

# The Sri Lanka Monitor

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## Kilinochchi standoff

THOUSANDS of Sri Lankan troops are massed outside the northern town of Kilinochchi after five weeks of inconclusive fighting with the insurgent Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in a bid to capture the town.

There are no independent reports of Operation Sath Jaya and government press censorship remains in force. Unconfirmed reports say over 150 soldiers were killed and hundreds more wounded as the Tigers blunted the advance with thousands of teenage cadre and heavy weapons captured at the fall of Mullaitivu in July. LTTE fatalities are estimated at around 60.

Tiger resilience has surprised analysts who expected the guerrillas to beat a strategic retreat as they did from Jaffna town last November. But an Army-controlled Kilinochchi would threaten a road link to front-line Vavuniya 70 kms south and provide a launching pad for new strikes on the Tigers' real strongholds deep in the Vanni jungles further east. The LTTE clearly means to hold Kilinochchi if it can.

Colombo's rumour factory also speculates on a growing rift between the military and the government after political expediency and press censorship "buried the heroes of Mullaitivu" - 1,400 soldiers dead or missing after the Tigers overran an Army camp in late July. The Army's "go-slow" outside Kilinochchi is a message to President Chandrika Kumaratunga's increasingly beleaguered coalition government which has been conspicuously silent over the fate of the missing soldiers.

The President's uncle, deputy Defence minister Gen. Anuruddha Ratwatte finally appeared in Parliament on 8 August, 20 days after the Mullaitivu attack to read a 32-page statement acknowledging

### 200,000 refugees struggle in the Vanni

over 700 soldiers killed. But most of it was taken up with denouncing the previous United National Party (UNP) regime for giving the Tigers guns and money during its reign.

Over 200,000 civilians have fled Kilinochchi, many already refugees from Jaffna town. The government promptly cut all food convoys north of Vavuniya for five weeks until 12 August in the face of protests from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and international aid agencies. Vavuniya's Government Agent (GA) Ganesh says 475 food lorries have gone north only a third of the Vanni's needs for August. NGOs estimate around 4,000 metric tonnes of food aid have crossed the front line in the last three weeks.

Akkarayankulam a few miles south of the fighting has gone from sleepy hamlet to bustling metropolis with Kilinochchi traders transplanted and thousands of refugees cramming community halls and schools. For most people food and shelter remain marginal and there is growing risk of epidemic.

By mid-August, medical NGO Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) Holland was treating 1,000 out-patients a day in an improvised clinic in Akkarayankulam's cottage hospital, over 40% suffering from diarrhoea. Malaria is spreading and there are no drugs, antibiotics or chlorine to combat the threat of water-borne disease.

A few thousand civilians have drifted back to Kilinochchi during the lull in the fighting but shelling continues and the town has been stripped bare.

Only 1,500 refugees have crossed the front line to Army-controlled Vavuniya, 70 kms south. Neither the Tigers nor the military will permit a mass exodus. The LTTE's relief wing, the Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation (TRO) has dis-

tributed over Rs 2 million of food aid to pacify thousands of middle class Jaffna refugees increasingly disaffected with exile in the jungle.

To combat the Tiger suicide commando threat to Colombo, the military allow only 25 youth among the 200 a-day permitted to cross the Vavuniya front line. Over 1,00 young men are now held in a special transit camp at Vepankulam, a few miles west, some waiting weeks for friends or relatives in the south to confirm their identity.

LTTE cadre penetrated Vavuniya in late August, killing three in a grenade attack on a police jeep. Sixteen civilians were wounded in crossfire before three guerrillas escaped in a hijacked lorry, abandoning it near Asikulam where some of the 50,000 refugees returned from India since 1991 remain in limbo in UN camps, unable to return to their front line villages.

Colombo was already alive with rumour that the government was about to outlaw the LTTE as a terrorist organisation. British Foreign minister Malcolm Rifkind on a 24-hour visit surprised his hosts by telling the press that the UK would not ban the Tigers but would push for a new amendment to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention preventing terrorists or those helping them from claiming asylum.

For the last two years, Sri Lankan Foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar has toured Western capitals, campaigning for a global ban on the Tigers to sever their \$50 million a-year fundraising arm. The two foreign ministers also discussed a new extradition treaty.

Contradicting a rash of wall posters across Colombo, Mr Rifkind denied he had come to broker a deal for the government who need opposition UNP support to save the devolution package it proposes as a democratic alternative to the Tigers. Tamil moderate opinion has already rejected the proposals and few believe they can form the framework of a long-term solution.

