

# The Sri Lanka Monitor

No 60

January 1993

Produced by the British Refugee Council

## Kittu dies in mystery ship blast

SATHASIVAM KRISHNAKUMAR, known as *Kittu*, the senior International Representative of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) died on 15 January, after a ship returning him to Jaffna was intercepted by Indian navy craft in international waters and blown up by the guerrillas following a two day chase, when Indian sailors attempted to board the vessel nine miles off Madras.

LTTE sources claim the 300-ton *MV Ahad* was intercepted 290 miles east of southern Sri Lanka and escorted into Indian waters. When two naval frigates closed on the ship it was destroyed in an explosion detonated by the guerrillas killing nine on board. Also among the dead was LTTE munitions expert *Kutti Sri* whose loss, observers say, will hit the Tigers equally hard. Nine LTTE cadre including senior Tiger Leader *Jeyachandran* jumped overboard and were remanded in custody by a South Indian Court on 18 January. Both Colombo and Madras were on high security alert following the incident and south Indian politicians P Nedumaran and Dr Ramdoss, sympathetic to the LTTE were arrested to pre-empt organised protest.

Following a 36-hour news blackout, Indian officials claimed the *Ahad* was carrying high-grade anti-aircraft weapons and was intercepted 23 miles east of Point Pedro, two miles outside Indian territorial waters. It remains unclear whether Indian intelligence services knew *Kittu* as well as the weapons were on board but LTTE sources now fear a high-level informer inside their European networks. They point to a new offensive by RAW, India's CIA, in revenge for the humiliation of India's military intervention in Sri Lanka from 1987 to 1990 and the reciprocal killing of former Indian premier Rajiv Gandhi in May 1991, allegedly by the LTTE.

A hand grenade was thrown at a vehicle in a quiet Jaffna street in the heart of the Tigers' stronghold, seriously injuring the driver on 4 January. The vehicle also contained senior LTTE leader *Pottu Amman*, who supposedly masterminded the Gandhi assassination. Jaffna commander *Dinesh* and six others were killed

in a similar mystery attack at Ariyalai last October. A new purge is underway at the top in the Tigers with persistent rumours of a rift between LTTE leader Prabhakaran and his deputy *Mahataya*. Fresh speculation this month that *Mahataya* has fled to Singapore was dismissed as "RAW propaganda".

*Kittu*, 33, a former Jaffna military commander, was a cousin and confidante of Prabhakaran who kept closely in touch with his leader during a four-year spell as the Tiger's senior representative in Europe. He lost a leg in 1985 when a bomb blew up his car in the internecine struggle for control of Jaffna between the Tigers and other militant groups.

Paris representative and LTTE Central Committee member Lawrence Thilagar says *Kittu* was returning to Jaffna with secret peace proposals approved by unnamed European governments. Others say *Kittu* had a more personal mission. Some of his thinking had changed in four years of exile and he wanted Prabhakaran to know how the ruthless inward-looking Tiger movement was perceived by over 250,000 Tamil refugees in Europe. He also believed that if the Tamil liberation struggle was to be successful in the long term it must win acceptance from the international community and observe international human rights standards. Thousands gathered for a massive three-day *hartal* or protest in Jaffna after his death and there were LTTE-organised demonstrations in London, Paris and New York. In the aftermath, the only certainty is that the Tigers will strike back, probably at Indian interests.

As the *Kittu* drama unfolded, Colombo's newly-installed Anglican Bishop, Rev Kenneth Fernando had just returned from a peace mission to Jaffna where he talked with Prabhakaran, the first time the elusive guerrilla leader had met with outsiders for almost two years. Bishop Fernando described Prabhakaran as a "humane man", kicking up a new dust storm in the Colombo press, and called for a new inter-religious peace initiative. Prabhakaran released two of 39 police held by the Tigers, into ICRC custody as a goodwill gesture and invited the

Bishop to return to Jaffna with a delegation of southern "intellectuals".

