

Jaffna under military control

OVER 250,000 civilians were forced back into western Jaffna when the Sri Lankan Army swept through north-east Vadamaratchy and Point Pedro in mid-May in the third of a series of high profile military offensives on the former stronghold of the insurgent Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

The government claims that the entire Jaffna peninsula is now under military control, but other reports say disputed territories remain and several areas are no-go zones. The Army encountered almost no resistance from the Tigers, losing only one soldier in the Point Pedro advance. The Tigers withdrew to minimise casualties against superior fire power.

The Army success in the north has hardened attitudes on both sides and with growing demands in southern Sri Lanka for the annihilation of the LTTE, the government is expected to press home its military advantage. The military has offered an amnesty to rebels who surrender and renounce violence. Analysts believe that the Army will launch further operations south from the peninsula to seize Kilinochchi to open a land route through Elephant Pass.

Opening a land route now seems vital if Jaffna is to be fed. Jaffna's senior civil administrator the Government Agent (GA) says only one-third of the food needs of the population are available and has called for relief assistance from international NGOs. The Tigers told a UN and NGO delegation to Kilinochchi in late May that they could guarantee safety of NGOs in areas under their control but could not assure security in Army-held areas. LTTE guerrilla operations in Jaffna peninsula will be intensified say observers.

The government plans massive recon-

Government launches new relief appeal

struction of the Jaffna peninsula. Housing minister and *Sudu Nelum* (White Lotus) movement leader Nimal Siripala de Silva announced in Parliament on 8 May that nearly 300,000 people had returned to their homes in Jaffna. The hospital is now functioning and according to Mr de Silva over 70 cooperative shops have been opened. Northern Province Resettlement & Rehabilitation Authority (NPRRA) Chairman Somapala Gunadheera says that officials from several ministries are currently in Jaffna assessing needs of major sectors including agriculture, health and transport.

The Sri Lankan government has sought budgetary support for 500,000 tonnes of food from the international community for drought and refugee relief. But the Defence Ministry has blocked an inter-agency NGO assessment mission. At a meeting with President Chandrika in early May, UN and donor representatives were informed of a crash programme in the north budgeted at Rs 3.7 billion (\$70 million), but no detailed plans were provided.

Britain has agreed to provide technical assistance to restore the Jaffna electricity generator at Chunnakam. The German government has requested German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) for an assessment for reconstruction of Jaffna. The US government has declined Sri Lanka's request for 50,000 tonnes of food suggesting multilateral aid through the World Food Programme (WFP). Donors' caution will be reinforced by continuing LTTE attacks in the Jaffna peninsula.

The government's strategy of "war and peace" may have run into new snags.

Growing divisions within the ruling People's Alliance (PA) could wreck plans to alienate the LTTE from the Tamil community

through devolution of power. There is little enthusiasm among MPs for the Parliamentary Select Committee on Constitutional Reform. The proceedings of the committee were postponed in May for lack of the required quorum of four. PA member NSSP is becoming increasingly rebellious and continues to boycott voting in Parliament to extend Emergency rule. President Chandrika may yet be forced to sack the old leftists.

In such an event, the PA will depend on Tamil parties' support in the legislature. The Tamil United Liberation Front also continues to vote against Emergency. Tamil parties like EPDP and TELO are bitter over a government decision to allow them only a brief visit to Jaffna without their weapons. Tamil groups suspect that the government is attempting to gain a political foothold in Jaffna through its *Sudu Nelum* movement which has opened an office in Jaffna. Others say neither the military nor the Jaffna population want a return to the late 1980s when the anti-LTTE armed Tamil groups ruled Jaffna with impunity as proxies of Indian occupying forces.

Civilians told visiting reporters in Jaffna on 8 May that they yearn for a peaceful life. Speaking in Parliament on the same day Deputy Defence minister Anuruddha Ratwatte declared that the LTTE had been defeated militarily and politically. But he conceded later that the Army can maintain peace only for a short time and permanent peace needed a political solution.

