

Tiger hunt in Colombo

HUMAN RIGHTS NGOs fear a new spate of disappearances and extra-judicial killings after 2,000 Tamils were arrested in Colombo in October, in a new police drive against suicide squads from the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) seeking high-profile targets in the capital.

Police smashed an LTTE cell in the Modera suburbs in mid-October, after a body-belt bomb of the kind used to assassinate President Premadasa was found on the beach. Among those arrested were top LTTE cadre *Jude Jayaprakash* and *Fernando* who told police that another nine Tiger suicide bombers were primed on the route of Mr Premadasa's May Day rally if the first assassin failed.

Over 300 of the LTTE's elite *Black Tiger* commandos have died in suicide attacks in the last seven years joining the pantheon of LTTE martyrs or *maha veerar*. Police believe hundreds of LTTE cadre have penetrated the capital among the 100,000 Tamil refugees who have fled the north since the June 1990 war.

Hours after the Modera arrests, police rounded up 500 Tamils from the Colombo and Negombo suburbs detaining 100 LTTE suspects including 49 women. Police now seek LTTE armourer *Magendran* and former policeman *Muthukumar Mahendran* said to coordinate the Tigers' Colombo offensive. Press headlines warned of LTTE suicide squads "prowling" the capital as police and Army units threw a new security cordon around the city. Over 500 student lodges and cheap hotels housing northern Tamil refugees are under constant surveillance.

The arrests continue at the rate of 50-100 a day, with between 1,000 and 2,000 held in ten detention centres across the city. Police say the innocent are held for less than 24 hours. Tamil MPs and

NGOs fear new death squads active

human rights NGOs say the five major safeguards agreed in June to protect Tamils arrested are systematically ignored and there are ominous signs that the unofficial death-squads that characterised the previous regime are again active.

A joint statement from 17 Sri Lankan human rights NGOs says unidentified gangs remove suspects blindfolded in the middle of the night without informing relatives who they are or where they are taking those detained. TULF MP *Suresh Premachandran* told Parliament on 21 October that Tamil youths were being abducted from *Kotahena* and *Wellawatte* by armed men in unmarked vehicles.

This is reminiscent says an Amnesty International statement of government measures during the recent *Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna* (JVP) insurgency in the south, when thousands of people "disappeared" in custody through lack of procedural safeguards on arrest and detention. *Harihan* and *Sadeswaran* aged 13, two of six Tamils identified by Amnesty as unacknowledged arrests are still missing.

Sources say the Directorate of Military Intelligence (DMI) reporting only to Army chief Lt. Gen. *Cecil Waidyaratne* has a brief to clear Colombo of the terrorist threat using death squad veterans and Tamil mercenaries. A shadowy DMI unit operating out of *Ragama* a few miles north of Colombo includes *Richard Dias* alias *Captain Munas* implicated in the disappearance of 158 Tamils from a Batticaloa refugee camp in 1990, *Mohan* a former PLOTE cadre whose Army-backed death squad terrorised Batticaloa for the last three years and former PLOTE cadre

Uma Prakash recruited from exile in Tamil Nadu with 20 of his followers.

Those with eastern connections may have scores to settle. *Easterneers Ravindrarajah* and *Ravi* from the Tamil

group EPRLF were found in *Negombo* with their throats cut in mid-October. There is an emerging pattern of operations. A Tamil youth abducted from an *Armour Street* lodge by men in a white van without number plates was held blindfolded for ten days and interrogated in pure Tamil. He was released near *Hulftsdorp* on 24 October. Others speak of similar experiences. *Ragama* seems a focus for such "reappearances". Four Tamils were dumped blindfolded in the town and another two in Colombo. Ununiformed men including Tamils stopped the *Vavuniya-Colombo* train at *Ragama* on 31 October arresting 20 Tamil men and 15 women.

Suspicion falls heavily on young male detainees in police custody who have no Colombo relatives to make official enquiries over their release. Most are young Tamils fleeing the increasing brutalization of the conflict. To the police they are Tigers on a mission. Over 30 of the LTTE suspects arrested in mid-October are said to be former Tigers seeking an escape route to the West.

