

## NGOs push for polls watch

**S**RI LANKA'S Commissioner of Elections has agreed to set up a 30-strong team of international observers for the forthcoming general elections on 16 August, after mounting pressure from local and international human rights agencies who will mount a nationwide monitoring of the poll.

Over 2,000 civilian volunteers from People's Action for a Free and Fair Election (PAFFREL) and the Movement for a Free and Fair Election (MFFE) will monitor 15 out of 22 electoral districts. Local NGO efforts will be strengthened by a team of 20 from the Washington-based International Human Rights Law Group (IHR LG), which monitored the UN-sponsored Cambodia elections in 1993.

Some 39 political parties and independent groups will field 1,440 candidates for 225 seats in Sri Lanka's tenth parliament to be elected by nine million registered voters. Over 50,000 police will stand guard over 9,533 polling stations across the country.

NGO teams want government permission to monitor the polls "clustered" on the islands west of Jaffna and at Tellipalai, the military's foothold on the peninsula, where less than 6,000 of Jaffna and Kilinochchi's 600,000 registered voters will be able to vote - unable to cross the battle lines.

Another 300,000 Tamils in LTTE-controlled areas of Mullaitivu, Vavuniya and Mannar districts are effectively disenfranchised as are 500,000 internally displaced which includes 100,000 from the north who are refugees in the capital, Colombo. Only 19,000 people have registered to vote elsewhere, most of them northern Muslims in Kalpitiya refugee camps with 4,500 already refused.

Both the ruling United National Party (UNP) and its major opponents the Sri Lanka Freedom Party's (SLFP) People's Alliance (PA) are lukewarm on election monitoring. New UNP General Secretary Gamini Wijesekera told IHR LG representatives that local monitors were biased and that only the international government-accredited team could enter polling booths. The SLFP hierarchy remembers with some

bitterness how international observers rubber-stamped the results of 1988 presidential and 1989 general elections despite widespread violence and poll-rigging.

NGO spokesman Charles Abeysekera told a Colombo press conference in late July that pre-election violence had surpassed all previous polls. Over 1,000 election-related complaints were recorded with 12 people killed, most of them opposition supporters.

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Buddhist monk Ven. Suduwelle Uparathana Thero was killed as police opened fire on a PA rally near Chilaw, north of Colombo on 11 July. Thugs allied to Telecommunications minister AMS Adikari allegedly murdered SLFP organiser Piyasena in a brawl near Eppawela, Anuradhapura, on 29 July.

Sri Lanka's political warlords are determined to cling to power. After 17 years of UNP rule, a landslide SLFP victory is widely predicted based on the campaigning charisma of Mrs Bandaranaike's daughter, deputy leader, Mrs Chandrika Kumaranatunge. Chandrika has complained of a plot to kill her and says in a letter to President Wijetunge that curfew passes already sent to police stations across the country will be used to unleash UNP violence on polling day.

But the UNP is making up ground with its *stability versus chaos* media campaign harking back to the food shortages of the last SLFP government in the 1970s and observers say the result may become too close to call. Tension is rising in Colombo with panic buying of staple foods and new petrol shortages.

Sri Lanka's three million voters under 30 - too young to remember the SLFP years and alienated by the UNP's brutal suppression of the Sinhalese Marxist People's Liberation Front (JVP) insurgency between 1987 and 1990 when 40,000 people died - may hold the balance of power.

Acting JVP leader Somawansa Amarasinghe secretly returned to Sri Lanka in early July but did not appear at a massive rally at Nugegoda, where coalition leader Ariya Bulegoda said the JVP-affiliated National Salvation Front (NSF) would contest the election in 15 districts. The new force in youth politics, SLFP ally, *Janatha Mithuro*, which advocates peaceful but radical social reform, says NSF is a UNP front designed to splinter the youth vote.

Amnesty International in an open letter to the major political parties contesting has called for public commitments to international human rights standards and an end to impunity for Sri Lanka's feared security forces.

