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UNP rebels gain ground

THE constitutional revolt against Sri Lanka's President Ranasinghe Premadasa quickened after opposition MPs tabled a motion of no confidence in the government on 25 September. A showdown is expected when the motion is taken up after Parliament reconvenes on 8 October.

The revolt began in late August when 20 MPs, including 47 from Mr Premadasa's ruling United National Party (UNP), signed an impeachment motion making 24 allegations of corruption and abuse of power against the President. Mr Premadasa immediately suspended Parliament until 24 September and four weeks of invective and vicious infighting followed.

A vanguard of eight UNP rebels led by Education minister Lalith Athulathmudali and former Mahaweli minister Gamini Dissanayake were expelled from the party after Mr Athulathmudali called for a national referendum to curb the "one-man rule" of the executive presidency and a return to parliamentary democracy. The rebel MPs retain their seats for three months until a Supreme Court appeal. The rest of the dissidents among the UNP's 125 MPs in the 225-seat Parliament remain undercover after 116 signed a pledge of loyalty to Mr Premadasa. No one yet knows the depth of Mr Athulathmudali's support but the bandwagon is rolling.

Thousands attended mass rallies in Colombo, Kandy and Kegalle as the UNP dissidents accused Mr Premadasa of forming a devil's pact with the Tamil Tigers (LTTE) - supplying arms to the Tigers to defeat rival Tamil groups and force out the Indian Peace Keeping Force

- arms that were now being used to kill Sinhalese soldiers.

This revolt is not about the system but about the man, observers say. In his 33 months of rule Mr Premadasa sidelined the high-caste aristocracy of the old UNP elite, concentrating power in the hands of a trusted few. Ministers in his government privately complained of being virtually powerless and MPs, feudal princes in their own constituencies, chafed at the loss of perks and patronage.

It is the President's lower caste origins and his blend of puritanism and populism that are on trial. Speaking in Colombo, Mr Premadasa said aristocrats were out to block the path of progress and to undermine the social revolution he had instigated through his ambitious poverty and housing programmes. Colombo *Sunday Observer* columnist *Anuraddha Tilakasiri* - thought to be one of Mr Premadasa's "Special Advisers" - listed the President's achievements in crushing the southern Marxist People's Liberation Front (JVP) and said a degree of authoritarianism was necessary to destroy the root causes of youth unrest. The rest of the press is cautious with a vein of open criticism slowly emerging. On the streets of Colombo, the gloves are off with a full-scale poster war underway, trading accusations.

There were stormy scenes when Mr Premadasa reopened Parliament on 24 September as opposition MPs heckled and jeered, holding up photographs of the President's alleged misdeeds. Some pretended to wipe oil from their chairs, a pantomime gesture to deflect the spells supposedly cast on them by three Malaysian magicians hired by Mr Premadasa.

Speaker M H Mo-

■■■■ A year has passed since Kumaraguru Kugamoorthy, a Tamil journalist and worker with human rights group MIRJE, was snatched by armed men on Colombo's Jawatte Rd, last September. There has been no police investigation into his abduction. He has simply "disappeared". Across the the North-East, thousands of civilians have vanished into the furnace of the June war, killed by government death squads or Tiger guerrillas. Human rights agencies report on the North-East war on *Page Four*.

hammed castigated the opposition but said he would entertain the impeachment motion against the advice of the Attorney General. There were doubts over the validity of some of the signatures, said Mr

Mohammed, on which he would rule shortly. Mr Athulathmudali, in his resignation speech as Education minister, said there was deep frustration throughout the UNP and urged MPs to express themselves openly. After the UNP closed ranks to extend the State of Emergency, Parliament broke up until 8 October.

If the impeachment motion has created the chemistry of dissent, the no-confidence motion is the acid test of Mr Premadasa's immediate survival. It accuses him of supplying arms to the Tamil Tigers. His defiant response was to enlist support from the LTTE-controlled faction of Tamil group EROS, whose nine MPs resigned last year.

EROS parliamentary leader Edward Sebastianpillai arrived in Colombo by ICRC ship from Jaffna on 25 September and six EROS MPs will be sworn in before the all-important vote. With the support of another 12 or 13 Tamil and Muslim MPs, Mr Premadasa may just survive but at a price. As defence sources announced the end of the Army's month-long *Operation Akuna Seraya* (lightning strike) against the Tigers in Mullaitivu, a presidential spokesman denied that an unconditional ceasefire in the North was the price for EROS support.

