

Tamil Air Force changes Sri Lankan war's dynamics

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Thriving industry of extorting Tamils

Amidst kidnappings and ransom demands, Tamil businesses in Colombo are downing shutters. And the Sri Lankan government is accused of complicity.

I Dilrukshi Handunnetti
Himal Southasian

SIXTY-YEAR-OLD Egamabaram Palaniraja, the owner of Mythili Jewellers in the heart of Colombo, went missing on 12 September last year, along with his 23-year-old son Balasarava-nan and employee, Ganesan Muhundan.

All three were abducted while returning home at around nine in the evening, just metres away from the Sri Lankan prime minister's office.

Two days later, Palaniraja was released 250 km from Colombo, in Polonnaruwa in the North Central Province, and ordered to arrange an "undisclosed" amount of ransom money to secure the release of his son and employee.

After extracting millions of rupees, the abductors released both of the youths but retained the vehicle.

For a citizenry that slid into a virtual war last July despite the existence of a truce to which both the government and the LTTE rebels continue to pay lip service, the past few months have been a nightmare.

Beyond the stepped-up military engagements, there have been dramatically increased levels of forced disappearances, extortions, extrajudicial killings, general harassment and intimidation.

Amidst widespread human-rights violations in Sri Lanka today, one of the most significant, and most under-reported is the ongoing

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A Sri Lankan special forces trooper on patrol in Colombo. Wealthy Tamils or their relatives are being abducted by suspected Army-backed paramilitaries with impunity in Sri Lanka's capital. Photo SANKA VIDANAGAMA/AFP/Getty Images

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NEWS

A thriving industry...

Continued from page 1

ing intimidation, extortion and abduction of affluent Colombo-area Tamil businessmen.

This phenomenon was recently referred to as a "thriving industry".

Palaniraja is among the lucky few. Many abducted Tamils never return home, even after paying multi-million-rupee ransoms.

S Srikandarajah, a leading sugar merchant, and his driver were abducted in July 2006. But they failed to secure their freedom even after SLR 30 million was paid for their release.

While Thirunavakurusu Puvaneshwaran, a successful Tamil businessperson, was released after SLR 1.5 million was extracted as ransom money, trader Maxie Bolton has still not been let go although the requested money was deposited.

With the phenomenon of disappearances prevailing in Colombo, its sizeable and economically powerful Tamil population is seized by fear.

Not only is it susceptible to forced disappearances by the Sri Lankan Army, the LTTE break-away Karuna group and occasionally the Eelam Peoples' Democratic Party (EPDP) for alleged connections with the LTTE, its commercial success also puts it at risk.

Some of the abducted have been released after severe warnings, while the mutilated bodies of other victims have been recovered near culverts, waterways, paddy fields and roadsides, transmitting a potent message to the living.

Since the resumption of virtual wartime conditions in July 2006, the Civil Monitoring Committee (CMC), a multi-party human-rights group that works in Colombo and its suburbs, has recorded over 80 disappearances.

Although there has recently been something of a lull in the numbers of abductions reported, the trend in extortion is on the up and up.

A likely indicator of the excessive intimidation has been the increase in the number of Sri Lankan Tamil business families fleeing the island. According to CMC records, over 30 Tamil businessmen have left the island during the past two months, to shift their base of operations to India, Singapore, Malaysia, Europe or West Asia.

These victims tended to lay the blame on the Karuna group and, to a lesser degree, army deserters as well as activists with the EPDP. In Colombo today, Karuna activists far overshadow any other outfit in carrying out extortions, with occasional collaboration from government security forces.

While analysts point out that the disappearances do not necessarily have a political element to them - with victims being not just Tamils with origins in northeastern Sri Lanka, but also those of

"Abductions continue in the capital, Colombo. As of February 7, the Civil Monitoring Committee, an organization documenting disappearances, had recorded 51 abduction cases in and around the city over the previous year. Thirty-four of the people were still missing and six had turned up dead. Most of the others were released after paying a ransom. Human Rights Watch recently interviewed more than one dozen families of persons missing from Colombo and other parts of the country, who were last seen being taken away by the military or police." - Human Rights Watch, April 18, 2007

"Members of the [paramilitary] Karuna group, in collaboration with the Sri Lankan police, demand ransom from us and though we have complained to the police along with phone numbers as evidence, no action has been taken." - Pettah and Fort traders, protesting in Colombo on March 16, 2007

Several Tamil traders and businessmen have fled to India following a spate of killings and abductions, IANS reported in September 2006. Sinhalese gangs in Trincomalee are targeting prominent Tamils and many ordinary Tamils in the capital were gripped by a "fear psychosis" the agency reported.

Indian origin and the occasional wealthy Moor - others note that government complicity is aiding the culture of impunity.

Either way, says CMC chairman Sirithunga Jayasooriya, the evidence is incontrovertible as to who is being targeted: "Many victims are from two predominantly Tamil areas, Colombo 6 and Colombo 13. They are also business hubs."

Many of the victims have only returned to the island following the 2002 Ceasefire Agreement (CFA), with an eye to investing in their homeland.

One Sri Lankan Tamil who keeps houses in Britain and Sri Lanka, who did not want to be named, says that a white van has recently been seen repeatedly near his Colombo residence. The passengers of the vehicle had questioned the man's neighbours about his return from the UK, and also about his Sri Lankan businesses.

"I took a couple of years to formulate a business plan," he explained. "The business climate created by the truce is what inspired me to return after decades in the UK. Now I have returned here only to be hounded by white vans wanting to find out details about my investments."

He is now contemplating returning to the UK, and abandoning his Sri Lankan venture.

Many others have, of course,

already thrown in the towel.

A reputed Colombo jeweller, who has received several threatening telephone calls demanding millions of rupees, says that it is not possible to continue his business in Sri Lanka anymore.

"I have already selected a location in Chennai to relocate my business," he said. "It is sad because I ran two jewellery shops for 30 years in Colombo without any problem, and even survived the 1983 communal riots."

Not only do Tamil businesspeople in Colombo feel physically and commercially threatened, says CMC convener and Colombo District legislator Mano Ganesan, but matters have been compounded by significant police inaction.

"There is a complete breakdown in the law-and-order situation," he says.

"We have provided telephone numbers, some bank-account numbers of extortionists, and eye-witness accounts in certain instances to assist the authorities. They have done absolutely nothing to bring the culprits to book."

As the pressure mounts, Ministry of Defence spokesman Keheliya Rambukwella admits to "some problems".

But while he adds that a presidential inquiry into the matter "could be appointed", he refuses to discuss when this will happen. He also denies widespread charges that the government has failed to take action.

"It is easy to blame the government," he said. "Civil society can help the authorities by providing vital information."

Even while the CMC has been attempting to provide just those details, the allegations of government complicity have received added momentum from within the government itself, particularly from Deputy Vocational and Technical Training Minister P Radhakrishnan, himself a Tamil.

Upon receiving complaints from other Tamils who had recorded their own interactions with extortionists, Radhakrishnan took the matter up with President Mahinda Rajapakse, providing the telephone numbers of several extortionists, along with an appeal for immediate intervention.

The only outcome: Radhakrishnan was summoned by the police to explain how he got the telephone numbers.

With the Sri Lankan government failing to control the situation, the opposition is getting vocal, as is the demand for international intervention.

The possibility of international involvement in highlighting the disappearances has brought some hope to even victims' families, says Ganesan. "Given the gravity of the issue, what we ask is so little," he says.

"But for a government that is hell-bent on abetting the crimes by sheer non-action, this may prove impossible."

(Edited)

NEWS

SLFP 'power-sharing' proposals shock

SRI LANKA'S ruling party unveiled its long awaited constitutional reform proposals this week, setting out a vision of centralized power that startled even those skeptical of the hardline government's preparedness to share power with the Tamils.

Constitutional experts, Sri Lanka's main opposition and Tamil political parties were taken aback by the proposals put forward by the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) to a standing all party conference on constitutional reform, the APRC.

Even the anti-LTTE Tamil paramilitary groups allied with the SLFP government of President Mahinda Rajapakse were compelled to denounce the proposals.

As ever, however, the ultra-Sinhala nationalist parties were quick to condemn the proposals as going too far towards sharing power.

Amid the criticism from several political parties including the Sinhala hardline JVP and JHU, the SLFP said the proposals would be 'slightly adjusted' before being submitted to the APRC.

The SLFP's ultra-conservative proposals are likely to disappoint members of the international community who are backing President Rajapakse's efforts to militarily destroy the Tamil Tigers.

The international community has repeatedly urged the government to put forward a credible power sharing proposal in a bid to tempt the Tamils and create a split between the LTTE and the community, which is enduring considerable suffering as a result of Sri Lanka's military onslaught against the Tigers.

There have been no formal international reactions to the SLFP's proposals.

Indeed, with leading SLFP figures stating a few weeks ago that the proposals would be in line with President Rajapakse's hardline election manifesto of 2005 - 'Mahinda Chinthanaya' (Mahinda's Thoughts) - expectations were low.

But the SLFP's vision didn't meet even these.

The LTTE has not officially commented on the SLFP package and the Tigers' military spokesman, Rasiah Ilanthiraiyan, told Reuters: "As long as the Colombo masters push ahead with their military agenda, we will not even consider moves such as these."

Analysts said the proposals would likely only widen the chasm between the foes because they fell far short of wider ethnic Tamil demands.

And the Hindustan Times quoted a top source at the LTTE's political headquarters as saying: "The proposal devolves power to the districts and not to the provinces. We cannot accept any proposal which does not envisage devolution to a unified north-eastern Province."

"This is going to be a total disaster," said Rohan Edrisinha of independent think-tank the Centre for Policy Alternatives.

"Psychologically this is going to be a huge blow to the peace process, because it would suggest that the SLFP is going back to the early 1980s if not 1970s."

"The SLFP is offering less than what is already in place in the form of the 13th amendment to the constitution (which set up provincial governments)," he added.

"Viewed from the point of view of conflict resolution, it's really quite astounding."

The proposals were swiftly criticized by the opposition United National Party (UNP) as well as the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) and the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) - the latter are Sri Lanka's largest Tamil and Muslim parties respectively.

Indeed, Tamils across the political spectrum rejected President Rajapaksa's devolution package because it does not envisage a federal set up, a meaningful sharing of power, and the re-unification of the Tamil-speaking north-eastern Province, the Hindustan Times reported.

These parties are for the continuance of the Province as the unit of devolution. The UNP instituted the Provincial Councils system in 1988 as part of the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord.

The Accord also decreed the merger of the Northern and Eastern Province into a single entity, in recognition this region is the 'historical habitation of the Tamil speaking people of the island.'

And the Tamils have been demanding a substantial amount of provincial autonomy - such as substantive federalism - in lieu of full independence from Sri Lanka.

The Muslims are eager not to counter the Tamil demand for provincial autonomy because a good number of them live in the Tamil-speaking north and east, the Hindustan Times noted.

Even pro-government Tamil parties like the TULF, EPRLF (P) and PLOTE said in a statement that the Tamils rejected the proposal "totally" as it did not envisage a federal set up.

The powers to be devolved to the regions had been reduced from what was already nominally in place, they said.

"Fifty years of agitation by the Tamil speaking people to win their rights, has brought them back to square one," the statement said.

"After so much of loss of life and destruction to properties and having failed to find a solution under a unitary system, the Tamils will not accept any solution less than one under a federal constitution."

The SLFP's proposals make it clear that Sri Lanka will be a decidedly unitary state (though it avoids using the term) and not a federation.

The unit of devolution will be the district and not the province, as is the case now.

The number of districts can go up from the present 25 to 30. Each district council (DC) will

have a 'chief minister.' He or she will be appointed by the president from among DC members.

In devolving power, the current supremacy of parliament, the executive powers of the President (including those relating to public security), and the powers of the judiciary will not be compromised.

The all-powerful executive presidency may be pruned or replaced by the Westminster system, if there is a consensus on this issue.

There will be a second chamber at the Centre, the Senate. All district chief ministers will be members of the senate, which will also have members nominated by political parties. The Senate can review, suggest and delay legislation, but not legislate or veto any legislation.

And before power is devolved to a district, all armed groups operating there (i.e. the LTTE), will have to surrender their arms.

In other words, the LTTE must disarm before any power-sharing can begin.

The APRC, meanwhile, is moribund with the JVP having pulled out, saying it will not be party to any efforts to divide the country and the UNP refusing to fully commit to it.

After Rajapakse won the 2005 Presidential elections, the international community put pressure on him to forge a southern consensus with the UNP on a proposal to of the LTTE in the North and East of Sri Lanka.

In response, President Rajapakse setup the All Party Representative Committee in early 2006.

The APRC consisted of all the Sinhala parties including the centre-right UNP and the ultra-nationalist JVP as well as anti-LTTE paramilitary parties.

The TNA, which swept the 2004 elections in the Northeast, were not invited.



President Rajapakse's proposals for ending Sri Lanka's war take more power away from the ethnic minorities. Photo Sudath Silva

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UK ROLE IN SRI LANKA

UK MPs want ban on LTTE lifted for talks

AMID signs of greater British involvement in efforts to end Sri Lanka's conflict, the UK government was this week urged by ruling and opposition lawmakers to lift the ban on the Liberation Tigers in the interests of a negotiated solution.

