

## Tigers target Colombo

As the Sri Lankan Parliament debated the monthly extension of Emergency rule on 10 March, suspected guerrillas of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) infiltrated Colombo and launched an attack, leading to the death of 15 civilians, seven police and five rebels. More than 65 people were wounded in the attack.

Some ten heavily armed Tigers, lying in wait near Castle Street-Cotta road junction at Rajagiriya suburb in west Colombo were detected by a civilian resident during the evening rush-hour. Approaching policemen were shot dead and a *Black Tiger* exploded a bomb killing several civilians.

Four guerrillas retreated, firing their machine guns to prevent pursuit and took-up position in the Serpentine flats in nearby Wanathamulla. The apartments were surrounded by 500 Sri Lankan military commandos. Following a gun battle lasting 12 hours, three Tigers exploded grenades committing suicide and the other was shot dead.

The daring attack in the capital has embarrassed the security authorities who claim to have thrown a ring of steel to protect the city. The LTTE cadre were waiting near the road leading to the Parliament in Sri Jayewardenepura, where, in addition to Emergency rule, the budget allocation for the Defence Ministry was being debated.

Observers believe that the Tiger target was Deputy Defence minister Anuruddha Ratwatte, who is reputed to have led the Army capture of Jaffna in 1995. The three armed force chiefs and the Inspector General of Police were present in Parliament at the time.

The police are puzzled how heavy weapons used in the attack were brought into the capital. They believe that the five or more Tigers who escaped from the scene are part of a support group operational within the city. Crimes Detection Bureau (CDB) Director Bandula Wickremasinghe says 12 suspects have been arrested. Some observers say that the Colombo attack and LTTE's continu-

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ing military operation *Oyatha Alaigal III* (Unceasing Waves) in Jaffna cast doubt over Tiger commitment to peace and may provide fuel to opponents of the Norwegian peace initiative.

An event 5,000 miles away in the northern hemisphere, further alarmed peace activists. The Norwegian government collapsed after it lost a parliamentary confidence vote on an environmental issue on 9 March. But fears were allayed after Foreign minister Thorbjørn Jagland affirmed the new government's commitment to peace in Sri Lanka. Norwegian MP Erik Solheim has been appointed special advisor on Sri Lanka and granted leave from parliamentary work for a six-month period.

In Colombo, the ruling People's Alliance (PA) and the main opposition United National Party (UNP) met on 9 March in the President's *Temple Trees* residence for the first round of talks on peace and constitutional reform. The parties agreed to continue discussions on the government's draft constitution tabled in Parliament in 1997. Four further rounds of talks were held during March. According to reports, President Chandrika insists that the PA-UNP talks must be completed before the Paris Aid Group meeting under the auspices of the World Bank on 29 May.

Outside *Temple Trees*, the two parties continued to criticize each other. UNP leader Gamini Athukorale condemned President Chandrika for accusing his

party in an interview to the *Far Eastern Economic Review* of collaborating with the LTTE to assassinate her.

NSSP leader Wickremabahu Karunaratne says the two parties have no real intention of devolving power or granting the rights of the Tamil people. The Tamil political parties point out that there are no Tamils in the delegations of the PA and the UNP. They continued to express concern that as in the case of all-party conferences and select-committee sessions in the past 12 years, vital issues such as the permanent merger of the northern and eastern provinces, unit of devolution and the Thimpu principles are not being discussed.

In a petition to President Chandrika Kumaratunge, *Mahanayakes* or high-priests of the four main Buddhist sects expressed opposition to Norway's involvement, calling for full military force to annihilate the LTTE. The Defence Ministry, meanwhile has issued a notice requesting Sinhalese parents to urge their children to join the Army.

While the Sinhalese hardline National Movement Against Terrorism (NMAT) and Weeravidhana continued demonstrations in Colombo against Norwegian involvement, 25,000 school children marched in Ragama in early March demanding peace. In late March, the Jaffna and Mannar Catholic Bishops expressed concern over the importance given to war and urged President Chandrika and the LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran to seize the unprecedented opportunity and create greater space for peace.