While the government agreed this month to allow the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to visit over 800 LTTE suspects held for over two years without trial in *Magazine* and *Kalutara* prisons, there is no effective monitor for the flood of new detainees.

Amnesty International has called for the government to honour the five safeguards for those arrested, agreed with Prime Minister *Ranil Wickremasinghe* in June; police receipts issued to relatives or employees for those arrested from homes or workplaces; women detainees to be accompanied by male relatives; those set free to be issued with a certificate of release; available registration forms for North-East Tamils arriving in Colombo; police statements written and signed by detainees in their own language. Amnesty also says arrests by plain-clothes officers must cease and that there should be reasonable grounds for detention. There must be no return, human rights NGOs say, to the dark days of the death squads.

United Nations refugee agency UNHCR has suspended operations in LTTE-controlled areas of northern Sri Lanka after 8,000 Tamils at *Madhu*, the island's largest refugee camp, staged a day-long demonstration on 30 October. The government has cut off food aid to force the refugees back to Army-controlled villages further south. UNHCR says it is powerless to intervene. Others say the demonstrations are orchestrated by the Tigers. Refugees at risk or political pawns? The *Madhu* revolt on page three.

THE NORTH

In the wake of *Yal Devi*

LTTE ideologue Anton Balasingham told visiting journalists in Jaffna that after the Army's *Yal Devi* offensive on the peninsula in early October, the Tigers were mobilising for all-out war and would solve the Tamil problem on the battlefield. The government's bellicose attitude was the main stumbling block to peace said Mr Balasingham and its consistent refusal to forward proposals for negotiations.

The road to Kilali in the wake of *Yal Devi* is a black ribbon of burned-out homes and villages. Over 50,000 people were displaced by the offensive and between 100 and 200 were killed. The Army's objective, the Tigers' strategic ferry crossing and vital supply line from Kilali to the mainland, remains operational and over 1,000 civilians crossed in a flotilla of 50 boats escorted by LTTE high-speed launches on 10 October. *Sea Tiger* units clashed with three Navy boats off Kilali on 19 October.

Sporadic shelling of Jaffna's one million beleaguered civilian population continues from Army positions at Palaly and the islands west of the peninsula. After *Yal Devi*, a new LTTE recruitment drive is in full swing with posters in Jaffna town telling people to prepare for full-scale war.

A new strain of cholera menacing Jaffna is being blamed on returning refugees from India. Described as "Bengali Cholera", there are now over 500 cases and nine have died. Heavy

rains in the peninsula increase the threat of epidemic. United Nations refugee agency UNHCR escorted another batch of 89 returnees to Kilinochchi in mid-October where it is promoting rehabilitation projects. The Tigers have refused UNHCR permission to take Mannar returnees home by road from camps in Vavuniya.

The government's new fishing ban has hit Mannar's population hard. Over 170 fishermen were intercepted by the Navy off Thalvupadu on Mannar Island and handed over to the police. There is no flour or sugar in the shops and fish sells at Rs 60 a kilo as military curfew continues. Bicycles and pedestrians are banned on the flashpoint Pesalai road after LTTE attacks. On the mainland, 300 families prematurely resettled in Vankalai remain virtual hostages surrounded by security forces in the coastal foothold of Army-controlled territory.

As the security crisis grows in Colombo, sources say the government will activate plans to push northern refugees in the capital back to Vavuniya. There are continuing reports of disappearances in Vavuniya District. Rasiah Rajeswaran of NGO *Lanka Seva* was abducted and questioned by six armed men before being released three days later. Pandarikulam on the outskirts of Vavuniya was cordoned off by security forces on 14 October and the inhabitants paraded in front of *talaiyati* or masked informers for hours in heavy rain.

Missing

The Annual Report of the government's Human Rights Task Force (HRTF) released on 29 September, says 2,351 people were reported to have disappeared in north-east areas in the last 12 months. HRTF has traced 114 in security forces' custody.

Disaster

Over 50 people were killed and 20,000 made homeless after landslides and heavy rains in Ratnapura south-east of Colombo on 8 October.

Appeal

The LTTE appealed to the Commonwealth Leaders Summit in Cyprus in mid-October for recognition of the Tamil right to self determination. LTTE leader Prabhakaran is willing to accept federalism said the communique.

