

Army strike Mannar

Senior state officers in northern Sri Lanka appealed for help in early July after 25,000 people were displaced at Vidataltivu in Mannar District in military operation *Rana Gosha IV* (Battle Cry).

The Army launched *Operation Rana Gosha IV* on 10 June and troops advanced towards Vidataltivu on the western coast, 11 miles north-east of Mannar town. Opposition from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was mild and the Army captured Andankulam, Adampan and the coastal village of Pappamoddai.

Some 8,000 people are said to have remained in the territory. A night curfew was imposed in these areas. The military say 500 sq. mile territory has so far been captured in the four *Rana Gosha* operations and only 1,400 sq. miles are now controlled by the Tigers in the Vanni.

Vanni Army Commander Lionel Balagalla told journalists at the Thatchankulam military base on 16 June that attempts to open a landroute to Jaffna will continue despite the failure of the 18 month-long *Operation Jayasikurui* (Certain Victory). The current small-scale operations are aimed at denying the LTTE, control of the population which is the base for new recruitment. Maj. Gen. Balagalla says that the *Rana Gosha* operations have brought 35,000 people under Army control.

When the Army began moving northwards from Pappamoddai on 26 June, there was stiff resistance from the Tigers. The heaviest clashes took place around Nayatraveli. Some 200 combatants are reported to have died in the fighting. The Tigers refused to accept 37 bodies, which were later buried on the orders of the Mannar Magistrate. Tamil group TELO alleges that they were civilians killed by the Army in Pappamoddai and other surrounding villages. Reports say five civilians were killed and 60 others were wounded by Army shells. More than 4,000 people took refuge in two churches in Vidataltivu. These churches have no basic facilities.

Reports say there is an acute shortage of food in the whole of the Vanni following Operation Rana Gosha IV which disrupted food supply through Pallamadu along the western coast.

Some 20,000 people fled northwards from Vidataltivu, after heavy Army shelling and took refuge in Paliyaru and Vellankulam. Mantai North Assistant Government Agent, Mariyadas says that some people found shelter in schools and temples, but others were living in the open, under trees. Food is short and they face difficulty in obtaining drinking water. Reports say some refugees have begun moving further north towards Kilinochchi District. On 2 July, over 120 people fled from Mannar in boats to the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu.

The military also launched *Operation Whirlwind* on 10 June, further north in Kilinochchi District, where troops advanced west from Paranthan towards Pooneryn. The Army encountered resistance from the LTTE within two miles, but assaulted and caused heavy damage to LTTE's *Rahulan* camp, which is believed to be a base for launching attacks on Jaffna peninsula. Although the military claim that *Operation Whirlwind* was a diversionary tactic, analysts believe that the military now aims to open a supply line to the Jaffna peninsula through Mannar and Pooneryn.

There is an acute shortage of food in the whole of the Vanni following *Operation Rana Gosha IV* which disrupted food supply through Pallamadu along the western coast. Early July reports say that following discussions with the ICRC, the LTTE agreed to allow food lorries through Army-held Mankulam on the Vavuniya-Kilinochchi road.

While fighting continued in the Vanni, infighting in Colombo led to restructuring of the military hierarchy. According to reports, President Chandrika Kumaratunge had become directly involved in military planning after the LTTE recaptured Kilinochchi in September last year. On 3 June, former Army commander Rohan Daluwatte was appointed as Chief of Defence Staff, to head the Joint Operations Headquarters (JOH). But within six days, the President scrapped this powerful post which would have effectively given Gen. Daluwatte command of all the armed forces.

Observers say there is dissatisfaction with Deputy Defence minister Anuruddha Ratwatte, and Gen Daluwatte's short-lived promotion was an attempt to reduce his powers as a prelude to removal. Mr Ratwatte appears to have thwarted any moves against him, at least temporarily.