The LTTE continued to lay down conditions for peace talks. Tiger political advisor, Anton Balasingham called for a ceasefire supervised by a Monitoring Committee and withdrawal of the armed forces to military camps. President Chandrika declared that there will be no troop withdrawals, ordering the commanders of the three armed forces on 29 March to remain in Jaffna and step-up efforts to eject the Tiger forces around Elephant Pass military camp.



## JAFFNA

# 12,000 people displaced

THE LTTE captured a four-kilometre section of the Elephant Pass-Jaffna road, between Palai and Muhamalai, after an amphibious landing on the eastern coast of Jaffna peninsula on 26 March. The Tigers overcame Army resistance and took Nagarcoil and Chempianpatru areas. The LTTE now control a 60-mile coastline between Kokkuthoduvai, south of Mullaitivu and Nagarcoil.

The capture of the road cuts off the main supply line to Elephant Pass military base. An alternative supply route from Chavakachcheri through Kilali, along the Jaffna lagoon also came under heavy LTTE attack. Observers say the Tigers have effectively isolated the Elephant Pass camp.

As the LTTE advanced west towards Palai, over 12,000 civilians were displaced. Some 6,000 people from the area fled to Nagarcoil and then further north to Point Pedro. Ten civilians were killed and over 50 were injured by shells on 27 March in Chempianpatru. Six houses and a post office were damaged in Airforce bombing. Two days later, LTTE's radio *Voice of the Tigers* called on civilians to move away from military camps.

In early April, some 5,000 people, displaced from Palai and Pachchilaipalli were at Kilali, prevented by the Army from proceeding to Jaffna town. The ICRC urged the military to allow humanitarian assistance for those trapped in the war zone. Although the government ordered food supply to the displaced,

reports say sufficient food is not reaching the displaced people.

In early March, fishermen complained that the Navy attacked them while fishing in the Jaffna lagoon off Gurunagar. Some fishermen were injured. The Navy say the fishermen went beyond the two-kilometre limit allowed. Twenty four people were banned from fishing for 14 days and their fishing passes were withdrawn by the military.

Jaffna's Guardian Association for Persons Arrested and Disappeared staged a demonstration before the government secretariat on 8 March, demanding information on over 700 people disappeared after Army capture of Jaffna peninsula in 1996. Five Army officers accused of involvement in the disappearances were produced before Jaffna courts on 14 March. Two other accused have died and a policeman is absconding.

Arrest and disappearances continue to cause concern in Jaffna. Local people say that security forces are not following legal procedures for arrest and detention. S Sutharsan of Jaffna town was arrested in early March and is currently held at the Urelu Army camp. His brother S Kandipan has disappeared.

Jaffna Central College students Alex Saji, 18, and Kanthasamy Indirakaran, 19, are missing since 5 March. The Sri Lankan Human Rights Commission has received complaints that Chavakachcheri student Rajaratnam Thatparan, 16, is also missing since 9 March.

## Crash

Ten people were killed when a plane from Hong Kong crashed at Kadirana near Negombo on 24 March. Another plane from Jaffna's Palaly airport crashed on 30 March at Talawa in Anuradhapura killing 26 security force personnel and four Ukrainian crew.

## Peace

Over 4,000 residents marched in Jaffna on 25 March demanding peace talks between the government and the LTTE with foreign mediation. A day earlier, visiting British High Commissioner Linda Duffield, told students at Jaffna Hindu College that Britain will encourage the Norwegian initiative and assist towards lasting peace in the island.

## Abroad

According to Sri Lankan press reports, following Defence Ministry instructions, the Army in Batticaloa ordered *Grama Sevakas* (Village Headmen) to compile details of all persons who had gone abroad from the district.

## Assault

Paris-based Reporters Sans Frontieres (RSF) has protested to Media minister Mangala Samaraweera against the assault on BBC correspondent Elmo Fernando on 6 April during Colombo demonstrations of the National Movement Against Terrorism (NMAT). Sinhalese organisations have carried out a number of protests before the BBC World Service in London, accusing the Sinhala service *Sandesaya* of supporting the LTTE.

