

India blocks Tiger talks

INDIA has effectively foreclosed on a negotiated settlement of the 11-year civil war between the Sri Lankan government and the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) after a formal extradition request for LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran in early June.

Mr Prabhakaran, Tiger Intelligence chief *Pottu Amman* and Women's wing leader *Akila* are among 41 accused in the Rajiv Gandhi murder trial in Madras bogged down after 17 months of preliminaries. Analysts say the request could not have come without Colombo's assent and that Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunge is lashing out at Prabhakaran for sabotaging peace talks. Others claim Indian Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao was pressured into the move to retain support of Gandhi loyalist MPs in his faction-ridden Congress (I) party.

Insiders say President Chandrika's People's Alliance (PA) government has ignored at least one major peace offer from the Tigers, nominating Norway as a third party mediator, since the LTTE broke the truce on 19 April. The PA instead will push for "military parity" - to significantly weaken the Tigers before more talks - but military supremacy is the preferred solution.

Colombo is gearing up for a major offensive on the north. Deputy Finance minister GL Peiris announced ten tax increases on luxury goods and an increased defence levy in early June in a bid to raise a further Rs 4.5 billion (\$90 million) for the government's war chest.

Sri Lankan forces inside the Tigers' Jaffna stronghold again pushed four kms east from Palaly airbase to Atchvely town on 16 June claiming 15 LTTE killed and 27 wounded. Over 10,000 people sought refuge in temples and schools from shelling and aerial bombing. The attack is widely seen as a dress rehearsal for a Jaffna offensive.

The Tigers are making preparations of their own. Recruitment in schools has been stepped up and fortifications strengthened using the 40,000 bags of cement that flooded into the peninsula

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during the four months of phoney peace.

In a pre-emptive strike hundreds of LTTE cadre in 50 armoured trawlers overran Mandaitivu island south of Jaffna town on 28 June, killing over 100 soldiers and capturing a large haul of arms and ammunition. Another 200 soldiers fled into the darkness in the face of the attack in which eight LTTE died.

The Colombo press fulminated over another military setback pointing to the lack of Airforce and Navy response and the depleted and demoralised garrison force on the island. In a bizarre footnote an Army deserter captured by the Tigers escaped to Sri Lankan positions at Palaly warning of an imminent Mandaitivu offensive three days before the attack. This unlikely odyssey perfectly captured military complacency raged editorials.

Tamil columnist *Taraki* says the Mandaitivu assault confirms the growing strength of the *Sea Tigers*, LTTE's navy, and questions the military logic and the human cost of a full tilt assault on Jaffna.

Other Tamil voices are raised in alarm or expectation. From its Colombo exile, Jaffna's University Teachers for Human Rights (UTHR) group condemned the LTTE for withdrawing from peace talks and scorned the dominant cultural institutions in the north for legitimising the paralysis of Tamil society by the LTTE's destructive brand of politics - "its haunted past of murder and paranoia". As if to confirm UTHR's analysis, senior Jaffna University staff subsequently wrote to Colombo newspapers disowning and discrediting the group.

Prominent Colombo Tamil politician Dr Neelan Tiruchelvam was more measured when he told the London *Observer* that LTTE leader Prabhakaran was "out of step with history" for pulling out of peace talks. There is a new scramble for power among the Tamil parties in the south as war fever takes hold.

There is a gulf of hostility between Dr Tiruchelvam's moderate TULF party and the former militants PLOTE, TELO and EPDP - successors of over 40 armed factions in Tamil liberation politics. Along with the Tamil-speaking Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) they compete for the whip hand in propping up President Kumaratunge's fragile coalition government.

PLOTE and EPDP want the government to go public with its devolution package to present the Tamils with a credible alternative to the Tigers. After months of delaying tactics minister GL Peiris now says the proposals cannot be made public before an all-party consensus. Dr Tiruchelvam one of the architects of the new proposals is counselling patience to prevent a Sinhalese backlash while TULF facing both ways says the Tigers must be a part of any eventual solution.

