

Peace hopes fade for Jaffna

A LAST-DITCH ATTEMPT by Tourism minister S Thondaman to broker peace talks between the Sri Lankan government and the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) collapsed in late December after violent opposition from senior Buddhist clergy.

Mr Thondaman 79, leader of Sri Lanka's Plantation Tamils and a long-term political ally of President Premadasa announced new peace proposals in a 13-point memorandum released in mid-December and said the Tigers had invited him to Jaffna to open discussions.

After a lukewarm reception in the Colombo press, Mr Thondaman's proposals were described by a succession of senior Buddhist clerics as "treacherous" and coinciding with LTTE demands. The peace package offers federal autonomy to the Tamil north as originally envisaged by the 13th Amendment and the Provincial Council system with increased police and revenue powers such as control of all ports and airports and authority to raise foreign aid directly.

President Premadasa kept his distance from the Thondaman initiative as the Buddhist backlash grew. Former Cabinet Minister Gamini Jayasuriya announced a new Buddhist front to fight the devolution package and a statement from the ruling United National Party's Working Committee on 30 December said no unilateral solution to the Tamil problem was acceptable.

India also signalled its opposition to the talks, announcing plans to extradite LTTE leader Prabhakaran and others for the murder of Rajiv Gandhi. Mr Thondaman abandoned plans to visit Jaffna

after the Tamil *Thai Pongal* festival on 15 January citing no response to his proposals from the LTTE.

Observers say Mr Premadasa's deft probing of Sinhalese opposition to the talks illustrates the gulf of intransigence between the communities. A Sinhalese government can never cede nominal or actual control of 75% of Sri Lanka's coastline to a minority 12% of the population. Government statements say it is not Tamil demands for devolution it rejects but the terrorist LTTE. For the Tigers it is further propaganda that the Sinhalese will never peacefully devolve power to the Tamils.

A full-scale military assault on Jaffna now seems inevitable. Over a million people have been under siege since 20,000 Sri Lankan troops cut off the Jaffna peninsula in mid-October. Food and medical supplies remain critical. An appeal to President Premadasa from the Jaffna-based Tamil Welfare Association says less than 6,000 tons of food aid - half Jaffna's monthly requirement - arrived in the peninsula in November. Government sources say 4,000 tons of food relief left Trincomalee by ship for Kankasanturai, the army-controlled port at the northern tip of the peninsula in early December. A ten-day battle around the military airport at Palaly a few miles east has prevented effective relief distribution and over 5,000 people have fled the area after heavy aerial bombing at Atchuveli and Thondamanaru. Sources say the Army has extended its northern foothold on the peninsula as far east as Valalai but that the pitched battle at Palaly aborted a major air-drop of Sri Lankan troops.

Another 100,000 people have fled the offshore islands west of Jaffna after the Army's October offensive and churches and temples are crammed with refugees. Most coastal villages are deserted and mined, awaiting the expected invasion. Aerial

bombing and offshore shelling from the Sri Lankan Navy are a daily occurrence as the softening-up process continues sanctioned by air-dropped leaflets asking civilians to move away from "terrorist targets". Jaffna lagoon is haunted by incessant air and sea patrols seeking targets. A LTTE Sea Tiger unit sank a Navy patrol boat off Pooneryn on 29 December killing all aboard. Two LTTE boats were destroyed the same day off Nagathevanthurai.

Hospitals are hopelessly overstretched with little or no antibiotics or painkilling drugs. Cholera and malnutrition are on the increase and lack of emergency services and transport pushes up the death toll. A woman died of cholera, ten days after childbirth in early December on the way to Jaffna hospital from Mattuvil by bullock-cart.

South-east of the peninsula, in Mullaitivu, the weak link in the Army blockade, LTTE attacks continue. Over 40 soldiers died and 30 were wounded in a major clash at Kokkuthoduvai on 24 December, ruling out all hopes of a New Year ceasefire.

Further south in Vavuniya, the frontier of Army control, President Premadasa speaking in early December said rehabilitation programmes were now underway in Army-controlled areas but many of the District's 100,000 population have fled to India or the UN-controlled camp at Madhu, Sri Lanka's most sacred Catholic shrine.

