

Colombo bombers target tourists

TAMIL separatists announced a new bombing campaign targeting tourists after explosions at four luxury hotels in Colombo on 8 April. Over 500 Tamils in the city were held in a wave of arrests while Foreign Minister ACS Hameed promised Western diplomatic missions new maximum security measures to protect the 400,000 tourists expected to visit Sri Lanka in 1994.

Anthony Aruldas was killed and Madhivannan, 22, badly injured when the bomb they were carrying exploded prematurely outside a Mount Lavana hotel. The Sapphire hotel in Wellawatte popular with Tamils was badly damaged in another blast and several people injured.

In a communique sent to five tourist hotels in the beach resort of Hikkaduwa south of Colombo, a previously unknown Tamil group, *Ellalan Force*, warned that tourists and foreign investors were now legitimate targets. Unless the government moved to solve the Tamil problem, the attacks would continue said an anonymous phone call to Colombo's *Reuters* office.

Sri Lankan military intelligence says the *Ellalan* group named after *Elara*, an ancient Tamil warrior king is a front for the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to protect their offices in Western countries from charges of promoting terrorism. Paris-based LTTE International Representative Lawrence Thilagar has denied LTTE involvement in the bombings.

A new security crackdown in Colombo is in full swing with new checkpoints and night raids by police on Tamil areas of the city. Aruldas, one of the Mount Lavana bombers, was the centre of a LTTE recruitment cell in the capital, defence sources say and claim the Tigers' "baby brigade" has been assigned new targets in Colombo after 14-year-old Kanthan from Neerveli in Jaffna was arrested in a Tamil house in Modera. A Tamil youth picked up in Kotahena described as a Jaffna military base commander is suspected of links with Aruldas and arrests have continued in Bambalapitiya and Wellawatte. An obituary in the pro-LTTE Canadian

Tamil journal *Ulagath Thamilar* described Aruldas as a hero who gave up a comfortable life in exile in Canada to sacrifice his life for the struggle.

There was renewed tension in Colombo before the country's annual political showpiece the May Day rally, where President Premadasa was assassinated a year ago allegedly by a LTTE suicide bomber. The military intercepted a lorry from LTTE-controlled territory at the Vavuniya checkpoint carrying a bomb supposedly destined for Colombo's May Day parades.

Despite the new security crackdown in Colombo, the Swiss government will push ahead with plans to deport Sri Lankans refused political asylum

The centrepiece of this year's ruling United National Party (UNP) rally - the unveiling of a commemorative statue of Mr Premadasa - was a poorly attended anti-climax after his widow and children boycotted the ceremonies. Still smarting after the Southern Provincial Council (SPC) election defeat last month, President DB Wijetunge planned a public reconciliation with Mr Premadasa's populist legacy in his unveiling address. Mr Wijetunge failed to appear at the ceremonies, defence sources citing the continuing security threat.

In contrast, SPC victor Mrs Chandrika Kumaranatunge told a cheering crowd of over 300,000 at the opposition Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) rally on the other side of Colombo, that the government had no interest in stopping the war in the north because its cronies were growing fat on the proceeds.

A new scramble for power has begun in both parties with December presidential elections looming. President Wijetunge has forced the resignation of UNP General Secretary Sirisena Cooray,

leader of the Premadasa rump in the party, after weeks of rumour. Mr Wijetunge plans a safe seat and a cabinet post for Kandy ally Gamini Dissanayake to tighten his grip on the UNP presidential nomination. Eminent scholar Prof GL Pieris resigned as Colombo University's Vice Chancellor to join the SLFP in mid-April saying the Constitution was being "savaged" and Parliament reduced to a game of "musical chairs".

Despite the new security crackdown in Colombo, the Swiss government will push ahead with plans to deport Sri Lankans refused political asylum. Announcing the programme in Berne on 20 April, Justice Minister Arnold Koller said over 11,000 Sri Lankan asylum-seekers who arrived in Switzerland after 1990 and whose cases are still pending could be deported if refused refugee status. Another 6,000 who arrived before 1990 will be allowed to stay.

