

Tigers demand interim body

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) urged the establishment of an interim administrative structure for the Tamil-dominated north-east region, but rejected Sri Lankan government proposals in late May declaring that they are inadequate.

The month of May saw a flurry of diplomatic activity to persuade the Tigers to resume peace negotiations and to participate in the international aid conference in Tokyo on 9 and 10 June. Japan's special envoy Yasushi Akashi held talks with LTTE leader V Prabhakaran in the Vanni on 7 May. Norway's Foreign minister Jan Petersen met the Tiger leader on 15 May and this was followed two days later by a meeting between LTTE's SP Thamichelvan and Norwegian Deputy Foreign minister Vidar Helgesen.

Mr Prabhakaran deplored that the Sub-Committee on Immediate Humanitarian and Rehabilitation Needs (SIHRN) had become ineffective and stressed the importance of implementing all decisions taken at the six rounds of peace talks. He insisted that some 100,000 internal refugees should be allowed to resettle in military high security zones (HSZ) in the north-east region and criticized the Sri Lankan government for seeking Indian advice on HSZs.

The LTTE leader's main demand was the establishment of an interim administration for the north-east. He emphasized that an efficient, transparent and accountable interim structure with 'adequate legal authority' was needed for successful implementation of rehabilitation and reconstruction projects without delay, corruption or bureaucratic obstacles.

In response to the Tiger demand, the government submitted proposals for a three-layered structure - an interim Apex Body to carry responsibility for planning, prioritizing and monitoring programmes in the north-east. The Apex Body will reflect the ethnic composition of the north-east and will directly determine utilization of the resources from the North East Reconstruction Fund (NERF). There will be a Management Board chaired by

An interim structure needs endorsement by the international community in order to mobilize adequate resources for the reconstruction of the north-east.

*Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe
Letter to Anton Balasingham 1 June 2003*

a Special Commissioner which will coordinate implementation of projects by government agencies and NGOs. The proposals also provided for a Development and Reconstruction Council (DRC).

In letters to Vidar Helgesen on 21 May, and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe on 30 May, LTTE's chief negotiator Anton Balasingham said that government proposals failed to define powers and functions of the decision-making bodies and to offer significant participatory role for the LTTE. He also condemned the proposal to give the donor community the final determination over the establishment of the DRC. He stated that the proposals ignored the reality that the LTTE runs a *de-facto* administration in the north-east.

The Prime Minister replied Mr Balasingham's letter on 1 June, assuring that the Apex Body would have 'adequate administrative authority' and will play a dominant role in strategic decision making in respect of rehabilitation and reconstruction. The PM also pledged that the LTTE would have a majority voice in the Apex Body, subject to effective safeguards mutually agreed upon for Muslim and Sinhalese interests.

While the parties to the conflict and international diplomats were involved in constructive efforts, President Chandrika Kumaratunge added another problem to

the crisis-ridden government in Sri Lanka on 9 May by wresting control of the Development Lotteries Board (DLB) from Economic Reform and Science minister Milinda Moragoda.

When the take over of the DLB became public, over 200 ruling United National Front (UNF) supporters entered the Government Printers in Colombo's Borella suburb and smashed equipment, furniture and vehicles, in an attempt to prevent the President's order being printed and published in the Government Gazette. Thereafter, the police closed and sealed the press on the directions of the government.

The DLB was established in 1983 and since 1997 is covered by an Act of Parliament. Profits of the DLB go into the President's Fund and the money is used for postgraduate scholarships to underprivileged students and assistance to the poor, particularly for medical treatment. In May, the President allocated Rs 100 million from the Fund for flood relief. She alleges that the government is preventing DLB money to the Fund.

The President took over the DLB by an order under Article 44 of the Sri Lankan Constitution, which allows her to change the functions assigned to a Cabinet minister at any time. Opposition People's Alliance (PA) supporters argue that the order came into force when it was signed by the President, but UNF members contend that it would become effective only when it is published in the Government Gazette.