# Disease kills in Kilinochchi

ELEVEN people died in Kilinochchi hospital in February as a result of malaria and septicaemia. Reports say 19,300 people were treated at the hospital in February, including 3,900 for malaria. On 15 March, a child named Paranjothy Tharsan died of septicaemia.

Restrictions on food and medicine continue to affect the Vanni population. Government officers say 50% of the medicines to the Vanni for the first quarter of 2000 are still lying in Vavuniya. Some goods provided by UNICEF and local NGOs were allowed into the Vanni on 25 March, including 7,500 mats, 1,000 lamps, soap, sports equipment and 16,000 student exercise books. These

had been lying in Vavuniya warehouses for the last ten months.

Although there are 400 lorries in the Vanni, the Army allows only 120 lorries to carry food. The Northern Province Heavy Vehicles Union officers say that lorry owners have not been paid Rs 2.2 million for carrying food to Tiger-held Vanni. On 25 March, government officers in Vavuniya had arranged to send fuel to hospitals in the Vanni. The military at the Ramya House checkpoint denied permission for fuel lorries to proceed, but two lorryloads of malathion insecticide were allowed.

Vanni MP S Adaikalanathan told Parliament in early March that although

the Defence Ministry has allowed transport of fertilisers to the Vanni, the military often denies permission. Farmers say that the lack of fuel and fertiliser is badly affecting agriculture.

A new rule introduced in early March says that government officers and students who pass the Eeratperiyakulam Army checkpoint into Vavuniya must possess a special permit. From 13 March, details of bus passengers such as names, addresses and the reasons for travel are being registered at this checkpoint. Such procedure already exists for passengers by train to southern areas. The Army say the new measure was introduced following bomb attacks in Colombo.



## ■ PLOTE cadre accused of killing 600 people

# Airbase extension

AS the LTTE intensify military operations in the north, the Army is fortifying its defences in the east. The area surrounding Batticaloa airport, which includes a temple, school, cemetery and houses, has been declared a security zone. People are prohibited from entering the area since 22 March.

In 1985, the government acquired 107 hectare land under Emergency regulations for the extension of the airport and 297 of the 308 families that lost lands were compensated after 1995. But upto 22 March, people were allowed to use the temple, school and the cemetery. Hundreds of people demonstrated on 23 March demanding access.

The LTTE shelled the Batticaloa air-

port on 6 March. According to the Defence Ministry, the police Special Task Force shot dead four Tigers at Vellaveli on 9 March. Army intelligence officer K Nanthakumar died on 14 March in an LTTE *Pistol Group* attack. Two days later, six policemen were killed in an attack on a military convoy, on the main Batticaloa-Welikanda supply route.

Reports say that the LTTE executed former PLOTE member Nadarajah Velan, 19, in March at Kommathurai. S Komaleswary, 58, was taken from her home in Kommathurai by unidentified persons and shot dead in late March. In mid-March the Committee of Inquiry into Undue Arrest and Harassment (CIUAH) ordered Batticaloa police to

investigate accusations that a PLOTE member operating with the Army is responsible for 602 murders in Batticaloa and Amparai districts.

The government ban on NORAD funded DERBA (Development of Batticaloa) programme and the Asian Development Bank assisted rural electrification project in LTTE-controlled areas in north and west Batticaloa, continue to be in force. The North-East Provincial Council has not allocated any funds for these areas in the year 2000.

Reports say 90% of the rice lands and 95% of the irrigation tanks in Batticaloa District are in LTTE areas. In the district, 119 of the 345 *Grama Sevaka* (Village Headman) divisions have been declared as uncleared (Tiger held). Some 127,000 people live in these areas.

In Trincomalee District, the LTTE launched an attack on an Army patrol on 5 March at Thoppur killing a soldier. Police say two Tiger cadre were killed in a clash at Gandhinagar two days later. The Army and the LTTE exchanged shells in Muthur on 22 March. Farmer M Raju was killed by a shell.

