

## The decay within

A new public opinion poll by Colombo University indicates that 66% of people in southern Sri Lanka prefer a political solution and reject the attempt to achieve peace through military means. The poll was carried out during the Provincial Council elections in April and the sample consisted of 2,100 persons. Observers regard as significant that only 7% are in favour of the ruling People Alliance government's twin strategy of war and peace.

The survey result reflects the impact of 16 years of war on the lives of people. Some analysts believe that the island faces increasingly difficult problems which are becoming unmanageable in the light of continuing war and its dreadful consequences.

Sri Lanka's Central Bank says defence spending is increasing and the uncertain economic situation has discouraged domestic and foreign investment. The Bank has called for immediate steps to control the island's growing budget deficit which it says is largely due to the cost of the conflict and lower tax collection. The government planned to keep the deficit down to 6.5% against 7.9% in 1997. But the deficit has risen to 9.2% of GDP. Defence expenditure stood at 5.6% of GDP in 1998, an increase from 5.4% in the previous year.

Many believe that the high crime rate is linked to the war. In an interview with *Reuters* in early May, the Deputy Inspector General of Police HMGM Kotagadeniya said 'crime is a direct fall-out of the war in the north-east'. Crimes, including contract killings, are said to be committed by many among 12,000 army deserters still at large. Their weapons are available on the black market.

A Navy deserter and a reserve Police Sub-Inspector were among the 17 suspects arrested in connection with the abduction of business firm Aitken Spence Director GC Wickremasinghe in March for a ransom of Rs 20 million. Mr Kotagadeniya says that the direct involvement of police in crime may now have to be examined.

*Writing about Sri Lanka in the Newsweek magazine, journalist Tony Clifton says that 'nowhere has war embedded itself more malignantly into the normal workings of a nation'.*

Rapes increased to 1,066 in 1998 from 844 in 1997, while killings rose to 1,993 from 1,576. The government has resumed executions after 23 years. Amnesty International views the decision as a retrograde step which would 'seriously undermine international confidence in the government's commitment to human rights and reform'.

Observers say that welfare has suffered at the expense of the war and children are particularly vulnerable. British NGO Save the Children estimates that 900,000 children in the north-east are affected by the war. There are continuing allegations that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) recruit children despite their assurances to the United Nations. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), there are 500,000 child labourers in the island and 10,000 of them are street children.

Sri Lanka has the highest suicide rate in the world, around 7,000 each year. There is a thriving war economy. Writing about Sri Lanka in the *Newsweek* magazine, journalist Tony Clifton says that 'nowhere has war embedded itself more malignantly into the normal workings of a nation'. He estimates 50,000 have died so far, an additional 30,000 have disappeared and more than one million have lost their homes.

Over 800,000 people depend on government assistance, 600,000 of whom are internally displaced. As fighting continues, the number of the displaced in the north-east increases and many refugees

have been displaced several times. Around half a million Sri Lankans are estimated to have left the country as a result of the war. The exodus continues. The European Union is displeased over the delay in reconstruction in Jaffna.

Despite the mounting problems, there are no signs from the government or the LTTE that the peace process will resume. A delegation of the National Peace Alliance (NPA) visited the Vanni on 24 May. An NPA delegation two months earlier met LTTE leaders in the Vanni and after returning to Colombo, held discussions with President Chandrika Kumaratunge. NPA convenor and University Professor Tissa Vitharana says that the Tiger leaders promised cooperation in achieving peace and the President's response was positive.

But, by the time the NPA delegation made its second visit, war had intervened. The Sri Lankan Army had captured the Madhu area in Mannar District, in *Operation Rana Gosha* (Battle Cry). The Tigers ignored the message from the delegation sent through Mannar Bishop Rayappu Joseph, requesting a meeting. In early May, Bishop Joseph had urged the LTTE to work towards an acceptable solution to all parties.

