



Tamil Information

NEWS BULLETIN OF
THE TAMIL INFORMATION CENTRE

Access to
Information is a
Fundamental Right

MAY 1993

NO. 22

DEATH OF A PRESIDENT

Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa was assassinated by a suicide bomber in Colombo on 1st May while leading the May Day procession of the ruling United National Party. None of the Ministers or state Ministers was close to the President when the assassin struck, but 23 others including his personal valet Mohamed Mohideen were killed. Senior Police Superintendent Ronnie Gunasinghe, who was implicated in the murder of journalist Richard de Zoysa three years ago also died in the blast.

Foreign observers who were in Colombo at the time say some kind of bloodletting was anticipated on the May Day after the assassination of Democratic United National Party leader Lalith Athulathmudali a week earlier. Another DUNF leader Gamini Dissanayake accused President Premadasa of masterminding the killing of Athulathmudali.

Five special police teams are now investigating President Premadasa's assassination. The police are blaming the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) even before the investigations are completed, and say that a severed head found at the scene is that of the assassin. He is said to be Kulaveerasingham Veerakumar, a Tamil from Jaffna.

Similarly, the police have accused the Tigers for the killing of Athulathmudali. A body found at the scene of the DUNF leader's assassination, said by police to be that of the killer, was later found to be that of a Tamil Hindu priest's son arrested by police only three days earlier.

Observers have expressed surprise at the speed with which the road where President Premadasa and others were killed, had been cleaned, hardly giving any time for

investigators to examine the scene of the crime. The Scotland Yard team which was at that time in Sri Lanka to investigate Athulathmudali's murder, whose mandate had been extended to cover President Premadasa's killing, found that only a clean road remained to examine.

There is no doubt that the general poor human rights situation is a matrix for assassinations of this nature and killings may continue until the government truly and whole heartedly becomes committed to improving human rights. However, political assassinations must be condemned unreservedly. No cause is served by political killings, they only contribute to the degradation of the society.

Ranasinghe Premadasa was appointed Prime Minister in 1978 and became President of Sri Lanka on 2 January 1989 following the Presidential elections in 1988. He has been praised as a friend of the poor and a champion of the cause of the downtrodden. Press reports also say that Premadasa was the only person who could have solved the Tamil problem.

These are mere myths. Premadasa in fact ran an authoritarian government and presided over the massacre of the largest number of civilians, both Tamil and Sinhalese, in the history of Sri Lanka.

As Prime Minister, Premadasa was mainly responsible for the dismissal of 80,000 workers who participated in a general strike in 1980 demanding higher wages. Negotiations and international pressure for the reinstatement of the workers proved fruitless and their families underwent enormous suffering, leading in many instances even to suicide.

Premadasa often declared on public platforms that he would reject international intervention of any

kind emphasising that Sri Lanka was capable of solving its own problems. However, during his tenure as President, Sri Lanka became a slave to international lending agencies the IMF and the World Bank. President Premadasa used the word "Peoplistisation" for privatisation to mislead the people. Privatisation, at the instance of the World Bank, has resulted in reduction in wages, particularly in the plantation sector and the economic structural adjustment programme has led to the widening of the gap between the rich and the poor. Social welfare has been cut back and large number of workers have been made redundant. The "friend of the poor" had been in fact creating more poor people, while his associates amassed wealth.

While Premadasa boasted that the growth rate was 4.8% in spite of the North-East war, the growth does not mean anything to the majority of the population and the debt burden during his tenure increased to an enormous US \$5 billion from \$284 million in 1978.

The new President D. B. Wijetunge has ordered the dismantling of some of the institutions created by Premadasa. Prominent among these was a secret police unit of fifty police officers led by retired Deputy Inspector General of Police A. C. Lawrence. Only in a police state would one find such institutions. This unit was involved in tracking down those opposed to Premadasa by telephone tapping and various other illegal methods. Reports say that income tax records by suspected persons were made available to this police unit. It is now suspected that this unit may have been involved in the disappearance of a number of persons.

