

## Truce for papal visit

After ten weeks of behind-the-scenes tension an official ceasefire between Sri Lankan government forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was announced by President Chandrika Kumaranatunge when parliament reconvened on 6 January.

The 14-day ceasefire nominally ends the day after a 24-hour visit to Sri Lanka by Pope John Paul II on 20 January, but Colombo clearly believes the peace process is back on track after the interregnum created by the assassination in October of opposition leader Gamini Dissanayake by a Tamil suicide bomber - a hallmark of other political killings attributed to the LTTE.

The new People's Alliance (PA) government was forced to suspend negotiations in the aftermath, but with the papal visit looming and the Tigers casting doubt on President Chandrika's peace credentials, an agenda for new talks was hammered out after nine exchanges of letters through the ICRC.

A government peace team accompanied by Army and Navy representatives made a flying visit to Jaffna on 3 January to broker the truce. Four policemen held by the Tigers for over four years were released as a good-will gesture. Both parties have agreed to set up six district-based committees to monitor the ceasefire across the North-East headed by foreign observers from Canada, Norway and Holland.

A 600-metre demilitarised zone will be observed around all Army camps in the north and daylight fishing permitted around Jaffna and affected areas up to two miles offshore. Over 260 Jaffna fishermen have been killed in navy attacks in the last four years.

A safe passage to the mainland for over 10,000 Jaffna Catholics travelling to Colombo for the papal visit through the western Sangupiddy route will be confirmed when talks recommence on 14 January but the military is unlikely to dismantle its strategic Pooneryn camp nearby. The Tigers Kilali ferry across Jaffna lagoon is already working six nights a week bringing pilgrims south, generating millions of rupees in taxes for

the militants.

President Kumaranatunge describing the fragile pact as the dawn of a new era is seeking "peace with honour and not peace at any price" and will negotiate on the basis of her father's 1956 Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact which offers regional rather than federal government. Observers say this is unlikely to satisfy the Tigers. LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran in a 40th birthday radio broadcast on 26 November climaxing the Tigers' annual Heroes Week celebration of martyred cadre urged Jaffna's population to swear an oath adopting the LTTE's separatist credo "The thirst of the Tigers is the homeland of Tamil Eelam".

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Chandrika's government has promised the LTTE a \$800 million peace package to rebuild Jaffna and kick-start political negotiations by early February but the Tigers are holding out for full implementation and resettling of Jaffna's refugees before embarking on meaningful discussions. The Sri Lankan Army remains unconvinced but Defence secretary Gen Hamilton Wanasinghe's one-year extension of office will ease President Kumaranatunge's prickly co-existence with the military's hardline faction.

There is renewed speculation that her People's Alliance (PA) government will float a referendum before July linking the abolition of the executive presidency with a new federal constitution to

strengthen its negotiating position in both north and south - a high risk strategy.

Powerful neighbour, India will back the peace process Sri Lankan minister Lakshman Kadirgamar told journalists after discussions with premier Narasimha Rao in New Delhi in early December. Colombo's *Sunday Times* echoing LTTE's official organ *Viduthalai Puligal* says RAW, India's CIA, retains a covert brief to destabilise the talks. LTTE leader Prabhakaran and Tiger intelligence chief Pottuamman are the chief accused in the Rajiv Gandhi murder trial now underway in Madras.

Correspondents are divided over who is dragging who to the negotiating table and who will gain the most from a ceasefire or how long it will last. At its simplest the papal visit has forced the Sri Lankan military to agree a ceasefire it has been unwilling to concede since the PA government took office in August. Whether the LTTE will give ground and agree to talks on a political settlement before reconstruction and rehabilitation of Jaffna is less clear.

In the run-up to the truce, the Tigers kept up the pressure with a string of attacks in the east. Defence sources say 20 guerrillas were killed when over 200 LTTE cadre stormed an isolated Army base at Thumbaraveli, west of Batticaloa lagoon on 29 December.

