

## TIGERS HIT BACK AFTER JAFFNA OFFENSIVE

THE battle for Jaffna entered a new phase in July when the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) launched a number of large-scale attacks in the Vanni and the east to draw the Army into battle away from the Jaffna peninsula.

In a devastating assault in remote Katupotha north-west of Anuradhapura on 11 July the Tigers wiped out an Army camp killing 52 soldiers and injuring 11 others. Attacks in the east cost the lives of many more soldiers. The Army however announced the completion of Operation Balavegaya II on 12 July, sealing off all land routes into the Jaffna peninsula and capturing Iyakkachchi junction north of Elephant Pass. Defence sources claimed that in the two-week fighting 340 Tigers were killed and only 37 soldiers died.

Former Airforce chief Harry Gunetilleke said consensus between the UNP and the SLFP was essential before talks with the Tamils and that the permanent merger of the North and the East should be taken seriously. Amidst rumours of secret talks between the government and the LTTE, the north-east merger remained an explosive issue. The alliance of seven Tamil parties, recently bolstered by the Ceylon Workers Congress will not accept any solution without merger of the two provinces and is seeking support from other political parties for a four-point plan. The SLFP has already rejected the plan. The Select Committee set up to solve the ethnic question seems increasingly ineffective and irrelevant.

The Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) has indicated support for the merger but on condition of a separate council for the Muslims. The issue was further complicated by a new Muslim front under the auspices of the Muslim Information Centre supported by parliamentary Speaker MH Mohamed, which declared in mid-July that the SLMC had no mandate to speak on behalf of all the Muslims and called for the delinking of the north and the east. A presidential proclamation at the end of July said that the referendum on the merger due on 28 August was postponed to 5 March next year.

Negotiations between the SLMC and the Tamil parties came to a standstill when Tamil group TELO urged the government to begin talks with the LTTE and two massacres of Muslims in July allegedly by the LTTE increased tension in the east. An angry SLMC leader MHM Ashraf declared a jihad or "holy war" against the LTTE and demanded a separate Muslim unit in the Army.

Opposition parties launched innovative protests against the government in July. Claims of success of a jana gosha (mass shouting) protest on 1 July by the opposition was denied by the government. Increasing internal conflicts did not deter the SLFP beginning a motorcade protest in the north-central province and the DUNF led by former minister Lalith Athulathmudali announced a signature campaign demanding the resignation of President Premadasa. Plans to form a common front against the UNP in future elections were set in motion.

After a ten-week lull, India resumed its controversial repatriation of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in south India when 123 returnees including 13 children arrived by plane in Trincomalee on 3 August. After international refugee agency UNHCR expressed concern over allegations of forcible repatriation India will permit UN monitoring of a cross-section of refugees before they leave Tamil Nadu. The state's rehabilitation director Mr Bhujanga Rao says another 7,000 of the 60,000 Sri Lankan refugees in camps have agreed to go home. Over 23,000 returned between January and May this year.

## JAFFNA UNDER SIEGE

THE Sri Lankan Army has advanced ten kilometres from Vetrilaikerni on the east coast of the Jaffna peninsula in an effort to link up with Elephant Pass camp capturing three LTTE strongholds after fierce fighting. In early July the Army declared Mulliyan and Pullaveli cleared areas and the Army column thrusting north from Elephant Pass after heavy aerial bombing captured Iyakkachchi junction on 9 July. Military sources said that a number of Tigers were killed by troops landed in helicopters at Vannankulam.

Although the government announced that all land routes into the peninsula had been sealed off, civilians still cross the lagoon at Kilali. A helicopter attacked a boat on 16 July forcing men and women to jump into the lagoon and swim for the shore and another boat carrying 20 passengers disappeared. According to reports thousands of people were stranded at Kilinochchi facing attacks from advancing troops.

Jaffna Government Agent K Manickavasagar told the Rehabilitation Ministry in late July that the number of persons displaced within the peninsula had swelled to 350,000. There was an acute shortage of kerosene, coconut oil and soap and the people were entirely dependent on food aid by ship following the severing of land routes.