Violence erupted in Puttalam District as a consequence of the DLB issue. On 13 May, suspected UNF supporters entered to house of PA local council member D Sirisena at Mathurankuli and caused extensive damage. A rice mill belonging to PA local councillor W Dayaratne at Mellankulam was also damaged. Observers say the President has taken the first step towards her aim of destabilising the government. They warn that the power struggle between the President and the Prime Minister could irrevocably damage the peace process.

Jaffna Peninsula

Soldiers attack housing scheme

REPORTS say that some soldiers from Palaly military base entered several houses in the Ketpali Housing Scheme at Mirusuvil in southern Thenmaratchy area on 17 May and attacked civilians, damaged doors and windows and smashed household goods. S Yogarasa and P Prabhakaran suffered injuries and were admitted to hospital. Soldiers are also accused of attempting to rape a woman.

Jaffna Fishermen Associations say fishermen are being harassed by the security forces. Two fishermen were admitted to hospital in early May after an attack by the Navy off Mathagal, north-east of the peninsula. Some fishermen in Gurunagar near Jaffna town were also assaulted and arrested. The Army has constructed barbed wire fences along the sea coast in some areas, making movement of fishermen difficult. They have also ordered the removal of shops supplying food to fishermen on the coast.

While civilians faced problems from the security forces, the LTTE continued to target other militant groups. Tamil group EPDP member and former local councillor D Jeyarasa, 45, was shot dead on 3 May at Point Pedro, while returning home after distributing EPDP's newspaper *Makkal Kural* (People's Voice).

The LTTE office in Vadamaratchy was searched on 1 June by the Army for radio equipment. Tiger Jaffna leader S Ilamparithy accused the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) of joining the search in breach of its neutral role. Press reports say that the SLMM has

agreed that future inspections will be carried out by the SLMM alone.

Hundreds of people demonstrated before the Jaffna government secretariat on 5 May against a new military camp in the heart of the town. Following demands to vacate Subash and Gnanam hotels in the town, the Defence Ministry chose the location for the new base. NGOs say a military base close to the public library, market and government offices will affect civilian movement. Army officers have called on the SLMM to intervene. A protest was also staged in north-eastern Valvettithurai on 2 May against a proposed Army camp near the playground of Chithampara College.

Concern has been expressed over continuing discrimination in resettlement payments to returning internal refugees. Those returning from the Vanni are paid Rs 25,000 for temporary shelters, but returnees from southern Sri Lanka are denied this payment. After the Vavuniya-Jaffna A9 road was opened on 15 February last year, 44,181 families have returned to Jaffna but only 4,225 families have received assistance for shelter.

Some 22,000 war widows in Jaffna peninsula are also suffering without proper assistance. Most of them lack food, clothing and medicines for their children. Reports say only 10% of the widows receive assistance from NGOs or government agencies. S Pradeepan, 22, was wounded by a landmine in late May at Panichchady near Iyakachchi when he went to inspect his house.

Injured

Following an altercation with a shop owner on 1 June, some 100 Navy personnel attacked people in Mabola, seven miles north of Colombo. Reports say 26 civilians were injured. Over 500 people demonstrated the next day in the streets, demanding the arrest of the offenders.

Committee

On 2 June, Defence minister Tilak Marapane appointed a committee headed by retired judge Oliver Weerasena to enquire into attacks on journalists in Jaffna on 12 February. Meanwhile, Tamil Journalist P Manickavasagam complained to the Defence Secretary that he was threatened with death on 7 May by a Tamil militant group in Vavuniya.

Arrest

Suspected LTTE members Asirvatham Sathyapavan, Devarajah Sasiharan and Gunapalan Sujith were arrested in mid-May at Ranong, 300 miles southwest of Bangkok. Thailand police say they had guns and ammunition in their possession and had been involved in weapons smuggling for a long time. On 23 May, a Thai court denied bail to the suspects.

Order

According to reports, the LTTE has ordered barbers (hair dressers) in Jaffna to close their shops on Wednesdays instead of Sundays. The Tigers also announced a penalty of Rs 100 for barbers not obeying the order.

