

Sole representative status: why claim - and why oppose?

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Humanitarian crisis worsens amid international indifference

THE humanitarian situation in Sri Lanka's embattled eastern province continued to deteriorate this week as hundreds of thousands of displaced Tamils there faced growing shortages of food and shelter.

Displaced by successive Sri Lankan military offensives over the past few months, an estimated 200,000 people are living in squalid conditions without adequate sanitation and security.

International aid organizations and United Nations agencies working with the IDPs in the East have warned of a looming humanitarian crisis and made urgent appeals for international support.

As yet, however, there has been no response from the international donor community.

The Common Humanitarian Action Plan for Sri Lanka has only received 33 per cent of its required funding for food aid and has called the latest influx a major humanitarian challenge.

But Sri Lanka Government spokesperson K. Rambukwella dismissed the severity saying only 52,000 are displaced, contradicting his own administration's official figures.

Meanwhile, the government, whilst not providing assistance is forcibly returning refugees to areas considered unsafe against their wishes and the advice of refugee agencies.

"Sri Lankan authorities are using threats and intimidation to force civilians who fled recent fighting in Sri Lanka's civil war to return home," Human Rights Watch (HRW), a rights watchdog, accused Colombo in a press release issued 16 March.

Just over two weeks ago, a staggering 130,000 people fled their homes in LTTE controlled Vavunatheevu and Karadiyanaru

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Air Tigers hit Katunayake

IN a graphic demonstration of their home-grown air capability, the Liberation Tigers Monday launched a bombing raid against the Sri Lankan Air Force's (SLAF) heavily defended main airbase at Katunayake.

Two aircraft of the Tamil Eelam Air Force (TAF)

launched a night raid Monday, dropping several bombs on the hangars where Sri Lanka's main jet bomber fleet are kept.

The adjacent international airport, 35 kilometres (20 miles) north of Colombo, was not hit, but it closed briefly before resuming operations a few hours later.

Whilst the government says only two helicopter gunships were slightly damaged, airmen coming off duty told reporters in Colombo that several SLAF jet bombers were put out of action by fierce fires which broke out in the hangars struck by the LTTE aircraft.

Up to 40% of the SLAF's strike capability has been knocked out, they said.

B. Raman, a former counter-terrorism head of India's external intelligence service, said in an analysis this week that the

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NEWS

Humanitarian ...

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to escape from a renewed Sri Lankan military onslaught on their villages.

They took refuge in already overcrowded refugee camps in Army-controlled territories pushing the total number of IDPs in the Batticaloa district to well over 200,000.

"There is no room for thousands of new war-displaced in cramped refugee camps in Sri Lanka's east, so many are sheltering under trees or in schools and churches," Reuters report, dated 13 March, said.

Many of the camps are in local schools, preventing the education of ten thousand more Tamil children.

"Because of the new influx of IDPs, 110 schools remain closed in the district. Around 23,000 students from Paduvankarai are not attending schools," Batticaloa Zonal Director of Education, A. M. E. Paul said.

"Students in 18 other schools face difficulties as they witness the daily trauma of IDPs and fellow students staying in the premises as refugees," he said.

The World Food Programme (WFP) made an urgent appeal for funds to support its operations, described the need for international assistance as "critical and urgent."

Meanwhile, accusing the Sri Lankan state of forcibly resettling IDPs to recently captured areas north of Batticaloa town without considering their safety and wishes, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) has ceased all operations relating to resettlement of refugees.

The UNHCR pull out comes following protests from the UN agency echoed by the international human rights group, Human Rights Watch (HRW), against the government decision to forcefully resettle IDPs in Muttur and Vakkarai.

Reports have said of government officials denying aid to refugees who refuse to board buses taking them to their former homes in areas that are still volatile.

On February 15, the WFP Regional Director for Asia Tony Banbury said "unless we receive new funding very soon, we will run out of food supplies by the end of April."

"After all the suffering endured by the victims of the fighting in Sri Lanka, they should

not be hurt further by a lack of international support and concern," he added.

"We will do everything we can to ensure that all these victims of the conflict - many of them women and children - get the assistance they so desperately need," he said.

The international community including the co-chairs of peace process, USA, European Union, Japan and Norway have been silent on the continuing military offensive and indifferent to the resulting human suffering.

A delegation of members of Parliament from Tamil National Alliance (TNA) have met foreign ambassadors and sought urgent help.

Thangeswari Kadiraman, TNA MP for Batticaloa said "There are 89 refugee camps, but still, many thousands are living outside with only trees for cover. And the rains are complicating the situation."

‘After all the suffering endured by the victims, they should not be hurt further by a lack of international support and concern’

However, there has been no international response.

Whilst there has been no response to the international aid agencies' appeals, neither has there been condemnation of the Sri Lankan counter-insurgency strategy of driving hundreds of thousands of Tamils from their homes by indiscriminate bombardment.

In some districts, WFP has already been forced to put on hold its Mother and Child Nutrition and school feeding programmes in order to re-direct its limited resources towards the newly displaced.

It has also suspended most food-for-work rehabilitation projects in districts ravaged by the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami.

Following several months of government embargoes on LTTE-controlled areas, WFP said it "urges the Government and the LTTE to guarantee unimpeded access by WFP and other humanitarian organizations to the displaced people."

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NEWS



(file photo) Large numbers of Tamil refugees are crammed into overcrowded camps in Sri Lanka military controlled areas. Photo Gamini Obeysekera/AFP/Getty Images

Situation 'critical and urgent' - UN

THE United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), struggling to cope with hundreds of thousands of displaced people in Batticaloa, has warned of acute shortage of basic supplies including food and urged for immediate assistance from the international community.

According to the WFP, over 200,000 Tamils driven out by Sri Lankan military offensives in the eastern district will run out of food by end of April, if urgent funds are not received from donor countries.

"If donor governments do not come in with fresh funds, supplies will run out by end April," WFP spokesperson in Colombo Selvi Sacithandam said.

WFP Regional Director for Asia Tony Banbury described conditions in the area as "critical and urgent."

"Unless we receive new funding very soon, we will run out of food supplies by the end of April. After all the suffering endured by the victims of the fighting in Sri Lanka, they should not be hurt further by a lack of international support and concern," he said.

Referring to the latest influx of refugees as a major humanitarian challenge, the WFP official added "we will do everything we can to ensure that all these victims of the conflict - many of them women and children - get the

assistance they so desperately need."

Since the latest exodus began on March 8, the WFP has issued repeated warnings of impending food shortage and appealed for assistance to provide for the IDPs in Batticaloa.

According to the agency it could only take care of 60% of the supplies and that the remainder was to be provided by the Sri Lankan Government and other assistance of local NGOs and INGOs.

Basil Sylvester, District Officer in Batticaloa for the Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies said "The UN can only take care of 60% of the food supplies, and they say that they are running out funds, there are a lot of people here and we need to act fast."

Food however is not the only concern, according to UN agencies, who say that security, sanitation and over crowding are all major concerns.

The Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) has warned that "WFP is facing a break in pipeline towards end of April and is calling for urgent contributions from donors with requirements only for conflict IDPs and vulnerable groups affected by the hostilities at US\$ 1 million a week for 400,000 people nation-wide."

According to WFP lack of international support has forced it

to put on hold its Mother and Child Nutrition and school feeding programme in order to redirect its limited resources towards the newly displaced and suspend most food-for-work re-

habilitation projects for the tsunami affected.

Meanwhile the Common Humanitarian Action Plan for Sri Lanka has only received 33 percent of its required funding for

food assistance.

The WFP told a press briefing in Geneva, Switzerland said it was too early to predict whether international donor funds would come through.

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NEWS



Tamil refugees are being forced onto busses taking them back into embattled areas. Photo TamilNet

UNHCR slams forcible resettlement in unsafe areas

THE United Nations High Commission for Refugees has pulled out of all refugee resettlement operations in Sri Lanka's East after accusing the Government of forcibly resettling displaced Tamils in unsafe areas.

The move comes amid accusation that the Sri Lankan security forces are using Tamil civilians as human shields for artillery attacks and ground offensives against the Liberation Tigers.

Echoing protests by UNHCR, Human Rights Watch (HRW) also raised concerns last week over the reports of people being forcibly returned to their villages.

The Sri Lankan government has formally rejected the accusations and insists that all resettlement will be voluntary and the participation of UNHCR.

But Sri Lanka's minister for Resettlement and Relief Services, Rishad Badurdeen admitted the government had forcibly moved displaced people.

He was quoted by local media as saying that around 10 per cent of the people were reportedly moved to a resettlement camp against their will.

The military also confirmed forcible resettlement had taken place. Military spokesman Prasad Samarasinghe admitted to reporters that last week a group of people were transferred to UNHCR transit camp in Killivedi against their will.

And UNHCR Spokesperson Ron Redmond in Geneva referring to the Government assurances said ground reports suggest otherwise.

"Reports indicate that this [voluntary resettlement] has not been the case and we also are disturbed by statements attributed to local authorities that all assistance may be stopped if internally displaced people remain in Batticaloa and that the Government would not be able to guarantee their safety," he said.

Meanwhile refugees living in camps in government-held Batticaloa told Reuters that Sri Lankan officials had threatened to halt food and water handouts if they did not agree to return to their homes in the embattled areas.

"According to one of the reports, women and children at one site were forced to board buses despite pleas that they couldn't leave while their husbands were still at work and children at school," Mr. Redmond said.

The UNHCR distanced itself from the Government's actions by ceasing to participate in refugee resettlement in the East.

Amin Awad, head of UN refugee agency UNHCR in Sri Lanka announcing their decision to pull out of resettlement work in the East said "we are saying that we are not involved with this situation, we don't want to give the

IDPs the impression that we are assisting or facilitating or promoting return."

"The conditions in Vakaraai are not right for resettlement and there is work to be done on services and minimum conditions for return."

"We feel that the minimum conditions of security, demining, removal of UXOs (unexploded ordnance), need to be put in place and also food stocks and quantities of relief items should be in place and some services like basic health."

The UN agency estimates that the government has returned approximately 10,000 people against their will to Vaharai north of Batticaloa town and Sampur south of Trincomalee where landmines have not been cleared and infrastructure has been destroyed due to fighting.

Government defense spokesman Keheliya Rambukwelle responding to allegations of forcible resettlement said "it is their right to be resettled in their original places. The government is fulfilling that right. If someone interprets it as forcible resettlement, well then that's disappointing."

"This whole journey is not a bed of roses. It's a tough journey to deal with 100 - 150,000 people," he argued.

"In the process you might have a few cases where some people don't want to be resettled."

NEWS



Refugees collect food handouts for their families. But supplies are running out. Photo TamilNet

Refugee exodus overwhelms aid efforts

Simon Gardner
Reuters

HUNCHED over a fire cooking rice amid a sea of tents as a new refugee exodus swells already cramped camps in war-ravaged east Sri Lanka, Krishnagobal Sivamalar fears for her future.

Forced to flee her home in a swathe of jungle and paddy fields to escape artillery shells and air raids as the military seeks to wrest the area from LTTE, the 25-year-old housewife salvaged only the red checked dress she is standing in.

