

Neelan slain by Black Tiger

Prominent Sri Lankan academic and Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) MP, Neelan Tiruchelvam, 55, was assassinated by a male suicide bomber in the heart of Colombo on 29 July. The attack took place at the Kynsey Road-Rosmead Place intersection in a Colombo high security zone.

Security for other TULF leaders has been strengthened. Reports say elite commandos have been assigned to protect MP and TULF Secretary General R Sampanthan. A week earlier, the police announced that Vigneswary, 25, from the eastern coastal town of Trincomalee and other *Black Tiger* suicide cadre had entered the capital seeking high-profile targets.

Colombo newspaper *Sunday Times* columnist Iqbal Athas says that Mr Tiruchelvam's security was discussed at four high-level conferences only a week earlier and the Directorate of Internal Intelligence (DII) and the Army's Directorate of Military Intelligence had warned that he would be targeted.

Mr Tiruchelvam served as an international observer in many countries, including South Africa, Pakistan, Chile and Nigeria. In Colombo, he presided over the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES), an institute promoting ethnic reconciliation and conflict resolution. He was a consultant in an evaluation of the constitution for Kazakhstan in September 1991 and took part in a review of the constitution-making process in Ethiopia in November the same year. He was elected chairman of the London-based human rights agency Minority Rights Group (MRG) in 1999.

There has been widespread condemnation for the killing of Mr Tiruchelvam.

US President Bill Clinton, expressed shock at the death and added that a powerful voice for reconciliation in Sri Lanka had been silenced. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson were among many other prominent leaders who expressed shock and outrage.

US-based Human Rights Watch condemned the assassination as a deplorable violation of humanitarian law. A spokesperson for the agency said that 'Neelan was a life-long campaigner for human rights and a tireless advocate for a peaceful resolution to the bloody conflict'. A public statement by Sri Lankan and other academics around the world denounced 'with utmost vehemence and moral repugnance, this killing of an unarmed, non-violent civilian scholar and politician allegedly by the organisation which was also responsible for the murder of Rajiv Gandhi'.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) remain silent on the death of Neelan. They have emerged as the chief suspects. The Tigers are also the prime suspects in the murders of other TULF leaders, including Appapillai Amirthalingam and Vetrivelu Yogeswaran in 1989 and more recently Jaffna Mayors Sarojini Yogeswaran and Pon Sivapalan.

In a July statement, Amnesty International said that the Tigers recently stepped-up their intimidation of MPs and public officials. The killing of Neelan appears to be a warning that involvement in politics by moderate Tamil leaders will not be tolerated by the LTTE who have declared themselves 'the sole representatives' of the Tamil-speaking people of Sri Lanka.

The LTTE regards Tamils cooperating with the Sri Lankan governments as traitors to the Tamil cause. Neelan's involvement in the drafting of the government's devolution proposals and his participation in the Parliamentary Select Committee on Constitutional Reform (PSC) had left him a marked man. The Tigers have rejected the peace package describing it as 'a mask to conceal government's military intentions'.

Tamil human rights activists say the assassination has undone years of painstaking work in the international campaign for Tamil rights. Others lobbying to remove the ban on the LTTE in India and the US believe that they now face an impossible task. The Sri Lankan government on the other hand, has cited the killing of Neelan in its campaign to ban the LTTE in other countries and block Tiger fund-raising.

Neelan believed that constitutional reform was essential to address the causes of conflict and minority grievances. As a constitutional lawyer, his advice was sought by institutions and governments. In 1978, he was involved in the efforts of the Ceylon Workers Congress which led to the introduction of provisions in the Constitution which guaranteed, for the first time, fundamental rights for stateless Hill Country Tamils.

In June, Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunge announced that the new constitution incorporating government devolution proposals would be tabled in Parliament. Observers say that this announcement may have triggered the attack on Neelan in July.

Neelan himself spoke of the fundamental and irreconcilable ideological differences between those engaged in armed confrontation and a political party committed to non-violence. He stressed the need to create political conditions which restore respect for the sanctity of human life. He pointed out that in other contexts such conditions have been created when para-military organisations re-enter the political mainstream in the wake of a political solution.

