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Tiger arms ship sunk

An arms ship belonging to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was sunk by the Sri Lankan Airforce and Navy off the coast of Alampil in Mullaitivu District on 14 February.

According to the military, six Tiger boats transporting weapons from the supply ship *Horizon* were also sunk. Other reports say a number of boats had escaped. The LTTE claims that the flotilla was on its way south to launch an attack on naval vessels at Trincomalee port when it was intercepted by two Indian naval vessels and information passed on to the Sri Lankan military.

Fear has gripped the capital, Colombo, in the aftermath of the LTTE 31 January bomb which killed over 80 people and caused extensive damage estimated at Rs 5 billion (\$100 million). A rumour that Colombo's water supply had been poisoned spread like wildfire on the night of 6 February, jamming telephone lines as thousands of panic-stricken residents attempted to warn relatives.

A few days later, 150kg of explosives were found in a lorry parked in the Sama Vihara Buddhist temple premises in Kotahena. Three monks are being interrogated and Inspector General of Police WB Rajaguru warns that 20 Tigers are masquerading as Buddhist priests in the capital. Reports say an Army sergeant who issued permits for the Central Bank suicide bombers to go to Colombo from Vavuniya has also been arrested.

Security operations in Colombo have been intensified. According to reports a battalion of the Army's *Sinha* regiment has now been deployed to hunt Tigers in the capital. The government ordered all schools in the island to be closed from 15 February fearing LTTE attacks. Reports say the Malaysian and Japanese missions in Colombo have received threats from *Ellalan Force*. The LTTE has denied any links with the shadowy group.

Thousands of Tamils have been arrested in Colombo since the Central Bank bomb and 400 are being held. The arrest of an Assistant Commissioner of Labour has come as a surprise.

V Rudrakumaran, LTTE's representative at the Bergen conference proposed greater power-sharing for the Tamils by over-representation at the centre as in the case of the Dayton peace accord in Bosnia.

Ramalingam Dharmalingam was taken into custody on 9 February from Dharmadutha Vihara Buddhist temple where he lived from 1985. Police say Mr Dharmalingam spied for the LTTE and was involved in the assassination of President Premadasa in May 1993.

As the Tiger threat continues Colombo residents accuse the government of sacrificing security in densely-populated Colombo city to hold Jaffna where over 20,000 troops are guarding areas largely devoid of people. Tiger skirmishes continue in the north along with major LTTE attacks in the east.

The sinking of the LTTE arms ship was overshadowed by the massacre of 24 Tamil civilians at Kumarapuram in Trincomalee District on 11 February. In Colombo, over 140 Tamil detainees staged a five-day hunger strike after they were attacked by prison guards.

Tight security measures for the Independence Day parade on 4 February and ceremonial opening of Parliament's new session on 9 February caused chaos in Colombo. Roads were blockaded and many people were unable to go to work. Ministers were annoyed when they were asked to travel by bus to the Parliament.

In her address to Parliament President Chandrika Kumaratunge declared that

the government would follow a three Ds strategy for peace - *Devolution* through *Dialogue* with the people and *Development* of war-torn areas. The main opposition United National Party (UNP) which has launched a million-signature campaign condemning security lapses in Colombo, boycotted the ceremonial opening.

The Parliamentary Select Committee on Constitutional Reform will begin discussing the government's devolution package on 7 March. Reports say President Chandrika may go for snap elections if the People's Alliance is unable to obtain UNP's support for the two-thirds majority necessary for the passage of the proposals in Parliament.

In the search for peace, Norway's Christian Michaelson Institute held a conference on *Sri Lankan Conflict and International Responsibility* on 26 February. While the conference in Bergen was attended by the Norwegian Foreign minister and delegates from Sri Lanka, a demonstration was held outside the Norwegian embassy in Colombo protesting that it was intended to promote the LTTE. The Sri Lankan government failed to nominate a representative.

