

The Sri Lanka Monitor

No 11 January 1989

Produced by the British Refugee Council

Premadasa's moving Presidency seeks a people's mandate

AFTER A PERIOD of relative calm and cautious optimism surrounding the inauguration of a new President and the lifting of the State of Emergency, Sri Lanka's forthcoming General Election on 15 February has rekindled a deadly campaign of violent opposition and political assassination throughout the island.

Following his inauguration on 2 January, Mr Ranasinghe Premadasa promised "a moving Presidency" that would take the Government to the people and get the economy working again. In the interim Cabinet sworn in two days later, Mr Premadasa himself took personal charge of ten Ministries including Defence, Finance and Planning, abolishing the Ministries of Civil Security and National Security.

All funds set aside for Sri Lanka's lavish 41st Independence anniversary on 4 February would go instead, said Mr Premadasa, into his ambitious Poverty Alleviation Programme under which 1.4 million families on food stamps will receive Rs 2,500 (\$75) monthly over two years. Village-level officers had already been appointed to get the scheme in place before the February election.

A new Friendship Treaty with India would shortly replace the Indo-Lankan Accord said the President and on 11 January Sri Lanka's State of Emergency in force for over five years was lifted, allowing the release of 1,500 political dissidents and an end to incommunicado detention. Human rights agencies welcomed the move but drew attention to parallel legislation such as the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) which retained wide-ranging powers for security personnel.

Electioneering began in earnest on 9 January with Opposition leader Mrs Bandaranaike petitioning the Supreme Court to declare December's Presidential Elections

null and void, citing 140 instances of fraud and intimidation under the provisions of the Presidential Election Act. The Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) election manifesto called for the abolition of the executive Presidency, the abrogation of the Indo-Lankan Accord, an end to corruption in public life and a rational economic policy. The SLFP campaign would concentrate on the villages, said Opposition MP Anura Bandaranaike, spearheaded by the local candidate and the SLFP District organiser, beginning in Gampaha.

Nine political parties and nine independent groups will field 1300 candidates for 196 seats in the new 235-seat Parliament, under a complex system of proportional representation, returning MPs on the basis of their party's District-wide performance rather than the individual candidate's constituency showing.

Mindful of the high stakes, Mr Premadasa had already asked Ministers who lost their respective electorates during the Presidential election, to stand down and the names of 31 UNP MPs were missing from the party's nomination papers.

In the North an LTTE boycott has further narrowed the field - the SLFP will not stand in Jaffna - and in the East the vote is likely to polarise around ethnic prejudice, in favour of the SLFP, the Muslim Congress and the Tamil Front.

Elsewhere it is also likely to be a three-or-more-cornered contest with the emergent United Socialist Alliance (USA) challenging the two main parties and the prospect of various breakaway groupings further splintering the anti-UNP vote already divided between the SLFP and the Left opposition USA. One of these groupings - the Eksath Lanka Janatha Pakshaya (EJLP) - led by Rukman Senanayake has forged close links with the Inter-University Students' Federation (IUSF) said to

be controlled by the southern insurgent Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP). Informed sources say many of the EJLP candidates in the Gampaha, Matara, Moneragala and Hambantota Districts are either JVP or ex-SLFP.

By mid-January with campaigning well under way, reports were already emerging of the systematic killing of candidates and District Organisers - predominantly SLFP - against a backdrop of mounting political violence. The bodies of Indrapala Abeyweera, SLFP candidate for Kalutara and two prominent party members, gunned down in Monantuduwa on 10 January, were brought to Colombo party headquarters for an elaborate lying-in-state and a public funeral. A lurid "poster war" was also underway in Kandy and the South, with public buildings covered with a "rogues gallery" of election posters defaced with death-threat slogans.

At a meeting with Opposition leaders on 16 January, Mr Premadasa guaranteed candidates comprehensive protection. An election security plan now being drawn up involved 30,000 police to protect the 8,072 polling booths as well as party workers and election staff. But by 29 January, over 20 Parliamentary candidates had been murdered - including Tamil Congress' M.B. Sivagnanam contesting Jaffna - close to 50 people killed during the previous 24 hours and the provisional January death-toll had risen to around 500.

In February for the first time, a recent amendment to the Election Act will allow registered electors, deterred by intimidation or violence at their own polling station to cast their vote at another. But there are those who say that Mr Premadasa's "moving Presidency" may require much more than a people's mandate to dispel political instability.

