

Right climate for peace

The leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) Velupillai Prabhakaran urged the Sri Lankan government in late November to create a congenial climate to allow peace talks free from conditions of war.

In a message marking *Maveerar Varam* (Great Heroes Week), LTTE's annual commemoration of its martyred cadre, beginning on 21 November, the Tiger chief accused the Sri Lankan leadership of lacking political will and sincerity and demanded third party mediation to resolve the island's conflict. Negotiations cannot be free and fair, he asserts, if the government uses military aggression and economic blockade of the Tamil-dominated north-east Sri Lanka as political pressures.

Mr Prabhakaran says that the LTTE is not imposing any conditions for peace negotiations, but his demand for 'initial talks to discuss removal of pressures' - meaning a ceasefire and lifting of the economic blockade - is clearly a pre-condition. The insistence on third party mediation is another condition.

Some observers view the call for peace talks as a positive step and point out that unlike previous years, when devastating attacks were launched on military or civilian targets during Heroes Week, this year the *Air Tigers* merely displayed their newly acquired aircraft at Mulliyavalai in Mullaitivu District.

Tamil and Muslim parties urged the government to seize the Tiger offer while the main opposition United National Party (UNP) declared that 'all available options should be utilised in finding a solution'. But the UNP is reluctant to join government attempts to devolve power to regions by constitutional reform or support the Sri Lankan business community's recent peace initiative.

The government maintains that the Tigers must lay down arms and agree on a specific time frame to complete negotiations. In recent months, President Chandrika Kumaratunge has insisted that the LTTE should publicly declare that it has abandoned the struggle for *Tamil*

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Eelam or separate state. The government has rejected third party mediation, but President Chandrika welcomes facilitation of peace talks by any foreign nation. There is concern that the gulf between the parties is unbridgeable while pre-conditions for talks remain.

Critics say that the display of air power by the LTTE exposes the hollowness of its peace offer and will lead to further militarisation. The government may now consider acquiring surface-to-air missiles. The LTTE, which has been banned by the US, may not have launched any major attack during Heroes Week to avoid further international strictures. Many Sri Lankan politicians are emphatic that the Tigers cannot be trusted after breaking the ceasefire during peace negotiations with the People's Alliance government in April 1995.

The visit of British Foreign Office minister Derek Fatchett to Sri Lanka, in early November, led to speculations of renewed UK involvement in peace. Mr Fatchett told NGOs in London that the bipartisan agreement initiated by his predecessor Liam Fox was difficult to build on, given the electoral ambitions of the Sri Lankan political parties. Britain is not seeking to impose any solution but will be ready to take part when the climate is right, Mr Fatchett says.

Mr Prabhakaran, in his Heroes Week message, accuses foreign nations of exacerbating the suffering of civilians by providing military assistance to Sri Lanka. Observers say that current British government policy has cast doubts over its role as a mediator. Britain continues to supply arms to Sri Lanka (see page 3). The British Home Office, in its Sri Lanka assessment report has largely excluded the atrocities committed by the security forces against Tamil civilians.

The Tamil parties are dismayed over the President's response to the plight of Tamil civilians in the north-east, particularly her acceptance of the lower refugee figures submitted by the Army than the Government Agents of the Vanni region. The parties are also angry over the killing of 15 civilians by the Airforce in the Vanni during Heroes Week. The Tamil United Liberation Front voted against the government's budget for 1999 protesting over food cuts to refugees and the allocation of massive funds for the war.

Tabling the budget in Parliament on 6 November, Deputy Finance minister GL Peiris said that Sri Lanka had achieved a growth rate of 6.4% in the past year with narrowing of the fiscal deficit. The total public debt, according to Mr Peiris, has fallen, inflation and interest rates have declined and national savings increased with foreign reserves at a healthy level.

Economists say a fundamental weakness arises from commitment to expenditure, particularly defence spending. The 1999 defence allocation of Rs 47 billion (\$700 million) is expected rise during the year. The average growth rate for 1995-98 is 5.2%, well below the target of 8%, lack of investment being the main reason. Investment declined from 27% of the GDP in 1994 to 24.4% in 1997. Economists observe that an investment ratio of 40% of GDP is needed to sustain a growth rate of 8%. SP Tao, the Chairman of Overseas Realty (Ceylon) Ltd which owns Colombo's World Trade Centre says that the security situation in the island must improve before it can attract more investment.

JAFFNA

Fishing ban

THE military banned fishing in the Jaffna lagoon on 5 November, following information that the LTTE may infiltrate the peninsula posing as fishermen. Jaffna fishermen were allowed fishing only during the day between 5.30am and 3.30pm. The Northern Province Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Authority (NPRRA) Chairman NA Obadage says that the Jaffna Government Agent has been authorised to provide relief to affected fishing families, from December.