LTTE's representative at the conference V Rudrakumaran suggested an asymmetric relationship between the north-east region and the central government as compared with other regions and greater power-sharing for the Tamils by over-representation at the centre as in the case of the US-brokered Dayton peace accord in Bosnia. Some observers view the statement from a militant group which has steadfastly stood for a separate state as significant. Others say more power to the north-east is only a stepping stone to a separate state.

Mr Rudrakumaran also said that the distrust between the parties was too deep and called for international mediation. The Sri Lankan government has ruled out international involvement although Foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar is said to have called for UN mediation in the recent cricket dispute between Sri Lanka and Australia.

THE NORTH

NGOs fear disaster

NGOs have warned again of a catastrophe looming if more humanitarian assistance is not provided to 320,000 displaced and destitute people in the Vanni region who fled Jaffna last November.

NGO visitors to the region say that there have already been a number of deaths because of insufficient food and medicine. There are only four doctors in Kilinochchi hospital and no laboratory facilities for diagnosis. Refugee children are malnourished and skin diseases and diarrhoea are spreading. Women have to deliver babies in the open.

Water is increasingly scarce and sanitary conditions are deteriorating as wells are used by large number of families. At a conference in Vavuniya on 19 February the Vanni Government Agents (GA) urged international agencies to provide assistance for new tube wells. Local rice production has fallen because of growing drought.

Over 3,000 people held in Vavuniya for five days after the Colombo Central Bank bomb were allowed to proceed north in early February. Only those who are certified seriously ill, government officers and relatives for funerals can now travel south from Vavuniya.

The dispute between UNHCR and the government over radio equipment for the international refugee agency in Kilinochchi, has not been resolved. UNHCR says radio equipment is essential for its operations and has refused to accompany government food convoys to

the north since mid-January. Education has been badly affected with refugees occupying over 180 schools in the north. Large number of students are displaced making recruitment easier for the LTTE. Reports say the Army has denied permission for a team of local doctors to go to Point Pedro to conduct practical examination for medical students.

The Point Pedro hospital, currently supervised by the ICRC is short of doctors and medicines. Jaffna GA S Pathmanathan has written urging the Defence Ministry to allow private dealers to transport medicines to Jaffna.

Those who have returned to their homes from refugee camps in Army-controlled areas have been asked to fly white flags and display a notice containing details of residents. Over 100 people keen to return to Jaffna were flown to Palaly from Colombo on 19 February.

The Tigers continued to harass the Army in Jaffna. An Army patrol was ambushed at Mathagal on 6 February killing two soldiers. The Defence Ministry says a Tiger was killed in a clash at Vannarpannai on 15 February. Three days later three policemen in a bullock cart were killed by a landmine.

Four Tigers died in an attack on Periyavilan Army post on 20 February. Pooneryn on the mainland was bombed by the Airforce on 24 February killing two civilians. Two LTTE women died in an attack on the Army at Kondavil on 28 February.

Misuse

Criminal proceedings have been brought against a Swiss Federal Refugee Office (ODR) officer who misused the signature of a Tamil asylum-seeker to obtain a passport in order to enable his repatriation to Sri Lanka.

Declared

Tiger international representative Lawrence Thilagar says the LTTE has no intention of disrupting the 1996 cricket World Cup matches. Australia and West Indies have refused to play in Sri Lanka fearing LTTE attacks.

Safe

International refugee agency UNHCR says in a January guideline that Tamils do not face serious problems in Colombo by reason of their ethnic origin, although many Tamils perceive identity checks, round-up, temporary detention and house searching as discriminatory harassment.

Refugees

Fourteen refugees from Delft Island west of Jaffna peninsula who reached Rameswaram in south India on 14 February were handed over to the Tamil Nadu police by the Indian navy.

Warning

Ceylon Workers Congress leader S Thondaman warns of industrial strife if demands of the Plantation workers, including wage increase and 300 days work in a year are not met by the Ceylon Estate Employers Federation.

