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Military censorship

The Sri Lankan government imposed censorship on military news in June under Emergency regulations, for the third time since September 1995, further eroding freedom of expression guaranteed in the island's constitution.

The Emergency (Prohibition of Publication and Transmission of Sensitive Military Information) Regulations, effective from 5 June, prohibit foreign and local media from publishing information on military operations, deployment of troops or use of equipment, including aircraft or naval vessels. Publication of statements on the official conduct or performance of the security forces is also disallowed.

Censorship imposed by the ruling People's Alliance government on 21 September 1995 continued till 20 December that year, during which period the military launched *Operation Sunray I* to take Jaffna city. Censorship was reintroduced on 19 April 1996 as the Army began *Operation Sunray II* to capture the southern Thenmaratchy area in the Jaffna peninsula, and was in force until 6 October 1996.

On these two occasions, the censorship authorities were civilians. In the current censorship, however, a military officer, Army's Deputy Chief of Staff Maj. Gen. Jaliya Nammuni was named as Competent Authority. As newspaper columns were slashed, Sri Lankan parliamentarians expressed concern over censorship being in the hands of the military.

Deputy Defence minister Anuruddha Ratwatte claims that the government upholds the policy of media freedom but asserts that censorship has become necessary. He accuses the media of acting irresponsibly by leaking military plans. Mr Ratwatte also says war casualty figures published in the media create panic and he would announce the figures when necessary.

The Sri Lanka Editors Guild dismissed Mr Ratwatte's claim that the media provides strategic information to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam

The US-based Committee to Protect Journalists says censorship is incompatible with democratic governance and has urged the government to allow the Sri Lankan people access to free and unbiased information on the conflict.

(LTTE). While the Sri Lankan Free Media Movement (FMM) describes the censorship as a flagrant violation of government's commitment to defend media freedom, the US-based Committee to Protect Journalists says censorship is incompatible with democratic governance and has urged the government to allow the Sri Lankan people access to free and unbiased information on the conflict. In a letter to President Chandrika Kumaratunge, *Reuters* news agency points out that censorship severely undermines the credibility of news reporting.

Journalists or independent observers are prohibited into the north-eastern war zone and the conditions of the civilians remain largely unreported outside Sri Lanka. Death of civilians as a result of military operations and lack of food and medicine continue to occur. The current censorship will only help to continue the cover-up of the plight of civilians, observers say.

Hours after censorship was imposed in September 1995, Airforce bombers killed 34 children in a Jaffna school. In a repeat performance, the Airforce struck at Suthanthirapuram in Tiger-held Mullaitivu District on 10 June while the Army shelled the area. Twenty five civilians, including three children, were killed and 52 injured. The LTTE say five cadre

were also killed. Following the attack, over 1,380 families fled to neighbouring villages. Some 380 families found shelter in schools at Kaiveli and Puthukudiyiruppu, but others were forced to live under trees. MP Joseph Pararajasingham, speaking in Parliament in mid-June, condemned the killings as a grave violation of human rights.

Colombo observers believe that censorship was introduced to control information on losses in the battlefield at Mankulam in the Vanni and civilian casualties, while the government faces Provincial Council elections in a month's time. The Suthanthirapuram incident has been effectively blacked out by the censorship.

The Provincial Council elections in six provinces scheduled for August were in doubt, after President Chandrika Kumaratunge seemed to accept a challenge from the main opposition United National Party (UNP) leader Ranil Wickremasinghe to hold the Presidential elections before provincial polls.

Sources say some PA members favour a Presidential election in which, they believe, President Chandrika would be able to defeat Mr Wickremasinghe. But winning the provincial elections, without a clear victory in the Vanni while the military expenditure rises rapidly, may prove more difficult.

The uncertainty was cleared when the cabinet decided on 26 June to go ahead with the Provincial Council elections. However, difficulties remain. Election Commissioner Dayananda Dissanayake has indicated that at least 30,000 troops are needed for election security. Mr Ratwatte is reported to have informed the cabinet that it would not be possible to release any troops until December.

Four main *Mahanayake Theras* or Buddhist highpriests have urged the government to postpone the elections until the end of the war as withdrawal of troops will adversely affect the offensive against the Tigers who have suffered defeat in Jaffna and the Vanni and are now considerably weakened.

Sri Lanka Monitor on the internet: <http://www.gn.apc.org/refugeecounciluk>

JAFFNA

Fear grounds local councils

SINCE the murder of Jaffna Mayor Sarojini Yogeswaran by suspected LTTE gunmen in May, local councils elected in January have almost ceased to function. In the aftermath of the killing, five TULF councillors, including Jaffna city's Deputy Mayor Thirunavukarasu resigned. The brutal murder of Jaffna Traders Association Secretary and TULF member S Namasivayam on 5 June and the killing of SLFP organiser Oswald on 24 June in Jaffna town have heightened fears.

