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Tug-of-war for refugees

RIDING a wave of popularity following the fall of Jaffna town, President Chandrika Kumaratunge urged Tamil political parties at a meeting on 11 December to persuade the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to lay down arms as a condition for ceasefire and negotiations.

President Chandrika assured Tamil leaders that government devolution proposals will be submitted to the Parliamentary Select Committee on Constitutional Reform (PSC) after the Tamil *Thai Pongal* festival on 15 January. But she turned down a plea to discuss the peace package before it is examined by the PSC.

Tamil parties want the government to make a commitment to keep the north-east merged. But government ally the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) will not agree for the inclusion of Amparai District which has a large Muslim population.

Tamil parties fear the proposals will be diluted before becoming law to appease Sinhala nationalists who are increasingly vocal since the Army victory in Jaffna. Reports say changes to the proposals will empower the President to dismiss any regional council that threatens the unity of Sri Lanka. Influential Buddhist high priests the Mahanayake Theras of Asgiriya and Malwatte have reiterated that the LTTE must be crushed before the devolution proposals are implemented.

Reports suggest that the government will continue its twin strategy of "war for peace" supposedly to force the LTTE to the negotiating table. The government believes that over 300,000 Tamil refugees who have fled to the Vanni on the mainland must be persuaded to return to Jaffna if any gain is to be gleaned from the military victory.

The Airforce has dropped a million leaflets in the Vanni and Thenmaratchy in the peninsula containing the devolution proposals and calling on the people to return to home areas.

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Army's reputation for civilian atrocities. The Tigers have also demonstrated that anyone attempting to return will be severely dealt with. Reports say five Tamil refugees who argued with local LTTE leaders have been abducted and have not been seen since. A new round of fighting for control of the Jaffna displaced is almost certain when the monsoon breaks in February.

To increase the pressure, the government has announced that wages of government officers and pensions will be paid only in Jaffna and has suspended cashflow to LTTE-controlled areas. A 100-strong government team flew to Jaffna in late December to monitor reconstruction and establish a new civil administration. Censorship on military news imposed in September was lifted on 21 December.

In a long New Year statement, LTTE leader V Prabhakaran has ruled out any peace talks until the Army withdraws from areas captured by the military in *Operation Sunray*, including Jaffna city. Tiger International Representative Lawrence Thilagar says LTTE will now give priority to the welfare and settlement of the 300,000 refugees in the Vanni.

While the Army consolidates its position in Jaffna, the Tigers are building a

new bureaucracy in the Vanni. Lands are being distributed to refugees from Jaffna which has alarmed the local population. The Tigers have set up ten-member mobile relief teams and have ordered that all welfare measures must be carried out through LTTE's Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation. The Tigers have also stepped up attacks in the east where over 70 soldiers were killed in December.

Both the LTTE and the government are preparing for the next round of fighting and have launched recruitment drives. Refugees arriving in Colombo say large numbers of youths are joining the LTTE and undergoing intensive training in jungle bases.

Sri Lankan intelligence officers say a ship carrying arms for the Tigers has left a Greek port. Reports say a Pakistani ship carrying arms for the military has arrived in the Colombo port. New battle tanks and Israeli aircraft have also arrived. A cabinet sub-committee has recommended conscription for those between the ages of 18 and 25.

The Army clearly believes that the LTTE has been weakened after sustaining 5,000 casualties and losing its Jaffna infrastructure and munitions factories. Hardline politicians and senior soldiers are urging new military operations to finish off the Tigers while they are weak. Some say the low military and civilian casualties in the Jaffna offensive has strengthened the government. Victory has bolstered Sinhalese confidence which may dilute opposition to the devolution proposals. Others believe that very confidence may set the stage for an *Operation Sunray II*.

Foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar believes that troops will shortly take control of other areas of Jaffna and secure the east. According to Deputy Defence minister Anuruddha Ratwatte plans are already in place to destroy the LTTE before March. But analysts believe it will be difficult to flush out the Tigers from their jungle bases in the Vanni and another round of costly and inconclusive guerrilla conflict is in prospect.

THE NORTH

Exile in the jungle

EPDP leader Douglas Devananda has requested more food and fuel for the Vanni area where over 300,000 people from Jaffna have sought refuge.

In a letter to President Chandrika Kumaratunge, Mr Devananda points out that food supply was reduced by over 85 lorry-loads in December and the new exodus demands at least 1,650 lorry-loads of food and much more than the current 2,450 barrels of kerosene every month.

Local food production in Vanni is expected to fall because of the continuing drought and restrictions on fertiliser. Only 10,000 hectares of land are under cultivation whereas the target is 23,000 hectares. The drought has also reduced water levels in wells by over 50%.

NGOs say nutritional levels are below normal and severe malnutrition has been reported among some children. Facilities for food storage are lacking. According to reports United Nations refugee agency UNHCR has set up a temporary food store in Kilinochchi. UNHCR is currently escorting government convoys north from Vavuniya. Prices have risen sharply. Vegetables have shot up from Rs 20 to Rs 100 a kilo. Sugar is sold at Rs 60 and soap at Rs 65.

The number of refugees in the Vanni is a growing health hazard. ICRC-supported mobile medical clinics are in use and people seriously ill are taken to Vavuniya hospital. Reports say the LTTE is levying a charge from each patient sent to Vavuniya.

Although medicines going north have increased, there remains a total ban on anaesthetic drugs and surgical supplies making surgery difficult. According to press reports, NGOs are now expected to provide all medical supplies for the north through the Health Services Ministry. But a tug-of-war between the Health Services Ministry and the Defence Ministry is affecting delivery.

NGOs are planning an urgent shelter programme to house the refugees, but once again are under pressure from the LTTE and the government. The Tigers want to approve all plans and the government is extremely reluctant to fund new settlements and legitimate the LTTE-inspired diaspora.

There is concern over the distribution of land in the Vanni by the LTTE to refugees from Jaffna. Local people fear that refugees may attempt to retain these lands even after returning to Jaffna. LTTE has asked refugees to plant food crops. But most of Jaffna's high castes lack the experience or inclination to engage in cultivation and there is tension with local people.

Reports say over 100,000 students have been displaced making them potential LTTE recruits. Schools begin in January and the Tigers are emptying Vanni schools of refugees and setting up work brigades to clear the jungles for new settlements. Jaffna families are not enthusiastic and questions are being raised whether the students will be allowed to continue their education.

Concern

The Civil Rights Movement (CRM) has expressed concern over proposed changes in the law to enable the government to appoint an interim management board for NGOs. CRM's secretary Suriya Wickremasinghe says the amendment would constitute a grave violation of the freedom of association.

Cargo

A Greek cargo ship carrying 181 Asian illegal immigrants, including an unknown number of Sri Lankans, ran aground off Sicily on 19 December.

Appeal

Twenty eight members of the US Congress have written to President Chandrika Kumaratunge urging her to provide humanitarian assistance to the displaced people and allow relief agencies access to northern Sri Lanka.

Smuggling

Thailand has denied allegations by Foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar, during a visit in December that one of its islands in the Andaman Sea is used by the LTTE for drug and arms smuggling.

Appointment

Britain's High Commissioner in Sri Lanka John Field will retire from diplomatic service at the end of February 1996. Former Falklands Islands Governor David Tatham is expected to be appointed as new High Commissioner.

Rebuilding Jaffna

FOLLOWING the capture of Jaffna city in early December, the Sri Lankan government is re-establishing civil administration in Army-held areas to encourage the return of refugees.

