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1,000 die in the north-west

HEAVY FIGHTING continued in the north-west this month as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) attacked Sri Lanka's largest naval base at Karainagar off the Jaffna peninsula and Government forces struggled to win back control of Mannar District.

After a four week siege of the Karainagar base on Karaitivu Island, Sri Lankan forces launched a counter offensive on 28 April with massive air and sea support pushing south on Kayts and securing footholds on Mandaitivu Island.

Sources say over 200 Tigers and 75 civilians died on Karaitivu now under Army control. Many of the local population escaped before the Tigers blew the Punnalai causeway to the peninsula but the old and the sick remain trapped. The Army says six soldiers died and 26 were wounded in the operation. Church workers on Kayts say 15,000 people are without food and water and no relief has reached the islands for the last five weeks.

Accompanying the Karaitivu counter attack, Sri Lankan forces at Elephant Pass linking the peninsula to the mainland, fought a pitched battle as they pushed forward on LTTE positions laying siege to the key Army camp for the last four months. The Army maintains over 100 Tigers and 25 soldiers were killed and many more wounded.

Further south in Mannar where the Army has only a slender foothold on the coast, a wave of air strikes preceded coordinated offensives on Adampan, Murunkan and Vidaitivu, a major LTTE port. Defence sources say the military captured a number of LTTE bases including an underground complex at Parappakadhan on the Madhu road but analysts say Army claims of control

Tigers seek referendum on a separate state

are overblown. A major LTTE base reported captured at Nanattan in early April is in reality six teenage cadres stationed in the local school. Three weeks later 45 soldiers on routine patrol were killed in a LTTE ambush outside this sleepy village. Mannar Island in Army hands since November is still a battleground. Nine police died in a LTTE attack north of Pesalai on 7 April.

Pushing west to meet the military at Mannar, are two Army brigades at Puvarasankulam driving the population in waves before them. They believe there are major Tiger bases close to Madhu where 30,000 refugees huddle in the shadow of Sri Lanka's most sacred Catholic shrine. As the fighting raged, over 5,000 civilians were trapped for two weeks at Thandikulam outside Vavuniya until the LTTE opened the checkpoint to the south on 16 April. Three people were killed in the crossfire a few days later when an impatient crowd rushed the barrier.

Over 1,000 LTTE and 166 soldiers were killed in the north-west offensives say defence sources, but observers fear many other civilian casualties. The Tigers say 100 cadres and 500 soldiers died in the Mannar sector but their figures likewise have propaganda objectives. The LTTE's elusive leader Prabhakaran reportedly visited Mannar to stiffen local resistance which may signal that losses have been heavy.

On 1 May, Sri Lankan forces broke through the Thandikulam checkpoint where the two armies are separated by a few hundred yards, pushing ten miles up the Jaffna road to Omanthai. One of their

objectives is said to be Nedunkerni, reportedly Prabhakaran's command and control centre but like Nanattan and Madhu by the time they get there, the Tigers will be long gone. Curfew was im-

posed throughout Vavuniya and Mulaitivu and villages such as Kondakkaranakulam and Koliyakulam devastated by aerial bombing.

The much-heralded peace moves scheduled to break out on Sinhalese/Tamil New Year in mid April sank in a welter of blood and suspicion. On New Year's night, the Tigers reportedly attacked Athimale in Moneragala District killing 23 Sinhalese villagers.

At the opening of Parliament a few days later, President Premadasa again invited the LTTE to the negotiating table, hinting at concessions while reiterating the Government's three preconditions - a commitment to disarmament, the participation of Prabhakaran and involvement of the other Tamil parties. Mr Premadasa repeated his plea at a May Day rally in Colombo while 200,000 of the war-weary listened to defiant speeches from the LTTE leadership at a meeting in Jaffna.

LTTE spokesman in Paris Lawrence Thilakar described Mr Premadasa's offer as "a smokescreen for military adventurism" and said the insistence on preconditions was a deliberate impediment to a peaceful solution.