Premadasa also ordered the brutal suppression of the Peoples Liberation Front (JVP) in 1989-90, in which 60,000 Sinhalese youths,

most of them innocent, were massacred. He did nothing to check the excesses of the armed forces. The army often went into villages in the south, rounded up all the youths and shot them dead, on the basis of the theory that at least a few JVP members among them would be killed. Premadasa often spoke proudly about the suppression of the JVP and had denied any compensation for those killed. He treated human rights agencies as subversive organisations, and human rights workers were often killed or disappeared. JVP leaders were apprehended and massacred in custody and reports indicate that Premadasa knew that they were in custody before they were killed. No inquiry has been thus far held into these illegal killings.

In these matters he had his own method of giving orders to his henchmen. One evening he severely criticised the opposition press and the following day the printing press were all attacked and government officers began to harass opposition media. The impeachment motion against Premadasa in 1991 charged him of abuse of power, using state funds for personal glory and the intentional prevention of investigations into the murder of journalist Richard de Zoysa.

It is widely believed that Premadasa was keen in solving the Tamil national problem. However, his actions have throughout contributed to aggravation of the conflict. The All Party Conference (APC) to solve the problem collapsed after Premadasa failed to show any interest in its proceedings. Political party leaders say Premadasa attended only a few sessions of the APC.

The ruling United National Party (UNP) led by Premadasa never submitted any proposal to the Parliamentary Select Committee (PSC) appointed in August 1991 to find a solution. The PSC was weighted decisively in favour of the Sinhalese parties with the UNP having an absolute majority. Premadasa had throughout the proceedings of the PSC been saying that he would accept and implement

its decision with an ulterior motive. His intention was to divide the Tamil Homeland and he used Jaffna M. P. Srinivasan to propose the demerger of the North-East province. The Select Committee, by a majority decision and not by Tamil-Sinhala consensus, has recommended at the instance of Premadasa the division of the North-East.

Premadasa also brought about great misery to the Tamils of Sri Lanka. After fighting resumed between LTTE and the armed forces in June 1990, Premadasa ordered the aerial bombing of the North-East. A large number of Tamil civilians have been killed by the Sri Lankan airforce. Major military operations have been launched in the North-East, and during this period Premadasa presided over security council meetings which planned and executed the operations without any regard for civilian life. Thousands more have died in military operations.

While Premadasa built large number of houses in the south under his "million houses programme", in the North-East under his command the armed forces destroyed over 150,000 houses and countless number of other buildings.

Premadasa also ordered the economic blockade of the North, banning 48 essential items including medicine, fuel and building materials. Food to the North was greatly restricted. Thousands of Tamil civilians, including children, have perished as a result of the economic blockade. During Premadas's regime over a million Tamils in Sri Lanka were internally displaced and over 200,000 Tamils fled the country.

A man responsible for the sufferings of the poor cannot be a friend of the poor. A man who was responsible for the deaths of thousands of Tamils cannot be a friend of the Tamils. A man who ordered repression of the Sinhalese resulting in thousands of deaths cannot be the friend of the Sinhalese. Then who was Premadasa? He was a *myth*.

Provincial Council Elections

The People's Alliance led by the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) scored a convincing victory in the Western Province in the Provincial Council (PC) elections on 17 May. Chandrika Bandaranayake, daughter of former Prime Minister Srimavo Bandaranayake became the Chief Minister of the Province within which capital Colombo lies.

PC elections were conducted in seven provinces in the south. According to the Sri Lankan government, the security situation in the North-East Province is an obstacle to holding elections in the province. Most of the 32 registered political parties contested for the 366 seats in 17 districts where voting took place in 8,193 polling stations. Over 73% of the 9,301,304 registered voters participated in the elections. Over 50,000 police and army personnel were deployed to provide security.

The ruling United National Party (UNP) gained overall majorities in Uva, North Central, Central and Sabragamuwa provinces. Although UNP was the party with the largest number of seats in the Southern and North West provinces, it failed to gain an overall majority. However, the Governors of these provinces invited the UNP to form the provincial governments which the other parties oppose. The combined opposition, the Democratic United National Front (DUNF) and the PA, has now sought legal remedy, alleging that the Governors had acted beyond their powers, whereas they should have invited the combined opposition with majorities in the councils, to form the provincial governments.

