

## Unceasing waves in Vanni

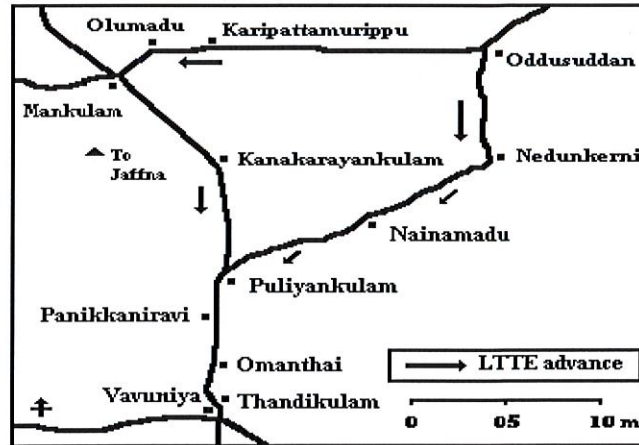
**T**he Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) captured ten towns and 400 sq. mile territory in the northern Vanni, throwing back the Sri Lankan Army in a lightning operation named *Oyatha Alaigal III* (Unceasing Waves) in early November.

The Tigers overran Oddusuddan camp on 2 November and thereafter moved rapidly south and west in a five-day offensive to take the other towns, including Nedunkerni, Mankulam and Puliyankulam. Heavy fighting is said to be taking place in Omanthai, just seven miles north of Vavuniya. Observers say casualties on both sides may be in the region of 1,500. The Army has rushed 2,000 additional troops into Omanthai area in a desperate attempt to stem the LTTE advance.

The loss of almost the entire territory captured in *Operation Jayasikurui* (Certain Victory) and *Operation Rivi Bala* (Sun Power) over a period of 19 months, in a matter of days, has shocked Colombo. President Chandrika Kumaratunge, as commander-in-chief of the armed forces reacted with predictable anger, sacking several northern Army officers, including Vanni Commander Maj. Gen. Neil Dias.

As Army Commander Lt. Gen. Sirilal Weerasooriya appointed a military court to enquire into the debacle, the government reinforced censorship on military news introduced under Emergency regulations in June 1998. The Tiger assault came in the wake of the announcement to hold presidential elections.

Sri Lanka Elections Commissioner Dayananda Dissanayake ended a month of speculation when he announced in late October that the presidential election would be held on 21 December. Nominations for the election will be accepted on 16 November. The Commissioner's notification followed President Chandrika Kumaratunge's official proclamation on 20 October, to hold



presidential election an year before her term of office ends. As soon as President Chandrika made public that as candidate for the ruling People's Alliance (PA), she would seek a second term, the main opposition United National Party (UNP) leader Ranil Wickremasinghe also declared his candidacy.

President Chandrika said that she brought forward the election to seek a mandate to break the stalemate in finding a solution to the island's ethnic conflict. She accused the UNP of unwilling to provide support in Parliament for a two-thirds majority needed to adopt a new constitution incorporating government devolution proposals.

Addressing foreign investors on 5 October, Mr Wickremasinghe reiterated his demand for negotiations with the LTTE. He said that the UNP is in favour of a foreign facilitator for peace talks and called for an interim council to administer the Tamil north-east region. President Chandrika challenged the opposition leader in a hard-hitting mid-October letter, asking him to make clear the precise set of proposals that should be discussed with the Tigers.

The President also wanted to know UNP's views on the government devolution proposals and demanded Mr Wickremasinghe to disclose details of alleged discussions UNP's Jayalath Jayawardena held with LTTE leaders in the Vanni over the past two years. The letter effectively places the entire blame on the UNP for the failure to resolve the

ethnic problem. Observers say that the PA government has the prime responsibility in the matter and no real progress has been made since the draft constitution was published in 1996, but prosecution of the war has been given greater impetus. While emphasizing that constitutional and legal guarantees were essential to ensure minority rights, President Chandrika says that a political solution must include equal opportunities, specially in education and employment.

