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Massacre in Polonnaruwa

A NEW WAVE of communal killings convulsed Sri Lanka's war-torn eastern districts in late April after 57 Muslim villagers from Alichipathana on the Batticaloa-Polonnaruwa border were hacked to death while they slept, reportedly by the guerrillas of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Hours later 53 Tamils from nearby Muthugala and Karapola were brutally murdered in reprisal. Women and young children were among the dead.

The Tigers have stepped up attacks on eastern Muslims in recent weeks targeting traditional centres such as Kattankudy and Kalmunai. Muslim Home Guards working with the Army are also accused of a string of casually brutal killings. The LTTE regards the Tamil-speaking Muslim community as "traitors" and massacred 140 people at Friday prayers in two Kattankudy mosques and 119 in Eravur in August 1990. A month later a LTTE ultimatum forced 50,000 Muslims to leave the north.

The area around Alichipathana, close to the Batticaloa-Polonnaruwa road linking the east to the rest of the country is also a flashpoint. LTTE Batticaloa commander *Karikalan* regularly picks off Sri Lankan Army patrols near Welikande with deadly results.

There was speculation in Colombo that the attack was timed by a hardline LTTE faction to destabilise the already-fragile peace process as a delegation of Buddhist monks returned from a six-day visit to Jaffna on 27 April, carrying new LTTE proposals. Other sources say the Tigers flatly rejected a 13-point peace plan put forward by the monks which offered a referendum on a merged North-East Province in three years time and a

No progress in peace talks

regional senate with powers to raise foreign development aid. The LTTE proposals are unlikely to offer significant concessions, observers say as the poker game continues.

There is a similar scepticism over the parliamentary Select Committee set up last August to solve the ethnic problem. The Committee due to report in late April on over 200 submissions, including one from the Tigers it refuses to acknowledge, will now meet in May. Insiders say it will offer no more devolution than the ill-fated Provincial Councils of 1988 and is already dismissed as irrelevant.

The struggle for power inside the Army High Command continues with a major change of strategy imminent. The Joint Operations Command (JOC) in Colombo is relegated to an advisory capacity with a new forward mobile headquarters at the front, run directly by the three armed services chiefs. Analysts say Army Commander Lt Gen Cecil Waidyaratne will now focus on the east and has sworn to restore normalcy in three months by keeping the Tigers' crack troops bottled up in Jaffna. Hardline Jaffna Army commander Wijaya Wimalaratne will spearhead the new eastern offensive while leader of the "hearts and minds faction" Lt Gen Denzil Kobbekaduwa stands guard on the peninsula.

The Army's offensive on Tiger bases in the Vanni jungles ended in early April a few hundred metres from LTTE leader Prabhakaran's *Puniitha Bhumi* base now deserted and encircled by impenetrable minefields. LTTE attacks on Army forward positions at Kokkuthoduvai north of Kokkilai lagoon continue and in a clash on 24 April, six soldiers were killed. *Operation Black Fox* west of Vavuniya brought a further ten kilometres

around Cheddikulam inside the Army's Forward Defence Line.

The Army designates such areas as "partially cleared" meaning the Army's writ runs by day and Tigers' by night. Representatives of relief agencies were earlier this month flown to Vavuniya and given a guided tour of 17 villages ripe for rehabilitation. Army strategy envisages a "soft zone" behind the front line normalised by NGOs while the Army creeps forward. Such a policy is unlikely to deter Tiger incursions as NGO experience in Mannar District vividly illustrates. Fresh Army offensives in Mannar and Vavuniya began in late April accompanied by widespread aerial bombardment.

In Colombo in early April seven opposition parties demanded President Premadasa's resignation after former police chief P Udugampola accused government MPs of running the *Black Cats* death squad during the three-year brutal insurrection by the southern Sinhalese Marxist People's Liberation Front (JVP).

