

# Tigers target Ampara District. (1996, February 25). *The Island.*

## On the sport report

by Rohan Abeywardene

Terrorists who have established the Trincomalee and Batticaloa districts since their unilateral relaunching of hostilities in April last year, are now hell bent on doing the same in Ampara, the last district of the province.

When we visited this predominantly Muslim district last week after a lapse of two years there was an uneasy calm, even in Kalmunai, the biggest coastal town south of Batticaloa.

Unlike in February 1994 when we last toured the area on the eve of the Pradeshiya Sabha election, when the tension was primarily within the Muslim community divided between the SLMC headed by A. H. M. Ashraff and the UNP campaign headed by then Minister of Trade and Commerce A. R. M. Mansoor, now it is strictly between the LTTE on one side and those wanting to maintain stability and the normal way of life.

The area known as the Digamadulla, the rice bowl of the country with thousands and thousands of

acres of uninterrupted paddy lands in between towns like Sammanthurai, Kalmunai, Ninivur, Olivil, Adalachenai and Akkaraipattu is still quite prosperous. Though terrorists have blasted 47 electric transformers in the region, mainly Muslim areas, the vast paddy lands owned mostly by Muslims have so far not been affected by terrorism. Wherever we went we saw hundreds of tractors bringing in a beautiful harvest of paddy to nearby towns with each tractor carrying loads to their maximum.

What appears to be holding back terrorists from going too far appears to be the racial composition of the two communities in the area. As both communities live in interwoven villages almost throughout the region in, past riots Muslims seem to have got the better of the Tamils because of their superior numbers. According to residents here there have been at least eight Tamil-Muslim riots in the past.

In 1994 with the army

and the police commands having clearly beaten the Tigers in the East or at least having them on the run, many a Tamil voiced fears about a secret Muslim violent organisation called 'Jihad', wherever we went. But today with the LTTE slowly regaining the ascendancy, no one seems to voice any fear of 'Jihad'.

Instead some of the same Tamils attributed the destruction of transformers, the blowing up of the Kalmunai telephone exchange, the attack on a PLOTE office and the destruction of a USAID funded project to drain some 8000 acres of swamp for cultivation at Kittangi among other attacks to a third force other than the LTTE. They were hinting that it could be the government behind the attacks.

But a leading Tamil educationist in the area put the record right when he declared that all the attacks were in retaliation for taking of Jaffna by the security forces.

Far from the government waging a dirty campaign in the region, its resources are very thinly stretched, in Kalmunai police alone, two years ago more than half the men were Sinhalese, now the Sinhala officers are



Destroyed Kalmunai telecommunications exchange

very much less, the vacuum is primarily filled by Muslims. The much feared and respected Police Special Task Force, which had given a good account of themselves at practically every encounter with terrorists, have had to vacate four of their camps in Ampara to give covert to other areas. At the STF main camp at Karaitivu in a Tamil village adjoining Kalmunai we ourselves saw the ye-

men service they were rendering with the very limited resources. Probably due to logistical shortcomings, we saw to our horror one of the base's acting commander arriving at the camp by bus from the direction of Ampara only with his assault rifle to defend himself.

Unlike in other areas many of the Tamils in Ampara coastal belt are much behind the Muslims

economically and the terrorist attacks appear to be aimed mainly at crippling the Muslims economy. According to M. I. M. Mashood, Officer-in-Charge of the SLMC Ampara district office, terrorist attacks on transformers have already shut down about five rice mills in Kalmunai and 15 mills at Sammanthurai. There are said to be more than 300 Muslim owned rice mills upto Pothuvil in the

district. Some of the violence is truly mindless, hurting all communities and carried out merely to make the place chaotic and ungovernable. On the night of January 3, the terrorists blasted Kalmunai automatic telephone exchange worth millions of rupees knocking out 650 phones at Kalmunai and 300 at Akkaraipattu. Though the bulk of the telephone subscribers in the area are said

to be Muslims, it also cut off people like the Head of the Human Rights Task Force in the region J. Y. Rajel, a burgher, who is there to render an invaluable service to civilians in a time of civil strife.

When we visited the exchange on the evening of February 13, we saw him hovering about trying to get one of a handful of lines being restored to vital offices in Kalmunai.

Even in the destruction of transformers, there had been utter viciousness. While in the south when JVP decided to attack the power sector in the late 80s during their second insurrection they merely drained the oil from many of the transformers, so the restoring of power was a case of refilling the oil in most instances, but here every transformer had been put out of operation by blasting them with grenades or simply firing at them with guns, where they are either to be entirely replaced or repaired at great cost.

Y. L. S. Hameed, the coordinating Secretary to SLMC Leader and Minister of Ports, Shipping and Rehabilitation, proudly maintains that despite many LTTE provocations since their party assumed leadership in the area there

had not been a single riot and all communities are equally treated in carrying out rehabilitation work. But we heard many a complaint otherwise. And we also saw many destroyed homes, results of previous riots, left unattended for years. While some of them belonged to Muslims, many of them were clearly Tamil properties, especially at Karaitivu.

Mr. Hameed also sees many of the good work they have been doing being increasingly reversed by terrorists. Even before terrorists blasted the Kalmunai exchange there was already a backlog of 3000 telephone applicants from the same town and a total waiting list of more than 7000 in the entire belt. To meet this demand a massive telecommunication expansion project had been drawn up for the entire East to be set up by Ericsson of Sweden. But the Swedish engineers had been chased away by the terrorists about six months ago.

"Now we are trying to enter into an agreement with another foreign company to implement the project", he said hopefully.

There is hope for the region. For many of the

people we met still have hope of resolving the country's burning problems. One such person the Regional Telecommunication Engineer Kalmunai A. K. T. Rajadurai, who is on good terms with practically everyone, cheerfully says they can still complete the project in one and half years.

His plan is to carry out the initial surveys themselves and then invite the Ericsson people once again.

HQ Kalmunai Chief Inspector M. H. M. Farook seems to think he is handling the situation as best as he could with the available men and resources, and terrorists have not spared his men either. One policeman was shot and injured, while two homeguards have been killed.

He admits that terrorists move about day and night in two groups as ordinary civilians. One group carries out killings of informants and the other destroying economic targets.

The HQ however feels they are not strong enough to launch full scale assaults the terrorists presence

See page 14

## Tigers target...

From page 7

we were able to gauge to some extent from the vain trouble we took to locate some PLOTE and EPRLF cadres. When we visited the PLOTE office, which was bombed by terrorists several days earlier killing one of its cadres we found the place closed. Several attempts to trace cadres of both groups too failed.

Believe it or not there had been a large popula-

tion of Sinhalese in Kalmunai till 1990 when the LTTE unleashed the Second Eelam War and not only massacred the policemen of the region who surrendered to them on the orders of the then government, but also turned on the Sinhalese civilians in the area with a vengeance.

From about 300 families, Sinhalese are now reduced to about ten to 15