Her extended family of eight now lives in a small, stiflingly hot tent on a sandy coastal stretch in the eastern district of Batticaloa, where around 40,000 people have fled over the past week, taking the total number of war displaced in recent months to an estimated 120,000-150,000.

"We couldn't stay there because of the artillery and rocket attacks," the mother-of-three said in her native Tamil, sporadic artillery rounds booming in the distance. "All the houses are damaged. We don't want to go back because of the war."

"Both sides are the problem, both the LTTE and the army," she added, referring to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. "We were very happy before. Now the war has brought sadness to our lives."

Behind her, clothes hang to dry on a barbed wire fence and from tent ropes as children play barefoot in the sand and pump

water from a well to wash.

Sweet-smelling smoke billows from her makeshift stove of burning palm fronds and a tune chimes as an ice-cream vendor arrives at the camp.

A 2002 ceasefire has collapsed and the military has vowed to wipe out the LTTE militarily, which analysts say means the fighting will escalate.

This month's exodus comes on the heels of an influx of thousands of refugees in December and January in the face of another military offensive to capture a Tiger eastern stronghold.

The LTTE has warned of a bloodbath across the island if the military pushes on with its plan to completely defeat them within the next 2-3 years.

Government officials and aid workers in Batticaloa, a district of scrub jungle, lagoons and paddy fields whose coastline was ravaged by the 2004 tsunami, are struggling to cope with the influx of displaced.

"It's very difficult to maintain the IDPs (displaced) and look after them," said Sinnathamby Baskaran, government Divisional Secretary of Eravur Pattu, an area of Batticaloa district now home to over 40,000 refugees in 17 camps.

"The first problem is providing food. Day to day the IDPs are increasing."

"We can manage to accommodate 25,000 people. The problem is now more than 40,000 have come here," he added.

"So we are finding water and sanitation problems, toilets are a problem, we have shelter prob-

lems."

The World Food Programme says its food stocks are low and desperately needs help to be able to feed everyone.

"Presently the sheer number (of displaced), 150,000 approximately, is overwhelming the resources available," said Sacha Bouter, head of WFP's Batticaloa operations.

"We estimate the gap at the moment is probably somewhere between 30,000-40,000 people in terms of food."

"The majority of those are residing with host families, so there is some minimal safety net around them," she added.

"This is the first time in the history of this area that this level of displacement has taken place."

Authorities are trying to resettle civilians displaced from the former LTTE stronghold of Vakkarai further north to ease pressure. But it is a slow process and troops are still clearing landmines in the area.

Back in the camps, the refugees are hostage to the same uncertainty that has prompted a recent sell-off on the stock market and raised fears investors could shun the \$23 billion economy as tourists are doing.

"I want to go back home. There is no livelihood here," said 52-year-old vegetable delivery man Amarasingham Logetharajah, standing in a blue traditional sarong and showing scars on his forearm and shin made by the shrapnel of army shells.

"The fighting is still going on. Whether my future is dark or bright, I don't know."

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Early Warning

The LTTE has demonstrated more than simply its air capability

The Liberation Tigers' airstrike this week on Sri Lanka's main airbase at Katunayake has understandably triggered shockwaves both in the island and further afield. Whilst the Sri Lankan government insists its aircraft are unscathed, amid a blackout imposed by Colombo, there are persistent reports that a significant part of the Air Force's strike capability has been knocked out - something some Indian analysts are also insisting. Irrespective of the reality, what is clear is that the LTTE has developed an indigenous air capability. It is the first armed non-state actor to do so, and it has managed it without the support of any state. Moreover the LTTE has achieved this against considerable odds and in spite of determined and extensive efforts by the Sri Lankan government and its allies to constrict the LTTE's supply lines (hence the begrudging admiration expressed by many commentators, including some of its critics).

Thus it is the institutional growth reflected in this single LTTE airstrike that is of significance. For almost a year, Sri Lanka's hardline government has single-mindedly pursued a military solution to the Tamil question. In that time, large tracts of territory were captured from the LTTE in the sprawling and thinly defended east. President Mahinda Rajapakse and his coterie of Sinhala nationalists have trumpeted this as evidence of the inevitability of a victory over the Tigers. Promising a final victory over the Tigers, Colombo has pursued a ruthless and blatantly racist strategy. At least two hundred thousand Tamils have been driven from their homes. They have been starved and bombarded for months. International aid agencies were officially prevented from providing humanitarian relief. And for the past few months the onslaught has been conducted in full sight of the international community.

Sri Lanka's promise of a quick victory over the LTTE - or, for the more skeptical, the promise of a serious weakening of the Tigers - has provided the justification for the humanitarian suffering unleashed on our people. Indeed various rationales have been floated for why Sri Lanka should not be restrained. The most cowardly of these is that Colombo simply won't listen. The same international community that determinedly calls for sanctions against other (much larger and most robust) states which refuse to accept international norms hides behind notions of sovereign-

ty when it comes to Sri Lanka.

Amidst the deliberate infliction of widespread suffering on the Tamil people, the international community - including the mighty Co-Chairs - merely mouth feeble platitudes for Sri Lanka to pursue a political solution. As well as the war, that is. The peculiar logic is that once the LTTE is under severe military pressure, the Tamils could be persuaded to accept a much lower level of powersharing (it is no accident that these days no one talks of federalism). The more astute international actors are aware of the flaws in this logic: i.e. without the LTTE it's irrelevant what the Tamils are prepared to accept. Yet international interests are served by an end to the conflict, even in the absence of a just solution for the Tamils i.e. the destruction of the LTTE would suffice.

In short, amidst the rampant violence of the Sri Lankan state, the LTTE has become the convenient whipping boy for a variety of international actors including, shamefully, those who for many years lectured the Tamils on human rights and international humanitarian law. Many of these actors, it shouldn't be forgotten, weighed enthusiastically into the Norwegian peace process, stymieing the LTTE's efforts to secure international legitimacy and eventually contributing to the dissipation of the momentum of the peace process itself. Now with human rights violations by the state having become so widespread and blatant as to be impossible to ignore, all they can offer is feeble criticism. The Tamils, however, have to fend for themselves.

It remains very much to be seen if President Rajapakse can deliver the inexorable reduction of the LTTE that he has promised. But what can be guaranteed is that amidst his efforts Sri Lanka will descend into a maelstrom of violence. With its raid on Katunayake the LTTE has demonstrated more than merely its ability to carry out airstrikes in any part of the country. More importantly, it has demonstrated its ability to overcome the considerable international difficulties that have been placed in its path. The continued expansion and refinement of the LTTE's institutional structures, of which its air wing is one, in spite of heightened efforts precisely to prevent this, suggest that faith in Sri Lankan promises of a neat military solution is foolish. But if the international community is not prepared to act against the state, it has no other options.

Sole representative status: why claim - and why oppose?

The rejection of the most powerful Tamil actor's leadership claim has historical precedents - even in South Asia.

Vidya Kumaraswamy
 Tamil Guardian

ONE of the most contested aspects of the LTTE's politics is its claim to the sole (or more recently, authentic) representatives of the Tamil people in dealings with the Sinhala-dominated Sri Lankan state.

The LTTE's claim is rejected by its detractors using a number of arguments, one of the more fashionable of which is that Tamils themselves have multiple identities (such as those of class, caste, gender, region and religion) and that no single organization, particularly the violent LTTE, can really claim to represent all Tamil political aspirations.

Those of a more academic bent talk of the 'impossibility of Tamil nationalism,' given the allegedly multiple social, political and economic differences within the 'imagined' Tamil nation.

Another response is simply to point to Tamil opponents of the LTTE, as if the mere existence of Karuna or V. Anandasangaree is proof enough that the LTTE cannot claim to represent the totality of political opinion within the Tamil people.

The extent to which these figures actually have any solid political base or viable political program (i.e. independent of Sri Lankan government sponsorship) is less important in this regard than their espousal of an anti-LTTE position.

Furthermore, the LTTE and the Tamils that endorse its claim are expected to simply keel over and give up the struggle in the face of this superior, novel and incontrovertible logic.

The latter's response, naturally, is that those challenging the LTTE's sole representative claim or promoting anti-LTTE actors are primarily seeking to undermine and weaken the Tamils' struggle for self-determination.

Interestingly, their argument has a historical precedent, dating to at least the high noon of the British Empire - in South Asia itself.

In the years following the formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885, senior British officials were eager to pour scorn on its claim to represent Indian public opinion (i.e. the British were not wanted).

For example, the then Vice-

roy, Lord Dufferin, dismissed Congress as 'a microscopic minority.'

And well before the current post modern vogue, a thoroughly modern British colonial official, Sir John Strachey, was emphatic about the impossibility of the Indian nation.

"There is not, and never was an India, or even any country of India.. no Indian nation, no 'people of India' of which we hear so much," he confidently told a gathering of Cambridge Undergraduates.

"That men of the Punjab, Bengal, the North-West Provinces and Madras should ever feel that they belong to one great Indian nation is impossible."

At different stages in the struggle between Congress and the colonial state, British authorities challenged the Congress'

The British alleged that Congress could not be the 'sole representative' as it did not represent religious minorities, Dalits and rural peoples.

authority to represent the Indian nation by pointing to divisions of religion, caste and class.

