

Security ring around the south

OVER 100,000 Tamil refugees in Colombo and the south may be pushed back to the war-torn north-east as part of a new strategy to end the military stalemate and smash the security threat to the capital from the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Arrests of hundreds of Tamils in Colombo have continued in the wake of the Premadasa assassination. Tamil MPs met Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe on 10 June to hammer out five major safeguards for those detained. Police receipts provided for those arrested from homes or workplaces; women to be accompanied by male relatives; certificates for those released; more registration forms for North-East Tamils; police statements written and signed by detainees in their own language.

Those most at risk are North-East refugees or Hill Country Tamils still without identity documents despite the 1989 citizenship agreement. Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) General Secretary MS Sellasamy says over 2,000 estate youth have been arrested in Colombo. Ariyakutty Theiventhran from Mullaitivu, in Colombo to send his niece to France, was arrested in mid-June. Nixon, a Jaffna student visiting Kotahena to be best man at his sister's wedding, was arrested at the local St Anthony's festival.

Colombo Tamils are also targeted. Wattala shopkeeper KN Jeyakumar, born and brought up in Ratnapura, was arrested in Maligawatte on 17 June. Opposition MP Lakshman Jayakody told Parliament during the debate to extend Sri Lanka's 12-year State of Emergency that Tamil bankers and engineers in the city were arrested and treated as common criminals. Amnesty International says hundreds have been arrested despite

Referendum proposal denounced by Tamil parties

long-standing residence or employment in Colombo and despite bona fide identity documents.

Revised Emergency regulations published in Colombo newspapers on 18 June now require householders to provide local police with a full list of occupants. Legal aid groups say registration will not offer protection from arbitrary arrests or from the widespread extortion practised by Colombo police to squeeze money from detainees' relatives.

Colombo police tightened security checkpoints around the capital after six LTTE assassins trained in south India were captured entering the city on 11 June. Four Tiger suspects were arrested soon after in Kotahena and another six in Negambo. LTTE suspect Kanapathipillai Srimohan took cyanide when cornered said Chilaw police. Siddharthan leader of PLOTE, one of three Tamil groups supporting the Army in the field, says the Tigers will continue to seek high profile targets in Colombo.

The militant groups will play a key role in a new security drive to seal off the south and force displaced Tamils back to their home areas, analysts say. Over 300 refugees were returned to Batticaloa from Colombo's Vivekananda Hall camp on 30 June, despite a hunger strike by inmates.

Eastern refugees will be forced to remain in their districts and Vavuniya will become a capital-in-exile for northern Tamils with new passport and international telephone and banking facilities. Only Tamils with special clearance will be allowed to travel to Colombo. Analysts say the new security *apartheid* will be gradual, but is inevitable if the Tiger threat to Colombo is to be curtailed.

PLOTE with its new headquarters in Vavuniya will run the northern operation. EPDP currently out of favour and suspected of the

Athulathmudali assassination is seeking a fiefdom in Trincomalee while PLOTE and TELO squabble over Batticaloa. Vigneswaran, senior aide to exiled EPRLF chief Varadaraja Perumal is in Colombo to negotiate his leader's return and a more active role for the former North-East provincial administration.

This regional carve-up is part of an emerging military strategy to write off the north and enforce normalcy in the east. Observers predict a new Army offensive on Kilinochchi the LTTE's rice bowl and last supply conduit to the peninsula. After major operations in northern Batticaloa in early June Army officials said the district was now safe for all refugees, including those in Colombo, to return home.

The announcement followed the 10 June decision by the widely-discredited Parliamentary Select Committee (PSC) proposing a referendum in Eastern Province on whether it remains merged with the north. Tamil politicians boycotting the PSC sessions were stunned then enraged by the prospect and both militants and moderates say "the Tamil homeland" concept is indivisible.

The merger was part of the devolution package of a Provincial Council (PC) government for the North-East brokered by Indian military intervention in 1987. Mr Wijetunge's government will tempt the Tamil groups with early PC elections and a new division of the spoils, but the price may be too high.