The ruling PA and the main opposition United National Party (UNP) were preoccupied with internal dissent. Reports say that UNP leader Ranil Wickremasinghe faces challenge from within and President Chandrika Kumaratunge has received a letter from Fisheries minister Mahinda Rajapakse criticising the PA's lack of commitment to carry out election pledges.

President Chandrika says that the government will end the war and implement political proposals before national elections. How these can be achieved within the next year is unclear. The delay in peace is allowing extremism to rear its ugly head. The hardline organisation, Sinhala Weeravidhana has begun a new campaign of intimidation against the minorities in southern areas which may be difficult to control.



JAFFNA

# Pure threat

ALL government and local government offices in Jaffna were closed on 22 and 25 May following a Tiger threat. Letters signed by *Thuyavan* (The Pure) of the LTTE in mid-March, ordered that all government offices should be closed on Tuesdays and Fridays. The Tigers also demanded the Jaffna Petroleum Corporation to be shut down, to disrupt all transport.

On 28 May, Jaffna Commander Maj. Gen. Lohan Goonewardene asked government officers to return to work. The Army also requested copies of attendance registers from government departments. *Thuyavan* informed Jaffna Government Agent (GA) K Shanmuganathan in early June that the ban was lifted temporarily, claiming that it was imposed to demonstrate that the Army was not in real control of Jaffna.

The LTTE also ordered all local government bodies to cease functioning. Tiger gunmen shot and injured Tamil group PLOTE's Valikamam councillor Baheerathan on 14 May. Tamil group EPDP's Nallur councillor Thiagarajah Rajkumar was killed on 31 May by suspected LTTE gunmen. Following the attacks, five other councillors resigned. PLOTE leader N Manickathan warned that all 60 PLOTE councillors will resign if the government failed to provide them protection.

Search operations and arrests continue as the Army attempts to identify Tiger infiltrators. The people are concerned

over arrests in the light of earlier disappearances. Seven youths, including R Jegatheeswaran, 17, of Varani were arrested in early May. Three more people were detained in Irupalai on 6 May. A day earlier student Lualo, 17, went missing in Jaffna town. Parents have complained to the Sri Lankan Human Rights Commission that five students from Neerveli are missing since 11 May. Eight men were taken into Army custody near Jaffna town on 15 and 16 May.

Over 500 Jaffna University students protested on 3 May against arrests and alleged Army ill treatment. Students of nine Jaffna town schools began boycotting classes on 11 May demanding the release of T Sivarupan of Kanagaratnam School. He was released the following day. The Army has accused the LTTE of entering schools and enlisting students. The military's own recruitment drive launched in May predictably failed.

In May, the Army ordered people in Valikamam area to display photographs of all family members, outside their homes. This is expected to be extended to the entire peninsula. Each household is currently required to display a list of family members, certified by the Village Headman and an Army officer.

The LTTE shot dead an Army officer at Columbuturai near Jaffna town on 25 May. Following the killing, soldiers ran amok attacking civilians in the area. Five people, including R Selvamariikkar, 45, were arrested.

## Impact

The Committee of Inquiry into Undue Arrest and Harassment has requested the Attorney General for a report on the impact of the Immigrants and Emigrants Act after the amendment in July 1998. The Bail Act 1997 and the provisions of the Code of Criminal Procedure Act 1979 relating to bail are inapplicable to offences under this Act, making it equivalent to the Prevention of Terrorism Act. Over 100 Tamil youths are in detention or have been convicted under the Act, reports say.

## Confirmed

The Supreme Court of India, on 11 May, confirmed the death sentences of two Sri Lankans and two Indians accused in the Rajiv Gandhi murder case. Three were sentenced to life and 19 others were acquitted.

## Temple

Deputy Defence minister Anuruddha Ratwatte asked Colombo businessmen in late May to finance the construction of a Hindu temple near Colombo, to neutralise the harmful effects of the Srirangam Hindu temple in Tamil Nadu, India. The new temple may cost Rs 600 million (\$8.6 million).