While these military manoeuvres continue, peace in the island remains as remote as ever. Leading businessman and trading firm Aitkin Spence Chairman R Sivaratnam has expressed disappointment over the lukewarm response of the two main political parties to the bipartisan peace programme launched by businessmen in October 1998. Observers say there are no signs of government measures to realize the President's assurance to the Tamil political parties that the devolution package would be tabled in Parliament before August this year.

There was mounting speculation in June of a new peace initiative involving South Africa, following the visit of Tiger ideologue Anton Balasingham to Britain, for medical treatment. Mr Balasingham, a citizen of Britain, is said to have travelled from the Vanni through Singapore, accompanied by his wife Adele, who was with the LTTE's medical corps. He may become involved in strengthening the Tiger International Secretariat in London. Observers say Western governments which have been complaining, now have someone from the LTTE for consultation outside Sri Lanka.

JAFNA

Army camp torture

THE Army launched a military operation on 23 June and advanced from Varani in Thenmaratchy towards Iyatralai near Mirusuvil, 17 miles north-east of Jaffna town. The troop advance was accompanied by shelling. Iyatralai resident Ramu Vethavanam was killed and five houses were damaged in Thanankilappu and Koyilakkandi. Over 1,500 families fled west to Navatkuli.

The military say the operation followed reports that the Tigers were preparing for a major attack on the peninsula on 5 July, *Black Tiger Day*, annually observed since the first suicide attack was carried out by LTTE's *Captain Miller* during Sri Lankan Army's *Operation Liberation* in July 1987.

LTTE attacks in Jaffna continue. Three soldiers were killed and seven others were injured in a Tiger landmine attack on 1 July at Nunavil, two miles west of Chavakacheri. Following the incident, soldiers attacked civilians on the streets wounding seven people. Three soldiers have been arrested.

Press reports say Pandatharippu resident R Rajendran, 37, suffered severe torture at Mahiyapiddy Army camp. It is alleged that his head was covered with a plastic bag dipped in petrol and he was hit with a hammer on the forehead. The Sri Lankan Human Rights Commission (HRC) complained to Maj. Gen. NR Marambe, who reprimanded officers involved in the torture. The HRC received 69 complaints of human rights

abuses in June, including five against Tamil groups working with the Army.

The Jaffna magistrate ordered the military to produce in court, five people arrested following the killing of an Army officer on 25 May. Five refugees who returned from the Vanni were arrested at the Gurunagar refugee camp on 10 June. The Army detained seven suspects in Valvettithurai on 22 June in connection with the killing of a policeman.

A delegation of Jaffna's Women Development Centre, led by Saroja Sivachandran told visiting North-East Province Governor, Maj. Gen. Asoka Jayawardena in June that women fear to travel in the peninsula because of harassment at Army checkpoints and highlighted the difficulties in locating women arrested by the military. The delegation also said that some 20,000 women whose parents or husbands have died in the conflict continue to suffer without employment or proper support. Maj. Gen. Jayawardena says that the 22,000 vacancies in Jaffna, including 6,000 for teachers will be filled in stages.

The Jaffna Citizens Committee for Peace met Maj. Gen. Marambe in early June and made representations regarding the effect of restrictions on movement and problems in obtaining permits for people who wish to travel to Colombo on urgent business. The Citizens Committee urged the Army to remove the ban on cultivation of 24,000 acres of land in the Jaffna peninsula.

PLOTE uncovered

Hunting for a Jaffna councillor who resigned, soldiers raided PLOTE offices in Vavuniya on 10 June. The Army say V Vijayaratnam has links with the LTTE and is protected by PLOTE. In June, the Tigers urged other Tamil group members to join them.

Clear line

Seven Tamil youths were arrested in Kathmandu on 2 July. Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunge is scheduled to visit Nepal on 5 July.

UN visits

The UN Working Group on Disappearances may visit Sri Lanka in October 1999 and the UN Committee Against Torture, early in the year 2000.

Overburden

The Mallavi hospital in LTTE-controlled Mullaitivu District treated 91,000 people in May, of whom 1,490 were for malaria and 250 for diarrhoea. Reports say cholera is spreading in Mannar and Kilinochchi districts.