Observers say LTTE leader Prabhakaran fears and distrusts Mr Athulathmudali - who was a hard-line National Security minister under President J R Jayewardene - and is close to a deal with Mr Premadasa's intermediary Tourism Minister S Thondaman, whose "final peace offer" in mid-September led to another exchange of letters. At a press conference in Jaffna in early September, Mr Prabhakaran again called for unconditional peace talks monitored by the international community.

Whatever is on the table, Mr Premadasa's dangerous liaisons may yet damn him in the public eye. There is a calculatedly volatile seam of anti-Tamil chauvinism running through "the return to democracy" campaign. The President's pact with the devil leaves him in the eye of the storm.

THE NORTH

A body blow

AFTER a month-long offensive on isolated Mullaitivu District, Sri Lankan spokesmen say the Army captured and destroyed three major LTTE bases code-named *Suganthan*, *Satish* and *Michael*, after heavy fighting in late September. The camps, part of a complex of 14 LTTE bases north-west of Kokkilai lagoon, contained armaments factories and massive food stocks. Sources say the operation was to trap LTTE leader Prabhakaran, who was reportedly at the nearby *Kamal* base until recently.

Government sources say 650 LTTE and 73 soldiers were killed and another 150 soldiers were wounded. Other reports say Army casualties have been heavy and advancing troops were hampered by dense jungles and lack of water. Over 10,000 civilians fled from areas around Nedunkerni and Mullayavala after days of aerial bombing. Civilian casualties are not known but there are now serious food shortages. Observers say the operation is a body blow for Tiger logistics, linking its north and eastern operations.

In Jaffna, the expected onslaught after the Army's relief of Elephant Pass has not come. Civilians are tense and LTTE propaganda increasingly strident, urging the population to prepare for yet another "last battle". The exodus of those who can still raise Rs 10,000 for a Tiger "exit visa" continues.

Food stocks are again low as government aid ships dock at Kankesanthurai, one of three military bases inside the peninsula, rather than the Tiger-controlled port of Point Pedro. Food aid can be sent but not collected, boosting the economic blockade while allaying humanitarian concern. Shelling from the other bases at Karainagar and Palaly

continues to kill civilians in villages over 15 miles from their recently installed 130 mm artillery.

The medical situation is now critical with relief convoys forbidden to carry antibiotics, painkilling drugs, oxygen and vaccines. Heart patients and those requiring major surgery have little chance of survival. Over 100 people have died of rabies in the last year. Stray dogs increase as food stocks dwindle.

Prices have rocketed as Army operations continue. Soap, one of 45 items forbidden beyond the Army checkpoint at Thandikulam is Rs70 a cake. Milk powder is almost unobtainable and there is increasing child malnutrition among the families of day-wage labourers and the poor. There is now a shortage of money itself, with banknotes, like Jaffna and its people, torn and frayed.

The slender artery at Thandikulam north of Vavuniya that connects the Tiger north with the government-controlled south remains a corridor of fear and uncertainty. An eight-year old boy died in a civilian stampede on 7 September. Over 10,000 people gathered at Santhasolai on the Tiger side in early September after the government introduced new regulations allowing five litres of kerosene per person travelling north, one day a week. A suitcase bomb which injured 16 people including four LTTE at the Tiger checkpoint on 16 September has increased suspicion and surveillance on both sides.

Thousands of civilians who comprise "the bicycle brigades" still make the week-long journey from Jaffna to the markets of Vavuniya, ploughing painfully north, a sack of rice and a kerosene can strapped to their cycles - bobbing corks in the ocean that keep Jaffna afloat.

Exiled in Tamil Nadu

AT a press conference in Madras in late September, new Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayalalitha Jayaram expressed frustration that the Indian government had not moved to deport over 1,000 hard-core LTTE militants held in Tamil Nadu for the last three months. Jayalalitha called for more funds for the Tamil Nadu police as a major cordon-and-search operation began at Vedaranyam, a LTTE stronghold on the Tanjore coast.

