

LTTE extend ceasefire

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) extended the ceasefire by another month from midnight 24 January. The fighting continues in the Jaffna peninsula, but the Tigers' unilateral ceasefire is a welcome respite for the beleaguered people of north-east Sri Lanka.

The announcement of extension came after Norwegian special peace negotiator Erik Solheim rushed to London to meet LTTE's political advisor Anton Balasingham on 22 January. The LTTE say that the ceasefire extension affirms Tiger desire for peace and offers more time for the Norwegian peace effort. The LTTE called on the international community to bring pressure on the Sri Lankan government to accept the ceasefire.

Suspensions within and outside the government over the motive of the Tiger offer remain. The LTTE are accused of unilaterally breaking the ceasefires in 1990 and 1995. Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickremanayake declared that the government will continue to fight until the Tigers come for negotiations and a ceasefire thereafter would depend on their conduct.

In mid-January, President Chandrika Kumaratunge told the ruling People's Alliance that the government will not yield to international pressure. If the LTTE wants to pursue a political solution, they could submit proposals, which may be a basis for peace talks, she remarked. The President continued to insist that peace talks should be in accordance with an agreed timetable, which details every aspect of the procedure. Reports say that the LTTE declined to sign a Memorandum of Understanding outlining the process for negotiations prepared by Mr Solheim, and want the government to endorse it first.

Erik Solheim met the opposition leader Ranil Wickremasinghe in Colombo on 11 January. The United National Party (UNP) leader did not view the government's rejection of the ceasefire as a drawback but observed that peace cannot be won by war and that

The LTTE ceasefire has shed a ray of hope that a negotiated settlement is not entirely beyond our reach. The war only heaps more economic burdens and exacts greater sacrifices from our people.

*Bishop Malcolm Ranjith
Sri Lanka Bishops' Conference*

every effort must be made to draw the LTTE to negotiations. A government statement following a meeting between the Mr Solheim and the President says that the discussions were encouraging but confirms government position against a ceasefire before peace talks.

In her message on the 53rd anniversary of independence on 4 February, President Chandrika said that the cost of living is rising because of large monies spent on the war. The Sri Lankan rupee has again been devalued and the government is facing demonstrations over fuel prices, which have risen by over 20%. The UNP's protest march *Janasakthi* (People power), against soaring prices, from Kandy to Colombo, began on Independence Day.

Analysts say the deteriorating economic conditions may force the government to agree for a ceasefire. The government may continue the war until the Army re-captures Elephant Pass in the Jaffna peninsula. The LTTE seized the massive military base in April last year and advanced up to Jaffna town. Since then the Army has launched a counter offensive and has re-taken parts of the territory east of Jaffna town. Some observers believe that the government is using the ceasefire issue to pressure Britain to ban the LTTE under the Terrorism Act 2000.

The UK Act empowers the Home Secretary to proscribe an organization

which he believes commits or participates, prepares for, promotes or encourages terrorism in any country. Any person who belongs to, supports or assists such organization would commit an offence. Fundraising for a proscribed organization is also an offence. The law requires banks and businesses to report suspicions on funding arrangements or laundering of terrorist money.

Sri Lankan Foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar, who has been waging a five-year international campaign against the LTTE, warned last month that Britain's failure to ban the LTTE under the Act and close the Tiger headquarters in London would severely damage relations between the two countries. Meanwhile, 11 Tamil political parties in Sri Lanka have communicated to the British government, firmly opposing a ban on the LTTE.

The Tigers are said to raise large amounts of funds from the expatriate Tamil community, particularly in Western countries. A UK proscription would encourage the other European nations to follow suit. The US and India have already banned the LTTE. There is widespread concern that a ban may affect the Norwegian peace initiative and UK's involvement in the process. It will also strengthen the hand of extremists in Sri Lanka who are opposed to peace. Mr Balasingham warns that a ban will force the LTTE to withdraw from the Norwegian process. Others cite the threat of a British ban as a reason for LTTE declaring a ceasefire. A UK ban, they argue, would keep the Tigers on course to the negotiating table.

As the debate raged, a bomb damaged vehicles at the office of British agency Oxfam in Colombo on 31 January. Similar bomb attacks were carried out last year on Norway's embassy and the office of the Norwegian agency Redd Barna. The National Front Against Tigers (NFAT) has claimed responsibility. In January 2000, the NFAT claimed responsibility for the killing of Tamil Congress leader Kumar Ponnambalam.

THE NORTH-EAST

Protest for peace

A large number of people participated in a demonstration in Jaffna, organised by university students on 17 January, demanding peace talks and self-determination for Tamils. Earlier, Jaffna Army commander Anton Wijendra had refused permission and police warned of drastic action if the demonstration went ahead. Seven students issuing leaflets about the protest were detained.