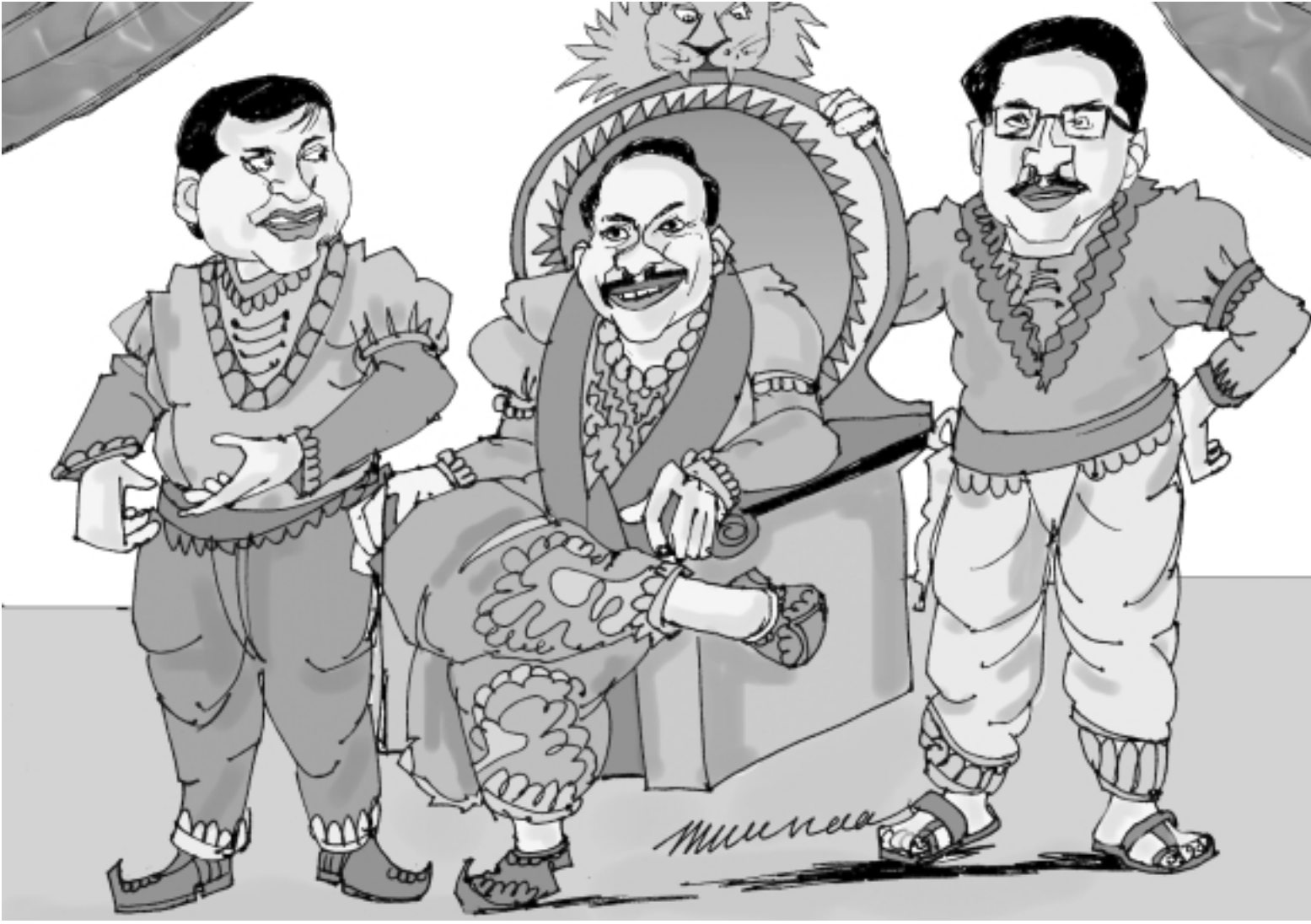
The Congress, it was alleged, could not be the 'sole representative' as it did not represent religious minorities, Dalits and the rural population.

Instead Congress was deemed to be a concern of upper caste, urban educated Hindus.

Indeed, the Colonial state went further, taking upon itself the mantle of guardian and protector of other groups against the minority interests being selfishly pursued by the Congress party.

With hindsight it is clear that in challenging the Congress' claim to represent the Indian nation, the Colonial state was

EDITORIAL & OPINION



actually obfuscating its own exploitative and oppressive nature.

By pointing to the alleged divisions within the Indian nation, the Colonial state drew attention away from anti-colonialists' argument that India's wealth was being drained, at the expense of her people, to support the British economy.

Furthermore, the anti-colonialists pointed out, excise and import duties favored British imports over the development of local industry thereby preventing the Indian economy from moving out of its dependence on the export of raw commodities.

The oppressive nature of the colonial state became starkly clear at moments of popular confrontation, as occurred during the episodes of nationwide anti colonial protest mobilized by Congress.

Particularly well known incidents include the massacre at the Jallainwallah Bagh when the army, under the command of Brigadier General Reginald Dyer, opened fire on a crowd of unarmed peasants that had gathered for a fair.

The state that claimed to represent the sturdy, loyal peasant against the seditious, upper caste urbanite opened fire on a crowd of unarmed men, women and children. According to the official report 379 civilians were killed but Indians put the dead at closer to 1,000 with more than 2,000 wounded.

Interestingly, in response to the British sneers, Congress did not deny the existence of multiple poles of difference within the Indian nation.

Instead it claimed to represent the interests of all Indians as

colonial subjects in the struggle against British imperialism.

The thrust of Congress's argument was that colonial rule was oppressive and detrimental to the interests of all Indians, irrespective of their other identities.

Meanwhile Congress leaders, particularly Gandhi, campaigned against the iniquities of caste while as early as 1920 the Congress party, recognizing the existence of multiple linguistic identities, reorganized its party structures along linguistic lines.

Although not even the most ardent Indiaphiles would argue that post-Independence India has been an unqualified success there have been striking achievements. India has remained a reasonably stable democratic and federal state that recognizes multiple linguistic and caste identities alongside the Indian identity.

The existence of multiple poles of difference within groups demanding the right to political independence is a recurrent phenomenon of both successful and unsuccessful nationalist movements.

Opposing states have also always sought to divide nationalist movements by playing upon these differences.

Nelson Mandela describes in his autobiography how the white Nationalists state attempted to undermine the African National Congress (ANC)'s bargaining position by creating divisions within the black and colored population.

"The Nationalists' long-term strategy to overcome our strength was to build an anti-ANC alliance with the Inkatha Freedom Party and to lure the

Coloured Afrikaans - speaking voters of the Cape into a new National Party," he writes.

"From the moment of my release, they began wooing both [Inkatha leader] Buthelezi and the Coloured voters of the Cape."

Once again the state's strategy is one of obfuscation. By point-

The LTTE argues it is the only major, organized political force that is acting on behalf interests that all Tamils share as a consequence of their collective marginalisation within the Sinhala-dominated state.

ing to the differences within the black and coloured peoples, the Apartheid regime sought to distract attention from the exclusions and hierarchies they all suffered under white minority rule.

Dharmaratnam Sivaram, the Tamil writer and journalist assassinated in April 2005, identified the creation of divisions amongst those struggling for freedom as a classic tactic of counter-insurgency.

Mark Whitaker reports in his recent study of Sivaram's life, work and politics - 'Learning Politics from Sivaram,' - a conversation in which Sivaram discussed the use of divide and

rule tactics in breaking the will of a resisting population.

According to Sivaram, "promotion of numerous political and interest groups from within the target population backed, covertly or overtly, by either vigilante groups or by the state, to dilute and obfuscate the basic issue in question that in the first place gave rise to the insurgency."

The claim that Tamils are a nation with a right to political independence does not deny the existence of gender, class, regional and religious differences amongst them.

Rather what it asserts is that the social and economic well being of all Tamils would be served by a set of autonomous political institutions that would not be hostage to the whims of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism.

It should not be forgotten that the Tamil demand for independence came as a consequence of thirty years of discrimination and oppression at the hands of a state that privileged the economic, social and political claims of the Sinhala Buddhist majority at the expense of the Tamil - speaking minority.

This discrimination and violent oppression affected all Tamils equally, regardless of their gender, religion, region, class or caste. The racist mobs that hunted out Tamils during the pogroms of the 70's and 80's were not good post-modernists, stopping to consider their victims' multiple sub-identities.

Similarly the violence being unleashed now against the Tamils by the Sri Lankan state does not discriminate. Are not those supposed to be Karuna's supporters

languishing in Batticaloa's refugee camps along with the rest of the district's Tamils?

The failure to share international development aid equitably has affected Tamil communities from all the northeastern districts: Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu, Mannar, Vavuniya Trincomalee and Batticaloa.

Sri Lanka's Kfir bombers do not discriminate between Hindus and Christians, men and women or fishermen and farmers. All Jaffna Tamils, irrespective of caste, class and religious bent are feeling the crippling effects of the government's refusal to open the A9 highway.

The politics of divide and rule have found form in principled arguments such as the need to make peace negotiations 'more inclusive' or the need for 'other Tamil voices' to be heard.

It is interesting that Karuna, one of the so called 'alternative voices', has nothing to say while 200,000 Tamils driven from their homes by the Sinhala military now languish in refugee camps.

Anandasangaree, meanwhile, rails against the 2002 Ceasefire Agreement, saying the truce had prevented the 'liberation' of the Tamils of the Vanni.

Indeed, it is no accident that such actors are feted by the Sinhala nationalist forces.

By prioritizing the differences within Tamils, these arguments attempt to shift attention away from the burning question of the political status of the Tamil people: are they to be an autonomous nation in a multi-national state or subordinate minorities in a Sinhala Buddhist one?

Interestingly, whilst there are repeated calls for a Sinhala consensus (equates to non-ruling parties uniting behind the Sri Lankan state in its dealings with the LTTE), there is no similar call for Tamil unity.

This is even whilst the state is urged to negotiate a lasting political solution with the Tigers!

Just as in the case of Congress and the Indians, in demanding to be recognized as sole representatives of the Tamil people, the LTTE does not claim to represent every single Tamil interest and sub-identity.

Rather, the LTTE claims to represent the overarching political interests that Tamils, as a collective, have in common as a consequence of the oppression and discrimination they share.

The LTTE argues that it is the only significant, organized political force that is acting and speaking on behalf interests that all Tamils share as a consequence of their collective marginalisation within the Sinhala Buddhist state.

Thus, especially in the current climate, where Tamils are facing levels of brutality last endured during President Chandrika Kumaratunga's 'war for peace', arguments and strategies that prioritise the differences within amongst Tamils over their collective suffering can be plausibly dismissed as nothing more than new attempts to break their will to resist Sinhala domination.

Katunayake ...

Continued from page 1

"TAF air strike has severely damaged, if not destroyed, at least a half of the aircraft holdings of the SLAF."

"The Sri Lankan Government has imposed a total black-out on the losses [it] suffered [so as] to hamper any damage assessment by the media and other analysts," he wrote.

Three air force men were killed and another 16 wounded in the raid which began at 12.45 am.

The LTTE admitted responsibility the daring raid, publishing for the first time photos of their fledgling airforce, showing a group of pilots and a small aircraft.

The LTTE said Monday's attack was in retaliation for SLAF bombing of Tamil civilians.

"Other Sri Lanka military installations will also be targets of our future attacks," LTTE military spokesman Rasiiah Ilanthirayan told reporters.

Sri Lanka's President Mahinda Rajapakse held an emergency meeting of the country's security leadership Monday as the government imposed a total blackout on the LTTE bombing raid.

During the day Monday journalists were kept away from the airbase by heavily armed air force troops who searched surrounding areas with dogs.

Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) officials who attempted to visit the Air Force base Monday to initiate inquiries into the attack were refused access to the site by top Air Force officials, an SLMM spokesman told the Daily Mirror.

SLMM spokesman Thorfinur Omarsson said the monitors however managed to visit the injured at the Negombo hospital and would make another attempt to visit the air base Tuesday stressing it was important that access is granted for the monitors to rule on the incident.

Meanwhile, only two propeller-driven Pucara ground attack aircraft and a seaplane took off from Katunayake all day Monday.

A significant section of the SLAF's jet bomber fleet, including several Israeli-made Kfirs are based at Katunayake.

At least six Kfirs were housed in the hangers bombed by two LTTE aircraft in the early hours Monday.

The LTTE bombs had triggered fires and secondary explosions in the hangars, airmen who came off duty Monday told reporters.

The Sri Lankan government has played down the attack saying only two bombs dropped by the LTTE aircraft exploded.

But several press reports in the early hours quoted residents being woken by at least four loud blasts followed by gunfire.

Tourists in the international terminal speaking to international agencies also reported a series of loud explosions amid gunfire.

