

## Army's express offensive on Jaffna

OVER 200 civilians may have died in the largest Sri Lankan offensive for two years as a column of 3,000 troops pushed 14 kms north into the Jaffna peninsula in late September, taking the strategic ferry crossing at Kilali in a six-day running battle with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Smaller Army detachments moved south towards Kilinochchi and north from Pooneryn while Sri Lankan ships and aircraft pounded Jaffna with a 48-hour artillery barrage. More troops advanced from Palaly, the Army's foothold inside the peninsula, in synchronised strikes designed to splinter LTTE resistance. The main column moving north from Elephant Pass was outflanked by LTTE guerrillas in a suicidal charge west of Pallai killing over 100 Sri Lankan soldiers and wounding 200 others.

After another 48 hours of air barrage and bitter fighting, on 1 October Sri Lankan forces took Kilali the LTTE's major supply line across Jaffna lagoon and the last crossing point for escaping civilians. Over 200 people have died already this year after Navy attacks on the hazardous night crossing. Another seven were killed and 20 injured in an air attack on 6 September.

Over 200 boats were destroyed as Operation *Yal Devi* - named after the Colombo-Jaffna express train - captured Kilali but both sides took heavy casualties. The Army says over 200 Tigers and 118 soldiers were killed with 250 soldiers seriously injured. The LTTE says over 200 soldiers were killed and 400 wounded with 84 Tiger deaths including Kilinochchi commander *Naresh*. Both sides routinely minimise their losses and while civilian fatalities climb in Jaffna's crumbling hospitals starved of drugs and equipment, the final death toll may top 1,000.

Most civilians died in the aerial bombing and indiscriminate shelling that is Jaffna's daily ordeal. Over 20 were buried alive when an underground air-raid shelter near Chavakachcheri took a direct hit. Over 16 students attending classes at Kokkuvil Social Centre were injured and four elderly people killed as the local Nanthavil Amman temple was badly dam-

aged. Another 16 people died in the shelling that accompanied the Army's dash to Pallai.

Then, instead of pushing on to Chavakachcheri as expected, on 3 October, the Army withdrew to the major Elephant Pass base leaving the smouldering remains of Kilali in LTTE hands. Army spokesmen insisted that primary objectives were achieved. Large numbers of LTTE cadre were killed and the challenge to government authority at Kilali had been quashed. Other analysts say the 80,000-strong military has the superior firepower to take territory, often at tremendous cost, but not the logistics to hold it, over-extended as they are across hundreds of miles of potential battlefield.

Sources say Operation *Yal Devi* was scheduled to be a 25-day offensive to take Chavakachcheri, a vital staging post on the road to Jaffna town. The military clearly underestimated Tiger resistance and the cold sacrificial logic of that suicidal charge at Pallai that derailed *Yal Devi*.

The night after the withdrawal, over 1,000 civilians crossed from Kilali to Sinna Paranthan on the mainland in large flotillas flanked by Tiger speedboats. LTTE lorries had saved and hidden hundreds of boats while the Sri Lankan column stalled at Pallai and the infrastructure at Kilali remains intact insisted Tiger sources claiming a propaganda victory.

The Colombo press was scathing about Army strategy, saying a bombing raid on Kilali would have achieved more lasting results without military casualties. Clearly it was politicians who ordered first the offensive and then the withdrawal for clearly political reasons said the *Sunday Times*.

The *Yal Devi* offensive followed a week of high-profile Tiger celebrations inside Jaffna to honour former political leader *Thileepan* whose death in a protest fast on 27 September five years ago sparked the war with Indian peace-keep-



ing troops. Elusive LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran was unusually visible and after a series of embarrassing losses, the military was determined to spoil the party. An 11 year-old girl, was killed and 11 others injured in Chunnakam by shelling from Palaly and Mathagal as the *Thileepan* anniversary began.

Defence sources say Sri Lankan aircraft bombed a major LTTE base north of Nayar lagoon in Mullaitivu on 7 September. Ten days later, Navy units destroyed five boats supposedly bringing Tiger leaders for a summit in Alampil, the LTTE's main supply link between north and east. The Navy also intercepted a major LTTE arms shipment north of Vetrilaikerni say military reports. Over 16 civilians were killed and 50 injured when Sri Lankan planes strafed a LTTE rally 50 yards from a refugee camp in Mathalan near Mullaitivu on 18 September.