International Wing leader Kittu earlier this month told the Indian press that the Tigers were willing to enter the democratic process and would face a referendum to see whether the people of the North-East wanted "Tamil Eelam" a separate state, and who should be their representatives. He challenged the Government to discuss the modalities of the referendum and invited international supervision.

Mr Premadasa is unlikely to take up Kittu's challenge. Without disarmament the LTTE referendum would be no more than an elaborate fraud observers say. But if a free and fair poll was possible after 25 years of gangsterism and genocide, Mr Premadasa and perhaps also the Tigers might fear the answers to these two questions.

LTTE International Wing leader **Kittu**, says the Tigers want India to mediate with Colombo and set up talks for a political settlement to the North-East war. Kasi Anandan of the Tiger's political wing met Rajiv Gandhi in Madras in late April to enlist his support in case of a Congress (I) victory in India's general elections in May. But what else do the Tigers want? What is the price of peace? A talk with **Kittu** on *Page Two*.

Aid workers under fire in the North

Gunning down the Good Samaritan

FOUR MEMBERS of a medical team from French relief agency Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) were wounded when their vehicle was strafed by the Sri Lankan Air force at Puthukulam junction north of Vavuniya in early May. Their Toyota pickup clearly marked with Red Cross flags was returning from the refugee camp at Madhu where MSF runs a regular clinic, and had Army permission to travel. The four wounded were airlifted to Colombo where a nurse needed emergency surgery.

Defence sources said first that Sri Lankan aircraft were fired on from a vehicle in the vicinity and then that the MSF team was on a prohibited road. MSF refutes both charges. Three weeks earlier a relief convoy organised by international refugee agency UNHCR was fired on at Thandikulam checkpoint and a driver slightly injured. The Army says 15 LTTE guerrillas hid in a UNHCR lorry killing two PLOTE cadres at the Government side of the checkpoint. UNHCR strenuously denied the charge lodging an official protest and suspending all food convoys to Madhu.

There is growing concern among NGOs who daily cross the front lines to bring food and medicine to the refugee population. This is the fifth incident this year and casualties were increasingly predictable. Analysts say the Army sees relief NGOs as allies of the Tigers and wants to scare them out of the North-East particularly from Madhu where it believes there are major Tiger bases.

In Jaffna prices remain stable, rice at Rs 30 a kilo, sugar Rs 35, flour Rs 25, but a crisis is sure to follow the two-week

closing of the Thandikulam checkpoint in April and the Army push on Omanthai. There is still an acute shortage of medicine and also firewood for cooking. In Urelu North Hindu cemetery a pile of firewood intended for cremation vanished overnight. The ICRC plans to build 150 huts at Thenmaratchy for refugees from Jaffna town and Trincomalee. Others erected at Sarasalai are for those displaced from around the Government airbase at Palaly.

A report by left-wing MP V Thirunavukarasu says the North-East has received only 30% of its relief requirement and less than 20% of medical needs in the first two months of this year. Jaffna received 7,233 tonnes of food aid in January and February, 25% of the basic requirement and needs an estimated 300,000 litres of kerosene and 200,000 litres of diesel to bring in the forthcoming Yala rice harvest. With the fuel blockade at Thandikulam they are unlikely to see 10% of that despite promises from Colombo.

The cash flow crisis in the North grows even more serious. Jaffna District requires Rs 250 million or \$6 million a month for wages, pensions and bank withdrawals. The Government has sent Rs 50 million so far this year and promises another Rs 70 million shortly.

Some reports say the Tigers are increasingly sensitive to the cash shortage and have returned gold sovereigns taken from families who do not provide boys for "the movement". Others say the rate has increased from two gold sovereigns to three because after the loss of perhaps 1,000 cadres this month, it is the boys they really want.

Missing

Some 3,325 Sri Lankans are officially "missing" in Kuwait in the aftermath of the Gulf war, say Foreign Ministry sources. Almost 50,000 of 100,000 Sri Lankan workers in Kuwait and Iraq were repatriated before the allies' January offensive.

Released

Some 25 of 56 LTTE suspects arrested during a three-month crackdown by south Indian authorities, were released in early April after a Madras High Court ruling on the unlawful detention of Sri Lankan refugees. Another 300 from Tamil group TELO detained in a "refugee camp" in Pudukottai are free to go, officials say.

