

Refugees die in Madhu

Thirty eight Tamil civilians taking refuge in the Madhu Catholic Church in Mannar District to escape the fighting between Sri Lankan government forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) were killed by shells on 20 November. The dead included 13 children and 57 people were wounded.

There was fighting around the church and it is unclear who was responsible for the shell attack. The Tigers and the Army blame each other. The military say the church was targeted because there were 300 Sri Lankan soldiers at the time in the church premises. The LTTE in turn have accused the Army of using the civilians in Madhu as a human shield.

The 17th Century Madhu Church, the most-sacred Catholic shrine in the island, has been a sanctuary for hundreds of years and is famous for miracles and healing powers. In recent times, it has become a safe haven for refugees fleeing violence in the region. Pope John Paul expressed sadness and solidarity with the victims of the attack.

The 300 soldiers who were in the church premises left the area the next day following orders from President Chandrika Kumaratunge. Mannar Catholic Bishop Rayappu Joseph has been repeatedly calling on the Army and the LTTE to treat the church area as a demilitarized zone. There were around 3,000 refugees in the church at the time of the shell attack. But as fighting continued in the area, the refugee population swelled to 10,000 by end of November.

More than 8,000 Sinhalese people fled from Veli Oya area in Mullaitivu District in early December, as the LTTE overran military camps established to provide them protection. These refugees are currently accommodated in schools at Padaviya in Anuradhapura District.

There was panic in Vavuniya when the Tigers ordered the 60,000 population in the town on 10 November to go to designated areas. Many fled fearing that the LTTE were poised to launch an assault on Vavuniya town and took refuge in

Medecins Sans Frontieres expressed concern that extended fighting in the north-east would create serious shortages of food and medicines.

temples and schools. The attempts by security forces to persuade the people to remain in the town failed. Thousands of people were stranded on roadside and under trees, between Poovarasankulam on the Vavuniya-Mannar road and Cheddikulam on Medawachchiya-Mannar road.

The military was accused of attempting to use civilians as human shields when refugees in Vavuniya camps were denied permission to leave. Some 10,000 refugees in the Poonthottam camp pleaded with the senior state officer, the Government Agent, to move them to a safer area. Their National Identity Cards (NIC), however, were with the police. Movement outside camps without NICs and travel permits is dangerous.

As international agencies ICRC and UNHCR distributed non-food items such as tents, Vavuniya GA Ganesh wrote to the Essential Services Commissioner (ESC) in mid-November, requesting permission to issue dry rations to the newly displaced people. Reports say that the ESC was prepared to supply them food, but no permission was forthcoming from the Defence Ministry. The government's position appeared to be that the people had left Vavuniya town voluntarily and therefore did not fall within the category of internally displaced persons.

In late November, Bishop Joseph appealed to President Chandrika to instruct the Defence Ministry to grant permission. The President appointed a

committee headed by North-East Governor Maj. Gen. Asoka Jayawardena to look into the problems of the internally displaced people in Mannar and Vavuniya. The committee met on 25 November in Anuradhapura and decided to provide two weeks' dry rations.

But eight days earlier, the LTTE, through its clandestine radio *Puliyin Kural* (Voice of the Tiger) requested the people to return, assuring that Vavuniya would not be attacked. People began returning, but at the end of November many remained away from Vavuniya. Observers believe that the Tigers had no intention of attacking when they ordered the people to vacate Vavuniya town.

Renewed fighting has cut off the supply route to the Vanni through Mankulam, opened on 9 August after disruption in food supply for nearly six weeks. No food has reached the area since 2 November. There are some 375,000 people in the LTTE-held areas of the Vanni, 80% of whom are internally displaced.

As food stocks in the Vanni became depleted, Mullaitivu GA S Sundaram and Kilinochchi GA T Iyathurai appealed to the ESC and the Vavuniya military high-command for fresh food stocks. In late November, the ESC announced that it was unable to send food but had paid Rs 13 million (\$183,000) to the Mullaitivu GA and Rs 7.8 million (\$109,000) to the Kilinochchi GA to purchase food locally. But without new stocks from outside, purchase in the Vanni proved difficult.

French medical agency Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) said that the actions of the Sri Lankan Army and the LTTE have placed civilians at risk and restrictions on access of the population to humanitarian assistance has sharply reduced the level of assistance provided to civilians in the north. MSF declared that civilians will continue to suffer from lack of medical care, food and shelter materials unless restrictions cease and called on the government and the LTTE to agree on humanitarian corridors and safe access areas.

JAFFNA

The disappearance agony

THE Defence Ministry says in an early December statement that its Board of Investigation headed by Bandula Kulatunge looked into 765 complaints of disappearances in 1996 and 1997 in Jaffna. Sixteen people were ascertained as dead and 201 were found in prisons. There is no evidence, the Ministry claims, in respect of 174 cases to commence investigations.

