

Massacre in the hills

Twenty seven Tamils were killed in a vicious attack by a mob on inmates of a rehabilitation centre in Bindunawewa, two miles north-east of Bandarawela in the Hill Country's Badulla District on 25 October. Fourteen others sustained serious injuries and one of them died later in hospital.

The centre was managed by the National Youth Services Council. Troubles began on 24 October, after the detainees protested against long detention. They had also complained that letters addressed to them were not being delivered and they were not allowed telephone calls. An Army unit that arrived from the military base at Diyatalawa, five miles south-west, was withdrawn after a settlement was reached.

At dawn on 25 October, a mob armed with machetes, knives and clubs stormed the centre and pounced on the sleeping inmates. Youths who fled were hunted down. The centre was set ablaze along with several of the bodies and survivors say some were thrown alive into the fire. Colombo newspaper *Sunday Leader* columnist DBS Jeyaraj says medical staff at Bandarawela hospital refused to treat the wounded.

The Sri Lankan Human Rights Commission (HRC), visiting the scene, found evidence that did not support the claims of the officer-in-charge that the detainees ran amok and caused extensive damage, although some damage was done. HRC also heard evidence that on 24 October, posters had appeared in Bandarawela town inciting the local people to violence against the inmates of the rehabilitation centre. Hill Country observers suspect that nationalist organisations such as Weeravidhana and Sihala Urumaya (Sinhala heritage), which have been whipping up racial sentiments, were behind the poster campaign.

The HRC says that some 60 policemen present at the time of the attack were guilty of grave dereliction of duty in failing to take effective action to prevent the deaths. None among the mob had a gun. But the police were fully

Echoing the lack of confidence among many Sri Lankan civil society organisations, some UK agencies urged the British government to offer international assistance in securing an independent objective investigation.

armed with firearms. According to other human rights agencies in Colombo, one of the victims, now in hospital, had sustained gunshot injuries.

The police rounded-up some 200 Sinhalese people at Bindunawewa and began intimidating some of them to confess to the crime, but were forced to release all, after other villagers surrounded the police station. The villagers insist they maintained good relations with the detainees and were not involved.

Bandarawela Police Superintendent BM Premaratne admitted that the arrests had only the effect of 'thwarting any purposeful process of investigation'. The HRC declared that the evidence gathered is consistent with premeditated and planned attack and has called for a fair, impartial and effective investigation. The HRC also urges appropriate and deterrent disciplinary action against the errant officers irrespective of rank.

Emergency regulations empower the Defence Secretary to send a detainee under the regulations or the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), to rehabilitation and also decide the period of rehabilitation. Members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) surrendering to the security forces must be sent for rehabilitation. In addition, a court may extend the period of rehabilitation of a surrenderee who has been found guilty. The detainees at Bindunawewa rehabilitation centre were young Tamil men between 11 and

23, who had been arrested or surrendered as suspected members of the LTTE.

President Chandrika Kumaratunge condemned the attack, blaming "outsiders" and immediately dispatched two teams from Colombo for investigation. Two soldiers and 14 policemen were later detained. The Bandarawela magistrate S Kaluarachchi overruled a police claim that because national security issues were involved, the inquest proceedings on 27 October should be held in camera and ordered a public enquiry.

Observers are doubtful that a full probe will be held and say Tamil prisoners have been attacked many times before. Thirty five Tamils were massacred by other prisoners on 27 July 1983 in the maximum security Welikade prison in Colombo. Two days later, 18 inmates were killed in the same prison. No enquiry was held into the murders.

Three detainees were hacked to death by Sinhalese prisoners in Kalutara prison, 25 miles south of Colombo, on 12 December 1997. A presidential commission concluded investigations in April 1998, but its report remains unpublished. Two Tamils were killed in the same prison in January 2000. The enquiry has effectively been shelved.

While Sri Lankan people and organisations expressed revulsion, international condemnation over the killings was swift and severe. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan expressed profound distress and three US Congressmen of the House International Relations Committee called on Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to support an international investigation.

In an open letter to President Chandrika, Amnesty International urged a comprehensive review of the detention regime, including provisions of the PTA and Emergency regulations. Amnesty points out that the regulations allow the Defence Secretary to detain a person indefinitely for rehabilitation. It is possible for people detained for preventive or investigative reasons to find themselves in lengthy detention under the Secretary's rehabilitation orders.

HILL COUNTRY

Spreading violence

THE violence in Bandarawela spilled over in late October into other parts of the Hill Country. Political party, the Upcountry People's Front (UPF) organised a protest meeting on 29 October in Talawakelle, eight miles south-west of Nuwara Eliya, after the funeral of S Shanmugarajah, a Hill Country Tamil youth who died in the Bandarawela massacre four days earlier.