In mid-June, 104 EPDP members lost their seats after failing to take oaths as councillors. The TULF-controlled Valikamam North regional council adopted a resolution on 19 June suspending its own activities. In place of Mrs Yogeswaran, the TULF chose Colombo lawyer P Sivapalan, who was sworn in as the new Jaffna Mayor on 29 June.

Doubts have been raised whether the local councils can continue to function with the current wave of uncertainty and fear. Colombo newspaper *The Island* columnist DBS Jeyaraj says although the LTTE threat is the primary reason for the collapse of the local councils, the government also stands indicted of failing to provide meaningful measures for their functioning.

Local NGOs say that after two years, people who returned follow-

ing the Army capture of Jaffna, have not received adequate assistance to restart their lives, even after many visits and assessments by government officers and UN agencies.

Over 50% of those resettled have not received the initial payment of Rs 5,000. Some 5,500 people are still living in 56 refugee camps unable to return to their homes. Shortage of medicines and doctors in hospitals continues. NGO representatives say that no assistance has been provided to repair the 81,000 houses damaged in the fighting.

Fears over arrest and detention continue to persist. Thirteen young men arrested in March and April and held in Jaffna were transferred to Kalutara prison in June. On 7 June Kokkuvil Technical College student S Lavakumar was arrested in Kaithady. The following day, M Sivakumar was taken away by armed men accompanied by a masked informer in Jaffna town.

Relatives say S Kanthasamy and R Kanagaraj were arrested by police in Jaffna town in mid-June. Perumal Jeyarasa of Sulipuram was detained on 11 June. Three members of the same family were arrested in Sulipuram in late June. The bodies of three women were found in a cemetery at Chavakachcheri in early June. Two more bodies were recovered at Madduvil on 1 July.

Attack

Unidentified gunmen fired on Colombo newspaper *Sunday Leader* editor Lasantha Wickrematunge's Nugegoda residence on 17 June causing damage. The *Sunday Leader* has continued to report on corruption in high places.

Summit

Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Indian Premier Atal Bihari Vajpayee are expected hold discussions during the summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation beginning in Colombo on 29 July.

Blasted

Over 25 electricity transformers have been blasted in several areas, including Kadawatte, Ratnapura and Batticaloa, from the beginning of May. Suspects range from the LTTE to the People's Liberation Front (JVP).

March

Thousands of people marched in Colombo on 16 June and petitioned the British High Commission for a ban on the LTTE in the UK. On 17 May, over 2,000 expatriate Sinhalese gathered at Trafalgar Square in London had urged Britain to close down LTTE offices.

Bleak future

A cross-party group of 21 MPs attending a seminar on the 'Rights of the Child' on 26 June in Dambulla, expressed concern over the bleak future for children and urged the government and the LTTE to end the war.

Villages destroyed in Vanni

DEPUTY Defence minister Anuruddha Ratwatte told Parliament on 10 June that 208 soldiers died and 63 were missing in 12 days of fighting near Mankulam in *Operation Jayasikurui* (Certain Victory) since 28 May. Mr Ratwatte also claimed that 225 Tigers were killed. Reports say another 105 soldiers died in intense fighting after 11 June. But by the end of June the Army was still outside Mankulam, the last heavily-defended Tiger town before Kilinochchi, 22 miles north. According to reports, the Army gained control of Thunukkai road, west of Mankulam in late June.

Sources say a number of villages along the Vavuniya-Mankulam road cap-

tured by the Army have been destroyed. These areas have been planted with landmines, further restricting the movement of the people.

Water supply for people in the Vanni continues to remain a major problem despite the efforts of international NGOs. With drought predicted later in the year, the situation is expected to deteriorate. Vavuniya's senior government officer, Government Agent K Ganesh says that 30% of the medicines for the first quarter of 1998 have not been sent to Tiger-held Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu districts.

In Vavuniya, a policeman was killed when suspected LTTE cadre

attacked PLOTE MP Y Balachandran's house at Pandarikulam on 8 June. The house was destroyed with handgrenades. Reports say S Ganeshamurthy was abducted by PLOTE on 12 June.

Sri Lanka Red Cross driver Pathmanathan was detained by the Army in early June in Vavuniya. In a complaint to the Sri Lankan Human Rights Commission, United National Party (UNP) MP Jayalath Jayawardena says Mr Pathmanathan was arrested after accompanying a delegation from southern Sri Lanka to assess the situation of refugees in the Vanni.

