

Tamil Congress leader Kumar Ponnambalam assassinated in Colombo

Carnage in the capital

Thirty three people were killed and more than 180 were injured in attacks on presidential election meetings in Colombo and Ja-Ela on 18 December. A suicide bomber targeted President Chandrika Kumaratunge while she was leaving the stage near the capital's Town Hall where the final election meeting of the ruling People's Alliance (PA) was held. The President was wounded and later received medical treatment in Britain.

Colombo's deputy police chief TN de Silva was killed by the bomb. Justice minister GL Peiris, Provincial Councils minister Alavi Moulana and Trade minister Kingsley Wickremaratne were among the wounded. At about the same time as the Town Hall incident, fifteen people, including former Army Commander Lucky Algama, died in an attack on the main opposition United National Party's (UNP) election rally in Ja-Ela, 11 miles north of Colombo.

A woman suicide bomber of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) is believed to have carried out the Town Hall attack. The Police initially said that Leelaletchumy of Batticaloa was the suicide bomber and took into custody her mother K Marimuthu, 66, and sister Muthuletchumy, 30. Later reports have suggested that the bomber was *Niro* of Mullaitivu. She had entered the area with a 'suicide kit' containing some four kg explosives while there was heavy military presence and intense security checks were being carried out.

The attack on the head of state in the heart of the capital has caused considerable embarrassment to the island's security authorities. In the last two months, the national intelligence agencies had been warning of an LTTE attempt on the President's life. Colombo newspaper *Sunday Times* columnist Iqbal Athas says a foreign intelligence agency had also warned of Tiger death squad attacks. In addition to an investigation into the suicide attack, the police have initiated a probe into the lapses in security.

A third police team is investigating

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the Ja-Ela UNP meeting incident. The police claim that this attack was also carried out by a suicide bomber and say that the bomber's head was later found on the roof of a building in the vicinity. But other reports say Lucky Algama had been targeted with a grenade.

The police were investigating Lucky Algama, who had become a high profile campaigner for the UNP. Government members accuse him of masterminding the military withdrawal in the Vanni in early November and facilitating the rapid advance of the LTTE forces. But reports say that a Court of Inquiry into the military debacle has not found any evidence to suggest that the Vanni defeat was the result of a political conspiracy.

The government also allege that UNP leader Ranil Wickremasinghe had agreed with the LTTE that the Tigers could administer the north-east region for two years if he was elected President of Sri Lanka. Sources say that in the light of Tiger insistence that peace talks cannot be held during war, Ranil may have agreed for such an arrangement to provide time to re-establish civil institutions to facilitate talks in a peaceful climate.

In an election marred by violence, Chandrika was re-elected President for another six-year term on 21 December, defeating Ranil by 709,000 votes. Chandrika took 51% of the 8,635,000 votes cast, while the UNP leader gained 42% winning in only 21 of the 160 electorates. Over 73% of the 11.7 million registered voters turned out to vote.

In the last presidential election in 1994, Chandrika won 62% of the votes. A large section of the Tamils supported her, placing their faith in her to bring the 17-year turmoil to an end. Observers say that her failure to achieve constitutional reform taking into consideration Tamil aspirations has forced many Tamils to look elsewhere for saviours.

In her inaugural speech on 22 December, President Chandrika invited the UNP to support the government in finding a solution to the Sri Lankan conflict and urged the Tamil people to reject the LTTE. Observers believe that in the absence of concerted and concrete efforts towards peace by all parties and the international community, violence and assassinations are likely to continue.

All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC) leader and outspoken lawyer Kumar Ponnambalam, 61, was killed in Colombo on 5 January. The assassination took place only hours after another suspected LTTE woman suicide bomber killed 13 people, including four police constables and injured 25 others near the Prime Minister's office on Flower road in Cinnamon Gardens suburb.

Mr Ponnambalam had been accompanied in his car from home by a Sinhalese man, known only as *Shantha*, who had become acquainted with him recently. The Tamil leader's body was later found in the car on Ramakrishna Lane in Wellawatte suburb. *Shantha* has disappeared. A previously unknown group, the *National Front Against Terrorism*, has claimed responsibility.

Mr Ponnambalam was an ardent supporter of the LTTE and the Tamil cause. A strong critic of the government and President Chandrika, he was in the forefront of exposing human rights violations against the Tamils and handled many cases of Tamils detained in Colombo. His wife has accused elements within the government for the murder. Tamils in Colombo have expressed fear that military-backed death squads may have returned in the face of the continuing LTTE threat to the capital.

JAFNA

Sarathambal murder

THE Geneva-based World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) says that S Sarathambal, 20, of Punkudutivu Island, west of Jaffna peninsula, was gang-raped and murdered by Navy personnel. She had been dragged from her home near Kannaki Amman temple on 28 December and her body was found the following day. OMCT says President Chandrika ordered a probe, but the four offenders have been transferred to another area to make investigation difficult.

