

# 'Undeclared war' in Jaffna taking its toll on Lankans

AFP, Jaffna

Roadside killings and night-time knocks on the door have replaced mortars and suicide bombs as the new terror in this northern Sri Lankan city.

And it is increasingly the residents here who suffer, many say, as the government and Tamil separatist groups carry out a vicious "undeclared war" that targets civilians more than it does guerrillas or soldiers.

"Anything can happen at any time," M. V. Kanamylathan, chief editor of the Tamil-language newspaper Uthayan, told AFP from his offices.

"It is like a volcano -- people go

about their daily lives and it is unseen but it can erupt at any time to do as much damage as possible," he said.

Just two months ago gunmen stormed the Uthayan building, killing two and wounding several others in an attack that has yet to be accounted for.

With the national truce unraveling amid daily violence and peace monitors virtually crippled by Tamil Tiger demands to lessen their presence, Sri Lanka is again veering dangerously close to open warfare.

Since December 825 people have died in military operations or tit-for-tat killings across the island in a surge of violence.

But the killings and disappearances in Jaffna -- a spit of government-controlled land in the country's northern tip that is cut off from the rest of the island by a vast swathe of territory controlled by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) -- already amount to war.

"There is an undeclared war. The (2002 ceasefire agreement) is there, but what happens all the time is this side or that side does something and the people are caught in the middle," Kanamylathan said.

Life continues -- the streets are crowded with traffic and the shops around the bus station do a brisk trade in everything from dried food to household goods.

But heavily-armed army bunkers

commandeer almost every street corner. Even before night falls the streets empty in Jaffna, where scars of a turbulent past are evident in the bullet-pocked walls and bombed-out buildings that blight nearly every neighbourhood.

"Even with no recent incidents, people are still living with a lot of tension," said 65-year-old shop worker Arumuganathan, who was buying a paper at a newsstand before hurrying home.

"Every time something happens, the LTTE blames the government and the government blames the LTTE. Because of this the civilians are the victims," he said.



PHOTO: AFP

Tamil women ride their bicycles in the northern city of Jaffna as their daily life remains relatively uninterrupted by recent unrest. People here say they still live in fear amid a dirty war fought by the government and Tamil separatist groups that is continuing to kill civilians.

## Zarqawi buried in secret in Iraq

REUTERS, Baghdad

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq killed this month in a US air strike, has been buried in a secret grave in Iraq, Iraq's national security adviser said yesterday.

"The Iraqi authorities recently buried the body of Zarqawi in a marked but secret place," Mowaffak al-Rubaie told Reuters.

Zarqawi, a Jordanian, was killed on June 7. Iraqi, US and Jordanian authorities have been anxious his tomb not become a place of pilgrimage.

al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden called on the U.S. military to release Zarqawi's body to his family in a Web site audio tape on Friday. He also said Jordan's King Abdullah should allow him to be buried in his hometown.

## Ulfa offers direct talks with Delhi

AFP, Guwahati

An outlawed separatist rebel group offered direct talks with the Indian government to end decades of violence in the northeastern state of Assam.

"We are satisfied with the progress made in talks between the government of India and our representatives," the United Liberation Front of Asom (Ulfa) said in a statement in Guwahati, Assam's largest city.

"The sincerity shown by the government to bring a lasting solution to the problem in Assam has given us hope," it said on Saturday.

The Ulfa, which has been fighting for an Assamese homeland since

1979, said it awaited the release of five of its imprisoned leaders in line with a pledge made at talks its representatives held last month with the Indian government.

"We hope the assurances given by the Indian government becomes a reality to pave the way for direct talks," Ulfa chief Arabinda Rajkhowa said in the statement.

The last round of direct talks between Ulfa leaders and New Delhi took place in 1992 after the government freed five jailed rebels in the run-up to the negotiations.

The talks ended abruptly after the five freed rebel leaders went underground.

## Congress shedding crocodile tears over price hike: Left front

PTI, New Delhi

Terming Congress concerns over price rise as "shedding crocodile tears", Left parties have blamed the policies pursued by the UPA government for the predicament and would be meeting here on Tuesday to take stock of the situation.

