

Killing zone at Kilali

OVER 50 people were killed and 15 injured on 2 January in the latest in a series of attacks by Sri Lankan naval patrols on civilians fleeing across Jaffna lagoon, as the military blockade tightens on the stronghold on the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

A survivor told Colombo Tamil newspaper *Virakesari* how he feigned death when civilians in three boats south of Kilali were gunned down in the blinding glare of a spotlight by Sri Lankan naval personnel. He escaped when one of the boats broke free as it was towed away in heavy seas and drifted under cover of darkness to the south side of the lagoon. Five people are in Kilinochchi Hospital with gunshot wounds and 14 bodies have been recovered.

Jaffna MPs K Premachandran and K Navaratnam have demanded an independent enquiry but defence sources claim the boats were a LTTE supply convoy. Over 200 civilians have died in Sri Lankan attacks on the Kilali crossing in the last five months in an attempt to close down the last corridor to the peninsula. Over 1,000 civilians flee Jaffna every day through Kilali seeking food, money and medical assistance further south as the military blockade tightens. The Tamil Tigers have consistently refused to open up the Sri Lankan-controlled land-bridge further east at Elephant Pass, fearing a large-scale military invasion.

In a New Year message, Jaffna's new Catholic Bishop Thomas Savundaranayagam urged President Premadasa to lift the blockade to save Jaffna's civilian population wracked by disease and malnutrition. A high-level delegation from United Nations refugee agency UNHCR visited Jaffna in December to try and open up a humanitarian relief corridor through the peninsula's western crossing point at Sangupiddy but sources say the Tigers turned down the option because the Sri Lankan military would not withdraw from Pooneryn on the southern shore of the crossing. Sri Lankan forces celebrated Christmas with an air attack on Ariyalai church killing one woman and injuring 12 other civilians.

A new scandal is brewing in Colombo over the disappearance of shiploads of relief supplies for Jaffna. Secretary for Rehabilitation Christie Silva dodged questions at the weekly Cabinet press briefing on 1 January saying a police investigation was underway. Less than half of the 8,000 tons of government food aid supposedly sent, arrives in Jaffna in any given month say Jaffna civil servants. Independent assessments say Jaffna requires over 15,000 tons monthly to survive.

Mr Silva says almost 9,000 refugees stranded in camps, who returned from south India on a controversial repatriation programme, will now be allowed to return to their homes in "uncleared areas" - official jargon for Tiger-controlled territory. This will ease congestion in crowded reception centres in Mannar and Trincomalee run by UNHCR who are monitoring the programme. Only 2,000 of the 50,000 Sri Lankan refugees in camps in south India have registered to return when the programme recommences in a few weeks, and NGOs fear more pressure will be put on the vulnerable to "volunteer". Another 150,000 Sri Lankan refugees in south India live outside the camps.

In Sri Lanka, NGOs have come forward to assist UNHCR to upgrade conditions in reception centres for repatriates in Vavuniya and Trincomalee beset by official indifference and bureaucratic delay. But conditions for internal refugees are often worse. Refugees in the notorious Clappenberg camp in Trincomalee told a visiting delegation of opposition MPs on 12 December that they had received no rations for 45 days and that many of the camp's 5,000 inhabitants were sick and starving.

The peace trap

RUMOURS of secret peace talks between government envoys and the LTTE swept through Colombo after a 14-day visit to Europe in late December by Sri Lankan Justice Minister ACS Hameed. The Colombo press were convinced Mr Hameed held high-level discussions with Paris-based LTTE Central Committee member Lawrence Thilakar despite denials from both the government and the Tigers.

Whether or not the discussions took place, public pronouncements were predictably circular. Mr Thilakar called for an end to the Sri Lankan military offensive in mid-December to create a climate for peace talks. The government reiterated that there could be no talks till the Tigers laid down arms. A subsequent LTTE statement said there could be no talks without a ceasefire. Military spokesmen say 1,154 Sri Lankan security personnel were killed and 2,004 injured in the North-East war in 1992 including 42 soldiers killed in a LTTE ambush in Welis Oya on 24 December. Army sources claim 2,876 LTTE cadre confirmed killed during the same period.