LTTE blockades west coast

THE LTTE hijacked six boats carrying fuel off Vathalakundu between Kalpitty and Mannar on 19 February removing 50 barrels of kerosene destined for Mannar. Supply to the public, suspended after the incident, was resumed in late February following the arrival of 400 barrels of fuel. Reports say 1,000 barrels a month are needed monthly in Mannar and fishing has been affected by the shortage.

Despite Navy presence, the LTTE is freely using the western sea, observers say. Over 300 policemen were deployed on the beaches in early February after two unidentified ships, suspected to be Tiger supply vessels, were sighted off Iranawila in Chilaw.

Reports say 24 Tamil Nadu fishermen

were abducted by the LTTE on 14 February in the Palk Strait and taken to Iluppaikadavai, 12 miles north of Mannar, before being released. Six Sri Lankan fishermen in three boats went missing after setting off from Pesalai on 21 February.

Fear of LTTE infiltration of Army-controlled Mannar Island is causing problems for civilians. Fishermen V Jesunesan and C Patrick were arrested near Vidataltivu on 1 February. Reports say over 500 youths who arrived from the Tiger-held Mannar mainland on 24 February for a teachers competitive examination were detained and harassed by the Army. Eleven were held for further investigation.

Further east in the contested Veli Oya area in Mullaitivu District, five soldiers including three officers were injured in a LTTE landmine attack near Kalyanapura on 18 February.

The Tigers and the Army clashed at Athavetunuwewa on 27 February. Three soldiers and two Home Guards were injured. A civilian was killed. Alampil and Kumulamunai areas were heavily shelled from the Mullaitivu Army camp in late February.

The Presidential Commission on disappearances will begin investigations in Puttalam District in early March. Over 200 complaints to the Commission from the area include abductions by the Army and the LTTE.

■ LTTE attacks multiply in the east

Batticaloa burns

OVER 150 Tigers launched an assault on Kinnayady Army camp in Valaichenai on 21 February injuring four soldiers. Fourteen LTTE cadre were killed in counter-attacks. After the attack the Army shelled Kinnayady village killing two civilians and seriously wounding eight others. Nearly 600 families fled the area.

Following a second attack on the camp three days later, 125 houses in the village were burned and another 90 looted and damaged. Local MP K Thurairajasingham has demanded an inquiry into the incident.

The Tigers, under the command of deputy leader *Karikalan* have stepped-up guerrilla raids in the east. Four policemen

were injured in an amphibious attack on Paithalai police station on 5 February. S Chandrasekaran, injured in crossfire later died in hospital. A Tiger was killed in a clash at Mylambaveli on the same day.

In an ambush on 7 February at Navalady 11 soldiers were killed. Three days later a soldier died in a clash at Vantharumoolai. Six policemen were killed at Pullumalai on 14 February. A Tiger died in an Army ambush on 19 February at Pulipainthakal.

The Army carried out a number of search operations in Batticaloa District. Villagers were forced to join jungle clearing between Kalkudah and Valaichenai as the Army suspect Tiger infiltration through Paithalai. Soldiers

involved in a search operation at Iyankerni on 8 February fired a shell on Bharathy village injuring four civilians. Three days later patients fled as police fired on Valaichenai hospital alleging that Tigers were hiding in the building.

The Batticaloa-Colombo train was damaged by a LTTE landmine between Vantharumoolai and Eravur on 11 February. The Tigers blasted at least four electricity transformers in February plunging several villages in darkness. Reports say over 50 transformers have been damaged since April '95 estimated at Rs 82.3 million (\$1.6 million).

An EPDP delegation led by Douglas Devananda told Deputy Defence minister Anuruddha Ratwatte that the rice harvest and marketing have been badly affected by STF ban on vehicles into the Paduvankarai area west of Batticaloa lagoon. Transport has deteriorated after fuel shortages and commandeering of buses by the military.