The Army arrested five people, including K Vimalasenathirasa, 17, in Jaffna town in mid-December. The Sri Lankan Human Rights Commission (HRC) received a complaint that four Kodikamam students went missing in December. HRC's Jaffna co-ordinator S Sritharan was threatened with death in early December. A letter from unidentified persons accuses him of links with the LTTE. Mr Sritharan was transferred to Vavuniya in late December.

In a new phase of *Operation Oyatha Alaigal III* (Unceasing Waves), the LTTE launched attacks on 11 December in an attempt to capture the heavily fortified Elephant Pass military base, lying at the entrance to the Jaffna peninsula on Vavuniya-Jaffna road. The Tigers landed troops by sea on the eastern coast of the peninsula and established a three-mile beach-head, taking the important Army supply base at Vetrilaikerni, five miles north-east of Elephant Pass.

Reports say the Tigers shot down an

Airforce helicopter using surface-to-air missile and attacked Paranthan junction, seven miles south of Elephant Pass. The Army have withdrawn to a more secure position north of Paranthan, but have come under heavy mortar fire. In an attempt to isolate Elephant Pass, the Tigers launched attacks on the east and west of the camp and also on Iyakachchi, two miles north.

Airforce planes bombed Kerativu and Thanankilappu on 31 December. Security forces say that they prevented a Tiger amphibious attack on Kerativu, south-east of Jaffna town. Fighting around Elephant Pass continued in early January but the LTTE was unable to make any significant headway.

The 11 December attack on Elephant Pass camp was accompanied by a Tiger announcement urging people living near military bases in coastal areas of Jaffna to move to safer areas. The LTTE began shelling Thenmaratchy and the Army retaliated by shelling *Sea Tigers* in Jaffna lagoon. The Sri Lankan Airforce bombed coastal areas.

Reports say eight civilians were killed by Tiger shells and 16 were wounded in Thenmaratchy. As LTTE artillery fire continued, some 4,000 people fled from Chavakachcheri and Kodikamam. Jaffna Government Agent K Shanmuganathan says 800 people have taken refuge in the Chavakachcheri hospital. On the night of 14 December, a shell hit the hospital damaging the building.

Journalists killed

Paris-based Reporters Sans Frontieres expressed concern over Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation journalist Anthony Mariyanayagam's killing by LTTE gunmen in a church in Vavuniya on 31 December. Journalist Anura Priyantha and cameraman P Indika were killed in the Colombo Town Hall suicide attack on 18 December.

Disappeared in east

Amnesty International has expressed fear that V Vijayarajah, 22, of Valaichenai disappeared after arrest by Sri Lankan soldiers on 3 January. The Army told parents that he would be released the following day, but later denied the arrest.

The war dead

The LTTE say that 14,355 cadre, including 160 *Black Tigers* died in the last 17 years. Between 1994 and 1999, 9,558 Tigers were killed. According to an Army publication, since October 1981, 10,688 soldiers died. Between 1994 and June 1999, 6,261 were killed. This excludes those listed as missing in action and the other security services.

North-east votes

Ranil Wickremasinghe gained 369,000 votes while Chandrika Kumaratunge received 330,000 in the election in the north-east. In Jaffna only 19% of the 612,000 registered voters turned out and 31% of the 205,500 voters in the Vanni cast their votes. In Batticaloa and Trincomalee districts the turn-out was 64% and 63% respectively.

Presidential election results - 21 December 1999

		Votes	%
Chandrika Kumaratunge	People's Alliance (PA)	4,312,157	51.12
Ranil Wickremasinghe	United National Party (UNP)	3,602,748	42.72
Nandana Gunatillaka	People's Liberation Front (JVP)	344,173	4.08
Harischandra Wijayatunge	Sinhala Sons of the Soil Party (SMPB)	35,854	0.43
WAM Ranjith	Independent candidate	27,052	0.32
Rajiva Wijesinghe	Liberal Party (LP)	25,085	0.30
Vasudeva Nanayakkara	Independent candidate	23,668	0.28
Tennyson Edirisuriya	Independent candidate	21,119	0.25
Abdul Razool	Sri Lanka Muslim Party (SLMP)	17,359	0.21
Kamal Karunadasa	People's Liberation Solidarity Front (PLSF)	11,333	0.13
Hudson Samarasinghe	Independent candidate	7,184	0.09
Ariyawansa Dissanayake	Democratic United National Front (DUNF)	4,039	0.05
Alwis Premawardhana	Bahujana Nidahas Peramuna (PFE)	3,983	0.05
	Registered voters	11,779,180	
	Valid votes	8,435,754	
	Rejected votes	199,536	
	Total polled	8,635,290	
	Percentage polled	73.32	

■ Village headman killed in Amparai District

Demonstration

MORE than 600 people participated in a demonstration at Vantharumoolai in Batticaloa District on 10 December, demanding an end to human rights violations against civilians. Protesters called on the government to stop killings and the use of civilians as human shields. Extra-judicial killings continue to worry human rights agencies and the people of the east. The death squads of the Army and the LTTE operate with impunity and the victims of human rights abuses, often have no recourse to remedy.