In the Hill Country, candidates of the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) supported the UNP and its candidates were included in the UNP lists. Fourteen CWC candidates were elected polling over 400,000 votes. Following the grant of citizenship to stateless Tamils by legislation in 1986 and 1988 large number of Hill Country Tamils were

eligible to vote. A total of 18 Tamils were elected in the Hill Country, ten from Nuwara Eliya District, three from Kandy District and one from Matale District. In the earlier councils there were only 13 Tamils. In the Sabragamuwa province, where there are a large number of plantation Tamils none was elected. However, a CWC candidate has been appointed as a member in Ratnapura under the proportional representation bonus system.

Apart from the CWC, candidates of the Lanka Jathika Estate Workers Union (LJEWU), the National Union of Workers (NUW) and the Upcountry People's Front (UPF) candidates were also elected. P. Chandrasekaran, President of the UPF, who is currently detained at the Colombo Police headquarters, has become a provincial councillor.

In the Hill Country nearly 13% of the votes were rejected. Following the election, CWC President and Rural Industrial Development Minister S. Thondaman declared that the CWC had proved its popularity and no government can now ignore the Hill Country Tamils. He has also demanded that Cabinet ministers should be appointed in proportion to the number of votes obtained and on such basis three cabinet posts should be reserved for the CWC. Reports indicate that the CWC will now press for the acceptance of its proposal to the Parliamentary Select Committee for the solution of the Tamil national problem.

Some observers say the overwhelming unity shown by the Hill Country Tamils indicates a new awareness of identity and realisation of the importance of solidarity in the current chaotic situation in the country. Elected Tamil councillors have now been urged to immediately attend to the many problems confronting the Hill Country Tamils for over 40 years, particularly those relating to education.

TIC ACCESSION LIST

A selection of documents received by TIC in May 1993

SHR 3181

Varatharajah, S

Sinhalese Colonisation in Tamil Lands: A Perspective

France: Tamil Co-ordinating Committee; 12 April 1992

12p

DESCRIPTORS: Colonisation/ Tamil Homeland/ Acts

SHR 3182

Tainilattu vitar: Mavitar Ninaivukal (Text in Tamil)

Norway: Tamil Co-ordinating Committee; November 1992

75p

DESCRIPTORS: Suicide Squad/ LTTE/ Liberation Fighters

SHR 3183

Manita Utimaiyum Ematu Potatamum (Text in Tamil)

Yalppanam: Manita Urimaikkana Palkalaikkalaka Acitiyarkal; 15 March 1993

39p

DESCRIPTORS: Discrimination/ Ethnic Problem/ War/ LTTE/ Sri Lankan Government/ IPKF/ Human Rights Violation

SHR 3006

CWGSL

The Human Rights Situation in Sri Lanka by The Country Working Group on Sri Lanka

Geneva: UNHCR; February-March 1993

10p

DESCRIPTORS: Human Rights Violation/ UNHCR/ Sri Lankan Government/ LTTE/ Recommendation

SGN 327

Tanikacalam, Katir

Tamilar Varalarum Ilankai

Idappeyar Aivum (Text in Tamil)

Cennai: Catavana Publisher; June 1992

267p

DESCRIPTORS: History/ Sri Lanka/ Archaeology/ Place Names/ Tamil/ Language

SGN 340

Ponnampalam, Mu

Vitutalaiyum Putiya, Ellaikalum

Punkudutivu (Jaffna): Cuyam Veliyitu; December 1986

84p

DESCRIPTORS: Tamil/ Essays/ Poems/ Short Stories/ Politics

SGN 347

Amarasingam, Ta

Tiru Po Kantaiya Avarkalin 75vatu Pitanta Tina Vaita Vila Malar 19.12.1992. (Text in Tamil)

Tirukonamalai: Kanti Master Vaitavila Malar Kulu; 19 December 1992

DESCRIPTORS: Biography

PB

Mounam (Tamil Periodical)