Troops were present in full force on the day of the protest near the university and fired over hundreds of students from other schools to prevent them entering the campus. Jaffna Bishop Thomas Savundaranayagam expressed dismay at the Army's attempt to deny the democratic right of peaceful protest against war. People in the east also participated in demonstrations despite the military's warning of severe consequences.

A day earlier, the Army launched *Operation Kiniheera IX* (Anvil) and advanced with artillery support and heavy aerial bombing, from Eluthumadduval further south to Poonar. A shell killed a temple priest I Sambasivasarma. The Army faced stiff Tiger resistance but captured 7 sq kms. Sixty two soldiers were killed and 281 wounded. Forty one Tiger bodies were handed over to the LTTE through the ICRC. The Army advanced further in the second phase of *Kiniheera IX* and took control of Muhamalai on 22 January.

As fighting continues, the needs of civilians receive less attention. Jaffna

NGOs say that the aims of the Northern Resettlement and Rehabilitation Authority (NRRA) - relief and resettlement of the displaced, rebuilding of damaged property, maintenance of essential services, resumption of economic activity - have not been achieved in the last four years. NGOs are calling for the removal of unjust security restrictions and impact assessment of NRRA programmes.

Agencies also say that the displaced people in Jaffna are caught between the warring sides. The Army wants them to resettle in Chavakachcheri which is now in military hands. The LTTE is urging the people not to resettle until landmines in the area are removed. S Navaratnam, who went to Chavakachcheri to inspect his house in mid-January was seriously wounded by a landmine.

In Jaffna, some 280,000 people remain displaced, including 66,000 who fled the high security zone around Palaly and Kankesanthurai military bases in 1995. The Army has also asked people to resettle in Ariyalai and Navatkuli, east of Jaffna town. People have expressed reluctance to return because of landmines. Further, many houses have been damaged in the fighting.

S Dharmakulasingham says in a January letter to President Chandrika that soldiers killed his wife Vigneswary on 2 October at Mirusuvil. Navy personnel attacked fisherman Kanthasamy Kugarajah in early January while fishing off Velanai, seriously injuring him.

Casualties

The Army say 1,464 soldiers died in the the war with the LTTE in the year 2000 and 9,000 were wounded. The military also say that 87 civilians died and 566 were injured.

Asylum

The Navy arrested seven youths in a boat off Wennapuwa, ten miles north of Negombo in early January. Officers say that their intention was to travel to Italy to seek asylum.

Acquisition

Land Development minister DM Jayaratne announced in mid-January that from February onwards the government will acquire 360,000 acres of derelict private land. It is unclear whether this includes lands of people displaced in the current conflict.

Protection

Over 300 fishermen began a hunger strike on 8 January, before Ramnad District Collector's office in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, demanding protection from the Sri Lankan Navy in the Palk Strait. The Navy shot dead two Tamil Nadu fishermen in January and seriously wounded four others.

Arrest

Tamil Nadu police arrested two suspected LTTE members in the Mandapam refugee camp in Ramnad District. They were sent to a special detention centre for LTTE members near Chennai.

Detainee murdered in Kalutara prison

TAMIL detainee Shanmuganathan Nithiyanathan, 27, was murdered on 4 January in Kalutara prison, 25 miles south of Colombo. Prison officers say his mutilated body was found following a clash among detainees. But Tamil MP P Selvarajah expressed suspicion, in light of earlier killings in the prison, and has called for an investigation.

Currently over 800 Tamils are held in Kalutara under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) and Emergency regulations, including 630 from north-east Sri Lanka. Detainees complained to a team of the Sri Lankan Human Rights Commission (HRC) visiting Kalutara prison in January, about their treatment, insecurity and conditions in the prison.

They say food provided to them is insufficient and adequate medicines are not available in the prison hospital, particularly for diabetes and heart disease. Relatives from the north-east find it extremely difficult to visit the prison because of restrictions imposed under Emergency regulations. Cases against many of them in the High Courts of Colombo, Kandy and Badulla are usually postponed for long periods, sometimes to nine months. Five youths ordered to be released by the courts are still in custody.

The police arrested Jaffna journalist Nadarasa Thiruchelvam, 48, on the night of 2 January, while in Colombo for a wedding. Mr Thiruchelvam has informed the HRC that he was handcuffed to a

chair and confined for 12 days in a room. On 14 January, he was transferred to the sixth floor of the police headquarters, where he was beaten with plastic pipes filled with concrete. His wife was allowed one visit but was not informed of the reasons for the arrest.

Colombo human rights agencies say search operations and Tamil arrests in the city continue. The Centre for Human Rights and Development estimates that 18,000 arrests were made in 2000. The agencies are particularly concerned over arrests in the nights. Lodges and shops in Grandpass were searched on the night of 25 January and 35 Tamils were taken into custody. Reports say all were released after enquiry.

