

Jaffna Mayor Sarojini killed

Jaffna Mayor Sarojini Yogeswaran, 63, became the latest victim of the gun culture in Sri Lanka when she was shot dead at her home in Army-controlled Nallur on 17 May. Jaffna city councillor M Paramasivam, who was injured in the shooting, was unable to identify the killers. The security forces launched an investigation, but there is little hope of finding the two assassins.

Mrs Yogeswaran, elected as the first woman Mayor of Jaffna in January, had refused personal security offered by the Army. Her husband, former Jaffna MP Vetrivelu Yogeswaran was assassinated in Colombo by the LTTE in July 1989 along with moderate Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) leader A Amirthalingam. In a note sent to the publishing house of the Jaffna Tamil journal *Uthayan* on 17 May, the underground organisation, *Sangiliyan Army*, claimed responsibility for the Mayor's death. But another note to *Uthayan's* editor the following day from the same group, denied involvement. The second note, however, said that Ms Sarojini was at the top of *Sangiliyan Army's* hit list.

Three days before the Mayor's killing, a day after the first anniversary of Army's *Operation Jayasikurui* (Certain Victory) in the Vanni, Jaffna's north-eastern Vadamaratchy Commander Larry Wijeratne was assassinated by a *Black Tiger* suicide bomber. The attack took place as Mr Wijeratne, who had been transferred to Colombo, left Point Pedro, after a farewell party given by the Vadamaratchy Traders Association. Two other officers were wounded.

After the capture of the Jaffna peninsula in early 1996, the security forces in southern Thenmaratchy and western Valikamam areas are alleged to have committed major violations of human rights, including extra-judicial executions, rape and disappearance. The Vadamaratchy area under Brigadier Wijeratne, however, was largely spared. He held regular consultations with local organisations and developed rapport with the people.

Sri Lanka's aid donor nations have deplored the tragic impact of the war on the entire nation and called on all political leaders to rise above partisan politics and unite in the cause of peace.

The *Sangiliyan Army* denies any links with the LTTE but says that its objectives are compatible with the aims of the Tigers. Many observers have no doubt that the *Sangiliyan Army* is a Tiger front and the two killings were intended to serve as a warning to the people of Jaffna against collaboration with the government or the Army. They point out that no other Tamil organisation has the strength or ability to operate in the north-east without being targeted by the Tigers.

With control of the population essential for the LTTE and the government, both parties appear to be using intimidation as one method of achieving this aim. The LTTE's forcible evacuation of the Jaffna population in 1995 and the government's attempts to return them to the peninsula by denying basic needs to the people in the Vanni are two examples of this strategy.

In April, government officers were warned by both the LTTE and the military against cooperation with the other side. Analysts say that the Tigers aim to disrupt government plans for reconstruction and deny political control in the north-east. According to the military, LTTE infiltration in Jaffna has increased. Tiger attacks may intensify so that even if the Army succeeds in *Operation Jayasikurui*, it will have to contend with a destabilised peninsula.

The Army's *Operation Jayasikurui*, launched to open the 50-mile landroute to Kilinochchi from Vavuniya, entered its second year on 13 May. The LTTE leader V Prabhakaran has pledged to continue fighting and says the Tigers have thwarted the real aim of the operation which is to 'divide the north-east Tamil homeland'. So far, 3,000 combatants have been killed and 8,000 injured on both sides. Currently over 35,000 troops are engaged in *Operation Jayasikurui*, but Army Commander Rohan Daluwatte wants more soldiers to complete the operation.

Sources say less than 5,000 of the 15,000 Army deserters returned following an amnesty in early May. The Army has withdrawn soldiers from the Eastern Province and the islands west of the Jaffna peninsula for the Vanni operation. The military may launch a recruitment campaign in schools to enlist 15,000 soldiers. Plans to introduce conscription are also on the cards. Reports say Rs 550 million (\$9 million) has been spent on the operation and the LTTE has captured arms and equipment worth another Rs 500 million.

