

Army stalls in the Vanni

The Sri Lankan Army was forced to suspend its military offensive north of Vavuniya in late June after the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) devastated the rear of the advancing columns in two human-wave assaults killing over 600 soldiers.

The Tigers launched a dawn attack on 10 June on Army's 55 Brigade headquarters established at Thandikulam, north of Vavuniya three weeks into *Operation Jayasikurui*, designed to open the 40-mile land route between Vavuniya and Kilinochchi.

LTTE guerrillas blasted the Nochchimoddai bridge and held the area between Thandikulam and Nochchimoddai for 24 hours before withdrawing. Reports say the Tigers removed large quantities of arms and ammunition before blowing up an arms store and putting long-range artillery positions out of action. The military field headquarters was destroyed. The LTTE used its newly acquired artillery guns on Army camps and the airbase in Vavuniya to prevent reinforcements. Thousands of civilians fled the town in panic.

Troops advancing on another front from Nedunkerni in early June northward toward Oddusuddan, a key town in Tiger-controlled Mullaitivu, had brought several villages under control. By the end of June the Army had reached Pandarikulam, within three miles of Oddusuddan. On the Vavuniya-Kilinochchi road, the Army resumed the third phase of the operation from Periyamadu on 23 June, aimed at capturing the strategic town of Puliyanakulam, 14 miles north of Vavuniya.

Over 1,000 Tigers launched a second assault on 24 June between Omathai and Periyamadu, preceded by a *Black Tiger* suicide attack. The field headquarters re-established at Periyamadu was again destroyed. The arms and vehicles captured by the LTTE in the two attacks,

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including artillery guns and armoured cars, is estimated at Rs 500 million (\$10 million). It is believed that over 600 were killed on both sides and 1,500 wounded.

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The guerrilla attacks show the vulnerability of troops overstretched in the vast Vanni region. There are also accusations that senior officers ignored intelligence warnings of impending Tiger assaults.

The LTTE clearly exerted maximum effort to safeguard its heartland as the capture of the Vavuniya-Kilinochchi road would have far-reaching implications for future Tiger strategies and recruitment. The LTTE is expected to launch further attacks on the Army contingent approaching Oddusuddan, just three miles from Mullaitivu town. According to reports, Interpol has informed the Sri Lankan intelligence services that the LTTE is currently negotiat-

ing with Kurdish guerrillas to obtain new surface-to-air missiles.

While the war escalates, the civilian population is increasingly vulnerable. Aerial bombing and shells killed at least 24 people and injured over 100. Reports say some civilians ordered to vacate their homes by the LTTE were caught in the crossfire. TULF leader M Sivasithamparam alleges that soldiers looted homes of 400 families fleeing the scene of the Thandikulam attack.

Transport minister Srimani Athulathmudali was dropped in a major Cabinet reshuffle on 9 June. The 30-member Cabinet includes eight new ministers. Reconstruction has been removed from Rehabilitation minister MHM Ashraff's portfolio.

Sri Lanka's NGO-led National Peace Council (NPC) welcomed promotions for MPs who back a political solution. Some PA MPs took part in recent peace meetings in Northern Ireland and Philippines and were associated with statements calling for inclusion of the LTTE in the search for negotiated peace. The NPC says the government's twin-track push to force peace through military and political pressure is essentially one-track in its motivation - the exclusion of the LTTE in the peace process.

Tamil parties expressed their dissatisfaction in a letter to President Chandrika in mid-June over the delay in the peace process. Reports say Tamil moderate party TULF, which has not signed the letter, plans a walk-out during the next Emergency debate in Parliament demanding a ceasefire.

Tamils have also raised protests over government decision to submit new electoral reform proposals to the Parliamentary Select Committee on Constitutional Reform while it has still not reached consensus on key issues such as the nature of the Sri Lankan state, unit of devolution and control of land.

JAFFNA

Human shields and profiteers

EPDP MP M Chandrakumar told the Sri Lankan Parliament on 5 May that the Army is using civilians as human shields in Jaffna. People from several villages are being forced to sleep in front of the perimeter fence surrounding Velanai Army camp.

The disappearances and killings continue. Jaffna's Guardian Association for Persons Arrested and Disappeared says that it has not been able to obtain any information about the 760 disappeared youths from meetings with senior military and Defence Ministry officers.

In June, *habeas corpus* applications were filed on 14 youths arrested on 19 July 1996 at Navatkuli. Sisters Thangarajah Langeswary and Ketheeswary arrested on 28 March in Jaffna have disappeared. Reports say the Army shot dead four civilians in Valikamam on 17 June.

