

# *The Sri Lanka Monitor*

Vol 2 No 9 December 1989

Produced by the British Refugee Council

## North-East on a knife-edge as Tamil factions clash

SRI LANKA's beleaguered North-East Province remains spectacularly poised between war and peace as military units of the Tamil Tigers (LTTE) and the Indian-backed Tamil National Army (TNA) vie to fill the political vacuum left by the retreating Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF).

After its failure to hold Amparai District last month in the wake of the Indian withdrawal, the TNA - a conscript army raised by Tamil militant groups who make up the North-East Provincial Council administration (N-E PC) - moved into Batticaloa in early December, occupying public buildings and looting shops and stores.

Following a TNA attack on Batticaloa Police headquarters on 5 December, thousands of local people sought refuge in churches and schools in the area. When a surrender ultimatum by the LTTE went largely unheeded, the Tigers launched a surprise sea attack on TNA positions early on 10 December, killing almost 100 of the boy-soldiers.

The LTTE swiftly consolidated their position, capturing a major TNA/ENDLF camp 5 miles south of Batticaloa at Thanmunai. The remnants of the TNA were said to have fled by sea to Trincomalee and into the Unnichchai jungles where the injured were airlifted out of the district by IPKF helicopters.

Local sources say LTTE cadres are now in complete control of Batticaloa and Amparai Districts working in tandem with the Provincial Police and consciously attempting to establish a rapport in Sinhalese and Muslim areas where the excesses of the TNA have been greatest.

In other parts of the North East, as the IPKF withdraw from Mannar Vavuniya and Mullaitivu, the LTTE's blueprint for success in Batticaloa has largely been repeated. Observers say two factors militate in

their predominance. The raw conscripts of the TNA fuelled by liquor and threats are no match for the jungle-hardened LTTE. Nor have the TNA commandants - remnants of the Tamil militants TELO and ENDLF - been able to outmanoeuvre a mobile guerrilla force by enclaving themselves in stockaded strongholds as they did in Mannar and Batticaloa.

The situation is now reversed with the TNA hiding out in a hostile jungle or in a few villages where PLOTE and TELO hold sway and the LTTE openly controlling many of the North-East's urban centres.

The Indian withdrawal has been blatantly strategic. Sri Lanka press sources say the number of Indian troops withdrawn from Trincomalee and Jaffna's port, Kankesanthurai, matches only those who have arrived in the last two weeks.

The Indians intend to leave major troop concentrations in the Jaffna Peninsula and Trincomalee, having vacated the other six North-Eastern Districts. Indian Foreign Minister I K Gujral has timetabled a total pull-out by 31 March but analysts say the continued Indian presence in Jaffna is a spoiling tactic designed as a ready-made trade-off for an Indian garrison in Trincomalee if the LTTE plan to contest Provincial Council Elections in April.

On 20 December the LTTE's leading ideologue Anton Balasingham announced the formation of a new political party, the People's Front of the Liberation Tigers (PFLT) embracing democratic socialist principles. An Election Commission official said political status was granted to the group a week earlier.

The EPRLF-run N-E PC administration oppose fresh PC elections, citing a 60% turnout in the East in November 1988 despite an LTTE boycott. EPRLF say, if the LTTE can retain arms and be recognised as a political party, why should the duly

elected administration in the North East disarm its police force?

The LTTE clearly intend both to police fresh elections as well as contest them. Whether the collusion of the Sri Lankan Government will extend that far is still unclear. Already the Sri Lankan Army has begun opening and reprovisioning camps and bases throughout the North-East. The pact that exists between the Government and the Tigers is still no more than an uneasy truce.

Rival Lankan Tamil militant groups met in Madras in mid-December under the aegis of Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Karunanidhi, a confidant of India's new premier V.P.Singh, but little of practical value seems to have emerged. All positions now seem entrenched - including that of the Indians.

Sri Lankan Defence Minister Ranjan Wijeratne, in a blistering diatribe accused Indian bureaucrats of sabotaging the IPKF withdrawal and of arming and provisioning the TNA. Mr Wijeratne is expected to fly to New Delhi in early January for further talks.

Meanwhile bitter fighting continues throughout the North-East, often with unpredictable results - PLOTE killed 20 LTTE cadres at Cheddikulam near Mannar on 28 December. As the last Indian troops withdrew from Vavuniya two days later, 28 EPRLF cadres were killed three miles west, at Nellukulam in a clash with the LTTE.

