

## Tigers seize Elephant Pass

In a dramatic turn of events, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) captured the strategic Elephant Pass military base at the entrance to the Jaffna peninsula on 22 April, in *Operation Oyatha Alaigal III* (Unceasing Waves), thrusting President Chandrika Kumaratunge's People's Alliance (PA) government into a new crisis.

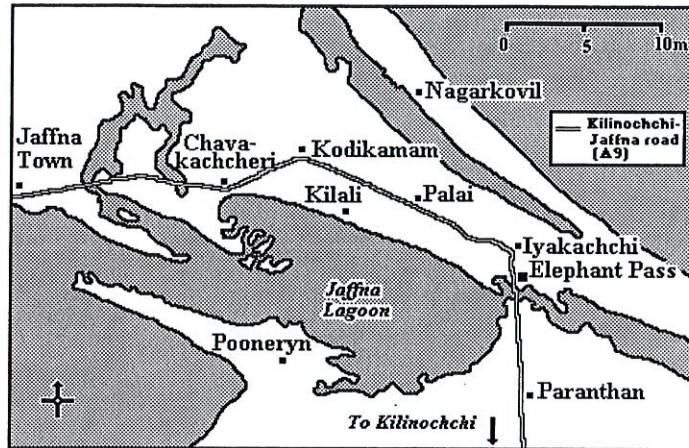
Elephant Pass has been a defence base for Jaffna since 1760, during Portuguese rule.

A military camp was built in 1952. The Sri Lankan Army held the base even when the LTTE controlled the peninsula from 1986 to 1995. The camp was a vital spring board for Army offensives such as *Operation Yal Devi* (name of Colombo-Jaffna train) in September 1993 and *Operation Sath Jaya* (Truth's Victory) in July 1996. Over 1,000 Tigers died in an attempt to take the camp in July 1991.

In late March, the LTTE landed forces on the eastern coast of Jaffna and led by *Task Force Commander Balraj*, captured a section of the Kilinochchi-Jaffna road between Muhamalai and Palai, cutting off the main supply route to Elephant Pass. An Army operation to dislodge the Tigers achieved only a limited success.

The LTTE advanced south-west from the eastern coastal Maruthankerni area on 18 April and broke through Army defence to capture the key Puthukadu junction, bringing under control a six-km stretch of Kilinochchi-Jaffna road, between Palai and Iyakachchi. On 20 April, the Tigers turned south-east against Iyakachchi camp which was a defence base for Elephant Pass. The camp fell after heavy fighting and the Tigers moved further south.

The Elephant Pass base was encircled and all access routes were cut-off. Most of the troops in the camp escaped the onslaught and withdrew along the road leading north-west to Kilali. Deputy Defence minister Anuruddha Ratwatte says 358 soldiers including 21 officers died. Some 2,240 soldiers and 128 offi-



cers were wounded and 346 are missing. The Tigers say they captured 152mm field guns, military vehicles and other heavy equipment. After raising the LTTE flag at Elephant Pass the Tigers moved west and overran Palai on 30 April.

The fall of Elephant Pass has sent shock waves through the government establishment. President Chandrika rushed back on 27 April from Britain where she was undergoing medical treatment. Appearing on *Rupawahini* TV on 30 April, she declared that the setback at Elephant Pass will not deter the government. Blaming everyone else for the debacle, she said there will be no peace talks unless the LTTE laid down arms. Two days earlier, the Colombo UN office had announced that its programmes in Jaffna, including landmine clearance, were suspended. UN emergency relief operations, however, would continue.

A delegation of the main opposition United National Party (UNP) led by Ranil Wickremasinghe met the President on 2 May to discuss the current status of the war. The President pledged to keep the opposition leader informed of the developments in Jaffna and the decisions of the government. Mr Wickremasinghe urged the government to remove censorship on the local media, which he alleged is leading to rumours and confusion.

The next day, President Chandrika introduced Emergency regulations (see Briefing May 2000) extending censorship to Sri Lanka-based foreign journalists. Apart from news relating to the war,

comments about the President, government, judiciary and the constitution will be subject to censorship rules. The government set-up its own Media Information Centre at the Information Department in April.

