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The end of an illusion

A BRIEF but bloody chapter in Sri Lanka's history was closed on 25 March when the last 2,000 soldiers of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) set sail from Trincomalee a week ahead of schedule. IPKF Commander-in-Chief A S Kalkat was last to board the frigate *Magar* in a lavish farewell ceremony hosted by Defence Minister Ranjan Wijeratne.

In 32 months of bitter fighting with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the Indians lost 1,200 men in an operation costing \$1 billion. Over 10,000 civilians died, half of them in an Indian assault on the northern capital of Jaffna defended by 300 LTTE guerrillas in October 1987.

Lured into Sri Lanka to sap Tamil separatism by erstwhile President J R Jayewardene, the IPKF became swiftly bogged down in a politico-military morass that elicited comparisons with America's humiliation in Vietnam. At its height, 100,000 Indian troops with sophisticated air and artillery support were ranged against a small guerrilla army, hostile terrain and an increasingly hostile population.

But the end was now in sight when on 11 March, the leaders of the Indian-backed Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), who ran the Vichy-style North East Provincial Council (N-E PC), were airlifted to India along with their families. Two Indian ships carrying 1,600 EPRLF/ENDLF cadres and their families were refused permission to land at Madras and were eventually taken to an improvised refugee complex in Orissa further north. Local reports say

Indian troops quit Sri Lanka ahead of schedule

conditions are basic and security has been tightened after 800 of the exiles 'escaped'. Sources suggest they have been taken to Army camps in north India for military training. EPRLF General Secretary K P Pathmanabha is locked in discussions in New Delhi and the whereabouts of former N-E PC Chief Minister A Varadaraja Perumal are unknown. Some say he may seek sanctuary in the West.

From mid-March the Tiger takeover was virtually complete. Jaffna was peaceful but in the middle of a Sandinista-like programme of political education as flags and loudspeakers appeared everywhere, counselling calm and public obedience.

There was tension in Trincomalee as the Tiger writ edged closer to China Bay harbour and the withdrawal deadline loomed. There were fears of a clash between thousands of Sinhalese refugees in the Fort Frederick area as Tamil government servants returned to work for the first time in 21 months, but local security was tight. The LTTE have co-opted 57 senior Tamil bureaucrats from the various N-E PC ministries, who will they say run a skeleton civil administration until Provincial Council elections take place.

President Premadasa moved swiftly, hours after the Indian exodus, declaring President's Rule in the N-E Province, replacing PC Chief Secretary V Nadarajah with LTTE nominee S Ganeshanathan.

Following LTTE/Government discussions in Colombo the horse trading began in earnest. President Premadasa agreed to close the Israeli Interests Section, bringing

11 Sri Lanka Muslim Congress MPs back into the fold and his own party closer to the two thirds majority he requires to repeal the Sixth Amendment to the Constitution. The Tigers say they will not participate in elections until the Amendment, which demands an overt disavowal of separatism, is repealed.

A few days later, Defence Minister Ranjan Wijeratne told a Colombo press conference that the LTTE must now disarm if they wished to stand in elections. The Tigers clearly reject this proposition and have repeated their call for dissolution of the N-E PC and Western observers at fresh elections, citing the statement of International Wing leader Kittu to the Madras paper *Malaimurasu*, that the LTTE intends to function as a second army in the North-East.

It may be some time before trust will replace armed truce. At the moment neither side seems likely to back down, nor have they much room for manoeuvre. LTTE leaders Anton Balasingham and Yogi are adamant that they can reach agreement with President Premadasa but both sides need early Provincial Council elections if the situation is not to deteriorate further.

Unconfirmed reports say the Tigers are bulldozing new underground bases and hospitals in the Vanni jungle. 15,000 young northerners are said to have joined up in a post-withdrawal recruiting drive.

Post mortems on the Indian military misadventure in northern Sri Lanka have veered towards the polite, pointing to the futility of regional superpowers trying to impose a settlement from the outside. The truth is much simpler. The Indians were out-fought and out-thought while trapped in the grand illusion of their post-colonial greatness.