Confrontation and killing continues in the North

A DRAMATIC upsurge of confrontation and killing in the North has claimed over 100 civilian casualties this month - many as a result of reprisals by security forces, local sources say. In a growing catalogue of incidents there were three major flashpoints, Jaffna, Mannar and Vavuniya.

After a series of sporadic clashes in early January, Indian troops were placed on alert throughout the North following intensified attacks on security installations by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Attacks on IPKF units at Valvetiturai, Sathirachanthi, Ariyalai and Kasturiar Road led to increased cordon-and-search operations by security forces in these areas and reports of civilian deaths and detentions. At Pandatherippu on 13 January, after an Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) officer was killed, three civilians are said to have been shot - one man in front of his two children - and three others arrested.

The LTTE counter-offensive is believed to be the operational debut of the 'Accord Group', a battalion of 1,000 young militants secretly trained for the last year in jungle bases. A further 1,000 are said to have been recruited - some unwillingly - in the last few months. In a spectacular attack on an Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) camp at Jaffna Hindu College in late January, the LTTE are said to have inflicted heavy casualties. Observers say the struggle between EPRLF and LTTE will shortly reach a decisive stage.

Following a landmine explosion on 18 January at Pesalai on Mannar Island which killed six IPKF soldiers, nine civilians including Fisherman's Union representatives were seriously injured in the retaliatory action that followed. A subsequent explosion which killed three Indian soldiers on 22 January, set off a large-scale exodus from the area as IPKF troops reportedly went on a shooting rampage. Some 18 shops and houses in the vicinity were burned down and five Tamils were killed. At Silavathurai, south of Mannar, dur-

ing the same period, six Sri Lankan Army (SLA) soldiers and one civilian were killed in a militant ambush.

In Vavuniya District, after ten Sri Lankan soldiers were killed in a raid on an SLA base at Ettambagaskada on 17 January, Maharambaikulam village was attacked by SLA units. Some 15 Tamils were killed and another 15 admitted to Vavuniya hospital with serious injuries. A pregnant woman was among the dead. Following an investigation by Vanni Brigade Commander Ranjan de Silva, 100 soldiers from the 5th Battalion Ceylon Light Infantry were transferred out of the area and Citizens' Committees re-established in the area in collaboration with EPRLF-led militant groups.

Outside Vavuniya a private bus travelling from Colombo to Jaffna came under fire at Galkandamadu on 20 January and five of the occupants were seriously injured. In the deteriorating security situation, travel to and from the peninsula has become increasingly hazardous. The Colombo papers have carried a number of letters this month alleging systematic intimidation and harassment by IPKF troops and Indian-backed militant groups at checkpoints on the Jaffna route.

At one checkpoint between Omanthai and Mankulam passengers were made to run with their hands raised, through a half-mile gauntlet of two rows of baton-wielding Sikh soldiers. This, local opinion said, was as a result of an LTTE attack on the post some days earlier.

Attacks on civilians by security forces follow a distinctive pattern, human rights organisations and community groups say. Any militant attack is generally followed by retaliation in one form or another, often at random, on local people or property. The IPKF, it is said, will avoid direct confrontation with the militants arriving at the scene of incidents much later, extorting money and information and attacking unarmed villagers with impunity.

Local pessimism may not be misplaced when it sees such reprisals more as a military tactic than as a moment of madness.

Student Amnesty

On 6 January, Minister of Higher Education and Foreign Affairs A.C.S. Hameed, requested the immediate release of all University students subject to parental guarantees. At a meeting with University Vice-Chancellors, Mr Hameed was assured that all Universities would function by 2 March.

Protection

All candidates contesting the 15 February General Election will be provided with two revolvers and a telephone link on request, said a Government spokesman in Colombo on 9 January. Revolvers could be purchased on Government Agent licence from either the State Trading Corporation or the private sector.

Indictment

Three police officers were indicted in the Colombo High Court on 10 January with the murder of human rights Attorney-at-Law Wijedasa Liyanarachchi last September and were remanded into CID custody. Trial was fixed for 27 March.

Rail Disaster

The Galle train from Alutgama ploughed into a bus on an unprotected level-crossing at Ahungalla near Balapitya on 17 January, killing 45 of the passengers, mostly school children, and injuring 17.

Bank raids

Gunmen armed with Chinese assault rifles escaped with almost Rs 1 million (\$35,000) after attacking three State banks in the south at Imaduwa, Walagala and Devinuwara on 23 January, killing one security guard.

Killings

At Akuressa in Matara District, the mutilated bodies of 15 civilians were found on 31 January. Special Task Forces operating in the area were said to be responsible. Provisional reports claim 584 political killings in January throughout the island.

