

SRI LANKA MONITOR

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Lankan troops active in Trincomalee

SRI LANKAN TROOPS have been ordered into Trincomalee to assist the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) after a grim series of reprisal killings throughout the district in the last four weeks left over 100 civilians dead or injured.

Returning from talks in New Delhi on 17 March, Lands and Mahaweli Minister Gamini Disanayake confirmed that the Sri Lankan army would now be playing a major role in the east. Under the original terms of the Indo-Sri Lanka Peace Accord, the army was confined to barracks in the Northern and Eastern Provinces.

But by early March 800 Lankan troops were already patrolling the Allai-Kantalai road, where only a few days earlier 28 Sinhala civilians were killed when the lorry in which they were travelling was blown up - allegedly by an LTTE land mine.

Ministry of Rehabilitation officials had only just announced the completion of a programme for the resettlement and rehabilitation of 10,000 displaced families in the Kantalai area.

Subsequent terrorist attacks on Sinhala villages in the vicinity were to leave mounting civilian casualties - and a disturbing new wave of refugees - in their wake.

Then on 12 March, 19 Tamils - mostly Muslims - were killed when armed men in military fatigues attacked a private bus near

Horowupotana on the road to Trincomalee.

Three days later two Indian soldiers and 28 suspected militants were killed in a shoot-out at Mankulam. Among the dead was *Kandian*, the LTTE Malavi leader who had led the recent attacks on Sinhala civilian targets, security sources claimed.

Some 45 LTTE suspects were detained in Trincomalee for interrogation by the IPKF.

Talks are now said to be underway in Colombo between Indian and Sri Lankan

army officials on co-ordinating joint operations in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. Press reports have put the current IPKF strength at around 80,000 - with a 25,000 increase expected by mid-April.

A civilian source in Trincomalee claimed that many of the Tamil population would now be concerned what might happen if the IPKF were to withdraw from ethnically sensitive areas and were replaced by Sri Lankan Army forces.

Cholera in Jaffna

CONCERN IS GROWING over an outbreak of cholera in Jaffna. Despite the preventive measures adopted by the health authorities, the number of cases has risen to 60. The deaths of nine people have been reported.

Deputy Director-General of Health Services, Dr E Rajanathan told the Sri Lankan Press in the middle of March that the breakdown in communications and the continuing curfew in the North presented serious obstacles to the effective control of the disease.

Other sources suggest that an acute shortage of medical facilities, supplies and personnel in the Jaffna peninsula are more likely to be the cause of his difficulties.

The outbreak first reported in Delft has spread to Manipay, Kopay, Kayts, Chavakachcheri, Kilinochchi and Kankasanturai.

Refugee settlements in these areas are said to be particularly vulnerable because of the continuing absence of effective sanitary and medical provisions in the camps.

Eastern Front protest continues

TENSION remained high in Batticaloa last week after a Mothers Front spokesperson confirmed that their fast-unto-death campaign would continue despite the force-feeding of Mrs Annamma David and the detention of three of their leaders by the IPKF.

Mrs David, aged 58, who began her protest on 20 February, was taken to a mobile military hospital on 16 March, after her daughters claimed she was being forced to continue the fast against her will.

A chain of token sympathy fasts had already begun in the area, and after a one-day hartal in Batticaloa, Mothers Front representatives said that two new Mothers would be selected to continue the fast by *Thiru Arul Cheetu* (selection before God).

The names of volunteers would be written on slips of paper and drawn by an elderly Mother at the shrine of a deity.

The demands of the Mothers are (1) that the Indians should declare a ceasefire, (2) that the Tigers should surrender their arms, (3) that both sides should enter into immediate negotiations.

Although they are seen by the Indians as an LTTE mouthpiece, the Mothers enjoy strong popular support among many tired of the continuing see-saw of terror and violence in the East.

A large number of people have kept vigil with the fasting Mothers at the Mamankam temple over the last few weeks, many joining the fast for 24 hours.

Widespread communal clashes between Muslims and Tamils in the Kathankudi area of Batticaloa District have been narrowly averted - apparently because of reciprocal hostage-taking by the two communities.

On two occasions this month Muslims kidnapped Tamils from nearby Manjanthoduvai to enforce the release of Muslim Home Guards - allegedly held by the LTTE.