■ *Fifteen Sri Lankan Tamil asylum-seekers are reported to have drowned at sea on 19 July, when their boat capsized north-west of Australia. Five others were saved after tourists informed the Australian officials. The authorities launched a search on 20 July but were able to recover only one body. Reports say the survivors are currently held in a detention centre at Port Hedland, 500 miles north of Perth. The refugees are believed to have travelled in a ship from Indonesia and transferred to a boat near Christmas Island. In late July, the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry published the names of 12 Sri Lankans who died.*

THE NORTH

Remembering Black July

A civilian and three soldiers were injured in an LTTE bomb attack in Jaffna town on 4 July. On the same day, two armed youths burned a passenger bus travelling from the town to Maruthanamadam.

Observers say that the LTTE has infiltrated many areas of the Jaffna peninsula. Suspected Tiger cadre robbed Army-issued special identity cards from passengers in a bus at Nunavil on 13 July. The identity cards may be used to infiltrate key areas of Jaffna. Tiger posters in Jaffna town in late July warned other Tamil militant groups that they face annihilation if they failed to join the LTTE.

The security forces intensified cordon and search operations in the run-up to *Black July*, the annual remembrance of the major violence against the Tamil community in July 1983. A number of people were detained. An Army truck narrowly escaped a Tiger landmine attack at Chunnakam on 11 July, but civilian V Thanikasalam, 55, was killed.

The landmine clearance programme in Jaffna was finally underway on 19 July. The UN teams are expected to work only in areas permitted by the Army and use sniffer dogs. Reports say landmines have caused over 100 deaths in Jaffna and maimed 1,000 people.

Over 4,000 Jaffna fishermen demonstrated on 11 July after the Army issued an order prohibiting them wearing sarongs when going to sea for fishing. The Army says sails in boats are banned

and the fishermen were using their sarongs as sails. There is also concern over reports that government assistance to 90,000 people in Jaffna will be stopped.

On the mainland, the LTTE has continued to target members of other militant groups which are fighting on the side of the military. Senior PLOTE leader S Baskaran was killed in a Tiger bomb attack on 16 July at Kovilkulam in Vavuniya District. Another PLOTE member N Navaratnam was wounded and died later in hospital. PLOTE's military commander Manickadasan is said to have left Sri Lanka a week earlier and slipped into the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu for unknown reasons.

Suspected Tiger cadre shot and seriously wounded Tamil group TELO member S Jeyenthiran in Vavuniya town in early July. The LTTE killed three policemen and three civilians at Thekankadu on 26 July.

In the Vanni, the Tigers have again begun targeting the Veli Oya area of Mullaitivu District. The Army shot dead three women LTTE cadre at Janakapura in Veli Oya on 4 July. The military say seven soldiers were killed and six others were seriously injured when the LTTE shelled Kokkuthoduvai on 12 July. Buildings were damaged and several students sustained injuries when the Army shelled Pandiyankulam on 28 July. Over 500 people fled the area.

Neelan Tiruchelvam

Refugee Council Chief Executive Nick Hardwick writes:

Neelan Tiruchelvam was a man of peace, principle and intelligence. I met him in December 1996 while visiting Sri Lanka with a Refugee Council delegation. He spoke to us in his capacity as a Member of Parliament for the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), and also as co-director of the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES). Despite his intensely busy schedule, Neelan graciously took out time to explain the complex situation in Sri Lanka to us.

Due to red tape, our delegation had difficulty in travelling to the troubled north until Neelan intervened. In addition to this, he gave us a reasoned, unbiased assessment of the situation for Sri Lankans caught up in the conflict. As a result of his and other support, we were able to write the report, *Protection denied: Sri Lankan Tamils, the Home Office and the forgotten civil war*, in February 1997, which was well received in the Western countries. The report has helped inform relevant authorities in decisions of Sri Lankan asylum seekers' claims.

