

Army chiefs killed by LTTE mine

SIX of Sri Lanka's most senior military commanders and four other soldiers died when their jeep hit a powerful landmine at Arali Point on Kayts island west of Jaffna on 8 August, while preparing a further assault on the stronghold of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Among the dead were Northern Commander Major General Denzil Kobbekaduwa 52, Jaffna Commander Brigadier Wijaya Wimalaratne 52, and Naval Northern Commander Commodore Mohan Jayamaha. Major General Kobbekaduwa was Sri Lanka's most experienced and perhaps best loved soldier who openly espoused a hearts and minds approach to the North-East war attempting to minimise casualties and win over Tamil civilians in contested areas.

Military sources say the jeep hit an old pressure mine as it veered off the road during a reconnoitre of Army forward positions but the LTTE was quick to claim responsibility for a carefully planned operation. Eight LTTE cadre have been killed trying to infiltrate Kayts in the last few weeks.

Sections of Colombo which thrives on conspiracy were convinced the killings were an inside job and pointed to infighting in the Army over military tactics. The Tigers' ability to target Sri Lanka's military high command on a lonely road on a particular day launched a barrage of veiled accusations. Douglas Devananda leader of pro-Army Tamil group EPDP deployed on Kayts categorically denied involvement in the killings.

Despite a glowing tribute to the dead commanders at a rally in Kegalle, Presi-

New offensive strengthens military foothold in Jaffna

dent Premadasa refused to sanction state funerals or a national day of mourning and did not attend the burials at Kanatte cemetery in Colombo. Speculation revived that Major General Kobbekaduwa with strong family links to the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) was to have been a joint opposition candidate for the presidency when he retired as Army Chief of Staff in 1994.

Grief and anger boiled over at the Kanatte funerals and over 100 people including two cabinet ministers were hurt in mob violence. Politicians blamed rival party thugs. Dayan Jayatilke, one of Mr Premadasa's inner circle of special advisers reputed to write a vitriolic weekly column in the *Sunday Observer*, was stripped naked and badly beaten by rioters. Former President JR Jayawardene announced he would now drop a million dollar libel suit against the mysterious journalist *Anuraddha Tilakasiri* after receiving an unqualified apology from the Lake House newspaper group.

There were fears of a new wave of ethnic violence against 150,000 Tamils in Colombo. In July 1983, after the funeral of 13 soldiers at Kanatte ambushed by the nascent LTTE in Jaffna, a week-long holocaust killed 3,000 Tamils in Colombo and the Hill Country and displaced thousands more. Only hours after Major General Kobbekaduwa's death, 35 Tamils were slaughtered by unknown gunman at Mahilanthanai, a remote village on the Batticaloa border and Colombo was prepared for the worst. But

the capital remained tense and relatively quiet. On 20 August, Sri Lankan forces launched *Operation Earthquake* from their foothold inside the Jaffna peninsula at Palaly airbase, pushing three kms

west to capture a key LTTE port at Mathagal after five days of fierce fighting. Casualty figures remain unclear but among those killed was *Rajan*, commander of the LTTE's crack *Charles Anthony Brigade*. Both sides accused the other of using civilians as human shields.

The Army now controls around 20 kms of contiguous territory at the north-west tip of the peninsula and intends establishing civil administration and police stations. Heavy shelling continues from Palaly to prevent LTTE encroachment. A naval patrol boat was captured in a LTTE counter attack on Mandaitivu in early September. A slender escape route for civilians across Jaffna lagoon west of Elephant Pass remains open at Kilali involving a four-hour boat ride in high winds for Rs300.

Jaffna town's Medical Officer of Health says every home is now a mini refugee camp with 65,000 swelling the 140,000 peacetime population. Over 7,000 houses have been destroyed in the town since the June 1990 war, there is no water or electricity and respiratory and gastro intestinal illness are rampant. Two years of enforced malnutrition means mothers and children are increasingly vulnerable and the trauma of daily bombing and destruction has triggered a six-fold increase in psychiatric disorders. Farm labourers and fisherman denied work cannot afford the high-priced trickle of basic foodstuffs on the open market.

