

Seeking independence in today's world

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A soldier lines up residents for a check in Ampara. Sri Lanka's military is overwhelmingly Sinhala. Photo STR/AFP/Getty Images

Sri Lanka blocks access to TamilNet

THE Sri Lanka government came under criticism from local and international media watchdog after the it ordered local internet service providers to block access to TamilNet, the web-based news agency covering events in the island's northeast.

"Tamilnet is a source of news and information that is known throughout the world and for the past 10 years its coverage of Sri Lanka's civil war has proved essential," Reporters Without Borders said in an appeal.

"The government must put a stop to this censorship and restore access to the site at once."

The Sri Lankan government has denied blocking the site, but the national security spokesman and minister Keheliya Rambukwella said he would love to hire hackers to disable Tamilnet

Service providers rejected the government claim.

"We have blocked it as per a government directive," a Dialog Telecom spokesman said.

Reporters have been stopped from visiting Tiger-held areas since August 2006 for what the government says are security reasons.

Rajapakse regime under pressure

PRESIDENT Mahinda Rajapakse's government is coming under increasing international pressure over its continuing human rights abuses and hardline approach to the island's ethnic question.

A chorus of international condemnations following the government's deportation of hundreds of Tamils back to their 'places of origin' in the Northeast has been fol-

lowing by a fresh burst of criticism from human rights and media watchdogs and a slew of negative articles in the international press.

A visit to the United Nations in Geneva by President Rajapakse was a public relations setback with the government coming under fire just before from an international panel of experts

tasked with overseeing his government's probes into a select group of killings and abuses.

The pressure comes as Tamils are deported, abductions and killings are blamed on state security forces, and aid groups and truce monitors say they are obstructed from doing their jobs.

Earlier this week Sri Lankan government told the Sri Lanka

Monitoring Mission not to issue any statements on violation of the 2002 Ceasefire Agreement that are reported to them.

"They have been told to entertain complaints but no statements will be issued on their rulings," government spokesman Minister Keheliya Rambukwella said.

Press reports said the SLMM chief, Lars Solvberg, was told of

government unhappiness over a recent report in which the SLMM said government troops had been involved in abductions.

Both Britain and the United States have suspended some aid to Sri Lanka this year citing rights abuse concerns - though both are selling large quantities of arms

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NEWS

Anything is fair when fighting LTTE - Gothabaya

Tamilnet

SRI LANKA'S hard-line Defence Secretary launched a bitter attack on the international community Tuesday, saying Sri Lanka was being bullied by Western states over human rights. "We have to defend ourselves. I'm talking about terrorists. Anything is fair," Gothabaya Rajapaksa told Reuters and the BBC. He said the United Nations agencies had been infiltrated and misled by the Liberation Tigers over 30 years.

However the United Nations on Wednesday strongly reacted to Rajapakse's accusations. Frederick Lyons, the resident and humanitarian coordinator in Sri Lanka, said he had "absolutely no grounds" to question the integrity of the UN staff in Sri Lanka.

Gothabaya, who is also President Mahinda Rajapaksa's brother, accused foreign powers of applying double standards when it comes to human rights violations, saying all measures were fair to defeat "terrorists".

Last week the Sri Lankan government evicted hundreds of Tamils from Colombo triggering a chorus of condemnation from Western states.

"This is discrimination and bullying by the international community," Rajapaksa told Reuters and the BBC in an interview Tuesday.

"Without understanding the problem, they are trying to bully us, and we won't be isolated. We have all the SAARC countries, the Asian countries," he added. "Britain or Western countries, EU countries, they can do whatever. We don't depend on them."

"They think that they we get aid. No, they are not giving anything."

Both Britain and the United States have suspended small amounts aid to Sri Lanka this year citing rights abuse concerns - though both countries have sharply raised their arms sales to the Sri Lankan military this year.

President Rajapakse last month shrugged off Britain's move to cut aid and vowing that his government would not be held hostage over aid.

And Japan, Sri Lanka's biggest donor by far, has refused to cut aid. Last week Japan's peace envoy, Yasushi Akashi, visiting Sri Lanka said human rights may sometimes have to suffer in the war against terror.

Although Prime Minister Rat-

nisri Wickremesekere apologised for last Wednesday's expulsions in which hundreds of Tamils were put on busses at gunpoint and sent to the North and East, Mr. Gothabaya defended the government's actions.

"It is a good example where the whole world was misled," he said. "Everyone knows the LTTE is infiltrating [the south] ... We can't arrest 300 people and detain them. What is the best option?"