Neelan's assassination adds another precious life to the list of tens of thousands who have already been killed in the Sri Lankan conflict. Political assassinations and needless deaths will continue to happen unless there is peace. There is an urgent need for Britain and other Western governments to become more involved in finding a resolution to the conflict. Let us hope that some good comes out of this tragic death.

Legitimate reasons

THE Committee of Inquiry into Undue Arrest and Harassment (CIUAH) advised military and police officers on 12 July that there must be adequate, legitimate reasons for arrest of Tamils in Colombo, and ethnic origin should not be the basis for detentions.

The CIUAH is concerned over continuing round-ups of Tamils and police failure to issue receipts to relatives on arrests. CIUAH Chairman Lakshman Jayakody says appropriate measures have not been taken on his request to the Defence Ministry to appoint more Tamil police officers.

Security in the capital was tightened in the run-up to *Black July*. Sri Lankan

intelligence services said in July that the LTTE had slipped a ten-member *Black Tiger* squad into the capital to assassinate President Chandrika and other senior politicians. A bomb exploded at 11pm on 27 July at the Colombo central bus stand, but caused no damage.

The police arrested 30 Tamil youths at the Fort railway station on 8 July. In the two days that followed, the police and the Army jointly searched many areas of the city and detained over 100 young Tamil men and women. Seventeen Tamils were taken into custody at Fort and Maradana on 14 July. The police also detained a number of Tamils at Kandy and Matale in the Hill Country.

The Supreme Court ordered the release of Jaffna resident Piraisoody Sasikaran, 22, on 22 July. Mr Sasikaran was arrested in November last year. In a fundamental rights application to the court, he had alleged illegal arrest and detention.

In late July, the Jaffna magistrate court held an enquiry into the death of Anton Gunasingham in military custody in September last year. The government Judicial Medical Officer (JMO) said in his evidence that Mr Gunasingham had been tortured and there were 23 lacerations, bruises and cigarette burns on his body. Three soldiers face murder charges over his death.

■ *Passenger ship sunk in Trincomalee harbour*

Civilian targets

SUSPECTED LTTE cadre hacked and burned to death four Sinhalese civilians in Rathmalgaha Ella village near Mullegama, 16 miles north-west of Amparai. The assailants also burned two vehicles. Police say the attack may have been aimed at Amparai police Superintendent Lucky Dissanayake. The following day, the police Special Task Force (STF) launched a search operation, suspecting that the Tigers were hiding in Inginiyagala jungles, south-west of Amparai town. But none was found.

As in Jaffna and Vavuniya, there is an increase in LTTE attacks in Batticaloa District. In July, the police warned that six *Black Tiger* suicide units had infiltrated Batticaloa town. They advised politi-

cians not to attend any public events. Three civilians, including Albert Sabapathipillai, 68, were killed in a Tiger cycle bomb attack near the police quarters in a high security zone in Batticaloa town on 14 July. Four policemen and 17 civilians were injured and five shops were damaged.

Two days later, the LTTE shot dead two policemen and abducted two others at Palameenmadu. The bodies of the abducted policemen were found in the Batticaloa lagoon the following day. The Tigers also attacked the Army at Kalmadu in Valaichenai on 21 July killing a soldier. Civilian P Pakiyarajah was killed during a clash at Kaluvankerni, near Eravur on 24 July.

Reports say that the LTTE publicly executed Kannankudah residents V Sithamparapillai and K Thavarajah on 2 August accusing them of spying for the military.

The *Razik Group* joined the Army in a search of Eravur jungles, north of Batticaloa town on 11 July. Over 50 people in coastal villages were interrogated. The police arrested four people during a cordon and search operation of Batticaloa town on 12 July and handed them over to the Terrorist Investigation Division.

In Trincomalee District, the LTTE bombed and sunk the passenger ship *Newco Endurance* in the harbour, on 25 July. The ship was used for passenger service between Trincomalee and Muthur. Crew member Savarimuthu Arulnayagam, 54, was killed in the blast. Police believe that the bombing in a high security zone was carried out by a *Sea Tiger* diving unit.