As the *Yal Devi* offensive got underway Sri Lankan Foreign Minister ACS Hameed was telling the United Nations General Assembly in New York that peace efforts were being actively pursued through a Parliamentary Select Committee (PSC) due to make its final recommendations on 15 October. The Tamil moderate parties say Mr Hameed's backstage manipulation of the widely discredited PSC ensured their four-point formula for peace was never discussed and led ultimately to their withdrawal. The PSC's two year bout of sleepwalking they say, has been no more than a sham.



## THE NORTH

## 100,000 families hit by fishing ban

NEARLY 100,000 fishing families have lost their livelihood after a government ban on all boats in the northern sea between Mannar and Trincomalee because of heavy damage inflicted by the *Sea Tigers* on the Sri Lankan Navy last month.

North-East MPs say most fishermen live in poverty and many are in debt after buying boats and equipment. In a letter to President Wijetunge, northern MP Mavai Senathirajah has demanded the removal of the prohibition or immediate compensation for the fishermen.

Under Emergency regulations promulgated in September the prohibited zone includes Sri Lankan territorial waters of five districts and vessels are forbidden to enter without written permission. The Minister of Fisheries Joseph Michael Perera says the restriction is temporary necessitated by the security situation.

A severe drought is paralysing the Mannar area and people are forced to walk for miles to fetch water. A new Army procedure introduces six different identity cards for Mannar residents, visitors and those travelling from Army-controlled areas into Tiger territory. Army officers claim that the new system is to avoid unnecessary arrests.

The Army now controls only a strip of coastal land on Mannar mainland and its control of Mannar Island is increasingly challenged by LTTE attacks. Shelling from camps is becoming more frequent. Fifty-one year-old Marykirithal and young daughter Thaseela were seriously injured by shells fired on Vidaltivu from the Thallady Army camp on 18 September. Tiger guerrillas, clashed with troops advancing east from Vankalai on 27 September killing five soldiers.

In Vavuniya District, six people were arrested in mid-September attempting to smuggle batteries and spark plugs - raw material for Tiger bombs according to the Army - across Thandikulam checkpoint to the north. Areas around Omanthai and Navatukulam north of Vavuniya were bombed by the Airforce on 26 September damaging many houses. More houses were damaged when Ramiah Village in Poovarasankulam on the Mannar road was shelled.

The Sri Lankan government claims around 10,000 tons of food has been sent to the north in the last four weeks. But reports from Jaffna speak of food shortage and sharply rising prices.

Because of curfew in late September a food ship returned from Point Pedro port unloading only part of its cargo and another ship with 3,200 tons of food remains in Army-controlled Kankasanturai. Over 60 lorries with essential food are held at Medawachchiya and lorry owners have bitterly complained to President Wijetunge about Army harassment and commandeering of vehicles for military use.

While new Foreign Affairs Minister ACS Hameed told the UN General Assembly that food and medicine were being sent to the war zone, NGO reports from the north spoke of a new medical crisis. In July alone 28,000 people sought treatment in Jaffna hospital. An outbreak of cholera in Jaffna is being blamed on refugees returning from India on the current repatriation programme. Four people have died and 40 are in hospital. Jaffna's fractured water and sanitation services present a high risk of epidemic, health workers say.

### Arrest

Reuters news agency says LTTE second-in-command *Mahattaya* was arrested with around 100 supporters by Tiger cadre from LTTE leader Prabhakaran's elite bodyguard in early August. *Mahattaya* was demoted to running a rehabilitation project outside Jaffna after a power struggle with Prabhakaran earlier this year.

### Execution

An autopsy report on five JVP suspects, shot dead allegedly while trying to escape from Mahara prison on 8 September, says four of them were badly beaten and injured before being shot. Sources say guards and inmates attacked the political prisoners' wing with knives and clubs after dark.