The report of a Swiss Refugee Council (OSAR) fact-finding mission to Colombo released in late April opposes the repatriation and lists ten recommendations to ensure the safety of those returned. Entitled "*The time is not yet ripe*" a quote from Justice JFA Soza head of Sri Lanka's Human Rights Task Force, the report says only Sri Lankans with a functioning network of contacts in Colombo should be returned with valid travel and identity documents. No Tamil from the LTTE-controlled north should be deported says OSAR.

Despite a three-day token fast in Berne market square organised by the International Federation of Tamils (IFT) Swiss Tamil reaction has been muted. Many already know the programme is designed to deter *future* asylum-seekers from Sri Lanka and that less than 300 will be returned in the first two years. Others know that after four years in Switzerland, they can withdraw their asylum claim in return for a B humanitarian permit of residence renewable every year. Over 5,000 B permits were issued to Tamils last year.

In Colombo, there is little further sign of *Ellalan Force* in action. But if they are the Tigers, insiders say, they are not renowned for making empty threats.

THE NORTH

Mannar advance

SRI LANKAN forces launched a new offensive west of Vavuniya pushing five miles up the Mannar road to Puvarasankulam on 25 April. Eight soldiers were wounded as the LTTE withdrew. The advance was preceded by aerial bombing of the Tiger port of Vidattaitivu and the LTTE stronghold of Pandivirichchan further west where two civilians were killed and eight injured.

The military are consolidating control of hamlets around Puvarasankulam issuing security passes to hundreds of families in the area. Over 15 LTTE cadre were killed in air attacks a few miles north in Sinnathampanai, defence sources claim. In a parallel thrust further south, 500 Sri Lankan soldiers with armoured support advanced ten miles from the Cheddikulam frontline to the strategic crossroads village of Parayanalankulam.

Sri Lankan forces in Jaffna pushed forward in early April, extending their five-mile foothold around Palaly airbase by a further 1,000 metres. Over Tamil New Year in mid-April there was extensive shelling from the Army-controlled islands to the west. Nearly 20 people were injured and one man killed and the Sri Meenatchy temple badly damaged. Mother-of-seven Manickam Sarasu, 40, was killed and her eight-year-old daughter Shiyamali seriously injured as Sulipuram was shelled from Karaitivu on 20 April.

People in the peninsula are nervous anticipating a full-scale offensive after reports in late April of thousands of troops massing at Trincomalee. Four or

five planes a day arrive at Palaly landing soldiers local people say and senior Tamil civil servants in Colombo have been issued transfer directives to administer a recaptured Jaffna.

The last exit from the peninsula, the Tigers' ferry crossing at Kilali, functions three nights a week. Over two thousand civilians crossed on 20 April, many to collect the foreign remittances in Colombo banks from relatives in the West that keep the Jaffna economy afloat.

Further east in remote Mullaitivu, villages around Vatrpalai are shelled from Mullaitivu Army camp and from ships off Mullivaikal. There are growing medical shortages in the district. In the fiercely contested Manal Aru region further south, LTTE hit-and-run attacks on frontier areas continue. One policeman was killed and two injured at Padaviya on 16 April and two soldiers and two Tigers died in a dawn raid on a guard post at Gajabapura five days later.

Military analysts say the Army is employing new guerrilla-like tactics pointing to their lightning raids on Kunjukulam in Mannar and Thannimurippukulam in Mullaitivu last month, where nine LTTE cadre died in a mysterious ambush. The Tigers believe there are several long-range Army commando groups operating independently in the Vanni jungles seeking LTTE bases. LTTE launched a major counter-search operation south of Oddusuddan in mid-April.

Arms spree

Sri Lankan Navy Commander Vice Admiral Mohan Gunasekara has signed a Rs 1.5 billion (\$375 million) deal with China for four new warships. Senior defence officials left for Moscow on 10 April to buy 100 Russian BMP armoured truck vehicles for the Army's new mechanised infantry brigade.

Compensation

Over 12,000 North-East public servants have claimed over Rs 746 million (\$18 million) compensation for damage to property in the last ten years said Rehabilitation ministry officials who are urging the treasury to release Rs 200 million to begin payments.

