

TIGERS OFFER TRUCE

AFTER six months of war in North-East Sri Lanka, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) surprised the Sri Lankan government by declaring a unilateral ceasefire commencing midnight on 31 December.

Following their victory at Mankulam last month, the LTTE intensified attacks on the security forces, resulting in the death of at least 60 soldiers. The Tigers scored their biggest hit by killing two senior officials - Trincomalee Commander Lakshman Wijeratne and Senior Superintendent of Police Richard Wijesekera - in a landmine explosion at Morawewa in the Trincomalee District. Opposition allegations that secret talks with the LTTE were the cause of the lull in Army operations in early December in the North-East, was denied by Defence Minister Ranjan Wijeratne. He reiterated that talks would begin only after LTTE laid down arms.

Retaliatory strikes by the security forces began on 20 December in the Paduwankarai area of Batticaloa. Curfew was imposed throughout the District as the Army and the Special Task Force attacked LTTE positions with air support. A day later, curfew was extended to Amparai, Vavuniya and Mullaitivu Districts. In the North contingents of the Peoples' Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), moved towards Madhu in Mannar and Cheddikulam in Vavuniya with the Sri Lankan Army.

Reports say that 33 PLOTE cadres involved in the Maldive Islands coup and released from custody on 20 December in the Islands, have joined their colleagues in the battle front. Security forces in the East were assisted by militants of the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO). According to Defence Minister Ranjan Wijeratne, 5000 new soldiers were being sent to the North-East every six weeks. PLOTE and TELO cadres, he assured, would be absorbed into the regular armed forces.

The Tamil Nadu police began arresting members of Sri Lankan Tamil militant groups in mid-December following statements by Indian Prime Minister Chandrashekhar that the law and order situation in the southern Indian state was in crisis because of the presence of the militants. The Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M Karunanidhi is said to have ordered the arrests in order to save his State government, which had fallen from favour with the Central government, from dismissal by New Delhi.

Although President Premadasa stressed the importance of ethnic harmony at the 36th Sessions of the United National Party attended by many opposition parties, observers say no tangible action is being taken towards a peaceful solution. EROS member A Arulpragasam who surfaced in early December as a mediator between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government said that the Tigers were prepared to join in the creation of an interim council for the North-East. There has been no response from the government for the peace proposals of the LTTE or the Tamil and Muslim parties. President Premadasa has postponed the referendum on the North-East merger to 22 August 1991.

Many search operations were carried out by the security forces in the South on intelligence reports that the Peoples' Liberation Front (JVP) was regrouping. Armed gangs abducted several people and bodies were seen burning on road sides in some areas. According to Mr Wijeratne, an Army officer who helped JVP leader Somawansa Amerasinghe to escape to India, had been arrested.

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS CONTINUE

SECRETARY GENERAL of the Eelam Peoples' Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), Suresh Premachandran, says at least 4000 people have disappeared in the Amparai, Batticaloa and Trincomalee Districts. Many arrests by the security forces had been made during search operations and in refugee camps. In early December, Mr Premachandran said that a conference of political parties had been arranged to discuss the course of action relating to disappearances. Complaints have also been made that no compensation has been awarded to families of persons disappeared in the South.

At a press conference on 4 December Defence Minister Ranjan Wijeratne said that 6952 persons were being detained under emergency regulations and a further 1343 under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. According to the Commissioner General of Rehabilitation 2183 detainees have been released so far.

Dinesh Gunewardene said in Parliament on 7 December that 1600 telephones in the island are being tapped by security services, including those of Ministers, Members of Parliament and government officers.

The Opposition put forward a motion in Parliament on 9 December demanding the appointment of an independent commission of inquiry into the killing of journalist Richard de Zoysa. The Speaker announced, against strong opposition from government members, that a debate would be allowed on the subject.

REFUGEES INCREASE

IN EARLY December Defence Minister Ranjan Wijeratne said that there were 1,084,990 refugees in Sri Lanka and 120,000 in the south Indian State of Tamil Nadu. The sufferings of the refugees was made worse by heavy rains in the East. The refugees camped in jungle areas were unable to travel to towns to obtain food and government assistance was not reaching them. According to reports 2,800 houses were damaged by floods and a further 70,000 people became refugees in the Amparai District.

As a result of the floods three refugees died of snakebite on 13 December. The Tigers say that at least 200 refugees, including women and children have died because of floods, disease and starvation. Other reports indicate that many refugees who attempted to escape Army operations fell victim to the floods.

The Army ordered the refugees in schools and hospitals in Thambalakamam in Trincomalee to vacate the buildings, on the request of the Education and Health Departments. Refugees are said to be searching in villages for accommodation.

Some refugee camps came under attack during December. The Army attacked the the Karaitivu refugee camp in the Batticaloa District, using guns and grenades killing four refugees. Clappenberg camp in the Trincomalee District was raided by the Army on 24 December. Fifteen refugees are said to have been abducted from the camp.

* In late December the police raided hostels in Wellawatte, Bambalapitiya and Kollupitiya areas in Colombo and arrested number of young Tamils. Police say they are attempting to identify LTTE cadres who have escaped Army operations in the North-East.

