

Chandrika dissolves Parliament

The ruling People Alliance (PA) announced on 8 August that the Bill for a new constitution will not be pursued after failing to muster enough support among MPs to ensure the two-thirds majority required for its passage in the Sri Lankan Parliament.

The Bill, which provides for devolution of power to the regions as a solution to the prolonged ethnic conflict, faced widespread opposition. The Tamil groups say the provisions fall far short of Tamil aspirations and will not solve the problem. They have declined to support the Bill despite attempts by foreign envoys in Colombo to persuade them. The Sinhalese groups contend that the Bill will only exacerbate the problem, as the Tamils will use devolution to establish a separate state in the north-east. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have rejected the proposals. The opposition United National Party (UNP) refused support saying that an all-party consensus and a common negotiating position with the LTTE are needed.

President Chandrika Kumaratunge reiterated her commitment to solving the ethnic conflict by constitutional reform and expressed confidence that the Bill will be passed within two months of PA winning the next general elections. She declared that if UNP's support was not forthcoming and PA is unable to obtain a two-thirds majority, then a Constituent Assembly will be established to adopt the constitution by a simple majority. In 1972, the United Front government, led by her mother Sirimavo Bandaranaike, ensured the adoption of the first republican constitution, when the National State Assembly (Parliament) sat as a Constituent Assembly to overcome constitutional difficulties.

President Chandrika initiated measures to achieve unity within the PA and gain support outside. The World's first woman Prime Minister, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, 84, was persuaded to step down and Public Administration minister Ratnasiri Wickramanayake was appointed as premier, in preference to other aspi-

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rants such as Lands minister DM Jayaratne and Culture minister Lakshman Jayakody. Sources say that in return for the appointment, Mr Wickramanayake, is expected to appease the Buddhist clergy who are up in arms against government devolution proposals.

The new Prime Minister, who is considered a hawk in the cabinet, declared that the immediate task before the country is to destroy LTTE terrorism and launched a scathing attack on Tiger leader V Prabhakaran. He also pledged that the views of the Buddhist high-priests, the *Mahanayake Theras*, would be sought on 'every line, clause and paragraph' of the draft constitution.

Youth Affairs and *Samurthi* minister SB Dissanayake was elected General Secretary of PA's main constituent, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) on 17 August. Some observers believe that the move is to ensure the services of thousands of officers of the government poverty alleviation programme *Samurthi* for election campaign, particularly in the face of the new nationalist party Sihala Urumaya (Sinhala Heritage) making inroads into PA's vote bank. Mr Dissanayake is reputed to have been the brain behind the PA victory at the anarchical Western Provincial council elections in January 1999.

The PA signed an electoral agreement with Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (People's United Front or MEP) on 27

August. MEP is a Sinhalese nationalist party led by Dinesh Gunawardene and has campaigned against constitutional reform. The appointment of Lt. Gen. Lionel Balagalle as new commander of the Sri Lankan Army following the retirement of Lt. Gen. Srilal Weerasooriya is seen as part of the election strategy. As expected, government forces launched a new offensive, *Operation Rivi Kirana* (Sunbeam) on 3 September to retake LTTE-held areas in eastern Jaffna. Victory in Jaffna is needed to boost the chances of the PA at the elections.

President Chandrika dissolved Parliament on 18 August, just six days before the end of the six-year period of Parliament and fixed nominations for the week beginning on 28 August. Parliament is expected to be recalled to extend Emergency rule, which means the government will retain the enormous powers under Emergency regulations during elections. As in 1994, President Chandrika called for a mandate to end the war and resolve the ethnic conflict.

As the scramble for electoral alliances commenced, accusatory salvos were fired in attempts to tarnish the images of political leaders. The police say former Superintendent of Police Douglas Peiris, who was arrested at the Colombo airport on 3 August, has confirmed that UNP leader Ranil Wickremasinghe was involved in running a torture chamber at Batalanda in the period 1988-1990. UNP General Secretary Gamini Athukorale is also accused of involvement. The UNP has dismissed the allegation as a government election stunt.

Observers say the LTTE may attempt to capture whole of Jaffna before the elections and simultaneously launch operations to destabilise southern areas. Meanwhile, election violence reported in several areas is expected to escalate. Diplomats are warning of a bloodbath and the US embassy has cautioned American citizens to avoid political meetings, government and military installations and public transport.

JAFFNA

Operation sunbeam

THE Sri Lankan Army launched *Operation Rivi Kirana* (Sunbeam) on 3 September in an attempt to extend defence lines from Jaffna town and to capture Chavakachcheri town. As troops advanced east from Columbuturai towards Navatkuli bridge, two other columns moved south from Sarasalai and Nunavil towards Chavakachcheri.

