

Businessmen offer peace plan

The business community in Sri Lanka launched a new peace initiative in October, declaring that the achievement of a lasting solution to the conflict in the island will henceforth be its primary task.

A conference on 22 October, arranged by major business organisations, including the Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry and the Exporters Association, adopted a 10-point work plan, besides urging cooperation between the two main political parties and bipartisan agreement towards resolution of the Sri Lankan problem. A national committee on peace, including government and opposition delegates, will also be appointed.

The work plan, while envisaging equality and personal security for all Sri Lankans, encourages the political parties to adopt policy criteria for agriculture, industry and trade, which will remain unchanged for 15 years. Whether the business community has any leverage over hardened politicians to accomplish consensus is yet to be seen.

The main opposition United National Party (UNP) refused to participate because Justice minister GL Peiris attended the conference. The UNP believes that Mr Peiris manipulated the failure of the all-party conference on the ethnic conflict organised by the party in September.

Representing the ruling People's Alliance (PA) at the conference, Mr Peiris welcomed the new initiative and agreed with the business community that there can be no economic development without lasting peace. The war and the resulting difficulty in attracting foreign investment has worried the businessmen.

The 1998 fiscal deficit is expected to exceed the target of 6.5% and reach 8% at the end of the year, due to escalating war expenditure and shortfall in revenue collection, economists say. NGOs have continued to point out the rising crime, increasing poverty, the misery of the

A new survey by Colombo University reveals that the majority of the Sinhalese people favour peaceful means to end the conflict and reject a military solution.

internally displaced and the enormous loss of life as a result of the war.

In late October, the businessmen met UNP leader Ranil Wickremasinghe, who pledged that his party would support any meaningful steps of the government towards peace, but insisted that there would be no deal without the participation of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

At an earlier meeting with the business community, Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunge said that she wanted the UNP and other political parties to join the new initiative. In late October, the President blamed Mr Wickremasinghe for refusing a recent government offer of bipartisan cooperation. She declared that peace efforts will continue even without UNP support.

The peace plan is not without its critics. The hardline National Movement against Terrorism, which advocates a military solution, urged the business community to contribute 10% of income to the National Defence Fund and assist in the annihilation of the LTTE. The call by the businessmen for reform of labour laws is seen by trade unions as an attempt to erode workers' rights consolidated over several decades.

The immediate aim of the businessmen seems to be to unite the two major political parties. But with presidential polls announced for early next year, it may prove an impossible task. The statements of party leaders indicate that the race has already begun for the general elections in the year 2000. The parties may now look for political mileage in conflict rather than collaboration.

Two days after the conference, following negotiations with the ICRC, the LTTE released six soldiers, detained for the last five years, and three crew members of the ships *Iris Moana* and *MV Missen*. The Tigers say that the release is a humanitarian gesture to improve mutual understanding. The move has raised hopes that the LTTE may be willing to establish contacts with the government.

The allocation of massive funds for war, meanwhile, has angered the government's Tamil allies. The moderate Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), accused the government of giving priority to military efforts and threatened to vote against the 1999 budget proposals scheduled to be tabled in Parliament in November. The government has a thin majority in the legislature. The TULF also expressed shock over President Chandrika's statement in South Africa that the Tamils are not the original people of Sri Lanka.

While politicians squabble, there is a great desire for peace among the Sri Lankan people, observers say. A major survey by Colombo University's Centre for Anthropological and Sociological Studies, made public in October, reveals that majority of the Sinhalese people favour peaceful means to end the conflict and reject a military solution. The survey results may come as a surprise to those claiming to represent people's opinion and advocating war. Sociology Professor Siri Hettige, who supervised the survey, says that the people at grassroots understand the complexities of the situation and are open-minded than those opinion-makers with vested interests.

JAFFNA

Tigers eye Jaffna

THE LTTE's success in capturing Kilinochchi and attempts to destabilise the local administration in Jaffna has deepened fears that an assault on the peninsula is imminent. Tiger notices appeared in early October in southern Thenmaratchy urging the people to leave their homes and seek refuge in safer areas in western Valikamam.

A LTTE leaflet demanding cooperation of the people says that initial efforts to liberate Jaffna are in progress. Rumours that the Tigers have acquired aircrafts are also causing apprehension. The Army carried out a search operation on 15 October in Eechamoddai, near Jaffna town, after LTTE posters appeared in the area. Hundreds of people were interrogated.

Heads of departments and other government officers have received letters, allegedly from the LTTE, calling for their resignation. Following a letter of threat to District Judge M Thirunavukarasu, five district courts in Jaffna were closed. The judges informed the Judicial Services Commission in October that they will not be able to continue work.