France: Pu. Vigneswaran; May-June- July 1993

44p

DESCRIPTORS: Tamil/ Literature/ Arts

PB

SAARC Link: Quarterly News Letter

Sri Lanka: South Asian Human Rights Action Programme; 1993

10p; N0.1

DESCRIPTORS: Freedom of Expression/ Detention/ LTTE/ Human Rights Violation/ Malnutrition/ Children/ Sri Lanka/ Maldives/ Bhutan/ Pakistan/ Bangladesh/ Nepal/ India

MAY DIARY

MAY 01

MAY DAY MAYHEM: President Ranasinghe Premadasa along with 23 others was killed in an explosion in the midst of a procession on its way towards a May Day rally grounds in Colombo. Police blamed a suicide bomber for this explosion and suspected the involvement of Tamil Tigers. The LTTE denied this and said it was a backlash following the killing of the president's political rival Lalith Aththulathmudali a week earlier.

MAY 02

AID MISSION: Secretary to the Ministry of Finance R. Paskaralingam left for Washington for talks with World Bank officials in preparation for the Paris Aid Group meeting on June 18.

MAY 03

THREE ARRESTED: Police arrested three persons in connection with the assassination of President Premadasa. A manhunt was launched for another Jaffna youth alleged to be involved in the killing.

MAY 04

DISEASES SPREAD: High incidence of typhoid, malarial fever and diarrhoea has been reported in the Jaffna peninsula. K. Ravinchandran (23 yrs) from Varani died of typhoid in hospital while a student S.Mahesan (12 yrs) from Karaveddy also died in hospital from diarrhoea. Acute shortages of drugs in hospitals were blamed for these deaths. In Vadamadachi east 2,474 cases of malaria had been reported in the first three months of 1993. There are no facilities for testing blood samples at the local hospital and the disease rages unabated.

MAY 05

TIGER ATTACK IN VAVUNIYA: LTTE launched an attack on an Army guard post at Kokkuveli in the Vavuniya District. A soldier was injured and admitted to

Vavuniya hospital.

MAY 06

CURFEW IN THE ISLAND: Curfew was imposed throughout Sri Lanka from 10pm to prevent violence following the funeral of President Premadasa, according to Police.

MAY 07

NEW PRESIDENT: Prime Minister D.B. Wijetunge (71 yrs) was elected President by Parliament. His nomination by the ruling party was unopposed. The new President announced the grant of allowances to pensioners, permanency of service to temporary and casual employees and increases in the guaranteed price for paddy.

MAY 08

KUDIMBIMALAI CAMP: The army established a new camp with around 500 soldiers in the Kudumbimalai jungles, Batticaloa District. Agricultural tractors used by the Tamil And Muslim cultivators in the surrounding areas were commandeered by soldiers for establishing this large camp. The collection of milk from cattle in the area has been suspended by villages due to the presence of soldiers in the area. Both the agricultural and dairy pursuits have been consequently affected.

MAY 09

JUDGES' PREDICAMENT: The Supreme Court declared that it had no powers to decide as to whether a Judge or Commissioner of the Appeal Court in the North-East province had superior jurisdiction. This followed an application by an Appeal Court Judge who found that a new Appeal Court Commissioner had been appointed whereas the Court of Appeal had sole jurisdiction earlier. The Commissioner appointed is a Tamil to facilitate the conduct of proceedings in Tamil.

MAY 10

FR.SINGARAYAR: Scholar and educationist Rev.Fr.Singarayar died in Jaffna. A highly respected religious dignitary Fr.Singarayar gained fame for his stout refusal to escape from prison, where he had been interned by the government for alleged LTTE links during a jail break in the hope of establishing his innocence. After a protracted trial charges against him were dropped.

MAY 11

ECONOMIC BLOCKADE: The TULF MP Joseph Pararajasingham called on the newly elected President Wijetunge and urged the lifting of the economic blockade imposed by the government on the North as a goodwill gesture on his assumption of office.

MAY 12

AERIAL BOMBING: A woman was killed and several others were injured when Air Force planes twice bombed Kanakapuram in the Kilinochchi District. A few buildings were also damaged.