Observers say heavy bombardment by the newly acquired MIG-27 planes and attacks using multi-barrel rocket launchers, which began four days earlier, had little effect on the LTTE. The 5,000 troops came under intense mortar fire by small LTTE units and suffered heavy casualties. The Army was forced to withdraw within eight hours. More than 250 soldiers were killed and 800 wounded. The Army gained only a 200-metre territory in Columbuturai. Reports say over 75 Tigers were also killed.

As political parties descended on Jaffna for election campaign in August, the LTTE and the Army continued to exchange shell fire. Several civilians were wounded and more people were displaced. The ICRC say 160,000 people have left their homes and majority have found shelter with friends or relatives. Some 17,000 people are in 136 refugee camps in western Valikamam and north-eastern Vadamaratchy.

TULF's Mavai Senathirajah, who visited Jaffna in early August, says that a refugee family is provided rice worth Rs 1,260 (\$16) a month, which is not suffi-

cient even for ten days. Jaffna needs 2.6 million litres of fuel a month, including kerosene. Reports say distribution has become difficult as a result of the security zones and other military restrictions. Further, the Army has commandeered four bowsers belonging to the Petroleum Corporation.

There are allegations that shortage of wheat flour and fuel is affecting civilians and government officers are encouraging a thriving black market. In early August, Jaffna's senior state officer Government Agent (GA) K Shanmuganathan urged the Cooperative Commissioner to investigate the incident in which wheat flour issued to cooperative stores ended up in the hands of private traders.

The GA says Rs 50 million (\$632,000) is spent on relief each month and that he has pointed out to the government that the food supply to the peninsula is insufficient. But he denied that there was malnutrition or starvation. Although Rs 250 million (\$3 million) was allocated for the current year for Jaffna development, Colombo Treasury has not released part of the funds making it difficult for the Jaffna government secretary to implement programmes.

The Army say two Tiger infiltrators were shot dead in Chemmani on 5 August. R Suvendrarajah was wounded by a landmine at Kadduvan in mid-August and died in hospital. Tiger shells injured S Pamini, 12, in late August at Puthur. She also died in hospital.

Disappearance

Amnesty says the Navy arrested GMM Zackariya, who was on his way to Nilaveli in Trincomalee on 11 August, but later denied his detention.

Employment

According to the Foreign Employment Office, 178,052 Sri Lankans obtained employment abroad in 1999, a 12% increase on the previous year. In the first seven months of this year, 105,000 gained foreign jobs. The earnings from remittances in 1999 stood at Rs 74 billion (\$948 million).

Released

The Colombo High Court released former Red Cross Society officer Sivanathan Kishore on 28 August after 16 months in custody accused of links with the LTTE. Mr Kishore was arrested in Vavuniya in April 1999 and a confession had been obtained from him under duress.

Killed

UNP supporter Saman Kumara was shot dead on 22 August while putting up election posters in Kegalle. A masked gang alleged to be linked to the ruling PA fired on an election meeting of the opposition UNP at Gampaha on 13 August, injuring seven people.

Visit

Norwegian peace negotiator Erik Solheim visited Sri Lanka on 28 August and held discussions with government, opposition and Tamil parties for three days.

Both sides use food as weapon

IN an alert on 1 September, the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) warned of a humanitarian disaster in LTTE-held Vanni, where government economic embargo is causing starvation. Local Government Agents have recommended supply of dry rations to 374,000 among the 568,000 resident population, but the Army refused to allow food for 120,000 people.

JRS says the Army uses food to draw civilians towards its areas while the rebels use it to recruit and train youth. JRS also points out that shelter needs are great due to the restrictions on the supply of shelter material to the Vanni. Jaffna Bishop says 1,240 families which fled

from the Jaffna war zone into the Vanni have not been provided any relief on allegations that they are LTTE supporters.

According to other reports, patients sent to Vavuniya hospital from Vanni hospitals are being returned without any treatment as a result of shortage of medicines and medical equipment. The Health Ministry has still not paid the Rs 16.6 million (\$212,000) allocated for Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu hospitals in 1999 for refurbishment. In late August, the Army refused to allow important medical equipment, including X-ray machines, for Mallavi hospital.

In Vavuniya, refugees in eight government camps began a hunger strike on 10

August, demanding regular relief provision. There has been a delay in relief provision since 15 June. Government officers who went to discuss the issue were detained by the refugees and had to be rescued by police. People allege that the police attacked them and wounded a youth. Reports say that 1,648 families in the camps have not received any relief for over four months.

Seven police were wounded in an LTTE landmine attack in Vavuniya town on 6 August. In another Tiger mine attack on an Airforce truck on 1 September at Velankulam, 14 miles north-west of Vavuniya, 14 military personnel were killed and eight wounded.