Airlines Monera and LionAir closed their offices in Jaffna after receiving a number of warnings. A LionAir plane which took off from Jaffna's Palaly airport with 48 civilian passengers disappeared over Iranaitivu Islands in late September and the LTTE is suspected of shooting it down. A large number of peo-

ple, including foreign nationals, are stranded in Jaffna following the suspension of air services. By disrupting air services and attacking ships, the Tigers have effectively isolated the Jaffna peninsula from the rest of the island.

In October, 27 local councillors resigned their posts in fear. All the local councils have come to a standstill following the killing of two Jaffna mayors in the last four months. Karaveddy regional councillor Kanagasabai Rajadurai was shot dead on 6 October. The Tamil parties have urged Colombo's foreign envoys to exert pressure on the LTTE to allow the councils to function.

Jaffna's former Army Commander Lionel Balagalle says that there are 200 Tiger infiltrators in the peninsula and the LTTE has no manpower or the weapons to launch an attack on Jaffna. On 27 October, Tiger shells killed an officer and wounded three other soldiers in the Elephant Pass camp. Four Tigers were arrested on Punkudutivu Island, west of Jaffna peninsula, in late October.

Reports say military security operations have intensified in western Valikamam area. The Army launched a search operation in Chankanai and Nitkamam on 10 October. Two days later, the area between Sithankerni and Pandatharippu was searched. People were ordered to assemble in public places and interrogated. The Vaddukottai area came under intense search on 20 October.

Appeal

Sri Lankan Foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar urged South Africa in October to prevent the LTTE from establishing a base in the country. The appeal follows reports that the Tigers plan to shift their headquarters in London to South Africa.

Ambush

The LTTE ambushed a military patrol and killed seven soldiers at Bakiella in Amparai District on 3 November. Two other soldiers were seriously wounded.

Strike

Over 1,500 tea workers on Passara Group continued a strike throughout October demanding the removal of the superintendent who is accused of racism. Some 56,000 workers in Uva Province staged a strike on 12 October in a show of solidarity.

Bail

Colombo newspaper *Virakesari's* journalist S Srigajan was released on bail on 28 October. Mr Srigajan was arrested in July suspected of involvement in a conspiracy with *Black Tiger* Ganesh Thanarani to assassinate President Chandrika.

Transfer

In early October, 117 Tamil detainees in Anuradhapura prison were transferred, after a plot by Army deserters in the same prison to murder them was uncovered. All Tamil detainees under Emergency and the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) are expected to be moved to Boossa camp in Galle, 65 miles south of Colombo.

NGOs appeal to the UN

THE Jaffna NGO consortium urged the UN Secretary General in late October to ensure that sufficient humanitarian assistance reaches the people of the Vanni in northern Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan government slashed food aid to LTTE-held areas from 1 July. The Vanni region, hit by earlier cuts, has further suffered by a 57% reduction in food supply. Reports say that attempts of Colombo's business community to send food to the Vanni has been thwarted by the Defence Ministry.

The government has also cut fuel supply alleging that fuel reaches the LTTE. The shortage of fuel has affected agriculture and the Government Agents warn that the food situation is likely to deteri-

orate further. Reports say that the Vanni is being denied development assistance. Upto October, the LTTE stronghold of Mullaitivu received only 27% of the Rs 3.4 million development aid allocated. The Defence Ministry has delayed permits to transport shelter materials to the Vanni and the GAs are unable to carry out essential repairs to refugee huts before monsoon rains in November.

The shortage of medicines continues. Three refugee children died of diarrhoea in Akkarayankulam hospital in early October. Cholera is reported in some areas and there are fears of an epidemic. The Vanni refugees have continued to demonstrate against food cuts before

government and UNHCR offices for the last two months. Civilians returning to Kilinochchi, after its capture by the LTTE in late September, say they found human remains. Over 60 people visiting homes disappeared during Army control of the area. Six returnees to the town in October were injured by landmines.

Further west in Mallavi, shells seriously wounded a man and a pregnant woman on 12 October. Two other civilians, M Nageswaran and V Suthan, were killed by shells fired from the Elephant Pass Army camp in late October. Airforce bombers attacked civilian areas in Kaiveli near Puthukudiyiruppu on 24 October wounding a woman.

■ MPs demand probe into civilian deaths

Abductions in the east

TAMIL MP Neelan Tiruchelvam urged Sri Lanka's Human Rights Commission in October to hold an enquiry into the death of Batticaloa farmer Ramakutty Thiyagarajah, 52, after torture in police custody. Mr Thiyagarajah, summoned by the police Special Task Force (STF) to Komari military camp on 14 October, suffered severe torture. Later he had been thrown out of the camp and died at home on the same day. Mr Tiruchelvam says three others arrested in the same area had also been tortured in the camp.