The government succumbed to pressure from various groups, including students, and withheld the Equal Opportunities Bill, which was scheduled to be presented in Parliament on 7 October. The Bill seeks to make discrimination on several grounds, including ethnicity, gender, religion and language unlawful. It also provides for the establishment of an Equal Opportunity Commission and an Equal Opportunity Tribunal with powers of affirmative action where discrimination is alleged.

In 1997, Mr Wickremasinghe rejected extensive devolution as contained in the government devolution proposals claiming that the 13th Amendment to the Constitution had settled the unit of devolution issue. The PA says that if the UNP is unwilling to go beyond the 13th Amendment, then the call for talks with the LTTE is a sham and is intended only to entice Tamil voters.

Elections are also the time for scapegoats. Sources say that President Chandrika has severely criticized Justice minister GL Peiris for the lack of progress in the quest for constitutional reform. She is said to blame him for including a clause entrenching the highest status to Buddhism in the draft constitution, which she believes has given minorities further cause for concern. Mr Peiris is also under criticism for introducing the Equal Opportunities Bill and placing the government in a difficult position at election time.



## THE VANNI

# Tigers take Puliyanankulam

IN a surprise attack, the LTTE overran the Army camp at Oddusuddan in Mullaitivu District and took control of the town on 2 November. The following day the Tigers launched an assault capturing the Army camp at Nedunkerni, six miles further south in Vavuniya District.

BBC's Colombo correspondent Susannah Price described the fall of the town as the worst setback for the Army in over a year. The LTTE advanced further west and south and took Ambankamam, Olumadu, Nainamadu and strategic Mankulam town on 5 October. Kanagarayankulam, seven miles south, fell a day later and the Tigers proceeded to capture Puliyanankulam, seven miles further south. In their advance accompanied by intense artillery fire, the Tigers destroyed 21 military camps capturing huge quantity of weapons.

Earlier in the month, the Army made extensive preparations for major operations in the Vanni. On 14 October, the military launched *Operation Watershed I* from Ambankamam. Despite torrential rains troops advanced north-east, but came under artillery fire between Ambankamam and Muthayankaddu Tank, three miles north of Olumadu.

In two days of fighting 36 soldiers died and another 364 were wounded. The ICRC say in a press release that 32 bodies of Tigers were handed over to the LTTE in the Vanni on 16 October and three more such transfers took place. The Army also began *Operation Rela Pahara*

*II* (Wave Assault) in Paranthan, south of Elephant pass on 15 October killing nine Tigers. *Operation Watershed II* was launched on 28 October and troops advanced from Olumadu northwards to link-up with Muthayankaddu. The Tigers shelled a field hospital within the Elephant Pass camp on the same day killing a soldier and wounding 21 others.

The London-based Tamil Information Centre warned in late October that the operation would be a risk to refugees and called on international agencies and governments to devise a plan of emergency preparedness. There are 376,000 people in Tiger-held areas in the Vanni and over 80% of them are internally displaced. Senior state officers, the Government Agents say food shortages in the region continue and prices of fuel and milk food have risen. Renewed fighting in the Vanni will make the situation worse.

In mid-October, the LTTE imposed a ban on farmers selling rice produced in Vanni districts to the government. In the last 18 months, government officers purchased the rice required for refugees from local farmers at Rs 1,050 (\$15) a 50 kilo bag. Following the Tiger ban, officers say rice will have to be brought from Colombo and other essential goods may have to be reduced.

In Vavuniya, ten civilians were injured in a grenade attack at the bus station on 9 October. Two electricity pylons were damaged with bombs at Thavasikulam, two days later.

## Killed

EPDP MP and editor of Tamil weekly journal *Thinamurasu* (Daily Drum), Atputharajah Nadarajah and his driver were shot dead by unidentified persons in Colombo's Wellawatte suburb on 2 November. Sources say Mr Nadarajah abstained from voting in Parliament for the extension of Emergency while the other EPDP MPs voted with the government in support of extension.

