

## International focus on peace

In a significant statement in mid-November, British Foreign Office minister Peter Hain drew attention to progress made in Northern Ireland through negotiation and devolution and called on the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to begin peace talks to find a lasting solution to the island's conflict.

Mr Hain's statement came during a visit to Sri Lanka, after Norway's special negotiator Erik Solheim announced following a meeting with the Tigers in October that the LTTE was serious about peace discussions. In consultation with the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE, Mr Solheim is said to have prepared a schedule which aims to reduce tension and build confidence.

The British minister declared that a separate state in north-east Sri Lanka will not receive recognition by Europe, USA or India, but assured that the principle of self-determination and Tamil control of most if not all the key policies affecting daily life would be supported by the international community.

In his annual *Great Heroes Day* statement on 27 November, Tiger leader V Prabhakaran asserted that the LTTE was seeking a negotiated settlement that would be fair, just and equitable satisfying the political aspirations of the Tamil people. He emphasized that his call for cessation of hostilities and lifting of the north-east economic blockade, which would create conditions of normalcy conducive for peace negotiations, should not be construed as pre-conditions.

The Tiger leader cast doubts on government's commitment to peace, pointing out several measures in the past six years and the mobilisation of the country for war in March 2000: "...the colossal sums allocated for military spending, the procurement of massive-scale military hardware, the continuous recruitment for the armed forces and the witch-hunting of army deserters".

Mr Prabhakaran said that the war is a liberation struggle of the oppressed Tamil people conducted within the norms

*I am convinced that the Sri Lankan government's insistence on territorial sovereignty of the whole island and the LTTE's objective of autonomy can be secured.*

Peter Hain

British Foreign Office minister

of international humanitarian law pertaining to armed conflicts. The refusal to face this reality is the stumbling block to finding a political solution through peaceful means, he claimed.

Observers say that the conciliatory tone of the LTTE may be because of increasing concern over the adoption of the 1999 UN Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism and the British Terrorism Act 2000. Mr Hain revealed that the British government was seriously considering a Sri Lankan request for the ban of the LTTE in the United Kingdom.

Some Colombo-based diplomats believe that Mr Prabhakaran's call for unconditional peace talks provides an unprecedented opportunity. US Assistant Secretary of State Karl Inderfurth, who was in Sri Lanka on 28 November to complete the extradition treaty between Washington and Colombo, announced that his government supports the territorial integrity and unity of the island favouring a solution that protects the dignity and security of all Sri Lankans.

There was no response from President Chandrika Kumaratunge, but government-controlled newspaper *Daily News* described the Tiger statement as a 'breakthrough'. Another Colombo journal *The Island* warned that the stance for peace talks can be nothing more than part of LTTE's battlefield strategy. In early December, Prime Minister Ratnasiri

Wickremanayake said he would not stand in the way of peace involving Norway, but ruled out a ceasefire declaring that there will be no let-up in the military campaign against the Tigers.

In his statement, the LTTE leader criticized the aid donor countries for providing massive financial assistance enabling the Sri Lankan government to continue the war and suggested that 'if Sri Lanka is to be directed towards the path of peace, the reins are in the hands of international governments'. The Sri Lanka Paris Aid Consortium, comprising governments and international agencies, is scheduled to meet under the auspices of the World Bank on 18 and 19 December to decide on foreign assistance for the island in the year 2001. Sources say that the Sri Lankan government is concerned that aid may depend on the progress of the peace initiative.

President Chandrika began a European tour on 25 November. It is likely she will assure European leaders that her government is committed to peace. Observers believe that she will also reiterate Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar's request to Britain's Home Secretary Jack Straw earlier in the month for a ban on the LTTE and its front organisations.

Although some parties such as Sihala Urumaya vehemently oppose any peace initiative, the November developments have generated enthusiasm and optimism within and outside Sri Lanka. But observers warn of pitfalls. They urge the international community to be vigilant and leave no stone unturned in the effort to bring peace to Sri Lanka.

What is the position of regional super-power India on the strong involvement of Western nations and the current position of the LTTE on peace talks? The question may be answered in the days to come! Indian Home minister LK Advani told Parliament's *Rajya Sabha* (Upper House) on 30 November that his government is determined to secure the extradition of Mr Prabhakaran who is the prime suspect in the murder of Rajiv Gandhi.



## JAFNA

# Heroes Week arrests

THE security forces intensified cordon and search operations in Jaffna in the run-up to LTTE's *Great Heroes Week* in late November, suspecting Tiger infiltration into Army-controlled Jaffna town and western Valikamam areas. New checkpoints were set-up at vehicle entrances to the town and a number of arrests were made. Reports say that the Army is holding a 13 year-old girl in Kankesanthurai military base.