The credibility of the government's other peace ploy, the Parliamentary Select Committee set up to solve the ethnic question, has dissolved after six Tamil parties excluding TEO described the 11 December sessions as a "betrayal" and an "utter farce". The meeting again refused to discuss the Tamil parties' "four-point formula" instead endorsing the "Srinivasan proposals" which promote a watered-down federalism on the Indian model and the demerger of the North-East province.

Former ENDLF MP K Srinivasan who supported President Premadasa during the impeachment crisis of August '91 is now regarded as a government stooge and the Select Committee hopelessly compromised. In 18 months the Committee has refused to consider four separate LTTE peace proposals and rejected repeated offers to visit Jaffna for talks. Tourism Minister Mr S Thondaman, a powerful intermediary with the confidence of both sides, withdrew his Ceylon Workers Congress party from the Committee on 22 December, pledging renewed allegiance to the "four-point formula" - permanent merger of the North-East, meaningful devolution, Muslim autonomy in a single Provincial Council and safeguarding Sinhalese minority rights.

The Select Committee debacle shows how little has changed says Colombo insider columnist *Taraki*. Prabhakaran and the Tamil armed movements came to power precisely because Sinhalese politicians consistently refused to negotiate democracy and devolution for the North-East. Their continuing intransigence presents the Tamils with no credible alternative.

A homecoming

WEST of Vavuniya in contested Mannar District, where Army units have only a slender foothold on the coast, local sources report a continuing build-up of LTTE forces around Sri Lanka's most sacred Catholic shrine at Madhu where UN refugee agency UNHCR runs a camp for over 30,000 internal refugees. Sri Lankan forces have pushed up to Giants Tank and Andankulam in preparation for a thrust west towards Madhu and LTTE-controlled territory.

Some of the 2,000 people from nearby Vankalai who fled to UN-monitored refugee camps on Mannar Island after Army atrocities in February 1991 were forcibly returned to the village in December to act as a buffer zone for advancing Sri Lankan forces. Over 70 families returned to the ruins of Vankalai took shelter in the remnants of churches and schools before security forces abruptly changed their minds and returned them to Army-controlled Mannar Island. In late December Sri Lankan forces launched a new offensive north of Cheddikulam capturing a LTTE camp at Polakayavilandakulam.

Relief denied to refugees in the east

BATTICALOA Additional Government Agent Y Ahamed and Oddumavady Assistant Government Agent Uthuman were among six people killed by a landmine near the Miyankulam Army camp, 34 miles north of Batticaloa, on 26 December. Local MP MLAM Hisbullah has demanded an inquiry into the incident alleging that the bodies also bore bullet wounds.

Refugees in Chenkalady are on the brink of starvation without relief supplies for many months and reports say 4,000 families are surviving on leaves and fruits in Vaharai, north of Valaichenai. Army operations west of the lagoon have badly affected food supplies. Thirty two families from Periyaporativu driven out by the Army in 1991 have not received any relief. Over 5,000 Tamil refugees who fled from 13 villages in Amparai, currently living in sheds constructed by NGOs in Karaitivu in Batticaloa District are not receiving adequate assistance, according to reports.

Torrential rains flooded tanks in Vadamunai in mid-December, displacing over 100,000 people in Batticaloa and Amparai districts. An epidemic of malaria and typhoid followed and two children died in Batticaloa hospital. Welfare organisations have asked the Health Department to spray Malathion and chlorinate wells. Malathion remains on the list of items banned by the Army. According to the Ambilanthurai Animal Husbandry Association many animals have also contracted disease.

People in the Valaichenai area complain that they are unable to take emergency cases to the hospital at night because of Army check-points. Two women died as a result in December and deaths of children also have been reported.

The Army launched *Operation Jeyaganga* south of Batticaloa on 12 December in an effort to overrun Tiger strongholds in the Paduvankarai area. According to the JOC, LTTE's David, Vasan and Ranjith camps were destroyed and ten Tigers were killed. Other reports say three civilians were shot dead by the Army. The LTTE killed a soldier and injured three others in Vavunativu on 22 December. Twenty people were arrested at Mandur by the Army of whom only ten were released later. People were not permitted into the Paduvankarai area and the Army has established two large camps at 40th Colony and Thanthamalai.