Enquiries in respect of 374 cases commenced, but could not proceed due to inadequacy of evidence, according to the Ministry. In early December, the Ministry sent out letters to the relatives saying that it cannot establish the fate or whereabouts of the 374 people arrested by the Army in Jaffna.

Reports say that most of the relatives have refused to accept these letters saying that this is another attempt to end the investigations. In an early December letter to President Chandrika, Amnesty International urged the government to make public the findings of the Board of Investigation so that they can be verified. Amnesty says the findings of the Board do not inspire public confidence.

Relatives have been told that the fate of at least two of the disappeared is not known, even though their bodies were among those exhumed and identified in June at Chemmani. Amnesty has also called on the government to seek international expertise in forensic criminal investigation, including DNA testing, to help bring the killers to justice.

In the run-up to the LTTE's annual *Great Heroes Day* on 27 November, the security forces in Jaffna carried out search operations and arrested a number of young people. Manipai resident Yoganathan Mohanadas and Anaikottai engineering student Devadas Turin were detained on 10 November. The Army arrested two young women, E Padmini of Neerveli and S Sugarmila of Madduvil in mid-November.

The office of the Sri Lankan Human Rights Commission (HRC) in Jaffna received 67 complaints of human rights violations in November, including 57 against the security forces. According to reports, the security forces shot dead a boy on bicycle in Chavakachcheri on 2 November. It has been complained to the HRC that two refugees who arrived in Gurunagar in a boat from the Vanni were arrested on 19 November.

The police arrested Radha Saluja, 21, on 29 November in Thirunelveli. When relatives contacted the police, they were informed that she will be released only if her husband, who is a LTTE suspect, surrenders. N Balaruban of Chunnakam and T Prabhakaran went missing in November. The security forces have denied arresting them. Following demonstrations by Jaffna University students, Selvanayagam Sutharsan, who was arrested in October on charges of possessing firearms, was released on bail on the recommendations of the Attorney General.

Good governance

A report by the London-based Foreign Policy Centre made public before the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Durban, South Africa, calls for the expulsion of Sri Lanka, Kenya, Zambia and Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth if they do not improve the treatment of their citizens. The report includes a checklist of criteria for membership, which would oblige members to respect human rights.

Interrogation

Tamil daily newspaper *Thinakkural* editor, A Sivanesachelvam was interrogated by police on 1 December, allegedly for publicising the plight of civilians in the Vanni. Emergency regulations imposing censorship on war-related news were reinforced in early November. UN human rights prize winner Sunila Abeysekera filed an application in the Supreme Court challenging censorship.

Released

The Supreme Court ordered the release of Mannar GA SM Croos on 2 November, following a fundamental rights application alleging illegal detention. Mr Croos was arrested in September accused of LTTE links.

Postponed

Following the military coup in Pakistan and the fall of the Nawas Sharif government, the 11th summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation scheduled for November in Kathmandu, Nepal was postponed.

Civilian deaths in Vanni

FIGHTING between the Army and the LTTE continued in late November near Omathai, seven miles north of Vavuniya town. The Tigers captured 400 sq. mile territory in a five-day operation in the Vanni named *Oyatha Alaigal III* (Unceasing Waves) in early November.

As the Tiger offensive continued, some of the retreating Sri Lankan soldiers attacked civilians and looted shops in Vavuniya town, according to the Vavuniya Traders Association. Reports say that they also shot and wounded a military policeman who attempted to prevent the looting.

Sri Lankan Air Force planes bombed Palliyady in Mullaitivu District on 3

November, killing six people, including Dharmarajah Krishnapillai, 65. Three children were among the seven wounded. Three civilians, including two year-old Gajanthini, were killed by LTTE shells at Thonikkal, near Vavuniya, on 18 November. During clashes between the LTTE and the Army the following day, a shell killed another three people and injured five at Kovilkulam.

In Mannar District, shells killed four people, including Krishanthini, 7, and injured six on 27 November. Following an order from the LTTE, thousands of people in Vankalai and Andankulam fled north-east to Madhu Church or north-west to Mannar town in mid-November.

The Tigers began shelling the Thallady Army camp, three miles south-east of Mannar town damaging a section of the camp. The Army retaliated by shelling Erukkalampiddy on Mannar Island. The people fled towards Pesalai, further west on the island. Kakkavattakandan area was shelled on 27 November killing S Mahalingam and N Narayanasamy.

As fighting continued, power supply to Mannar town was disrupted. Reports say 19 doctors in Mannar hospital left for Colombo fearing attacks on the town and patients in the hospital were discharged. There has been no fuel or food supply to Mannar since fighting intensified.

