

# The Sri Lanka Monitor

No 88

May 1995

Produced by the British Refugee Council

700 die in six weeks of Eelam War Three

## Chandrika's call to arms

**P**RESIDENT CHANDRIKA KUMARATUNGE'S People's Alliance government has promised a new military offensive to smash the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) after six weeks of fighting which have claimed over 700 lives and displaced thousands of Sri Lankans.

In a TV address to the nation on 22 May, the President said the Tigers had spurned peace and opted for war and the military was now fully equipped materially and strategically. The LTTE revoked a 100-day truce on 19 April, sinking two Navy gunboats in Trincomalee harbour.

Mrs Kumaratunge, who won general and presidential elections last year promising a just settlement to the island's 11-year ethnic conflict said this was not a war against the Tamil people. She pledged to maintain food and medical supplies to Tamil areas and to make public her long-awaited devolution package "within the next few weeks".

What the Colombo press calls *Eelam War Three* the third major phase of fighting in the Tigers' push for *Eelam* or a separate state, finds the Sri Lankan military in crisis.

A new missile capacity displayed by LTTE in late April threatened to ground military transport planes and helicopters ferrying supplies and reinforcements to three major Army camps on the edge of the Tigers' Jaffna peninsula stronghold. Soldiers were reduced to rice and lentils and the wounded dying before they could be evacuated claimed southern newspapers.

Four high-altitude Sri Lankan air-force F7 jets each carrying two 250kg bombs pounded Paranthan a few miles south of the key Elephant Pass Army camp in early May. Over 17 LTTE were killed say defence sources. The Tigers say they were civilians. The following day the F7s attacked a major LTTE buildup south of Pooneryn Army camp which a new Tiger ultimatum had vowed to destroy.

On 17 May, after air and sea bombardments of Atchuvelli junction and

Valvettiturai, 1,000 Sri Lankan troops supported by T55 tanks pushed three miles east from the military's Palaly base inside the Jaffna peninsula to the shores of Thondamanaru lagoon. Over 20 LTTE were killed and 30 Sri Lankan soldiers wounded. Another 6,000 civilians were displaced by the fighting.

*Thousands of villagers are streaming out of newly contested areas north of Trincomalee and east of Vavuniya fearing Tiger attacks or Army reprisals.*

After a series of stormy military summits in Anuradhapura and the capital, Overall Operations Commander Major General AMV Seneviratne and three other senior officers were sidelined for their "defeatist" assessments of plans for a Jaffna offensive. Major General Rohan Daluwatte takes over and 12 senior Army officers retired for political reasons by the previous administration are recalled as Major Generals in a major reshuffle.

Colombo port was virtually shut down for three days in mid-May as seven ships docked, carrying arms and munitions for the military. More weapons are expected after new deals with Israel, the Czech Republic and China.

The Tigers continue to target the east, challenging the military's fragile hold on the coastal strip with hit-and-run attacks from jungle bases in the interior. More than 19 Special Task Force police commandos died in an ambush in early May in the Tigers' monsoon stronghold of Kanjikudichcharu south of Amparai. Another 28 soldiers died when LTTE guerrillas overran isolated Tharavikulam Army camp in the Manmunai jungles, north west of Batticaloa on 28 May.

Three days earlier, the Tigers massa-

cred 42 Sinhalese villagers at a fishing camp at Kallarawa north of Trincomalee, in a chilling return to tactics of ethnic cleansing. The military hit back with a three-day assault on the Tigers' Thiriyai base camp a few miles inland killing 60 LTTE and nine soldiers. LTTE say only three guerrillas died.

Thousands of villagers are streaming out of newly contested areas north of Trincomalee and west of Vavuniya fearing Tiger attacks or Army reprisals. Over 12,000 Muslims have fled Pulmoddai after soldiers shot dead two women, two children and an old man at Arafat Nagar following a LTTE attack on the nearby Army camp which killed five.

Hundreds of Sinhalese families have fled rural Polonnaruwa after Dimbulagala Hamaduruwo, a prominent Buddhist monk, known for his anti-Tiger stance, was shot dead on 26 May. Over 200 police transferred to the east have not reported for duty.