At a landmark debate on Sri Lanka's conflict in the British Parliament last Wednesday, leaders of a newly formed all party group representing the interests of the island's Tamils urged the Blair government to lift the ban on the LTTE and also called for LTTE political leaders to be allowed to address the British parliament to better understand their views.

Lawmakers from the ruling Labour party and opposition Liberal Democrats, Britain's third largest party, argued that the ban on the LTTE was preventing dialogue towards a solution to Sri Lanka's conflict by preventing engagement with the LTTE and with Tamils more generally as the latter feared speaking out for fear of falling foul of anti-terrorism laws.

During the debate MPs from the main opposition Conservative Party supported the ban but endorsed dialogue with the Tigers regardless.

A day before the debate, British lawmakers from all main parties formed Westminster's first ever all-party group for Tamils with the stated aim of "promoting peace with justice and dignity for the Tamils in the island of Sri Lanka."

Mr. Keith Vaz MP of the Labour Party and Mr. Simon Hughes MP of the Liberal Democrats were elected Chair and Vice-Chair respectively of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG).

According to press reports, amongst the group's plans were: "(i) Arranging a summit in London between representatives of the Sri Lankan Government, the LTTE and the Norwegian Government, (ii) invite the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Donald C McKinnon, to meet with the group to discuss the situation on the island and (iii) visiting Sri Lanka; in particular the worst affected areas of the conflict."

On Wednesday, opening the three hour debate at Westminster on Sri Lanka's conflict, junior Foreign Minister Kim Howells said the LTTE had to end its violence before the UK ban could be lifted.

"We have repeatedly urged the LTTE to move away from the path of violence. In the absence of a full renunciation of terrorism in deed and word, there can be no question of reconsidering its proscribed status," he said.

Despite Dr. Howells comments, the call for the ban on the LT-

TE to be lifted was resumed later by Mr. Vaz and Mr. Hughes amongst others.

Mr. Vaz put it to Dr. Howells: "One of the bars to a proper solution to this problem is the ban that remains on the LTTE. [Have you] had any further discussions with Home Secretary [John Reid] about whether the Government would be prepared to lift that ban, so ensuring that all parties could be part of a discussion to bring peace to the island?"

Dr. Howells said he had not discussed the matter with Mr. Reid, "but if I thought that it was a good idea I would certainly do so."

He pointed out that regardless of the ban, UK officials continued to meet with LTTE representatives on an ad hoc basis. He cited visits last year to LTTE-controlled Vanni by Mr. Paul Murphy, MP.

However John McDonnell, another Labour party MP, argued "although there can be informal

'One of the bars to a proper solution to this problem is the ban that remains on the LTTE' - Labour MP

dialogue, nothing can substitute for more formal dialogue and recognition. Removing the ban would undermine one of the elements of the sense of grievance that contributes towards the conflict."

In response, Dr. Howells said: "This [de-proscription] has to be considered very carefully. ... there is no silver bullet that is going to sort everything out. If we thought that that recognition [of the LTTE] would take matters forward, we would certainly be prepared to consider it very seriously - I give [you] that undertaking."

Mr. Edward Davey, an MP from the Liberal Democrats called on the minister to set out the review process by which de-proscription might take place, saying "some people in communities throughout this country and around this House feel that a one sided approach is being taken and that a proper review process might ensure that a truly balanced approach is taken."

Saying "we have had quite a number of meetings with Tamil groups from around the country; as well as talking to the Sri Lankan Government, we have met all kinds of representatives," Dr. Howells insisted Britain was taking a



UK Tamils at a rally in support of the LTTE. The bans on the LTTE are silencing their views.

balanced approach to Sri Lanka's conflict.

"Our approach seeks not to take sides either with the Sinhalese Government or with the LTTE but to try to use our good offices and our experience in Northern Ireland, among other places, to try to find ways in which it might be possible to help the Norwegians to make the ceasefire work, and then to take that peace process forward, put the issues on the table, and get everyone around the table to try to resolve the issue."

The Minister was supported by the main opposition Conservative party. Tory MP Peter Luff argued: "I congratulate the Minister on his balanced approach to a sensitive and difficult subject. ... As long as organisations practise such blatant violence and disruption of civil society, it is difficult to give them the recognition that they crave."

Responding later to this, Mr. Simon Hughes, a senior member of the Liberal Democrats argued past violence couldn't be allowed to be a bar to future dialogue.

"That [history] cannot be used now as a justification for not talking to people, because that will mean that no progress will be made," Mr. Hughes argued. "I understand why the [LTTE] was proscribed, but I agree that it [the ban] has been more unhelpful than helpful."

"The proscription of organisa-

tions gives people a further cause to take up arms. I remember when Sinn Fein could not be heard to speak-its representatives were banned by the [then] Conservative Government. Did that reduce support for Sinn Fein? Of course it did not. Did it make it go quiet? No. In fact, it gained support."

"Banning people makes them go underground. I am sure that the UK and the EU as a whole would benefit from the unbanning of the LTTE if that were to be part of a package of movement towards peace on all sides," Mr. Hughes argued.

Elaborating to the House on the proposed activities of the APPG for Tamils, Mr. Vaz said "we were determined to take the issue [of peace] forward, and on that basis we agreed three things."

"First, at the end of September a delegation of all party members should visit Sri Lanka, particularly areas under the control of the Tamil Tigers, to engage in a dialogue in a positive and constructive way.

"We also agreed to invite the chief negotiator for the Tamil Tigers [Mr. S. P. Tamilselvan, also head of the LTTE Political Wing] to visit the United Kingdom and to come to Parliament so that we could hear his views on what is happening.

"The third thing that we agreed was to hold a summit meeting here in July at which all the vari-

ous parties could participate as a means of exploring how to take the issue forward."

Referring to the extensive

'UK and the EU as a whole would benefit from the unbanning of the LTTE if that were to be part of a package of movement towards peace' - Lib Dem MP

contributions Britain's Tamil community was making to the country and their efforts to lobby the government, Mr. Vaz said: "I firmly believe that the ban on the Tamil Tigers - certainly as regards the way in which they operate in this country - should be lifted as soon as possible."

"The proscription by the Government of various organisations in 2001 happened because of certain events that were occurring worldwide at the time, and we reacted by imposing that ban on a number of organizations."

"I know that Governments sometimes have to react in a knee-jerk manner, but six years have now passed and it is time to reconsider the ban and to look at ways

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UK ROLE IN SRI LANKA

Arms sales equal UK's tsunami aid

BRITAIN licensed £7 million worth of weapons and military equipment for export to Sri Lanka this year alone, it was revealed during a debate in Parliament last Wednesday. The sum matches the amount of British aid provided in the wake of December 2004 tsunami.

Also Thursday the UK government said it was holding back half its £3 million annual aid allocation for this year citing British concerns over human rights in Sri Lanka.

"Inquiries that I have made reveal that £7 million-worth of [UK] arms were licensed for delivery to Sri Lanka in the last quarter for which figures are available," Joan Ruddock, a ruling Labour party MP, told the House Wednesday during a landmark debate on Sri Lanka.

"Licenses were for armoured all-wheel drive vehicles, components for heavy machine guns, components for military distress signalling equipment, and many other types of equipment, includ-

ing military aircraft ground equipment and communications equipment, and small arms ammunition," she said.

"All of that is military equipment that could conceivably be used in the conflict," she said.

"I know that our Government have obeyed the rules-the EU and the national criteria by which we agree export licences. There is no question of wrongdoing. However, ... I ask the Minister to consider whether those export licences and similar licences should continue when a live conflict is clearly under way in the country."

However, government ministers did not respond to Ms. Ruddock's question.

Earlier in the debate, junior foreign minister Kim Howells said British Foreign Minister Margaret Beckett had met with Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister and "reiterated Britain's commitment to peace and our willingness to get involved in that whole process."

"She spoke of the terrible hu-

manitarian impact of the conflict on the civilian population and the need for both sides to do more to protect that population. She repeated the message that there can be no military solution to conflict," Dr. Howells said.

Later in the debate, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development Gareth Thomas said in the wake of the December 2004 tsunami, Britain "committed aid of about £7 million immediately after [it] struck."

Of this sum, about £500,000 is outstanding, Mr. Thomas said. It had been allocated to "to develop the capacity of the North-East Provincial Council to lead the recovery process," he added.

The council has since been disbanded when the North-East Province itself was demerged by the Sri Lankan government last

year.

Meanwhile the British government said Thursday it will withhold £1.5 million of aid this year.

Britain agreed in 2005 to provide Sri Lanka £41 m (\$81.6 million) in debt relief until 2015, in yearly instalments of 3-6 million pounds, as long as Colombo met a series of conditions, Reuters reported.

Britain was due to make a payment of 3 million pounds this year, or around \$6 million, and has paid just half.

"What we have said for this year is we are making half of the agreed payment because there is an ongoing consultation process about progress towards meeting the conditions agreed between the two governments," the spokesman for the British High Commission in Colombo said.

During Wednesday's debate British ministers told Parliament the government had a coordinated approach to Sri Lanka's conflict.

"We complement our high-level engagement with more practical assistance through a joint Department for International Development, Ministry of Defence and Foreign and Commonwealth Office peace-building strategy for Sri Lanka," Dr. Howells said.

"[These departments] combine our operations in the country, and we are using funds from [our] global conflict prevention pool to support a series of programmes that will help to bring the sides together, slowly to try to create the conditions for a sustainable peace," Mr. Thomas said.

"We want a peaceful solution to the conflict. ... We will continue to be engaged in the search for peace in Sri Lanka."

UK: 'Come on you Sri Lankan Lions!'

THE British diplomatic mission in Colombo shed diplomatic neutrality last Friday to support Sri Lanka's cricket team in their World Cup final against Australia, AFP reported.

"We're hoping for a repeat of the 1996 World Cup final result. Come on you Sri Lankan Lions. Let's hear you roar," a message from the UK High Commission said.

British High Commissioner Dominick Chilcott led his mission's staff in signing greetings to skipper Mahela Jayawardene and his teammates ahead of last Saturday's game in Barbados.

"The British High Commission wish the Sri Lankan cricket team the best of luck in Saturday's cricket World Cup final," the High Commission said in a statement signed by all its staff.

"We're hoping for a repeat of the 1996 World Cup final result. Come on you Sri Lankan Lions. Let's hear you roar," the message said, referring to Sri Lanka's surprise win in that competition, which was held in Britain.

The lion is the symbol of the Sinhala community in the island which has been torn by ethnic strife since independence from Britain in 1948. Sri Lanka's flag features a golden lion brandishing a sword.

It was introduced in 1972 as the government of the time changed the country's name from Ceylon and introduced a majoritarian constitution, dumping the safeguards for the island's minorities in the British-inspired Ceylonese

constitution.

In an interview last year, Mr. Chilcott observed: "Britain thought that the rights of the Tamils in particular would be safeguarded by these arrangements. However history has proved otherwise that these safeguards were inadequate and not robust enough. I regret that Britain's policies have to such an extent been the cause for the problems."

Noting that "in over half the number of countries in the world the British colonial rulers adopted a 'divide and rule' policy," he also said "In that regard this policy was not unique to the island alone."

On Friday Mr. Chilcott, dressed in the Sri Lankan team's blue and yellow T-shirt, raised his hands in the air with 52 staff members in support of the Sri Lankan team, AFP reported.

Last week Mr. Chilcott became embroiled in controversy when he visited the officers of Daily Mirror editor, Ms Cham-pika Liyanarachchi, after she received a threatening phone call from Sri Lanka's hardline Defence Secretary, Gotathabaya Rajapaksa, over reports in her paper.

Mr. Chilcott was summoned by Mr. Rajapaksa to his offices the following day. Both men agreed to keep the contents of their discussion out of the press.

The UK High Commission subsequently denied a report in the state-owned Daily Mirror that Mr. Chilcott had admitted he had been misled about threats to the editor.



UK's junior Foreign Minister, Kim Howells, seen with Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapakse, first raised the idea of British involvement in resolving the conflict during a visit to the island in early 2007

UK MPs want LTTE ban lifted ...

Continued from page 4

in which we can help to ensure that the dialogue proceeds."

Referring to Northern Ireland, Mr. Vaz said: "It is possible to move on [from violent conflict], but we cannot move on unless we have a dialogue, and we cannot have a dialogue if we proscribe and ban the groups involved."

Susan Kramer, a Liberal Democrat MP, supported Mr. Vaz, saying: "many members of the Tamil community who have absolutely no interest in terrorism and who do not even consider themselves to be members of the LTTE are inhibited from speaking out because they are afraid of being tagged with the terrorist label."

"It is wrong for such people to be treated in that way and to feel that fear. Whoever is spinning that fear-whether it be the Sri Lankan Government or others-should stop. Participating in the

British political process is the right of every British citizen," Mr. Vaz said.

Joan Ruddock, Labour MP, later added: "My constituents make a plea to us and the rest of the European Community not to curb the peaceful and democratic activities of Tamils living in the Diaspora."

Edward Davey, Liberal Democrat MP, said the Lankan government was labeling those who support of Tamils or human rights as LTTE sympathizers.