Both major party manifestos are predictably "the same medicine with different labels" said a world-weary Colombo press after the UNP reportedly plagiarised substantial sections of the SLFP policy document. There is a plethora of promises on local democracy and welfare issues. The UNP manifesto however pledges the survival of the executive presidency which a significant SLFP victory will dismantle, with a return to the Westminster system with Chandrika Kumaranatunge as Prime Minister and her mother the ailing Srimavo Bandaranaike in a token ceremonial role as Sri Lanka's first woman president.

The political merry-go-round continues. UNP deputy Speaker and film star Gamini Fonseka joined the SLFP in a blaze of publicity in early July. Hema Premadasa, the former president's widow was denied a UNP nomination in a cynical last-minute manoeuvre by the party hierarchy. Premadasa loyalists like former party general Secretary Sirisena Cooray and State Information minister AJ Ranasinghe have been sidelined. Mr Premadasa's son is rumoured to be working for a SLFP victory in Hambantota. To the victors go the spoils.

## THE NORTH

## Black Tigers breach Palaly

**BLACK TIGER** suicide commandos spearheaded a LTTE attack on the Army's strategic foothold in the Jaffna peninsula at Palaly airbase in late July. A helicopter was destroyed and the communications tower badly damaged. Casualty figures are unclear. LTTE units remain inside the three-mile perimeter security zone around the airport waiting to launch a second wave of attacks. Tiger sources say the offensive is to prevent the elections being staged at nearby Tellipalai.

Small-scale clashes in Jaffna continued throughout July, accompanied by air attacks and artillery shelling by the Sri Lankan military. Three civilians died and 15 were injured as aircraft bombed Valvettiturai on 20 July, damaging Urani hospital. An abortive attempt by the Army to push south from Tellipalai in mid-July was accompanied by heavy shelling from Karainagar and Mandaitivu. Further west on the south-west shore of Jaffna lagoon two LTTE cadre died in a night attack on Pooneryn.

Offshore encounters between naval craft and the *Sea Tigers* have increased. Three LTTE boats were sunk off Point Pedro and two Tigers killed in early July. A Tiger boat stockpiled with explosives for a suicide attack was captured off Kayts a week later. Two other LTTE craft were destroyed off Nagarkovil and Chellai on the Mullaitivu coast in late July. Navy attacks on Jaffna fishermen are routinely portrayed as successful attacks on Tiger craft. Over 100,000 Jaffna fishing families are virtually desti-

tute as the naval blockade continues. Colombo's Rehabilitation Ministry spokesman Pathmanathan says 223,763 refugees in the Jaffna peninsula receive free government food aid costing Rs 67 million (\$1.4 million) a month. Jaffna's one million civilian population get over 6,500 tons of food aid each month valued at Rs 400 million (\$8.8 million). Others are less upbeat. A government enquiry into missing food aid shipments has been quietly buried.

While food stocks have stabilised, medical supplies remain critical with over 20 major drugs including vaccines, antibiotics and heart drugs banned by the military blockade. Jaffna hospital staff made an urgent appeal to Sri Lankan doctors across the world through a visiting BBC journalist as the shortage of trained personnel reaches crisis point. A shell which fell inside the ICRC-run hospital perimeter on 25 July failed to explode.

The Tigers' supply lifeline to the mainland, the strategic ferry run across the lagoon at Kilali remains operational. Further south, the Sri Lankan Army attacked the LTTE checkpoint separating the two forces at Nochchimoddai ten miles north of Vavuniya on 9 July. Two Tiger cadre and a civilian were killed. Buildings and buses were gutted by fire. The LTTE have re-established a customs checkpoint a few miles further north. Three civilians and two LTTE were also killed in an Army raid on nearby Omanthai.

### Aid cut

After a visit to Colombo in mid-July by South Asia Director Paul Iseman, the World Bank has withdrawn \$25 million of unutilized credit for the Sri Lankan government including \$10 million for emergency reconstruction in the North-East.

### Fine

The Supreme Court has ordered police inspector Rohan Fernando to pay Rs 30,000 and the state a further Rs 117,000 after three suspects were stripped and had their teeth pulled out with pliers by six Homagama policemen in May 1990. Disciplinary proceedings against another 40 police officers for human rights offences have been abandoned police sources say.