Following the attack, a number of people were arrested in Trincomalee town. The next day, the Army ordered all the people in Uvarmalai suburb to re-register with the police. The Tigers also blasted several electricity towers and transformers in July disrupting supply to many areas.

Four soldiers were wounded in a Tiger landmine attack at Salapaiyaru on 7 July. Three civilians were injured by two cycle bombs on 23 July at Muthur and Serunuwara. In another attack at Salapaiyaru on 31 July, four soldiers were killed and five others wounded.

Mannar murder

THE brutal rape and murder of a Tamil woman by soldiers has caused widespread shock and anger. It is alleged that soldiers forced their way into Ida Hamilta's home at Pallimunai in Mannar District at 1.30am on 11 July, raped, stabbed and shot her dead while her mother wailed outside. According to Mannar Judicial Medical Officer, there were 18 wounds on her body. Local people say the police refused to register a complaint and threatened neighbours not to divulge the incident. The Mannar magistrate ordered Hamilta's body to be exhumed and sent to Colombo for further examination. An identification parade was held on 20 July and two soldiers were identified. Another 16 soldiers are being investigated. The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) is also probing allegations that an Army officer and ten other soldiers were involved in several murders, rapes and disappearances in Mannar District. In a

letter to President Chandrika, 30 women organisations have expressed concern over continuing rapes in the north-east despite death sentences to the accused in the Krishanthi Kumarasamy rape and murder case. The NGOs have called for urgent measures to prevent future incidents. Colombo human rights agency the Forum for Human Dignity has recorded over 45 rapes by soldiers in the north-east since February 1996. Local agencies say many rape victims do not report their ordeal for fear of retaliation or ostracization from the community. Most rape cases remain uninvestigated. In July, the CIUAH wrote to the Sri Lankan Attorney General urging action against three soldiers accused of raping a Muslim woman at Oddamavady in Batticaloa District, in the presence of her husband.

Sunny Village sacked

AFTER the LTTE killed a soldier on 19 July, soldiers ran amok in Sunny Village on Mannar Island, shooting and attacking civilians. Fourteen people were seriously injured. The soldiers also burned six houses and two shops.

Vanni MP S Adaikalanathan says several people who were in the houses when they were set on fire, managed to escape. Four soldiers, including an officer have been arrested. Army Brigadier Kulatunge ordered payment of Rs 10,000 compensation for each house burned.

Five days later, the LTTE shot dead three soldiers who went to a well to collect water in Mannar's Madhu Church area which is now under military control. Madhu Church is the most-sacred

Catholic shrine in Sri Lanka. Mannar Bishop Rayappu Joseph, who has campaigned to declare the 400 acre area around the church as a demilitarized zone, has condemned the killing of the soldiers. In early July, a policeman was killed in a Tiger landmine attack further south near Uyilankulam.

Since the closure of the Vanni routes following Army operation *Rana Gosha*, over 1,700 people have arrived in Pallimunai on Mannar Island by boats from Vidaltivu. The refugees are being sent to the Pesalai refugee camp, after registration. Government officers in Mannar say that support for refugees will become extremely difficult if people continue to arrive on the island.

Humanitarian crisis in Vanni

International NGOs expressed concern over the sharp deterioration in the humanitarian situation in northern Vanni following the disruption of transport to the region since 26 June. They urged the government and the LTTE in late July to reach agreement to guarantee safe passage for civilians and supplies to the war zone across the frontline.

People in the the Vanni have suffered for many years as a result of government restrictions on food, medicine and fuel. Observers fear that the current problem will contribute to the long-term ill-effects on the population, particularly children. Senior state officers in the Vanni, the Government Agents (GA) appealed to Colombo's Essential Services Commissioner (ESC) saying that food stocks were critically depleted.