Prime Minister D B Wijetunge described Mr Udugampola's allegations as false, misleading and motivated by revenge. Mr Udugampola was summarily retired earlier this year and is currently in hiding after a court order summoned him to appear during fresh investigations into the death in police custody of a human rights lawyer in September in 1988. A government injunction swiftly slapped on communist newspaper *Aththa* for publishing details of the allegations declared the issue *sub judice* and effectively nullified an emergency debate in Parliament much to the amusement of the Colombo press who pronounced once again the opposition had "fallen off a gift horse".

But others had already joined the fallen. A few days after the opposition's *Pada Yatra* rally at Kataragama on 1 April to protest against government policies, key organiser Rupasena Weeratunga was beaten to death at Gamakanda in the deep south. A note left by the body identified the victim as "a traitor".

■ On 23 April, American human rights agency *Asia Watch* published a joint appeal to the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE leadership to respect international standards in the laws of war and to protect civilians from torture, violence and reprisals. The appeal lists 12 specific abuses including indiscriminate attacks on civilians through aerial and artillery bombardment, torture and reprisal killings and suspending food supplies to civilian areas.

THE NORTH

Painkiller

LTTE sources say the Sri Lankan Navy destroyed 11 Jaffna fishing boats off Point Pedro killing 30 fishermen on 20 April. Only one body that of Umapathi Sivarajah was washed ashore. Defence sources claim the navy intercepted Sea Tiger units laying mines and destroyed their craft.

Air and sea shelling of Jaffna's coastal areas continues almost daily as the population waits under the ever-present threat of Army invasion. Food stocks have stabilised with the arrival of 9,000 tons of food aid monthly supervised by the ICRC but medical supplies remain critical. Jaffna Red Cross President Dr Nachchinarkinayan says there is a rising tide of unnecessary civilian deaths caused by the shortage of antibiotics and painkilling drugs - among 45 items banned from relief convoys by the Army. Many doctors have also fled the peninsula and two years of military blockade and food shortages mean growing malnutrition among young mothers and children.

Over 1,200 out patients attend Jaffna General Hospital every day with another 200 admissions. There is no electricity, no vaccines, no painkillers, 40 doctors and three ambulances. Over 540 people died in Jaffna hospital this year including 25 suicides. Last year 1,672 people were bitten by rabid dogs causing ten deaths.

The Tigers continue their assault on the Army's footholds inside the peninsula at the port of Kankesanthurai and the military airfield at Palaly. A 106mm anti-tank

weapon captured in the Mullaitivu offensive last month was used to shell Palaly runway on 11 April. Skirmishing around Elephant Pass continues. Some 15 civilians died at Kommady south of Elephant Pass on 24 April when a landmine exploded as a local trader set fire to rubbish. The area was previously under Army control.

Due east there is flooding at the Uryan crossing point of Chundikulam lagoon where hundreds of people leave the Jaffna peninsula every day but the growing drought in the north will soon push thousands more south in search of food. Others flee the iron rule of the Tigers who control everything from crop rotation to summary justice. Five people were publicly executed in Jaffna on 30 March, two policemen, two for spying and one for "immoral behaviour".

Further south, hundreds wait on either side of the bottleneck at Nochchimadu checkpoint outside Vavuniya that links the Army-controlled south with the Tiger north. They make the week-long round trip from Jaffna to buy rice and kerosene or travel on to Colombo to collect cash remittances from relatives abroad. Bicycles are banned from the kilometre of no-mansland after several bombing incidents so there is a cycle park on the Tiger side that must be reached bent double under a sack of Vavuniya grain - like the set for some vast surrealist film.

Reprieve

British police agreed to re-open the case of Samuel Kulasingham in early April after a 55-day hunger strike by the Sri Lankan Tamil. Mr Kulasingham and Prem Sivalingam were jailed for life four years ago for a firebomb attack in east London in which three Tamils died.

Extortion

Hill Country sources say a local gang is systematically extorting money from Tamil traders in the Passara area. Over 100 Hill Country youth are still in custody after a police crackdown on LTTE infiltration in Uva in January. Some 47 are in Magazine prison, Colombo. Four more youths were arrested in Matale in mid-April for alleged links with the LTTE.