"I believe that the Sri Lankan authorities, possibly through their representatives in this country, are trying to prevent people from speaking out to prevent freedom of speech. We must convey a message that we will debate such issues in this country, that that is our democratic right, and that the Sri Lankan authorities should accept it and not try to intimidate people who speak out by trying to label

them LTTE sympathisers or terrorists."

Mr. Davey said that when the LTTE was banned in 2001, the British Parliament had not been given a chance to discuss the case of individual organizations but on a 'catch-all' bill listing 20 organizations from around the world.

"There was no single debate about the LTTE, just one debate on the whole [list]. We did not have 20-odd separate votes after 20-odd separate debates - just one. Of course those regulations included a number of organizations that needed to be proscribed, as the whole House agreed, but I believe there is a debate - a legitimate debate - about whether the LTTE should be proscribed, and it ought to be heard."

"The process that proscribed the LTTE in the first place was inadequate. That, in itself, is an argument in favour of a review at the very least."

EDITORIAL & OPINION

TAMIL GUARDIAN

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Fallen Fig Leaf

International hopes rest on Rajapakse's war strategy

Sri Lanka's ruling party unveiled its much-heralded 'power-sharing' proposals last week, startling even the most cynical of observers with the starkness of its vision of centralized power. They were greeted by a chorus of outrage. But while southern moderates lambasted the Sri Lanka Freedom Party's (SLFP) proposals, Sinhala nationalists howled that they had not explicitly committed to a unitary state - even though, in effect, it further strips power from minorities. President Mahinda Rajapakse is reportedly going to address the omission before submitting it to the All Party Representative Committee (APRC). Despite the United States' repeated endorsements of the APRC, it is now universally accepted that it was merely a device to forestall international criticism. It is, in any case, a dead horse.

With these proposals, President Rajapakse has signaled his wholehearted commitment to the military option. This, in effect, is his vision of Sri Lanka, to be rolled out following the eradication of the Tamil Tigers. In private, international observers admit to being stunned. Even if he was committed to a Sinhala nationalist utopia, some argue, for the sake of keeping up appearances, Rajapakse could have put forward some measure of devolution, no matter how weak. Instead, his proposals have compelled even his Tamil paramilitary allies to howl in protest and embarrassed those in the SLFP who still describe themselves as moderates. And officially, there has been pin drop silence from the international community, including the United States, the most enthusiastic supporters of the APRC charade.

From the outset, however, the SLFP has been saying that its proposals will be in keeping with President Rajapakse's 2005 election manifesto, 'Mahinda Chinthanaya' (Mahinda's Thoughts). It has been true to its word. The surprise therefore comes from a misguided belief that, once safely ensconced in office, President Rajapakse would moderate his position. The simple fact is, he sees, with some justification, no reason to. Firstly, once the LTTE is destroyed, he is confident any damn solution can be imposed on the Tamils and Muslims (whose leaders have grown remarkably quiet once they entered the ruling coalition). Secondly, he is getting every international assistance to do just that. He is, after all, fighting the good fight, the 'war on terror.'

Sri Lanka is sliding inexorably towards

an all out war. Even a superficial analysis of current dynamics shows that President Rajapakse is focusing single-mindedly on a battlefield victory (as, for that matter, is the LTTE). Every action by the government is intended to foreclose the possibility of a peace process and strengthen the war effort. This is why diplomats - including the indefatigable Norwegians - are barred from talking to the Tigers. This is why international NGOs are being harassed into avoiding the Northeast, why peace groups are being stamped on. Sinhala nationalists are being urged to protest against international actors, like Britain, who advocate peace talks.

The international response to President Rajapakse's all out military drive has been one of total acquiescence. The green light that the US gave Colombo to wage war against the Tigers is visible to everyone. No Sri Lankan government has had it so good in this regard. International criticism is about the widespread human rights abuses - not the recourse to war. And even that criticism is reprehensibly mild. The UK's much-lauded, but minor cutting of aid last week doesn't worry Colombo. Why should it - if the block on £1.5 million of aid is intended to express disapproval, what does the recent sale of £7 million of weapons say? And when the other donors, including several European countries, continue their aid programs.

Ultimately, operating with a problem definition that blames the LTTE, rather than the oppressive Sri Lankan state, for the island's war, international actors are loosely united behind Colombo. It can't hurt, they say, if the LTTE is weakened, if not crippled. The logic stems from the same naïve belief in the inevitability of liberal compromise pragmatically mushrooming in a post-conflict Sri Lanka that lead to starry eyed expectations of the President Rajapakse's proposals.

Thus the only check on President Rajapakse and the Sinhala state, is the LTTE's capacity for resistance. And for some time, the death knell of the LTTE has been sounded by an army of armchair strategists. Some of this insight has been challenged by recent developments, including the military's lack of traction in western Vanni, the continuing volatility of the newly captured east and, of course, the LTTE's airstrikes. But much international hope is still pinned on President Rajapakse's strategy. Which is why all out war is now inevitable.

Britain must

This cardinal issue must be dealt with squarely if Sri Lanka's bitter conflict is to be ended.

J. T. Janani
Tamil Guardian

The debate on Sri Lanka in Britain's Parliament on May 2nd resulted from two impulses: firstly, the UK government's increasing interest in playing a role in ending Sri Lanka's conflict and, secondly, the persistent lobbying and activism of the Tamil Diaspora.

The wide ranging debate saw parliamentarians from the ruling Labour party and the Liberal Democrats, the third largest party in Britain taking strong pro-Tamil positions. They were several calls for the ban on the LTTE to be lifted.

The main opposition Conservative party and the UK government itself condemned the LTTE as terrorists.

All sides condemned the worsening human rights situation in Sri Lanka. It was argued that the Sri Lankan state had failed to meet Tamil aspirations. Some MPs outlined the decades of repression and oppression of the Tamils by successive Sri Lankan governments.

But there was a key omission from the debate: that the Tamil people's right to self-rule must be supported.

This cardinal issue must be dealt with squarely if Sri Lanka's bitter conflict is to be ended.

Firstly, it is the inalienable right of the Tamil people to determine our own political destiny, to govern ourselves, to be free.

Secondly, the ground reality in Sri Lanka is that of two states - the Sinhala dominated, recognised state and the de-facto LTTE run administration in Vanni. The avoidable reality of two separate armies, navies and, now, air forces cannot simply be wished away.

The international community's unqualified commitment to the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka, irrespective of the conduct of the state towards the Tamils simply ignores these two aspects.

This very point was raised in the fourth report of the British Parliamentary Foreign Affairs committee published two days after the debate on Sri Lanka (and independently of it).

The report includes British experts' opinion that a key problem in resolving Sri Lanka's conflict is that the bargaining

power of the LTTE had not been recognised by the Sri Lankan government and the international community.

According to a British security expert cited by the report, "all the negotiating pitches and all the encouragement from the international community - from India and so on - have been in relation to returning Sri Lanka to, or maintaining, the territorial or nation state status of the country."

"This effectively means that the LTTE's bargaining position is very strong, but the level at which it is being asked to negotiate is actually much lower."

"Effectively what [the LTTE] is being asked to do is go back to

If there cannot be international support for a separate state, there shouldn't be backing for a united one either.

the situation before [the war began in] 1983 and the status quo ante, which of course the LTTE is never going to do. It is never going to do it when it also knows that it has broken the monopoly of force once controlled by the Sri Lankan Government."

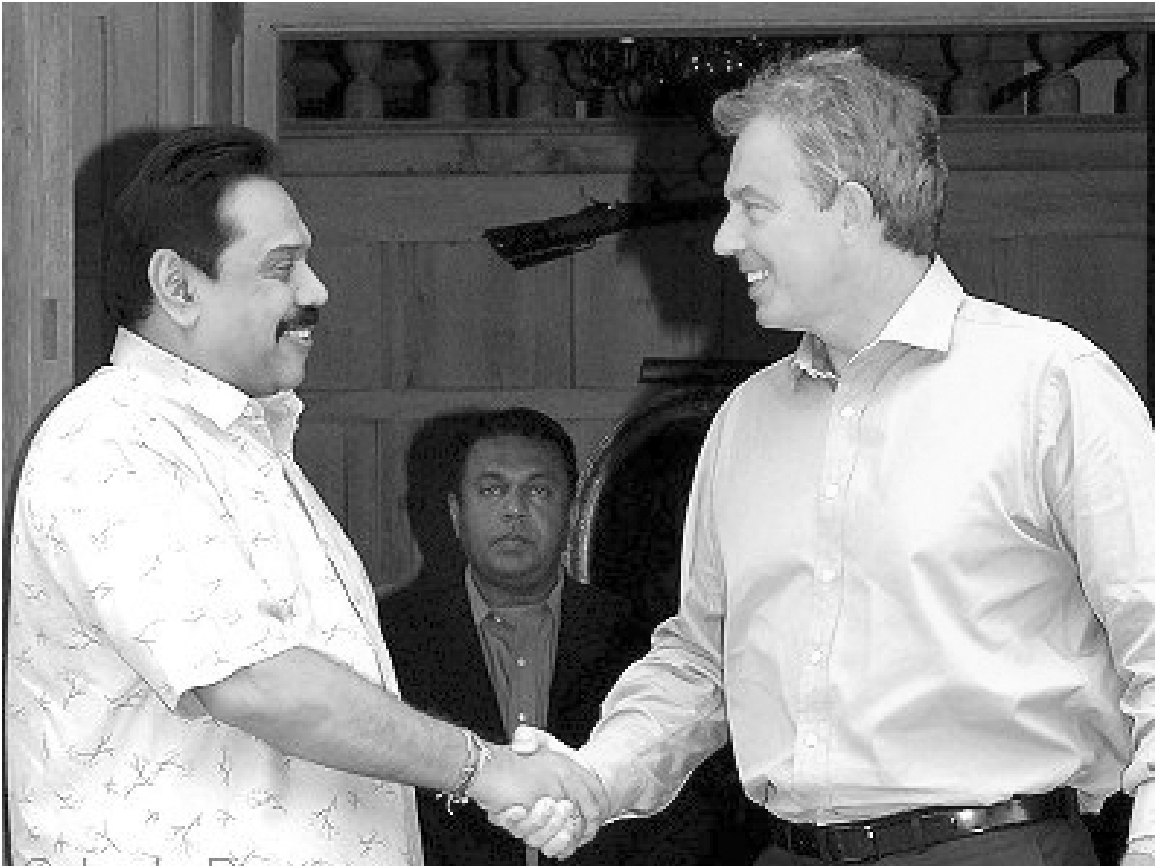
Experts from a leading British security think tank, Chatham House, went on to tell the foreign affairs committee that "practical political issues on the ground" had simply been "overlooked or ignored by the international community."

Tellingly, they pointed out: "we know the international community has problems when it comes to looking at partition, confederation and so on. Of course it does."

Indeed, for decades, the Tamils have listened with dismay as leading countries including the United States, Britain and others have repeatedly reaffirmed their

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back the principle of Tamil self-rule



Sri Lanka's President Mahinda Rajapakse met Britain's Premier, Tony Blair, in September 2006.

commitment to Sri Lanka's territorial integrity (while also asserting commitment to the principles of democracy and freedom).

This is especially so, because, firstly, this entails the LTTE must simply - irrespective of the Sri Lankan state's preparedness to address Tamil grievances - surrender the bargaining power it has acquired;

And secondly because a state's territorial integrity is not an inviolable principle of international politics - as is amply demonstrated by US and UK policy in other international contexts (Kosovo, Eritrea, etc).

Although the Tamils in Britain have repeatedly come in for praise as model citizens by various establishment figures, UK foreign policy has never taken into account the deeply held political convictions of the local Tamils.

Instead British foreign policy has been driven by Western geopolitical and economic interests.

For example, despite repeated protests by the Tamil Diaspora - and international human rights groups - of widespread rights abuses by the Sri Lankan state, Britain this year alone sold more the £7 million of arms to Colombo (and that despite a policy that weapons should not be sold to countries where they could be used for internal repression).

At the same time, hundreds of thousands of Tamil languish in refugee camps in the government - controlled east and the half-million residents of Jaffna struggle to obtain essential supplies. Amid deafening international silence.

If Britain wishes to play a

role in producing a just and lasting peace in Sri Lanka, the Tamils must now ask for this one-sided and selfish policy to change.

True, there were calls in the Parliamentary debate for the ban on the LTTE to be lifted in order to facilitate efforts towards peace. That this matter is raised so forthrightly in the British Parliament is welcome and testament to the efforts of Diaspora lobbyists.

But it is only a basic step for an honest peace broker.

To begin with, international proscription has hardly been a resounding success. In the past few years, despite bans and several other 'unofficial' restrictions, the LTTE has raised money abroad and built up its military and civil administration. And it has encouraged the Sri Lankan state to violence anew. Colombo is now aggressively and unabashedly prosecuting a major war against the LTTE, inflicting widespread misery on the Tamils in the process.

As ever, there is a large gap between the rhetoric of the international community and its actions.

While criticising the human rights abuses by the Sri Lankan government, Britain along with the US and India, have been providing Colombo with military, financial and political backing.

In short, the pro - Tamil opinions expressed in the UK Parliament must be measured against tangible British action.

Going forward, the key issue for the Tamils must be the unqualified international support for Sri Lanka's territorial integrity.

