

The battle for peace

Chandrika Kumaranatunge's new People's Alliance (PA) government is battling to keep the peace process with the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) on track after a series of military strikes by the Tigers and the Sri Lankan Army.

A four-strong government delegation led by former Jaffna Government Agent (GA) Lionel Fernando and Prime Minister Kumaranatunge's Secretary Balapatabendi, will fly to Jaffna in mid-October to open talks. The Tigers' negotiation team consists of deputy political leader *Karikalan*, former Jaffna commander *Dominic*, head of economic development *Ravi* and *Ilamparathy*, Jaffna political aide.

Analysts say the Tigers' agenda for the first round involves restoring electricity to Jaffna, opening up a safe travel route from the peninsula, lifting of the military blockade on the remaining 14 banned staple goods and the modalities for a ceasefire. Significant normalisation is essential before any real negotiations can take place says LTTE.

Jaffna GA Manickavasagar in Colombo with a 28-page memorandum of rehabilitation proposals said many Jaffna civilians were now buying 2.5kw generators to provide electricity since the government lifted part of the economic blockade last month. Over 10,000 bicycles were shipped to Jaffna in the last three weeks, the ban on batteries lifted and the Prime Minister - or Chandrika as she is known to all - has set up a nine-ministry rehabilitation task force for the North-East to bolster confidence-building.

Journalists visiting Jaffna in mid-September described the one million war-weary population's enthusiasm for peace as the "Chandrika season" with badges and bangles depicting the new Prime Minister everywhere amid the besieged city's permanent propaganda display of life-size cutouts of teenage fighters killed in battle.

But the prospect of peace talks is ringing alarm bells in the Sri Lankan military. PA State Defence minister Col

Anuruddha Ratwatte began a tour of front-line Army camps in early September to reassure the soldiers there would be no sell-out. During the 14 months of LTTE peace talks with President Premadasa beginning in 1989 the military was marginalised, confined to barracks and hundreds forced to surrender or killed when hostilities reignited in June 1990. Hardliners in Army high command say the Tigers are only buying a breathing space and that the price of 10,000 lives to mount a full-scale assault on the peninsula to smash the LTTE is worth paying in the long term.

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LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran in a long interview with the BBC in early September urged the Sri Lankan government to declare a ceasefire, maintaining the cessation of hostilities was essential for peace talks. He also called for the dismantling of the strategic Pooneryn Army base on Jaffna lagoon's south west shore to facilitate a safe civilian passage route through Sangupiddy

Over 100,000 people were refugees inside the peninsula said the LTTE leader. If the military withdrew from civilian areas like Valikamam north they could return home along with 80,000 Muslims in the south - expelled by LTTE ultimatum in October 1990. Observers speculate that in the second phase of the talks the Tigers will demand the resettlement of refugees in key areas across the north-east, where there are major military bases, to eat into Army-held territory.

Prabhakaran's ceasefire proposition was ominously underlined when LTTE Sea Tiger units sank the Sri Lankan Navy's largest ship the 40 metre 330 ton *Sagarawardene* in a suicide attack off Mannar Island on 21 September killing over 20 sailors and capturing its captain LT Comm Ajith Boyagoda. Six LTTE died in the explosion.

The Tigers are consolidating control of coastal areas south of Mannar opening a new front on Negombo and Colombo and securing their supply lines to south India. Over 20 fishermen disappeared after LTTE cadre intercepted their boats in four separate incidents off the Mannar coast a few days before the *Sagarawardene* attack.

The LTTE has kept up the pressure on the Pooneryn base. Defence sources claim over 35 LTTE cadre and three soldiers died in a major clash in early September. Elite Army long-range commando groups are pushing out from Pooneryn to forestall further attacks.

In late September the military advanced on Atchuvveli from its fragile foothold around Palaly in the Jaffna peninsula. A LTTE statement says 20 civilians died in the attack. Military sources claim 75 Tigers were killed in *Operation Jayahanda* and a training camp and a bunker complex destroyed. Jaffna civilians say the offensive was a reprisal for the *Sagarawardene* attack.