Hostages

Justice JFA Soza, Chairman of Sri Lanka's Human Rights Task Force (HRTF) said in early April that 5,793 people are currently in detention camps in the aftermath of the failed JVP revolt in the south. Unofficial sources put the figure at around 10,000. HRTF had intervened in continuing complaints of assault and short rations only with limited success said Justice Soza.

Executions

Tamil group PLOTE says 17 members of the Kulasegaram family from Mullaitivu sought refuge in Vavuniya in mid-April after Mr Kulasegaram's three sons and son-in-law were shot dead by the Tigers for supporting other Tamil militants.

The long way home

AS THE BACKLASH against 200,000 Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in south India continues India announced plans to airlift 1,500 refugees a week to Trincomalee beginning in late April. Almost 17,000 Sri Lankan refugees have returned by ship since January as part of an Indo-Sri Lankan government repatriation programme.

Last month India notified 110,000 Sri Lankan refugees living outside government-run camps to register for return and clearly means to step up the repatriation programme. Refugee NGOs say conditions are unsafe for return while the war continues and question whether the refugees are returning voluntarily despite as-

surances from Indian Home Minister S B Chavan. Returnees say they are being pushed out by official indifference and local resentment after Rajiv Gandhi's murder attributed to the Tamil Tigers. Tamil Nadu camps are without doctors and clean water supplies. Over 15 refugees have died from cholera in Tiruchirappalli camps this year.

On Mannar Island of 6,000 Tamil refugees who have returned, 1,500 are in welfare centres and another 2,000 in temporary shelters or with relatives. Even in so-called "cleared areas" only 50% can return to their homes or have homes to return to. Only 1,792 of the 30,000 Muslims who fled the district have

returned lured by promises of new homes and food subsidies which have yet to materialise.

On the mainland, control of Mannar District remains fiercely contested. Ten soldiers and 20 LTTE cadres were killed in a Tiger ambush outside Vankalai on 18 April. Further west, returnees from northern areas are corralled in an old rice mill outside Vavuniya where they are forced to donate blood for the war effort. Like the others they have been promised Rs 2,000 (\$50) start-up grant, Rs 15,000 to rebuild their homes and three months dry rations. The lucky ones will get Rs 200 and a shove across Thandikulam checkpoint into Tiger country.

Bus bomb blasts Amparai

Black Friday

OVER 28 people were killed and another 50 wounded when a bomb hidden on a Kalmunai bus exploded, at Amparai bus station on Sri Lanka's east coast on 10 April. Most of the dead were Muslims. Police blamed the LTTE and have arrested eight people including the driver and leading suspects Nemi and Mary.

The east coast remains tense after police and Army roundups in Kalmunai. Amparai Tamil Maha Sangam has called for a meeting with President Premadasa to highlight growing food shortages, the plight of the disappeared and those injured in reprisal attacks. After a policeman was killed and two others injured in a LTTE ambush near Palamunai west of Amparai in early April, 12 people were admitted to Batticaloa hospital following reprisal attacks at Palamunai junction.

Further north in Batticaloa District there is mounting fear between Tamils and Muslims as communal and reprisal killings continue. Hundreds of Tamils marched in protest from Thalankudah to Batticaloa in early April seeking protection from Muslim Home Guards. Three Tamils were shot at Senkalady on 24 April in retaliation for two Muslims killed a week earlier. Two Tamils Sithampararajah Sivakumar and Rasalingam Maheswaran were abducted, killed and their bodies buried in a shallow pit in Meeravodai.

No one is exempt from this madness. After two TELO cadre were killed in a LTTE attack in Mandur, 15 miles from Batticaloa on 14 April, seven people were hacked to death including a family of six. Local MP P Joseph in a telegram

to President Premadasa has called for a full enquiry.