**Tamils to be safe from police harassment in Colombo need good social connections or money to pay says recently returned academic Dr Ratnajeewan Hoole in a hard-hitting article in the capital's Island newspaper, after his sister was arrested as an LTTE suspect. More details on page four.**

## THE NORTH

# Terror tactics

HUMAN RIGHTS agencies fear that over 200 Tamil youths have disappeared in the Jaffna peninsula since *Operation Sunray* in December last year. Many of them may be held in Army interrogation centres which are springing up all over Jaffna.

A civilian claims that 4,000 people from several villages in Thenmaratchy were rounded up in mid-July and in a scene reminiscent of the Indian Peace Keeping Force days, paraded before *thalayattis* or masked informers. Over 200 were detained and assaulted. The Tamil *thalayattis* themselves may become victims if they failed to identify a required number of "Tigers". GCE student Kirupakaran was arrested along with many others on 22 July at Maravanpulavu. His parents were severely assaulted when they went to the Army camp to make enquiries. Soft drink businessman Lingam and his employees have been detained. His chain of shops in Jaffna town has been sealed.

Over 600 people are said to have been rounded up in Kokuvil East on 19 August. LTTE claims that school girls were shot and wounded by the Army during the operation have not been substantiated. The LTTE alleges that several fishermen arrested at sea near Araly a month ago were tortured and killed. After relatives made enquiries at the Army camp, five mutilated bodies appeared on

the shores of Araly on 29 August. Tigers also say Tamil students K Thavanesan, Thirunavukarasu and T Suthakaran arrested by the Army at Thanankilapu in Thenmaratchy have disappeared.

Allegations of ill-treatment of women and extra-judicial executions are also being made against the security forces. Reports say that three women were raped by soldiers at their home in Manthuvil on 1 August. The bodies of eight youths were found in Thenmaratchy in early August. Krishnapillai Thavarasa and Ponniah Srivalli were shot dead by the Army on 15 August at Ponnalai.

The Army crackdown has been intensified by a continuing string of Tiger attacks inside the peninsula, over 200 in July says *Reuters*. The military has full control only over areas west of KKS road and east of Puthur-Chavakachcheri inside 12ft-high earth fortifications.

LTTE and Army landmines continue to cause civilian casualties. At Erlalai in Valikamam three people travelling in a bullock cart were killed by a landmine on 2 August.

The relief distribution system remains fragile and sufficient food is not reaching many areas. Over 15,000 Jaffna people want to leave and are unable to travel to Colombo following the suspension of the ferry service to Trincomalee. Another 200 passengers to Jaffna are stranded in Trincomalee.

## Displaced

The Rehabilitation Ministry says over 769,000 people have been internally displaced in the island's 25 districts. Over 387,000 are displaced in Kilinochchi and Jaffna districts.

## Accident

Liberal Party leader Chanaka Amaratunge, 39, was killed in an motor accident on 1 August at Daluwatte, south of Colombo. Mr Amaratunge was an ardent advocate for substantial devolution of power to minority communities.

## Increase

The People's Alliance government increased the price of wheat flour for the third time since assuming power from Rs 13.95 a kilo to Rs 16.95 from 27 August. The cost of bread has risen by Re 1 from Rs 5.75 a lb.

## Revenge

At least 60% of the people who fled Mullaitivu after the LTTE assault on the Army camp in July have returned. An initial survey indicates that 29 civilians had been killed by the security forces in retaliation.

## Hospital deaths

Reports say 22 people died at the Mallavi hospital within a week in late August because of the lack of medicines and medical equipment. They were sent to Mallavi after the Kilinochchi hospital was closed following Army's *Operation Sathjaya*.

# words not deeds

LONDON-BASED human rights agency Amnesty International says in an August report titled *Sri Lanka: Wavering commitment to human rights* that the Sri Lankan government is not living up to its stated commitment to human rights.

Amnesty alleges that disappearances and arbitrary arrests continue and impunity remains a serious concern. Since Amnesty's report further abuses have occurred and the discovery of three dead bodies in and around Colombo have rekindled fears over death squads.

Seven policemen were arrested in August by the CID, accused of the murder of Colombo Tamil businessman S. Subramaniam. Twenty two police offi-

cers detained in 1995 for the murder of 31 Tamils have returned to active service after being granted bail.

Amnesty has documented several cases of torture and rape by security forces. In an application to the Supreme Court in August, Jaffna resident R Ramamurthy alleges he was brutally tortured by the Army in Vavuniya and Colombo. V Sivan currently in Colombo's Magazine prison says he suffered torture at a Batticaloa Army camp.

According to Amnesty thousands of Tamils have been arbitrarily arrested. Over 100 Tamil prisoners in Kalutara and Magazine prisons decided in late August to begin a fast against prolonged deten-

tion. These prisoners ended a 7-day fast in June after the Defence Ministry assured them that they would either be charged or released.