### Hearing

Sri Lanka's Bar Association says 40 fundamental rights cases, alleging torture and unlawful detention on behalf of some of the 400 eastern Tamils held at the Kalutara prison for over three years without trial, opened at the Supreme Court on 9 September.

### Tarzie Vittachchi

Tarzie Vittachchi Sri Lanka's most prominent international journalist died in Oxford, UK on 17 September aged 72. He won the Ramon Magsaysay Prize for *Emergency* 58, his dramatic account of the 1958 anti-Tamil riots.

### Protest

Police tear-gassed 4,000 demonstrators in Beliatta, Hambantota District on 19 September, as opposition Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) MPs launched a one million postcard campaign to protest against the rising cost of living.

## Palk Strait manoeuvres

INDIA has accused Sri Lanka of breaching an agreement between the two countries after the ban on fishing in the Palk Strait. While granting sovereignty to Sri Lanka over the tiny Kachchativu Island south-west of Jaffna peninsula, the agreement allows access to Indian fishermen.

The killing of four Indian fishermen in the Palk Strait in early September by the Sri Lankan Navy has also led to protests by India after Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayalalitha demanded appropriate action.

Jayalalitha has blamed the Indian central government for failing to cooperate

in the hunt for the Tigers, after Home Minister SB Chavan said that LTTE infiltration in Tamil Nadu is widespread. Jayalalitha's AIADMK party scored convincing victories in two by-elections on 20 September re-establishing the party's strength. She broke off the alliance with the ruling Congress (I) in March this year. Reports say despite her close relations with the Hindu BJP, Jayalalitha received support from Muslim areas.

Heavy security was ordered after the Muslim town of Kayalpattanam was attacked by mobs from the banned Hindu

extremist *Rashtriya Swayam Sevak* (RSS) on 14 September. Reports say the RSS used a local dispute to seek revenge for the destruction of its headquarters in Madras last month.

Twenty-two of the 26 accused in the Rajiv Gandhi murder case refused to attend court in early September demanding direct access to visiting relatives at Poonthamalli sub-jail. Currently they are separated from visitors by a high security glass barrier. In late September five Sri Lankans were arrested at Egmore in Madras for possessing drugs.



## ■ Killings continue in the east

# No way home

TAMILS in Valaichenai refugee camp north of Batticaloa have refused again to return home without proper security and effective rehabilitation assistance. Many are from villages on the flashpoint Polonnaruwa road in the jigsaw of Sinhalese and Muslim settlements and fear reprisals for continuing Tiger attacks. LTTE units struck again east of Polonnaruwa, killing five policemen at Kutuvavila in late September.

Refugees from the Tiger stronghold of Vellaveli in the south of the district also fear to return. After three policemen were shot dead in a remote village by LTTE guerrillas in early September, security forces bound P Gopalapillai hand and foot, dragging him along the road while others beat him to death with rifle butts.

Over 50 houses were burned to the ground. Two Tamils taken away for questioning from Mahilavettuvan in mid September by unidentified gunmen are believed dead and a third man A Thangarajah is in hospital with serious injuries. Local people fear further reprisals.

Government officials are anxious to use NGOs to push ahead with resettlement in the east, targeting isolated Amparai District as the first option. NGOs say the military cannot simply declare areas "cleared" but must offer proper protection to those resettled. NGOs are now forbidden to provide assistance in uncleared areas. Almost 15,000 refugees remain in camps in Amparai and another 7,000 with rela-

tives. But Colombo insider columnist *Taraki* says the Tigers have a stranglehold on the district through their monsoon bases in the Kanchikudichchi Aru jungles south west of Thirukovil serviced by Sinhalese *ganja* farmers. LTTE avoid major confrontations unless a base is threatened. One Special Task Force police commando was killed and four injured in a landmine attack near Bakmityawa on 15 September.

Back in Batticaloa, the drought is increasingly serious and medical facilities in many areas are at a standstill. Valaichenai hospital has no medicines and the Out Patient Department which treats 500 people a day is overwhelmed. A Tamil youth ST Kirubairajah shot dead in Chenkalady by soldiers on 12 September while trying to escape, was a LTTE suspect say military sources. Tamil-Muslim tensions in coastal areas remain high after a new armed Muslim group, the Mujahadeen Guerrilla Movement surfaced in Kattankudy.

