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Colombo bomb blasts military HQ

A MASSIVE bomb blast destroyed Sri Lankan military headquarters in Colombo on 21 June, killing at least 23 people and injuring another 150, many of them civilians.

A suicide squad, allegedly from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) rammed the gates of Joint Operations Command (JOC), the nerve centre of the war against the North-East, in a van packed with 150lb of high explosives about 9.30 am.

The explosion created a giant fireball engulfing surrounding houses and vehicles. Among the wounded was Director of Army Operations Brigadier Tilak Paranagama and nine soldiers were among the dead. Damage in the area is estimated at around \$4 million.

Sources say the Tigers believed a high-level military conference would be underway when the suicide bombers struck but in fact the blast narrowly missed an Army consultation with Sri Lankan NGOs who were held up in rush hour traffic.

In the aftermath, there has been loud criticism of the military's continued underestimation of the LTTE's capabilities, lax security in Colombo and the siting of JOC in a residential area wedged between two colleges. Roundups have begun in Tamil areas of Colombo and JOC has moved to a secret location.

While refusing to comment on who was responsible, LTTE Paris spokesman Lawrence Thilagar expressed satisfaction with the JOC attack in that operations against innocent Tamil and Sinhalese civilians were planned there.

Observers speculate that the JOC bomb was a response to the brutal massacre of 182 Tamil civilians in the eastern

New Army atrocities in the East

flashpoint of Kokkaddicholai, south of Batticaloa, after a landmine blast killed two soldiers on 12 June - the first anniversary of this phase of the war.

Sources say a detachment of soldiers led by Lt. Kudaligama went on the rampage in nearby Mahiladitivu and Munaiikkadu, hacking civilians to death and burning 500 houses. Six women were raped and a relief team from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) denied access to the area for 48 hours while soldiers disposed of the dead, says an investigating team of Opposition MPs.

The Government claims only 67 people were killed and President Premadasa expressing shock and sorrow in a letter to local Tamil MP Pararajasingham Joseph, has set up a three-man Commission of Enquiry.

But another Tamil MP, K Premachandran described the current investigation as "a farce" and analysts say the Army's "hearts and minds" operation in the East to woo the civilian population away from the Tigers has ground to a halt.

Tiger strategy they say is to provoke civilian reprisals from the mostly Sinhalese Army and to polarise the Tamil population around the need for an armed force to plot its political destiny.

Other observers believe the Colombo blast is a tactical strike designed to outflank the Army's progress west of Vavuniya where Sri Lankan forces launched a ten-day offensive on 14 June against the Tigers' regional command centre at Pandivirichchan, a few miles from a major refugee camp at Madhu.

In phase two of Operation Wanniwickrema, three infantry battalions pushed 17 miles west of Vavuniya to the Paraiyanalankulam junction with the Madhu road after heavy fighting at Puvarasankulam and Pandivirichchan. Defence

sources say over 250 LTTE cadres and 36 soldiers were killed in the operation but local sources say many civilians were killed and houses destroyed in a blitzkrieg of aerial bombardment accompanying the offensive. The Tigers claim they shot down a Bell 212 helicopter which crash-landed during the operation.

The scale of Army success in the west is uncertain. As in phase one of this operation last month in Omanthai, Sri Lankan forces staged a strategic retreat after capturing important but deserted LTTE bases. This suggests both that the Army cannot hold the terrain and that surrounded by hostile forces, it is wary of strategic entrapment.

There is growing concern over the Army's scorched earth policy as it careers in and out of Tiger-held territory, torching villages and scattering civilians. There are now 30,000 war-weary at Madhu, Sri Lanka's largest Catholic shrine, where a UN lifeline of food convoys protects as well as feeds them.

The press in Colombo contemptuously describes them as "relatives of the Tigers" and it is clear with air strikes only a few miles away that they are now a legitimate target whether through fear or fire-power.

Away from this grim theatre of war, there is still talk of peace. On the first anniversary of the June war, LTTE Paris spokesman Lawrence Thilagar called for unconditional peace talks somewhere in Europe. Government spokesman Bradman Weerakoon feigned ignorance of the offer and two weeks later in a birthday speech President Premadasa was adamant that Sri Lanka would seek no outside advice or assistance to solve internal problems.

