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JVP leaders killed in custody

SRI LANKA's most wanted man, Rohana Wijeweera, leader of the extremist People's Liberation Front (JVP), was killed on 13 November while in army custody in a dramatic series of developments that have decimated the Sinhalese rebel leadership.

Wijeweera was posing as a wealthy tea planter in Ulapane in Kandy District when he was arrested by the Rapid Deployment Force and brought to Army headquarters in Colombo, by helicopter. There he made a statement on video appealing to Sri Lanka's youth to renounce violence and subsequently agreed to lead security forces to a JVP "headquarters" outside Colombo. He and another JVP Politbureau member, H B Herath, were killed when Herath pulled a gun on security forces at the hideout, said a press statement by Army Chief Lt. General Hamilton Wanasinghe. Both bodies were cremated immediately "under conditions of maximum security".

Only 24 hours later, JVP second-in-command Upatissa Gamanayake was apprehended and also agreed to lead security forces to a "safe house" outside Colombo. He was shot while trying to escape during a power failure and his body quickly cremated. Press statements by Sri Lanka's socialist Nava Sama Samaja Party and S D Bandaranayake of the Sri Lanka Progressive Front described the government's version of events as "incredible", "mysterious" and "suggestive of foul play".

Replying to similar allegations in a BBC interview on 15 November, Sri Lanka's Defence Minister Ranjan Wijeratne was characteristically blunt. This was not a court of law and he had no need to answer such questions. President Premadasa is said to have ordered an immediate enquiry into the killings but, observers say, it is unlikely to reach any unpalatable conclusions.

Rohana Wijeweera was born in Matara in 1943, joining the Commu-

nist Party in 1960. After studying medicine at Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow, he broke away to form a new leftist movement in Sri Lanka influenced by Maoism and his idol, Che Guevara. By 1971 it was strong enough to launch a full-scale insurrection in the South, put down brutally by Mrs Bandaranaike's government at a cost of 10,000 lives. After a period of imprisonment, Wijeweera and others were pardoned by the incoming United National Party government in 1977. In 1983 the JVP was used as a scapegoat for widespread ethnic riots and again proscribed.

THE THIRD ROUND of talks between the Sri Lankan Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) ended inconclusively late last month. The Tigers still refuse to join the North-East Peace Committee while "preparations for war" by the Indian-backed Provincial Council administration continue. They will pursue direct talks with the Government instead. With the arrival of LTTE leader Kittu in London, a major public relations initiative has been launched. The LTTE are expected to shortly announce the formation of a new political party prepared to contest Provincial Council elections after the Indian withdrawal. The present EPRLF-led Provincial Council, press-ganging an army of boy soldiers to fight all-comers, is now caught in a political pincer movement and is likely to be declared illegitimate by the Sri Lankan Government as soon as enough Indians board ship.

Since July 1987, with the arrival of the Indian Peace Keeping Force, a groundswell of Sinhalese nationalism propelled the JVP back into open insurrection. Their two-year campaign cost another 10,000 lives and \$250 million dollars in damage to public and private property.

But now, following a 72-hour chain reaction of arrests and "attempted escapes" Defence Minister Ranjan Wijeratne said in mid-November that security forces had "eliminated" six of the seven JVP politbureau members including student leader D M Ananda, who is said to have led the army to Wijeweera's hideout.

Whether the JVP movement can survive such a body blow remains unclear. As the Sri Lankan press was

quick to point out, the root causes of revolt - the contradiction between an open market economy and lack of opportunity enforced by an age-old system of graft nepotism and greed will not immediately disappear.

The surviving JVP Politbureau member, known by the pseudonym *Kerthi Wijebahu*, is the leader of the JVP's military wing, the *Deshapremi Janatha Vyaparaya* (DJV). He has opposed all negotiations both with the Government and the Opposition and, observers say, it is his ruthless atavistic vision that is behind the bloodletting of the last two years.

The JVP/DJV battle plan operates around autonomous *balakayas* on 'strike units' active in the Buddhist clergy, the student movement and the rural peasantry. The fate of their erstwhile leaders will not encourage them to surrender.

Security forces launched a high profile operation against the DJV leader's reported stronghold at Weerawila in Hambantota District following the Politbureau killings, with little result. Arson and assassination have continued throughout southern Sri Lanka, notably in Kurunegala and Moneragala and over 1,000 JVP suspects have been rounded up in the last week.

Sri Lanka's Youth Affairs Minister Nanda Mathew was among nine people injured in a grenade attack on a Government-sponsored rally near Colombo on 26 November.