At St Anne's Church in Mathagal, another 100 families have joined the ranks of the 250,000 internal refugees in the peninsula whose population now tops one million. All over Jaffna, churches, temples schools and community halls are full of the hungry and the war-weary. World opinion has already averted its gaze, claiming more pressing dilemmas and disasters elsewhere. As the October rains approach, analysts say the pace of the Army offensive is likely to quicken.

Ailing opposition leader Mrs Srimavo Bandaranaike has lost a three-year court battle to depose Mr Premadasa after widespread violence disrupted the 1988 presidential elections. Financial markets were on hold and five Supreme Court Judges requested police protection in the run-up to the verdict, released on 1 September. Mr Premadasa hailed the judgement as "yet another victory for the people" and analysts predict a spell of political bloodletting in the upper echelons of both parties. More details on page four.

REFUGEES

Food aid slashed as repatriation battle continues

INDIA's stop-go repatriation of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees was again halted when Madras High Court temporarily suspended the programme on 21 August after a public interest petition from two Tamil Nadu politicians alleging the refugees were being forcibly returned.

India first suspended the controversial programme in mid-May after UN High Commissioner for Refugees Mrs Sadako Ogata wrote to Indian Prime Minister Mr Narasimha Rao raising similar fears. Repatriation recommenced on 3 August after India invited UNHCR to monitor returning refugees in south India.

Madras High Court judge M Srinivasan lifted his suspension in late August saying he was satisfied that UNHCR involvement guaranteed the voluntary nature of the return. The petition will be heard on 14 September. Relief workers say UNHCR will have access to only a sample of returnees and that returning refugees will be in danger as the north-east war continues.

UNHCR's New Delhi representative Fazlul Karim intervened to prevent Mrs Jeevayoha Mary, her seven year-old son and Mr and Mrs Velu Pandian and three children being forced to join 132 returnees who flew from Madras to Trincomlee on 3 August but unless the UN presence is reinforced, monitoring will be in name only. Camp officials remain hostile and local refugee worker P Nagalingam was threatened after displaying information at Mandapam refugee camp that only those who volunteered would be repatriated.

UNHCR currently runs a refugee camp for over 30,000 at Sri Lanka's most sacred

Catholic shrine at Madhu in Mannar district and will open a new camp 6km north at Palampiddy to house the returnees. Existing reception centres in Vavuniya and Trincomalee where conditions are harsh and sanitation poor will also come under UN supervision.

But Madhu is the only safe haven in hundreds of miles of contested territory. Four Sri Lankan soldiers were killed in early August at Nanattan a few miles west as LTTE attacks continue on the Army's slender foothold on the Mannar mainland. Another 15 security personnel were killed at Pirappammaduva, only 12 miles north-east of Vavuniya.

NGO fears were compounded when Colombo announced in late August that food aid to 600,000 refugees inside Sri Lanka would be cut by 50% after a financial crisis at the Ministry of Rehabilitation. Dry rations per refugee will drop to Rs4.50 (US 10 cents) a day, enough for 250gms of rice or less than 1,000 calories daily. Food aid to 70,000 Sinhalese and Muslim refugees in six southern districts supplied by the World Food Programme will not be cut. Government spokesman Bradman Weerakoon denied that the cuts were to be enforced only in the north-east.

Sources say the reduction reflects new World Bank-imposed ceilings on social welfare spending but also signals tough new measures to force civilians out of LTTE-controlled areas. When they risk being shot or starved more refugees are likely to flee Sri Lanka than those who are so reluctantly returning.

LTTE revival in south India

TAMIL NADU Chief Minister Jayalalitha Jayaram, in a blistering exchange with opposition MP Dr Subramaniam Swamy in late August, denied she had eased India's surveillance of the Palk Strait and paid the LTTE protection money to forestall an assassination bid.