"So you can tell them, if you don't have any legal business in Colombo ... we don't want to detain you, you go back to your homes. In fact this operation was much better. We could have put all of them in detention."

He dismissed criticism by international human rights groups and international ceasefire monitors of the SLMM that Sri Lankan security forces are engaged in human rights abuses, including killings and abductions of civilians.

"We have to defend ourselves. You can't risk the country ...," Rajapaksa said.

"What I am saying is, if there is a terrorist group, why can't you do anything? It's not against a community... I'm talking about terrorists. Anything is fair."

"When the U.S. does operations, they say covert operations. When something is (done) in Sri Lanka, they call it abductions," he added. "This is playing with the words."

Rajapaksa said British Foreign Office Minister Kim Howells, who visited the island on Monday, had been "completely misinformed".

"Howells didn't talk a single word against the LTTE, a single word against terrorism," Rajapaksa said. "They are threatening isolation, they are stopping aid."

"They want us to suffer," he added. "When America is attacked ... every country (calls it) war against terrorism, but why are the terrorists being treated in a different way in Sri Lanka? Is Britain talking about isolating America?"

Rajapaksa also said U.N. agencies in Sri Lanka, which have also urged the government to halt rights abuses, had been misled by local staff sympathetic to the LTTE.

"For 30 years or so, this LTTE planned this, they infiltrated the U.N.," Rajapaksa said. "The problem is the U.N. organisations, they took a lot of locals (on)."



Gotabaya Rajapaksa, pictured with brother President Mahinda Rajapaksa, attacked western countries, and particularly the UN, for their comments on Sri Lanka's human rights record. Photo TamilNet

"There are a lot of things happening in the UN," he said.

The United Nations told Reuters the claim was groundless, and voiced concern such comments might expose humanitarian workers to increased risk given the number of aid workers killed in recent years.

Frederick Lyons, of the UN said "Such groundless accusations could seriously endanger the safety and security of UN staff in an environment in which a number of humanitarian workers have lost their lives over the past year, he said expressing deep concern regarding the accusations by Mr. Gotabhaya."

A statement released by the UN on Wednesday June 13 stated "All UN staff are recruited under terms of employment in which they are responsible to the UN Secretary-General and to the principles of the United Nations. They are also honour-bound to work with complete neutrality and to receive no instruction from any third party."

Meanwhile, Britain's Howells said Monday during a visit to Sri Lanka he was worried about growing rights abuses and an escalation in the conflict. The British minister called for talks with the LTTE. "I told President Rajapakse that Britain stands ready to offer its skills in peace building.... I told him I know of no conflict that was resolved through military means," Howells was quoted by AFP as saying.

"At the end of the day, you need a political solution to meet the aspirations of the Tamil people," he said. "Sri Lanka runs the risk of isolation," Howells said, referring to growing international concerns over rights abuses in the island.

Expulsions, p11-14

Under pressure ...

Continued from page 1

this year.

"The abductions have got to cease, the human rights abuses have got to cease... The kind of tactics that were used to clear Tamil people out of Colombo suburbs must never happen again." British Foreign Office Minister Kim Howells said earlier this month.

But President Rajapaksa says many of the reports of abductions and abuses are fake and designed to discredit his government, and denies the security forces are involved.

Gotabaya Rajapaksa, the president's brother, says Western powers apply double standards when it comes to rights violations.

The UN food agency, the World Food Programme, has slapped conditions on food aid to avoid war refugees being resettled against their will.

Diplomats say Sri Lanka is also hurt by often contradictory statements ministers and senior officials make to local and international audiences, in a complex political arena that includes hard-line Marxists and activist Buddhist monks.

"At a certain point in time, you give up on Sri Lanka," one foreign ambassador based in Colombo, declining to be named, told Reuters. "There are so many mixed messages that you get a totally blurred vision of their foreign policy."

"Officials constantly contradict one another to score domestic points. This is the danger of having one message for your domes-

tic audience and one for the international community. That's exactly what isolates them."

Meanwhile the fighting between the Sri Lankan armed forces and the Tamil Tigers is continuing.

Recent clashes have raised the prospect of widening conflict in the island nation of 19.5 million that could severely damage the economy and isolate the government, former Sri Lankan diplomat Nanda Godage said.

"We could be heading in the direction of sanctions," he said.

Top Sri Lankan defence officials have said in the past they will need about two to three years to subdue the LTTE and force them to talks, an outcome the Tigers say is impossible.

"The LTTE and the Tamil people under no circumstances will come to the table in a position of political and military weakness," LTTE Political Wing leader S.P. Thamilselvan said recently.