In frustration the PLOTE-EPDP axis threatened to withdraw its support to the government in Parliament as did SLMC leader MHM Ashraff in mid-June over Sri Lanka re-establishing diplomatic ties with Israel.

To buy time President Chandrika has agreed to set up an interim administration for the North-East essentially a division of provincial government spoils among the Tamil parties. TULF will not take part saying it may hinder a long-term solution.

Almost 60 senior Sinhalese professionals signed a letter of protest warning that Sinhalese and Muslims in the North-East will be marginalised and there is a new flurry of pro-Sinhala articles in the press. Whatever President Chandrika's devolution proposals there will be a Sinhalese backlash of sorts. The sooner they are made public the sooner the dust will die down.

THE NORTH

The battle to come

THE LTTE have stepped up recruitment of new cadres in the north saying that the government is planning a major assault on Jaffna in July. Two Tiger leaflets in Tamil titled "*Strength is life*" and "*People prepared to fight live in freedom*" say the *Sea Tigers* and the anti-aircraft unit need to be strengthened. Civilian defence groups in training for many months have been activated.

The military is also in a state of preparedness and Deputy Defence minister Anuruddha Ratwatte declared in Parliament on 21 June that the *Eelam War* will be won by the year's end. With the Airforce tied down by the LTTE's new missile deployment the Navy is expected to play a major role in any offensive. The Navy which suffered heavy losses in the past months is having new problems. A 500-ton amphibious landing craft recently acquired by the Army turned out to be a commercial vessel unfit for warfare. Reports say the crew has refused to sail the craft to the north from Trincomalee.

Jaffna civilians are bearing the brunt of continuing shelling from military camps and Airforce bombing. A fisherman was shot and injured by the Sri Lankan Navy in the Pannai sea in early June. A woman was injured when a plane bombed Vadamaratchy on 9 June. Relatives have complained to the ICRC that displaced people who returned to homes in Army-controlled areas in Tellippalai and Alaveddy west of the Palaly base have been arrested. In early June two refugees returning to Tellippalai were shot dead by the Army. Refugee Thanalechumy Thiyagarajah, 45, lost a leg in a landmine

explosion when she went out to collect firewood in Mallakam in late June. Two Tigers and four soldiers were killed in a clash near the Pooneryn Army camp in late June.

Jaffna is now reeling under the economic blockade and the ban on fishing. Attending a meeting of the NGO Consortium in Colombo in early June Jaffna Government Agent (GA) K Ponnambalam and Kilinochchi GA S Thillainadarajah urged NGOs to increase aid to provide refugees drinking water, electricity and permanent buildings. The GAs say ambulances and mobile medical units are needed as the war escalates.

Prices of essential goods in Jaffna are shooting up. Currently fish is sold at Rs 200 a kilo, vegetable at Rs 60 and a bottle of kerosene Rs 200. With the ban on petrol and diesel to the north kerosene has become an important fuel for people. But kerosene supply to Jaffna has been cut by one-third.

Jaffna people complain that food shipments are always delayed and rice, flour and sugar supplied to the cooperative stores are insufficient. A refugee delegation from the north which met North-East Rehabilitation Coordinator Maruthurkani in mid-June has pointed out that regular food supply to the north has been affected because the Army continues to commandeer food lorries.

In Mullaitivu District a *Sea Tiger* boat was destroyed by the Navy off Chalai on 14 June. Another boat was damaged in the same area on 23 June, according to the Defence Ministry.

Bust

Philippines police arrested six Sri Lankan Tamils in Manila in early June, accused of smuggling refugees to worldwide destinations on forged passports to generate funds for the LTTE.

"Traitors"

LTTE Intelligence chief *Pottu Amman* has urged vigilance against "Tamil traitors" after five civilians were found guilty of giving information to the military says Tiger weekly *Kalathil*. Five Tamils were executed by LTTE in Omanthai in early June.

Retreat

The People's Alliance (PA) government has withdrawn a proposal to reinstate the death penalty after an Amnesty International protest.

Ultimatum

The Sinhalese Marxist People's Liberation Front (JVP) rumoured to be regrouping in the south has demanded that President Chandrika Kumaratunge honour her election promise to dissolve the executive presidency by 15 July.