Days later, another group of intellectuals convened by Colombo Tamil lawyer Neelan Tiruchelvam were briefed by Dayan Jayatilleke one of President Premadasa's inner circle on the realities of the government's room for manoeuvre over the peace issue. While the widely discredited Select Committee process has yet to reach final conclusions, Jayatilleke said the federal option would engender pathological opposition from the majority Sinhalese community. The only pragmatic route was to marginalise the Tigers militarily and for the Tamil parties to make the best of the Provincial Councils system introduced by the 13th Amendment in 1987. Jayatilleke himself was briefly a minister in the EPRLF provincial government that nominally ruled the North-East while Indian forces and the Tigers fought it out.

Some analysts say that Mr Premadasa never intended to offer more devolution than the puppet-like provisions of the Provincial Council system and that the Select Committee and associated sideshows are merely an elaborate circular tour of the issues designed to bring the Tamils back to the starting point. Leading Sinhalese Buddhists who wrote to Mr Premadasa last month oppose even partial devolution of land and police powers to a North-East Provincial government under the present system. Mr Jayatilleke's *cri de coeur* met with scorn and incredulity from many at the meeting but the government's studied inability to break new ground is even less likely to convince the Tigers. The only alternative to *Tamil Eelam* (a separate state) is *Tamil Eelam*, LTTE leader Prabhakaran told senior cadre in Jaffna last month and cynicism and intransigence are unlikely to change his mind.

If *Kittu*'s mission was peaceful in whatever sense, his death represents another lost opportunity to break down intransigence, polarisation and escalation on both sides. If Bishop Fernando's initiative has pricked the public conscience more pressure must come for peace from both outside and inside Sri Lanka.

## Strangling the north

NINE HUNDRED AND FIVE children died needlessly because of medical shortages in Sri Lanka's war-torn northern districts, between May and November last year, according to a survey published in January. The children were among 14,416 people admitted to hospitals suffering from malaria and diarrhoea. Jaffna's Health Department has condemned the long delays by the Colombo government in sending medical supplies and says only a fraction of what is really needed goes north.

Jaffna health authorities cannot now contain diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis and leprosy in the absence of organised programmes by the National Health Department. The upward trend in maternal and infant deaths is due to poor nutrition, reports say. Another survey carried out in Jaffna recently indicates that almost 60% of children are 20% below average weight, and that over 5% are seriously malnourished.

Following the massacre of civilians in Jaffna lagoon at Kilali in early January, transport to the peninsula was disrupted for several weeks leading to rises in food and fuel prices. A kilo of sugar costs Rupees 45 and a bottle of kerosene rose to Rs 220. Paddy rice production has declined because of growing drought and reports say many families do not have even one meal a day.

In a letter to President Premadasa in mid-January Jaffna's Anglican Bishop, Rev DJ Ambalavanar, said people were destitute and denied help and called for the lifting of the ban on the use of the Kilali crossing.

Ministry of Rehabilitation reports maintain that 3,200 tons of food aid were sent to Jaffna by ship on 19 January, and that a further shipment of 3,050 tons is scheduled. But confidence in the ministry

has been shattered after the discovery in December that over 50% of food sent to the north has "disappeared". A CID investigation team which has questioned 50 people says important people are involved and arrests are imminent. Other sources say quantities of food consignments to the north are spirited away in mid-sea implying naval involvement. Hundreds of lorries carrying food to the north were held at Medawachchiya, south of Vavuniya after the Army refused to accept Ministry-approved bank receipts for vehicle registration certificates. In the current military stalemate such delays can be as deadly as bombs and more cost-effective.

The Sri Lankan Airforce again used F7 jets to bomb the Jaffna peninsula and shelling from military camps has continued. Nine civilians were killed and 16 injured in air attacks at Sithankerni on 6 January. Over 25 houses were destroyed. Army shells damaged Kathiripai Hindu temple and Kattaimeni church, injuring over 25 people in late January.

The LTTE continued to target Veli Oya in Mullaitivu District in January. Defence sources say the Army shot dead two Tigers at Kokkuthoduvai on 12 January. A large force of LTTE attacked an Army patrol at Athavatunuwewa on 18 January, killing 14 soldiers and injuring five others. The following day, another Tiger raiding party killed seven security personnel in Veli Oya. Military sources admit that they cannot contain LTTE attacks from Mullaitivu jungle bases, because they are overstretched in hostile terrain.

The Army launched a massive new three-pronged assault on northern districts in late January. The civilian population faces another round of food shortages, death and destruction.