The Army shot dead K Nagendran of Kinnayady on 4 December. Unidentified gunmen killed MS Aliyar at Malligaikadu two days later. *Razik Group* members shot dead shepherd S

Nanthakumar on 28 December. Another shepherd A Ramesh suffered serious injuries. The *Razik Group* alleges that they were LTTE cadre, but relatives say they had no links with the Tigers. According to reports *Razik Group* members have been absorbed into the armed forces and are part of the National Auxiliary Force.

The LTTE attacked a military patrol near Batticaloa lagoon on 3 December and killed two soldiers. Policeman MM Anubar was killed by gunmen at Sainthamaruthu on 6 December. Six days later, alleged LTTE *Pistol Group* members shot dead Vavuniya student S Jegatheeswaran in Batticaloa town.

The Tigers launched an attack on

Tamil group PLOTE's checkpoint in Vavunativu on 13 December killing V Anpalagan and two other PLOTE members. Civilian M Sivakumar was also killed. People entering Batticaloa town from LTTE-controlled areas, west of the Batticaloa lagoon, pass this checkpoint.

On the same day, eleven Tigers were killed when the LTTE attacked Kirimichchai Army camp in Vaharai, north of Valaichenai. Three soldiers died and 19 were injured. Earlier in the month, an Army officer warned civilians in Vaharai that failure to provide information about the Tigers may result in indiscriminate attacks on villages.

Further south in Amparai District, a motor cycle bomb at Kalmunai town, seriously wounded seven civilians and four policemen on 8 December. Seven shops were damaged in the attack. Thirukovil Grama Sevaka (Village Headman) Markandu Thangarajah was shot dead on 13 December. He had earlier been a member of Tamil group EPRLF, which is currently fighting against the LTTE.

In Trincomalee District, the Tigers overran a military camp at Thuvarankadu on 3 December killing five Navy personnel and wounding four policemen. A Sub-Inspector and two policemen were killed in a Tiger attack on a checkpoint at Thoppur on 9 December. Civilian Mohamed Sadik was also killed. A sailor was killed and three were wounded in an LTTE attack on 1 January on Nilaveli naval base, north of Trincomalee town.

Free and fair?

IN the run-up to the presidential elections since nominations on 16 November and during elections, over 1,590 violent incidents were reported despite the deployment of 75,000 police and 25,000 troops. This included 54 murders, 30 attempted murders, arson, injury and damage to property. According to election monitoring agency, the People's Action for Free and Fair Elections (PAFFREL), 900 complaints of election violations were received. The Centre for Monitoring Election Violence (CMEV) says that in 59 of the 161 electoral divisions, the results had been irredeemably compromised by systematic impersonation, ballot stuffing, violence, intimidation of voters and abuse of state machinery and resources. A circular letter from the Youth Affairs minister had required all *Samurthi* (poverty alleviation programme) workers to participate in the election campaign of the ruling People's Alliance. The CMEV adds that the entire election in the north-east province should be nullified as the minimum conditions to ensure free and fair vote were unavailable. According to the Colombo agency, 200 polling centres in the north-east were removed from the poll without warning or adequate alternative arrangement.

Throughout the election campaign, the government and the government-controlled media had been hostile to the election monitoring agencies. Reports say that the state's External Resources Agency blocked funding by the Asia Foundation to CMEV for election monitoring. Lord Meghnad Desai, the leader of observers from Commonwealth nations said on 24 December that the election was free and fair. But the team also submitted 18 recommendations for conducting free and fair elections in the future. These include the appointment of an independent Elections Commissioner.

NINE year-old S Peguya of Visvamaru and 18 month-old K Pahinthan of Alampil died of septicaemia in Mullaitivu District in early December. Humanitarian agencies say the lack of food and medicine in the Vanni is badly affecting the civilians.

Supplies to the Vanni was cut-off on 2 November following the Tigers' military operation *Oyatha Alaigal III* (Unceasing Waves). Mannar Bishop Rayappu Joseph says over 16,000 refugees in Madhu and Thatchanamaruthamadu are facing severe difficulties without adequate food and medicines. The Army and the LTTE reached agreement on 7 December to allow lorries through Periyathambanai, 17 miles west of Vavuniya town. The

Supply route

lorries will travel from Pramanalankulam on Vavuniya-Mannar road into LTTE areas through Periyathambanai, Periyapandivirichchan and Madhu, accompanied by the ICRC. Lorries with medicines and postal bags crossed the frontline into Tiger territory on 9 December and 30 food lorries went into the Vanni four days later.