Two years later, the Tigers who were preparing a last stand at the gates of Jaffna town are now the masters of the North. Even Jayewardene's legendary political acumen would not have countenanced such a complete reversal.

But all this is in the past. The warning shots of a new phase of the conflict have already been fired. It is now up to the LTTE and the Government to prove conclusively that the idea of peace between Tamils and Sinhalese is merely elusive rather than just another grand illusion.

In an unexpected Cabinet reshuffle in late March, one of Mr Premadasa's former rivals for the Presidential nomination, Plantations Minister Gamini Dissanayake was dismissed. Mr Dissanayake was often outspoken on the economy and had good relations with the Rajiv Gandhi administration in India. Defence Minister Ranjan Wijeratne adds Plantations to his portfolio and Coconut Industries Minister Harold Herath is a surprise choice as Foreign Minister. ACS Hameed, a leading Government figure in LTTE negotiations, becomes Justice Minister.

Secret army runs killer squads from Colombo HQ

A law unto themselves

A GROUP of officers inside the Sri Lanka Army are responsible for the spate of vigilante killings and take orders only from a Cabinet Minister, says the latest round of speculation from Colombo. The officers are said to be linked to Operation Combine, the highly successful anti-subversive operation responsible for the capture of Rohana Wijeweera and other leaders of the People's Liberation Front (JVP) last year.

Defence Minister Ranjan Wijeratne, winding up Operation Combine at a ceremony in Colombo on 8 March, paid tribute to its leaders, Major General Waidyaratne and Brigadier Lucky Al-gama, for wiping out the JVP in four months.

Army Commander-in-Chief Hamilton Wanasinghe, who looks increasingly isolated, was hurried off to Japan on a courtesy visit before the Combine ceremony. Ranjan Wijeratne told the meeting that an independent Special Forces Brigade under Brigadier Janaka Perera would be set up to monitor national security. A Brigade Headquarters in Colombo would be established under Col. Sathis Jayasundera.

Waidyaratne and a clique of officers around him, now appear to be the real power in the Army and a vicious struggle is underway between the two factions to implicate each other in the robberies and killings that accompany Army activity in the South.

Some 13 people, abducted by armed men on 27 February from their homes at Nittambuwa in Gampaha District, were found shot and burned at Wavulkelle. A female student among the victims had been raped and tortured. The massacre came to light when a man escaped with injuries and sought refuge in a Gampaha MP's house. Four policemen from the Weeragula police station in the same District were arrested in mid-March in connection with the killings and a Police Sub-Inspector has absconded. Two weeks later, the Gampaha home of Opposition SLFP MP Jeyaraja Fernando was attacked by uniformed men in an unmarked vehicle and two security guards injured.

On 6 March, four soldiers of the Bala-wathgama Army detachment in Kegalle District were arrested by the Kirulle po-

lice for involvement in the murder of CH Ratnayake, the brother-in-law of Sabaragamuwa Provincial Council member Danapala Eritawatte. Four other soldiers were arrested by the Wattala police on charges of robbery and murder. They had stabbed four men and thrown them into the Hamilton Canal in Wattala. One man died, but the others lived to tell the tale.

On 11 March two soldiers and a reserve policeman were detained by the Haputala police after the rape of a woman from Ohiya Estate. Three policemen attached to the Maradana police station are in detention for robbery in the Dematagoda area in Colombo.

Two junior Army officers were arrested in mid-March by military police in Hambantota in connection with the murder of a person named Dingi Malli in Ambalangoda. Three more soldiers were taken into custody by the police for their involvement in a rape at Aranayake. According to security sources, four Navy personnel were arrested on 20 March when they allegedly attempted to abduct a policeman's wife on Galle Face Green in Colombo.

Thirteen people including six Army officers were produced before the Colombo Magistrates Court on the same day in connection with a number of robberies in various parts of Colombo and were remanded in custody. By late March, there were said to be over 100 security personnel in custody for various offences. There is now growing concern over Government plans to establish an Army base in each of Sri Lanka's 25 Districts garrisoned by 1,000 troops.

