

Mizan Khan (103), 04/13/95

Updates

Deepa Khosla (116), 07/24/96, 06/27/99

Sri Lankan Tamils in Sri Lanka

Total **Area** of Sri Lanka: 65,610 sq. km

Capital: Columbo

Population (1998): 2.272 million. This is around 12% of the country population of 18.934 million. (The country population is drawn from the US Census Bureau.)

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Overview

The 2.3 million Sri Lankan Tamils comprise the majority of the inhabitants of the north and a significant plurality of those in the eastern coastal regions of the island nation of Sri Lanka. They are considered to be one of the "indigenous" peoples along with the majority Sinhalese (the aboriginal Vedda now number only about 2,000). The Tamils and Sinhalese groups remained mostly isolated from one another throughout the last millennium until the imposition of British colonial control brought them into contact. The Tamils gained a disproportionate degree of favor within the British colonial administration (also, thousands of Tamils were brought over from India during this time to serve as plantation labor--see Sri Lanka-Indian Tamils).

Upon gaining independence in 1948, the majority Sinhalese reacted strongly against the perceived instruments of their prior domination and enacted legislation designed to promote the preeminence of Sinhalese culture. The Official Language Act of 1956 was intended to make Sinhala the unitary language of Sri Lanka. The use of the electoral system to legislate Sinhalese domination ignited an increasingly powerful reaction by the indigenous Tamils. The year 1975 marks the polarization of Sri Lankan society along the Sinhala/Tamil division as the Tamil party, the United Liberation Front, began to espouse separation and the Tamil "Tiger" vigilante groups began to commit sporadic acts of violence.

The character of the ethnic conflict changed dramatically in 1981 as the two groups had succeeded in mobilizing, and in radicalizing, their mutual opposition and distrust. Severe communal rioting broke out in August, 1981 and quickly spread. Communal tensions remained high until they again broke out in violence in July 1983, this time engulfing the entire island and throwing the nation into a civil war that is still raging.

The Sinhala-Tamil conflict increasingly involved the Indian state of Tamil Nadu (across the Palk Strait from Sri Lanka) in support of the Tamil separatists. This led the Indian government into an expanding role in trying to reach a settlement to the conflict. The Indo-Sri Lankan Peace Accords of 1987 formally involved the Indian government in the Sri Lankan conflict and led to the stationing of a 50,000 member Indian Peacekeeping Force (IPKF) in the Tamil areas to guarantee the peace. It also obligated the Sri Lankan

government to change its administration of the Tamil areas in favor of greater regional autonomy and the devolution of power.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) refused to submit to the IPKF authority and began to wage a guerrilla war against the "occupation" forces. At the same time in the southern Sinhalese-dominated area, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP, or People's Liberation Front), a Sinhalese terrorist organization, mobilized to fight against the Sri Lankan government, which it perceived as being responsible for acquiescing to the Indian "occupation". The other major actor in the highly unstable situation in the late 1980s was the Tamil organization, the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF). The EPRLF took responsibility to run the temporarily merged Northern and Eastern autonomous provincial councils (under the auspices of the IPKF which was mandated by the peace accord of 1987).

The situation in Sri Lanka remained extremely unsettled, and potentially volatile, throughout the late 1980s as the Sri Lankan government attempted to regain the initiative in the ongoing conflict. The United National Party (UNP) government led by President Premadasa entered into direct talks with the LTTE in May 1989. It also tried to undermine the power of the JVP by ordering the Indian Peacekeeping Force to leave by July 29, 1989.

Chronology

1990

January: During the first week of this month, gunmen in Jaffna, northern Sri Lanka, killed 30 teenagers. The victims were generally those who showed an affiliation to Tamil militant groups loyal to the Indian Peacekeeping Force (IPKF) in the country. Jaffna has been the scene of bloody confrontations between the anti-IPKF Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the pro-Indian Tamil National Army (TNA), the military wing of the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), which is the ruling party of the temporarily-merged north-eastern provincial council. The TNA was created to fill the vacuum after the IPKF pullout.

Indian troops abruptly pulled out of the Tamil stronghold of Jaffna peninsula, leaving the town to the Tigers that they had battled for two years. The evacuation of Jaffna leaves only one major town still patrolled by the IPKF -- the port of Trincomalee, 147 miles northeast of Colombo. The Indian departure from Trincomalee is expected to trigger a power struggle within the Tamil movement, as Trincomalee is the base of several pro-Indian Tamil groups who are fiercely opposed by the Tigers. These groups captured control of the provincial council in an election boycotted by the LTTE, which is now staking its claim to political power and wants new elections called (XNS, 01/09/90 & 01/10/90).

March: Members of the EPRLF will not accede to the request of Foreign Minister R. Wijeratne to lay down arms, according to its leader V. Perumal, the just-dismissed Chief Minister of the north-east provincial council. On March 1, Perumal's first action as Chief Minister was a unilateral declaration of independence. Perumal stated that, "The government of Sri Lanka will have to recognize the Democratic Republic of Eelam as a separate state". The Sri Lankan government has ignored the unilateral declaration of independence and has proposed the dissolution of the provincial council. Perumal left for India with his family in a special Indian aircraft. India has indicated that it "does not support any call for Eelam (independent state) in any form" (XNS, 03/04/90).

Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister welcomed the reported decision of Indian Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi to refuse entry to 3,000 cadres of the TNA. The ship carrying the TNA militia is reported to be on its way back to Sri Lanka (XNS, 03/08/90).

2,000 Indian soldiers, the last group of an original force of 50,000, returned home after a controversial 32-month stay.

May: The LTTE had called for a hartal (strike) to demonstrate solidarity with striking Indian Tamil tea plantation workers in the central highlands. Most worrying to the government and the Sinhalese majority was the reason for the strike rather than its success. The plantation workers have little in common with the separatist Tamils. They are Indian Tamil workers, some of whom are not Sri Lankan citizens. The government recently decided to repatriate 100,000 Indian Tamils under a 1975 agreement with India. In response, the Up-Country Plantation Workers Union launched a protest strike. Its leader was arrested and the Tigers saw the opportunity to widen their base among the Indian Tamils.

June: The Chief Minister of the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu offered to provide medical aid to Tamil militants wounded in fighting against Sri Lanka's security forces. The Chief Minister did not make it clear whether he supported a charge by the Tigers that napalm was being used, but he said: "In the war...the Sri Lankan forces must avoid situations in which they rain napalm bombs on their own people" (Reuters, 06/27/90). New Delhi promised to try to prevent more civilian deaths in Sri Lanka's escalating violence.

July: Ethnic loyalties are reported to be wearing thin in India's Tamil Nadu province, as yet again, boatloads of Sri Lankan Tamils are seeking refuge from the latest outbreak of civil warfare. At least 20,000 refugees have made the 20-mile voyage across the Palk Strait to India since the LTTE launched attacks on Sri Lankan forces last month. In 1983, Tamils in India took to the streets in support of their Sri Lankan kin.

14 members of the EPRLF and one civilian died in a gun battle in Madras, the capital of Tamil Nadu, India. Refugee leader Chandrahasan blames the LTTE for undermining sympathy in its bloody drive for supremacy among the Tamil militant groups. "Indian governments aren't in sympathy with our movement because they fear it will spread separatism through the subcontinent", said one Tamil nationalist (Reuters, 07/17/90).

In eastern Sri Lanka hundreds of Muslims have fled their homes after rebels massacred 168 Muslims traveling with a food convoy.

November: Tamil rebels are obtaining weapons from southern India, Sri Lankan Deputy Defense Minister R. Wijeratne said in Parliament (Reuters, 11/29/90).

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1991

January: India's Foreign Minister promised to never again send troops to intervene in the conflict between Colombo and Tamil separatist rebels. Radicals from both the Sinhala majority, the Janata Vimukti Peramuna (JVP), and the Tamil minority, the LTTE, refused to accept the 1987 Indo-Sri Lankan Accord. The Tigers fought against the Indians killing about 1,200 soldiers and wounding 3,000 during the IPKF's 32 months of operation before its withdrawal last March by the new non-Congress government. The Indian government withdrew following repeated calls to do so from the new Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa, who

was against the agreement (Reuters, 01/29/91).

May: On May 21, former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was killed by a suicide bomber -- a young woman -- during an election rally in a rural enclave south of Madras. Gandhi was Prime Minister from 1984, following his mother's assassination, until 1989. Responding to the demands of some Tamil politicians, India's Law and Justice Minister, S. Swamy, says his country will not deport Sri Lankans because of the suspected involvement of Tamil militants in the assassination (AFP, 05/27/91).

As the word spread that Gandhi's killer was a Sri Lankan Tamil, the exile Tamil population was seized with fear. There are about 210,000 Sri Lankan Tamils in Tamil Nadu state (The New York Times, 05/31/91).

June: While investigating the assassination of Gandhi, one senior official in Madras stated that, "It is now established beyond doubt that the LTTE did it" (Reuters, 06/13/91). The LTTE has denied assassinating Gandhi, whom it viewed as an enemy of Tamil separatism.

July: Indian police have arrested about 2,000 Sri Lankan Tamils in Tamil Nadu after the lapse of a deadline for them to register with the police. The goal of the operation was to separate the militants from the refugees.

August: Some Tamil groups who are fighting alongside the Sri Lankan army against the LTTE have asked to take part in the proposed peace talks between the government and the LTTE. This comes in the wake of the declaration by S. Thondaman, the sole Tamil Minister, to act as the negotiator between the two sides. Sri Kantha of the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO) and Kandasamy of the People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), both former rebel groups who are bitterly opposed to the LTTE, expressed concern at the possibility of the LTTE taking advantage of another ceasefire proposed by the government (XNS, 08/26/91).

September: The Indian probe into Rajiv Gandhi's killing is demolishing a vital base of the leading suspects -- the LTTE. Police have unearthed arms and explosives caches, closed illicit weapons factories, unravelled smuggling rings and destroyed the Tiger's communications network in Tamil Nadu.