The Tigers' new eastern front threatens to tie down thousands of troops, protecting remote Sinhalese farming communities pushed into the eastern jungles in the great colonisation schemes of the '60s. But the military is already dangerously over-extended. The recent spate of attacks shows clearly the Army's inability to defend small isolated camps. The Colombo press say soldiers turned and ran when the Tigers torched Kallarawa and in another attack at Wakalakade east of Anuradhapura in early May. Military high command will concede ground in the east and close 20 mini-camps in favour of larger bases less vulnerable to Tiger raids like Tharavikulam.

Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans who brokered a peace settlement in Cambodia told journalists in Colombo during a 24-hour visit on 22 May that there seem little scope for third party mediation - meaning that the government had politely rejected his offer - but that both his government and the Commonwealth were ready to assist.

Jaffna now prepares for a major offensive and its sixth year under siege. As the south-west monsoon clouds gather, the Tigers will target Colombo in reply.

## THE NORTH

# Death from the skies

FIFTEEN people were seriously injured when a shell from the Palaly Army base hit a passenger bus on 20 May at Valalai on the Thondamanaru-Point Pedro road in the Jaffna peninsula. On 30 April, shells killed seven civilians and badly damaged the Thondamanaru Selvachannathy temple.

The military shelled Atchuveli in mid-May to curtail the new LTTE missile threat by expanding the perimeter of Palaly air-base three miles east. Shells injured a young woman at Vadamaratchy on 7 May. Sivalingam, 50 was killed at Atchuveli North on 17 May and five others were injured. Over 15,000 people have fled Thondamanaru and Atchuveli and have sought refuge in Chavakachcheri. Jaffna people have resumed building bunkers.

Some observers believe that the Tigers are preparing major offensives on the Jaffna military camps which are now more vulnerable without air supply. Two soldiers died in a LTTE attack on the outer perimeter of the Elephant Pass camp on 16 May. Three days later the Tigers struck an observation post in the camp killing seven soldiers and wounding 14 others. The Navy failed in an attempt to reprovise the vital Pooneryn Army base on the south-west shore of the lagoon in late May. One sailor and three Sea Tigers were killed in fighting as Navy patrol boats appeared on Jaffna lagoon for the first time since November 1993.

The LTTE Kilali boat service across the lagoon was suspended in early June because of rain and strong winds. A limited boat service and Army restrictions coupled with the fishing ban have affected fuel and essential food supply to the peninsula.

Jaffna Government Agent (GA) K Ponnambalam told a conference at Colombo's Rehabilitation Ministry on 31 May that Rs 5 million (\$100,000) was immediately required to supply food. The government claims that 4,000 tons of food has been despatched by ship to Point Pedro. Plans for rehabilitation have ground to a halt after the government disbanded the North-East Rehabilitation Task Force in mid-May.

Shortage of medicines is affecting poor patients in the north. Even pain-killers and antibiotics are in short supply. People are expected to buy medicine in the private market. Reports say 116 people died in the Jaffna hospital in May, the majority of septicaemia.

Only a fraction of the 300 lorry-loads of food required for 200,000 people has reached Kilinochchi District and reports say the GA has no reserve food stocks. Kerosene is hard to obtain even at a high price. After 19 April fertiliser has been restricted and Kilinochchi farmers need 50 lorry-loads of fertiliser each month.

Alankerni, south of Pooneryn was bombed by Sri Lankan Airforce on 10 May. LTTE's intelligence wing is eyeing suspected informers and in early May five Tamils were arrested in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu. Clashes have resumed in the contested Veli Oya area in Mullaitivu District. In three separate attacks in early May the LTTE killed five soldiers and wounded four in Veli Oya. Defence Ministry says 19 Tigers were killed in a clash on 27 May in Veli Oya, including area deputy leader *Asuran*.

## Protest

Over 100,000 opposition supporters in south India were arrested on 4 May, during a day of protest against Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayalalitha's AIADMK government. India's Supreme Court granted Jayalalitha a temporary injunction against two corruption charges eight days later.

## Floods

Over 20,000 families were displaced by heavy rains and flooding across Sri Lanka's south-west belt in early May.

