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IPKF mount new offensive on North-East

AFTER five months of deadly hide-and-seek, the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) launched a major offensive against Tamil Tiger bases in the Nithikaikulam jungles in north-eastern Sri Lanka in early March.

Following a string of civilian massacres last month in Sinhalese frontier areas of North-Central Province allegedly by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Indian forces supported by Mi-25 helicopter gunships cordoned off vast jungle tracts south of Nayuru lagoon in Mullaitivu District, said to contain the LTTE high command.

Settlements in the Alampil and Kumulamunai areas were destroyed by artillery bombardment, forcing villagers to flee as the two-stage *Operation Baaz* sought to flush the militants into the open. An LTTE statement released in Jaffna on 22

March, said 30,000 Indian troops were involved and there were already over 300 civilian casualties. The Indian High Commission in Colombo dismissed the allegations as "highly coloured and exaggerated".

Three recently elected MPs from the Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students (EROS) who visited Mullaitivu a few days later, said that 775 refugee families from the Kumulamunai area were sheltering in Thaneerutru Tamil School. Medical facilities were non-existent and food scarce.

Fierce fighting was said to be continuing in the Kokkilai area, with contradictory reports of military casualties. In one confirmed incident 25 IPKF soldiers and six militants were killed as Indian forces attempted to re-enter the Kumulamunai area.

North-East Provincial Council (N-E PC) leader Mr A Varadaraja

Perumal, meanwhile was in New Delhi complaining of the lack of progress in the devolution of power and the disbursement of funds to the N-E PC from Sri Lanka's President Premadasa. Trilateral discussions should begin immediately said Mr Perumal, for the reconstruction of the N-E, which has already been pledged \$500 million in foreign aid.

Mr Perumal returned to a storm of criticism in the Sri Lankan press and the suggestion that IPKF-backed forces of the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) were also implicated in Sinhalese civilian massacres last month at Borawewa. The Sri Lankan Army's Special Task Force (STF) would continue to give protection to Sinhalese settlements in eastern Amparai, even after the deployment of the EPRLF-dominated Civilian Volunteer Force (CVF), said STF Senior Superintendent R K L Karunasena, on 26 March.

In Mr Perumal's absence, Minister Designate Mr Dayan Jayatilleke, the only Sinhalese in the N-E PC resigned, fearing estrangement from the country's Left movement. He called for a redrawing of N-E boundaries to excise Sinhalese-majority areas and the replacement of the IPKF by a force from the Non-Aligned group of nations.

Unless the 5 July Referendum on the merging of the N-E Province was postponed, Mr Jayatilleke said, conflict between the IPKF and the Sinhalese Left insurgents, the People's Liberation Front (JVP), was inevitable and a chain reaction of deadly consequences would follow.

Drought grips North-Central Province

DAUGHT has devastated Sri Lanka's North-Central Province leaving over a million people suffering serious food shortages, official sources revealed at the end of March. A large-scale relief operation, coordinated by Government and international agencies, is already under way in Anuradhapura, Padaviya, Polonnaruwa, and parts of Mannar and Mullaitivu Districts.

Foreign Affairs Minister Ranjan Wijeratne said 10,000 tonnes of rice and flour had been rushed to Anuradhapura for immediate distribution by the Department of Social Welfare. The Sri Lanka Red Cross Society has also launched a Rs10 million (\$350,000) relief programme in the affected areas providing dry rations for up to 10,000 families.

The USA has now agreed to double its food aid provision to Sri Lanka for 1989 under the PL 4-80 Programme, to around \$30 million, following appeals for assistance from President Premadasa.

The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations says this year's major rice crop about to be harvested in Sri Lanka will be reduced by 35 per cent. The current low level of irrigation reservoirs will in turn affect the secondary "yala" rice crop, usually sown in April. Many parts of Sri Lanka are experiencing their third year in succession of bad harvests and bulk paddy prices have risen by 50 per cent.

*Premadasa promotes a poor man's budget***Janasaviya: standing the economy on its head**

THE LAST six months have seen momentous change in Sri Lanka, not the least of which has been the emergence of a new President and a new economic strategy.

The Poverty Alleviation Programme or *Janasaviya* - "the economy in the service of the people" - was put through its paces for the first time, when it was presented in Parliament by newly-appointed Prime Minister Mr D B Wijetunge, as the fulcrum of the new administration's budget proposals.