For the Tamil-speaking Muslim community, targeted by the Tigers, the dilemma may be more acute. Parties like Mr MHM Ashraff's Sri Lanka Muslim Congress lost ground heavily in southern PC elections in May but fear whichever way they vote in a referendum will leave them further isolated. Others favour a canton system that guarantees a territorial base in districts like Amparai. Tamils say the present government's emerging designs for a Tamil homeland owe more to the South African model than their fractured dreams of *Eelam*.

President Wijetunge's first poker game with the LTTE began on 13 June, when 38 policemen and a Sri Lankan soldier, held by the Tigers in Jaffna for three years, launched a fast to secure their release. Two weeks later, after six were freed, negotiations had dissolved in a welter of counter-accusations. The Jaffna hostage drama unfolds on page two.

JAFNA

Hostages

SOME 38 Sri Lankan policemen and one soldier held by the LTTE in Jaffna for three years became political pawns in a new hostage drama as they launched a hunger strike on 13 June to secure their release. The price the Tigers put on their freedom was the lifting of the blockade, biting deep into Jaffna's economy, on seven of 42 key commodities.

Over 70 relatives of the hostages were brought to Jaffna on 18 June, by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) along with Rehabilitation Commissioner Brig. Ananda Weerasekera, the first Sri Lankan government emissary to visit Jaffna for three years. The Tiger propaganda machine was already in full swing, LTTE radio frequently broadcasting interviews with the hostages and their relatives contrasting their humane treatment with the trauma of the Jaffna civilian under siege.

By 22 June, Brig. Weerasekera had secured agreement with the Tigers for a phased release of the hostages in return for a shipload of fuel, 60 LTTE suspects in Colombo and the military embargo temporarily lifted on medicines, bicycles, petrol, diesel, cooking oil, stationery and fertiliser. The fast ended as Weerasekera flew to Colombo with Jaffna Government Agent Manickavasagar and five policemen and their relatives. LTTE theoretician Dr Anton Balasingam described the trade as "the beginning of peace".

Vavuniya was a boom town as hundreds of Tamils bought bicycles and other essentials to take through Thandikulam, the checkpoint to Tiger-controlled territory. Lorries carrying 500 barrels of petrol destined for Kilinochchi and LTTE bases in the Vanni were allowed through as a goodwill gesture.

But by 28 June, Brig. Weerasekera was back in Jaffna and all bets were off. There had been a misunderstanding said the beleaguered broker. The military would not countenance a permanent lifting of the blockade which the Tigers now said they demanded all along. Only one sick policeman was released and *MV Kumana's* 3,000 barrels of fuel stayed on board in Army-controlled Kankasanturai harbour. Military spokesman denied LTTE *Sea Tiger* units had subsequently lured the vessel out to sea with false signals and plundered the cargo.

The Colombo press described the standoff as "a fiasco" and a propaganda victory for the LTTE. The pipeline to peace turned out to be a simple fuel injection. There are now rumblings in the military that the present partial blockade is ineffective and tactically inept.

The Colombo regime still sends over 5,000 tons of food aid worth over \$4 million every month to Jaffna's one million war-weary civilians, hostages of another kind. The military increasingly frustrated, complain "We are feeding the Tigers and then we are fighting them". But Jaffna needs over 15,000 tons of food a month to survive and a new medical survey says 50% of Jaffna's 42,000 children are affected by malnutrition, 2,000 of them seriously ill. Young mothers, the sick and the elderly are now increasingly vulnerable after three years of slow starvation.

Food aid diverted also means profit for ambitious Army officers who need to buy promotions or houses in fashionable Colombo suburbs. Cabinet spokesman Harold Herath admits Rs 11 million (\$250,000) worth of food aid has disappeared and that a high-level enquiry is underway.

Killing zone

Kilali, the Jaffna peninsula's last escape route across the lagoon remains a deadly lottery despite LTTE escorts. Sri Lankan gunboats attacked 30 boats crossing by night on 12 June killing 12 civilians and guerrillas including senior Tiger commander *Charles*. Another LTTE cadre died and four were injured when naval units attacked 40 boats packed with passengers on 30 June. Civilian casualties are not known.

Thirst for peace

An international Catholic delegation visiting Jaffna in mid-June said there was "a common thirst for peace" among Sri Lankans in both the north and south.