## Prisoners

A new report from the University Teachers for Human Rights (UTHR) Jaffna, says women prisoners of the LTTE held at Mattuvil were regularly beaten and tortured.

## Resignation

Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC) chief Vasantharajah resigned in mid-May citing disagreement with the government's handling of peace talks with LTTE. GP Rajapakse former Puttalam GA takes over.

## Rear base

India has stepped up naval surveillance in the Palk Strait after Tamil Nadu police detained key LTTE operative *Mani* and five fibre glass boats off the Vellore coast on 17 May.

## Downturn

Analysts are calling for a devaluation of the Sri lankan rupee by at least 10% to boost uncompetitive exports as *Eelam War Three* slows down the economy.

# Border wars

SRI LANKAN troops are massing at the northern border town of Vavuniya local reports say in preparation for a major offensive. Schools and public buildings have been requisitioned to house incoming troops.

As rumours flew in late May the LTTE blew up the town's transmitter tower cutting communications to the south. At Thandikulam checkpoint, the only official crossing point between the two front lines a few miles north, the blockade is tightening. Fewer civilians are allowed to cross with fewer staple goods. Private lorries carrying food aid remain banned.

To the east, the Tigers are creeping across the Veli Oya frontier. Some 11 police and six civilians were killed as the Tigers stormed a police post at Kebetogowella on 10 May.

Further west tension is growing on isolated Mannar Island. Over 400 civilians were rounded up for interrogation after LTTE attacks. Two local NGO staff were hospitalised after beatings from soldiers. Over 50 frightened families have sought protection at the UNHCR refugee camp at Pesalai. Food and fuel shortages caused by the intermittent sea link with Kalpitiya will worsen with the onset of the south-west monsoon.

Five policemen died in another attempt by the LTTE in late May to destroy the causeway linking Mannar Island to the mainland. Four soldiers were killed when the Tigers ambushed a foot patrol close to Sunny Village refugee camp on 2 June. On the mainland four LTTE were killed in an Army advance north-west of Cheddikulam in mid-May.

Further south hundreds of families are fleeing villages like Madagamma on the borders of Wilpattu game reserve after the police withdrew over 50 defence posts. Police said the posts were easy targets for the Tigers and will offer civilians weapons training instead.

## ■ Civilians are targets in the east's new killing grounds

# Tracks of the Tiger

TIGER guerrillas massacred 42 Sinhalese civilians in a remote fishing village at Kallarawa 20 miles north of Trincomalee on 25 May. The dead included 12 women and six children. Amnesty International says LTTE cadre shot people in front of their homes and set fire to the village destroying a nearby Army camp. Ten days earlier, 13 soldiers and four civilians died in a LTTE ambush close to Kallarawa. In a retaliatory strike, Sri Lankan forces attacked a LTTE jungle base at Thiriyai a few miles west, reportedly killing 60 guerrillas.

The area north of Trincomalee has become one of the east's killing grounds as fighting intensifies. Defence sources claim soldiers killed over 28 LTTE cadre and wounded 70 in a major firefight at

Kumburupiddy on 13 May. Small scale clashes which kill three or four soldiers or guerrillas are almost a daily occurrence. Five Muslims were shot dead by soldiers near Pulmoddai in reprisal after a LTTE attack in early May. At Muthur, three Tamils are missing after Kabir a local Muslim was shot dead by the Tigers as an informer.

Over 1,000 cadre of the LTTE's crack *Charles Anthony Brigade* have infiltrated the east with former eastern commanders *Karikalan* and *Karuna*. In remote Vaharai, north of Batticaloa, 27 soldiers died when the Tigers ambushed a foot patrol on 23 May. Tamil farmers from the interior and migrant Sinhalese fishermen in Kalkudah have fled south fearing further attacks as food and transport

become scarce.

West of Batticaloa lagoon in the Tigers' Manmunai stronghold, major Army cordon-and-search operations displaced over 400 families in mid-May. In a military sweep of Pendukalchenai, troops burned six huts, destroyed crops and arrested seven local farmers most of them over 50. After night searches of Kumburumoolai and Kiran local people say women have been raped. Soldiers are increasingly trigger-happy and a number of civilians have been killed in "cross-fire" during searches.