At Aluthpola in Minnuwangoda, more than 15 burning bodies were found by the police on 5 March. On 15 March, two bodies were seen burning at Boossa and in Mahaoya three bodies were recovered with gunshot injuries. Reports said that 17 persons were killed by vigilantes on 25 March in the South and their bodies left burning by the roadside.

Security forces have arrested many people in the South, including a number of Tamil youths in Colombo thought to have connections with pro-Indian militants such as EPRLF. Large quantities of arms are said to have been recovered. According to the Government there are now 14,000 youths in custody.

Inflation

Inflation hit its highest-ever level in February according to Sri Lanka's Census and Statistics Department as the Colombo Consumers' Price Index Number hit 952 points - a rise of 22%.

Asylum

Sinhalese asylum-seeker, Viraj Mendis, who spent two years in sanctuary in a Manchester church arrived in Frankfurt in early March after a year in hiding in Sri Lanka. He was reunited with his wife who now has a job in West Germany.

Appeal

Dr Subash Chandra Fernando, brother-in-law of the late JVP leader Rohana Wijeweera, appealed to the Bar Association of Sri Lanka for assistance after his legal counsel withdrew. He faces charges of inciting public feelings of disaffection towards the Government.

Overheard

Replying to a question in Parliament from DM Jayaratne (SLFP Kandy) on 14 March, Defence Minister Ranjan Wijeratne said official tapping of telephones could only take place on the authority of the President. Written complaints should be submitted to the Telecommunications Ministry.

Aid

Britain will supply over £13 million in government aid to Sri Lanka in the coming year, said Tony Faint, Asia Director of the UK's Overseas Development Administration in Colombo in mid-March. A £20 million grant over three years for reconstruction in conflict-affected areas was also agreed.

Compensation

Over half a million dollars has been paid out to victims of violence in the 13 local government divisions of the Jaffna Peninsula in the last two years, officials say. 3,370 deaths have been officially registered and 1,226 people have applied for compensation for injury.

Catch

Some 300 Indian fishermen and 50 boats have been detained in the last month by LTTE patrols in Sri Lankan territorial waters off Point Pedro. Vadamaratchchi fishermen have blamed Indian vessels for destroying nets in the area.

LTTE supremo surfaces in Jaffna **The return of Thamby**

AFTER THIRTY MONTHS in hiding in the Vanni jungles, *Thamby*, the LTTE's commander-in-chief Veluppillai Prabhakaran returned to a hero's welcome in Jaffna. Speaking to reporters on 1 April, he declared that the LTTE trusted President Premadasa, but said Tamil aspirations were yet to be realised. He warned that the LTTE would not hesitate to resume armed struggle if oppression was unleashed on the Tamil people.

The IPKF withdrawal from the North was completed on 20 March when around 1,000 soldiers boarded ship at Kankesan-

turai. On the same day, the headquarters of the LTTE's political party, the *Peoples Front* was opened at Kondavil by its new President K Mahendrarajah (*Mahattaya*) who invited the people to participate in *Peoples Front* socio-economic programmes at a village level.

Following the Indian withdrawal, the remains of five civilians killed by the IPKF in October 1987 were exhumed by relatives from a trench in Anaikottai. Earlier in the month, Valvettiturai Citizens Committee advised relatives of those who 'disappeared' after arrest by

the IPKF to claim compensation. Attempts to establish the whereabouts of those arrested had failed, the Committee said. Meanwhile the LTTE have begun collecting particulars of killings in the North-East by the IPKF, Sri Lankan forces and rival militant groups.

Jaffna showed signs of a swift return to normalcy. Bus services were extended and the night train service from Colombo has resumed. Banks transact regular business and cinemas hold late-night shows. Schools have resumed sports competitions and cultural events. Visitors to Jaffna say there is no shortage of food or fuel. Sources in Jaffna say the LTTE has already penetrated most civil organisations in the North and East. LTTE members are present at work places and often intervene in events.