Casualties

State Defence Secretary Air Marshall Walter Fernando said in late April that 1,282 of Sri Lanka's armed forces have been killed and another 480 reported missing since the start of the June war. Civilian casualty figures were not given. Indian officials say the Sri Lankan navy has killed 13 Indian fishermen in the Palk Strait since the February crackdown on LTTE supply lines.

Execution

After a summary trial, a 33 year-old civilian Pulendran, from Kurumbanpiddy was publicly executed by a LTTE firing squad at Peyadikulam junction in Vavuniya on 26 April, accused of collaborating with the Sri Lankan Army.

The price of peace

IN his time, Sathasivam Krishnakumar alias *Kittu*, leader of the LTTE's International Wing in London, has fought on many fronts. A former military commander of Jaffna, he lost a leg in a bomb blast and was imprisoned in Madras while negotiating for the withdrawal of Indian troops from Sri Lanka.

Now he says India as the regional power can bring about a settlement between the Tigers and Colombo by acting as a mediator rather than a negotiator. Mr Premadasa's three preconditions for peace are impossible. Disarmament is especially impossible. The Tamils, if not

the Tigers require a protective mechanism if they are not to be cheated in the future as they have been in the past by successive Sinhala governments, he says.

A solution under Sri Lanka's unitary constitution is also a non-starter and Mr Premadasa's invitation to participate in Provincial Councils, he regards as derogatory. The Tigers currently favour the associative structure mooted by European Community states which preserves their sovereignty and cultural distinctiveness. Which demands perhaps a de facto ceding of sovereignty by the Sri Lankan gov-

ernment or Eelam by any other name?

He smiles. "The European states who participate in the European Community are not prepared to give up their right to self-determination. Neither are we. Self-determination is not a dirty word, it is an inalienable right." Are these preconditions or prerequisites?

"We also want peace", says *Kittu*, "but we are not ready to give up our rights for that peace."

Speaking in Batticaloa in February, Mr Premadasa promised the Tamils *ellam* (everything) in place of Eelam. He should now say what that everything will be.

Army cuts off food aid to the poor in Trincomalee

Death Squads blight Batticaloa

A FRESH OUTBREAK of brutal killings by death squads said to be from the security forces has convulsed Batticaloa District. Three bodies with severed heads were found at Mandur market in early April. Two headless corpses appeared at Iruthayapuram on 26 April. Three burned bodies were found at Kalliyankadu on 30 April and two headless corpses near the Kallady bridge in Batticaloa town, the same day.

Local Tamil MP Pararajasingham Joseph says that there were at least 12 similar incidents in late April and has handed a letter of protest to President Premadasa demanding immediate action.

Satkunanathan, the brother of LTTE Batticaloa leader *Karikalan* was abducted and murdered by a group calling itself the *Black Cobras*. Posters have appeared throughout Batticaloa town, now tense

and deserted, threatening to kill anyone who associates with the Tigers.

Observers say the *Black Cobras* are reminiscent of Army vigilante squads like the *Green Tigers* who decimated the South during the JVP uprising and link their appearance with new Eastern Commander Major General Cecil Waidyaratne who ran the feared Operations Combine that captured and killed most of the JVP politbureau.

Roundups continue. At Valaichenai, 75 people were arrested on 17 April and 33 detained. One youth was shot dead trying to escape. In Pandiruppu in late April, 300 people were arrested but all were released except three. There is still an ebb and flow of refugees in many areas governed by Army operations and food stocks remain uncertain.

The Army claimed a major success in early April capturing a LTTE jungle base

and large quantities of arms and ammunition at Thoppigala. Seven soldiers and over 70 LTTE cadre reportedly died in the two-day battle. Areas like Kokkaddicholai, west of the lagoon remain fiercely contested and three soldiers were badly injured in landmine blasts in late April.

North of Batticaloa, in the Tiger stronghold of Vaharai, LTTE cadres killed 11 soldiers and wounded 20 in an ambush at Panichchankerni on 5 April. Defence sources say reinforcements who rushed to the scene killed 12 LTTE in a subsequent encounter.