Vanni & Trincomalee

Internally displaced people in Vanni

SOME 56,200 people still remain displaced in government-held areas of Vavuniya and Mannar districts, while 197,800 continue as refugees in LTTE-controlled zones of Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu, Mannar and Vavuniya. The internal refugees receive dry food rations from the government, consisting mainly of rice, wheat flour, lentils, sugar and milk powder. According to Government Agent (GA) K Ganesh, 11,696 persons were in 13 refugee camps at the end of May in Vavuniya District. Since the ceasefire agreement in February 2002, some 12,500 people have been resettled in the district.

Restrictions on some goods to the LTTE-controlled areas remain. Permits

from the relevant GA is needed to transport petrol, diesel, iron rods and cement. Vavuniya GA says 136,000 people passed the Army checkpoint at Omanthai into LTTE-controlled Vanni in May and 133,000 entered Vavuniya from the Vanni.

Local NGOs say no investigations have been carried out into the disappearance of 184 people when the Army held Kilinochchi District between 1996 and 1998, and the families have not received any compensation. The remains of 71 people are reported to have been recovered. On 13 May, a member of Tamil group TELO was shot dead in Vavuniya town. The LTTE is suspected to be responsible for the killing.

In Trincomalee District, EPRLF member Kiruban was murdered on 1 June. The LTTE is accused of the shooting which occurred in Trincomalee town. The Army arrested 125 people, but released them after enquiry. The Tigers are also suspected of shooting and injuring two Army intelligence officers in the town, two days earlier.

The LTTE arrested a naval officer near Thambalagamam in late May for entering their area with weapons. The Tigers also took into custody two police officers in Muthur on 29 May for a similar offence. The policemen were released two days later. On 31 May, the Navy arrested six LTTE cadre near Sampur accusing them of smuggling explosives.

Batticaloa

Eastern murders

FORMER member of Tamil group PLOTE and Army intelligence officer S Perinpam was shot dead in the heart of Batticaloa town on 21 May. On the same day, LTTE member K Koneswaran was abducted at Ninthavur in Amparai District. His body was later found in a paddy (rice) field with gunshot wounds. The LTTE blame the Tamil group Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP).

The Tigers have been accused of targeting members of other Tamil groups and Tamils working as intelligence officers in the Sri Lankan military. These Tamil groups appear to be launching retaliatory attacks. The LTTE have denied targeting other militant groups. Following an appeal in early May, the

Defence Ministry ordered police security for all EPDP offices in the north-east.

Razik Group cadre Y Rameshkumar was seriously wounded in a grenade attack in Batticaloa town on 5 May. Another *Razik Group* member K Navasooriyam was shot dead at Puthur in mid-May in a military high security zone. SLMM chief Tryggve Tellefsen expressed grave concern and warned that the killings represented a serious threat to the stability of the ceasefire.

Former member of Tamil group EPRLF, A. Devaraj and his wife were injured by gunmen on 12 May at Sorikalmunai in Amparai District. The next day, six people were wounded in a grenade attack on PLOTE's office in

Batticaloa town. Former Vavunativu local councillor and PLOTE member C Velayutham is missing since 12 May.

A grenade thrown at the LTTE office in Batticaloa town on 16 May failed to explode. The Tigers accuse the PLOTE and Army intelligence for the attempted attack. PLOTE have denied involvement. T. Dharmalingam, 68, and K Ariyavathy, 35, were wounded by a grenade at Setrukuli on 19 May. They are said to be LTTE supporters. Two days later, EPRLF cadre and former Vaharai local councillor Nagamani Pushparajah was shot and injured at Valaichenai.

The EPRLF told visiting Canadian High Commissioner Valarie Raymond that ten members of Tamils groups had been killed, 12 abducted and 30 others wounded by the LTTE since the ceasefire came into force. The Prime Minister has appointed a committee comprising Defence Secretary Austin Fernando, Army commander Lionel Balagalle and defence advisor Merrill Gooneratne to probe the murders.