The humanitarian supply route through Pappamoddai in Mannar District was closed on 26 June following Army operation *Rana Gosha IV* (Battle Cry). Since this date, negotiations between the Army and the LTTE to open a new supply route have continued, each side sticking to its position without consideration for the plight of civilians.

The Army suggested one of three routes: 1) From Poovarasankulam on Mannar-Vavuniya road to Thunukkai in Mullaitivu District; 2) from Army-held Mankulam on Vavuniya-Jaffna road to the north or west into Tiger-controlled areas; 3) from Mankulam to the east through Puthukudiyiruppu into Mullaitivu District. The LTTE agreed on 1 July to allow the use of the road northwards from Mankulam.

The military insisted on the establishment of a five kilometre long, one kilometre wide demilitarized civilian security zone from Mankulam, in effect demanding the LTTE to withdraw five kilometres. The Army drew attention to the LTTE shooting of policemen at the cross-loading checkpoint at Uyilankulam in Mannar District in April, as justification for this demand. Predictably the Tigers refused and informed the ICRC that the short distance between the checkpoints of the Army and the LTTE could be treated as a security zone.

Patients requiring critical medical care are facing life-threatening delays. Because of shortage of medicines and medical equipment in Vanni hospitals, seriously ill patients are usually sent by ambulance to hospitals in Vavuniya or

Human Rights Watch says civilians have been without adequate food, medical care and other humanitarian assistance for weeks, and the risk of acute malnutrition in children is growing.

Anuradhapura. But such transfers are now not allowed. Mathiyaparanam, a patient in Kilinochchi hospital whose transfer to Vavuniya was denied, died in mid-July.

At least eight people died in the Vanni in July, due to lack of proper medical care. According to US-based agency Human Rights Watch, some 100 patients waited for transfer. In late July, staff at Puthukudiyiruppu hospital pleaded with the ICRC to save four people who were seriously ill. One of them, S Sunthararajan, later died.

The ESC says Rs 18 million (\$287,500) has been paid to the Vanni GAs to purchase rice in the open market. But no food has entered the Vanni since the closure of the supply route and the food available in the Vanni is almost exhausted. NGOs say that there is a backlog of 975 lorryloads of government rations to the Vanni.

The government has always disputed the refugee figures submitted by its own officers in the Vanni. Whereas the ESC claims that only 162,400 people have been listed as internally displaced, the GAs say there are 376,300 people in LTTE-controlled areas and 297,700 of them are refugees. The government transferred Mullaitivu GA Tharmakulasingham and Kilinochchi GA T Rajanayagam to Colombo in late July, accusing them of giving false information to international agencies about the situation in the Vanni. Reports say military officers may replace them.

Most of the 25,000 people displaced in Mannar in *Operation Rana Gosha IV* continue to live in the open at Palaiyaru and Vellankulam exposed to the elements. Mannar Bishop Rayappu Joseph who visited the areas in July says that the people are suffering without adequate food, drinking water or fuel.

Many civilians are trapped on both sides of the border and face extreme difficulty separated from their families and economic means. Over 2,000 Vanni people were stuck in Vavuniya town unable to return home. On 28 July, the Army took these people in 29 buses to Mundrumurippu and allowed them to walk to LTTE areas, without agreement with the Tigers. When the people began walking towards Tiger-controlled Thunukkai, the Tigers fired gunshots forcing them to return. The LTTE say that the Army attempted to use the people as human shields by allowing them to walk over minefields.

Observers believe that the blockade of NGO offices by people in Mallavi on 17 July demanding the agencies to pressurize the Sri Lankan government to open a supply route, was LTTE inspired. The agencies have stressed that their non-partisan role was critically important for service in the war zone. Thousands of people also surrounded government and UN offices affecting humanitarian work.

The transport disruption has affected money supply and people are unable to withdraw cash from banks. Hundreds of postal bags are lying in Vavuniya and the Vanni. As a result, government officers, teachers and hospital staff have not received their wages. The GCE (Advanced Level) examination scheduled for early August may also be disrupted. At the end of July, no agreement had been reached.

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 The Sri Lanka Project

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