

The Sri Lanka Monitor

No 99

April 1996

Produced by the British Refugee Council

Second thrust on Jaffna

Military pushes east to Kilali

THE Sri Lankan Army launched a four-pronged assault on eastern Thenmaratchy and Vadamaratchy areas in *Operation Sunray II* on 19 April to gain control of the entire Jaffna peninsula.

Western Valikamam and Jaffna town are under Army control following the first phase of *Operation Sunray* in December 1995 leading to an exodus of over 220,000 refugees. As a prelude to *Operation Sunray II*, the government extended Emergency to the entire island from 4 April. Curfew was imposed in Jaffna and censorship on military news re-introduced on 19 April.

The major line of advance into Thenmaratchy for 20,000 troops was from Puthur, 8 miles north-east of Jaffna town, through Mattuvil. Within two days Chavakachcheri and Kachchai had fallen. Troops accompanied by heavy artillery and air support captured the key lagoon crossing at Kilali on 26 April cutting off the Jaffna peninsula from the mainland.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) did not offer major resistance, but say around 50 civilians including several people waiting to cross the Jaffna lagoon at Kilali were killed by helicopters. The Army says over 200 Tigers died in action. According to some reports the LTTE has moved equipment and arms to the Vanni on the mainland.

The LTTE has accused the Army of atrocities against returning civilians. The Tigers say a head teacher and a doctor were killed and a woman raped by soldiers. According to the LTTE, returning youths are being held in separate camps.

Observers believe that the attack on civilians at Kilali was aimed at preventing another exodus into the Tiger-controlled Vanni. As the military operation reached a climax Deputy Defence minister Anuruddha Ratwatte and Army

spokesman Brig. Sarath Munasinghe claimed that 200,000 people were pouring into Valikamam as if they were returning voluntarily. Observers believe the government figure is inflated and refugees have been forced to move into Army-controlled areas in the west of the peninsula through a corridor at Puthur.

Dr Michael Schubert of British NGO, Medical Emergency Relief International (Merlin) confirmed after visiting Jaffna for a rapid assessment that thousands of Tamils were returning. Mr Schubert who spoke to returnees says the LTTE was not preventing people leaving but warned them not to speak to the Army. Tiger newspaper *Kalathil* says that a large number of people have left Vadamaratchy.

After Merlin's fact-finding mission, a number of NGOs have been asked by the government to return to Jaffna. The NGOs jointly say that a comprehensive independent assessment of the Jaffna situation is necessary before a decision.

The military offensive in the north did not deter cabinet minister and Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) leader S Thondaman from launching a week's strike on tea and rubber plantations from 22 April. Over 600,000 workers joined the strike demanding wage increase and 300 days work in a year. Plantation minister Ratnasiri Wickremanayake's 14-point plan in mid-April to solve the outstanding problems within 12 months was rejected by the CWC.

The long-standing feud between the two ministers boiled over when Mr Thondaman initiated a no-confidence motion in Parliament against Mr Wickremanayake in late April and sought the support of the main opposition United National Party (UNP).

The UNP handed a million-signature petition to President Chandrika on 18 April, demanding

more security for Colombo city. The petition followed a daring LTTE suicide attack in Colombo harbour on 12 April. Nine *Sea Tigers* were killed in the assault and a LTTE vessel was blown up. The government says three vessels in the harbour were slightly damaged. Tiger claims that six naval vessels were sunk were discounted by local sources.

After the oil refinery attack in November and the Tiger threat to blow up Colombo schools, Sinhala opinion in the capital is increasingly hard-line and Tamils fear a backlash. Defence minister Ratwatte says it is LTTE's major strategic objective to create new ethnic riots in Colombo like 1983 when over 3,000 Tamils were killed and 50,000 displaced.

Over 3,000 doctors in state service began a strike on 26 April after Health minister AHM Fowzie sacked 460 doctors on internship. The minister's decision followed allegations that the Health Ministry altered a merit appointment list favouring some interns.