His rebuttal came a few days after a Sri Lankan cabinet minister made a secret visit to London to test Tiger bona fides over the modalities for peace talks. Mr Premadasa clearly rules out external mediation, but with the current carnage in Colombo, there can be no talking there.

After one year of inconclusive fighting in Sri Lanka's "June war" as it has come to be called, almost 10,000 people have died, say independent estimates. State Defence Secretary Walter Fernando told journalists this month that 1,369 security personnel had been killed and 585 were missing in action since 11 June last year. The Tigers say they have lost 500 cadres, other estimates say almost 2,000. There is a similar but brutal symmetry in civilian deaths. Almost 3,000 have died in the North say reports and another 3,000 in the East.

INDIA AFTER RAJIV

New government vows to drive Tigers from Tamil Nadu

HOT ON THE TRAIL of Rajiv Gandhi's killers, the new Congress(I)-backed government in Tamil Nadu now plans to screen 220,000 Sri Lankan Tamil refugees, say reports from south India.

Former film star Jayalalitha led the AIADMK coalition to a sweeping victory in the southern leg of India's bloodiest general elections, seizing 224 of 232 seats in the Tamil Nadu state assembly and 38 of 39 places in the New Delhi parliament.

Her arch rival Muthuvel Karunanidhi, whose DMK government was dismissed with Mr Gandhi's connivance for actively supporting the Tamil Tigers, won only one seat - his own - which he resigned a few days later. Nationwide, Congress(I) and its allies won 236 of 511 seats in parliament and stopgap leader PV Narasimha Rao was sworn in as Prime Minister on 21 June. Another 34 seats were uncontested as Punjab elections were again postponed.

Speaking to All India Radio Ms Jayalalitha (42), vowed to break the stranglehold of Sri Lanka's Tamil Tigers in the south, who remain the prime suspects in Mr Gandhi's killing. Genuine refugees from Sri Lanka would be rehabilitated said the new Chief Minister but militants would be isolated and deported.

Over 120,000 refugees living outside official camps in Tamil Nadu have now been told to register with the police or face deportation. Local landlords and employers who fail to register Sri Lankans face prosecution. Screening is already underway among 100,000 refugees in 350 camps throughout the state.

Local organisations say many refugees have no travel documents and India may

exercise an option to return them to Sri Lanka. India pledged \$13 million to fund UN refugee camps in northern Sri Lanka to try and contain the refugee crisis.

The largest manhunt in Indian history is now underway for Rajiv Gandhi's killers. There are road-blocks around every south Indian town and village and naval security in the Palk Strait is tight.

Indian police are now convinced that the Tamil Tigers masterminded the assassination though the LTTE continues to deny the killing. A LTTE suspect arrested near Nagapattinam, identified a man in north Indian dress standing close to the assassin in a photograph taken minutes before the explosion, as *Sivarsan* - the alias of a LTTE munitions expert implicated in the killing of EPRLF leader Padmanabha in Madras, last June. The assassin is said to be as *Thanu*, a LTTE female cadre from Vavuniya.

Thousands of leaflets have been air-dropped over northern Sri Lanka offering rewards for information on the assassins and 33 cadres from Tamil group PLOTE, imprisoned after an abortive coup in the Maldives in 1989, now form part of a special investigation squad in Vavuniya.

Sivarsan, dubbed *One Eyed Jack* by the Press, remains at large but Indian police have arrested four Sri Lankans and four local Tamils in connection with the killing. They include *Nalini* (27), a Sri Lankan secretary who travelled with the assassin to Sriperumpudur, with a third woman *Subha* who is still on the run.

There is still speculation over several sightings in Madras of *Dixon*, another LTTE munitions expert, accompanied by a Tamil engineer based in Frankfurt.

Jackpot

Hundreds of slot machines and other gambling equipment were confiscated and destroyed in a series of police raids in Colombo hours before legislation outlawing casinos came into effect in early June. The ban will cost \$2 million a year in lost taxes.