## Accused

Police claim that Sinhala newspaper *Lakbima* journalist Srilal Priyantha, now in custody, was a leader of the People's Liberation Front (JVP), wanted in connection with five murders in 1988-89. Mr Priyantha has written articles on corruption in the military.

# Food problems

SENIOR state officer, Vavuniya Government Agent K Ganesh said in late May that 315 lorry loads of food due to be delivered to the Vanni since March, had not been sent following military operation *Rana Gosha* (Battle Cry). The local population and 350,000 refugees in the region continue to suffer without adequate food, medicine and fuel.

After the Army operation, communication with the LTTE for food transport arrangements, has become more difficult. NGOs say that there is continuous shell fire and the new route for food lorries from Uyilankulam through Pallamadu in Mannar District along the western coast is hazardous.

Food lorries are allowed into LTTE areas of the Vanni on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays escorted by the ICRC. Army checking and cross-loading at 9th Mile Post near Uyilankulam must be completed before 3.30pm each day to allow lorries to reach northern Vanni by nightfall. The ICRC has agreed to escort food lorries only three days a week.

GA Ganesh says due to these reasons, he is unable to arrange more food lorries to the Vanni. According to Mullaitivu GA, R Tharmakulasingham, there is an acute shortage milk food and kerosene in the district. The Army prevented food lorries into LTTE-controlled areas for a week from 10 May.

The military launched *Operation Rana Gosha III* on 10 May, and advanced north-west from Madhu towards Vidaltivu. In heavy fighting at Periyamadu, 53 combatants died and over 200 were injured, reports say. The Army announced on 16 May that 32 sq. mile territory around Periyamadu had been captured from the LTTE.

The Navy say that an LTTE boat carrying weapons was sunk near Mullaitivu on 1 May killing 11 cadre. Four policemen died and 11 others were wounded in a Tiger attack at Poovarasankulam on 10 May. Over 2,500 people fled north-west to Thunukai when the Army shelled Pandiyankulam in mid-May.



## ■ Treasury fails to pay bills in the east

# Ships to Jaffna

ADDRESSING Parliament in early May, TULF MP Neelan Tiruchelvam called on the government to resume regular ship services to Jaffna. Government Agent K Shanmuganathan and NGOs told a visiting team of Sri Lankan diplomats on 8 May to Jaffna, that proper transport facilities between the peninsula and southern areas were urgently needed.

Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Authority's N Obadage says that arrangements are being made for a permanent ship service. Shipping company Liverpool Navigation (Private) Ltd has filed a fundamental rights application in the Supreme Court, after the Defence Ministry denied permission to run a service to Jaffna. The company says that it

purchased the ship *MV Liverpool City* after President Chandrika called for assistance from the private sector.

Some 1,400 people are registered in Vavuniya to go to Jaffna and another 1,015 wait in Mannar. A further 4,000 people are stranded in Trincomalee. The passenger ship *Lanka Muditha* arrived in Trincomalee with 1,190 passengers from Jaffna on 18 May. Around 1,250 refugees sent from Mannar to Trincomalee, after the government ordered closure of the Madhu refugee camp, left for Jaffna in the ship.

Eight days earlier, 240 Muslim families from the Lovelane refugee camp staged a protest fast in Trincomalee town, demanding restoration of govern-

ment assistance which was stopped in June last year. The refugees say that no action has been taken to resettle them. The Army searched Allesthottam refugee camp on 8 May and arrested 23 young men and women. The camp houses refugees returned from India several years ago.

Reports from Batticaloa District say that the Treasury in Colombo has failed to pay Rs 77 million (\$1.1 million) allocated by the government for assistance to 5,800 refugee families. As a result, cooperative societies have refused to issue dry rations to refugees after March. Batticaloa GA AK Pathmanathan has requested the Treasury to release Rs 20 million (\$286,000) for dry rations. Reports also say that Rs 110 million (\$1.6 million) was earmarked for rehabilitation in the current year, but only Rs 16 million has been received.