The government declared that the country is on "war footing" giving itself powers to acquire buildings and other assets of persons found guilty under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) and

to force people to become involved in any service in the national interest. Development work considered non-essential are suspended for three months to divert funds to the war effort. Reports say that all ministries have been ordered to cut expenditure by 6%.

Armed force reserves have been called for service and reservists asked to report at the nearest military base before 10 May. There are also plans to increase the National Defence Levy to 6.5% from 5.5% to raise the immediate need of Rs 12 billion (\$170 million) to acquire arms. Deputy Finance minister GL Peiris says Rs 10 billion (\$143 million) worth additional treasury bills will be issued.

A new excise duty on cigarettes and liquor is expected to bring in Rs 1.5 billion. According to press reports, Defence Secretary Chandrananda de Silva is negotiating with governments of Britain, Czech Republic, Iran, Israel, Russia and Singapore for new weapons and equipment. Meanwhile, Pakistan has denied sending a ship load of arms to Colombo.

Concern has been expressed by governments and NGOs over the deteriorating situation in Sri Lanka. The Hong Kong-based Asia Human Rights Commission (AHR) says continuing the war for political reasons must end and has urged the government and the LTTE to seize the opportunity for peace offered by the Norwegian involvement. AHR has called on UN Secretary General Kofi Annan to decisively intervene as in several other conflicts.

## THE VANNI

# Medical crisis

FRENCH medical agency, Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF), which works in Vavuniya, Mallavi and Puthukudyiruppu hospitals, said in mid-April that there was an acute shortage of medicines in Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi districts in northern Vanni region. Even anti-biotics and pain-killers were not available.

The civilian population in the Vanni continues to suffer as a result of government restrictions on food and medicines. Hospitals are unable to accept patients. Reports say 216,000 people were treated in 1999 in Kilinochchi hospital, 31,617 for malaria, and 186 people died, including 17 children.

In a letter to senior Army officers in mid-April, Vavuniya Health Services Director, Dr K Ilango said that malaria was spreading and drugs were urgently needed. Following a meeting with Vavuniya Government Agent K Ganesh, the Army permitted a lorry carrying medicines into the Vanni on 21 April with the assistance of UNHCR.

Although the Defence Ministry had permitted 45 different kinds of medicines, ICRC's Harsha Gunawardena says that the Army allowed only 14. At a meeting on 28 April, international humanitarian agencies explained the difficult situation in the Vanni to the Health Ministry. The meeting decided to send a letter to the Defence Ministry urging action to send adequate medicines.

Vavuniya Army officers say that medicines were cut because LTTE cadre

injured in the fighting in Jaffna were being treated in the Vanni. The Northern Province Health Department requested 20,000 aspirin tablets but only 2,000 were allowed. Press reports say over 80 patients suffering from Asthma, heart disease and diabetes left the hospital because of lack of medicines.

In Vavuniya, of 32 people who went missing in March, 20 were later released from Army custody. Nine remain in detention and three have disappeared. Vavuniya Human Rights Commission (HRC) Co-ordinator S Sriharan says that HRC officers have been denied access to the police Terrorist Investigation Division (TID), where it is alleged a number of people are detained.

The HRC has received complaints that four youths went missing in late April. The Army arrested eight youths, including student P Kartheepan, 16, also in late April, during a search operation in Sastrikoolankulam. M Chandran, 17, was abducted from his home in Vepankulam on 25 April by unidentified persons.

The LTTE attacked Arawantalawa police station, 12 miles west of Vavuniya town, on 14 April killing a Home Guard. Four soldiers who searched the area, were killed by a landmine. Suspected Tiger cadre attacked PLOTE MP Y Balachandran's house in Pandarikulam on 27 April. Mr Balachandran was away from his home at the time of the attack. According to the police, this was the fourth attempt on his life.

## Defeat

The government was defeated in Parliament on 5 April on a resolution tabled by Lands minister DM Jayaratne to dissolve the Paddy Marketing Board, set-up in 1971 to assist farmers.

