

## Provincial elections postponed

Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunge extended the state of Emergency to the whole of the island on 4 August, primarily, to postpone the Provincial Council elections scheduled for 28 August. The islandwide Emergency was reduced to the north-east and its border areas, Gampaha and Colombo on 10 July last year.

Provincial Council election laws disallow deferring of polls. The government has chosen the quick option of using Emergency regulations thereby necessitating the extension of Emergency to all areas where elections were scheduled. The main opposition United National Party (UNP) says that the postponement breaches the 13th Amendment to the Sri Lankan Constitution and proposes legal action against the government.

The government decision is said to have followed Deputy Defence minister Anuruddha Ratwatte's refusal to release 30,000 troops needed to police the elections and provide security to candidates. Analysts point to the flagging popularity of the government in mid-term as the main reason for putting off elections.

Mr Ratwatte claims that the war in the north-east is at a crucial stage and emphasises the need to maintain the current military pressure on the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to gain victory. Justice minister GL Peiris also says that elections at this stage may

affect the course of the war and the sacrifice of thousands of soldiers in the battle-front would be in vain.

Following the extension of Emergency, President Chandrika told the Press Trust of India that the government is prepared to negotiate with the LTTE involving a third party. The Presidential Secretariat says in a press release that the President did not propose third party mediation but talks may be considered if the Tigers accepted specific government conditions.

One of the conditions, the Presidential Secretariat further says, is that discussions could begin through a facilitator, rather than a mediator, while military operations continued and the government will not be willing to change the military status quo until such talks reached finality on a political solution.

The NGO-based National Peace Council welcomed the offer, but some Colombo observers who are doubtful about government motives, contend that the real intention behind the offer is to deflect criticism over censorship and the postponement of elections. Others say it is a response to questions raised by leaders attending the summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

The tenth SAARC summit began on 29 July in Colombo, amidst heavy security. Over 6,000 policemen were deployed and new checkpoints established. Security was further strengthened after the new Terrorist Investigation Division (TID) claimed that a plot to assassinate President Chandrika was uncovered following the arrest of *Black Tiger* Ganesh Thanarani. Ms Thanarani is

alleged to have written a letter, while in custody, to Colombo Tamil newspaper *Virakesari* reporter, Sandralingam Srigajan implicating him in the conspiracy. Mr Srigajan was arrested on 16 July and *Virakesari's* Vavuniya correspondent Ponniah Manickavasagam was detained on 20 July. Two days later the newspaper's former astrological columnist K Theivanayagam was taken into custody.

International agencies expressed concern over the arrests. Paris-based Reporters Sans Frontieres urged the government to define the charges against Mr Srigajan and release him unconditionally if he was detained because of his newspaper articles. Media minister Mangala Samaraweera has assured that the arrests were on suspicion of LTTE links and had nothing to do with their journalism. *Virakesari* complains that the journalists were not informed of the reasons for their arrests and are held incommunicado.

The eagerly-awaited meeting between Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Indian Premier Atal Bihari Vajpayee took place in Colombo on 29 July. India did not agree to Pakistan's earlier suggestion that the Kashmir issue should be discussed by the conference. The growing tension between the countries since the nuclear tests in May has worried the other SAARC nations. The two leaders agreed to continue bilateral talks. However, the meeting between the foreign secretaries of the two nations could not continue because of differences over what was agreed at an earlier meeting in Islamabad in June 1997.

Following discussions with Mr Vajpayee, President Chandrika Kumaratunge announced that India would extend cooperation to Sri Lanka in finding a solution to the island's chronic conflict. The Tamil parties who met Mr Vajpayee say that he carefully listened to their representations on the suffering of people in northern Vanni, arbitrary arrests of Tamils, the reduction in food aid to refugees in the north-east and the current uncertain situation in the Jaffna peninsula.