Beyond Vavuniya lies the spectre of a still-occupied Jaffna, now replete with major Indian fortifications. The Indians clearly have a sense of history. If the LTTE want Jaffna, the cultural epicentre of Tamil insurgency, they may have to take it, as the Indians did in October 1987. Unless of course they trade control of Trincomalee, India's original object of desire.



## Violence flares up again in the Hill Country

IN A MONTH of uncertainty, widespread violence was current throughout the Hill Country. In Passara on 12 December, 13 persons were shot allegedly by the People's Liberation Front (JVP), and their bodies burnt in the house of United Socialist Alliance Provincial Council member S Leelarathne. Those dead included two brothers of Mr Leelarathne and two members of the National Auxiliary Force.

In the Nawalapitiya area, ten bodies were recovered by the police on 15 and 16 December. Five more bodies of youths were found in the same area on 24 December. It is alleged that vigilante groups were responsible for these killings.

Electricity sub-stations in Norton Bridge and Nanu Oya were attacked by armed men on 12 December, plunging southern areas, including Matara, Hambantota and Galle, into total darkness. In Nanu Oya two buses and the railway station control room were burnt to the ground.

Numerous arrests were made by police in the Hill Country during December, including 12 Tamil youths in Nuwara Eliya. A Trade Union official said that persons arrested included those suspected of the murder of regional Director of the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) K Sinnathamby. Hill Country sources say a prominent CWC member was also arrested, for allegedly recruiting for the JVP and

offering sanctuary to JVP members in his home for several months.

Parents on a number of Plantations have complained that they are unaware of the whereabouts of their children recruited into Security Teams providing protection to Estates. Those youths recruited have been sent to outlying areas with no further contact with their parents.

Complaints were also made by North-East Provincial Council member, V N Panneerchelvam, that after the clashes in Amparai in October between militant groups, EPRLF members and students in the Hill Country were arrested and severely assaulted in custody. He also alleged that particulars of EPRLF members in the Hill Country were being compiled by the police and sent to the Criminal Investigation Department. EROS leader V Balakumar said that members of his organisation too were being harassed in the Plantation areas.

Tamil militant organisations have been blamed for the dramatic increase in robberies and death threats throughout the Plantations. The Eelavar Democratic Front, the political wing of EROS issued a statement denying involvement, but in late December, two EROS MPs visited Hatton for talks with senior security officials following the arrest of 14 EROS cadres and the confiscation of weapons given to EROS MP S Ramalingam.

### Comedian killed

Popular Sri Lankan actor Nihal Silva (36), famous for his comic creation *Sergeant Nallathamby* was shot dead in the early hours of 3 December. His car failed to stop when challenged by soldiers on the Wellawatta bridge crossing into Colombo.

### Disappearances

Higher Education Minister A C S Hameed told Parliament on 5 December that according to Government statistics, 235 University students had "disappeared" during the last two years. Another 158 students were in custody and charges had been filed against 32.

### Prices

Rumours circulating in Colombo say further price rises in food, fertiliser, fuel and transport are likely in early January as the Government moves to implement World Bank recommendations as part of \$785million aid package approved in October.

### APC to resume

International Affairs Adviser Bradman Weerakoon said on 24 December that sessions of the All Party Conference convened by President Premadasa on 13 September would resume next month. The main opposition SLFP say they will take no further part in the proceedings.

## *Amnesty calls for an end to Sri Lanka's Emergency*

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, the London-based human rights organisation, urged the Sri Lankan Government again this month, to withdraw its Emergency Regulations which permits the disposal of bodies by the security forces without post-mortem or inquest. Amnesty also asked the Government to appoint an independent commission to inquire into extra-judicial executions and to pay adequate compensation to the families and dependents of victims.

In a report published in December, Amnesty records the massacres

carried out by security forces and vigilante groups such as *Black Cats* and the *Eagles of the Central Hills*, particularly in the Anuradhapura, Kandy and Tangalle areas, in reprisal for the killings by the JVP. According to the report, there has been an upsurge in extra-judicial killings in both the North-East and the South, since June 1989 when the Emergency was reimposed.

The report also highlights the deliberate killings of journalists, human rights activists and lawyers, and summarises evidence of official acquiescence in extra-judicial exe-

cutions and the direct participation of the security forces.

The Sri Lankan government, according to the report, has persistently denied any involvement in 'death squad' killings. Where official inquiries have been instigated, no findings have been made public.

Reprisal killings by the IPKF in the North and East after attacks by the LTTE are also documented. Although an official investigation was announced by India into the IPKF massacre of civilians in Valvettiturai in August, similarly, no public accounting seems likely to emerge.



