

Prisoners killed in Kalutara

Two Tamil detainees and a Muslim inmate were hacked to death by Sinhalese prisoners at Kalutara prison, 25 miles south of Colombo, on 12 December.

Hundreds of Sinhalese prisoners entered a separate Tamil-detained area within the prison and attacked them with knives and clubs killing Jaffna residents Maruthalingam Dharmalingam and Shanmugarasa Sivanesan and Mannar refugee HG Khan. Seventeen others were injured, seven of them seriously.

Detainees who escaped the ordeal say soldiers present refused to intervene when the prisoners begged them for help as they were beaten to death and thrown into a drain near the prison walls. Soldiers also made no attempt to prevent civilians gathered outside the prison throwing stones at the Tamil detainees. Prison officers later told MPs that soldiers on guard can intervene only in case of an attack on the prison or if prisoners attempted to escape.

In late November, 220 Tamil detainees were transferred to Kalutara from Colombo's Magazine prison after they staged a protest fast against poor prison conditions and prolonged detention without trial. Detainees say they were attacked by jailors and force-fed before being transferred.

On 10 December, Sinhalese prisoners attempted to enter the Tamil section, after Tamil prisoners demanded more food, but were prevented by guards. Thereafter the Tamils were attacked with stones. The following day some prisoners succeeded in entering the area and seriously wounded two Tamils. Following a complaint by a Colombo human rights agency, the Kalutara High Court ordered the Prison Superintendent to submit a report on the incident.

Human rights observers are concerned that the authorities failed to take precautions despite the continuing tension. London-based human rights agency Amnesty International says prison staff

Justice minister Peiris says he would recommend a Commission of enquiry into the deaths.

and soldiers appear to have failed to protect Tamil detainees and according to some reports were even actively involved in the attack.

A conference of senior government officers on 15 December, summoned by Justice and National Reconciliation minister GL Peiris, decided to immediately set up a special police unit at Kalutara for the protection of Tamil detainees and transfer them later to the Boossa detention centre in Galle District, 60 miles south of Colombo.

The Boossa detention centre is notorious for ill-treatment and torture of Tamil prisoners. The 460 Tamil detainees at Kalutara who launched a protest fast, were distressed by the decision and demanded visiting MPs that they should be transferred to a prison where safety of prisoners and visiting relatives would be guaranteed. The fast ended on 16 December after State Attorney Sugatha Gamlath promised protection and expeditious disposal of their cases.

Opposition United National Party MP Jayalath Jayawardena who visited the prison says Tamil prisoners continue to live in fear and has called for an independent investigation. Mr Peiris says that he would recommend to President

Chandrika Kumaratunge for a commission of enquiry into the deaths and promised compensation to families of those killed.

Amnesty International's view that the attack on Tamil prisoners appears to have been premeditated gained strength after it was revealed that the murder incident had been photographed by a prison officer. The Defence ministry has appointed a team to investigate the allegation. Questions over how prisoners had access to weapons also remain unanswered.

Six days before the prison murders, President Kumaratunge issued new regulations on visits to detainees under Emergency and the Prevention of terrorism Act. Visits will now be restricted to one a week to a person nominated by the prisoner. The visitor must obtain a letter from the police where he resides stating that there are no objections. Observers say the regulations are intended to restrict visitors and will further affect Tamil detainees.

Several Tamil detainees who witnessed the killings refused to give evidence at the magisterial enquiry for fear of their lives. Human rights agencies have expressed dismay over the prison murders. The Movement for Inter-Racial Justice and Equality (MIRJE) says in a late December statement that the government must accept responsibility and has urged adequate preventive measures.

In July 1983, 53 Tamil prisoners were massacred in the Colombo maximum security Welikade prison. In February 1996, over 100 prison officers attacked Tamils in the capital's Magazine prison injuring many detainees. No investigation has been carried out into these and a number of other incidents.

Since the present government gained power there have been a number of deaths in custody. MPs who have complained for many years over treatment of Tamil detainees say unless those responsible are identified and punished, impunity and such atrocities will continue.

THE VANNI

Victims of war

REPORTS say thirteen people died without adequate food and of disease in December at Jayapuram in Kilinochchi District. There are over 380,000 refugees in the Vanni and it was reported at a Colombo meeting of NGOs and political parties on 12 December that only 480 lorryloads of food is reaching the Vanni a month although over 1,000 lorryloads are currently needed.

At a conference three days earlier, summoned after opposition UNP and Tamil parties demanded a parliamentary debate on the situation in the Vanni, Deputy Defence minister Anuruddha Ratwatte claimed that there are only 297,300 people in the region. The report of a three-member committee appointed in October 1996 to determine the number of refugees remains unpublished.