The causeways between Kayts and Mandaitivu islands and the peninsula are being repaired. A 100-member rehabilitation team has been despatched to the north and Emergency Relief Coordinator SMJ Senaratne says steps are being taken to restore electricity and water supply. Buildings damaged in the war will be repaired. Plans are being made to re-open Jaffna hospital. The cost of reconstruction is estimated at Rs 39 billion (\$780 million).

The Army is engaged in clearing operations in Jaffna town and

Valikamam, the western area of the peninsula. The Tigers continue to infiltrate in small attack squads. Two soldiers were injured in a LTTE attack from St Patrick's College on 8 December. Three LTTE were killed in a clash at Vallaveli, 10km from Palaly two days later.

Several clashes were reported in Valikamam West in mid-December. The Defence Ministry says a LTTE camp was discovered at Kalmunai Point west of Pooneryn on 19 December and some Tigers killed. Vadamaratchy area came under heavy Army shelling in mid-December. The LTTE attacked Army positions in Mathagal on 25 December. Two days later several LTTE cadre died in an attack on an Army camp at Puthur. Five soldiers were killed in a landmine

attack at Kopay on 31 December.

Reports say the Army launched a military operation south of Elephant Pass camp on 21 December and another operation north of the camp on 29 December. At least six LTTE boats were destroyed by the Navy in the northern seas.

According to NGOs there are currently over 150,000 newly displaced people remaining in Thenmaratchy and Vadamaratchy.

Health is a major concern and NGOs have set up medical screening and are carrying out nutrition surveys. Transport of soap and chlorine to Jaffna are now allowed. But reports say diarrhoea is spreading among the refugees. In early December five people died of diarrhoea in Chavakachcheri hospital.

■ Civilian death toll rises in eastern clashes

Caught in the crossfire

THE LTTE rammed a vehicle filled with explosives into the Special Task Force (STF) camp at Puthukudyiruppu in Batticaloa District on 5 December killing ten security personnel. Another 24 STF died when RPGs were fired on a bus carrying reinforcements. In the ensuing clash 23 Tigers were killed and another 29 STF injured. Local MP Joseph Pararajasingham says the Army shot dead 30 civilians trapped in the bus.

The LTTE has again stepped up attacks in the east. Major search operations by the STF with Airforce support in Thoppigala and Kanjikudicharu in early December were aimed at flushing out the Tigers from jungle bases. The STF says the Tigers had withdrawn further north

before the operations and accused *Rupavahini* television of leaking military plans. Two *Rupavahini* employees have been arrested.

The LTTE hit back with an amphibious attack at Santhiveli on 23 December killing 32 soldiers and wounding 34 others. The Army shot dead S Rajalingam and injured three other civilians. Four Tigers were killed in an Army ambush on 27 December.

The LTTE and the military clashed in early December at Palukamam and S Mullaimaran and N Nimalan working in their fields died in crossfire. MP Pararajasingham protested to President Chandrika that 10 Tamil villagers were abducted by Home Guards in mid-

December in Maha Oya area. The military shelled Thandiyady on 24 December killing V Ambiga and three year-old M Sasitharan. V Kanthalingam was killed at Madavivembu in shelling two days later.

Two Tigers were shot dead in early December at Chenkalady. In an abortive attempt to kill Kallady Army camp commander Col. Ranjith Vithna, a LTTE suicide bomber blew himself up near the Kallady bridge. Col. Vithana sustained minor injuries, but a civilian was killed.

The Army has warned of a new LTTE campaign after TELO member K Anvar was injured by a letter bomb. Parcel bombs addressed to Army officers have also been intercepted. TELO cadre S Suthakaran was shot dead by LTTE at Chenkalady on 27 December.

In Amparai, 15 refugees were attacked and injured by the Tigers at Vembilady in Thirukovil on 13 December, security sources say. The LTTE fired on a bowser in Pottuvil on 20 December killing the driver and his assistant.