New Foreign minister and Colombo Tamil lawyer Lakshman Kadirgamar briefed the international community on Sri Lanka's peace plans at the United Nations General Assembly in New York in late September but refused UN mediation or intervention in a meeting with United Nations Secretary General Boutros Boutros Ghali.

India's attitude to the Jaffna talks remains uncertain after the humiliation and withdrawal of its peacekeeping force in 1989. With LTTE leader Prabhakaran one of the chief accused at the Rajiv Gandhi murder trial currently underway in Madras and Gandhi's widow, son and daughter being courted by the ruling Congress party, New Delhi will take some convincing.

THE NORTH

The Chandrika season

REPORTERS reaching Jaffna say a wave of enthusiasm is sweeping the peninsula for new Prime Minister Chandrika Kumaranatunge and her promise to end the 11-year war. Shops are offering "Chandrika bangles" and "Chandrika soap", as symbolic and material expressions of the yearning for peace.

The first confidence-building act of the government was to lift the ban on 28 of the 42 essential items to the north, including water pumps, fuel and medicine. However, local people say the Army still harasses them at the major Thandikulam checkpoint refusing some goods passage, imposing restrictions.

While the Tigers and the government argue over opening of a safe passage to Jaffna, people make the hazardous boat journey across Jaffna lagoon to Kilali. Reports say more people are now travelling to Jaffna. The iron grip of LTTE on the peninsula remains. Two civilians who robbed a family from Colombo in early September near Kilali were caught by Tiger police and executed in public on 25 September.

Justice is meted out by 12 judges of the *Tamil Eelam* judiciary, including a three-member Appeal Court. The Judges, all under the age of 24, undergo a two-year training. A Department of Justice supervises law administration and a law manual and code for lawyers are in force. The peninsula's customary law *Thesavalamai* has been amended to give Jaffna women power to dispose of their property without the husband's consent.

The prospect of peace talks has not

ended indiscriminate air and sea attacks in Jaffna. Reports say that in the past eight months 90 civilians have been killed and 233 wounded. Two fishermen were killed and many houses damaged in Point Pedro in naval shellfire on 6 September. The following day Sellathurai Thirunavukarasu, 47 was shot dead by the military when he visited his home in Army-controlled Pandatharippu. The bodies of two fishermen who disappeared further south-west at Pooneryn were later recovered with gunshot wounds. Three more fishermen were arrested by the Navy at Thiruvadinalai and another killed at Pannai in shelling from the Mandaitivu Army camp on 16 September. Two days later yet another fisherman was shot dead by the Navy off Vadamaratchy and seven others were injured. According to reports, six Tiger women cadre died in an accidental explosion in their camp at Uduvil on 19 September.

Welfare and other facilities in Jaffna remain marginal. In his report to the Prime Minister, Jaffna Government Agent K Manickavasagar says that there are 264,335 refugees in Jaffna and the peninsula received just over half the food required in 1993. Malnutrition is a major concern and according to the Jaffna Secretariat 6,010 of the 13,491 children born in Jaffna District in 1993 died. Jaffna doctors say lack of electricity is damaging the eyes and lungs of students who use kerosene lamps to study. But amid the ruins Jaffna people now have new hope for the future.

Emergency

Sri Lanka's State of Emergency, in force for most of the last 20 years, was lifted by the new People's Alliance government in early September, except in the North-East war zone.

Legacy

Sri Lanka reluctantly signed a \$208 million agreement in mid-September to buy two French airbus planes, negotiated by the previous UNP government. To back out of the deal would have cost almost \$100 million.

Shooting

Leading Tamil lawyer and former TELO member Motilal Nehru was shot and wounded by unknown gunmen in Colombo in late September. Police blame the Tigers. Other Tamil groups are said to be under threat.

Tied aid

The World Bank and International Monetary Fund have resumed aid to Sri Lanka, suspended for the last 18 months, but have urged caution over new economic policies to curb poverty and unemployment.