Last week Conservative Member of Parliament Mr Clifton Brown, lambasted the LTTE before noting, with characteristic British understatement: "political representation for the Tamil minority in Sri Lankan politics is another issue. If Sri Lanka is to be capable of creating a long-term and peaceful solution to its problems, engagement in an inclusive political process is essential."

Today it is blatantly obvious that the Sri Lankan military violates Tamils' rights with absolute impunity, that the state bureaucracy is racist, that the politicised judiciary and corrupt police are no recourse for the minorities.

It follows that the Sri Lankan state has forfeited its right to the allegiance of the Tamil people and that the latter, exercising their right to self-rule, must decide what form of governance, including independence, they now want.

And this is the only position that is consistent with the lofty ideals extolled in Britain's Parliament.

Shirking from commenting on a solution to Sri Lanka's war, Mr. Brown however maintained: "I do not want to get into the internal politics of Sri Lanka - that is not our business."

It is however the business of the Tamil Diaspora. As Mr Simon Hughes, speaking on behalf of the Liberal Democrat party, told Parliament: "the Tamils told me that they wanted to make their own decisions, too, and that is a laudable and honourable objective."

He went on to say: "there should be a suitable degree of autonomy within a peaceful, secure and stable Sri Lanka. If later the Tamil people voted for

independence in a free election - unharassed and without any pressure - that would be a separate issue."

The world, he said, "would have to accommodate that [wish] through proper international recognition processes."

"It is absolutely not for me, from here, to prescribe whether there should be a federal state or a confederal state, but I am absolutely clear that a unitary state with no proper devolution beyond what has been offered so far will not work."

The point Mr. Hughes was making is that the Tamils must negotiate an interim solution within a united Sri Lanka - with international support.

But the Tamils cannot have faith in any internationally backed peace process unless it begins with parity of negotiating power between the Tamil and Sinhala peoples.

It is not a question of relative military power or not, but one of mutual ethnic respect.

Ergo, if there cannot be international support for a separate state, there shouldn't be backing for a united one either: both must be possible outcomes even if the Tamils are encouraged to opt for something short of independence.

A balanced framework for negotiation involves accepting every outcome including partition as a possibility.

If Britain is to play any honest part in resolving Sri Lanka's conflict resolution, London needs to explicitly accept that the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka cannot be a pre-condition for the Tamils.

This is not only because such a position is consistent with the principle of an 'internally' forged agreement, but because it is the premise for a just solution.

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SRI LANKA’S AIR WAR

Third LTTE air raid triggers panic in Colombo

AIRCRAFT of the Liberation Tigers launched their third raid on April 28, attacking oil and fuel storage sites of the Sri Lankan Air Force (SLAF) near the capital, Colombo, sending shockwaves through the government and the military establishment.

The pre-dawn air raid on March 28 by the Tamileelam Air Force (TAF) air craft triggered panic in the capital as the authorities cut electricity plunging the city into darkness while security forces peppered the skies with gunfire.

But the erratic firing by Sri Lankan forces failed to bring down the tiger planes and they returned safely to Wanni.

Many people in the capital were watching the Cricket World Cup final between Australia and Sri Lanka when the LTTE planes dropped bombs on Kolonnawa and Muthuraajawala oil facilities at 1:50 a.m. and at 2:05 a.m.

"We were watching the match when the lights went off. Within minutes the night sky was brightened with anti-aircraft fire," a local resident told the BBC.

"After about 30 minutes the firing ceased. After a lull of about an hour there was a second round of firing. A plane could be seen flying westwards towards the Indian Ocean."

dian Ocean."

Officials reported fire pumps at the Kolonnawa gas storage depot situated eight kilometers north of Colombo were set ablaze by the attack and the Muthuraajawala oil refinery was shut down.

LTTE military spokesperson Rasiah Illanthirayan told Reuters the TAF attacks were in response to an earlier air raid by Sri Lankan Air Force (SLAF) planes in LTTE administered Wanni.

Warning that LTTE air raids would continue as long as the SLAF planes keep bombing, he told Reuters "The Sri Lankan military are adamantly trying to prove they will always seek a military solution."

"So we have no other way than to take our own measures," Illanthirayan added. "There will definitely be more. We have no choice other than striking back."

The attack, second raid on Colombo by tiger planes, has forced the Sri Lankan government to urgently seek more advanced air defence systems and introduce an array of security measures to prevent an embarrassing repeat.

"This is a new dimension, we are trying to get some more advanced systems," said military spokesman Brigadier Prasad Samarasinghe speaking to reporters.

Sri Lanka to buy advanced fighter jets from Russia

Sri Lanka's air force is shortly to take delivery of five advanced fighter aircraft from Russia to counter the threat posed by the LTTE's air wing, The Nation newspaper said. In addition to buying five MiG 29 interceptors, Sri Lanka is looking to upgrade its ground attack Kfirs to interceptor role by adding radars and missiles.

"Though the Sri Lankan officials were in talks with their Indian, Pakistani and Chinese counterparts, it is reliably learnt that the new MiG 29s joining the air force, are from Russia," the paper said, adding

Following the attack acting civil aviation director general Parakrama Tissanayake announced, as a security measure, starting May 10 Sri Lanka's only international airport Katunayake International Airport (KIA) 10 miles north of Colombo will be shut between 10pm and 4.30 am.

In addition, Sri Lankan air force has introduced continuous patrolling of skies above Colombo at nighttime.

Despite the stepped up security, the attack has left Colombo residents experiencing the same fear that residents in the north had felt for decades.

"There is no difference between the north and south as residents in both these areas now live in fear of air attacks", agencies quoting Ananda Gunawardena, a resident close to Colombo

Reacting to the attack international airlines suspended flights and tourists cancelled holidays to the island.

Tourists canceling holidays, added to the flight cancellations

that India has been manufacturing it since the 1980s.

The average price in the world market of the MiG 29 is in the range of US\$ 15 million, it said. The MiG 29 was mainly produced to counter leading US fighter aircraft such as the F15 and F16 and in most of its variants has only an air to air strike capacity, The Nation said. "If the necessary upgrades are not carried out on the new aircraft, their role would be limited to intercepting the LTTE's light aircraft, with limited contribution to the main task of the SLAF, which is ground attack."

has already led a 36 per cent drop in visitor numbers through the Katunayake international air port which saw four million passengers passing through last year.

Shutting down of the air port at night is expected to affect tourist in flow further pushing the tourism industry into dire straits.

This is the third air raid by the LTTE's newly unveiled air wing.

The first ever air attack by the LTTE planes hit the air force base adjoining the Katunayake international airport on March 26.

Whilst Sri Lanka denied there was any damage to their fleet from the six bombs dropped by the LTTE planes Indian analysts suggested attack has reduced Sri Lanka air force capability by as much as much as 40%.

The second air attack took place on April 24 when LTTE air crafts dropped bombs inside the sprawling Palali military base in Jaffna peninsula destroying an engineering complex and an ammunition dump.

Local residents secondary explosions were heard for 5 hours indicating extensive damage.

Whilst the military command has ridiculed the tiger planes as a joke military analysts see them as highly effective and potent threat.

"Although the LTTE's acquisitions appear primitive, they have clearly demonstrated through their last four sorties the helplessness of the government to protect its own airspace," Iqbal Athas, a Jane's Defence Weekly analyst said.

The LTTE sees their newly unveiled air force as an addition to their growing state infrastructure.

According Illanthirayan "The air actions open up new possibilities in the military, political and diplomatic fields," reported the Hindustan Times.

"We have territory, administrative, judicial and law enforcement systems; an Army, Navy, and now an Air Force. Let's call a spade a spade, we are a state!"



Top: Indiscriminate firing of anti-aircraft guns by Sri Lankan forces lit up the Colombo sky line early Sunday morning. Photo Sunday Times. Above: LTTE leader Velupillai Pirapaharan with the Air Tigers crew. Photo LTTE

Tamil Air Force changes war dynamics

Amal Jayasinghe AFP

THE new capability of the Tamil Tigers to carry out airborne attacks has not only made them a rarity among the world's guerrilla outfits but has also badly shaken an entire country.

Sri Lanka's defence ministry has acknowledged that the Tigers may be operating at least five light aircraft, used in three headline-grabbing raids against military and civilian targets over the past month.

The Tigers already possess an effective naval unit known as the Sea Tigers.

The Tiger air force may be minuscule compared with Sri Lanka's fleet - which comprises supersonic jets, spy planes and helicopter gunships - but so far government forces have failed miserably in countering the flying Tigers.

"You can understand that the Tigers will use a light aircraft once, but there is something wrong when the air force is not able to take it out after three attacks," said retired brigadier general Vipul Boteju.

The authorities switched off power to the capital of one million people when the Tigers carried out their third bombing raid here on Sunday, targeting two oil depots. The city was thrown into a state of panic.

In the wake of the attack, several international airlines announced they were cancelling or altering their flights to the island's only international airport, whose runway is also used by Sri Lankan air force jets - a prime target for the LTTE.

The Sri Lankan military, however, is insisting that the Tiger air threat is a "joke."

"These light planes can't do much damage," said army chief Sarath Fonseka, who appeared on national television shortly after the LTTE bombed the main military complex in the north of the island last week.

"It is a joke. You can drop a bomb from any flying thing. Even tossing a grenade while riding a swing is an 'air attack,'" Fonseka said.

"The maximum damage that the Tiger planes can do is equivalent to two mortar bombs hitting a bunker," Fonseka added, asserting that the armed forces were capable of taking care of the LTTE's new air wing.

Pictures released by the Tigers indicate they operate Czech-built Zlin Z-143 single engine, four-seater light aircraft modified to carry four bombs mounted on the undercarriage.

According to Morovan Aeroplanes, which manufactures the Zlin, the Z-143 is a versatile airplane designed "for the pilots who want more than straight flying from point A to point B."

"Night and IFR (instrument flight rules) training and flying and great flight characteristics and additional instruments make the ZLIN easy to fly at night or (in) low visibility conditions," according to Morovan.

It is not clear whether the Tigers have extensively modified the aircraft, which military sources believe may have been bought from a source in South Africa, but the standard version has a wing span of just over 10 metres (33 feet) and an endurance of up to five hours and 10 minutes.

It has a maximum level cruising speed of 260 kilometres (162 miles) an hour and cannot be intercepted by the supersonic jets of the Sri Lankan air force, which are too fast and do not have air-to-air attack capability.

The two passenger seats can be removed to give room for extra fuel and a bigger payload. It can take off and land from unprepared surfaces, needing only 640 metres to take off and 765 metres to land.

Shortly after the first Tiger attack on its main airbase, which shares a runway with the international airport, the air force said it failed to bring down the Tiger aircraft because it did not have night flying capability.

A week later the government announced it was carrying out night time air raids against suspected Tamil Tiger positions to demonstrate it was by then able to fly at night. But the Tigers have flown two more night sorties unchallenged.

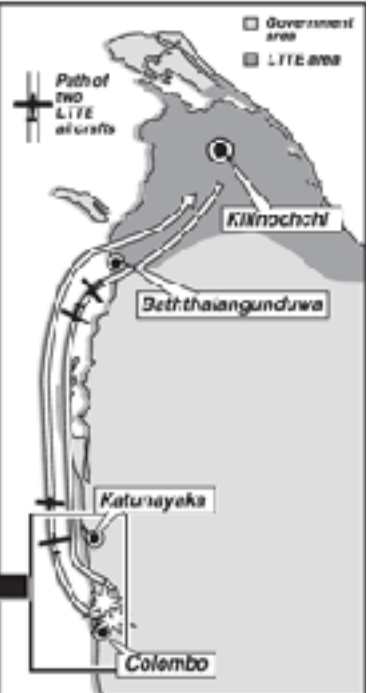
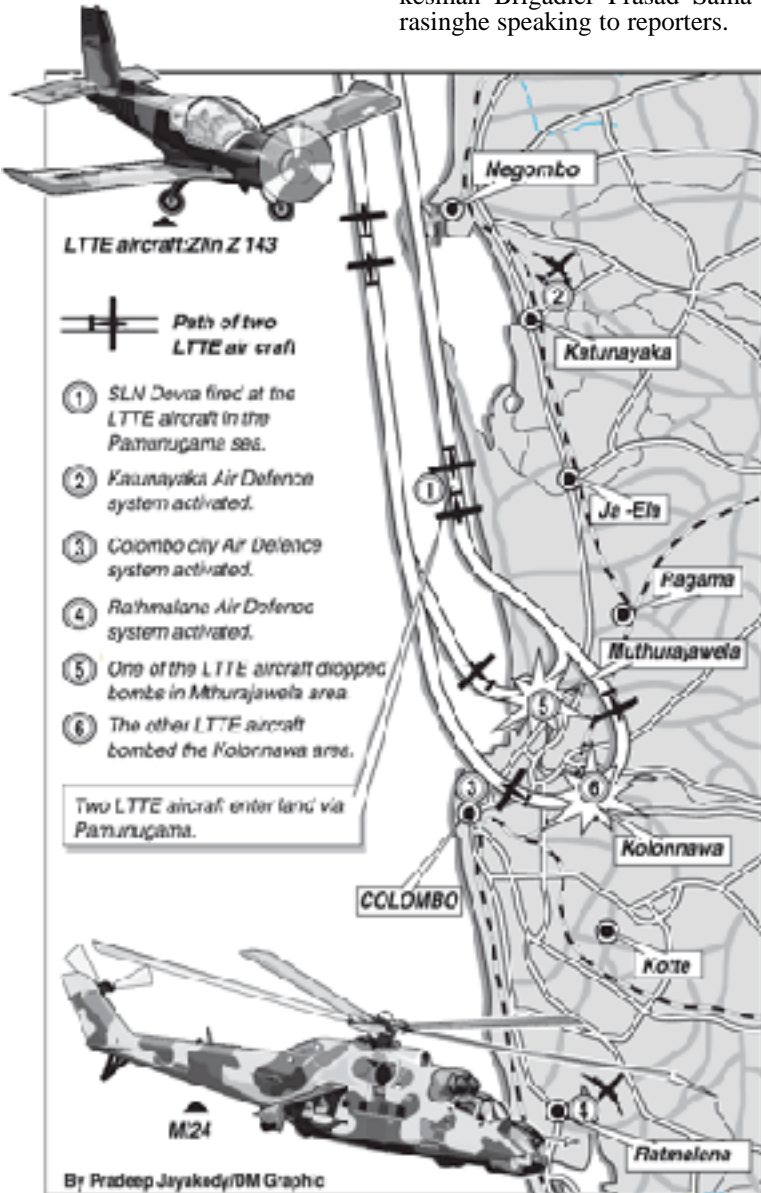
The only time a Mi-24 helicopter gunship was scrambled to intercept the flying Tigers, the chopper developed engine trouble and crash landed.