## Strike

Fishermen in the coastal town of Nagapatanam in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu began a strike on 30 April after the Sri Lankan Navy shot dead three Tamil Nadu fishermen in the Palk Strait a day earlier.

## Commuted

In April, Tamil Nadu Governor Fatima Bibi commuted the death sentence of Nalini, the only woman among the four people given the death penalty in the Rajiv Gandhi murder case, to life imprisonment. On 2 May, the Madras High Court released five Sri Lankans and Indians charged with the bombing of Meenambakkam airport in 1984 killing 30 civilians. Life sentences were overturned for lack of evidence.

## Release

The LTTE released sailor Jayaratne Banda on 10 April in Mullaitivu. Mr Banda was one of eight crew members of the passenger ferry *Iris Moana* hijacked by Tigers on 28 August 1995 with 144 people on board.

## Postponed

The Sri Lanka Paris Aid Group meeting scheduled for 29 May was postponed indefinitely, following the fall of Elephant Pass.

# Civilians in the war zone

AS heavy fighting between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan Army continued east of Jaffna town, a *hartal* (general strike) was staged on 12 April demanding that civilians in the war zone should be allowed to leave. Thousands of people demonstrated before the Jaffna government secretariat. Some 5,000 people were trapped in the Palai and Kilali areas. In a letter to the ICRC, Maj. Gen. Balagalla denied that the Army was using civilians as a human shield.

In mid-April, the Army allowed people to leave the area. But an NGO-appointed committee said that the military is requiring people to complete a form before leaving, which has to be cer-

tified by the local *Grama Sevaka* (Village Headman). Army officers say that this procedure is necessary to prevent LTTE infiltrators entering Jaffna town and other military-controlled areas.

Jaffna Government Agent K Shanmuganathan says that people in Soranpatru and Dharmapuri in Palai area, which had been declared a high security zone, were denied permission to leave. The Jaffna secretariat said in mid-April that 5,933 people displaced from Palai and Maruthankerni have been housed in 15 welfare centres in Point Pedro, Thenmaratchy and Jaffna town. A large number of displaced people have sought refuge with friends or relatives.

The Army arrested three youths in Irupalai, four miles north-east of Jaffna town on 3 April. The following day, two others including Ravichandran Rajivan, 16, were taken into custody in Kopai, further north. Local people say that no receipts were issued to relatives for the arrests in Kopai, as required by law.

A young woman, Thayaparan Viji, and her child were wounded when the Army in Jaffna shelled LTTE positions in Pooneryn on the mainland. Army shelling on 8 April in Sembianpatru on the east coast killed Sellakandu Thangam, 62, and Velupillai Thavam, 24. Three others were wounded. A shell in Kilali, south-east of Chavakachcheri wounded seven people.

## ■ Tigers shoot Sinhalese farmers

# Task Force rampage

ANGERED by posters welcoming the fall of Elephant Pass, members of the police Special Task Force (STF) ran amok in Manmunai and Kirankulam in Batticaloa District on 25 April, entering houses and attacking civilians. Many people were injured and 20, including 69 year-old Palipody Manickam, were admitted to the hospital.

As the LTTE launches attacks daily, the military has continued search operations and arrest of Tiger suspects. Local people complain that arrest procedures under Emergency regulations are not being followed. According to the Human Rights Commission, of the 75 people arrested in Batticaloa between January and April, 62 are in custody, but the

whereabouts of 13 people are unknown.

Four Muslim youths were arrested in mid-April at Oddamavady, north of Batticaloa town. Police say a fifth man, detained in Kattankudy, was in possession of a large quantity of explosives. In a search operation in Pandiruppu on 23 April, over 500 people were arrested and 100 were detained for further enquiries. Following a Tiger attack on a naval vessel two days earlier, shells were fired from Vavunativu Army camp towards Kannakudah. The Kannaki Amman Hindu temple was damaged.

Ten policemen, including an Assistant Superintendent were killed and four others were injured in Gravelkande, 29 miles south-east of Polonnaruwa town on

7 April. Reports say the Tigers earlier shot dead two Sinhalese farmers and ambushed a police unit that rushed to the scene. Six policemen were wounded a week later in a bomb attack on a jeep at Savalakadai, south of Batticaloa.