MAY 13

JAPAN'S CONCERN: Japan's envoy Masaki Kuniasu in his talks with President Wijetunge expressed concern at the war situation in the North-East and conveyed the Japanese government's belief that negotiations would be held early with a view to resolving the conflict.

MAY 14

MIXED SIGNAL: President Wijetunge speaking at a press conference in Kandy spoke of a peaceful solution to the North-East problem but saw no clear means to this approach. He claimed that the LTTE and not the government as creating difficulties for the law abiding citizens in those areas.

MAY 15

MAIL SERVICE: Over 1000 mail bags bound for besieged Jaffna peninsula are held up at the central mail exchange for over two months

MAY DIARY

according to the Postal Department. Non availability of a land route to Jaffna is the cause for this and despatch by ship is proving difficult due to bureaucratic wrangling between two government departments.

MAY 16

STRIKE CONTINUES: Trade union sources indicated that the work stoppage at the Needwood Tea estate in the Badulla District would continue as the demand for increased pay had not been met. This strike began on 19.04.93.

MAY 17

PROVINCIAL COUNCIL ELECTIONS: Elections to the councils for the seven provinces except North-East were held and the ruling UNP obtained an absolute majority in four provinces and was behind the joint opposition in three provinces including Western Province where capital Colombo lies.

MAY 18

KILALI CLAIMS MORE LIVES: The only possible access to the Jaffna peninsula through the Jaffna lagoon, prohibited by the government claimed four more lives. The civilians were killed while trying to cross the lagoon by boat and were hit by shell fire. Over 2,000 passengers were waiting at Kilinochchi to make the hazardous journey.

MAY 19

TAMIL YOUTHS ARRESTED: Twenty seven Tamil youths mostly from the hill country were arrested by the Police at Kandana, in Colombo District. Several such arrests were reported in other parts of Colombo.

MAY 20

MINISTER AND CONSTITUTION: President Wijetunge appointed close associate of Premadasa and lawyer K N Choksy as Minister of Constitutional

Affairs. He was also appointed of Minister of State.

MAY 21

WESTERN PROVINCIAL COUNCIL: Mrs. Chandrika Kumaranatunge was appointed Chief Minister of the Western Province. She pledged that she would work towards more equality in society.

MAY 22

EELAM DAY PROCLAIMED: At a ceremony held in Somerville city, Massachusettes USA, Mayor Micheal Capnano hoisted the Eelam national flag alongside the US stars and stripes flag and proclaimed the Eelam national day. He also called upon fellow citizens to recognise the just struggle of the Tamils and called for UN intervention for recognising Tamil right of self-determination.

MAY 23

EYES ON PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION: Speaking to reporters at Puttalam the new Prime Minister indicated that while attempting a peaceful solution of the ethnic problem the government would continue the campaign to militarily weaken LTTE. He expressed the hope that by the end of 1994 when the presidential election is due a political solution could be finalised.

MAY 24

KILALI CROSSING: The Jaffna lagoon was continued to be used by civilians despite government prohibition. Around 25 boats crossed the lagoon while the LTTE boats engaged attacking naval vessels. Reports indicated that three LTTE men were killed when their boat was hit by shell fire.

MAY 25

LTTE LOSES: JOC spokesman Brigadier Angamana reported the

killing of three LTTE members at Weli Oya in a confrontation. One soldier was killed and fifteen were wounded in this incident.

MAY 26

TELO CADRES KILLED: TELO cadre probing beyond the security post at Pambaimadu in Mannar District clashed with LTTE. Three TELO members were killed and another wounded.

MAY 27

ASSISTANCE CURTAILED: The Tamil Nadu government issued an order curtailing assistance programmes run by local NGOs for the Tamil refugees in government camps. This would mostly affect women and 6 children who are currently the beneficiaries of this assistance. Even employment outside is restricted between the hours of 8 am to 6 pm under the order which will again affect the earnings of refugees.

MAY 28

BOYCOTT TO CONTINUE: TULF and EPRLF decided not to participate in the Parliamentary Select Committee meeting fixed for 10 June 1993.

MAY 29

ARMY LOSE MEN: Five soldiers were killed and five injured at Jayanthipura in Batticaloa District when the LTTE mounted an attack on a security post.