Karavai Kandasamy, 56, deputy leader of the Democratic People's Liberation Front (DPLF), the political wing of Tamil group PLOTE and a government ally was shot dead at his home in south Colombo on 31 December. Defence sources blame the Tigers, pointing to their predilection for eliminating opponents at unexpected moments and security has been tightened around leading Tamil politicians and government ministers.

The Pope's open-air mass on Galle Face Green on 21 January will be another nightmare for Colombo security services. But the papal visit is under other pressures. Senior Buddhist clergy representing Sri Lanka's majority religion say Pope John Paul denigrated Buddhism in his recent book and have demanded he make a personal apology.



## THE NORTH

# A child dies...

OVER two hundred and seventy new-born children died in the Jaffna peninsula in the last nine months, because of lack of medical facilities says a report by the Regional Health Director. Three children died of septicaemia in December in the Jaffna hospital and eight others from dengue fever.

Malaria and diarrhoea are spreading in many areas. Pachchilaipalli area north of Elephant Pass is particularly affected and Palai hospital is overflowing with patients. Reports say the situation in the Jaffna hospital is no better. Hospital authorities admitted over 2,000 patients while beds are available for only 1,200. Drugs and medicine are scarce and staff shortages are now acute with over 100 doctors needed.

Refugee camps are particularly vulnerable to infection. A recent survey at a camp in Ketpali indicates a high incidence of disease. Food distribution has become difficult with the recent rains. A meeting of government officers on 13 December at the Jaffna *kachcheri* decided that future food supply to the 241,000 displaced people in the peninsula would be through the Food Department. Tiger deputy political leader *Karikalan* told north-east NGOs at a meeting in Jaffna in mid-December that the LTTE would not obstruct rehabilitation but NGOs who work in government colonisation schemes further south would not be acceptable.

While the LTTE and the government exchanged letters to bring about a cease-fire, attacks in the north continued. Airforce helicopter gunships strafed a bus crammed with passengers near Chavakachcheri in early December. Casualties are unknown. The Navy destroyed two *Sea Tiger* boats off Mandaitivu on 4 December. On the same day LTTE killed a soldier and wounded two others in an attack north of Elephant Pass.

Three Tigers who infiltrated the Elephant Pass camp in early December were shot dead. Army positions in Vasavilan south-east of Palaly came under Tiger mortar fire on 18 December. The following day the Elara naval base on Karainagar Island was attacked killing a soldier and wounding two others.

In the contested Veli Oya area in Mullaitivu District fighting continued. Defence Ministry says troops on patrol in Kokkuthoduvai shot dead two Tigers in early December and captured arms. On 20 December, Tigers attacked the Army in the same area killing three soldiers.

Further south in Vavuniya, northern passengers approaching Thandikulam in mid-December fled for their lives after Army shelling. Trader Sarawanamuthu Pulendran, 47, was shot dead by unidentified persons at Bharathipuram near Nelukkulam. Police say Mr Pulendran's death was the tenth in a series of mysterious killings in the district.

## Appeal

Batticaloa MP P Joseph has appealed for the Mylanthanai murder trial to be transferred to Colombo fearing Tamil witnesses will be intimidated at hearings in Anuradhapura. Over 20 soldiers will be tried for the massacre of 35 Tamil civilians in Batticaloa after the killing of Gen Denzil Kobbekaduwa in August 1992.

## Peace plea

Thousands took part in a peace march in Colombo on 9 December organised by the Campaign for Peace with Democracy (CPD). In messages to the government and the LTTE, CPD urged both sides to make public their proposals for a peaceful solution.

## Strike

Over 75,000 plantation workers launched a one-day strike in mid-December in support of 2,500 workers on Cullen Estate, Badulla which is being repossessed by a nearby Buddhist temple after a rent dispute with the estate management company.

## Disappeared

Amnesty International have issued an urgent appeal on behalf of Tamil group EPRLF member Velayutham Varnakulasingham, 23, kidnapped by six LTTE while attending a relative's funeral at Muthur, Trincomalee District on 19 December. Unconfirmed reports say he is held at a Tiger camp near Koonithivu.