*Forty five Sri Lankan Tamil refugees, including five children, drowned on 25 July, when an overcrowded boat sank near Rameswaram in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Over 185 refugees fleeing the war zone in northern Sri Lanka have died in the Palk Strait since October 1996. In July, 88 Tamils reached India by boats, to join over 70,000 Sri Lankan refugees in Tamil Nadu camps. Another 100,000 Sri Lankans are said to be living outside camps. In late July, Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) leader and Estate Infrastructure minister S Thondaman urged Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to grant Indian citizenship to 100,000 Plantation Tamils of Indian origin among the refugees.*

JAFFNA

# Development delay

JAFFNA'S senior government officer, Government Agent K Shanmuganathan says that Colombo's decision to cut food aid to Jaffna by 40% from 1 July will create major difficulties. Government's Essential Services Commissioner claims that Rs 200 million (\$3.3 million) has been spent in Jaffna towards self-reliance and says the time is ripe for reducing assistance.

If the government proposal is implemented, 34,000 of the 84,000 families currently assisted will not receive food aid. The GA says a further 29,000 displaced families are expected to return to Jaffna in the next nine months.

Bureaucratic restrictions and prevailing security arrangements are slowing development work in Jaffna. The peninsula's new Mayor P Sivapalan says that only small-scale projects may be implemented, but major development work is impossible due to the adverse effect of the military's presence on the freedom of movement.

Reports say that the construction of 1,000 houses in Chandilipai and Chankanai, with the assistance of German development agency GTZ has been delayed by government bureaucracy by six months. People doubt that any assistance will be forthcoming for the reconstruction of the 81,000 houses damaged in the peninsula.

The restrictions on fishing continue and most fishing families are suffering without any income. Jaffna's People's

Organisation says in a letter to President Chandrika that 75% of agricultural activity has not been undertaken because of lack of investment and facilities to market the produce. No proper programmes are implemented to assist women widowed in the war. There are over 19,100 widows in the peninsula, most of whom are distressed by difficulties they face in providing for their families.

Press reports say that UNDP's programme to clear landmines has been delayed following Defence Ministry's reluctance to issue permits for equipment to the peninsula. The government fears that equipment may fall into the hands of the Tigers. In the last six years, over 1,800 civilians have lost limbs by landmines in Jaffna, 1,440 of whom are below 30 years of age.

Two soldiers were killed and four others injured when over 70 Tigers attacked Army positions at Gurunagar near Jaffna town on 25 July. The LTTE says four cadre died in the fighting. According to the Army, two women Tigers were killed on 30 July at Point Pedro.

The military arrested G Karunakaran at Manipai on 14 July. Four days later, R Sagathevan was taken into custody from his home in Pandatharippu. Two other civilians were also arrested in a Gurunagar refugee camp. On 17 July, the Army arrested two women in Nallur. The military surrounded Kandarmadam on the next day and detained over 100 youths for several hours.

## Closed

London-based International Alert closed its Colombo office in early July following a protest by local people after it sacked Programme Manager Frederica Jansz for writing an article in the Sri Lankan newspaper *Sunday Times* on the LTTE and refugees in Norway, without authorisation.

## Commission

The civilian-appointed Sinhala Commission into the grievances of the Sinhalese people, has urged in its final report released on 18 July, the abrogation of the Indo-Sri Lanka agreement of 1987 which provides for the merger of northern and eastern provinces.

## Abduction

Reports say that 25 Muslim fishermen abducted by the LTTE near Kaddaiparichchan in Trincomalee on 26 July were released two days later after a ransom of Rs 75,000 was paid.

## Torture

The Geneva-based World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) says that WAJ Chaminda arrested by the Ja-Ela police on 6 August was tortured in custody. Mr Milroy who visited Mr Chaminda was beaten up.

## Security

A new security measure to prevent LTTE infiltration, allows only three-day stay in Vavuniya for those arriving from the Vanni. People who wish to stay longer must obtain special permits from the security forces.

# Vanni MP assassinated

TAMIL group PLOTE leader and Vanni MP S Shanmuganathan was killed by a landmine at Rambaikulam in Vavuniya District on 15 July. His three year-old son Vathsanan and three others were also killed in the blast.