On 22 December, the Army launched a fresh offensive west of Vavuniya pushing eight miles up the Mannar road to Sambalthottam accompanied by heavy aerial bombing. Their objective is said to be Pandivirichchan, a Tiger command-and-control centre close to the Madhu refugee camp.

As a massive build-up of Sri Lankan troops on the islands west of Jaffna was reported in late December, LTTE units in the peninsula went on full alert. For a million civilians punchdrunk on 18 months of shelling and starvation there is nowhere to run.

President Ranasinghe Premadasa opening the 6th SAARC summit of regional heads of government in Colombo on 21 December warned Western countries that their attempts to link development aid to Third World governments' human rights records constituted "a new colonialism" and that the current terrorist challenge to the nation state in the region demanded a collective South Asian strategy. Mr Premadasa also called for a new South Asian Commission on poverty alleviation to address the region's central problem. A full report on page four.

SOUTH INDIA UNDER SIEGE

Tracks of the Tiger

THE SOUTH Indian state of Tamil Nadu, home to 60 million Tamils is still reeling after a year when governments fell and former prime ministers were assassinated as a sleeping predator on the body politic bared its teeth - Sri Lanka's Tamil Tigers.

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M Karunanidhi was dismissed in January after a series of robberies and killings by LTTE militants and for leaking India's foreign policy plans to the Jaffna high command. For the last ten years, the Tigers quietly built up a formidable rear base in south India forging links with organised crime and local smugglers to provision the liberation struggle only 30 minutes away by speedboat across the Palk Strait.

Madras and New Delhi vied to pour millions of rupees into different Sri Lankan militant factions. Even when the Indian army fought a disastrous 32-month war against the LTTE, the Tigers retained open support and sophisticated supply lines in south India further strengthened by Mr Karunanidhi's two-year reign.

In May this year as the crackdown on LTTE supply lines gathered pace, a new threat to the Tigers emerged in Rajiv Gandhi who seemed destined to return to power in the general elections. Gandhi, the architect of the Indian military intervention retained expansionist designs on northern Sri Lanka and was a proven enemy of Tamil self-determination. Most observers believe the Tigers masterminded Gandhi's assassination by a female suicide bomber outside Madras on 21 May although the LTTE has consistently denied the charge.

Six months of meticulous probing by the assassination Special Investigation Team (SIT) has revealed a massive LTTE infrastructure in south India including bomb factories in Coimbatore and a

communication and supply complex in Trichy. Over 50 people are under arrest in connection with Gandhi's death and 25 alleged militants have committed suicide, a LTTE trademark, including the four key actors in the assassination plot.

Now a new wave of arrests has revealed a Tamil Nadu Retrieval Force (TNRF) of over 1,000 south Indian Tamils trained in Jaffna to transplant separatism to Tamil Nadu. Gandhi's killing was part of a LTTE master plan to form a greater *Eelam*, or separate state comprising north-east Sri Lanka and south India, says TNRF's Srikanth arrested in Thirupur on 5 December.

Pan Tamil nationalism has been a constant theme in south Indian politics from the *Thanithamil* movement of 1916, to the black-shirted fundamentalists of Dravida Kazhagam (DK) and the rise of the DMK in the '60s. But the Gandhi assassination proved a monumental miscalculation and the Tigers' popular support in south India has vanished overnight. DMK leader Karunanidhi watched his party lose all of its 170 seats in the 234-seat Madras Legislative Assembly in the elections that followed and new AIADMK Chief Minister Jayalalitha means to indict him for complicity in Tiger crimes.

Former DMK Home Secretary, R Nagarajan arrested on 21 November, implicates Karunanidhi in the Tigers' alleged assassination of rival EPRLF's leadership in Madras in June 1990. Karunanidhi has countered with a photocopy of Nagarajan's "original" statement claiming it was doctored by police. A new police team, TANSIT, now formed to investigate the EPRLF murders may break the DMK connection wide open.

Cargo

Over 11 tons of arms and munitions purchased by Sri Lanka from Chile were seized at Budapest airport in mid-December in transit to Yugoslavia. Sri Lankan Foreign Affairs Director General Nihal Rodrigo said he was unaware of any arms deal with Chile.

