

The election menace

The Sri Lankan business community's National Committee for Peace and Development, led by Lalith Kotalawala, held discussions on 2 September, in an attempt to reach consensus towards solving the island's conflict. Senior leaders of the ruling People's Alliance (PA) and the main opposition United National Party (UNP) participated in the meeting.

The UNP wants the executive presidency abolished before government devolution proposals are tabled in Parliament, while the PA contends that these two aspects are linked and must be dealt with together as part of the proposed new constitution.

The PA says the minorities have expressed the view that the political system has failed for the last fifty years and the ethnic problem could only be solved by a powerful presidency free from the shackles of a parliamentary cabinet system. The disposal of the executive presidency before a solution to the conflict, therefore, would be premature.

Mr Kotalawala has expressed his desire to meet the chief of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Velupillai Prabhakaran, but believes that without agreement between the PA and the UNP on a concrete proposal, confronting the Tiger leader would be futile. Reports say that Mr Kotalawala has sent a letter to the LTTE's International Secretariat in London seeking a meeting with Mr Prabhakaran.

The business forum hopes to achieve consensus between the two main parties before October. The PA and UNP differ on proposals relating to land, police powers, foreign investment and borrowing, the unit of devolution and whether Sri Lanka should be a unitary state or union of regions. The UNP agreed to meet the Tamil political parties and make proposals within two weeks for further cooperation. The Tamil parties have described the meeting as an "eye-wash".

The Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) began boycotting Parliament from 3 August demanding restoration of

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food supply to the north, establishment of proper transport to Jaffna and removal of restrictions on fishing. The other Tamil parties are also disillusioned. PLOTE leader D Sitharthan declared that his party will "never again" support the PA or the UNP at elections. But he says PLOTE will back the government's devolution proposals if powers of the President to dissolve elected regional councils are withdrawn.

UNP leader Ranil Wickremasinghe said in early August that there is no change in his party's position that peace talks should be held with the LTTE. Addressing the UN Sub Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities on 4 August, Sri Lanka's Permanent Representative, HMGS Palihakkara declared that despite a long list of atrocities, the government was open for discussions with the Tigers. But he reiterated that talks were possible only if the LTTE abandoned the struggle for Eelam or separate state and agreed to complete the talks within a specified time frame. Five days later, thousands of Tamils demonstrated before the UN in Geneva, demanding recognition of the Tamil right to self-determination.

While the Sinhalese headline Weeravidhana and the National Movement Against Terrorism (NMAT) conducted symbolic funeral rites to the government's peace package in Matara in mid-August, four PA members, including the Communist Party (CP) and the Lanka

Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) marched in Colombo, calling on the government to end the war and submit the devolution proposals for Parliamentary approval. Plan Implementation minister Jeyaraj Fernandopulle called on President Chandrika Kumaratunge to talk to the Tigers with UN mediation before the peace package is tabled. Observers suspect an overall election strategy behind these curious requests from the government's own members.

The UNP began a series of demonstrations in Colombo on 4 August demanding the revival of the defunct Bribery Commission and fulfilment of government's election promises. On 18 August, when protesters attempted to march on the Presidential Secretariat, the police tear-gassed and attacked them.

Over 7,000 police were deployed to provide security to the PA's rally in the capital on 21 August, celebrating the completion of five years in government. President Chandrika portrayed her vision for the new millennium and identified the challenges facing her government. Chief among these challenges are the ethnic conflict and poverty, recognized as the main problems when PA gained power in August 1994.

Sources say factions within the PA believe that it is safer to face national elections without resolution of the ethnic problem, arguing that a solution, whatever form it takes, will alienate large sections of the Sri Lankan community. Others are of the view that a lasting solution will enhance the image of the PA, depriving the UNP ammunition in an election campaign.

There is no doubt that next year's national elections have already heightened activity. Political parties will hereafter aim at gaining more votes and analysts say that there is no evidence of real intention to solve the conflict. The PA said before elections in 1994 that only the politicians and arms dealers benefited from the Sri Lankan war. In 1999, hardly anything has changed and there is little hope for 2000 and beyond.

JAFFNA

New demand

ACCORDING to reports, the Army's demands relating to security are creating more problems for the people of Jaffna. The military say strict security measures are necessary to curb LTTE infiltration into the peninsula. A new order requires each family to provide a family photograph to the closest military camp, together with three copies of a form containing information about the family. All family members must be present at the camp to submit the forms.

The people in Army areas must have military-issued special identity cards (SIC), in addition to National Identity Cards, although human rights agencies say this contravenes constitutional provisions on equality. After discovery that the Tigers were posing as students, all students are now expected to possess SICs. By August, 378,500 of the 525,000 Jaffna population had been issued SICs.