The LTTE intensified operations in the peninsula in June. Three soldiers and two civilians in a bus were killed by a landmine at Ilavai on 4 June. Suspected LTTE gunmen shot dead Chavakachcheri resident A Kumarasuriar in early June. In a landmine attack in the Chavakachcheri area on 13 June four soldiers were killed and eight others wounded.

Local NGOs have still not been allowed to operate and international NGOs are working under difficult conditions. British NGO Medical Emergency Relief International (MERLIN) closed its Jaffna office in early June after the

Defence Ministry refused permission for radio equipment, says Tamil newspaper *Virakesari*. In late June representatives of UNHCR, FAO and UNDF visited Jaffna to assess the situation. UN refugee agency UNHCR has implemented 11 micro projects in 1997 and has called for NGO assistance to complete another 50 by December.

Another citizen's body, the Jaffna People's Committee for Peace and Harmony warned of shortages of doctors and nurses at the Jaffna hospital which serves 36,000 patients each month, in a letter to the Health Ministry. The hospital also lacks modern equipment and needs 300 more beds. New senior health officers appointed to the peninsula's hospitals have not taken up their posts.

Jaffna Cooperative Union Director S Sivanesarajah says bureaucracy is dangerously delaying food shipments. Cooperative shops where people are able to buy at prices fixed by the Government Agent (GA) receive only limited supplies of food. Over 90% of the food goes to private traders selling at exorbitant rates and the black market is thriving.

Reports say civil administration is unable to function independently, as all decisions are taken by the military at all levels. Retired Army officers have been appointed to senior administration positions. Continuing human rights abuses deter young people returning to Jaffna and observers say the local economy is critically short of labour.

New funds

Tamil Nadu's DMK government has reserved 28 university seats for Sri Lankan refugee students. It has also increased the monthly payment to each refugee family by Rs 50 and allocated Rs 50 million for repair of refugee huts from state funds.

Protest

Seventy Sri Lankan Tamils staged a protest fast in Sydney in mid-June against a decision to deport them. In early July another 17 Tamil refugees landed at Coral Bay in western Australia, 700 miles north of Perth.

Convicted

The Colombo High Court on 1 July convicted *Sunday Times* editor Sinha Ratnatunge accused of defaming President Kumaratunge in an article on 15 February 1995. Mr Ratnatunge was sentenced to 18 months suspended imprisonment.

Arrest

Former UNP Housing minister Sirisena Cooray was arrested by police under Emergency regulations on 16 June. According to the media, police have uncovered a plot to assassinate President Kumaratunge.

Refugees

Of the 74,900 people who arrived in Vavuniya from the Vanni since October 1996, 11,800 still remain in 11 camps. Over 5,000 have returned to LTTE areas in the Vanni and 58,000 have been sent to Jaffna.

Bureaucrats slash food aid

THERE are serious food and medical shortages for over 25,000 people north of Vavuniya displaced as a result of *Operation Jayasikurui*.

Sri Lanka's Essential Services Commissioner has, by a 9 May circular letter to government officers, ordered the arbitrary reduction of the people receiving food aid from 420,000 to 185,000. According to the Vavuniya GA K Ganesh, although 1,525 lorryloads of food was needed for the Vanni for May and June only 640 lorryloads were received. Over 7,900 barrels of kerosene was required but only 2,700 were supplied. Thousands of refugees demonstrated in Madhu on 1 July demanding more food and medicine.

Hospitals in the Vanni struggle without sufficient medicines and shortage of staff. In April and May, Akkarayankulam hospital treated over 49,000 patients. Sixty one people died in the hospital during the two months. Medical Agency *Medecins Sans Frontiers* (Holland) says the hospital has not received medicines ordered from Colombo and children have been deprived of preventive injections for the last three months.

Another 17,000 patients were treated at the Mallavi hospital. An ambulance travelling with nine patients from Vavuniya to the hospital was held by the Army at a checkpoint on 17 June. The military says that medicines banned to the Vanni were hidden in the ambulance

and the driver and his assistant were taken into custody.

Ten civilians were killed and 24 others injured in shelling when the LTTE attacked the Thandikulam Army base on 10 June. Over 6,700 people who fled to Vavuniya town are housed in four refugee camps. Nineteen civilians and four policemen were seriously wounded by a Tiger bomb in the heart of Vavuniya town on 16 June.

Further north-east, six LTTE boats travelling to Kokkilai from Trincomalee were sunk by naval patrol craft on 28 June killing 35 Tigers. The Navy says four of the boats were carrying medicines and medical equipment for wounded LTTE cadre in the Vanni.

■ *Military reprisals blight the east*

Army shells Batticaloa refugee camp

A shell fired at the Peithlai refugee camp killed 15 year-old Nadarasa Premavathy in mid-June. Indiscriminate shelling by security forces has caused many deaths.