The fishing ban was extended to all other areas of the peninsula on 17 November, in the run-up to LTTE's annual *Maveerar Varam* (Great Heroes Week). The ban has worsened the suffering of over 10,000 fishing families in the peninsula. Reports say 90% of the 7,200 fishing boats belonging to these families have been destroyed in the war.

The LTTE continues its pressure on the Jaffna population. Tiger leader V Prabhakaran says that the LTTE will not permit government administration in Army-held areas. Chavakachcheri regional council secretary V Arunanthi resigned in early November after death threats. Principals have received letters urging them to close the schools.

The Presidential Commission on Disappearances postponed its visit to Jaffna scheduled for early November. The secretary to the Commission says that the addresses of the complainants are not ascertainable. The Jaffna-based Guardian Association for Persons

Arrested and Disappeared has demanded the Commission to provide a list of people disappeared in Jaffna since 1996. The NGO says it will not participate in the Commission's enquiries without a list.

Meanwhile, complaint has been made to the Sri Lankan Human Rights Commission that S Satchithanatham was arrested by the Army at Kopai on 3 November. K Yoganathan and G Pushpakaran of Thirunelveli were detained the following day.

Two civilians were killed in Kandavalai on 1 November by shells from Elephant Pass military base. Five days later, V Theivanai, 62, was killed by a shell from the same camp. Her husband was seriously wounded. Five naval personnel arrested in connection with two rapes in Vaddukottai are currently held at the Chunnakam police station.

Most shelters of the 5,600 refugee families in Jaffna camps are leaking during rains. Their homes lie within the military high security zones of Kankesanthurai, Palaly and Karainagar where civilians are not permitted. Reports say that almost 60% of the current Jaffna population of 493,800 is dependent on government assistance.

At a meeting of the Jaffna NGO consortium in November, Health Department officials revealed that only 50% of the medicines required for Jaffna District are sent from Colombo. Over 250 posts for doctors and other medical staff in the Jaffna hospital remain vacant.

Inconsistent

The Supreme Court declared on 1 December that the new Provincial Council Elections Bill, granting authority to the Elections Commissioner to conduct elections for five Provincial Councils, is inconsistent with the Constitution. The August elections were postponed under Emergency.

Levy

The National Security Levy on goods and services, introduced in the budget for 1996, was increased from 4.5% to 5.5% in the 1999 budget tabled in Parliament on 6 November.

Detention

Deputy Foreign minister Lakshman Kiriella told Parliament in 1 December that 550 Sri Lankans are detained in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Lebanon, Arab Emirates and Singapore for entry without proper documents.

Protest

After Sri Lanka accused in early November that UNICEF took a "soft approach" towards LTTE over child soldiers, UN special envoy on children, Olara Otunnu urged the Tigers to honour the pledge in May to refrain from recruiting children.

Moving

Following speculations that South African President Nelson Mandela may become involved in a peace initiative, the Sri Lankan government says the LTTE is trying to move its London headquarters to South Africa, where the Tigers are said to enjoy support from the large Tamil community.

Certain Victory ends

THE Sri Lankan government decided on 4 December to end *Operation Jayasikurui* (Certain Victory), launched in May 1996 to open a landroute to Jaffna through Tiger-held Vanni. Thousands of combatants died in the bloodiest campaign of the ethnic conflict. The decision follows the LTTE capture in September of Kilinochchi town which lies 25 miles north of Army-controlled Mankulam. Reports say that the military will launch a new operation, *Rivi Bala* (Sun Power), aimed at capturing the LTTE stronghold of Mullaitivu.

As the LTTE commemorated Great Heroes Week in late November, the Sri Lankan Airforce launched attacks in the

Vanni killing fifteen civilians. S Arulselvan, 25, and Rajaletchumi, 75, were killed at Kokkavil in Mullaitivu District on 13 November.

Airforce bombs killed four civilians at Mulliyavalai in Mullaitivu District on 21 November. The following day, M Kavitha, 7, S Joseph, 60, and L Nagendran, 73, died in Airforce attacks at Kottaikattiyakulam. Six civilians, including three students, were killed at Sundikulam on 2 December.

In Vavuniya, the LTTE launched an attack on an office of Tamil group PLOTE at Koomankulam on 13 November. A PLOTE member was killed and five others injured. Vavuniya

Cooperative Union's S Veerasingham was wounded by gunmen near his home in Nelukulam on 15 November.

Officers of the World Food Programme (WFP) are expected to visit Vavuniya in early December to assess the situation of over 11,000 people in refugee camps in the area. Reports say there are 551 widows and 51 orphans in the camps. Among 4,596 students, 489 are not attending schools.

Further west in Mannar District, four refugees smuggling banned articles were shot dead by the Army at Uyilankulam on 13 November. Reports say that the military has killed 12 people involved in smuggling, since August.