In May, five PLOTE members were killed by a landmine in Vavuniya and Vanni MP V Balachandran's home was attacked in June. Observers say the landmines are increasingly used to target opponents, after military operations in Vavuniya effectively prevented LTTE's *Pistol Group* from carrying out selective assassinations.

In the Vanni, as fighting continues around Mankulam, the civilian popula-

tion is increasingly vulnerable. Reports say that a large number of people, including over 500 children, are begging in the streets to keep life and limb together.

The Defence Ministry, claiming that part of the fuel to the Vanni falls into the hands of the LTTE, has decided to further reduce fuel supply. The government agents have been ordered to submit details of vehicles, fishing boats and water pumps currently in use. Although the Defence Ministry is said to have approved supply of 2,550 barrels of fuel, only 1,000 barrels a month have been received in Kilinochchi District since July 1997.

Some 18,200 of the 35,600 displaced

families in Kilinochchi District were receiving relief. Following last month's government decision to slash food aid, only 8,800 families will be entitled to assistance. Press reports say that 15 people died in Pooneryn area as a result of lack of food.

The quantity of medicines supplied to the Vanni continues to fall and hospitals suffer. Although 1.6 million malarial tablets were requested for the first quarter of 1998, Colombo allowed only 300,000. For the second quarter, 1.65 million tablets were requested but none has been received. Vanni residents say many people have contracted malaria several times - some even six times.

## ■ *Protesting students assaulted in Trincomalee*

# Gang attack

SEVEN Tamils were cut with swords and seriously injured at Kalmunai in Batticaloa District in early July. Local people say they are fearful of a heavily armed mysterious gang in military uniform targeting civilians. The same gang is suspected of robberies and assaulting people in two Tamil homes at Natpiddimunai and Pandiruppu.

Civilians in the east continue to be affected in the fighting between the security forces and the LTTE. Civilian Muniandy was killed during a clash at Kannankudah in Valaichenai on 6 July. Six year-old Asmini was wounded. Four days later, the Army shot dead carpenter Nathan of Paithalai. Four fishermen were killed on 12 July at Kinnayady.

The Special Task Force (STF) carried out a search in Pandiruppu on 6 July. The village was searched again a week later and five people were taken into custody. Four Tamil youths, including student T Sithamparapillai, who were arrested by the Army at Ambilanthurai were later found in the Badulla prison, 60 miles away. Batticaloa MP P Selvarajah says 14 year-old student V Karunakaran was killed in Airforce bombing on 1 August at Kokkaddicholai. Three other civilians at Karanavai were wounded by shells two days later.

Further south in Amparai District, the LTTE attacked a STF patrol at Pulukunawa on 7 July killing 13 policemen. Security sources say 20 Tigers were

killed. In Trincomalee District, four soldiers died in a clash at Amarivayal on 9 July. Police say LTTE's intelligence cadre Thambirajah Thiruchelvam, who planned to attack electricity installations was arrested in July.

On 6 July, the Army attacked students staging a fast in Trincomalee town in support of graduates who are demanding jobs. Three students were injured. Soldiers are also accused of threatening local political leaders. Tamil parties have demanded President Chandrika to hold an enquiry into the unprovoked attack.

The security forces carried out a search operation at Uvarmalai on 26 July. Thousands of people were ordered to assemble at Vivekananda College and paraded before *Talayattis* or masked informers. Those detained were later released. Two children were injured by shells in Muthur on 31 July. The LTTE shot dead police constable Muthubandara on 4 August at Salli.

Trincomalee town Regional Secretary Velum Mayilum says that all 1,203 refugees at the Glass Factory camp were sent to Jaffna by ship on 15 July. The refugees spent the last two months in the camp. Over 200 other passengers are awaiting in Trincomalee to travel to the peninsula. Rasalingam Saraswathy in Allesthottam refugee camp committed suicide on 19 July. Over 1,500 refugees, who were returned from Tamil Nadu in 1992 with UNHCR assistance remain in this camp.