### Award

Tamil poetess Selvi, held in LTTE prison in Jaffna for the last three years has been awarded the prestigious "Poetry International 1994" prize. The organising committee in Holland called on "all persons and bodies in authority, to use their influence towards obtaining Selvi's release".

### Housing pledge

All Tamil plantation workers will own their own houses by the year 2000 said Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe at a ceremony in Nuwara Eliya in mid-July to hand over ownership deeds to housing associations in a new agreement with Mr Thondaman's Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC).

# Gun law in Vavuniya

LOCAL NGOs say they fear to monitor the polls in Vavuniya where Tamil group and Army ally PLOTE rules the town and surrounding countryside with the gun. A string of election-related incidents has increased the tension.

Former LTTE cadre Gnanadas, 25, was found shot dead outside Vavuniya on 15 July and an Airforce private killed in the town a few days later. Balasubramaniam of Second Cross Street was hacked to death and his body burned on 23 July. Four days later a bomb at Vavuniya railway station injured three policemen and two civilians. A Tamil was killed and 15 injured after a hand grenade was thrown at the Vavuniya-bound train outside

Anuradhapura on 9 July. Local people claim the attack was racially motivated. Over 24 Tamils in Anuradhapura were arrested in the aftermath.

Tamil moderate party TULF contesting PLOTE's hegemony at the elections says armed PLOTE cadre threatened to kill local candidate V Anandasangari on 13 April. Despite appearances by heavyweights such as Anandasangari and party leader M Sivasithamparam, fewer than 200 people have attended TULF election rallies in Vavuniya and PLOTE are expected to sweep the board.

Ten miles west of Vavuniya at Puvarasankulam, the current frontline on the Mannar road, three Sri Lankan soldiers and an unknown number of LTTE

cadre were killed in a clash on 12 July. An ambulance from French medical agency Medecins Sans Frontieres was caught in the crossfire transporting patients from Vavuniya hospital to Madhu refugee camp, where there are 20,000 refugees in LTTE-controlled territory. There were no further casualties. Food stocks in Madhu remain stable says Mannar Government Agent Ganesh. On the Mannar coast, Sri Lankan aircraft bombed Silavathurai on 14 April killing 10 LTTE cadre. Defence sources said the port was the Tigers' base for a series of attacks on Sinhalese fishermen off Kalpitiya further south. Another 15 civilians were reported killed in Murungan in the same air attack.

## ■ Rival Tamil parties unmoved by opposition overtures

# A hung parliament

COLOMBO'S Supreme Court turned down a petition from Tamil moderate party TULF in mid-July which argued that current conditions will prevent free and fair elections in Jaffna. Most areas of the north are under LTTE control. Analysts say less than 1% of Jaffna voters are in the Army-controlled islands west of the peninsula and only 45% of Vanni voters will be able to vote. The Tigers have denounced the polls and Jaffna Government Agent K Manickavasagar is under strict LTTE orders to boycott the election process.

Bitter rivalry has led to clashes between the Tamil parties in the run-up to the polls. EPRLF members were attacked by EPDP cadre and prevented from campaigning on Jaffna islands.

EPDP leader Douglas Devananda has the backing of the government which is counting on support from EPDP MPs in the new Parliament. Mr Devananda denies he is the UNP coordinator for Jaffna. EPRLF is not expected to perform well in the north-east as it did in 1989 with the support of the Indian Army. Bitter memories remain of EPRLF's Vichy-like administration during the Indian occupation.

EROS, PLOTE and TELO, members of the new alliance TNUF, say lack of security and difficulty in obtaining travel permits has made campaigning on Mannar Island impossible. Reports also say TNUF members have clashed with the TULF in the east. After complaints by EPRLF and TULF, police will be

deployed on the Jaffna islands. But a demand to disarm the EPDP group, which is fielding ten candidates was turned down by Defence Secretary Hamilton Wanasinghe.

TULF will contest separately in the Vanni and the east but will support Kumar Ponnambalam's ACTC in Colombo. Observers believe the Tamil vote in Colombo will be split by PA's MS Sellasamy and UNP's two CWC candidates. Disunity among the Tamil parties has weakened their bargaining power with the two major political parties. Analysts say the PA is dangerously over-confident of a landslide victory and has failed to exploit the deteriorating relationship between the UNP and the minorities. Only EPRLF has said it would support the PA. Minority support would be vital in the case of a hung parliament which is a growing possibility.