The UPF is led by P Chandrasekaran who was a deputy minister in the People's Alliance (PA) government. He left immediately before presidential elections in December 1999, and offered his support to the opposition United National Party (UNP). He was elected as MP for Nuwara Eliya at the general elections on 10 October, on the UNP ticket.

Some allege that troubles began after a gang attacked the protestors. Others say the protestors themselves launched the attacks. Twenty two shops belonging to Tamils and Sinhalese, including a shop owned by Mr Chandrasekaran, were burned. On Meddakumbura Estate, mobs attacked a Tamil family killing an 80 year-old man. Press reports say three women in the family were abducted and raped. Four carriages of the Colombo-Badulla train were burned at Watagoda.

The police opened fire wounding a number of people, including a Tamil youth who later died in Kandy hospital. The authorities deployed the Army and imposed a 48-hour curfew in Nuwara Eliya District. The police also opened

fire at crowds in Boralande. S Mathavan was seriously wounded and died in hospital. S Sivakumar, shot in the head, was arrested by police in Kandy hospital.

Buses were targeted in Ginigathena, ten miles north-west of Hatton, wounding many Tamils. Fifteen Tamil shops in Ginigathena were looted and set ablaze. Sources say the Army allowed around 500 Sinhalese on the streets during curfew and participated in the destruction.

The events in Ginigathena prompted local citizens in Hatton, both Sinhalese and Tamil, to request the government not to deploy the Army in the town. The authorities declined but issued curfew passes to 60 youths to be on the streets in the night. Local people say that the police in Hatton acted impartially and prevented violence in the area.

Some 500 people belonging to both communities have become refugees and have taken refuge in schools and temples. Over 50,000 plantation workers who refused to work from 30 October, returned after four days.

Mr Chandrasekaran was arrested on 30 October accused of inciting violence, but was released by a court. His decision to protest during tension in the Hill Country has been criticized. He argues that protests are essential in a democracy and the right to demonstrate against injustice is being denied. The government measure of arresting an MP without obtaining permission from Parliament Speaker has also come under criticism.

Died

Sirimavo Bandaranaike, 84, world's first woman Prime Minister, died on 10 October, after voting at the general elections.

Recruitment

The Defence Ministry began a campaign in October for 10,000 new Army recruits. Army Commander Lionel Balagalle says attempts to return some 15,000 deserters have failed.

Arrest

The Navy arrested 11 refugees attempting to flee to India from Jaffna island Punkudutivu in October. They are held at Kankasanturai military base under the PTA.

Damaged

The Jaffna Government Agent says 128,688 houses damaged in the peninsula after 1984 have not been repaired. Currently, 1,000 houses are being built with assistance from German GTZ.

Denial

Amnesty International has expressed concern for the safety of S Thushyanthan and T Sriranganathan, who were arrested by the Army in early October in Vavuniya.

Agreed

The LTTE and the government agreed to observe a ceasefire during UNICEF's polio prevention programme in the north-east on 28 October and 2 November.

Medicine shortage causes deaths

MULLAITIVU'S Medical Officer Dr Sivamohan says that medicines for two quarters of the year have not been received in the Vanni and the district hospital is unable to function. The hospital is forced to issue prescriptions, but private pharmacies are also hit by the medicine shortage.

In Mullaitivu District hospitals, over 690 patients were treated for diarrhoea in September and October, 75% of whom were below 10 years of age. A child died of diarrhoea in Udayarkaddu hospital. In October, a pregnant woman named U Sathyapriya died of septicaemia in Mallavi hospital.

In early October, Pooneryn resident S Navaratnam died of diarrhoea in

Kilinochchi hospital. Between January and August this year, 1,144 people were treated for diarrhoea. Eighteen children were admitted to the hospital with the disease in early October.

According to health officers, more than 2,800 children below five years of age in Mullaitivu District are suffering from severe malnutrition. Refugees are badly affected. According to current figures, 301,250 of the 375,000 Vanni residents are internally displaced.

The Sri Lankan Airforce continues to bomb LTTE-controlled areas of the Vanni. Planes attacked Mathalan in Mullaitivu District on 14 October, wounding four civilians, including 17 year-old Velum Mayilum Rubika. Four

houses were damaged. The following day, planes again bombed the area damaging many more houses.

In Vavuniya, the magistrate ordered the arrest of police officers who assaulted and wounded Markandu Indrakumar, after arresting him in Vavuniya town on 6 October. The Army arrested Vavuniya traders N Shanmugarajah and K Erambamurthy on 19 October. Five others who were also taken into custody were later released. Security forces say plastic explosives were found when their shop in the town was searched.

A day earlier, the LTTE attacked a military camp at Ganeshapuram on Vavuniya-Mannar road, killing four soldiers and wounding 13 others.