Floods

Heavy rains lashed southern Sri Lanka from Puttalam to Galle in early June destroying 50,000 houses and displacing 250,000 people. Government sources say \$6 million is needed for immediate relief.

Suicide

Police Superintendent K Dharmadasa, found guilty in March of the murder of prominent human rights lawyer Wijedasa Liyanarachchi, shot himself in Borella on 4 June.

Refugees

Figures released by the Ministry of Rehabilitation on 10 June say 256,025 people are in refugee camps throughout Sri Lanka and another 433,195 are displaced by the current fighting.

Whitewash

French medical agency Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) described a Presidential Commission report on an attack by Sri Lankan helicopter gunships on an MSF team north of Vavuniya as a "total whitewash" and gave the Government until 15 July to implement new safeguards for relief workers. Talks are underway.

The enemy within

IN the wake of the massive blast that destroyed military headquarters (JOC) on 21 June, Army sources believe the LTTE has embarked on a major bombing campaign to destabilise Colombo.

As military pressure on the Tigers increases west of Vavuniya, the LTTE will now play their trump card analysts say and bring the horror of war home to Colombo's complacent population.

There are over 150,000 refugees from the North-East war in the city, in camps or cheap lodgings or with relatives. Some maybe LTTE "sleepers" awaiting orders from sophisticated Tiger cells rebuilt

during the 14 months of peace talks preceding the June war.

Moving hardware and munitions into Colombo is no problem while the LTTE retains control of a flourishing smuggling network linking Tuticorin in south India to Puttalam, two hours drive north of the city.

The police crackdown to capture the Colombo bombers has heightened the tension as 261 Tamil youths were arrested in the Pettah area in late June, many of them from the Hill Country.

Many streets are now blocked off to traffic and residential areas teem with

private security guards. A number of Government offices were evacuated after telephone bomb threats.

Police say they have smashed a LTTE cell of five safe houses and are holding 25 people implicated in the JOC blast. The alleged ringleader, *Varadarajah*, a munitions expert from Batticaloa swallowed a cyanide capsule when cornered by Colombo police in early July. Systematic spot-checks of all vehicles entering central Colombo are now underway as rumours circulate that there are two more LTTE car-bombs primed and ready to roll.

THE EAST

Massacre of the innocents

THOUSANDS of Tamils have fled the Kokkaddicholai area, aid workers say after an Army unit ran amok on 12 June killing over 180 civilians, many of them women and children.

Many people have fled across Batticaloa lagoon to Thalankudah on the coast road where relief is being organised. The Government, in an attempt to play down the incident has set up a three-man Commission of Enquiry and says only 67 people were killed. But at least 50 people in the area are unaccounted for and local MPs believe many other bodies were destroyed by the Army.

A woman survivor gave an eye witness account to Prime Minister DB Wijetunge on 14 June saying 56 bodies were buried near a rice mill at Mahiladitivu. Army sources said they could not be exhumed as the area was not secure. The Commission has three weeks to report. Tamil groups

PLOTE and TELO who fight alongside the Army have threatened to withdraw their support and EPRLF spokesman Abu Yusuf described the incident as "genocide".

Areas west of Batticaloa lagoon remain fiercely contested with the Tigers laying landmine ambushes of the type that triggered the Kokkaddicholai massacre. The bodies of four Tamil youths abducted in Batticaloa were found in the Unnichai jungles on 10 June, after a claymore mine killed two soldiers there a few days earlier.

North of the Polonnaruwa road, three months of Army operations have left the local population frightened and short of food. Valaichenai Army commander, Col. Vasantha Perera wants to starve the Tigers out of Vaharai by squeezing relief supplies. When aid workers reached Kathiraveli a few weeks ago, there had

been no Government food aid for the last six months.

A massive Army camp is under construction between Punanai and Valaichenai to stop the Tigers seeping into Polonnaruwa District and to hold the road open. Sri Lankan forces launched a major assault on LTTE bases in the Thoppigala jungles on 9 June reportedly killing 30 Tigers.

There are no safe havens in north Batticaloa. Nine people including three women were hacked to death by unknown assailants outside Chenkalady in late March. Local people say Tamil youths accompanied the killers.