Election showdown scheduled in the East

TO GET THE COUNTRY moving again, the devolution of power from Ministries to Provincial Councils remains the Government's first priority, Rural Industrial Development Minister S.Thondaman told N-E PC leader A.Varadarajah Perumal at a conference on devolution in Colombo in late January.

Already the new PC coalition government led by the Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) has succeeded in restoring essential services in the Eastern Province. Telephone and postal services have returned to Trincomalee, Batticaloa's bus and train services have been upgraded and food stocks replenished.

The PC administration has co-opted a number of senior civil servants from central government to streamline its operations and avoid bureaucratic delays. Urgent action would be taken said Dr K.Vigneswaran, Secretary to the Chief Minister, to resettle long-term refugees, both Sinhalese and Tamil, still resident in camps in Trincomalee town.

The priority uppermost in many minds however, remains the forthcoming general elections on 15 February. Will the people endorse the PCs or strap them into an internecine struggle with a newly-elected national tier of representation? Clearly different issues are emerging in the North and the East, observers say.

RELIEF AND REHABILITATION

North-East Council member and EPRLF regional secretary Mr Sharma has called for the dependents of all those killed, injured or disappeared in the Batticaloa and Amparai Districts over the last five years to contact EPRLF district offices, in order to apply for compensation from the Ministry of Rehabilitation. A similar circular sent to the Mullaitivu Government Agent's office says full supporting documents must be submitted. Mullaitivu GA, K.Ponnambalam has already taken measures to pay Rs 4,000 (\$150) to fishermen affected by violence in the area. The Asian Development Bank has granted Rs 9.9 million (\$350,000) to Mullaitivu Department of Education for the reconstruction of schools and other education facilities. Chief Minister A.Varadarajah Perumal said in early January that central government would allocate Rs 15 million for development in the North-East. Substantial foreign aid is also expected.

Poll set to reveal priorities over merger of Provinces

The real contest in the North will be between pro-Indian and anti-Indian Tamil groups. In the East it is the permanent merger of the Province with the North, subject to a referendum on 5 July, that will polarise the electorate.

Sinhalese and Muslim voters are likely through parties such as the Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP) and the Muslim Congress (SLMC), to use this opportunity to register violent opposition. There are potential splits on all sides and the result may be much less clear-cut than the PC or Presidential elections in the East where different issues were dominant. Trade and Shipping Minister Lalith Athulathmudali, talking to the Press on 21 January, was still confident that the ruling UNP who were trounced at the PC poll, yet won a clear majority in the Presidential elections, would make a substantial showing.

The Tamil vote is also subject to schism. With a complex proportional representation system and as many as 80 candidates competing in each electoral district for 11 or so seats the fragile Tamil Front, full of uneasy partners, will find it difficult to put aside old enmities. Tamil United Liberation Front General Secretary Amirthalingam, banished to Batticaloa, will not make an easy comeback against stiff local opposition. Unhappily there is yet another showdown on the horizon. Lalith Athulathmudali has made it clear that President Premadasa will actively campaign before 5 July against the permanent merger of the Provinces and will not heed EPRLF entreaties to abandon the referendum.

Needing only a simple majority, the combined Sinhalese and Muslim vote would be enough to overturn Tamil aspirations. Whatever the election results, the N-E administration may already be living on borrowed time.

☐ At least 11 civilians were seriously hurt and another 40 received minor injuries when IPKF troops cordoned off Pallikudirrupu village in Amparai district on 7 January. A residents' committee in Akkarai-pattu said a number of shops and houses were damaged. Over the 38 miles between Akkaraipattu and Batticaloa there are 11 IPKF camps and five major checkpoints. The journey currently takes four hours.

Electricity and water supplies were restored to the coastal belt of Amparai in mid-January after a break lasting 35 days. There is still a serious shortage of medical staff however at Ampara hospital which sees 600-700 patients daily. In the Thirukkivil area the cattle epidemic, rinderpest, continues to spread. Vaccination has had little effect and over 700 animals have died so far.

Heavy flooding struck the Kalmunai and Sammanturai areas on 15 January causing 3,000 people to leave their homes. A senior security official at Ampara said the scale of the damage was not yet known, as a number of villages remained inaccessible in the continuing deluge.

Conflict between militant groups continues. Two local EPRLF leaders were shot dead at Yalaiyady Vettai on 21 January. Anandan (24) was in charge of the Kaluvanchikudy area and Sumanan (25) of the Madur area.