■ *The LTTE disrupts electricity supply to Batticaloa*

Grave violations in the east

V SATHASIVAM of Pandiruppu in Amparai District says that his son Sanjeevan, 18, was killed at the Kalmunai police station after his arrest on 13 October. He had suffered brutal torture. His fingers had been broken and his tongue split. His body, exhumed on the orders of the court, had several gunshot wounds.

Grave violations of human rights, particularly by security forces, in the east continue to remain as a concern. In November, Batticaloa lawyers and students launched the Centre for the Protection of Human Rights. Reports say the Centre will examine serious abuses, including illegal detention, rape and extra-judicial executions.

The military carried out a search operation on 9 November in the coastal villages of Thalavai, Punnaikudah and Kaluvankerni at Eravur in Batticaloa District. Youths in the villages were interrogated and some detained. Puthukudyiruppu and Thalankudah villages south of Batticaloa were searched on 25 November. All men above the age of 18 in these villages are currently required to report at the Manmunai Special Task Force (STF) camp every Sunday.

Three civilians were injured in a LTTE grenade attack on 5 November at a police checkpoint in Kattankudy. The Police arrested four youths at Kondayankerni on 9 November.

Kandasamy Ratnaiah, 39, was shot dead by the Army at Karuvakerni in Valaichenai during a search operation in mid-November.

Sinnathamby Krishnapillai, 65, died in crossfire during a clash between the LTTE and the police STF at Mandur on 10 November. Two days later, a soldier was injured by a bomb in Valaichenai. In mid-November the LTTE blasted eight electricity posts, again cutting off electricity supply to the entire Batticaloa District forcing people to use kerosene lamps. Forty electricity posts have so far been blasted. On 20 November, the LTTE shelled Batticaloa town where the Army headquarters is situated. The military retaliated by firing mortar shells into Tiger-held areas of Paduvankarai, west of Batticaloa lagoon.

The military began compiling details of vehicles in Batticaloa town and areas south of the town in early November. Suspected LTTE cadre hijacked a vehicle near Kaluthavalai on 1 December and took it to Palukamam. The STF shelled Palukamam area, killing a 13 year-old boy. The Tigers also hijacked four fishing boats at sea near Vaharai, north of Batticaloa, on 22 November. A few days earlier, the military banned fishing in Vaharai sea.

In Amparai District, the STF and the LTTE clashed on 19 November at Sinnawathai. Five Tigers were killed and four policemen wounded. The Tigers bombed three electricity installations at Sainthamaruthu on 30 November.

Arms of peace

THE Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) says in a report titled *The supply of UK military equipment to Sri Lanka*, that Britain should not be permitting the export of arms to Sri Lanka which has a very poor human rights record. In the first year of the present Labour government, 67 licences were granted for military equipment to Sri Lanka, which may include small arms, combat aircraft and large calibre weapons such as mortars. Twenty licences are for supply of "electronic equipment specially designed for military use". Foreign Office minister Derek Fatchett is said to have stated in September that licences were considered case by case in terms of Britain's criteria and the European Union Code of Conduct, with particular attention to Sri Lanka's human rights record, and its legitimate defence and domestic security interests. In early 1998, Britain supplied a hovercraft designed for military use, armed with a 20mm cannon. CAAT draws attention to Oxfam's recent analysis that 50% of UK arms exports went to countries suffering political violence or high-intensity or low-intensity conflict, and observes that Sri Lanka comes into the high-intensity category. The LTTE is also accused of grave human rights abuses, none of which balances the massive disruption of Tamil civilian lives by the continuing pressure of the Sri Lankan security forces, the bombing of civilian targets and the ongoing record of violations, CAAT says. The British government, through Mr Fatchett, has declared its wish for "a lasting and just peace" and has offered mediation. CAAT says it is hard to reconcile this stance with a partisan support for one of the contending parties, still less with arms sales which can only help to intensify the carnage in the island.

Stranded in Trinco

HUNDREDS of people demonstrated on 4 November before the Trincomalee regional secretariat demanding resumption of ship services to Jaffna. The protesters say that they have spent all their money and many are unable to feed their children. On the same day, 500 passengers, including foreign nationals, arrived from Jaffna in the ship *Lanka Muditha*. Reports say that there were no soldiers travelling in the ship. The Tigers have warned that any ship carrying soldiers will be a legitimate target.

On 13 November, a further 1,068 people arrived from Jaffna. According to reports some 8,000 people, including refugees are stranded in Trincomalee and the Tamil parties have urged the govern-

ment to resume ship services from Mannar. The *Lanka Muditha* left Trincomalee on 1 December carrying 602 Jaffna passengers.

