

New stand-off weapons in the hands of LTTE? (1999, September 26).
The Sunday times.

New stand-off weapons in the hands of LTTE?

The new wave of Tiger guerrilla activity in the past weeks, both in and outside operational areas, have clearly shown an escalating trend.

If that was a matter of concern to Colombo's defence establishment, at least two occasions that are observed as anniversaries in the LTTE calendar, which fall today and tomorrow, added to it.

One is the 14th death anniversary of Thileepan, then deputy leader of the LTTE Political Wing. Thileepan was the first LTTE cadre to die after a 13 day long fast from a specially constructed dais near the Nallur Kandasamy Temple on September 26, 1987. Among other things, he was demanding the withdrawal of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) from Sri Lanka.

Tomorrow, September 27, marks the first anniversary of the LTTE counter attack on "Operation Jaya Sikurui" (Victory Assured), which led to the fall of Kilinochchi. The attack came 24 hours before what turned out to be the final phase of "Operation Jaya Sikurui," got under way. The incident, a watershed in the history of the separatist war, left more than 1,400 dead or missing in action and later led to the long-est ever military offensive being called off.

Needless to say security installations countrywide have been warned to be on alert for any possible attacks to mark the anniversaries, both today and tomorrow. Among main

near the Telecommunications building in Batticaloa town.

Friday's Claymore mine explosion occurred barely six weeks after a similar incident in the Batticaloa town. On August 11, ten policemen were killed and 21 more were injured when a Claymore mine ripped through the vehicle in which they were travelling. This incident took place near the Batticaloa Police Station.

Special Task Force radio intercepts of LTTE communications after the latest Claymore mine incident in Batticaloa on Friday heard Karuna (former Batticaloa "Commander" now operating in the Wannu) congratulate Nizam (a LTTE cadre) for carrying out the attack.

Since July, this year, Tiger guerrillas have stepped up attacks in the east (Situation Report - September 5, 1999). If they were intended to force the Government to re-deploy troops from the northern operational theatre to the east, the civilian massacre on three villages in the 31 Colony in Amparai district, where 54 men, women and children were brutally massacred, has aggravated security requirements in this area.

Security forces and Police officials who have stepped up patrols in vulnerable areas have been busy persuading panic-stricken civilians from leaving their homes. These areas include the villages around Maha Oya, Central Camp and Uhana.

to security forces and the police.

One such Stand Off weapon, introduced this year, was the Multi Barrel Rocket Launcher (MBRL). It was first used when the LTTE attacked the Army's 212 Brigade Headquarters in Mannar on March 17, this year (Situation Report - March 21, 1999). The LTTE carried out this attack by firing 120 mm mortars, 122 mm artillery and MBRLs on the Thallady camp from two locations - Viduthalivu, 11 kilometres away and Pappamodai, seven kilometres away. Seven soldiers and three civilians were killed.

The attack caused damage running into millions of rupees. Stocks of artillery shells of assorted sizes, still on trucks waiting to be unloaded, blew up. That caused secondary explosions to fuel dumps. Stores stocked with rations blew up. So were nine "Iron Horses" (GTVs or Gun Towing Vehicles) and four light vehicles.

Thereafter MBRLs were extensively used to stall the advance of the latest military offensive - Operation Rana Gosa 5 on September 12 - easily the most short-lived operation in the ongoing war. More details on this flawed operation have now begun to emerge after senior military officials conducted a debrief and also following other significant developments. More on that later.

An important development



sembled the report of a Recoiless Gun, possibly 105 or 106 mm. The fire had injured two soldiers. Both had found it difficult to breathe and had to be evacuated to Palaly Military Hospital. There, the two men had remained unconscious for nearly two hours. Small aluminium casings suspected to be from the three rounds have been found in the area.

More details of "Operation Rana Gosa 5" have now emerged. They not only update the account in these columns last week but also rectify a few errors that have crept in, particularly on the directions from which the Army's two Divisions advanced.

"Operation Rana Gosa 5" commenced at the auspicious hour of 6.21 am on Sunday, September 12. The 55 Division

ker line but were pinned down by heavy fire.

It was well past noon when the Security Forces Commander, Wannu, Major General Vasantha Perera, decided to issue orders to formally call off "Operation Rana Gosa 5." This he did after he flew in a helicopter to Parayanakulam junction where he met the Divisional Commanders Major General Sisir Wijesurya and

developments that followed in the subsequent months.