In a letter to President Kumaratunge, Batticaloa MP K Thurairajasingham says that the Army shelled Puthukudyiruppu on 2 June following a LTTE attack in Karuvakerni, killing a woman, injuring 18 others and damaging 50 houses.

Two days later Army shells killed Thambimuthu Annapackiyam at Nasivantivu. A shell exploded inside a school injuring six students. Kayankerni student Thayanithi Kuganesan, 7, was killed by a shell on 11 June.

EPDP leader Douglas Devananda says that Akkaraipatru police fired indiscrimi-

nately without provocation injuring a woman and damaging houses. Two young shepherds were killed by a shell at Thirukovil in late June.

Army camps and police stations in Valaichenai, north of Batticaloa town are continually targeted by the LTTE, as security forces and the Tigers struggle for supremacy. The Chenkalady camp of Tamil group PLOTE which is fighting on the side of the Army, was attacked by the LTTE on 9 June. Three PLOTE cadre were killed and three others injured. The Tigers intercepted a police Special Task Force (STF) patrol on the Batticaloa-Amparai border on 15 June killing 14.

According to statistics compiled by Batticaloa government secretariat, over

2,680 women have been widowed in the district as a result of the war, 1,560 youths have disappeared, 6,400 civilians have been killed and 4,100 wounded. Over 109,000 families have been affected by violence and 92,000 houses damaged. Only 20,000 families have received full or partial compensation. Colombo bureaucrats are delaying repairs to irrigation tanks in the region despite approval by the President.

In Trincomalee District, the Tigers killed 24 soldiers at Pulmoddai on 18 June. Following the attack the Army shelled populated areas killing a civilian and injuring many others. Over 20 houses and two shops were damaged.

Residents say the Tigers have intensified attacks in the district. The LTTE shot dead two policemen praying at the Salliamman temple on 4 June. A soldier was killed on 19 June at the Muthur bus stand. In late June four electricity transformers were damaged by the LTTE.

Kantalai hospital employee Mahendran was killed when unidentified persons fired on an ambulance on 6 June. Two other hospital employees were injured. Police took four Muslims and two Tamils into custody on 22 June alleging that they supplied medicines and spares for vehicles to the LTTE.

The LTTE abducted 34 Muslims and four Sinhalese on 2 July at Irakkandy, north of Trincomalee town. The Tigers say the Army arrested five of their colleagues on information provided by the villagers.

disappeared

THE University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna) (UTHR) says in a June report titled *Jaffna: A Vision skewed* that government refusal to initiate institutional reforms within the Army and lack of credible investigations into disappearances have encouraged human rights violations by the military and the LTTE in the Jaffna peninsula. The report analyses the plight of civilians caught up between the warring Army and the LTTE. The Army, the reports says, immediately guns down suspects who are pointed out by *thalayattis* or masked informers, sometimes killing innocent civilians. Beatings in detention and at checkpoints have heightened insecurity among the population.

LTTE's arbitrary execution of civilians often merely for being seen talking to soldiers is designed to terrorise local people. Both the Army and the LTTE, in gruesome warnings to the population, publicly display bodies of victims. The LTTE actively demonstrates its absence of concern for the people, by launching attacks in public places provoking Army reprisals on civilians, says UTHR. The Defence Ministry, which effectively rules Jaffna, has been given too much power. The Ministry's general approach is to cover-up rather than investigate human rights violations and punish offenders. UTHR emphasises that independent inquiries into questionable deaths of civilians, both during and after battles, are desperately needed if people are to believe that the government is making honest attempts to rebuild Jaffna.

Mannar hijack

THE LTTE hijacked refugee ship *Misen* near Pesalai on 1 July demonstrating opposition to displaced civilians being transported from the Vanni to Jaffna. The ship was damaged with a bomb and two Indonesians among the nine sailors abducted were later released. Ship services have been suspended.

Currently over 4,500 refugees in Mannar are waiting to travel to Jaffna and more refugees are arriving from the Vanni war zone daily. Another 3,500 are waiting further east at Uyilankulam. In June over 70 people reached the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu.

Diarrhoea and malaria are spreading fast in refugee camps and Pesalai hospital is struggling to cope with increasing patients and shortage of medicines. Local

government officers say the money allocated for refugees is only sufficient to provide one meal a day and petitioned Northern Province Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Authority chief Somapala Gunadheera visiting Mannar on 20 June.

The Tigers continue to infiltrate Mannar. The Navy attacked a LTTE boat off Talaimannar on 10 June. Three Tigers jumped into the sea and escaped. Following a LTTE attack on a patrol in Talaimannar four days later, the Army shelled a housing scheme injuring Poomany and Sagayamalar.