Fears have been expressed that the government caught up in internal dissension and facing economic difficulties may give priority to war. In a message to the government and the international community, the LTTE warns that intensified military operations will permanently close the doors to peace. Sri Lanka's NGO-led National Peace Council has called on both parties to analyse the factors that led to the breakdown of the last round of talks and enter into new negotiations.

The Sri Lankan economy is in deep trouble following a series of strikes. The daily eight-hour power cut necessitated by the unprecedented drought, is ruining industry. The strikes by plantation workers and doctors were ended by negotiations. But after a strike by 13,000 electricity workers disrupted water supply to Colombo city in May, the government used the Army to bring employees to work by force.

THE NORTH

Deadly homecoming

EIGHT civilians in a tractor were killed by a landmine in Kondavil, 3 miles north of Jaffna town on 28 May. People now fear to return to some areas of the peninsula. Over 20 people injured by landmines are currently receiving treatment at the Jaffna hospital.

Jaffna hospital administrative officer R Pathmanathan says around 60% of employees have returned to work. There are no surgeons and emergency surgery is currently carried out at the military hospital in Palaly airbase. The Chavakachcheri hospital further east is also functioning and doctors say there is an acute shortage of medicines.

Over 11,000 hectares of land in Jaffna District remains uncultivated and food is in short supply. A five-member family receives 9 kilos rice, 8 kilos flour and 6 kilos sugar per month which people say is hardly sufficient.

Forty two journalists airlifted to Jaffna on 8 May by the government for a guided tour saw long food queues. People told the journalists that were queuing for over ten hours. Maj.Gen. Janaka Perera says the food shortage is due to unexpected number of people returning to their homes and the situation will improve gradually. Scarcity has caused steep rise in prices. Rice costs Rs 70 a kilo and kerosene Rs 110 a bottle.

Although international NGOs have been given access to Valikamam area, relief work is difficult without a distribu-

tion mechanism. The lack of coordination between the four separate military commands now administering Jaffna is also creating problems.

A night curfew is in force and people are being issued new identity cards. They have been ordered to exhibit a list of residents and fly a white flag outside their homes. Many returning residents were dismayed to find their homes plundered and are down-hearted at the prospect of beginning life from scratch. Over 80% of the houses are damaged and accommodation is a major problem.

Over 300 Tamil youths returning home were taken into custody. Parents have been denied access but reports say the ICRC was allowed to visit them. Some 60 LTTE suspects have been moved to Colombo and are currently held in police stations. According to reports from Jaffna the Army is also hunting for 50 human rights and religious activists it links with LTTE.

People arriving in Colombo by the twice-a-week government ferry service through Trincomalee say the Army is cautious in its dealings with civilians. Observers believe the situation may change if the LTTE launched major attacks in the peninsula. Soldiers are accused of rape of a young woman at Nunavil in Thenmaratchy on 5 May. The LTTE says four civilians were shot dead by soldiers on 28 May at Kondavil, six miles north of Jaffna town.

Ruled out

President Chandrika Kumaratunge again ruled out international intervention or mediation in the 12-year civil war telling journalists in Japan in mid-May that "we believe the ethnic problem is entirely a domestic one and we intend to solve it ourselves".

Deficit

Economists say the envisaged budget deficit of 7.8% of GDP is likely to exceed 10% by end of 1996 because of increasing defence expenditure and unprecedented drought. The defence expenditure for the current year is expected to reach \$800 million.

Committee

After President Chandrika appointed a three-member committee into demands of Plantation trade unions in mid-May, the Ceylon Workers Congress decided to withdraw the no-confidence motion in Parliament against Plantations minister Ratnasiri Wickremanayake.

Identified

Local human rights agency Parents and the Family Members of the Disappeared has identified 230 people responsible for disappearances during the last government, including three former cabinet ministers.