Each household must display a list of occupants in front of the house and workplaces must display lists of employees. Foreign visitors are barred from taking video cassettes or electronic equipment into the peninsula. Jaffna residents complain that all letters from southern Sri Lanka and abroad are again being opened by the authorities before delivery.

Adding to the problems, government dry rations to 90,000 families were not issued in August. This includes 20,000 families which are prohibited from returning to homes in high security areas, and living with friends or relatives.

In August, newspapers reported over 20 arrests in various parts of Jaffna. Five refugee returnees from the Vanni were taken into custody at Gurunagar refugee camp. Five others, including 14 year-old S Thushanthini are reported missing. The Human Rights Commission says the Army issues receipts for arrests and currently 22 people are detained at Kankesanthurai military base.

The police shot dead V Jeyakumar and A Christurajah within the two-kilometre fishing zone off Gurunagar on 11 August. Following discussions with the fishermen's associations on 13 August, the Army allowed fishers to wear sarongs while fishing. In July, the Army banned sarongs, accusing the fishers of using them as sails.

On 17 August, the Army launched a military operation in Nelliyan and Sembianpatru, in north-eastern Vadamatchy area. The military say that this zone, currently controlled by the LTTE, is the base for infiltration into other parts of the peninsula. Two policemen were killed in a Tiger grenade attack at Kottady near the Fort in Jaffna town on 31 August.

On the night of 21 August, the office of Tamil newspaper *Uthayan* was bombed by unidentified persons, causing extensive damage. *Uthayan*, which is the only newspaper currently published in Jaffna, has been critical of the Tamil groups fighting on the side of the Army against the LTTE.

Pressure

Sri Lanka's ambassador to the United States, Warnasena Rasaputram, accused Britain, on 26 August, of allowing a base for the LTTE in London and said that he expected the US to pressurize the UK to close Tiger offices. Britain has denied Sri Lankan accusations that the shooting incident in Southall, Middlesex, at a cricket tournament organised by the expatriate Tamil community on 31 August, was linked to terrorism.

Petition

Sinhala journal *Ravaya* editor Victor Ivan petitioned the Chief Justice GPS de Silva in August, accusing the Attorney General (AG) Sarath Silva of suppressing evidence in the charges of rape and misappropriation against magistrate Lenin Ratnayake. Mr Sarath Silva is expected to be appointed as the next Chief Justice.

Deal

Police questioned *Sunday Leader's* editor Lasantha Wickrematunge on 20 August, after the Colombo newspaper alleged that Presidential Media Advisor Sanath Gunathillake was involved in a corrupt deal with a businessman.

Children

Colombo Tamil newspaper *Virakesari* says that a recent survey in Kilinochchi among 11,846 children below five years of age, shows that 54.8% are malnourished and 29.4 suffer severe malnutrition. *Virakesari* further says that this is a 17.2% increase from 1993.

Agreement on Vanni route

AFTER a six-week blockade, food lorries finally crossed the frontline into Tiger-held Vanni on 9 August, following an agreement negotiated with ICRC assistance between the LTTE and the Army. Civilians and food lorries traversed the new 100-metre demilitarized zone, northwards from Mankulam, watched by senior military officers and LTTE's deputy leader SG Karikalan.

Observers have welcomed the opening of the new route, but express grave doubts about sufficient food and medicines reaching the Vanni refugees without disruption. Reports say 50 northern Catholic priests have signed a letter to the Tamil MPs calling for their resigna-

tion if they are unable to ensure humanitarian aid to the Vanni population.

By mid-August, over 3,500 Vanni people stranded in Vavuniya had returned home and 90 food lorries entered Tiger territory. Vavuniya Government Agent K Ganesh says 20 lorries enter the Vanni daily, each carrying 15 tonnes of food. According to NGOs, there is a backlog of 900 lorry-loads of rations to the Vanni.

Passengers to the Vanni are now checked by the Army at Kokkuveli, three miles north of Vavuniya and then taken in buses to Mankulam. People arriving from the Vanni through Mankulam are checked at Peyadikoolankulam, near

Kokkuveli, and issued permits to enter Vavuniya town.

Military operations continue in other areas of the Vanni. In early August, the Army shelled Thunukkai and Pandiyankulam, west of Mankulam, displacing a large number of people. The Tigers fired on a water bowser at Iranai Iluppaikulam, north-west of Vavuniya town, on 8 August, wounding a soldier.

Mullaitivu Education Director says that the education of over 24,000 students in 45 schools in the district has been badly affected by government restrictions. Many students are unable to attend school and students attending find it difficult to study without adequate food.

■ *LTTE pressure on NGOs in the east*

Vaharai Black Tiger attack

ARMY Major B Karunanayake was killed in a *Black Tiger* suicide attack inside a military camp at Vaharai, 35 miles north of Batticaloa town, on 9 August. Major JH Karunadasa was wounded. The heavily-defended Vaharai camp lies on the frontline leading to Tiger-held areas of Kathiraveli and Palchenai, further north.