(clockwise from left) Locally manufactured bombs, cradles and release mechanisms attached to one of the aircraft; one of the LTTE aircrews pictured after the bombing raid. Some of the LTTE's aircrew pictured with LTTE leader Vellupillai Pirapaharan. Photos LTTE



Tiger planes no risk to India

FOLLOWING the LTTE's air raid on Sri Lanka's main airbase Monday, the Sri Lankan government claimed the Tiger plans posed a threat to the region, implicitly calling on India to help it defeat the movement.

The Indian government has expressed 'concern' at the LTTE raid, but has not been drawn on the issue.

Meanwhile, Indian security officials told Indian media that they don't see the LTTE attacking Indian interests anywhere, including in Tamil Nadu, which is separated from Sri Lanka by a strip of sea.

A joint statement by thirteen political parties supportive of the hardline position of the government of President Mahinda Rajapakse condemned the attack.

"The air power of a frenzied and desperate organization as the LTTE is a grave threat aimed not only to Sri Lanka but also to the entire South Asian region," the statement said.

"We call upon the international community to make a proper

assessment of this very real danger and draw its serious attention to all actions taken both locally and abroad by these separatist terrorist forces in Sri Lanka," it said.

"The LTTE is the only terrorist group in the world to have air capability," Sri Lankan minister for trade, commerce and highways, Jeyaraj Fernandopulle, said.

'It is a great demonstration of their tactical ability. The Tigers have shown what they are capable of.'

Although stating they don't see a risk to Indian interests, officials in Delhi described the LTTE's acquisition of air power with concern.

"It is a very, very serious development," one Indian security offi-

cial said on the condition of anonymity told the Times of India.

He added that if a LTTE aircraft could take off from Tigers-controlled Mullaitivu district, fly all the way to Colombo, bomb and return to base, then Tamil Nadu too could be easily accessed.

Another official told the Times: "it is a great demonstration of their tactical ability. They have shown what they are capable of."

Another official added: "It shows the LTTE can widen the conflict. We don't know what else is in the offing."

Two years ago India public aired its concern about the existence of military aircraft with LTTE.

In response, SP Thamilselvan, the LTTE political wing, said: "all our organisation's structures and efforts are aimed at protecting our people. This is not in any way a threat to any other country in general, particularly India. India or the Indian people need not fear this. The surprise and concern voiced by India surprises us."

Simon Gardner
Reuters

A NEWLY unveiled Tamil Tiger "air force" of between two and five light planes is no match on paper for Sri Lanka's dozen fighter jets, but they pose a proven threat the military would be ill-advised to underestimate, experts say.

The Tigers smuggled small, propeller-driven planes into the island in pieces aboard merchant ships they owned after a 2002 ceasefire and reassembled them, analysts said. The truce has now broken down into renewed war.

Monday's pre-dawn air strike on the island's biggest air force base, close to Colombo's international airport - the first such LTTE attack - may sound like something out of a Biggles schoolboy novel, but it should be cause for worry.

"This air attack appears to have taken the air force by complete surprise, and this is confirmed by the delayed response, by which time

the attackers have been able to return to base," said Iqbal Athas of Jane's Defence Weekly.

"It is a significant threat for a number of reasons. What they did, although they may have failed to achieve their target, is to demonstrate that they have such a capability," Athas said.

"The larger offshore patrol vessels of the navy can become vulnerable, troop transport ships can become vulnerable and so can armed groups leading an offensive on the ground."

The attack has also exposed the vulnerability of Sri Lanka's air defences. Experts say Sri Lanka has no access to costly 24-hour real-time satellite footage of its skies.

At least one of the Tiger aircraft is believed to be a Czech-made Z-143 two-seater light aircraft.

"They have been caught with their pants down. It's like something out of Biggles," said one foreign security expert on condition of anonymity, referring to novels about a fictional British World War One fighter pilot.



War enters a new phase

B Raman
SAAG

THE Tamil Eelam Air Force of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, which has been in existence for at least nine years without the Sri Lankan intelligence having the least idea about its location and capability, went into action for the first time since its creation in the early hours of March 26.

It was a conventional air attack and not a suicide mission.

Two aircraft of the TAF flew over the Sri Lankan Air Force base at Katunayake near Colombo and

dropped four bombs. At least three SLAF personnel were killed and about 20 injured. Two helicopters, reportedly given by Pakistan, were badly damaged. There was also some damage to the Israeli aircraft of the Sri Lankan Air Force.

The LTTE has claimed that both its planes returned safely to base and has released a photograph of Prabakaran with the officers of the TAF.

It is reported that the approach of an unidentified aircraft towards the base was detected by the Sri Lankan Air Force radar, but the anti-aircraft units at the base failed to go into action.

The SLAF pilots' capability for night operations is poor and the

Air Tigers took advantage of this to fly over the base unintercepted and bomb it.

The Sri Lankan authorities immediately closed the nearby civilian airport and diverted all incoming flights to Indian airports.

The LTTE has projected its air strike as in retaliation for the repeated bombing of civilian areas by the Sri Lankan Air Force, which has killed a large number of innocent Tamil civilians. Many of these air strikes of the SLAF were carried out by mercenary Ukrainian pilots.

It was not only a reprisal air strike, but also a pre-emptive air strike to prevent an offensive operation, which the Sri Lankan Armed Forces are planning to launch in the Northern Province in order to liberate the areas under the control of the LTTE there.

A fresh team of Pakistani counter-insurgency experts and air force officers has recently arrived in Colombo to assist the Sri Lankan Armed Forces in their planned operations in the Northern Province.

Apprehending this offensive, the LTTE has stepped up its arms procurement efforts. As reported earlier, it has already managed to replenish its stocks of explosives. It had undertaken a detailed study of the Hizbollah operations against Israel in July last year in order to draw lessons from it. It was also trying to procure from the Hizbollah the surface-to-surface rockets, used effectively against Israeli targets.

It is not yet known whether it has succeeded in procuring them. If it has, it may bring them into action against military and economic targets in Colombo.

The war against the LTTE started by President Mahinda Rajapakse after assuming office in November, 2005, with the help of Pakistan, has now entered a new phase.

B. Raman is Director of the Institute For Topical Studies, Chennai. He has served as head of counter-terrorism for India's external intelligence agency, Research and Analysis Wing.

Colombo plans for protracted war on LTTE

WHILST insisting to the international community it is committed to peace, Sri Lanka's hardline government is preparing for a protracted war to destroy the Tamil Tigers, reports said.

News wires quoting a senior official in Sri Lankan defence establishment as saying that the military campaign against the LTTE could last at least another three years.

"Within the next two to three years, we should be able to eliminate them. You fight to win, there is nothing called impossible -- its difficult, but not impossible" the official told foreign reporters.

Declaring that the five year old ceasefire agreement between the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE as all but dead, the official claimed that the government has both regional and international backing for its military campaign against the LTTE.

His comments echoed President Mahinda Rajapakse's assertion earlier this month that the government "was not concerned" about the 2002 Ceasefire Agreement which ended several years of bitter fighting.

The defence official said the government would continue with its military campaign whilst seeking a political solution to the conflict in accordance with President Rajapakse's vow to seek an "honourable peace".

"The security forces are on a strong footing to win the military campaign, but a political solution must be pursued in parallel," the official said.

He was responding mounting international pressure on Colombo to propose a solution to the ethnic question.

Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama during a visit to Washington in March suggested that political proposals towards resolving the conflict could be ready in a few weeks.

During a visit to India in November last year President Rajapakse too made a similar promise to deliver a political plan within two months.

However political analysts in Colombo say the hardline government, elected on a platform of a unitary state, is no where close developing a credible solution that would be satisfy legitimate Tamil aspirations.

Many Tamils feel the Rajapakse government is merely paying lipservice to international pressure, whilst focusing on militarily destroying the LTTE - whose armed struggle is spurring international pressure for power-sharing with the Tamils.

Sri Lanka's ongoing military campaign began with an assault

described as a limited defensive operation to eliminate the risk to Trincomalee harbour posed by LTTE artillery guns in Sampoor.

This stand, adopted to ward off international pressure, underpinned President Rajapakse's assertion that there is no war in Sri Lanka.

"There is no civil war in Sri Lanka. What we have is an internal conflict and the current military actions are a defensive operation against the terrorist offensive actions launched by the LTTE," he told Indian reporters.

As in earlier bouts, the Sri Lankan military has targeted Tamil civilians as means of undermining support for the LTTE.

In the operation to capture Vaharai, the Sri Lankan army blocked food and medicine to the area and used indiscriminate shelling and aerial bombardment of villages, creating a humanitarian crisis.

The LTTE pulled out of Vaharai earlier this month, but the population of almost 80,000 residents and formerly displaced Tamils who moved into the area are still languishing in refugee camps.

Emboldened by the territorial gains and tacit international support for Sri Lanka's war efforts, a confident Army chief, General Sarath Fonseka has vowed to 'liberate the east from LTTE and then focus on the North.'

During a visit to the Temple of Tooth, the main Buddhist temple in Sri Lanka, to seek the blessings of the Buddhist clergy for his campaign, Gen. Fonseka declared: "after eradicating the Tigers from the East, full strength would be used to rescue the North."

There is widespread acceptance in Colombo that the international community has given a 'green light' to the Sri Lankan state to weaken the LTTE before negotiating a solution with it.

However Sri Lanka's objective is to use international assistance and support to wipe out the LTTE and preclude the need to accommodate Tamil demands.

Tamil analysts point to the similarities between the current government's twin prong approach towards destroying the LTTE and former President Chandrika Kumaratunge's protracted 'war for peace' as she termed it.

From 1995 to 2002, President Kumaratunge also waged a brutal war in Tamil areas whilst promising to deliver a political solution.

The fighting raged for seven years war with disastrous effects on the Sri Lankan economy, but no credible political solution was put forward in all that time.

NEWS

Sri Lanka rejects foreign rights monitoring

SRI LANKA last week rejected any foreign scrutiny of its human rights record amid growing international criticism of extra-judicial killings, abductions and the recruitment of child soldiers.

Government spokesman Keheliya Rambukwella said Colombo would not allow any unsolicited monitoring of rights in the embattled island, but would invite "eminent persons from time to time" to assess the situation.

"Many eminent persons have visited Sri Lanka at the invitation of the government... that is because we have nothing to hide," Rambukwella told reporters.

"But, that is by invitation."

"We will protect our sovereignty and will not allow any foreigner to force on us a set-up to monitor (rights)," he said.

Rambukwella further added that if an independent international organisation or group arrives in the country without the government's invitation to look into the human rights issues, that would be considered a hindrance to the activities of a sovereign state.

Human rights groups have charged that at least 750 people had disappeared since the escalation of fighting between government forces and Liberation Tigers in December 2005.

The bodies of people who had been shot dead "execution-style" blindfolded with their hands tied behind their back have turned up in swamps and by the roadside across the country.

The government has denied involvement in the killings, which have sparked growing interna-

tional criticism that the authorities were not doing enough to bring the offenders to justice, reported AFP.

However, the chief police officer has admitted the involvement of his men.

The new Sri Lankan ambassador to Geneva also voiced strong opposition to the plan for an international monitoring mission.