Sri Lanka's military was aware of an air strip built by the Tigers for several years and in 2005 the government lodged a formal complaint with Nordic truce monitors who are observing a now moribund ceasefire.

It is not clear if the Tigers use the clearing in Iranamadu, which can be clearly seen on satellite images, as the base for their Zlin aircraft. The clearing has been bombed by the air force several times.

Military sources believe that the Tigers smuggled in the aircraft in knocked-down form two years ago and assembled them in territory held by them.

The lax supervision soon after the December 2004 tsunami may have helped the Tigers, according to defence sources. Speaking to Colombo-based diplomats, a top military officer on Monday admitted that security forces were "still learning" how to deal with the new threat from the Tigers.



Air raids seen taking toll on Sri Lanka's economy

WHILST Sri Lanka's government has brushed aside the threat posed by the Liberation Tigers' air attacks, the tourist industry is bracing for further setbacks as airlines pull out and other countries warn citizens to stay away.

In addition to tourist arrivals falling further, Colombo's potential as a passenger transit hub was been stymied, Hindustan Times reported.

Defence spending is expected to soar as Colombo defends against the LTTE's modified light aircraft.

Even before the recent raids, ratings agency Fitch had given Sri Lanka a rating of BB- with a negative outlook as the domestic security situation posed risks to economic stability and growth.

Acting Civil Aviation Director General Prakrama Disسانayaka told

the Daily Mirror the Airline Operators Council had expressed concerns when they spoke with him on Sunday. Saying the LTTE sudden air raids have a relative effect on airlines schedules, the council said it was finding it difficult to operate on schedule if such occurrences continued.

In addition to Emirates and Cathay Pacific which suspended their flights from Sunday more airlines are planning to reschedule their flights to and from Colombo following the recent LTTE aerial attacks, the Daily Mirror said.

Singapore Airlines has said it would fly only during the day while Thai Airways said it would assess the situation, the paper said.

Britain and Australia have raised the threat level to nationals visiting

Sri Lanka while the State Department cautioned US citizens in a travel advisory updated for the first time since October 2006.

"Although there is no specific indication that American citizens or institutions are targets, there is a general risk of American citizens being victims of violence simply by being at the wrong place at the wrong time," the State Dept. said.

The Australian foreign office said there was a danger of kidnapping for ransom of foreign nationals, including in Colombo and as such urged all Australians, particularly those of Sri Lankan Tamil origin, to ensure that appropriate identification was carried at all times.

Britain's Foreign office warned of a high terrorism threat in Sri Lanka and said attacks against gov-

ernment and civilian targets have taken place throughout the country, including in areas and on travel routes popular with tourists.

The warning could affect arrivals, already down by 36 per cent over the past year, the Hindustan Times said.

"It is unfortunate that this should happen when Colombo was becoming a major hub for transit and transshipment in this region. If the war continues, it may lose this position," Harsha de Silva of the economic think tank LIRNE Asia told Hindustan Times.

With four million passengers passing through the airport, Colombo was a major hub in South Asia, the paper said.

Last year, there were over 500,000 arrivals and the industry

had raked in \$ 410 million to be the third largest dollar earner, it added.

Nonetheless Tourist Board Chairman Renton De Alwis vowed the industry would bounce back like in previous such crises, the Daily Mirror said.

The new economic difficulties come amid crushing inflation - 17 per cent - and soaring government spending on the military.

"Real wages fell by 10 per cent in agriculture and 12 per cent in the services. They increased only in the inefficient and loss making public sector," Harsha de Silva says.

With the air raids exposing major chinks in the defence system, Sri Lanka is expected to go in for expensive air surveillance, detection and night operations equipment and more aircraft.

The budgeted defence expenditure for 2007 was US \$1.25 bn, a 28 per cent increase over the past year.

"But this could go up to US\$ 1.8 bn soon," former Air Force Commander, Harry Gunatilleke told Hindustan Times.

The extra spending on defence is going to slow down developmental expenditure, especially on infrastructure.

The economy is indeed growing at 7.5 per cent, but the growth is not in the vital sectors, points out de Silva. "Telecom accounted for 20 per cent while a critical sector like agriculture accounted for only 1%."

The government expects the war to be over in three years. But before that, the soaring defence expenditure may have sent the economy into a tail spin, Hindustan Times said.

NEWS

Violence round up - w/e 6 May

Summary of incidents - apart from major clashes - since 30 April

6 May

● Unidentified persons triggered a claymore device at Kokkaddichcholai in Batticaloa, killing three STF troopers and injuring four. The claymore attack was carried out on STF troopers travelling in a tractor to Batticaloa from Kokkaddichcholai, which was recently occupied by the Sri Lanka Armed forces after the recent offensives against the LTTE.

● Police claimed that an LTTE member was killed in an exchange of gunfire between the STF and LTTE at Poratheevu in Kaluvanchikudi, Batticaloa. The STF recovered a T56 type rifle and magazine from T. Yogarajah, of Poaratheevu, the police said. The STF claimed he was killed in STF retaliatory action in response to an LTTE attack on one of their units.

● A group of SLA soldiers who attempted to move towards Navatkulam in LTTE controlled territory on the Vavuniya Mannar border were repulsed and 2 SLA soldiers were killed.

● Armed men waylaid Mariasekaram Vigneswaran, 42, of Vadaliadaippu, a family man, and shot him dead near Aiyanaar temple in Pandaitheruppu, Valigaamam, Jaffna, as he was returning home on his bicycle.

● Jaffna police handed over the remains of a fisherman recovered hanging at Kakkaitheevu, Aanai-kkoddai. Rajenthiram Kunapalan, 38, bore wounds on hands, legs and body-, caused by beating and was probably already dead before being hung. He may have been abducted and killed elsewhere before being brought to Kaakkaitheevu and hung, local residents speculated.

● Unidentified persons doused petrol and set fire to a hardware store on Eravur Main Street in Batticaloa. Two shops adjoining the hardware store were also completely burnt. Damage is estimated to run into millions of rupees. A group of youths had requested all shops in Eravur to be shut Saturday as a mark of condolence to a home guard shot dead the previous Wednesday and owners complied. But most of the shops were opened in response to a request by Eravur police and the hardware shop was one among them.

5 May

● A gang of more than ten armed men in civil clothes, forcibly entered and searched Jaffna University campus. The security officer

was severely beaten and held by some of the armed men at gunpoint while the others searched the campus area for several hours. The injured security officer notified Campus administration of the attack and registered complaints at Jaffna police station.

4 May

● Ten civilians were arrested at Valaithodam and three at Wellawatte, both in Colombo city, as they reportedly failed to prove their identity and provide satisfactory reason for their stay in the location. Most of them were arrested while staying in lodges and with friends' houses.

● Four students studying advanced level in two prominent high schools in Jaffna were forcibly abducted from their homes by armed men in white vans. Suntharalingam Yasotharan, 17, from Kokuvil East, Nagarajah Venukanthan, 18, from Brown Road Jaffna, and R. Ramanendran, 18, are students at Jaffna Hindu College and Kugarajan Kannan, 17, attends St. John's College. Yasotharan's father is a principal at the American Mission College in Thamatti in the islets of Jaffna, and Venukanthan's father is a high level official at the Jaffna branch of the International Committee of Red Cross. The abductors forcibly entered the students' houses by breaking open the entry doors.

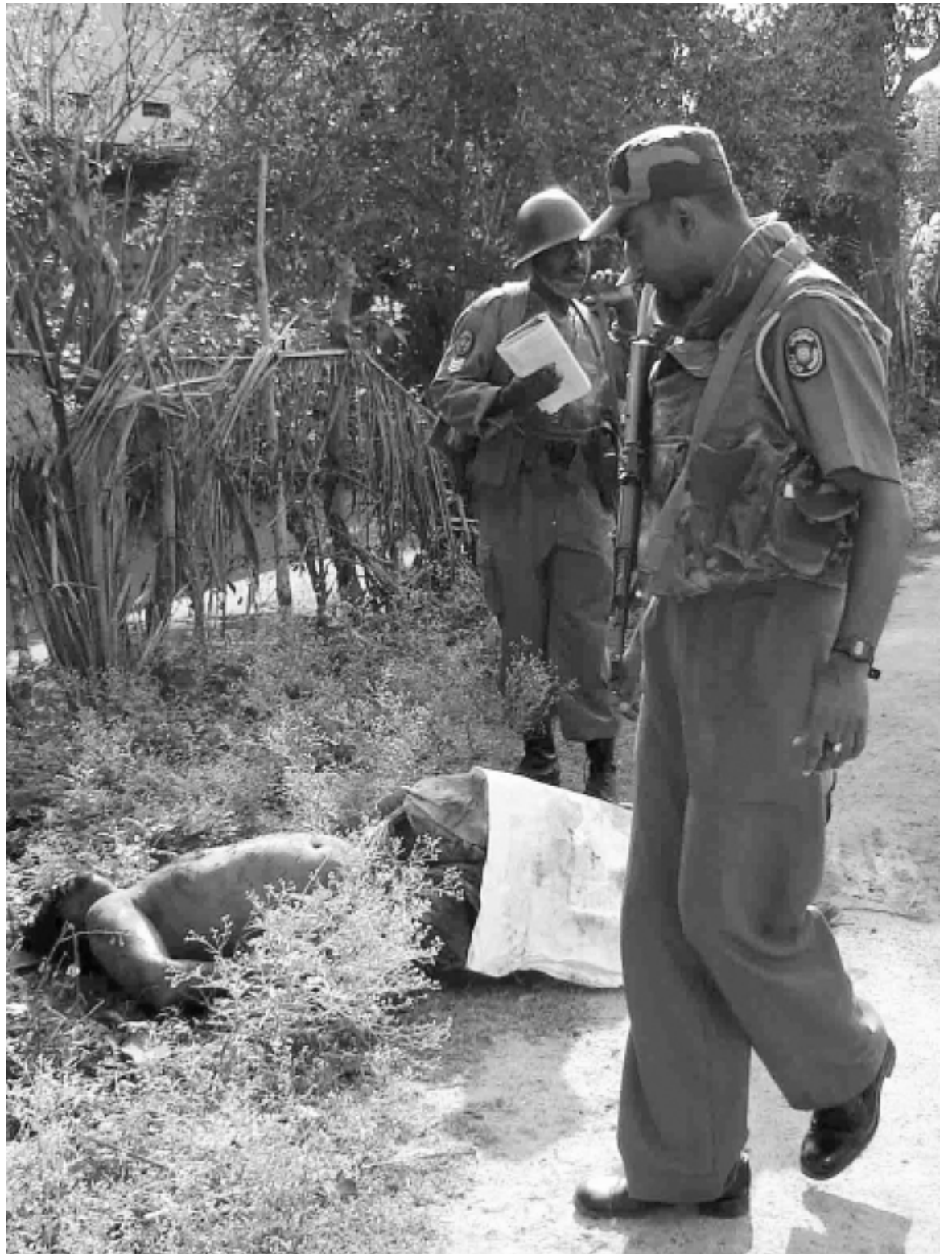
● The LTTE claimed three Sea Tigers were killed in action when a sea-fight broke off Pulmoaddai on the north-east coast. Both the LTTE and the Sri Lanka Navy claimed to have inflicted heavy damage on the other in the clash. The Sri Lankan military claimed to have killed twelve Sea Tigers.

3 May

● The LTTE repulsed a fresh offensive by the SLA along the Vavuniya Mannar border, LTTE's Military Spokesman Irasiah Ilanthirayan told media in Kilinochchi. 2 bodies of SLA soldiers were captured with arms and ammunition by the Tigers when the SLA offensive towards Palmpiddi by more than 300 SLA troopers was thwarted, Mr. Ilanthirayan said. A Tiger fighter was killed in the action. The bodies of the two soldiers were handed to the ICRC on Friday.