Verdict

A Presidential Commission of three Commonwealth judges concluded on 24 June that Sri Lankan Army Northern Commander Lt.Gen. Denzil Kobbekaduwa was killed by a LTTE landmine last August. A previous report by British defence expert JR Wyatt blamed explosives fixed to the base of Kobbekaduwa's jeep, pointing to Army involvement.

Suspects

Sinhalese salesman Saman Sujeeva and 13 others were produced in Colombo Magistrate's Court on 28 June in connection with the assassination of President Premadasa. They were detained pending further enquiries.

Aid

Japan granted a further six concessionary loans in late June to Sri Lanka worth \$350 million for water, road and telecommunication projects.

The road to Cheddikulam

AS the military drive to consolidate areas west of Vavuniya continues, civilian authorities announced 10,000 refugees at the UN-run Madhu Church camp, Sri Lanka's most sacred Catholic shrine, would have their food aid suspended if they did not return to Cheddikulam by 1 July.

Madhu poses particular problems for the military. With 30,000 refugees, UN officials and a religious shrine set in deep forests surrounded by LTTE base camps, it cannot launch a full frontal assault. First the refugees must be forced out into

"cleared areas". Military offensives have the reverse effect as hundreds of villagers flee for the safety of Madhu when the Army pushes forward. Several LTTE cadre were killed when the Army attacked LTTE positions at Nanattan, an hour west of Madhu on 18 June.

Cheddikulam, due south on the strategic Mannar road is still a front-line zone with a growing Army camp. Over 140 Tamil villagers waving white flags made a dawn crossing into Cheddikulam in mid-June. They had fled Kristokulam a few miles north, after LTTE units

launched a new forcible conscription drive in the area. The Tiger levy of one male from each family or Rs 10,000 is now mandatory as military pressure grows. The Army uses a local radio station to broadcast the benefits package waiting for those who cross over.

Further west on isolated Mannar island, the LTTE continues to target the fragile causeway link to the mainland used only by security forces. Four police were killed close to Thallady on 9 June and two others died in a subsequent attack three weeks later.

■ New Army offensive in Batticaloa to prepare for referendum

Deadline

SRI LANKAN forces launched a major offensive around Vaharai in northern Batticaloa in early June designed to liberate the east in time for an October referendum on its future, says senior Army Commander Maj. Gen. Lucky Algama.

Four battalions and Special Forces took part in *Operation Sea Gale* killing 20 LTTE and capturing 20 more after cutting off their escape route at the Verugal ferry link. Eight coastal fishing hamlets around Mankerni were captured and the Army is now building a large base camp at Vaharai formally a LTTE stronghold. Cordon-and-search operations continue in the area.

In a parallel operation, 2,500 male villagers were paraded in front of 25 masked informers at Valaichenai further

south, while anxious wives and children looked on. Seven suspects were arrested. Hooded men screened the population of Kaluvankerni outside the local Catholic church on 21 June and four people were detained at Kommathurai Army camp. Another four villagers were arrested after a similar roundup at Vahaneri on the strategic Polonnaruwa road on 26 June. Army units attacked a major LTTE base on the Trincomalee-Polonnaruwa border a day later. Over 20 guerrillas and two soldiers died in the assault.

Analysts say the military's October deadline is a tall order. Vast areas of Batticaloa west of the lagoon remain fiercely contested. Soldiers shot dead farmer Thavarasa and burned his house during a search of the flashpoint

Kokkaddicholai area in mid-June. The district's interior, formerly the country's rice bowl, produces only 50% of its potential crop as soldiers burn or confiscate harvests and Tigers tax wealthy farmers. Soldiers ambushed and killed *Madan* the LTTE's chief tax collector in the district in late June.

Batticaloa is pushing ahead with resettlement. Four out of 13 refugee camps around the town have been closed and 187 families provided with Rs 6,000 (\$150) and three months dry rations to rebuild their homes and livelihoods. After that they must fend for themselves. Representatives from Tamil parties visited 1,200 refugees at Valaichenai camp on 27 June to hear complaints of water, food and medical shortages.