Seenithamby Kirupakaran was shot dead during search operations at Senaikudiyiruppu and another civilian was killed at Kaluvankerni in early May. Thangarajah Kanagasabai, 35, was shot dead by soldiers while fishing on Batticaloa lagoon in mid-May. Local MP K Thuraisingham said he was given clearance at nearby Palathady Army camp.

Batticaloa's densely populated coastal strip is tense after a string of incidents. One soldier was killed and two wounded in a clash at Valaichenai in early May. Four year-old Krishanti was killed as police opened fire after a LTTE grenade attack north of Valaichenai.

South of Batticaloa town the Tigers ambushed a bus on a jungle stretch of road near Thalankudah killing five policemen and three Tamil women on 24 May. Over 19 Special Task Force (STF) police commandos died in a LTTE ambush in the Kanjikudichcharu jungles south of Amparai in early May.

## Tamil talks

TAMIL political parties held a series of crisis meetings with President Chandrika Kumaratunge this month as tension rose in the capital and fighting intensified in the north and east. An eight-point memorandum from Tamil moderate TULF called for new human rights safeguards for Tamils arrested in Colombo, for a lifting of the northern blockade and a return to the negotiating table. Earlier on 17 May, the President agreed to re-establish the government's Human Rights Task Force in a meeting with five Tamil parties namely CWC, EPDP, PLOTE, UPF and EPRLF. EPDP's Douglas Devananda called for a new interim administration for the north-east and UPF leader P Chandrasekaran urged the administration to issue ID cards for Plantation Tamil youth to curtail continuing arrests. The President gave the Tamil parties a sneak preview of her long-awaited devolution package but would commit nothing to paper. The current proposals offer only a little more than present provincial legislation retaining control of defence, foreign affairs, trade, banking and delegates came away frustrated and disappointed. The Tamil parties currently shore up Mrs Kumaratunge's fragile coalition government with their 17 seats in Parliament. The more establishment TULF and CWC parties maintain LTTE must have a place in any effective peace settlement while the others - mostly the political wings of armed militants - oppose this. Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) leader S Thondaman again aroused a storm of controversy when he described LTTE leader, Prabhakaran as "a historical freedom fighter" on a visit to south India in mid-May. Civil rights group MIRJE in a late May statement appealed to the government "to go beyond the LTTE and place its proposals for a political solution before the people of Sri Lanka". But with war fever gaining ground in the south, the government will sit on its plans.

## Killers in uniform

THURAIRAJAH UTHYASEKAR and three other Tamils were pushed late at night into some open scrub land. The police stepped back a few paces and unleashed a hail of automatic gunfire. He somehow escaped with a shattered wrist and crawled painfully to a nearby convent after feigning death.

The killings followed a 12-hour attack by LTTE on three police stations on the heavily populated outskirts of Batticaloa on 23 May. Nearly 30 local people were treated at Batticaloa hospital for gunshot wounds and Tharmalingam Malathy, 45, was shot dead by police as she turned to leave Vijithapuram police station seeking her son Sasykumar, her sister told a magistrate's enquiry. Local MP Pararajasingham Joseph in a letter to

President Kumaratunge, says the killings were a direct reprisal for the LTTE attack. Local police have been transferred out of the district.

There is growing outrage over the military using civilians to clear mines. Mrs Kanapathipillai Arulmani, 35, lost a leg and two other women were badly injured in landmine explosions after soldiers forced them to walk a half-mile stretch of railway track near Murakkottanachenai in early May.

Police went berserk at a Tamil refugee settlement near Pottuvil after a constable shot himself in the foot. Over 100 houses were burned down and women and children treated for gunshot wounds. Hundreds of Tamils have taken refuge at local temples and churches.

# 18 VIPs and 29 key installations are Tiger targets **Colombo red alert**

**O**VER 1,500 Tamils were arrested in Colombo this month as security fears intensified of *Black Tiger* suicide squads penetrating the capital seeking high-profile targets.

Police arrested over 300 LTTE suspects in a three-day sweep of Wellawatte in early May. Eight key figures in the Tigers' Colombo intelligence network were among the detained including three women. One died after taking cyanide in a Kohuwela police station while another woman Skanda Rani was arrested at a Mount Lavinia house containing powerful communications equipment. Among the arrested, police claim is *Madhur*, LTTE controller for Colombo.