Torture

A Presidential Commission heard that former Police Superintendent Douglas Peiris ran an unofficial torture centre at the Batalanda Housing Scheme.

Political pawns

TAMIL MP A Thangathurai told Parliament on 8 May that the Rehabilitation Ministry has refused to recognise 60,000 new refugees who arrived in the Vanni on the mainland from Jaffna after *Operation Sunray II* in April. Hundreds of people demonstrated before the Kilinochchi Government Agent's office two days earlier demanding food aid. The new refugees have increased the burden of welfare agencies which are struggling to feed the 220,000 refugees who fled to the Vanni after *Operation Sunray I* in December.

The LTTE has appealed to NGOs to provide food to the new refugees. NGOs point out that the government has the

primary responsibility to feed the population and NGOs can only supplement government aid. The government asserts that refugee figures are exaggerated and insists that Vanni refugees must return to Jaffna. In the first 13 days of May only 310 lorry-loads of food were allowed into the Vanni across the Army checkpoint at Thandikulam, although the military agreed to allow 50 lorries each day. Food transport was again disrupted in May after Tamil group PLOTE demanded taxes from lorry owners.

Although NGOs remain gravely concerned about food and medical supplies nutritional surveys do not show high percentage of malnutrition. However NGOs

warn that if the current situation is not checked, disaster may follow. Drought remains the major danger. Some tanks and wells are completely dry and others down by 70%. This year's major *Maha* rice harvest will be badly hit. All of this will increase pressure on people to return to Jaffna.

Reports say 800 people in Army-controlled areas of Vavuniya have applied to return. Some 100 government officers were airlifted to Jaffna in early May. In the absence of a land route and the lagoon crossing at Kilali in the hands of the Army the only way to Jaffna for those in Tiger-held territory is south through Vavuniya town.

■ Food aid crisis looming

Tigers close in on the east

THE LTTE continued devastating raids in the east killing 14 soldiers and injuring 13 others in an ambush at Santhiveli, 15 miles north of Batticaloa on 11 May. The Defence Ministry says at least 50 Tigers were killed by the Army.

The LTTE has been launching attacks from strongholds north of the Welikande-Valaichenai road, a vital supply line the Army patrols to keep open. The Kinnayady Army camp near Valaichenai was attacked on 4 May and five soldiers were injured. Eleven soldiers died and 11 others wounded in a clash two days later at Mylanthanai, west of Valaichenai. Eighteen Tigers including areas leader *Gunam* were also killed.

Further south, the Army's attempt to

control another supply line, the Chenkalady-Badulla road, is also proving difficult as the Tigers launch attacks in the area. A LTTE bomb killed four Airforce personnel visiting the leper colony of Mantivu, on a Buddhist holiday on 3 May.

Extra-judicial killings in Batticaloa continue. R Kumaraguru was shot dead at Vantharumoolai on 8 May. Police say he died in crossfire. The bullet-ridden body of hospital employee Somalingam Vani abducted in March was found in the same area on 10 May.

The Defence Ministry says a TELO member and two PLOTE cadre were shot dead by the LTTE on 29 May in Cheddipalayam. Another group EPRLF

has now joined the Tamil groups fighting at the side of the Army. Batticaloa residents accuse the EPRLF of a new round of harassment and alleged rape in the Sithandy area.

The Army continues its policy of bringing maximum pressure on LTTE-controlled areas where, according to an ICRC survey 90% of the people are malnourished. After several weeks villages along the Chenkalady-Badulla road were allowed three ICRC-escorted lorry-loads of food on 23 May. Observers say the ICRC is reluctant to be involved because food distribution takes place near the Santhiveli Army camp which was attacked by the LTTE.

Tiger-controlled Vaharai area, 40 miles north of Batticaloa has received almost no food and comes under constant shelling by the Army. The military has also banned all transport to the region forcing people to walk 30km south to Valaichenai to buy essential food items.