Troubled waters

The Indian Navy arrested 30 Sri Lankan fishermen in the Palk Strait on 25 June, accusing them of fishing in Indian territorial waters.

More power

The British High Commission in Colombo says five electricity generators for Jaffna may be received in the island before end of 1999.

GA asks for more

AT a meeting of government and UNHCR officers on 11 June, Vavuniya Government Agent P Ganesh requested the construction of 800 more huts in refugee camps in Vavuniya. Some 21,000 people are cramped in 15 camps in conditions of poor sanitation.

A large number of refugees entered Vavuniya after the government closed the UNHCR-assisted Madhu refugee camp in Mannar. The student population has increased by 7,000. Some 3,700 students attend schools from the 15 camps and another 9,700 are from refugee families living with friends or relatives.

Over 2,000 people with resident permits in Vavuniya town were questioned

by the military on 5 June. Two days earlier, an LTTE bomb damaged rail lines at Eeratperiyakulam, four miles south of Vavuniya town. The Army arbitrarily rounded-up men on the streets on 10 June for questioning. A soldier was killed and three others were wounded in a landmine attack at Eeratperiyakulam on 28 June.

In Mannar District, the LTTE shot dead two policemen in early June at Murunkan. The police killed a man at Kattupalli on 6 June alleging that he attempted to smuggle banned goods into LTTE areas. The Mannar magistrate has ordered an enquiry into the incident. Three Tigers were killed in a clash at Thiratikulam on 11 June. Reports say

over 30 youths, including six students, were arrested by the Army in June.

The refugees in Madhu camp have all been removed. The government has ordered that refugees in the UNHCR-assisted Thatchanamaruthamadu camp nearby, must also be resettled or moved to other camps. Mannar GA SM Croos has urged the government to keep the camp open, saying that other camps in the district are already overcrowded. Press reports say that while assisting in resettlement, UNHCR will also help refugees living with friends or relatives. In Mannar District 7,100 people are in refugee camps and another 1,000 live with friends or relatives.

■ 1,500 people displaced in Vaharai

Impunity

A Batticaloa District court ordered the arrest of an Army officer on 7 June in connection with the death of a young woman named K Vigneswary. A day earlier, Murakottanchenai camp commander Capt. Bernard Kelaart had fired several times on to the streets, allegedly to test new guns received from Colombo.

Human rights violations in the east continue despite hundreds of letters from local MPs to President Chandrika and government ministers. Soldiers brutally assaulted 19 year-old Nithiyananthan Suthakaran near Mavadvembu Army camp on 18 June. He was admitted to the hospital in a serious condition. His mother and his sister Krishnaveni were also beaten up. In a letter to President

Chandrika, Batticaloa MP Joseph Pararajasingham has demanded action against the soldiers.

Another Batticaloa MP K Thurairajasingham says that the Attorney General has failed to file cases against soldiers arrested in connection with murders in Kalkudah, 16 miles north of Batticaloa town. The MP alleges that Presidential Directives requiring issue of receipts to relatives on arrest are never followed. A number of people who went missing in the district were later found detained at Welikande, Polonnaruwa or Anuradhapura.

A public meeting was held in Batticaloa District on 26 June to mark the International Day Against Torture.

Eastern organisations say 364 Batticaloa people, including 50 women, have suffered torture at the hands of the security forces since 1990.

The LTTE, which controls northern and western areas of Batticaloa District launched a number of attacks in June. A policeman and a *Razik Group* member were shot dead at Kalmunai on 4 June. Former member of Tamil group PLOTE, P Inbarajah was killed by suspected Tiger cadre on 14 June.

The Army carried out cordon and search operations in Valaichenai and Kalmunai areas on 24 June and interrogated hundreds of people. A policeman was wounded in a Tiger grenade attack on the same day in Batticaloa town. Another policeman at Manmunai Special Task Force (STF) camp was seriously wounded by a LTTE sniper on 28 June.