A bomb exploded in Valaichenai market on 25 December injuring two persons. Four days later the LTTE ambushed an Army foot-patrol at Punanai in Batticaloa District on the Polonnaruwa-Valaichenai road, killing four soldiers.

In late December the Special Task Force (STF) ordered all persons between the ages of 15 and 40 in Karaitivu to obtain special identity cards before the end of the year. People in Muthalaikannimedu were forcibly evicted from the village by the STF. Over 100 families have taken refuge in the Mandur Ramakrishna Mission school.

Forced resettlement in Trincomalee

REFUGEES from Alankerni, Eechamtivu, Kinniya, Nilaveli and Kuchchaveli in refugee camps in Trincomalee will be forcibly returned to their villages in January by a high-level Army directive as the battle for contested areas of the district continues. Rations in many refugee camps including Clappenberg have been stopped to enforce the order. Five Tamil MPs have cabled President Premadasa saying many of the villages are destroyed, looted and unprotected. Trincomalee's Government Agent issued notice in mid-December that damaged houses not repaired within two weeks would be demolished. Tamil MPs suspect a new Sinhalese colonisation drive is already underway.

Human rights demonstrations baton-charged

HUMAN RIGHTS activists and journalists were baton-charged and tear-gassed after police attacked a peaceful demonstration in Colombo on 10 December to mark World Human Rights Day. Among those assaulted were opposition MPs Vasudeva Nanayakkara, Mahinda Rajapakse and Wijedasa Pathirana President of the Organisation for Parents and Family Members of the Disappeared (OPFMD), a pressure group fighting for compensation and civil rights for the families of over 40,000 people killed or disappeared during the three-year insurgency by the southern Sinhalese Marxist People's Liberation Front (JVP). Also Attacked were **Associated Press** correspondent Dexter Cruz, **Reuters** reporter Anuruddha Lokuhapuarachchi and other journalists. **Lankadeepa** photographer Lalith Welivittigoda is in hospital with critical injuries. Sri Lanka's Foreign Correspondents Association strongly condemned the attack and called for a full investigation.

There has been a spate of attacks on journalists covering anti-government demonstrations in recent months and newspapers publishing politically embarrassing stories have been indicted under Emergency regulations to render further revelations *sub judice*. Communist newspaper **Aththa** acquitted by the High Court after publishing revelations concerning government-run death squads by former police chief P Udugampola, faces new Appeal Court proceedings on 15 January. A bomb was thrown at at the home of **Aththa** News Editor Bennet Rupesinghe in Ragama on 24 December.

A new set of hearings by the Presidential Commission of Enquiry into NGOs began in mid-December to examine national development agency **Sarvodaya** and its charismatic leader Dr AT Ariyaratne. Observers say the government seeks to smear Dr Ariyaratne who Mr Premadasa sees as a potential political rival.

* Arrests and roundups of Tamil youths have continued in the aftermath of the assassination of Sri Lankan Navy chief Vice Admiral Clancy Fernando in Colombo last month. Navatkuli LTTE leader **Jegan** was arrested in the capital in mid-December as Colombo police warned of a 20-strong assassination team in the city planning their next target. Another six Tamils were arrested a few days later. Over 40 Tamils and 60 alleged JVP suspects were arrested in Hambantota in early December. Another five Tamils were arrested in Matale on 13 December. Defence Ministry posters distributed in late December warned against providing accommodation to strangers saying prosecution would follow under Emergency regulations.

* Reports in Norwegian newspaper **Verdens Gang** say Singapore police have smashed a Sri Lankan refugee-smuggling syndicate arresting over 200 people. Over 20,000 Sri Lankan Tamil refugees claimed asylum in Europe in 1992.

* Analysts predict tough new economic reforms after the Sri Lankan government agreed to review alternative methods to finance health care and education to qualify for the next instalment of low-interest loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) under the Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility (ESAF).

* Mr Premadasa speaking in Kandy on the fourth anniversary of his inauguration as President on 2 January said there was now an urgent need for a peaceful solution to the North-East crisis. LTTE Central Committee member **Yogi** told Dutch journalists in Jaffna that no settlement was possible without a federal constitution and a merged North-East Province.