Janasaviya aims to establish village-based agro-industries by encouraging self-employment through grants, subsidies and soft loans. Families who earn less than Rs 700 (\$25) a month, will now qualify for Rs 2,500 State assistance each month, paid in the form of coupons worth Rs 1,042 exchangeable for basic commodities with the balance banked on their behalf over a 24-month period.

The accrued capital is intended to self-finance a substantial section of Sri Lanka's population out of the poverty trap and into small business - in Mr Wijetunge's words to bring about "a marriage between the big investors and the small producers". This, says the Government, will give Sri Lankan industry an indigenous base and the clarion call is for the nation to invest in the poor.

The *Janasaviya* programme allocated Rs 10 billion (\$350 million), floats serenely over a budget deficit outlined by Mr Wijetunge to Parliament as standing at Rs 53 billion (\$1,770 million). The Government proposes to bridge the shortfall with Rs 23 billion (\$765 million) of foreign aid and the rest from domestic non-inflationary borrowing.

As the Sri Lankan press pointed out, the Government's economic strategy depends heavily on foreign assistance and President Premadasa will have to be as successful in the capitals of world finance as he has been at the village level, to get *Janasaviya* up and running.

The Government has already succeeded in postponing the World

Bank Aid Group meeting due in June until September, to allow them to reformulate their investment proposals. But the second instalment of an International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan due in March, now seems in doubt following a purported IMF cable read to the House by Opposition MP Lakshman Jayakody during the budget debate, which said that Sri Lanka had reneged on agreed repayment criteria following the country's rapidly deteriorating balance of payments.

The current economic indicators are not promising. Inflation is running at 14 per cent and the current account deficit at \$461 million. Gross external assets are said to be sufficient to finance only 2.5 months of imports projected for 1989. The country's tea, rubber and sugar industries have been decimated by 10 years of civil war. The dictates of the previous administration's Open Economy have lured Sri Lanka into a cul-de-sac where prices are manipulated by strong buyers in developed nations to the detriment of weak sellers in developing countries.

The imposition of a 15 per cent income tax surcharge outlined in the budget and a drive against Rs 13 billion tax arrears has not allayed the suspicions of Sri Lanka's urban English-speaking elite who see the *Janasaviya* programme as an assault on the "athi heki" - the well-to-do.

The Opposition's response during two weeks of budget debate has been - not unpredictably - scathing. Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) leader Mrs Bandaranaike described the budget proposals as "a gigantic hoax", claiming that the unresolved budget deficit even after domestic borrowing was likely to be around Rs 18 billion.

Offering a checklist of the deterioration of the economy, unmentioned in Prime Minister Wijetunge's truncated one hour presentation, Mrs Bandaranaike said that international donors would inevitably demand such a deficit bridged by heavy domestic taxation and the cutting of subsidies.

Human rights appeal

International Alert Secretary General, Martin Ennals, addressing the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva on 4 March on behalf of human rights organisation *Liberation*, called for the Commission to appoint a Special Rapporteur on human rights in Sri Lanka.

Poll enquiry

Elections Commissioner Chandrananda de Silva has ordered an official investigation following allegations by the centre-left Eksath Lanka Janatha Party (ELJP) of a fraudulent poll during last month's general election in Kegalle District, ELJP leader Rukman Senanayake said on 6 March.

Assassination

Former Vice Chancellor of Colombo University, Prof. Stanley Wijesundera was shot dead in his office by suspected JVP gunmen on 8 March in Colombo. Prof Wijesundera had recently criticised continuing student violence in the Universities which has kept many of them closed for over two years.

Jaffna clash

Over 20 LTTE militants and an un-named number of Indian soldiers have been killed in running gun-battles in Point Pedro and Karainagar in Jaffna, since 16 March. Security sources said there had also been a number of civilian casualties but gave no details.

Death toll

Since 1 January of this year 2114 people have died in the continuing conflict in Sri Lanka, official sources revealed in mid-March. There were 1112 killings in January and 756 people died in February's violence. During the first 13 days of March there were 246 murders.

Death squads stalk Anuradhapura District

REMOTE AREAS of Anuradhapura were convulsed in late March by a brutal series of vigilante killings which local opinion has attributed to police death squads.