As the Army and the LTTE prepared for a showdown around Mankulam in the Vanni, Sri Lanka's aid donors, meeting in Paris on 27 May under the auspices of the World Bank, approved \$780 million in aid and pledged more assistance for north-east reconstruction in the event of peace. The representatives of foreign governments who attended the meeting expressed deep concern over the continuing conflict and urged efforts to end the enormous toll in human suffering and foregone economic development.

While commending the government for its efforts to devolve authority to the regions, the donors deplored the tragic impact of war on the entire nation and called on all political leaders to rise above partisan politics and unite in the cause of peace. Requests to aid donors from peace organisations to use aid as a leverage to achieve peace in the island went unheeded.

Infiltration

SEVEN people, including five members of the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) were killed and eight others injured in a landmine attack in Vavuniya on 12 May. Tamil group PLOTE is involved in military operations with the Sri Lankan Army against the LTTE.

Reports say Tiger infiltration into Army-controlled Vavuniya, particularly around Cheddikulam, south-west of Vavuniya town, is causing concern. A number of security personnel, including intelligence officers and PLOTE members, have been shot dead by LTTE's *Pistol Group*.

The Tigers shot dead two policemen on Poovarasankulam-Cheddikulam road on 13 May. In a landmine attack on an Army convoy in Cheddikulam the following day, 13 soldiers and a policeman were killed and 42 wounded. Following these incidents, civilians from the Vanni were prohibited entry into Vavuniya for a week from 17 May, as the military launched search operations. The Army is seeking information on infiltrators and has warned that travel permits issued to civilians may be withdrawn. People say the ban on bicycles is causing difficulties to students who travel long distances to attend school.

Two full-time Public Health Inspectors have been appointed to look into the continuing health problems in Vavuniya refugee camps, where some 11,000 people from the Vanni are held.

Most of these people want to go to southern or eastern Sri Lanka and await travel permits. Some people in Vavuniya have contracted cholera and there is concern that the disease may spread to the camps. Vavuniya Government Agent K Ganesh says that the military agreed on 6 May to allow those in the camps to live with permanently resident relatives in Army-held areas of Vavuniya District.

North of Vavuniya, two children died of disease at Akkarayan hospital in Mullaitivu District in late May. Hundreds of people are affected by malaria, diarrhoea and typhoid. Reports say hospitals at Mallavi, Akkarayan and Veravil are expected to treat increasing number of patients and continue to struggle with shortage of medicines and staff.

The Army resumed attempts to capture Mankulam on 28 May. Army advances on two fronts - from Mundrumurippu, south-west of Mankulam and from Ambakamam and Olumadu in the north-east - were checked by heavy resistance from the Tigers. By end of May, the Army had made little progress, but suffered hundreds of casualties.

Fishermen P Karunakaran and T Rasaratnam were killed by Airforce bombs at Silavathai in Mullaitivu District on 21 May. Three other civilians were seriously wounded. Five soldiers were killed and 23 injured in a clash with the LTTE at Paranthan, three miles north of Kilinochchi on 20 May.

Illegal

MP Joseph Pararajasingham has complained to the Sri Lankan Human Rights Commission (HRC) that Anthony Thayanathan, arrested in 1992 and believed disappeared, is held in an illegal secret detention centre near the Maharagama Cancer Hospital, 12 miles south-east of Colombo.

Extended

India announced on 12 May that the ban on the LTTE will be extended by two years. India first proscribed the LTTE in May 1992 following the assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in May 1991.

Clarification

Reports say that the US sought clarification from the Sri Lankan government after Foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar said on 15 May, in the wake of Indian nuclear tests, that Sri Lanka was not opposed to India becoming a nuclear power.

Intelligence

According to press reports in May, Sri Lanka's intelligence agency, the National Intelligence Bureau (NIB) will be divided into two, one for internal and the other for external intelligence gathering.