Last week a resolution was tabled before the US Congress calling on all parties to the Sri Lankan conflict to negotiate a political solution that will be fair to all ethnic communities whilst ruling out a military solution to the conflict.

The sponsoring Congressmen said the US has a strategic interest in promoting peace in Sri Lanka and throughout South-East Asia.

Also this week, India's Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee urged Sri Lanka to negotiate a solution to the conflict. "The recent developments in Sri Lanka, the violence, have been a cause of concern to all," he said.

NEWS

International experts slam Sri Lanka human rights probes

Tamilnet

A PANEL of international experts tasked with overseeing a Presidential commission looking into a set of human rights violations criticized the inquiry's progress and performance Monday.

The experts also said the mandates and powers of the Commission and IIGEP were being misleadingly overplayed by Sri Lankan officials and said it was not an alternative to international human rights monitoring.

"We remain concerned that current measures taken by the Government of Sri Lanka and the Commission to address issues such as the independence of the Commission, timeliness and witness protection are not adequate and do not satisfy international norms and standards," Independent Group of Eminent Persons (IIGEP), said.

"We regret that public statements from State officials are creating the misleading impression that the Commission and IIGEP have wide mandates and powers and the resources to address ongoing alleged human rights violations in Sri Lanka. This is not the case," the IIGEP.

"It is critical that the Commission and IIGEP not be portrayed as a substitute for robust, effective measures including national and international human rights monitoring."

Criticising the close role of the Attorney General's Department in the Commission, the IIGEP said: "we consider these to be serious conflicts of interest, which lack transparency and compromise national and international standards of independence and impartiality that are central to the credibility and public confidence of the Commission."

"We are concerned that the Commission's finances are managed by the Presidential Secretariat," the IIGEP said.

"We are concerned that the Commission did not commence even preliminary investigations and inquiries until May 2007, despite being constituted six months earlier,"

"Internal processes have not been transparent; no detailed work plan has been announced; essential staff have not yet been fully recruited; investigative and witness protection units are not functioning," the IIGEP said.

"Significantly, evidence already known to be in the possession of Governmental bodies relating to the cases has not been gathered and transmitted to us," the experts said.

"Such unnecessary delays undermine public confidence in the ability of the Commission to car-

ry out its mandate in a timely manner."

Criticising the absence of witness protection under Sri Lankan law, the IIGEP said: "appropriate legislation that accords with international norms and standards should be enacted and implemented as soon as possible."

"Witness protection is absolutely essential in order to investigate serious violations of human rights that are within the Commission's mandate," the experts pointed out.

The full text of the IIGEP's statement, signed by the Chairman P N Bhagwati, follows:

On 1 June 2007, we, the International Independent Group of Eminent Persons (IIGEP), submitted our first Interim Report to the President of Sri Lanka. The report contains our observations and concerns about the President's Commission of Inquiry to Investigate and Inquire into Alleged Serious Violations of Human Rights (the Commission).

We reported to the President that the Commission has so far made hardly any noticeable progress in investigations and inquiries since its inception in November 2006. Moreover, since our formation in February 2007, we have identified and raised a number of concerns with the Commission and the Government of Sri Lanka.

We remain concerned that current measures taken by the Government of Sri Lanka and the Commission to address issues such as the independence of the Commission, timeliness and witness protection are not adequate and do not satisfy international norms and standards.

Independence

We are concerned about the role of the Attorney General's Department as legal counsel to the Commission. The Attorney General's Department is the Chief Legal Adviser to the Government of Sri Lanka. Members of the Attorney General's Department have been involved in the original investigations into those cases subject to further investigation by the Commission itself.

As such, members of the Attorney General's Department may find that they are investigating themselves. Furthermore, it is possible that they be called as material witnesses before the Commission.

We consider these to be serious conflicts of interest, which lack transparency and compromise national and international standards of independence and



The killing of seventeen aid workers was among the human rights violations an international panel has accused the government of not properly investigating. Photo TamilNet

impartiality that are central to the credibility and public confidence of the Commission.

We are concerned that the Commission's finances are managed by the Presidential Secretariat. The Commission does not have financial independence enabling it to exercise control of its human resources and operations.

In particular, the Commission should be allocated sufficient funds to secure the permanent confidentiality, safety and integrity of its victim and witness protection scheme.

Timeliness

We are concerned that the Commission did not commence even preliminary investigations and inquiries until May 2007, despite being constituted six months earlier in November 2006.

To date, internal processes have not been transparent; no detailed work plan has been announced; essential staff have not yet been fully recruited; investigative and witness protection units are not functioning; and significantly, evidence already known to be in the possession of Governmental bodies relating to the cases has not been gathered and transmitted to us.