People arranging to go abroad are under increasing pressure from the security forces. S Nathan, travelling to Colombo from Kaluvanchikudi, to go abroad was taken into custody along with his wife and child at Welikanda on 7 April. Batticaloa MP P Selvarajah has complained to the Committee of Inquiry into Undue Arrest and Harassment (CIUAH) that E Suntharalingam and S Suvendran, who had arranged to travel abroad were arrested by the STF on 9 March, when they went to Wellaveli to bid farewell to relatives. They were later killed. The STF claims that they were LTTE members. Security forces are currently compiling a list of people who have gone abroad from Batticaloa.

LTTE's *Pistol Group*, which carries out selective assassinations, shot and wounded a policeman and a civilian in Valaichenai on 17 April. Former PLOTE cadre N Ratheeswaran, 18, was killed in a Tiger grenade attack in Batticaloa town on 3 May. Four civilians suffered serious injuries.

The LTTE launched a mortar attack on Welikanda police station on 2 May killing two soldiers. Shells exploded near the Welikanda hospital and patients were removed to safe places. Part of the hospital was damaged.

# Abolish PTA

IN its report to the 52nd session of the Human Rights Commission in Geneva in April, the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (WGD) says that Sri Lanka remains the country with the second largest number of non-clarified disappearances. Many of the missing persons allegedly traced by the Sri Lankan authorities seem not to correspond to the disappeared persons submitted by the WGD. Although a considerable number of criminal investigations had been initiated in relation to disappearances which occurred ten years ago, only very few of the suspected perpetrators have actually been convicted. The WGD has urged the Sri Lankan government to appoint an independent body to investigate all disappearances since 1995, expedite efforts to bring perpetrators to book and make 'enforced disappearance' an offence under criminal law punishable by penalties as stipulated in Article 4 of the UN Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. The WGD

has called on the government to abolish the Prevention of Terrorism Act and Emergency regulations or bring them into line with international standards.

The WGD says that all unofficial places of detention, in particular those established by paramilitary organisations such as PLOTE and TELO should be immediately dissolved and a central register of detainees set-up. The prohibition of enforced disappearance should be included as a fundamental right in the Sri Lankan constitution, to which the remedy of a direct human right complaint to the Supreme Court under Article 13 is applied, irrespective of whether the disappeared person is presumed to be alive or dead. The WGD has also recommended that the differentiation between public civil servants and others must be abolished in the award of compensation.

NINE people were killed when a bomb exploded at a musical event celebrating the Sinhala-Tamil New Year in Trincomalee on 12 April. A day earlier, a policeman and a civilian died in a LTTE assault on a checkpoint at Gomarankadawela, 20 miles north-west of Trincomalee town. Two soldiers died in an attack at Lingapuram on 16 April.

The military say that the LTTE is attempting to destabilise the district and may be planning to disrupt the main Trincomalee-Colombo supply route. Security in Trincomalee was tightened in April, following the Tiger attacks. The Navy shot dead civilians, A Thirukumaran and S Rajendran at Ilankanthai in Muthur on 27 April.

## Festival attack

Some 1,000 people demonstrated before the government secretariat on 2 May, demanding ship services to Jaffna. A petition was submitted to North-East Governor Asoka Jayawardena. Regional Secretary Velum Mayilum says over 4,000 people have registered to travel to Jaffna. Around 3,000 found accommodation in the town, but others were living in the open. The people say they have spent all their money on lodging and food.

The passenger ship *Lanka Rani*, purchased by the Shipping Corporation for passenger service between Trincomalee and Jaffna, has been given to the Navy on Defence Ministry orders. Reports say a second ship *Lanka Devi* will arrive in Colombo harbour on 1 May.

# UN Rapporteur says torture is committed with impunity

## Student torture

IN a letter to the Inspector General of Police (IGP), Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) leader V Anandasangary says that a Tamil student arrested in Colombo's Cinnamon Gardens suburb on 3 April, suffered torture at a police station. It is alleged that she was burned with cigarettes and a policewoman cut her neck and hands with a knife.

