

Black July's deadly anniversary

COLOMBO and the south were on high security alert this month fearing new bomb attacks by the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) on the tenth anniversary of *Black July*, the spark that ignited Sri Lanka's bloody civil war. The Tigers instead launched a full-scale military assault wiping out a key Army base in the isolated Weli Oya region linking the north and east.

Ten years ago on 23 July 1983, over 3,000 Tamils were killed in Colombo and the south after the fledgling LTTE killed 13 Sri Lankan soldiers in Jaffna. In a week of politically-organised violence 50,000 Tamil homes were destroyed and 100,000 Tamils fled north seeking refuge. Following the Premadasa assassination in May, Colombo feared the Tigers would mark the anniversary with another high profile target.

Over 300 Tamil youth were arrested in police roundups on 7 July including three LTTE cadre. Police reported a new seven-man Tiger bomb-squad in the capital after arresting *Selva* a LTTE explosives specialist in Kotahena a week later. The day before the anniversary the police surrounded New Chetty Street at 4am arresting 28 Tamils including seven women. New President DB Wijetunge hurriedly cancelled a much-publicised visit to Batticaloa to launch the Presidential Mobile Secretariat the same weekend and the military was on nationwide alert.

LTTE suspects in Colombo's Welikade prison, many held for over three years without charges, began a new hunger strike for five basic demands as the *Black July* anniversary dawned. During the 1983 riots, 53 Tamil prisoners in Welikade were murdered by guards and Sinhala inmates.

When the Tiger attacks came, they were sudden and devastating. In a dawn raid on 24 July, LTTE units from Wilpattu jungle bases killed 10 policemen at Iluvankulam near Puttalam 80

Tigers wipe out Weli Oya Army camp

miles north of Colombo. The following day, a large LTTE force simultaneously attacked three Army camps guarding Sinhalese settlements in the Weli Oya area linking Trincomalee and Mullaitivu. Over 40 soldiers were killed and 29 wounded as Janakapura camp housing 150 soldiers was razed to the ground. Another 17 Sinhalese civilians died in attacks on nearby Janakapura village. Defence sources say ten LTTE cadre died in the offensive. Seven Sinhalese villagers and the ashes of 18 soldiers were released by the Tigers to International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) intermediaries in Mullaitivu in late July.

Hundreds of Sinhalese villagers fled to a makeshift refugee camp hurriedly established at nearby Nikawewa school. The Tigers have long vowed to clear Weli Oya or Manal Aru (Tamil: sandy river) of the hated Sinhalese colonists sent they believe by the Colombo government to fragment the continuity of the Tamil north-east.

The Colombo press meanwhile fulminated over "the Army's worst defeat of the Eelam war" as sources revealed the Tigers escaped with Rs 50 million (\$1.1 million) worth of weapons and ammunition and Rs 1 million in cash destined for soldiers' pay packets. Two air attacks on civilian areas of Thirunelvely and Kopay in the Jaffna peninsula which killed 11 people including three school children on 26 July were a naked reprisal for the Janakapura operation say LTTE sources.

Colombo was already tense after the breakdown of talks in Jaffna last month to release 32 policemen and one soldier held by the Tigers for over three years. Characteristically the intermediary, the ICRC was blamed, with Sinhala graffiti outside its Colombo headquarters screaming "Tamil spies get out".

The captive policemen began a new hunger strike on 29 July and eight are said to be in a critical condition.

Religious leaders in Colombo sent urgent appeals to both sides but after last month's debacle observers say the Army will brook no concessions favouring a new military offensive fuelled by the backlash in the south if the policemen die. A new round of air strikes killed Jaffna College student Thayaparan Muhunthan, 20, and injured ten others at Vaddukottai. There is renewed shelling from Army positions at Karainagar, Palaly and Araliturai as the pressure mounts on Jaffna's one million war-weary.

Back in Colombo, a wave of police roundups began in Kotahena, Pettah and Grandpass after a LTTE hit-list of high profile targets was discovered in a safe house in late July. Police sources say over 600 Tamils are in custody but legal aid organisations say the figure may be double. Hill Country Tamils without National Identity Cards are particularly at risk.

