

## Buddhist temple bombed

Sri Lanka's most sacred Buddhist shrine the *Dalada Maligawa* or Temple of the Tooth in the Hill Country's Kandy town was extensively damaged when suspected guerrillas of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) exploded a massive truck bomb on 25 January. Thirteen civilians, including two children, were killed and four of the suicide bombers also died in the blast. St Paul's church in the vicinity was badly damaged.

The tooth relic of the Buddha, believed brought from India in the 4th Century AD and enshrined in *Dalada Maligawa* in the 16th Century, was unharmed. The *Dalada Maligawa* has remained a symbol of Buddhist culture in Sri Lanka and a centre for pilgrimage. Celebrations on 4 February to mark 50 years of independence from British rule, attended by Britain's Prince Charles, were scheduled before the temple.

As President Chandrika Kumaratunge rushed to the scene of the carnage, crowds vented their anger attacking the Selvavinayagar temple, half mile west, and smashing icons of Hindu gods. Ten Tamil-owned homes and shops were damaged. Police arrested over 50 people and prevented attempts to burn the Hindu Maha Sabhai cultural centre. But the temple chariot of the Muthumariamman temple at Gurudeniya, six miles south-east of Kandy, was burned down.

As part of a massive security blanket around the hill capital, guidelines issued by police in early January requested residents not to house anyone without the relevant documents including proof of police registration. Around 60 schools were commandeered for 10,000 security personnel and all schools were closed from 23 January.

The ease with which the Tigers had penetrated Kandy embarrassed Deputy Defence minister Anuruddha Ratwatte, who declared that the Rs 400 million (\$7 million) celebrations would go ahead in Kandy despite the bomb attack.

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Army officers blame the police saying they were not consulted in security arrangements. Mr Ratwatte submitted his resignation on 28 January after President Chandrika decided to shift the celebrations to Colombo. While crowds burned Ratwatte effigies and others marched in his support, the President refused to accept his resignation. Although the Tigers succeeded in disrupting the celebrations, the backlash, if one was expected, did not come. But an incident away from the hill capital further marred the independence anniversary. Police and Home Guards massacred eight Tamil civilians in Trincomalee on 1 February.

As Buddhist monks demonstrated in Colombo and Kandy, there was international outrage for the attack on *Dalada Maligawa*. Amnesty International says deliberate killing of civilians cannot be tolerated and has called on the LTTE to abide by basic principles of international humanitarian law.

Prince Charles's programme was scaled down and festivities on 4 February before Parliament in Colombo was a subdued affair, with only 300 privileged civilians, as a security ring was thrown around the area. The government banned heavy vehicles into Colombo city to pre-

vent suicide bombers and ordered holidays to offices in business districts.

As emotions ran high in the aftermath of the Kandy bomb, the government decided on 27 January to proscribe the LTTE. The Tigers were first banned in 1978 by the Proscription of the Liberation Tigers and Similar Organisations Act which was repealed the following year by the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

Since then Sri Lankan governments have resisted demands to proscribe the LTTE, particularly after India's ban in May 1992 and the US in October 1997. London-based Tamil Information Centre which condemns the attack on *Dalada Maligawa*, warns that the LTTE ban would not only deepen the gulf between Sinhalese and Tamil communities but also close the doors to peace and international disregard of the crisis would result in further polarisation.

The peace process suffered a further blow when influential *Mahanayake Theras* or highpriests of four main Buddhists sects rejected the government devolution proposals on 31 January. The *Theras* oppose the proposed union of regions replacing the current unitary state and determination of the unit of devolution on ethnic basis. They say the peace package would lead to *Tamil Eelam* or separate state in the north-east. The rapid turn of events overshadowed the late January proposals of the main opposition United National Party, calling for power-sharing for minorities in central government and asymmetric devolution.

London-based Catholic Fund for Overseas Development (CAFOD) says ordinary people desire peace but there can never be peace until the government and LTTE enter into talks and the distinct identity of both peoples is fully appreciated in a constitutional framework. CAFOD has called on Britain to use its position of historic friendship to promote negotiations between Sinhalese and Tamil leaders.

## THE VANNI

# Health crisis

AS attention focuses on Prince Charles's safety in Sri Lanka during the 50th independence celebrations, health care situation in the Vanni has reached critical proportions with alarming health and severe malnutrition problems among refugees, says London-based NGO Christian Aid.

In Mullaitivu District, 339,000 of the 727,000 people attending hospital in 1997 were treated for malaria, doctors often guessing from symptoms as facilities for blood tests are minimal. Some people have contracted malaria several times leading to lack of immunity, brain haemorrhage and an outbreak of tuberculosis. Incidence of septicaemia, typhoid and diarrhoea have also increased and there is an acute shortage of vital drugs. Medicines received in the Vanni are often old or declared ineffective and no more in general use. In Puthukudyiruppu alone 33 people died of malaria and diarrhoea in December and January.