### Escape or execution?

Madras LTTE leader and munitions expert, *Chandran* who was arrested with six others in early January, has died in police custody. A Madras police spokesman said he jumped from an upper storey window while trying to escape. Six of 19 Tiger cadre who escaped from a high security jail in Vellore have been arrested in Bombay.

### Denial

Speaking in Parliament, Prime Minister DB Wijetunge denied Sri Lankan naval units killed over 50 civilians crossing Jaffna lagoon from Kilali on 2 January. Mr Wijetunge claimed LTTE units attacked naval patrol boats. A new crossing point at Allipalai, two miles from Kilali functions intermittently.

### Forcible return

Sri Lankan Tamil asylum-seeker Ratnam Baskaran, 25, deported from Paris in mid-January, was produced in Negombo Magistrates Court while police made further enquiries into his background. Bail was set at Rs105,000 (\$2,500).

### Asylum deaths

Five Sinhalese asylum-seekers died from suffocation, travelling in a sealed compartment of a van which crossed the Austrian border from Hungary in late January, police sources say.

### Deported

Swiss national Heinz Lugberstedt, 53, arrested in Anuradhapura, will be deported from Sri Lanka, Colombo police said in late January for alleged LTTE links. The Colombo press claims Switzerland is now a major centre for LTTE fundraising and arms-buying.

## Fatal shore

AFTER an amphibious attack by the LTTE, killing two policemen at Pesalai on Mannar Island on 22 January, Sri Lankan soldiers ran amok, shooting dead a civilian and injuring five others, two of them inside the UNHCR-run Pesalai refugee camp. Three shops in the area were burned down.

Government officers told refugees on Mannar Island in mid-January that those voluntarily returning to their homes around Pesalai would be paid Rs 5,000 by UNHCR and the Rehabilitation Ministry. Reports say refugees are reluc-

tant to go home because houses are damaged and security is uncertain. A UNHCR-organised delegation, including Danish and Canadian diplomats, visiting Mannar endorsed plans for refugee resettlement, but voiced security concerns.

After reports last month of Tiger cadre infiltrating the UN-run refugee camp at Madhu, Sri Lanka's most sacred Catholic shrine, where there are 30,000 internal refugees, UNHCR staff in Colombo say the LTTE has agreed to withdraw from the camp area.

Six policemen and a civilian were shot

dead by gunmen at Maruthankulam refugee camp, five miles south-east of Vavuniya on 13 January. Military spokesmen said the LTTE carried out the attack but other sources claim one of the Tamil militant groups working with the Army is responsible. During the Army search that followed, a Home Guard was killed and a PLOTE cadre injured. The LTTE killed four soldiers in Vavuniya in a night attack on 25 January. A new UNHCR refugee camp at Asikulam was opened on 10 January with 276 refugees from Vavuniya railway station camp.

## Bitter harvest in Batticaloa

### Starving the east

AS *Maha*, the major harvest season approaches, Batticaloa's Army Commander, Brigadier Rohan Guneratne, has told farmers they need Army permits to bring in their rice crops, as a new crackdown begins, to starve out Tiger units west of the lagoon.

The military has ordered the closure of 13 Cooperative stores supplying dry rations to refugees in Batticaloa District in mid-January, until Army-approved family identity cards are obtained by refugees. In future, dry rations will be issued only to family card holders and Army officers say they are on high alert to prevent food stocks falling into Tiger hands.

Brigadier Guneratne also told local officials that areas north of Manmunai

have been "cleared" and that refugees in 13 camps could return to their villages in safety. The much-feared Special Task Force (STF) however surrounded Kaluthavalai village in this area and arrested eight people on 17 January. Another 30 Tamils were arrested in the same village three days later. Local officials say 70,000 of the district's 220,000 population are refugees with 96% of the 7,315 people in camps from areas north of Manmunai. NGOs say unofficial estimates are almost double government figures. Over 33,000 houses in the district have been destroyed.

A delegation of opposition MPs visiting refugee camps in early January found run-down buildings with leaking roofs and no sanitation. Children were special-

ly vulnerable after recent heavy rains said their report. Batticaloa hospital cannot provide essential drugs, instead issuing prescriptions for people to buy medicine at high prices from private traders. Food prices in the district rose sharply after floods in December.

