

# The Sri Lanka Monitor

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## Muslims massacred in the east

OVER 170 Muslim villagers and 20 security personnel in remote Polonnaruwa District were shot and hacked to death early on 15 October in a frenzied attack, reportedly by guerrillas of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Sri Lankan defence sources say over 300 Tigers from jungle bases across the Mahaweli river swept through four isolated Muslim hamlets around Paliyagodella after Home Guards ran out of ammunition. Villagers seeking sanctuary suffered heavy casualties as LTTE cadres lobbed two grenades into a crowded mosque and raked the building with automatic gunfire. Six escaping guerrillas were killed by helicopter gunships.

President Premadasa visiting over 90 survivors of the massacre in Polonnaruwa hospital said the LTTE sought to provoke reprisal attacks on Tamils and that such carnage could not be allowed to continue. A statement from the LTTE's Paris office denied involvement in the killings blaming government forces engaged in a "carefully orchestrated retaliatory campaign". Enraged Muslim leaders called for a *jihad* (holy war) against the Tigers and for separate Muslim regiments in the Sri Lankan Army.

Since the June 1990 war the LTTE has pursued a two-track policy of ethnic cleansing forcing 50,000 Muslims out of northern districts and attacking Muslim settlements in the east. Over 140 people were massacred at Friday prayers in two Kattankudy mosques and another 119 in Eravur in 1990. The Tigers say Muslim village leaders systematically betrayed LTTE positions to the incoming Sri Lankan Army and regard Tamil-speaking Muslims as traitors.

Almost 30,000 Sri Lankan Tamil refugees have been repatriated from South India this year on a controversial inter-governmental programme now monitored by the United Nations. India says the refugees are a security threat, Sri Lanka has no money to feed them and sees them as terrorist sympathisers. They join another 600,000 hungry and destitute internal refugees, caught between contending armies in the shifting battle lines of the north-east. The plight of Sri Lanka's displaced on *page two*.

### Army takes stock of northern strategy

The Paliyagodella massacre is a part of a third stream of LTTE attacks directed at government "colonisation" projects in Weli Oya north-east of Vavuniya and the gigantic Mahaweli scheme in Polonnaruwa where Sinhalese settlers are pushing into Tamil areas says Tiger propaganda. Muslims in frontier settlements have also come under attack. Almost 60 were killed in a similar attack at nearby Alanchipotana in April triggering a massive Muslim exodus from the area and the reprisal killing of 53 Tamils around Muthugala.

Colombo insider columnist *Taraki* says the LTTE's anti-Muslim stance in the east began only in 1988, when Batticaloa boys susceptible to local pressure, replaced Jaffna cadre such as *Kumarappa* as regional commanders. There are claims of a growing rift between the north and east leadership and that Batticaloa leader *Karikalan* is under house arrest in Jaffna. Other reports say former Jaffna commander *Banu* led the Paliyagodella attack as part of LTTE deputy leader *Mahattaya's* thrust east.

As Muslim outrage over the killings grew, Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) leader MHM Ashraf led a *Black Friday* protest in Colombo on 23 October. Opposition MPs boycotted Parliament and police fired on thousands demonstrating at Maradana mosque. In the ensuing violence one person was killed and 15 injured including two journalists. There were several attacks on Tamil shops and Vivekananda refugee camp in Kotahena. Another 20,000 people marched through Polonnaruwa town calling for increased protection from Tamil terrorists as Sinhalese shops closed in sympathy.

The rift in the Sri Lankan military widened in early October as President Premadasa returned opera-

tional command of the war in the north to Joint Operations Command (JOC) in Colombo after six months of inconclusive control by the three service chiefs. JOC chief General Hamilton Wanasinghe wants to divert soldiers from the northern battle front to protect the east much to the fury of Army commander Lt Gen Cecil Waidyaratne who wants more and better-trained troops.

Sri Lanka now has 150,000 armed personnel in the field including 14,000 Home Guards and 13,000 paramilitary forces Industries Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe told Parliament on 22 October but there is growing unrest in the military over corruption, a spate of desertions and shoddy weaponry from China and collapsing east European states.