Meanwhile President Chandrika returned with a promise of \$20 million economic aid from Beijing after a three-day visit in late April. China is a major supplier of arms to Sri Lanka. On her return, five Tamil parties urged President Chandrika and the LTTE to agree a ceasefire. The Tiger London spokesman Anton Rajah called for unconditional peace negotiations mediated by a third party and appealed to "international governments and international bodies to come forward to broker a peace agreement". The government's response has been predictably lukewarm. Defence Secretary Chandrananda de Silva told the BBC that a political devolution package was on the table today but that "things must be clearer as to what purpose is to be served" by talks.

Government forces will now push home their military advantage and LTTE is clearly preparing for long drawn-out guerrilla warfare. Control of the 220,000 displaced Jaffna civilians in the Vanni is the next prize.

The government banned news broadcasts by Sirasa FM and Yes FM radios owned by Maharajah Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) for announcing that an island-wide curfew had been imposed when Emergency regulations were extended island-wide in early April. News Editor S Senadheera and News Director R Amarasinghe of MBC have been charged for "disturbing the public order".

THE NORTH

Jaffna amid the ruins

BRITISH medical agency Merlin says that 5% of all buildings in Jaffna town have been severely damaged and 60% need repairs. The town lacks electricity and running water and the Jaffna hospital is destroyed to a large extent.

The military claims over 200,000 civilians have returned home after *Operation Sunray II*. Reports say that people in the Army-controlled areas in the west of the Jaffna peninsula are facing grave difficulties. Dry rations, including rice and wheat flour are issued once a week and vegetables are available only in a few shops in Vaddukottai.

A medical centre has been set up at Pannalai and those seriously ill are taken to the Palaly Army base. Most crops have been destroyed and dead animals litter the area. In Vadammaratchy there is an acute shortage of food and kerosene prices have risen, NGOs say.

Clashes in Jaffna have continued. The Army says 41 Tigers were killed at Sangarathai in Valikamam West on 3 April. Five soldiers were also killed and 14 injured. Another 43 LTTE died in attacks in Pandatharippu and Chankanai the following day. In a clash at Kaddaikadu north-east of Elephant Pass on 8 April two soldiers and three Tigers were killed. Heavy Army shelling of eastern areas has continued throughout April. A woman was injured by shell on 6 April at Kaithady, south-west of Chavakachcheri.

People in Vadammaratchy and Thenmaratchy staged a 20-mile human chain protest from Chavakachcheri to Point Pedro on 10 April as rumours grew of the impending military operation. Following the protest the Jaffna Confederation of People's Organisations dispatched a petition through UNHCR urging the UN Secretary General to prevail on President Chandrika to call off the operation.

Local NGOs in Kilinochchi say that the Government Agent's food stores are almost empty. In March only half of the expected 8,000 tonnes of food was received. Food convoys were suspended for a period in April because of tax demands by the Tamil militant group PLOTE which controls Vavuniya town.

Water supply to the refugees in the Vanni is now the main concern of the NGOs. Colombo has not responded to the Government Agents' request for drought relief. The Defence Ministry has refused permission for a UNICEF emergency water/sanitation engineer to visit the Vanni. The government also has not changed its policy on shelter programmes insisting that the objective is to return the refugees to Jaffna.

Kilinochchi Health Ministry officials have not received funds for 1996 to carry out health and sanitation work. NGOs say malaria is a major concern and drugs and equipment are inadequate to combat diseases.

Deported

British scholar Jane Russell was arrested on 11 April and deported from Sri Lanka after a week's detention.

Immigration Controller JA Ariyasena says she had failed to obtain the recommendation of the Board of Investment for extension of her business visa.

Wanted

The High Court has issued a warrant for the arrest of Brigadier Rohana P. Liyanage who is accused of involvement in the disappearance of 32 schoolboys at Embilipitiya in 1989.

Charged

Former Army Commander Hamilton Wanasinghe was indicted in early April in the Colombo High Court for Rs 7.5 million illegal earnings through bribery in arms deals.

Postponed

The UNP has accused the government of using the Emergency to postpone local government elections. On 18 April President Chandrika Kumaratunge put off elections under Emergency regulations until the end of the year.