The Army mounted a search operation in early December in Trincomalee District and arrested 20 LTTE suspects on their way to Batticaloa from Jaffna. Military intelligence say that Tiger leader *Thangam* has returned to Trincomalee and is targeting Army informants. Veerasingham Kirubakaran was shot dead at Alankerni on 15 December. The following day Rajadurai was killed at Manalchenai in Muthur. Another informant S. Rageswararasa was shot dead in Trincomalee town on 26 December.

Cash crisis

THE Defence Ministry instructed banks and other financial institutions in late December that cash should not be sent into Tiger-controlled areas alleging that some Rs 350 million (\$7 million) sent monthly to the north as wages to public officers and pensions is snatched by the LTTE. President Chandrika says "We are funding the LTTE. No wonder they are the most feared guerrillas in the world". The government earlier announced that wages will be paid out only in Jaffna.

The blocking of food will raise international concern but the stopping of cash will hardly raise an eyebrow. The government's tactic may hit the LTTE where it hurts. Without cashflow the people will not be able to pay "taxes" and the Tiger economy will be greatly affected. Currently the LTTE taxes are, among others, on consumer goods, transport, transfer of property and exit permits. The government strategy is also aimed at causing disaffection against the LTTE and to make the people in Vanni to return to Jaffna.

Reports say senior government officers are not keen on constructing shelters for the displaced people. Sections in the government seem to believe that a sufficient squeeze on the people will lead to a rebellion against the rebels. The economic blockade already in place under Emergency regulations which ban a number of essential items to the north will increase the pressure.

A government decision to issue identity cards for the people in Army-controlled areas in the north in addition to the national identity card has sparked anger. In the east, special identity cards have been issued by the Army. Observers say the decision will further alienate the Tamils.

The government's declared objective is to win the hearts and minds of the Tamils. But its attempts to bring the LTTE to its knees will hit the people hardest.

West from Vavuniya

SRI LANKAN forces pushed three kms west from Puvarasankulam in a new offensive in mid-December designed to recapture the hinterland from Vavuniya west to the Mannar coast.

The advance was accompanied by heavy shelling of Periya Pandivirichchan, the Tigers command-and-control centre close to Madhu, where over 5,000 civilians from the Jaffna exodus have sought refuge in a camp run by UN refugee agency UNHCR. LTTE sources say eight civilians were injured and a ten year-old girl was killed in a helicopter attack nearby on 29 December.

Cheddikulam is the Army's frontline position on the other road west to Mannar 12 kms further south and a major refugee centre. Nine Tamils were arrest-

ed after operations in mid-December.

Isolated Mannar island remains tense after A Muraleedaran, 36, local leader of Tamil militant group and Army ally, PLOTE, was shot dead by LTTE in Mannar town on 22 December. The island is dependent on food and fuel supplies by ship from Kalpitiya further south and there are signals that the Tigers will step up attacks south of Mannar from their stronghold in the Wilpattu jungles.

Over 300 Tigers attacked a remote police post at Keelapuliyankulam, 11 kms north of Puttalam on the Anuradhapura road in late December killing one policeman and injuring four others. Five LTTE died in the attack. Security forces are arming villagers in the area to form irregular militias.

Tiger threat to the capital continues

Colombo fears for arrested Tamils

COLOMBO MUNICIPAL COUNCIL has called on the Defence Ministry in a 21 December resolution to hold Tamils arrested on suspicion of LTTE involvement in a separate detention centre. The resolution follows complaints from parents and relatives that Tamils detained in remand prisons are facing attack or harassment by other prisoners. In early December the Human Rights Task Force (HRTF) also asked for LTTE suspects to be held separately during inquiries.

Hundreds of Colombo's 350,000 Tamils are screened every day by security forces as the LTTE threat to the capital continues. Police say six northern Tamils have been arrested in connection with the suicide bomb attacks in Colombo in November. According to press reports over 600 Tamils were arrested in the capital in early December. Police say most are held only a few hours while documents are checked but CWC MP Devaraj said in Parliament in early December that mass arrests and ill-treatment of Tamil detainees are unjustified. Reports say the

police are now demanding Colombo residents carry proof of continuous registration with them.