Over 100 families from Meeravodai, four miles west, want to go home but cannot while Tamil lands are occupied by Muslim Home Guards. Local authorities refuse to act. Valaichenai hospital without drugs, refrigeration or blood-testing facilities is in crisis and there are fears of epidemic in surrounding areas.

Further south in remote Amparai District, typhoid is spreading through coastal areas of Kalmunai and Karaitivu. Police commandos of the Special Task Force stormed a Tiger base at Veeracholai on the Batticaloa border on 23 June capturing arms and ammunition. Local sources say over 53 people have been arrested in two weeks of cordon-and-search operations.

The refugee's dilemma

FOR those displaced by Sri Lanka's brutal civil war, there is never a right time to go home. It is always too early or too late. Too early and you walk into a battlefield. Too late and the victors have looted your house or confiscated your fields.

Tamils in Trincomalee fear the current resettlement drive is also a cover for further colonisation by the Sinhalese state. Since 1900, the Sinhalese population has grown from 4% to 33% of the districts's 250,000 population with Muslims another 30%. Major settlement schemes started after independence at Padaviya and Kantalai were designed to split the continuity of the Tamil north-east they believe. Since the June 1990 war, hundreds of Tamil refugees from the north of Trincomalee town towards Uppuveli, cannot go home because tough Sinhalese fishermen have been settled in their homes. They remain in insanitary or disease-ridden camps like the Technical College or the notorious Clappenberg. Villagers from Kappalthurai are clamouring to join those from Alankerny who have gone home before their lands are colonised. It is hardly paradise for those who return. Of 3,000 families resettled in Muthur since 1991 few have received cash grants pledged by the government to rebuild their homes and farms. Teachers and doctors are in short supply and security uncertain.

Night and day, the LTTE and the Army compete to enforce obedience, blockading food aid, brutalising families, burning homes. There are few places in the district where the war is truly "over". Dry rations remain irregular especially in remote areas like Eechilampattai where soldiers restrict food supplies to starve out the Tigers. The Trincomalee administration still has to settle a \$100,000 food aid bill before next month's rations can be sent.

No comebacks

SECURITY officials have discounted a revival by the militant Sinhalese Marxist People's Liberation Front (JVP) after a taped message from acting leader Somawansa Amarasinghe circulated widely in Colombo in early June. "My message to the public is that the JVP is alive and well and in the process of reorganising" said the Amarasinghe tape.

Over 40,000 people died or disappeared during the JVP insurgency between 1987 and 1990. Six of the JVP politbureau, including leader Rohana Wijeweera, were captured and killed in quick succession in late 1989 while trying to escape. Army sources say the movement's infrastructure has been smashed but small cells are still active like four JVP captured in Wadduwa in late June. Over 3,000 JVP suspects have remained in detention without trial for over three years. Amarasinghe is thought

to be in exile in France.

In a comeback of another kind, former police chief Premadasa Udugampola, reported to have supervised government death squads during the JVP insurrection, returned to the island from exile in India on 18 June. Udugampola went underground last year after falling out with former President Premadasa and then leaking details to the press of the regime's counter-terror against the JVP. A phone call from new President Wijetunge persuaded him to return home.

Mr Wijetunge a high class Kandyan Goigama represents a return to the status quo and he has told MPs that he will share power and decision-making with them. There are fears of a revival of the quasi-feudal "chit system" of MPs monopolising local patronage that has dominated Sri Lankan politics since independence.

WORLD BANK DONORS PLEDGE \$840 MILLION AID TO SRI LANKA

NGOs warn of new agricultural crisis

NGOs warned of an impending agricultural crisis in Sri Lanka and called for a new dialogue on poverty as donor governments pledged \$840 million aid to President Wijetunge's government at the annual World Bank meeting in Paris on 18 June.

In a hard-hitting memorandum to the Paris meeting, the European NGO Forum on Sri Lanka (ENGOFSL) said Sri Lanka's small farmers were in crisis after state subsidies for credit, marketing and irrigation were axed following a World Bank ultimatum. Sri Lanka's *Janasaviya* poverty alleviation programme has been a dismal failure says ENGOFSL and calls for the World Bank to publish its own confidential report on poverty in Sri Lanka as part of a new national debate.