South of Batticaloa in Amparai District, tension remains high as cordon-and-search operations by the police commando Special Task Force (STF) continue. Over 120 males arrested by the STF in Karaitivu were handed over to the Citizen's Committee representatives in early June.

STF patrols killed five LTTE cadres on 10 June at Sorikalmunai as they prepared an attack on Amparai Central Camp police station. In a subsequent operation STF units reportedly captured a massive LTTE bunker complex at Bakmitiyawa in the Akkaraipatru jungles.

Over 20 people including a Danish tourist were killed when the LTTE ambushed a Colombo-bound coach 12 miles outside Pottuvil on 27 June.

Prabhakaran surfaces in Jaffna

THE LTTE's elusive commander-in-chief Velupillai Prabhakaran unexpectedly surfaced this month at a Tamil cultural festival in Chavakacheri outside Jaffna, making his first public appearance in four years.

The LTTE leader who is protected by an elite Black Tiger commando group was last heard of in Mannar last month, directing resistance to the Army's push west from Vavuniya. Apart from a meeting with an Indian MP in 1989 and a conference with foreign correspondents after the Indian withdrawal, he has remained in hiding since he addressed a 100,000-strong crowd at Sudumalai in Jaffna in September 1987. In July 1989 there were persistent rumours that he had died in a shoot-out with his deputy *Mahattaya*.

LTTE forces laying siege to the Army's Elephant Pass camp for the last six months, mounted a fresh assault in late June from a network of trenches and bunkers now only 100 metres from the camp perimeter. There is still sporadic fighting on Kayts Island west of Jaffna as the Army consolidates its position with night raids from both sides.

A survey of Jaffna hospitals released this month says 56 cases of attempted suicide were admitted recently suffering from trauma or starvation. Six weeks of Army operations in the last three months have tightened the Army blockade at Thandikulam and food is again in short supply.

Colombo's Ministry of Rehabilitation says food relief for Jaffna will be sent by sea only to Kankasanturai after using Valaipadu west of Pooneryn for the last three months. A ship carrying 800 tons of food left Colombo on 20 June.

Taking on Trincomalee

RECENT reports from Trincomalee - the strategic port in the east that the Army means to hold at any price - say Tiger units are increasingly active in outlying areas of the district.

Six soldiers patrolling the Kallar-Mavilaru road were killed in a LTTE attack on 9 June and another five died in a landmine ambush in isolated Weli Oya bordering Mullaitivu District on 17 June. Another 19 soldiers died and four were wounded in an ambush on the Halambeewa road in Weli Oya three days later.

The Tigers continue to target areas of Weli Oya given over to colonisation by Sinhalese settlers who depend on Army patrols for protection. Nearer Trincomalee town, deserted villages between Uppuveli and Sambaltivu have already been colonised by 4,000 Sinhalese settlers supervised by Buddhist clergy.

Like areas further south the Army has secured the coastal road throughout Trincomalee District but much of the interior is a battleground. There is a constant ebb and flow of refugees. Over 3,000 Muslims from Pulmoddai who fled to Anuradhapura arrived in Kinniyai last month seeking food and shelter.

Relief convoys to rural areas are under tight Army control with the military increasingly reluctant to allow food into contested areas. They plan say observers to starve the civilian population into moving to large holding centres like Clapenberg in Trincomalee town, where night raids by Army death squads make extra-judicial killings and disappearances routine. Deserted villages such as those around Muthur will then become a killing ground where anyone who moves is a target.

Britain blocks £13 million aid package

BRITAIN has frozen a £13 million aid package to Sri Lanka in the face of continuing human rights abuses and the expulsion of British High Commissioner David Gladstone, last month.

A Foreign office spokesman in London said a new High Commissioner would shortly be appointed to ensure an effective voice on human rights and that all subsequent aid commitments would be linked to Sri Lanka's human rights record. Mr Gladstone has been a persistent critic of human rights in Sri Lanka especially in the south, where NGOs estimate over 60,000 people have disappeared since 1987 in the brutal struggle between security forces and the Sinhalese Marxist insurgent People's Liberation Front (JVP).

