

## Refugees hit by food cuts

The reduction in humanitarian aid by the Sri Lankan government to the north-east is causing international concern and has led to protests within the island.

From 1 July, the Essential Services Commissioner (ESC) reduced dry rations for refugees in the northern Vanni area by 57% although initially the government announced a cut of around 20%. Over 440,000 people in the Vanni received dry rations, based on surveys and estimates by senior state officers, the Government Agents (GA), but from July only 190,000 are entitled to food aid.

Colombo bureaucrats have questioned the refugee figures submitted by the GAs. A three-member government committee, appointed in October 1996 to determine the number of refugees, had submitted its report without visiting the Vanni. The report remains unpublished.

While a number of essential goods remain banned, food has been progressively reduced to areas controlled by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the north-east. The 60,000 people who fled to the Vanni following the Army's *Operation Riviresa II* (Sunray) in Jaffna in April 1996 were denied food aid and the government slashed food assistance by some 40% in May 1997.

Those displaced by the Army operation *Sathjaya* (Truth's Victory) in Kilinochchi in September 1996 were also excluded from assistance. Although the government's financial problems are blamed for the latest cuts, reports say no international appeal has been launched for assistance to help the refugees.

The government suspects that food to the Vanni reaches the LTTE. Observers say that even if part of the food ends up in Tiger hands, the cuts are arbitrary and will result in the denial of basic needs of the population. The reduction, the observers allege, has the strategic aim of bringing pressure on the LTTE and forcing Jaffna people to leave the Vanni.

Some 110,000 people have returned to Jaffna from the Vanni. The LTTE

*Fears that government food rations are reaching the LTTE, as well as other concerns, have resulted in a reduction in rations for refugees.*

allowed the people to go after exacting a tax from them, in the face of its inability to provide for the basic needs of the people in territory under its control. But the Tigers seem increasingly agitated over the loss of the population which is necessary to prosecute the war. In mid-August the LTTE imposed new restrictions on people leaving the Vanni.

Despite food being available in the Vanni, the lack of income for most people perpetuates dependency on government dry rations and war conditions hamper a permanent economy. Promoting agriculture and self-help projects has been more difficult by the restriction or ban on a number of essential goods. Observers point out the need for a humanitarian policy independent of political or military concerns.

Adding to the problems, there is also a government delay for permits for humanitarian relief. Permits for shelter and other essential materials are pending before the Ministry of Defence for several months. Observers say the humanitarian work of international agencies has been made difficult by such delays.

In Jaffna, the number of people receiving food aid was reduced by 40% from 416,000. On 27 August, following a meeting with a Tamil delegation, Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunge issued orders that from 1

September, refugees in Army-held areas of Jaffna, Vavuniya and Mannar should receive aid at the same level as in June. The food-cut in LTTE-controlled areas, however, remains.

Meanwhile, it has been discovered that 14,509 tonnes of rice, sugar, lentils and milk food estimated at Rs 310 million (\$4.8 million) approved by the ESC during the period April to December 1997, had not reached Jaffna. The Cooperative Wholesale Establishment (CWE) has begun an enquiry into the disappearance of food.

Reports say Batticaloa District has been badly hit by the food cut. Earlier, 479 families in refugee camps and 5,316 families living with relatives or friends received food aid. But now, the camp refugees and only 3,151 families outside camps are entitled for assistance. Most of those living with friends or relatives are from contested border areas and cannot be resettled for security reasons. Reports say the deprived families are living on lotus roots and leaves.

Vavuniya came to a standstill on 16 August by a *hartal* or general strike against fuel cuts, organised by Tamil group PLOTE. The Defence Ministry introduced the cuts saying that fuel was reaching the LTTE in the Vanni through Vavuniya. Fuel has also been cut to the Vanni. Kilinochchi District needs 3,555 barrels of kerosene a month, but the government allowed only 2,500 barrels which was later reduced to 1,000. In August, only 515 barrels were supplied to the district.