World Bank President Lewis Preston's much-publicised commitment to poverty alleviation remains merely rhetoric to many NGOs. Current World Bank policy in Sri Lanka demands wholesale privatisation of state-controlled industries and slashing subsidies

on agricultural inputs and staple foods.

Other economists believe keeping prices low, if necessary by subsidies, in a country where 80% of the population are small farmers may be the most effective way to alleviate poverty. Mr Premadasa's poverty flagship, the *Janasaviya* programme is ineffective agrees the World Bank in its confidential Annual Report on Sri Lanka's economy and should be scrapped.

The former President's other pet programme, the 200 Garment Factories Scheme remains deeply flawed as an export strategy says the ENGOFSL communique. Over 70% of export earnings in the garment sector are lost on imported inputs. Although President Wijetunge's government has made repeated commitments to Mr Premadasa's economic legacy, analysts say both programmes will be quietly phased out.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe who led the Sri Lankan delegation to the Paris meeting said donor countries welcomed the smooth transition and stabilis-

ing influence of the new administration but stressed the need to hold down public spending and curb inflation. He denied foreign aid to Sri Lanka was used for defence expenditure after reports that World Bank South Asia Director Paul Isenman had expressed concern over funds diverted to the Defence Ministry. Some donors at the Paris meeting called again for more transparency and accountability in Sri Lanka's human rights record.

Three days before the meeting, Colombo announced new price rises in bread, flour and kerosene to demonstrate their renewed commitment to force down inflation, officially 11% unofficially 19%. Characteristically the price rises hit the rural poor the hardest - those without electricity. But a 30% increase in electricity charges is also on the horizon. President Wijetunge has promised to cut back on some agricultural imports to boost local producers but for many poor farmers staring ruin in the face, it is too little too late.

Not promoting but facilitating

INDIA will resume its controversial repatriation of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees on 15 August announced Tamil Nadu Revenue Commissioner CNR Ramadoss on 1 July, in ships provided by United Nations refugee agency UNHCR.

Over 29,000 of south India's 230,000 Sri Lankan refugees were repatriated last year. UNHCR first refused to back the programme citing uncertain security conditions in northern Sri Lanka but relented when India offered the refugee agency a token presence in Madras to monitor whether refugees were returning voluntarily.

NGOs say there is a new drive to force the refugees to return by allowing conditions in 130 camps housing 80,000 Sri Lankans to deteriorate. NGOs were banned from the camps last month effectively closing them to external scrutiny. Indian officials claim over 7,000 camp inmates have registered to return but will not allow UNHCR to visit the camps regularly or to distribute information on security conditions in Sri Lanka - part of its international protection mandate.

Refugee workers say UNHCR appears more interested in gaining a foothold in

India, not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, than protecting Sri Lankan refugees from coerced return into a virtual war zone. UNHCR claims it is "not promoting but facilitating" repatriation which its revised protection guide-

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

The Sri Lanka Project
The British Refugee Council
3/9 Bondway
London SW8 1SJ
Tel: (071) 582 6922
Fax: (071) 582 9929

ISSN 0955-5943

Funded by voluntary agencies worldwide.
Technology by RnR DTP
Printed by Printco, 374 Willesden High Rd,
London NW10

lines endorse as long as refugees are returning willingly to conflict areas and are fully aware of the dangers.

Some NGOs question both the ethics and the semantics of UNHCR's current involvement and say Sri Lankan refugees need more visible protection from an increasingly hostile Tamil Nadu government.

Chief Minister Jayalalitha Jayaram, under growing pressure from New Delhi, told a Madras police conference on 24 June that strict control of Sri Lankan refugee camps had helped to drive the LTTE out of Tamil Nadu. The Tiger threat has dominated south Indian politics since Rajiv Gandhi's assassination two years ago and the militants retain powerful friends and comprehensive underground networks.

Both state and central governments accuse the other of covert support for the LTTE. Over 65 militants have escaped from special detention camps in Tamil Nadu with the collusion of local police or RAW, India's CIA. A four-day fast by 140 LTTE detainees at Vellore ended in mid-June after local officials promised improved medical facilities.