■ Continuing arrests in Batticaloa

Army captures Vaharai

THE Sri Lankan Army launched *Operation Indra Sera* (Solar Power) on 22 June and captured part of LTTE-held Vaharai area, north of Batticaloa. The Defence Ministry says 33 Tigers were killed. Vaharai has been a Tiger stronghold for several years, enabling attacks south of the Welikanda-Batticaloa road and amphibious assaults further south. According to reports, the capture of Vaharai will also affect LTTE shipments to the Vanni war zone.

Civilians displaced by the fighting fled to Kathiraveli, six miles north of Vaharai, but began returning to their homes at the end of June. Reports say measures are being taken to open government departments, and Batticaloa

Government Agent (GA) AK Pathmanathan has urged resumption of bus services to the area. In late June, the military also launched attacks on Tiger-controlled Paduvankarai area west of the Batticaloa lagoon.

Deaths and injury were reported in Batticaloa in June, as the LTTE and Tamil groups working with military such as the *Razik Group*, continued to operate in Army-controlled areas. The Tigers threw hand grenades at police guarding the Bank of Ceylon at Akkaraipatru on 4 June injuring 15 civilians. The next day, former Tamil group TELO member Michael Croos was shot dead at Valaichenai by LTTE's *Pistol Group*. Following the incident shots were fired

from an Army post, injuring Thevamani of Vinayagapuram.

The LTTE abducted 16 young women from Paithalai in Valaichenai in June, allegedly to identify Army informers, reports say. S Kanthan and M Ilango were abducted from their homes in Kalmunai by an unidentified armed gang on 16 June. Their bodies were found on a Kalmunai road the following day. A bomb exploded at a police checkpoint on Bar Road in Batticaloa town on 19 June injuring three women. Students Yogarajah Vanitha, 14, and Nagarajah Raji, 13, were shot and injured in Valaichenai on 22 June.

GA Pathmanathan has expressed concern to military officers over the arrest of state and local government officers while at work. Batticaloa Municipal Council Employment Director Wilson Kumaraiah, council worker Rajan Kulasingham and Eastern University lecturer M Varnakulasingham are in custody. The lecturer is accused of providing funds for the LTTE. UNICEF officer T Navaratnam and Oddamavady Regional Council administrator S Sivagurunathan, arrested in mid-June were released later in the month.

Seventeen Tamils in Kataragama, 65 miles south-west of Amparai, were detained by police after an armed gang attacked and looted vehicles on the Kataragama-Buttala road. The LTTE is accused of demanding large sums of money to release farmers abducted in Moneragala District, west of Amparai.

Death sentence

FIVE soldiers and a policeman were sentenced to death by a specially constituted High Court without a jury, in the Krishanthi Kumarasamy murder case on 3 July in Colombo. The charges were rape and murder of Krishanthi and the murder of her mother Rajammah, brother Pranavan and neighbour S Kirubamurthy in September 1996 in Jaffna. This is the first time severe punishment has been imposed for human rights violations by security forces. While Amnesty International described the court decision as a landmark judgment, other agencies urged the government to continue to bring security force personnel accused of human rights abuses to book and end the climate of impunity, without merely using the Krishanthi case for propaganda purposes. Many deaths and several alleged rapes remain uninvestigated and doubts remain over follow-up action in the case of disappearances. One of the accused, Somaratne Rajapakse, blamed his superior officers for disappearances in Jaffna and claimed that he knows the location at Chemmani in Jaffna where 400 bodies of people killed in custody were buried. Some 700 disappearances were reported in Jaffna since the Army capture of the peninsula in early 1996. Concerns remain over continuing detentions. Over 600 people, staged a protest in front of the Nallur Kandasamy temple on 26 June demanding concrete government action over disappearances. On 19 June, the Colombo Magistrates Court committed the Rajani Velayuthapillai case for trial to the High Court. In this case, four soldiers are accused of the rape and murder of Rajani in September 1996 in Jaffna. The High Court in Trincomalee granted bail in June for 18 policemen and Home Guards accused of the massacre of eight Tamils at Pokkuruni in Thambalakamam on 1 February.

AS 200 unemployed eastern graduates launched a protest in late June before Trincomalee's provincial Education Ministry demanding employment, 1,000 refugees in the Uppuveli Glass Factory camp staged a hunger strike demanding to be returned to their homes in the Jaffna peninsula.

The refugees say their children remain without education and health facilities in the camp are minimal. Two year-old Pradeepkumar died of disease in the camp on 25 June. Reports say a number of children in the camp are ill. The refugees ended the fast after political party leaders assured appropriate action, but said protests would resume if they are not sent to Jaffna before 2 July as

promised. Reports say the ship *Democracy* will be employed from July to transport refugees to Jaffna.

The Army is said to have captured coastal territory between Kuchchaveli and Pulmoddai, north of Trincomalee, in *Operation Jayabhoomi* (Victorious Earth) launched on 30 May. The operation was designed to check *Sea Tiger* movement along the eastern coast, security sources say.