The blockade of the north is weakened by large-scale profiteering involving Army officers. Over 3,000 police and soldiers have deserted this year and military authorities have made a public appeal offering an amnesty. There is also anger over expensive government *tamashas* (performances) such as *Farmers Day* celebrations in Polonnaruwa five days after the Paliyagodella massacre that are no more than political rallies. Characteristically the military believes that given the men and the money, it could finish the war in record time.

Rumours of peace moves resurfaced in Colombo in early October after the arrival of LTTE intermediaries from Britain and Australia. Sources say proposals for LTTE international representatives *Kittu* and Lawrence Thilagar to open discussions in Colombo were spurned by government representatives.

Seven Tamil political parties similarly rejected new proposals from the parliamentary Select Committee set up to solve the ethnic question. Chairman Mangala Moonesinghe's *Option Paper* proposed two separate Provincial Councils masquerading as one, and Tamil MPs are adamant there will be no solution without permanent merger of the north-east.

## The politics of the hungry and the plight of Sri Lanka's refugees

# Ends and means

AFTER a storm of protest in early October, Sri Lankan authorities agreed to rescind a 50% rations cut for the 600,000 refugees displaced by the bitter war with the Tamil Tigers. But there is little confidence among relief workers that the government is willing or able to feed everyone in the face of a growing financial crisis.

After the rations cut Rehabilitation Minister P Dayaratne told Parliament on 22 September that \$100 million was spent on refugees in 1991 and that this year's budget of Rs1.1 billion (\$24 million) was exhausted. Parliament approved a Supplementary Estimate for a further Rs1.1 billion but Secretary for Rehabilitation Christie Silva told journalists ten days later that the money only covered the Ministry's unpaid bills for food aid this year.

As pressure from opposition MPs and NGOs grew, the government announced full rations would be restored from 15 October but Cabinet spokesman Ranil Wickramasinghe hurriedly cut short a press briefing when the Rehabilitation Ministry's grasp of arithmetic was questioned. The Rs2.2 billion allocated for food aid is only 50% of Mr Dayaratne's estimate of 1991 expenditure. The political arithmetic of the cutback is transparent and the government is now buying time hoping NGOs and foreign aid will pick up the shortfall. Opposition MP SL Gunasekera was caustic about Mr Dayaratne's figures hinting that rehabilitation funds were channelled into the defence budget. Sri Lanka's defence spending is currently estimated at \$340 million a year only exceeded by labyrinthine local government spending of \$380 million.

Rations per refugee are thus restored to Rs9 (US 20 cents) a day enough to secure 500 gms of rice or a borderline 2,000 calories. But there are thousands who are on half rations already relief workers say as food aid is strategically withheld from Tiger-threatened areas like Eechilampathai south of Trincomalee and Vaharai north of the Polonnaruwa road. Colombo refugee camps stopped registering official arrivals in November 1990 which means 5,000 who have come since then share their meagre provisions. Food aid is also used to force the displaced back to their villages to create a buffer zone as Army units deploy behind them.

Trincomalee's Brigadier Siri Peiris complained bitterly last month that civil-

ians could not be coerced to return to flashpoints like Kinniya and Thuvrankadu. Villagers who remain south of Muthur can only transport three kilos of rice through military checkpoints three days a week in measures designed to starve out both civilians and Tigers. All medicines are banned and there is growing malnutrition among women and children.

Another 30,000 Muslim refugees in Kalpitiya have resisted threats for the last six months that rations will only be distributed to them at home on Mannar Island. Civilians in Jaffna who fled Karainagar earlier this year have received no food aid for over three months. It is an open question how long the Sri Lankan government will go on sending food aid across enemy lines as money and military success drain away. As one disillusioned Army officer observed "We are feeding them then we are fighting them".

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India again suspended its controversial repatriation of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in early October as monsoon weather hit the Palk Strait. Rehabilitation Secretary Christie Silva says 29,086 refugees have returned so far but reports say 50,000 still in camps in south India refuse to return as news filters back in letters from friends and relatives of harsh conditions and continuing fighting in Sri Lanka.