The Army arrested carpenter A Ravindran on 16 November in Muthur. At the time of arrest he had Rs 8,000, which the military suspect was destined for the Tigers. Four other youths were arrested in the same area the following day. Three women accused of spying for the LTTE were detained in mid-November. The Tigers launched an attack on an Army patrol at Pachchanur in Muthur area on 29 November. Nine soldiers were killed and four other soldiers wounded. Two civilians were also injured during the clash.

Torture allegations continue

Tamil arrests in the south

HILL COUNTRY youth Suresh was arrested at Ragala in Nuwara Eliya District on the night of 8 November by persons who claimed to be from the Criminal Investigation Department (CID). The following day another Ragala resident, Kanagaratnam and Punduloya youth N Yogeswaran were detained.

Tamil arrests in several areas of southern Sri Lanka continued. The police arrested ten Tamil youths at Kalutara in mid-November. Twenty three Tamils were arrested at Mahiyawa in Kandy on 19 November and 20 detained for not possessing police registration documents.

The police say a powerful bomb was found on 27 November near the Kandy home of Deputy Defence minister Anuruddha Ratwatte. Two Tamil men and two Muslim women were detained in late November at Aluthgama, 35 miles south of Colombo, and released on Rs 100,000 bail.

In view of LTTE's November Heroes Week, security in the capital was tight-

ened and arrests of Tamils continued. The Muslim United Liberation Front (MULF) accused the police of arresting Muslim youths in Colombo without reasons. An electricity transformer on Sea Street in Colombo's Pettah commercial district was damaged by a bomb on 22 November. Five Tamils were arrested in the area. The police are hunting for two Batticaloa youths in connection with the bombing. Development NGO Sarvodaya worker K Kanagaratnam and his wife were taken into custody at Grandpass suburb on 27 November.

Colombo trader K Thanikasalam, 51, says in a fundamental rights application to the Supreme Court that he is held by the Terrorist Investigation Division (TID) since his arrest on 13 July on the Sixth Floor of the police headquarters, without being produced before a court. He has not been informed of the reasons for his arrest.

Rasaratnam Ariyaratnam, arrested in Colombo in November 1996 was

released by court in November, after the state withdrew cases against him filed on the basis of a confession. Press reports say that he had been severely tortured in custody which has been confirmed by the government Judicial Medical Officer.

Over 30 Tamil prisoners in Kalutara prison began a new hunger strike on 28 November demanding trial or release. Some detainees climbed on to the roof of the prison. They ended the protest after Prisons Commissioner P Baskarasingham promised to discuss the issue with the Attorney General. There are currently 759 Tamils in Kalutara prison detained under Emergency regulations and the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

The police filed cases against 16 Tamil prisoners accused of attacking Tamil party EPDP leader Douglas Devananda during a visit to Kalutara prison in July. But no progress has been made in connection with the killing of three Tamil detainees in the same prison in December last year.

Appeal to the UN over food cuts

FOLLOWING a demonstration against food cuts at Puthukudyiruppu in Mullaitivu District on 7 November, refugees sent a petition to the UN Secretary General and the World Food Programme (WFP) urging action by the international community to ensure sufficient food supply to the Vanni. The government-imposed 57% food cut on the Vanni remains.

Tamil MP Neelan Tiruchelvam urged the international refugee agency UNHCR in November to attend to the needs of the displaced people in the Vanni who are suffering without adequate food, medicines and shelter. In mid-November, the opposition United National Party demanded a parliamentary delegation to the Vanni to ascertain the situation.

Heavy rains have affected the refugees in the Vanni. Their flimsy shelters are damaged. Some refugees have moved to different areas seeking safety. According to the Government Agents (GA) there are 433,384 refugees in the four Vanni districts. The government Essential Services Commissioner (ESC) earlier supplied food aid to 295,000 peo-

ple. Since 1 July, ESC has permitted aid only to 193,163 displaced people. Planning minister Jeyaraj Fernandopulle said in Parliament on 22 November that food was reduced following an assess-

ment of the number of refugees in the Vanni by the Rehabilitation Ministry. Tamils have accused the government of using food to make people suffer in order to bring pressure on the LTTE. President Chandrika has rejected the refugee figures submitted by the Vanni Government Agents and accepted the assessment of the Army.

In a press statement the Defence Ministry says that only 137,967 of the 300,000 refugees in LTTE-held areas of the Vanni are those displaced within their districts and will continue to receive government assistance. The Ministry blames the LTTE of taking part of the food sent to the civilians.

The Vanni GAs say 15,400 barrels of kerosene are needed in the first four months of 1999 to cultivate over 100,000 acres of land. The Defence Ministry has allowed 325 barrels saying that kerosene will be supplied in stages for agriculture. Since August, people have been denied permits to take five litres of kerosene allowed earlier. Food production in 1999 is expected to fall with the cut in fuel and restriction on fertilisers and insecticides.

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. 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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