Speaking at the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) last Thursday Ambassador Dayan Jayatillake took exception to the tone and attitude of at least two NGOs and Sweden's representative.

In a strongly worded speech he said Sri Lanka was committed to remaining 'constructively' engaged with UN mechanisms and the international community as a whole.

He emphasised that as a sovereign democracy it would not be "prodded, pushed or intimidated" into accepting any measures or institutions against its wishes.

"If certain steps were to be taken, they would have to be taken in concert with the Sri Lankan Government," Ambassador Jayatillake said.

"The Sri Lankan Government was constructively engaged with the international community in helping to improve the situation there."

In a joint statement issued at the session earlier in the day Human Rights Watch (HRW), the Colombian Commission of Jurists and the International Commission of Jurists said allegations of disappearances in Colombo and in



JVP protests foreign intervention

THE Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), a Marxist Sinhala nationalist party, staged a demonstration Thursday (pictured above) in front of the UN in Colombo against interference in Sri Lanka's local issues and the proposed international rights commission.

Slogans against Norway's peace initiatives were also voiced at the demonstration attended by Wimal Weerawansa, JVP Propaganda secretary, General Secretary Tilvin de Silva, parliamentarians, and JVP Provincial council members.

Hundreds of JVP supporters took part in the demonstration,

the NorthEast continued to be received and urged Sri Lanka to invite the Working Group to visit the country.

The Sri Lanka government has appointed a presidential commission of inquiry to investigate some selected human rights violations in the recent past, and claims this is sufficient.

Rambukwella said that a special unit has been deployed to ensure the safety of those who give witness before the commission and that it would function with total transparency.

shouting slogans demanding the agreement between the USA and Sri Lankan Defence Secretary Gothabaya Rajapakse be made public.

Separately, the JVP leader wrote to the UN to express his party's opposition.

In a scathing letter addressed to the UN Secretary General, JVP leader Somawansa Amarasinghe said Sri Lanka has a well-developed civil society in the form of trade unions, professional organisations and active political parties of all shades of opinion that could attend to these matters.

"The United Nations was born

He said since Sri Lanka has ratified to the conventions of the United Nations it has an obligation to fulfil the human rights requirements in the country and will continue to do so.

An International Independent Group of Eminent Persons (IIGEP) was also appointed by the President to enhance transparency of investigations and to ensure they conform to international norms and standards.

The international rights watchdog HRW has also urged the deployment of an international panel to provide independent monitoring of the island's rights record.

"To be effective, the mission would be mandated to investigate serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law ...; report publicly on its findings; and play a mediating role to help reduce local tensions. A monitoring mission will make it harder for those who commit serious human rights abuses to deny responsibility," argued HRW's Senior Legal Advisor James Ross in an opinion in the Daily Mirror.

"The Sri Lankan government would also be sending a very strong signal to the international community that it was genuinely concerned with the state of human rights in the country and - more importantly - was willing to take a bold step to do something about it," he argues.

of hope after the devastation of the Second World War initiated by the Nazis and Fascists. The nearest Sri Lankan political entity which has an ideology close to these groups that were defeated in World War II is the LTTE," the JVP leader said.

He further attacked UN Special Rapporteur Radhika Coomaraswamy, saying "We do not think she has been to the Jaffna peninsula in the last few years."

Mr. Amarasinghe charged that she was silent when nearly one hundred thousand people were killed by state-aided death squads in the South during the 1980's.

"Instead of dismissing out of hand the idea of a UN human rights monitoring mission, the Rajapakse government should take the initiative and begin discussions with concerned states to make this proposal a reality," Ross wrote.

However, Foreign Secretary Palitha Kohona went as far as to deny any accusations of human rights violations in the military campaign against the LTTE, insisting that Sri Lanka was "one country that has taken great care to avoid any civilian casualties".

A UN official, Allan Rock, last year accused Sri Lankan government forces of colluding with a paramilitary Karuna Group to recruit child soldiers in the island's east, a charge vehemently denied by the authorities.

Sri Lanka introduced draconian prevention of terrorism laws in December, giving sweeping powers to the police and security forces to arrest and detain suspects for long periods without trial.

Amnesty International and other rights groups have noted that the deteriorating rights record was linked to the escalating conflict between troops and the LTTE.

Meanwhile the US congress and the opposition in a joint statement have requested American President George W. Bush to send a committee to Sri Lanka to look into the human rights violations.

Minorities most under threat

SRI LANKA is near the top of a global ranking of countries where the situation for minorities has significantly deteriorated in the last year, says a new global survey.

Minority Rights Group International (MRG) said Sri Lanka and Pakistan had shown the biggest rise in this year's ranking of "peoples under threat", a major highlight of the international rights group's annual 'State of the World's Minorities' report.

The report was released at the UN in New York last Tuesday.

Sri Lanka jumped 47 places since the previous year and is now in the top-20 list of countries

where minority communities are most under threat in 2007.

The breakdown of the ceasefire between Colombo and the Liberation Tigers and intense fighting between government forces and the LTTE have left close to a 100,000 people displaced. Most are from ethnic minority communities, the report said.

Tamils and Muslims are not only caught up in fighting between the government and the LTTE but are specifically targeted for rights abuses, including abductions and disappearances because of their minority status.

"The human rights situation in

Sri Lanka is deteriorating by the day. Reports of killings, disappearances and abductions are increasing and these reports are predominantly coming from minority communities," said MRG director Mark Lattimer.

"The worrying factor in Sri Lanka is that multiple perpetrators are operating in a climate of fear and insecurity and little is being done by the government to address the situation," Lattimer added.

The main 2007 list of peoples under threat is led by Somalia, Iraq and Sudan. The top 20 list includes six Asian and 10 African states.

Violence round up - week ending 25 March

Summary of incidents - apart from major clashes - since 19 March

25 March

● Armed men with hand guns chased Soosaitaas Thanaraaj, 19, as he was selling grapes on the pavement of Hospital Road and shot him dead while he was running for his life calling for help. Thanaraaj used to buy grapes from his native village of Ilavaalai and sell them on the pavements of Jaffna city.

● The owner of an ice-cream bar and his assistant were shot and killed behind the bus stand on Jaffna Power House Road. They were identified as Arulraaj Jeyantharopan, 26, from Kokkuvil Kanthi Veethi and Yoakalin-kam Chaarangkan, 23, Theatre Road, Inuvil.

● Two SLAF personnel, a group captain and a sergeant, were killed when their vehicle ran off the road and hit a bridge at Weerawila in Hambantota district. Six more SLAF personnel were injured in the accident.

● Two armed men on motorbikes shot dead the Batticaloa district Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) organiser at Erivil in Kalavanchikudy, Batticaloa. M. Sabaratnam, 65, a father of four, was shot dead as he was having breakfast at a food stall near his house.

● A plantation Tamil student at Nawalapitiya Balika Vidiyalayam has been reported missing since February 27, according to a complaint lodged with the Nawalapitiya Police. D. Sellathurai said in his complaint that his son S. Krishnaraj, 16, left home to sit for his test and had not returned home. He was wearing green shirt and black trousers when last seen.

24 March

● Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation (TRO) directors, returning after monitoring the relief assistance to the displaced civilians, following the SLA operation on the Mannar Vavuniya border, were attacked by a SLA DPU claymore. Humanitarian worker Mr. Muthuraja Aruleswaran, 30, was killed and 3 TRO directors, including the Assistant Executive Director of the TRO, Vadivel Ravichandran, 38, were wounded in the attack at Periyamadur in Mannar. Mr. Aruleswaran, from Mudkompan in Pooneryn, is the father of a 1-year-old child, TRO officials said. The Emergency

Assistance worker was driving the TRO vehicle when the attack took place. International Planning Director of the TRO, Seenithamby Parameswaran, 41, and the Director of Akkarayan Development Organisation, Selvarajah Nixon, 37, from Silavattai, were also wounded in the claymore attack.

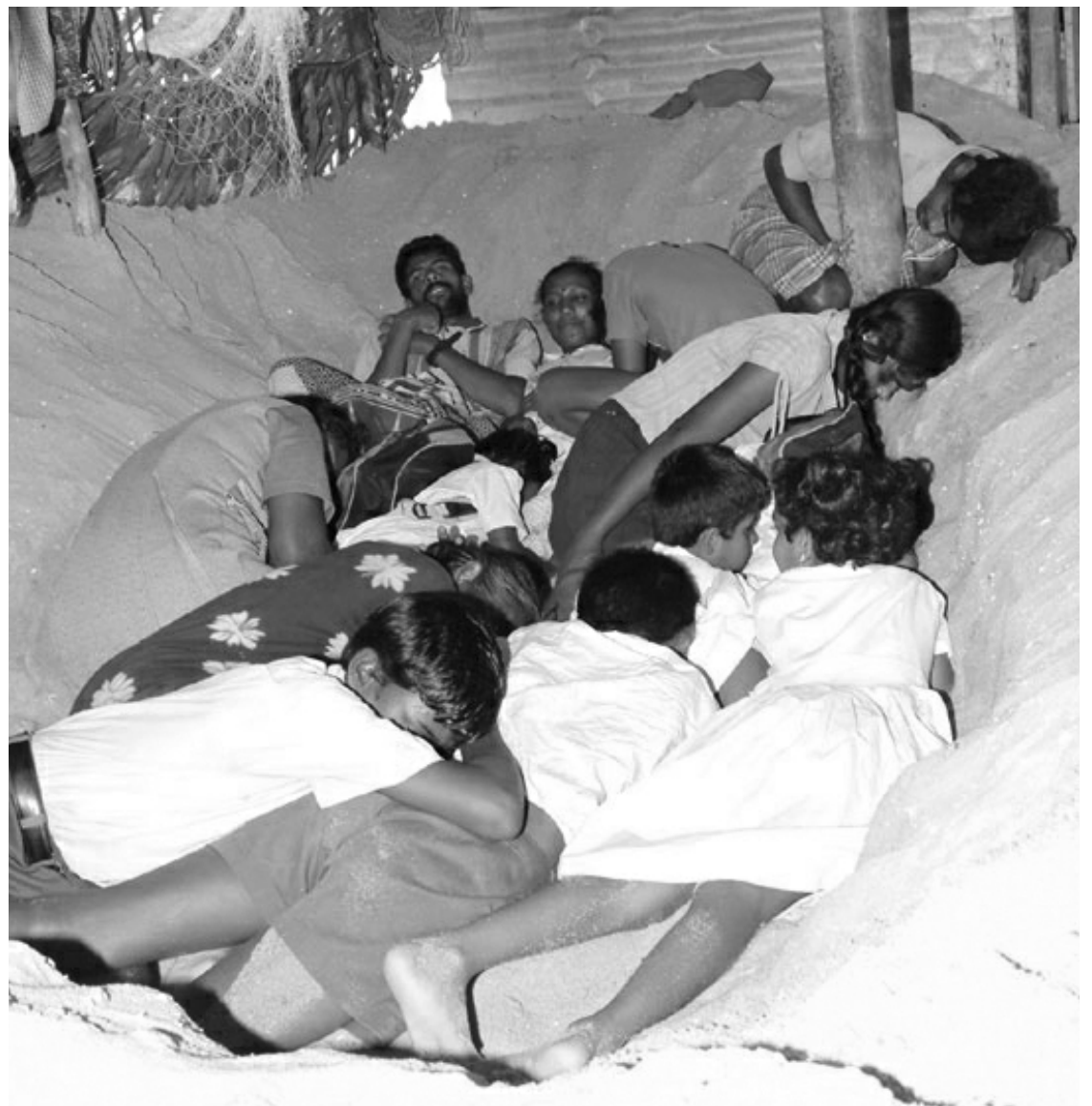
● Attackers lobbed a powerful hand bomb into a SLA check post near the SLA 51-2 Brigade Command in Jaffna city, killing a SLA soldier and wounding four. A civilian was wounded when SLA soldiers opened fire after the attack and was identified as Balasubramaniam Gajarooban, 21, of Thirunelveli. The attackers had escaped after throwing the bomb, which is believed to be a powerful hand grenade. Military officials in Colombo claimed that the attack was carried out by a suicide bomber, on a SLA road block.

