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Crackdown in Colombo

OVER 3,000 Tamils in the south have been arrested after Sri Lankan Naval Commander Vice Admiral Clancy Fernando was killed by a suicide bomber in Colombo as part of a new terror campaign, analysts say, by the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Subramaniam Logimohan, 22, from Kankasanturai rammed Fernando's car, as it sped down the Galle Road at 8.30am on 16 November, detonating powerful explosives strapped to his body. The Naval Commander and three aides died instantly as the car shot 15 feet into the air. The killing came two days before President Premadasa was due to open *Expo 92* Sri Lanka's first international trade fair expected to attract over 2,500 foreign investors.

Sri Lankan newspapers were already warning of rumours of a new LTTE hit-squad in Colombo as the Tigers launched a week-long celebration of LTTE martyrs, and leader Prabhakaran's 38th birthday. In two subsequent incidents, shots were fired outside the home of KHJ Wijedasa, President Premadasa's secretary on 21 November and Tamil youth Sivakumaran, 20, killed himself with a grenade when cornered in a house in Barnes Place three days later.

Colombo was now on "maximum alert" said security sources as a series of night raids scoured the capital's Tamil districts. There were also round-ups in Kandy, Nuwara Eliya and Matale where 27 Tamils were arrested. Among the 3,000 arrested are 20 hard-core LTTE with a hit list of Tamil politicians in Colombo, police say, and Tamil businessmen with trading links in the North-East.

Over 100,000 Tamils have fled to Colombo from the North-East war to join friends or relatives among the 150,000

Navy commander killed in new LTTE bomb campaign

Tamils who are part of the capital's 550,000 regular residents. Observers now fear a new backlash as the Tigers continue to target Colombo at will. From 23 November new laws require Colombo landlords to register all tenants. A tough new security plan for the city is under consideration requiring North-East refugees to acquire a special identity card on arrival in Colombo.

Analysts say arrests will continue, not least because Colombo police run a flourishing extortion racket where it takes Rs45,000 (\$1,000) to release those held for questioning under Sri Lanka's draconian Emergency laws. There are also fears that Western governments will begin repatriating Sri Lankan Tamil asylum-seekers from Europe early next year after an assessment by the international refugee agency UNHCR designated Colombo and the south "safe areas" for Tamils.

Ironically, the war seems to set to shift up a gear with Colombo as a key target in the present impasse. Outnumbered and under-resourced LTTE leader Prabhakaran's only hope of tactical victory is to bring the war into the homes of the Colombo elite. At the moment it is poor farmers' sons who die at the front. When Colombo becomes a battle zone, Tiger thinking goes, the Sinhalese will sue for peace. Security sources believe that among the thousands of Tamil refugees in Colombo are scores of LTTE suicide squads waiting to be activated.

The Army, increasingly frustrated by a series of military stalemates knows the present low-intensity conflict plays into the guerrillas' hands. Meanwhile over \$8 million of government food aid crosses

Colombo papers this month called for a period of "unity and austerity" and the country to be put on a war footing - a cry seized on by opposition politicians.

There is open contempt for the government's present strategy to force the Tigers to the negotiating table and for expensive political "carnivals" and State ceremonies that divert money from the military budget. If Colombo goes up in flames, President Premadasa may yet be forced to give the military its head. For the Tigers, peace talks are part of the Maoist cycle of military conflict say Army hard-liners, merely a breathing space to rebuild. For Mr Premadasa, a politician of 50 years' standing with statesman-like ambitions to resolve the Tamil question, they are his preferred arena of battle. But on his own terms.

On the eve of Naval Commander Fernando's assassination, a Quaker delegation returned from Jaffna with LTTE offers of an immediate ceasefire followed by peace talks which were successively spurned by government and Army representatives.

Tamil group TELO and ENDLF MP K Srinivasan had already broken ranks with the Tamil parties submitting new proposals to delink the merged North-East Province. Amid general scepticism, the ruling United National Party (UNP) and the major opposition Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) said they would now support a federal constitution as mooted by Srinivasan. A Parliamentary Select Committee will finalise peace proposals in mid-December.

