

LTTE withdraw from talks

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) declared on 21 April that they were suspending participation in peace negotiations with the Sri Lankan government. The seventh round of peace talks were scheduled in Thailand from 29 April to 2 May. As soon as the announcement was made, President Chandrika Kumaratunge issued an order alerting the armed forces.

LTTE's chief negotiator Anton Balasingham listed a number of reasons for the decision in a letter to Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe, including failure on the part of the Sri Lankan government to fully implement the ceasefire agreement of February 2002. But the main cause that led to the withdrawal is the exclusion of the Tigers from a US-sponsored international donor conference in Washington on 14 April.

Mr Balasingham says that they view the 'exclusion of the LTTE, the principle partner to peace and the authentic representatives of the Tamil people, from discussions on critical matters affecting the economic and social welfare of the Tamil nation, as a grave breach of good faith'.

The US say legal constraints had prevented an invitation to the Tigers. The LTTE remain on the US list of terrorist organisations since 8 October 1997. US ambassador Ashley Wills admits that the ceasefire has not been perfect, but notes that the blame does not fall exclusively on the Sri Lankan government. He called on the LTTE to reflect on its own transgressions such as assassination of opponents, intimidation of Muslims, taxation without representation, aggressive *Sea Tiger* behaviour and child recruitment.

The LTTE point out that the military occupation of Tamil lands, denying the right of displaced people to return home, is unfair and unjust. They accuse the government of distortion of the extreme conditions of poverty and deprivation of the Tamils in macro-economic policies. The Tigers are particularly incensed by the government's economic strategy document *Regaining Sri Lanka*, which they say fails to examine causes of poverty,

We have not terminated negotiations. We have intentionally created an interval for government to take immediate and constructive measures to address humanitarian issues faced by Tamils.

Anton Balasingham
LTTE's Chief Negotiator

effects of ethnic war and the unique conditions of devastation in the north-east.

The LTTE also announced that they would not take part in the aid conference in Tokyo on 9 June, where a sum of \$2 billion is expected to be pledged for reconstruction efforts. The work of the committees, including the Sub-Committee on Immediate Humanitarian and Rehabilitation Needs (SIHRN) have also come to a standstill.

The opposition parties, including those vehemently opposing the peace process, condemned the LTTE for the withdrawal and called for Tiger decommissioning as a pre-condition for resuming talks. Lakshman Kadirgamar, who is foreign affairs advisor to the President, demanded the inclusion of India in monitoring the ceasefire.

Despite the apparent cordiality in peace talks, tension between the parties has been mounting following confrontations between the Sri Lankan Navy and the LTTE's naval wing, the *Sea Tigers*. The Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM), the international ceasefire monitoring body, had asked both the Sri Lankan government and the Tigers to submit proposals to avoid clashes.

On 9 April, the LTTE proposed the recognition of the *Sea Tigers* as a naval unit on par with the Sri Lankan Navy, the demarcation of a line of control, extending 200 nautical miles along the north-

east coast from the Jaffna peninsula to Trincomalee, for navigation, training and live firing exercises. Lines of control have been recognized on land, under the ceasefire agreement.

Observers say *Sea Tiger* chief Col. Soosai wants to strengthen the naval unit because of his concern over US military assistance to Colombo. The LTTE have maintained that the Sri Lankan Navy operation *Waruna Kirana* (Coloured Rays), continuing since 25 May 2001, throwing a naval cordon around the north-east coast, is not included in the ceasefire agreement and therefore a violation. The government insists that the ceasefire agreement does not affect the Navy's duty to safeguard the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka and claims that the LTTE informally accepted such position.

The SLMM, has emphasized throughout that 'balance of forces' is vital to maintenance of peace. The head of SLMM, Trygve Tellefson proposed in a working paper on 20 April that the *Sea Tigers* should be recognized as a *de facto* naval unit and excluded from the regulations under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, which impose restrictions on the power of outboard motors of boats.