After a landmine explosion at Eppawela on 12 March which killed three police officers, 14 youths were found dead from gunshot wounds by a Meegaswewa roadside. Responsibility had been claimed by a hitherto unknown group the *Black Cats*, said Anuradhapura Police Chief DIG Udagampola and a number of hard-core JVP were among the dead.

In an earlier incident at Mahavilachchiya, seven JVP suspects were shot dead by armed men in unmarked uniforms after the murder of a high-ranking police officer.

The Eppawela killings triggered a JVP *hartal* (general strike) on 22 March in protest against "government murderers" as a rash of wall posters appeared pledging vengeance. Sections of Colombo were shut down and six people killed, as buses were burned and government offices attacked with home-made bombs.

Some 60 people in all had died in

the *hartal* violence, Foreign Affairs Minister Ranjan Wijeratne told the press the following day, most of them government supporters or security personnel. A full enquiry into the Anuradhapura killings was getting underway, said the Minister but the deaths of 16 people in nearby Kurunegala District during the *hartal* had already touched off a large-scale exodus from the North-Central areas.

A few days later the *Black Cats* were to reappear in Thalawa near Eppawela, leaving the bodies of two youths described by police as "suspect subversives" crudely decorated with anti-JVP slogans. Despite police appeals to people in remote areas of the District to come forward and assist them, local suspicion has already condemned them.

At Borawewa in north-east Anuradhapura, 8,000 Sinhalese had already sent a petition to President Premadasa asking for police protection following a series of massacres in the District last month, attributed to Tamil militants. It may be less clear now who will protect them - and from whom.

Jaffna: a voice from the camps

NO ONE really knows how many people are refugees in Jaffna District anymore.

Estimates vary from a third to two-thirds of its 800,000 population. There are people in makeshift camps, others with relatives and many others bivouacked in the ruins of their homes. Some from Trincomalee and Batticaloa have been there since the 1983 violence in the south. Others seek shelter from Indian army operations that are only days old. Nothing very much seems to change. There is water, there is electricity a mile away, but not for use who cannot pay.

"People are getting rich on rehabilitation" has become a common lament in Jaffna. While relief agencies struggle to provision a growing refugee population, for 480 families at Maniyarthotam the reality remains stark. No toilets, no schools, no hospitals, no nursery, no lights, no jobs.

The population of the camps is predominantly women and children. Few able-bodied men remain to support their families. The old are left to look after disparate groups of children, often the remnants of several families. They survive on dry rations and the dwindling remains of a Rs 2,000 cash grant from the Sri Lanka Red Cross.

At Vasanthapuram, 94 fishing families from Trincomalee and

Batticaloa live in limbo, denied their traditional occupation by Sri Lankan Navy patrols offshore.

And inside the camps, the war does not go away. The trauma, individual and collective, has a stunned presence of its own.

Relief agencies who have begun psychological counselling work in the peninsula, say that for many, they can only contain a grief that has already taken root.

International aid for Trincomalee

International refugee agency, the Office of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) will build 13,000 houses in the North-East Province as part of their programme in Sri Lanka, UNHCR Asia Bureau representative Mr R Sampathkumar told N-E PC leader Mr Varadaraja Perumal at a special meeting in Trincomalee in mid-March.

UNHCR would also provide assistance in developing agriculture, fisheries and small-scale industries the meeting was told. An Italian delegation who visited Trincomalee earlier this month have pledged a \$17 million loan and \$3 million in grants for redeveloping Trincomalee Hospital and the upgrading of the Province's medical services.

Representatives of NORAD the Norwegian government aid agency

visited Jaffna on 18 March, touring the Kokkuvil area which suffered extensive damage during a recent IPKF operation. NORAD has already pledged Rs550 million (\$18 million) to Sri Lanka for rural development projects in the Hambantota and Moneragala Districts.

There is still much to be done. A recent estimate suggests there are almost 10,000 children in Batticaloa District alone, who have been orphaned by the ethnic conflict.

UNHCR's repatriation programme for Sri Lankan Tamils in South India recommenced this month with the arrival in Sri Lanka of some 450 refugees in late March. Only 150 now remain in transit facilities in Tamil Nadu, although a further 100,000 Sri Lankan Tamil refugees are said to be resident outside the camps.