A church fact-finding mission to the Vanni in December has highlighted the extreme conditions and suffering of the people. Scarcity of food has led to malnourishment and prices remain high. Refugee sheds have been destroyed by monsoon floods and a large number suffer from malaria and diarrhoea.

According to Vavuniya Government Agent (GA) K Ganesh, transport of food is difficult as 200 lorries lie in LTTE-controlled areas without spare parts. Mullaitivu GA R Tharmakulasingham sent an urgent message in early December to the Social Services secretary requesting implementation of poverty relief programmes in the district.

Minister Nimal Siripala de Silva met national and international agencies on 24 December to discuss the Vanni situation in detail. Although a decision was taken to increase medicines to the Vanni by 30%, observers are doubtful that the Health ministry would be able to act independently of the Defence ministry.

Army operation *Jayasikurui* (Certain Victory) launched on 13 May to open a landroute to Jaffna continues. Despite some 4,000 Army casualties, Mr Ratwatte is determined to reach Kilinochchi before Sri Lanka's 50th independence anniversary on 4 February.

In early December, a large number of refugees in Vavunikulam, south-west of Mankulam, fled as the Airforce bombed the area. Three soldiers and eight Tigers were killed in clashes at Kanagarayankulam. Six soldiers died at Olumadu when their tractor was blasted by a landmine on 12 December. The Defence ministry says 11 Tigers were killed in fighting four days later at Kanagarayankulam.

In Vavuniya, hotel owner Sellathurai Sriharan and an employee were abducted by gunmen in a van on 15 December. Alleged Army informer K Jegatheeswaran was shot dead on 22 December by LTTE's Pistol Group which continues to infiltrate military areas. An Army intelligence officer was taken into custody in late December accused of rape of a 17 year-old girl at Vepankulam.

Attack

Three suspected LTTE suicide bombers died on 28 December when their truck exploded half a mile from the Magalle naval base in Galle District where Navy Commander Cecil Tissera was staying. Ten shops and two houses were damaged. Police arrested four Tamil youths and questioned Tamils working in shops in Galle.

Found

British customs officers arrested 15 Sri Lankans and a Bangla Desh national on 29 December attempting to enter Britain illegally, hidden in a freezer truck arriving from France.

Rejected

According to Danish television, the European Union turned down appeals from Lithuanian authorities for assistance to provide food and housing for refugees currently held in extremely poor conditions, but offered to assist improve border security. Other reports say 103 Sri Lankan illegal entrants in Lithuania will be deported.

Protest

Tamil party PLOTE staged a demonstration before Parliament on 5 December demanding government action on disappearances in Jaffna and release of 12,000 Tamil refugees held in camps in Vavuniya.

Disease

Two children died of disease at Sirambiyady in Jaffna in late December. Reports say a number of people in the peninsula are afflicted by an unidentified disease.

Leopards in Jaffna

ARMY Major Chandrananda Jayatilleke and three other soldiers were killed in a LTTE landmine attack on 23 December at Mirusuvil, 15 miles east of Jaffna. As the Army hunted for Tiger infiltrators in the run-up to local government elections scheduled for 29 January, the Tigers launched over 20 attacks in the peninsula killing 40 soldiers.

On 3 December the LTTE launched an attack on Army positions at Eluthumadduval east of Chavakachcheri. Two members of an elite LTTE unit *Leopards* were shot dead in early December in Kallikadu and Madduvil. The Army says *Sea Tiger* Arjunan and four others hidden in a house at Vathiri

in Vadamaratchy were shot dead on 16 December. Five LTTE suspects were killed in a clash in the same area two days later. The Army shot dead Yogarajah Ramesh, 17, on 25 December while he removed wall posters. Three civilians were killed in a landmine blast on 28 December at Velanai. Tamil party EPDP says ten youths arrested by the Army remain in detention.

The western Valikamam north area remains a high security zone. Some 10,500 people have been allowed to resettle in 15 of the 45 village headman divisions. Only 850 of the 3,000 families have received the Rs 5,000 resettlement assistance, although the Rehabilitation

ministry has provided each homeless family Rs 6,000 for huts. Sri Lanka Telecom Director Christie de Silva says 60 new telephone connections have been provided to Jaffna.

In early December Northern Province Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority (NPRRA) Chairman Somapala Gunadheera and government officers discussed Jaffna's needs. Officers reported that 8,554 people had died as a result of the war since 1990 and 2,620 disabled and requested an additional Rs 75 million for rehabilitation. Press reports say bureaucratic red tape is causing serious delays in projects which international agencies are prepared to implement.