Since Rohana Wijeweera's death there have been oblique references in the press to an army officer present at his capture and interrogation, whose brother was killed by the DJV. Does it suggest a crime of passion or an attempt to muddy the waters by the Sri Lankan military?

Wijeweera's death remains a puzzle, but whether his killing was the work of an embittered individual or the Army's upper echelons, Mr Premadasa must now proceed with caution. The Army may be developing ruling passions of its own.

Security forces settle old scores in the Hill Country

Unease in the Plantations after Wijeweera's death

A cautious and uneasy calm in the Plantation sector has followed the deaths of Wijeweera and other JVP leaders. Violent incidents involving the JVP were greatly reduced and no JVP-inspired strikes were reported. In the badly-affected Uva Province, where workers had lost wages for a number of weeks due to *hartals* and strikes, regular work has resumed.

Trade Union officials said that six days work was on offer even on those estates where factories had been burnt down. Tea from these estates would be transported for processing to estates where factories were still in production.

In early November, attempts were made by the JVP to burn all the tea factories in the Uva area. Some factories were completely gutted but others were saved by the workers. On 14 November, armed persons set fire to the Stoneycliff Estate factory in Hatton and on 17 November, 25 heavily-armed uniformed men tried to burn down the factory on St Leonards Estate in Ragala. These attempts were again foiled by the Plantation workers. A Trade Union official said 35 factories had been completely destroyed by the JVP throughout the Plantation area and as many partially damaged. Reports from Matara say the local tea industry has been badly crippled by the burning of seven major factories.

Previously, workers have lost wages due to JVP-enforced strikes but recently Plantation superintendents were ordered by the JVP to pay six days wages a week even if work was not offered. Some Trade Union workers pointed out that the JVP was only enforcing provisions laid down by Law. Superintendents defying the orders of the JVP were shot dead. Reports say that 27 superintendents have thus far been killed. Superintendents B Ambanpola and SR Waragoda of Ampitikande and Mahakanda Estates in Bandarawela were shot dead on 14 November under similar circumstances.

Although JVP violence has dropped dramatically, Hill Country residents say harassment by the armed forces has increased with the stepping-up of search operations for the subversives. Large number of arrests are reported and people say some have 'disappeared'. In Nuwara Eliya alone more than 1,000 persons were arrested during November.

There are now very real fears that Police Chief Udugampola and his vigilantes will run riot in the District as JVP opposition wanes. Many Hill Country youth have left to join the Tamil Civil Volunteer Force (CVF) in the North-East. Local sources say they receive money as well as weapons training and Plantation residents fear extortion and violence on their return.

Rajiv resigns

Rajiv Gandhi, scion of India's first family, resigned as Prime Minister on 29 November after a disastrous General Election result which left the ruling Congress (I) Party unable to form a government. With 50 results still to come Congress had won only 183 seats in the 545 Lok Sabha or lower house.

The opposition Janata Dal Party secured 111 seats and was expected to form a government with the Hindu fundamentalist Bharatiya Janata Party who gained 82 seats and various left-wing parties who took 43 seats.

In his resignation speech, Mr Gandhi said he had not paid enough attention to India's ethnic problems. Only hours later he was re-elected as Congress Party leader, ending widespread speculation over his withdrawal from politics. Congress with Mr Gandhi's family at its head has ruled India for 38 of its 42 years of independence.

In late November there was still disagreement among the new opposition coalition as to how India's new Prime Minister should be chosen.

Mr Gandhi is down but not out, observers say. Congress tactics are to let India endure a short period of coalition chaos with Mr Gandhi re-emerging as the only credible alternative.

Mr. Wijetunge's low-key budget gives nothing away

THE ECONOMY

SRI LANKA's economic performance deteriorated sharply during the first six months of this year affected by growing civil disturbance, said a Central Bank report released on 16 November.

Tea production dropped by 20% and rubber by 11%. A decline of 18% in public sector output was offset by 9% growth in the private sector. A 40% reduction in net capital inflow left Sri Lanka's gross external assets at SDR (Standard Drawing Rights) 372 million - enough to finance only 2.1 months

of imports in the next six months.

Prime Minister D B Wijetunge's second Budget presented the same day, earlier offered only an unostentatious array of indirect taxation strategies and minor wage increases for Government employees. Opposition MP Dharmasiri Senanayake, opening the Budget debate, said the bulk of the Government revenue was to be raised by increasing taxation on staple food items while offering tax holidays to venture capital.