LTTE's Pistol Group shot and injured an intelligence officer in Mannar town on 24 June. A Tiger attempting to infiltrate army-controlled Uyilankulam on 28 June was shot dead.

Northern refugees most at risk in Colombo

Ministers to probe Tamil arrests

PRESIDENT Chandrika Kumaratunge appointed a four-member ministerial committee in late June to probe allegations of harassment of Tamil civilians in Colombo by security forces. Human rights agencies have complained for many years over arbitrary arrests, prolonged detention without trial and disappearances of Tamils in the capital.

Observers believe that the enquiry is to pre-empt a meeting between the Justice minister GL Peiris and the Tamil parties on 3 July. The committee includes hard-line Deputy Defence minister Anuruddha Ratwatte who is in charge of the security forces.

At the meeting with Mr Peiris on 3 July, Tamil parties urged the appointment of a five member team from each Tamil party to which civilians can make initial complaints. Human rights activists insist that independent NGOs must be involved and that political appointments will further corruption.

After participants said that Village Headmen demanded money for identity card application forms, the government agreed to establish an office for people to obtain the forms freely. Participants also pointed out that Emergency regulation requiring police registration was not serving the purpose, as many who register are arrested repeatedly.

Rivalries between the Crime Detection Bureau (CDB) and immigration officers at the Colombo airport over Tamil passengers also led to arbitrary Tamil detentions often to spite the other department. In June three groups of Tamils leaving abroad, including 21 to Singapore, were detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) suspected of LTTE fundraising.

Police fear *Black Tiger* suicide cadre are hidden among the 150,000 Tamil refugees in the capital. As *Operation Jayasikurui* continued in the Vanni, security operations were stepped up. Colombo newspaper *Sunday Times* says some policemen took the law into their own hands, treating every Tamil visitor to Colombo as a suspected terrorist.

Over 50 Tamils were taken into custody in the Pettah commercial district on 3 June. A British Tamil couple were arrested near the President's "Temple Trees" residence on 11 June. Six Tamil youths from Batticaloa were arrested on 18 June and released later.

A government decision in June to scrap the Human Rights Task Force (HRTF) set up to monitor detainees, and replace it with a Human Rights Commission has outraged local NGOs.

A fundamental rights application filed in the Supreme Court in June reveals that a whole family which fled the northern war zone is in detention. Seevaratnam Rajanimala from Kilinochchi was arrested in Colombo on 28 November and for two days assaulted with a plastic pipe filled with concrete. Two of her four children are detained with her at the Welikada women prison. Her other two children are held at a Salvation Army hostel in Borella and her husband is detained at the Kalutara prison. She has so far not been informed of the reasons for her arrest.

Arrests are also taking place in other

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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southern areas. Four Tamils were detained in Kandy on 6 June on allegations of spying on Mr Ratwatte's home. Police say a large number of documents linking them with terrorist activity were uncovered. Three days later Kandy police took into custody a Hill Country youth working in the Nuwara Eliya market. LTTE suspect Chandran, allegedly sent by intelligence chief Pottu Amman to assassinate a top politician, escaped on 25 June from the police station in Nanu Oya, three miles south of Nuwara Eliya.

Seventy youths arrested in Jaffna and held in various prisons in the south, were released in June. But in mid-June another 52 Tamil youths, including 12 women, detained in the peninsula's Kankesanthurai Army camp were transferred to prisons in Colombo.

A government decision in June to scrap the Human Rights Task Force (HRTF) set up to monitor detainees, and replace it with a Human Rights Commission has outraged local NGOs. They were widely critical over HRTF's inaction and conciliatory pose but see the new entity as even more pro-government and less effective. HRTF's mandate has been extended until August but the new Commission still has no office and no operational arm and detainees will remain at real risk.

A large number of Tamils are still held in prisons for several years without trial. A detainee in Kalutara prison says that despite assurances of a number of politicians, no action has been taken to look into their plight. Many detainees allege torture in custody.

Jaffna trader A Sureshkumar, who came to Colombo to go abroad was arrested on 11 January and held by the CDB until 27 May when he was produced before a court. He alleges that he was hung by the feet and tortured. Sureshkumar is currently at the Kalutara prison. The Supreme Court has ordered a medical examination.

Jaffna student R Pragalathan says in a fundamental rights application that after his arrest at Bambalapitiya suburb on 7 January, pins were inserted under his nails and when he refused to sign a confession was brutally assaulted. Another Jaffna student G Balakumar, currently in Colombo Magazine prison, also suffered torture at the Joseph camp in Vavuniya after his arrest in June 1996.