Some Sri Lankan MPs have demanded the immediate resignation of President Premadasa, following his admission that the armed forces were cooperating with the LTTE to fight the pro-Indian TNA in the northeast before secret talks between Colombo and the Tigers collapsed in June last year (Reuters, 09/02/91).

November: Tamil rebels have reportedly acquired at least three surface-to-air missiles, based on records found in a boat captured by the navy.

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1992

January: The repatriation of Tamil refugees is continuing, with the second group leaving for home from Madras. The refugees are among the 30,000 Sri Lankan Tamils who have volunteered to return. The process began after the visit of the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister to New Delhi earlier this month.

February: The Sri Lankan government is reportedly indicating that plans for the recruitment of Tamils into the military and the establishment of a predominantly Tamil police force for the northeast were not

implemented because of renewed hostilities in 1990 and a lack of suitable candidates (US State Dept. Dispatch, 02/92).

The Buddhist clergy have become extremely vocal in the debate over whether to fight Tamil separatists or negotiate with them. One leading monk, the Venerable Rahulla, said, "Until this war is successfully concluded, no peace talks should be held". The monks are also angry about a set of peace proposals, formulated by S. Thondaman, Chairman of the CWC, who is believed by the monks to be planning for a larger south Indian domination of their country (The Independent, 02/07/92). In 1959, Solomon Bandaranaike, the then popular Prime Minister, was killed by a Buddhist monk while he was initiating new policies regarding Tamil minorities.

May: India has declared a ban on the operations of the LTTE within its territory. The Interior Minister said India would ask Sri Lanka to extradite LTTE supremo Prabhakaran and other Tigers accused of masterminding Rajiv Gandhi's assassination. The Minister said the LTTE was plotting "the separation of Tamil Nadu from India and encouraging chauvinistic groups in Tamil Nadu to openly preach secession and engage in unlawful activities" (Reuters, 05/14/92).

June: Seven Tamil parties are now discussing proposals to work out a common stand to find a political settlement to the ethnic conflict. The current engagement of Tamil parties including the CWC (a coalition partner of the government) and the EPRLF (which governed the semi-autonomous provincial council two years ago), is seen as a significant move in view of the resumption of activities by an all-party parliamentary committee. This is seen as a step towards seeking a united Tamil approach to formulate a peace package, which is likely to go before a parliamentary committee set up to forge a national consensus.

The parliamentary select committee, set up by S. Thondaman, is expected to meet by the end of the month to discuss a 4-point peace package that includes: the permanent merger of the northern and eastern provinces with a dominant population of Tamils, the meaningful devolution that signifies autonomy for the merged province, institutional arrangements to safeguard the rights of the Muslims in the north and east, guarantees to ensure that the Sinhala minority in those areas enjoy the same rights as minorities in Sinhala provinces (XNS, 06/21/92).

December: The Parliamentary Select Committee (PSC) announced that five parties in Sri Lanka, including the two major national parties, have agreed on setting up two separate councils for the north and the east in a bid to solve the ethnic crisis. According to the agreement by the ruling UNP, the opposition SLFP, the Muslim Congress, the Communist Party and the Samasamaja Party, the north and east of the island will be treated as two distinct provinces in a scheme of devolution similar to India's administration of its states. However, the two members of the 45-member committee representing 6 Tamil parties and the members of the CWC did not agree with the scheme. Most of the Tamil members of the committee dissented, as the majority rejected the idea of merging the north and eastern provinces into one administrative province (XNS, 12/17/92).

S. Thondaman, the Chairman of the Ceylon Workers' Congress, resigned from the PSC, stating that it failed to appreciate the aspirations of minority Tamils concentrated in the northeast, which comprises about one-third of Sri Lanka. Tamil parties including the LTTE claim the northeast as traditional Tamil homelands whose demographic patterns they assert successive governments have changed by state-aided colonization schemes.

1993

January: The Indian Navy denied its involvement in the death of Kittu, the Second in Command of the LTTE, claiming he had committed suicide. Kittu died last month along with nine other Tigers when their ship went up in flames after being seized by Indian Navy in the Indian Ocean. P. Neduraman, the President of the India-based Tamil National Movement, condemned the incident (Reuters, 01/15/93).

May: President Ranasinghe Premadasa and two dozen others were killed by a Tamil suicide bomber during the May Day parade. This followed the murder of Lalith Athulathmudali, the President's chief rival and leader of the opposition Democratic United National Front, which split last year from the ruling United National Party (UNP). Prime Minister Dingiri Wijetunga has taken over as the country's President.

Sri Lanka's provincial elections were held on May 17 with unusual calmness. Voter turnout was close to 75% in comparison to 50% in 1988. The ruling United National Party (UNP) won in 4 provinces. The leftist alliance, the People's United Front, led by Srimavo Bandaranaike won two provinces, including the Western province that covers Colombo.

No elections were held in the northern and eastern provinces, as it was judged that the Tamil Tigers would disrupt them.

November: In a major operation, the Tigers stormed an army base in the north, killing at least 200 soldiers and capturing much valuable equipment.

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1994

January: The long-delayed trial of 41 people accused of plotting the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi opened on January 19 in a prison courtroom in Madras, India. The prosecution alleges that the LTTE feared Gandhi's Congress party would win the elections and renew India's backing of a Sri Lanka government dominated by the Sinhalese majority (Reuters, 01/19/94). Of the 41 people on trial, 29 are Sri Lankan Tamils. The rest are from Tamil Nadu, home to 50 million Indian Tamils.

March: The ruling UNP has witnessed its first big electoral defeat in 17 years. The party, which is preparing for a presidential election later this year and a general election in early 1995, was heavily defeated in provincial council polls in the southern province. The party won just 23 seats, against 32 for the opposition SLFP led by Mrs. Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga. The result was widely seen as a vote against the policies of President D.B. Wijetunga, who championed a hard-line approach to the Tamil Tigers (Financial Times, 03/29/94).

August: The left leaning five-party People's Alliance, led by Mrs. Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, the daughter of Srimavo Bandaranaike, won 105 seats to the ruling UNP's 94 in parliamentary elections. The other 26 seats in the 225-seat parliament went to minority Hindu and Muslim parties. Although Tamil rebels boycotted the elections, they pledged support for the new government of Mrs. Kumaratunga who took office with an offer of unconditional direct negotiations with the LTTE.

September: In a rare interview with a BBC reporter, LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran urged the

government to declare a ceasefire and create a climate for peace negotiations to end the civil war (Reuters, 09/13/94).

October: The government has declared a state of emergency after a bomb blast killed the opposition presidential candidate G. Dissanayke and several top leaders of the UNP during a campaign meeting. At least 50 people died and 200 were injured in the blast believed to be detonated by a suicide bomber. The LTTE has denied involvement in the killing, but the rebels have always viewed Dissanayke as the chief architect of the Indo-Sri Lanka accord of 1987, which was aimed at crushing the Tamil rebellion.

November: With a pledge to curtail the power of presidency, Mrs. Chandrika Bandaranaike won a decisive victory in presidential elections. She captured about 62% of the votes including many votes from Muslims and Tamils. The rebels declared a unilateral ceasefire for a week to mark Bandaranaike's inauguration.

Twenty policemen and five civilians have been killed in two landmine blasts, staged by the suspected Maoist Peoples' War Group (PWG) in the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. The PWG, the remnant of a former peasant movement against landlords, reportedly has links with the LTTE (AFP, 11/29/94).

1995

January: Suspected Tamil rebels have shot dead the leader of the People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE). The PLOTE was among several former separatist Tamil groups that gave up their armed struggle in favor of parliamentary politics after India became actively involved in 1987 through the Indo-Sri Lanka Peace Accord.

February: About 500 Sri Lankan Tamils arrived in northern Mannar port; they are the first group of refugees to return from India since the repatriation process was suspended six months ago. The refugees are among the 8,000 who have agreed to be repatriated. About 100,000 refugees still remain in India.

March: The rebels have spurned a French offer to mediate peace talks, Sri Lankan President Kumaratunga stated while on her first official visit to New Delhi (AP Worldstream, 03/27/95).

April: Tamil rebels are expecting a government ministerial team for peace talks in their Jaffna stronghold on April 10. The government of President Kumaratunga initiated peace talks with the LTTE last October. However, the talks were stalled because of some new demands by the LTTE, such as the removal of army camps from Jaffna, the complete lifting of an economic embargo and a relaxation of a ban on night fishing. The LTTE leader extended the negotiating deadline from March 28 to April 19.

Update 07/24/96

April 23: The LTTE has broken a 14-week ceasefire with the government by launching a number of attacks during the past week. A Tiger suicide squad attacked two naval vessels in the eastern port of Trincomalee, killing 12 soldiers. The Tigers are reported to be the only insurgent group in the world that has its own navy. Also, a military base was ambushed in eastern Batticaloa district; 25 troops were killed while rebel casualties are unknown. During peace talks, the LTTE and the People's Alliance government of President Kumaratunga agreed to a truce which had held since January 8. The Tigers claim they broke the ceasefire because the government had not met their demands by the April 19th deadline. Authorities had agreed to lift

an economic embargo on Jaffna and relaxed regulations on night fishing; however, the LTTE also wants any Jaffna army camps dismantled and free movement for armed fighters in the east (Reuters, 04/23/95).

April 30: For the first time in the 12-year civil war, Tamil rebels used anti-aircraft missiles to shoot down two air force transport planes. All 94 people on board died. Since the LTTE broke a ceasefire, over 160 troops have been killed. The United States is scheduled to send a team of instructors to Sri Lanka next month to help train the army, which is under strain due to equipment and manpower shortages (Reuters, 04/30/95).

May: Sri Lanka says it is still committed to peace negotiations with Tamil rebels; however, it hasn't made any recent overtures (Reuters, 05/05/95).

May 5: India's External Affairs Minister, Pranab Mukherjee, says that the Tamil insurgency in Sri Lanka is an internal problem. Mukherjee also denied recent rumors that the Sri Lankan government had asked India for military aid to help combat the Tigers (Reuters, 05/05/95).