EUROPE

Mendis deportation signals danger for Tamil asylum-seekers

IN the early hours of Wednesday 18 January, Immigration officers accompanied by over 100 police forced their way into the Manchester church where Sri Lankan Viraj Mendis had claimed sanctuary for over two years and took him into custody. Just two days later, despite last-minute court appeals, Mr Mendis was deported to Sri Lanka on a scheduled Air Lanka flight bound for Colombo. His supporters had fought a losing battle up until an hour before the plane took off, to meet a Home Office deadline to receive firm assurances from a third country that they would accept Mr Mendis.

Mr Mendis, who says he faces persecution and possible death in Sri Lanka because of his support for the separatist Tamil cause, was met at Colombo's international airport by Chief Immigration Officer M.B. Ratnayake and was told he was free to go where he liked - despite arriving without a passport.

After a week of unrelenting attention, Mr Mendis had to repudiate press reports that he had exaggerated the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka and used it as a device to stay in Britain. In a statement on 29 January issued through his Defence Campaign in London, Mr Mendis said that in fact he now realised the situation in Sri Lanka was considerably worse than was apparent from outside.

The many anomalies surrounding Mr Mendis' sudden deportation and his growing vulnerability in Colombo have raised fears among the Tamil refugee community that his case will set a precedent for further returns to Sri Lanka.

Of the 5,000 Tamil refugees in Britain over 1,000 are still waiting for a decision on their case. Some 250 have only *Temporary Admission* status which means that they may be removed from Britain at any time.

Many of the 60 Tamil asylum-seekers returned to Colombo last year were sent back without essen-

tial identity documents or had them confiscated by security forces at the airport. They now lead a twilight existence, unable to resume a normal life, in constant fear of arbitrary arrest. Others who have managed with great difficulty to return to their home areas in the North and East say they have been detained and tortured by both Indian troops and militant groups. Others are missing.

Tamil refugee groups are in the process of setting up support groups and counselling sessions for those on *Temporary Admission* and comprehensive legal advice for those seeking help.

As the Mendis case makes clear, Britain still lacks an adequate appeal procedure for those refused asylum. In four years of legal wrangling, Mr Mendis has been able to appeal only on procedural grounds, in relation to the way the original decision to refuse asylum was reached, and not as to the substance of his case.

The European Consultation on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) has drawn attention to the increasing erosion of the rights of asylum-seekers in the UK. It is also concerned over present trends in the proposed harmonisation of European asylum policy in 1992 - after which a refusal to admit an asylum-seeker by one country may count as a refusal by all. Refugee agencies face a genuine human rights challenge, says ECRE General Secretary Philip Rudge if the principle of asylum is to be protected.

■ Decisions on all asylum cases in Holland involving Tamil asylum-seekers have been postponed following a hearing at Alkmaar in December, where the President of the Court asked UNHCR to furnish further information on the current security situation in Sri Lanka. The President is expected to give his decision on 7 February. Some eight cases involving Tamil asylum-seekers are currently pending at the Court of Appeal in Amsterdam.

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:

The Sri Lanka Project
The British Refugee Council
3/9 Bondway
London SW8 1SJ
Tel: (01) 582 6922.

Funded by British and European voluntary agencies.

Technology by R'n'R DTP.

Printed by Printco, 374 Willesden High Rd., London NW10

Karunanidhi conquers Tamil Nadu

MUTHUVEL KARUNANIDHI, veteran leader of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) party swept to victory in the Tamil Nadu State elections on 21 January, capturing 170 of the 234 seats in the Legislative Assembly. Ex film star Jayalalitha, leading one of the AIADMK factions, secured a surprise 46% of the vote, winning 32 seats. Rajiv Gandhi's Congress (I) held on to only 27 seats, failing to contract an alliance with any of the major parties.

The result is seen as a serious setback for Mr Gandhi whose support in the northern Hindi-speaking areas of the country is wavering and an early General Election, due by the end of the year, now seems unlikely.

Mr Karunanidhi, who has expressed support for various factions of the Sri Lankan Tamil separatist struggle in the past, told reporters immediately after his victory that a DMK government would not disappoint LTTE leader Mr Vellupillai Prabhakaran and the people of Tamil Eelam in their quest for a peace with honour and a negotiated settlement with Indian forces in Sri Lanka.

Press reaction in Colombo was unsettled, drawing attention to a recent statement by Indian High Commissioner J.N. Dixit, describing Indian support for Tamil militant groups as "a closed chapter". Such a conclusion said the media, in the light of Mr Karunanidhi's victory, was premature.