The Defence Ministry permits 60 lorryloads of food every week. But Vanni government officers say 515 lorryloads a month are needed to overcome the current shortage problems in the Vanni. Although money has been provided by Colombo's Essential Services Commissioner for local purchase, rice and other food stuff are in short supply.

Amnesty says man arrested in Colombo has disappeared

2,500 Tamils rounded-up

THE security forces rounded-up some 2,500 Tamils in Colombo after imposing a 12-hour curfew without warning on 6 January. They were paraded before masked informers and over 90 people were detained for further investigation. The arrests followed suicide attacks by suspected LTTE cadre in the capital.

Colombo MP R Yogarajan condemned the round-up as 'a Gestapo-style operation'. He says that the police fingerprinted and filmed the Tamils, treating them like criminals and violating undertakings to President Chandrika Kumaratunge. Hundreds of Tamils were rounded-up in the run-up to the presidential elections on 21 December, in other search operations.

International NGOs continue to express concern over arrests of Tamils. Amsterdam-based Sri Lanka Working Group (SLWN) says that Tamils from Sri Lanka's north-east region continue to face the risk of arrest in Colombo and detention for several years, without trial. The conclusion of the SLWN follows case studies of nine Tamil asylum-seekers deported from Western countries.

Arrests and detention are arbitrary and extension of detention by the Magistrate's Court is generally without fully considering the grounds of suspicion. Suspects are sometimes released after the Supreme Court has determined that the detention is illegal. But due to shortage of specialised lawyers and high costs, many detainees cannot initiate a fundamental rights action in the court.

The SLWN says that the introduction of the amendment to the Immigrants and Emigrants Act in July 1998 has heightened checks of deported asylum seekers, at the Colombo airport. The amendment increases punishment by a huge margin, disallows bail, suspension of sentence or conditional discharge, provides for mandatory sentencing and removes discretion of the courts against the concept of a fair trial.

The Refugee Council has received lists of 49 arrests of Tamil deportees under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) or Emergency regulations, between August 1998 and March 1999 and 15 arrests of deportees under the Immigrants and Emigrants Act between November 1998 and March 1999. The Council has also received a list of another

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83 arrested deportees, 49 of whom are Tamils and ten Muslims, under the Immigrants and Emigrants Act, whose cases were heard before the Magistrate's Court, between October and December 1999. The deportations were from several countries, including Germany, France, Poland and Norway.

A third list contains the names of 22 Tamils arrested under the Immigrants and Emigrants Act at the Colombo airport while attempting to go abroad. Human rights agencies which compiled these lists say that as a result of official secrecy surrounding deportations, in Sri Lanka and other countries, preparation of a complete list of deportees arrested has become impossible.

SLWN says further that there are no organisations in Sri Lanka concerned with monitoring the plight of deported asylum seekers. International refugee

agency UNHCR is involved only in 'passive monitoring', which means that it will only look into problems brought to its notice. According to SLWN, the monitoring by the Netherlands embassy in Colombo ceased on 4 February 1999, the Dutch government declaring that it is not responsible for deported asylum seekers.

The experience of Ravi Shanker is an example of the plight of deported asylum seekers. Ravi Shanker was returned from Netherlands in February 1998. He was questioned at the Colombo airport by police officers about links with the LTTE. After entering Colombo, he was granted a permit to reside in the capital, but the police made it clear that he must return to Jaffna.

He was arrested on 21 March and again on 15 July. On the second occasion, he was held at the Peliyagoda police station until 25 July, where he was stripped and tortured. He was interrogated about LTTE links by two policemen pretending to be from Sri Lankan government ally, the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) and another man claiming to be from Interpol. During this time, an officer from the Dutch embassy visited him for five minutes.

Ravi Shanker was produced before the Colombo Magistrate on 25 July and detained under the PTA until July 1999, before release on bail. His case has been brought before the Magistrate's Court on 18 occasions during which neither he nor his lawyer received proper information.

Amnesty International says that Nadarajah Navakrishnan, 27, arrested allegedly by the Directorate of Military Intelligence (DMI) in Colombo on 15 December, has disappeared. Mr Navakrishnan, who worked in a telecommunication centre, had been deported from Poland in May 1999. Colombo human rights agency, the Forum for Human Dignity has complained to the Committee of Inquiry into Undue Arrest and Harassment (CIUAH), that Colombo resident Sinnathamby Nadarajah, 63, is missing since 28 December.

Reports say that the Norwegian Justice Ministry suspended deportations of Sri Lankan asylum seekers in mid-December. Norwegian lawyers say 69 Tamils were returned from Norway to Sri Lanka between October 1998 and December 1999.

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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Charity No. 1014576
Company No. 2727514

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