After the pledging of a \$785 million World Bank aid package in October there is still widespread speculation over the price Sri

Lanka's domestic economy will inevitably pay for such assistance. A confidential World Bank report obtained by the Colombo *Sunday Times* says the Government has agreed to the privatisation of transport telecommunications and the removal of subsidies on food, fuel and fertiliser. The report also gives details of the merging of Government departments and the redundancy of 80,000 civil servants over a period of three years. Pension benefits for public employees will also be cut back. Mr Wijetunge's quiet little budget, observers say, is the calm before the storm.

The war that nobody wanted and everyone planned

The battle for Batticaloa

OMINOUS predictions that all-out war was imminent in the East became harsh reality, when on 5 November the LTTE launched an attack on the conscript Tamil National Army (TNA) at Thambiluvil and Thirukkivil in Amparai, only 12 days after the IPKF withdrew 4000 troops from the District. Some 50 militants died in the attack and reports say 150 TNA members were abducted by the LTTE.

Defence Minister Ranjan Wijeratne visiting the scene of the LTTE-TNA clash ordered 900 Sri Lankan soldiers into the District on 7 November, despite vehement protests by North-East Chief Minister Varatharaja Perumal. Mr Perumal's brutal induction of a conscript army has created wholesale destabilisation and widespread panic among the civilian population.

Potential rivals such as EROS cadres, also under Indian training, were attacked by TNA units at Akkaraipattu on 11 November, killing seven of the LTTE allies. The TNA also issued a leaflet warning local people not to refer any complaints to the local police.

Then on 17 November, the TNA simultaneously attacked five police stations in the District. Reports said that 51 policemen - including 38 Muslim trainees - four soldiers and 5 TNA members were killed.

As clashes between soldiers and TNA spread throughout the District on 20 November, the Government airlifted in more troops to confront the conscript army. EPRLF allegations that the Sri Lankan Army had attacked civilians and burnt houses were denied. Residents in the East however say that nearly 30,000 Tamils and Muslims have fled to the neighbouring Batticaloa District and relief agencies are under heavy pressure.

Observers in Amparai say that the attacks by the TNA were designed to delay the IPKF withdrawal - a charge which gained credence when Indian forces suspended their retreat from Batticaloa District.

A war of words continues alongside the clash of arms. EPRLF leaders, denying the existence of the

TNA, accused the Sri Lankan government of trying to bring down the Provincial government in collusion with the LTTE. Mr Wijeratne in turn, charged the IPKF with 'allowing an illegal force to be set up under its patronage'. With Indian voters about to go to the polls, the Indian High Commissioner's response was cautious: "This is not the time to trade allegations", he said.

President Premadasa, at a parliamentary Group meeting on 20 November, said that the violence in the East was a deliberate attempt to provoke Sri Lankan armed forces in order to justify the continued presence of the Indian troops in Sri Lanka. Sri Lankan Muslim Congress (SLMC) leader M H M Ashraff accused the TNA of looting and communal attacks on Muslim policemen and civilians.

Numerous kidnappings were re-

ported in the East in November. Over 20 wealthy residents of Kalawanchikudy and Palagamam in Batticaloa, were abducted by militants and millions of rupees demanded for their release. The SLMC accused Tamil militant group PLOTE of the kidnapping of five Muslims in Sammanthurai on 9 November. PLOTE has denied the allegation. A *hartal* by the SLMC crippled transport and other services in some areas of the East for several days in mid-November.

Amparai District now faces poor harvests during the forthcoming *Yala* rice crop. Affected farmers have appealed to the Government Agent for relief. The Agricultural Department has already said that it will not supply seed paddy for 147,000 acres of land earmarked for the major *Maha* rice crop to be planted in a few weeks.

Militants clash with Lankan forces

THERE WAS TENSION in the northern town of Vavuniya in late October following the kidnapping of 21 Sri Lanka policemen and two soldiers by Tamil militant group TELO. The abduction was a response to the disappearance of two TELO cadres on the Vavuniya-Anuradhapura road, sources said. A *hartal* organised by the Tamil National Council brought Vavuniya to a standstill.

The policemen were released a few days later but one of the soldiers, Wijesooriya, was not returned, security sources said. Two other Sri Lankan army personnel were abducted by Tamil militants in the Vavuniya area a week later.

Further south, in the first clash between the LTTE and Sri Lankan soldiers since peace talks began, 11 LTTE cadres were killed by soldiers of the Gemunu Watch in Wilpattu National Park in Anuradhapura District, while looting Government property.

For several months there have been rumours of the LTTE operating out of Sri Lankan Army bases just south of Wilpattu, where there are said to be major LTTE concentrations in jungle areas.