The Tamil Nadu Chief Minister has banned all meetings and processions supporting the LTTE under the National Security Act. Over 80 LTTE supporters were arrested at a meeting in Vellore on 2 September. After the suicide of Sivarasan, allegedly the LTTE mastermind behind the Rajiv Gandhi killing, 43 people are currently in custody in connection with the assassination. Screening continues in over 200 refugee camps across the state.

This year's Annual Report from the Indian Home ministry says there are 210,944 Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in India, 115,792 domiciled in camps in Tamil Nadu. The report says almost US \$25 million has been spent supporting Sri Lankan refugees since 1983. Tamil Nadu Revenue minister S D Somasundaram, visiting refugee camps in Madurai, said many refugees wanted to return as soon as the Sri Lankan problem was settled. Forcible return as an option could not be ruled out, he said.

Prabhakaran speaks

LTTE Commander-in-Chief Velupillai Prabhakaran, in Jaffna for his first interview with foreign journalists since April 1990, warned that there could be no military solution to the Tamil problem and called for unconditional peace talks.

Speaking in Tamil in an interview broadcast on the BBC Tamil Service, Mr Prabhakaran denied the stalemate at Elephant Pass had been a setback and said the battle showed the Tigers could now confront a conventional army face to face. Refuting claims that the LTTE conscripted children to fight the Sri Lankan

Army, Mr Prabhakaran said the LTTE eschewed forcible conscription. Large numbers of young people voluntarily joined the movement because of state oppression.

Mr Prabhakaran reiterated that the LTTE was "in no way involved" with the assassination of former Indian premier Rajiv Gandhi and said that despite a long history of Indian attempts to undermine their movement, the Tigers retained strong support in Tamil Nadu. Asked whether he thought international opinion had turned against the LTTE with the

expulsion of International Wing leader Kittu from the UK, Mr Prabhakaran described Britain's action as "irresponsible and inhumane". The Tiger leader said the LTTE's political wing had developed what was effectively a civil administration involved in every facet of social life, organising food production and relief and rehabilitation. Reserving comment on the constitutional crisis in Colombo, Mr Prabhakaran said it was now up to the Sinhalese people to decide whether they could peacefully co-exist with the Tamils as one people.

*Army mounts new offensive on the East***Operation Red Arrow**

AS fighting died down in the North, Sri Lankan forces began a major offensive in the eastern District of Amparai in late September. A few days after Special Task Force (STF) police commandos launched *Operation Red Arrow* around Rufaskulam and Kanchikudichcharu, LTTE guerrillas killed 11 soldiers guarding Sinhalese settlers further east at 13th Colony of Central Camp.

After increased LTTE activity in Amparai, the STF is building a major camp at Sorikkalmunai near Sammanthurai, which will also contain a refugee centre. Two fishermen were shot dead and two others injured at Palukulam in a cordon-and-search operation in mid-September.

There is a growing drought in Amparai and a Tiger ban on harvesting the forthcoming *Yala* rice crop still holds. A bomb hidden in a paddy field killed one Sinhalese farmer and injured four others at 12th Colony on 2 September. An STF Inspector and a soldier were killed in an explosion six miles outside Akkaraipattu on 4 September while they were inspecting a booby-trapped corpse. Three other soldiers were injured in another explosion nearby.

Further north, there is growing tension in Batticaloa after a series of LTTE attacks on police and Army personnel. The Tigers overran Sithandy police station on 12 September, killing two police

and injuring 17 others. Six civilians were shot dead in the Army operation that followed. Another three civilians shot dead were found tied to lampposts in Batticaloa town a few days later. Two other bodies were found at Vantharumoolai and another at Senkalady.

Ten soldiers were killed on 20 September when the LTTE ambushed an Army patrol between Valaichchenai and Vakaneri on the Polonnaruwa road. A day earlier 11 Muslims including three children were hacked to death as the Tigers continued their attacks on isolated villages on the Batticaloa-Polonnaruwa border. Sri Lankan forces still seek LTTE leader *Karikalan's* base in the Eravur jungles south of the Polonnaruwa road.