In late March, thousands of people demonstrated in Trincomalee town demanding Jaffna shipping services to be resumed. The shipping service is now under the newly created Northern Province Rehabilitation Ministry. UNP dissident Sarath Amunugama has been appointed minister. The new ship *Lanka Rani* is expected to begin services between Jaffna and Trincomalee in April.

## *Fear of death squads*

**THE** dreaded white vans, the hallmark of military death squads, have reappeared in Vavuniya, causing panic among the people. The Sri Lankan Human Rights Commission (HRC) received complaints that P Sureshini and K Govindaraj were abducted in mid-March by unidentified persons in white vans. T Rathika and P Sivarasa were taken away from Sastrikoolankulam refugee camp. The Army initially denied their arrest. But three of the abducted were later released from military camps. The fate of K Govindaraj remains unknown.

HRC's Vavuniya co-ordinator S Sritharan says legal requirements such as issuing receipts and informing relatives and the HRC within 48 hours of arrest, are not observed by the security forces. S Balachandran, 29, of Pandaraikulam, who went to Vavuniya police station on 3 March to renew his resident permit has disappeared. Sastrikoolankulam resident M Selvakumar, 33, is missing since 7 March. Volunteer teacher, V Mayurathan, 23, was arrested in Vavuniya town on 8 March. The Army has denied his detention.

In Vanni's Kilinochchi area, three skeletal remains were discovered in a shallow grave on 21 March. Forty two other skeletal remains have so far been found, most of them in Ratnapuram and Uruthirapuram. Local people believe that these are remains of civilians who visited their homes when the area was under Army control. The LTTE recaptured Kilinochchi in September 1998 in *Operation Oyatha Alaigal II* (Unceasing Waves). Reports say 243 people disappeared in the area during Army control. Observers urge the new HRC, appointed on 23 March and led by Faisz Musthapha, to use its wide powers and take effective measures against human rights violations in Sri Lanka such as disappearances.

MANNAR magistrate M Ilancheliyan, ordered police in late March to file charges against two soldiers in the Ida Carmalita case and arrest three other suspects. The soldiers are accused of rape and murder of Ms Carmalita in July last year at her home in Pallimunai. The magistrate expressed dissatisfaction over investigations carried out by police who have not submitted any report.

The LTTE continue to infiltrate Army-held areas in Mannar. Security forces searched the Pesalai refugee camp on 17 March and all camp residents were paraded before *Talayattis* or masked informers. The military say Tiger finance controller *Kalaiyarsan* was shot dead at Murunkan on 26 March.

## Arrest order

Despite the LTTE threat, fishing restrictions were relaxed following a meeting between fishermen and military officers on 17 March. Fishing hours were extended by one hour until 5pm. Earlier, fishing was allowed between 6am and 4pm. The fishing zone was also extended from two km to four km from the shore.

The Army granted permission to some 1,500 people to attend the Hindu *Maha Sivarathiri* festival at Mannar's Thiruketheeswaram temple. The military has been accused of occupying and desecrating the temple for the last ten years. Colombo MP R Yogarajan says the devotees were photographed, videoed and finger-printed in Mannar before being allowed to go to the temple.



# Canadian returnees harshly treated in Colombo

## Norway signs return agreement

The Norwegian and Sri Lankan governments signed an agreement in March for the deportation of rejected asylum seekers from the Western nation. The agreement stipulates that the number of refugees returned in the first year will not exceed 350. The Sri Lankan government will provide travel papers for returnees, subject to proof that they are citizens of the island. The agreement will be reviewed after an year.

Switzerland, Netherlands and Denmark have already entered into refugee return pacts with Sri Lanka. Reports say following the work of the European Union's (EU) High Level Working Group on Asylum and Migration last year, a process has been initiated to authorise the European Commission to conclude EU repatriation agreements with Sri Lanka and Morocco.