■ Police attack in a mosque

Insecure harbour

THE LTTE launched a suicide attack on the Sri Lankan naval base at Trincomalee harbour 23 October sinking a naval vessel and damaging another. Security forces say an explosive laden boat was rammed on to the naval vessel. Eight *Sea Tiger* boats breached the harbour defences and two were sunk. Two naval officers were killed and over 40 were injured in the attack.

The Tigers simultaneously fired shells at the naval base from mortar positions at Clappenberg, just four miles south-west of Trincomalee town and Marble Beach, a mile further south. According to press reports, a helicopter was hit by a Tiger surface-to-air missile a plunged into the sea killing four Airforce personnel.

The Army say a *Black Tiger* suicide cadre was shot dead near Marble Beach and another was arrested. As the fighting continued, over 500 families fled from nearby Nachchikudah. Government officers accommodated them in three schools at Vellaimanal and provided them food. The Army banned fishing in Trincomalee sea, affecting 10,000 families. According to reports, another *Sea Tiger* boat with explosives was sunk near the harbour on 4 November.

In Batticaloa and Amparai districts, the security forces and the LTTE continued to clash, affecting the civilians. LTTE's *Pistol Group* shot dead two members of Army ally the *Razik Group* near Paddiruppu on 5 October. The Army

shot dead Kailayapillai Jeyakumar on 9 October at Kinnayady when he was returning home after a temple festival. Following an election dispute on 14 October, soldiers entered a mosque in Oddamavady and attacked Muslims who were in prayer. Reports say soldiers also entered houses and assaulted women.

The LTTE fired shells on an Army camp in Kiran on 25 October. The military retaliated and shelled Tiger-controlled areas west of the Batticaloa lagoon. N Ravindran and S Vaman were wounded and admitted to Batticaloa hospital. The Tigers also shelled police posts in Chenkalady and Eravur, north of Batticaloa town, on the same day. Sabeśan Vasanthadevi, 24, was killed by a shell at Kaluvanchikudi, 17 miles south of Batticaloa town on 27 October.

A policeman was injured when the LTTE attacked the Valaichenai police station on 29 October. The Tigers also fired on the ambulance carrying the policeman to the hospital, near Punanai, killing the driver of the vehicle and wounding three more policemen. Following the incident, the security forces shelled the nearby Karuvakerni village, killing Ilayavan Thuraiappah, 63, and damaging over ten houses.

In Amparai District, the LTTE ambushed a police patrol near Central Camp on 4 October, killing two policemen and wounding five others. At Bakiella, a Sub-Inspector was killed in a clash between the LTTE and the Special Task Force (STF) on 24 October.

Journalist murder

JAFFNA journalist Mylvaganam Nimalarajan, 38, was killed at his home on 19 October. Armed men entered the house at 10pm, wounded his father with a knife and thereafter shot Mr Nimalarajan in the head. The assailants escaped after throwing a grenade wounding two other relatives. Mr Nimalarajan, who regularly contributed to the BBC's Tamil and Sinhala services, was also a correspondent for Colombo Tamil newspaper *Virakesari* and Sinhala weekly *Ravaya*. The BBC says that during the general elections he reported extensively on allegations of vote-rigging and the problems of people displaced by war.

Suspicion has fallen on Tamil group and government ally, the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) which has been accused of involvement in intimidation and irregularities in the run-up to and during elections. EPDP's leader Douglas Devananda was sworn in as Northern Rehabilitation minister on the same day of the attack. The EPDP has denied the allegation, but Mr Devananda continues to insist that Mr Nimalarajan was an agent for the LTTE.

The Vienna-based International Press Institute has called on President Chandrika to initiate a thorough investigation and bring those responsible swiftly to justice. New York's Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) says that the course of the war cannot be adequately reported because of the Sri Lankan administration's failure to grant journalists regular access to the conflict areas. 'In this context Nimalarajan's reports were particularly crucial source of information', the CPJ points out. Journalists in southern Sri Lanka describe Mr Nimalarajan as a man deeply troubled by the war and who sought to make connections with organisations and individuals in the south for a common purpose.

CONTINUING *Operation Oyatha Alaigal IV* (Unceasing Waves), the LTTE mounted attacks on Nagarkovil, 10 miles south-east of Point Pedro, on 19 October and broke through military defence lines. The Tigers also shot down an Airforce helicopter. The Army say that the Tiger advance was checked and *Sea Tiger* boats carrying reinforcements from the east were forced to retreat.

On 29 October, the military launched *Kiniheera III* (Anvil) and advanced a mile south from Madduvil. The main aim of the Army seems to be to capture the 12 mile road between Chavakachcheri and Ariyalai, near Jaffna town, to ensure military supplies to the troops in the Thenmaratchy area.