At a meeting at Batticaloa Rest House attended by Indian Army officers and Tamil and Muslim community leaders, a Tamil spokesperson claimed that many Muslim villages were in the hands of former Home Guards.

Heavily armed Indian troops moved into Kathankudi a few days later, in a bid to prevent further ethnic clashes.

Leading Muslim businessmen of Batticaloa and Kathankudi - many of whom closed their shops in protest - have pledged Rs152,000 to assist those families dislocated by the communal clashes.

A few miles south of Kathankudi in nearby Kalmunai on 12 March, the LTTE were said to have shot dead Abdul Careem, a Tamil convert to Islam and a former LTTE member.

Further north, a number of leaders of the Muslim movement *Jihad* in the Vavuniya area were reported to have been killed by unknown assailants.

■ Thirty policemen who are alleged to have run amok in Batticaloa in late February, smashing up a grocery store and injuring five people, have been transferred out of the division pending a departmental enquiry.

Air attack

Five Tamil civilians died on 1 March at Sasthrikoolankulam, Vavuniya when an Indian helicopter gunship allegedly attacked the village believing it to be a terrorist position.

General strike

A five-day hartal campaign announced by LTTE poster from 15 March caused chaos in Jaffna town. Shops and schools remained closed and transport was disrupted. Food prices have remained reasonable mainly because there has been a good harvest but not sufficient transport to export the produce from the area. Fuel is still difficult to obtain.

Elections delayed

The Homagama by-election was postponed in early March after a number of shootings in the area, allegedly by JVP hit squads. Nominations for the Provincial Council elections were also postponed in five of the nine provinces.

TULF leader killed

A. Velmurugu, Eastern Province TULF leader and Kalmunai Citizens Committee President was killed by unknown assailants last week. According to his wife he was blindfolded and abducted by gun-wielding youths in a car. His body was later found on the road near Kalmunaikudy.

Operation Vajira

The IPKF has completed a massive cordon-and-search operation code-named Vajira in the Jaffna and Kilinochchi Districts. Operations will be extended to the rest of Mullaitivu and to the Mannar and Vavuniya Districts shortly.

Displaced and Detained: the long wait for peace

LESS THAN TEN PER CENT of refugees from the Northern and Eastern provinces have so far been able to return to their homes, Lands and Mahaweli minister Gamini Dissanayake told journalists earlier this month.

The fear of terrorist attack is keeping many people away from their homes, maintained the minister. Once adequate security measures were taken to protect civilians, the refugees would be able to return.

Figures obtained from the Ministry of Rehabilitation on 1 March show 135,185 people in refugee camps or welfare centres throughout Sri Lanka, and another 672,951 registered as displaced, or receiving dry rations from the government.

The majority of the 54,000 Muslims in refugee camps are in Batticaloa District where communal tensions remain high, while most of those receiving food aid are in the Jaffna District, whose economy was shattered by the IPKF offensive.

A delegation of Indian officials has visited Vavuniya and Batticaloa Districts to assess long-term rehabilitation needs but in many areas urgent relief needs have still to be met.

The World Bank has agreed to fund a Reconstruction Programme of around US \$ 388 million (Rs 13 billion) to rebuild the economy of Sri Lanka over the next three years.

The government intends to offer a package worth up to Rs 25,000 to assist displaced families to return to their homes. An allowance of Rs 15,000 has been offered for new housing, a further Rs 4,000 for material needs

and Rs 6,000 worth of food stocks over a six-month period.

Plans now call for the Government Agent in the various districts to issue travel passes for the displaced to reach their home areas, where they will be registered for benefits. But there is concern over who is eligible for such assistance.

The package appears to be limited to those registered as displaced at Welfare Centres - perhaps only 15 per cent of the families affected.

Those who were resettled by the government in a number of areas before December 1987 - and who may have lost lands, homes and possessions - appear at the moment not to qualify for help under the scheme.

The fate of some 50,000 plantation Tamils in the Vavuniya area now encroaching on government land seems equally uncertain.

Many others may fear to return to areas still in the grip of uncertainty and violence.

A further 200 families were displaced in Vavuniya District following clashes between the LTTE and the IPKF in early March. Few Sinhalese families appear to be left in the area.