May 10: Small political parties and those that represent ethnic minorities are worried that proposed electoral reforms could reduce their presence in Parliament. A parliamentary committee is currently considering reforms such as a mixture of proportional representation and the first-past-the-post system. Some analysts indicate that the changes are needed to ensure that ethnic minorities are properly represented (Reuters, 05/10/95).

May 16: Government and military sources indicate that in the month since the LTTE broke the ceasefire, well over 400 people have been killed. 181 rebels have died while another 250 have been wounded. The military has lost over 250 troops. Most of the clashes have occurred in eastern Trincomalee district (Reuters, 05/16/95).

May 17: Three human rights commissions appointed by President Kumaratunga when she took office last November are trying to heal old wounds by acknowledging the disappearances of tens of thousands of people. They are now focusing on mechanisms to punish the guilty and compensate relatives. Between 20 and 60,000 people disappeared from 1988-1990 during an armed rebellion by the left-wing Sinhalese movement, the JVP or People's Liberation Army (Reuters, 05/17/95).

May 24: At least 30 soldiers, 20 LTTE members, and three civilians were killed in three separate incidents in Batticaloa during the past week. Western governments including Britain have condemned the recent Tiger attacks, while praising the government's efforts to seek a political solution to the conflict (Reuters, 05/24/95).

June: Sri Lanka plans to establish a human rights task force that will monitor arrests and detention facilities. The move follows criticism from Western governments and human rights groups about abuses perpetrated by the country's security forces. Tamil political parties have also recently asked the President to ensure that innocent Tamils are not harassed during search operations (Reuters, 06/01/95).

June 2: The independent human rights group, The Law and Society Trust, states that gross human rights violations (e.g. disappearances and unlawful killings) decreased in Sri Lanka in 1994 (Reuters, 06/02/95).

June 3: A 12-year old girl died when at least nine homes belonging to Indian Tamils on a tea estate in Galle district were torched. A curfew had been declared in Galle the previous day after a mob attacked Tamil shops. Tamil residents have taken refuge in temples; a Tamil MP contends that the police only responded once most of the damage had been done. Army and navy reinforcements have been called in. The attacks

against the Indian Tamils are reported to be in response to last week's murder of a leading Buddhist monk who was an active opponent of the LTTE. Meanwhile, thousands of Sinhalese families are reported to be fleeing the eastern region fearing retribution from the Tigers (Reuters, 06/03/95, 06/05/95).

June 3: Military sources state that a two-day offensive against a Tiger hideout near Trincomalee resulted in the deaths of 110 rebels. Ten soldiers died during the assault (Reuters, 06/03/95).

June 3: India has asked Sri Lanka to extradite the leader of the LTTE, Velupillai Prabhakaran. The Indian government charges that Prabhakaran masterminded the May 1991 assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. Gandhi was blown up by a suspected female Tiger during a rally in Madras, the capital of the state of Tamil Nadu (Reuters, 06/03/95).

June 7: Tourism to Sri Lanka is on the rise, despite a recent bombing at the country's international airport. The Tourist Board reports a 15% increase from the previous year. No casualties were reported in the first Tiger attack outside the northeast since April (Reuters, 06/07/95).

June 13: Authorities indicate that at least 44 people have been killed in Batticaloa district in two separate attacks by the Tamil Tigers (Reuters, 06/13/95).

June 15: President Kumaratunga has issued special instructions to the police and armed forces to respect human rights. Included are directives on the treatment of women and children, informing detainees why they are being held and allowing them to communicate in the language of their choice (Reuters, 06/15/95).

June 21: Frank Wisner, the US Ambassador to India, says that Washington will not allow the sale of weapons to the LTTE. The US listed the Tigers as a "terrorist group" when it broke a ceasefire in April (Reuters, 06/21/95).

July: Twenty-five unidentified bodies were discovered in Bolgoda Lake and northwestern Kurunegala district during a three-week period in May and June. The Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) asserts that the victims could be Tamil youths who were reported missing in Trincomalee district and Colombo. The bodies were found with their hands tied and bore evidence of torture (Reuters, 07/03/95).

July 4: Amnesty International is calling on the Sri Lankan government to investigate claims that at least 19 civilians were murdered by security forces in the northeast in May. Some killings reportedly occurred during search operations while others were allegedly retribution for Tiger attacks. Tamil groups fear that death squads that were prominent during the JVP insurgency are now back in business (Reuters, 07/04/95).

July 9: The army has launched Operation Leap Forward in the country's north in order to combat the LTTE (Reuters, 07/15/95).

July 15: In two bombing incidents and a Tamil attack on Mandaitivu Island in the first two weeks of July, around 110 soldiers, 50 rebels and 5 civilians were reported killed (Reuters, 07/01/95, 07/07/95).

July 15: The Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDF), a former militant group, is threatening to quit Parliament (and thus withdraw its support of the People's Alliance) unless the military halts a major offensive in the north. The EPDF's threat follows the recent bombing of a church at Navali, just north of Jaffna, in which 121 civilians were killed. Mothers and Daughters of Sri Lanka, a coalition of 18 women's

organizations, also called for a cessation of the military assault (Reuters, 07/15/95).

August: President Chandrika Kumaratunga has announced a new devolution proposal aimed at ending the Sri Lankan Tamil insurgency. Under the plan, the country would be divided into eight administrative regions which would have control over key areas such as land, finance, and law and order. The north and eastern areas, where the indigenous Tamils are concentrated, would be merged into one region, fulfilling a demand long pressed for by the Tamil Tigers. Rural Industrial Development Minister S. Thondaman, an Indian Tamil, has, however, criticized the plan. He demanded that power in the northeast be given to the LTTE who should be given five years to restore democratic institutions. Kumaratunga rejected Thondaman's demand, stating there will be no more talks with the LTTE. The plan is to be included in a new constitution that is set to be drawn up by the end of the year (Agence France Presse, 08/03/95).

August 07: An Indian Tamil was identified as the suicide bomber who set off a cartload of explosives near Colombo's landmark Independence Memorial Hall. 22 people were killed while more than 40 were wounded. The Indian Tamil bomber was reported to be a member of the LTTE. The attack has been described as the LTTE's response to the President's recent devolution proposal (Reuters, 08/07/95).

August 08: Police indicate that the target of yesterday's suicide bombing was a motorcade either carrying the President or her Deputy Defense Minister. It is unclear why the Indian Tamil bomber detonated the explosives before reaching his target (Reuters, 08/08/95).

August 11: In a letter sent to the Reuters News Agency, the Eelam Force, which is reported to be part of the LTTE, claimed responsibility for this week's bombing in Colombo. The letter also threatened to halt tourism and foreign investment unless Operation Leap Forward was terminated (Reuters, 08/11/95).

August 11: An international coalition, the NGO Consortium on Relief and Rehabilitation, has called for a political solution to the Tamil insurgency. The organization also says that many European states, including Russia, and those in the EU, have condemned the recent bombing in Colombo. There has been some controversy in Sri Lanka about the impartiality of NGOs (Reuters, 08/11/95).

August 12: The LTTE has officially rejected President Kumaratunga's devolution proposal. The plan has been accepted by all the parliamentary parties except the main opposition, the United National Party, which has yet to announce its position (Reuters, 08/12/95).

August 14: Some 4000 Tamils demonstrated in front of the UN Subcommission on Human Rights offices in Geneva, Switzerland, to show their support for the LTTE (Reuters, 08/14/95).

August 17: Sri Lanka has rejected third party mediation or talks with the LTTE to reach a peaceful solution to the Tamil insurgency (Reuters, 08/17/95).

August 20: Authorities report that the financial center of the LTTE has been destroyed. Eight people, including the funds manager of the Tigers, have been arrested by police. Over \$40,000 was also recovered. The Tigers are one of the world's best equipped groups. They have a makeshift navy, an air wing, mobile radar, anti-aircraft missiles, and a supply of members willing to engage in suicide missions. Many of the funds provided to the LTTE are obtained from local Tamil businesspeople along with ethnic kin living abroad (Reuters, 08/20/95, 08/23/95).

August 25: Sri Lanka has reportedly purchased three gunboats, two landing aircraft, armored personnel

carriers, and ammunition from China (Reuters, 08/25/95, 09/21/95).

August 26: Sources indicate that up to 50 Tigers were killed during their assault on a police post just south of Batticaloa. Eight soldiers also died (Reuters, 08/26/95).

September: The LTTE is still holding 150 hostages, a week after it hijacked a ferry. The International Committee of the Red Cross is attempted to mediate. The escalation in violence in recent weeks is viewed as a precursor to a major army offensive (Reuters, 09/04/95).

September 14: The government has banned all private domestic flights following reports that the LTTE was planning an airborne attack on the Parliament (Reuters, 09/14/95).

September 21: For the first time since 1988, Sri Lanka has imposed censorship on military news, in response to what it calls "irresponsible" reporting. Some analysts believe the move follows reports of serious divisions in Kumaratunga's cabinet (Reuters, 09/21/95).

September 24: Around 3000 Buddhist monks demonstrated in the town of Kandy urging the President to withdraw her devolution proposal. The monks and many other Sinhalese fear the plan could be a stepping stone to an independent Tamil homeland. Since April, the government has spent \$78 million to counteract the Tigers (Reuters, 09/24/95).

September 24: At least 20 children were reportedly killed following heavy shelling and aerial attacks in northern Jaffna region. Authorities denied the civilian claims. Meanwhile, 21 troops were killed when the LTTE sunk their naval boats (Reuters, 09/24/95).

October: The leaders of four Tamil parties in Parliament have expressed serious concern following the recent deaths of 70 people as a result of airforce bombings against the LTTE in the northern Jaffna area. While stopping short of withdrawing their support from President Kumaratunga's minority government, they asked her to take steps to prevent future civilian casualties (Reuters, 10/01/95).

October 15: Sri Lanka is amassing tens of thousands of troops, backed by tanks and artillery, in the northern Jaffna region. The army's latest offensive, Operation Thunder Strike, is being hailed as a decisive effort to end the 12-year Tamil insurgency. Military sources claim that over 300 rebels have been killed since the operation began on October 1 (Reuters, 10/15/95).