Overtures

LTTE deputy political leader *Karikalan* sent a message to Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe in mid-April saying the Tigers were willing to open peace talks. President DB Wijetunge ruled out talks until the LTTE laid down their arms, reiterating that all Tamil parties must take part and that the basis for dialogue must be publicly announced.

State of Emergency

Moving to renew Sri Lanka's 17-year State of Emergency on 21 April Parliamentary Affairs Minister Dr Wimal Wickremasinghe said security forces carried out 74 cordon-and-search operations and 14 military attacks in the last month.

Silenced

LEADING Tamil exile and former TELO member Sabaratnam Sabalingam was shot dead in his Paris flat on 1 May.

Sabalingam, a publisher and interpreter was working on a history of the Tamil militant movements that exposed the many assassinations and "internal killings" among the groups. Many suspect the LTTE of his murder.

Sabalingam was one of nine founder members of the original Tamil New Tigers group in the '70s led by present LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran and assassinated PLOTE leader Uma Maheswaran. Sabalingam was shot in the back of the head by two Tamil boys who came for advice on their claim for political asylum.

Ten days earlier, a European

Parliament resolution called on member states to close all LTTE offices in Europe, charging they were used to propagate terrorism against a friendly country and to extort funds from Tamils in exile.

Western governments increasingly believe that the Tigers and other Tamil militants run flourishing refugee and drugs-smuggling rackets to finance their arms-buying and international lobby. Switzerland's new repatriation programme designed to deter future Sri Lankan asylum-seekers is motivated by a national perception that refugee groups and ethnic minorities now dominate organised crime as competing mafias.

Other European countries are considering their options. Another 33 Sri Lankan asylum-seekers without identity

papers were found in a Czech truck in early April as the vehicle was stopped by Germany's tough new border controls.

New Delhi journalist V Manohar says RAW, India's CIA, has developed a new understanding with the Tigers after extensive discussions with LTTE International Representative Lawrence Thilagar in Paris. Its initial purpose was to secure safety guarantees for Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao's visit to London in March. There is speculation that New Delhi will not renew its two-year ban outlawing the LTTE on 14 May although Tamil Nadu state has already done so. Colombo insider columnist *Taraki* sensing new overtures to India in the Tiger press wonders who is fooling who.

■ More Army reprisals in the east

Ring of fire

TAMIL farmer Veeran Vairamuthu, 50, was burned alive in his house as Sri Lankan security forces ran amok in a remote village in northern Batticaloa District on 18 April, after a LTTE landmine ambush nearby injured several soldiers. Most of Murugankovilady's 60 houses were burned to the ground and ten Tamils seriously injured including Ilayathamby, 84, and Sinnathamby, 75, as soldiers shot and beat fleeing villagers with rifle butts.

Isolated Vaharai, where refugees were resettled by the military only a year ago is still contested territory. NGOs are banned from Eechilampathai a few miles north in Trincomalee District, in case they see villagers conscripted for forced labour from prison-like hamlets sur-

rounded by barbed wire, "earning" their dry rations from Army-controlled stores in Seruwila. A military cordon sealed off the area six months ago as the hunt for Tiger bases intensified. A LTTE complex capable of housing 1,500 cadre was found deserted at Angodawillu on the Trincomalee-Batticaloa border in late April. A new report by Rehabilitation Minister P Dayaratne says 74 of 236 rural administrative divisions of Batticaloa remain in Tiger hands and over Rs 4 billion (\$100 million) is needed to rebuild over 40,000 homes and provide compensation for destitute farmers and fishermen. Officially there are 5,644 refugees in camps in the district and another 47,505 displaced with family or friends but NGOs reckon many more.

In reality, the military nervously police the coastal strip while the Tigers sit tight in the interior. Batticaloa Army coordinating officer Brig. Goonewardene has banned farming on over 10,000 acres west of Eravur to prevent civilian contact with LTTE. The Tigers attacked Senkalady police station on 20 April killing two constables. There were widespread cordon-and-search operations in Palamunai after a policeman was shot dead a day earlier, at an Eravur check-point.

Food and medical shortages are endemic. Health workers told a Cabinet Sub-Committee in late April that a serious shortage of medical staff in Batticaloa now threatened civilian lives. Thousands of refugees in the district have received no dry rations since February and children are going hungry say weeping parents. Officials blame bureaucracy in Colombo and a delay in printing food stamps.