● Mannar police recovered a grenade opposite the telecommunication office along Mannar railway station road. The grenade was diffused by the SLA bomb disposal squad. Government troops rushed to the site on receipt of information from the Mannar Police and blocked all traffic and civilian movement along the road.

23 March

● LTTE officials in Kilinochchi charged that more than 300 SLA troopers had breached 2 km into LTTE territory and taken more than 120 villagers of Periyathampanai, on the Vavuniya Mannar border, as "human shields". More than 300 SLA troopers were engaged in the ground offensive, which followed heavy artillery shelling by the SLA and a DPU claymore attack wounding 2 civilians in Parappukkandanthan. The troopers were forced to pull back from Thampanai and Sinna Pandivirichchan after 15 hours of heavy fighting. LTTE officials said they defeated the two pronged offensive, without harming the civilians who were in the hands of the SLA. Around 60 SLA soldiers were killed, the Tigers claimed. Official figures from Colombo said 14 soldiers were killed and 42 wounded. The LTTE said they lost 6 fighters.

● The SLA launched heavy artillery and Multi Barrel Rocket Launcher fire on Periya Pandivirichchan. Joseph Manuelpillai,



Teachers and students took shelter in a bunker as their school was bombed. Photo TamilNet

Kfirs target school, injure three

SRI LANKA Air Force (SLAF) Kfir bombers bombed a school in Chundikulam, Vadamaradchi East in Jaffna, on March 19, wounding a female teacher and two schoolboys.

Three bombs were dropped 25 meters from a class room of Chundikulam Vidyalyam. Two other schools, Aliyavalai Church Ceylon Tamil Mixed School and Uduthurai Mahavidyalayam, were also functioning at the site as they

had been displaced from their original locations.

A bomb that hit a tree exploded in the air, wounding Kanap-athipillai Nirojan, 11, attending 7th grade at Chundikulam Vidya-layam, Luxmikanthan Jegathe-epan, 16, attending 9th grade. The teacher was identified as K. Sathiyavathy, 26.

Around 175 schoolchildren, 8 teachers and the principal of the school narrowly escaped

injury or death.

Kfir bombers dropped bombs on the school at 9:45 and later at 11:45, when the children were attending their classes.

A TamilNet correspondent who visited the site of the attack witnessed a second air strike at 11:45 a.m.

There are no military installations in the area populated by IDPs. IDPs and the villagers fled towards shrub jungles following the attack.

51, a watcher attached to the Madu Multi Purpose Co-Operative Society (MPCS) secretariat was killed in the artillery fire. Heavy artillery and MBRL rocket fire was stepped up on the settlement near Madu church from the SLA camp in Piramanalankulam Junction on Mannar - Vavuniya Road and Madu Road Junction on Mannar Madawachchi Road.

● A SLA soldier went missing in Kinniya, Trincomalee. R. P. S. R. Wickramasinghe, 24, of Nawalapitiya, disappeared while travelling with a group of soldiers from Palathoppur military detachment in Muttur to Upparu in Kinniya. A complaint was lodged by the SLA with Muttur Police that the soldier is presumed drowned while crossing Mahaweli Ganga to reach Upparu with fellow soldiers.

● An attempt by SLA to invade into LTTE territory, from their camps in Unnichai and Vavunathivu, was successfully thwarted said S. Seeralan, LTTE Batticaloa District Deputy head of the Political wing. An Unmanned aircraft had circled over the area, after which four

SLAF kfir fighter jets bombed Vavunathivu area in an effort to lend support to the SLA troops. In addition, the SLA, from its camps in areas under its control in Batticaloa, launched heavy artillery and Multi Barrel Rocket Launcher fire on LTTE held

Continued on page 12

EPDP - Eelam People's Democratic Party
FDL - Forward Defence Line
HRC - Human Rights Commission
HSZ - High Security Zone
ICRC - International Committee of the Red Cross
LTTE - Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
SLA - Sri Lanka Army
SLAF - Sri Lanka Air Force
SLHRC - Sri Lanka Human Rights Commission
SLMM - Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission
SLN - Sri Lanka Navy
STF - Special Task Force

NEWS

Violence round up - week ending 25 March

Continued from page 11

areas, Seeralan said. A Buffel Armoured Personnel Carrier was damaged, and SLA troopers who tried to advance had withdrawn when LTTE launched retaliatory attacks on Vavunathivu SLA camp, he added.

● Armed men on motorbikes waylaid Nirmalanathan Mayooran, 19, an employee of Perianai Church in Jaffna and abducted him at gunpoint as he was coming out of his house at Bankshall street in Jaffna town.

● A group of masked men forcibly entered a house in Faizal Nagar in Kinniya and shot at the inmates, injuring a husband and wife Arumugam, 40, and his wife Vijerani, 37, were admitted to hospital. Trincomalee office of the SLMM was informed of the incident.

● The wife of a Tamil resident of Negombo complained to Negombo Police that her husband, Selliah Tharmarajah, 46, who was employed at a foreign employment agency, had not returned home after he left by bus with his national identity card to report for work in Colombo office. Mr. Selliah Tharmarajah, 46, a native of Kopay in Jaffna district has been missing since January 11, according to the complaint lodged by his wife Vishayanthi Kalpana, 40. The family has been residing at Wellawatte in Colombo and later in Negombo for several years.

22 March

● A female employee of a pharmacy in front of Jaffna Teaching Hospital within a SLA HSZ was shot dead by two gunmen on a motorcycle and who pretended to buy medicine. Uthayajothika Kapilan, 27, from Kaithady was working at the Westco pharmacy, when she was killed. Local traders, who witnessed the escaping gunmen, said the gunmen

rode with ease towards Vembadi Junction where there is a heavy presence of SLA troopers, and blamed the Sri Lanka intelligence operatives for the killing.

● SLA troopers abducted a labourer from his house at Mandan, Karaveddy in Vadamadachy, Jaffna, knifed and strangled him, and dumped the body in Valaiveli area thinking he was dead. People who went in search of him the next morning found him severely injured fighting for life and brought him home. Thangathurai Thayaparan, 28, a father of one, testifying before Point Pedro Magistrate, said that he was abducted at gunpoint by SLA troopers and that he can identify his abductors. Thayaparan's younger brother, an auto driver aged 23, had received death threats from the SLA and Thayaparan's relatives speculate that Thayaparan was mistakenly abducted for his brother.

● Tharmaratnam Uthayasangar, 19, a student from Kudaniyan, Varani was found shot dead in Thenamradchy, Jaffna. Armed men shot him dead at his house.

● Sivapathasundaram Vijithas, 27, a father of one from Kokuvil, had married at Pommaiveli. His body was found dumped near his wife's house. Arasalingam Robinson, 18, was stabbed to death and burned with kerosene and was found in Annankai area in Kondavil. Both men were working as motor mechanics in a repair garage at Five Junction in Jaffna town from where both were abducted by armed men.

● SLA troopers in Buffel Armoured Personnel Carrier and motorbikes, accompanied by armed men in a white van, forcibly abducted a youth and a 16 year old student at gunpoint from the youth's house at Vayatkari Lane in Vannarpannai, Jaffna. Masilamany Ajanthan, 24, is married and the abducted student, Vigneswaran Krishanthan, 16, studied at Jaffna Illayathamby Vidyalayam.



Uthayajothika Kapilan was shot by gunmen in the pharmacy where she worked. Photo TamilNet

The latter, a relative and neighbour of Ajanthan, had gone to Ajanthan's house to get help with his lessons.

● Meikandathevar, 47, from Mirusuvil north, admitted to Jaffna Teaching hospital with serious gunshot wounds, succumbed to his injuries.

21 March

● The LTTE launched heavy artillery shelling on SLA camps in Morakkoddanchenai and Mavdivembu, and on check posts along Trincomalee Batticaloa A-15 road inflicting damage to the SLA positions north of Batticaloa. LTTE fighters raided at least one SLA camp at Mavdivembu. The SLA claimed to have located 8 bodies of LTTE fighters after the raid which lasted for more than 2 hours. At least 4 SLA troopers were killed and 8 SLA troopers were seriously wounded in LTTE shelling. Two civilians, Kathamuthu Marimuthu, 54, Soudararajah Saraswathy, 42, were killed in retaliatory fire by the SLA. A SLA mini camp in Mavdivembu was almost destroyed in the raid and the Morakkoddanchenai SLA base sustained significant damage due to heavy artillery firing. SLA troopers fired mortars and artillery shells into SLA controlled areas infiltrated by the LTTE fighters in small groups. 28 civilians, sustained wounds in shelling, were admitted at Batticaloa hospital.

● Armed men on a motorbike shot dead a 27 year old Tamil man in the heart of Trincomalee town. He is a resident of Killikunchumalai area in Kanniya village. The men had stopped a three-wheeler driven by the victim along Main Street in Trincomalee town and shot him dead.

● Sri Lanka Armed Forces along the coastal belt of Vadamadachy, Jaffna, reinstated the ban on fishing on Vadamadachy north and east seas until further notice. The SLA stopped fishermen going

fishing and said the ban will remain until they receive orders from high command to lift the ban.

● Unknown persons set fire to the SLA mini camp at Chullipuram, Valigamam, Jaffna, when the troopers were out on patrol. Additional troops were deployed at the site while the camp continued to burn. SLA troopers cordoned off and searched areas in Chullipuram and directed residents to gather at a public place for interrogation. The SLA troopers also forced passers by to rebuild the camp. In an earlier incident, the same SLA mini camp was burnt by armed men and in the cordon off and search by the SLA troopers following the burning many innocent civilians were beaten and subjected to harassment.

● SLA troopers arrested a youth during a cordon off and search at a school area in Sakkottai, Vadamadachy north, Jaffna, but denied arresting the youth when contacted for information. The search was triggered after noise of gunshots being fired in the area. SLA troopers rounded up all the fishermen in the vicinity and had them gathered on the main street where they were subjected to many hours of interrogation.