In late June, 1,500 people were displaced in Vaharai, 34 miles north of Batticaloa town, following exchange of shells by the Army and the LTTE. The Tigers had earlier told the people to move away from the Army camp at Vaharai. Reports say that the displaced people are suffering without shelter and adequate food.

According to reports, over 1,000 resettled refugee families have not been included in the list for benefits under the government's poverty alleviation programme, *Samurthi*. Many letters to the Social Services Ministry in the last two years from the Batticaloa government secretariat remain unanswered.

Chemmani bodies

EXCAVATORS authorised by the Sri Lankan government unearthed two human skeletons from a gravesite at Chemmani in Jaffna on 17 June. The remains are believed to be those of Rasiah Satheeskumar and Mahendran Babu, both employees of a workshop in Ariyalai, three miles east of Jaffna town. The site was identified by Army corporal Somaratne Rajapakse who, along with five others, was sentenced to death last July in the Krishanthi Kumarasamy murder case. In early June, Mr Rajapakse's wife received letters threatening dire consequences, if her husband identified the graves. Amnesty International says more than 400 Jaffna people disappeared after arrest by the security forces in 1996. Representatives of Amnesty International, Physicians for Human Rights and Asia Foundation were present as observers during the excavation which was supervised by Jaffna Additional Magistrate M Ilancheliyan. In his evidence to the magistrate, Mr Rajapakse said that he knows details of murder of people and a torture chamber where he saw the bodies of a number of victims. He also said that he witnessed the murder of a Tamil couple who were bludgeoned to death by Army officers in Ariyalai.

Reports say that three other soldiers convicted in the Krishanthi case have said in their evidence to the Sri Lankan Human Rights Commission that bodies are also buried in Ariyalai. They are also reported to have stated that senior military officers involved in the disappearance of a large number of Tamils are currently serving in other areas. In late June, Tamil political parties urged the government to take action against those responsible for the murders. In the light of continuing military operations and the forthcoming national elections, observers believe that government response is highly unlikely.

THERE is concern in Batticaloa, after the LTTE warned the five local MPs in June that they should not attend public functions. In late June, MP and Deputy Telecommunication minister AM Hizbullah announced cancellation of all appointments. Although the reasons are unclear, some observers believe that the Tigers aim to prevent the MPs campaigning for the forthcoming national elections. The LTTE also accuse some NGOs in the east of corruption and have threatened to intervene.

The Tigers launched a number of attacks in the east in June, including one within the Batticaloa town. Reports say that LTTE's *Jayanthan Brigade* led by *Karuna* is again deployed in the region.

Warning

Further north in Trincomalee District, suspected LTTE cadre bombed and damaged a telecommunication tower at Pulmoddai on 3 June. The security forces found explosives in a van near Thambalakamam in mid-June. Two suspects in the van from Colombo were arrested.

LTTE's *Pistol Group* shot dead Suthakar during a temple festival at Palathopur. Suthakar, a former member of a Tamil militant group, had been working with the Army. Two soldiers died in an LTTE attack on Nilaveli Army camp on 24 June. Four refugees sustained severe burns in a fire at the UNHCR-assisted Alles Road refugee camp on 17 June.

Deportation of asylum-seekers from Australia

Vanitha released

THE Supreme Court of Sri Lanka ordered the release of Jaffna resident Muthuthamby Vanitha on 11 June, following a fundamental rights application. Asylum-seeker Vanitha, deported from France in October last year, was arrested by Kotahena police in Colombo in November accused of LTTE links. Amnesty International says in its 1 June report that she suffered severe torture in custody.

Observers say asylum-seekers are suspected by Sri Lankan authorities of having lent support to the LTTE, as evidenced from questioning of returnees by security officers. NGOs say the risk to returnees has increased since the introduction of the Emergency regulations banning the LTTE in January 1998, which provide that support to the Tigers is a punishable offence with imprisonment of seven to twelve years.