Review

Japan's Foreign Ministry will review its funding of the projected Colombo to Katunayake airport highway which will forcibly displace 10,000 people says Sri Lanka Environment Foundation Chairman Ravi Algama.

Outcry

Police headquarters in Colombo has received a spate of letters alleging financial extortion by policemen to release Tamil suspects arrested in security sweeps in the capital, a senior officer told journalists in late October.

Political theatre in Tamil Nadu

Y GOPALASAMY, a senior member of the opposition DMK in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu was sacked by the party's leader M Karunanidhi in early November ending a year of verbal warfare. Gopalasamy, a LTTE confidante, has been accused of plotting with the Tigers to assassinate Karunanidhi. The Gopalasamy faction within DMK says the conspiracy claim was invented by Karunanidhi who in turn blames central government intelligence agencies for engineering the split. Leader of the ruling AIADMK party and Chief Minister Jayalalitha has ordered police protection for Karunanidhi.

Analysts say Gopalasamy was expelled to pre-empt a future challenge to Karunanidhi's son DMK youth wing

chief MK Stalin succeeding his father. Another of Karunanidhi's sons MK Alagiri is being actively promoted.

Jayalalitha's former colleague and Tamil Nadu Janata Party leader VS Chandralekha has petitioned Governor Chenna Reddy demanding the removal of the state government. She accuses Jayalalitha of failing to smash LTTE activity in sensitive coastal areas.

Governor Reddy met Indian President Sharma in mid-October to discuss Jayalalitha and to table a 200-page report on the worsening law-and-order situation in Tamil Nadu. The relationship between the ruling AIADMK and Mr Reddy further deteriorated after Revenue Minister SD Somasundaram accused him of acting like a "Super Chief Minister". The previ-

ous DMK government under Karunanidhi was dissolved by New Delhi in January 1991, alleging that the LTTE threat to law-and-order was destabilising all of India. Analysts say the split in the DMK is a welcome bonus for Jayalalitha but she will be again under pressure from the centre if Congress (I) forges an alliance with one of the factions. This seems unlikely for the present.

Tension remains high in the Palk Strait after the Sri Lankan Navy shot dead four Indian fishermen near the disputed Kachchativu Island west of Jaffna on 8 October. Foreign Secretary Bernard Tillekeratne flew to New Delhi to placate his powerful neighbour. India has in turn released over 30 Sri Lankan fishermen arrested off the Laccadives a month ago.

■ Army claims new successes against Tigers

Wijetunge plans January elections in the East

REITERATING his political credo that there was no ethnic problem in Sri Lanka only a terrorist problem, President DB Wijetunge announced that local government elections will be held in the East in January, followed by a referendum on the continued merger of North and East provinces.

Batticaloa MP Prince Casinader condemned Mr Wijetunge's stance as an attempt to conceal the legitimate nature of the Tamil struggle. Elections without a political solution were an "absurd comedy" and a cover for Sinhalese colonisation said Mr Casinader.

Army spokesmen claim a new string of successes in the east killing over 70 suspected LTTE guerrillas in the last two months. Sri Lankan soldiers overran a

key Tiger base at Angodavillu on the Trincomalee border in mid-October killing three LTTE and recovering arms and ammunition. Another six LTTE died in an Army raid on a Tiger landing point at Verugal. But the military retains only uneasy control over the eastern coastal strip while the hinterland, notably west of Batticaloa lagoon remains in Tiger hands.

Another 1,000 LTTE cadre have infiltrated the east admits the Army, over 200 in urban areas. Intensive cordon-and-search operations are underway in Batticaloa town to prepare for the January elections. LTTE Amparai political leader *Kunju Master* was killed by Sri Lankan forces at Parakodichchenai in Batticaloa on 16 October. Large-scale

cordon-and-search operations in Amparai continue in Tamil areas around Thirukovil, Alayadivembu and Karaitivu.

LTTE tax collector *Sudakaran* was cornered by police in Eravur before he could take cyanide. The Tigers use students to deliver letters to Batticaloa businessmen demanding Rs 10,000 (\$250). Three boys were arrested in early October. Fishermen are taxed at Rs 100 per boat per week. Over 10,000 acres of farmland west of Eravur lie uncultivated as the Tigers and the military vie for control. Community leaders have called for relief assistance for farmers.