Threat

Tea Board officials in Colombo say many countries were checking tea shipments from Sri Lanka after a faxed threat from the Tamil militant *Ellalan Force* to poison tea exports with arsenic.

Forced out

OVER 100 Sri Lankan Tamils refused asylum in Switzerland mounted a protest demonstration in Berne in early September over plans to forcibly deport them to Colombo on the new Swiss government repatriation programme.

Despite opposition from refugee NGOs the Swiss government has deported 34 Sri Lankans on the programme since June out of a target figure of 600 over two years. United Nations refugee agency UNHCR and the Swiss embassy in Colombo both monitoring the programme say no returnee has been targeted by security forces. Local NGOs say monitoring is cursory with no substantial followup and that there is no fast-track for returnees to obtain vital National

Identity Cards (NIC) as promised. At least two returnees have been arrested because they had no NIC.

The programme's real purpose say refugee analysts is to deter future asylum-seekers from Sri Lanka and force out over 35,000 who have already applied in Switzerland. Swiss officials have examined over 3,500 of the backlog of 16,000 Sri Lankan cases this year giving refugee status only to 33 people. Those refused lose their work permits and are given three months to leave the country.

Over 600 have fled to other European countries this year. Many more may go underground inside Switzerland and there is a new sanctuary movement emerging

spearheaded by the churches. Other European countries fearing an influx may design similar programmes, refugee workers say. France operates an unofficial hard-line "push-back" policy on Sri Lankan asylum arrivals, refusing to let them leave the plane. French officials were in Colombo in mid-September to review the situation.

French police are cracking down on the Sri Lankan exile community citing a series of sectarian killings between militant groups and suspected drug links. A special unit at Interpol headquarters in Lyons is tracking the Tigers worldwide drug-running network. They are hunting its controller TS Kumaran formerly of Jaffna university.

■ The Tigers kill 14 soldiers north of Batticaloa

The war drags on in the east

THE LTTE struck in the east on 28 September as if to emphasize the need for a ceasefire, killing 14 soldiers in an ambush at Tharakulam in the Vaharai area north of Batticaloa.

As peace talks were mooted in Colombo and Jaffna, clashes continued in the east as the Tigers and the Army struggled for military supremacy. In early September, four LTTE cadre died in Army attacks in Sithandy and Valaichenai. The Defence Ministry says ten more Tigers were killed in Nedunchenai, south-west of Batticaloa in mid-September after the death of two policemen. Local LTTE leader *Das* was shot dead by the Army in Kaluvankerni on 17 September. The Tigers launched an attack on an Army patrol near

Santhimalai on 21 September killing three soldiers and six days later shot dead a Kattankudy Home Guard.

In the increasingly volatile situation in the east, local militant group leaders are targets. Chenkalady Pradeshiya Sabha chairman and TELO vice president Thurairatnam Jeyarajan, 30, was shot dead at his office by an unidentified youth on 13 September. Local people voiced surprise over the escape of the gunman from Mr Jeyarajan's office which is close to the police station. PLOTE member Thambirasa Ponnambalam, 27, was also killed on 27 September, allegedly by the LTTE. Political party rivalry continued and factions were bent on settling scores. A grenade was lobbed and gunshots were

fired at the home of UNP MP A Moulana in Eravur on 28 September.

Reports say there is a growing shortage of building material in Batticaloa. Welfare organisations say little reconstruction is possible. Batticaloa residents complain that electricity supply is irregular and affects schools and hospitals. Further south at Kalmunai in Amparai District, patients in the hospital have no regular water supply. After the LTTE attack in Vaharai, military search operations in the area have increased. Karaitivu village was surrounded in late September and local men detained briefly.

Following complaints from Amparai MP ULM Muhaideen that farmers in coastal areas were forced to sell paddy to private dealers at a lower price, visiting Minister MHM Ashraff has directed the Paddy Marketing Board to intervene. Batticaloa MP K Thurairasasingham says thousands of acres of paddy lands south-west of Vanthrumoolai falling inside the security zone declared by the Army in 1990 remain uncultivated impoverishing local farmers.