Vavuniya Government Agent K Ganesh says that although there are 400,000 displaced people in the Vanni, dry rations are received only for 270,000. A recent survey of 16,700 children under five years of age reveals that 71% are malnourished and 33% suffer severe malnutrition. Children have developed night blindness through lack of vitamin A and need constant supervision. School principals say many students faint in hunger and schools are sometimes closed early as students cannot cope with lessons without adequate food.

According to Kilinochchi government secretariat records, 73 civilians who went into Army-controlled areas from Tiger-held territory, between July 1996 and May 1997 to inspect their houses are missing. Sinniah Suresh visiting his home in Nedunkerni in mid-January was beaten up by soldiers.

In early January the Army announced that *Operation Jayasikurui* (Certain Victory) troops advancing on two fronts from east and west took control of Kanagarayankulam, seven miles south of Mankulam, following heavy fighting. The Defence Ministry says six *Sea Tiger* boats were destroyed by bombers off Mullaitivu on 23 January.

On 1 February the LTTE launched a massive assault south of Kilinochchi and simultaneous attacks on five other targets, including Paranthan, four miles north, and Elephant Pass Army camp. Sri Lankan troops were forced to withdraw a mile from Kilinochchi defences. The Army says a Tiger commando unit attempting to blast an artillery base at Iyakkachchi, three miles north of Elephant Pass, was wiped out.

In two days of intense fighting 103 soldiers were killed and the LTTE say 150 cadre died. According to London's *Financial Times*, *Operation Jayasikurui*, to open a landroute to Jaffna from Vavuniya, now in its ninth month, has cost the Sri Lankan Army 1,800 dead and 5,000 wounded, but has also inflicted losses of 1,000 on the Tigers.

## Traced

Reports say the Sri Lankan Human Rights Commission (HRC) has traced only 91 of 176 people reported disappeared between July and November 1997 outside Jaffna, to police stations and detention centres.

## Hunger strike

A fast begun on 13 January by refugee consultant Bernt Hauge in Trondheim demanding the Norwegian government to review the cases of 600 Tamil asylum-seekers targeted for deportation, continued at the end of January.

## Equipment

Colombo's *Sunday Times* says following the US ban on the LTTE in October, Washington has approved combat-related equipment to Sri Lanka including \$11 million mobile fire-finding radar. The newspaper also says an UK firm will supply 18,455 combat body armour at a cost of \$4.1 million.

## Denied

A team from US Congress House Committee on International Relations visiting Sri Lanka to assess the current situation was denied permission by the Defence Ministry in early January to travel to Jaffna.

## Arrested

Forty five Tamil asylum-seekers returned from Lithuania were handed over to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) on arrival at Colombo airport on 23 January. Reports say five Sri Lankan women were arrested in Rome in late January for illegally entering Italy.

# Civilians die in custody

AS the Human Rights Commission opened an office in Jaffna in early January, nine soldiers, including an Army officer, were detained following the death of two civilians in custody. S Saraswathy, 21, and S Seelan, 24, arrested in Atchaveli on 28 November were killed in an Army camp.

In the run-up to local elections on 29 January, security was intensified. Jaffna Commander Lionel Balagalle believes 200 Tigers may be in the peninsula to disrupt the elections. The Army shot and injured R Kanagaratnam found outside during curfew in Nallur on 7 January. Two other curfew breakers were shot dead on 20 January in Vadamaratchy.

In three clashes in early January, seven LTTE were shot dead in Chavakachcheri. The Tigers launched an assault on Punkudutivu Island, west of Jaffna, on 23 January killing nine members of the Tamil group EPDP and wounding six others. The Army fired on a boat arriving from Pooneryn on 24 January killing two civilians and injuring seven. The Navy and the Sea Tigers clashed off Gurunagar near Jaffna town on 27 January. Following the incident the Army shelled Gurunagar area for several hours injuring five civilians.

The EPDP won ten of the 17 councils in the Jaffna local elections. PLOTE took control of four councils and moderate

TULF won two while TELO gained one council. The TULF won the vital Jaffna municipal council and Sarojini Yogeswaran, wife of former MP V Yogeswaran assassinated by the LTTE in July 1989, was elected Mayor. The TULF was able to contest after the Court of Appeal directed the election officers on 16 January to accept the party's nomination papers which were rejected earlier.

Only 18.4% of the 571,486 registered voters cast their votes, but some 40% of the actual number of voters currently present in Jaffna may have voted. Observers believe that over 106,400 Jaffna people decided to vote despite LTTE opposition to the election, is significant.