PRESIDENT MEETS

ENVOYS: At a luncheon meeting with foreign envoys President Wijetunge stated early action would be taken to remedy the troubled situation continuing in the North. He also indicated that bringing peace to the whole nation was his aim.

India: Refugees Forced to Leave

Voluntary organisations have been prohibited from entering Sri Lankan refugee camps in Tamil Nadu by an order of the state government on 27 May. The order also states that refugees would be allowed to leave the camp for employment only between 8.00 am and 6.00 pm.

The Tamil Nadu government order is seen by observers as another in a series of measures to bring pressure on Tamil refugees to force them to leave the camps. NGOs were prohibited from entering camps several months ago. However few NGOs were able to supplement relief provision by the government and also attend to health, sanitary, educational and training needs. Officials of the UNHCR, which recently opened an office in Madras, are also not permitted to enter refugee camps.

The ban would mean, refugees will not be able to supplement their nutritional needs. Children, many of whom are said to be undernourished, will be particularly affected. Diseases may spread with the lack of health services provided by NGOs. The restriction on movement will drastically reduce income of refugees. For employment as daily-wage workers, refugees must leave camp early in the morning.

Observers say the time period specified by the government order aims at keeping the refugees within the camps so that they may be controlled easily.

Sri Lankan Tamils living outside refugee camps have also been subjected to harassment, particularly after the assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. Since the LTTE is suspected by the Indian government to have carried out the assassination, all Sri Lankan Tamils are viewed with suspicion.

Refugees living outside camps were forced to register themselves at police stations. Even children were finger-printed, Sri Lankan Tamils had to queue outside police stations for hours for registration. Policemen began visiting residences and threatening refugees. The situation has now further deteriorated.

Extensions of visas are rarely given. Many persons whose visas or passports have expired, have been arrested and held in detention. Even women are held in detention for this reason. Visa officers demand large amounts of money for extension of visas. Those without a visa are fined up to Rs. 2,000.

NIGHT SHELLING

Shell fire is being directed by the security forces towards Pandatherippu, Panippulam, Vadaliyadaippu, Pannakam, Saanthai and Chulipuram north in the nights. Residents seek shelter in the night at neighbouring villages.

APPLICATION FOR RELEASE

Subramaniam Selvarajah has filed an application in the Colombo Appeal Court for the release of his nephew Thambimuttu Shanmuganathan of Chenkalady in Batticaloa District. Shanmuganathan has been in custody since August 1992 without charges or access to court. Torture during the first twelve days in custody is alleged in the application which also refers to the rejection of an appeal made to the Human Rights Task Force in October 1992.

BOMBERS PURCHASED

Air Commodore Anslem Peiris disclosed the purchase of seven F-7 supersonic attack aircraft from China and claimed that they would be used in the North to assist ground troops.

BRITISH AID: A WAR STRATEGY

Over £2.1 million worth of medical equipment donated by the British Government to the Jaffna Teaching Hospital in the North is lying in Colombo in 25 containers since the beginning of this year. The Defence Ministry is reluctant to release the 25 containers to Jaffna as such a move could not help in weakening the medical service in the North. However the British High Commission Officials do not see eye to eye with the Defence Ministry position. Despite this British Aid still remains a weapon for the government to harass the Tamils in the North.

MEDICAL EXAMINATION

In a fundamental rights petition for the release of Miss Perinpan Pushparani (18 yrs) of Vantharumoolai in Batticaloa District, the Appeal Court ordered a medical examination on her by the Judicial Medical Officer. It was alleged that the detainee had been tortured for three days at the Kommanthurai army camp and suffered several injuries including a broken right shoulder. It is reported that torture is widely used in the Kommanthurai army camp.

APPEAL TO PRESIDENT

The UNP organiser for Batticaloa Mr. Pathmanathan in a memorandum to President Wijetunge appealed to trace the whereabouts of over 150 people including women and children who were arrested by security forces in June 1990. These people were arrested at the Vantharumoolai Eastern University premises and Sri Murugan temple premises. Reports suggest that unless the whereabouts of these people were known immediately, there would be killings

SITUATION REPORT

JAFFNA SECRETARIAT

The Jaffna Secretariat where the Government Agent's office too is located depends on the bottle lamp light to function during the time without sun light. Inclement weather has created a need for lighting during the day and no electricity is available here.