# Frontline Mannar

TWO guerrillas and one soldier were killed in early December when 100 Tiger cadre attacked Army forward positions at Vankalai in Mannar District. Six LTTE and three soldiers were killed in continuing attacks a few days later.

Most of the Mannar mainland is in LTTE hands while the military controls Mannar Island. Two thousand refugees repatriated from India over a year ago, remain in makeshift camps because the military occupies their homes or their villages are in LTTE territory. Villagers returned to frontline buffer zones like Vankalai are no deterrent to the Tigers. Fishing is now permitted around the island after weeks of protest by destitute Mannar fishermen but conditions remain

unpredictable. One local man was killed and two injured in a mid-sea clash with Indian fishermen off Pesalai. Another fisherman, Anthony Peiris was wounded by the Navy on 7 December.

The Tigers keep an unofficial blockade running to squeeze the island's fragile economy and to protect their lucrative arms-smuggling route from India to the Mannar mainland further south. Naval patrols destroyed a LTTE boat in a two-hour chase south of Silavathurai on 10 December.

The LTTE has ordered over 10,000 refugees at the UN-run camp at Madhu, Sri Lanka's most sacred shrine, to return to their homes by the end of the year after a struggle for control between the

church and deputy political leader *Karikalan*. Over 1,000 will remain at a satellite camp at Palampiddy a few miles north and the Tigers plan their own model resettlement villages nearby.

The LTTE permitted over 2,000 refugees to return south to Army-controlled areas around Cheddikulam in September, but local Vavuniya MP Balachandran says the military has stripped their houses bare and there is little assistance forthcoming.

Further south at Puttalam, where there are over 30,000 Muslim refugees forced out of Jaffna by LTTE ultimatum in 1990, over 40 camps have received no dry rations for the last two months says Muslim MP Dr MI Iliyas.



## ■ Hit-and-run war intensifies in the east

# Raids and reprisals

THE LTTE launched a devastating attack on Thumbaraveli Army camp on the Chenkalady-Badulla road in Batticaloa District on 28 December. An escaped soldier says the camp was destroyed and over 20 soldiers killed. Defence sources say it was 20 LTTE who died. Local farmers in Karadiyanaru are also missing after the attack.

As fighting slackens in the north, military operations have intensified in the east. Two fishermen S Balakrishnan and S Chandrakumar were shot dead by the Navy in the Navatkudah lagoon on 3 December. A police Inspector and a woman were injured in a LTTE grenade attack in Kallady south of Batticaloa on 7 December. On the same day Tiger cadre *Satha* was killed in an Army ambush at

Kaluvankerni in Eravur. Two days later two more Tigers were shot dead at Naripulthottam in Chenkalady.

The LTTE ambushed a police unit at Sathurukondan on 19 December injuring three policemen. Seven soldiers were killed and 23 injured six days later in a Tiger landmine attack on a bus near Kirumichchai in remote Vaharai.

In the continuing confrontations between militant groups, TELO member T Selliah was shot dead in Batticaloa on 7 December. Two days later A Rahuman was killed in Eravur. The bodies of three shepherds were handed over to the Batticaloa hospital in late December by the Army who say they had died at the hands of the LTTE at Poolakkadu. But people believe they were killed in Army

operations in the Kiran area. Rains continue to cause havoc. Ten people drowned when a boat capsized in Valaichenai lagoon on 5 December.

According to Government Agent AK Pathmanathan there are only 876 families in refugee camps in Batticaloa. A *Sunday Times* report says refugees resettled recently in the east have been badly affected by Army intimidation, lack of rehabilitation and corruption of government officials.

Six youths who went to see a film in Thirukovil disappeared in early December. Army search operations in Amparai District have been intensified. People complain bombing in Periyasolai jungles has driven wild elephants into villages, destroying houses and crops.