A Chinese-built Y-8 Airforce plane crashed north of Elephant Pass on 5 July killing 19 airmen including six officers. LTTE's claim that it shot down the plane with anti-aircraft guns was denied by the government. Other sources say a number of the military's volatile home-made "barrel bombs" were on board.

Ten days after the Katupotha attack, an explosion inside the Tantrimale Buddhist temple south-west of Vavuniya killed the chief priest. Although the LTTE was suspected initially, following investigations, a junior priest was taken into custody.

## COLOMBO TO DEVALUE RUPEE?

A Joint IMF/World Bank team visiting Sri Lanka in early July has recommended devaluing the rupee after the 1992 budget deficit exceeded the target figure of 8% of GDP, by over \$136 million.

Removing subsidies on wheat flour, introducing value added tax by 1994 and speeding up privatisation are other reforms forced on Sri Lanka by the World Bank. If Sri Lanka fails to comply the Bank may withhold the third tranche of \$450 million under its Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility (ESAF) approved in September 1991. A steep rise in the price of goods and services is predicted in order to meet World Bank targets.

A Sri Lankan application for a \$200 million soft loan to implement some of the reforms met with further World Bank conditions. The Bank insists on full privatisation of the state banks and an increase in the price of diesel to the level of petrol prices. Observers say Sri Lanka will find it difficult to agree with these potentially politically explosive conditions.

Although the government insists that devaluation of the rupee is unlikely, the Institute of Policy Studies predicts a devaluation of 8 to 9% by the end of the year due to inflationary pressures from higher import prices of grain, increased cost of electricity and the new defence levy. In March the Electricity Board made a fuel surcharge of 20% because of drought and power-cuts in April resulting in a 3% decrease in public sector production. The defence levy of 1% on imports and manufacturing items which was increased in May to 3% has been passed on to the consumer.

## THE EAST BLEEDS

CHAOS reigned in Batticaloa after armed men alleged to be LTTE cadres attacked a bus travelling from Kattankudy to Kalmunai on 15 July at Kirankulam killing 19 Muslims and injuring another five. Reports say that the Muslims were separated from the other passengers before being massacred. The government has appointed a committee headed by retired judge CGL de Alwis to inquire into the killings.

Policemen attempting to prevent Tamils being attacked in Kattankudy themselves were assaulted. Then the policemen began attacking the civilians. The situation was aggravated by another attack on Muslims on 21 July on the Batticaloa-Polonnaruwa train. Ten Muslims were gunned down by the Tigers who then blasted the engine with explosives. The LTTE deny involvement. Following this attack a lorry was stoned by Muslims at Valaichenai. The driver was hit and the lorry ran off the road killing a police constable. Five Muslims were abducted by gunmen on 25 July while fishing in the Kattankudy lagoon.

The Army announced in late July that Muslims would be provided protection to travel on the Batticaloa-Kalmunai road on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays and similarly Tamils travelling through the Muslim areas of Kattankudy, Maruthamunai and Eravur.

Tiger deputy leader Mahattaya is now said to be directing operations against the Army in Batticaloa. In an attack on Navalady road in Batticaloa on 29 July, 30 soldiers were killed. Following another attack on an Army patrol on 3 August in which 20 soldiers died, the Army decided to withdraw patrols from remote areas. Earlier in the month a number of attacks were carried out by the Tigers in Batticaloa. Defence sources say although the Army is stretched in the east and suffered casualties, heavy losses were inflicted on the LTTE. In an operation in the Thoppigala jungles on 6 July 30 Tigers died and five more were shot dead near Samanthiaru on 16 July.

Following these attacks security forces and Home Guards were again accused of civilian atrocities during search operations. Seven persons disappeared in the Valaichenai area in late July and 27 civilians were abducted in Karadiyanaru. Earlier in the month, soldiers were accused of robbing 137 head of cattle from five farmers.