The Kilinochchi-Paranthan debacle came as the turning point for the 18 month old "Operation Jaya Sikurui", the longest and costliest ever military offensive in Sri Lanka's history. This compelled the Government to announce on December 4, last year, that the operation was being called off.

The Jungle Telegraph
By Alia

Ceiling phobia

Some witty young military officers have dubbed it the "ceiling phobia."

Top brass in the Wannu are dismantling the ceiling from some of the buildings for fear the enemy could hide explosive devices.

This "operation" is the direct result of a Claymore mine explosion that killed PLOTE military wing leader, Manikkadasan and two others last month. The mine had been placed in the ceiling of the PLOTE office at St Anthony's Road in Vavuniya.

Whose baby?

An anonymous telephone call to Air Traffic Controllers at Bandaranaike International Airport on Friday (September 17) night that a bomb was on board a flight to Male caused panic.

Who should take the initiative on such occasions - the Sri Lanka Air Force (SLAF), in charge of security of the airline operating the flight? The question came to the fore that night and was the subject of a top level discussion at a security conference in Colombo.

SLAF officials say they wanted the goods off loaded from the aircraft. Sri Lankan Airways officials say since a security alarm has been sounded, SLAF should have helped in the task.

Whatever that may be, Sri Lankan Airways flight UL 103 bound for the Maldivian capital departed from Colombo only the next day - Saturday, September 18.

The call has turned out to be a hoax. But it has also raised questions of how quick the relevant authorities

SITUATION REPORT



BY IQBAL ATHAS

areas the LTTE had planned to trigger off incidents are said to be Trincomalee and Batticaloa districts. Even the City is not being ruled out though stricter security precautions have gone into place, particularly for the smoother conduct of the Army Tattoo for three days at R. Premadasa Stadium, this week, to mark Sri Lanka Army's fiftieth anniversary.

If the event itself drew large crowds, the Army's media planners, perhaps due to their ignorance, let slip a good opportunity by not having it telecast live. That would have given Sri Lankans, thousands who could not afford a journey to Colombo, leave alone the luxury of purchasing a ticket at the gate, an opportunity to see the colourful event. What better way of giving the Army a greater public image than letting Sri Lankans watch such a national event.

After all, the very purpose of holding the Tattoo is also to display to the public the rare skills, grit and determination of the officers and men who took part. Why only for a privileged few who were lucky to receive invitations or were able to afford a ticket? Could this not have helped the Army's sagging recruitment drive? Could this not have obviated the feeling in some quarters, though not with much justification, that the Army was pre-occupied in celebrations in Colombo for a privileged few when their own soldiers were falling victims to Tiger guerrilla attacks?

On the other hand, the families of the majority of over 110,000 soldiers came from the outlying districts and rural areas. That would have given them an opportunity to share some glorious moments that marked half a century of the Army's existence.

Be that as it may, the fresh wave of violence triggered off by the LTTE in the past weeks have shown a rising trend. The latest incident came shortly after noon on Friday when a Claymore mine hit a security forces convoy killing 18 soldiers and wounding 17 others. The mine had been placed behind the name board of a shop

Some residents of the village of Damana, near Ampara, are reported to have left the area.

There have also been reports of Tiger guerrilla groups attempting to infiltrate villages to carry out attacks. But increased patrolling and other security measures have prevented them. In Udappura, on the outskirts of Ampara, suspected Tiger guerrillas are reported to have fired their assault rifles into the air one night early this week. There have also been reports of Tiger cadres conducting reconnaissance in the villages of D a d a y a n t a l a w a, Mangalagama, Arantalawa and Nilambe areas.

On Thursday night, a Police Special Task Force patrol was fired upon in Arantalawa in the Ampara district. A Sub Inspector and a Constable were wounded in the incident. In 1987, this village was the scene of an LTTE attack on a bus carrying Buddhist priests killing 30 of them. Four civilians were also wounded.

Government officials from the District Secretariat in Ampara also visited villages to persuade residents not to leave. They offered them shot guns for their protection.

These developments came in the backdrop of new "Stand Off" tactics the LTTE has introduced into the ongoing separatist war. As exclusively revealed in these columns periodically, the LTTE had acquired a variety of stand off weapons for this purpose. The idea behind this move is said to be to minimise casualties to its own ranks whilst inflicting maximum casualties and dam-

this week heightened suspicions on whether other varieties of Stand Off weapons had also been acquired by the LTTE. This followed incidents in the Paranthan sector, south of Elephant Pass.