October 20: Thousands of people in Colombo have fled their homes as two oil depots continue to blaze following an LTTE bombing attack. More than 20 people were killed (Reuters, 10/20/95).

October 22: Tamil Tigers have reportedly hacked 66 people to death in three villages in eastern Sri Lanka. The government states that it will reactivate civil defense forces in order to counter the LTTE threat. Volunteer forces were last deployed in 1971 to help promote order during the JVP insurgency (Reuters, 10/22/95).

October 22: Military sources state that Operation Riviresa (Sunshine), the campaign to take over Jaffna, has resulted in 350 rebel and 76 army casualties since its launch a week ago (Reuters, 10/22/95).

November: The Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu is calling for the Indian government to initiate talks with Sri Lanka in order to stop civilian deaths in Jaffna. Tamil Nadu has a population of 50 million Tamils. Thousands of civilians have reportedly fled the Jaffna area southward since the launching of Operation Riviresa. The civilians are no longer welcome in India which has sent back 45,000 of the estimated 110,000 Tamil refugees that have fled there since the conflict began (Reuters, 11/03/95, 11/07/95).

November 19: The leader of the Shiv Sena, a right-wing Hindu nationalist party, has thrown his support behind the Tamil Tigers. Bal Thackeray also urged Hindus in India's Maharashtra state, to assert their Hindu identity and fight for their rights (Reuters, 11/19/95).

November 30: A 12-hour state-sponsored strike to protest civilian deaths in the Sri Lankan military's campaign in Jaffna brought the Indian state of Tamil Nadu to a virtual stand-still (Reuters, 11/30/95).

December: The Sri Lankan military has captured control over the northern Tiger stronghold of Jaffna. Around 250,000 civilians have fled the area and the city is reported to be in ruins with no power, water, or basic urban infrastructure. The government has pledged to provide funds for demining and reconstruction of the region. The retreating LTTE still controls the only roadway leading to the northern province and has vowed revenge in eastern areas (Reuters, 12/09/95).

December 10: Authorities indicate that the army capture of Jaffna signals the end of the Tamil rebellion. More troops have been deployed in the region to pursue the LTTE which has fled to the east. Government figures show that the Tigers are now down to 5000 fighters from their original 12,000. A UNICEF representative says that the Tigers are increasingly recruiting boys and girls just over the age of ten (Reuters, 12/10/95, 12/11/95).

December 14: Some 200,000 Tamil civilians who fled the army takeover of Jaffna are now residing in camps in the LTTE-controlled eastern Vanni region. Meanwhile, some Tamils who remained in Jaffna are now leaving the area, indicating that the LTTE ordered them to leave and regroup at its new headquarters in Vanni. The Tigers assert that they are building 80,000 houses for the refugees. Analysts state that the mass movement of people is a rebel attempt to retain its support base (Reuters, 12/14/95, 12/16/95, 12/17/95).

December 18: In an effort to force refugees to return to Jaffna, the government has halted the payments of state employees. It hopes that Tamil civilians will return once they run out of money. Major rebuilding operations are underway in Jaffna; however, the LTTE maintains that it will not allow the refugees to return while the army controls Jaffna (Reuters, 12/18/95).

December 19: A two-month operation by the UNHCR to provide non-food relief items for some 250,000 Tamils in the Vanni region will begin this week. Meanwhile, the government announced that censorship of military news will be halted; the ban on the foreign media was lifted on September 25 (Reuters, 12/19/95).

December 21: Authorities state that Tamil refugees will be able to return to Jaffna by next April. The government's rebuilding of the area has been slowed as it has had to first engage in demining operations (Reuters, 12/21/95).

December 23: The LTTE attacked an army detachment in Batticaloa district, killing 32 troops. Military sources report that more than 60 rebels were killed. The incident raised the prospect of a renewed Tiger hit-and-run campaign (Reuters, 12/23/95).

December 27: Thailand asserts that it has found no evidence to support the Sri Lankan government's claim that the LTTE was using a remote Thai island to smuggle guns and narcotics. Meanwhile, 15 Tigers were reported killed during a rebel raid on army defenses in Jaffna (Reuters, 12/27/95).

December 28: The first police station in 10 years opened in Jaffna. Government sources report that only 3000 residents remain in the town. Some refugees in camps in the rebel-held Vanni region have stated that they want to return home but fear reprisals from the LTTE (Reuters, 12/28/95, 12/30/95).

December 28: A member of the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO) had his hands blown off by a letter bomb. Another TELO member was killed in Batticaloa district this week. The organization has helped the army in its campaign against the LTTE. Two similar devices sent to senior army officers were defused (Reuters, 12/28/95).

December 30: An army officer and a civilian were wounded when a member of the Tiger's suicide squad blew himself up. Meanwhile, LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran has offered to resume peace talks with the government on the condition that there is foreign mediation and that the army withdraws from Jaffna (Reuters, 12/30/95).

Update 06/27/99

1996

January 12: A Tamil United Liberation Party (TULF) member of parliament asserts that the army is responsible for the deaths of 24 Tamil civilians in eastern Trincomalee district. The army confirms the attack but does not indicate the number of casualties. The attack was reportedly in retaliation for the killing of two soldiers by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)(Reuters, 01/12/96).

January 16: The government officially releases its proposals for devolution. They will be put before a parliamentary select committee on constitutional reforms. The changes must then be approved by a two-thirds majority of parliament and finally be subject to a referendum. The devolution proposal would change Sri Lanka from a unitary state to a union of regions and will be part of a new constitution that also includes the abolition of the executive presidency. The proposal was unofficially released in August 1995 and it garnered the support of moderate Tamil political parties. The major change in today's proposal is that the president would be able to dissolve regional councils if they promote rebellion or violate the constitution. This was likely added to pacify Sinhalese concerns. Under the proposal, Colombo would maintain control over national security, foreign affairs, major ports, and immigration (Reuters, 01/16/96).

January 19: To cut off its access to towns, the government has launched a limited offensive against the LTTE in the east (Reuters, 01/19/96).

January 28: Sri Lanka has banned imports of the book *Buddhism Betrayed*, written by a Tamil scholar. Buddhist groups assert that the publication is damaging to their religion (Reuters, 01/28/96).

January 31: A Tamil Tiger suicide bomber drives a truckload of explosives into the Central Bank building in the heart of Colombo. Over 80 people are killed and some 1200 wounded. Police detain 30 suspects

(Reuters, 02/02/96).

February 9: President Kumaratunga promises to seek a peaceful solution to the Tamil separatist conflict. She appeals to foreign governments to crack down on the overseas activities of the Tigers (Reuters, 02/09/96).

February 12 and 13: The leader of the TULF contends that at least 24 Tamil civilians were killed by soldiers in the village of Kumarapuram in Trincomalee district. The attack was reportedly in response to the LTTE's killing of 2 soldiers earlier in the day. The government says it will launch an inquiry into the incident. Meanwhile, around 1500 people, mostly Tamils, have been detained in the northern town of Vavuniya in connection with the January 31 bombing in Colombo (Reuters, 02/12-13/96).

February 14: Fearing a possible LTTE attack, the government orders the closure of all schools until further notice. Schools were also closed during the army's campaign to capture Jaffna (Reuters, 02/14/96).

February 26: The leader of the opposition United National Party, Ranil Wickremesinghe, criticizes the government for its war effort and for lapses of security in Colombo (Reuters, 02/26/96).

March 5: Around 2000 Buddhist monks denounce the government's peace proposal. They fear it will lead to the break-up of the country (Reuters, 03/05/96).

March 11: Some 300 Tigers reportedly kill 23 security force members after luring them out of their post in Batticaloa district. Some 20 rebels also die, resulting in the highest death toll in weeks (Reuters, 03/11/96).

March 31: President Kumaratunga contends that moderate Tamil politicians are only *half-hearted* in their efforts to sell the peace plan. Tamil parties, including the TULF and the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP), assert that the criticism is unwarranted (Reuters, 03/31/96).

April 18: Last week, the naval arm of the LTTE, the Sea Tigers, launched a suicide raid on the port of Colombo. Nine rebels died when the government says it blew up their boats (Reuters, 04/18/96).

April 22: Two crude bombs explode in India's southern Tamil Nadu state. No casualties are reported. A Tamil Nadu rebel group sympathetic to the LTTE claims responsibility. The unnamed group also says it was responsible for a 1995 explosion at the Sri Lanka Deputy High Commission (Reuters, 04/22/96).

April 26: The government says that some 250,000 Tamil civilians have returned to their homes in the northern Jaffna peninsula after the army launched a new offensive in the east. The civilians fled during the army's assault on the Jaffna peninsula in the second half of 1995. The LTTE asserts that the army is bombing civilians who are fleeing the east. Officials indicate that the current campaign, Operation Riviresa II, has resulted in 200 rebel deaths. The government spends \$700 million annually on the insurgency (Reuters, 04/26/96).

June 4: Switzerland bans some 23,500, mainly Tamil, Sri Lankans in its country from buying or carrying guns. This follows recent violent attempts reportedly by the LTTE to extort funds from the expatriate Tamils (Reuters, 06/04/96).

June 6: Sri Lanka appeals for \$274 million in foreign aid to rebuild the Jaffna peninsula region (Reuters, 06/06/96).

June 13: India extends its ban on the LTTE for another two years. The Sri Lankan Tamil rebel organization was first banned in May 1992 after it was blamed for the 1991 assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi (Reuters, 06/13/96).

June 21: In the past eight months, Canada, Malaysia, Switzerland, and Germany have clamped down on the fund-raising activities of the LTTE (Reuters, 06/21/96).

July 1: The LTTE ambushes an army patrol near Trincomalee. Some 29 soldiers and 35 rebels die (Reuters, 07/19/96).