In a dawn raid on the Special Task Force (STF) camp in Kanjikudichcharu, the Tigers' monsoon stronghold on 9 December, the LTTE killed five policemen and injured two others. In another attack on a police post in Central Camp area in early December the Tigers killed a policeman. On 21 December all males in Karaitivu were taken to the STF camp and released after inquiry. Villagers have been ordered by the STF to stay indoors after 10pm.

Following the killing of two intelligence officers by the LTTE at Pulmoddai in Trincomalee District on 1 December, soldiers ran amok burning nine houses and four shops. It is alleged that 11 people arrested were tortured. In attacks at Muthur and Kattaiparichchan the LTTE killed two policemen and two soldiers.

# Sleepers

SECURITY chiefs in Colombo are visibly nervous over the influx of 10,000 North-East Tamil Catholics into the city for Pope John Paul II's visit on 20 January. They believe the Tigers will use the pilgrims to plant more long-range "sleeper" assassination squads in the capital to be activated with deadly effect months or years later. The killing of Tamil politician Karavai Kandasamy on New Year's Eve has reinforced police fears. Colombo's first ever house-to-house search is underway in a city of a million inhabitants. Elite Special Task Force police commandos have been recalled from the east to patrol the capital. The Catholic church has issued special identity cards to northern pilgrims to prevent police harassment but Tamil party TULF's M Sivasithamparam says travellers are being harassed, fingerprinted or detained at Thandikulam outside Vavuniya, the major crossing point between the battle lines. Three Jaffna youths were arrested in Colombo in early December loitering near deputy Defence minister Anuruddha Ratwatte's house sparking new security fears. Another 22 Tamils including six women were arrested in night raids in the capital in early January. The end of the Pope's visit is not the end of the problem. Every week up to 5,000 Jaffna Tamils cross Kilali bound for Colombo to cash remittances from relatives abroad that keeps the fragile northern economy afloat. Gamini Dissanayake's assassination has reactivated a two-year-old security plan to cordon off Colombo to North-East Tamils by upgrading international banking and telephone facilities in Batticaloa and Vavuniya. Over 100,000 northern refugees are already in the capital in hostels or cheap lodging houses or with relatives among the 200,000 Tamils permanently resident there. Those who cannot explain their presence adequately are immediate suspects, especially women after the Dissanayake killing. Colombo shudders when the sleepers awake.

# Dark legacy

SRI LANKA'S Civil Rights Movement (CRM) has welcomed the creation of three regional commissions to probe disappearances but has urged the government to investigate cases dating back to 1984.

The three commissions' current mandate extends only to disappearances since 1988, when over 40,000 people vanished during the abortive insurrection staged by the southern Sinhalese Marxist People's Liberation Front (JVP). Over 21,000 people were held in detention camps with around 2,000 still in custody. A UN mission from the Working Group on Disappearances recorded over 12,000 comprehensively documented disappearance cases during a visit to Sri Lanka in 1991.

A CRM statement says the commissions' present mandate ignores disappearances in the Eastern Province that began in 1984 and set a pattern for later events. Kalmunai Citizens Committee President Paul Nallanayagam was indicted after helping distraught parents to look for the burial place of 23 young Tamils in Naipattimunai in 1985.

After a celebrated 49-day trial in Colombo High Court, Mr Nallanayagam was acquitted, but a veil of silence descended over the 23 missing young men and many other subsequent disappearances. The 1988 cut-off date also ignores prominent cases in the south such as the disappearance of Ruhuna University lecturer Sathyapala Wannigama says CRM.



## Chandrika's baptism of fire in the Free Trade Zone

# Strike fever saps investor confidence

A WAVE of wildcat strikes paralysed key industries across southern Sri Lanka in December as the new People's Alliance (PA) government with its socialist credentials came up against the hard realities of running a country.