After representations, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe has directed government officials to issue identity cards to 200,000 Hill Country youth but there is little confidence in the political will to break through the bureaucratic blockade. Another 12 Hill Country youth were picked up in Avissawella. Arrests continue elsewhere in the south. Over 23 Tamil youth from north-east areas, working in Kurunegala were detained in mid-July.

There were major demonstrations and marches in London and other capitals as many of Europe's 250,000 Sri Lankan Tamil refugees marked the bitter memory of 23 July. Over 1,000 Tamils demonstrated outside the UN building in New York but the international outcry that marked the '83 *holocaust* as Tamils describe it has dwindled into resignation and rancour.

Ten years of intransigence, deadlock, false dawns and counter-terror has fatigued international diplomacy as fresh crises surface with fatal regularity in the former Soviet Union, Somalia and Bosnia. Who remembers the people of Jaffna, a tropical Sarajevo, trapped in a slow-motion tragedy.

A new spate of disappearances and extra-judicial killings has rocked Mannar, Vavuniya and Batticaloa Districts as the Sri Lankan Army tightens its grip on contested areas in the face of military stalemate and continuing guerrilla attacks. Reports from the field inside.

JAFFNA

Pooneryn corridor talks break down

NEGOTIATIONS between the LTTE and the United Nations refugee agency UNHCR to open a humanitarian corridor to the besieged Jaffna peninsula through the north-west Pooneryn crossing have irrevocably broken down, UN officials announced in Colombo on 22 July.

UNHCR planned to restore the 500-metre ferry crossing at the mouth of the Jaffna lagoon for vital food aid and medical evacuations from Jaffna's crumbling hospitals. Civilians would use the crossing in a second phase but the Tigers refused to agree to Army checks on those leaving Jaffna, insisting searches be carried out by UN staff, said LTTE ideologue Anton Balasingham at a rally in Jaffna on 5 July, *Black Tiger Day*, held in honour of the Tiger's elite suicide commandos. Such checks UNHCR says could only be carried out by UN guards or "blue helmets" requiring de facto UN military intervention.

Other less-publicised demands were a tripartite agreement between the Sri Lankan government and the UN recognising the Tigers' status as "belligerents" under international law and a 72-hour warning of any military advance. UN officials declared themselves "saddened and frustrated" by the LTTE's maximalist stance but may be secretly relieved given the fragilities inherent in the Pooneryn corridor operation and the invective showered on the ICRC following the hostages debacle. Observers say while the Sri Lankan government vetoes any attempt at UN intervention it may suit the Tigers to stoke the siege mentality in Jaffna. Four Sri Lankan aircraft strafed Pooneryn, Nallur and Karadippokku on 16 July killing one and injuring six others. St Theresa's girls school in Kilinochchi was again bombed.

Recent reports say there are now

266,000 refugees and displaced persons inside Jaffna. Many thousands have fled into the peninsula from Trincomalee, Vavuniya and islands west of Jaffna in the three years since the June war. They shelter in temple courtyards and community halls without food, water or toilet facilities. Few of their children go to school. A report released last month by Jaffna's NGO consortium says malnutrition rates are rising steadily after three years of economic blockade. Jaffna's senior public official Government Agent K Manickavasagar in Colombo in late July appealed for more government and NGO assistance.

The last exit from Jaffna remains the treacherous night crossing over the lagoon from Kilali, when civilians protected by LTTE patrol boats, run the gauntlet of Sri Lankan naval attacks. The military have outlawed the Kilali run to cut the LTTE's last supply conduit to Kilinochchi's rich rice lands, proclaiming those crossing will be shot on sight. Over 120 civilians have been killed in mid-sea clashes this year. Sri Lankan gunboats destroyed two LTTE craft escorting civilian convoys on 10 July and 12 civilians died in another navy ambush on 29 July.

The Jaffna civilian is no more than a hostage. Most risk the deadly Kilali run to collect remittances in Colombo from relatives abroad or to seek hospital treatment. Their property or their families will be swallowed up by the Tigers if they do not return. The military inevitably will draw the blockade strings even tighter in the months to come. While the UNHCR initiative has foundered new international concern must provide a humanitarian corridor for Jaffna's one million war-weary and an end to the shooting gallery that is Kilali.