The four parties-- CPI(M), CPI, RSP and Forward Bloc, supporting the Congress-led coalition from outside, are meeting for deliberating on the price situation, disinvestment of NALCO and the overall political situation.

"This is shedding crocodile tears", Forward Bloc General Secretary Debabrata Biswas said reacting to the CWC meeting on price rise and plans by the Congress to hold an interaction with Chief Ministers of party-ruled states.

He asked "don't they know what the reasons (for the rising inflation graph) are? We have been raising these problems for so long but they have neither paid any heed to our suggestions nor taken any action on the matter".

"Congress, when it expresses concern over the price situation, acknowledges rising inflation. It cannot escape responsibility as it has been in power for over two years, during which the Left parties have been agitating on these issues," CPI National Secretary DRaja said.

RSP leader Abani Roy and CPI(M) leader Nilotpal Basu also blamed the government policies, including the hikes in petroleum product prices, for the general price rise.

## Muslim group slams rape, killing of Iraqi woman by US troops

AP, Baghdad

An influential Sunni Muslim organization yesterday strongly condemned reports that US troops raped an Iraqi woman then killed her and her family, saying it shows "the truth of the ugly American face."

The Association of Muslim Scholars said that what US troops have done by "raping this girl then mutilating her is shameful and will remain as a sign of shame to American invaders."

US investigators believe that American soldiers spent nearly a week plotting an attack in which they raped the Sunni Muslim woman, then killed her and her family in a religiously mixed area about 20 miles south of Baghdad.

## Troops kill 4 more rebels in Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar

Indian troops yesterday shot dead four Islamic militants along the de facto border dividing Kashmir between India and Pakistan, the army said.

"The four were killed in northern Baramulla district during a bloody encounter that began around four in the morning (on Sunday)," Indian defence ministry spokesman Hemant Joneja told AFP.

He said the four were killed after they breached the militarised ceasefire border known as the Line of Control.

"We are ascertaining more details," he said, adding it was the second "major infiltration attempt" by rebels in the past three days.

On Friday eight more suspected militants were shot dead after they infiltrated into Indian Kashmir from the Pakistani zone of the disputed state.

## Tigers slam Unicef over child soldier claims

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's Tiger rebels hit back Sunday at claims by the United Nations that more than 1000 children are enlisted as soldiers, saying its reports are grossly exaggerated.

The United Nations Children's Fund released a list of 1,387 children last week that it said were rebel soldiers amid increasing violence in Sri Lanka that threatens an already shaky truce with the government.

The rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) said it had checked the list and determined that more than 800 of those named were aged over 18.

"Given that more than 800 of the youths in the list are now over the age of 18, Unicef's call for the

release of these youths is not based on any international human rights standards," the LTTE said in a statement.

It also said 54 children on the list had been released from rebel ranks and claimed a random check showed Unicef had counted some names several times to boost its numbers.

"It can only be viewed as a desperate attempt to boost the numbers in their list with the view to discredit the LTTE," the statement said.

"When viewed against the silence of the Unicef in the face of horrendous attacks on children by the government of Sri Lanka operated forces, the above view is further reinforced."



PHOTO: AFP

A combo shows al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden and Abu Hamza al-Muhajir, who was endorsed by bin Laden as successor to slain Abu Musab al-Zarqawi as the network's chief in Iraq.

## Laden accuses Shias of Sunni 'genocide'

AFP, Paris

al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden accused Iraqi Shias of waging "genocide" against Sunnis and warned of retaliation, according to a new audio-tape posted on the Internet.

The message, the second in as many days purportedly from the Western world's most wanted man, came as yet another sectarian car bombing shook Baghdad, killing 66 people in one of the worst attacks this year.

A White House official said the message, if authenticated by US intelligence services, reflected al-

Qaeda's "dark vision" and shows that bin Laden and his supporters "offer nothing beyond further fighting, conflict and misery."

The speaker in the audio message posted on Saturday also warned against deploying international forces in lawless Somalia and expressed backing for Islamist forces there.

The voice said Iraqi Sunnis, once dominant under the ousted regime of Saddam Hussein, were being subjected to "a campaign of genocide at the hands of the gangs of grudge and treachery," a reference to Shias.