In the Seruwila area of Trincomalee District, ten civilians were shot dead in a 72-hour period in early November during Sri Lankan Army operations in Sinhalese villages. In late October, three soldiers were killed and three injured in JVP attacks on the Gajaba regiment in the same area.

Following a meeting with EROS MPs on 15 November, Trade Minister A R Munsoor said immediate action would be taken to restore Government institutions and public utilities in the North-East Province. Since rehabilitation work funded by international agencies was co-ordinated by Central Government, it was right that MPs should be consulted, said Mr Munsoor.

Jaffna mourns human rights activist

A 60th day Commemoration Meeting following the murder of University lecturer and human rights activist Rajani Thiranagama was held at Jaffna University on 21 November. Over 2,000 people took part in a seven-mile protest march through a gauntlet of streets lined with IPKF soldiers and armed militants from EPRLF. There were also workshops and meetings addressed by international human rights workers including Martin Ennals of International Alert.

On the same day two youths, Thirugnanaveeran and Arul, working as drivers at the Jaffna Bishop's House were abducted by armed men. Later their bodies were found with gunshot injuries. They had been tortured before being killed. Although the identity of the killers were not known, observers in Jaffna believe that the killing of the youths

was a warning to church members against active participation in the Rajani Thiranagama meeting.

Ceasefire violations were reported throughout the North during November. The LTTE say the Indian government sent 2,000 fresh troops into Jaffna on 31 October. The IPKF camp at Valvettiturai has been extended, it is said, to accommodate them and new Tamil National Army (TNA) camps have been established in Nallur, Kottadi and Kondavil. Allegations of troop reinforcements were denied by the Indian High Commission. The LTTE also accused Indian intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis Wing of masterminding the conscript TNA and said they would reconsider the current ceasefire.

On 15 November, Marimuthu Wigneswaran, a CVF member was killed by unknown persons at Vep-

pamkulam in Mannar. The LTTE's Mullaitivu commander *Thanksu* was killed at Thanneerutru village on 18 November, allegedly by an IPKF unit.

The ban by the EPRLF on the Jaffna newspapers *Eelanadu*, *Murasoli* and *Uthayan* continued throughout November. Reports say appeals by journalists to IPKF officers and the Sri Lankan government to lift the embargo have produced no results. Sections of the printing presses of all three newspapers meanwhile, have been removed, reports allege. *Virakesari*, the Colombo Tamil daily earlier banned by the EPRLF is now permitted distribution in the North. Two Sri Lanka Transport Board buses carrying the EPRLF newspaper *Viduthalai* (Freedom) were reported burnt by the LTTE at Kopay and Neerveli.

Europe: deportation, disinformation and disarray

HOLLAND's High Court in Amsterdam rejected an appeal on 9 November by six Tamils against deportation to Sri Lanka. The decision - which says racial persecution of Tamils is not proven and the existence of a UNHCR programme in Sri Lanka means they may be safely returned - has caused widespread concern in refugee circles.

The judgment also said violence in Sri Lanka was arbitrary and thus two of the appellants - young female Tamils, victims of sexual attack - did not have a special case. The existence of a UN refugee programme which returned 25,000 people from India in 1988 was unthinkable, the judgment continued, if conditions were unsafe.

The Dutch Refugee Council immediately wrote to UNHCR who confirmed on 16 November that their voluntary repatriation programme from South India was suspended in April 1989, "due to large-scale potential violence and general insecurity in Sri Lanka and has not been resumed."

This belated admission has reinforced widespread concern over UNHCR's public information policy. The April 1989 issue of UNHCR's Refugees magazine - also referred to by the Dutch Court - promoted a unilaterally positive view of their operations in Sri

Lanka, as did the annual UNHCR consultation with NGOs on refugee protection in Geneva in May.

There is also concern over UNHCR's promotion of a voluntary repatriation programme for Tamil refugees in Europe. Although the programme is voluntary, its very existence leads governments to question the position that Sri Lankans should not be returned at the present time.

Lawyers for the six Tamils say they will now appeal to Holland's Supreme Court which will take up to a year. All six have gone underground, some in Sri Lanka, others in Europe.

Some may be in Switzerland where the Tamil refugee population will double to around 10,000 this year, a meeting in Geneva of the European Consultation on Refugees and Exiles was told in early October. Most of the Tamils will arrive undercover from other European countries seeking employment in Switzerland's lucrative tourist industry.

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,

The Sri Lanka Project
The British Refugee Council
3/9 Bondway
London SW3 1SJ
Tel. (01) 552 6922.

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