Further north in Trincomalee, tension remains high as roundups and disappearances continue. Rations to refugees were suspended while the new Army Commander Brigadier Siri Pieris asked for a list of camp residents. Sampaltivu camp north of the town has been closed and the refugees moved to the already overcrowded Clappenberg camp. Relief workers say the Army has cut off dry rations to those on food stamps because the civil administration cannot pay its bills.

The Army say they uncovered a major LTTE base at Sampur on 16 April capturing ten cadre, arms and propaganda materials. But outside the security of Trincomalee town, Government forces are increasingly beleaguered. Eight soldiers died in a confrontation with Tiger cadres north of the town on 1 May.

Frontiers of fear

THE TAMIL TIGERS marked Sinhalese New Year on 14 April with an attack on Athimale on the Moneragala-Amparai border killing 23 villagers. A week later they struck again at Niyadella a remote farming hamlet in southern Moneragala, killing another 23 Sinhalese 13 of them children.

Defence sources fear a new wave of attacks on southern frontier areas where Tamil parts of Amparai merge with Sinhalese Moneragala. Hambantota MP PMB Cyril says the Tigers have penetrated as far south as Okkampitiya and plan to drive the Sinhalese out of Moneragala as they did from Weli Oya in the north.

Mr Premadasa however told a rally in Balangoda that "blue sheep in Tiger clothing" - meaning opposition SLFP supporters - were out to destabilise local elections and scare people out of the district. After a security conference in Moneragala town on 23 April over 700 villagers in surrounding areas were supplied with arms.

The same day Tamil workers on the Parawela tea estate close to Okkampitiya were attacked by armed men. Over 40 people were injured six seriously and houses burned. Another attack took place the following day and a third on 28 April. Almost 100 Tamils took refuge in Passara temple. Police say the attackers have been identified but no arrests have been made. Two estate workers were killed in mob violence at Badalkumbara and Tamil houses burned. Others sought police protection. In Colombo, with a new security crackdown following the killing of Ranjan Wijeratne last month there is now a growing fear that this is a war that knows no frontiers.

The Tamil-Muslim divide

THE COASTAL STRIP south of Batticaloa is now a series of Tamil and Muslim ghettos with both communities too scared to venture outside their own areas. Those who leave have been driven out. Most of the Tamils in Pottuvil, a predominantly Muslim town fled a few miles up the coast to refugee camps or relatives in Komari and almost every family has lost a son in the vicious internecine killing that has racked the surrounding areas.

Muslim Home Guards now patrol the roads with Army pickets seeking Tiger suspects. Four LTTE were killed in a clash with the feared police commando Special Task Force (STF) outside Pottuvil in mid April.

South of the town, heavy contingents of STF combed the Panama jungles around Kanchikudicharu seeking a LTTE hit

squad that killed 23 villagers at Athimale on 14 April. Tamil group EPRLF says eight Tamils travelling from Kalmunai to Colombo in the aftermath of the Moneragala killings were abducted by the Army at 17th mile post Amparai.

After last month's bomb blast in Akkaraipatru which killed eight Muslims, 455 people were arrested and all but nine released. Intensive operations have continued around Alayadivembu and the surrounding jungle areas of Thandiyady and Sahamam with helicopter support. Many local people have been detained. In Thirukkivil local people say uniformed men burned a Tamil alive on the night of 13 April. Two soldiers and a civilian driver were killed when the LTTE ambushed an Army patrol on the Kandy-Amparai road on 28 April.

Elections revive terror in the South

HUMAN RIGHTS WORKERS say extra-judicial killings and disappearances in the South are again on the increase in the run-up to local elections due on 11 May. Over 15,000 candidates from 11 political parties will contest seats on 236 local government bodies. No elections will be held in the North-East.

Opposition MP Dinesh Gunawardene told Parliament on 23 April that death squads now operated by night in areas of Colombo District such as Kotte and Mirihane. Polonnaruwa SLFP MP Maithripala Sirisena says opposition election rallies are regularly attacked by gangs of thugs.