TULF member Neelan Tiruchelvam, alone among the Tamils, moderate or militant, believes that the PA can deliver. Others remain unconvinced despite a commitment from SLFP General Secretary Dharmasiri Senanayake that the party will offer unconditional negotiations with LTTE without laying down of arms or the participation of leader Prabhakaran. An SLFP government will not reject foreign assistance to resolve the conflict and will keep the north-east merged by the redrawing of the eastern boundaries. TULF leader M Sivasithamparam says PA's proposals are "merely cosmetic".

# A million promises

Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) leader MHM Ashraff has promised half a million Muslim votes for the opposition PA. Apart from its traditional support in the east, SLMC hopes to gain votes among the 30,000 Muslim voters displaced from the north in Puttalam refugee camps. Mr Ashraff has assumed a high profile in the PA campaign and is in line to be a minister in a PA cabinet. Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) leader S Thondaman who made joint proposals to resolve the ethnic conflict with Mr Ashraff in June, has also pledged half a million Plantation Tamil votes for the ruling UNP. But four other large plantation unions support the PA and in Talawakelle, P Chandrasekaran's Upcountry People's Front (UPF) has become a formidable CWC opponent. The CWC and the UNP trade union LJEWU control over 70% of union membership and on the plantations, trade union loyalty often transcends all other affiliations. Other reports say that the 4.29% Plantation Tamil vote will not significantly tilt the election result, especially if it is fragmented. Attempts by the powerful Indian-Tamil business community, which believes that the CWC has lost its identity by siding with the UNP for 17 years, to persuade the party to contest on its own ticket, have failed. CWC says its pre-election agreement with the UNP ensures its independence inside and outside Parliament. CWC General Secretary MS Sellasamy, who was denied nomination by the UNP following a CWC demand, was sacked by the union's National Council on 27 June and Mr Thondaman's grandson SR Arumugam elected in his place. Mr Sellasamy will contest in Colombo and is expected to bring in large number of votes for the PA. Some observers say Plantation Tamils, alienated by President Wijetunge's anti-Tamil stance may yet surprise Mr Thondaman by voting against the UNP.

## Crackdown

SECURITY has tightened in the east in the run-up to the elections. A new wave of cordon-and-search operations is underway in Batticaloa and the jungles cut back for one mile-stretches on each side of the Valaichenai-Kalkudah road to prevent LTTE infiltration. The Tigers have warned Tamil candidates not to take part in the polls. Tension is rising. Two policemen were shot dead in Kalkudah and local councillor V Alagiah, 65, killed by two youths who called at his Sithandy home on 16 July.

Further south in Amparai District with a 40% Muslim population there are clashes between rival UNP and SLMC supporters. Tamil villagers in Akkaraipatru accuse Special Task Force police commandos of violence and harassment during intensive search operations in mid-July. A woman, Mrs

Kumaravel Parvathy subsequently committed suicide. Infant diarrhoea is spreading in Kalmunai and there is a new rise in rabies cases throughout the district.

Search operations are also underway further north in Trincomalee town and outlying areas. There are continuing clashes between soldiers and LTTE at Kumburupiddy, north of the town. Defence sources say over 15 Tigers died in encounters at Palampatru and Mavakkulam.

Trincomalee's strategic harbour and location and a population one third Sinhalese, one third Tamil, one third Muslim make it a key election target for the government. President Wijetunge has announced a massive new National Development Programme for the area including a new international airport, heavy industry and tourism development.

## Confusion over ground rules for Swiss deportation programme

# Closing Europe's doors

CONFUSION surrounds the controversial inter-governmental repatriation programme for Sri Lankans refused asylum in Switzerland, now in its second month of operation.

Swiss authorities are squabbling over the ground rules with United Nations refugee agency UNHCR. Another 16 Sri Lankans were deported to Colombo in July. Only two forcibly returned are part of the programme; insist Swiss officials who want to make full use of their quota of 300 forcible returns this year.