# Returnee tortured

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL says in an early August report that Jaffna resident Thambirajah Kamalathan was tortured following his arrest on 15 July. Chilli powder was rubbed into his eyes and his genitals were squeezed. Asylum-seeker Kamalathan was returned from Senegal in February along with 189 others and arrested on arrival in Colombo. He was released on bail and after visiting Jaffna, returned to the capital in mid-July for the court case, when he was detained and tortured. Amnesty further says that in Colombo, large numbers of Tamils are regularly arrested in cordon and search operations. Young Tamil men originally from the north-east suspected of LTTE links are especially at risk of being tortured. Although Sri Lanka acceded to the Convention against Torture in 1994, broad powers of arrest and detention given to the security forces by the current security legislation contribute to human rights violations, including torture. In addition, torture is facilitated by widespread impunity of perpetrators, as no one has been charged for torture despite a number of judicial decisions.

In a fundamental rights case in July, the Supreme Court ordered the Sri Lankan state to pay Rs 100,000 as compensation to Kumaru Selvaratnam who suffered severe torture at the hands of the security forces.

Asylum-seekers returned from other countries remain at risk. Manickam Rajan, returned from the Netherlands in February was arrested for the second time on 14 July at Queens Lodge in Pettah suburb and later released. Another Netherlands returnee E Jeyavel was arrested for the second time on 15 July by the Security Operations Unit at his lodge in Kollupitiya suburb. Mr Jeyavel is currently being held at the Peliyagoda police station.

# Cholera in Mannar

K ARUMUGAM, 18, died of cholera at Vaddakandal in Mannar District on 2 July. Four days later, Najima Amir of Erukkalampiddi on Mannar Island also died. Reports say many refugees in the Madhu refugee camp have contracted cholera and two were admitted to Madhu hospital. Over 50 people, including some from the Erukkalampiddi refugee camp, were admitted to Mannar hospital.

In an effort to prevent an epidemic, the sale of ice-cream and soft drinks were prohibited on the recommendations of the Public Health Inspector and a public education campaign was launched. In late July, Mannar Government Agent SM Croos announced that the disease was under control.

The reduction in food aid will affect Mannar badly as more refugees arrive from the Vanni. Over 75 people a day are said to be arriving on Mannar Island. The GA has been ordered to reduce the number of families receiving assistance from 16,200 to 14,200.

The LTTE blasted three electricity towers with bombs on 6 July at Chemmantivu on Medawachchiya-Mannar road. An Army officer and another soldier were killed by a LTTE landmine on Mannar-Vavuniya road on 20 July. A Tiger died in a clash on 30 July at Nanattan. Three Navy personnel who were clearing mines on Mannar Island to facilitate resettlement were injured by a landmine on 31 July.

## Ministerial committee on Tamil harassment

# Arrests before summit

PRESIDENT Chandrika Kumaratunge appointed a high-level committee in mid-July to probe harassment of Tamils during security round-ups and detention. The eight-member committee headed by Cultural minister Lakshman Jayakody, includes Foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar, Justice minister GL Peiris and EPDP leader Douglas Devananda.

According to reports, the committee is also empowered to intervene in cases of illegal detention. The Presidential Secretariat says that Ms Kumaratunge appointed the committee after her orders requiring humane treatment of Tamil detainees were being flouted by some police officers.

Critics say an independent body, rather than a government committee, is needed to monitor complaints of harassment against government institutions. Ministers have busy schedules and will not be able to devote time. They also point out that President Chandrika appointed a ministerial committee in June 1997 on the same issue - to probe harassment of Tamils by security forces.

In the run-up to the SAARC summit, security was tightened and search operations were carried out in Colombo, Dehiwela, Mt Lavinia, Ratmalana, Panadura and Moratuwa. Thousands of Tamils were taken into custody. Most were released within 48 hours but some detained further.

