

The Sri Lanka Monitor

No 74

March 1994

Produced by the British Refugee Council

UNP stumbles in the south

SRI LANKA'S ruling United National Party (UNP) stumbled to a shock defeat in Southern Provincial Council elections on 24 March putting President DB Wijetunge's political future in doubt and increasing speculation of an opposition revival in forthcoming presidential and general elections.

Suddenly the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) opposition coalition or People's Alliance (PA) is a credible contender after winning 32 of the 53 seats and an unprecedented 54% of the vote. Proportional representation prevented a rout. The UNP would have won only one seat in a first-past-the-post system, significantly in former President Premadasa's home town of Balapitiya.

A revitalised opposition led by Mrs Chandrika Kumaranatunge monitored every polling station to prevent electoral fraud and successfully rallied the youth vote through the *Janatha Mithuro*, one of the successors of the Sinhalese Marxist insurgent People's Liberation Front (JVP) who have renounced the politics of violence.

Mr Premadasa's legacy is under intensive reevaluation in the aftermath. President Wijetunge's openly chauvinist campaign call to break the power of the minorities in national politics was received with boredom or bewilderment in the south. Caste and class were more important.

The dismantling of Mr Premadasa's populist anti-poverty programmes, the restoration of Kandyan high-caste Goyigama hegemony in the UNP, the studied arrogance of party heavyweights, the opportunism of new recruits Anura Bandaranaike and Gamini Dissanayake all alienated the electorate.

UNP party bosses now plan to relaunch Mr Wijetunge in the former President's populist mantle in a lavish May Day rally on the first anniversary of

Mr Premadasa's assassination and to tone down his anti-Tamil rhetoric. But the damage is considerable. Mr Wijetunge's strict Kandy schoolmaster persona and his obsession with breaking the power of Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) leader Mr S Thondaman in the Hill Country make him a growing liability.

July general elections are now too risky and back-stage manoeuvres are already underway to sideline Mr Wijetunge before presidential elections must be held in December. A three-way struggle for the UNP presidential nomination is likely between Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe, Gamini Dissanayake and UNP General Secretary Sirisena Cooray, high priest of Mr Premadasa's memory.

For the opposition, the emergence of Mrs Bandaranaike's daughter Chandrika Kumaranatunge as a charismatic leader drawing huge crowds at the southern polls makes her a visible presidential contender. Whether Mr Wijetunge and Mrs Bandaranaike at the apex of Sri Lanka's political gerontocracy will meekly step aside is a more open question.

In a bout of pre-positioning Mrs Kumaranatunge reassured the business community that she will retain Sri Lanka's open economy if elected while Kandy MP Lakshman Kiriella said a SLFP government will invite the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) for peace talks on a federal constitution based on the Indian model.

But before the elections, there will be war rather than peace. Military analysts predict that new Sri Lankan Army commander Lt.Gen. Gerry de Silva will open his account with a high profile but cautious offensive north of Vavuniya after Tamil and Sinhalese New Year in mid-April. The Tigers are also preparing major new attacks to blight the UNP's election prospects, northern sources say.

Both sides are probing. The LTTE launched a further attack in late March on the strategic Elephant Pass camp

that links the Jaffna peninsula to the mainland, losing over 50 cadre, defence sources claim. Three soldiers died in a Tiger ambush near Pooneryn, the scene of a major LTTE victory last November. Another two soldiers were killed in a mortar attack in the flashpoint Weli Oya area. Amid reports of a LTTE build-up Sri Lankan forces attacked a Tiger camp north-east of Omathai in early March killing six cadre in a three-day operation.

Indiscriminate shelling and air and sea attacks on the Jaffna peninsula have continued. One civilian was killed and six injured in shelling from Army positions on Mandaitivu in early March. Thondamanaru was hit by air strikes two weeks later and three civilians killed and others injured in Murasumodai. Four fishermen were killed and six injured after a Sri Lankan Navy attack off Nagarkovil.

A good-will visit to Jaffna on 1 April by Parliamentary Speaker MH Mohammed was cancelled at the last moment for "logistical reasons" - in case Mr Mohammed's helicopter shuttle to Jaffna town fell into enemy hands. Mr Mohammed held extensive discussions with LTTE international representative Lawrence Thilagar in Paris in preparation. The visit would have been the first high-level contact between the warring parties since June 1990.