The Tigers continue to launch wide-ranging attacks across the district. LTTE units attacked police stations at Valaichenai and Kattankudy in early April. Casualties are not known. Most of northern Batticaloa's rice harvest has been confiscated by the Army supposedly to prevent seizure by the Tigers, a visiting opposition delegation was told in late April. Fishing is now banned in Kattankudy after a spate of LTTE attacks using boats. Some 13 fish markets in the area are closed or badly damaged. The Tigers have knocked out six electricity transformers paralysing Kaluvanchikudi and other areas west of Batticaloa lagoon.

The Army camp at Punanai on the Welikande road, linking the east to the rest of the country remains a target for Batticaloa commander Karikalan and in an attack on 10 April, six Sri Lankan soldiers were killed. A few days earlier six LTTE cadre were killed in a clash at Iralkulam.

Defence sources say former journalist and LTTE's Batticaloa intelligence chief Nithyanandan was shot dead by TELO and Army units near Eechamtivu in late April. Reports of rape and civilian killings following Army and police operations continue. Two women were reportedly raped by police at Sukkankerni on 27 April.

New year terror

AS weekend celebrations for the Tamil/Sinhalese New Year got underway on 10 April, a massive car bomb blasted the Colombo suburb of Maharagama killing 15 people and injuring another 50. Police suspect the bomb was meant for a high profile target but the vehicle broke down ten miles outside the city centre. There are question marks over LTTE involvement. The bomb was a cruder variety than those usually used by LTTE and the authorities have not ruled out the involvement of the remnants of the southern Sinhalese insurgent JVP group. But security officials say LTTE bomb expert Ruban slipped into the city a few days earlier and full-scale manhunt is underway using pro-Army Tamil groups to screen

Colombo's Tamil population. Thousands of Tamils arrived from the north for the New Year festivities and the city is tense and apprehensive.

Police quickly began massive search operations throughout Colombo District checking residence permits. Colombo residents providing refuge for friends and relatives from the north must register them immediately with local police or face arrest. Over 50 bewildered new arrivals were arrested in Maradana and later released but another 18 Tamils were arrested in Wattala on 23 April, suspected of involvement in the Maharagama blast.

A few days later, police arrested LTTE suspect Sekaram who they say was surveying Colombo's international airport in preparation for a new car bomb attack. With a new wave of power cuts and water shortages as the drought tightens its grip on the south, Colombo is a pressure cooker.

Cordon and search

SOME 14 Sri Lankan soldiers were killed and six injured in a LTTE ambush in Pachchanur near Muthur south of Trincomalee town on 10 April. The attack was followed by large-scale roundups of civilians in Palaiyutru and Anbuvelipuram including many women. Student SC Mohaneswaran arrested in Muthur is being tortured by security forces in their Plantain Point headquarters, local people allege.

Trincomalee remains a city under siege with what passes for normalcy shrouded behind a maze of barbed wire and checkpoints. Around the city is a 30-mile band of "partially cleared" areas routinely punctured by LTTE night raids. In hot spots, relief agencies are prevented from transporting more than one day's food at a time to prevent provisions falling into the guerrillas' hands.

Travel is banned during Army operations meaning people may go a week or ten days without dry rations. Beyond the cleared areas are a band of dense jungles hiding Tiger bases and the corridor to the north. New Army operations began in late April after two Tiger camps were discovered at Morawewa and a munitions dump at Kadawewa.

Among the 500 Sri Lankan refugees who arrived by ship at Trincomalee on 9 April were 60 cadres from Tamil group EPDP and 125 from TELO, seconded to the Army in the Jaffna islands and Batticaloa. International refugee agency UNHCR has stationed an expatriate observer in Trincomalee but still refuse to get involved with the refugee returns programme citing the security situation and uncertainty over the voluntary nature of the returns.

TAMIL HUMAN RIGHTS GROUP REPORTS ON THE NORTH-EAST WAR

Trapped, tortured and tormented

THE TAMIL people are now prisoners of their own liberation movements, trapped in daily trauma of repression, hunger and loss, caught between the parallel brutalities of the Sri Lankan Army and the Tamil militant groups. So argues the latest report "The Trapped People among Peace Makers and War Mongers" from the University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna) or UTHR.