In early August, thousands of people began demonstrations before offices of the ICRC, UNHCR and other international agencies at Mallavi in the Vanni, some of which ended in violence. Government offices were forced to close temporarily as a result of the protests. UNHCR Colombo representative Bo Schack says that inter-governmental agencies and international NGOs cannot be blamed because the government has made it clear that it is solely responsible for food supply to the war zone.

## THE VANNI

# The sinking of *Princess Kash*

THE Sri Lankan Airforce bombed and sunk the cargo ship *Princess Kash* on 14 August, after it was boarded by the LTTE, south-east of Mullaitivu. The ship was carrying cargo for Jaffna, including 84,000 packets of cement, 1,000 motor-cycles and dry rations for refugees, with the approval of the Defence Ministry.

A statement from the Presidential Secretariat says that the ship was closer to the eastern shore than the stipulated 50 nautical miles and the air attack was ordered on suspicion that the ship's crew connived with the LTTE to deliver dangerous merchandise. The Tigers claim they boarded the ship for a routine check.

Seventeen Indian members of the crew were later handed over to the ICRC, but the LTTE detained four Sri Lankans. Following an Indian government demand, they were released by the Sri Lankan authorities, as there was no evidence of nexus with the Tigers.

Businessman M Sathananthan of SVM Private Ltd, one of the 66 private companies involved in sending goods in the ship, however, was detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. Over 500 traders demonstrated before the Jaffna secretariat on 17 August demanding the release of Mr Sathananthan and compensation for their losses by the sinking of *Princess Kash*.

In early August, fierce fighting was reported near Mankulam after the LTTE launched an attack on *Operation Jayasikurui* (Certain Victory) troops. The

Sri Lankan military began *Operation Jayasikurui* on 13 May 1997 to open a landroute to Jaffna from Vavuniya through Tiger-held territory. Reports say over 100 combatants were killed in clashes further north near Kilinochchi in mid-August.

In Mannar District, six civilians were killed by the Army in Uyilankulam and Katpalli areas in early August. Military officers claim that soldiers mistook them for Tiger cadre in the night. R Nithiyandasivam and K Kulasingham were murdered at Eluthur on 4 August. In this case, the Army denied that any search operations was carried out in Eluthur at the time of the killings. Sources say, Mannar Brigadier TRD Silva is determined to smash smuggling rings operating in these areas.

From 16 August, the LTTE denied permission for people to enter Mannar and armed cadre were posted north of the Army checkpoint at Uyilankulam to prevent civilians leaving the Vanni. Some 600 people are usually allowed per day by the Army into Mannar on three days a week, and 15 vehicles are provided for transport to Mannar town.

Brigadier Silva says the LTTE has been largely controlled in Mannar District, except in areas between Talaimannar and Pesalai on Mannar Island. Policeman Shantha Jayasena was shot dead by the Tiger *Pistol Group* in Mannar town on 19 August. Another policeman was injured.

## Arrest

T Mathusoothanan, a columnist for human rights agency MIRJE's Tamil newspaper *Sarinigar*, was arrested in Colombo on 26 August. The Sri Lankan Free Media Movement says the security forces breached Presidential Directives on arrests which require that information is immediately provided to relatives. The journalist was traced to a police station after 17 hours.

## Equality

The UN Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities' Norwegian member Asbjorn Eide launched a scathing attack in August on NGOs which support the LTTE. Mr Eide said the LTTE is an undemocratic movement unable to contemplate peace and called on the international community to convince Tamil expatriates that the way for human rights is through accommodation based on equality and full respect for Sinhalese culture.

## Refoulement

In late August, the Australian Council for Overseas Aid (ACFOA), urged the security forces and the LTTE to abide by international law and called on Sri Lanka to permit access to the war zone. Noting the impact of current practices on Sri Lankan asylum-seekers, ACFOA urged the Australian government to ensure procedures at Australian and overseas ports do not expose the country to the real risk of *refoulement* against obligations under the Convention on Refugees.