Attacked

Controversial Nuwara Eliya Mayor Nalin Thilaka Herath's house was attacked on 4 April. She escaped unhurt but five others were seriously wounded. A man died later in hospital. The attack followed a dispute between the Mayor and a religious centre.

Tamil Nadu elections topple Jaya

THE ruling Congress (I) and Chief Minister Jayalalitha's AIADMK alliance is heading for defeat in the April elections in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Over 42 million people are eligible to vote to elect 39 Members of Parliament and 234 members of the state assembly.

When renewal of the alliance was announced by Prime Minister Narasimha Rao on 27 March all hell broke loose in Tamil Nadu. Congress (I) strongman GK Mooppanar walked out forming a new party, the Tamil Maanila Congress (TMC) and joining the opposition alliance led by M Karunanidhi's DMK. Local Congress members were so furious that huge cut-outs of Mr Rao were smashed and set ablaze. The new align-

ment was strengthened when popular film star Rajnikanth declared his support.

Ms Jayalalitha has come under severe criticism for her autocratic rule and corruption. Last year, while poverty-stricken people looked on, Ms Jayalalitha conducted her adopted son's wedding in grand style spending some Rs 60 million. Recently Jayalalitha aides were implicated in a Rs 300 million fraud involving the Tamil Nadu Textile Corporation. She has consistently blamed Sri Lankan Tamil refugees for security problems.

The Sri Lankan conflict seems to have lost its power as an electoral issue despite LTTE leader V Prabhakaran's letter to Tamil Nadu political leaders after *Operation Sunray* in December seeking support. But the election manifestos of

both DMK and AIADMK promise intervention with New Delhi to solve the Sri Lankan Tamil problem.

Observers say that in recent months LTTE has been following a policy of *rap-prochement* with India. Some Tamils believe that a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in India may have more sympathy for the predominantly Hindu Sri Lankan Tamil community.

Throughout India 590 million people are eligible to vote and candidates of 443 parties are vying for 543 seats in the *Lok Sabha* or lower house of Parliament. Analysts predict a hung Parliament. The third force, the National Front- Left Front alliance and the regional parties may play a vital role in the formation of the next Indian government.

■ New Dengue fever outbreak in Batticaloa

ICRC warns of malnutrition in the east

THE International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has informed Batticaloa's senior civil administrator, Government Agent (GA) Pathmanathan that a large number of people are malnourished in the LTTE-controlled Vaharai area north of Batticaloa town.

An ICRC escorted food convoy of eight lorries is allowed in once a month, but civilians are prohibited from taking food into the area. In late April, Batticaloa's military coordinator also refused ICRC permission and the food lorries are held in Valaichenai despite a decision to send additional food at the Provincial Security Committee meeting chaired by North-East Governor Gamini Fonseka. Since January no fuel has

reached Vaharai and transport was suspended in early April. The military insists that these measures are necessary to prevent food falling into the hands of the LTTE. The rest of Batticaloa also may suffer, as planned *Yala* rice cultivation on 16,000 hectares has not begun because of restrictions on fuel, fertiliser and vehicles. Mr Pathmanathan has urged eastern Civil Coordinator Cyril Peiris to take urgent action to avoid food shortages.

Hospitals in Batticaloa admitted over 300 people suffering from dengue fever which killed 21 people in April. Health Minister Fowzie ordered the immediate despatch of 100 litres of malathion spray from Colombo to prevent spread of the

disease.

The Tigers ambushed an Army patrol at Welikanda on 11 April killing a soldier and injuring another three. Another soldier died when LTTE shelled Paithalai Army camp on 13 April. Two days later police posts in Eravur came under attack. LTTE shot dead TELO local council member Asokan on 14 April.

The Polonnaruwa-Batticaloa train was damaged in a LTTE landmine attack on 20 April at Mylambaveli. The following day two policemen were killed in a Special Task Force (STF)-Tiger clash at Thuraivandiyamadu. Large areas were plunged into darkness when the LTTE blasted electricity transformers in Kalmunai and Pandiruppu on 22 April.