Despite the concerns and absence of proper monitoring procedures, deportation of asylum-seekers from other coun-

tries continues. According to reports, on 4 June, Australia deported two asylum-seekers held at the Villawood Detention Centre in Sydney from 1997, without adequate notice to their legal representatives. Human rights agencies in Colombo say that Australian officers accompanying a deportee handed him over to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), who produced him in courts alleging LTTE connections.

Human rights agencies have long been complaining about the lack of arrangements to monitor refugees returned to Sri Lanka. Observers say UNHCR's "passive monitoring" is totally inadequate, particularly in view of continuing arrests, widespread torture by security forces and death of detainees as recorded by Amnesty International. Sixteen Tamils were arrested on 19 June following the discovery of a bomb on Central Road in Colombo's Pettah suburb.

Sri Lanka Red Cross North-East Coordinator Sivanathan Kishore, current-

ly in police custody, filed a fundamental rights application in the Sri Lankan Supreme Court in early June, alleging illegal arrest and detention. Mr Kishore was taken into custody in April on suspicion of LTTE links. Red Cross driver N Eeswaranathan is also in detention. Another Red Cross officer, R Ramesh was arrested in Vavuniya on 11 June.

Mr Kishore says that he did legitimate work such as transport of patients in the war zone and handing over bodies of combatants killed in battles. Mr Kishore, who also served as an Inquirer into Deaths, denies involvement in activities inimical to national security.

On 15 June, Mr Kishore was taken to his home at Rambaikulam in Vavuniya by officers of the Terrorist Investigation Department (TID) and his wife Suganthi was questioned in his presence. The Red Cross alleges that a campaign to tarnish the image of the organisation is underway and has complained to President Chandrika.

PA loses grip on Southern Province

IN a relatively calm Southern Provincial Council election on 10 June, the ruling People's Alliance (PA) won most number of seats, but failed to retain overall majority. The PA gained 27 (44.9% of votes) of the 55 seats, while the main opposition United National Party (UNP) won 21 seats (39.1%). The People's Liberation Front (JVP) again emerged as a third force with seven seats (12.3%).

The government is disappointed by the results, particularly in view of general and presidential elections scheduled for the year 2000. Observers say that the government is concerned about the lack of minority support. But winning the hearts of the Tamil people may prove impossible without a satisfactory solution to the Sri Lankan conflict.

Sources say that President Chandrika has been advised to hold the presidential election first, on the assumption that she would defeat Ranil Wickremasinghe who is expected to be UNP's candidate, and after regaining presidency, will be able to steer her party to victory at general elections. Analysts believe that the chances of victory for the PA in a general election

held first, are slim. In case the PA loses, party members may not be enthusiastic in a presidential election campaign.

Adding to government problems, the medical services were seriously disrupted

when 4,500 doctors of the Government Medical Officers Association (GMOA) launched a strike on 14 June alleging political interference. The GMOA says that the North-Western Province Chief Minister is appointing senior officers whereas it should be done by the Public Services Commission (PSC) according to national policy decided by the Cabinet.

Under the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, the Provincial Council is empowered to make the appointments to the provincial health service. On application by the Chief Minister SP Navinne, the Court of Appeal issued an interim injunction stopping the government making the appointments through the PSC.

The District Court on 22 June issued an order restraining the GMOA from continuing the strike. Meanwhile, the government declared health as an essential service. The doctors were defiant and continued the strike which resulted in the District Court issuing warrants for the arrest of the GMOA office bearers. The strike was called off on 2 July after a meeting with the President. But the issue remains unresolved.

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 Refugee Council
3 Bondway, London SW8 1SJ
Tel: (0171) 820 3100; Fax: (0171) 820 3107
E-mail: breslproject@gn.apc.org
Internet: www.gn.apc.org/breslproject

The Refugee Council:
Tel: (0171) 820 3000; Fax: (0171) 582 9929
E-mail: refugeecounciluk@gn.apc.org
Internet: www.refugeecouncil.org.uk
Charity No. 1014576
Company No. 2727514

ISSN 0955-5943
Printed by: Imedia Print, 76-89 Alscot Road
London SE1 3AW