Refugees due to return to the Batticaloa District this month were advised by the Ministry of Rehabilitation to remain in Colombo until the security situation becomes more stable.

More recently, over 1,000 Muslim families fled Digawapi in Amparai District after alleged attacks on civilians by the LTTE and the Special Task Force. A relief worker in Colombo said that he hoped the Government would offer sufficient protection to those who

were to participate in the Reconstruction Programme. The Government should also introduce more flexibility into such a large-scale endeavour he maintained. *All* of those in need of assistance must be given an opportunity to rebuild their lives.

Amnesty appeal

OVER 800 Tamil political prisoners detained at Boosa and Welikade have written to President Jayewardene requesting an amnesty under the terms of the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord.

Tamil Congress General Secretary and Attorney-at-law, Mr. Kumar Ponnambalam, said that the appeal was originally undertaken by a number of detainees represented by him and was later taken up by the majority of those in custody.

Under Clause 2.11 of the Accord, the President agreed to grant a general amnesty to political and other prisoners held in custody under the Prevention of Terrorism Act and other emergency laws. Only 56 of the detainees have been convicted of any offence.

A group of five other prisoners at the New Magazine Prison, Welikade began a fast-unto-death on 17 March in protest at their continued detention.

They had sent similar letters to President Jayewardene and Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi a month earlier requesting the release of all political prisoners under Clause 2.11 of the Accord.

Influx of youth unsettles Colombo

CONCERN has been steadily mounting during the past two months over the number of youths arriving in Colombo from other parts of Sri Lanka.

There have been reports that some have come to Colombo to escape Army search operations and others to avoid the attentions of militant groups.

Colombo police have been on the alert since early February following alleged intelligence reports that a major confrontation between Tamil militant groups in the capital was imminent.

JVP subversives also continue to mount sporadic operations in the city. The police are often uncertain where to lay the blame.

People visiting the capital - particularly from the North and East - have been advised to go with their identity cards and register at the nearest police station giving details of their accommodation arrangements in Colombo.

While this is a necessary safeguard, apparently it has not prevented young men suffering police harassment especially in the sensitive Bambolapitiya and Weliwatte districts of the city.

There was another large influx of youth into these areas just before the well-advertised IPKF offensive in Batticaloa last month.

In the Borella police area more than 5,000 census forms have been issued to local people asking them to fill in details concerning occupation, dependents and relatives.

A number of newspapers have pointed out that many young people are reluctant to

register with the police due to the continuing climate of mutual suspicion.

The problem is often aggravated by language difficulties due to the lack of Tamil-speaking police officers.

Community leaders have called for the appointment of more Tamil officers to attempt to defuse a situation that is becoming increasingly serious.

The SRI LANKA MONITOR is part of an information processing service set up by the British Refugee Council to keep Sri Lankan refugees in Britain, Europe and elsewhere, informed about the current situation in their home areas.

If you have any information you wish to share, or any enquiries you wish to make regarding developments in Sri Lanka, contact:

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Pressure mounts on JVP

SOME 323 known members of the proscribed Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), described by the police as hardcore subversives, were arrested throughout the island in March.

Hundreds of other suspected JVP cadre members were also taken into custody in a major police operation.

In a press communique Police Headquarters said the arrested included seven Central Committee members as well as a number of District organisers and propaganda and weapons experts.

Two weapons factories manufacturing Galkattas or home-made pistols were allegedly discovered close to Weligama in Matara district.

In the last few days however, nine people were injured in a bomb attack on a council meeting in Matara on the south coast and two officials of the United National Party were reported killed by gunmen in Kalutara District. Both attacks were

blamed on the JVP, whose assassination campaign is said to be continuing despite the round-ups.

Seven political parties last week submitted a memorandum to President Jayewardene requesting him to lift the proscription on the JVP unconditionally to enable it to participate in the democratic political process.

The parties - of whom the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) is the most prominent - also called for the unconditional lifting of the proscription on Trade Unions and student organisations.

Outlining an eight point programme, demands were also made to stop further arbitrary arrests and killings, to set up a Human Rights Commission of representatives of all recognised political parties, and to dissolve ad hoc paramilitary institutions such as Home Guards, National Auxiliary Force, National Task Force and the Special Task Force.