The Batticaloa Government Agent announced that compensation would be paid this month to relatives after the massacre of civilians by soldiers at Kokkaddicholai in June last year. Tamil MP Pararajasingham Joseph said Batticaloa officials failed to implement the awards until he wrote to the President.

Eighteen policemen were killed in simultaneous LTTE attacks on police stations at Sambaltivu and Athimoddai in the Trincomalee District on 29 July. Following the attacks the Army cordoned off villages in the area. People were forced to assemble near temples and after questioning, a number of arrests were made.

Two days later two Tamil civilians were killed by Sinhalese Home Guards. Six more persons were shot dead by the Army at Uppukulam and their houses were burned. Sinhala-Tamil tension in Trincomalee was heightened after 40 huts belonging to Sinhalese fishermen were gutted by fire, despite a police statement that it was an accident. The fishermen had settled in Trincomalee two years ago and since then there have been frequent disputes with the local Tamils.

Refugees in Amparai District say there is no protection for Tamils returning often unwillingly to their homes after Army ultimatum. Many houses have been robbed and damaged by Home Guards. Refugees say camp conditions are poor and number of representations made to President Premadasa have received no response. Tamil group PLOTE has distributed clothes to refugees resettled in Veeramunai.

## DEATH THREATS AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS LAWYERS

HUMAN RIGHTS NGO, Lawyers for Human Rights and Development (LHRD) has written to President Premadasa complaining of death threats against LHRD lawyers appearing in fundamental rights applications before the Supreme Court. LHRD which provides free legal advice and other legal assistance, says that constant threats have disrupted their work and compelled them to withdraw from fundamental rights applications. The printers where LHRD's newsletters are printed has also come under threat.

The Kandy regional office of the Human Rights Task Force (HRTF) appointed to inquire into human rights abuses, was opened on 16 July. Chairman of HRTF, JFA Soza says that regional offices have also been set up in Matara and Batticaloa and would be opened to the public round the clock.

One hundred youths trained under the Youth Rehabilitation Programme for JVP detainees were to be released in Colombo on 14 July. According to the Commissioner General of Rehabilitation around 7,500 detainees have been released. TM Dayaratne, a Boosa camp detainee sought protection from the Presidential Commission on Disappearances as he had been threatened with death by police. Ten JVP suspects escaped from the Pelawatte detention centre on 11 July. Seven of them were recaptured the following day.

Following adverse comments by the Disappearances Commission, eight police officers who had served in southern provinces during the JVP uprising were sent on compulsory leave. Police say that allegations of atrocities would be investigated and criminal charges brought against them.

\* The Sri Lankan Army is concerned over falling recruitment rates. Only 360 applications have been received for the 1,000 vacancies in the Army and this has led to an amnesty for the 4,000 who deserted the forces since 1987. The demand by the Airforce for US C-130 Hercules aircraft has been turned down by the government. However more funds for the military and the purchase of a squadron of ground attack aircraft were approved by the Joint Operations Council headed by President Premadasa on 22 July.

\* The Tamil Nadu government issued notice under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, on the LTTE on 8 July asking for explanation within 30 days as to why the Indian order declaring the militant group unlawful should not be confirmed. LTTE was banned by India on 14 May for involvement in the assassination of former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi. The Indian government order has now been referred to a tribunal to determine whether there are sufficient grounds for the ban.

\* Pakistan has accused India of spreading rumours of a military liaison between Pakistan and the LTTE. A spokesman for the Pakistan UN delegation in New York denied that there was such a connection. A report in India had said that the Indian government was concerned over increasing Pakistani assistance to the LTTE. Other reports said that LTTE leader Kittu recently visited Pakistan to obtain arms.

\* Eighty Tamil youths alleged to be LTTE suspects were arrested in Negombo, 25 miles north of Colombo, on 19 July. After inquiries five were detained and the others released. Police claim a number of LTTE "safe houses" had been discovered in the area. Another 13 Tamils were arrested at Wattala.