The preliminaries indicated few signs of compromise. At a diplomatic briefing in Colombo in mid-March the government again reiterated its three preconditions for peace talks: LTTE to renounce violence; all-party participation including Tamil parties; participation of LTTE leader Prabhakaran. The Tigers currently view all three as unrealistic and obstructive.

Mr Mohammed's other assignment in Jaffna would have been to plead the case of over 60,000 Tamil Muslims expelled *en masse* from the north in October 1990 by a 24-hour LTTE ultimatum. Most left with little more than the clothes on their backs. Four years later, over 40,000 remain in abject poverty in run-down refugee camps on the Kalpitiya peninsula north of Colombo. Another forgotten casualty of this forgotten war.

International aid agencies working in the war-torn north are under increasing pressure from tough new Tiger policies to "coordinate" NGO work. Local staff have been threatened, diesel syphoned from lorries and aid convoys searched and "taxed". NGOs fear that in future they will be told where to work, how much to spend and who to employ. The LTTE opens a new economic front on page two.

THE NORTH

Payday at Puliyankulam

INTERNATIONAL aid agencies running food convoys and relief programmes in the war-torn north are under increasing pressure from tough new Tiger policies threatening to take over their work.

In the latest of a series of incidents on 10 March, a convoy from international refugee agency UNHCR was stopped at a new Tiger checkpoint three miles south of Puliyankulam where Mullaitivu cadre demanded Rs 2,500 (\$60) tax and Rs 250 "checking fee" per lorry. Ten days later an International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) convoy was stalled at Puliyankulam for 12 hours after refusing to pay. Three months supply of vaccines for Kilinochchi hospital were spoiled.

Private traders pay the same Tiger taxes plus 20% of the value of the load. Another Rs 10,000 per lorry goes to Tamil group and Army ally PLOTE before they cross the Nochchimodai checkpoint north of Vavuniya into Tiger-controlled territory. Over 50 traders' lorries cross Nochchimodai every day.

The three-year military blockade of the north has generated a massive payday of millions of rupees a month for the Tigers and corrupt Army officers filtering contraband across the frontline. Over 40 staple goods including petrol, medicines and batteries are banned. Military advisers are currently urging President Wijetunge to lift the blockade and strangle the Tigers' cash flow.

In a joint letter to the LTTE's Central Committee delivered in early April, aid

agencies say humanitarian assistance should be exempt from the Tiger's tax regime and that non-governmental agencies (NGOs) must maintain their independence and ability to choose and implement their own projects.

There is growing pressure from LTTE for international NGOs in the north to work through local partner NGOs on Tiger-approved projects. Local staff have been threatened, diesel syphoned from vehicles and convoys searched.

The Tigers say as the de facto government they have the overview of local needs and priorities and are seeking only to "coordinate" NGO programmes. They point to Mullaitivu District where international NGOs are working in only six refugee camps close to Puthukudiyiruppu while there are another 20 camps desperately needing assistance further south in the Welioya area. NGOs fear that in the future they will be told where to work, how much to spend and who to employ.

The Tigers have looked long and hard at the \$1 million donated by the German government to the Jaffna-based Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation and almost \$1 million UNHCR plans to spend on "micro-projects" in Kilinochchi through American NGO Care International and perhaps decided it is time to take over. LTTE's Director of Finance *Kutti* has plans to introduce his own blockade banning a range of products from the south to boost local production. But if LTTE pushes the NGOs too hard, they cannot push back. They can only pull out.

Doors open: In a speech to mark International Women's Day broadcast on LTTE radio on 8 March Tiger leader Velupillai Prabhakaran urged Tamil women to join the military struggle but said the doors for peace talks with Colombo remained open. Sources report increasing recruitment of women cadre by LTTE in recent months.

Release: Upcountry People's Front leader P Chandrasekaran was released on bail on 18 March following his election as Provincial Councillor in Talawakelle last May. He has been in police custody since July 1991 accused of harbouring *Varadarajan* alleged LTTE bomb expert who destroyed Army Joint Operations Command (JOC) in Colombo killing 23 people and injuring 150.