# Farming systems for Jaffna

HOSPITALS in the Jaffna peninsula are unable to provide even minimum service, because of shortage of doctors and other hospital staff. Reports say, little effort has been made to fill over 660 vacancies, including for specialists.

Hospitals continue to suffer from shortage of medicines and medical equipment, lack of ambulances and laboratory facilities. The Jaffna hospital has limited facilities for storing blood and according to reports, blood is sold outside the hospital at Rs 5,000 (\$77) a pint.

Jaffna's NGOs say military checkpoints have increased and people have no freedom of movement. Although some school buildings have been

repaired by UNHCR, UNICEF and German GTZ, Jaffna's Education Department says 90% of all school buildings need repairs. A survey shows that over 104,300 buildings in the Jaffna peninsula were damaged by the war, including 13,000 business centres.

Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Authority NA Obadage says Rs 147 million (\$2.3 million) has been allocated for 36 agricultural projects and 23 have already been completed costing Rs 10 million. According to Mr Obadage, the others are long-term programmes for agricultural infrastructure aimed at developing sustainable farming systems.

In a letter to President Chandrika,

Jaffna NGOs allege that rehabilitation programmes in the last two years have failed to solve fundamental problems. Some 60% of employable people remain unemployed and 30% of the population lives on one meal a day. The restrictions on local NGOs has denied grass-root participation in planning and development. NGOs have urged the President to appoint an independent body to assess the current rehabilitation programmes.

The body of Emilinona Gopalan, missing since 1 August, was found in mid-August at Chavakachcheri. Complaint has been made to the Human Rights Commission that S Sivasubramaniam of Alaveddy is missing since 30 July.

## ■ Tiger bomb in Batticaloa town

# Civilian ordeal

BATTICALOA MP Thurairajasingham has written to the Sri Lankan Human Rights Commission accusing the military of attacking civilians in the Valaichenai area. Following a LTTE landmine attack at Meeravodai junction injuring two policemen on 3 September, the military shelled the area wounding Nalliah Vimalarani, 17.

The Army also fired shells on Kondayankerni on the same day, during a temple festival, killing S Anjalidevi and seriously wounding eight year-old S Chandrakumar. Police fired and killed nine year-old Mohanaratnam Kohilarani and injured her sister Anurani, 10, at Karuvakerni on 21 August. Thirteen civilians and three policemen were

wounded by a Tiger motorcycle bomb three days earlier in the heart of Batticaloa town.

Local people allege that a number of murders remain uninvestigated. R Rasaratnam and his wife Nageswary were shot dead in their house on 7 August. Police say these murders may have been committed by LTTE's *Pistol Group*. Three days later, masked men dragged fisherman Innasie Francis from his home at Karuveppankerni and shot him dead on the road. According to local sources, the victim's nephew is a LTTE member and the military-aligned *Razik Group* is suspected to be involved. On 11 August, carpenter Liyoni William, 65, was shot dead in Valaichenai.

The Army hunted for Tigers on 14 August at Arayampathy, two miles south of Batticaloa town, and ordered all residents to assemble at the local school for interrogation. On the same day, the Terrorist Investigation Department (TID) arrested five people, including Dr K Subramaniam, near Paddiruppu bridge in Kaluvanchikudi, after a *talayatti* or masked informer pointed them out.

Fear pervades Trincomalee District also, because of continuing killings. On 4 August, T Soundararasa, 21, was shot dead at Pallikudyiruppu. The bodies of Sampur residents T Sivakumar, S Gunarasa and S Manickarasa were found in Anaikukulam on 19 August. Relatives say they had been brutally tortured before being killed. A shell fired on a house in Sampur on the same day killed V Nallammah and wounded six others.

Three people from the UNHCR-supervised Allesthottam refugee camp, who went fishing to Salappaiyaru in northern Trincomalee were shot and injured. These refugees had earlier fled to India, and had been living in Allesthottam since their return to the island.