Describing Dr Swamy as "a pathological liar", Ms Jayalalitha also denied tapping the phones of 28 leading south Indians including journalist Cho Ramaswamy. Charges from other politicians such as AICC leader GK Mooppanar that LTTE cells were again active in Tamil Nadu were designed to discredit her one-year drive against the Tigers said the Chief Minister.

There have been persistent reports in the last few months of restored smuggling links supplying Jaffna with weapons diesel and medicines. With hundreds of Indian fishing boats still plying the Palk Strait daily and over 200,000 Sri Lankan Tamils officially refugees in south India many LTTE networks may still be intact.

Some 20 alleged members of the Tamil Nadu Retrieval Force (TNRF) set up by the Tigers to foment insurgency in the south Indian state were formally charged in a Madras Court on 26 August along with four alleged members of the LTTE.

Cold wind over Europe

AN EMOTIONAL APPEAL from 51 Sri Lankan Tamil asylum-seekers held in a Hungarian detention camp for over three months was smuggled out of Budapest in late August. The Tamils, who surrendered to Hungarian authorities after their guide abandoned them, are held in the notorious Kerepestarcsa detention camp.

Their letter speaks of sub-standard conditions and violent treatment by guards. Women have been sexually harassed and medical provision is non-existent. Many are locked up all day in total darkness. The Tamils say they will launch

a hunger strike on 7 September unless international refugee agency UNHCR intervenes on their behalf.

Eastern Europe is now the prime destination for Tamil refugee smuggling networks as the climate of opinion hardens in countries further west. There were 20 separate racist attacks on asylum hostels in Germany in late August and the government is considering even tougher legislation to keep asylum-seekers out. There are almost 250,000 Sri Lankan refugees in Europe arriving at a rate of 25,000 a year.

Switzerland will pioneer a repatriation programme for rejected Tamil asylum-seekers later this year and other European countries are expected to follow suit. A Swiss government delegation led by Mr Marcel Zuckschweart visited Colombo in early August to assess the situation. Current European thinking says Colombo is stable enough to receive returning Tamil asylum-seekers. Refugee workers say Colombo police reports indicate around 300 young Tamils are arrested every week as LTTE suspects and that returnees inevitably are at risk.

The east racked by reciprocal killings

Mirrors of violence

TAMIL-MUSLIM relations in Sri Lanka suffered a further setback when a bicycle bomb in a market killed 22 Muslims and injured 67 others at Sainthamaruthu in Amparai district on 1 September. The Tigers have been accused but the rebel group has blamed the government of masterminding the attack to divide the two communities.

Amid mounting tension ten Tamils were injured in the ensuing violence. Muslim shops and schools were closed in protest. Ten days earlier the Tigers shot dead three Muslims on 12th Colony in Amparai. Tamil rice harvests were burned in retaliation and many youths were arrested by the Army. Reports say that on 12 August Muslim Home Guards shot dead Ilayathamby Nesadurai of Karaitivu who

was to give evidence on Home Guard atrocities.

The killing of senior military officers in the north had its repercussions in the east. Armed men believed to be soldiers, shot and hacked to death 35 Tamils at Mahilanthanai, east of Polonnaruwa on 9 September. Villagers fled the area to refugee camps in Valaichenai. Two Tigers were killed at Valaichenai the next day followed by heavy fighting.

After Army search operations in Karadiyanaru jungles, west of Batticaloa lagoon, military sources say up to 30 Tigers died when a LTTE training camp was attacked. After 14 soldiers were killed on 3 August, the Army arrested 26 Tamil villagers working in their fields. Later six of them were admitted to the

hospital with gunshot injuries and the fate of the others remains unknown.

The LTTE shot dead six policemen providing security to harvesting farmers at Bakki Ella in Amparai district on 15 September. Two days later civilians on streets were attacked after two soldiers were killed by a landmine at Thetrativu, 12 miles south of Batticaloa. On 26 September the Army attacked LTTE hide-outs in Thikkodai killing two Tigers and arrested 26 suspects.

In late August security forces launched major cordon and search operations in Amparai. A large number of persons were rounded up by the Special Task Force and five were held. Fishermen were unable to put out to sea and farmers complained that the paddy harvest was disrupted in coastal areas. Hundreds of soldiers were also involved in search operations in the Vellaveli area west of Batticaloa lagoon.