Suspended

UN refugee agency UNHCR has suspended the return of 300 refugees formerly in India, from camps in Vavuniya to Jaffna. People refuse to go since fighting recommenced.

Food boost

The PA government will spend Rs 20 million declaring 1996 "Productivity Year" to boost local food production as bad weather and the cost of the war have sent prices soaring.

hit and run

THE Tigers continue to target Sinhalese settler villages in the vulnerable Weli Oya area between Vavuniya and Trincomalee. Five soldiers were killed at Kokkuthoduvai in mid-June and eight police died in a landmine ambush at Kebetigollewa north-east of Anuradhapura on 28 June.

Hundreds of migrant Muslim and Sinhalese fishing families have fled the coastal strip north of Trincomalee leaving burnt-out villages and boats after LTTE attacks. Defence sources say 30 Tigers were killed and 20 wounded in a major operation west of Kumburupiddy in early June. Six soldiers died in a landmine ambush in the flashpoint

Pulmoddai area on 29 June.

Trincomalee town is tense after a new wave of arrests and the reappearance of the feared "white van" associated with disappearances and death squads. Local TULF MP A Thangathurai says local people are missing after arrests and has written to President Chandrika. Tiger area intelligence chief *Sorrun* died in Trincomalee hospital after taking cyanide to evade capture. Former LTTE cadre Ganeshalingam alias *Guru* from Sampur was shot dead in Trincomalee town on 10 June. The Tigers suspected he was an Army informer.

North of Vavuniya, Sri Lankan air raids killed 60 LTTE near Omanthai in

mid-June Defence sources claim. There is a diarrhoea epidemic in nearby Nedunkerni and five people have died. Thandikulam checkpoint between the two front-lines is tense after a Tamil woman was arrested with four bomb detonators.

Further west LTTE pressure on isolated Mannar island is growing. Food, medicine and fuel are in increasingly short supply. A new wave of roundups has begun after four soldiers were shot dead in front of St Sebastian's Cathedral by LTTE cadre dressed as school boys. On the Mannar mainland mother-of-five Kamala, 41, was injured when the Airforce bombed Mulankavil in early June.

■ *Reprisal killings mount as the military retreats from Vaharai*

Backlash

THE Army backlash in the east has continued with mounting reports of extrajudicial killings of civilians in reprisal for Tiger raids.

Ten Tamil villagers including eight year-old Murugan Kala were shot dead in an unprovoked dawn attack by soldiers in remote Pananthanai on the Batticaloa-Amparai border on 25 June. Another four Tamil men and two women were shot dead near Koduvamadu in mid-June after troops ran amok following a landmine ambush which killed eight soldiers.

Two students were shot dead during a police search of Thuraineelavanai on 16 June. Over 100 youths held in custody were only freed through the intervention of EPDP MP Rasamanickam who has

written to President Chandrika demanding an enquiry. Households were ransacked and property stolen. Villagers were beaten and robbed in a similar search a month earlier. Amnesty International has released a dossier listing nine reprisal attacks in May by security forces and Muslim Home Guards which killed 16 Tamils in the east.

The relentless elimination of LTTE opponents and community leaders also continues, a deadly jigsaw of old and new alliances. EPRLF area leader Anandan was shot dead in Akkaraipatru in early June. Akkaraipatru town council leader and former EROS member Nadarajah was shot dead in a Hindu temple a few days later. Kalmunai peace

committee leader Arulampalam Vellanayagam was killed at his home close to a police post. Former TELO member Thatchanamoorthy Sekar linked to the military was shot dead in Thalavai in late June.

After Tiger units killed 18 soldiers near Kiran on 12 June, local villagers have been beaten and shelled says Batticaloa MP Thurai Rajasingam. Karunamuthu, 52, and Kamalanathan, 12, are still missing after the Army took them away following an earlier attack.