Such unnecessary delays undermine public confidence in the ability of the Commission to carry out its mandate in a timely manner.

Witness protection

We are concerned that there are no adequate victim and witness protection provisions under Sri Lankan law. We are of the view that witness protection is absolutely essential in order to investigate serious violations of human rights that are within the

Commission's mandate. Appropriate legislation that accords with international norms and standards should be enacted and implemented as soon as possible to protect victims and witnesses.

We regret that the Commission still has no functioning victim and witness protection mechanism. In the absence of appropriate legislation, an effective scheme or functioning protection unit, we fail to understand how the Commission could have invited the public, as it did as recently as 14 May 2007, to come forward and give evidence.

As the Commission is operating without witness protection legislation, it is unable to guarantee the safety and security of witnesses. Summoning and examining potential victims and witnesses may create fear in their minds about safety and security, deterring them from coming forward to give evidence.

Mandates

The Presidential Warrant limits the scope of the Commission to a retrospective and fact finding role. The core work of the Commission is to obtain information, investigate and inquire into alleged serious violations of human rights arising since 1 August 2005, including 16 specific cases; and to examine prior investigations into these cases.

The Commission is required to make findings and report to the President on the facts and circumstances pertaining to each case; the descriptions, nature and backgrounds of the victims; the circumstances that may have led to, or resulted in, those persons suffering such deaths, injury or physical harm; the identities, descriptions and backgrounds of the persons and groups responsible for

the commission of deaths and other acts; measures of reparation to be provided to the victims; and recommendations in order to prevent the occurrence of incidents in the nature of those investigated and any other recommendations considered as relevant.

The IIGEP, comprising of 11 Members, has been invited by the President to observe the investigations and inquiries of the Commission, in order to ensure transparency and observance of international norms and standards.

The IIGEP does not have a mandate to conduct independent investigations and inquiries; nevertheless, we are open to all persons who wish to provide information and evidence on the cases under review by the Commission.

Although we are obliged by the Presidential Invitation to transmit third party information to the Commission, it would not be right for us to disclose any information without the consent of the third party, or which may impair the safety or security of such third parties until we are satisfied that effective, functioning and credible witness protection measures are in place.

We regret that public statements from State officials are creating the misleading impression that the Commission and IIGEP have wide mandates and powers and the resources to address ongoing alleged human rights violations in Sri Lanka. This is not the case.

In the current context, in particular, the apparent renewed systematic practice of enforced disappearance and the killings of Red Cross workers, it is critical that the Commission and IIGEP not be portrayed as a substitute for robust, effective measures including national and international human rights monitoring.

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NEWS

Britain: Sri Lanka's war is unwinnable

THIS week a circular issued by the British government to the British members of the European Parliament was made public. The circular which summarises the current situation in Sri Lanka is highly critical of the Sri Lanka's human rights record.

It also states that Prime Minister Tony Blair has written to President Mahinda Rajapakse a military solution is untenable and a credible political solution is vital for lasting peace.

We reproduce below the briefing note to the British MEPs.

1. The UK is a close friend of Sri Lanka, we value our wide-ranging ties, and we would like to see Sri Lankans themselves achieve a negotiated settlement that satisfies legitimate aspirations of all communities. We hope that the All-Party Conference will present a way forward. We stand ready to help.

2. The UK's high level engagement on Sri Lanka continues. The Prime Minister has written to President Rajapakse with the key messages of

- The war is unwinnable;
- The need to win hearts and minds and ensure protection of human rights; and that it is
- Vital to have a credible constitutional framework.

3. The Rt. Hon. Paul Murphy hopes to visit in July to share the UK's experience of the Northern Ireland peace process and devolution. The Rt. Hon. Kim Howells hopes to visit in June. We stress to partners that they are not peace envoys. We are in close contact with the Norwegian facilitators of the peace process, and they support our efforts. We remain, committed, and ready to talk to the LTTE.

4. The UK continues to express deep concern to the government about their military action to defeat the LTTE, which brings an immense human cost, damages Sri Lanka's international standing; and ultimately will not work. The Defence Secretary (Rajapakse's brother) continues to talk publicly of needing two to three years to finish off the LTTE. Both sides need to do more to ensure that the civilian population is protected better, through the supply of essential supplies, access for humanitarian agencies and by avoiding causing civilian casualties. The forced return of internally displaced persons, and extra judicial killings by security forces is not acceptable. Sri Lanka's standing in the international community is being seriously damaged.