NGOs believe the repatriation programme is premature and counter to international protection principles. India insists the returns are voluntary and after the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in May 1991 allegedly by the LTTE that Sri Lankan refugees are a continuing security threat to south India. Another 150,000 Sri Lankan refugees live outside camps in Tamil Nadu. NGOs, now refused access to camps say food, housing and other welfare provisions have been cut back to a minimum to drive refugees to "volunteer" to return

to Sri Lanka. International refugee agency UNHCR who is monitoring the programme is also refused access to camps and was prevented from distributing a leaflet saying UNHCR will protect refugees being returned to their country against their will. Observers say UNHCR monitoring is restricted to a cursory check of less than 50% of returnees before they board ship giving the programme a legitimacy it does not deserve.

In Sri Lanka, government bungling and bureaucracy has blocked UNHCR plans to upgrade ten reception centres in Vavuniya and Trincomalee where over 5,000 returnees cannot go home. Those who live in LTTE-controlled or "uncleared" areas are no longer permitted by the military to return and will spend the duration of the war in another refugee camp. Government figures say over 20,000 returnees have gone home already but most have no homes left to go to and have little hope of promised government help. They must rely on friends and relatives for a roof over their heads or return to the camps. Over 350,000 officially displaced live outside the camps and are even less likely to receive regular food aid say relief workers.

In Mannar District where UNHCR has opened a new satellite camp for 3,000 returnees at Palampiddy, there are already 31,000 displaced at the UN camp at Madhu, Sri Lanka's most sacred Catholic shrine. Another 2,000 fled to Madhu after the Lankan Army pushed west in early October occupying Adampan and Andankulam. The major target was Giants Tank and thousands of acres of rice land approaching harvest that the Army intends to deny to the enemy. Military authorities now want to push back refugees to Vankalai to deter LTTE attacks. Five soldiers died in a Tiger attack near Uliyankulam in late October.

On Mannar Island, 3,000 returnees are trapped in camps in contested areas in the north at Pesalai and Talaimannar where civilians are shot if they leave the road. Government officials have again announced that the area has been cleared and that 50,000 residents of Mannar Island must return to their home areas by 15 November or their rations will be stopped. Refugee representatives who toured villages on Mannar say most houses are ruined and little or no rehabilitation has taken place. But if they are hungry enough bureaucrats agree, the refugees will go back.

*Jaffna fights for its life*

## The killers of Kilali

DESPERATE civilians fleeing across Jaffna lagoon at Kilali, the last fragile link to the mainland have been killed in a series of deliberate attacks by Sri Lankan patrol boats and aircraft. Seven people including two women who stood with raised hands in the blinding glare of a spotlight were shot down when their boat was intercepted by a Navy patrol vessel in late October.

Another eight people including a nine year-old girl were killed when Navy gunboats opened fire on two dinghies ferrying civilians across the lagoon say *Reuters*' reports. Two decomposed bodies were washed ashore two weeks later. Attacks have increased since the Sri Lankan authorities declared the strategic Elephant Pass causeway open to civilian traffic in early October but the Tigers refuse to let the vital land link be used fearing a large-

scale influx of Sri Lankan troops. Over 15 LTTE cadre died in a renewed attack on Elephant Pass on 22 October. Air raids and regular night patrols have secured control of the lagoon but many of the 30 so-called LTTE boats claimed destroyed by Sri Lankan military sources this month have contained civilians fleeing Jaffna's daily round of hunger, trauma and disease. In a series of air strikes, Sri Lankan bombers pounded areas around Valvettiturai, Thalayadi and Tellipalai. Five aircraft attacked Kokkuvil three miles north of Jaffna town on 18 October killing six civilians and destroying many houses reports local newspaper *Eelatham*.

Local Catholic relief agency HUDEC says malnutrition and sanitation problems have increased especially among

the 60,000 displaced by the Mathagal offensive in August. Malaria, diarrhoea and scabies are spreading fast in Valvettiturai and other areas and medical services are hopelessly overstretched. Fighting continues around Palaly as LTTE forces struggle to contain the Army's 20km foothold in the north-west of the peninsula.