A strategy is perhaps emerging for Mr Premadasa to satisfy all his critics. By "writing off the North to save the East" the Army can be given its head in Jaffna and the peninsula razed as a lesson to Tamil militancy. Compliant Tamil parties will provide a democratic facade in the East where the three-way demographic split will keep them in check at least at the ballot box.

■ Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans speaking in Parliament on 4 November renewed Australia's offer to mediate in Sri Lanka's North-East conflict as part of a high level Commonwealth initiative. Since June 1990, Norway, Sweden, Canada and Switzerland have offered to mediate or to provide the venue for peace talks.

enemy lines each month to keep alive a population the Army is trying to starve into submission. Senior Army officers writing as *Old Timer* and *Cognoscente* in the

THE NORTH

The spoils of war

THE BATTLE for Jaffna intensified this month as LTTE units launched a counter attack on Army positions north of Atchuveli at Idaikadu on 23 November killing 47 Sri Lankan soldiers and wounding 63. Over 50 LTTE cadre died in the attack, 25 of them women.

Further west the struggle for areas around Palaly continues. In a push south of Mathagal the Army destroyed 40 fishing boats claiming they were part of a crack *Sea Tiger* unit. Ilavalai already under Army control like Kayts and the western islands has been systematically flattened and stripped of all valuables including door and window frames. Widespread aerial bombing devastated civilian areas of Moolai, Nunavil and further south in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu. Bombs from Mig jet fighters left 12 ft craters outside Paranthan in late November, killing six people.

Inside the peninsula, food and medicine are increasingly scarce. Most Jaffna families are down to one meal a day as the rains drive prices up again. Diarrhoea and cholera are spreading fast and with no Malathion over 4,000 malaria cases have been reported in the last three months. Because of the fuel blockade there is no motorised transport and bullock carts serve as ambulances.

At Kilali the last escape route across Jaffna lagoon, Tiger screening of the 2,000 who cross every night is intense. Sri Lankan attacks continue and eight people are missing after naval gunboats fired on civilians crossing on 23 November. The killing of Naval Commander Vice Admiral Clancy Fernando in Colombo is said to be a direct LTTE response to growing naval success on Jaffna lagoon and a reprisal for

the killing of innocent civilians. With taxes on fuel and food smuggled into the peninsula, the Tigers make close to Rs 1 million (\$20,000) a night at Kilali and Sri Lankan forces know they must close the crossing down if the blockade is to bite.

LTTE taxes now make up 50% of all retail prices as the Tigers struggle to pay and equip 25,000 cadre, administrators and civilian "helpers". There are over 5,000 LTTE prisoners divided into criminals and "traitors". Assistant Superintendent of Police T Jeyakumar son of former Jaffna Mayor TS Thurairajah, held since June 1990 was executed recently after a trial according to a terse Tiger statement.

Amid the gloom, lavish celebrations for the annual *Mahaveerar Varam* or Heroes Week celebrating LTTE martyrs continued throughout late November. In a radio broadcast LTTE leader Prabhakaran called for peace but in the face of continued aggression pledged to continue fighting.

South-west of Vavuniya, a spate of LTTE attacks has punctured the western flank of the Army's Forward Defence Line. Six Sri Lankan soldiers were killed in a night attack on Chedikulam on 18 November. West of Medawachchiya where long lines of lorries carrying food aid north wait to be checked, 19 soldiers died in a LTTE assault on Kattupotha on 2 December. Further west as the Army attempts to consolidate its fragile hold on the Mannar mainland Sri Lankan forces captured *Skanda Farm* LTTE camp west of Adampan in late November.

Arms trade

Following a visit to Colombo by junior Foreign Minister Marx Lennox Boyd, Britain announced in early November, it would now lift its ban on arms sales to Sri Lanka. USA and Scandinavian countries who maintain an arms embargo have privately criticised the move.