NO FUNDS FOR RELIEF

Work of Department of Rehabilitation and Reconstruction in the Mannar District have ground to halt due to non-availability of funds. The allocation for this year has not been released and relief effort in this war ravaged district is bound to suffer greatly to the detriment of the refugees.

POSTER PASTING POLICEMEN

The envoy of a donor country saw for himself the posting of government party election posters by an Inspector of Police in civilian clothes. The incident occurred in Kurunegala District while the envoy was a guest with the G M Premachandra, the secretary of the DUNF an opposition party. This was promptly reported to the Inspector General and the Elections Commissioner.

DISEASES IN REFUGEE CAMPS

The spread of infectious diseases diarrhoea and small pox have been reported in many refugee camps in the Batticaloa District. The insanitary conditions in the camps and the lack of drugs in the hospitals have contributed to the spread of diseases among the refugees.

MALNUTRITION AND LACK OF DRUGS

Health authorities in the Jaffna peninsula have revealed the prevalence of undernourishment among large sections of elderly, children and students. Frequent illnesses among them is attributed to undernourishment caused by the high prices and non availability of essential food items. Preventive therapy in the form of vaccines is in short supply in hospitals and this is adding to an already bleak situation for the weak.

HOME FOR THE AGED

Eleven sick and elderly detainees held in custody for nine months when the army surrounded the villages of Thaiyiddy and Ilavaalai in the Jaffna District were released after ICRC mediation. They are Mrs Selliah Aachippillai (68 yrs), Mrs Ilayathamby Theivanai (68 yrs), Mrs Sinniah Sellamma (73 yrs), Mrs Mudalithamby Sellamma (65 yrs), Mrs Soosaippillai Annamma (78 yrs), Gasbon John Bosco (31 yrs), Mrs Veluppillai Sinnathangam (65 yrs), Henry Devasagayam (42 yrs), Mrs Lourdes Mary Regina (40 yrs), Sebasthi Sandiya (58 yrs) and Kandiah Alagaratnam (83 yrs).

TRINCO BASE HOSPITAL WITHOUT SPECIALIST

The only base hospital for 400,000 residents in the Trincomalee District has no specialist doctors and expectant mothers and those with uncommon complications have to be content with the service of the doctors with the basic medical degree.

CUSTODY SOUGHT

Sellammah Ariakutty of Chunnakam West in the Jaffna District sought the custody of her son through a writ application in the Appeal Court, Colombo. The application is in respect of Anantharajah (25 yrs) who was taken into custody on 04.09.92 while staying in lodging house in Colombo prior to his departure abroad.

HOSPITAL SANS ELECTRICITY

The cooperative hospital at Moolalai in the Jaffna District which is operational from 25 Sep.92 though having a capacity of 150 beds is functioning with no electricity. In very trying conditions a 24 hours service is provided with the demands on it increasing rapidly in view of the transport difficulties and the vast numbers falling sick in the besieged Jaffna peninsula.

ARREST OF INNOCENTS

Wanni MP M B Anthony Emmanuel Silva in a telegram to the President to intervene to stop the arrest of innocents including women by the armed forces in the three AGA divisions in the Mannar District which are under the control of the forces. The arrests are on suspicion as supporter of LTTE according to the MP.

MALARIAL FEVER

Malarial fever is spreading in the Jaffna District and Chavakachcheri hospital alone treated 752 patients for this illness in the 1st three months of 1993. 35 of these were suffered from brain infection according to hospital sources.

HEALTH STATUS OF REFUGEES IN INDIA

This report describes the work, experience and recommendations of Dr Pararasan Arulanantham who visited the Tamil refugee camps in India in March 1993. Dr Arulanantham is a member of the Faculty of Community Health and a Senior Clinical Medical Officer attached to the Department of Public Health Medicine, South East Kent Health Authority in Britain.