Over 300,000 of Jaffna's one million population are displaced, crowded into 233 refugee camps. Prices are again rising after September's food aid cuts and there is a growing shortage of kerosene as valuable Tamarind and Margosa trees are cut down for firewood. There is no work for tradesman and poor labourers and a growing banknote shortage means fewer people can find money to buy what meagre food is available. The coming rains will spread new disease epidemics and make bomb-cratered roads impassable.

The Tigers, backs to the wall, continue to run civilian life on military lines. Five people were sentenced to death in the last few weeks for "anti-social activities" including murder and rape. Social control is regularly reinforced by large political rallies celebrating martyrdom and mythology. Releasing a *Nine Year History* of the armed struggle at a high profile ceremony in Jaffna in early October, LTTE Central Committee member *Yogi* said government forces could not break the Tigers solidarity and self discipline in the quest for freedom.

## Missing

**BATTICALOA MP Pararajasingham Joseph says 33 Tamil youths are still missing after an Army operation in villages around Vellaveli on 19 October when 90 people were arrested. Relatives say local Army officers denied those missing were in custody and Defence Secretary Cyril Ranatunge has promised an inquiry. ICRC officials say the Army now admits holding those missing. Prime Minister DB Wijetunge on a high-profile tour of Batticaloa and Amparai has also demanded an investigation into the death of ten Tamils arrested by the Army on 10 October after their dismembered bodies were found in a quarry near Vellaveli on the same day. Reports say an Amnesty International team who visited Batticaloa in October has received documents confirming 4,189 disappearances and deaths since June 1990 and has taken testimony from 200 people.**

The Vellaveli area is the stronghold of LTTE Batticaloa military commander *Karuna* and observers say a new Army offensive is imminent.

Tamil-Muslim tensions increased after the Paliyagodella massacre. One Tamil was killed and four injured after police tear-gassed a Muslim demonstration in Eravur in late October. In Valaichenai another flashpoint one civilian was killed and eight injured when a bomb exploded outside the People's Bank on 8 October. A second explosion three weeks later which injured five Tamils was said to be retaliation by Muslim residents.

Daily life in Batticaloa District is convulsed by a string of killings and military clashes. Two LTTE suspects were shot dead in Kalkudah in early October and five Tigers killed when Army units ambushed a supply convoy near Unnichchai. Batticaloa is in the grip of the worst drought in recent memory and food shortages west of the lagoon are growing.

## Deadly frontier

THE EASTERN side of the Army's Forward Defence Line snakes along the 25km Trincomalee-Mullaitivu border and down into Anuradhapura and Vavuniya protecting a belt of Sinhalese farmers around Padaviya Tank and the western end of the Weli Oya settlement scheme. The LTTE regularly targets the area to drive out the hated "colonists" and to keep vital north-east supply lines open. Over 15 villagers and five soldiers died when the Tigers stormed isolated Kohongaswewa, 15 miles north-west of Padaviya on 1 October.

Three weeks later, 11 soldiers died in a LTTE ambush on the Pulmoddai-Padaviya road. Four soldiers died in attacks on Army forward positions at Mahakachikody in Vavuniya and another was killed and 23 injured at an-

other flashpoint, Janakapura on 24 October. In northern Trincomalee, the Army's fragile control does not extend beyond the coastal road and its fringe of fishing villages are now armed camps.

Over 100 Muslim families resettled in Kuchchaveli build their houses by day, sleeping inside the Army camp at night. Sinhalese fishermen who have returned to Kokkilai have no schools and no doctors says opposition MP SL Gunasekera. Three young Tamils from Pachchanur refugee camp were found shot dead in the Irukulam jungles on 1 November. Police claim two other men from Kaddaiparichchan and Senaiyur were killed by LTTE as informers. Trincomalee town remains calm but tense after police discovered large Tiger arms caches at Nilaveli and Alles Gardens on 20 October.

# On the record

A UN human rights team visiting Sri Lanka has received 14,000 petitions concerning missing persons, representatives of the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances told Attorney General Tilak Marapane during their ten-day tour in October.