The security forces also imposed a ban on fishing in the Jaffna lagoon on 1 November. The ban was lifted six days later, but 50 fishermen were taken into custody for fishing near LTTE-held Pooneryn area on the mainland. The Army has confiscated fishing nets and equipment worth Rs 5 million.

After the killing of journalist M Nimalarajan in October, three civilians have been murdered in Army-held areas. Local people suspect Tamil groups aligned to the Army. In early November, three youths were abducted by unidentified gunmen in a white van, the hallmark of Army death squads, at Amban, seven miles south-east of Point Pedro.

In mid-November, Airforce planes bombed Elephant Pass and Palai areas while the Tigers fired artillery shells towards Eluthumadduval further west. The Army launched *Operation Kiniheera IV* (Anvil) on 19 November and advanced towards Madduvil, three miles west of Chavakachcheri, to re-take the 15 mile road to Jaffna town. The military

say 6 sq km territory was captured, but the road remains in Tiger hands.

Both sides continued to fire shells causing civilian casualties. Two people were killed by shells in Kodikamam in mid-November. Student S Mayuran, 11, died in an LTTE grenade attack on a checkpoint at Anaikottai in mid-November. Two other civilians suffered serious injuries.

A soldier died in another grenade attack in Jaffna town on 17 November. In the Army shooting that followed, civilian N Sarojinidevi was killed. The LTTE's *Pistol Group* shot and wounded two policemen in the town in late November. The security forces shot dead A Muraleetharan in a revenge attack. Jaffna MP A Vinayagamurthy says that in early November, Point Pedro resident R Gnanambigai was raped and murdered by Navy personnel. The MP has written to President Chandrika calling for immediate investigation.

The problems of Jaffna refugees have worsened in the current rains as many of the shelters in camps are not strong. Reports say hundreds of displaced families have not received the government relief payment of Rs 2000. In mid-November, new Northern Rehabilitation minister Douglas Devananda ordered immediate provision of relief to 116,000 families affected by war. November relief had been delayed for an investigation into the theft at a Rehabilitation Department food store in Gurunagar.

## Flights

The government announced that Colombo-Jaffna passenger flights will resume on 17 November. Flights to Jaffna were suspended after a passenger plane crashed into the sea following an LTTE threat.

## Control

The LTTE's police force has placed a ceiling on the price of kerosene in the Vanni. From 6 November, kerosene can be sold only below Rs 125 a litre.

## Agreed

India agreed to release 82 of the 152 Sri Lankan fishermen held in prisons for entering Indian territorial waters. In late November, the Sri Lankan Navy fired on a boat killing an Indian fisherman, near Kachchativu Island.

## Deaths

The Tigers say that since 1982 up to 20 November, 16,599 cadre died in the war. In 1999, 1,543 were killed and this year 1,742 died.

## Appointed

After six weeks of speculation, Anuruddha Ratwatte was again appointed Deputy Defence minister on 30 November. GL Peiris was named Deputy Finance minister.

## Arrest

Reports say 124 Sri Lankans attempting to illegally enter Sicily from Turkey in November were arrested by Italian police. Each had paid \$9,000 to agents to enter Europe.

# Tiger landmine kills civilians

EIGHT civilians travelling in a private bus were killed by an LTTE landmine on 28 November near Kebitigollewe, 15 miles south-east of Vavuniya town, in Anuradhapura District. The dead included two girl students. Forty others were injured, 26 of them seriously.

Further north in Vavuniya, the Tigers attacked the Army at Cheddikulam on 12 November, killing a soldier. On 18 November, the Army attempted to advance north of Omanthai through Vilakkuvaithakulam. In the fighting that ensued, four soldiers and four Tigers were killed. The Army say six soldiers are missing after the fighting.

Vavuniya people fear that the dreaded white vans of military death squads have

returned. Five civilians are reported abducted in white vans. Vavuniya trader Kandasamy Karunakaran was abducted by unidentified gunmen in a white van on 17 November, taken to Colombo and detained. He managed to escape after five days and has reported his ordeal to the police in Vavuniya.

Meanwhile, complaints have been made to the Human Rights Commission that 18 people, 14 of whom were arrested by security forces in November including 13 year-old S Thileepan, are missing. Five were from Vepankulam and Poonthottam refugee camps.

Shortage of medicines plagues the Vanni region, where thousands of refugees continue to suffer. At a meeting

in Colombo on 12 November, TULF MPs told Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickremanayake that despite approval of the Defence Ministry, Army officers have refused to allow medicines for two quarters of 2000 into the Vanni and are holding them at Vavuniya.

Medical officers in Mallavi hospital in Mullaitivu District say 95% of the medicine stock is exhausted. Vitamins, antibiotics, drugs for diabetes and heart disease, anti-rabies vaccine and dressing are not available. In mid-November, the Army introduced new restrictions on people travelling into the Vanni from Vavuniya. Henceforth, each person will be allowed to carry only two small parcels of food or any other material.