When the attack took place, dry rations for poor families from Tiger areas were being issued. Relief provisions under the government's *Samurthi* poverty alleviation programme, are issued at the camp once a month. The military believe that the *Black Tiger* had entered the camp posing as a civilian.

In a change of strategy, the Tigers

have intensified small-scale operations in eastern and southern Sri Lanka. As the Army shelled LTTE-controlled Paduvankarai area, west of Batticaloa lagoon in early August, the Tigers ambushed a military convoy near Welikande, killing two soldiers and wounding seven others. Nine policemen died and 20 were injured in a landmine attack in Batticaloa town on 11 August.

The LTTE's *Pistol Group* shot dead an intelligence officer at Oddamavady in mid-August. The military imposed restrictions on civilian movement and began search operations. Reports say over 135 people were arrested in Batticaloa and Amparai in August. The Army launched a military operation north

of Vaharai on 1 September and brought Kathiraveli under control. Reports say the Tigers withdrew without resistance.

The military have restricted food, medicines and fuel into Paduvankarai. Press reports say that in recent months 37 people died in the area due to difficulties in transporting patients to Batticaloa town for treatment. Tamil MP Joseph Pararajasingham says soldiers attacked civilians during a festival at Sithandy Murugan Hindu temple on 24 August. The Committee of Inquiry into Undue Arrest and Harassment (CIUAH) has directed the Army to conduct an enquiry. Press reports say hundreds of Muslims fled from Kudapokuna, 15 miles east of Welikande in Polonnaruwa District, fearing LTTE attacks after a police post in the village was closed on 12 August.

In Amparai District, the LTTE attacked a Special Task Force (STF) patrol near Central Camp on 18 August killing six and wounding five others. A week later, the Tigers ambushed another STF unit at Kevuliyamadu, near Arantalawa. Five STF died in the attack and eight others were injured.

Sources say that the LTTE have begun enforcing the order that NGOs must obtain permission to operate in Tiger areas and approval for each project. The government earlier announced that development programmes will not be implemented in Tiger areas. The new demands from NGOs will no doubt adversely affect humanitarian work with impact on the civilian population.

Grave abuses

SOMARATNE RAJAPAKSE and four other soldiers, who were convicted in Krishanthi Kumarasamy murder case in June 1998, identified 20 burial sites around Chemmani in Jaffna in late August and early September. Two human skeletons were found in June from a gravesite in Chemmani identified by Mr Rajapakse. The soldiers say that the bodies of around 125 people murdered in Army custody in 1996 were buried at these sites. Ruhuna University's Forensic Medicine Professor Chandrasiri Neriella and representatives from Asia Foundation were present during identification of the sites. Excavation of the mass graves is expected to begin on 6 September.

Mr Rajapakse said in his evidence that soldiers stopped a temple priest and his assistant travelling on a motorcycle in Kaithady and after killing them buried their bodies near a temple. It is also said that education officer Selvaratnam and two others - Partheeban and Suthakaran -

who came to an Army camp in Jaffna town to obtain travel permits were murdered and buried within the camp. Mr Rajapakse further alleges that Army Major Thudugalle was involved in the torture and murder of many people at a house in Jaffna town.

Fear has been expressed following reports that a new Tamil group, similar to that of the *Razik Group* in Batticaloa, has been established in Jaffna by the military to hunt Tiger infiltrators. Currently the group has 15 members who had left other Tamil militant groups. They have been issued arms and operate from Urelu Army camp.

Meanwhile, ten other soldiers accused of human rights violations, including rape, protested by climbing on to the roof of the Jaffna prison. They are demanding to be sent to a prison in southern Sri Lanka and early trial.

SECURITY FORCES in Trincomalee are on alert after Tiger K Rameswaran, arrested on 10 August, revealed LTTE plans to destabilise the district. Some 150 Tigers have entered Trincomalee from Mullaitivu, reports say.

The LTTE killed a soldier at Kuchchaveli Army camp on 3 August. A day later, retired teacher VS Murthy, 63, died and six other civilians were wounded in a landmine attack at Muthur. In mid-August, the Army arrested 20 people, including an old woman at Nilaveli.

The Navy shelled the coastal village of Ilankanthai, south of Muthur on 14 August damaging a school. Fisherman Sadeek was killed during a clash between the Navy and *Sea Tigers* off Pulmoddai

two days later. The Tigers assaulted an Army post in Muthur on 21 August injuring a soldier. In shelling that followed, student P Mohanaruby was wounded.

In Mannar District, Government Agent SM Croos' driver Anthonydas was arrested on 27 August and taken to Colombo for interrogation. Police allege that he is a Tiger explosives supplier. Fifteen others have also been detained in Mannar and Colombo.