Ship services to Jaffna were disrupted after the *Princess Kash* incident near Mullaitivu on 14 August. Trincomalee regional secretary V Velum Mayilum says the ship *Lanka Muditha* left for Jaffna on 2 September with 1,047 people including 607 refugees. On the same day, 953 refugees from Vavuniya and another 288 from Mannar arrived in Trincomalee to travel to Jaffna.

## Escape from Lucky House

HUMAN RIGHTS agency Amnesty International appealed to the Sri Lankan government in early September to take decisive action to end persistent use of unauthorised places of detention, particularly by armed Tamil groups opposed to the LTTE. The practice by the security forces to allow Tamil groups to carry out search operations and screen civilians often lead to illegal arrests, prolonged detention and torture, disappearances and extrajudicial executions, according to Amnesty. TELO is said to hold prisoners at camps in Koomankulam, Pandarikulam and Vairavapuliyanakulam in Vavuniya District. PLOTE detains people at Kovilkulam and Rambaikulam which is referred to as "Lucky House". Pararajasingham Kugathanan escaped from Lucky House on 31 August into a nearby church pursued by PLOTE cadre who threatened the priest to hand him over. They were saved by police from a checkpoint in the vicinity. According to Amnesty, Mr Kugathanan had signs of torture all over his body.

Meanwhile, there is concern for Somaratne Rajapakse, who was convicted in the Krishanthi Kumarasamy murder case. He was attacked and wounded on 23 August in prison. At his trial, earlier, Mr Rajapakse stated that he knew of mass graves at Chemmani in Jaffna where 400 bodies of Tamils killed in Army custody were buried. Justice Secretary MS Jayasinghe maintains that Mr Rajapakse sustained minor injuries when prison officers attempted to prevent him swallowing an unlawful letter which was in his possession. But Amnesty International says, Mr Rajapakse appears to have been assaulted after he refused to sign a statement to the effect that he was emotionally disturbed at the time he made the statement about mass graves to the High Court and it was untrue.

## Hill Country bomb

A bomb placed on the railway track caused severe damage to the Badulla-Kandy train on 8 August near Rozella, 15 miles south-west of Nuwara Eliya. Following the attack, police arrested 22 Plantation Tamils on nearby tea estates, including two students, and detained them for ten days at a prison in Kandy.

Government minister and Ceylon Workers Congress leader S Thondaman has urged the police to avoid arrests without evidence. The National Peace Council says that indiscriminate arrest and torture to intimidate the population in the north contributed to the full-scale civil war of today and warns against pushing the Hill Country into becoming the next theatre of military operations.

Reports say that Deputy Inspector General of Police Sirisena Herath has initiated peace committees in all areas of the Hill Country. The Plantation workers will be involved in these committees. The objectives of the committees will be to protect dams, electricity installations and tea factories and to collect information on new arrivals on estates.

A Tamil couple was arrested in Kandy in late August on suspicion of LTTE links. Farmer, M Somasundaram of Kandapola, who was arrested on 25 December 1997, is currently held at the Nuwara Eliya police station. In early August, Nuwara Eliya MP M Sivalingam called for the trial or release of many Hill Country youths held in custody.

# Denmark signs repatriation pact

Denmark became the third European country on 18 August to sign an agreement with Sri Lanka for the repatriation of rejected asylum-seekers, following the examples of Switzerland and Netherlands. A number of Sri Lankans had been returned before the agreement was signed.

The repatriation will be phased and the accord envisages the return of 350 asylum-seekers in the first year. The Sri Lankan authorities will issue valid travel documents to the returnees, subject to acceptable proof that they are Sri Lankan nationals. The agreement is expected to be reviewed after two years to consider further extension.

The agreement says that 'both parties accept that Sri Lankan nationals who do not or no longer have the right of residence in Denmark will return in conditions of safety and dignity'. Two weeks earlier, Emergency rule was extended to the whole of Sri Lanka. NGOs have highlighted the unsafe conditions in Colombo and other parts of the island for Tamils and the continuing violations of human rights.