The Army launched new military operations in Vantharumoolai north of Batticaloa on 13 January. Reports say troops met little opposition. Over 50 Tamils were taken into custody on 21 January by the STF in Eruvil. In late January, another 20 people were arrested in Mandur and local people say they have "disappeared".

Batticaloa's Peace Committee met a visiting Danish government delegation on 21 January providing a list of 4,368 disappearances in the district and urging international pressure to protect Tamil civilians. Local MP P Joseph told the delegation that large-scale disappearances continued throughout the north-east and there was no political will to solve the ethnic question.

Six soldiers were killed and three others injured in a LTTE ambush in Amparai District near Pullumalai on 10 January. Defence sources say two Tigers were killed in a clash at Akkaraipatru two days later. The STF launched *Operation Moonlight* on 24 January in Komari and Kanjikudichcharu jungles south of Amparai, seeking LTTE bases. In clashes that followed, a STF commando and two Tigers were killed.

## Colombo protest

THE new Free Media Movement, which emerged in the face of repeated attacks on journalists last year, held its first public rally in Colombo on 21 January attracting over 10,000 people including prominent newspaper men and opposition leaders. Many speakers emphasised that their campaign for freedom of expression was directed not only at the state but at opposition parties and "those groups who vied for state power" - an oblique reference to the LTTE and the remnants of the southern Sinhalese Marxist People's Liberation Front (JVP) whose three-year insurgency in 1987 and the Army's brutal response claimed 40,000 lives. Over 5,000 JVP suspects remain in custody in the aftermath. Mr Premadasa condemned the Free Media campaign at a rally in Matale a few days later, saying "foreign elements" were helping journalists from anti-government newspapers to discredit him. They were trying to breathe new life into the JVP, said the President.

The spectre of a JVP revival has been frequently used in recent months by some government spokesmen as a threat as much as a warning, evoking the brutal counter-terror unleashed by the Army in many southern districts.

A new round of night visits this month by gun-toting JVP youths extorting money from Dambulla villagers, is as likely to feature off-duty Army personnel who supplement their salaries with such "deep cover" activities. Arrests of JVP suspects continue on a small scale. Seven people were arrested in Homagama and another four including a woman in Piliyandala in late January. A new human rights grouping Gamata Neethiya has started up in isolated Moneragala District to help local people know their rights when arrested by police.

### Guns and promises

DESPITE Mr Premadasa's Presidential Mobile Secretariat in Trincomalee on 29 January, reports of arrests and killings continued throughout the district. Opening proceedings, Mr Premadasa promised six new Regional Secretariats in Trincomalee to address people's problems.

In a petition submitted to the President, local NGOs called for the immediate end to Sinhalese colonisation of land belonging to Tamils and seven Hindu temples in the District. Some Trincomalee residents have been issued a directive saying that if they do not repair damaged houses within two weeks, the government will confiscate their property. Former North-East Provincial Council Chairman Ram Rajakarier sent a cable to President Premadasa a week earlier, urging the release of over 2,000 young Tamils said

to be held in Army camps and prisons.

The LTTE carried out several attacks in the run-up to the President's visit. Two soldiers were killed by the LTTE on 12 January at Wilgampehera and police constable Sathiyaseelan was shot dead at Uppuveli four days later. A large Tiger contingent attacked an Army unit between Sitraru and Meegaskande and after hour-long battle killed 14 soldiers including an officer. In a dawn attack on the Kuchchaveli police station north of Trincomalee on 30 January the LTTE killed a constable and injured five others.

A passenger boat travelling from Trincomalee harbour to Muthur capsized in a freak storm on 25 January, drowning 80 people including seven soldiers. Only 17 bodies were later recovered. Although the boat normally carried 40 passengers, 110 people were on board at the time of the accident.

## NEW MOVES TO DEPORT SRI LANKANS REFUSED ASYLUM IN EUROPE

**Danish premier resigns over Tamil refugee crisis**

THE Sri Lankan Tamil refugee issue in Europe scaled new heights of controversy when Danish Prime Minister Poul Schluter was forced to resign on 14 January after an official enquiry found he had lied to Parliament, covering up an illegal policy of delaying visas for relatives of Tamil refugees given shelter in Denmark.