Blast

Two masked gunmen escaped after blasting a section of the tea factory on Hill Country's Shannon Estate in Hatton, with bombs on 1 June causing damage estimated at Rs 2.5 million (\$38,500). The police say a Tiger unit has infiltrated the tea plantation areas.

Search in Jaffna

AFTER the assassination of Mayor Sarojini and Vadamaratchy Commander Wijeratne, the Army intensified security operations in Jaffna. In late May the Army launched an operation to capture the seven *Grama Sevaka* (Village Headman) divisions of Maruthankerni in Vadamaratchy east, which are under the control of the LTTE.

The military also began search operations for Tiger infiltrators. On 28 May, seven shops near the civil administration office in Chavakachcheri were declared as a security threat and ordered to be closed. After a policewoman was injured by a landmine in Kondavil on 4 May, 13 people were arrested. Two soldiers died

in an attack on an Army patrol at Nunavil in Chavakachcheri, the next day.

The Tigers launched an assault on an Army post in Gurunagar in Jaffna town on 30 May, killing two soldiers. Four civilians were wounded in the attack. A woman later died in hospital. Tamil party EPDP says that following the attack soldiers ran amok assaulting civilians.

In early May, development NGO, Sarvodaya leader and Human Rights Commission (HRC) member AT Ariyaratne visited Jaffna to assess the situation and submitted a report to President Chandrika Kumaratunge. Jaffna people say that there has been no response from the HRC to complaints made several

months ago on disappearances. President Chandrika appointed a three-member national commission into disappearances in early May, headed by Manori Muttetuwegama. The new commission will replace the three regional commissions, appointed in November 1994, which enquired into 16,642 disappearances and submitted reports last year.

Speaking in Parliament in early May, Tamil MP P Selvarajah demanded the publication of the north-east disappearance commission report. Apart from the Presidential commission, a Defence Ministry Task Force, a committee composed of military officers and the HRC have probed disappearances in Jaffna.

■ *People in refugee camp demand to be sent to Jaffna*

Civilian killed

POLICEMAN Janaka Priyantha was arrested in Batticaloa District accused of killing MH Muhaideen, 60, at Iyankerni in Eravur on 7 May. Mr Muhaideen was shot dead after an argument over police attempt to molest a local woman. Batticaloa MP Ali Shahir Moulana says that he has received other complaints about police behaviour in the area.

The civilian population continues to live under pressure from the Tigers and the military. Sources say that the LTTE continues to demand 'taxes' from civilians in areas it controls and in parts of Army-held territory, in some instances even from old people without any income. Five civilians were injured when a 'tax collector' threw a hand grenade at

a crowd chasing him in Batticaloa town on 10 May. The following day, the LTTE hijacked a lorry with rice bags at Kaluthavalai. Two other lorries were hijacked on the same day at Kattankudy. Two children and an old man were wounded by a landmine at Kiran in early May. Ninety three Tamils working in rice mills in Polonnaruwa District were arrested by the Army on 6 May and taken to Anuradhapura.

The LTTE shelled the Airforce camp and Army headquarters in Batticaloa town on 12 May injuring a soldier. The Army retaliated by heavily shelling Tiger-controlled Paduvankarai, west of Batticaloa lagoon. The LTTE attacked the Army checkpoint at Karuthapalam on

Chenkalady-Badulla road on 24 May killing two soldiers and two PLOTE members. Eight soldiers and five PLOTE cadre were injured. The Tigers also blew up a PLOTE office. Ten houses were damaged when the Army retaliated by shelling LTTE-held Vaharai area. Eight Tigers were killed in an Army ambush in Punanai on 26 May.

In Trincomalee District, the LTTE launched an assault on a police post in Muthur on 3 May killing ten policemen and a soldier. The Tigers say the attack was in revenge for the killing of Tiger cadre Arumugam Parameswaran in Soorankal earlier that day. An Army informant was shot dead by the LTTE on 19 May at Thoppur. The Navy says five *Sea Tiger* boats were sunk off Veruhal in late May.