Further south in Amparai District, over 100 Tigers attacked the Pulukunawa STF camp on 5 April killing 16 policemen and wounding another four. Three Tigers were killed in the attack. Amnesty International says that Tamils K Mahesan, M Kiruparan and M Jeevarasa arrested by the STF on 29 March have disappeared. The Human Rights Task Force (HRTF) set up to safeguard welfare of detainees, has been unable to obtain any information about them.

In Trincomalee District, the Army killed two Tigers at Pallikudyiruppu on 9 April. Reports say the LTTE fired on civilians gathering firewood near Srimangalapuram. A man was injured and another abducted. In an Army ambush at Kovilady on 14 April four Tigers and a soldier were killed.

Strike

AS people in the rest of southern Sri Lanka celebrated the Sinhala-Tamil New Year on 13 April, Plantation workers were preparing for a massive show of strength. The one-week strike in the Hill Country from 22 April has resulted in the loss of Rs 500 million. The 23 Plantation management companies are adamant that they can ill afford the trade union demand for Rs 8 wage increase per day and 300 days work in a year without increase in productivity. They say labour costs have soared leading to high production costs. Analysts point out that while blame is placed on workers, management staff who have overall responsibility continue to receive high wages. High taxes bleed the industry to fund welfare measures while the Plantation worker remains marginalised in education, health and housing.

Over 300,000 Plantation Tamils are yet to receive citizenship certificates which government agencies demand when transacting official business. Plantation observers question the wisdom of initiating a resolution in Parliament to nullify the denial of Sirimavo Bandaranaike's civic rights by the UNP regime without solving the problems of the Plantation Tamils arising from the deprivation of citizenship for four decades. Plantation workers also do not receive payments under the PA government's poverty alleviation programme, *Samurdhi*, on the basis that they have work for 20 days a month. But on many estates less than 15 days are offered. Plantation workers are also excluded from national housing schemes.

Solidarity of the unions has been vital for the success of the strike. The 12 union-strong JPTUC joined the CWC strike, although on a different set of demands. The odd one out was deputy minister P Chandrasekaran's UPF which says industrial action on plantations should not merely be over economic gain but aim at political rights.

Ruling the waves

THE government has announced new rules for those travelling by sea from LTTE-controlled Mannar mainland to southern Sri Lanka through Kalpitty. Applications should be submitted to the GA through the Mannar AGA and a permit obtained from the government secretariat with the approval of the police.

Sea and coastal patrols in Mannar were increased in early April and the Army prohibited fishermen from going to sea. The government will provide rations for 2,900 families affected by fishing restrictions in Army-controlled areas.

Over 1,500 fishing families further south in Negombo have also been affected by a fishing ban. The area has been declared a security zone to protect Colombo harbour from LTTE attacks.

The LTTE fired on fishing boats near Karaitivu north of Kalpitty in late April injuring three people. A gang attacked Ulukapura Muslim village in Puttalam on 26 April injuring 15 people. Police refused to register complaints by villagers. Local people say the police participated in burning houses in the village.

Eight UNP members, including Kurunegala Mayor GH Nimal Chandrasiri, were shot and injured on 1 April allegedly by bodyguards of local PA politicians. A UNP statement in early April says that the PA is developing a militant wing under the guise of the *Sudu Nelum* movement. The UNP also alleges that hundreds of guns have been given to government supporters to harass political opponents.

Abductions continue in Colombo *Unidentified persons*

FRUIT stall owner V Saravanamuthu and his employee S Nagulesvaran were abducted in the Colombo suburbs by unidentified persons in a white van on 17 April. Reports say following inquiries by Human Rights Task Force (HRTF), the two Tamils were handed over by the Army to the police.

Colombo lawyer A Vinayagamurthy says that their abduction was a clear violation of human rights and a breach of the presidential directives on arrests. Under the directives, relatives must be informed of arrests and receipts issued. Following a number of complaints of harassment and illegal arrests, Deputy Inspector General of Police (DIG) Dharmadasa Silva warned police officers at a meeting in early May not to abuse their powers.

Every day, hundreds of Tamils are screened at checkpoints or by major security sweeps of the capital seeking Tiger suicide squads who destroy high profile targets with increasing regularity.