Police say 12 Tiger suspects, including *Nayagam* with international links, and two businessmen who assisted the LTTE were arrested in Colombo. Over 75 Tamils were arrested in the capital's commercial district, Pettah, in late July. Further north in Negombo, a bomb killed a civilian and wounded four others. Police say two Trincomalee youths who planned to destroy electricity generators were detained on 27 July at Kadawatte, ten miles north-west of Colombo.

Sri Lankan press reports say that Tamil youths are currently being held in Hill Country police stations at Badulla, Bandarawela, Kandy, Nuwara Eliya and Ragala. Twenty four Tamils were arrested at Peradeniya near Kandy in late July and ten detained. Over 15 other Hill

Country youths were arrested on Dalkeith Estate in Kalutara District on 24 July for not possessing identity cards. Trade unions say over 50% of the Hill Country Tamils have not been issued identity cards.

In a fundamental rights application, Markandu Maheswaran says that he was assaulted after his arrest in Colombo by the Terrorist Investigation Division (TID) on 22 June and forced to sign a confession in the Sinhalese language which he does not understand. In another application, Nalliah Sriranganathan says he suffered torture after he was detained by police on 24 June.

In late July, the Supreme Court ordered the release of Periyathamby Arumugam, 73, held at the Fourth Floor of the police headquarters, since his arrest on 28 February. He was neither informed of the reasons for his arrest nor produced before a court. Matale resident Thavayoganathan, released on 18 July after two-year detention at Kalutara prison, was arrested again on the same day while returning home.

## The Chemmani mass graves

THE Sri Lankan Human Rights Commission (HRC) has requested the United Nations to designate a forensic expert to assist in the probe on mass graves at Chemmani in Jaffna, reports say. An accused in the Krishanthi Kumarasamy murder case, Somaratne Rajapakse, claimed in the High Court on 3 July that he knows the location of mass graves at Chemmani where 400 bodies of Tamils killed in custody were buried. Reports say the HRC has already interviewed Mr Rajapakse.

A large number of disappearances were reported after the Army captured Jaffna in early 1996. The Colombo-based Centre for Human Dignity recorded 676 disappearances, including 271 government officers and 26 students. The Jaffna people formed the Guardian Association for Persons Arrested and Disappeared and made representations to state authorities. A number of demonstrations were held by parents and relatives.

The UN Special Rapporteur on Extra-Judicial Executions, Bacre Waly Ndiaye declared in August 1997 that the gap between those disappeared in Jaffna and

those whose whereabouts are established is too huge. The Defence Ministry appointed a committee in May 1997 to probe the disappearances, but the demand was for an independent body

headed by a judge. In mid-1997, the government appointed the five-member Bandula Kulatunge committee comprising senior military and police officers.

The committee held its enquiries at the Palaly military base in Jaffna and only 369 of the 680 people summoned to give evidence were present. Meanwhile, Amnesty said that 39 more people disappeared in Jaffna in 1997 and in a November 1997 report accused the government of failing to protect people under its jurisdiction. The government rejected the report as partial.

The Kulatunge committee, in its April 1998 report, identified those responsible for disappearances in 25 cases. The report remains unpublished and no action has followed. President Chandrika's promise in December 1997 to relatives of the disappeared that a presidential commission will be appointed remains unfulfilled. The commission headed by Manori Muttetuwegama, appointed in May to replace the three earlier commissions has no mandate to probe disappearances during the four-year rule of the present Peoples' Alliance government.

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  
3 Bondway, London SW8 1SJ  
Tel: (0171) 820 3100; Fax: (0171) 820 3107  
E-mail: [brclsproject@gn.apc.org](mailto:brclsproject@gn.apc.org)

Refugee Council:  
Tel: (0171) 582 6922; Fax: (0171) 582 9929  
E-mail: [refcounciluk@gn.apc.org](mailto:refcounciluk@gn.apc.org)  
Web: <http://www.gn.apc.org/refugeecounciluk>  
Charity No. 1014576  
Company No. 2727514

ISSN 0955-5943  
Funded by voluntary agencies worldwide.  
Printed by: Imedia Print, 20 Rushworth Street  
London SE1 0RB