Indian commentators warned that a LTTE naval force with freedom of movement has serious security implications for the region and called on India to pressure Sri Lanka to reject Tiger demands. In Sri Lanka, the opposition parties were up in arms, accusing the SLMM of favouring the Tigers and undermining the sovereignty of Sri Lanka. In the face of such opposition, the SLMM withdrew the proposals and submitted fresh proposals.

As governments and agencies around the world urged the LTTE to reconsider their decision and return to negotiations, people in Sri Lanka braced themselves for the nightmare scenario of war. The Sri Lankan government strengthened security of ministers and other VIPs. But Constitutional Affairs minister GL Peiris expressed confidence that disputes will be resolved quickly and negotiations resumed in the near future.

Jaffna Peninsula

EPDP cadre killed

AMIRTHALINGAM RASAN, 19, an officer of the Tamil party Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) went missing on 4 April in Jaffna town and his body was found in an abandoned house at Soorawathai, three days later. Chunnakam police say his hands were tied behind his back. The suspicion for the killing has fallen on the LTTE, which is targeting members of opposition groups. A hotel belonging to Tamil group EPRLF and the office of PLOTE on Vembady road in the town came under grenade attack on the night of 24 April.

While these attacks took place, the disagreement over a new Army camp in the heart of Jaffna town continued in April. Tamil MPs met Jaffna Army commander Sarath Fonseka on 9 April and expressed opposition to any military camp in populated areas. Defence Secretary Austin Fernando has proposed closure of the Army camps currently in Subash and Gnanam hotels, and re-establishment in a four-acre plot close to Jaffna Telecom office. Reports say that the LTTE has rejected the proposal.

Over 153,700 internally displaced people (IDP) belonging to 41,500 families have returned from the Vanni to Jaffna. Reports say only 60% of the families are able to resettle in their own homes. The homes of the others have been destroyed, are in no-go areas of landmines or lie in high security zones.

Muslim organisations have condemned the discrimination against Muslim IDPs resettling in Jaffna. Local

officers are said to be delaying payments. It is alleged that those Muslims who came via the A9 Vavuniya-Jaffna road have not received any resettlement payment or other assistance. In addition, Muslim IDPs continue to face LTTE restrictions on their occupations.

In early April, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe appointed Jaffna MP T Maheswaran and North-East Governor Asoka Jayawardena as joint chairmen of the Jaffna District Development Committee, which has been allocated Rs 600 million for development projects.

Mr Maheswaran again urged the Prime Minister to remove the security forces from schools and temples. He points out that Mathagal Murugan temple and Hartley College in Point Pedro are occupied and says that 925 fisher families in Koyilakandy and Karainagar are unable to fish because of the presence of the military. In southern Thenmaratchy, farmers are not able to cultivate 6,000 acres of land. The Army allowed only 100 devotees to the Valliamman temple at Maravanpulavu on 14 April - the Tamil-Sinhala New Year Day.

In early April, Thangarajah Ganojan, 12, was seriously wounded by a landmine in Navatkuli, six miles east of Jaffna town, while playing near his house. Ranjan Sasikumar, 21, suffered serious injuries by a landmine on 29 April at Urumpirai, five miles north of Jaffna. He was involved in the construction of a new building in the area when he was wounded.

Thugs

Thugs instigated by a politician entered a police station in Seeduwa on 5 April and released a man held on remand. On the same day, thugs led by another politician damaged a police station at Wennappuwa and attempted to release five supporters in custody.

Meeting

Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunge met Tamil Nadu Chief Minister J Jayalalitha on 7 April in Chennai. Ms Jayalalitha is reported to have highlighted the need for early repatriation of Sri Lankan refugees in the southern Indian state. The clashes between Indian and Sri Lankan fishermen were also discussed.

Bridge

Sri Lankan High Commissioner Mangala Munasinghe announced in New Delhi that a joint India-Sri Lanka group has been commissioned to study the feasibility of joining the two countries by a bridge across the Palk Strait.