● Kopay police recovered the body of a family man, with severe injuries to his body inflicted by sharp blows from a blunt instrument. The body of Chelliah Jegatheeswaran, 42, from Kattaipirai in Irupalai, was found along New Chemmany Road in Kalviyanakadu, within Jaffna Municipal council limits. His wife identified the body and said he had been missing since going out on Tuesday evening.

● Armed men on a motorcycle shot dead Gnanapragasam Joseph, 46, a trader, and Velautham Deeswaran, 35, his associate, spraying bullets at them near the trader's house at Pothisumaku road in Vavuniya and escaped. The killers had called Joseph out

of his house by name and when he came out with Deeswaran, who had been talking to him, fired rapidly at close range, killing both on the spot. Joseph's relatives told officials Joseph had paid a ransom of 300,000 rupees to an undisclosed person, and again had paid 75,000 rupees on a further demand. The victims had no connection either to Tamil groups or military or police. Two months earlier Joseph's shop had been searched twice by police on tip-off that there was a bomb in the shop.

● Sri Lanka armed forces took into custody 72 civilians, most of them Tamils, in a cordon and search operation in Uddapu, a Tamil village in Chilaw district. The police said most of them were taken into custody when they failed to produce their National Identity Card and some failed to justify their presence in the location. Police took them to Munthal police station and subjected them to severe interrogation. Later the police released 67 of them and five have been further detained.

● Residents and traders in Puttalam observed a general shut down condemning the killing and abducting of civilians for ransom. Shops were closed, public transport came to a standstill and normal life in the town was disrupted. A demonstration was also held in the town with the participation of large number of people. Several speakers at the demonstration said the police have not been taking prompt action to stop abductions and killings of civilians in Puttalam. Puttalam Jemiyath Ulama Council and Al-Sura Council organized the general shut down and demonstration.

20 March

● Five people - a Hindu priest, two teen aged sisters, and two IDP youths from LTTE held areas

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FDL - Forward Defence Line
HRC - Human Rights Commission
HSZ - High Security Zone
ICRC - International Committee of the Red Cross
LTTE - Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
SLA - Sri Lanka Army
SLAF - Sri Lanka Air Force
SLHRC - Sri Lanka Human Rights Commission
SLMM - Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission
SLN - Sri Lanka Navy
STF - Special Task Force

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NEWS

Tamil journalist released, another held

WHILE a Tamil journalist held for four months on suspicion of "helping the LTTE" was released last week, a press freedom organisation accused the Sri Lanka Army of being involved in the disappearance of another journalist, and the editor of a Jaffna daily called on his colleagues to safeguard all Tamil journalists, especially those in Jaffna.

Munusamy Parameswary, 25, a journalist with the Sinhala language Mawbima newspaper, detained by the Terrorism Investigation Division (TID) on November 22, was released last Thursday.

Separately Reporters Without Borders (RSF) said Friday the Sri Lanka Army (SLA) was involved in the abduction and disappearance of Subramaniam Ramachandran, a journalist working for the Tamil daily Yarl Thinakural.

Ramachandran disappeared on February 15 after being questioned at the Kalikai junction, Vadamardachy SLA camp in Jaffna, and RSF said his colleagues believe that he is being held in an SLA camp.

"Following the police chief's recent admission that the security forces have been involved in abductions, Reporters Without Borders said it was in a position to affirm that the military participated in the arrest of journalist Subramaniam Ramachandran on 15 February north of Jaffna," RSF said in a press release.

"We appeal to the authorities to take action to locate and Ramachandran and have him released," the press release said.

"The fact that the government publicly acknowledges the participation of the security forces in kidnapping and forced disappearance is very worrying, but at the same time gives us hope that Ramachandran is still alive."

Meanwhile, the chief editor of the Uthayan newspaper called on fellow journalists to act immediately to safeguard journalists associated with the Uthayan, and



Journalists demonstrate in front of Colombo's main railway station to protest against the threats faced by their colleagues, with journalists disappearing, being abducted, killed and or arrested (left, file photo) while Munusamy Parameswary smiles her relief at being released after four months in prison. Photo TamilNet

all Tamil journalists in Jaffna.

"We are being throttled and systematically targeted - we need your help, now more than ever, to secure our livelihoods, our profession and a shared commitment to the inviolable values of democracy and the freedom of the media", he said in a letter to the Editors Guild of Sri Lanka.

"Threats in the last four months have increased. Incidents that have occurred during this period have made our journalists and essential staff lead a stressful life of fear and insecurity," he said.

Prior to his abduction in Vadamardachi, in northern Jaffna, Ramachandran had written for the Tamil daily Yarl Thinakural about the involvement of a businessman and military officers in sand ille-

gal trafficking. His stories gave such details as the licence numbers of the vehicles involved and the businessman's connections with certain officers.

The circumstances of his disappearance establish beyond any doubt that the SLA was involved, RSF said.

"Accompanied by a friend, he left the school he runs in Karaveddy at around 6 p.m. on 15 February. When they arrived next to the Kalikai Junction military camp, soldiers ordered them to stop for questioning. Ramachandran was taken into the camp while his friend was asked to leave."

"According to witness, a vehicle containing a military intelligence officer, two members of the EPDP (a pro-government Tamil

militia) and an army informer arrived one hour later, and then left a few minutes after that with Ramachandran. His family has had no word of him since then. Several Jaffna-based journalists say he is being held in a military camp in the north of the island."

Parameswary, who filed a fundamental rights application while she was detained, says she was staying at a boarding house in Colombo when she and a friend received telephone calls that that her friend's brother had been abducted and was being held in a van near the Savoy cinema.

When Parameswary and her friend, Thambirajah Susanthi, went to the Savoy, several men forced them into a van without number plates and took them to

the TID. Parameswary claims the abductors threatened her to stop writing for the Mawbima.

Parameswary said in her petition that "she was made to sign several documents and she signed them in order to avoid reprisal and she contests any incorrect, false or distorted facts or material in those [signed] documents."

Susanthi, is still in jail, but her brother was released a month after the two women were arrested.

Parameswary's parents are Tamils of Indian origin. Her father Selliah Munusamy is from Gampola and was a dairy farmer. He moved to Kilinochchi in 1972, married there, and has four children. Due to the war, the family relocated back to Gampola in 1998.

Violence round up - week ending 25 March

Continued from page 12

in Batticaloa district - have been taken away by paramilitary Karuna Group personnel and soldiers of the SLA Intelligence wing within the last 10 days, according to complaints lodged with Batticaloa SLHRC by their relatives. Alaguthurai Yogarajah, 23, of Kardiyanaru, Raveenthiran Gopinath, 21, of Ampilanthurai, Mylapodi Mehanathan, 45, a Hindu priest, Navaratnam Anjaladevi, 18, and Navaratnam Jeyalalitha, 16, two sisters from Unnichchai, were taken away forcefully from the temporary camps, schools and other public buildings, relatives said.

● Armed men abducted Mahalingam Baskaran, 34, a father of

two, at gunpoint from his house in Tholpuram, Chullipuram, Jaffna.

● An SLA street patrol unit opened indiscriminate firing on youths who stood talking along Udupitty-Valvettithurai road at Valvetty area in Valvettithurai, Jaffna. The youths fled leaving their motorbikes and bicycles behind and the troopers took all the vehicles into cussyody.

● A fifty-seven year old resident of Sirupitty, Velligamam, Jaffna, sought protection from SLA troopers and their collaborating paramilitary members at Jaffna police station through the Jaffna office of the SLHRC. The man said that two youths had been killed at Nilavarai in his area and that he too feared being abducted SLA troopers.

● A private house functioning as an extension of Jaffna prison - where persons under protective custody are lodged - has become overcrowded and unhygienic conditions prevail for want of adequate space and basic facilities, according to prison officials. More than 200 inmates, including nearly 60 placed under protective custody, live in this house capable of accommodating less than a hundred persons. Chickenpox has spread nearly to all, as those infected cannot be segregated from the rest for lack of space.

● Armed men shot dead a carpenter in his house at Murganoor in Vavuniya. The victim was identified as Ragu, 47. His daughter and son were abducted two years ago. The son managed to escape

from the abductors but the fate of the daughter remains unknown.

19 March

● Gunmen shot dead M. Ramesh, 26, the president of the Panankadu Auto Drivers' Union, while he was driving his auto in Akkarai-pattu, Amparai.

● Villagers of Mulli at Varani discovered two corpses in partly burnt state dumped in shrub land along Kodikamam-Point Pedro road between Thenmaradchy and Vadamardachi. The victims appeared to have been killed elsewhere, brought to Varani and burnt. Villagers fear there may be other corpses near the where the two bodies were found. A search by the police the next night ended in failure.

Military boot tracks were found on the marshy ground and residents allege that the burnt corpses were removed during the night by the troopers who the villagers accuse of dumping the bodies there.

● Unidentified persons lobbed a grenade on a sentry manned by home guards at Mudcove, Trincomalee. No one was injured in the attack, but home guards and army troops rushed to the scene opened fire in retaliation. Later government security forces and police conducted a cordon and search operation in the area and took about 19 civilians into custody.

● Veersingham Nishanthan, 29, and Arasan Sahayanathan, 39, two fishermen who went night fishing in Muhathuvaram sea in Batticaloa did not return home.

NEWS



Photos were garlanded and floral tributes were paid as part of the final rites of seven TRO officials missing for more than a year and now presumed dead. Photo TamilNet

Final rites for missing humanitarian officials

THE final rites for seven humanitarian workers abducted in January 2006 were held on 17 March, after three days of mourning.

Seven officials of the Tamils Rehabilitations Organisation (TRO), presumed to have been abducted by the paramilitary Karuna Group working in conjunction with the Sri Lanka Army, went missing on January 29 and 30 last year.

"The 7 aid workers remain 'disappeared' over a year after their abduction and, as a result of news reports and information conveyed to our organization, it is with great sorrow and condolences to the families that TRO now believes that our co-workers were executed soon after being abducted by the GoSL-affiliated 'Karuna Group' paramilitaries," the TRO said in a press release.

"Recent news reports state that they were tortured before being murdered and their bodies disposed of," the press release noted.

"TRO requests that the Police follow up on news reports and investigate the locations where the bodies may be buried," the press release stated.

The seven TRO officials who disappeared are Mr Thamiraja Vasantharajan, Mr Shanmuganathan Sujendran, Mr Kailasapillai Ravinthiran, Mr Arulthavarasa Satheskarana, Ms Thanushkodi Premini, Mr Thangarasa Kathirkamar and Mr Kasinathar Ganeshalingam.

Framed memorials with photographs were taken to relatives' homes in Kilinochchi on 14 March for people to pay their respects. The pictures were then taken in procession to the Kilinochchi Cultural Hall, where the final ceremony was held on Saturday.

Following lighting of the Common flame, relatives garlanded pictures of the seven staffers.

Press reports, and especially an investigative piece compiled by Tamil columnist D.B.S. Jeyaraj, based on interviews with former members of the Karuna Group, formally known as the Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Puligal (TMVP), said that the missing aid workers were executed by paramilitaries of the Karuna Group which took them captive.