The Tigers are targeting road links and electricity generators to isolate Batticaloa town. Six civilians were killed during a LTTE landmine attack on the Badulla road in early June. Another nine soldiers were killed and 14 wounded on 26 June during a Tiger attack on the strategic Kayankerni bridge that links Batticaloa's coastal strip with Vaharai.

In late June, the military began a major withdrawal from Vaharai closing all coastal military camps leaving large tracts of territory to the Tigers who began moving back in large numbers. Over 3,000 families, many Sinhalese settlers have already fled the Mahaweli B area which spans the Polonnaruwa road.

The Army will now concentrate on clearing the Thoppigala jungles west of Sithandy where the Tigers overran Tharavikulam camp in May killing 50 soldiers. Over 10,000 villagers were herded into Murakkottanchenai Army camp overnight while the military launched a dawn offensive on 1 July.

ICRC ship blast

THE *Sea Dancer*, a cargo ship chartered by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) ferrying medical supplies and emergency patients to and from Jaffna was blown up by a sea mine, a mile outside the military-controlled port of Kankesanthurai in the north-west of the peninsula on 4 June. One of the 12-man Indonesian crew was killed. A week earlier, senior ICRC staff discussed the options to deploy a three-person surgical team in Jaffna with LTTE high command and informed the Tigers that their mandate required them to evacuate wounded Sri Lankan military personnel if requested. The new LTTE missile threat has dramatically curtailed the ferrying of Sri Lankan wounded from the military airfield at Palaly. The Tigers opposed ICRC aid to the military saying LTTE should also be assisted to evacuate seriously wounded cadre from Trincomalee and Batticaloa. LTTE leader Prabhakaran has sent a letter expressing condolences for the death of the ICRC seaman and guaranteeing future cooperation.

But the Tigers still refuse to give the ICRC security guarantees entering or leaving Kankesanthurai and the military refuse to forego checks on who or what the ICRC are bringing south from the Tiger-controlled port of Point Pedro a few miles east. The dispute threatens vital medical supplies and urgent medical evacuations from the blockaded peninsula.

Last month, the ICRC suspended operations for ten days after the Sri Lankan Navy commandeered an ICRC-escorted shipload of supplies for its garrison on Analaitivu Island west of Jaffna.

After a meeting with Deputy Defence minister Anuruddha Ratwatte on 29 May, ICRC Asia Pacific delegate Jean Michel Monod called for a mass mobilisation of medical aid in the event of a

Fighting with fear

TENSION rose in the major Muslim settlement of Kattankudy south of Batticaloa in mid-June after six leading citizens received LTTE letters warning Muslims to leave the town by 1 July or suicide attacks would follow revealed Deputy Telecommunications minister Mohamed Hisbullah.

The letters written in halting Tamil were clearly a hoax said Deputy Information minister Alavi Moulana but over 1,000 wealthy Muslim merchants who dominate business in the east had already left for Colombo reported *Reuters*. A LTTE statement said the letters were bogus and a calculated attempt by the government to polarise the two communities.

In August 1990, the Tigers sent simi-

lar warning letters before massacring 103 Kattankudy Muslims at prayer in the local mosque. Nine days later the LTTE brutally murdered 122 Muslims in nearby Eravur. A month later the Tigers expelled over 80,000 Muslims from the North after a 24-hour ultimatum.

A government drive to recruit 5,000 local Muslim Home Guards in the face of the latest threat has met with little response. Local people believe local security forces are behind the letters. There is growing anger after a Muslim woman and her nephew were killed by a policeman near Eravur on 27 June. After a demonstration and more shooting a local Muslim framed for the killings was released and police have ordered an investigation.

Death squads leave their calling card outside Colombo *floating corpses*

THE discovery of 35 bodies in isolated locations outside Colombo has sparked new Tamil fears that military death squads are being used to combat the LTTE suicide bomb threat to the capital.

More than 12 corpses were pulled from Bolgoda lake south of Colombo, their hands and feet tied. They were drowned or shot in the head and many show signs of torture or starvation suggesting secret detention. Although badly decomposed many appear to be Tamils.