People also complain that they are being harassed and robbed by police imposters. A woman from Vavuniya was robbed of jewels worth Rs 40,000 on 21 December at Fort railway station, by persons demanding to see her identity card. Tamil MPs say a number of such robberies have taken place. Deputy Inspector General of Police Nissam has advised Tamils from the north-east not bring valuables to Colombo. Indrani Sivanantharajah alleges that she was robbed by three policemen of Rs 235,000 (\$4,700) during search of a lodge in the Pettah commercial centre.

MP Neelan Tiruchelvam has written to the Chairman of the HRTF calling for an inquiry on allegations of torture and harassment in police custody. In a fundamental rights application to the Supreme Court, Christopher Mariyanayagam, 56, alleges that he was tortured at the notorious Colombo police headquarters.

Search operations and arrests in the Hill Country continue. A Tamil woman travelling from Nuwara Eliya to Kandy for medical treatment was handed over to the police by a vigilance committee. She did not have Rs 3,000 for bail and was jailed by the Gampola courts. After a week she was released without any charge. Police say 21 Hill Country Tamils are held in Kalutara and Welikada prisons from August 1994.

After victory in Jaffna was announced on 5 December, a gang entered Millakande Estate in Horana and smashed workers' line-room houses. A man was seriously injured. MP R Yogarajah says Plantation Tamils in Kalutara are being continually targeted after incidents elsewhere on the island. Over 300 workers on Somerset Estate in Nuwara Eliya staged a strike on 8 December after police attempted to break into their houses to search for weapons. Sathiyaseelan was killed and three others injured in a bomb explosion at Divuluniyawa in Deniyaya.

Weapons shower in West Bengal

THE Indian government came under attack after Trade Minister P Sithambaram announced in Parliament that a file on the Rajiv Gandhi murder had 'disappeared' from the New Delhi office of Prime Minister Narasimha Rao. The discovery was made following a request for the file by the Jain Commission probing conspiracies behind the Rajiv assassination.

The LTTE is the prime suspect in the Rajiv Gandhi killing in Tamil Nadu in May 1991. Although charges were filed against 29 suspects in May 1992, the murder trial began only in May 1993 and over 235 have given evidence.

Senior government officers say the loss of the file will not affect the trial or the Jain Commission proceedings. But breakaway Congress (I) leaders in Uttar Pradesh have threatened legal action against Prime Minister Rao.

A Hong Kong private plane was forced to land by Indian authorities on 22 December after dropping large quantities of weapons in Puruliya District in the northern state of West Bengal. Five Latvian crew members and a Briton have been arrested. The aircraft had landed

earlier in Madras giving rise to suspicions of LTTE involvement. Two days later another plane from Karachi to Kathmandu was forced to land.

Reports say that following the escape of 43 LTTE supporters from the Vellore

jail in August, the 46 Sri Lankan families in the jail are being shifted to refugee camps to prevent further escapes.

Fifty two Indian fishermen abducted in November by the LTTE have been released according to reports. Sri Lanka is holding talks with India for the release over 85 Sri Lankan fishermen held by Indian coastguard.

The Indian navy has intensified patrols in the Palk Strait to prevent LTTE cadre escaping to Tamil Nadu from northern Sri Lanka. Security for the 300 participants in the South Asian Games in Madras was tightened after Tamil Nadu political parties threatened to protest. Several demonstrators including MDMK leader Y Gopalasamy were arrested outside the Nehru Stadium on 18 December, the opening day of the Games. Two days earlier a student burned himself to death in Trichy in support of the Sri Lankan Tamil cause.

Sri Lanka's former *Rupavahini* TV chairman and currently a Tamil rights campaigner M Vasantharajah was refused permission by immigration officers to enter India on 31 December to meet Tamil Nadu politicians.

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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