In a high-profile ceremony in Anuradhapura in early April, Youth Minister Nanda Mathew released a further 225 rehabilitated youth from the 13,000 held in custody in the aftermath of the insurrection by the rural Sinhalese Marxist People's Liberation Front (JVP). Around 2,500 have been released so far but sources say a number of detainees released from Boosa recently have been killed and their bodies burned on tyres -

the signature of Sri Lanka's security forces.

While the JVP movement is all but smashed, reports say its remaining leaders met in early April to form a new politbureau and to mark the 20th anniversary of the first JVP revolt in 1971 put down by Mrs Bandaranaike's United Front government at a cost of 10,000 lives. Acting JVP leader Somawansa Amerasinghe, brother-in-law of Housing Minister Sirisena Cooray, one of Mr Premadasa's closest confidantes, is in hiding in India. Operations against the rump of the JVP continue. A special police team raided a JVP hideout in Suriyawewa in Hambantota in early April recovering arms and ammunition.

Other reports say the Government is considering the extension of the notorious 1988 Indemnity Act which gave security forces immunity against prosecution for acts committed under the Prevention of Terrorism Act between July and December 1987. With the current campaign by the Mother's Front on behalf of the 60,000 said to have disappeared during

the JVP revolt, sources say the Government will extend the immunity period to "after 1987".

Sri Lanka's human rights record again came under fire from the international community at a meeting of the UN Human Rights Committee in New York on 10 April. Attorney General Sunil de Silva was closely questioned on allegations of continuing extra-judicial killings, torture and disappearances and asked why the Prevention of Terrorism Act, described as a temporary measure had been in force since 1979. Sources in Colombo say the Government will now try and postpone a visit by the UN Working Group on Disappearances and a Special Rapporteur on Arbitrary Executions due in September until after the crucial meeting of donor governments in Paris to discuss World Bank aid to Sri Lanka in October.

■ Former Plantations Minister Gamini Dissanayake who returned to Colombo on 18 April has been charged with involvement in the abduction of prominent academic Prof. Ralph Buultjens in 1988.

Detained and deported

AS FIVE Sri Lankan Tamil refugees illegally deported from Britain in 1988 took their case to the European Court on Human Rights in Strasbourg this month, a fresh wave of Tamil detentions and deportations has further stained Europe's humanitarian asylum record.

Of 29 Tamils detained at Roissy Airport near Paris in early April, four were forcibly returned to Colombo a few days later. Only after a ten-day hunger strike were the others allowed to apply for asylum.

On 1 May, 25 year old Ledchumikanthan and 29 other Tamil asylum seekers were dragged in handcuffs to Paris Orly and deported to Bangkok. French officials denied the Tamils had claimed asylum, neatly sidestepping an undertaking given by the Interior Ministry after the Roissy deportations that no Tamil would be forcibly returned without being interviewed by international refugee agency UNHCR.

France has taken an enlightened view of the Tamil problem in Sri Lanka granting 60% of 6,000 asylum applications in the last two years. But since a series of

inter-governmental consultations in Vienna in January, observers say that Tamils and Palestinians may be increasingly targeted for deportation.

Refugee workers say either European governments have little understanding of current conditions in Sri Lanka or they are cynically employing an informal

quota system. "The numbers game" theory says the more asylum seekers arriving from a country, the more likely they are to receive a hostile reception in Europe, regardless of conditions at home.

Papers submitted to a meeting of the European Consultation on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) in March say another 20,000 Tamils claimed asylum in Europe in 1990 bringing the total to almost 200,000. In many countries asylum applications have doubled and with them the number of arriving Tamils. Britain with 30,000 applications last year has registered over 12,000 from Sri Lankan Tamils since 1980.

There are also 100 Tamils in Vienna, trapped in the airport transit lounge and other unofficial prisons. Austria wants to return them to Colombo or to Yugoslavia, a favourite entry point as the cracks widen in Eastern Europe.

Three Tamil children died of exposure on 18 April as a group of Tamil asylum-seekers were caught in a blizzard while illegally crossing the Yugoslav-Italian border. Hard-line policies will not stop those who are fleeing for their lives.

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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