An attempt to destroy Colombo harbour was foiled in early April.

Colombo police chief Dissanayake says 174 Tamils were detained in a 24-hour security sweep of the city in mid-April. Speaking in Parliament MP Joseph Pararajasingham said that 1,100 Tamil youths are in custody, 300 of them for over four years without trial. He also alleges that confessions are being extracted from detainees under torture. The Court of Appeal will hear *habeas corpus* applications in respect of over 20 Tamils in custody including M Baskaran, 21, who is alleged to have been tortured at the Kallady Army camp in Batticaloa.

Seven Tamil women LTTE suspects in the Colombo Welikade prison were attacked by other inmates on 12 April. Prison officers say the women will be transferred to a safer prison in Kandy. The attack is the second on Tamil prisoners in the last two months.

Sailors on patrol brutally assaulted a Tamil youth on 1 April at Hulstsdorp and

tore up his identity card. Indian national M Rajendran arrested by police in Wellawatte was released by the Mt Lavinia court in early April for lack of evidence. Eight people who came from Batticaloa to visit their sons at the Colombo Magazine prison were taken into custody at a Maradana lodge on 6 April. Following the intervention of Mr Pararajasingham they were released. Their sons had been arrested when they came to Colombo for an interview.

On 4 April, a soldier opened fire at the car of Navy chief Mohan Samarasekera believing that a Tiger suicide squad was at the gates of the Defence Ministry. Deputy Defence Minister Anuruddha Ratwatte told Parliament on 9 April that the government was aware of LTTE plans to strike at Colombo and other areas in the south to create an ethnic backlash. Following LTTE's harbour attack on 12 April, security forces destroyed the huts of 500 families in coastal areas of Modera and Wattala.

Exile backlash against Tigers

A petition signed by over 9,000 US residents to the US State Department in early April has accused the LTTE of regular extortion from expatriate Sri Lankan communities. The petition calls on the US government to prohibit Tiger fundraising and to close pro-LTTE offices.

The LTTE enjoys widespread support within the expatriate Tamil community in the West, but observers say many Tamils are being forced to toe the line. Tamils taking neutral or anti-LTTE views are increasingly coming under pressure.

The Toronto Tamil weekly *Munchari*, edited by Sri Lankan journalist DBS Jeyaraj was forced to close down after threats and violence. Mr Jeyaraj blames the pro-LTTE World Tamil Movement (WTM) in Canada. WTM coordinator Manickavasagam Suresh denies involvement. Mr Suresh is currently in detention charged under Canadian immigration laws of membership of LTTE, a group engaged in terrorism.

Thousands of Tamils demonstrating outside the Swiss Parliament in Berne on 27 April against *Operation Sunray II* also demanded the release of top Tiger representative Nadarajah Muraleetharan.

Swiss police detained him and five others for violence against other Tamils.

The International Communist Party says LTTE supporters attacked its members distributing the party's Tamil news-

paper in Paris on 12 March causing serious injuries. Reports say over 50 LTTE supporters attacked a Socialist Party May Day rally in Dusseldorf, Germany.

The Sri Lankan government has agreed to renew the January 1994 agreement with Switzerland for repatriation of Tamil refugees. In the last year 6% of over 17,000 refugees arriving in Switzerland were Tamils. Only 279 of the 23,000 Tamil asylum applicants have been given refugee status.

Western governments are taking tough measures against asylum-seekers. The rate for humanitarian leave to remain for Sri Lankans in Britain has fallen from over 90% in 1993 to less than 10% in 1995. New asylum rules have imposed restrictions on asylum-seekers claiming welfare. In mid-April the High Court ordered the Home Secretary to reconsider new asylum applications of two Tamils made after fresh violence in Colombo.

As conflict escalates, Sri Lankans continue to flee the island. Six Tamil asylum-seekers drowned near Lampedusa Island south of Sicily on 25 April. Fourteen others were saved by a Dutch ship.

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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British Refugee Council
Charity No. 1014576
Company No. 2727514

ISSN 0955-3943

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