Further north in Trincomalee District almost 200 Muslim families resettled around Kuchchuveli want to leave after increasing LTTE activity in the area. Military sources say 10 guerrillas were killed in an attack on the LTTE's major base on the Trincomalee-Batticaloa border near Angodavillu. In a dawn offensive Tiger cadre killed a policeman and three Home Guards at Sabinagar police station in Kattaiparichchan on the south side of Koddigar Bay on 28 September.

# Killing zone

**THE Kilali ferry run across the Jaffna lagoon is the LTTE's lifeline and the civilian's deathtrap. For the Tigers it gives access to Kilinochchi's rich rice fields and to fuel and weapons caches deep in the Mullaitivu jungles. For the civilian it is the only exit from Jaffna to collect money from relatives abroad or to seek hospital treatment for aged parents. Sri Lankan military authorities say the crossing is illegal and travellers will be shot on sight. Over 200 have been killed in air and Navy attacks this year. In one attack in January which killed 50, a man feigned death while sailors boarded boats mutilating dead bodies to steal jewellery. Another 17 people drowned in August when their boat capsized during shelling. Defence sources in Colombo usually describe the attacks as clashes with the LTTE. As the sun went down on Kilali on 6 September, a lone helicopter circled lazily watching hundreds of people waiting for cover of darkness for the night run to Nallur. Over 80 boats set out flanked as usual by armed *Sea Tigers* in high speed launches. A survivor told Colombo Tamil newspaper *Virakesari* what happened next. "About half-way we heard two helicopters and saw searchlights probing the darkness. Suddenly there was firing from every direction. People were screaming. I was sure we would sink. The driver was killed and five people wounded. When we reached Nallur at midnight another aircraft attacked us killing one and injuring four". Only 25 boats reached Nallur that night and seven people were killed and 20 wounded.**

**Sri Lankan Presidential Adviser Bradman Weerakoon in Geneva recently for an International Conference on the Protection of War Victims eloquently insisted that governments must take responsibility for the actions of their agents and deny them immunity. He said nothing however about Kilali.**

## DB's gambit

PRESIDENT DB Wijetunge's repeated assertion in early September that there is no ethnic problem in Sri Lanka only a terrorist problem, already signalled a new hard-line consensus in the south to pursue the military option. Tamils predictably reacted with outrage. Moderate political party TULF sent Mr Wijetunge a seven-page history lesson deploring the lack of political will to stop the war. Colombo Tamil politician Kumar Ponnambalam called for "showpiece Tamils" like Deputy Mayor K Ganeshalingam to quit the ruling United National Party (UNP).

Mr Wijetunge has dissolved the military's Joint Operations Command (JOC) structure making General Hamilton Wanasinghe Defence Secretary and head of a Joint Committee of service chiefs to run the war in the north-east. This gives planning back to the military and greater

autonomy to field commanders. A recruitment drive last month has successfully inducted 10,000 new recruits.

Tourism minister and Plantation Tamils' leader, 81 year-old Mr S Thondaman again offered to initiate peace talks with the LTTE in Jaffna. After a meeting with LTTE's International Representative Lawrence Thilagar in Paris, Mr Thondaman says the separatist Tigers will settle for federalism. Parliamentary Speaker MH Mohamed offered to join Mr Thondaman in Jaffna and called for an interim council for North-East Province that would include LTTE as a first step to peace. Colombo Tamil newspaper *Virakesari* says President Wijetunge has agreed to back Mr Thondaman's proposals if the military has made no progress in three months time. It depends what is meant by progress and at what price.



## TAMILS TARGETED AS COLOMBO SECURITY CRACKDOWN CONTINUES

# The hit-list

COLOMBO'S *Sunday Times* says police in the city now have a quota system for Tamil arrests and that they are targeting wealthy youths at leading schools and prospering businesses as the LTTE threat to the city continues.