Cyclone

Over 20 people died and 25,000 houses were damaged by cyclonic winds and rain which devastated south and eastern Sri Lanka in mid-November. Over 10,000 homes were damaged in Batticaloa District.

Death squads

In a fresh outbreak of death-squad killings, three charred bodies were found in the Anuradhapura area in mid-November. Among the dead was Tamil lorry driver K Ilankeswaran who traded regularly in the north.

Release

Some 14 Hill Country Tamils held without trial in Magazine Prison for over a year were released in late November in the presence of CWC General Secretary MS Sellasamy and Rehabilitation Commissioner Jayalath. Another 42 will be released soon. MPP Joseph says over 1,000 Tamils have been held without trial since June 1990.

Enquiry

Sri Lanka has agreed to an international commission to investigate the death of Army Northern Commander Lt Gen. Denzil Kobbekaduwa on Kayts in August after a British explosives expert said Kobbekaduwa's jeep was destroyed by a bomb fixed beneath the vehicle.

After the storm

SOME 19 of the 187 LTTE militants, held at Vellore, Tamil Nadu in the wake of the Rajiv Gandhi assassination, escaped on 16 November as a cyclone ripped across south India killing over 200 people. Among the dead were three elderly Sri Lankan refugees at Periyarnagar camp in Madurai District. Housing, already run-down in most of the refugee camps, has been badly hit and no government assistance has been offered.

With the encroaching monsoon, the situation is critical and NGOs say if the

government is willing to set aside bureaucracy, refugees could carry out repairs themselves for a fraction of the cost. Tamil Nadu Refugee Commissioner Ramdas visiting Sri Lankan camps in Sivagangai on 30 October harangued refugees, warning them they could not stay in India and demanding they register to return to Sri Lanka on the current controversial repatriation programme.

The programme is currently suspended until early January. Sri Lankan

State Rehabilitation Secretary Dr Raja Amarasekera says another 2,000 have agreed to return. Some 17 western NGOs have written a joint letter to international refugee agency UNHCR monitoring the programme, expressing concern over the safety of returnees and whether they are returning voluntarily.

The Tamil Nadu government still refuses to allow NGOs or UNHCR access to the refugee camps and there is mounting concern over social and material conditions and the pressures put on people to repatriate.

Batticaloa braves another body blow

Cyclone devastates east coast

TORRENTIAL rain and 100 km-an-hour winds battered Batticaloa as a cyclone hit Sri Lanka's east coast in mid-November. Over 10,000 houses were damaged and a number of fishermen are still missing. Coastal areas around Navalady, Kallady Thannamunai and Kalkudah were badly hit. The government has allocated Rs13 million (\$325,000) for relief but MP P Joseph has appealed to President Premadasa for more assistance. War and drought have already devastated one of Sri Lanka's key rice-growing areas with less than 10% of its 200,000 acres under cultivation and its people displaced and destitute.

Army units launched two new offensives south-west of Batticaloa in early November, killing over 20 LTTE and

capturing three base camps, defence sources say. Tamil group EPRLF says 16 farmers were shot dead by the Army during the operation in villages west of Kokkaddicholai and another 50 arrested. Three women were abducted by soldiers from Ayithiyamalai ten miles west of Batticaloa town says local MP Prins Casinadar who has sent a protest cable to the Defence ministry.

Tamil-Muslim tensions continue after a string of casual killings. Three Muslim businessmen were among five people seriously injured after an attack on a bus near Kiran on 11 November. Two weeks later six Tamil youths were arrested at Kirankulam after the entire village population was screened in a day-

long operation. Local reports say the police commando *Special Task Force* who patrol Amparai have moved into southern Batticaloa to release more troops for the northern front. In a combined operation LTTE Amparai leader *Yogarajah* took cyanide when cornered near Kalmunai on 20 November, defence sources claim.

Batticaloa town is tense after three bodies burned beyond recognition, the hallmark of Army death squads, were found beneath the new bridge on 25 November. Police launches a new sweep for LTTE infiltrators after a shoot-out at Bar Road junction three days later. A bomb hidden in a radio exploded in a repair shop opposite Batticaloa police station killing the shop owner. Defence sources say four LTTE cadre killed at Karaveddi on 1 December included local intelligence chief *Major Abhayan*.