Many of the strikes were marked by violence, especially in the Free Trade Zone (FTZ) where low wages and weak trade unions attract foreign companies and capital. Police refused to act when seven Japanese managers at Noritake porcelain company in Matale were taken hostage by striking workers in early December. Only a phone call from the Japanese Foreign minister to President Chandrika Kumaranatunge forced state intervention.

Hong Kong national Lin Hsin Hui and local management staff at Prima bakeries in Welikade were taken at knife-point to the roof of their seven storey offices and held for 24 hours. The manager of a graphite mine at Dodangoda was held prisoner 1,000 feet below ground until he gave into strikers' demands. Another

manager of a Pannala textile plant was stabbed during negotiations with strikers.

By mid-December over 70 strikes were underway. Trade unions, after 17 years on the margins were out to gain a stranglehold on a new government coalition with a socialist past and a future committed to capitalism with a human face.

The PA clearly feared the ultra-leftist People's Liberation Front (JVP), responsible for violent insurrections in 1971 and 1987, remained entrenched in the trade union sector and there were rumours of JVP posters appearing in various southern towns. As strike violence continued, special police units were formed to combat labour unrest and a new police intelligence unit to prevent a JVP resurgence.

President Chandrika Kumaranatunge's personal intervention and promises defused many of the more difficult strike scenarios but she alienated thousands of striking doctors by describing their delegation as supporters of the previous

United National Party (UNP) administration. Opposition leader Ranil Wickremasinghe said the UNP was a scapegoat for the PA's non-performance as prices of staple foods soared in the local market.

Colombo's stock market plunged in the aftermath as investors awaited reassurance when the President spelled out a major privatisation programme when parliament reconvened in early January. Shares in aviation insurance and transport would be sold off while the state would retain long-term management leases in the key plantation sector. "Significant revenues raised by privatisation will be used primarily to retire public debt" said Chandrika.

The market was mollified but the private sector remains wary of the PA's socialist past. The World Bank predicts a Rs 80 billion (\$2 billion) budget deficit and urges Sri Lanka in a 34-page document to scrap inefficient state bank, plantation and other sectors.

## Inadmissible evidence

INDIA'S National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) says there is no evidence that 70,000 Sri Lankan refugees in southern India are to be forcibly repatriated but that NGOs should be allowed access to government-run camps.

NHRC Chairman Justice Ranganath Mishra visiting three of 138 camps in Tamil Nadu in mid-December said most of the refugees he talked to wanted to go home. NGOs petitioned NHRC to investigate conditions in the camps and persistent reports of coercion after voluntary agencies were banned from working in the camps by a government directive 18 months ago. Conditions in the camps were not bad, but could be improved said Mr Mishra who has asked the government to allow NGOs to provide vital health and welfare services inside the camps.

Over 300 LTTE suspects held in a special high-security refugee camp at Vellore insisted they should be returned only to Jaffna and not into Sri Lankan government hands said the NHRC Chairman. Refugees attending a Displaced Tamils Welfare Conference in

Trichy on 18 December condemned current camp conditions and urged India to ratify the United Nations 1951 Convention recognising refugees. The conference also censured UN refugee agency, UNHCR for tacitly backing

India's return programme to Sri Lanka while publicly maintaining that conditions were not safe for such returns. India will resume its controversial repatriation programme when the north-east monsoon abates in early February. Refugee workers say around 5,000 Sri Lankans have agreed to return but local authorities may use the current ceasefire to pressure others to go home.

Tamil Nadu's Chief Minister Jayalalitha who was catapulted to power by the backlash against the Rajiv Gandhi assassination in 1991 has consistently scapegoated Sri Lankan refugees in her struggle to contain LTTE's penetration of the south Indian state. In her running battle with New Delhi's central government and its Madras Governor Chenna Reddy she regularly demands that all Sri Lankan refugees be expelled from India.

A number of prominent Sri Lankan scholars attending the 8th International Association of Tamil Research (IATR) Conference in Tanjore in early January were deported by security officials. They included Jaffna University's Professor of Tamil Dr Karthigesu Sivathamby.

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

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