A European Community (EC) statement released earlier this month described Mr Gladstone's expulsion as "unacceptable" and said there was continuing concern over human rights in Sri Lanka. In October, EC donor governments attending the annual World Bank

meeting on Sri Lanka in Paris, highlighted a resolution linking future aid to Sri Lanka's human rights record and Britain immediately suspended £3 million of programme aid.

But observers say Sri Lanka is prepared to tough it out with the international community and has told aid donors that it will not be pressured on domestic political issues. Opening Sri Lanka's third Free Trade Zone at Koggala on 14 June, President Premadasa said "We will not sell our souls to satisfy our hunger".

Mr Premadasa's government claims measures such as a Presidential Commission on Missing Persons introduced last January will stamp out extra-judicial killings and disappearances which continue at the rate of 100 a week. Critics say the Commission has no retroactive powers and is merely a palliative to allay international concern. Of 425 complaints made to the Commission since January, only 35 fall within its limited terms of reference.

Sri Lanka's dilemma is that while it struggles to maximise foreign investment

through schemes such as the Koggala project, creating 80,000 jobs in the process, its economy is still heavily dependent on foreign aid.

Direct foreign investment was only 4% of aid transfers last year and as the current Central Bank report shows only 279 million SDR in foreign aid transformed a 177 million SDR current account deficit.

Others say Sri Lanka can live without the meagre \$60 million of European aid while large donors like the Japanese remain impervious to the human rights lobby and Chinese military assistance continues.

Ironically the crisis comes when Sri Lanka's economy may be on the road to recovery. This year's World Bank meeting is postponed till next February while Sri Lanka bolsters its balance of payments position through an IMF \$300 million Extended Structural Adjustment Facility (ESAF). In return Sri Lanka must reduce import tariffs and privatise all state corporations by the end of the year - an increasingly unlikely undertaking.

JVP resurgence is a human rights cover-up, say NGOs

DEFENCE sources in Colombo say insurgency by the southern Sinhalese Marxist JVP movement is again on the increase and claim to have arrested over 200 JVP suspects in the last two months. Over 50 were captured last month in remote Moneragala District which remains a JVP stronghold.

Almost 14,000 youths are detained in police stations and makeshift prisons in the south in the wake of a three-year revolt which collapsed when JVP leader Rohana Wijeweera was captured and killed in police custody in November 1989.

Acting JVP leader Somawansa Amerasinghe is in hiding in south India and is actively promoting a new programme of insurgency, sources say. A military leader, *Jayarathne*, who escaped from police custody recently is regrouping JVP forces in the field.

Police seized two JVP cadres and a cache of weapons in Kurunegala District in early June and *Nihal* from the JVP's military wing was shot dead by police at Athurugiriya on 24 June after escaping from a detention camp.

Four police were arrested after a JVP suspect E G Siripala died from internal

injuries sustained at Bulathsinhala police station on 13 June and human rights NGOs say the JVP resurgence is no more than a convenient rationalisation for continuing human rights abuses by Sri Lankan security forces.

Interestingly, as the small fry are picked off, there is a growing rehabilitation of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist

ideologues such as Gunadasa Amarasekera, formerly associated with the JVP whose hard-line views now appear more frequently in print, presumably with Mr Premadasa's tacit approval.

NGOs continue to come under pressure and the Presidential Commission set up to probe the political affiliations and funders of NGOs will now continue hearing evidence till the end of the year. Former ambassador to Germany, Stanley Jayaweera, told the Commission that human rights groups, Sri Lankan or otherwise, were not impartial and were exploiting the present situation for financial gain.

In a recent article in Colombo's *Sunday Observer* entitled "Intellectuals, NGOs and human rights", a former leading leftist now an adviser to the President threw out an ominous warning.

Certain checks and balances were needed said the article to prevent NGOs from becoming the victims of and vehicles for anti-democratic ideologies - alleging they harbour JVP sympathisers or collaborators. Alluding to leading NGO figures, the article menacingly concludes that in order to harvest democracy in Sri Lanka, pesticides may have to be used.

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: (071) 582 6922.

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