Protest

Widespread opposition in the fishing community of Chilaw led by the Catholic Church is growing over government plans to install a *Voice of America* radio station and an Australian tourist hotel complex in the Pambala lagoon area.

Returned

Thirteen Sri Lankan asylum-seekers deported from Greece arrived at Colombo airport on 12 December. Police said they would be questioned for LTTE connections.

Debut

A T Ariyaratne, charismatic leader of national development agency *Sarvodaya* told the Colombo *Sunday Times* in late December that he planned to enter politics and had drawn up a 22-point plan based on Gandhian principles to tackle Sri Lanka's problems.

Homecoming

An Indian Foreign Ministry spokesman has announced that the first shipload of 5,000 Sri Lankan refugees voluntarily returning to Sri Lanka will leave for Trincomalee on 20 January. There are 200,000 Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in south India, 110,000 in government-run camps.

Muslims held to ransom in Jaffna

OVER 300 delegates attending a conference of Muslims in Colombo have appealed to President Premadasa to secure the release of 36 Muslim businessmen held hostage by the LTTE in Jaffna for the last year, after 50,000 Muslims were forced out of the north by a LTTE ultimatum. The Tigers demand ransoms of up to Rs 5 million (\$125,000) for each of the hostages.

Sir Abdul Ameer President of leading Muslim NGO, Refugees Relief Organisation (RRO) says northern Muslims be-

came paupers overnight, forced out of the north empty-handed and are Sri Lanka's forgotten refugees. A RRO team visited Puttalam where there is growing unrest among 30,000 Muslim refugees, to distribute food and medicine. Many of the refugees are from Mannar Island and government agencies are withholding dry rations until they return to speed up "normalisation".

Muslim political parties are adamant that they will not be left behind the Tamils in the scramble for devolution.

Muslim United Liberation Front (MULF) leader M I M Mohideen wants a separate Provincial Council for the North-East's 400,000 Muslims based in northern Amparai District where Muslims constitute almost 50% of the population. Another nine Muslim enclaves in Batticaloa, Trincomalee and Mannar would be administered from Kalmunai. The former French possession of Pondichery enclaved in three different Indian states forms a useful constitutional model says Mr Mohideen.

A breakthrough for Sri Lankan forces in the east

Flood, fear and firepower

OVER 50,000 people are homeless in Batticaloa District after six days of torrential rain in mid-December caused heavy flooding in Sri Lanka's eastern districts. Schools and temples in Kaluvanchikudi, Thanamunai and Kallady are full of refugees and thousands of rice fields are submerged. Tamil MP Pararajasingham Joseph has appealed for government help in the face of rising prices and growing shortages.

After a series of military offensives in the Thoppigala jungles, Sri Lankan forces captured three LTTE camps, including the headquarters of LTTE Batticaloa leader *Karikalan*. Unconfirmed reports say both *Karikalan* and southern Batticaloa Commander *Karuna* were killed in the operation. Two other Tiger leaders, *Joy* and *Sathrukan*, were reported killed in an Army ambush near Chenkalady on 11

December. The operation marks a breakthrough for Sri Lankan forces after months of hit-and-run attacks by the Tigers. Another 12 soldiers were killed and 11 injured in a LTTE ambush while ferrying rations to Karadiyanaru as the offensive got underway.

Batticaloa town underwent two massive Army sweeps this month. All young men were taken to the Airforce base and screened by masked informers on 30 December while house-to-house searches took place. Detention figures are unknown. In Kinnaiyady a week earlier, 400 people were arrested but after the Citizen Committee's intervention, only 15 were held. One man was eventually "identified" as LTTE.

The Tigers' kidnapping and extortion racket continues to bear fruit. Some 18 businessmen kidnapped by LTTE from

the Kaluvanchikudi area were released after relatives paid Rs 200,000 (\$5,000) ransom for each of them. But unconfirmed reports say five women, the wives of wealthy businessmen, abducted in Thikkodai, Amparai District last month, have been killed as the ransom deadline expired. Three other businessmen were abducted from Kovilkulam this month and a Muslim from Senathipura in Polonnaruwa. A Kallady woman *Iyakatty Suvanthi* was also abducted from Polonnaruwa town, allegedly by the Army.