One captured youth had a photo of the Presidential Secretariat building with him. Colombo's *Sunday Observer* says LTTE has targeted 18 VIPs including the President and opposition leader Ranil Wickremasinghe and 29 key installations in the city. Rameswaran, a northern Tamil youth was arrested taking photographs at Katunayake international airport and three Tamil women from Valaichenai were detained loitering near the Sri Lankan Broadcasting Corporation complex in central Colombo.

Over 30 Tamil youths were arrested in the Pettah commercial quarter in mid-May as police sweeps continued of hostels and cheap hotels housing over 100,000 northern Tamil refugees in the capital.

A week later Colombo police were on red alert for 25 female LTTE cadre after Vijayarani a Mandaitivu woman was arrested in Dehiwela. In another major round up in late May, 600 Tamils were arrested. All but ten were later released. Police say they have arrested over 250 Tiger cadre in the capital since fighting resumed on 19 April.

Human rights groups are increasingly concerned over arbitrary mass arrests amongst the city's 350,000 Tamil population after reports of financial extortion, robbery and assault. Police say the majority of those arrested are held for only a few hours while identity papers and National Intelligence Bureau (NIB) reports are checked and that complaints are unproven or isolated incidents.

Lawyers say a young Tamil from Canada was denied bail and prevented from attending his brother's wedding. Another youth who came from Singapore

**Human rights groups are increasingly concerned over arbitrary mass arrests amongst the city's 350,000 Tamil population after reports of financial extortion, robbery and assault.**

for his father's funeral was arrested on the beach at Modera while the ashes were cast into the sea.

Tamil party TULF proposed 12 major human rights safeguards for those arrested at a crisis meeting with President Kumaratunge in late May including arresting officers identifying themselves, informing relatives, detainees to be handed over to police stations within 24 hours and certificates granted when released. Human rights workers say changes in procedure mean police can now hold suspects for up to six days without informing relatives and release can only be ordered by a court.

The city is tense and the authorities jumpy with new roadblocks and security checkpoints multiplying every day. Indian coastal trading ships were diverted to Galle in mid-May to free Colombo

harbour from a further threat of LTTE attack. The ban combined with heavy rains in the south has sent vegetable and staple food prices spiralling.

Colombo is now under threat from suicide planes screamed southern headlines as rumours flew of the LTTE's embryo airforce of six microlight aircraft smuggled from France. President Chandrika rapped the free press for revealing anti-aircraft installations at her Temple Trees residence, overlooking a front page photo of the guns in the government-controlled *Sunday Observer*.

Colombo's rumour mill is in top gear. Spokesman Capt. Sarath Munasinghe says military intelligence receives over 100 telephone calls a day identifying potential suspects and new threats and rumours which sweep the city in waves.

Outside the capital there is tension and a similar spate of arrests in Kandy, Anuradhapura, Kalutara, Matara and Badulla. CWC MP TV Sennan told Parliament in early May that ID cards must be issued to Hill Country Tamil youth who flock to the capital in increasing numbers seeking work. Two Tamil suspects loitering near deputy Defence minister Anuruddha Ratwatte's Kandy home were arrested in mid-May. A note found nearby said "No one can escape the bomb". Most of the 91 Tamils arrested earlier in Kandy have been released.

Five Tamil boys returning from pilgrimage to Kataragama were arrested in Matara. Police believe the Tigers increasingly favour their "baby brigade" and women to penetrate the south undetected. After the funeral of the prominent Buddhist monk Dimbulagala Hamaduruwo, assassinated in late May, rows of Tamil shops were burned down in Galle and the potential for Sinhala backlash grows.

European governments who condemned the Tigers' return to the battlefield will continue to forcibly return Sri Lankan Tamils refused asylum on a "last-in-first-out" basis to deter future asylum seekers. A Sinhalese and a Tamil were deported from Norway in late May and another two from Denmark. Reports from a European Council of Refugees conference in Florence this month suggests over 10,000 Sri Lankans claimed asylum in Europe last year. *Eelam War Three* seems destined to trigger a new outflow.

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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ISSN 0955-5943

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