Since 1988, UTHR has been the only independent Tamil voice cataloguing human rights abuses in the north-east. It is now as much a voice of conscience, and its reports a coda or moral commentary on the violence of previous months. Some of its leaders are dead, the others have gone underground.

The report condemns all the major actors in this tragic conflict in turn. It accuses the LTTE of terrorising the Tamil population into dumb servility and of glorifying violence and death. It shows how the Army's random killings and disappearances drive young Tamils into the

arms of the Tigers or forces them to flee to Colombo or Western countries. It accuses the government and the NGOs of paying only lip service to human rights concerns and is scathing over the recent peace proposals by Tourism Minister Thondaman saying they serve only to legitimate LTTE repression and play into the hands of Sinhala chauvinists in the south.

Those who ignore such excesses abdicate responsibility for their own people says UTHR. It appeals to the Tigers to open up the liberation process and apply basic human rights and freedom of expression. The LTTE and other critics deride UTHR as lacking realpolitik and tinged with Christian moralism but its writings offer other voices from the north-east that are now rarely heard.

The latest report dispassionately records the aftermath of the Kokkaddicholai massacre in Batticaloa last July listing a string of Army killings and robberies by Tamil militant group TELO. It also shows

how Tiger attacks are designed to provoke reprisals from the Army and the Muslim Home Guards to further polarize the Tamils and stiffen civilian resistance.

Another chapter details the brutality suffered by over 4,000 Tamils in LTTE prison camps, suspected of spying or supporting other Tamil groups. Endorsing a recent published account "Psychos who love weapons" by Samaran an escaped LTTE detainee, UTHR highlights conditions at Thunnakai and Charles prison camps where detainees are kept in deep underground pits and regularly beaten and tortured.

Among those held at Thunnakai are a Myliddy shopkeeper who sold fish to Indian occupation forces and a ten-year old boy forced to sell newspapers for a rival militant group. Every family in the north has lost someone to the Army or the Tigers or others. UTHR calls for liberation from the trauma of a war with no conscience, no historical memory and no human face.

Drought tightens its grip on the south

SRI LANKA is now in the grip of one of the worst droughts this century with over a million people in the south facing hunger and ruin after two successive crop failures. Social Services Director NWE Wijewardene says Rs 45 million (\$1 million) has been set aside for a monthly relief package of Rs 315 food aid. Over 60,000 families have been supplied so far and officials expect more relief assistance from donor countries.

Colombo District which usually has 400mm of rain in the first four months of the year has had only 24mm, a pattern repeated throughout the country. There is no drinking water at Ja-Ela ten miles north of the capital and widespread water and power cuts elsewhere. Over 15,000 families in the North West Province whose food stamp quota ended on 1 April appealed for immediate assistance and government MP TLB Hurulle told Parliament over 335,000 people in Anuradhapura were affected by the drought. The World Food Programme is already supplying food aid for 75,000

refugees from the north-east war, south of Anuradhapura and relief agencies say the drought will hit the north equally badly.

Sri Lanka's tea crop will be badly hit by the drought and this year's production is

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.

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expected to fall by 30% from last year's 240 million kgs losing valuable foreign exchange earnings. There is also mounting disquiet over plans to privatise Sri Lanka's ailing tea and rubber plantation sector. An association of the leaders of the four main Buddhist sects called on President Premadasa to halt the privatisation process in mid-April saying important national assets were under threat. There are fears in the Horton Plains area and around the major Buddhist shrine of Sri Pada that adjoining land will fall into non-Buddhist hands. In a speech at Bulathsinhala a few days later, President Premadasa insisted that only the management of plantations was to be handed over and that the state currently subsidised the plantation sector to the tune of Rs 400 million (\$10 million) a month. Members of the United Plantation Services Union a leading trade union among white collar workers in the state plantation corporations have refused to handle any documents in connection with the privatisation process.