Further north in troubled Trincomalee District, a vicious struggle for control of areas on the south side of the Koddigar Bay is in full swing. LTTE units blew up the vital Thopur bridge linking Muthur and Serunuwara, crippling military and civilian traffic. Muthur is under increasing pressure as Army units force displaced villagers back to their homes. Local reports say the village headman of Eechilampathai a Tiger stronghold further south has disappeared during a business visit to Trincomalee town.

Burned out

SOUTH of Batticaloa in isolated Amparai District there are almost 100,000 Tamils of whom over 20,000 are officially refugees. The District is 40% Muslim and part of the Sinhalese colonisation drive and thus a high-profile target for the LTTE. Over 20 police and soldiers died in a dawn ambush at Aravanthalawa on 3 November. Most Tamil families are now clustered in coastal areas of Kalmunai, Akkaraipatru and Thirukkivil, marooned in schools and temple courtyards. Farms and homesteads in the interior lie abandoned. Every Tamil family in Lahugala has fled to Pottuvil and their houses burned out or stripped bare. Community leaders say 650 Tamils are missing since the June war and over 17,000 acres of Tamil land around Akkaraipatru are now cultivated by Sinhalese and Muslims. In the camps there is little or no health care. Food stamps buy only rice and sugar at inflated prices from corrupt local officials. Most professionals have left the district creating an acute shortage of doctors and teachers. NGOs and local community workers struggle to meet the growing crisis. The coastal villages live under virtual siege with LTTE night raids and dawn roundups by the security forces.

Akkaraipatru remains a flashpoint. In cordon and search operations by the feared *Special Task Force* (STF) on 18 November 730 people were arrested and 702 later released. STF units surrounded Sinnathottam outside Thirukkivil a week earlier and arrested 95 Tamils. Over 70 were later released to Citizens' Committee representatives who know that in the explosive interval between arrest and detention, suspects may "disappear".

Return to Alampil

REMOTE Alampil a fishing village on the Mullaitivu coast was abandoned by the Sri Lankan Army in early November after months of virtual siege by the LTTE. Reports say the Army's Forward Defence Line (FDL) is under increasing pressure to break the Tigers' vital supply link between the north and east but has met with little success.

Returning villagers found all of Alampil bulldozed to the ground apart from two houses. Coconut estates had been cut down for two miles towards Kumulamunai to give a clear view of the sea in case of LTTE amphibious attack. Hundreds of families have lost homes and livelihood. They have little hope of compensation. Alampil exemplifies the Army's dilemma. Like the Americans in Vietnam, faced with hostile terrain and

population they must "destroy the country in order to save it". Or more cogently, in order to save themselves, marooned in thousands of square miles of Vanni jungle. Sri Lankan troops are too thinly spread to make FDL bunkers an effective barrier. Seven soldiers died in a LTTE attack on 10 November at Kent Farm in Weli Oya where the Tigers have vowed to push out hated Sinhalese colonists.

Few Army bunkers are manned after dark given the Tigers' expertise at night fighting. Further north, the seven-kilometre bunker line between Elephant Pass and the coast at Vetrilaikerni, supposedly to throttle Jaffna into submission, is deserted after dark. A LTTE women's brigade on reconnaissance in October recovered quantities of weapons from FDL positions at Kattaikadu.

TAMIL MPS PROTEST OVER \$425 MILLION DEFENCE BUDGET

Whitewashing the war economy

TAMIL MPs railed against Sri Lanka's "war economy" when Prime Minister DB Wijetunge presented Mr Premadasa's fourth annual budget to Parliament on 6 November.

Declaring a Rs91 billion (\$2 billion) deficit on the coming year's \$4 billion expenditure estimates, around 8% of GDP, Mr Wijetunge predicted 5.3% economic growth in 1993. The Prime Minister also announced tax cuts in the export sector and a 30% wage rise for public servants.