Census '94: Sri Lanka's Census and Statistics Department say they will spend Rs 12 million on a national census in September but North-East Province will be excluded as "the situation is not conducive". Sri Lanka's last census was in 1981.

Going home: The first group of 129 Tamil refugees from India to voluntarily return to Jaffna arrived in Point Pedro in a government-chartered ship escorted by UNHCR officials in late March. LTTE videoed the arrival for propaganda purposes during lavish welcome ceremonies.

for a separate state

LTTE pressure on the NGO sector is also symptomatic of a wider process, what the Tigers call "progressive Eelamisation" or "step-by-step-Eelam" - the drive for a separate state. A unilateral declaration of independence is an irrelevance says Tiger strategy. *Eelam* is already a de facto reality - a *fait accompli* to be consolidated by vigorous institution-building, social engineering and absolute control of every aspect of social and material life.

The new smartly-uniformed LTTE police force and immaculately painted Tiger law courts stand out in stark contrast to the crumbling buildings and shabby civilians around them. Everywhere there are monuments to slain cadre who gave their lives for the

struggle - giant roadside portraits of martyrs hung with garlands and emblazoned with propaganda slogans.

Even in the smallest village this month, there are *pandals* or shrines to Mrs Poopathy Kanapathipillai who fasted to death in a Batticaloa temple six years ago after her son was killed by Sri Lankan police. The cult of martyrs is the engine of social control. Children in school study the LTTE's "New History" curriculum which glorifies the *veerar* - mythic warrior heroes of the great Tamil seaborne empires that stretched deep into South East Asia ten centuries ago. The past and the present are one.

The Tigers have also established their own Defence College to produce an elite officer corps schooled in military strate-

gy - the successors of the clandestine '70s study circles of young Jaffna militants poring over copies of Clausewitz and Sun Tzu. The first graduates featured in the victory at Pooneryn.

Colombo insider columnist *Taraki* says LTTE has "divorced" the West as well as the Sri Lankan government realising any external intervention can only shore up the unitary state. Prabhakaran has turned inward and will go it alone at whatever cost. Israel remains a powerful model; a war state surrounded by enemies, financed by exile capital, whose elder statesmen were "terrorists" in the '50s. As the diplomatic corps of an embryo *Eelam* would put it "the modalities of our relationship with other states will be clarified by future events".

■ 3,000 Sinhalese fishermen flee Kalpitiya

Ethnic cleansing in the west

OVER 3,000 Sinhalese migrant fishermen and their families fled the islands off the Kalpitiya peninsula in late March after a series of LTTE attacks left 27 fishermen dead and another 13 missing. Some of the dead were beheaded.

The Tigers are increasingly active south of Mannar's west coast, protecting their southern supply route from India off Kudremalai Point and threatening new targets like Puttalam Cement factory. There were fears of a backlash in Negombo, which has a substantial Tamil population, as the dead fisherman were buried.

The exodus will hit Kalpitiya's economy hard. The peninsula, 150 kms north of Colombo, houses 40,000 Tamil Muslim refugees expelled from Mannar

and the north by LTTE ultimatum in October 1990. Kalpitiya officials were warned again this month by LTTE communicate not to force the Muslims to return as the Army struggles to consolidate its foothold on Mannar Island.

Over 3,000 refugees returned to the island from India in mid-February in the latest phase of the controversial repatriation programme. United Nations refugee agency UNHCR monitoring the returnees, plans to spend Rs 7 Million (\$175,000) to improve the islands' infrastructure. Security remains uncertain. One returnee from India, Keyomer Dalima, was shot dead "by unknown persons" say local people too frightened to talk. LTTE cadre stormed Tharapuram police station on 9 March killing four

policemen and wounding 12 others. An island-wide search operation followed.

While the island remains cut off from LTTE-controlled Mannar mainland, 385 returnees from India were allowed to land at the Tiger port of Vidattaltivu in late March. Sri Lankan aircraft bombed the town on 12 March destroying six houses and damaging 20 others. Most of the Vidattaltivu returnees were heading for Madhu, Sri Lanka's largest refugee camp run by UNHCR who returned in mid-February after a four-month dispute with the Tigers over refugee rations and security. UNHCR will no longer escort government food convoys but concentrate on bringing in *cadjan* to replace thousands of camp roofs damaged in the December rains. Numbers at Madhu have fallen by 35% to around 20,000 as farmers return home for the *Maha* harvest.