Another 14 bodies were found washed ashore on the coastal strip between Negombo and the northern Colombo suburb of Modera. Negombo with its large Tamil population was described as "a den of Tigers" by a senior police official in May. Police confirm that over 90 LTTE suspects were detained in a Colombo roundup in mid-June and taken to Negombo for questioning.

A few miles east near Giriulla, the decomposing bodies of five blindfolded youths were found under a culvert in late June. Only one body has been identified,

27 year-old Jaffna Tamil Naren Rajadurai who disappeared from his job in a Colombo video shop four weeks ago. Two other blindfolded bodies of young women were found in a rice field in Kurunegala. Police chief Frank Silva has ordered an investigation.

Human rights NGOs say the floating corpses are a chilling echo of the state terror unleashed against the Sinhalese Marxist insurgent JVP movement between 1987 and 1990 when over 40,000 people died or disappeared. They fear military death squads are again active.

The Tiger threat to the capital has intensified. A communique from the shadowy *Ellalan Force* claimed responsibility for a 30kg bomb that failed to explode at Colombo airport in early June. The group, reportedly an LTTE front, warned tourists to stay away from Sri Lanka and said more bombs would follow. Two people were injured when a bomb exploded in a Colombo restaurant on 6 June and another eight hurt in an

explosion at the city's Pettah bus station three days later. Over 600 Tamils were arrested in continuing police roundups.

President Chandrika Kumaratunge announced new human rights guidelines for security forces in mid June guaranteeing access to those arrested within four days by the government's revamped Human Rights Task Force. Receipts for those arrested must be given, relatives informed and women and children escorted by family.

Human rights groups say the guidelines guarantee nothing and say police regularly extort money from frightened Tamils to quicken their release. Six Colombo police inspectors and several other officers are currently under investigation. Police chief Frank Silva says the capital's 150,000 Tamil refugees from the North-East war no longer need to register at police stations under revised Emergency laws but harassment, extortion and disappearances will continue warn Tamil community leaders while the Tiger threat looms.

Seeking allies

IN a whirlwind tour of European capitals this month, Sri Lankan Foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar urged government to crack down on LTTE activists in their countries in a new drive to combat international terrorism.

Over 200,000 Sri Lankan Tamils have sought political asylum in European countries and over \$10 million a year is channelled back to the Tigers through LTTE front organisations. British, French and German foreign ministers promised Mr Kadirgamar to review current policy. A parallel delegation of German MPs visiting Colombo said if Sri Lanka banned the Tigers, European countries would follow suit and the proposal is gaining ground.

The Tigers in turn have launched a new international propaganda initiative. There were demonstrations of around 3,000 Tamils in many European cities in early June protesting over new arms sales to Sri Lanka and blaming the Chandrika Kumaratunge government for the breakdown in peace talks.

Over 20,000 Tamils from the Federation of Associations of Canadian Tamils (FACT) at a rally in Toronto on

17 June urged the Canadian government to recognise the de facto state of Tamil Eelam. The international community remains unimpressed. Canada's State Secretary for Asia Raymond Chan urged the LTTE to return to the negotiating

table after a three-day visit to Colombo. Australian Foreign minister Gareth Evans told the Canberra parliament that the Tigers had torn up the best chance the Tamils had for a peaceful settlement of the civil war. Frank Wisner US ambassador in India said America supported Sri Lanka's defence measures against the Tigers. Both USA and Canada listed LTTE as a terrorist organisation after it unilaterally withdrew from peace talks on 19 April.

More European governments will reconsider the North American approach after Mr Kadirgamar's visit as they seek mechanisms to stem the flow of over 10,000 refugee arrivals a year from Sri Lanka.

Sweden is the latest to consider tough new immigration laws as 29 Tamil refugees many of them suffering from hypothermia were rescued from a sinking Lithuanian trawler off Karlskrona in early June. Sweden is considering returning them to Lithuania says Bjorn Weibo head of Sweden's Immigration Board as a signal to deter other potential refugees from using the dangerous Baltic route controlled by Russian mafias.

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
379 Bondway
London SW8 1SJ
Tel: (0171) 582 6922
Fax: (0171) 582 9929

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