People in the Glass Factory refugee camp in Trincomalee staged a protest on 23 May demanding to be sent to Jaffna. Over 6,000 refugees in Mannar, 2,000 in Vavuniya and 1,000 in Trincomalee have registered to go to Jaffna. On 27 May 490 more refugees arrived in Trincomalee from Mannar. The government is expected to hire two ships which could carry 1,300 passengers to Jaffna each journey from early June.

■ Reports say 30,000 people in the Jaffna peninsula have registered to travel by ship to southern areas. Currently two private firms operate five passenger flights to and from Jaffna, six days a week. The cost of the flight is Rs 5,000, which most people cannot afford.

Murder in the mosque

TENSION gripped Batticaloa and Amparai districts in mid-May after Muslim policeman TL Badurdeen was shot dead while praying in a mosque in Akkaraipatru on 14 May. The assailant threw a grenade while escaping, injuring seven Muslims outside the mosque. On the same day, grenades were thrown at an electricity transformer near a mosque in Kalmunai, wounding another seven civilians. Observers say the attacks are a blow to reconciliation attempts by members of both Tamil and Muslim communities. The police accuse the LTTE of carrying out the attacks. In August 1990, LTTE gunmen massacred 140 Muslims inside two mosques in Kattankudy. The killings ripped the two communities apart and led to the formation of militant Muslim groups. Observers expect the relations to further deteriorate as the LTTE attempts to gain supremacy in the Eastern Province, if its forces are weakened in the Vanni. The Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) called for calm in the east and derided LTTE's claim to the visiting UN envoy Olara Otunnu that it respects humanitarian law. The LTTE has also told Mr Otunnu that there will be no obstacle for Jaffna Muslims returning to their homes. In October 1990, the Tigers expelled some 75,000 Muslims from the Northern Province who continue to suffer in refugee camps in Puttalam and Anuradhapura. Developments in the east have shocked and disappointed northern Muslims who were seeking LTTE cooperation in their quest to return to their homes. Muslim MP R Hakkeem welcomes LTTE's statement to Mr Otunnu, but believes the time is not yet ripe for resettlement. He says Muslims who returned to Army-held areas in Mannar are forced to submit to LTTE extortion as the sun sets and Army interrogation when the sun rises.

New camps in Mannar

SHELTERS are being built at Uyilankulam, Katkadanthakulam and Jeevanothayam on Mannar mainland for 25,000 refugees from the Vanni. Mannar Government Agent SM Croos says around 4,000 people arrive from the Vanni each month and over 3,000 are currently at Pesalai and Erukkalampiddi refugee camps on Mannar Island, waiting to go to Jaffna or southern Sri Lanka.

The number of refugees in Mannar is expected to increase as only 2,000 people a month are transported by ship from Trincomalee to Jaffna and there are no ship services from Mannar. Social workers are concerned that increasing numbers in camps without adequate facilities will only exacerbate the suffering of the

people as in the case of the refugee camps in Vavuniya District.

Reports say those travelling to southern Sri Lanka are facing increasing difficulties. People complain that the security forces are refusing travel permits even to those who submit adequate evidence on the purpose of travel. Mannar government secretariat officers have urged the Army commander to appoint a committee to study the problems faced by the passengers.

Mannar farmers say they have not received fertilisers despite applications and several discussions with Army officers. They fear that rice cultivation in Army-controlled areas will be badly affected in the coming months.

UNHCR's main reason for being in Sri Lanka

Compensation

THE Sri Lankan Supreme Court ordered Rs 5,000 in May as compensation to Vadivel Vethanayagam who was arrested in November 1996 and suffered torture in custody. The government Judicial Medical Officer (JMO) confirms the torture of Mr Vethanayagam.

On 28 May, the Colombo High Court refused to accept a confession obtained under torture and released Batticaloa resident Kandasamy Sivakumar, 24, detained for seven years. In another case, the JMO also confirms the torture of Anthony Mala. She was arrested in July 1995, and allegedly hung by the feet and beaten with iron rods, burned with cigarettes and given electric shocks.