A series of cordon-and-search operations continue in Amparai. Special Task Force (STF) units captured what they described as a major LTTE base at Otkiyan Kudane in early December containing large stocks of food and arms. Other STF detachments took two LTTE bases in jungle areas close to Vembadikulam after fierce fighting a week later.

Further north in Trincomalee District, LTTE hit-and-run attacks continue to wreak havoc. After successful attacks at Kuchchaveli in the north of the district earlier this month LTTE units killed three soldiers on patrol near Muthur. The Army also launched a large-scale cordon-and-search in the Sampur area of Koddiiyar bay in early December detaining many villagers. LTTE sources say the government plans to make Trincomalee town a Free Trade Zone and to increase the pace of Sinhalese colonisation.

Miracle in the jungle

AS A NEW ARMY offensive pushes west from Vavuniya, sweeping civilians in front of it like flocks of frightened birds, over 25,000 people have sought refuge deep in the jungle in the shadow of Madhu Church, Sri Lanka's most sacred Catholic shrine. Since September 1990, international refugee agency UNHCR has run a camp here for the displaced and the destitute, running weekly food convoys across Army lines to feed the forgotten. Madhu has been a sanctuary for hundreds of years, famous for miracles and the healing power of its holy sand. For thousands more it is now a safe haven as war rages all around them.

The Army's target is Pandivirichchan, a village of 1,000 people only two miles from Madhu, believed by the military to be a Tiger command-and-control centre. It also attracts regular bombing raids. Five schoolchildren and an examiner were injured on 9 December when the local school was bombed during an O-level examination.

Further east towards the Mannar coastline, a heavy concentration of Sri Lankan troops is pushing up across open country to villages like Nanattan where four LTTE were killed in a clash on 15 December. As the military column edges closer, frightened villagers will flee down the red-dirt country roads, swelling the numbers at Madhu by up to 5,000.

Church workers also use Madhu as a base to take food to more distant villages like those in Omanthai parish, cut off by the war. Despite the shortages of milk powder and medicine, Madhu remains a modern-day miracle in a sea of fear and uncertainty.

Hill Country crackdown

ANOTHER 67 Tamils were arrested in Badulla and other areas of Uva in December in the face of a major LTTE infiltration of the Hill Country, police sources say. Uva Chief Minister Percy Samaraweera held a crisis meeting with police and Trade Union officials on 19 December. Five police officers from Passara were among those arrested and another 80 suspects are being sought.

The Hill Country is potentially fertile ground for the Tamil militants as home to 700,000 Tamil tea estate workers, the descendants of workers brought from south India last century. Years of bad conditions on the estates and denial of citizenship have allowed Tamil movements such as PLOTE and EROS to gain support in the hills. Thousands of Hill Country Tamils fled to the north after ethnic violence in 1977 and 1983 and

quickly became radicalised. Only the iron hand of Mr Thondaman's Ceylon Workers Congress, as much a political party as a Trade Union, has prevented militant Tamil movements gaining more ground. But there are warning signs. Former PLOTE member and Up Country People's Front leader P. Chandrasekaran is currently under arrest, for involvement in the LTTE's bombing of Colombo military headquarters in June.

Uva's police chief D.I.G. Amarasekera says several LTTE leaders from Batticaloa are in the area and local Tamil merchants are financing arms and safe houses. But Tamil businessmen say it is the police who are extorting money from them and threatening their families. Over 5,000 tea estate workers staged a token strike on 1 January, over plans to privatise state-owned plantations.

SAARC pledges poverty offensive

PRESIDENT Ranasinghe Premadasa addressing a one-day summit of regional heads of government, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), in Colombo on 21 December fiercely rejected attempts by Western nations to link development aid to human rights and called for a new South Asian Commission on poverty alleviation.