Tamil EPRLF MP Suresh Premachandran highlighted the budget's Rs18 billion (\$425 million) provision for defence which would be used to drop bombs on the innocent civilians of the North-East. Four jet fighters and a fleet of fast naval attack craft were currently in order at a cost of \$100 million, he said. TULF MP Pararajasingham Joseph said the people of the North-East were war orphans to whom such a budget was mean-

ingless. "Please allow us to separate and go our own way" said the Batticaloa MP.

Opposition SLFP MP Mervyn D de Silva said that by strapping itself to World Bank strictures, the government had incubated the twin evils of unemployment and malnutrition. Over 18% of the labour force, about 1.1 million people, are unemployed and 50% of pre-school children have nutritional anaemia.

Development models from Singapore or Taiwan could not be transported blindly to Sri Lanka said Dr de Silva. But careful analysis of the growth of Far Eastern economies showed that they systematically intensified the agricultural sector while rapidly industrialising. Increased rural incomes thus created demand for new industry's products. The UNP government had allowed agriculture to collapse as was shown by the drift to the cities and the growth of Colombo's slums. Government policy was based on extravagance, waste, kickbacks and cor-

ruption said the SLFP MP.

Other economists described Mr Wijetunge's proposals as an "election budget" although based on sound fiscal management. But while inflation has been pegged back to around 12%, the average wage-earner sees only rising prices in staple foods. Other critics of World Bank policy in the Third World say 30% of the \$2 billion budget deficit is interest on foreign and domestic debt which Sri Lanka immediately borrows again to break even, never breaking out of the debt cycle.

But help may be at hand. Former Finance Minister Ronnie de Mel was acquitted on currency and theft charges in Colombo High Court in early December. He is now tipped to return to Sri Lanka after a five-year exile and to be appointed Finance Minister. Mr de Mel was renowned for his negotiating skills and for securing several large World Bank loans for Sri Lanka in past years.

Voodoo politics

SECTIONS of the Colombo press accused Mr Premadasa of political scare-mongering this month after the President said the opposition SLFP were trying to inject new life into the JVP or People's Liberation Front the southern Sinhalese Marxist group whose three-year armed insurrection cost 40,000 lives.

Mr Premadasa's target was the SLFP Human Chain demonstration against government policies which sought to link hands along the 62-mile route from Colombo to Ratnapura. In the event the protest was washed out by cyclonic winds and rain which savaged the south in mid-November.

The press however noted that the raising of the JVP bogey and "political voodooism" could have dangerous destabilising consequences. It was the suppression of dissent that led to the JVP revolt said *The Island* but deplored the SLFP's political immaturity in staging the protest on the third anniversary of the killing of JVP leader Rohana Wijeweera.

The JVP insurrection still casts a long shadow in the south. Government figures say 4,475 suspects are still held under

Emergency laws while 8,702 have been released in the last two years after rehabilitation. Thousands of families have lost breadwinners and are denied government assistance since "the disappeared" do not qualify for death certificates. Lawyer Asoka Gunasekera representing the

families of 25 schoolboys reported missing in Embilipitiya in 1989 has received telephone death threats.

Rumours of a JVP resurgence have continued for the last three months amid new security operations. JVP military leader *Dickson* was shot dead by Matugama police on 29 October "while leading police to a JVP hideout" - a fate which befell Wijeweera and three others of the JVP Central Committee. Another JVP suspect was arrested in Akuressa in early November.

The press, particularly smaller and community-based newspapers remain under pressure. The editor and proprietor of *Yukthiya* filed a fundamental rights petition in the Supreme Court in mid-November alleging Mrs NT Herath the Mayor of Nuwara Eliya confiscated 450 copies of the paper from a local shop on 10 October. *Yukthiya* manager Joe Seneviratne and others were attacked by a local gang while selling the paper in Nuwara Eliya a week later. Over 5,000 people attended a Free Media Movement demonstration in the town on 1 November.

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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