Over 1,200 refugees in Eravur complain that dry rations have not been provided for the last three months. According to the Rehabilitation Ministry 138,500 people are currently receiving dry rations in Batticaloa District.

Refugee shelters at Alayadivembu in Amparai District were damaged by torrential rains in early February. Rice crops were submerged and harvested crops washed away. Reports say 150,000 acres of rice crops have been affected. Four Tamil children were killed in Army shell attacks on Thikkodai on 24 February.

Carnage

FOLLOWING the killing of two soldiers by the LTTE, the Army massacred 24 Tamils on 11 February in Kumarapuram near Kiliveddy, 23 km south of Trincomalee town. Four of 28 others injured died later in hospital. Human rights activists say 17 year-old A Thanalakshmi was gang-raped by soldiers before being killed. An Army board of enquiry is investigating and 16 soldiers have been arrested. Amnesty International has called for an independent investigation.

Visitors to Trincomalee say the situation is volatile. Two Tigers were killed in an Army ambush at Pallikudiyiruppu south-east of Trincomalee on 6 February. The LTTE attacked a military post at Sambaltivu north of Trincomalee on 12 February killing four policemen. Police say local councillor HL Sumathiratne and his two security officers died in crossfire. In a landmine attack two days later at Pulmoddai five policemen were seriously wounded. Four Tigers in a tractor were shot dead by the Army on 23 February at Kuchchaveli. On the same day A Subramaniam and S Rasendran working in a quarry at Kanniya were shot dead by soldiers.

Around 600 refugees from a UNHCR-supervised camp in Uppuveli were forcibly removed in military trucks by the Army further north in late February for resettlement in Kuchchaveli. Twenty five refugee families were similarly removed to Kuchchaveli from Nilaveli. Reports say UNHCR officers were not consulted. Over 75,000 people are receiving dry rations in Trincomalee District.

The Army allows only limited amounts of food and fuel and permits are necessary for building materials. Villagers are unable to use radios because of ban on batteries and food production has fallen by fertiliser restrictions. The Army fears batteries and chemicals may fall into the hands of the Tigers for making bombs.

UNP purge

A rebel group has emerged within the main opposition UNP after leader Ranil Wickremasinghe decided to drop senior members from the Working Committee. Former ministers including Festus Perera and Wimal Wickremasinghe have fallen victims in the clear-out.

The rebels say they will remain in the party and form a pressure group within and have attempted to recruit supporters of former presidential candidate Gamini Dissanayake. Ms Wickremasinghe and Dissanayake were contenders for the leadership of the party after the assassination of President Premadasa.

Mr Wickremasinghe has denied that the rebels were sacked fearing that they may support the government devolution package. Mr Wickremasinghe met the Sri

Lanka Muslim Congress and the Tamil parties in February. SLMC has expressed fears that Muslims will become a minority in a merged north-east with one regional council. The Tamil parties urged the UNP to drop the demand for a unitary state and support the permanent merger.

Mr Wickremasinghe told President Chandrika at their meeting on 21 February that the UNP would submit its proposals to the Parliamentary Select Committee. President Chandrika has her own problems. People's Alliance member DUN(L)F's Srimani Athulathmudali is vehemently opposed to any constitutional change that will affect the unitary state. Party rivalries and internal conflicts which have destabilised Sri Lanka are rearing their heads again.

Fears for those detained in the capital

Colombo jailers attack Tamil prisoners

OVER 100 prison officers attacked Tamils in the Colombo Magazine prison in Borella on 19 February with metal rods, clubs and cricket bats injuring a number of detainees. There are currently over 140 Tamil prisoners in the Magazine prison including 63 year-old AP Ramiah who is unaware of the reasons for his detention.

Lingeswaran, an accused in the Lalith Athulathmudali murder, became unconscious when repeatedly beaten by prison guards as he was held by another prisoner. Chandrasekaran, Parameswaran and Army headquarters bomb suspect S Segar suffered severe injuries and were removed from their cells. The four prisoners were later found in the prison hospital following a complaint by lawyer Kumar Ponnambalam to the Colombo High Court.