July 9: The Sri Lankan Parliament agrees to establish a permanent Human Right Commission. Currently, there is a state-run Human Rights Task Force that monitors abuses by security forces involving in fighting the Tamil rebellion. Last year, the government arrested several members of a para-military police commando unit that has been accused of abducting, torturing, and killing Tamil youths. It has also curbed the powers of the security forces. Some analysts indicate that the human rights situation has slowly improved in the last couple of years (Reuters, 07/09/96).

July 10: The opposition United National Party (UNP) and members of the Buddhist clergy oppose the government's peace plan as they want to maintain a unitary state (Reuters, 07/10/96).

July 10: A rebel suicide bombing in Jaffna town last week resulted in the deaths of 23 soldiers and civilians. The LTTE was ousted from the Jaffna peninsula area in April (Reuters, 07/10/96).

July 18: The LTTE lays siege to a key army base (Mullaitivu) in the northeast. More than 150 troops and 34 rebels die. Seven rebel boats are destroyed. In another incident, the Tigers kill eight soldiers on patrol (Reuters, 07/18/96).

July 19: The Tamil Tigers sink a navy gunboat with 40 sailors onboard. The rebel assault on the Mullaitivu army base continues. The LTTE says that it has killed 500 soldiers, with 120 casualties. This is reported to be the bloodiest battle in the 13-year insurgency. Analysts indicate that the incident reveals that the Tigers are still a capable fighting force despite their ousting from the Jaffna peninsula (Reuters, 07/19-21/96).

July 23: The government recaptures control of the Mullaitivu army base after the Tigers retreat (Reuters, 07/23/96).

July 24: At least 67 people die and 450 are injured as two bombs explode on a commuter train in Colombo. The LTTE is suspected as it often engages in violent acts to mark the anniversary of the start of its insurgency. This is the 13th anniversary (Reuters, 07/24/96).

July 26: Buddhist monks demonstrate in Colombo against ~~A~~foreign funding for the LTTE. More than 2000 Tamils are detained in the northern town of Vavuniya for questioning about the Colombo train bombing two days earlier (Reuters, 07/26/96).

August 19: Police in Tamil Nadu screen for LTTE members among the more than 1000 Tamil refugees who arrive in recent days to flee the fighting in the north and east of Sri Lanka (Reuters, 08/19/96).

August 23: The United States promises to stamp out any illegal activities on its soil that are against the Sri Lankan government. Of primary concern is the LTTE's fund-raising activities, including reports of extortion (Reuters, 08/23/96).

August 25: The government launches a military offensive to capture the town of Killinochchi. This has been the headquarters of the LTTE since it was ousted from Jaffna town in December 1995 (Reuters, 08/25/96).

September 21: Analysts indicate that hopes for an early end to the war have dimmed as the peace plan is deadlocked in parliament and the military campaign has stalled (Reuters, 09/21/96).

October 1: Some 100 Tamil refugees in Denmark stage a hunger strike to protest the expulsion of 5 refugees. Some 400 Tamils are reported to be in camps in Denmark (Reuters, 10/01/96).

October 8: Last month, the government captured Killinochchi, the headquarters of the Tamil Tigers (Reuters, 10/08/96).

October 31: An official of the UN World Food Programme dismisses claims by the International Federation of Tamils that the government is using food as a weapon in the war. The Federation says that international aid is not reaching the north where some 600,000 Tamils have been displaced since last October (Reuters, 10/31/96).

November 27: The leader of the LTTE, Velupillai Prabhakaran, rejects recent government calls for a resumption of peace talks. He vows to keep fighting for a Tamil homeland (Reuters, 11/27/96).

December 10: President Kumaratunga agrees to postpone local elections in the north set for early 1997 after Tamil political parties assert that they need more time as vast areas are still under LTTE control. The government wants to establish a political alternative in the region (Reuters, 12/10/96).

December 11: Reports indicate that the Tamil Tigers attacked a remote security in the southeast, killing or injuring 40 security personnel. This is viewed as the biggest battle in more than two months (Reuters, 12/11/96).

December 25: The Liberation of Tigers Eelam (LTTE) begin an undeclared Christmas truce by releasing 16 Sinhalese fishermen it captured in November. LTTE leader Prabhakaran offers to open talks; one of his pre-conditions is the withdrawal of troops from Tamil areas (Reuters, 12/25/96).

1997

January 11: The government says that 350 Tigers and 161 soldiers were killed during this week's LTTE raid on Paranthen army base in the north. The Tigers indicate that they lost 140 members, including 78 women (Reuters, 01/11/97).

January 13: Eight soldiers die in a landmine blast. In another incident, Tamil rebels kill five soldiers in a raid on army defenses in Vavuniya district (Reuters, 01/13/97).

January 18: The police state that some 200 Tigers overran a remote police outpost in the north; 22 policemen were killed (Reuters, 01/18/97).

February 2: At least 30 people are killed in Tiger-government clashes in the north and east (Reuters, 02/02/97).

February 11: Police officials state that the Tigers attacked a police post in the northeast, killing at least 15 of their personnel (Reuters, 02/11/97).

February 21: Some 130 Tamils are feared dead after a trawler carrying 150 Tamil refugees fleeing for India capsizes off northern Sri Lanka (Reuters, 02/21/97).

February 28: The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) says that it has initiated talks between the Muslim and Tamil communities in eastern Batticaloa district. Eight Muslims and three Tamils have died in clashes this month (Reuters, 02/28/96).

March 27: Three people are killed and seven injured when a grenade is thrown in a largely Muslim neighborhood in eastern Valachchenai town. The Tigers are suspected (Reuters, 03/27/97).

April 25: Reports indicate that government forces are preparing to launch a military offensive to establish an overland supply route through rebel territory to its bases in the north (Reuters, 04/25/97).

April 27: The Tamil Tigers escalate their hit-and-run tactics, allegedly killing 13 security personnel on patrol in the town of Pulmoddai. The home of a prominent Muslim family connected to a government minister is also attacked. In the past six days, the LTTE is reported to have killed 48 security personnel (Agence France Presse, 04/27/97).

May 7: After twenty years, President Chandrika Kumaratunga's Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) opens an office in Jaffna. The SLFP is the dominant member in the ruling People's Alliance (Agence France Presse, 05/07/97).

May 20: The LTTE says that 60 of its members have been killed as the military's largest-ever ground offensive enters its second week. Some 20,000 soldiers are involved. The military says that there have been 250 rebel and 85 government casualties (Agence France Presse, 05/20/97).

May 23: Hundreds of policemen are suspended for refusing to serve in the military campaign in the north (Asiaweek, 05/23/97).

May 28: The Sri Lankan navy sinks at least seven Tiger boats which were attempting to provide reinforcements to stop a government offensive. The military says 50 rebels died (Reuters, 05/28/97).

May 29: Some 19 Tamil civilians are feared drowned as their boat capsizes off northwest Sri Lanka. They were fleeing the civil war (Agence France Presse, 05/29/97).

May 30: The government captures the key rebel towns of Nedunkerni and Omanthai. The LTTE sends a delegation to meet with the President. Some 335 people have been killed on both sides in recent weeks (Asiaweek, 05/30/97).

June 7: Seventy-six people are reported dead as the LTTE tries to slow a government offensive (Agence France Presse, 06/07/97).

June 16: A reported LTTE bomb in a crowded northern market wounds 25 people a day after a Tiger clash with government forces results in the deaths of 11 commandos (Agence France Presse, 06/16/97).

June 18: Twenty-five security personnel are reported dead after an LTTE ambush in the northeast (Agence France Presse, 06/18/97).

July 16: The LTTE allegedly assassinates a Tamil United Liberation Front Party member of parliament. This is viewed as a warning to Tamil political parties to steer clear of the government's efforts to finalize a devolution package. Four others are also killed. The TULF, which is reported to have the broadest support in the east, says that it will continue to support the proposal (Statesman (India), 07/06/97).

July 16: The government seeks the support of the Red Cross to help escort ships containing food supplies to the north after the Tamil Tigers reportedly attack merchant vessels (Agence France Presse, 07/16/97).

July 21: Security forces kill at least 52 Tigers in a battle near Sittandy, Batticaloa district. The LTTE recently assassinated a Muslim member of parliament, who was viewed as a moderate UNP member. Twenty-five people have been arrested in connection with the incident (Agence France Presse, 07/21/97).

July 28: The US urges the LTTE to cease all acts of terrorism and voices support for the government's peace proposal. Three days earlier, Australia denounced Tiger violence. Amnesty International calls on the rebels to cease human rights abuses including the killing of non-combatants (Hindu, 07/28/97).

July 31: A prominent politician in India's Tamil Nadu state urges the Indian government to sever diplomatic ties with Sri Lanka to protest alleged attacks on Indian fishermen. Sri Lanka denies that its security forces killed four fishermen this month. LTTE members often pose as Indian fishermen (Agence France Presse, 07/31/97).

August 1: The Sri Lankan army offers a 10-day general amnesty to some 12,000 military deserters. Only 1500 return to duty (Asiaweek, 08/01/97).

August 11: The LTTE says claims by the UNHCR that it has been blocking efforts to return residents to the north are false. Meanwhile, fighting between security forces and the rebels resulted in over 80 deaths this month (Hindu, 08/11/97).

August 20: The government will appoint high-powered citizens' committees to deal with the growing problem of police extorting money from families of arrested Tamils. Tamil leaders also report harassment during search operations and at road blocks (Agence France Presse, 08/20/97).

August 21: Security forces capture four rebel positions near the town of Puliyankulam. The government says 274 people on both sides have died in two days of heavy fighting. The rebels assert that they only had 26 casualties. Since the current military offensive began in May, security forces have only gained control of 16 kilometres of a 75 km road which provides the only land access to Jaffna. The government currently supplies Jaffna by sea and air (Agence France Presse, 08/21/97).

August 27: The Jaffna-based NGO, University Teachers for Human Rights, asks for major revisions to the Prevention of Terrorism Act. It asserts that Tamils see the act as a way to crush their legitimate aspirations (Hindu, 08/27/97).