In early June, security forces carried out search operations in Trincomalee town. The military also introduced new rules for fishermen, allegedly to curb LTTE infiltration. Fishermen who want to fish in the night must leave for sea before 6pm and return only after 6am.

Child dies

Dutch citizens finger-printed in Colombo **Devananda wounded in prison attack**

TAMIL party Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) leader and MP Douglas Devananda was attacked and seriously wounded by Tamil detainees on 1 July at the Kalutara prison, 25 miles south of Colombo.

Mr Devananda visited the prison after 48 prisoners began a fast on 24 June demanding trial or release. After requesting inmates in three prison sections to abandon the fast, Mr Devananda entered Section B where he was surrounded and attacked with iron rods and knives. Attorney-at-Law Maheswary Velayutham who accompanied him was briefly held prisoner but was unharmed.

An Assistant Prison Superintendent was suspended on the orders of President Chandrika, press reports say. EPDP officials believe that the assault was pre-planned by LTTE cadre among the Tamil prisoners. Fifteen detainees suspected of involvement are under interrogation. In a letter to President Chandrika, Jaffna MP N Rameswaran says the attack on Mr Devananda is the culmination of frustration resulting from government's failure

to fulfil its pledge to expedite cases against detainees. The EPDP has urged the government not to use the incident to justify prolonged detention of Tamils.

Detention of Tamils in southern Sri Lanka continues. A new organisation, the Terrorist Investigation Department (TID), has been added to the plethora of police and intelligence agencies. Human rights agencies allege that an illegal detention centre has been set up at Malalasekera Mawatha in Colombo.

The Peliyagoda area, west of Colombo, was searched in early June and a number of people detained. Fifty people were arrested in Pettah suburb on 17 June. Over 100 Tamils were rounded-up in Ratnapura on 20 June after an electricity transformer was blasted.

In June, the Supreme Court awarded compensation to Mannar resident T Ranjani, arrested by police on 26 November and tortured in custody. In another fundamental rights application, Hill Country youth Christopher Solomon says, following his arrest in Kandy on 17 April, he was assaulted by police and

forced to sign a confession. Ninety five people returned from Senegal in March and detained were released by the Negombo court on 25 June. Reports say the government plans to introduce new legislation to punish those who are returned from abroad after leaving the country illegally.

Utrecht University's Dr C Pathmamanoharan and his Dutch wife, on a visit to Sri Lanka, were harassed and finger-printed when they went to register with the Welikada police on 20 May. Dr Pathmamanoharan lives in Holland since 1971 and is a Dutch national. He was unable to contact the Dutch embassy in Colombo on the telephone number claimed by the Dutch government as a special number for those in difficulty. Dutch journalists who tried also failed to reach the embassy on the number. Mr Pathmamanoharan says he and his wife were finger-printed for the reason that he is a Tamil and dreads to think of the plight of asylum-seekers who are currently being returned from Netherlands under an agreement with Sri Lanka.

Food aid to the north slashed

REPORTS say that following a meeting between President Chandrika and Essential Services Commissioner (ESC) NA Obadage on 16 June, the government has decided to cut food aid to refugees in the north from 1 July. Food aid will be slashed by 40% in Jaffna, 20% in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu districts and 15% in Mannar and Vavuniya districts.

Of the 81,200 families which receive food relief, only 55,500 will be assisted from 1 July. In the Vanni, only 32,200 of the 77,500 families will receive aid. According to reports the government is unable to continue the Rs 240 million (\$4 million) a month food aid because of difficulties over finances.

The Government Agents were prohibited by Colombo to provide food aid to the 60,000 people in the Vanni displaced from Jaffna following Army operation *Sunray II* in April 1996. In May 1997, the number of people receiving food aid was arbitrarily reduced from 420,000 to

185,000 although at the time UN agencies estimated the number of refugees at 310,000. The government has always suspected that part of the food sent to the Vanni falls into the

hands of the Tigers. Even before the government's current decision, food was reduced. Reports say that in May, food to the Vanni by the ESC and the cooperative societies was 2,039 tonnes, 808 tonnes less than food delivered in April.

The food sent in May was also less than 40% of the average monthly delivery in the previous 24 months. Reports also say that the food available is adequate only for 150,000 people, while the displaced in the Vanni are currently estimated at 317,000. Observers say the cuts will worsen the situation and bring further misery to the people.

The Northern Province Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority (NPRRA) will again assess the number of refugees in the north. According to reports, the refugee budget allocation of Rs 1.5 billion (\$25 million) for 1998 was adequate only for six months and the Treasury, facing increased defence spending, is able to provide only an additional Rs 500 million.

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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