Over 17,000 people live in the Vaharai area. Food stamps for over 358,000 people living in poverty in Batticaloa District have not been issued food stamps for the last two months to enable them to purchase food cheaply. Relief for 15,000 fishermen prevented from going to sea by security restrictions was suspended two months ago.

Further south in Amparai, an electricity transformer at Central Camp was damaged by the LTTE on 16 May. A Special Task Force (STF) member was killed by the Tigers at Thambodhi on 2 June.

checkpoint

THE capture of Jaffna peninsula's Kilali area has trapped over 400,000 people in the Vanni. The boat crossing at Kilali earlier organised by the LTTE remains banned under Emergency regulations. Many people in the Vanni want to return to Jaffna, but the only route available currently is through Vavuniya and Trincomalee towns. Every day 2,000 people arrive at Nochchimoddai the military-controlled checkpoint outside Vavuniya seeking a gateway to the south.

The Army daily allows only 25 people into Vavuniya and others must return to Tiger-controlled Omanthai. Thousands of people crossing the no-man's-land are turned back, but return the following day to try their luck again. The Army will not permit people between the ages of 15 and 30 fearing Tiger guerrillas hidden among them. The LTTE also enforces its restriction on young people leaving the Vanni. A large number of youths are forced to remain and reports say the LTTE has significantly increased its cadre. Older people and families pay heavy fees for exit permits. Most people are heading for relatives in Colombo or the new twice weekly boat service to Jaffna from Trincomalee which currently has a six week waiting list.

The LTTE strictly screens those entering and leaving Vanni to prevent information on LTTE military positions leaking out. The LTTE is said to control the rice market in the Vanni fixing prices to prevent hoarding. International remittances from relatives seem to be deposited directly into the LTTE-controlled Bank of Tamil Eelam where a large commission is levied on each transfer.

The Tigers who have lost their economic and political base in Jaffna are tightening the screw on the civilian population. More and more Jaffna people want to go home.

Death squad

THE bullet-ridden bodies of Sivarasa Krishna and Palanivel Gunasingham were found at Selvanayagapuram in Trincomalee on 29 May. The two Tamil youths had been abducted in a white van the previous night from Anbuvalipuram.

White vans are associated with military death squads and a number of people abducted have disappeared. Tamil MP M Chandrakumar says in a letter to President Chandrika that white vans are creating widespread fear and has called for immediate inquiry.

Observers say abductions are the Army's response to Tiger attacks. Trincomalee MP Sunil Shantha Ranaweera says LTTE has increased terror attacks in the District. The Tigers move easily under cover of darkness in

rural areas and after the fall of Jaffna have pledged to intensify attacks in the east. The LTTE blasted two electricity towers on 3 May plunging entire Trincomalee in darkness.

A policeman was killed and another injured in a LTTE attack on the Thoppur police station, 20km south of Trincomalee town, on the following day. The Tigers ambushed an Army patrol at Mavilaru further south on 17 May killing a soldier. Two policemen were injured when the Tigers shelled the Pulmoddai police station on 18 May. Six soldiers died on the same day in another attack on the Kivulkade Army camp. In a fierce clash following a LTTE raid on Meegagodella Army camp on 27 May eight soldiers and 18 Tigers died.

Colombo Citizens Committee says monitor search operations *France prepares forcible returns*

A Sri Lankan government report says that France is taking preliminary steps towards an agreement with Sri Lanka to "facilitate and regulate the repatriation of Sri Lankan asylum-seekers". The report follows a meeting between the visiting French Foreign Affairs State minister Margie Sudre and President Chandrika in early May. Observers believe that the capture of Jaffna and the government's attempt to restore civil administration will encourage more Western nations to seek repatriation agreements.

Sri Lanka and Switzerland have already agreed to extend the pact reached in January 1994 for forcible returns. In May, nine rejected asylum-seekers were deported to Sri Lanka. The Swiss Refugee Council (OSAR) says asylum-seekers should not be returned in the current volatile situation in Sri Lanka.