Colombo human rights agency, the Movement for Inter-Racial Justice and Equality (MIRJE), says, "emergency circumstances have often aggravated violations of the rights of the minority communities. It is most unfortunate that the PA government has used war as a weapon to attack democratic norms and practices". MIRJE is concerned that Emergency should not escalate harassment against the Tamil community.

Police say they arrested two important LTTE cadre in early August in Dehiwela, who were part of a 25-member LTTE unit involved in attacks on telecommunication facilities and electricity transformers in recent months. Senior Police Superintendent L Perera says new explosive devices have been found and warned people to brace themselves for further Tiger attacks.

Army Captain KS Wickremaratne was shot and injured on Vajira Road in Bambalapitiya suburb on 25 August. A Tamil suspect named *Thiyakaran* was arrested on the same day. Police say that following the arrest of two Tigers in Wellawatte suburb on 1 August, it has been revealed that several members of LTTE's *Pistol Group* which carries out selective assassinations has infiltrated the capital. Police say they also found over

*Despite increasing signs of tension in the capital, and warnings from human rights organisations, the Danish government has signed a repatriation pact with Sri Lanka.*

100kg of RDX explosives in a house at Aludeniya in Kandy, intended for the purpose of attacking senior politicians and military officers.

Round-up of Tamils continues in the capital and other areas. Over 75 Tamil youths were arrested in Wattala on the night of 14 August and 25 were detained. Twelve others were held in mid-August at Kaluwella in Galle District, 65 miles south of Colombo. MIRJE says: "Notwithstanding the existence of Presidential Directives on arrest and detention and mechanisms such as the Human Rights Commission and the recently established Anti-harassment Task Force, ordinary civilians continue to be arrested by persons in civilian clothes. They are not informed of the reasons for their arrests. Their families are not informed as to their whereabouts, nor is any receipt issued to record their

arrest. They are held incommunicado and subject to all forms of harassment and ill-treatment".

The Anti-harassment Task Force (AHTF) headed by Culture minister Lakshman Jayakody, which began sessions in early August, decided to establish a separate police unit to carry out investigations on complaints of security force harassment by citizens and for liaison between detainees and their families. All arrests under Emergency regulations and the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) must be reported to the AHTF.

AHTF member and MP, MM Zuahir said on 10 August that police arbitrarily arrest Tamils in Colombo and thereafter look for a reason to detain them. It was revealed before the AHTF in August that Peradeniya University Engineering student Balasingham Prakash was arrested at the Pettah suburb bus stand. Pettah police have denied the arrest and his whereabouts are unknown. Human rights lawyer A Vinayagamoorthy says that since 1983, he has filed 10,000 fundamental rights applications relating to arrest and detention and only in less than 10 cases the accused were determined by the court as LTTE members.

There are currently over 725 Tamil detainees in Kalutara and Colombo's Welikada prisons, including several who are held for over three years without trial. Several hundred others are detained in police stations and military camps. Mr Vinayagamoorthy says many have suffered torture.

Farmer V Jeyaseelan says in a fundamental rights application that he suffered torture after his arrest by the Army in Batticaloa on 20 December 1997. In another application JP Thamila says she was arrested on 19 April when she came to Colombo to obtain a visa to join her husband in Italy. Currently she is detained at the Mt Lavinia police station. Agrarian Services Department's A Sarojinidevi, arrested 16 July, is held at the Terrorist Investigation Division on Chaitiya Road. She has not been informed of the reasons for her arrest.

Thirteen Sri Lankans returned by Russian authorities from Moscow were arrested at the Colombo airport in mid-August. Press reports say bail for them was fixed by the Negombo magistrate at Rs 3.5 million (\$583,000). Each person had paid Rs 450,000 (\$7,000) to an agent for travel to Switzerland.

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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