■ Civilian air passengers at risk

STF fire

KARUNAKARAN ANITA, 11, and Thillainathan Latha, 23, were injured in a shooting incident in Batticaloa town on 15 January. Local people say a police Special Task Force (STF) patrol fired into their house without any provocation. In late January, the Army shot four civilians who went into jungles in Vaharai in northern Batticaloa. Velayutham Vasanthakumar was killed.

The Human Rights Commission was notified that refugee Sellathamby Anantharajah, 42, was detained by the Army on 20 January. No reasons have been given for the arrest or detention. Mr Anantharajah had been living in Peithalai refugee camp for the last five years with five members of his family.

In early January, the Army denied permission to Social Services officers to enter LTTE-controlled Vaharai area to assist civilians. These areas were badly affected by a cyclone in December. Social Services minister Milroy Fernando has assured equal treatment of flood victims in Army areas and LTTE territory. But local people say discrimination continues. Army restrictions on transport of goods into Tiger areas and on the freedom of movement remain.

In Trincomalee District, agencies told the visiting US ambassador that civilians in LTTE-held areas are suffering due to restrictions on food and medicines. They say medical facilities are minimal and children are affected by malnutrition.

Travellers between Trincomalee and Jaffna continue to face difficulties as a result of irregular ship services and security force restrictions. Regular services were affected after the LTTE began targeting ships in June 1997 alleging that the vessels were also carrying soldiers. Air services between Jaffna and Colombo were suspended after a passenger plane crashed into the sea, following an LTTE threat, in September 1998.

Although air services resumed on 17 November last year, passengers complain about difficulties in obtaining permits. Reports say that planes carrying soldiers fly close behind passenger planes to and from Jaffna. Passengers are extremely nervous and say lives are at risk.

Following reports of food shortages in Jaffna, Northern Rehabilitation minister Douglas Devananda has sought permission from President Chandrika to hire two foreign ships to transport food and construction materials. The minister says that the lack of regular ship services has adversely affected reconstruction and development work in Jaffna.

At a meeting with Trincomalee military officer Gamini Hettiarachchi in mid-January, NGOs complained that people are being harassed at a new Army observation post at Rakkuli, two miles west of Muthur. The post was established after the LTTE infiltrated nearby areas to launch attacks on military bases. NGOs also brought to the notice of the commander that five schools in the district are occupied by soldiers.

Death penalty

IN a 10 January statement, Amnesty International has expressed concern over reports that the death penalty may be resumed in Sri Lanka after 24 years. In the face of rising crime, the Sri Lankan Cabinet decided in March 1999 to reintroduce the death penalty and since then pressure within the government to implement the decision has been mounting. Reports say new Justice minister Batty Weerakoon is determined to bring back the death penalty. Under current law the death penalty may be imposed for murder, abetment to suicide, treason and drug trafficking. Amnesty says if Sri Lanka resumes executions, it would be against international trend towards abolition. So far 108 countries have abolished the death penalty and on 18 December 2000 a petition for a moratorium on the penalty, signed by three million people, was presented to the UN Secretary General. Amnesty has urged the government to consider a commission of inquiry into rising levels of crime which would propose effective measures.

According to reports, 90% of the crimes are related to unemployment, poverty or political rivalry. The war is a major obstacle in the path to solutions. The World Bank refers to the constraints imposed by war as one of the reasons for poverty reduction remaining below expectation.

Colombo University Sociology Professor Siripala Hettige says some 35,000 Army and police deserters are the main reason for the rise in crime. Many of them have retained their weapons and are readily available for contract killings and robberies. According to the police, 1,385 murders, unrelated to the ethnic conflict, were committed in 1998 and the following year 1,711 were killed. In the first six months of 2000, there were 608 murders and 4,000 robberies.

Mannar deaths

THE Mannar Citizens Committee says that the Army killed 32 civilians in the district in the year 2000. Over 140 were detained and 12 have disappeared. Some 60 people are still being held in military camps within the district. Hindu priest Athinarayanasarma, his wife Kumudini and a relative were taken into custody on 12 January when they entered the district. The priest had been transferred from Batticaloa District to serve in a temple in Mannar. No reasons have been given for the arrest and detention.

According to the security forces, LTTE cadre continue to infiltrate Army-controlled areas in Mannar. On 6 January, explosives were found in a house at Murunkan, 12 miles south-east

of Mannar town. Police say ten Tigers in the house at the time escaped.

The Northern Resettlement and Rehabilitation Authority (NRRA) says that the main aim in the year 2001 would be resettlement of refugees currently in military-held areas. In the beginning, some 2,000 families displaced from LTTE-controlled Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi districts would be temporarily settled on lands belonging to the state in Nanattan area, west of Murunkan. People displaced from Trincomalee and Vavuniya districts will be returned to their home areas. Reports say that the Army shot dead seven LTTE cadre during a search operation at Omanthai, seven miles north of Vavuniya town.