A delegation of five Tamil political parties told Colombo's Swiss ambassador on 21 May that Tamils are viewed with suspicion throughout the island and

urged the suspension of the programme. According to press reports the ambassador assured the Tamil parties that the Swiss government will follow a humane policy in the case of Sri Lankan refugees.

Arrests of Tamils in Colombo continue as security forces believe Tiger suicide bombers are hidden among 150,000 refugees from the north. Police arrested an alleged Tiger leader in the capital in mid-May. Deputy Inspector General of Police Dissanayake says the LTTE continues to send suicide units to Colombo.

Human rights organisations have launched a "Colombo Citizens Committee" to monitor human rights violations during military search operations. Senior Police Superintendent Gunasena de Silva told the inaugural meeting of the new committee that detainees must be held until reports from intelligence services in Colombo and Vavuniya clear them.

Human rights agencies say despite presidential orders, arbitrary detention,

torture and extortion continue. Mrs T Packiyam and her 15 year-old daughter Pushpalatha were arrested at Modera and after detention for a month allowed bail. They were rearrested as they left the court. The Chief Magistrate has called for explanations from police.

In an application for breach of fundamental rights before the Supreme Court, S Ravichandran alleges that he was severely tortured in a Batticaloa Army camp and a confession obtained of LTTE membership under threat of torture at the Colombo Magazine prison in February.

Disappearances are still a major concern. Of the reported 81 disappearances from January to April this year, the Human Rights Task Force (HRTF) has been able to trace only 23. Human rights agencies say many disappearances remain unreported for fear of reprisals and have expressed concern over government's silence on prosecution of offenders in cases investigated by the three disappearance commissions.

Southern politicians steer India's new regime

SOUTHERN Karnataka state Chief Minister HD Deve Gowda, 63, became India's Prime Minister on 1 June, after President Shanker Dayal Sharma invited the Third Front alliance to form the government following the failure of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to demonstrate a majority in Parliament.

Earlier BJP's Atal Bihari Vajpayee resigned, becoming India's shortest serving Prime Minister. Congress (I) will support the Third Front if only to keep the Hindu-fanatic BJP out of power. The 14-member Third Front also included Tamil Nadu's DMK and the new Tamil Maanila Congress (TMC) formed by Congress (I) dissident GK Mooppanar.

The DMK and TMC won 211 of the 235 seats in the Tamil Nadu legislative assembly elections. Ms Jayalalitha's ruling AIADMK was trounced winning only four seats. Her ally in the state, Congress (I), sunk with her without winning a single seat. Despite a low-key campaign on Sri Lankan issues pro-LTTE party V Gopalasamy's MDMK suffered a humiliating defeat.

Mr M Karunanidhi's election as new Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu is viewed

with some apprehension in Sri Lanka. Colombo newspapers say Mr Karunanidhi will come under pressure from pro-LTTE lobbies to take a more conciliatory approach to the Tigers. In

the past Mr Karunanidhi has supported the LTTE when it politically suited him. He disclaimed support for the Tigers before the April elections and is expected to follow the dictates of New Delhi.

The Indian Home Ministry extended the 1992 ban on the LTTE for a further two years on 14 May. Some observers say Mr Karunanidhi will wait until the Rajiv Gandhi murder trial is completed before any commitment.

The Special Investigation Team (SIT) which probed the Rajiv assassination is facing new allegations of incompetence. Twenty six people, including LTTE leader V Prabhakaran were charged with the killing in August 1992. But the Jain Commission looking into conspiracies behind the murder says there are gaps in the investigation.

According to New Delhi journal *India Today*, SIT failed to probe the link between the Rajiv assassination in May 1991 and the killing of EPRLF leader K Pathmanabha in June 1990. SIT is also accused of failing to investigate the connection between the Rajiv assassins and some DMK members and international links to arms dealers.

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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