5. The UK has also expressed concern at reports that Government of Sri Lanka forces have been complicit in child recruitment by paramilitaries (operating in the east). This has been an issue

where HMG and Government of Sri Lanka have for many years joined forces in publicly condemning the LTTE. It is imperative that the government takes immediate steps to stop child recruitment by paramilitaries in areas it controls.

6. The capacity of Sri Lanka's domestic human rights mechanisms has to be strengthened. The Constitutional Council needs to be appointed legally so it can fulfill its role of ensuring independence in key institutions such as the police, judiciary and human rights.

7. The UK supports the work of the All-Party Committee (APC) on a devolution offer. International partners, including India, are concerned that Sri Lanka Freedom Party's (SLFP) initial proposals fell short of expectations. The UK hopes the final devolution offer will be bold and credible, and provide a good basis for dialogue between all communities.

Britain: 'We are in close contact with the Norwegian facilitators. We remain, committed, and ready to talk to the LTTE.'

8. Shortly after his election in late 2005, President Rajapakse tasked an All Party Committee (APC) with producing framework for an overall political settlement, effectively an offer on devolution of the southern polity that the government could endorse and put to the LTTE.

9. On 1 May 2007, the President's SLFP party offered proposals to the APC that were seen across the political ethnic spectrum as inadequate, and in no way a basis for a credible offer to the Tamils. The Indians have made clear their displeasure. The government has stressed however that the SLFP proposal is not final and that proposals from all the parties would be open for discussion at the All Party Representative Committee (APRC). We expect the APC to take another couple of months at least to arrive at its consensus offer.

10. In September 2006, following international alarm over the deaths of 17 local employees of the French NGO Action Contre la Faim in Muttur, the government announced it would hold a Presidential Commission to investigate the 12 most high profile human rights cases. An International Independent Group of

Eminent Persons (IIGEP) was established to oversee the process. In Dec 2006 the UK nominated Sir Nigel Rodley to the IIGEP.

11. The UK is concerned about growing impunity, despite the establishment of the President's Commission of Inquiry. We believe IIGEP can play a useful role, but it has a narrow remit to tackle only past human rights violations. The IIGEP is not a human rights panacea. Early signs from the Commission of Inquiry and IIGEP are not encouraging, the process is too slow, the Attorney General's Department role undermines the commission's independence and there is inadequate witness protection. The Commission of Inquiry cannot be used as a reason to avoid addressing current human rights abuses. With ongoing human rights violations, and an ineffectual Commission of Inquiry and Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission, there is a growing case for introducing international human rights monitors to Sri Lanka.

12. An EU text for a UN Human Rights Council resolution on Sri Lanka has been on the table at HRC since the third session last autumn. As Sri Lanka currently has the Chair of the Asia Group, influencing voting in that group, they have so far managed to prevent the resolution from being tabled. The fifth session of the HRC in June will have little time for country specific issues. In the likely event that the situation in Sri Lanka continues to deteriorate, support for the resolution may increase. Various NGO groups are lobbying for an EU-US, and possibly India co-sponsored resolution.

13. Despite NGO pressure, the Government of Sri Lanka strongly contests any notion of an international human rights monitoring mission. There appears little prospect of a change of position. An international attempt to push for a UN-led mission seems likely. It would probably see Sri Lanka retreat to the hard line group of the like-minded. It is not clear who might lead such an effort.

14. The UK's payment of the €41m post tsunami assistance to Sri Lanka is subject to condition that government would not:

- Instigate hostilities;
- Have an unjustifiable increase its military spending;
- Be in significant violation of international obligations; and
- Have a breakdown in the GoSL's accountability systems.

15. Earlier this year the Rt. Hon. Hilary wrote to GoSL asking what measures were to be taken to ensure that these condi-

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NEWS

Human rights not a priority when fighting war on terror - Japan

JAPAN will continue to give aid to Sri Lanka despite the country's failure to address the spiralling human rights violations. Mr Yasushi Akashi, Japan's special envoy, made the announcement on Saturday June 9 at the end of his four-day visit to the country. Further, he told local press reporters that human rights issues takes second place when fighting terrorism.

Japan is the single largest donor to Sri Lanka, and provides nearly two thirds of all international aid to the island. It has contributed 63 percent of total bilateral aid received by the country since 2003. Japan is also one of the Co-Chairs of the 2003 Aid Sri Lanka Conference along with the US, the EU and Norway that backed the peace process.

When asked about the forced eviction and deportation of Tamils from Colombo, Akashi stated that "these certainly did not accord with the 'values of a civilised society', but it was natural that these values sometimes suffered and were likely to be given 'second place' in a country fighting terrorism".

Japan is the only co-chair that has not condemned the deportation of Tamils from Colombo on June 7.