The body of Iyathurai Inbarajah, 18, was discovered on 19 October in a shallow grave at Kalmadu in Valaichenai. Mr Inbarajah went missing after he reported at Kalmadu Army camp as required by

the military. Batticaloa MP Joseph Pararajasingham has written to President Chandrika demanding an investigation. People say at least 29 people have been murdered in the area this year.

On 16 October, ten students of Methodist Central and Shivananda schools were detained by the Army. Reports say the arrests followed an attack by a Tiger posing as a student. Security forces warn that students found outside during school hours will be arrested. All Batticaloa schools have been requested by the military to supply lists of students who have not attended classes for more than a month.

Army officers say students were abducted by the LTTE in October from

Arayampathy, two miles south of Batticaloa town. Tamil group EPRLF has accused the Tigers of forced recruitment in Batticaloa and Amparai districts. The EPRLF alleges that each local Tiger organiser has been ordered by the LTTE high-command to enlist at least 50 youths.

Local people say that restrictions earlier imposed on Vaharai continue even after the area was captured by the Army in June. Civilians are allowed to carry only a small quantity of food stuff into the area. In early October, the Army confiscated food from traders although they held permits. Reports say the Defence Ministry has denied permission for implementation of development projects in LTTE-controlled areas in north and west Batticaloa, including plans for supply of electricity.

In two weeks from 10 October, the LTTE knocked down 30 electricity towers in Army-controlled areas, plunging Batticaloa District into darkness and affecting businesses and factories. The Electricity Board says Rs 1.2 million is needed for repairs.

Four members of the Tamil group TELO were killed in a LTTE landmine attack at Arayampathy on 11 October. A Tiger was shot dead by the Army at Pandiruppu two days later. A bomb thrown on the stage during a musical programme on Hindu *Deepavali* festival day, 19 October, killed Singer T Koushalya and K Sivaprakash. Sixteen other people were injured.

Chemmani unsafe

RESPONDING to an invitation by the Sri Lankan Attorney General, Sarath Silva, human rights agency Amnesty International says that Sri Lanka must guarantee the safety of forensic experts participating in the exhumation of mass graves at Chemmani in Jaffna. An accused in the Krishanthi Kumarasamy murder case revealed in July that the bodies of 400 Tamils killed in Army custody are buried at Chemmani. Observers welcome the invitation to Amnesty, but point out that the government has still not responded to a request for permission by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) to investigate the gravesite. Despite the assurances of former Jaffna Army Commander Lionel Balagalle, local people are convinced that the government delay in the probe, is facilitating destruction of evidence of the mass graves. A consortium of local humanitarian agencies alleges in an October letter to President Chandrika that bodies are being removed from the graves and burned.

There is concern in Jaffna over continuing search operations and arrests. The highpriest of Jaffna's Selvachannathy temple went missing on 16 October and was located on 29 October at the Kankesanthurai military base. Rasanayagam Uthayakumar, 42, was arrested by the Army at a checkpoint in Nallur on 23 October. His body was handed to the Jaffna hospital five days later, claiming that he committed suicide. The security forces made a similar claim in September over the death of GA Gunasekaram in custody. It has been alleged that Navy personnel raped a 16 year-old student on 17 October at her home in Vaddukkottai, after beating-up the parents. Commander Balagalle says an enquiry into the incident has been ordered.

FOLLOWING the suspension of flights to Jaffna, over 10,000 people have registered to travel to the peninsula by ship from the eastern port of Trincomalee, reports say. The LTTE attacks on a naval convoy providing protection to the passenger ship *Lanka Muditha* on 30 October has also disrupted ship services. The *Lanka Muditha* carrying soldiers and 525 passengers was forced to return to Jaffna during the attack.

The Tigers say that any ship carrying soldiers will be a legitimate target. The Tamil parties criticise the decision to transport soldiers and civilians together and accuse the government of using the people as human shields. Currently only an ICRC ship is allowed between Jaffna

Human shield

and Trincomalee carrying patients and medicines. Over 500 refugees in Trincomalee's Glass Factory camp staged a hunger strike on 2 November demanding to be sent to Jaffna.

Reports say 14 members of LTTE's *Pistol Group*, which carries out selective assassinations, were arrested this year. The *Pistol Group* shot dead Abdul Majeed in Muthur on 6 October accusing him of spying for the military. The Army killed two Tigers in the same area on the same day. Two soldiers were injured in a Tiger landmine attack near Thiriyai in early October. Two people died of cholera on 29 October in Pulmoddai. Seven people from the area were admitted to the hospital with the disease.