Press reports say after complaints of MPs over arbitrary arrests and harassment of Tamils, the Human Rights Commission summoned four senior officers, including Inspector General of police, WB Rajaguru in May and advised that breach of laws and fundamental rights by police was unacceptable.

Thirty eight Tamils were arrested on 17 May in Kataragama, 120 miles south-

east of Colombo, suspected of attacks in and around the Yala Wildlife Sanctuary. The following day in a major operation in Kandy nearly 1,000 houses were searched and several Tamils detained.

Despite the human rights situation in Sri Lanka giving cause for concern, Western governments continue to reject Sri Lankan asylum applications, basing their decisions on Position Papers of international refugee agency UNHCR in preference to other information sources. The last Position Paper dated 1 March 1997 maintains that 'general security conditions and basic observance of human rights standards in government-controlled areas have essentially not deteriorated since mid-1994. UNHCR has also published a Background Paper on Sri Lanka.

The Refugee Council's view is that the 1 March 1997 Information Note is not intended for use in refugee determination procedure. UNHCR states as follows in a letter to the Refugee Council:

"The primary purpose of the Information Note is to make public

UNHCR's position on the return of rejected asylum-seekers to Sri Lanka, as well as developments in Sri Lanka pertinent to return.....The Note concludes with a paragraph cautioning the readers - mostly government officials - for changes in the situation in Sri Lanka and calling for a careful assessment of claims in the light of up-to-date information.

".....A background paper is one source of information among many others produced by highly specialised, committed organisations and individuals. One must realise that UNHCR is a refugee agency and not an organisation mandated or equipped for human rights research or monitoring.

"It should be noted that in the absence of a formal agreement like in the case of Switzerland and Sri Lanka....UNHCR does not play an official role in respect of the return of failed asylum-seekers. UNHCR's main reason for being in Sri Lanka is not monitoring of returned asylum seekers or monitoring of the human rights situation, but protection and assistance of internally displaced persons".

UN special envoy meets the LTTE

MEETING the visiting UN Secretary General's Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict, Olara Otunnu on 7 May in the Vanni, LTTE leaders undertook to observe provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and refrain from recruiting children or engaging them in combat.

The LTTE is known to have used children between 16 and 18 years in combat and children below 16 years for services such as guard duty. The LTTE has also placed restrictions on children above 12 years leaving Tiger-held areas. Observers have welcomed the LTTE assurances, but are doubtful over implementation in view of the current military pressures.

LTTE leaders Anton Balasingham and SP Thamilmichelvan also agreed not to impede return of refugees to home areas or interfere with humanitarian aid. The LTTE is accused of preventing the return of Muslims to their homes in the north and using food aid to control civilians.

As the Army and the LTTE accused each other of violating a two-day ceasefire announced by the Tigers, Mr Otunnu visited Jaffna and refugee camps in the

Vanni and expressed concern over the lack of proper programmes for children growing up in conflict areas.

NGOs say 930,000 children in the north-east are affected by the war,

including 180,000 in LTTE-held territory and 490,000 in contested areas. An estimated 220,000 children are displaced in the north-east and another 16,000 live in refugee camps in Puttalam District.

A number of factors, NGOs say, including food shortage and health problems, have increased mortality and morbidity in children, particularly in the Vanni. Around 10,000 children in the same area have no educational facilities. Massive effort is needed to rehabilitate the children but, observers say, restrictions in the context of war are impeding the work even of the few agencies that have been permitted to operate.

In a report titled *Children in South Asia: Securing their rights*, Amnesty International says that children are routinely picked up by security forces on suspicion of links with the LTTE and there is evidence of torture of children in custody. A number of children have also been killed in deliberate or indiscriminate attacks by the security forces and the LTTE. Amnesty says disappearances, including children, have been a long-standing concern in Sri Lanka.

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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