● One Sri Lanka Police constable was killed when gunmen fired at the sentry point in Pampaimadu, Vavuniya. The men escaped amid a hail of return fire by the police.

● Three bodies of civilians were



In recent weeks many civilians have been abducted and their bullet riddled bodies dumped, like this civilian found in Vavuniya on 2 May. Photo STRDEL/AFP/Getty Images

recovered in two sites in Vavuniya. Partially burnt bodies belonging to two males were recovered by Vavuniya police in Povarasankulam-Cheddikulam junction area. And a third body of a male victim with several gunshot wounds was recovered near Kallaathu bridge. Vavuniya police said that the three victims were probably killed elsewhere and their bodies dumped at the two sites.

● A cordon and search operation in Velanai, Jaffna, by the Sri Lanka security forces continued for a second day.

● Two members of the Karuna group were shot and injured in an internal strife at the camp near Toddy Tavern junction on Muhathuvaram Road in Batticaloa. An auto rickshaw driver passing close to the camp, U. M. Nazoordin, 55, a father of four, was caught in the cross fire and was injured.

● Twenty-two civilians were arrested in Wellawatte, Colombo, and six of them were produced in court and remanded. Others are being detained in police stations for further inquiry.

2 May

● Two SLA troopers were injured when a claymore device hidden in an empty building along Vathiri-Udupiddi road in Navindil, Vadamaraadchchi, Jaffna, exploded as the troopers tried to remove it.

● The LTTE launched heavy artillery fire on SLA FDL positions in Maravanpilavu, Thenmaradchi, Jaffna. Three SLA troopers were seriously injured in the shelling which lasted for ten minutes.

● Kodikaamam police recovered the body of a male, estimated to be between 35 to 40, with gunshot wounds in Kottiyaathoo cemetery in Chanthirapuram, Madduvil, Thenmaradchi, Jaffna. Police found one bullet wound on the head, one on the chest, and another on the leg. The body, clad in blue and black pants with a white shirt with blue and green stripes, is suspected to have been dumped at the site at least a week earlier. The man is thought to have been abducted elsewhere and taken to the cemetery where he was shot.

● SLN soldiers arrested the chief

priest and the Temple Trustee Board Chairman of Perunkulam Muththumaariamman Hindu temple at Velanai in Kayts, an islet of Jaffna, along with three workers, when the temple authorities informed the SLN of explosives found in the temple building site.

● Armed men opened fire on a police jeep at Punnaikuda in Eravur, Batticaloa, killing a home guard who drove the jeep to the service station at first mile post. Shajahan Fowmi, 28, of Meerakeni, was identified as the home guard killed.

● Two youths on their way to the temple for prayers were gunned down by men riding a motorbike Wednesday in Velanai east in the Jaffna Islets. Sivapalan Gajendrapalan, 21, and Kandaiah Kannathasan, 28, were relatives, and were riding a bicycle towards the nearby temple when they were shot.

1 May

● Sri Lanka government armed forces arrested two Tamil civil-

Continued on page 15

NEWS

Bridging food gap amongst refugees said difficult

IRIN

FOOD distribution to the 140,000 displaced people in Batticaloa district has improved; now relief agencies and government authorities are attempting to fill gaps in food availability, principally for those staying with host families.

According to a United Nations Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) report for the second week of April: "A gap of approximately 18,000 [displaced people] staying with host families exists."

The IASC report indicated that government authorities planned to target them for food distribution.

The number of displaced in Batticaloa district increased rapidly from 79,000 in February when civilians living in areas under the control of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam fled en masse after heavy shelling and fighting between the LTTE and government forces.

By mid-March, there were close to 160,000, according to government and UN High Commission for Human Rights (UNHCR) figures.

At present, about 140,000 people are displaced in the district.

According to the IASC report, more than 50 percent of Sri Lanka's displaced are in Batticaloa, scattered in 87 camps or living with host families.

World Food Program (WFP) Country Director, Jeff Taft-Dick, told IRIN that an appeal for additional food assistance had met with a favourable response and sufficient stocks would be available at least for the next two months.

He noted that the situation had also improved since last month.

"There is better balance, greater coordination and we have received additional funding since our appeal last month," Taft-Dick said.

He added that WFP received funding from the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and Japan.

The United States and European Union had also contributed to increase supplies.

WFP requires about US\$1 million a week to look after the food needs of 400,000 displaced people in Sri Lanka, predominantly in the north and east.

"The supply pipeline appears safe at least until end of June," Taft-Dick said, adding that some

of the new funding was in cash, allowing the WFP to procure supplies locally, cutting the time to get food to those in need, as well as helping the local economy.

Taft-Dick said that while WFP was providing 70 percent of food supplies, the remainder was being made available directly by government and local organisations.

He noted that all food distribution was carried out under the direction of the Government Agent's office in Batticaloa.

WFP is providing about 1,500 tonnes monthly of rice and wheat flour as well as dhal, sugar and cooking oil.

UN and government agencies and non-governmental organisations have also increased staff and resources in an effort to help the displaced.

The high number of displaced in Batticaloa as well as the fact that they are so widely dispersed makes food delivery a logistical nightmare, Basil Sylvester, the coordinator of the Batticaloa office of the Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies (CHA), a forum for local and international NGOs and agencies, told IRIN.

Sylvester said that while some camps received only dry rations, others continued to get cooked food.

At some sites food was delivered in bulk while at others, families were given food rations.

The CHA coordinator also said people in camps that have been established longer were coping with the food situation far better than the newer ones.

"Those [camps] with people who came from Muttur [in Trincomalee district] in August 2006 are well organised," said Sylvester.

"They get their supplies." But, the newer arrivals, such as those from Vavunathivu in Batticaloa district, displaced in March 2007, are still facing problems.

Supplies are getting to all the displaced but at some sites they remain meager, according to Sylvester, with individual rations in some camps of 150 grams or so per day - less than half what they should be.

"There's no starvation, but the stocks have not been enough from the time the [displaced] came in March; now after almost one-and-a-half months, the rations have not yet increased," Sylvester said.



Jaffna students, though still able to attend schools, are facing food shortages and security concerns due to the continuing economic embargo and violence against civilians. Photo TamilNet

40% of children in IDP camps are undernourished: UNICEF

OF 11,200 children under the age of five who are internally displaced and living in camps in Batticaloa, 30%-40% suffer from malnutrition, a survey by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) revealed.

Based on the survey, UNICEF estimates that 3-5 percent of under-five children suffer from severe acute malnutrition (wasting).

According to UNICEF Sri Lanka, 175 severely malnourished children are in community-based nutrition rehabilitation programmes.

Accordingly, UNICEF has conducted a series of training programmes among local health personnel and facilitated the implementation of nutrition rehabilitation programmes at community

and health facility levels using ready-to-use foods and therapeutic milk.

In addition, high energy biscuits were distributed to under-five children, pregnant women and lactating mothers.

"Last month we conducted a training programme for health personnel from Batticaloa and they are carrying out the distribution process. We have targeted children identified with both mild and severe cases of malnutrition and through this programme we hope to prevent them from deteriorating further," UNICEF Project Officer for Nutrition Dr. Renuka Jayatissa told the Daily Mirror.

"Once these children have been fed the special foods complete with additional vitamins and minerals their condition will

improve to the level of being able to subsist on the normal food being given to other camp inhabitants," she said.

UNICEF has said there was a shortage of milk foods in hospitals in Batticaloa and expects to remedy the problem through distributions made through health officials who took part in the programme.

"We generally do not promote powdered milk to mothers with infants because the nutritional value of breast milk is higher and when preparing it the milk can get contaminated. So instead we will continue to provide special biscuits for the mothers and milk based nutritional supplements for the children. UNICEF hopes to continue this programme until the end of this year," Ms. Jayatissa said.

Civilians bear brunt of conflict

THE Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM), in the country to monitor the 5 year old Norwegian facilitated ceasefire agreement, has expressed concern over the escalation of the conflict in Sri Lanka.

The worst victims of the violence have been innocent civilians, SLMM head Lars Johan Solvberg told The Sunday Leader.

"The SLMM has been gravely concerned over the increased number of civilians trapped in the line of fire and becoming innocent victims to the escalating conflict. This year alone hundreds of civilians have lost their lives, which is a tragedy."

Of the more than 4,000 who have died in the fighting since December 2006, 1,500 are estimated to be civilians, the paper

noted.

The SLMM head added that the ground situation had changed drastically from the time the 2002 ceasefire agreement (CFA) was signed by the government and the Liberation Tigers.

"The most important thing is that the ground situation is not anymore like it was five years ago. It is clear that the CFA was based on a different ground situation, and the fact that the ground situation has changed in the north and the east is a challenge to the CFA and to the SLMM," he said.

"Compared to the situation in the early days of the CFA, both parties seem to have escalated their military efforts, adding new capacities to their operations. This is a negative development to the conflict, which worries the

SLMM," he said.

The changing ground situation has brought pressure on the monitors themselves to adapt.

"The SLMM is challenged to adapt to the changing nature of the conflict, in order to serve the parties as well as possible under the changing circumstances."

Solvberg feels that though both parties indicate their willingness to resume communication with the monitors, both were hitching the resumption of talks to conditions.

"Both parties have expressed their will to talk, but both of them have conditions connected to actions taken by the other party. This complication is an ongoing challenge, but it is not too late for the parties to recommence," the paper quoted him as saying.

NEWS

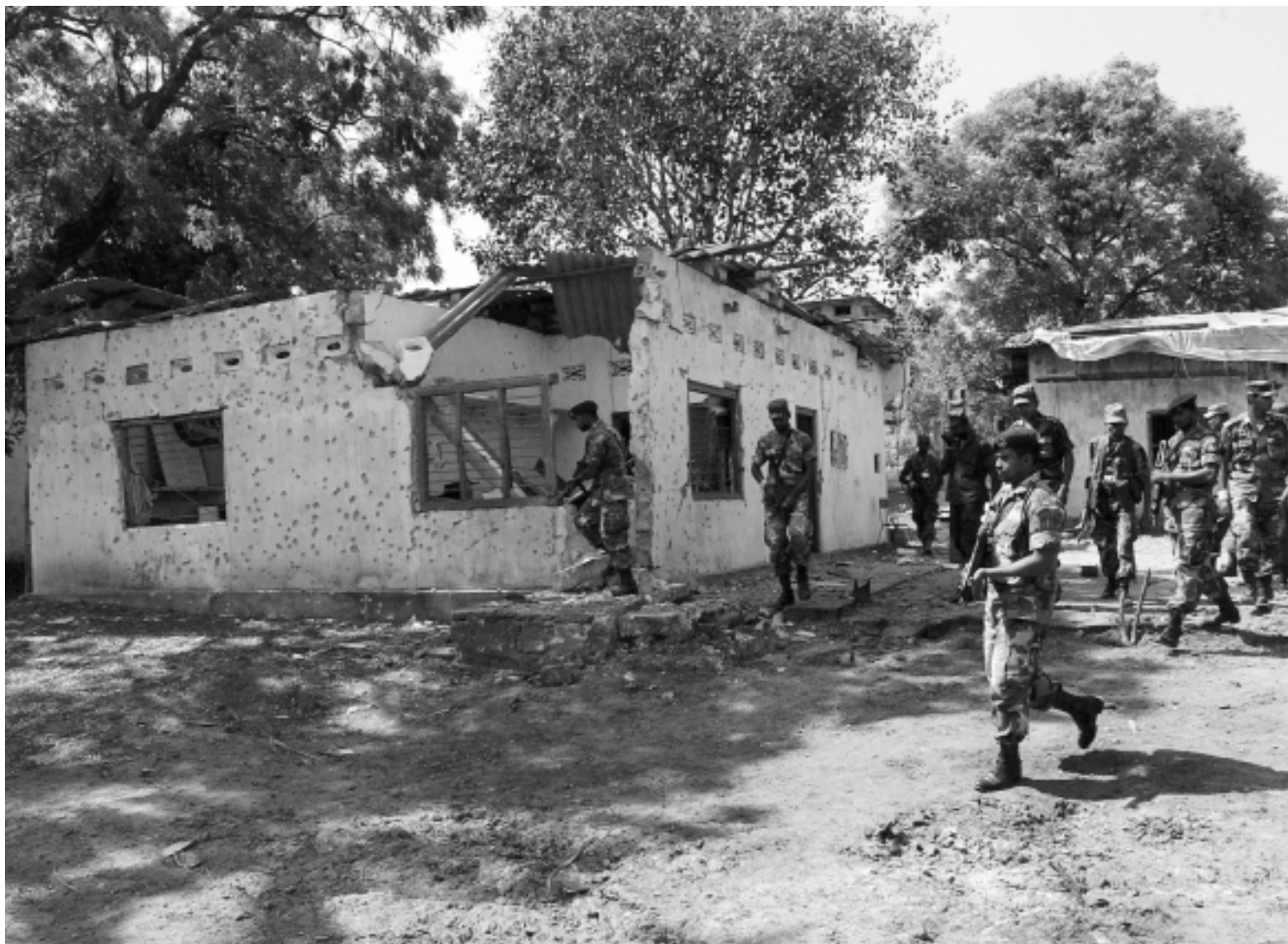
TAF bombs Palaly

SRI LANKAN troopers in camps across the Jaffna peninsula emptied bullets into the air in a barrage of gunfire after the Tamil-eelam Air Force (TAF) bombed Palaly, the SLA's main base complex in the peninsula, in the early hours of April 24.