LTTE control extends 20kms south almost to Cheddikulam and 30 kms east to Puvarasankulam, the objective of two recent Army advances from Vavuniya, 12 kms away. Over 200 Sri Lankan soldiers from Cheddikulam made a lightning raid on remote Periyakunchikulam 20 kms west on 28 March, killing two elderly civilians and taking two others hostage before withdrawing.

At Menik's rice mill in Cheddikulam 130 Tamil refugee families live under tight Army guard. They are "line-crossers" - families who have fled from LTTE-controlled areas through jungle gaps in the front line. It may be months or years before the military trusts them enough to let them go.

Identity crisis

RAVINDRAN is trapped. Refused asylum and deported from Britain over a year ago, he spends all day in the corner of one of the few Tamil refugee camps left in Colombo. He has no money and worse no National Identity Card (NIC). Without a NIC he is a non-person and a terrorist suspect. To replace his NIC involves re-writing a Kafka novel. Ravindran's Grama Sevaka or village officer must countersign his application to confirm his identity. But Ravindran is from a small village in the Jaffna peninsula and, despite the intervention of sympathetic NGOs, his village officer will not sign the form without seeing him in person. Without the identity card he cannot cross the Nochchimoddai checkpoint to Tiger-controlled territory - even if he wanted to. Colombo authorities will only accept an application from a family house in the city for a resident relative. Applications from the thousands of Tamils resident in cheap hotels, hostels and refugee camps in the capital are routinely refused. Swiss NGOs were in Colombo in March to monitor arrangements to deport hundreds of Tamils refused asylum in Switzerland. Many of them like Ravindran may be from the north and have no identity card. Authorities have promised a fast-track to regularise their documents and will provide a hostel in Nugegoda to help them find their feet. UNHCR will provide "passive monitoring". But Ravindran will stay in limbo.

The Swiss programme is designed as much to stem the flow of future asylum seekers from Sri Lanka. Already Swiss arrival figures have dropped by 50% this year and other European governments like Denmark and Holland are actively considering similar programmes before they become new targets of the Tamil exodus. Governments who deport people to a society at war owe them at the very least their identity and can and should intervene with relevant authorities. Ravindran might as well be in prison.

Reprisal

AFTER a bomb attack on an Army jeep at Palukamam in Batticaloa District, over 80 villagers were rounded-up and brutally attacked by soldiers on 23 March. T Mahendran, 22, suffered serious injuries. Police shot dead nine year-old Thanashantha Kanthasamy in Batticaloa town on the same day.

Batticaloa MP P Joseph told visiting US State Department official Robin Raphael in early April that the civil administration in the east remains under Army control despite the local elections. Tamil prisoners told a Sri Lanka Bar Association investigation team visiting Batticaloa that they had been tortured and forced to sign statements in Sinhala which they do not understand. A young woman from Kallar had been raped in custody.

Security in many areas has been tightened and new road checkpoints established. Defence sources say 19 Tigers were killed in an ambush on 16 March at Kathiraveli as the Army cordon around remote Eechilampathai enters its fifth month. Villagers cannot enter or leave the area without Army permission.

The government wants to push ahead with resettlement in the east. New North-East Governor Lionel Fernando has urged refugees to return to home areas and begin a new life. There are currently 4,692 refugees in eleven camps and 55,268 living with friends or relatives in Batticaloa District. Refugees from villages on the Polonnaruwa-Batticaloa border told a visiting opposition delegation that they could not go back without security guarantees.

NGOs call for human rights rapporteur on Sri Lanka

Geneva follies

ELEVEN NGOs urged the UN Human Rights Commission (UNHRC) at its Fiftieth Sessions in Geneva in March to examine continuing human rights violations in Sri Lanka and to appoint a Special Rapporteur to monitor the country's future performance. NGOs highlighted the plight of the internally displaced and the civilian population of northern Sri Lanka under economic blockade for the last three years. In another joint statement, 17 NGOs called on the UN Secretary General Boutros Ghali to promote peace by recognising the Tamils' right to self-determination.