## ■ Home Guards shoot civilians in Amparai

# Trinco massacre

SIX Tamil civilians attending a house-warming party at Pokkuruni in Thampalakamam, 12 miles south-east of Trincomalee town, and two other villagers were massacred by police and Home Guards inside a police post on 1 February. Among those killed were two students. As 3,500 people demonstrated, Kantalai police attempted to pressure witnesses to sign statements claiming that those killed were LTTE cadre.

Amnesty International says the incident is reminiscent of the massacre of 24 civilians at Trincomalee's Kumarapuram in February 1996. Legal proceedings in the Kumarapuram killings are dragging and the judge removed from the case in January has not been replaced.

In Batticaloa District, 18 people were admitted to hospital following attacks by soldiers in Valaichenai on 25 January. As the LTTE carries out attacks to destabilise the district, the Army continues to shell Tiger-held areas north and west of Batticaloa lagoon. Local people say soldiers fire indiscriminately into populated areas killing or injuring civilians.

The Special Task Force advanced north-west from Mandur, 16 miles south of Batticaloa town, to Vellaveli on 6 January accompanied by shelling. Four civilians at Porativu were wounded. North of Batticaloa, Karuvakerni Vigneswara school near Valaichenai was closed on the same day after a shell injured two students. R Ratheesparan, 10,

lost a hand in a shell explosion at Gandhipuram in mid-January.

On 12 January, soldiers from Kommathurai Army camp shot and injured P Ponnammah, 70, who later died in hospital. Fisherman M Mustapha, 70, was injured by gunfire from Meeravodai Army camp. S Jeyakumary was seriously wounded by a LTTE shell near the Valaichenai Army camp on 25 January.

Four soldiers were killed in a LTTE ambush at Puthukudyiruppu on 8 January. The Tiger *Pistol Group* shot dead police officers S Dissanayake and G Sujeeva in a Kaluvanchikudy restaurant on 26 January. Two days later the LTTE launched assaults on Vahaneri and Miyankatkulam Army camps on Batticaloa-Colombo road killing seven soldiers and injuring another ten.

The Army rounded-up over 500 people on 9 January at Murakkottanchenai and paraded them before *Thalayattis* or masked informers at the Ramakrishna school. In a major search operation in villages around Valaichenai on 21 January thousands of people were interrogated and a number of youths detained.

Further south in Amparai District, Home Guards walked into a house in Veeramunai at 4.00am on 4 January and shot dead student Rasiah Navaratnam, 17, and his cousin Moothathamby Nithiyanandan, 24. Six hours earlier Home Guard Mohamed Farook was killed by the LTTE in the same area. Police say seven Home Guards have been arrested.

# Shadow of death

**SHADOWY death squads roam Vavuniya and fear grips the northern border town. Reports say 35 mysterious murders in and around the town since 1994 remain unsolved. P Puvanendran was shot dead at his home in Poonthottam on 3 January and six days later ICRC's Vavuniya office security guard G Ravindran was murdered. Observers believe that the death squads are linked to security forces. Tamil party EPRLF has called on the government to investigate the killings. Police say LTTE's *Pistol Group* has infiltrated Vavuniya and is targeting security forces and informers. Soldier Priyantha Thilakarathne was killed by a gunman on 7 January near Sinthamanipillayar temple. Police Sub-Inspector S Pathmakumara was shot dead five days later on Horowupotana road. In a house-to-house search following the killings, police rounded-up over 1,000 people between the ages of 15 and 45 and interrogated them in a school. Two days later 350 youths with one-day permits to enter Vavuniya were detained. It is said that *Pistol Group* members arrested or killed all had permits in their possession.**

There was chaos after police announced on 19 January that extensions on one-day permits issued on entry into Vavuniya will be reduced from one week to three days. People arriving from Vanni for various reasons including medical treatment say the time allowed is insufficient. Another police rule introduced on the same day restricts the time for refugees in camps to visit the town to four hours thus effectively preventing them taking up jobs outside. The government provides only cooked food and casual employment gave some income to many among 10,500 people in camps waiting for over a year to travel to southern areas.

# Plantation strike

OVER 600,000 plantation workers are poised to strike on a wage demand from 5 February. Trade unions want wages to increase from Rs 83 to Rs 105 a day while the Ceylon Employers Federation representing 23 plantation companies has offered Rs 93 saying that the union demand will cost an additional Rs 2.6 billion (\$45 million) a year.

A two-year no-strike pact expired in December and bargaining on 23 January failed to yield results. Sri Lanka has again become world's largest tea exporter mainly due to shortage in supplies from Kenya, Bangla Desh and Indonesia and demand from former Soviet Union nations. Tea exports rose by 8% in 1997 and revenue by 22%. The companies

argue reserves must be built against possible decline in tea prices. The Tea Research Institute warns of the El-Nino effect predicting a drought in 1998.