*Robbery and violence rack Jaffna***The North's internecine struggle for survival**

CLASHES between the conscript Tamil National Army (TNA) and the LTTE and Sri Lankan forces spread throughout the North in December as the IPKF withdrew from Mannar, Vavuniya and Mullaitivu.

On 3 December, in an attack by the TNA at Vavuniya, on two truckloads of Sri Lankan Army personnel, 17 soldiers were killed. Following the attack four Tamils were arrested by the army. Two of them, Cooperative Union worker K.Muthiah and Refugee Rehabilitation Fund Coordinator A.Ramanathan, were later admitted to the Vavuniya hospital with serious injuries.

Two Tiger cadres were killed when a LTTE checkpoint was attacked on 7 December by rival groups. The Naval and Army camps in Talaimannar were attacked by the TNA on 11 December following

IPKF withdrawal from the Mannar District four days earlier. In the ensuing clash five persons were killed and fifty injured. Eight TELO members injured in the encounter were admitted to a hospital at Ramnad in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Over 1,000 Sri Lankan refugees have arrived in South India in the last three weeks, many of them young males who are either injured or disabled. In Mannar over 5,000 civilians fleeing the area took refuge in Pesalai's churches and schools. Local relief organisations say that a number of houses have been damaged and that many fishing boats have disappeared.

As the deadline for IPKF withdrawal approached, a dramatic rise in killings was reported in the Jaffna area. On 3 December the bodies of three youths were found at Kopay and Kondavil. Eight bullet-

ridden bodies were seen near the Viramakali Amman Temple in Jaffna town on 8 December, and the following day another two bodies were recovered on the Main Street. Notes left near these bodies said that they were LTTE supporters. Nine mutilated bodies were found on 10 December at Kaithady and another five at Chunnakam, the same day. Jaffna residents say that most of those killed were LTTE supporters.

Throughout December the number of robberies also increased significantly in the North. On 7 December unidentified armed men robbed six jewellers on Kasturiam Road in Jaffna town. All jewellery shops in Jaffna were closed on 18 December as a protest. A government warehouse in Vavuniya was broken into on 26 December and 200 bags of flour were removed.

The Jaffna Catholic Bishop's House was ransacked by armed militants for the second time in a month and five more persons were abducted. Reports from Jaffna say one of those kidnapped has been killed and two others released. Unconfirmed reports say three Tamil youths returning from a foreign country were shot dead on 24 December at Murikandy, while travelling to Jaffna in a car.

*Batticaloa gets the bill for liberation*

Batticaloa's better-off residents have complained that in the wake of LTTE ascendancy, professionals and business people have been subject to financial extortion. They allege a fixed amount for each category of professional has been determined by the Tigers. For example, a teacher was expected to pay Rupees 3,000 (£50), village headmen Rupees 50,000 (£830) and bank employees between Rupees 50,000 and 200,000 (£3,330). A trader has to pay Rupees 200,000 or more, depending on the volume of his business. People have been warned that failure to pay would result in dire consequences. During the LTTE attack on Batticaloa the family of EPRLF MP Sam Thambimuttu was kidnapped and their home stripped of valuables. They were released a few days later.

Reports from Jaffna also indicate that several businessmen have been ordered by the LTTE to pay large sums of money. Two traders were told to pay one million Rupees (£16,660) each. One of them, it is reported, negotiated to pay half the amount demanded. The other per-

son, who could not pay, was kidnapped and has so far not been released. A famous Jaffna businessman has been ordered to pay five million Rupees (£83,300). Jaffna residents say that if the trend continues, all business will come to a standstill.

■ THOUSANDS of Tamils demonstrated outside the residence of Provincial Council Chief Minister A Varatharaja Perumal in Trincomalee on 13 December, demanding a continuing Indian military presence in Sri Lanka's North-East Province.

A delegation of Muslim MPs from the Eastern Province met President Premadasa a few days later, to seek assurances on their political future. Muslims make up 32% of the Eastern Province but only 17% of the merged North-East Province. They have been targetted in many of the Tamil militant attacks. Some 16 Muslim youths fleeing TNA conscription were killed by EPRLF cadres at Pandiruppu near Batticaloa in early December.

■ FORTY-FIVE conscript soldiers of the Tamil National Army (TNA) were killed on 25 December after a three-day battle with LTTE forces at Aralagamwila in Polonnaruwa District. Another 176 surrendered to Sri Lankan Army units. The TNA recruits were part of a force of 500 who fled Batticaloa following the LTTE assault ten days earlier. Clashes between the TNA and a substantial LTTE force said to number 1,000 continued into late December at Unnichchai, 20 miles south east of Batticaloa, one of the few areas where TNA units have retreated in force and consolidated. Fresh fighting was also said to be underway between the two groups in Mannar.