In April, UN Special Rapporteur on Torture expressed concern over continuing torture in Sri Lanka. The Rapporteur says that persons arrested on suspicion of being a member of the LTTE are being tortured and unauthorised places of detention, specially in Jaffna and Vavuniya, continue to be used.

Prisoners held here are allegedly beaten, administered electric shocks, have petrol poured on their back and lit and are bitten by dogs on their private parts. The Rapporteur further says torture is committed with impunity and despite the enactment of the Torture Act in 1995, no one has been convicted.

A Batticaloa court released Anthony Krishnaveni, 22, in April, following the evidence of the government Judicial Medical Officer (JMO). The confession on which the case against her was based, had been obtained under torture. After her arrest in September 1998, she was repeatedly tortured, which included beating on the head with a cricket bat.

Evidence was also produced that a confession was extracted under torture from another Batticaloa resident T Prabhakaran, 20. According to the JMO, chillie powder applied to his eyes has impaired his sight. His head was covered with a plastic bag dipped in petrol and his toe nails were pulled out.

Security in urban centres in southern Sri Lanka was tightened in the run-up to the Tamil-Sinhala New Year on 12 April and May Day and Tamil arrests continued. During a search operation in Kandy on 8 April, eight Plantation Tamil youths were taken into custody. Two days later, two Tamil women were detained.

Many Tamils were rounded-up in Jaela, 12 miles north of Colombo, on 9 April, in a search of lodges and houses and 17, including seven women were detained. Fifteen Tamils, including a 14 year-old girl were detained in Colombo's Kotahena suburb on 27 April.

Colombo MP R Yogarajan condemned the issue of new police registration forms to Tamil residents in some areas of Colombo in April. Earlier, the IGP had accepted that registration is not mandatory under Emergency regulations. Following Mr Yogarajan's protest, the police agreed to withdraw the forms.

The Department of Registration has rejected 3,000 applications for National Identity Cards (NIC) of Tamils in Udapussellawa, 12 miles north-east of Nuwara Eliya. The Department is refusing to accept birth cards issued by estates in place of Birth Certificates. A large number of Plantation Tamils are without NICs and their freedom of movement, therefore, is restricted.

## The Indian dilemma

REPORTS say that the Sri Lankan government has asked India for assistance to evacuate some 40,000 troops in the Jaffna peninsula if they become trapped as the LTTE pushes into Army territory. In late April, a delegation of monks from the Buddhist National Sangha Council visited the Indian High Commission to request military assistance for Sri Lanka.

On 3 May, Indian Foreign minister Jaswant Singh ruled out military intervention. But India would provide humanitarian assistance. India became embroiled in the conflict in 1987, when an Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) arrived in the island following the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement of 29 July 1987. The peace force was soon at war with the LTTE. By the time the IPKF withdrew in March 1990, after demand by Sri Lanka, 1,200 Indian troops had been killed. The IPKF/LTTE war led to the assassination of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in May 1991.

The bitter experience in Sri Lanka has made India more cautious. However, many analysts believe that the Sri Lankan conflict is difficult to solve with-

out India's role. The Indian government is also concerned about public opinion, particularly in Tamil Nadu, the southern state where 55 million Tamils live. As fighting continued in Jaffna, more

refugees began arriving in Tamil Nadu, where there are already 70,000 Sri Lankan refugees in 133 government camps. Some 80,000 are said to live outside the camps, 37,000 of whom are registered with the police.

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M Karunanidhi, whose DMK party is an ally of the Indian government, warns about the consequences of intervention but says he would not 'tie New Delhi's hands'. Most Tamil Nadu parties, including former Chief Minister Jayalalitha's AIADMK oppose military involvement.

As a regional power, India is placed in a difficult position. There is fear that LTTE's rise may fuel separatist sentiments in Tamil Nadu. Observers say India is reluctant to intervene, but, does not want to see its influence diminished by other nations. Arms supply from Pakistan and China may worry India. Sri Lanka has also restored diplomatic ties with Israel, who are providing air power to knock out LTTE's artillery. With general elections looming, observers believe that President Chandrika will not hesitate to summon even the devil.

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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