FIGHTING INTENSIFIES IN THE EAST

THE EAST, particularly the Batticaloa District, witnessed escalation in attacks by the LTTE and retaliatory Army operations.

Special Task Force (STF) members including a Sub-Inspector, were killed in an LTTE ambush at Paanama in the Pottuvil area on 4 December. Following this incident, according to the EPRLF, 76 Tamil civilians were massacred by the STF in the same area. On 7 December three home guards were killed at Mullipottanai in the Trincomalee District. Nine soldiers, including an officer were killed in a landmine explosion at Meeyankulam on 16 December. According to security sources three LTTE members were shot dead at Periyakalappu in Akkaraipattu two days later.

In the Morawewa landmine attack on 18 December at Trincomalee, six soldiers died along with the two officers. Following these attacks by the LTTE, the Army launched a massive search operation in the Paduvankarai area in the Batticaloa District. Defence sources said that 32 Tigers were killed during a 42 hour curfew and many persons arrested. According to the LTTE, on 17 December the security forces killed 17 civilians in Batticaloa and Amparai. Residents say that six fishermen fishing in the Batticaloa lagoon were killed by helicopter fire on 20 December.

Batticaloa police say that at least 300 complaints relating violence and damage were being registered every day for the past two months.

GCE (Ordinary Level) examination was conducted in 52 centres in the Batticaloa District commencing on 3 December, under heavy security. Observers say that majority of the students from the Senkalady, Vantharumoolai and Palukamam areas did not attend. Teachers complained that the syllabus had not been completed and the students were unable to study for the last six months because of the war.

BOMBING KILLS IN THE NORTH

THE BOMBING of alleged LTTE targets by security forces continued in the North. Residents of Mankulam say that the area had been heavily bombed following the destruction of the Army camp and ground forces burned shops and houses in Puliyanakulam and Omanthai. On 6 December a mother and child were killed at Pathiniyar Mahilankulam in a bombing raid. Curfew imposed in Vavuniya on 23 November was removed only on 8 December and passengers were being paraded before masked talayatis. Four men, including a home guard were arrested in Vavuniya in connection with the murder of four Tamils on 4 December.

Two soldiers patrolling in the Kayts Island were shot dead by the LTTE on 12 December. A day later security sources claimed that 15 Tigers had been killed in Palaly and Mullaitivu. Security sources also said that more than 25 Tigers died when Air force planes attacked a camp near Mallakam in the Jaffna peninsula.

Prices of consumer goods and fuel in the North rose sharply and because of intensified fighting, food was ferried from Vavuniya to Jaffna only on bicycles. Residents complained that only one third of the requirements of the peninsula were met. The unloading of food was supervised by the LTTE and allegations were made that large quantities were diverted to Tiger camps. Lorry operators have to pay Rupees 25,000 to the security forces to obtain permits and Rs 5,000-10,000 to the LTTE for every lorry carrying food into Jaffna.

* President Premadasa announced on 15 December the appointment of a seven member Special Commission of Inquiry, headed by former Supreme Court Judge R S Wanasundera, to inquire into the activities of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Sri Lanka. The Commission has been mandated to inquire into,

- the activities and funding of local and foreign NGOs operating in Sri Lanka;

- the provisions of law which have been promulgated for monitoring and regulating the activities and funding of such organisations;

- whether any of the funds received from foreign sources have been misappropriated or are being used for activities prejudicial to national security.

* Chinese Prime Minister Li Peng's three day visit to Sri Lanka in mid-December gave rise to speculation that arms' shipments from China would increase, although the visit was said to relate to economic cooperation. According to Presidential International Affairs Advisor Bradman Weerakoon, the Chinese have helped Sri Lanka to buy arms and ammunition. A development aid package of Rupees 380 million (f4.75 million) from China was announced later.

* Defence Ministry Secretary Cyril Ranatunge released the following statistics relating to the war in the North-East since June 1990, at a press conference on 6 December:

	Killed	Injured	Missing
Armed forces	472	1620	106
LTTE	2040	530	-
Civilians	662	290	-

* Police attacked a satyagraha (non-violent) demonstration of the United Socialist Alliance (USA) in front of the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy on 15 December, injuring at least 100 persons, including veteran USA leader Bernard Soysa. The demonstration was against the rise in the cost of living and human rights violations. The police said that the gathering was illegal, because police permission had not been obtained.

KILLERS ACTIVE IN THE SOUTH

ABDUCTIONS and disappearances continued in the South during December. Koralage Janaka, K Prabath Bonnie and Lal Shantha were abducted from their homes in Athurugiriya on 3 December and their bodies were found on the roadside the next day. K Weeraratne de Silva, secretary of the Local Government Health Advisory Service Association of the Colombo Municipal Council, was abducted from his home at Dematagoda in Colombo on 10 December. On December 12, K L Dayaratne was taken by an armed gang from his home in Rajagiriya. The abductors told his wife that he was being taken to the police station for inquiry. On the same day Chamlin de Silva was abducted from his home by persons in police uniform. A body of a youth was found burning on tyres at Sooriya Wewa, Embilipitiya on 17 December.