Whilst reassuring continued assistance to Sri Lanka Akashi was quoted as saying, "we have concerns and guidelines. We are for the rule of law, democracy, human rights and security."

The 2003 Tokyo declaration linked aid to progress in the peace process, but according to Kyodo News Akashi justified continuing assistance to Sri Lanka by stating "Japan does not want victims of

the war to pay the price for the problems in the peace process"

Other donor countries, such as EU and the US, have reduced their aid to Sri Lanka based on the country's poor rights record.

Over the past few months, number of governmental and non-governmental organizations, have condemned the increasing violence in the country, and the deterioration of the peace process.

However, Akashi claimed that "it is difficult to measure or 'quantify' progress in the peace process in an ever changing and complex conflict situation",

In a donor conference held in 2003 donor countries pledged \$4.5 billion dollars to Sri Lanka, which was conditional upon progress in the peace process. However, most of this fund has already been dispersed despite the failing peace process.

Akashi acknowledged that there were 'deficiencies and shortcomings' in regard to human rights in Sri Lanka, but he got the impression that these were being addressed by the government.

However, his statement contradicts the report published last week by the international human rights panel - International Independent Group of Eminent Persons (IIGEP) - appointed by the international community to investigate Sri Lanka's handling of human rights abuses.

In the highly critical report IIGEP has concluded that, Sri Lanka has shown hardly any progress in dealing with human rights violations. In addition, the report went on to state Sri Lanka lacked proper procedures to deal with rights issues.



Akashi met Rajapaksa on a visit during which he said his country would not cut aid. Photo TamilNet

When Akashi arrived in Sri Lanka last Tuesday, he said he found the atmosphere "heavy and depressing with a sense of crisis and tension. But at the end of the visit following talks with President Mahinda Rajapakse, he is leaving with a "certain amount of hope and optimism about the future of the country, reported the Kyodo News.

Akashi did not meet the representatives of the Liberation Tigers or Tamil parliamentarians.

Britain calls for end to war, peace talks

DR Kim Howells, UK Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Office, during his third visit to the country called for Sri Lanka to end all military efforts and to resume talks with the Liberation Tigers, reported the Island newspaper.

He said the ongoing military efforts will not bring peace to the country and the government had "no option but to negotiate with the LTTE", said the paper.

Further, he argued that "war has only moved the front lines North and South along A9 and has but neither side has been able to win a decisive victory".

He went on to state that "even if the security forces were able to win - what then? There would still need to be a political deal, otherwise resentment will build up and there will be more violence, in twenty-five or fifty years", the Island quoted him as saying.

In the recent months, the Sri Lankan government has been actively involved in strengthening their military capabilities, especially its airpower with purchases of highly sophisticated fighter planes.

Howells also expressed deep concern for the human rights abuses, and said "they damage Sri Lanka's image overseas and make it more difficult for the international community to give the Sri

Lankan government the political support it wants", the paper said.

As a way of justifying the interest and attention given to Sri Lanka's rights abuses by the international community, he said "some claim that comments about human rights are interference in Sri Lanka's internal affairs. But human rights are not a purely domestic matter. Both Sri Lanka and the UK are signatories to the United Nations human rights conventions, which means we both have an obligation to uphold the highest standard of human rights".

Despite all the violence and human rights abuses, he said the British and Norwegian governments and the wider international community want to see "Sri Lanka remain as a single country".

He acknowledged the discrimination of the government against the Tamils, and said "Sri Lanka needs a sustainable political solution, one that allows its Tamil population to feel they will be able to prosper within a Sri Lankan state that takes pride in the identity of all its people".

He urged the government to work with the "moderate Tamils" to find a solution to the conflict.

Howells met President Mahinda Rajapaksa and other southern politicians, but no Tamil politicians.

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WEDNESDAY JUNE 20, 2007 No. 351

Stepping Up

Why is Sri Lanka now under international pressure?

Sri Lanka's President Mahinda Rajapakse is now under greater international pressure than ever before. The two issues are his refusal to halt the blatant human rights abuses by the Sri Lankan armed forces and also to put forward a proposal for a solution to the protracted ethnic conflict. With their friendly advice falling on deaf ears, the Western states have ratcheted up their pressure on the Rajapakse regime with public criticism and threats of action.

It is on the human rights front, quite rightly, that the government is under the greatest pressure. While international human rights groups have been making vocal protests for some time, international media has now ramped up coverage of the deteriorating conditions in Sri Lanka. And, as if on cue, the international panel of experts overseeing President Rajapakse's much-heralded probe into a handful of incidents of past abuses has also come out with strong criticism about conduct of the probes. There are reports and claims of visas being denied to security forces' personnel involved in rights abuses and rumblings of sanctions being prepared. There is almost unanimous agreement amongst the international critics that international human rights monitoring must be introduced to the island.