Over 80 refugees forced out of a Colombo camp in July are stranded in Valaichenai with no food aid for the last two months. Local officials say they have been paid a settling in allowance and that they are not their responsibility. The refugees refuse to return to Vadamunai while Army operations continue. Refugees being "resettled" get Rs 4,000 and three months food stamps, then they must fend for themselves.

Further north in Trincomalee, LTTE raids and Army operations continue. Tiger units attacked an Army post at Muthur on 3 October killing three soldiers. Another five are missing. Four LTTE died in an Army ambush at Sundankadu, two weeks later. In a major operation south of Yan Oya, Sri Lankan forces stormed an LTTE camp in mid-October killing eight and recovering arms and ammunition. Policeman Ajith Jayantha died in a LTTE ambush near Pulmoddai on 25 October.

Revolt at Madhu

UNITED NATIONS refugee agency UNHCR has suspended operations in LTTE-controlled areas of northern Sri Lanka after thousands of Tamils staged violent demonstrations on 30 October at Madhu, the island's largest refugee camp 30 miles west of Vavuniya. UNHCR refused to intervene after the government cut off food aid to 8,000 of the camp's 30,000 population from 1 November to force them back to Army-controlled villages around Cheddikulam further south. UN camp officials withdrew to Vavuniya after ten hours trapped in their office while Mannar Government Agent K Ganesh negotiated a two-week rations lifeline for the angry refugees. Since June successive government ultimatums have failed to force the refugees out. Army spokesmen in Vavuniya claim many want to return but are virtual hostages of the Tigers who are orchestrating the protest. NGOs say few refugees in Tiger areas trust the military sufficiently to return home to Army-controlled villages while the war rages. Over 10,000 at Madhu fled three years ago when government forces razed Cheddikulam to the ground beheading 25 people after LTTE attacks in the area. But the LTTE will also lose food aid, local labour and new recruits if they allow free movement south.

The Madhu crisis is another setback for UNHCR whose operational capacity and objectives in Sri Lanka have been questioned. Lauded at international conferences as the pioneer of the "safe haven" concept, Madhu shows how difficult it is to protect refugees inside a war-zone on a long-term basis. It also reveals a new hard-line stance by both combatants. NGOs working in the north have been under increasing pressure from Tiger directives. The military clearly regard sending food aid across the front-line as madness. In the words of one disillusioned Army officer they can never win if they go on feeding the Tigers and then fighting them.

Hill Country strikes

PLANTATION trade unions are up in arms over the reduction in the number of days' work offered to workers by the 22 private companies currently managing the tea estates. A series of strikes has paralysed many estates. In late October 10,000 workers in the Hatton area stopped work demanding 25 days guaranteed employment a month. Managing companies contend that world tea prices remain static and the work force is too large. Banks are reluctant to provide investment because the five-year management lease ends in 1997.

Ceylon Workers Congress President and Tourism Minister Mr S Thondaman wants new talks on workers' conditions as promised by erstwhile President Premadasa before companies' leases are

extended. Mr Thondaman's close link with Mr Premadasa has affected his relations with the new government and reports say a group within the ruling UNP is demanding his removal.

Mr Thondaman has also written to President Wijetunge regarding the arrests of Plantation youth in Colombo. Police have searched many towns and estates in the Hill Country and arrested a number of people. Seven Tamils were detained in Matale town on 11 October. Eighteen youths from Bambarakelle Estate in Nuwara Eliya were taken into custody in late October. US ambassador Teresita Scheffer told the government's Human Rights Task Force in Badulla that more effort was needed to trace Tamil youths disappeared in the Hill Country.

Tamil hunger strikers protest over deportations

Colombo unsafe for refugee returns say Euro MPs

AFTER meeting President Wijetunge, a European Parliament delegation including British Euro MP Anita Pollack told the Colombo press on 6 October that the current situation in Sri Lanka was not conducive for Western governments to return rejected asylum-seekers.