LTTE's new newspaper, *Eelanadan*, launched on 19 February, is proving popular in Jaffna. A TV service, *Nitharasan* and a radio service will begin soon.

Rehabilitation Ministry Secretary, K C Logeswaran, visited Jaffna on 16 March for discussions with government officials on the implementation of rehabilitation programmes. Former Jaffna Government Agent Devanesan Nesiah will act as Co-ordinator between the N-E PC and the Government.

Keeping the peace in Amparai

IN AMPARAI, the LTTE face two immediate problems - low-level conflict with other groups and state-aided colonisation. Law and order remains uneven.

Police say militants robbed five Muslim houses at the beginning of March in the Sammanthurai area. A number of other robberies and attacks on civilians were also reported. According to sources in Amparai, the Karumkottivukulam area is being colonised with Government assistance. New houses and shops are being built, which, it is said, may deprive irrigated lands of water.

The LTTE say they have set up camp in Malwatte in Amparai to protect people. Some 130 Sinhalese families have returned to villages in Pottuvil after an absence of five years.

A PLOTE jungle base in Amparai was attacked by the LTTE on 10 March. One person was killed and seven others injured. Police fired at LTTE cadres attempting to remove a barricade near Kalmunai police station on 13 March. LTTE leader *Karikalan* averted a clash after discussions with senior police officers. The LTTE abducted several people from Kalmunai, including two policemen on 22 March. They were released after the intervention of senior police officers.

The LTTE say they discovered two Tamil National Army (TNA) camps in the Pottuvil jungle on 16 March and recovered a large quantity of arms. According to Sri Lankan security sources, 31 TNA members were arrested by the *Special Task Force* on 18 March at Siyambal-

anduwa in Moneragala District. In Batticaloa town, armed LTTE militants can be seen assisting police with traffic duties. Colombo-Batticaloa night train services resumed on 19 March and the High Court began sitting for the first time since 1987.

Ministers A.C.S. Hameed and A.R. Mansoor visited Kathankudi in Batticaloa on 25 March for discussions with Muslim leaders. Following discussions with the LTTE, Karadiyanaru and Pulpainthakal army camps were closed down.

Unrest continues in the Hill Country

FIVE unidentified gunmen shot dead S.Sathasivam, S.Mathavan and another person, all Plantation workers belonging to the same family, on the North Meddecombra Estate in Punduloya in the Nuwara Eliya District on 9 March. Police say a number of people have been arrested in connection with the killings. Police also recovered a burned body in the Punduloya area.

A Tamil youth was arrested on 7 March at Passara in Uva District. Police say he had an AK47 rifle and ammunition in his possession. In mid-March N. Vijayapalan, suspected of belonging to Tamil militants, ENDLF was taken into custody following to a robbery in the Hill Country. Two others were also arrested.

At a ceremony on 20 March in Kandy, 125 Plantation youths passed out as police officers. They are to be deployed in

the Hill Country, the first time such a large number of Tamil youths has been inducted locally.

One of the largest Trade Unions in the Plantations, the Ceylon Workers Congress held its Golden Jubilee Convention in Hatton on 24 and 25 March. The Convention adopted resolutions urging that Plantation workers be made owners of their line room accommodation and adjoining lands. The Government was also asked to give preference to Plantation workers in the distribution of other uncultivated land on Estates.

Reports at the end of March say that Gamini Dissanayake, relieved from his position as Minister of Plantations, has also been removed from the Presidency of another large Plantation Trade Union, the government-aligned Lanka Jathika Estate Workers Union.

THE PROSPECTS FOR PEACE IN THE SOUTH

The rehabilitation of Ruhuna

In *Ruhuna*, the traditional name for Sri Lanka's deep south, political violence has replaced Buddhist piety as the dominant ideology. For the second time in 20 years, a Marxist-inspired rebellion by the People's Liberation Front (JVP) has been crushed at the cost of thousands of lives. President Premadasa has ambitious plans to rehabilitate southern youth, long denied political voice or economic muscle. Can he succeed or are the seeds of revolt already sown in the next generation?