According to UNHCR, 12,640 Sri Lankans applied for asylum in Europe in 1999. Between 1989 and 1998, there were 205,872 applications worldwide from Sri Lankans and 56,405 (27.3%) were granted UN Convention refugee status and 18,144 (8.8%) were allowed to stay on humanitarian grounds.

Between 1980 and 1999 UK received 35,375 applications and only 339 (0.96%) were recognised as refugees. But 13,476 (38.1%) were granted humanitarian leave. UNHCR says 1,900 (57.9%) of 3,282 applicants have been granted humanitarian leave in Norway. Around 1,000 asylum applications are pending.

Norway began deporting rejected Sri Lankan asylum seekers two years before the March agreement. Following a meeting in March 1999 in Oslo, the British Refugee Council (BRC) sent a letter to the Norwegian Justice minister raising concerns over returns to Sri Lanka. The BRC pointed out UNHCR's recommendation to Western nations to consider provisions of the UN Convention on Torture, before deportations. The BRC letter remains unanswered.

The BRC has time and again pointed out the unsafe conditions in Sri Lanka and the humiliating experiences of returning refugees. The BRC has insisted on proper procedures for refugee status determination and safety of returned asylum seekers. No effective procedure has been established for receiving, advising or monitoring repatriated refugees.

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The Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry says that the Norwegian agreement is a recognition that the human rights situation in the island has improved. But British Foreign Office minister Peter Hain expressed concern in March over continuing human rights violations in Sri Lanka and failure to prosecute violators. The US State Department has recorded grave human rights abuses and in March 2000, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture reported the torture of returned asylum seekers M Vanitha and T Kamalathasan.

Twenty Sri Lankans arrived in Sri Lanka on 16 March after being deported from Germany. Over 50,570 applications were made by Sri Lankan asylum seekers in Germany between 1989 and 1998 and 8,810 (17.4%) have been granted refugee status. Colombo's German embassy says 5,500 rejected refugees face deportation.

Reports say that the travel documents of the 20 German deportees were confiscated. Immigration officers told Colombo

MP R Yogarajan that the Defence Ministry has ordered them to confiscate travel documents of all asylum seekers deported to Sri Lanka. Two German deportees V Suthakaran and S Theivendran were detained and produced before the Negombo magistrate on 21 March. Despite police objections based on suspicion of LTTE links, the court granted them Rs 50,000 bail.

Another deportee V Varadarajah was arrested at the airport on 16 March and released on bail the following day. MP Joseph Pararajasingham says that Chilaw police refused to register Mr Varadakumar. German deportee V Paramasivam was released on bail by the court on 17 March. He was arrested again on the same day and detained for three more days. The Kollupitiya police refused to accept the court documents.

Thulasi Gnanakrishnan and her two children, deported from Canada, were arrested at Colombo airport on 28 February. She was released on bail the following day and ordered to appear in court on 30 May. The Canadian High Commission in Colombo told her lawyers that she was detained overnight at the police post in the airport to allow time for the police to 'confirm their identity' and that 'she was free to go about her business in Sri Lanka'.

The lawyers say that her identity certificate had been issued by the Sri Lankan High Commission in Ottawa and in addition Ms Gnanakrishnan had an old Sri Lankan passport. They also say that Slave Island police in Colombo have denied her permission to stay in Colombo and without a permit she cannot go out of her residence. *Sunday Leader* columnist DBS Jeyaraj says the family was interrogated for over four hours and harshly treated.

While Tamil arrests continued in March, There is concern over increase in attacks on Tamils in Colombo and other southern areas, since Norway became involved in peace efforts. In a late March letter to President Chandrika, All Ceylon Hindu Council Chairman K Neelakandan highlighted a number of incidents and called on her to take immediate action to prevent the attacks. Colombo student Mahalingam Gobikrishnan, 18, was accused of LTTE links and severely beaten in a train on 22 March.

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: (0207) 820 3100; Fax: (0207) 820 3107 E-mail: slproject@refugeecouncil.org.uk Internet: www.gn.apc.org/brcslproject

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