Further south in Puttalam District, Colombo Tamil newspaper *Thinakaran* journalist S Ganeshan was arrested at Chilaw on 14 August, while recuperating following an accident. Reports say he suffered degrading treatment at the hands of the police.

Trinco alert

Allegations of torture continue

Tigers in Hill Country

POLICE say that the LTTE is infiltrating the Hill Country, as part of a new strategy to destabilise southern Sri Lanka. Tiger cadre *Sulochanadevi* was arrested on 25 August on Battuwatte Estate in Madulsima, eight miles north-east of Badulla town. There were explosions in Badulla and Hatton in mid-August aimed at disrupting electricity supply. Two other bombs in Hatton were diffused.

The Kandy police warned residents not to accommodate outsiders without registration at the nearest police station. Over 50 Tamil youths were arrested in the hill capital in early August and eight were detained. A man was arrested in Kurunegala in early August. Police say bomb-making material was hidden in his vegetable basket. Jaffna resident B Kumaran and his wife Vimalarani were taken into custody at Ketawala in Talatu Oya, five miles south-east of Kandy, on 14 August. According to the police, gelignite and detonators were found at their home.

Badulla MP TV Sennan says that over 100 Hill Country Tamils are in detention without trial. Three Tamils, including 17 year-old Vijayalatchumy, were arrested in a bus at Peradeniya on 17 August. Temple priest K Karmegam of Deltota Estate in Galaha was detained four days later.

Human rights agencies say that of the 1,694 arrests of Tamils reported in August in the island, 113 were in the Hill Country and 385 in Colombo. LTTE cadres Srikanthan and Mahendrakumar were arrested in Colombo in August. Police claim that plots to assassinate senior politicians, including Health minister Nimal Siripala de Silva, Justice minister GL Peiris and EPDP leader Douglas Devananda have been uncovered.

In cordon and search operations in Pettah, Kotahena and Maradana suburbs on 11 August, over 100 Tamils were detained. Following information that nine Tigers had infiltrated the city, 210 Tamils were taken into custody on 23 August.

Kandy resident DLD Schokman says in a fundamental rights application that he suffered torture at Kandy police station after his arrest on 18 August last year. He alleges that he was detained for eight months and forced to sign a confession before being produced in a court.

Amnesty International has said that the prevailing climate of impunity encourages torture. In early August the Supreme Court ordered a report from a government Judicial Medical Officer (JMO), after Vavuniya resident S Parameswaran alleged torture following his arrest on 26 April.

Teacher D Nimalan alleges that his head was covered with a plastic bag dipped in petrol and he was given electric shocks at a Vavuniya Army camp. N Suresh, 19, arrested on 18 June, was tortured at Mavadivembu Army camp and admitted to the Batticaloa hospital in a critical condition. In mid-August, a Batticaloa court ordered the arrest of soldiers responsible for the torture.

PLOTE leader killed in Vavuniya

SRI LANKAN government ally PLOTE's military commander N Manikkadasan, 40, was killed by a bomb at the Tamil group's *Lucky House* camp in Vavuniya on 2 September. Two other PLOTE cadre also died in the attack.

Police believe that the bomb was planted in the office earlier and exploded by a remote-controlled device. Despite the recent feuding between the PLOTE and TELO, police suspect LTTE for the attack. Mr Manikkadasan was accused of carrying out assassinations and Amnesty International says that the *Lucky House* camp is used as a torture centre.

Although the Army has extended its hold over territory far beyond Vavuniya, the Tigers have succeeded in penetrating defences in many areas. The situation in the district is increasingly becoming volatile. On 4 August, a military truck was blasted at Vepankulam, with a remote-controlled bomb, killing eight police Special Task Force (STF) members. Sixteen were wounded.

Two days later, six soldiers, including an officer, were injured by a claymore mine at Pattanichchi Puliyankulam.

Following the attack, the STF fired indiscriminately killing B Sakthivel, 43, and wounding two other civilians. The STF also entered a TELO camp nearby, shot and injured four cadre. Eleven soldiers

died and 11 others were wounded in another landmine attack at Navavi, west of Omanthai on 18 August.

A child was killed and two other children were wounded in police retaliation after a Tiger attack on a police post at Vepankulam on 25 August. Following the incident, the STF burned another TELO camp at Ukkulankulam. They also shot and injured five TELO cadre.

Another mine killed Police Inspector Gunatilleke and four policemen at Cheddikulam on 31 August. Six others, including three civilians were wounded. After the incident, the police shot dead a member of Tamil group EPRLF and arrested another cadre.

In recent months, TELO have been accused of supporting the LTTE. The Tamil militant groups TELO and PLOTE were in the forefront of the Army's defence strategy for Vavuniya. But infighting and doubts over their allegiance have introduced a new problem for the military. TELO leaders deny the charge and warn that further attacks may force them to resume armed opposition to the government.

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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