Military reports from Colombo confirmed that at least 6 of their personnel were killed, but said the casualties were due to Tigers' artillery. However, other reports speculated that more than 30 troopers were wounded in the attack inside the Palaly HSZ.

SLA troopers in camps in Varani in Thenmaradchy, Mand-aithivu in the islets west of Jaffna, and Atchelu and Uduvil in Valigamam shut off the lights and sprayed gunfire in the air, fearing attack by the TAF aircrafts as the aircrafts returned to their base in Vanni.

Residents near the above SLA camps sought cover as the bullets fired by the panicked soldiers rained down. Tharmalingam Vijitha, 29, a housewife in Eezhaalai, was injured when soldiers opened fire at the Tiger aircrafts.



Sri Lankan military troopers patrol outside a bombed building within the Palaly air base in the Jaffna peninsula, 24 April 2007 after the Tamileelam Air Force bombed the complex using light aircraft. Photo Sanka Vidanagama/AFP/Getty Images

Violence round up - week ending 29 April

Continued from page 13

where the problems faced by their constituents were discussed. The TNA said the government is keen to limit access between the Batticaloa TNA MPs and their constituents, to create political space for the renegade paramilitaries.

- An eighteen year old student from Karaveddy, Vadamaradchy and another 16 year old student from Pokatti, Kodikamam in Thenmaradchy sought protection with the Jaffna SLHRC, along with a young family man from Chavakacheri in Thenmaradchy, all fearing death from SLA troopers and SLA-backed paramilitaries. The student from Karaveddy and the family man from Chavakacheri said that armed men in white van came to their houses during nights several times with the intention of abducting them. They had gone underground and urgently need protection. The 16 year old student from Pokatti said his father was summoned to the SLA civil administration office at Kodikamam and ordered to hand him to the SLA. The SLA personnel had confiscated the National Identity Card of his father, the student added.

- SLA troopers posted near Kantharodai SLA camp stopped a trader at the sentry, led him blindfolded with hands bound through a paddy field to a Buffel APC

parked at a distance from the camp, and took him to Uduvil SLA camp, his wife said in a complaint to the Jaffna SLHRC. Thiyagarajah Ranjithkumar, 29, of College Road, Kantharodai, a textile trader, was seen by his wife's relatives being taken away in an APC. He had gone out on a personal errand when he was abducted by the SLA, his wife said in the complaint.

23 April

- Unknown persons shot and seriously injured an EPDP member in Kayts, an islet of Jaffna. S. Sivarasa, 37, was hit by a single bullet from a pistol. He had been going out on personal errand on his motorcycle when the armed men shot at him.

- A student of Jaffna Technical College went missing. Kanthasamy Purushothaman, 22, from Poovalkarai, Point Pedro, Vadamaradchi, had gone missing on his way to college.

- SLA troopers on street patrol unit opened fire on unknown persons who refused to obey SLA orders, close to the SLA Intelligence unit camp at Uduvil in Valigamam East, Jaffna. The armed assailants opened fire in retaliation and escaped.

- The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of Sri Lanka police conducted an intensive

search in TNA parliamentarian N. Sri Kantha's official residence in Mathivela, Colombo. TNA parliamentarian Mavai Senathirajah's secretary Selvarajah Samuel who was at the residence during the search was interrogated for nearly three hours. All the rooms, bathrooms, kitchen and the roof of the residence were searched meticulously. Mr. Sri Kantha was not present when the CID conducted the search and nothing suspicious was found.

- A leading Tamil businessman in Colombo was abducted by armed persons in a white van in Wellawatte while he was walking along the road. Rajaratnam Rajapathy, 24, owns a textile shop 'Jeyachandran Textiles' at Galle road, Wellawatte. Eyewitnesses said armed persons in a van abducted the businessman. Relatives informed Mano Ganesan, MP for Colombo district and the Leader of Western Peoples Front, of the details of the abduction.

- Sri Lanka armed forces in large numbers conducted simultaneous cordon and search operations in Vadamaradchy, Thenmaradchy regions of Jaffna. Key roads were blocked and residents were herded into play grounds and temples in close proximity and interrogated. Armed forces and paramilitaries took cover in many places the previous night, cut off all the leading roads entering the city

and did a door to door checking in the areas of Kaladdy, Parameshwara Junction, Muththirai Santhi and Ariyalai within Jaffna municipal limits. All the young men and women were paraded in front of masked men for identification. Young men and women from Ariyalai were led to a church and 'identified' by masked men.

- Four civilians, including a woman, were killed and 37 wounded when a bus carrying Tamil and Muslim passengers from Mannar to Colombo was hit by a claymore mine at Andiyapuliayan-kulam along Mannar-Madawachiya road in Vavuniya. Relatives blamed the SLA for the attack on the civilian bus.

- Villagers in the LTTE held Madhu areas in Mannar have requested the civil and military authorities to re-open the Puliyadyirakkam Road, the gateway to 13 Grama Niladhari divisions in

LTTE held territory. Madhu Divisional Secretariat area comprises 17 GN divisions of which four are in the government held territory. Puliyadyirakkam Road, the only land route along Mannar-Madawachiya main road to LTTE held territory has been closed since the outbreak of fighting between government troops and the LTTE in August 11 last year.

- The owner of an electronics shop was killed and his associate seriously injured in a bomb blast at his shop in Kaluwanchikkudy, Batticaloa. Kaluwanchikkudy Police and STF started investigations immediately to ascertain whether the bomb exploded inside the shop or somebody hurled it. M. Sarma, 30, an electronic engineer, was identified as the owner of the repair shop. Thamotheeram Kiritharan, 21, was the associate injured in the explosion.

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 - w/e 29 April

Summary of incidents - apart from major clashes - since 23 April

29 April

● Two oil storages that supply fuel to SLAF bombers were attacked by the Tamileelam Air Force. Oil and fuel storages in Kolonnawa and Muththuraajawala were attacked after SLAF bombers attacked a suburb of Kilinochchi in LTTE territory.

● Six youths and a priest were killed in a firefight with the SLN during a cordon and search operation in Velani in the islets of Jaffna. The incident occurred close to the Mudippillaiy Temple in Velanai west. Ratnasabapathy Aiyar Somaskantha Kurukkal, 60, from Usan Kanthasaami Koaviladi was the priest killed and his body bore injuries at several places. The cordon and search operation followed an attack by armed youth in which a SLN commander was killed. Sri Lanka armed forces barred public from entering or leaving Jaffna Islets. The commander is alleged to have engaged in a spate of killings along with the members of the paramilitary EPDP in the islets of Jaffna. Sri Lanka Military spokesperson said the attackers used the temples sculptured towers as cover to mount the attack when they were killed. Although the SLN did not reveal details of casualties and injuries suffered by its troopers, helicopters were used in transporting the SLN dead and the wounded to hospital.

● Selvarajah Rajivarman, 25, a young journalist working at Jaffna's Uthayan newspaper, was killed by gunmen in Rasavin Thoadam junction, Jaffna.

● Gunmen shot and killed a trader, Nagalingam Tharumakulasingham, 48, a father of four, in a commercial establishment at Mantuvil in Thenmaraadchchi, Jaffna.

● SLA troopers shot dead a youth at Sentaankulam SLA FDL, within Palaali HSZ. Sinnathurai Sujijeyanthiran, 19, a mentally ill youth, from Maathahal, had lost his way when he went out of his house and had accidentally entered the SLA FDL area.

● SLA troopers lying in ambush along a lake at Sithandi in Eravur, Batticaloa shot dead three IDPs who had gone to check their cultivation. Ponnusamy Sellathurai, 46, from Kudaveddai, Eeralakulam, Nagalingam Thiruchelvam, 42, and Ms. Poopalapillai Poomani, 30, both from Perumaaveli, Sithandi, were shot.

28 April

● The SLA ordered families in

Potkerni and other suburbs in Thampalakamam, a traditional Tamil village in Trincomalee, to be present at Kulakodan Tamil Vidiyalayam to check their identities and to explain the purpose of their stay in the location.

● A fisherman was killed in the Jaffna lagoon within the perimeters of Jaffna Municipality when SLA soldiers fired artillery from the shores towards waters of the lagoon. The incident happened soon after the SLA relaxed fishing along Paashaiyoor and Columbuturai, and allowed fishermen to use paddle boats to go fishing in the lagoon. Rasappu Yogendran, 52, a father of three, was killed and an associate in the same boat narrowly escaped injuries.

● Armed men in a white van following a youth along Point Pedro-Jaffna road, opened rapid fire on him near Karaveddi Kunchar Kadai junction in Vadamaradchchi and forcibly carried the seriously injured youth away in the van. The white van armed men abducted the injured youth when he fell on the road. He was shot at and abducted within the SLA HSZ and just 200 meters from SLA camps.

● Armed men shot and injured Thavarasa Dinesh, 23, at his house in Karaveddi, Jaffna, causing serious injury to his shoulder.

● Armed persons shot dead a Tamil civilian in Pattithidal, Muthur, Trincomalee. A group of armed men had dragged S. Sithiravel, 25, a paddy farmer, out of his house and fired at him.

● Sixteen civilians, majority of them Tamils, were arrested in a four-hour cordon and search operation in Colombo by Sri Lanka's security forces. Twelve of them were taken into custody for alleged involvement in terrorist activities.

27 April

● Two youths went missing at Sathira Junction along Hospital Road, Jaffna. Rasalingam Rajaratnam, 27, went missing on his way to college from his house at Palaly Road in Thirunelveli. Theiventhiran Piratheepan, 28, from Kokuvil was reported missing as he was returning home from Jaffna town.

● A group of armed men waiting in ambush shot and killed three SLN troopers on a road patrol in Kuchchaveli, Trincomalee.

● Sivaraj Paheerathan, a Jaffna university undergrad detained by the SLA on August 18, 2006, filed



Civilians are being injured and killed in increasing numbers. Photo TamilNet

a fundamental rights petition in the Supreme Court seeking his release. The petition states that the army arrested him for no reason when he was in the office of the Jaffna University Students Union to take a telephone call to his parents in Puthukuddiruppu, Mullaitivu. He has been detained for the last eight months and this has been badly affected his education, the petition said.

● Two fishermen from Vankaalai, stopped at a SLA checkpoint at Thomaspuri on Vankalai - Nanadan Road were taken blindfolded to Naruvilikulam coast. Victor Canisius Culas, 39, a family man and Sebamalai Jebatheeswaran Peiris, 30, were riding on a motorbike for a marriage arrangement, according to their families, who complained to the ICRC and the police. Naruvilikulam villagers who heard unusual vehicle movement during the early hours, witnessed footprints of military boots at the coastal site.

26 April

● SLAF bombers attacked Thiruvaiyaaru, Kilinochchi. Tension prevailed in Kilinochchi hospital and many school children remained home. Three SLAF bombers dropped around 12 bombs, 200 meters from Thiruvaiyaaru School. A house was destroyed in the attack.

● Armed men in military fatigues wearing masks robbed cash, jewels and household things in Thamaraiikkerny- Hisbullah village in Eravur, Batticaloa. A group of around 10 robbers threatened the inmates of four houses, including women and children, at gunpoint and then removed all the jewels they were wearing. They also searched the houses and got away with all valuables. They also robbed a small shop located adjoining the houses.

● Armed persons wearing masks abducted an IDP, a father of one, from his temporary dwelling in

Seddipalayam and shot him dead at Kaluthavalai, a neighbouring village in Kaluwanchchikkudy, Batticaloa. Mahenthirarajah Varathan, 23, of Nagamunai, Ampilanthurai in Paduvankarai, previously controlled by the LTTE, fled home due to the SLA offensive and took refuge with his relatives at Seddipalayam. The masked men went to his place, called him by name and took him away forcefully when he came out. They took him to Kaluthavalai, shot him and dumped his body in front of the Nagathampiran temple.

● The funeral of Mr. Lourdunayagam Princely, 27, the Mannar District Project Engineer of the World Bank funded North East Housing Reconstruction Programme, one of the five civilians killed in the claymore mine explosion targeting a private bus on April 23, was held in the Mannar general cemetery amid a large crowd of people of all walks of life. In the explosion four civilians died on the spot and 37 were injured. Mr. Princely was one of the injured. He succumbed to injuries.

● Kodikamam police recovered the body of a family man at Yathali in Varani, Thenmaradchy, Jaffna. Vellupillai Kanagalingam, 45, lived within the demarcated boundary of SLA HSZ, an area where the 52nd SLA division and SLA camps are located. The hospital said he died of poisoning. Kanagalingam was seen buying things as usual from an eating place the previous evening. He had been

living alone in his house, which was also used as a motor repair garage. His mother had gone looking for him at the house as he failed visit her in the morning as he does regularly.

● SLAF personnel at Katunayake airbase fired precautionary shots into the air as an alarm was issued in Colombo that two unidentified aircrafts were observed over Puttalam sea. All flights were grounded and power supply in Colombo city was cut off. Tension prevailed in Colombo city following the false alarm.

● A SLAF helicopter gunship, MI 24, that took off from Anuradhapura airbase following the reports of unidentified aircraft over Puttalam sea, crashed into a private land adjoining the airforce base but both pilots and gunmen escaped unhurt.