■ Ambulance attacked in Trincomalee

Death in the market

FIVE civilians were killed and 59 others, including four policemen, injured when a bomb exploded in a crowded market in Batticaloa town on 9 December. The police accuse the LTTE, but people say security forces were responsible for the carnage. Local MPs have written to President Chandrika demanding an independent enquiry into the explosion which took place inside a high security zone in the town with five checkpoints and a police station.

Two days later, another bomb in a vehicle within the town killed the driver and postal worker PV Sathesh. Mystery also surrounds the latter incident. Sathesh was a member of the LTTE and surrendered to the Army in 1990.

As the Tigers continued to launch widespread attacks in the east, the security forces carried out a number of search operations. The Army shot and wounded pregnant woman Thayalanayagi during a search operation at Vinayagapuram on 5 December. Her child removed by surgery was found dead. Two days later the Army shot and seriously injured K Prabhakaran, 12, in Valaichenai. Reports say Batticaloa hospital patient Anthony Sasitharan was shot dead in mid-December by the police as he climbed over the hospital wall.

The LTTE attacked security forces on 17 December at Thalavai in Eravur killing a Home Guard and seriously wounding civilian Thangavel Sumithra.

Two soldiers were killed on the same day at Kiran. The following day the Army shot dead two Tigers at Eravur. Eight people were arrested after weapons were found buried in Majamthoduvai, south of Batticaloa town, in late December.

Five members of the *Razik group* were killed by the LTTE in an attack on 26 December at Punnaikudah in Eravur. A week earlier, a member of the *Razik group* and two Tigers were killed in a clash. The *Razik group*, a breakaway faction of Tamil party EPRLF, currently fighting the LTTE on the side of the Army, has also been accused of abductions and murders. Tamil group TELO's Sivalingam Singarasa was shot dead by the Tigers on 27 December at Arayampathy.

In Trincomalee District, ambulance driver N Sountharajah and V Dillirajah were killed on 14 December at Iranaikerni near Kuchchaveli. The Army blames the LTTE but the local people suspect they were shot dead by soldiers. Doctors and other hospital employees staged a strike on 16 December demanding adequate security for medical staff.

Over 670 people from Vavuniya refugee camps were sent by ship to Jaffna in early December, but 350 remain in the Uppuveli camp. Since LTTE attacks on ships began in July, ship services between Trincomalee and Jaffna are irregular and refugees remain under insanitary conditions in the camp. Markandan Annammah died of disease in the camp on 17 December.

Convention

A Peace Delegates Convention in Colombo on 4 January, organised by the National Peace Council rejected government's "peace through war" strategy, calling for commitment on the part of the LTTE and the government to establish appropriate structures and mechanisms to achieve lasting peace through negotiations. The 1,700 delegates, from all communities, urged the parties to honour international humanitarian law and stressed the importance of parity and dignity in negotiations. In her goodwill message, President Chandrika Kumaratunge pledged that the government would do everything possible to achieve a political solution, while the LTTE welcomed the Convention resolution recognising the right of all nationalities to determine their own destiny as the basis for honourable peace. The delegates, mindful of the economic and social costs of the war, emphasised the need for urgency in finding a solution. A study titled *Cost of the war* by

Colombo-based Marga Institute launched at the Convention says the war expenditure for both the government and the LTTE between 1983 and 1996 amounted to Rs 228 billion (\$3.8 billion). Internally displaced persons rose from 524,000 in 1994 to over 1 million in 1996 with an annual cost of welfare at Rs 3 billion (\$50 million). In August 1997 the number of refugees were 785,000 of which 75,000 were under the age of five. Repair of damage to different sectors such as agriculture and housing will cost around Rs 60 billion (\$1 billion). The study says the heightening of security, the emergency and the continuing exigencies of war impose restrictions on people's human rights and violate the privacy of their homes - conditions to which the Tamil people are by far the most vulnerable.

Mannar pass

HUNDREDS of people are stuck on Mannar Island waiting for police passes to travel to other areas. Those arriving from the Vanni through the Army checkpoint at Uyilankulam may be issued a renewable one-day pass following an interview if they produce recommendation letters from the Village Headman and the Assistant Government Agent of the area from where they arrived.

Over 850 people were issued permits in December to travel to Vavuniya. Permits to Colombo are more difficult. Large amounts of money have to be paid often through intermediaries who are mainly businessmen.

Many people who fled the fighting in the Vanni have left their family cards

behind and are unable to obtain dry rations. Health facilities on the island are marginal and there is fear of an epidemic. Reports say only three lorryloads of dry rations arrived in December although 70 lorryloads were expected and many refugees have not received adequate dry rations for the last three months.