Delays in water supply from the Kantalai tank are jeopardising rice cultivation in 5,000 acres of land at Thambalakamam in Trincomalee District. Farmers say the paddy crop is diseased. In an Army ambush on 21 September at Sabinagar in Trincomalee two Tigers were killed. On the following day three soldiers died in a LTTE attack at Pallikudiyiruppu.

DB blocks enquiry

THE perils of cohabitation government were laid bare when President DB Wijetunge blocked proposals from his People's Alliance (PA) cabinet in early September to set up three new Commissions of Enquiry into over 40,000 killings and disappearances since January 1988 during the insurrection by the southern Sinhalese Marxist People's Liberation Front (JVP). The President's gesture was a last defiant one. He will not stand in the presidential elections now scheduled for 9 November and will retire from politics. His United National Party's (UNP) candidate will be Gamini Dissanayake who has seized control after the party's general election defeat in August. His major opponent will be present Prime Minister Chandrika Kumaranatunge who needs to consolidate her fragile hold on power. The PA will dismantle the executive presidency and return to the Westminster system says Constitutional Affairs minister GL Peiris. The new PA government wants to indict those in the police and the military for thousands of deaths and

disappearances and to compensate families left without a breadwinner. A reckoning and a rewriting of the years of terror is underway but it will be a slow and painful process. Hundreds of senior police and Army officers may face charges of extra-judicial killing and more than 50% of the 4,000 detainees currently in police and Army camps may be released. New legislation is being drafted for a Human Rights Bill and a National Human Rights Commission in consultation with leading human rights agencies such as the Civil Rights Movement and MIRJE. Schoolmaster Dayananda Galapatti and four of eight soldiers accused of involvement in the disappearance of 32 schoolboys in Embilipitiya in August 1989, appeared in court in late September. Excavations are underway at Suriyakande where the boys are thought to be buried and new mass graves have been discovered in Matala, Kandy and Galle.

Power broker

PLANTATION trade union Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) leader S Thondaman is preparing the ground for switching sides to support PA's Chandrika Kumaranatunge at the Presidential elections in November.

CWC's Executive has backed Mr Thondaman's gamble and six demands have been put forward to the two major political parties, including 25 days work a month for plantation workers and ownership of line-rooms. Observers say Mr Thondaman favours joining the PA government instead of languishing in the opposition while Trade Deputy Minister P Chandrasekaran's UPF gains ground in the Hill Country. His strategy aims to checkmate Mr Chandrasekaran and restrain former CWC General Secretary MS Sellasamy who has formed a new

breakaway trade union.

The prospect of the "Chandrika wave" engulfing the plantations and marginalising the CWC has pushed Mr Thondaman towards the PA. But Mr Thondaman says it is because of the new Prime Minister's commitment to solve the ethnic problem. Some senior CWC officials say Mr Thondaman's price is a ministerial position for himself and his grandson Arumugam.

At a meeting with Opposition leader Gamini Dissanayake in mid-September, Mr Thondaman slated the UNP for not informing the Speaker about the agreement allowing CWC to function separately in Parliament. The UNP hurriedly sent a letter to the Speaker. But few now believe the UNP can hold on to CWC support.

India's controversial repatriation programme continues

Ashraff pledges new deal for displaced

NEW Rehabilitation minister MHM Ashraff, on a series of visits to Trincomalee refugee camps in mid-September, was appalled by conditions describing them as "worse than cattle sheds". Overcrowding and overflowing toilets at squalid Clappenberg camp saw Mr Ashraff fulminating at local bureaucracy. "The refugees are living in terrible conditions. They don't have even mats to sleep on. Children are naked and they are not given funds" he said.

Trincomalee's local government or *kachcheri* supposedly spent Rs 53 million on resettlement housing and not even 53 houses had been built said an angry Mr Ashraff. Breaking through red tape the minister immediately arranged for some of the 78 families in Clappenberg from nearby Kappalthurai to return home with cast-iron promises of assistance inputs.