■ *Army target populated areas in Trincomalee*

## Eastern MP assassinated

BATTICALOA MP Nimalanayagam Soundaranayagam was assassinated on 7 November by two gunmen near Kiran, ten miles north-west of Batticaloa town. Mr Soundaranayagam was elected MP on 10 October on the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) list and had refused to accept protection offered by the government.

As Batticaloa moaned the death of a popular politician, the people and organisations condemned the killing. The TULF appealed for public help but there is little hope of finding the killers, because a number of armed groups and death squads aligned to the government and the LTTE roam the east, operating with impunity. As a *hartal* (general

strike) was observed in the district on 13 November to protest against the murder, the police arrested the MP's assistant Sellathamby Loganathan who was injured in the attack.

Two day before the shooting incident, the LTTE fired on police posts in Eravur. The Army retaliated by shelling Sunkankerni in the night, killing four month-old S Satheesh and wounding 12 other civilians. Twelve houses were damaged. Two policemen and a civilian were injured in Tiger bomb attack on a police jeep on 10 November in Akkaraipatru.

Torrential rains caused havoc in Amparai and Batticaloa districts in mid-November. Over 100,000 families were affected by the floods. Batticaloa

Government Agent R Monagurusamy says 40,000 acres of rice lands are inundated causing estimated losses of Rs 100 million. Damage to roads, tanks, houses and other buildings is estimated at Rs 700 million (\$8.6 million).

In Amparai District, over 2,500 refugees were not provided dry rations for the last three months. After a local MP intervened, dry rations for two months were issued in mid-November. The refugees were displaced in 1990 and have demanded repeatedly to be allowed to return to their villages.

In Trincomalee District, the ban on fishing following the sea-borne attacks of the LTTE in October, has affected 8,000 fisher families in coastal areas. The security forces also denied permission to the fishermen to hold a protest meeting against the ban. Both the *Sea Tigers* and the Navy are said to be strengthening their forces in the region and a show-down is expected.

The Army shelled Soodaikudah, five miles north-west of Muthur, on 13 November, killing B Kugarajah and damaging his house extensively. Over 450 families fled further south and took refuge in schools. The UNHCR and ICRC are assisting the refugees.

Reports say Rakkuli and Navalady villages, two miles west of Muthur, are being shelled for the last three weeks causing damage. The local people have written to President Chandrika requesting her intervention to stop the Army targeting populated areas.

## Prison fear

IN the aftermath of the massacre at the Bandarawela rehabilitation centre in October, Tamil detainees in prisons and detention centres have expressed fear for their safety. Detainees in Kalutara prison, 25 miles south of Colombo, demand transfer to detention centres in Tamil areas. In the alternative, they suggest transfer to any detention centre in Colombo, with facilities for supervision by international human rights agencies. The Kalutara prisoners allege that after the Hill Country killings, a number of Tamil prisoners were isolated on the pretext of enquiry and brutally assaulted by prison guards. In late October, at least six detainees were taken out of the prison allegedly for transfer to other prisons.

In mid-November, Justice minister Batty Weerakoon ordered strengthening of security for Tamil detainees in Kalutara and Boossa detention centre in Galle, 65 miles south of Colombo. The minister also wants special protection for Tamil detainees when they are taken to courts to attend cases. But observers say that in the light of the large number of detainees under Emergency regulations and the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) and security force and prison guard connivance or participation in massacres, these measures unlikely make any difference to the present climate of impunity.

According to reports, currently there are some 2,500 Tamil detainees under the Emergency regulations and the PTA in eight prisons, 346 police stations throughout the island and a few Army camps. many of them have not been charged and cases relating to others are dragging for months or years as a result of delays in the Attorney General and Police departments. Observers say that there is an urgent need for the review of the detention regime as recommended by Amnesty International.

REPORTS say that Mannar Bishop Rayappu Joseph has arranged lands for the resettlement of 1,280 people in Pesalai refugee camp on Mannar Island. These refugees are from Vidaltivu on Mannar mainland and were displaced in June 1999 following Army's Operation *Rana Gosha IV* (Battle Cry).

The Bishop visited the camp on 5 November. Fishermen among the refugees told him that they were being harassed by the Navy and requested the Bishop's intervention to secure monthly permits for fishing in place of the current weekly permits. On 13 November, 31 refugees arrived by boats on Mannar Island from Mulangavil on mainland Vanni. They say that they left the area

because of shortage of food and medicines. Twenty five refugees left for India in boats from Pesalai on 23 November.

Investigations are underway on allegations of Navy involvement in smuggling banned goods into LTTE-controlled areas. In November some 20 civilians suspected to be involved in the operation were interrogated. The Army announced in November that traders must produce income tax receipts from Inland Revenue, to transport goods into Mannar.