So far the regime is unrepentant. The President himself simply denies that abuses are taking place. Those said abducted have either gone abroad or joined the Tigers he says. He blames the LTTE entirely for the ongoing killings - a daily occurrence across the Northeast and even Colombo, marked by the dumping of mutilated corpses. Meanwhile, his brother, Gotabhaya Rajapakse, the Defence Secretary, is openly contemptuous of the international hand wringing over rights abuses. He compares Sri Lanka's brutal counter-insurgency to US actions elsewhere and charges hypocrisy.

The international pressure on the Sri Lanka state to halt its abuses is, of course, welcome. However, the inherent character of the atrocities is studiously not being acknowledged: that the state is using a systematic campaign of terror to subdue the Tamil demand for self-determination. A cursory survey reveals the pattern: the victims are activists or relatives of those involved even peripherally in the Tamil political struggle.

In this context, the international pressure has been a long time coming. The

abuses came out of the escalating shadow war between Sri Lankan military intelligence (and its allied paramilitaries) and the LTTE which began in late 2003. But beyond these atrocities, for the past year the Sri Lankan military has waged a war that has targeted the Tamil population: indiscriminate and deliberate bombing and shelling has systematically cleared the Tamils from large swathes of the Northeast. The government has ruthlessly used starvation and denial of medicine as a tactic to compel populations to move out of LTTE-controlled areas.

Yet throughout all that, the international community has supported President Rajapakse. Even at the peaks of human suffering in the Northeast countries like the United States have come out stridently in support of Sri Lanka. The self-styled 'war on terror' has by far taken priority over international human rights and humanitarian norms.

Even the international pressure on President Rajapakse to forge a southern consensus and put forward a solution to the ethnic question is driven by the logic of counter-insurgency, rather than justice. A solution must be offered, some suggest, to encourage the Tamils - who are said to be 'moderates' - to distance themselves from the Tigers - the 'extremists'. What is important then is not whether President Rajapakse can actually deliver a solution (in fact he can't: it is well known that the shaky ruling coalition built on handouts, blackmail and coercion is moribund and the state is being managed by a Rajapakse family-led coterie).

It is for these reasons that the international community continues to laud the now discredited All Party Representative Committee (APRC). This body can never deliver a proposal that all major Sinhala parties can accept and yet offer credible power-sharing to the Tamils. Sri Lanka's post-independence history demonstrates that the southern polity, which operates in the logic of majoritarian anti-minority outbidding, will never agree on a reasonable solution for the Tamils. Some voices suggest over a year of brutalizing has softened up the Tamils and produced a desperate yearning for an end to the violence. In this climate all that is required is a credible solution from the government for the LTTE to have to negotiate or see its support amongst the Tamils ebb away.

But this is a plan that is as old as the conflict itself.

On the road

Reflecting on Tamil displacement over 30 years, on UN refugee day

Selvyn Navaruban
 LTTE Peace Secreterait

UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) for Sri Lanka reports that 300,000 people were displaced from April 2006 to April 2007 in the Tamil homeland. This though tragic and coming during a ceasefire period is just a small part of the repeated and large scale displacement to which Tamil people have been put through.

The vast majority, more than 200,000, of these recently displaced are from Batticaloa and Trincomalee. Many of the recently displaced live under tarpaulin tent under direct sunlight. They lack the very basic facilities to cook and bathe. They walk miles to collect drinking water. Children's education is devastated. Health in these refugee camps can be severely compromised due to inadequate hygiene in a crowded situation.

The 2004 Boxing Day tsunami created another 350,000 refugees in the Tamil homeland. Unlike the affected people among the Sinhala population who have been given permanent homes with the international aid, large percentage of the tsunami affected Tamil people continue live temporary shelters intended to last only six months because the Sri Lankan government blocked tsunami aid reaching the Tamils. These shelters are also crowded denying privacy to families. They become flooded during rain.

In effect, over a period of 30 years, almost the entire Tamil population from the Tamil homeland has been displaced at least once and a large percentage of them displaced multiple times.

The 1983 pogrom against the Tamils displaced many Tamils from Colombo to other countries and also to the Tamil homeland.

The confiscation of private land surrounding the Palaly airport since the 1980's displaced thousands of families. A similar confiscation of land in Kytes around the same period displaced more families. Palaly and Kytes now have extensive military bases using land owned by Tamil people after forcefully evicting the owners.