September 4: The government holds talks with the opposition United National Party (UNP) to reach a common stand in preparation for possible talks with the Tigers. Last week, the UNP called for a resumption of the negotiations. The failure of the last talks in 1995 is partly attributed to disagreements between the two major political parties (Agence France Presse, 09/04/97).

September 8: Tiger rebels attack and torch a Panamanian registered cargo ship off the northeast coast. Two soldiers protecting the vessel at Pulmoddai were killed. The LTTE also attacks a military facility in the village of Kalyanapura. Seven civilians and seven rebels die (Agence France Presse, 09/08/97).

September 9: The Tigers burn a Chinese cargo carrier. Seven people onboard die (Agence France Presse, 09/09/97).

September 21: The Sinhala Commission, a panel appointed by some leaders of the Buddhist Sinhalese community, voices its opposition to the government's peace plan. It says that changing the unitary character of the country is a step toward the creation of a separate Tamil Eelam state. The government plans to present the plan to Parliament in the first week of November (Agence France Presse, 09/21/97).

September 30: The Tigers free 11 Muslim fishermen and a Sinhalese man to commemorate the 10th death anniversary of a top rebel (Agence France Presse, 09/30/97).

October 1: The LTTE launches attacks on army positions near the rebel-held town of Puliyankulam. Up to 100 dead on both sides are reported. In Colombo, hundreds of monks demonstrate against the peace plan. Leaders of the Buddhist Sinhalese community reject a qualified apology from a senior government minister who accused the Sinhala Commission of blocking efforts to end the bloodshed (Agence France Presse, 10/01/97).

October 2: Tamil parties are reacting cautiously to the peace proposal that would grant greater autonomy by establishing regional councils for Tamil and Muslims in the northeast. The government says a referendum will be held in the multi-ethnic east to determine if they want to join a northern council. For the first time, a separate council for Muslims is proposed. The regional councils would have powers over land, law and order, finance, and the right to raise loans from abroad or receive foreign aid directly (Agence France Presse, 10/02/97).

October 3: Officials admit that the police went on a rampage in a Tamil village in Amparai after a policeman was killed by rebels. Six civilians died in the incident (Asiaweek, 10/03/97).

October 4: Some Tamil political parties, including the Eelam Peoples=Democratic Party, oppose carving Muslim and Sinhalese areas out of the existing eastern province. Dozens of Tamils hold demonstrations in Colombo demanding information on missing relatives. Since the army captured Jaffna peninsula in December 1995, 730 people have been reported missing. Officials indicate that 182 of these people are in custody (Agence France Presse, 10/04/97).

October 11: The LTTE is suspected in an arson attack on a state bus company in the southeastern town of Kataragama. Problems have also been reported between rival businesses in the region (Agence France Presse, 10/11/97).

October 13: A one-day strike, organized by the Democratic People's Liberation Front, is observed in the town of Vavuniya. It is held to protest against the ill treatment of Tamils at the hands of the police and security forces (Agence France Presse, 10/13/97).

October 14: The Tigers launch a new wave of attacks near the towns of Kanagarayankulam and Batticaloa. Around 45 people are reported dead. Since the government began its largest-ever offensive in May, over 2000 casualties have been reported (Agence France Presse, 10/14/97).

October 15: The LTTE is blamed for a truck bomb that devastates Colombo's business district. Widespread damage is reported to the new World Trade Center and luxury hotels. Over 20 civilians and 12 rebels are killed. The Tigers deny any involvement. Last week, the US State Department included the LTTE on its list of foreign terrorist groups. This designation means that the Tigers cannot engage in fund-raising activities in the US (Agence France Presse, 10/15-16/97).

October 17: President Kumaratunga offers to halt the military offensive if the rebels agree to negotiate (Agence France Presse, 10/17/97).

October 19: The Tigers stage a suicide attack in an effort to destroy a navy gunboat. Two sailors are killed and two rebel boats are sunk (Agence France Presse, 10/19/97).

October 24: The government tables the peace proposal in parliament. A parliamentary select committee which has spent two and a half years studying the plan is unable to reach a consensus on its future (Agence France Presse, 10/24/97).

October 26: Sixty people are killed in various clashes between the Tigers and government forces, the majority near the town of Kanagarayankulam. The government says it has captured control of some 46 kilometres of a 75 km road which is the only land route to the north (Agence France Presse, 10/26/97).

November 2: Forty-two people are reported dead as the LTTE attacks an army patrol south of Killinochchi (Agence France Presse, 11/02/97).

November 8: The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam formally reject the government's peace power-sharing plan. It says that it fails to recognize a Tamil nation and homeland (Agence France Presse, 11/08/97).

November 21: The Tigers shoot down a helicopter gunship with a missile C possibly a US-made Stinger. The two pilots are killed (Asiaweek, 11/21/97).

December 5: Over 400 people die as a LTTE counter-offensive stalls the military's advance near the town of Kanakarayankulam (Agence France Presse, 12/05/97).

December 9: Four people are killed when the Tigers hurl two grenades into a crowded market in the east (Agence France Presse, 12/09/97).

December 11: Tamil and human rights groups demonstrate in Colombo to seek the release of prisoners and to obtain information on numerous missing persons (Agence France Presse, 12/11/98).

December 12: Sinhalese prisoners in Kalutara jail kill three inmates C a Muslim and two Tamils who were suspected to be members of the Tigers. Tamil prisoners at another facility stage a two week fast to protest their transfer to Kalutara (Deutsche Presse-Agentur, 12/12/97).

December 30: At least five Tamil political parties begin electioneering for the first local polls to be held in Jaffna in fifteen years. They include the TULF, TELO, EPDP, and PLOTE; the latter four were formerly militant groups. The elections are set for January 29. The UNP says it will not participate as it is against the idea of holding the polls. The ruling People's Alliance will not field candidates as its coalition includes some of these Tamil parties. An NGO, the People's Action for Free and Fair Elections, is helping to promote violence-free polls ((Agence France Presse, 12/30/97; Deutsche Presse-Agentur, 01/05/98).

1998

January 25: Mobs set fire to a Hindu cultural center in the plantation region of Kandy in retaliation for the suicide bombing of the sacred Buddhist Temple of the Tooth. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which is fighting for a separate homeland in the north and the east, has been blamed for the attack. Three Tamils and eight civilians were killed in the bombing incident(Agence France Presse, 01/25/98).

January 26: For the first time ever, the government bans the LTTE. It had not done so earlier as it wants to draw the LTTE into the political process. Hundreds of Buddhist monks march in Colombo to protest the bombing of the Temple of the Tooth. Fearing a repeat of the massive 1983 anti-Tamil riots, authorities urge the Sinhalese majority not to retaliate against the Tamil community. Members of the Sinhalese community also publicly echo this call (Agence France Presse, 01/26/98).

January 26: Buddhist organizations blame Britain for the bombing of the Temple of the Tooth. The LTTE maintains offices and raises funds in Britain (Agence France Presse, 01/26/98).

January 27: The LTTE is reported to be responsible for the murders of two EPDP members who were contesting local elections set for January 29 (Agence France Presse, 01/27/98).

January 28: The air force bombs Tiger-held areas while the rebels attack three army bases. Eight soldiers and two rebels die (Agence France Presse, 01/28/98).

January 29: Death sentences are handed out against 13 Indians and 13 Sri Lankans in connection with the 1991 assassination of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. Last November, India's United Front government fell after a coalition partner, the DMK, a Tamil Nadu party, was accused of having links with the LTTE in 1991 (Agence France Presse, 01/29/98).

January 30: Despite intimidation efforts by the LTTE, about half of the eligible population of 200,000 votes in Jaffna's first local elections in fifteen years. The Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) wins the most seats (9/23) on the Jaffna Municipal council along with capturing another of the 17 local councils. The Eelam People's Democratic Front gains the majority in 10 councils; the Democratic People's Liberation Front (also

known as PLOTE) wins 4 and the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization captures 1 council. Some analysts indicate that the polls are a vote for peace (Agence France Presse, 01/30/98).

February 1: Authorities state that the security forces killed some 220 Tigers as they fended off an attack in Killinochchi. Some 20 soldiers died (Agence France Presse, 02/01/98).

February 2: The death toll in continuing clashes between government forces and Tamil Tigers is now reported to have reached 400. Since the government began its largest-ever offensive last May, almost four thousand casualties have been noted (Agence France Presse, 02/02/98).

February 5: Prince Charles appeals for peace when he visits Sri Lanka to celebrate the country's 50th anniversary (Agence France Presse, 02/05/98).

February 6: Four rebels and five soldiers die in a Tiger suicide attack in Colombo (Agence France Presse, 02/06/98).

February 9: Police arrest 12 security personnel in connection with the killing of eight civilians in the village of Thampalagamam eight days ago. Last week, hundreds of Tamils demonstrated to protest the killings by government forces (Agence France Presse, 02/09/98).

February 11: The Tigers blow up a bus carrying soldiers near Batticaloa town. Two soldiers die. The air force bombs rebel-held areas in the north and east. Several hundred people have died in the last 11 days of heavy battles (Agence France Presse, 02/11/98).

February 23: Sixty-five people are reported dead after a Tiger suicide attack against two navy boats (Agence France Presse, 02/23/98).

February 26: Nine LTTE are killed in various attacks. A few days ago, clashes between the Tigers and government forces near the town of Mankulam resulted in 30 rebel and 23 government casualties (Agence France Presse, 02/26/98).

March 5: A Tiger suicide bombing of a bus in Colombo results in 32 civilian deaths and injuries to 250 others. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan condemns the attack (Agence France Presse, 03/05/98).

March 9: Five people are killed and thirty injured in a vehicle bomb blast in the east (Agence France Presse, 03/09/98).

March 23: Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee says that India will not support the LTTE (Hindu, 03/23/98).

March 27: Twenty-three Tigers and eight soldiers die in clashes (Agence France Presse, 03/27/98).

April 9: Nine members of the LTTE are killed (Hindu, 04/09/98).

April 14: The Tigers kill four people in an attack on a police post (Deutsche Presse-Agentur, 04/14/98).