K Suthakaran and K Yogadas say the attack was led by prison officer AK Chandrasiri and identified him in the High Court. Tamil prisoners staged a five-day hunger strike demanding adequate security.

The Justice Ministry appointed Additional Secretary MS Jayasinghe to conduct an inquiry. Mr Ponnambalam has denounced the inquiry which proceeded without a representative for the prisoners as an eye-wash. The detainees say their statements were recorded in the Sinhala language which they do not understand. A request by lawyers for an identification parade has been denied. Speaking in Parliament on 23 February TULF MP Neelan Tiruchelvam demanded a Commission of Enquiry.

Observers say the Magazine prison attack is reminiscent of the assault on Tamil detainees at the Colombo Welikade prison in July 1983 when 53 prisoners were massacred. Currently there are 120 Tamil prisoners in various prisons for two to three years without charge or trial. B Muthusamy, held for over two years began a hunger strike in Magazine prison in early February.

In a letter to Justice minister GL Peiris, TULF leader M Sivasithamparam says that although prisoners arrested under Emergency regulations must be released if charges are not filed within 90 days, in the case of Tamil prisoners detention is prolonged by changing their cases to fall under the Prevention of

Wimal Fernando of the Movement for the Defence of Democratic Rights says security measures are leading to harassment, humiliation as well as insecurity of the Tamil community.

Terrorism Act (PTA). Legal experts say these detentions are illegal. Under the PTA a person may be held in custody up to 18 months without charge or access. Mr Sivasithamparam has urged the appointment of a team of state lawyers to expedite the cases and release prisoners if there are no charges.

Following the Central Bank bomb in January some 2,000 Tamils were rounded-up in Colombo and 400 are detained in Welikade and Mahara prisons. A number of Tamils have also been arrested in other areas of the south and Hill Country. Three youths were taken into custody on Unnasgiriya Estate in Elkaduwa in mid-February. M Nagarajah returning after working in Saudi Arabia for five years was arrested outside Katunayake airport.

Another Tamil visiting Sri Lanka in late February for a domestic ceremony was also taken into custody. B Suthakaran arrested in June 1995 and released in December was detained again in January.

TULF MP Joseph Pararajasingham describes the conditions in Mahara prison in a letter to Mr Peiris as deplorable. According to Mr Pararajasingham prisoners are held in crowded insanitary conditions. Water shortages make life miserable for most detainees. The MP has called for an independent committee including representatives of NGOs and the ICRC to investigate Mahara prison conditions.

The demand underscores the ineffectiveness of the Human Rights Task Force (HRTF) headed by former Prisons Commissioner CT Jansz. The new HRTF was established in June 1995 with a mandate to monitor fundamental rights of detainees and ensure humane treatment. Press reports in early February say HRTF's failure to carry out its mandate in the case of arrested Tamils has created suspicions. Others say the mandate remains narrow and its work has been hampered by internal quarrels.

Sri Lankan human rights agencies are concerned that President Kumaratunge's directive on procedures for arrests, such as issuing detention certificates to relatives, is rarely followed. Mechanisms to penalise security force officers flouting the directive are lacking. In early February the Mt Lavinia magistrate reprimanded the police for failing to record the arrest of a mother and child who were produced before the court.

The 22 security force members suspected of murdering over 30 people and throwing their bodies into Bolgoda lake last year have been released on bail. In February another two dead bodies were found in canals at Mirigama. The body of Trincomalee student K Arulkumar was discovered near the Bambalapitiya railway station in Colombo on 17 February.

Human rights agencies also say that habeas corpus has ceased to be an effective remedy for detainees because of delays by the Attorney General's department, in some cases up to nine months. Torture continues to cause concern. On 15 February the Supreme Court awarded Rs 20,000 in the torture application of Trincomalee resident RGP Sugunapala.

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.

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