LTTE's *Pistol Group* shot dead a policeman in Batticaloa town in early May. The Tigers attacked an Army unit at Welikande in Polonnaruwa District on 13 May killing four soldiers. Four days later, the security forces searched Navatkudah, three miles south of Batticaloa town and arrested two youths.

A house-to-house search was carried out in Valaichenai villages on 24 May. Several men were detained for interrogation and later released. Police say an LTTE member was taken into custody on 18 May at Akkaraipatru in Amparai District. On his information, a student and an NGO staff member were detained.

## Daily torture

HUMAN RIGHTS agency Amnesty International says in a 1 June report that torture is among the most common violation reported in Sri Lanka and continues almost daily in the context of the armed conflict. The agency has obtained its evidence from testimonies of victims, reports of government Judicial Medical Officers (JMOs), Supreme Court judgments and reports of government commissions and other investigative bodies. The Committee of Inquiry into Undue Arrest and Harassment (CIUAH) received 47 complaints of torture between July and December last year. Despite long-term existence of laws against torture and the enactment of the Torture Act in 1994, the crime is committed with impunity. Amnesty says while a handful of cases are reportedly pending in courts, so far no one has been convicted. The highest judicial authority in the island, the Supreme Court, has commented on the prevailing climate of impunity in relation to torture and has repeatedly expressed frustration

at the lack of follow-up by the police and the Attorney General. The wide powers given to security forces under Emergency regulations and the Prevention of Terrorism Act which allow prolonged detention without judicial authority, permit torture and provisions making confessions admissible as evidence are an incentive for torture to extract a confession. The prevalence of torture is intrinsically linked with other human rights abuses, particularly, long-term pattern of disappearances reported in the country. Amnesty has recorded torture of Tamil political prisoners, torture of children and rape by security forces in custody. There is strong evidence, according to Amnesty, that the current post-mortem procedures have been repeatedly used to cover-up the torture to death or killing by shooting of detainees.

## Madhu camp

IN early May, Deputy Defence minister Anuruddha Ratwatte ordered all refugees in the UNHCR-assisted Madhu church camp to be resettled. The order followed demands by Mannar Bishop Rayappu Joseph to remove the Army from the 400-acre Madhu church sacred area, alleging arrests and harassment of civilians since capture of the area in April.

At the time of the order, there were 20,000 refugees - 7,000 from areas now controlled by the Army in Vavuniya District, 3,000 from Jaffna and 10,000 from LTTE-held Vanni, including Mannar. The government also decided to transfer the 10,000 Vanni refugees who cannot be immediately resettled, to Palampiddy, further north. UNHCR says

facilities at Palampiddy are inadequate. Mannar refugees in similar situation will be sent to Pesali or other refugee camps.

Over 1,000 Jaffna refugees staged a protest before the UNHCR office in Madhu, expressing their desire to remain in Mannar. They say that there is no likelihood of being resettled in their home areas and fishing restrictions in Jaffna will affect their livelihood.

Sixteen soldiers were injured in an LTTE landmine attack on 21 May in Mannar. Further south in Puttalam District, Muslim refugees demonstrated on 14 May demanding the release of 67 refugees arrested two days earlier. Police say they were using electricity illegally, but agreed to grant them bail.



## Kalutara detainees on hunger strike again *Indiscriminate arrests*

THE police arrested 63 Tamils after two electricity transformers were blasted with bombs at Bambalapitiya and Narahenpita in Colombo on 3 May. Two days later, police took into custody 100 Tamils in Wellawatte and Dehiwela. According to the Police, 600 people were arrested last year in connection with damage to 144 transformers. On 25 May, 46 Tamils in Negombo, 20 miles north of Colombo, were arrested and 13 detained.

Most of the arrested are released within 48 hours, but observers say that this does not negate the fact that the round-ups are arbitrary. Following a bomb explosion in Pettah suburb on 16 May, over 50 Tamil workers in shops on Sea Street were detained. Reports say security in the capital was strengthened in late May after a six-member Tiger hit squad infiltrated the city.