Under Danish law, the immediate family of 5,000 Tamil refugees and other refugee and immigrant communities may claim residency rights. As Mr Schluter stepped down, over 100 Sri Lankan Tamils were already on hunger strike to prevent the deportation of a young Tamil refused asylum. The deportation was suspended after the Danish government froze all forcible returns and sent a fact-finding delegation to Sri Lanka.

Many governments are seeking to reverse the flow of 500,000 asylum seekers who entered European countries last year and Tamils seem set to be a test case. Over 250,000 Sri Lankan Tamil

asylum-seekers have arrived in Europe in ten years. Less than 5% are granted full refugee status, most being given a "temporary" status meaning they can be returned to Sri Lanka when conditions improve. France alone has no two-tier system granting refugee status to many of its 30,000 Tamil applicants. Few of those refused outright in Europe are deported and the backlog of decisions and lengthy appeal procedures means there is a growing log-jam and little practical difference between refusal and acceptance say frustrated government officials. Refugee NGOs say timing and the conditions in the country of origin are crucial to avoid *refoulement* - returning an asylum-seeker to a hostile state or imminent danger.

The Sri Lankan case came back on the agenda last June when international refugee agency UNHCR circulated a briefing to its national offices dividing Sri Lanka into four zones designating Colombo and the south, safe for prospec-

tive returns. After many false starts in the last five years Switzerland will pioneer a new repatriation programme for rejected Sri Lankan asylum-seekers in June this year.

Switzerland has over 16,000 undecided Sri Lankan asylum cases which will now be re-opened. The rejected cases will be deported said Hans Peter Echoni, first secretary at the Swiss embassy in Colombo. Other sources believe the initial programme will target no more than 400 rejected Sri Lankans in Switzerland and that its real aim is to turn around or deter future asylum-seekers. But if the programme takes off, other governments may climb aboard the bandwagon.

The rise of the new right in Europe and allegations of drugs and arms deals involving Tamil refugees in Switzerland have added fresh impetus to the debate. Criminal networks smuggling Tamil refugees into Europe exposed in Norwegian newspaper *Verdens Gang* last month will add to the backlash.

**Premadasa offers new debate on development**

SRI LANKAN President Ranasinghe Premadasa threw down a new challenge in early January, offering opposition leaders a public debate on the government's development policies and economic performance.

In a letter to Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) leader Mrs S Bandaranaike, the President endorsed suggestions to discuss the three flagships of his current policy fleet, the *Janasaviya* poverty programme, privatisation or the "peoplistation" of public corporations and the ambitious programme to build 300 new garment factories across the country.

Speaking in Trincomalee, Mr Premadasa said that over 350,000 families had benefited from his innovative *Janasaviya* scheme which provides capital to the poor to start small business ventures. Another 100,000 families would join the scheme on 14 March said the President. But the debate that really matters is with the World Bank who have frequently reined in Mr Premadasa's populist economic policies by threatening to withhold vital loans.

The World Bank South Asia Division Vice President, Joseph Wood, was in

Colombo in mid-January and dropped a few heavy-handed hints to the press for streamlining government policy. Mr Wood was impressed by the resilience of the economy in spite of the civil war in the north-east but urged the government

to spend less on defence. Privatisation of the public sector was on track said Mr Wood but private managers in the plantation sector must have a bigger stake. Mr Premadasa's 300 garment factories scheme was "a good gamble" said Mr Wood but cautioned against too rapid expansion. The World Bank, in town to discuss a \$100 million credit line for Sri Lanka for structural adjustment, clearly wants further economic reforms, and analysts say more stringent demands are in the offing.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) Policy Framework Paper for Sri Lanka over the next three years cuts deep into the public sector making thousands of workers redundant and replacing pension rights with a social security fund. Health care, education and public utilities like electricity must become "self-financing" meaning dramatic price rises. Inflation is already back to 14%, unofficially 20%, and Sri Lanka's trade deficit has widened to almost \$1 billion, recent figures say. Prices of petrol, rice, bread, medicines and other essentials have risen by 15% and Mr Premadasa's debate may yet become an outcry.

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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ISSN 0955-5943

Funded by voluntary agencies worldwide.  
Technology by RnR DTP  
Printed by Printco, 374 Willesden High Rd,  
London NW10