Roundup

Tamil Nadu police seized over 5,000 home-made explosive devices and a group of LTTE suspects in a safe house in Nagapattinam said *All India Radio* on 29 June.

Postponed

The Parliamentary Select Committee set up to solve the ethnic conflict, met in Colombo on 6 July and after hearing evidence from senior Army officers, announced that a referendum could only be held in the east when security conditions had improved.

Refugee

Almost 1,000 runaway Sri Lankan housemaids in Kuwait seek refuge or advice every month at the Sri Lankan embassy after harassment or ill treatment by their employers, said a Foreign Ministry official in Colombo in early July.

Arrests

Eleven of 13 Batticaloa Tamil women arrested in Kandy while attending an NGO training course were released after intervention by local community leaders. Two remain in custody in Batticaloa's notorious *Belsen* camp and one has been badly beaten.

Challenge

A team of Sri Lankan lawyers representing Mrs Srimani Athulathmudali has challenged a Scotland Yard investigation report released in Colombo on 16 July, which absolves the Sri Lankan government and security agencies of involvement in the assassination of her husband, prominent opposition politician Lalith Athulathmudali on 23 April.

A burden to the state

INDIA will resume its controversial repatriation of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees from the southern state of Tamil Nadu on 12 August when over 1,000 returnees will leave Madras in *SS Nicobar* bound for Trincomalee.

The refugees have become "a burden to the state" said Union Home Minister Rajesh Pilot in early July as he agreed to supply Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayalalitha with ships to repatriate 80,000 Sri Lankan refugees in government camps. Only 6,000 have so far agreed to return. The programme is monitored by

international refugee agency UNHCR who offered India ships last month to kick-start the repatriation process.

NGOs say conditions in the camps are allowed to deteriorate to put pressure on refugees to return. NGOs are now banned from the camps and UNHCR whose international protection mandate allows them to inform refugees about conditions in their home area, has been consistently refused access since arriving in Tamil Nadu last year.

Observers say New Delhi seeks to bring Jayalalitha and her 11 AIADMK

Lok Sabha MPs back into the ruling Congress (I) alliance. Minister VC Shukla rushed to Madras seven days before a crucial vote of confidence in Parliament to persuade Jayalalitha to end a 84-hour fast over sharing water resources with Karnataka State. In the event Prime Minister Narasimha Rao won a narrow 14 majority on 28 July without AIADMK votes but the horse trading is not over. Jayalalitha is out to break the LTTE threat to the south and 200,000 Sri Lankan refugees are a soft target.

■ 200 disappear in Batticaloa District

A quiet violence

REPORTS from Batticaloa say over 200 people have been abducted or have disappeared in the last three months as the military and the Tigers vie for control of the civilian population and the district's fertile rice lands.

Many are taken away from homes and workplaces for "questioning" by men in unmarked uniforms on plain clothes. The military then deny they are in custody. Seven civilians including school principal Kanapathy, 53, and local hospital doctor Sivarajah were taken in for questioning during a roundup in Mannampitiya in early July. Two Muslims were abducted from Kalmunaikudy further south in Amparai at 3am by six armed and uniformed men.

Many of those targeted like

Mannampitiya trader Sothinathan are wealthy merchants and may be held for ransom - a LTTE speciality. But local sources say the Army and its Tamil militant allies like PLOTE and TELO are competing to deny the Tigers funds and enrich themselves in the process.

Former PLOTE commander *Mohan* now heads a shadowy plain clothes assassination squad that has ambushed two senior Tiger leaders in the last 12 months and is widely accused of extortion and civilian killings. Amnesty International also has issued an urgent appeal regarding 16 Tamil men arrested on 17 February whose whereabouts remain unknown despite enquiries by Justice Soza's Human Rights Task Force.

Despite a massive security presence

Batticaloa's Mobile Presidential Service on 23 July was a non-event after the President's non-appearance. There was a ten-day ban on fishing on the coast and the lagoon to prevent LTTE infiltration. Routine military operations continue. Six LTTE cadre were killed and three Sri Lankan soldiers injured in a clash near Sithandy on 2 July.