Many European governments have been considering such returns encouraged by a UNHCR statement in June which tacitly endorses an internal flight alternative in Colombo and the south provided the returnees have relatives or previous residence in the area. The Swiss government is negotiating a pioneer programme of organised returns which Sri Lanka is reluctantly examining. Talks are underway with Colombo NGOs to run camps for the returnees. Tamil refugee camps in the capital are quietly being cleared to provide facilities. Nearly 400 refugees from the east were evicted from Modera camp on 4 October and returned to Batticaloa. Another 100 refused to return and are living on the street.

Other European countries are testing

the ground. Over 150 Tamils launched a hunger strike in Sweden after two Tamils refused asylum were deported on 6 October and detained by police in Negombo on return. A Swedish government delegation was dispatched hurriedly to Colombo to review current policy. A week later, 17 year-old Markandu Jeyarajah was forced on to an aircraft by French police at Roissy airport and returned to Sri Lanka. Refugee workers say Sri Lankan and other asylum-seekers at Roissy are increasingly refused their right to apply for asylum and are quietly deported in a matter of hours - a disturbing trend accelerating across Europe.

Over 200,000 Sri Lankans have applied for asylum in European countries since 1980. Less than 2% receive full refugee status, most acquiring only temporary protection to be rescinded when conditions in Sri Lanka improve. With 500,000 refugee arrivals in Europe last year, many countries are pushing ahead with a two-track refugee procedure allowing them to screen out applicants

from countries with safe areas or "internal flight alternatives" or those who have passed through designated "safe third countries". Rising racism within Europe is making governments nervous. Dharmalingam Rajeswaran from Mandaitivu and his wife and two children were burned alive in a right-wing arson attack in Saarbrücken, Germany in early October.

Ironically, figures for Sri Lankan asylum-seekers this year have dropped by 50% to a projected 12,000 suggest country reports submitted to the biannual general meeting of Europe's refugee councils, the European Consultation on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) in Geneva in early October. But many countries like Switzerland with growing social problems with refugees have already targeted the Tamils. NGOs reaffirmed their opposition to returning rejected asylum-seekers to Sri Lanka at a special UNHCR meeting in Geneva on 29 September and urged the UN refugee agency to actively monitor those sent back.

Anura turns the tables

OPPOSITION politician Anura Bandaranaike has resigned from the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and in a shock move, agreed to join the ruling United National Party (UNP) in late October. His defection is part of a long-running dynastic struggle with his mother SLFP leader Sirimavo Bandaranaike who wants her daughter Chandrika to succeed her. Anura's father SWRD Bandaranaike founded the SLFP in 1952 after resigning from the UNP which he helped to form. Other Anura supporters are expected to follow weakening further the crisis-ridden SLFP. Pundits say a UNP MP will step down to let Anura enter Parliament and that he may preside over a new Ministry of External Resources.

The defection is a welcome distraction for the UNP reeling in a storm of criticism after the *Yal Devi* Jaffna offensive. If *Yal Devi* was Mr Wijetunge's opening bid to be presidential candidate in the December 1994 elections then he needs a string of military successes to put this behind him. Army chief Lt. Gen. Cecil Waidyaratne incensed by armchair critics has called for new Emergency regulations imposing military censorship after

journalists refuted his claim that the LTTE's strategic ferry operations at Kilali had been smashed. Sri Lanka's Free Media Movement protested to President Wijetunge after Lt. Gen. Waidyaratne reportedly telephoned

Colombo's *Sunday Times* threatening to have journalist Iqbal Athas burned on rubber tyres - the signature of government death squads during the JVP insurrection period.

Peace talks with the LTTE seem ever more distant despite Parliamentary Speaker MH Mohamed's admission that no military solution was possible. Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe visiting US State Department officials in Washington insisted that the government was open to discussions with the LTTE but official overtures had been rejected by the separatists.

Sri Lanka's Court of Appeal has invalidated the appointment of two UNP Chief Ministers for Southern and North Western Province in May's Provincial Council elections in favour of opposition alliance candidates. Two people were shot dead and 15 injured during riots in Galle on 12 October after Southern Province's Governor Bakeer Markar delayed the swearing-in of Mr Amarasiri Dodangoda as Chief Minister. Governor Markar has refused to resign claiming he was acting on "orders from above".

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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ISSN 0955-5943

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