

SWANSONG

The JVP (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, People's Liberation Front) led a violent campaign against the Indian troop-presence and the ruling United National Party (UNP) from 1987-89.

Student led demonstrations and strikes called by the JVP brought life throughout the Sinhalese-majority south of Sri Lanka to a halt several times last year, rocking the political establishment.

A government crackdown on the left-wing rebels last year resulted in the deaths of their top leaders and a lull in violence, but it said the emergency laws were still necessary to restore normality.

"Under cover of this kind of justification the government is trying to prevent legal actions by workers or students through their unions ... an infringement of fundamental democratic rights which has to be denounced nationally and internationally," says Tampoe.

Sri Lanka has been ruled under emergency law for the greater part of the last two decades. A public security ordinance allows the President to add new regulations, while parliament has to approve the extension of the emergency every month.

When the president and the parliamentary majority come from the same party - as is the case at present - this becomes a formality.

Before the regulations on workers' and students' activities were passed, the CMU wrote to the president asking him to revoke an emergency law governing essential services.

Under this regulation, ports, banks and many other institutions named as 'essential services' can be brought under a military officer who can "require any person to do any work ... in connection with national security or the maintenance of essential services".

"By the end of August, JVP-led violence had already ceased, but this regulation came into effect September 5," Tampoe pointed out. The last JVP-led general work stoppage or 'hartal' took place August 20 1989.

Linus Jayatilleke, leader of the trade union wing of the Trotskyist Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP, New Equal Society Party) describes the new regulations as 'draconian'.

Thursday's lifting of some of the emergency laws came as the human rights organisation Amnesty International released a report claiming thousands of people had been killed in the State's anti-JVP campaign.

A row erupted between the London-based human rights organisation and the Colombo government last month when Foreign Minister Ranjan Wijeratne alleged Amnesty was a "terrorist organisation".

An Amnesty Report in December drew special attention to Regulation 55 (FF)

saying, "This regulation encourages extra-judicial execution insofar as it permits the security forces to commit murder with effective impunity."

"We request you ... to revoke Emergency Regulation 55 (FF), especially having regard to the fact that hundreds of dead bodies have been found all over the country," the CMU January 5 letter to Premadasa declared.

It added that these bodies were "mostly burnt or thrown into rivers with no explanation from you or any spokesperson of your government as to how [these bodies] came to be so dealt with, and at whose hands."

The government argued that full powers had to be given to the security forces to counter the JVP's violent onslaught on the establishment.

Giving the first indication that some emergency laws would be relaxed at a conference of political parties Wednesday, Premadasa said "No price was too high to pay to end terror."

He said he would implement "as soon as possible" the call by a commission set up to inquire into the causes of 'youth unrest' that the emergency should be lifted, but did not say when this would be.

Referring to the lifting of Regulation 55 (FF), one human rights activist here said Thursday, "Now there is justice for dead bodies. It's time to think about the living."

PUBLICLY FREED,

A total of 6,556 subversive suspects have been released from rehabilitation centres in the last two years.

According to the Commissioner General of Rehabilitation, Brigadier Ananda Weerasekera, most of the youths have been re-established in their previous schools, universities and pirivenas. Some of them are being provided with self-employment and foreign

employment training. And a few others, the Commissioner noted, are expected to take up politics as a career.

Three young men detained at the Thelavala camp in Ratmalana, were recently discharged. Their release was urged by the Jayalath Committee which studies individual 'cases' of 'terrorist' suspects and recommends their release or rehabilitation according to the estimated degree of their subversive involvement.

According to press reports, a few days after the men returned to their homes in Welimada, they were abducted and murdered by a group of armed men.

This incident received only moderate media coverage. We publish below, excerpts from the report which appeared in the Aththa of 19 October 1991

PRIVATELY MURDERED

Although it has been stated that terror has been eliminated and peace restored, there is evidence to the contrary emerging from a report from Welimada about the killing of three people and the burning of their bodies.