## Extended

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright extended the designation of the LTTE as a foreign terrorist organisation on 8 October. The US first added the Tigers to its list of terrorist organisations in October 1997.

## Protection

Six police units were set-up in October to check increasing crime in Colombo following many killings in gang wars. Deputy Inspector General (DIG) HMGB Kotagadeniya says interference by politicians is making effective action to curb crime impossible. The police arrested 500 criminal suspects in the Colombo suburb of Maligawatte on 27 October.

## Arrest

Suspected LTTE agent Eric Savundaranayagam was taken into custody in mid-October in connection with the assassination of TULF MP Neelan Tiruchelvam in July. Press reports say he was arrested in Chennai (Madras) by Tamil Nadu police and handed over to Sri Lankan authorities.

# Human rights abuses in Jaffna

REPORTS say a 35 year-old widow was gang-raped by soldiers on 29 September at Varani, 16 miles north-east of Jaffna town. Tamil group EPDP has demanded the military commander for an enquiry into the incident.

The Sri Lankan Human Rights Commission says that it received 40 complaints of human rights abuses in Jaffna in October. A number of cordon and search operations were conducted in late October. Soldiers shot and injured a woman on 9 October near Tellippalai. Six people were killed by the Army at Arugaveli near Periyativu Island south of Chavakachcheri. Reports say four of them were civilians. On 25 October, nine

people arrested and three, including Jaffna University student Selvanayakam Suganthan, were detained.

The Tigers continued to infiltrate the Army-controlled peninsula and pressurize the local administration. LTTE's *Pistol Group* shot dead a soldier on Temple Road in Jaffna town on 7 October. Following a LTTE grenade attack in mid-October in Jaffna town, the Army shot dead a suspected Tiger and wounded a bakery owner. The bodies of four young men and a woman were handed over to the Jaffna hospital on 16 October. The police say they were Tiger cadre killed in a clash a day earlier at Kodikamam.

Jaffna cooperative union manager DR Premalal was shot dead in the town on 27 October. The security forces believe that LTTE's *Pistol Group* which carries out selective assassinations was responsible for the killing. In mid-October, seven bodies, believed to be Sea Tigers', washed shore in the Jaffna islands.

The Jaffna hospitals continue to suffer without specialists. Doctors in the south appointed to serve in Jaffna are reluctant to go and some have applied for medical leave. Reports say Health minister Nimal Siripala de Silva has appointed a committee to enquire into the issue. In early October, three women died during childbirth in the Jaffna general hospital.



## ■ Fear of Tiger attacks in the east

# Justiciable homicide

THE Kalmunai court in Eastern Province ordered on 21 October the arrest of policemen accused of involvement in the torture and murder of Sathasivam Sanjeevan.

Mr Sanjeevan was arrested in October 1998 and the police later claimed that he was shot dead by the LTTE when being taken for an enquiry. Following a complaint by the Human Rights Commission, his body was exhumed. The government Judicial Medical Officer's report says that Mr Sanjeevan had suffered severe torture and according to the Government Analyst he had been shot at close range.

Batticaloa MP Thurairajasingham says that in a number of instances Inquirers into Sudden Deaths (ISD), who

are empowered by law only to record the apparent cause of death, were exceeding their powers by declaring deaths by security force shooting as "accidental deaths" or "justiciable homicides". He has expressed suspicion that the ISDs are under pressure from the police to make such declarations.

Following a complaint, Judge J Visvanathan has informed all ISDs that they should act within their powers, pointing out that there is no provision in law to declare a death as "justiciable homicide". In early October, the Magistrate's Court issued summons for the fourth time on a soldier accused of attempting to murder by shooting S Nagarajah on 29 March in Sithandy.

As Deputy Defence minister Anuruddha Ratwatte visited Amparai on 3 October to inspect new security arrangements in border villages of Batticaloa and Amparai districts, the LTTE attacked a police post in Sungavil in Batticaloa killing a policeman and wounding two others.