■ Government doctors refuse to serve in LTTE areas

Casualties

CIVILIAN casualties continue to cause concern, as government forces and the LTTE fight for territorial gain in the east. Shells from Kaluvanchikudy Army camp, 14 miles south of Batticaloa town, on 4 November injured four people in the village, including S Mamankam, 59. Local MP P Selvarajah protested to the Army high command for the attack on civilians. Two days later, the police Special Task Force (STF) shot dead two men fishing at night in the Batticaloa lagoon at Kaluthavalai, two miles north.

On 9 November, Sri Lankan soldiers shot dead Tamil youths K Ravindran, 20, and S Mathan, 18, at Valaichenai. *Razik Group* members killed M Perinpamurthy on 10 November in Kaluvankerni as he

worked in a coconut grove. The *Razik Group* works with the Army and has been accused of human rights abuses.

Reports say that some military camps in the east were closed and soldiers transferred to the Vanni to prevent the LTTE advance in the region in early November. The Tigers continued to infiltrate Army-held areas in Batticaloa. Military intelligence officer S Ravichandran was seriously wounded in a grenade attack in Batticaloa town on 5 November.

The next day, M Nishanthan died in a Tiger bomb attack on a telecommunication office. Following the security threat to the town, the police ordered the relocation of three government departments, currently situated near the office of the

Police Superintendent, to establish a new security zone. The Army found a bomb under the driver's seat in a public bus from Batticaloa to Manampitiya in late November. The driver I Gnanasekaram and three others were taken into custody.

The STF carried out a cordon and search operation in Karaitivu and Manalchenai, south of Batticaloa town, on 11 November and detained several youths. They were paraded before *talayattis* or masked informers and were released later. Relatives complain that the whereabouts of Vantharumoolai resident S Ganeshamurthy, arrested by the Army on 16 November, are unknown.

Nine government doctors have refused to serve in LTTE-controlled areas west of the Batticaloa lagoon. Some 80,000 people in these regions are affected by shortage of doctors. Military restrictions on food, medicine and fuel to Tiger territory continue. Meanwhile, the LTTE celebrated *Great Heroes Day* on 27 November in areas under its control.

In Trincomalee District, the LTTE's *Pistol Group* shot dead Manickam, 35, at Serunuwara in late November. Mr Manickam had earlier worked with the military. The ship *Lanka Muditha* arrived in Trincomalee on 9 November with 350 passengers from Jaffna. Some 1,250 people, including 70 university students and 275 refugees waited in Trincomalee, but the ship took only 550 passengers to Jaffna on 16 November. Reports say that the ship carried buses and other material for the presidential election in Jaffna.

Health risks

FRENCH medical agency Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) say in a statement that there are increasing health risks to the civilian population in the Vanni because of shortage of medical supplies, food and shelter. During November, civilian deaths in Vanni's Mallavi hospital, where a MSF team works, were at a higher level than at any time in 1999. The mortality rate among the 710 patients admitted was 4%, while the rate for children under 12 years was 6.5%. Some 150 civilians were admitted to the surgical ward, but only 46 major operations were carried out because of lack of medical supplies. Eight civilians died in November from shell blast injury, including two following surgery. Seven children under the age of 12 died in the hospital in November. The wet season has caused increase in malaria and respiratory infections and essential paediatric medicines to treat these diseases are no longer available.

MSF says that beyond security restrictions in the course of the war, unnecessary obstacles are placed creating difficulties for humanitarian assistance and medical evacuations. Since 2 November, there has been no access to Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu districts across the frontline. The Sri Lankan security forces issued warnings to international agencies that there would no longer be security guarantees within the Vanni and asked them to keep away from LTTE installations, although the agencies are unaware of their locations. MSF further says that approval given by Colombo for supplies to the Vanni have been blocked in Mannar or Vavuniya by the local commands. Inconsistent messages from the Army and the LTTE regarding movement of supplies and personnel across the frontline, lead to confusion, affecting humanitarian intervention.

Election violence

A bomb at a UNP election meeting in Eppawala, 90 miles north-east of Colombo, killed a student and wounded 38 others on 14 November. A police Sub-Inspector wounded in the attack died later in hospital. Election monitors say over 500 incidents had been reported by the end of November, including intimidation, bomb attacks, shooting and damage to party offices.

Gun shots were fired on 16 November at the office of MP Ravi Karunanayake, who crossed over to UNP from the PA. UNP offices in Borella, Mirihana and Welikada were attacked. Armed thugs descended on UNP head office, *Sirikotha* in Kotte, south-east of Colombo, on 30 November, causing damage.

Local agencies, People's Action for Free and Fair Elections (PAFFREL) and Movement for Free and Fair Elections (MFFE) are engaged in organising 8,000 election monitors throughout the island. The agencies and opposition parties demanded the presence of foreign observers at the elections.