President Chandrika says she is aware of police corruption

Student torture

BATTICALOA student Ehamparam Damayanthi, 17, accused of failing to provide information about the LTTE to the authorities was released in late October by a High Court, after evidence of the Government Judicial Medical Officer confirmed her torture in custody. Ms Damayanthi was arrested in Batticaloa in April 1996 and the case against her was based on a confession, which the court said had not been made voluntarily. Human rights agencies visiting Sri Lanka in October found evidence of widespread torture.

Jaffna Chavakachcheri resident Kulasingham Vimala says in a fundamental rights application to the Supreme Court that after her arrest in November 1996 in a Colombo Hindu temple, she was tortured by police at the Crimes Detection Bureau (CDB). Ms Vimala had arrived in Colombo after obtaining a travel permit from the military in Jaffna.

Security forces believe that LTTE cadre have infiltrated Colombo and other

southern areas. Police arrested a Tiger member at Mattakkuliya in Colombo on 20 October. According to the police, he had been regularly transporting Tamils from the north-east in a van into Colombo city. Four passengers in his van were also detained.

Answering questions from Tamils, on *Rupavahini TV* on 26 October, President Chandrika said that she was upset by excesses of the security forces in relation to arrest of Tamils. She emphasised that security measures in Colombo are necessary as long as the LTTE threat to the capital remains. It is natural, she said, that Tamil people are harassed more than the others, because the LTTE uses the Tamils for carrying out attacks.

President Chandrika further stated that police officers unnecessarily harassed Tamil people during interrogation and suggested that the opposition party UNP was behind the police officers' actions. She also reiterated her earlier statement about police bribes and said that some

police officers demanded as much as Rs 25,000 from Tamil detainees for release from custody. The President assured that she had spent many hours with senior police officers formulating systems to control the abuse.

Reports say a number of Tamils in Kalutara, 25 miles south of Colombo, were taken into custody in security sweeps, before the presidential mobile service scheduled in the town in early October. Three members of a family were detained by police in Matale in the Hill Country, before President Chandrika's visit to the area.

In October, three Hill Country youths, currently detained in Badulla prison, filed cases in the Supreme Court claiming breach of their fundamental rights by the security forces. Kandapola resident Sinnathamby Thamichelvan says that he was severely tortured by police following his arrest in January. A confession had been extracted from him in July under threat of torture.

Cholera in Mannar

THE Uyilankulam Army checkpoint on Mannar-Cheddikulam road, was closed on 10 October after cholera was reported in Mannar. Uyilankulam is the only place where people from the northern Vanni are allowed to enter southern areas.

Six people died of cholera in early October at Vidaltivu, north of Mannar town, and over 90 people were admitted to the hospital. Another 60 cholera patients received medical treatment in Madhu hospital, further south-west. Schools and restaurants in Vidaltivu were closed on the orders of health authorities. Over 2,000 people passed through the checkpoint when it was reopened on 23 October, after the Government Agent announced that the disease is under control.

Restrictions at the Uyilankulam checkpoint has led to civilians attempting to smuggle food and fuel. Two people smuggling goods into LTTE-controlled Vanni areas were shot dead by the Army near Uyilankulam on 10 October. Four days later, Raphael Alexander was killed near Mannar town while attempting to smuggle kerosene.

Restrictions in Mannar and the fighting in the Vanni have led to refugees continuing to arrive in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Over 125 refugees landed in Tamil Nadu from the

western coast of Sri Lanka in October. Another 48 were arrested on 7 October at sea by the Sri Lankan Navy and returned to Mannar. In Tamil Nadu, there are currently around 70,000 Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in 133 camps. Tamil Nadu spends Rs 20 million (£285,000) a year on the refugees which is reimbursed by the Indian government.

Reports say strict policing has effectively prevented LTTE infiltration in refugee camps. The Tigers are currently confined to special camps. But allegations of Tiger activities outside camps continue. Five Sri Lankans, accused by Tamil Nadu police of attempting to send medicines to the LTTE in Sri Lanka were released by a Chennai court in early October. Police found 58 bags of medicines at Thondy coast in Rannad District in late October, destined for Sri Lanka.

Meanwhile, the LTTE has challenged its ban before a tribunal under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. The Tigers were proscribed in India under the Act in May 1992 accused of the assassination of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in May 1991.

THE SRI LANKA MONITOR is part of an information 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: brcsproject@gn.apc.org
Internet: <http://www.gn.apc.org/brcsproject>

The Refugee Council:
Tel: (0171) 820 3000; Fax: (0171) 582 9929
E-mail: refugeecounciluk@gn.apc.org
Internet: <http://www.gn.apc.org/refugeecounciluk/>
Charity No. 1014576
Company No. 2727514
ISSN 0955-5943
Funded by voluntary agencies worldwide.
Printed by: Imedia Print, 76-89 Alscot Road
London SE1 3AW