Several executions and disappearances are attributed to Tamil groups PLOTE and TELO. The LTTE is accused by Amnesty of carrying out large-scale massacres, particularly of Sinhalese civilians in border villages of north-east. An unknown number of Tamils and Muslims continue to be detained by the Tigers.

Government sources angrily described the report as "unfair". Justice minister GL Peiris says the government remains committed to human rights and allegations of Amnesty will be answered.

## ■ A wave of attacks in the east

# Crossfire

TWENTY FOUR policemen and four civilians were killed when over 200 Tigers attacked a police post providing security to a Sinhalese village north of Welikanda in Polonnaruwa District, on 29 August. Ten other policemen and three civilians were wounded. Kudapokuna village lies on the vital route between Polonnaruwa and Batticaloa and the LTTE has continually targeted the area to disrupt military supply lines.

Since the fall of Jaffna in December last year the Tigers have launched major attacks in the east. In early August the police called for civilian cooperation to prevent LTTE infiltration into Batticaloa town.

Two policemen were injured in the town by a grenade on 8 August. Another grenade was lobbed three days later into crowds attending the Mamankam Hindu temple festival injuring four policemen and 26 civilians. The LTTE have denied responsibility. In another attack at Oddamavady near Valaichenai on 30 August a Muslim youth was killed.

The security forces have withdrawn after a major military operation in the Tiger stronghold of Vaharai in July. But shelling and blockade of the area have continued causing severe hardship to the people. Hundreds of civilians fled the LTTE-controlled Vavunativu and Pattipalai areas after the Army issued leaflets ordering the people to move

away from Tiger camps. Local MPs have protested against government plans to set up a major naval base on Mantivu few miles further north. The military believes that LTTE infiltration from Paduvankarai and other jungle areas west of the lagoon could be checked by the new base. The 50-acre island has been a leprosy colony since colonial times and has a hospital where 40 patients are receiving treatment.

Further north in Trincomalee security was intensified after Tamil group TELO's district organiser S Baskaran was killed on 26 August in a grenade attack. Six others were seriously injured. LTTE assaults in Trincomalee have increased in ferocity. Eight soldiers were killed in Mavilaru on 9 August. Two days later a soldier died in an assault on an Army patrol near Meegaswewa south of Trincomalee town. Four soldiers were wounded in a Tiger attack on the same day in Puthur.

The LTTE also seems to issue a warning to foreign operators in the area. A Philippines merchant vessel *Princess Wave* was damaged by a bomb off Pulmoddai on 9 August. Nine civilians were injured. Korean engineers working for the last 9 months improving telecommunication in Trincomalee returned to Colombo after their office in the town was bombed on 14 August.

In Amparai District a civilian died in crossfire during a clash between the Special Task Force (STF) and the LTTE on 28 August.

# disillusion

**THE enormous suffering of refugees in the Vanni places the Tamil political parties in a difficult position. While continuing to support the government they are unable to ensure that sufficient food and medicine gets across Thandikulam. On the other hand they are also unable to do anything about the inadequacy of the government peace proposals or expediting the procedure for its acceptance. TULF leader M Sivasithamparam points out that over an year has elapsed since the publication of the peace package and expresses concern that it is now doomed to suffer the same fate as previous failed peace initiatives. TULF continues to oppose the government in Parliament for extension of Emergency rule. The other Tamil parties are edgy and say they may be forced to do the same. They are also annoyed over government decision to appoint a coordinating committee for the north-east instead of an interim administration which would incorporate representatives of the Tamil parties. Observers say negotiations are underway behind the scenes with Hill Country leader and minister S Thondaman to ensure CWC votes in Parliament in case the other Tamil parties decide to oppose the government. If Mr Thondaman agrees, his grandson Arumugam will be rewarded with a ministerial post.**

**The Tamil parties have a third problem. They are also unable to convince the UNP to take a clear and definite stand favourable to the minorities. The UNP announced in July that it opposed the change in the unitary state. But there are stirrings within the party. Colombo Mayor and UNP Treasurer K Ganeshalingam has declared that the unitary state will not solve the conflict. He has called on the UNP leader Ranil Wickremasinghe to support the merger of the northern and eastern provinces.**

## US trains military

IN a series of articles Western journalists say that US military personnel are involved in the war in Sri Lanka. Former Army Commander Gerry de Silva revealed in April after a visit to America that US forces would arrive in the island to assist in the war against the LTTE.

Western military involvement in Sri Lanka has been suspected for some time. Some reports suggest that foreigners are piloting planes on bombing missions and some have been killed. Others say US special forces are providing training to the Sri Lankan military at Wirawila airbase in Hambantota District, 230 km south-east of Colombo.

The US Information Service issued a statement on 16 August denying American participation in combat opera-

tions but confirming US military officers involvement in cooperation programmes to improve training skills of Sri Lankan military personnel.