■ The Army target farmers in Batticaloa District

Beheaded

K Thurairajasingham, MP for Batticaloa District, has condemned the beheading of Arunasalam Chandramohan, 21, by the security forces on 9 August at Sithandy. Following an LTTE attack in which two military personnel were wounded, soldiers are alleged to have shot dead Thiyagu Vincent, 29, and attacked Mr Chandramohan with knives before cutting his head off.

The two farmers had been working in a nearby field. Mr Chandramohan's wife C Ambigavathy told a judge that she saw a soldier carrying the head in a plastic bag. The head and the body were produced separately at the inquest. Local MPs have urged President Chandrika to investigate the incident.

Reports say that soldiers from Welikande shot dead farmer Thiyagarasa Sinnarasa, 17, and abducted nine others in early August. Local people complain that the Special Task Force (STF) shot dead farmers S Vijayasundaram and S Nishanthan in their field at Valaikalai, 17 miles south of Batticaloa town on 16 August. Four days later, another farmer Kanthakutty Thavarasa died in Army shooting in his field at Vantharumoolai, north of Batticaloa town.

Concern has been expressed after the Army shot dead Ramakrishna Mission student Manickavel Vijayadharshan, 21, at Kaluvankerni, west of Batticaloa town on 18 August. Sathasivam Kokularaj, who was wounded told a judge that they

were shot after raising their hands. Three soldiers have been arrested.

The LTTE attacked a police patrol in Valaichenai town on 9 August injuring four policemen. Complaints have been made that the Tigers abducted three Muslims and a Sinhalese from Kudapokkuna in Polonnaruwa District. Reports say that the Tigers hijacked six boats belonging to Muslim fishermen, near Vaharai on 26 August.

In Amparai District, the STF have ordered shop owners in Thirukovil to obtain permits to continue their business. The owners are also expected to provide the STF details of stock. In mid-August, the police issued an order that people from the LTTE-controlled Paduvankarai area, west of Batticaloa lagoon, going into Amparai to work in rice fields must obtain a police permit.

A policeman and two Home Guards who provided security for Sinhalese farmers in Bakkiella were killed in an LTTE attack on 20 August. Two days later, four Tamil civilians collecting firewood in Karmalai on Amparai-Batticaloa border went missing. The bodies of M Subramaniam and M Thurairajasingham were later found in the area.

In Trincomalee District, three naval officers and a child were killed in a Tiger landmine attack on a military convoy near the town on 9 August. Five civilians and 28 sailors were wounded. Security forces killed LTTE intelligence officer *Marathan* the following day at Kaddaiparichchan.

Vavuniya violations

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL urged President Chandrika Kumaratunge in a letter on 31 August to investigate the increasing incidence of disappearances in Army-controlled northern Vavuniya District. Seven people arrested by the security forces between 10 and 26 August have disappeared bringing the total disappeared in Vavuniya town to nine. In addition, many people have reportedly been held in secret detention for up to two or three weeks and subjected to torture. Amnesty observes that the disappearances have taken place in the context of a general deterioration in human rights following the introduction of Emergency regulations on 3 May. Velupillai Tharmalingam was arrested on 10 August at a checkpoint in Kovilkulam. His wife Yalini has informed the Human Rights Commission (HRC) that she made enquiries at the checkpoint, the Army headquarters and the police Counter Subversive Unit, but the security forces have denied arrest. Three days later, P

Sivakumar was arrested at the Sastrikoolankulam refugee camp and he has disappeared. On 30 August, police arrested two people at the Poonthottam refugee camp. The following day, two others from Santhasolai and Thonikal were detained. Six youths, including a student, were taken into custody at Mathavuvythakulam on 3 August. The LTTE carries out attacks on the military in and around Vavuniya town. Army search operations are conducted to identify Tiger infiltrators and arrests often follow. K Jegatheeswaran, 20, and Mylvaganam, 21, arrested on 14 August at Sastrikoolankulam, are currently being held at the Vavuniya Army headquarters. The information was provided to relatives by the HRC. The status of the Presidential Directives requiring issue of arrest receipts and information to relatives is unclear.

PRESS reports say that the ICRC refused permission for six members of Tamil group EPRLF to board the ship *City of Trinco* on 21 August at Trincomalee harbour to travel to Jaffna. Military personnel are forbidden in the twice-a-week passenger ship, to prevent LTTE attacks.

The ICRC began providing protection to the ship on 7 August, following an agreement with the government on 26 July. The ICRC has security guarantees from the government and the LTTE. On 21 August, the Northern Province Rehabilitation Authority assigned the responsibility of issuing ship tickets, to government ally, EPDP. The other Tamil parties allege that this is to help EPDP's election campaign in Jaffna.