Fear pervades border villages after the LTTE attack on Punchi Sigiriya in Amparai last month. Reports say the Tigers attempted to attack the 8th Colony village in Amparai on 28 October, but the villagers had taken refuge elsewhere during the night. Amnesty International has expressed concern that three Tamil refugees, including S Velayutham, 56, in the border village of Sinnawathai have disappeared after arrest by Home Guards on 8 October.

In Trincomalee District, a refugee in the UNHCR-assisted Allesthottam camp was arrested by the security forces in early October. The LTTE attacked an Army water bowser on 5 October in Kanniya killing two soldiers.

The Navy carried out a house-to-house search operation in Manayaveli area near the naval base on 9 October to identify Tiger infiltrators. Fishermen N Sivapatham and Y Pathmanathan were arrested by the Navy while fishing off Muthur. Army searched Trincomalee town and surrounding areas on 20 October. Over 2,500 people, including children, were paraded before *Talayattis* or masked informers at the Selvanayagapuram school.

## Chandrika rule

OBSERVERS believe that it would be difficult for President Chandrika to repeat her 1994 presidential election performance, when she received 62.3% of the votes, boosted by minority support. The LTTE, who were holding peace talks with the government at the time, provided tacit support. But now they are at full-scale war with government forces. Her government is plagued by internal dissent and her plans to end the war by solving the ethnic conflict and replace the current presidential system by a Westminster-style cabinet government, are in tatters, providing ammunition to the opposition. The minority parties are reluctant to offer support and there are attempts to put forward one candidate to represent all the Tamil parties. The two parties that would unconditionally support President Chandrika seem to be the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress and Hill Country's Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC). But the death of CWC leader and Livestock Development minister S Thondaman, 87, on 30 October has pushed the government further into crisis. The Tamil parties say that during the five-year Chandrika rule, Tamil civilians have suffered extreme restriction on freedom of movement and violations of human rights by security forces. They argue that under such conditions, election campaign in the Army-controlled north-east is futile and elections in LTTE areas is impossible. The parties have severely criticized the government for the 12% increase in the defence expenditure for the year 2000, which will be a staggering Rs 52.4 billion (\$728 million). The launch of *Operation Watershed* in the Vanni, in an attempt to turn the military campaign to political advantage has backfired. Despite all these problems, analysts say, UNP candidate Ranil Wickremasinghe will not be able to match her public appeal.

## Sea Tiger clash

THE Sri Lankan Navy attacked two *Sea Tiger* boats near Kachchaitivu 26 miles north-west of Mannar Island on 7 October. A boat was sunk and fifteen *Sea Tigers* were reported killed. Security forces say that supplies to the LTTE continue to arrive from the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu.

The Navy intercepted three other boats with medicines and other material near Pallimunai on Mannar Island on 5 October. Three Tiger suspects in the boats were arrested, but four others jumped into the sea and escaped.

Eight policemen were killed and 14 others were wounded in a LTTE attack on a police post at Vankalai, seven miles south-east of Mannar town. Following

the attack, soldiers ran amok attacking civilians. Three fish huts were burned and fishing boats were damaged.

Police attacked 12 people who came from LTTE-controlled areas in the Vanni on 9 October, to Pallimunai. The police also threatened Catholic priest Sebastian Croos and forcibly removed his identity card. Following a complaint by Bishop Rayappu Joseph, Mannar Army commander Brig. Rohan Ranasinghe assured that people from the Vanni will be allowed at Pallimunai. Requests have also been made to the military to allow a boat service between Mannar Island and Thevanpitty. The service between the island and Vidaltivu has been suspended following military operations.



## CIUAH directives to security forces breached **2,000 Tamils rounded-up**

HUMAN RIGHTS agencies have expressed concern over the indiscriminate and arbitrary arrests of Tamils in Colombo. Cordon and search operations were intensified in the run-up to the Army's Golden Jubilee celebrations on 10 October.

During the first two weeks of October, over 2,000 Tamils were rounded-up in the Colombo suburbs of Narahenpita, Kotahena, Wellawatte and Grandpass and 100 were detained. Colombo region DIG TN de Silva says some of those detained did not have police registration or permits to enter Colombo.