Over 8,000 Tamils have been arrested in Colombo since the assassination of President Premadasa on 1 May. A police spokesman denied that patrols were expected to make a certain number of arrests every day and said that those who were innocent were released after 24 hours. Sources say between 500 to 1,000 Tamils remain in police custody at any given time. Another 960 are in Kalutara and Magazine prisons near Colombo, many held without charge for over two years. A new report by the government's Human Rights Task Force (HRTF) says the Army has detained 2,224 people mostly Tamils in the north-east war zone.

Colombo police announced another 400 arrests in a series of night raids in early September. Tamil moderate party

TULF in a memorandum to President DB Wijetunge condemned "the indiscriminate and mass arrests" of Tamils in Colombo and human rights organisation MIRJE has launched a new legal aid programme for detainees and their relatives.

Over 100,000 north-east Tamils have fled to friends and relatives among the 150,000 who make up Colombo's 700,000 population offering ideal cover for LTTE bomb squads to infiltrate the city say police. Over 60 Tigers with assigned targets are said to be in custody and 25 female LTTE on intelligence-gathering missions. Two suspected Tiger cadre opened fire on Navy personnel near Colombo harbour on 8 September before being overpowered.

Financial extortion by police to secure a detainee's release is endemic which is why the Colombo Tamil upper classes are now actively targeted. North-east families who send their sons to Colombo will pay Rs 400,000 (\$10,000) to "refugee runner" agencies to arrange their escape to

Western countries with false papers. Every Tamil arrival in the capital is a potential escapee to be squeezed by the city's police. Over 200,000 Tamils have fled Sri Lanka since the June 1990 war - 50,000 to the West.

Almost every week Colombo police declare a new LTTE alert in the capital. After a communique saying Batticaloa explosives expert *Balan* was in the city, police units swooped on Tamils enjoying an early morning walk on Wellawatte beach on 11 September arresting 30. A police spokesman said it was people's duty to prove that they were not Tigers. Another 97 Tamils from Jaffna and Mannar in Modera refugee camp near Colombo harbour for over three years were arrested by police on 22 September.

While the LTTE threat to the capital is real, Colombo police now seem to have their own agenda firmly fixed on intimidation, profiteering and settling personal scores. In a capital and a nation divided it is bound to backfire.

## A less than ideal situation

OVER 7,000 Sri Lankan Tamils have returned by ship to Trincomalee since mid-August in the latest phase of India's controversial repatriation programme. But NGOs say many have been coerced to go back by deteriorating conditions in Tamil Nadu refugee camps and direct pressure from Indian officials.

SC Chandrasaran of Madras NGO OFERR says officials abused refugees who refused to register for the return programme, threatening to suspend their meagre food allowance or to send them to special camps or sub-jails where 200 are currently held. Over 73,000 Sri Lankan refugees live in 130 camps across Tamil Nadu while another 150,000 live outside, many dependent on remittances from Western countries.

India says the return programme is voluntary and monitored by United Nations refugee agency UNHCR. But Tamil Nadu's state government has refused both NGOs and UNHCR access to refugee camps and deliberately allowed conditions to deteriorate. American human rights agency *Asia Watch* cited NGOs' exclusion from the camps as "implicit coercion" and urged India to suspend the repatriation in a

hard-hitting report released in early September. Ironically, this phase of the programme ended a few days later because of the incipient north-west monsoon. Over 36,000 Sri Lankans have been repatriated from India since January 1992.

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

*Asia Watch* believes that if refugees knew conditions in north-east Sri Lanka, they would refuse to return. NGOs are increasingly disillusioned with the UN's role in legitimating the programme and say it is ignoring its international mandate to protect refugees.

"The right to return is as important as the right to exile" says UNHCR's deputy New Delhi's representative Rajiv Kapur. UNHCR only has access to check a sample of returnees for a few hours at the point of departure. Over 30 Mannar families refused to leave buses at Madras harbour for over 24 hours in late August until they were allowed to go back to Mandapam - one of the tougher and more notorious Tamil Nadu camps.

UNHCR's flagship publication *Refugees* says returnees know they face "a less than ideal situation and have weighed the risks involved". A large number in Sri Lanka insist they are now better off says the August edition.

With no access to Indian refugee camps and limited operational ability to monitor returnees in Sri Lanka, some NGOs regard UNHCR's present posturing on repatriation as either bad conscience or complicity.