Patients forced to submit documents to the LTTE

Economic blockade

MANNAR Catholic Bishop Rayappu Joseph, who visited LTTE-controlled areas in the Vanni recently says that only 25% of the food and medicines needed is allowed into the region. Concern has been raised following Sri Lankan government Media Centre claims that there is no economic blockade of the north-east and food is regularly supplied by the Essential Services Commissioner (ESC).

According to reports, many people in the Vanni are affected by under-nutrition and the lack of medicines. Doctors in northern Mullaitivu hospitals say nearly 15% of the children born last year were of low birth weight due to poor maternal nutrition. Twenty five children under 12 were admitted to Kilinochchi hospital in December suffering from malnutrition.

In Kilinochchi hospital, 18,870 patients were treated in December and 18 people died, including two of malaria. According to hospital reports infant mortality rate increased last year compared to previous years. In the hospital, of 174 who died in 2000, 14 were children and 25 were still born. As a result of lack of medicines and medical equipment 150 people died within 24 hours of admission. Among the 12,917 treated at Mallavi hospital in December, 2,034 suffered from malaria and 209 from diarrhoea. Between 1990 and 2000, 66 children were still born and six died after birth in Mulliyavalai maternity home.

Reports say anti-rabies vaccine is exhausted in the Vanni hospitals and in the stores of the Health Department. Seriously ill patients are currently being sent to Vavuniya hospital for treatment. People going to Vavuniya are expected to hand over the National Identity Card (NIC) and the Family Card to the LTTE, along with the NIC and Family Card of a relative below the age of 45 who remains in the Vanni. The latter will be taken to task if the person leaving the Vanni does not return. This LTTE rule also applies to patients going to Vavuniya hospital.

In a January letter to the Health minister John Senaviratne, Vanni MP Rasu Kuganeswaran says that a three year-old child died at Poovarasankulam hospital because there is no ambulance at the hospital to take patients to Vavuniya. The MP says that in the last eight months four other people died because of the same reason. Ten year-old Akkarayankulam

Displaced persons and other Tamils in the north-east faced discrimination, restrictions on movement, arbitrary arrest and custodial abuse. Due to government restrictions, Tamil civilians were often unable to reach work sites, attend schools or seek urgent medical care.

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student, I Murugananthan, died of septicaemia in late January.

The Ceylon Tamil Teachers Association says in a letter to Education minister Susil Premajayantha that a number of items are banned or restricted into the Vanni, including school equipment, exercise books, laboratory and office equipment, books, calculators, copiers and computers. According to reports, there are 11,335 disabled people in the Vanni and 432 need artificial limbs. The government has imposed a ban on materials needed to make artificial limbs.

In Vavuniya District, there are over 138,000 people, including 3,000 in LTTE-controlled areas. Some 70,000 people are from other districts. Over 23,000 are in 15 government refugee camps in the district. The refugees live

under severe military restrictions in cramped conditions and say the food supplied is inadequate.

A study carried out by the Health Department in the camps indicates that the refugees suffer from poor health conditions. Forty two per cent of children below five years of age suffered from moderate or severe undernutrition. Some 56% of pregnant women and 52% lactating mothers were anaemic and 50% of young women between the ages of 13 and 19 were malnourished.

Of the 5,700 families in the camps, 5,490 receive assistance from the World Food Programme and other families are assisted by the ESC. The ESC provides each family between Rs 336 and Rs 1,260 worth dry rations per month, based on the number of members in the family. But according to assessments made by officers on basic needs, families should receive between Rs 560 and Rs 2,880 worth dry rations. Under the WFP assistance each person receives Rs 11.10 worth dry rations per day. All members of the family are entitled.

Health officers are also concerned over long-term psychological impact of displacement and life in cramped conditions. They recommend immediate measures to resettle the refugees and provide them assistance until they are able to earn a living. They also say that displaced people must receive nutritional supplements to promote their health.

According to reports, over 6,000 people were killed in Vavuniya District between 1990 and 1999 mainly due to military operations. Over 13,400 died in Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi districts during the same period. On the night of 9 January, a masked gang of four abducted student S Muhundan from his home at Pandarikulam. Fellow students staged a demonstration against the abduction.

Sources say Tamil groups allied to the Army are responsible for a number of abductions and disappearances. Mr Muhundan was found blindfolded the following night in a rice field. Amnesty International says Suppiah Sivalingam, a refugee from Kilinochchi, was ordered to report at the 'Sanasa' Army camp on 14 January before he is issued a permit to stay in Vavuniya. He went to the camp and has not been seen since. Amnesty has expressed concern for his safety.

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. The Sri Lanka Monitor for a particular month may contain information relating to events of previous months or the early part of the following month.

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