Batticaloa and Amparai districts are in the grip of unprecedented drought. Wells are drying up and people face the daunting task of walking several miles past many check-points in search of water. Hospitals report an increase in the number of patients as the extreme weather helps the spread of disease. Kaluvanchikudy hospital which covers 50 villages has only two doctors. Batticaloa Social Services Department says there are just not enough water bowsers to supply all refugee camps in the district.

Jaffna pressure

JAFFNA CITIZENS COMMITTEE has appealed to Western and Asian foreign missions in Colombo to halt the Sri Lankan government's offensive on the Jaffna peninsula which they say has caused large-scale civilian casualties. The Committee says that over 30,000 civilians have been killed in the north-east and 10,000 have disappeared since the June 1990 war began. Shelling and bombing accompanying the Army's *Operation Earthquake* killed ten civilians and injured 50 others in Jaffna peninsula on 20 August. A week earlier a young woman at Oddumadam and a student at Erlalai were killed in shelling from Palaly and Mandaitivu.

The Tigers attacked a PLOTE check-point at Nochchimodai in Vavuniya District on 13 August killing one cadre. Four soldiers and seven Tigers died in a battle at Alampil south of Mullaitivu on 24 August. Four days later the Tigers overran three Army posts south of Vetrilaikerni killing five soldiers.

Pressure on relief agencies increased when 80,000 people in the Mathagal area fled to Jaffna town and relief aid was reduced by half by the Rehabilitation Ministry. The Government Agent provided six days' dry rations to those who took refuge in schools and temples. Ministry officials say Jaffna has two months' food stocks and 3,200 tons of food is being unloaded at Point Pedro. A further 2,000 tons remain in a ship at Kankasanturai.

Sources say only ten food lorries are allowed per day north of Vavuniya. Over 250 food transport tractors from north are currently held by the Army at Eerateriyakulam.

An ultimatum to Jaffna teachers to return to the district before 15 September is being reviewed by the Education Ministry following allegations that 23 teachers were shot dead for not following the curriculum introduced by the Tigers.

Hostages

BELEAGUERED Trincomalee was subjected to further terror when a time-bomb killed ten people and injured 31 others at a bus stand on 30 August. Security in the city was tightened fearing further LTTE attacks.

According to security sources seven Tigers were shot dead at Ambilanthurai on 3 August and two more died in an ambush at Chantiveli. In another ambush by Army commandos in Trincomalee on 21 August two Tigers were killed and one captured. A LTTE landmine attack on 23 August between Kallaru and Mavilaru killed five soldiers. The Tigers hijacked two petrol tankers three days later at Kumburupiddy which were bombed and destroyed by the Air force.

A fire which began at Annamarthidal destroyed five deserted Tamil villages south of Thambalakamam on 22 August. A week later 36 huts of Muslim refugees at Mathuranagar were gutted by fire.

Thambalakamam villagers say the Army is diverting vital irrigation to fields now cultivated by the military and many destitute farmers are forced to seek work in Trincomalee. UNHCR is providing food relief at Clappenberg refugee camp only to returnees from India which has caused wide resentment, say NGOs.

Tamils in Trincomalee have expressed concern over new Sinhalese settlements in areas where Tamils fled violence. Visitors to Trincomalee say Tamils in the town feel like hostages surrounded by Army camps and new settlements.

SRI LANKAN JOURNALISTS UNDER ATTACK

A free press or a fair trial?

FOREIGN correspondents in Sri Lanka walked out of the weekly government press briefing on 20 August in protest over a recent spate of attacks on journalists. Several hundred journalists from the *Free Media Movement* who met at Colombo's new Town Hall a day earlier called for immediate government action and that those responsible for the attacks be brought to justice.

On 7 August, journalists covering the launch of a campaign to collect a million signatures demanding the resignation of President Premadasa were attacked by thugs and cameras and video equipment damaged and stolen. The campaign is spearheaded by the Democratic United National Front (DUNF) a breakaway faction of the ruling United National Party (UNP) led by former minister Lalith Athulathmudali.