Tension heightened after the LTTE was accused of murdering Muslim youth Mohamed Hussain on 16 May in Kinnaiyady. In early June, however, an Army intelligence officer suspected of the killing was arrested. In order to promote reconciliation, LTTE and Muslim leaders met in Alayadivembu in early May and agreed to form 12-member joint committees in four zones - Pottuvil, Ninthavur, Amparai and Sammanthurai - to settle disputes.

Rights of the child

Vulnerable

THE UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, in its observations on Sri Lanka's report on children, expressed concern in May that during the transition to peace and reconstruction process, children affected by the conflict remained particularly vulnerable. In response, Sri Lanka's Permanent Representative to the UN, Prasad Kariyawasam, said that although there was apparently continued recruitment of child soldiers, the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE, in concert with UNICEF, had agreed to setup three transit centres for their rehabilitation. The LTTE and UNICEF signed an agreement on 4 March on an Action Plan which provides for transit centres for children released by the LTTE. The UN Committee recommended to Sri Lanka to develop a comprehensive plan of action for implementing the rights of the child during the reconstruction process. The Committee urged Sri Lanka to particularly, (a) prioritize the reintegration of all combatants under 18, and ensure that all armed groups integrated into national armed forces adhere to the 18-year minimum age of recruitment; (b) develop, in collaboration with NGOs and international agencies, a comprehensive system of psychosocial support and assistance for children affected by the conflict, in particular child combatants, unaccompanied IDPs and refugees, returnees and landmine survivors; (c) take effective measures to ensure that children affected can be reintegrated into the education system by prioritizing the rehabilitation of school buildings and facilities and provision of water, sanitation and electricity in conflict-affected areas. Observers say child soldiers are only a tiny fraction of the children who need assistance. UNICEF has estimated that 900,000 children in the north-east have been seriously affected and need urgent rehabilitation.

Floods

Havoc

THE worst floods in 50 years, caused by heavy monsoon rains in May, devastated Ratnapura, Galle, Matara and Kalutara districts affecting nearly 400,000 people, including 68,000 families in Matara. Floods also affected Nuwara Eliya and Batticaloa districts. Rescue workers recovered 266 bodies. More than 500 people are missing.

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 24,400 houses were destroyed in all districts and another 26,200 were damaged. In the mountainous regions of Ratnapura and Nuwara Eliya, landslides destroyed houses and cut off access to roads. Bridges, roads and telecommunication and power infrastructure were damaged.

UN says the most urgent needs are provision of clean water, including drainage and decontamination of flooded wells, the restoration of power supply and communications to isolated areas and health and sanitation. Many governments and international agencies responded immediately to the disaster needs. The European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) announced a \$944,000 assistance.

The LTTE sent four lorryloads of relief materials, including food, clothes, mats and roofing, from the Vanni. Tiger leaders *Ravanan*, *Elilan* and *Anbarasu* visited Kalutara and Ratnapura districts and delivered the materials directly to the flood victims.

Colombo

Political patronage for criminal gangs in Sri Lanka

Colombo assassination

SOUTHERN Provincial Council's Agriculture minister R Ranjit, 46, was shot dead by a gunman in Colombo on 25 May. The incident took place at 10am in a high security zone just outside the headquarters of the police Criminal Investigation Department (CID) on York Street in the Fort commercial centre. Mr Ranjit, an opposition People's Alliance (PA) member, was arrested two months earlier in connection with weapons smuggling and released on bail. He had been ordered by police to report at the CID headquarters every Sunday.

The PA alleges that it was a political assassination, pointing an accusing finger at the ruling United National Front (UNF). While Interior minister John Amaratunge promised an independent enquiry, police say the killing was carried out by a Colombo criminal gang which has the protection of powerful politicians. Inspector General of Police TE Anantharajah has directed the formation of four police teams to investigate.

According to the police, 28 criminal gangs operating in Colombo and surroundings were responsible for 30% of the 350 murders between January and April. A 30-member special police team has been formed to take on the gangs. Observers say criminal gangs are connected to highly placed politicians and this will make the task of the special team extremely difficult.