In the aftermath of the Army's massive Vaharai offensive last month there are ambitious plans to inject Rs 10 million (\$250,000) in rehabilitation funds into the area. Local people remain pessimistic. Vaharai Citizen's Committee President Sinnathamby Shanmugam, 56, was shot dead in mid-July walking to his niece's house after dark without a lantern - against Army orders.

In many former Tiger strongholds civilians displaced by the advancing military - such as 50 families forced out of Mylavettuvan on 13 April - have received no assistance at all. Medical workers continue to warn of deteriorating conditions in Valaichenai refugee camp, brought on by the drought. Doctors say there is a growing crisis as shortages paralyse the district's hospitals.

Further north in Trincomalee, the town retains a semblance of normality while LTTE attacks continue in rural areas. Six soldiers died and six were injured in a Tiger ambush outside Kantalai on 28 July. LTTE sources described it as another operation to commemorate the *Black July* anniversary.

The bombing of Jaffna

AT 8am on 26 July, out of the blinding blue of Jaffna's skies, two Sri Lankan aircraft dropped four bombs behind Thirunelveli Dairy Farm killing Shanmugam, a trader, and his four grandchildren. His house was completely destroyed and four others badly damaged. At midday on a second bombing run at Kopay six civilians including three schoolboys died and eight were injured close to the Irupalai Aluminium factory building. A Hindu temple and a young girl sheltering there were smashed to pieces. There were no warnings, no air-dropped leaflets announcing operations. Why should there be? After all, no one is watching. There will be no international protest or outcry.

Daily life in Jaffna is conditioned by the distant drone of aircraft engines and the run to the bunkers behind almost every house. A phalanx of cyclists waits under trees by the side of the road gauging the intentions of the aircraft no more than silver specks in the glare. By night the crump of shells from Karainagar or Palaly thuds through the darkness triggering a nightmare chorus of howling dogs. Over 1,000 civilians have been killed in the three-year bombing of Jaffna and almost 1,500 have died from gruesome injuries. Another 1,000 children died needlessly in 1992 because Jaffna hospitals lack basic drugs and medical equipment to save them.

This is a low-tech war of attrition. The Sri Lankan Airforce lack the technology and advanced intelligence to pinpoint legitimate targets. The LTTE for all their ingenuity lack anti-aircraft defences. When defence sources say two LTTE arms factories were destroyed in another air raid on 30 July in Vaddukkottai, it means Jaffna student Thayaparan Muhunthan, 20, was blown apart and ten others including two-year old Sunthararam badly injured.

Forced out

EIGHT people died and 40 were injured when two bombs exploded behind Colombo's Bambalapitiya Pillayar Temple during the annual Hindu *Vel* festival on 2 August. While authorities blame feuding contractors, there have been regular Sinhalese threats to the festival down the years. The explosion followed new government attempts to clear Colombo of Tamil refugee camps, two of which are part of the temple complex.

The camp in the temple courtyard was closed on 29 July and 300 people taken to Mutuval and Saraswathy Hall camps already overcrowded with blocked toilets and one standpipe for water. Only 73 elected to return to Batticaloa on government-supplied buses. Over 180 refugees were returned to Navalady an isolated transit camp eight kms south of Batticaloa when Vivekananda camp in Colombo was closed in late June. In tum-

bledown huts on the beach in the *kachchan*, windy season, more than half contracted diarrhoea and conjunctivitis from sand blizzards. Many said that they had returned against their will and that families had been divided. NGOs intervened to assist them but many have returned home to even more uncertain conditions west of Batticaloa lagoon because they cannot survive where they are.

What assistance they have been promised may be a long time coming. Most refugees settled in cleared areas have received little more than Rs 2,000 (\$50) and irregular dry rations. Government officials now plan to cut the house rebuilding grant by 65% to Rs 5,000. In the bid to clear Colombo, another 3,000 people will be pushed east into trouble zones with little more than vague promises and a cooked meal.

DESPITE ARMY DEFINITIONS VAVUNIYA AND MANNAR DISTRICTS ARE CONTESTED TERRITORY

No man's land

OVER a third of Vavuniya District's 2,645 sq kms is now in Army control as the military pushes forward with forcible resettlement programmes to create a civilian buffer zone between itself and Tiger attacks. With the help of Tamil group PLOTE, Vavuniya town is to become a capital-in-exile for fleeing Jaffna Tamils to blunt the security threat to Colombo.