On 18 August, veteran cartoonist Jiffy Yoonus 60, of the communist newspaper *Aththa* was knifed in the face while returning home. A day earlier armed men broke into his home and threatened to kill

him if he drew cartoons of the President. Sri Lankan detectives questioned *The Island's* editor after the newspaper quoted a letter from Mr Yoonus to the Inspector General of Police. Government spokesman Bradman Weerakoon offered journalists police protection at a press briefing in late August.

The current intimidation comes in two formats journalists say. Newspapers making embarrassing disclosures are hauled into court under emergency regulations and subsequent reporting restricted under *sub judice* laws. Journalists covering anti-government rallies, particularly those of DUNF are harassed or physically attacked.

The editors of *Aththa*, *Yukthiya* and DUNF newspaper *Rajaliya* were charged in April under emergency regulations with inciting hatred and contempt of the Sri Lankan government after publishing revelations by former police chief P Udugampola that prominent government politicians ran death squads during the three-year insurrection by the southern

Sinhalese Marxist People's Liberation Front (JVP). *Article 19* the London-based international campaign against censorship has called for an immediate withdrawal of the charges.

There has been a growing clamour for an independent Media Commission as *sub judice* is increasingly used to gag political comment and damaging disclosures. Colombo University Vice Chancellor GL Pieris has called for new legislation to protect journalistic privilege but observers say *sub judice* is too powerful a weapon for the government to abandon.

Sri Lanka's *Civil Rights Movement* says there have been over 30 politically motivated outbreaks of violence in the south in recent months and calls for government intervention to protect freedom of expression and the democratic process. Many have been aimed at the DUNF splinter group. DUNF leader Lalith Athulathmudali sustained minor injuries after six men firing weapons in the air attacked him while canvassing in his Ratmalana electorate on 29 August.

Premadasa wins presidential election court battle

SRI LANKA's Supreme Court has dismissed a petition brought by opposition leader Mrs Bandaranaike challenging the election of Mr Premadasa as President in 1988 during the violent insurrection by the southern Sinhalese Marxist People's Liberation Front (JVP).

After three years of court proceedings the 88-page judgement released on 1 September conceded that violence and intimidation were widespread during the election but said Mrs Bandaranaike had not proved the result was affected. She was ordered to pay costs.

A few days earlier thousands had attended a rally at Borella commemorating the first anniversary of attempts to impeach President Premadasa, where Mrs Bandaranaike challenged Mr Premadasa to resign and fight another presidential election against her.

Having survived yet another challenge Mr Premadasa observers say will purge the ruling United National Party (UNP) and a cabinet reshuffle is likely before he visits Pakistan and other south Asian countries in late September as current chairman of the South Asian Association

for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Mr Premadasa has not left the island since he assumed the Presidency in January 1989.

The JVP whose revolt was crushed at a cost of 60,000 lives remains a powerful spectre. Mr Premadasa told a UNP convention in Bandarawela that after a fresh wave of robberies and threatening letters

to foreign investors in the Free Trade Zone, the JVP was regrouping and reorganising.

State Labour Minister and Matara MP HR Piyasiri who keeps a small private army as security blames 400 hard core JVP still on the loose in the south. Matara SLFP MP and human rights campaigner Mahinda Rajapakse says the JVP revival is a total fabrication designed to liquidate opposition supporters. Almost 6,000 JVP suspects remain in government custody under emergency regulations after the three-year insurrection. Aturuge Jayawardene 44, of Ambalangoda was released recently after being held for 33 months suspected of firearm offences. The court awarded him Rs7,500 (\$160) compensation.

JVP Tangalle leader MAK Jayasiri surrendered to police in mid August while former soldier MR Chandana was arrested for taking part in a JVP attack on Pannala Army camp. JVP suspect KPN Wijesinghe who escaped from police custody in Galle on 16 August was later shot dead by unknown persons say security sources.

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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