A Sri Lankan Army intelligence captain, said to be responsible for a series of local civilian atrocities, was shot and seriously wounded by the LTTE just three miles outside Batticaloa town in late September. His ambush, hailed as a triumph by the LTTE, is simply another grim statistic amid a throng of civilian and military casualties. There appears to be little progress in the Presidential Commission of Enquiry into the massacre of 123 civilians by the Army in June at Kokkaddicholai, west of Batticaloa lagoon. The Commission heard evidence from 35 people over two days at Batticaloa airbase, then adjourned for further sessions in Colombo - away from the bereaved and the angry.

The politics of the hungry

AFTER last month's reprieve for over 400,000 refugees on food relief who live outside official camps, the Sri Lankan government has launched a new diplomatic offensive to attract international aid. A team led by Finance Secretary Paskaralingam told US officials in Washington in mid-September that Sri Lanka urgently needs another US \$30 million worth of food aid to feed its growing refugee population in the next few months.

Observers say if the campaign falls short of its target, Colombo will have little choice over cutting back on relief. As well as 253,937 refugees in camps and 419,748 displaced from their homes, officials now admit to another 1,090,961 described as "economically affected" by the war who were absent from previous months' statistics. Their inclusion, observers say, is simply to bolster the government's case abroad and there is little evidence of any real rehabilitation underway.

In the Eravur division of Batticaloa many of those displaced from Senkalady have received only 16 of 60 rounds of dry rations and an interim payment of Rs 500. The rations issue is an important stimulus to resettlement. People will not leave refugee camps and return to their homes if the government cannot provide for basic needs while they rebuild their lives. Where there is no resettlement, there will be no cultivation and people will be unable to feed themselves - dependent on a regime that treats them as terrorist sympathisers. At the end of the spiral are destitution and famine.

In the Eechchilampattai area of Trincomalee District, those displaced by the war have received almost nothing and relief agencies have recorded malnutrition rates of 24% in some villages. There are those the government cannot feed and those it *will* not.

Rumbles in the south

THERE is apprehension in Sri Lanka's southern provinces that growing instability over the constitutional crisis will aid the recovery of the Sinhalese Marxist insurgent People's Liberation Front (JVP) crushed by the Army in a three-year struggle that cost 60,000 lives.

As the poster war between the UNP rebels and the government got underway, JVP posters also appeared in Dikwella and other areas of Matara saying "We will continue the struggle. We will liberate the people." A JVP communique issued in London denouncing the government for creating the present crisis was dismissed by the Sri Lankan press as a fake. The JVP revolt collapsed at the end of 1989 when leader Rohana Wijeweera and five other politbureau members were captured and killed while in police custody. Almost 15,000 JVP

suspects are still in detention camps held under Sri Lanka's state of Emergency. The JVP's present leader Somawansa Amerasinghe is in hiding in India.

Security operations continue in the south to root out the remaining rebels. Hambantota once a stronghold of the movement remains a flashpoint. JVP suspects were rounded up after two local businessmen were stabbed to death in late August. Tissamaharama JVP leader Percy Nimal Jayasinghe died in an exchange of fire after police surrounded his house on 5 September. Around 20 JVP suspects were arrested by police in a major operation in Gampaha recovering weapons and stolen goods worth Rs 500,000 (\$12,500). In another operation north of Colombo in early September, in Pehaliyawatte and Negombo large numbers of suspects were detained.

HUMAN RIGHTS AGENCIES REPORT ON THE NORTH-EAST

The drift towards total war

TWO leading human rights agencies reported this month on Sri Lanka's North-East war and the terror that has followed in its wake. Amnesty International's report *Human rights violations in a context of armed conflict*, says Sri Lankan government forces have arbitrarily detained and deliberately killed thousands of defenceless people since the war resumed.

Many of the killings in the East are attributed to paramilitary death squads operating in plain clothes and unmarked vehicles. The Amnesty research team in Sri Lanka was forced to cancel a visit to Batticaloa after a telephone threat from a paramilitary group.

Over 3,000 people have 'disappeared' in Army custody in the East since June 1990, says the report. Over 120 Tamils vanished from Pottuvil refugee camp last August, another 158 from Vantharumoolai and 160 people disappeared from villages around Sathurakondan a month later, in three of the best documented incidents. Victims of extrajudicial executions, says Amnesty, "have reportedly been shot, bayoneted, stabbed, hacked or beaten to death."