Further north in Trincomalee, the Tigers remain entrenched in outlying areas of the district with occasional forays on the town. One Sri Lankan soldier was killed and two wounded by LTTE cadre in a hijacked vehicle on 8 April and two Airforce personnel died in an ambush at Panmedawachchiya five days later. There were major cordon-and-search operations in Trincomalee town with people from Kannakipuram and Port areas screened by masked informers at a local church. Some 12 men and eight women were taken away.

coping strategies

TAMIL EELAM runs on kerosene. Bottles of electric blue liquid wink in the sunlight outside every small shop or boutique on the road to LTTE-controlled Kilinochchi. Hundreds of lorries adapted to run on paraffin keep the northern economy on the move. After four years of military blockade, both civilians and guerrillas have developed simple coping strategies to survive.

Inside the Jaffna peninsula, many people have learned to live on one meal a day but food prices have stabilised at double those of Colombo and every inch of suitable ground is growing something edible. People now fear the irregular night shelling from Army positions more than the daylight air raids. It comes without warning and you cannot run. Three women in one Atchuvely family Perinpanayagi, 54, her sister Sakunthaladevi, 42, and daughter Sivadarshini, 19, were killed in artillery fire as the military inched half a mile south from Palaly in early April. It is hard to cope with infection and trauma. Over 90 people have died of septicaemia in Jaffna hospital in the last four months and malaria is spreading again outside the town. The psychological damage to young and old is less visible and harder to measure. UNICEF has agreed a Rs 2 million (\$50,000) life-line of drugs and medical supplies for the Jaffna area but it may take months to materialise.

Conservative Jaffna society must also cope with the LTTE's latest surge of social engineering - the outlawing of dowry payments. Offenders will be firmly punished say the Tigers ominously. LTTE's political wing held a week-long seminar in Rajakiramam village in Vadamaratchy in late March, while the Women's wing launched health and education programmes in a new "intensive" approach to community work. Its purpose is not to boost recruitment say the Tigers. The Sri Lankan military does that every time it shells the peninsula.

Power struggle

AFTER defeat in the south last month, President DB Wijetunge is struggling to pull together dissenting factions of his ruling United National Party (UNP) in preparation for December's presidential elections. Mr Wijetunge has banned all foreign visits by UNP MPs, instructing them to stay in their constituencies except on days that Parliament meets. Leading by example, the President has cancelled a visit to China after advisers told him to "overcome his enemies" in the party first.

Perceptions after the southern polls defeat are that grass roots organisation in the UNP is weak and that no party representing the Sinhala majority will succeed without courting the minorities namely the Hill Country Tamil Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) or the Sri Lankan Muslim Congress (SLMC).

In a well-publicised "secret" meeting in early April, President Wijetunge and CWC leader Tourism Minister Mr. Thondaman physically embraced and made up their political differences - for the moment. SLMC leader MHM Ashraff, flushed with a fresh mandate from his party congress in Kalmunai called on Mr Thondaman to work for *rapprochement* between the LTTE, the Muslims and the Tamil parties, as the CWC leader again asked President Wijetunge's permission to visit Jaffna.

Mr Thondaman's feud with CWC General Secretary MS Sellasamy heightened as Mr Sellasamy petitioned President Wijetunge in mid-April to sack Mr Thondaman for "openly working against the government". Thonda's terse response was "I wish him luck!". The two meet in court in July.

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister calls for expulsion of all Sri Lankan refugees

Soft target

FULMINATING over New Delhi's apathy, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayalalitha called again in early April for the expulsion of 180,000 Sri Lankan Tamil refugees, blaming them for a wave of violent crime and highway robberies sweeping the south Indian state.

The move followed the arrest of Dr S Ramdoss leader of the *Pattali Makkal Katchi* (PMK), the political arm of the farming Vanniar caste, numerically dominant in northern Tamil Nadu. Two people were killed in riots as buses were burned and three days of violent clashes with police ensued. PMK is one of a range of local opposition parties who champion LTTE's vision of a "greater Eelam" that includes south India's 60 million Tamils. Both factions of the major opposition DMK party abstained as Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly renewed a two-year ban, outlawing the LTTE on 21 April.