On Friday morning (September 24) around 10.30 am, troops were on a training stint. Two Main Battle Tanks (MBTs) lay parked in a nearby area. Their training chores were disrupted when two rounds of 120 mm mortars landed in the vicinity. No one was hurt. Just then, troops heard the volley of loud fire, they found one of the parked MBTs partly damaged. The second MBT was hurriedly started and the troops tried to tow the partly damaged one to the main road. Within moments, the tank exploded and was destroyed.

Troops found pieces of coil wire affixed to a copper plate and suspect it could be part of the munition or explosive device that destroyed the tank. It has been flown to Colombo for examination. Was it the handiwork of an LTTE infiltrator who succeeded in fixing an IED (Improvised Explosive Device) to the tank - a difficult task since security measures to guard the tanks are strict. Or was it an anti tank missile with a guidance system, which was one of LTTE's latest acquisitions? Army officials are yet to come up with a conclusive answer.

Soon after this incident, troops in forward bunkers at the defence lines heard three rounds of heavy gun fire in the area. An Army official in Paranthan said the rounds re-

They have also been sent to Colombo for examination. What was this weapon? Did it contain any harmful chemical or toxic substance or did some other factor cause the breathing difficulty and the unconsciousness? Military authorities are trying to find answers to these and many other questions that have arisen.

Both the fire on the battle tank and the forward area bunkers had come from the direction of Murasumoddi which lies to the east of Paranthan junction. Intelligence sources say these two weapons or devices, whose exact identity are yet to be determined, may be among items that may have been smuggled into the east coast from LTTE vessels in the international waters, in the high seas off Mullativu. The fact that the LTTE has been able to successfully smuggle them despite extensive patrols in the region by the powerful Indian Navy and their Sri Lankan counterparts, who are battling with inadequate resources, have become the subject of serious concern, particularly after the extensive use of mortar, artillery and MBRL shells by the LTTE to thwart the advance of troops deployed in Rana Gosa 5.

The same sources said they were investigating reports of LTTE landing fresh shipments of mortars and other items near the north eastern coast of Chundikulam, on the nights of Wednesday and Thursday. They said there had been heavy boat movements in the area reportedly ferrying inland stocks from ships in the high seas. This is believed to be the latest shipments in smuggling operations in the past several months.

It has now become increasingly clear that in the past ten months when it did not carry out major offensive action against security forces, the LTTE has re-grouped, after recruiting new cadres and re-equipping themselves with weaponry recently smuggled. A debrief of the conduct of "Operation Rana Gosa 5" by military officials at the Security Forces Headquarters (Wanni) in Vavuniya has further underscored this fact.

September 12, the 53 Division broke out from two different locations south west of the village of Periyamadu. The 552 Brigade advanced from north of the Sinnakulam tank whilst 551 Brigade moved from south of the same tank. Both Brigades were tasked to move in a north easterly direction whilst the 553 Brigade was held in reserve.

The 53 Division comprising the Air Mobile Brigade (AMB) and the 533 Brigade broke out from a location south east of the village of Periyamadu. They were tasked to advance in a north westerly direction. The two Divisions were to thus link up encircling the Periyamadu village.

On the night of Saturday, September 11, the day before the launch of the operation, the two Divisions had taken advantage of the darkness and advanced stealthily towards the main's land. Both Divisions are learnt to have come within almost 75 metres of Tiger bunker line that night. A soldier from the 533 Brigade had trampled a Joni mine and had to be evacuated. The explosion is said to have alerted Tiger guerrillas.

However, even before this incident, military sources say, there was reason to believe the LTTE had prior knowledge of a troop advance in the area. This was through radio intercepts and subsequent information which confirmed that additional cadres had been rushed to the area from Nantankandil via Chiratikulam to east of Periyamadu. Similarly additional cadres had also been brought in from the Pallemadu and Viduthalivu axis. If 120 mm and 81 mm mortar positions were in place, the LTTE had thereafter moved 122 mm artillery and MBRLs to this area.

Heavy artillery, mortar and MBRL fire forced the two Divisions to withdraw to their original positions. Troops of the 53 Division returned shortly after 11.30 am the same day whilst the 55 Division were in the original positions by 9.30 am the same day. The 53 Division (Air Mobile Brigade and 533 Brigade) had proceeded nearly a kilometre after breaking the LTTE bun-

General Sisira Wijesuriya and Brigadier T.M. Bohran.