Calling for increased political cooperation among SAARC countries to combat cross-border terrorism and drug-trafficking, Mr Premadasa condemned the interpretation of human rights in narrow and exclusively political terms and warned of "the danger of a new colonialism wrapped in spurious moral considerations emanating from alien cultures". A collective South Asian approach to the terrorist challenge to the nation state in the region was essential he said and called for new discussions of bilateral problems between SAARC nations.

The seven SAARC leaders representing 20% of the world's population, many

of whom live below the poverty line, agreed to focus on the region's underdevelopment and the SAARC joint declaration speaks of the poor as "a huge potential resource which should be mobilised to create economic growth".

The new South Asian Commission on poverty alleviation is likely to draw heavily on a UN-funded pilot study prepared by the Independent Group for South Asian Cooperation (IGSAC) which includes Sri Lankan economists Lal Jayawardene and Ponna Wignarajah. Other economists believe that while SAARC and IGSAC have got the rhetoric right, the financial equation is skewed. It is export-led growth that will alleviate poverty not the other way round. Collaborative economic ventures to maximise natural resources and to bolster trade would be more effective, analysts say.

Human rights groups in Colombo also expressed dismay over SAARC's downgrading of civil liberties, describing it as "a defensive position". Sri Lanka may become a test case for the international

community when a damning report by the UN Working Group on Disappearances, who visited the island in October, is presented at the UN Human Rights Commission meetings in Geneva in February.

A few days later, the World Bank's Paris Aid Group meets to discuss international aid to Sri Lanka in the coming year. At the last meeting in October 1990, the 12 European Community countries issued a statement expressing concern about Sri Lanka's human rights record saying it was now a factor in future aid transfers. Holland, Britain and Norway have since reduced bilateral aid to Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka's military budget of \$250 million is also likely to attract close scrutiny after resolutions passed at the IMF-World Bank annual meeting in Bangkok but there are questions too about the country's economic performance. The IMF has suspended a \$455 million credit line, granted in August, as concern grows over the slow pace of privatisation of Sri Lanka's state banks.

Missing

THOUSANDS of youths have disappeared since President Premadasa came to power and the government remains silent over their fate, Opposition leader-in-waiting Anura Bandaranaike told a rally in Colombo to mark Human Rights Day on 10 December.

In the Army's brutal three-year struggle with the Marxist insurgent People's Liberation Front (JVP) over 60,000 people died or disappeared. Prime Minister D B Wijetunge told Parliament in December that 5,433 JVP suspects remain in detention, with 4,036 held in Army camps and that investigations in many cases were still incomplete. Human rights agencies say as many as 15,000 may be detained and some of the 6,000 released after rehabilitation in the last 18 months have also disappeared.

Opposition leaders vowed to form a new human rights front as fresh information came to light on the disappearance of 46 schoolboys in Embilipitiya in 1989 at the height of the JVP insurrection. Amnesty International in a hard-hitting report on Ratnapura's Sevana Army camp where the boys were held, has again urged Sri Lanka to extend the terms of the

Presidential Commission on Disappearances. The government agreed this month to accept 28 of 32 Amnesty recommendations on human rights issues and will open regional offices for its Human Rights Task Force, set up a 24-hour hotline for disappearances and tighten up police procedures. But the Disappearances Commission's mandate still pre-

cludes the investigation of cases prior to 11 January 1991 leaving the Embilipitiya parents and thousands more in limbo.

Opposition MP and human rights campaigner Mahinda Rajapakse says many JVP activists are still at large and the socio-economic conditions which triggered the revolt have changed little. Mr Rajapakse has catalogued 3,000 disappearances in Hambantota District alone and says the government's *Jana-saviya* poverty programme disqualifies families from other welfare benefits such as food stamps leaving many worse off.

The crackdown on the remnants of the JVP continues in the south with the reported death in police custody of JVP acting second-in-command Jayaratne alias *Dawson*, apprehended by Madagoda police on 14 December. The JVP's present leader Somawansa Amerasinghe is in hiding in India and an Army captain was indicted in early December for helping him to escape. Dayawathie Ratnasekera alias *Sudu Akka* allegedly the JVP leader for Southern Province was arrested in late December. Embilipitiya remains a flashpoint. Another nine JVP suspects were arrested on 8 December.

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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