Jayalalitha, the opposition and New Delhi's central government routinely

accuse each other of conspiring with the Tigers for political gain as LTTE penetration of the south Indian state continues to dominate Tamil Nadu politics.

The refugees are a soft target, a political football kicked back and forward between New Delhi in the war between the centre and the state. Prime Minister Narasimha Rao in a letter of rebuke leaked to the press cautioned Jayalalitha to distinguish between refugees and LTTE militants, reaffirming New Delhi's commitment to voluntary repatriation only to Sri Lanka.

Almost 40,000 refugees have returned to Sri Lanka since January 1992 on a controversial bilateral repatriation programme. Another 70,000 remain in government-run camps in Tamil Nadu while another 110,000 live outside on remittances from relatives in Western countries. Last May, India banned most NGOs from working in camps closing them to external scrutiny. New Delhi claims the repatriations are voluntary but

many refugees say cutbacks in rations, schools and deteriorating housing in camps leaves them little option but to return. Hasim Utikan, Sri Lanka representative of United Nations refugee agency UNHCR who is monitoring the programme says another 5,000 have agreed to return this year but almost 3,000 refugees in Bhavanisager camp in south India's Periyar District say those who refuse to volunteer are confined to camp, losing jobs that supplement their meagre rations.

In the last ten years, 75,000 Sri Lankan refugee children have been born in exile in south India. Over 10,000 have returned with their parents to uncertain conditions in the war-torn north of the island but local officials refused to register them until protests were made to the Rehabilitation Ministry in mid-April. On Mannar Island where the refugees arrive, there are ominous signs that the Tigers are increasingly active, extorting taxes and ambushing police patrols.

Farmers' suicides spark outcry over World Bank policy

SOUTHERN Sri Lanka's rural heartland is in revolt after the suicides of 14 Sinhalese farmers in Polonnaruwa, overwhelmed by crop failure, rising debt and falling harvest prices.

Many were colonists in the Mahaweli scheme with only one to two acres of land. Father-of-five RG Somapala from Susirigama drank poison in January as the Farmers' Credit Society he pioneered, collapsed under a bank debt. Heavy rains destroyed half Polonnaruwa's rice crop this year leaving 60,000 families with little or no income. Farmers launched a major demonstration on 24 April after the local Paddy Marketing Board stopped buying rice, leaving private speculators to drive prices down further. Sugarcane farmers began a fast-unto-death after Hinagura Sugar Company refused to raise its buying price.

Samuni Samarakoon of the Peasant Information Centre in Ibbagamuwa says World Bank-inspired reforms of the agricultural sector in 1989 are driving farmers to suicide. Removal of subsidies and price controls on fertilisers has caused input costs to spiral. Privatisation of the

paddy marketing sector has pushed down selling prices. New bureaucracy for bank loans drives farmers to rural money lenders charging exorbitant rates.

New World Bank emphasis on export agriculture and removal of tariff barriers means small farmers can no longer get a

fair price for their food crops. The cost of production now exceeds the selling price leaving farmers trapped in an unequal contest no better off than those who lose their harvest to flood or drought says opposition MP Dr Mervyn De Silva. World Bank Deputy Director Dr Paul Isenman in Colombo in mid-April told journalists that Bank policy was being "demonised" and stereotyped. Liberalisation of Sri Lanka's economy had brought a fall in infant mortality and a rise in education standards. Agriculture, health and education remained Bank priorities said Dr Isenman.

As 200,000 protesting farmers marched on the Uva Province Chief Minister's office with a petition Agriculture Minister Dharmadasa Banda agreed a new appeals procedure to write off farmers' loans since 1976 but few expect quick or positive results. Legislation passed in 1990 and 1991 permits jailing defaulting farmers or confiscating their property.

Over a million Sri Lankan farmers owning less than two acres already know they cannot feed their family in the coming year.

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

The Sri Lanka Project
The British Refugee Council
3/9 Bondway
London SW8 1SJ
Tel: (071) 582 6922
Fax: (071) 582 9929

ISSN 0955-5943

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