Promise

UNHCR's goodwill ambassador and Hollywood star, Angelina Jolie visiting Jaffna on 16 April, promised a donation of \$10,000 to help rebuild the children's ward in the Jaffna hospital.

Arrest

Thirteen youths waiting to board an illegal boat to Italy were arrested on the Palavi coast in Puttalam District in April. They had each paid Rs 300,000 (\$3,150) to travel agents.

The Vanni

SLMM on the sinking of a Chinese ship

THE Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM), in its report on the sinking of a Chinese trawler on 3 March off the coast of Mullaitivu District, says that 'armed elements', not recognized by the government or the LTTE, may be responsible.

SLMM reports that these criminal elements pose a serious threat to the peace process and should be disarmed, but has not identified them. According to the SLMM, no evidence linking either the Navy or the LTTE to the attack has been found. The Tigers and the Sri Lankan Navy have denied involvement in the attack at sea.

The SLMM also says it is not pointing at any specific political parties or groups in Sri Lanka. Observers say there is no

other group in the island, other than the Sri Lankan Navy and the LTTE, capable of launching such an attack. Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunge has criticized the decision of the SLMM.

In early April letters to the Navy commander Daya Sandagiri and the chief of the ceasefire monitors Maj. Gen. Trygve Tellefson, the President accused the SLMM of failing to conduct an impartial enquiry and attempting to equate the LTTE with the sovereign state of Sri Lanka. She alleges that there is much evidence to raise suspicion against the LTTE. The SLMM has always emphasized the need for balance of the two opposing forces for the success of the peace process.

Fishermen in Mullaitivu are afraid to go fishing at sea because of threats by the Sri Lankan Navy. Clashes between the Navy and the *Sea Tigers* have made the area even more hazardous. The Navy claim they are engaged in *Operation Waruna Kirana* (Coloured Rays) to protect Sri Lankan territory and have increased naval patrols. Fishermen say their inability to go fishing has resulted in the rise in prices of sea food.

According to reports, an internal naval enquiry has found no evidence of a LTTE attack on the Sri Lankan ship *Lanka Muditha*. Accusations had been made that on 31 March, the *Sea Tigers* launched an assault on *Lanka Muditha*, which was carrying 1,700 soldiers.

Trincomalee and Batticaloa

Trinco ethnic violence

FOUR Muslims and three Tamils were killed in ethnic violence in Trincomalee District in April, following the disappearance of Muthur residents Mafool Naem and Razak Jabeer on 31 March. The LTTE was blamed for abduction, but local Tiger leader C Pathuman denied the accusation.

Violence flared in Muthur after the mother of one of the missing youths committed suicide on 15 April. In addition to the deaths, 13 Tamils and five Muslims were wounded. According to Muthur *Pradeshiya Sabha* (regional council), 6,779 Muslim, 1,118 Tamil and 34 Sinhalese families were displaced in 34 *Grama Sevaka* (Village Headman) divisions. They have taken refuge in

mosques, schools and churches. Over 100 houses in several settlements were damaged or burned. In Muthur alone 40 houses were reduced to ashes.

The police imposed a curfew in Muthur from 1.15pm on 18 April, after a shooting incident in Kaddaiparichchan, two miles east of Muthur, in which six people were injured. More troops were deployed on the streets with orders to shoot any law-breaker.

Government ministers Rauf Hakeem and Mohamed Maharoof, were sent to Trincomalee on 15 April by the Prime Minister to diffuse tension and attend to the needs of the people. But they soon began quarrelling among themselves over political differences.

A discussion took place between a Muslim delegation and LTTE leaders on 22 April, in the presence of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission. A statement issued by both sides called for immediate end to violence, urging the government to maintain law and order in areas under its control without taking sides. The LTTE undertook to ensure the safety of Muslims in territory under their control. Both parties agreed to cooperate in achieving peace and unity.

But the following day, unidentified persons shot dead Zainulabdeen Lebbe at Selvanagar in Thoppur, five miles south-east of Muthur. A Muslim woman named Sabeela was shot and injured at Allainagar in the same area. The LTTE blamed a hidden hand behind the shooting, and an attempt to drive a wedge between the Tamils and Muslims.