As Tiger infiltration into Mannar continued, the Army shelled some areas. Two civilians - an 18 year-old youth and a child - were killed by shells at Vattakandal in early December. Reports say shells also exploded near Pannamadu hospital. Three soldiers were killed when the LTTE attacked Army positions on 24 December at Kannaveddy on Mannar-Vavuniya road.

Special Task Force returns to the capital

Bombs in the hills

BOMBS destroyed a fuel storage depot belonging to a private company at Hatton in the Hill Country on 4 December. Police say 25 Tamil youths from Jaffna and Trincomalee were arrested following the explosion and released later.

On 14 November an electricity transformer in Badulla town was damaged with bombs. Two more transformers were blasted in Bandarawela on 18 December. Although the police suspect the LTTE, Badulla MP TV Sennan says southern groups may be responsible.

The bomb attacks have given rise to fears of new harassment of Tamils in the Hill Country. The Joint Plantation Trade Union Committee (JPTUC) meeting in December in Kandy called for President Chandrika's intervention to end arbitrary arrests. Reports say over 50% of Plantation Tamils have no national identity cards although most applied several years ago. Hill Country NGOs also joined a Colombo demonstration marking the International Human Rights Day

on 10 December to highlight the difficulties faced by Plantation Tamils.

Police arrested six Tamils on suspicion of LTTE links in Galaha in late November and detained temple priest Sivashankara Sharma. Tamils in some areas of Pussellawe and Gampola complain that their homes are often searched by police in the nights. On 14 December, Matale police arrested S Natkulasingham and his son Michaelo who arrived from Trincomalee in search of employment.

National Union of Workers President T Aiyadurai says in an early December statement that Hill Country's young men and women are unable to attend social functions fearing police arrest. Security forces demand proof of police registration and refuse to accept national identity cards or letters of identity from village headmen or estate superintendents.

In Colombo, security remains tight and police say 20 *Black Tigers* are in the city to destroy 17 strategic targets. The capital is divided into six security zones,

each headed by an Army or police officer. Maj. Gen. Jaliya Nanmuni will be overall commander. Special Task Force (STF) commandos are now redeployed. The STF was removed from Colombo in August 1995 after the murder of over 30 Tamils in custody. The court case relating to the killings has been abandoned.

Twenty Hill Country youths who came to Colombo for the Human Rights Day demonstration were arrested by police. Fifteen Tamils in buses were arrested on Aluthmawatha road on 9 December. Three days later the Army surrounded Kotahena suburb in the night and detained a number of Tamils.

Parents of the disappeared, who met President Chandrika on 29 December pointed out that they returned to Jaffna from LTTE-controlled Vanni on government request and the disappearances occurred while government forces occupied the peninsula. The President assured the parents that she would appoint an independent body to investigate.

TULF pushed out of Jaffna polls

NOMINATION papers of the moderate Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) for the Jaffna local government elections were rejected on 23 December as containing errors.

Elections for 17 local bodies including the Jaffna municipal council will be held on 29 January. Tamil parties PLOTE, TELO, EPRLF, EPDP and a breakaway group have announced 1,171 candidates for 234 seats in the councils. The TULF and other Tamil parties agree that the Jaffna situation is not conducive for democratic elections but say they decided to contest after failing to persuade the government to consider postponement.

Government's main aim in holding the elections appears to be to convince the international community that normalcy has been restored and Jaffna is ready for major reconstruction. A successful election in Jaffna may marginalise not only the LTTE, but also southern hardliners opposing government devolution proposals. The election could also be a litmus test of the Tamil people's mood in the run-up to the proposed June referendum on the devolution plans.

The government hopes that concentration of LTTE forces in the peninsula to disrupt the elections will reduce Tiger strength in the Vanni enabling the Army to move swiftly in *Operation Jayasikurui*

and open a landroute to Jaffna from Vavuniya, analysts say.

Following concerns raised, the Elections Commissioner Dayananda Dissanayake says the Tamil parties will be disarmed before the elections. There is fear over interference from the Army which controls life in Jaffna. In December, the Commission into the March 1994 Vavuniya and Eastern Province local elections recommended removal of civic rights of 67 police officers for interference in the election.

In Jaffna, electoral registers have not been updated for 15 years. Over 300,000 Jaffna residents are in the Vanni and another 30,000 Jaffna Muslims driven out by the LTTE in 1990 live in southern areas. Although 81,500 people have returned from the Vanni, 51,300 people left the peninsula since May 1996 and thousands of Jaffna voters reside in southern parts without easy access to the peninsula. According to the government 4,900 are still in refugee camps and 51,800 live with friends or relatives. Observers say the Jaffna election is about strategy rather than democracy.

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.

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