At a meeting with Swiss officials in mid-July, UNHCR complained that details on returnees were not sent to their Colombo office in time and that Swiss canton officials were now examining 1991 Sri Lankan asylum applications thus breaking the "last-in-first-out" principle of the bilateral agreement. Over 15,000 of 30,000 Sri Lankan asylum-seekers in Switzerland still await a decision on their case. If refused they "qualify" for the return programme. Another

800 Sri Lankans who sought asylum in Switzerland so far this year should be the first cases examined say exasperated UN officials.

UNHCR is providing "passive monitoring" of those deported to Colombo which many NGOs believe is inadequate for a country at war. A Swiss Red Cross team visited Colombo in mid-July to explore the potential for more active monitoring with local NGOs.

Over 100,000 Tamil refugees in run-down hotels and lodging houses are prime targets for regular police sweeps of the Sri Lankan capital as the LTTE bombing threat continues. Maruthanayagam, 42, a Jaffna dry fish trader was arrested at a Kotahena checkpoint in mid-July accused of blowing up a plane full of tourists at Colombo airport in 1986. Twelve north-east youths were arrested in the largely Tamil suburb of Dehiwela after a bomb explosion on 25 July. Over 10,000 young Tamils will flee Sri Lanka this year to claim asylum in

Western countries paying up to Rs 600,000 (\$15,000) each for false passports and visas to corrupt Colombo "refugee runner" agencies. Over 100 Sri Lankan asylum-seekers were arrested in early July as they landed on flimsy rafts on the shores of southern Italy. They said they had been duped by smugglers who promised to take them from Ukraine to Germany.

Balasingham, a Sri Lankan refugee in Holland, went on trial in Norway in early July charged with smuggling 20 Tamils into Norway. The money paid went to a LTTE-controlled syndicate. Norwegian newspapers claim Oslo is the new centre for Tiger operations in Europe. Norway is expected to follow the Swiss example and begin deporting Sri Lankans refused asylum. Most Tamils now list Canada as the most favoured destination and there is a growing market in recycled Canadian passports. Canadian officials visited Colombo in early July for high-level consultations.

## NGOs call for access to south Indian refugee camps

AT a state-wide meeting in Madras in early July, NGOs warned south Indian officials that conditions in government-run camps for 70,000 Sri Lankan refugees in Tamil Nadu have deteriorated and called for the lifting of a 14-month-old ban on NGOs working in the camps.

Refugees from 122 camps described how housing, water and sanitation standards were dangerously low and cash doles remained frozen at 1990 levels. In a six-point memorandum a NGO State Coordinating Committee called for immediate improvements in camp conditions, education facilities and the closing of six notorious "special camps" or jails where over 1,500 refugees are detained without charge or trial.

The deterioration in camp conditions is part of a series of secondary pressures to persuade refugees to return to Sri Lanka on a controversial voluntary repatriation programme. "If things get too comfortable, they won't want to go home", say senior Indian officials. The NGO ban in May 1993 was designed to increase pressure as repatriate numbers dropped, as well as to deprive camp inmates of supplementary feeding, edu-

cation, counselling and income generation programmes. Indian officials like State Home Minister PM Sayeed accuse NGOs of actively dissuading refugees to return to Sri Lanka. Over 40,000 have returned on the programme since January

1992 to Mannar Island and Trincomalee.

Local and international NGOs also challenge the watching brief of international refugee agency UNHCR currently monitoring the returns. UNHCR also has no access to the camps and is prevented from circulating information on conditions in Sri Lanka - part of its normal protection role. In a four-hour visit to Mandapam, one of the more notorious camps, in January, senior UNHCR staff described conditions as "adequate". The Madras meeting has called again for the NGO ban to be lifted supported by a group of international NGOs including the British Refugee Council.

Indian government attitudes to over 200,000 Sri Lankan refugees in the south hardened after the assassination of ex-Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, allegedly by LTTE, in May 1991. Over three years later the Gandhi murder trial is stalled in its preliminary stages while prosecution and defence lawyers haggle over fees and access to over 1,014 witnesses. Only 54 have given evidence in the last five months of proceedings. Defence lawyers launched a boycott of the case in mid-July.

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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