Further south in Batticaloa District, supporters of EPRLF and LTTE clashed on 13 April at Arayampathy. EPRLF members Subramaniam Jegathevan and Alaguthurai Ganeshan were shot dead. Police arrested three youths and the local magistrate ordered an identity parade.

Paramanathan Ravindrakumar, 37, an Army intelligence officer, was shot and injured in Batticaloa town on 15 April. Two days later, Alayadivembu *Pradeshiya Sabha* chairman and EPDP member Marimuthu Rasalingam, 42, was shot dead by two assailants at Akkaraipatru, 35 miles further south. Tamil group EPDP says that the LTTE is responsible for these shootings.

Children

Conscription

THE Sri Lankan human rights agency, University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna) (UTHR) has accused the international community, in a March report titled *Child conscription: A tragedy of contradictions*, of failing to take proper action on child recruitment by the LTTE. The Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM), a number of UN bodies including UNICEF, the ICRC and many international NGOs have a presence in north-east Sri Lanka. UTHR says that international involvement in the peace process is meaningful only if it enhances human rights, and that the LTTE must be convinced to relinquish its extreme ethno-centric viewpoint, respect the concerns of others in the country and show tangible progress towards upholding human values. Disproportionate importance has been given to the military dimension, UTHR alleges. While agencies are watching the military balance, there has been a steady decline of democratic and human rights values, especially in relation to political opponents, women and children.

According to the UTHR, recruitment of children by the LTTE, mainly in Batticaloa and Amparai districts is continuing. Tiger representative in the Batticaloa unit of the SLMM, S Sinnaiah said in September 2002 that there were 12,000 underage recruits from all districts of the north-east in the LTTE. The Tigers have pledged to the UNICEF that underage recruits will be released. Some have been set free. But UTHR says that from mid-January to mid-February, LTTE forcibly removed 70 youths from Murakkottanchenai, 12 miles north-west of Batticaloa town. On 3 March, 14 year-old Rangesh Linganathan was abducted from Puthur village, near Batticaloa town. UTHR alleges that the LTTE told the boy's parents that he would be killed if they complained to the SLMM.

Batticaloa

STF attack

TWO civilians were wounded and admitted to hospital in an attack by members of the police Special Task Force (STF) at Kaluvanchikudy, 15 miles south of Batticaloa town on 27 April. The STF began assaulting the people after losing to a civilian team in a tug-of-war contest during a sports festival.

A *hartal* (general strike) was staged in Kaluvanchikudy the following day. Batticaloa MP G Krishnapillai has demanded an enquiry. The STF has been responsible for grave violations of human rights in the eastern region, before the February 2002 ceasefire and no charges have been brought for the massacres carried out by the STF. People say that the STF continues to act with impunity.

According to reports, the firing of weapons from the Thampitty STF camp on Chenkalady-Badulla road, is affecting resettlement of IDPs. Catholic Bishop Kingsley Swampillai has brought the issue to the notice of the SLMM.

The security forces have issued an order preventing repairs to Parameswara school in Valaiyiravu, a mile south-west of Batticaloa town. The repairs, assisted by NORAD, were to be carried out at a cost of Rs 1.2 million. The Airforce had granted permission earlier, but now says that security implications will have to be examined. The school is in a high security zone. The Puthur school, which has been granted assistance by the World Bank, is facing similar problems.

Human Rights

Corruption in visa issues in Colombo foreign missions

Asylum returns

REHABILITATION minister Jayalath Jayawardena said in early April that he had requested Swiss ministers not to return rejected asylum seekers from Switzerland before permanent peace is achieved in Sri Lanka. He made the request during a visit to Switzerland.

Mr Jayawardena says that he explained to the Swiss ministers that peace talks were taking place between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE and no agreement for lasting peace had been reached. The Sri Lankan government has indicated that resettlement of internally displaced people (IDP) would receive priority over reception of refugees from other countries.