April 18: The United States urges the LTTE to end its fighting and to join peace talks. While ruling out

American mediation, the US says it supports the peace proposal. Since 1996, the US has been sending delegations of counter-terrorism experts to meet with Sri Lankan officials (Agence France Presse, 04/18-19/98).

April 19: Human rights groups indicate that mass arrests and the disappearances of Tamils are still occurring in war zones in the north and east (Agence France Presse, 04/19/98).

April 21: Authorities state that 60 Tigers and 28 soldiers have been killed in clashes near the rebel-held town of Mankulam. Commonwealth Secretary General Emeka Anyaoku offers his assistance to help resolve the conflict (Agence France Presse, 04/21/98).

April 28: A powerful bomb devastates a major telephone exchange; 20 Tigers are killed (Agence France Presse, 04/28/98).

April 29: Hundreds of demonstrators, including monks, protest in Colombo following remarks by a foreign policy advisor of India's ruling Hindu-nationalist BJP party that India should shed its policy of total non-interference in regional affairs. The advisor also stated that Sri Lanka must agree to controversial territorial concessions to end the conflict. Another Indian official states that the conflict is an internal Sri Lankan matter (Agence France Presse, 04/29/98).

May 3: Eleven soldiers are reported dead in a Tiger attack on a police post in Trincomalee. The LTTE announces a unilateral two-day ceasefire to allow a UN official to visit the area to examine the effect of the war on children (Agence France Presse, 05/03/98).

May 17: The Tigers are blamed for the murder of Jaffna's mayor. She was Sri Lanka's first female mayor (Agence France Presse, 05/17/98).

May 18: The LTTE tells a UN envoy that Muslims will be allowed to return to their homes in Jaffna. The Tigers allegedly kill a Sinhalese soldier while he is praying in a mosque (Agence France Presse, 05/18/98).

May 22: UN Special Representative Olara Otunnu visits the north and meets with the Tigers. Meanwhile, 20 rebels and 5 soldiers die when government forces attack Tiger boats (Hindu, 05/22/98).

June 5: The Tamil Tigers contend that they have killed more than 100 soldiers and lost 20 rebels in renewed battles (Agence France Presse, 06/05/98).

June 10: Reports indicate that there have been over 430 casualties in recent fighting between the government and the LTTE (Agence France Presse, 06/10/98).

June 30: Tamil prisoners stage a protest at Kalutara prison; a visiting Eelam People's Democratic Front (EPDF) member of parliament is injured (Agence France Presse, 06/30/98).

July 7: The Tigers reportedly attack police commandos. Some 24 people die in the incident (Agence France Presse, 07/07/98).

July 17: The LTTE is likely to blame for the murder of a PLOTE member of parliament. Other party members have been attacked this year (Hindu, 07/17/98).

July 22: Thousands of Tamil refugees demonstrate in Mannar district against cuts in food relief and they petition the United Nations to press the government to restore the aid. A member of the Jaffna council, the EPDF, stated last month that it was against a government move to reduce the number of civilians eligible for aid by one-half. The government says the cut reflects the fact that many Tamil civilians have been resettled (Agence France Presse, 07/22/98).

July 31: During the SAARC summit being held in Colombo, the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) plans to appeal to Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee to persuade the opposition United National Party to accept the peace proposal (Asiaweek, 07/31/98).

August 5: President Kumaratunga invokes a nation-wide emergency and postpones elections for provincial councils slated for the 28th of this month. The opposition UNP contends that the government fears it will lose the polls. Kumaratunga says that as troops are engaged in an offensive in the north, adequate security for the elections cannot be provided (Agence France Presse, 08/05/98).

August 21: Tamil refugees force the closure of all government offices in rebel-controlled areas to protest cuts in food aid (Agence France Presse, 08/21/98).

August 29: Some 200 Sri Lankan Tamils protest in Durban, South Africa during a Non-Aligned Movement summit. They call on South Africa to bar Colombo from participating due to human rights abuses in Sri Lanka (Agence France Presse, 08/29/98).

September 6: The LTTE offers to resume negotiations through third-party mediation. It contends that the government is using the war to remain in power. Last week, the government and the opposition UNP agreed on the need for talks with the Tigers. In the last few days of fighting, seven Tigers and two soldiers were reported killed (Agence France Presse, 09/06/98).

September 9: The government rejects unconditional peace talks with the LTTE. President Kumaratunga says one of the main conditions for talks is that the country remain undivided (Agence France Presse, 09/09/98).

September 11: The Tigers reportedly bomb a key government office in Jaffna town. At least 12 people are killed including the mayor and the region's top army and police officers (Agence France Presse, 09/11-14/98).

September 13: The Women's Action Committee, an NGO formed in 1982 by mostly Sinhalese women, is actively campaigning for an end to the conflict (Agence France Presse, 09/13/98).

September 21: In a speech to the UN General Assembly, Sri Lankan President Kumaratunga urges countries to implement domestic anti-terrorism laws to curb activities such as the Tamil Tiger's fund-raising (Agence France Presse, 09/21/98).

September 29: Some 1500, mostly female, Tigers capture the key town of Killinochchi. Over 400 casualties are reported. The town was the headquarters of the LTTE after it was driven out of Jaffna in December 1995. Government forces gained control of Killinochchi in September 1996 (Agence France Presse, 09/29/98).

October 4: Clashes between Tigers and government forces result in 14 casualties. They follow the government's capture of the northern town of Mankulam (Agence France Presse, 10/04/98).

October 13: Eleven Tigers and one soldier are killed in clashes in Trincomalee district. Opposition politicians assert that the Tiger's capture of Killinochchi resulted in the deaths of 1900 soldiers. While it does not provide a casualty toll for its forces, the government says 750 rebels were killed (Agence France Presse, 10/13/98).

October 31: Tiger suicide bombers attack a Sri Lankan gunboat. More than 30 rebels and 18 sailors are killed (Agence France Presse, 10/31/98).

November 6: The Tigers unilaterally release six government soldiers and three Sinhalese merchant seamen they have been holding for years. The freed men believe the LTTE is preparing for a new round of talks (Agence France Presse, 11/06/98).

November 13: Seven Tigers and a civilian are killed when the LTTE reportedly attacks a rival Tamil group in Vavuniya district. Three rebels die in clashes with government forces (Agence France Presse, 11/13/98).

November 15: President Kumaratunga says that the government is ready for conditional talks with the LTTE without the prior negotiation of a ceasefire. The TULF has asked the government to resume negotiations through a third-party mediator. Britain and South Africa have offered to mediate, if all parties agree (Agence France Presse, 11/15/98).

November 19: Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar contends that at least two South Africa-based groups supporting the Tigers are organizing and raising funds in that country. South African ports are also reportedly being used for smuggling arms. South Africa says it will discourage the LTTE from setting up a bureau in the country (Agence France Presse, 11/19/98).

November 30: Five soldiers and five rebels are killed in four confrontations. The violence occurs just a day and a half after the LTTE offers to negotiate. The opposition United National Party welcomes the offer to hold talks, asserting that the government's current peace proposal is unacceptable (Agence France Presse, 11/30/97).

December 2: The government rejects talks with the Tigers until they are militarily weakened. The LTTE's offer to open negotiations noted the group's military prowess. Moderate Tamil parties urge the government to begin talks (Agence France Presse, 12/02/98).

December 2: The UN Development Programme lambasts the Tamil Tigers for dragging on the war and urges foreign governments to pressure them to drop their demand for a homeland and begin talks. It says the LTTE has not shown any willingness to accept a political settlement and that it is recruiting children for its battle (Agence France Presse, 12/02/98).

December 5: The Tigers admit they have lost control of another town, a day after the defense ministry calls off its biggest and bloodiest offensive (Agence France Presse, 12/05/98).

December 6: The government minister leading the military drive against the Tigers narrowly escapes death in a mortar bomb attack. Thirteen people, including eight LTTE, are killed (Agence France Presse, 12/06-

07/98).

December 10: International human rights groups claim that more than 600 people were killed by government forces in the north in 1996 (Agence France Presse, 12/10/98).

December 16: Sri Lanka's new army chief rules out a troop withdrawal from captured areas as a precondition for talks (Agence France Presse, 12/16/98).

December 18: The defense ministry states that the Tamil rebellion has led to 19, 457 deaths in the past four years (Asiaweek, 12/18/98).

December 26: The Tigers assassinate a local politician in the north. Five rebels die during the attack (Agence France Presse, 12/26/98).

December 28: An opposition party in India, the Janata Party, urges Sri Lanka to capture LTTE leader Prabhakaran. It also states that if it is not able to do so, Indian troops should be allowed to pursue him. Prabhakaran is wanted in India in connection with the 1991 assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi (Agence France Presse, 12/28/98).

1999

January 15: Some 25 Tigers and 3 soldiers are killed in heavy fighting in the northern Wannai region (Agence France Presse, 01/15/99).

January 27: The People's Alliance wins elections for the North-West Provincial Council during polls marred by violence and allegations of vote-rigging. Federal elections must be held in the middle of next year (Agence France Presse, 01/27/99).

February 1: Major land and sea battles have reportedly resulted in 50 rebel deaths or injuries. The government searches foreign-owned ships suspected of carrying weapons for the Tigers (Agence France Presse, 02/01/99).

February 6: The US supports the idea of a facilitator to help bring the rebels to the negotiating table (Agence France Presse, 02/06/99).

February 15: Sixteen Tigers are reported killed in recent battles (Agence France Presse, 02/15/99).

February 16: The National Alliance for Peace, a group representing four of the country's religions, says that it will make a fresh effort to bring the sides to the negotiating table. It plans to stage a rally on February 26. Earlier this month, some of the organization's Buddhist monks and Catholic priests met with the Tigers in rebel-held areas. This latest peace initiative was largely triggered by Buddhist monks (Agence France Presse, 02/16/99).

February 21: The Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) alleges that the latest initiative by the monks, which had tacit government approval, is an attempt to garner votes for April's local elections in five provinces (Agence France Presse, 02/21/99).