In mid-October, the Committee of Inquiry into Undue Arrest and Harassment (CIUAH) indicated that it would investigate the mass arrest of Tamils. The CIUAH, headed by Culture minister Lakshman Jayakody was established in July 1998, following complaints of security force harassment of the Tamil community in Colombo and other southern areas.

The police say LTTE cadre continue to infiltrate Colombo. Two electricity transformers and two shops at Sea Street in the Pettah commercial district were damaged by a bomb on 5 October. Policemen found another bomb near an electricity transformer in Pettah in mid October. Two bombs exploded at Pettah bus station on 19 October wounding two policemen.

Tamil MP R Yogarajan complained to the CIUAH that soldiers and policemen who arrested 60 Tamils on Armour Street in Pettah on 15 October failed to identify themselves and breached a CIUAH directive that debars demanding proof of police registration from the people.

Following the complaint, MP Yogarajan was questioned by the police, accused of using his influence to release six LTTE suspects from custody. Mr Yogarajan says that they had been arrested in the streets without any evidence of links with the Tigers.

At a meeting arranged by the CIUAH

with senior police officers in early October, MPs pointed out that the police were not observing, among others, the following directives on police registration:

1) Photographs of applicants should not be demanded; 2) all members of the family should not be asked to come to the police station; 3) people coming to the station for police registration should not be finger-printed; 4) the police should not demand a Grama Sevaka (Village Headman) certificate; 5) the police should not limit the period of stay in Colombo.

Seventy eight people were rounded-up in the Hill Country after a bomb damaged railway lines at Nanu Oya, three miles south-west at Nuwara Eliya, on 2 October. Seventy were later released. The surrounding tea estates were searched and another 14 Plantation Tamils detained. A day earlier, 25 Tamils were taken into custody at Dambulla, 40 miles north of Kandy.

## BJP alliance wins Indian elections

AS predicted by opinion polls, the 24-member National Democratic Alliance (NDA) led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) emerged victorious in the Indian general elections held in September. The NDA secured 298 seats in the 543-member Lok Sabha or Lower House of Parliament. The opposition Congress party and its allies gained only 136 seats.

A general election was forced when the BJP-led coalition government collapsed in April after Tamil Nadu's AIADMK party withdrew its support in Parliament. Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee refused to accede to AIADMK chief J Jayalalitha's demand to dissolve the DMK government in Tamil Nadu. Ms Jayalalitha faces over 45 corruption charges initiated by the DMK.

In Tamil Nadu, the DMK-BJP coalition secured 26 of the 39 Lok Sabha seats while the AIADMK-Congress won 14 seats. The three Cabinet members from Tamil Nadu includes, senior DMK politician Murali Manjunath who becomes Trade and Industries minister. There will also be eight deputy ministers from Tamil Nadu.

The Sri Lankan government demanded clarification from India, following DMK leader and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M Karunanidhi's mid-October statement that he would be glad if *Tamil*

*Eelam* emerged. The LTTE is fighting to establish *Tamil Eelam* or separate Tamil state in north-east Sri Lanka. The Indian government says that it supports the unity and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka. Many in Sri Lanka are unconvinced by this statement. Colombo newspaper *The Island* says 'it is time now that Mr Vajpayee be called upon to spell out his party's Sri Lanka policy'.

Some observers believe that the strong Tamil Nadu presence in the new Indian government, particularly the involvement of the DMK and the Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) would bring, over a period of time, pressure on New Delhi for some kind of intervention in the Sri Lankan conflict. The Tamil political parties in Sri Lanka said in October that Indian involvement is essential.

Meanwhile in early October, the two Sri Lankans and two Indians, sentenced to death in the Rajiv Gandhi murder case lost their final appeal to the Supreme Court. Many organisations have appealed for clemency, pleading with Indian President KR Narayanan to commute the death sentence to life imprisonment.

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: info@refugeecouncil.demon.co.uk  
Internet: www.refugeecouncil.org.uk  
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