Some European nations seem to believe that the ceasefire agreement guarantees safety of civilians. British government ministers have mentioned Sri Lanka as a safe country where refugees could be returned. However, the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) and the Sri Lankan Human Rights Commission have

reported hundreds of violations, since the ceasefire. The Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), the repeal or amendment of which is a primary objective of the EU's High Level Working Group, continues in force intact. The problems of detainees under the PTA remain to be solved.

Veerasamy Yoganathan, 63, who was held under the PTA for 84 months and produced before court more than 80 times, but without trial, was released in April, after his plight was highlighted in Colombo newspapers. Mr Yoganathan says that a number of others, including Thandavan Rajalingam of Passara in the Hill Country, are held for several years without trial. Most of them had suffered torture at the hands of the security forces.

S Lingaratnam was arrested in July 1992 in Trincomalee. No reasons were given for his arrest. He suffered extreme torture and a confession was extracted from him. He was produced before a magistrate in July 1995 and a case was filed in the High Court only in October

1996. Since then, the case has been postponed 63 times. Sixty five year-old S Thatchanamurthy is detained under the PTA for the last eight years and has been mentally affected. Other prisoners say he has not been provided proper treatment.

Meanwhile, according to the Sri Lankan newspaper *Sunday Times*, an officer in the British High Commission in Colombo has been suspended for demanding Rs 500,000 (\$5,260) for some visas and sexual favours from applicants. The newspaper report also alleges that ineligible persons were granted visa and genuine applicants complained of rude treatment and other forms of harassment in the visa section.

According to a *BBC* report on 2 May, nine people, including former US State Department officers Acey Johnson and Ms Long Lee, have been charged in a California court for corruption in the issue of visas at the US embassy in Colombo. The charges follow a 11-month long investigation.

Long Range Reconnaissance Patrols

Tigers blame long arm of the government

LTTE negotiator Anton Balasingham claimed in a speech on 7 April in Geneva that the Sri Lankan government's Long-Range Reconnaissance Patrol (LRRP) had infiltrated the Tiger-controlled areas of the northern Vanni region.

Mr Balasingham says that a claymore remote-controlled mine was recently found on a road on which LTTE leader V Prabhakaran was scheduled to travel. A search operation was ordered and thousands of Tigers combed the jungles of Vanni to apprehend LRRP members.

The LRRP is part of the Directorate of Military Intelligence (DMI), directed from a secret location in Athurugiriya. According to Colombo newspaper *Sunday Times*, this safehouse was raided on 2 January by Kandy police, who found weapons and arrested six soldiers. Unauthorized operations were alleged, and police filed a case against Army chief Lionel Balagalle and Director of DMI Kapila Hendavithana. A Commission headed by former High Court judge Dharmasiri Jayawickrema is probing DMI operations conducted from the safehouse in Athurugiriya.

The LTTE claim that the LRRP is trained by foreign intelligence services and responsible for the killing of LTTE leaders, Col. Shanker, Col. Nisam and Lt. Col. Gangai Amaran. They say others such as Col. Balraj, Col. Jeyam and political leader SP Thamilselvan have also

been targeted. The Army have denied LRRP operations in the north-east, but say that LTTE hit squads have penetrated the capital Colombo.

Sources allege that Tiger intelligence chief Pottu Amman has issued an order for the elimination of all members of the LRRP and other informants. According to press reports, at least 20 military intelligence operatives have been murdered since the ceasefire in February 2002. Former LTTE member Lingasamy Devarasa, was shot on 26 April by two people who arrived in an autorickshaw. He later died in hospital. The incident took place at Kohuwela in Colombo. Mr Devarasa had helped in LRRP operations in Batticaloa District.

Another LRRP operative and former member of Tamil group PLOTE, K R Ragupathy was killed in Mt Lavinia on 18 March. The security forces have introduced new security measures in Colombo, including checkpoints to track down the Tiger hit squads. Observers believe that the Tigers may have informants within the military and warned that there will be more deaths.

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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