According to Dr. Arulanantham there were 80,663 Tamil refugees housed in 136 camps situated in 18 districts in Tamil Nadu in March. He describes camp conditions:

"I had the opportunity to visit various camps at Palaru Anicut, Salavan Kuppam, Kaddmannar Kudy, Okkur, Dindugal, Lena Vilakku and Thoppukollai. I also examined children in camps near Madurai at the M M S S S, access to the camps had been limited due to recent disturbances. I also examined children from camps near Trichy at the OFERR (Organisation for Eelam Refugees Rehabilitation) office. I was able to collect clinical information on more than 200 children at the age of school entry - born 1986, 1987, which I shall be analysing on my return to the U.K."

UNDERNUTRITION

"There is widespread undernutrition of children living in the camps, leading to delayed growth and susceptibility to infection. Since the 5-7 years old children I have examined have been in India for less than three years, it is difficult to attribute this entirely to the conditions in the camps. Social unrest, movement of populations, insecurity, lack of adequate employment all carry their toll in the well-being of children. e.g. The refugees from the island of Neduntheevu (Delft) in Sri Lanka had left their island due to lack of food and insecurity caused by war on the mainland. However, this problem of undernutrition is remediable to a large measure by improved feeding. I congratulate those involved in the feeding programme which has got under way, with help from Dutch

Interchurch Aid. I must also recognise with gratitude, the contribution made by the Indian Government in providing financial support (dole) and rice at subsidised prices together with other rations every 15 days, without which large sections of the refugee population would simply have perished".

VITAMIN A DEFICIENCY AND FATS

"Connected with the problem of undernutrition is the prevalence of Vitamin A deficiency (which can cause permanent blindness). This is clearly of recent origin. This would in turn point to a lower intake of oils or fats in the diet, as Vitamin A is a fat soluble vitamin. The chief source of fats in Sri Lanka is the coconut, which is an expensive commodity in Tamil Nadu (about Ind. Rs 7 per nut) - this would cost about Ind. Rs. 210 per family per month, which is clearly outside the range of most of the families. I feel that the problem can be remedied by a substitution of locally edible oils such as gingelly (sesame seed) or ground nut - each of which has a fat content over 40%. The addition of these to the nutritional supplements will be culturally acceptable and would, I feel, enhance the programme by:-

- i. increasing calorie intake - sparing proteins for body building.
- ii. providing a vehicle for absorption of Vitamin A and its precursors found in vegetables. These vegetable oils do not themselves contain Vitamin A.
- iii. supplying essential fatty acids".

MEGADOSE VITAMIN A

"The programme of administration of mega dose Vitamin A has been started but has not reached all the camps. I feel the dosage should be standardised and administered at fixed regular intervals for children from the age of

2-7 years, eg. 50,000 I U (one chewable tablet) every three months (say Jan, April, July, Oct). The administration of the vitamin can with benefit, be coupled with weighing of the children and plotting it on the growth chart as an index of health.

Older children and occasionally adults may need to be included in the programme at the discretion of the medical attendant. The programme of Vitamin A supplementation will need to be reviewed at a future date - say in about two years".

DENTAL CARIES

"Widespread dental caries was present in some camps but not in others, and I feel this reflects the presence or absence of fluoride in drinking water in their present location or places of origin in Sri Lanka. Information about fluoride content of underground water in different localities in Tamil Nadu should be obtained to plan intervention to protect secondary dentition (adult teeth). Dental hygiene in camps was less than desirable but does not constitute a high priority at present".

SPACING OF CHILDREN

"Family planning is a sensitive issue to a community facing dispersion and destruction. However, from the viewpoint of child health it is important to space out the children to permit the newborn child to survive. It is important to note that breast feeding has a significant natural contraceptive effect during the period of lactation and should be promoted (ie. bottle feeding should be discouraged). There is some indication that fertility rates have dropped in the camps due to natural causes, and contraceptive advice may be superfluous at present. However, I feel more study is needed in this area."

TAMIL INFORMATION is published by Tamil Information Centre
Tamil House, 720 Romford Road, London E12 6BT. Tel: 081 514 6390
SUBSCRIPTION: UK - £ 6.00 All Other Countries - £10.00