Over 40,000 Sri Lankans died or disappeared during the brutal three-year insurgency by the southern Sinhalese Marxist People's Liberation Front (JVP). Analysts estimate another 5,000 have disappeared in the north-east since the June 1990 war with the Tamil Tigers.

Sri Lanka's Civil Rights Movement told the UN team how the erosion of legal safeguards under current Emergency laws encourages disappearances. Detainees can be held virtually indefinitely in secret locations without being produced in court despite the government Human Rights Task Force (HRTF) set up to monitor those in custody.

The Presidential Commission on Disappearances set up in January 1991 has

no retroactive powers and has held public hearings on only six cases. Human rights NGOs are sceptical of government measures and see them as a smokescreen to allay international concern. A European Community statement at the World Bank meeting on Sri Lanka in February 1991 called for "transparency and accountability" in the country's human rights record.

The Bar Association of Sri Lanka (BASL) in their meeting with the UN team called for a new government Commission to investigate disappearances from 1983 when thousands died in Colombo race riots. A UN recommendation following a 1991 visit advising that BASL monitor reported disappearances from police stations has still not been implemented by the government. Among other submissions to the UN team was an appeal from 52 detainees on the notorious *Sixth Floor* of Colombo police headquarters held without charge in degrading conditions. All but three are Tamils.

BASL told an Amnesty International

delegation also visiting Sri Lanka in October that the Supreme Court has registered 5,393 fundamental rights violations petitions from southern detainees in the aftermath of the JVP insurgency including 753 this year. Sri Lanka still holds 4,475 JVP suspects under Emergency regulations and lacks the evidence to prosecute many of them. NGOs say there may be another 4,000 unofficial detainees in police stations and Army bases.

Government spokesmen claim a JVP revival is underway in the south and say a series of raids by police in Tangalle Hungama and Galle has uncovered large arms caches. Ten leading JVP detainees who tunnelled out of the Pelawatte camp in September are still on the loose. Others point to an increasing number of robberies and rapes carried out by some of the 3,000 Army deserters in the south.

Attacks on journalists and newspapers continue and there was a mass protest in Nuwara Eliya on 1 November following disturbances in mid-October.

## A signal illusion

WESTERN embassies in Colombo have endorsed a new repatriation programme for Sri Lankan Tamils refused asylum in Europe as governments prepare a new hard-line policy directed at Third World asylum-seekers. At a recent consultation in the Norwegian embassy in Colombo, officials shared the results of an in-depth surveys which categorised eight out of ten Tamil asylum-seekers arriving in Norway as "bogus".

European government officials gave the green light for the programme during informal consultations in Switzerland on 23 September and international refugee agency UNHCR has agreed to provide "passive monitoring" for returnees in Colombo. Refugee agencies fear they will face a hostile reception from security officials and question the wisdom of returning asylum-seekers to a country embroiled in a vicious civil war. A Tamil woman deported from Denmark in August was held by police for 14 days for suspected LTTE links until a Negombo magistrate threw out the case for lack of evidence.

There are almost 250,000 Sri Lankan

asylum-seekers in Europe and reports submitted to an October meeting of the European Consultation on Refugees and Exiles suggest another 20,000 will arrive this year. Fewer than 1% gain full refugee status in European countries. Most are refused or given *Exceptional Leave to Remain* meaning they can be returned to

Sri Lanka when local conditions improve. A recent UNHCR analysis divides Sri Lanka into four areas and says asylum-seekers can be returned to Colombo and central areas "provided basic safeguards are observed".

Refugee workers in Europe are puzzled by the new hard-line approach and characterise government attempts to send "the right political signals" to deter asylum-seekers fleeing Sri Lanka as "an illusion". People whose lives are in danger will always seek safety and the push-back policy is likely to drive reluctant returnees in Europe underground. India has closed its doors to Sri Lankan Tamil asylum-seekers and its repatriation programme offers Europe a precedent to do the same.

Ironically most European countries already practice forced repatriation of refused Tamil asylum-seekers. Switzerland who returned over 100 Tamils to Colombo this year is expected to take the lead with the new "voluntary programme". In the words of one analyst, "It's the wrong time and the wrong place".

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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