The *Sea Tigers* and the Navy clashed at sea near Pallimunai on 21 November. A Tiger cadre was killed and two naval vessels were damaged. Eight soldiers were killed in a Tiger landmine attack on Mannar-Vavuniya road on 30 November.

## Resettlement



## Vavuniya resident suffers severe torture

# Colombo security

FOLLOWING suicide attacks in the previous months, security was tightened in Colombo in the run-up to LTTE's *Great Heroes Week* in November. Over 1,500 policemen provided security for the ceremonial inauguration of parliamentary sessions on 9 November. Some 1,000 troops and plain clothes officers of various police agencies, including the Terrorist Investigation Division (TID) were deployed throughout the capital.

Colombo region Deputy Inspector General of Police (DIG) Bodhi Liyanage said on 21 November that increased vigilance and special security measures have prevented four suicide bombers reaching their primary targets this year, although a number of civilians were killed. The police are particularly on the look out for four suicide bombers whose targets are said to be senior politicians.

Search operations continued in November. A Batticaloa resident who was scheduled to leave for Britain was arrested at Dehiwela on 14 November.

Forty young Tamil men and women were rounded-up in Wellawatte suburb on 27 November. After Jaffna MP Maheswaran intervened, 15 were released. A number of youths were also taken into custody in Grandpass suburb on that day. Police say a suspected suicide bomber was arrested near Negombo, 25 miles north of Colombo, following information provided by a Tiger suspect.

Subramaniam Kannan, 23, of Vavuniya, arrested by police on 20 June alleges in a fundamental rights application to the Supreme Court that he suffered severe torture for 42 days. At the time of the arrest he was not informed of the reasons. He was handed over to the Army on 26 June and was beaten repeatedly with batons at the 211 Brigade Army camp in Vavuniya. He was stripped and given electric shocks.

The Army thereafter handed Mr Kannan over to the police Counter Subversive Unit (CSU). His head was covered with a plastic bag dipped in

petrol. He was repeatedly assaulted and barbed wire was inserted into the rectum. He was forced to sign a confession under torture in the Sinhala language which he does not understand. Under Emergency regulations and the Prevention of Terrorism Act, a confession made to a police officer is admissible as evidence.

No development is reported in investigations on the killing of 28 Tamils in a rehabilitation centre at Bandarawela in October. The police say 30 youths suspected of involvement in the massacre are absconding. Currently 13 policemen, two soldiers and 26 civilians are in custody over the incident. Fourteen Tamil youths wounded in the attack are being treated in Colombo and Diyatalawe hospitals. Visitors say that the ten youths in Diyatalawe hospital remain handcuffed. According to Colombo agency the Centre for Human Rights and Development (CHRD), no one has been allowed to see the four persons receiving treatment at Colombo hospital.

## Arrests in the Hill Country

MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT have expressed concern over arrests of plantation youths following the violence that clouded the Hill Country in late October and early November causing damage of over Rs 100 million (\$1.2 million).

A number youths have been taken into custody in Haputale, Upcot and Badulla. Eighteen Tamil youths from Needwood Estate in Haputale, who were granted bail on 3 November, allege that they were severely beaten up in detention.

In a letter to President Chandrika, MP and Upcountry People's Front (UPF) leader P Chandrasekaran says that only Tamils are being arrested and no action is being taken against persons who burned Tamil shops in Talawakelle and Ginigathena. Two officers of the UPF have also been detained.

An UPF delegation led by Mr Chandrasekaran told Justice minister Batty Weerakoon in mid-November that arrests in the Hill Country relating to any violence in October and November should be under normal law. Current arrests under Emergency regulations or the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA)

make it extremely difficult to obtain release on bail. Emergency regulations introduced in May this year, empower the police to detain a person for 90 days with provisions for extension.

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. The Sri Lanka Monitor for a particular month may contain information relating to events of previous months or the early part of the following month.

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ISSN 0955-5943

Printed by: Imedia Print, 76-89 Alscot Road  
London SE1 3AW

While attempts are being made to form peace committees, trade unions and MPs say that the military presence in the Hill Country is creating tension and have demanded the withdrawal of the Army. But following a directive from Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickremanayake, government offices in the region have made it clear that the Army will remain until peace is restored and the refugees return to home areas.

NGOs have condemned Agriculture minister DM Jayaratne's suggestion that special resident identity cards should be issued to Tamils in the Hill Country. Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) MP M Sivalingam says such a measure will violate the fundamental rights of the people and create further problems for plantation youths who work in other areas, when they return home.

Six plantation Tamil workers were shot dead by the police during the violence in late October. According to reports, the bodies were buried without post-mortem. A cover-up is suspected and lawyers say that relatives are afraid to come forward to assert their rights.