Southern strike on JVP rebels

IN TANDEM with the big push by the IPKF on Tamil militants in the north, Sri Lankan forces launched a major crackdown on JVP rebels in the south in early March.

In an operation involving 3,000 troops and sophisticated air and sea support, 1,200 suspected JVP activists were rounded up in a strike against rebel strongholds in Matara, Akuressa and Kamburupitya. Over 200 suspected subversives including a number of Buddhist priests were held at the former detention camp at Boosa, quickly recommissioned by the army under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA).

Matara District was the main focus of the offensive, described by the army as the biggest since President Premadasa came to power. Over 2,000 men and women were screened in 11 police areas during the Matara operation codenamed *Janahamuwa*, but stiff opposition was to emerge as general strikes and bomb attacks closed down sections of the south for days on end.

Matara Urban Council Chairman

Jinadasa Hennanayake was among several killed in a fresh outbreak of violence on 20 March, which claimed the lives of a number of supporters of the ruling United National Party (UNP).

The capture of what was said to be one of the JVP's major training bases at Deniyaya on 27 March quickened government hopes for a time, but in a candid assessment, a high-ranking Army officer conceded that the results of the operation had been mixed.

At a rally on 1 April in Girandurukotte in eastern Sri Lanka, President Premadasa said he would offer Tamil and Sinhalese rebels up to 29 seats in Parliament if they would renounce violence and join the democratic process. The turnaround was spectacular but not unexpected. In the stop-go war in the north and the south both the carrot and the stick have been regularly employed. Observers say the government is likely to announce a general amnesty coinciding with the Tamil and Sinhalese New Year in mid-April.

Thondaman speaks out for the stateless

PLANTATION Tamils' spokesman and Sri Lankan Minister of Rural and Industrial Development, Mr S Thondaman told Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Mr M Karunanidhi during a meeting in Madras on 26 March, that he favoured an "exchange" of citizenship for Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in India who wished to remain there and for around 80,000 Sri Lankans of Indian origin who previously applied for Indian citizenship under Indo-Lankan repatriation agreements, but now did not wish to leave Sri Lanka.

Mr Thondaman and Mr Karunanidhi discussed in depth, the plight of some 80,000 Sri Lankan Tamils of Indian origin, repatriated to south India over the last twenty years under the Srimala-Shastri Pact of 1964. Only 10,000 of them had received proper rehabilitation assistance and many of the other 70,000 - mostly Plantation Tamils - were virtually destitute. The repatriates

were the subject of a series of articles in the Indian press this month drawing attention to their impoverished condition.

Mr Thondaman and the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister also discussed the continuing conflict in the Tamil areas of northern and eastern Sri Lanka. Mr Karunanidhi is believed to favour a United Front of Tamil groups that would include the LTTE and is said to have promoted the idea during a recent meeting with Indian Premier Rajiv Gandhi on 16 March.

Sri Lankan Foreign Affairs Minister Ranjan Wijeratne told Parliament on 30 March, that Mr Thondaman's views on citizenship and stateless persons were not those of the government. Although it was not known how many Sri Lankan refugees had returned from India, most of the refugee camps there had been closed, he said. Other sources say there are still 100,000 Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in Tamil Nadu.

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.

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MPs boycott Parliament

Tamil MPs from the Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students (EROS) who took eight of 11 seats in Jaffna during last month's general election, boycotted the opening of Sri Lanka's ninth Parliament on 9 March. A spokesman for the 13 EROS MPs - now the country's third largest political grouping renamed the "Eelavar Democratic Front" - said the right conditions must be created before they could enter Parliament. It is believed that the Tamil party has put forward three major demands.

- The release of all Tamil political prisoners, particularly EROS members.

- The repeal of the Sixth Amendment (1983) to Sri Lanka's Constitution, which requires incoming MPs to swear an oath disavowing separatism.

- An unconditional ceasefire in the North and East and multilateral talks towards a negotiated solution of the Tamil problem, with the IPKF confined to barracks during this period.

Observers say that while the Government may offer concessions of a kind over political prisoners, it may not have the willingness to repeal the Sixth Amendment, or indeed the ability to effect a demotion of the Indian role in the North.

EROS leader Mr V Balakumar is expected to meet with President Premadasa in early April.