March 22: Six soldiers die when the Tigers blow up an army vehicle. Officials also state that four LTTE were killed in an incident in Wannai district (Agence France Presse, 03/22/99).

April 2: Authorities indicate that the Tamil Tigers fired mortar bombs at a police station in Muttur resulting in five deaths. The death toll in the last 24 hours has reached 21 (Agence France Presse, 04/02/99).

April 6: Officials say that the Tigers= bombing of Valachchenai military camp led to the deaths of three soldiers and two civilians (Agence France Presse, 04/06/99).

April 7: The ruling People=s Alliance wins four out of five provincial council elections. The opposition United National Party (UNP) appears to have won over Tamil and Muslim voters in urban areas (Agence France Presse, 04/07/99).

April 28: The Sri Lankan government offers to hold talks if the LTTE agrees to both shelve its demand for a separate state and conclude talks within a given time frame. Officials also note that the Tigers have refused to cooperate in implementing a \$1 billion development program for the north; the LTTE first wants the army to withdraw from the north and the east (Agence France Presse, 04/28/99).

May 12: India=s Supreme Court acquits and releases ten Indians and nine Sri Lankans in connection with the 1991 assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. They had earlier received the death penalty. A small demonstration in support of the LTTE is held outside the prison (Agence France Presse, 05/12/99).

May 15: At least 42 people have been killed recently in fighting in the north (Agence France Presse, 05/15/99).

May 30: The government asks businessmen to help build a Hindu and a Buddhist temple north of Colombo. Some officials believe that this will help end the country=s ethnic violence (Agence France Presse, 05/30/99).

May 31: Amnesty International accuses both the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE of using torture and urges officials to bring those responsible to justice (Agence France Presse, 05/31/99).

June 1: Three members of the People=s Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) have quit their seats on the Jaffna council due to threats from the Tamil Tigers. Their resignations follow yesterday=s murder of an EPDP council member. The EPDP stages a strike to protest the killing. Since the January 1998 elections for the regional body, the LTTE has been blamed for the killings of two Jaffna mayors and nine other council members. Meanwhile, the government says that 11 civilians were killed when the Tigers exploded a mine and attacked a van near the village of Ehatugaswewa. Soldiers were also reported to have killed three rebels in separate confrontations (Agence France Presse, 06/01/99).

June 2: The LTTE denies Indian media reports that allege the organization planned to assassinate Congress Party Leader Sonia Gandhi. The media reports contend that the Tigers fear that if she wins upcoming federal elections, she will launch a crackdown against them (Agence France Presse, 06/02/99).

June 2: The Tigers accept the remains of a suicide bomber who allegedly assassinated a member of the Razeek Group, a Tamil militia organization that is cooperating with the government in their battle against the LTTE (Agence France Presse, 06/02/99).

June 3: The Tigers withdraw an order to civil servants to boycott work on Tuesdays and Fridays. The boycott over the past three weeks has crippled the local administration in the north (Agence France Presse, 06/03/99).

June 8: Sri Lanka will allow three organizations C Amnesty International, the Asia Foundation, and Physicians for Human Rights C to monitor the first ever excavation of an alleged mass grave in the north. It is alleged that more than 400 Tamils, who were mostly killed by security forces, were buried at the Chemmani site (Agence France Presse, 06/08/99).

June 11: Heavy fighting is reported near the town of Paranthan as a government offensive has left nearly 100 dead on both sides (Agence France Presse, 06/11/99).

June 13: The LTTE accuses the government of shelling civilians and admits it has lost some territory. Yesterday, officials claimed that soldiers captured some 30 rebel-held villages after two days of fighting. The death toll could reach 125 (Agence France Presse, 06/12-13/99).

June 18: Hundreds of Tamil civilians try to identify the remains of two bodies unearthed at the suspected Chemmani mass grave site. Human rights groups assert that some 600 Tamil civilians disappeared after the government took control of Jaffna in December 1995 (Agence France Presse, 06/18/99).

June 22: The government says that at least 23 rebels and 3 soldiers have been killed in renewed battles over the last few days (Agence France Presse, 06/22/99).

June 23: The Tigers are planning to send a top leader, Anton Balasingam, to South Africa to seek its help in ending the civil war (Agence France Presse, 06/23/99).

Risk Assessment

Tamil separatism has roots in developments both within and outside the country. Tamil resentment largely began in the 1950s with the policy initiatives of a Sinhalese majority government that diminished the citizenship rights of a well-established Indian Tamil minority, decreed Sinhala as the sole official language, advocated the unitary nature of the state, and favored Buddhism as the state religion. Major racial riots such as those in 1956, 1981, and 1983 further solidified the Tamils' sense of insecurity. The Hindu Tamil minority initially sought autonomy through peaceful means. However, beginning in 1983 it launched a violent insurgency campaign that now sought an independent Tamil homeland encompassing the northern and eastern areas of the country. The Tamils, especially the main rebel group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), occasionally waver between demanding full independence or settling for widespread autonomy in a merged northeastern region.

Throughout the 1980s, the well-organized and equipped Tamil Tigers launched numerous violent attacks against the Colombo government and its security forces throughout the country. In 1987, Sri Lanka turned to India for help to end the insurgency. The result was the 1987 Indo-Sri Lankan Peace Accord. Under the agreement, Sinhala and Tamil were made co-official languages, with English as the "link". Although measures

to devolve power to the provinces were widely advertised, political power remained centralized under the Constitution of 1978, enacted by President Junius Jayewardene. The accord also called for the deployment of an Indian PeaceKeeping Force (IPKF) to disarm the Tamil rebels and help restore order in the northern region. The LTTE rejected the accord and launched a military campaign against the Indian peacekeepers.

Sri Lanka's next President, Ranasinghe Premadasa, sought to develop a broad-based political coalition by appealing to moderate Tamils and other minorities, including Muslims and tea plantation workers of Indian Tamil origin. Premadasa's strong opposition to the IPKF led to some unusual alignments. The Sri Lankan government began negotiations with the LTTE to give them a political role and even supplied them with sophisticated weapons to fight the "new" enemy (the IPKF). Meanwhile, the Indian government which had once provided the Tigers with training and sanctuary continued its efforts to suppress the LTTE. The 50,000 contingent of Indian peacekeepers withdrew from Sri Lanka in 1990 after three years of large battlefield losses and limited gains in their efforts to squelch the Tigers.

Indian involvement in Sri Lanka largely stemmed from its security interests that sought to promote its predominant regional power status while keeping foreign actors such as the US out of the region. India's southern state of Tamil Nadu is also home to over 50 million Tamils, who pressed for action to protect the Sri Lankan Tamils. India's involvement in the Sri Lankan Tamil insurgency is now viewed as a costly miscalculation. In the early 1980s, India secretly trained and armed Tamil separatists including Sivarajan who masterminded the 1991 assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. Some Tamils viewed Gandhi as a "traitor" as he was in power when the 1987 accord with Sri Lanka was reached. In an interesting reversal, it is now alleged that the LTTE is training Tamils and other groups in India to carry out subversive activities within that country.

Following President Premadasa's assassination in 1993, Prime Minister D. Wijetunga temporarily took over the reins of power and pursued a hard-line approach against the Tamils, describing their movement as mere terrorism. Elections in 1994 led to a major electoral defeat for the United National Party which had governed for over 17 years. The People's Alliance government of Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga was largely elected on a campaign promise to end the civil war. Peace talks between the government and the LTTE led to a ceasefire in early January, 1995. However, the peace was shattered just four months later when the LTTE renewed its violent campaign, asserting that the government had failed to meet its demands including the withdrawal of army camps in the northern Jaffna area. The Sri Lankan government then refused to engage in direct negotiations with the LTTE; instead it proposed its own devolution package while it simultaneously launched major military campaigns to suppress the Tigers. The devolution package which provided for widespread powers to eight administrative districts, including a merged northern and eastern region (a long-time demand of the LTTE) was rejected by the Tigers. It also drew broad opposition from segments of the majority Sinhalese community and political parties including the United National Party. Any devolution package would require the support of opposition parties to be enacted into law.

In December of 1995, the military successfully recaptured control of the northern Tamil stronghold of Jaffna. The Tigers were forced to establish a new base in the Vanni region. Six months of intense fighting, including massive military air strikes, in the battle for Jaffna, resulted in the deaths of thousands of soldiers, Tamil rebels and civilians. It is estimated that the Tigers lost around 7000 fighters. Over 200,000 civilians either voluntarily fled or were coerced to leave the Jaffna area by the LTTE. While some Tamil civilians have returned to Jaffna, others are displaced throughout the country or reside in camps in rebel-held areas.

The capture of Jaffna was hailed as the beginning of the end of the Tamil insurgency. However, such optimism was premature. The LTTE quickly regrouped in the east and resumed its military attacks against

government forces. It also moved its campaign to the south with major suicide attacks on the Central Bank, the World Trade Centre, and commuter trains. In May 1997, the government launched its largest-ever military offensive to capture the only land route to the north. Some 20,000 soldiers battled the LTTE for a year and a half before this campaign was called off. More than 4000 casualties were reported.

President Kumaratunga's government has sought to militarily weaken the Tamil Tigers before negotiations are again held. It has also attempted to re-establish the political process in the north. In January 1998, the first local elections in 15 years were held in Jaffna. During the late 1990s, both sides offered to open talks; however, pre-conditions by one side or another scuttled these efforts. It is not clear how serious the Tigers are about reaching a political settlement. Various parties have called for third-party mediation and countries such as Britain and South Africa have offered their services. However, it is not known if either side will definitely accept outside involvement.

The Tigers are a highly disciplined, well-funded and equipped rebel movement. The government has come under pressure to reduce defense expenditures in order to promote economic growth; it also faces difficulties obtaining recruits for the armed forces. Neither side appears capable of militarily defeating the other. Unless there is a major breakthrough, this protracted conflict, which has already resulted in around 60,000 casualties, will likely continue for the foreseeable future.

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