### *Demise of rebel leadership stiffens resistance*

## **JVP rekindle killing spree in the South**

"The match is over" declared Defence Minister, Ranjan Wijeratne in mid-November, jubilantly espousing a local cricketing metaphor, after the mysterious deaths of Sinhalese rebel leaders, Rohana Wijeweera and Upatissa Gamanayake, in police custody.

Developments in December swiftly belied such optimism as a fresh wave of violence by the Peoples Liberation Front (JVP) scourged Sri Lanka's southern districts, in what were initially portrayed by Government sources as mopping-up operations.

Public utilities and the families of security forces remain primary targets of the JVP resurgence. Eight relatives of security personnel were hacked to death and another four injured at Rambodagalle village on 6 December. Some 15 of 24 men and women, brutally killed in an attack on Hakmana village in Matara District on 11 December, were related to police officers. Another 26 people were killed in the Matara area that same day.

Almost 30 buses were set ablaze at Ambalantota bus depot as violence continued unabated against railway stations, post offices and Government-owned factories.

There was likewise no respite from the activities of pro-government vigilantes and their by-now sickeningly familiar calling card - burning bodies by the side of the road in the grey of early dawn.

The bodies of 11 youths were found at Kalagannawa and Warakapola on 7 December and five more in the Tangalle area on 17 December. Six burning bodies were found in Akuressa the following day where a landmine had recently injured five police officers in a jeep. The killings took place during a massive police/army search operation in southern districts in mid-month which detained over 400 suspected "subversives".

Colombo newspapers report daily on the discovery of "bullet-ridden and smouldering bodies", but are careful to cite Reuter reports in cases of vigilante killings while the government retains control of

newsprint stocks. Between 30 and 50 killings are reported every day.

Speaking in the debate to renew Sri Lanka's Emergency Regulations on 22 December, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Vincent Perera said 574 people had been killed in violent incidents between 15 November and 14 December. Unofficial estimates say twice that number have died. Later that day, first reports were emerging of the gruesome killing of 175 youths in Hambantota District, their bodies strewn on roadsides and beaches. About 75 of the victims stabbed and hung from trees and lamp-posts were believed killed by the JVP. Pro-Government vigilantes and the private armies of local United National Party MPs were thought to be responsible for the others.

Then late in December, at a hurriedly-convened Press Conference, Defence Minister Wijeratne announced that Saman Piyasiri Fernando alias *Kerthi Wijebahu*, leader of the JVP's military wing the Deshapremi Janatha Vyaparaya (DJV), had died in a gun battle after being taken into custody in a Colombo suburb. Also killed in the confrontation was *Aravinda*, said to rank number three in the current JVP leadership.

Local observers found Mr Wijeratne's version of events unconvincing and pointed to the striking similarities in the killing of JVP leaders Wijeweera and Gamanayake last month - also while in police custody. There is speculation following rumours in early December that *Wijebahu*, like Wijeweera, had been in custody for some time and died under torture.

Despite the dismembering of the old-guard leadership, JVP resistance has stiffened throughout the South. Observers say its local and regional organisation has sufficient resilience to restructure its line of command. Like other militant movements there is a high degree of regional autonomy that makes overall control only an issue in the event of victory. As one JVP source put it, "When the jar is half-empty, we fill it up again."

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

ISSN 0955-5943

Funded by voluntary agencies Worldwide.

Technology by R'n'R DTP  
Printed by Printco, 374 Willesden  
High Rd., London NW10

## **Swiss crackdown on asylum-seekers**

SWITZERLAND has tightened up legislation relating to the deportation of asylum-seekers say recent reports, which has caused widespread concern among refugee agencies and the Tamil community in Switzerland.

Swiss Delegate for Refugees Peter Arbenz, who visited Sri Lanka in July 1988, has enlarged the criteria for summary deportation from capital crimes and drug dealing to include conviction of any crime and "illegal" applications for asylum - eg. the use of a false name.

These measures are in part an attempt to deal with an influx in the last 12 months of 5,000 Tamil asylum-seekers, most of whom have come clandestinely from other European countries to work in Switzerland's booming hotel and leisure industry.

Refugee agencies say despite the deteriorating situation in northern Sri Lanka many of the Tamil refugee population in Switzerland are now at risk of arbitrary deportation and have appealed to the authorities. In Denmark the growing conflict between warring Tamil militants in the north of Sri Lanka has been recognised both as grounds for seeking asylum and for the inadvisability of forcible return.