Arrests were also carried out in the Hill Country. Nine people were taken into custody in Matale town on 7 May. The following day, six people in

Hantane, south of Kandy, were arrested and a Tamil woman was detained. The Kandy police searched 150 houses in Mahiyawa suburb on 27 May and arrested five Tamils and three Muslims.

There is concern over attempts by the police to compile information about Tamil teachers in the Hill Country. Bogawantalawa teacher T Arutchelvam and Hatton Highlands College teacher Sivanantharajah are in detention for the last six months. On 24 May, the Supreme Court ordered the release of four traders from Ragala, eight miles north-east of Nuwara Eliya, arrested in November last year without proper cause.

Three Tamil detainees in Kalutara prison, 25 miles south of Colombo, began a hunger strike on 7 May demanding trial or release. Kalutara prisoners have staged many protests against their prolonged detention. Batticaloa resident Sabaratnam Parameswaran, 26, arrested in 1996 remains in Kalutara prison for the last 29 months without trial.

Kalutara detainee Rev. Anthony Alexander says that he suffered torture at a police station after his arrest in March 1998 and a confession was extracted from him. Jaffna resident M Balendra, 25, who had been detained in Kalutara for several years without trial, died in a Colombo hospital on 17 May. Prisons Commissioner P Baskaralingam says an enquiry into his death is underway.

Jaffna resident and widow Satkunam Indrani, currently in Colombo's Welikada prison, says in a fundamental rights application to the Supreme Court that she was arrested on 26 March when she came to the capital for medical treatment. She has not been informed of the reasons for the arrest.

P Sivasubramaniam, arrested in Batticaloa in June 1997 was released by a High Court in late May. The Judicial Medical Officer, in his evidence said that Mr Sivasubramaniam had suffered torture. There are 30 torture scars on his body and a finger had been cut off.

## TELO members killed in Colombo

SENIOR members of Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO) Sivalingam Sivadasan and Rajaratnam Kugarajah were shot dead in Colombo's Bambalapitiya suburb on 15 May. Trader and TELO supporter Mirukandu Jeyakody was also killed. Suspicion has fallen on another Tamil group, the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE). TELO and PLOTE are among the four Tamil militant groups armed and funded by the Sri Lankan government to fight the LTTE.

Rivalry among the Tamil militant groups has a long history. Competition over control of the Tamil population in Army-held areas of the north-east, for the purpose of illegal taxes, led to clashes between PLOTE and TELO. Police say 15 cadre have been killed in the last six months.

TELO's retaliation for the Colombo murders was swift. Within hours, four PLOTE members were shot or hacked to death in Vavuniya. Three days later, a PLOTE office in Vavuniya was blasted with a bomb. The Defence Ministry says in a statement on 18 May that the Army

has disarmed the two groups to prevent escalation of the fighting. There was heightened tension in Vavuniya as clashes continued even after the Defence Ministry's announcement. Tamil party

sources say only 5% of the arms had been withdrawn by the military. According to other reports, Sri Lankan intelligence services suspect that the LTTE has infiltrated TELO.

As PLOTE and TELO clashed, the LTTE had been planning a major strike in the Batticaloa. Leader of the *Razik Group*, Muthulingam Ganeshakumar or *Razik* was killed by a suicide bomber on Trincomlaee Road in Batticaloa District on 29 May. *Razik*, who was a member of Tamil group EPRLF broke away to form the *Razik Group*, operating mainly in the east with the Army.

The Sri Lankan security forces used the *Razik Group* successfully against the LTTE and *Razik* had been a long-time target of the Tigers. Reports say *Razik* also provided security to EPRLF leader and new government ally Varatharaja Perumal when he visited Batticaloa recently. The *Razik Group* has been accused of abduction and murder of civilians suspected of links with the LTTE. Amnesty International says in its 1 June report that the group has carried out torture in the east.

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

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