Meanwhile, the problems of Tamil detainees under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) continue. In Kalutara prison some detainees began a hunger strike from 3 May. Ramesh Surendran's condition deteriorated and was admitted to the prison hospital in mid-May. There are 71 detainees in Kalutara under the PTA. The hunger strike ended on 19 May after Prisons Commissioner Gen. Romy Marzook promised to speak about their cases to the Attorney General.

Colombo MP Mano Ganeshan who visited the prison on 1 May has written to

Tiger political leader SP Thamilchelvan, urging the LTTE to take up the issue of Tamil political prisoners with the government. Kalutara detainee S Lingaratnam was arrested in July 1992. During his 11-year detention, without charge or trial, his father died and the family has become destitute. AE Rosairo was arrested in Batticaloa in January 2000. He had suffered severe torture in custody at Iruthayapuram Army camp and by intelligence officers in Colombo. He had also been forced to sign a confession under torture in Sinhala language, which he does not understand.

Eight Tamil women detainees, including Selvathy Sabaratnam, 54, are held at Welikada prison in Colombo. Another detainee Vasanthy Ragupathy says she and her husband suffered brutal torture at the dreaded Fourth Floor of the police headquarters for 19 days. They were forced to sign confessions. Batticaloa resident Sarojini alleges that she was raped in custody by three policemen.

Sea Tiger recognition

Indian naval officer advises government

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe told Parliament on 6 May that retired Indian naval officer Vice Admiral PJ Jacob has been requested to advise the Sri Lankan government on issues relating to the ceasefire in the sea. Indian Army officer Lt. Gen. Satish Nambiar is already advising the government on issues relating to the ceasefire on land.

The government decision stems from LTTE proposals in April for the recognition of the *Sea Tigers* as a naval unit on par with the Sri Lankan Navy. The Tigers want exclusive zones in the north-east sea for naval exercises. Indian observers say that India is extremely concerned, because the *Sea Tigers*, even if given some sort of legitimacy, would be outside the ambit of international law. India is also worried that such a naval force would be a threat to its security and the sovereignty of Sri Lanka.

The SLMM has come under severe criticism in India and Sri Lanka for proposing recognition of the *Sea Tigers* as a *de facto* naval unit. In early May, the SLMM explained that the *Sea Tigers* already existed and the proposal was

made for the maintenance of 'balance of forces' and to prevent clashes at sea. The *Sea Tigers*, the SLMM stressed, would have neither legal rights nor legitimate tasks of safeguarding the sovereignty or territorial integrity of Sri Lanka as these obligations belong exclusively to the

government forces. An Indian military team arrived in Jaffna on 27 May to examine the security situation.

The report by Satish Nambiar to the government on 9 May proposes that Army's HSZs and LTTE's military installations should be removed at the same time. It also says that Army's arms and LTTE's long-range weapons should remain in specified areas where they can be inspected by the SLMM. Protests in Jaffna have continued against HSZs. There were 83,600 people in 45 *Grama Sevaka* (Village Headman) divisions at Valikamam in 1990. But since the setting up of HSZs in 1995, people have not been able to resettle in 30 villages.

Two days earlier, Defence minister Tilak Marapane said that the government had decided to relocate 152 military bases in the north-east and reduce the size of HSZs to allow resettlement of internal refugees. President Chandrika, however, expressed opposition to the decision, alleging that relocation of camps without reaching agreement with the LTTE on core political issues would endanger the security of the country.

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.

The Sri Lanka Project
The Refugee Council
3 Bondway, London SW8 1SJ
Tel: (020) 7820 3100; Fax: (020) 7840 4388
E-mail: slproject@refugeecouncil.org.uk
Internet: www.gn.apc.org/brcslproject

The Refugee Council
Tel: (020) 7820 3000; Fax: (020) 7582 9929
E-mail: info@refugeecouncil.org.uk
Internet: www.refugeecouncil.org.uk
Charity No. 1014576
Company No. 2727514

ISSN 0955-5943