The TVMP is an anti-LTTE paramilitary group set up by a renegade LTTE commander, Karuna, who defected to the Sri Lankan military after his six-week rebellion was crushed in an LTTE offensive in early 2004.

"The facts that I am privy to indicate that all seven abducted have been killed," Mr Jeyaraj reported.

"The solitary woman among them [Ms Thanushkodi Premini] was painfully gang raped before being killed," he said.

TRO President Mr. Sivanadiyar, speaking at the ceremony stated, "With respect to information on our abducted staff, though

we received much information on their status from the beginning, we took much effort and time to ensure and confirm the truth of all the information."

"In the year since the abductions we have observed a day of fasting and conducted media events in Colombo to publicize and appeal to the Sri Lankan and international community for the release of the abductees. Based on the news that has been published in the Sri Lankan newspapers and based on the research we have performed, we now strongly believe that our staff have lost their lives," he said.

"Despite the committed efforts taken by the International Red Cross, Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission, various Non-Governmental Organizations, UN Human Rights Groups, and the TRO, we were unable to save the lives of the seven dedicated workers," he added.

In the eulogy, Mr Sivanadiyar told the audience of the empathy the staffers had for the people who were suffering amidst violence and economic hardship, and the dedication with which the staffers served the people.

Tamil National Alliance parliamentarians Pathmini Sithamparamanathan, and K Gajendran, LTTE's senior member Balakumar, Head of Northeast Secretariat on Human Rights Rev. Fr. Kanagaratnam, and other officials of the TRO spoke at the event.

Violence round up - week ending 18 March

Summary of incidents - apart from major clashes - since 12 March

18 March

- Thirty-eight civilians, including 20 women, of all three communities, were arrested by Sri Lanka government troops in Mt. Lavinia, Colombo. The police said they were taken into custody as some failed to prove their identity and others could not justify their presence in the location. Cordon and search operations were also conducted in Moratuwa and Soysapura.

- Gunmen shot dead Vaiyramuthu Jeyachandran, 36, resident of LB3 Sivapuram, Kiliveddy, at Kiliveddy in Muthur, Trincomalee.

- A trader and a student disappeared in Pungankulam, Ariyalai, inside the Jaffna Municipal area, after being interrogated by SLA soldiers. They were identified as trader, Vigneswaran Subaskaran, 39, from Nunavil in Chavakacheri, and Thavarajah Nitharsan, 18, a student helping Subaskaran in his errands. Both had gone to Jaffna town to attend to business matters, later visited Subaskaran's mother's house in Ariyalai, and were returning to Nunavil along A9 when they were stopped by SLA soldiers near Pungankulam and interrogated for several hours. Traders in Ariyalai and other witnesses said an armoured Buffel vehicle entered the area and took the two civilians. Subaskaran had earlier been arrested by the SLA in December 2006, while he was staying with his mother, on false charges of possessing a hand grenade and released after being tortured.

- Kopalapillai Rameshthasan, 30, a family man, was abducted in Aanaikottai area in Jaffna, when he went to visit his family members in Velanai.

- A SLA soldier was killed at Sembimalai in Kuchchaveli, Trincomalee when an unidentified group of persons fired at a SLA foot patrol. The military claimed LTTE cadres had fired at the government troops.

17 March

- Amid an escalating number of killings in Jaffna peninsula, C. Meihandathevan, 28, a farmer, was shot at his home in Mirusuvil North, Thenmaradchy, in the fourth incident involving farmers.

16 March

- Reports from Jaffna said the SLA shot dead a youth who attempted to enter their Intelligence Unit main camp at Koolavady, Annaikottai, Valigamam, after lobbing a hand grenade, which did not explode. The SLA said the youth's jacket was packed with explosives.

- The SLA arrested three Tamil youths travelling in a private bus from Vavuniya to Mannar. The SLMM was informed of the arrest. Three Tamil youths stopped and boarded the bus at Murunkan. SLA soldiers stopped the bus at Koolankulam and arrested the three youths and took them away.

- Hundreds of SLA troopers who advanced into LTTE territory in Palamoddai, northwest of Vavuniya, were forced to hurriedly withdraw from the area, leaving behind military hardware. The Tigers put up stiff resistance against the SLA troopers, the LTTE's Military Spokesman, Irasiah Ilanthirayan, said. Four SLA troopers were killed and 20 wounded in the operation, the LTTE claimed. However, the SLA said it suffered casualties when LTTE attacked their positions.

- At least 19 SLA soldiers were injured, 4 of them seriously, when SLA troopers and the LTTE exchanged heavy artillery and rocket fire along the Thenmaradchi FDLs in the Jaffna peninsula. It is not known if LTTE suffered any casualties.

15 March

- The SLA launched heavy artillery and mortar fire towards the Mannar - Vavuniya border villages of Mullikulam, Keerisudan and Periya Pandivirichchan, causing hundreds of civilian families to flee. Artillery and mortar fire from Iranai Iluppaikulam targeted villages surrounding Mullikulam, inside LTTE controlled territory in Madu. Heavy artillery fire was also reported towards the areas surrounding the access point in Puliyankulam from Poovarasankulam SLA camp.

- The SLAF carried out three aerial attacks on Mullaitivu.

- SLA soldiers and police arrested thirteen Tamils from North and Eastern provinces in a pre-dawn search in Hathuduwa, Mt. Lavi-

NEWS



Shops in the heart of Colombo closed as owners protested the ongoing ransom demands, abductions and death threats they face from paramilitary groups, the military and the police. Photo TamilNet

Colombo shops close to protest ransom demands

PETTAH and Fort traders in Colombo staged a shut down on 16 March to protest against ransom demands and death threats, allegedly from the paramilitary Karuna Group working in conjunction with the police.

"Members of the Karuna group, in collaboration with the police, demand ransom from us and though we have complained to the police along with phone

numbers as evidence, no action has been taken," a shop owner said.

However, Kotahena police blocked traders from demonstrating in front of the police station, media reports said.

Many businessmen have paid the ransom demanded to secret bank accounts under death threats, the traders said.

The account number of a bank

in Singapore was given to deposit the money, some affected traders said.

Business activities ground to a halt in the busy area of Fort and Pettah as all shops remained closed in sympathy with the protests.

Traders' Union representatives sent an appeal to Defence Secretary Gothabaya Rajapakse to help stop ransom demands.

nia, a suburb of Colombo.

● Sivagnanam Rathikaran, 27, of Kasthuriyar Road, disappeared after he went to Jaffna city to attend personal errands.

● Thiraviyam Sasikumar, 37, a young family man of Point Pedro, left home for shopping in Point Pedro town and failed to return.

14 March

● The SLA refused permission to hundreds of Christian devotees to continue their annual foot pilgrimage to Calvary, in Komarasankulam, Vavuniya, citing security reasons. Devotees were forced to return to Mannar after they were stopped at Murunkan on their way to Vavuniya. The SLA also turned down appeals by Mannar Bishop Rt. Rev. Rayappu Joseph, church officials said.

● Three youths, from Kodikamam, Colombuthurai and Manipay, were accompanied by Jaffna SLHRC officials to safer areas, after they called for help fearing danger to their lives. The youths went underground fearing death at the hands of the SLA, after their names were called out during cordon and search operations in their respective areas earlier.

● The body of Mohamed Ali Nanthakumar, 26, with gun shot wounds, was recovered within the SLA HSZ at Konan Thottam

Veethy in the heart of Jaffna town. He had been missing since the previous evening when he went to escort his brother's daughter from school. Residents speculate Nanthakumar, of A.V. Road, Colombuthurai, was abducted and killed elsewhere before being brought in a vehicle and dumped at Konan Thottam Veethy. There is constant movement of SLA troops during curfew hours in the area where the body was recovered and could not have been dumped there without the SLA's knowledge, residents added.

● Police recovered mutilated male body packed in a green plastic bag, normally used by the SLA, caught in the fishing net along the coast at Punguduthivu, an islet of Jaffna. The body, with head, hands and legs severed, bore deep cut wounds in the stomach and appeared to belong to a male under 30. The bag containing the corpse was filled with stones and tied with barbed wire to stay in deep ocean bottom, but had been washed ashore due to rough seas.

● Thiraviyam Susikumar, 32, of Muthumariamman Kovilady in Alvai, Jaffna, was arrested by Navalady junction SLA camp troopers, according to his wife, who reported to the SLHRC that she witnessed SLA troopers taking her husband's motorbike into the camp.

● Anantharasa Anton Mariagnanarasa, 35, a fisherman and father of four, from Kudathanai in Vadammaradchy east, Jaffna, was stopped at the SLA sentry post near Valipuram Temple while returning home from Point Pedro, and taken away in a Buffel Armoured Personnel Carrier. His wife reported to the SLHRC that relatives had seen her husband being taken away by SLA soldiers.

● STF troopers shot dead a youth at VC junction in Kannaki village, Thirukovil, Amparai.

13 March

● Mortar shells launched by the LTTE hit the SLA Omanthai brigade base, seriously injuring a trooper. The SLA launched random shelling on Omathai following the attack.

● A fisherman, Charles Peiris, 34, and 2-year old son Joyson were injured when the SLN fired at a group of people in Pesalai, Mannar. SLN crafts patrolling the Pesalai Sea noted persons loading goods in boats along the coast. The soldiers started firing at them, and a father and a son who were inside their house near by were injured.

● A Muslim textile dealer disappeared in Mallakam area, according to a complaint lodged by his wife at the Jaffna branch of the

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SLHRC. Abdul Galam Subaideen, 26, a young family man, married to a Tamil woman, set out from home on business and did not return.

12 March

● Thirteen Tamil civilians, including three women, were arrested in a cordon and search operation by the SLA and Police at Kohuwela, Colombo. All are natives of the North East and were temporarily staying with friends and family or in lodges when they were arrested. Some of the arrested have failed to prove their identity, the police said.

● A postman and another civilian were killed in a claymore attack by a SLA DPU at fourth mile post along Madhu-Parapukadanthan road in LTTE held territory in Mannar. The postman, Fernando Arulanathan Croos, 48, was earlier a resident of Adamban and had sought refuge in Madhu refugee camp with his family following heavy artillery fire by the

government forces towards his village. He was cycling towards Vattakandal Sub-Post Office to report for work when he hit the claymore.

● The body of a SLA DPU soldier, killed by the LTTE Saturday at Periyathambanai, in LTTE held territory in Mannar, was handed over to army officers. The soldier was identified as Corporal Senaratne of Kadugannawa, Kandy.

● Gunmen shot dead a textile vendor in front of the Jaffna Teaching Hospital. The men shot Lawrence Mariyaselvam, 32, a young family man from Naval North, Manipay, in broad day light and escaped the site on bicycle.

● A body of youth strangled to death, was found in a toilet pit in an abandoned house in Chunnam South, Valikamam, Jaffna. Neighbours alerted officials after detecting a bad stench, and the body was found after a search. The body is believed to belong to one of the youths abducted in the peninsula by SLA soldiers and SLA-backed paramilitaries.



Students at this temporary school in Chundikulam for Tamils driven from their homes by Sri Lankan military shelling was bombed by the Air Force. see p11 Photo TamilNet



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