Protection

In Mannar District, the procedure of registration of passengers travelling to Colombo, at Cheddikulam, 35 miles south-east of Mannar town, has been reintroduced. All passengers from Mannar are expected to register and obtain permits in Mannar before leaving and re-register at Cheddikulam.

The LTTE say that they attacked two military camps in Puthukulam on 8 August killing nine soldiers and wounding 13. The Army heavily shelled Tiger territory on 29 August allegedly to relieve an Army unit that had penetrated the area. Military camps at Vankalai, Thallady and Uyilankulam came under LTTE shell fire. Shelling continued the next day and eight soldiers were injured.

Tamil male detainees sexually abused repeatedly

Abduction

SPEAKING in Parliament in early August, Up Country People's Front MP P Chandrasekaran said that the security forces abducted a Tamil woman at a checkpoint in the Colombo suburb of Maradana. The security forces had attacked her and another person and when she threatened to complain to higher authorities, she had been abducted. He urged Deputy Defence minister Anuruddha Ratwatte to take immediate measures to find the woman.

Mr Chandrasekaran also referred to the problems faced by Hill Country Tamils as a result of security measures in southern Sri Lanka. Kandy Municipal Council member S Malarchelvan says Tamils in Kandy's Mahaiyawa suburb are being continuously harassed by the police. He has appealed to Kandy Mayor Harindra Dunuville to intervene with the security authorities.

Many Hill Country Tamils, more particularly those living and working on tea and rubber plantations, lack national

identity cards (NIC) as a result of delays by the Department of Registration and this leads to arrest and other problems. The World Bank says the 'mobility and access to economic opportunities of many estate workers are constrained due to language barriers, social status or lack of national identity cards'. Reports say that the People's Bank in Ragala is refusing to grant loans to Hill Country Tamils who lack NICs.

Tamils detained in the south and released, often lack identity documents to remain in Colombo or travel to the north-east. Colombo Tamil newspaper *Virakesari* reports about a young man who was arrested in 1995 when he came to the capital to go abroad. Security authorities took possession of his passport and NIC. A case was filed against him only in 1998. He was released in July, after the case was withdrawn. But the police have refused to return his documents and he is unable to go out of his residence and lives in fear of arrest.

The concern over conditions of detention remains. The June 2000 report of the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture titled *Caught in the middle: A study of Tamil torture survivors coming to the UK from Sri Lanka*, describes the harrowing experiences of prisoners. Detainees were routinely hit by guards and some forced to give blood for transfusion. One person had been used for a medical experiment without consent and others were detained alone in a dark cell underground.

The Medical Foundation says that the most disturbing among allegations were repeated reports of sexual abuse of male detainees, because of the effect it had on them. Detainees described being repeatedly raped and made to perform other sexual acts by soldiers. Press reports say that a boy was admitted to Manthikai hospital in Jaffna's Vadamaratchy area after being sexually assaulted on 1 September by two soldiers from the Kudanthanai military base.

Risk to economic and social development

IN a June report titled *Sri Lanka: Recapturing missed opportunities*, The World Bank says that Sri Lanka's future economic and social development will depend not merely on maintaining sound macroeconomic management, but more importantly on the country's ability to resolve the continuing conflict.

The conflict has reduced Sri Lanka's economic growth and the most obvious direct cost is in terms of defence expenditures, which increased from 1.3% of GDP in 1980 to 4-6% over recent years. Some of the other direct costs are government expenditures on relief, damaged infrastructure and military expenditure by the LTTE.

There are many invisible costs, of which most important is the crowding-out of public investment due to the large defence outlays. This has had adverse impacts on both domestic and foreign investment and the island's long-term growth prospects. Other indirect costs include foregone tourist arrivals, tightening of the labour market for certain categories of population, disruptions in economic activity, infrastructure bottlenecks

and reduction in social welfare due to the tight security system.

The World Bank further says 60,000 have lost their lives in the protracted conflict, 700,000 have been repeatedly dis-

placed and half a million persons are part of the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora. The conflict has taken the lives of many political leaders and long-term impacts are worst on children in the north-east. Around 400,000 children are displaced in the region, with a large proportion suffering from serious psychological trauma.

Children in the region have an added trauma of being forcibly conscripted or lured into military combat by the LTTE. The World Bank also says the conflict has rendered the administrative apparatus in the north-east non-functional. It has contributed to rising violence and degradation of social and physical capital, destroyed trust between communities and undermined the legitimacy of the State.

The concerns of the World Bank seem to have had no effect. The Sri Lankan government tabled supplementary estimates in Parliament on 9 August for an additional Rs 28 billion (\$360million) for defence. The total expenditure for defence for the year 2000, excluding many hidden expenditures, stands at a staggering Rs 80.43 billion (\$1.3 billion), nearly 8% of GDP.

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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