In late March, 75 youths detained by the Government for involvement in subversive activities were released into the custody of their parents at a high-profile ceremony in Kandy presided over by Youth Affairs Minister Nanda Mathew. They are the first of 14,000 the Government says it is holding, to be returned to society as part of an ambitious rehabilitation programme.

Early in January, President Premadasa established a Task Force from key ministries under Rehabilitation Commissioner Col. Ananda Weerasekara, releasing Rs25 million (\$1 million) to set up 20 rehabilitation centres throughout the South.

Five camps are now in operation with around 8,000 earmarked for rehabilitation. The Commission's screening procedures recognise three categories of detainees:

- hard-core subversives who will face criminal charges
- those whose involvement is limited but require vocational training and guidance
- those whose involvement is peripheral to be released into their parents custody.

Human rights workers say conditions in the rehabilitation camps are much better than detention centres and that they are staffed from outside the prison service. There is still concern, however, over those held in small groups in police stations and other improvised jails - the notorious "chicken houses" that are said to supply the corpses 'necklaced' with burning tyres served up as reprisal in areas where JVP activity continues.

Col. Weerasekara has worked hard at confidence-building, encouraging religious leaders and voluntary agencies to get involved in the rehabilitation process. But there is reticence, tinged with anger

and regret over the Army's excesses. When the Sinha regiment withdrew from Embilipitiya (Ratnapura District) in late January, only 8 of 300 known detainees could be traced.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has received 3,800 requests on behalf of missing relatives since the delegation opened in Colombo in October last year. Following a meeting of the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva earlier this month, the Sri Lankan Government has agreed to a fact-finding visit from the Commission's Working Group on Disappearances later this year.

President Premadasa has already endorsed the major findings of a Youth Commission Report, and will introduce legislation in April reserving seats for 18 to 30 year olds in local government elections. Informed sources say, however, that local elections due in June will be postponed till December because of the continuing JVP threat.

It is clear that while Mr Premadasa has won several decisive battles, he has not yet won the war. His battle for the hearts and minds of the South may be a long one.

20,000 Tamils claim European asylum in 1989

OVER 20,000 Sri Lankan Tamils arrived in European countries last year seeking political asylum, a meeting of the European Consultation on Refugees and Exiles was told in Paris in late March.

The major receiving countries were West Germany with 7,758 applications and France with 3,326. Switzerland had a record 4,809 applications from Sri Lankans many of whom had arrived illegally from other European countries.

Acquiring refugee status for Sri Lankans in Europe remains a difficult task, observers say, especially in a number of countries where refugee arrivals have doubled this year. France remains the exception where an assiduous public information campaign on Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict has raised the recognition rate to 63%.

In Germany, where there are over 30,000 Tamil asylum-seekers, a recent Federal Court decision that individual political persecution cannot be ruled out by the existence of civil war conditions in Sri Lanka may have a positive bearing on

a number of cases, legal sources say.

There are now close to 120,000 Sri Lankan asylum-seekers in Europe, refugee authorities say. Around 2% of this year's 20,000 influx may be Sinhalese fleeing the civil war in the South.

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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In Britain, where refugee figures trebled last year, 1,515 Sri Lankans arrived, claiming asylum. Provisional figures suggest almost no refused cases were deported as compared to 1988 when over 100 Sri Lankan Tamils were forcibly returned to Colombo.

Legal sources say few decisions are now being made on Tamil cases and immigration authorities are clearly adopting a wait-and-see policy in the light of the changing situation in the North-East Province of Sri Lanka.

The Research Organisation of Tamil Eelam (ROOT) held a weekend seminar in London in late March to unveil plans for the redevelopment of the North and East once fresh Provincial Council elections have been held. The meeting was well attended by the Tamil expatriate community, including many prominent professionals.

ROOT will act as a coordinating point and a "think-tank" for community reconstruction and money was raised for a branch office in Jaffna.