The NGO lobby clearly unsettled the Sri Lankan government. Presidential Advisor Bradman Weerakoon told journalists in Colombo that pro-LTTE NGOs who signed the self-determination statement would shortly be named, leading to widespread speculation that either local or international NGOs working in Sri Lanka were among the signatories. This however proved to be untrue.

Addressing UNHRC on 7 March, Sri Lanka's Attorney General Tilak Marapana said Sri Lanka had acceded to

the UN Torture Convention and set up a mechanism to investigate disappearances before 1991. Emergency regulations relating to arrests had been revised and the UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial Executions would visit Sri Lanka later this year. Mr Marapana also promised to further revise Emergency regulations and to introduce new legislation on death certificates for missing persons and imprisonment for torture. As in the previous year, UNHRC's Chairman reiterated Sri Lanka's commitments in a further statement making them technically binding but un-enforceable, critics say.

Amnesty International says the impunity of Sri Lanka's security forces remains a major obstacle. Few soldiers or police have been prosecuted and those found guilty of human rights crimes receive only a modest fine usually paid by their superiors. In a new Sri Lanka report prepared for the UNHRC, Amnesty says several well-publicised government initiatives to improve human rights have still to be implemented especially the appointment of a Sri Lankan Human Rights Commission. New arrest

and detention procedures announced last year still permit lengthy detention. Safeguards such as issue of certificates of arrest and prompt notification of arrests to the Human Rights Task Force (HRTF) have been repeatedly flouted says Amnesty.

In a second report titled "New Emergency Regulations" Amnesty maintains the government has introduced new Emergency laws which have no bearing on public security concerns, such as the December 1993 regulation requiring registration of NGOs and monitoring of their finances. Emergency regulations governing post-mortem and inquests fail to provide adequate investigative procedures and could be used to cover-up illegal killings, according to Amnesty.

There is also growing disquiet in Colombo over President Wijetunge's recent decision to pardon two businessmen convicted of attempted homicide. In an article HRTF Chairman JFA Soza, Presidential Adviser Desmond Fernando and Colombo University Vice Chancellor GL Pieris say such cynicism openly encourages impunity.

Political pawns

KEY opposition politicians in Tamil Nadu have denounced the continuing repatriation of Sri Lankan refugees from south India calling for all-party agitation to end forcible returns.

Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) leader M Karunanidhi told thousands of Sri Lankan refugees at a rally on 2 April to celebrate the 96th birth anniversary of Sri Lankan Tamil leader SJV Chelvanayakam that there should be no repatriation until peace is restored in Sri Lanka.

New Delhi claims the repatriation is voluntary but many refugees say cut-backs in rations, schools and the deterioration of the camps leave them little option but to return. Over 70,000 refugees remain in government-run camps while another 110,000 live outside on remittances from relatives in Western countries. Last May India banned most NGOs from working in the camps closing them to external scrutiny. International refugee agency UNHCR monitoring the repatriation programme described conditions as "adequate" after a one-day visit to the Mandapam camp and says random interviews with refugee

families suggest they have no major complaints about camp conditions.

UNHCR Sri Lanka representative Hasim Utkan visiting Madras in February told reporters that if India and Tamil Nadu were more transparent about the repatriation there would be much less

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.

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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

criticism or fear. But since the Rajiv Gandhi assassination in May 1991 Sri Lankan refugees in Tamil Nadu are unwelcome guests. LTTE penetration of the south Indian state is now the most favoured battleground for the continuing political war between Madras and New Delhi.

Eight Tamil Nadu opposition parties sent a memorandum to Tamil Nadu Governor Dr M Channa Reddy on 16 March alleging Madras Chief Minister Jayalalitha had a secret nexus with LTTE allowing them free rein in the south through the collusion of senior security officials. DMK leader Karunanidhi maintained a stoic silence suggesting he is shifting his ground. Jayalalitha responded in characteristic fashion saying New Delhi had failed to release resources to combat terrorism and calling for a new two-year ban on the Tigers.

Since the Gandhi assassination Madras and New Delhi have routinely accused each other of covert links with the LTTE. Sri Lankan refugees in Tamil Nadu remain political pawns, trapped in a hostile landscape, frightened to go and frightened to stay.