When the latest operation ended, over 132 soldiers were either killed or missing in action. More than 800 were wounded but the majority of them were P2 or P3 cases or those not seriously wounded to be left out of battle.

Security forces in the Wanni have learnt that LTTE leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, had directed counter measures to thwart "Operation Rana Gosa 5." He is learnt to have operated from a hide out in a village called Mullangavillu in the eastern part of Wanni. Radio intercepts had revealed that Theepan, the Tiger cadre who led the attack on Kilinochchi-Paranthan defences last year, led the latest attack. At one point, a caller from an unidentified base had asked Theepan whether he needed a senior leader like Karuna or Ramesh to join him. However, Theepan had declared he could manage.

The well known adage about the tough get going when the going gets tough, the credo of Sri Lanka Army's commandos, was demonstrated by a soldier from the Fifth battalion of the Ceylon Light Infantry. Recruit Thushara was among a group of officers and men declared Missing in Action. Three days after the operation was called off, Thushara limped his way into his camp. The soldier had a bullet wound on his leg but spent three days dodging the enemy.

At a high level meeting where the conduct of "Operation Rana Gosa 5" figured, a senior military official is learnt to have taken the responsibility for the set back. However, he had explained that he was under pressure to execute the operation. The remarks clearly underscore the grim reality that has plagued the country's war machine. Qualified military men have been compelled to give way to political pressures thus risking the lives and limb of the brave officers and men - the real heroes of this 17 year long separatist war.

With the first anniversary of the Kilinochchi-Paranthan debacle only a day away, it is relevant to reflect on the

called off. Over 3000 troops were killed or missing in action and more than 8000 were wounded in this operation. Majority of the injured were P1 and P2 cases.

Subsequent months saw the setting up of a Joint Operations Bureau (JOB) with retired Army Commander, General Rohan de S. Daluwatte, as its Chairman. It was tasked with the responsibility of preparing strategic plans for military operations and to co-ordinate their execution. The creation of the JOB acknowledged the need for the conduct of operations with more studied military inputs and operational plans approved by the National Security Council - the highest body in the security establishment.

Gen. Daluwatte later undertook a tour of France, United Kingdom and the United States to study joint military mechanisms in those countries. Upon his return, he forwarded a report to President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, with a series of recommendations.

The move saw the creation of a Joint Operations Command (JOC) to replace the JOB and the appointment of Gen. Daluwatte as Chief of Defence Staff (CDS). The security forces and the Police were brought under the command of the CDS for the conduct of military operations. This arrangement was short-lived with the JOC being reduced to a supervisory body and General Daluwatte being re-designated General Officer Commanding (GOC) the JOC.

Today, the JOC continues to function without any direct involvement in the conduct of operations. It continues to sap the resources which would otherwise have been for use by the three-armed services. An example has been the use of vehicles where top officials have had the luxury or utilising more than two or three.

Whilst that being so, the conduct of military operations have reverted back to the period before Operation Jaya Sikurri was called off.

ties could react to a serious situation.

Re-directed

Britain's Royal Navy Destroyer "HMS Glasgow" was due to dock at the Colombo Port last week on a three day goodwill visit - the first in four years.

The ship with 268 men on board has been re-directed to the troubled East Timor prompting the British High Commission in Colombo to cancel all engagements.

Did not explode

Troops on "Operation Rana Gosa 5" (Waves Strike) who broke out from Paranthan defences to attack Tiger guerrilla positions last week were helped by SLAF Mi-24 helicopter gunships.

At one point during the operation, two bombs dropped accidentally within the Paranthan defences. Troops there heaved a sigh of relief as they did not explode. An Army bomb disposal team had to move into the area to defuse the bomb before soldiers were allowed to move in the area.

Star class bill

An Army top man who was on holiday in Diyatalawa called for his bill before departure.

He was surprised when he got it. The total was a four figure amount, something which only a star class hotel (like the one he stayed down south) would charge.

He raised queries. The bill had included the costs for his entourage, bodyguards driver et al. He said the Army should meet their costs since these men were on duty. He wanted them to issue a new bill for him and his family. That came pronto. The amount, however, was small and the top man paid it with a cheque. Now comes the other part of the story. Previous top men in his position never called for or paid such bills. Hence, they were absorbed into various other costs.