In a series of 32 recommendations, the Amnesty report urges the Sri Lankan government to admit responsibility for thousands of disappearances and extrajudicial executions in the last seven years and to create a climate that protects basic human rights. Amnesty wants new safeguards for detainees and a repeal of the Indemnity Act which protects security personnel from prosecution. Sri Lankan officials have investigated over 1,000 deaths in custody of those held under the notorious Emergency Regulation 55B-F. Many others have simply vanished, their bodies burned on rubber tyres.

But Amnesty also condemns the Tamil Tigers for the same range of human rights abuses. Since the June war, the LTTE has massacred Sinhalese and Muslim villagers, tortured and killed Tamil dissidents and expelled 50,000 Muslims from the North. Hundreds of Sri Lankan police who surrendered to the LTTE on the outbreak of war are believed murdered.

The report describes a major LTTE prison camp at Thunukai in Mullaitivu, where 800 prisoners in leg-irons are each confined to a numbered space three feet by two. Hard-core prisoners are kept in

"Yes, it was them. If they had just fired two shots, the Army would not have come. They would have called the helicopter gunships. But defending the people had not been on the agenda when they planted the mine. When the present politics destroys humanity, fighting for human rights virtually involves fighting against this politics. Even in village after village, where the Sri Lankan forces have swelled the ranks of the LTTE, the question is asked, 'Did we need all this death and destruction? Was it necessary for our sons to die?'"

The Kokkaddicholai massacre and after: UTHR Report no.8.

eight-foot pits surrounded by barbed wire. At another camp in Kachchai near Chavakachcheri, torture was routine. An informant describes how 16 Sri Lankan soldiers were beaten, abused and hung upside down over burning chillies. He and three other Tamils were repeatedly hit on the back with a sledgehammer.

The latest report from UTHR - the University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna) - describes in detail how the Tamil people are "let down by their liberators". Government atrocities legitimise LTTE repression in the North as the Tigers prepare a punch-drunk population for total war. The war-weary in Jaffna think only of survival says UTHR and have come to accept torture, disappear-

ances, deceit and killing as necessary.

In the last four years, UTHR has remained the only independent Tamil voice cataloguing the headlong descent into the horrors of war. One of their leaders Dr Rajani Thiranagama was killed by a Tamil group in Jaffna in 1989 - the others are in hiding. Like its predecessors, their report, *The debasement of the law and of humanity and the drift towards total war*, burns with the anguish of someone watching his people tear themselves apart.

Both sides are now locked in an internecine struggle says UTHR. But to win a guerrilla war, the state must become greater source of terror to the civilian than its adversary. Their report charts in detail how the trickle of everyday killings in the East has become a flood culminating in the massacre at Kokkaddicholai on 12 June this year, where 123 Tamil civilians were killed and six women raped by Sri Lankan soldiers after a LTTE landmine ambush.

A case study of Kiran, a village 11 miles north of Batticaloa, shows how Army atrocities have swelled the ranks of the LTTE. Since the June war, 50 people have been killed and 150 schoolboys have joined the Tamil Tigers after regular beatings during Army cordon and search operations. Kiran is reduced to grinding poverty, the population trapped between two predators, on the edge of despair.

Massacres like Kokkaddicholai, deliberately provoked by the Tigers reflect their political bankruptcy and show the logical end of LTTE tactics is total war, says UTHR. Jaffna is also a city under siege from within as LTTE propaganda permeates every part of daily life. There is an attempt to mould a generation without links to the past, whose only loyalty is to "the movement" and death. In the stalemate after Elephant Pass, LTTE loudspeakers screamed in the night "Awake Oh Tamil people. Why do you sleep while your young warriors are dying?"

Jaffna dissidents and non-violent activists are ruthlessly purged, like members of the *Theepori* (Spark) group, who vanished in a new round of repression in June. In a moving chapter on the Muslims, massacred in the East and expelled from the North by the Tigers, the LTTE has surpassed even its oppressors, concludes UTHR.

THE SRI LANKA MONITOR is part of an information processing service set up by the British Refugee Council to keep Sri Lankan refugees in Britain, Europe and elsewhere, informed about the current situation in their home areas.

If you have any information you wish to share, or any enquiries you wish to make regarding developments in Sri Lanka, contact

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