Resettlement and relocation were now urgent priorities of his revamped ministry said Mr Ashraff at a high-level seminar south of Colombo. Disaster management demanded integrity he said, outlining a six-point plan to assist the 600,000 internally displaced urging new awareness of the victims of the 11-year civil war.

Mr Ashraff has pledged to resettle all of the 60,000 refugees in camps on the Army-controlled side of the frontline by the end of the year. The World Food Programme will supply a further year of refugee rations of rice, lentils and sugar at a cost of \$2.35 million to 40,000 of the refugees in 147 camps.

New Jaffna MP IMT Ilyas says 30,000 Muslim refugees in ramshackle camps in Puttalam are systematically swindled out of food allowances and should be given cash rations instead. NGOs have protested that rehabilitation funds were haemorrhaging into the pockets of local officials in Trincomalee's corrupt backwater for the last four years. In a series of meetings with NGOs, Mr Ashraff outlined his new strategy prioritising relocation of those who cannot go home and doubling current housing grants to Rs 28,000 (\$700).

A few days after Mr Ashraff's visit, over 2,000 Sri Lankan Tamil refugees returned from south India by ship in the latest phase of India's controversial repatriation programme. A third shipload was cancelled by the growing pneumonic plague fears sweeping India. No further movements will take place until the mon-

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soon is over next February. India says the programme is voluntary but NGOs say conditions in 122 camps housing 70,000 refugees are being allowed to deteriorate to coerce them to leave. Tamil Nadu state's new Refugee Commissioner M Ragupathy refutes the claim saying United Nations Refugee agency UNHCR has certified that camp conditions are "excellent". UNHCR supposedly monitoring the voluntary aspect of the repatriation has no access to the camps and is allowed only cursory interview facilities at departure.

Refugees claim abuse and harassment by local officials. The 6pm-8am curfew in the camp is designed to freeze them out of the local labour market. K Narayan, 56, who walked six days through the Vanni jungles to escape in

August 1990, is tired of the pressure and will register for repatriation. Camp officials will only register the birth of his 11-month old grandson if he agrees to go home.

Chinnannan 70, and his wife will also go back. Their son Thangaraja, is being harassed by Tamil Nadu special Q Branch police and has lost his job. Q Branch officers regularly extort money and threaten refugees with imprisonment in the six "special camps" where 1,600 alleged LTTE sympathisers are held without charge or trial. In August, the Indo Sri Lankan Friendship Society appealed to India's National Human Rights Commission to investigate widespread human rights abuses inside the camps.

NGOs, also banned from the refugee camps by the Tamil Nadu administration in May 1993, say UNHCR is being used to legitimate the repatriation while restricting its normal protection role such as providing information on conditions in Sri Lanka to prospective returnees. The high expectations accompanying UN involvement have left local NGOs quizzical or cynical. UNHCR is prepared to be bound and gagged to get a foothold in India, some contend.

SC Chandrachud head of Madras's leading Sri Lankan refugee organisation OFERR, says "If UNHCR is not going to carry out its full mandate, if it is going to stand by while coercion goes on, yet attest to the voluntary nature of repatriation, what service is it doing for the refugees?"

UNHCR insists that its monitoring is effective but that its room for manoeuvre is limited. It is monitoring the programme not supervising it and hence "facilitating" repatriation not promoting it. Conditions in north-east Sri Lanka are too unstable to promote repatriation UNHCR insists again. But its network of camps for returnees in Trincomalee, Mannar and Vavuniya, its micro projects to rebuild the war-torn landscape and a \$13 million budget for this year seem to send a different signal.

UNHCR New Delhi representative Shamsul Bari cannot understand why the Indian government should deny access to the Tamil Nadu camps when the UN refugee agency is willing to finance improvements. Indian officials are more phlegmatic. "If the refugees get too comfortable they won't want to go home".

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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