In mid-August a delegation of US State Department officials held discussions with the Sri Lankan authorities. State Department Coordinator for Counter Terrorism Philip Wilcox leading the delegation declared US commitment to prevent the use of American soil for violence against the island.

If Sri Lanka's giant neighbour India is uncomfortable, it has not overtly denounced US military presence close to its shores. India is at loggerheads with the US over the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, alleging that it compromises Indian security.

# Returned academic blasts the capital's cops *being a Tamil in Colombo*

TAMILS to be safe from police harassment in Colombo need good social connections or money to pay says recently returned academic Dr Ratnajeewan Hoole in a hard-hitting article in the capital's *Island* newspaper this month.

In "Being a Tamil in Colombo" Dr Hoole describes how his sister and her husband were picked up at Pettah bus station because her hairstyle reminded police of an LTTE suspect. Both were abused and intimidated. His sister, a lecturer at Jaffna University, was struck by a prison warders' baton and forced to raise her skirt by a voyeuristic investigating officer.

Ignoring pleas to inform their families, the couple were produced before a magistrate and remanded for further investigations for ten days in Welikade prison where hundreds of LTTE suspects are held without trial, some for over four years. Welikade was overcrowded and insanitary and drugtaking and casual vio-

lence were routine. Someone with prison connections informed Dr Hoole who with the support of human rights NGOs and a friendly attorney effected their release. As a final indignity, his brother-in-law had to pay Rs 50 to avoid appearing in court in handcuffs to have his case dismissed.

It could have been very different if no one had informed Dr Hoole or if they had no friends or no money. Security officials believe the Tigers have secreted hundreds of suicide commandos among the 150,000 North-east refugees who have fled to Colombo. Hundreds are screened every day in police sweeps and some arrested on suspicion. The unlucky fall into the hands of corrupt officers who want to extort a bribe or torture a "confession" from them.

The challenge before the government says an *Island* editorial is to maintain high security while ensuring that Tamils held on suspicion are treated humanely

and released when there is no evidence against them. After the Wellewatte train bomb last month which killed 62, a more enlightened approach is unlikely.

Over 100 young Tamils were arrested in Fort and Maradana in early August and 25 in a search of Wolfendal St. a week later. Tamil group PLOTE has renounced its security role in protest at the government's screening methods.

Four alleged *Black Tiger* suicide cadre were captured by Colombo police in mid August and intelligence that two other suicide bombers were in the capital triggered a city-wide crackdown. A Tamil millionaire businessman was also arrested for allegedly smuggling LTTE operatives to Germany on false documents.

Two other Tamils trying to claim asylum in Germany were arrested at Colombo airport on 18 August after being deported from Singapore. Over 15,000 Tamils fled Sri Lanka last year to seek asylum in Western countries.

## Across the Palk Strait

IN a new turn of events, 1,500 Sri Lankan Tamils from Mannar Island have sought refuge in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu.

There are already 56,750 Sri Lankan refugees in 115 camps throughout Tamil Nadu. Around 63,000 have been returned to Sri Lanka under an agreement between the two countries. Another 100,000 Sri Lankans live outside the camps with friends and relatives.

The refugees began arriving in fishing boats in Rameswaram on 8 August. Most of them are from the UNHCR camp or areas around Pesalai. Refugees say that the food supply to the camp had been disrupted for several weeks and UNHCR officers declared that their safety could not be guaranteed after shelling from a new Army camp at Erukampiddy. In August there were several clashes in Pesalai between the military and the LTTE and major Army roundups of civilians.

On 26 August UNHCR despatched Rs700,000 worth tents, plastic sheets and cooking utensils to Mannar to restore local confidence. Press reports say UNHCR has also sent three officers to

hold discussions with the people of Mannar Island and the military.

New Delhi is keen that LTTE cadre do not slip into India with the refugees. In mid-August Indian authorities confis-

cated boats which carried Sri Lankan refugees and withdrew fishing permits to some fishermen. Over 30,000 fishermen launched a demonstration in Rameswaram on 20 August against the ban. Indian fishermen claim that they were forced by the LTTE at gunpoint to ferry the refugees across.

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M Karunanidhi says refugees will be subject to thorough investigation and those suspected of LTTE links will be held. Most new refugees are housed in the Rameswaram Mandapam camp separately from other refugees. Some have been sent to a special camp in Chenkalpattu.

Mr Karunanidhi also says that the problems of Sri Lankan Tamil militants and refugees will be approached separately. His reluctance to meet Sri Lankan Tamil leaders may be an indication that he will refrain from openly supporting the Tamil cause in the island. Mr Karunanidhi's tenure previously as Chief Minister came to an abrupt end when New Delhi dismissed the state government in July 1991 accusing him of leaking strategic information to the LTTE jeopardising national security.

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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