Unions accepted Rs 83 in April 1996 on assurance that wages will rise with profits. Their demand, they say, takes into account the rise in cost-of-living since 1996 and point out that the government has taken from companies responsibility for part of welfare such as housing.

Plantation workers continue to suffer the effects of denial of citizenship and franchise rights in the early years of independence. Unions say after 50 years of independence, effective measures are essential for real change in their living and working conditions.

## Civil Rights Movement condemns new Emergency regulations

# Army camp Colombo

SECURITY in Colombo and other areas of the south was tightened in the run-up to the 50th independence anniversary on 4 February and a number of Tamils were taken into custody. Over 160 Tamils, including three youths scheduled to leave abroad were arrested by the Army at Grandpass suburb on 8 and 9 January. Ten Tamil suspects were detained in Panadura, 15 miles south of the capital in early January.

Over 100 Tamils were rounded-up at mid-night on 22 January in Kochchikade suburb. Sivasamy Koneswary of Trincomalee travelling to Colombo airport to go abroad on 23 January and three others with her were arrested. Defence officers say two *Black Tiger* suicide squads skilled in explosives and urban warfare are in Colombo since October, protected by sympathisers. A bomb found in a Colombo-Panadura bus on 9 January was diffused.

Security of Colombo's Katunayake airport was brought under the Airforce

and 400 personnel were deployed. Headquarters of armed forces, Colombo port and the President's "Temple Trees" residence, regarded as the most likely LTTE targets, were declared as high security zones. Ministers' homes and ministry buildings were provided top security. Opposition UNP Chairman Gamini Athukorale complains that the capital now resembles an 'Army camp'.

Police say majority of the people arrested are released within a few hours, but some may be detained for further investigation. According to reports, over 1,100 are currently in detention and the Human Rights Commission has received 634 complaints relating to arrest and detention.

President Chandrika appointed a commission in early January headed by High Court judge Raja Nihal Fernando to probe the killing of three Tamils in Kalutara prison in December. Sixty three Tamils from Batticaloa prison were brought to Kalutara on 23 January and

officers say all Tamil prisoners will be transferred to Boossa military detention centre in Galle, 60 miles south of Colombo, in early February.

In late January Tamil prisoners threatened to stage a hunger strike against transfer to Boossa and new Emergency regulations imposing severe restrictions on visits to prisons. Visits are now restricted to one a week to a person nominated by the prisoner and the visitor must obtain a letter from the police where he resides stating that there are no objections. The Civil Rights Movement says the regulations offend against the principle of reasonableness and are inconsistent with international standards.

Meanwhile, the Indian government has protested against police search of Indian journalist Nirupama Subramaniam's Colombo residence on 3 January. Earlier, another Tamil Nadu reporter Sudha Ramachandran was questioned by police about her visit to LTTE-held areas in the north-east.

## Rajiv murder suspects sentenced to death

ALL 26 people, ten Indian and 16 Sri Lankan, accused of conspiracy to murder former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi were sentenced to death by a special court in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu on 28 January. Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated by a suicide bomber in May 1991 while on election campaign at Sriperumpudur, 25 miles south of Chennai (Madras).

Amnesty International has expressed the view that the accused may not have received a fair trial as the law under which they were charged, the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act, contravenes several international standards, including holding trials *in camera* and the non-disclosure of the identity of witnesses.

Of the 41 original suspects in the case, 12 have either been killed by Indian police in shoot-outs or committed suicide and the other three, including LTTE leader V Prabhakaran and Tiger intelligence chief *Pottu Amman* are in northern Sri Lanka.

In Sri Lanka, the Colombo High Court issued warrants on 27 January for

the arrest of Mr Prabhakaran and nine others in the Central Bank bomb case. They are indicted for destroying the Central Bank building in January 1996 and killing 78 people.

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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On the other side of the planet, LTTE's World Tamil Movement administrator Manickavasagam Suresh facing deportation to Sri Lanka was granted a temporary reprieve by a Canadian Court on 19 January. Mr Suresh, accepted as a Convention refugee, is in a Toronto jail since October 1995, after the Canadian government declared him *persona non-grata* as belonging to a group engaged in terrorism. The government decision was upheld by the Canadian Federal Court in August 1997. LTTE activists in Canada have been accused of crime and violence against opponents.

Although the deportation order was not revoked by the new decision, the Ontario Provincial Court advised the Canadian government to find a third country to accept Mr Suresh. Earlier, Amnesty International urged Canada to avoid *refoulement* - returning an asylum-seeker to a hostile state or imminent danger. Observers dismiss Sri Lankan government's assurance that the LTTE leader will not suffer torture or other degrading treatment in the light of evidence of widespread torture.