Nagarkovil battle

Three people were seriously injured in a LTTE bomb attack on an EPDP election meeting at Kokkuvil on 5 October. Ponniah Sinnathamby, 74, of Udupiddy was killed by a shell on 6 October. On election day on 10 October, the Tigers shelled areas south-east of Jaffna town forcing people to flee the area. Reports say an Army shell in Kodikamam, east of the town, wounded two women.

According to reports, over 172,000 people are currently displaced in Jaffna and displacement has affected farming. In south Vadammaratchy, Thenmaratchy and Pachchilaipalli areas, farmers are unable to cultivate 5,500 hectare land, nearly 50% of the paddy lands available in the Jaffna peninsula.

Tamil observers censure the LTTE

Another suicide bomber

AS preparations were underway on 19 October to swear in the new Sri Lankan Cabinet, a *Black Tiger* who was apprehended by police, exploded a bomb, wounding 23 people, six of them seriously. The incident occurred in front of the Town Hall in Colombo's Cinnamon Garden suburb. Two people died in hospital. The injured included three American women and three policemen.

The police suspect that the LTTE bomber may have intended to target a Cabinet minister. Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickremanayake urged ministers to strictly follow security guidelines issued by police. The LTTE may have intensified attacks in Colombo to tie down security forces in the south while operations to capture Jaffna continue. The Tiger tactic has been severely criticised by some Tamil observers who say that assassinations of political leaders and killing of civilians are proving to be serious obstacles in the international campaign for minority rights.

The police searched several areas of Colombo in mid-October and arrested a number of Tamil youths, alleging that three *Black Tiger* suicide cadre had entered the city recently. As the security forces suspect that many suicide bombers are from the east, visitors from Batticaloa are being targeted. Batticaloa resident V Pathmanathan was arrested on 26 September in Colombo. His whereabouts are unknown. Sebastian Sagayarajah who came to Colombo from Batticaloa for an operation is missing.

Complaint has been made to the HRC that six Batticaloa goldsmiths were arrested in Colombo by police on 27 September. No information about the detention has been provided to relatives. Anthony Kalpana from Ayithiyamalai in Batticaloa was detained when she came to Colombo to go abroad, but no information was given to relatives.

Tamil residents south of Colombo continue to complain of security force harassment during visits of politicians to

the areas. Kalutara and Horana were searched before a visit by Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickremanayake on 7 October and 40 Tamils on estates in the area were taken into custody. No reasons have been provided for the arrests.

In a fundamental rights application on 16 October, the Supreme Court ordered the release of 60 year-old dance teacher V Arulananthan. He had been arrested at the airport on 21 July, while returning after a dance event in Canada, on allegations that he was involved in fundraising for the LTTE. The court ruled that his arrest and detention were illegal.

Goldsmith Yogarajah Rajanikumar detained since June 1998, was released by Kalutara court in mid-October. The court said that the Attorney General's Department failed to establish the veracity of the contents of the confession, even though it had been made in Tamil, the mother tongue of Mr Rajanikumar. The confession was the only evidence against him on LTTE links.

Solheim meets Prabhakaran

THE peace process in Sri Lanka was given a boost when a Norwegian delegation led by special negotiator Erik Solheim held discussions with LTTE leader V Prabhakaran at Mallavi in northern Vanni region on 1 November.

In a statement following the meeting, the Tigers said that they stressed a cessation of hostilities, an end to military aggression and occupation and removal of the economic embargo on the north-east. The LTTE have been insisting on these demands since 1994, saying that without normalcy in the north-east, peace talks are unlikely to succeed.

President Chandrika and Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickremanayake have been stressing that the war against the LTTE will not be relaxed, but the government had secretly allowed the Norwegian delegation to visit the Vanni. The move followed Foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar's visit to Norway in early October.

At a press conference on 3 November, Mr Solheim said he believed that the Tigers are seriously interested in solving the problem through negotiations. The

Norwegian delegation had informed the LTTE leader of the international community's desire that the conflict should be solved within a united Sri Lanka and that the aspirations of the Tamil community

must be met in a substantial manner. Observers believe that Mr Prabhakaran's annual *Great Heroes Day* message in November will be of considerable interest to the international community.

While President Chandrika spoke over the telephone to Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee on developments, some southern parties intensified opposition to the peace initiative. The People's Liberation Front (JVP), which has risen as a third force in Sri Lankan politics, says no outside third force is necessary to solve an internal problem of Sri Lanka. According to Colombo newspaper *Sunday Times*, the Army has raised concerns that the peace initiative would have a devastating effect on the morale of the troops.

The main opposition United National Party said it would support any government initiative towards permanent peace. The UNP has been demanding several measures in exchange for support to the government constitutional reforms. Some of these are, appointment of independent commissions for the police, public service and elections and revival of the commission against bribery.

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