25 April

● Six youths in the protective custody of Jaffna prison, a private house with a capacity to hold less than 100 but packed with more than 200 inmates, have been infected with chickenpox.

● Mannar Police ordered suspension of all state and private sector night bus services to and from Mannar other parts of Sri Lanka along Mannar-Madawachchi and Mannar-Vavuniya roads citing the ongoing state of unrest. State and private sector bus operators were instructed to reschedule their services between 7.30a.m. and 6p.m.

APC - Armoured Personnel Carrier
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

● The body of a youth, estimated to be about 23 years, was found in Thalikkulam, Vavuniya. Local residents said the youth did not seem to be from the area, and he may have been abducted, killed and his body dumped in the area the previous night.

● Twelve SLA soldiers were killed and 33 wounded when a special unit of the SLA launched a fresh offensive amid artillery barrage towards Mullikkulam, north-east of Madu Church in Iranai Illuppaikulam, Mannar.

● A Buffel APC used by the STF in Amparai was destroyed in a combined ambush, LTTE military spokesman Irasiah Ilanthirayan told media. The Buffel, on its way from Pannalagama to Bakmitiya-wa, was rushing to the site of a claymore attack on a STF Road Patrol, where at least two personnel were killed and 3 wounded. The STF claimed the LTTE combatants who triggered the claymore device had fled during its retaliation following the attack.

● SLA personnel, involved either as the accused or witness in cases of abductions, killings and other such criminal allegations, fail to appear for the scheduled trials in the courts in Jaffna peninsula, causing numerous indefinite postponements of the cases. The SLA troopers are reluctant to appear for the trials in due to fear of their lives under the current volatile situation in Jaffna peninsula, lawyers representing them said. The sensitive trials include those with homicides and suicides among SLA personnel.

● More than ten masked armed men in civil clothes abducted a fisheries society member from his house at Kerniyady, Mathagal in Valigamam, Jaffna. The abductors had their faces covered by black cloth and spoke Tamil with an accent when they abducted Sella-thurai Thavaratnam, 48, father of six. Thavaratnam's wife said in a complaint to the SLHRC.

● A bomb exploded in an abandoned plot of land between Chavakacheri town and Chavakacheri Courts, after SLA personnel had appeared at Chavakacheri Courts and left. The abandoned plot of land had been a motor repair garage earlier.

● SLA soldiers arrested a teenage girl and a woman at Siththandy in Eravur, Batticaloa, and handed them to Eravur Police for further inquiries. Baby-Shanthiny Vimalanathan, 15, of Siththandy and Mathivathany Kunasingham, 29, of Kannankudah, had undergone arms training after being abducted by an armed group and were arrested while loitering near a Hindu temple in Siththandy having escaped from their abductors.

● A Tamil family man was killed and two, including a SLA trooper, were injured in an attack on a SLA sentry unit posted near a lake at Siththandy, Eravur, Batticaloa. The attack was launched from LTTE held area across the lake and the civilians were caught in the crossfire. V. Thuraisamy, 45, a family man from Lake Road, Morokodanchenai, was killed and Upali Jeyasinghe, 37, a trooper attached to Morokodanchenai SLA camp, and M. Kanthalingam, 38, from Siththandy, Morokodanchenai, were injured.

● Gunmen abducted a young Tamil family man from his residence in Vipulanthapuram, Mylapaveli in Eravur, Batticaloa, and shot him dead. Thevathasan Inthirakmar, 28, father of one and a labourer by profession, was forcibly taken from his residence by the armed gang while he was watching television with his family and then shot at a nearby location.

● The Colombo Chief Magistrate ordered the release of six Tamil civilians and detention of one Tamil woman to a Rehabilitation Centre in the south. They were arrested in a cordon and search operation in Moratuwa in western province two months ago and detained in the Boosa detention centre in Galle. Majority of them were natives of Jaffna district and residing in Moratuwa at the time of arrest. The names of the released are Rajaretnam Gajan, Sivalingam Pirapaharan, Sithambaram Rajaretnam, Ponniah Sathiskumar, Shanmugam Paheerathan and Sakunthala. Rajathurai Vani of Jaffna was sent to a Rehabilitation Centre.

● The Colombo Additional Magistrate released two Tamil youths, Kanthasamy Ravichandran and Tharmalingam Thirukumaran, natives of Jaffna district, on surety bail when the police informed court that there was no evidence to implicate the suspects in any offence. They were arrested in a cordon and search operation on March 30 at Grandpass area in Colombo.

24 April

● Armed men abducted a fisherman at gun point from his house in Pesalai, Mannar. The armed men who spoke fluent Tamil and Sinhalese said they were police officials before abducting Francis Thevaraj Fernando, 38, father of four. Fernando had refused to go with the abductors and had been forcibly taken away at gun point from his home.

● SLAF bombers dropped bombs in various locations in Puthukku-diyiruppu, Kilinochchi. Four bombers dropped bombs near civilian settlements as people sought refuge in bunkers. No civilian casualties were reported.

● SLA troopers in camps across the Jaffna Peninsula emptied bullets in the air in a barrage of gunfire after the Tamileelam Air Force attacked SLA's main base complex in the Jaffna peninsula. Tharmalingam Vijitha, 29, a housewife in Eezhaalai, was wounded in Eezhaalai when SLA soldiers opened fire at the Tiger aircrafts that completed their mission.

● The Sri Lankan government refused to provide helicopter transport to the four TNA Batticaloa MPs so they could travel from Colombo to Batticaloa to attend the District Development Council (DDC) meeting at Batticaloa Kachcheri. The MPs had requested transport help following death threats from the Karuna Group. The meeting was organized to explore solutions to the IDP problems and to endorse the other development activities planned for the current year. As there were no responses, the MPs were unable to attend the key meeting

Continued on page 14



Thousands attended the funeral of Rajivarman, allegedly killed by the EPDP. Photo TamilNet

Another Tamil journalist killed as earlier murders commemorated

ON THE anniversary of the killing of prominent journalists, yet another Tamil journalist was gunned down in the middle of Jaffna town.

Selvarajah Rajivarman, 25, was shot and killed on 29 April by a lone gunman riding a motorbike at Naavalar Road, Rasavin Thoddam junction, Jaffna.

RSF (Reporters Sans Frontiers - Reporters Without Borders), the French based journalists organization, condemned the killing.

"The people who murder journalists in Sri Lanka feel so well protected that they carry out fresh murders to mark the anniversaries of their preceding ones," RSF said.

"On the second anniversary of the murder of Tamilnet.com editor Sivaram Dharmeratnam and the first anniversary of the murder of two Uthayan employees, the killers struck again, murdering another journalist with impunity in an area controlled by the army. We call on the authorities to identify and punish those responsible."

"Jaffna-based journalists told Reporters Without Borders they suspected that the pro-government Tamil militia, the EPDP, could have been behind Rajivarman's murder," the RSF press communiqué said.

"The EPDP criticises Uthayan for supporting Tamil nationalism. EPDP members were suspected in the murder of journalist Mylvaganam Nimalarajan in 2000 and last year's murder of the three Uthayan employees," the release noted.

Meanwhile the Sri Lanka Tamil Media Alliance (SLTMA) appealed to the Sri Lankan government to take immediate action to find those involved in the killing.

"In Jaffna various forms of pressure and threats are being issued continuously on journalists and media organizations," the SLTMA noted.

"Even though this Alliance has brought to the attention of Media minister Mr. Anura Priyadarshana Yapa regarding the killings of journalists and the various forms of intimidation they are subjected to, we are very concerned to note that no action has been taken to stop these," the association said.

"The killing of Selvarajah Rajivarman is a clear indication that [the government] did not take any action to protect the media men especially the Tamil media personnel."

"The killing of yet another journalist has a created fear among Tamil media journalists," the SLTMA noted.

"We therefore publicly issue an appeal to [the Sri Lankan government] to take steps to arrest the culprits involved in this killing and produce them before law," the association appealed.

Rajivarman was working as a staff reporter and was on training since he had joined the Jaffna daily 6 months previously.

He used to go to the police stations and hospital seeking information about the many crimes that have been taking place in rec-

ent months in Jaffna. He had also been taking an evening journalism course at Jaffna university.

Before joining Uthayan, he had worked for three years for the newspaper Namathu Eelanadu, whose managing editor, Sinnathamby Sivamaharajah, was murdered in August 2006, and for the daily Yarl Thinakural, one of whose journalists, Subramaniam Ramachandran, has been missing since February. Three of Uthayan's employees were killed last year.

Rajivarman was from Aavara-ngkaal East, Puththoor in Valikaa-mam, Jaffna.

Thousands attended the funeral of the young Tamil journalist, killed as he was collecting news in Jaffna town.

Rajivarman's funeral, held the day after his killing, saw most of the residents of his home town turn out to pay their respects.

Media persons, religious dignitaries, and civil society leaders spoke at the event.

Rajivarman's remains were kept at his house, where thousands waited for their turn to see his body covered by flowers, and to pay their last respects.

The presence of a large number of SLA troopers posted on the Jaffna-Point Pedro road, just 400 meters from Rajivarman's house, did not deter the participants at the funeral. Attendees ranged from children to elderly residents.

His body was then taken in a procession to the family's cremations ground where his body was cremated in the presence of thousands.

NEWS

Two Australian Tamils charged

TWO TAMIL men in Australia were arrested last Tuesday after police raids in Melbourne and Sydney and charged with aiding the LTTE. The operation follows a wave of similar arrests in the United States and France of alleged supporters of the LTTE.

Aruran Vinayamoorthy, 32, and Sivarajah Yathavan, 36, both of Melbourne, were charged with belonging to the Liberation Tigers and providing support to the organisation. They have also been charged with providing financial support between July 2004 and this year to the group, allegedly using funds raised for the victims of the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami.

They could be jailed for lengthy periods - two of the charges carry 25-year maximum jail terms, and the other 10 years.

Although the LTTE is not a proscribed terrorist organisation in Australia, it is considered to be

engaged in terrorist activity and it is illegal to fund them.

Police allege the men transferred money into overseas bank accounts and bought equipment in Australia that could be used to make bombs. But their lawyer said there was no evidence they supported the group after 2005, when police first interviewed them.

The magistrate denied the men bail, saying they have not proven exceptional circumstances. The prosecution said the men were a flight risk and police would not be able to extradite them from LTTE territory. The men return to court in July.

The arrests caused Associate Professor John Whitehall, a pediatrician, to launch a public relations campaign. The director of neonatology at an Australian hospital last year spent three months training LTTE doctors and is now editing a book, to be published

later this year, on the medical corp of the organisation.

"I was teaching them how to look after sick children, I felt I was doing the right thing," he said.

Dr Whitehall told The Weekend Australian newspaper he was willing to talk about his work with the Tigers in an attempt to counter the view that "put the organisation in the same bracket as al-Qa'ida and Osama bin Laden".

"Of course, they have exceeded the Geneva convention of orthodox warfare, but you should not see them as the only people doing that," he said.

"There are other forces of terror at work, state terror, persecution and human rights abuses against the Tamils that has been going on for decades and which we never hear about, and which governments, like that in Australia, seem to ignore."

Violence - week ending 6 May

Continued from page 10

ians in Puttalam during the cordon and search operation. The two had failed to prove their identity and the reason for their stay in the location.

● Armed men shot dead a fifty-eight year-old civilian at Menkaamam, a Tamil village in SLA controlled Muthur, Trincomalee. The armed gang had forcibly entered the man's house and opened fire.

● A bail application was filed seeking the release of Sebastianpillai Vethanayagam, 40, an employee of the Murungkan hospital in Mannar, who has been detained under the PTA since his arrest on October 5 last year. Police arrested him while he was cleaning fish, charging that he was pro-

viding "secret signals to the enemy" as he cleaned and threw away the refuse.

● The LTTE fired artillery shells on areas within the SLA HSZ in Palaali and military helicopters were seen flying about.

30 April

● Police arrested a Muslim teacher after recovering a hand grenade and a T 56 rifle magazine with 27 live-bullets hidden in the roof of his house at Mullipothanai, Trincomalee. The police searched the teacher's house on a tip-off.

● A SLAF aircraft on a bombing raid south of Iranaimadu in Vannai spewed a large cloud of smoke after a explosion and the jet suspended the bombing raid, strugg-

ling to maintain height. Unconfirmed reports from Colombo said a Israeli-built fast attack Kfir failed to return. LTTE military officials told TamilNet that their anti-aircraft defence system automatically activated when an aircraft was detected in the Iranaimadu area.

● Sri Lanka military forces arrested three Tamil civilians in Gomarankadawela village in Morawewa, Trincomalee, during a cordon and search operation. They were taken into custody as they failed to provide satisfactory explanation for their stay in the area.

● Armed men shot dead a youth at Dutch Road in Meesalai, Thennaraadchchi, Jaffna. Rasamuthu Kiritharan, 25, may have been abducted elsewhere, brought to Meesalai and shot dead.

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Thousands of Tamils participated in the May day rally held in Paris on May 1. Participants distributed leaflets urging the French to recognize Tamils right to self-determination, carried photographs of the leader of Liberation Tigers, Velupillai Pirapaharan, and shouted slogans in support of Tamileelam during the procession. *Photo TamilNet*

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