Over 45 people have disappeared around Vavuniya in the last six months most taken into custody at the volatile Nochchimodda checkpoint that links the south to the Tiger-controlled territory, a few miles north of Vavuniya town. Every day the crossing functions, four or five Tamils travelling south are held by the military for anything from 24 hours to indefinitely while Army officers grill them on conditions in Jaffna or finger their valuables. Over 70 Tamil youths travelling to Colombo were detained at Nochchimodda on 28 July for over 22 hours of interrogation. Observers say once Vavuniya's postal, banking and hospital services are upgraded few Jaffna

Tamils will be allowed to go on to Colombo.

Other disappearances are less predictable. S Manoranjan, 21, an office worker with Norwegian NGO FORUT, was abducted on 21 June and his decomposed body found in the jungle outside Vavuniya in late July. Tamil group PLOTE seeking to stamp their authority on the local population are being blamed for many of them.

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Further west in LTTE-controlled territory at Madhu, the government has again threatened to cut food aid to 10,000 of the 30,000 refugees at the UN camp at Sri Lanka's most sacred Catholic shrine, unless they return to their homes around Cheddikulam, currently on the front line.

LTTE units again attacked Cheddikulam on 1 August killing one soldier.

After three years of limbo, many refugees at Madhu want to go home but will not trust the military. Murunkan at the edge of the Army's western foothold on Mannar District, supposedly cleared for resettlement, suffered aerial bombing again last month. LTTE Mannar commander *Kathir* says there is a 20-mile western front in the district in the struggle for control of 5,000 acres of fertile rice lands around Giant's Tank.

On isolated Mannar Island, where 4,000 refugees from south India will return in August, LTTE attacks continue. After five police were killed in a Tiger ambush, three Tamils returning to Pesalai refugee camp were arrested on 8 July and have disappeared. Amnesty International and ICRC have expressed concern. People are now afraid to travel and there are continuing food and medical shortages. Three soldiers and 12 LTTE cadre were killed in a clash near the old railway bridge at Thallady, the Army's Mannar headquarters, on 29 July.

Forging alliances

COLOMBO was a hotbed of political intrigue this month as rumours surfaced of attempts to form a national government, and of an imminent alliance between the ruling United National Party (UNP) and its breakaway faction the Democratic United National Front (DUNF). The succession struggle in the opposition Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) deepened as leader Srimavo Bandaranaike suspended her son Anura's membership of the party on 15 July.

Anura Bandaranaike was enmeshed in secret talks with former President JR Jayewardene to form a national government said his mother. A Parliamentary Private Member's motion by SLFP MP Neville Fernando to allow Anura and other SLFP rebels to cross the house was abandoned in early August. Opposition flared into open warfare as protestors surrounded Mrs Bandaranaike's house and home-made bombs were thrown at two prominent Anura supporters' homes.

Talk of a national government came to nothing but the UNP-DUNF alliance appears firmly on course with DUNF leader Gamini Dissanayake tipped as the

next Finance Minister. Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) leader and godfather of the Plantation Tamils, Tourism Minister MR S Thondaman played down the threat that DUNF's one-million vote

bank may pose to his position as favoured UNP ally and power broker.

There is growing unease among Hill Country Tamils over the privatisation of plantation management, now described as a "99-year sell-out". CWC General Secretary MS Sellasamy says over 100 complaints of malpractice have been lodged, workloads have increased and workers denied their guaranteed 20 days employment a month. Plantation workers fear a new management Social Welfare Trust will remove the strike weapon the CWC wielded so adroitly in the past. Wages, education and housing conditions are already marginal and their improvement under the trust is limited to 10% of management profits.

A deft piece of political rehabilitation has ensued after the return of former police chief Premadasa Udugampola who masterminded government death squads during the three year uprising by the southern Sinhalese Marxist People's Liberation Front (JVP). He is to become Vice Chairman of the Sri Lankan Ports Authority. For many it sets the seal on the new administration.

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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