The government initially opposed international election monitors but later relented following widespread protests. On 26 November, the Acting Elections Commissioner announced that foreign election observers would be allowed but laid down a condition that they could only observe and not monitor, denying a more active role for them in ensuring a free and fair poll.

Prabhakaran says the goal is secession

Promoting war

TAMIL Tiger leader V Prabhakaran said in his *Great Heroes Day* message on 27 November that the LTTE want to solve the Sri Lankan conflict by peaceful means, through civilized methods, without recourse to bloodbath and destruction of life. He called for international third party mediation for peace talks preceded by cessation of hostilities, withdrawal of the Army from Tamil areas and the lifting of the economic blockade.

He also says that the Tigers do not live in a fantasy world hoping to resolve the conflict by rational dialogue with the Sinhalese political leadership and that the racist political system, disregarding human rights and liberties, offers no alternative to the Tamils other than to fight, secede and establish *Eelam* or independent Tamil state. The new confidence of the Tigers is apparent when Mr Prabhakaran refers to the military success in the Vanni in early November as a 'turning point in this long historical journey towards emancipation'.

Mr Prabhakaran's statement and LTTE ideologue Anton Balasingham's speech in London on 27 November promote war and peace offers appear to be cosmetic. Observers believe that the Jaffna peninsula will be the prime target of the Tigers in the New Year.

Mr Prabhakaran describes President Chandrika's rule, as the 'worst form of tyranny ever suffered by the the Tamils' and says that 'she does not have the honesty and determination to resolve the Tamil national conflict in a fair and reasonable manner'. The Tigers say they rejected at least three recent offers by President Chandrika for secret talks.

The personal attack on President Chandrika has left peace activists worried. If she wins the presidential election in December, the possibilities are that she will be able to guide the People's Alliance to victory in the general elections next year. Analysts say that in the circumstances, peace efforts are unlikely to succeed in the next six years.

But, winning the presidential election on 21 December is the immediate concern of President Chandrika and her main opponent Ranil Wickremasinghe of the United National Party (UNP). Eleven other candidates, including Nandana Gunatilleke of the People's Liberation Front (JVP), filed nomination papers on 16 November. The two main candidates accused each other of secret links with the LTTE, but promised peace talks with the Tigers on being elected to presidency.

President Chandrika's campaign was boosted when five UNP MPs pledged their support to her on 5 November. Five days later, two of them - Sarath Amunugama and Nanda Mathew - were rewarded with ministerial posts in the PA government. President Chandrika also appointed Hill Country's Arumugam Thondaman as Minister of Livestock Development - a post held by his grandfather S Thondaman at the time of his death on 30 October - to gain the Hill Country Tamil votes.

Tigers target senior politicians

POLICE say that two Tamil youths arrested on 26 November in Nugegoda, south of Colombo, had explosives in their possession to blast electricity and telecommunication installations within the city. On 5 November, eight people were arrested in Colombo's Pettah suburb after a telecommunication device was blasted. Three days later, two youths were detained after another device in Maradana was damaged.

Defence authorities were concerned about LTTE infiltration into Colombo and other parts of the south in the run-up to LTTE's *Great Heroes Day* on 27 November and the presidential election on 22 December. They warned that senior politicians, including President Chandrika Kumaratunge and opposition leader Ranil Wickremasinghe, were prime targets of the Tigers. Security for the politicians was strengthened.

The Committee of Inquiry into Undue Arrest and Harassment (CIUAH) has directed the Inspector General of Police (IGP) to ensure that no person is arrested for not possessing a police registration certificate. The CIUAH has declared a

number of police arrests unlawful. Colombo human rights agencies say illegal arrests of Tamils in the city and other southern areas of Sri Lanka continue despite the CIUAH ruling.

Three Tamils who came to Colombo to obtain passports were arrested in Bambalapitiya suburb on 8 November. Mannar teacher Lucas Christa and S Sasitharan, arrested on 9 September, were released by court on 17 November due to lack of evidence of LTTE links. The problem of arrests may become worse with the arrival of large number of Tamils in Colombo following the escalation in the fighting in the Vanni.

A bomb damaged the railway line near Nanu Oya, three miles south-west of Nuwara Eliya in the Hill Country on 4 November. Four Tamils were arrested in the area. Another four Tamil were detained after the fuel storage tank at the Hatton railway station was blasted with a bomb on 28 November.

Amnesty International expressed concern in a November statement over the alleged torture of K Sriram at the Mirihana police station after his arrest on 25 August. V Yogaseelan alleges that he suffered severe torture for 21 days at the police station after his arrest in Nawala on 12 October. The police obtained a confession from him under torture.

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

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