A similar confiscation of land

from Tamils took place along the eastern region of the Tamil homeland starting from Kokkilai in the north all the way down to Amparai.

These confiscated lands were converted into high security zones and some of it was settled by Sinhalese brought from other districts. The latest in this saga of confiscating land in the name of high security zone is the take over of Sampur and Muttur-east in Trincomalee from which Tamil people were displaced in mid 2006 by military action.

The creation of high security zone alone has created 300,000 long term refugees who were refugees before the latest ceasefire agreement was signed and have remained refugees to date.

People escaping indiscriminate military attacks also created enormous number of refugees. The largest was created in 1995, about 400,000, during the capture of Jaffna. Although many returned to Jaffna at least half of those who displaced from Jaffna at this time have gone overseas or are living in Vanni.

At least 500,000 Tamils have left the country to escape the incessant threat to life and education. The latest 300,000 over the last one year must be added to this existing number of displaced. The total number of displaced, therefore, is in excess of one and a half million. The total Tamil population in the Tamil homeland is just over 2 million. Thus the displaced represents 75% of the entire population.

Forcefully evicting people repeatedly and in such large numbers and confiscating their land is a clear violation of the human rights of the people and it also violates many of the international humanitarian norms.

When measured in terms of the depth of displacement suffered rather than in terms of numbers Tamil people are the worst affected in the world at present. The world should wake up to this brutalization of a people by a State.

Ms. Selvyn Navaruben is the LTTE's spokesperson on Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs

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EDITORIAL & OPINION

Independence in today's world

Kanthavanam

Tamil Guardian

AN interesting dynamic is under way regarding the future of Kosovo amid United Nations Security Council debates on a lasting solution to a conflict not dissimilar to that in Sri Lanka.

The United States, Britain and France, due to opposition from Russia, China and, of course, Serbia, have been working on a resolution that will quietly yet effectively re-write the criteria for eligibility for independence.

The world's powers are effectively the 'gate keepers' to Statehood. They are well aware that they are not bound by international law to recognise declarations of independence, however justified the demand might be.

This attempt to make Kosovo a 'special case' due to the break up of the former Yugoslavia clearly shows the degree to which the 'War on Terror' (like the Cold War before it) has profoundly affected international relations.

"International stability" is now the order of the day, overturning genuine and legitimate arguments over denied rights and freedoms.

This is the logic, which by criminalizing violence against a state - no matter how repressive the state might be - that leads to organisations like the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) being viewed primarily as destabilising elements in the world order. It also ensures increased international support for the state such movements confront.

At the same time, the leaders of the international community dictate the ability of less powerful states to govern and gain access to all institutions and powers which come with international recognition.

This form of patronage ultimately distorts the international system as governing elites in post-colonial states distort the reality of their politics, fitting it into the policy aims and concerns of the leading members of the international community.

We can, for example, see Sri Lanka's President Mahinda Rajapakse's framing Sri Lanka's conflict as part of the 'global war on terror' an argument the US has readily and unquestioningly accepted.

Therefore, perversely, nationhood and the right to govern are not, as some would have it, a right to be earned by a people through taking specific steps in a process. It is apparently as a gift to be handed down from the leading states, out of the latter's largesse.

This can especially be seen in the creation of the 'special case' of Kosovo, through the handling of which the United Nations is attempting to set a criteria that will limit the number of new states that are likely to appear in

future.

In this logic, Kosovo is being treated as a special case because of the break up of the Former Republic of Yugoslavia and should not be seen as setting a precedent.

The UN here is clearly attempting to stem any encouragement that other peoples already fighting for their independence might take from the Kosovan case.

The international community hopes that the communities supporting independence, such as the Tamils will be dissuaded and eventually give up the cause.

The point about the 'special case' logic is to undermine the possibility that there might be unrecognised legitimate cases for external self-determination.

At the same time, movements like the LTTE are branded a terrorist organisation and its leaders prohibited from raising the debate in international fora.

Conversely, the Sri Lankan President and his ministers are able to travel the world unhindered and garner continued international support and protection for their state's territorial integrity. Their continued persecution of the Tamils is no bar to international access.

The special case logic also dissuades other states from taking up the independence causes of suffering communities. To champion independence in another state is deemed by this logic to be bad citizen of the world order. To do so where armed struggles is underway would be tantamount to 'supporting terrorism.'

This would also fit with underlying themes of the report authored by former Ambassador Jeffrey Lunstead and titled 'The United States Role in Sri Lanka's Peace Process 2002-2006.'

It is a thinly disguised attempt by the US to reclaim its image as a protector of rights and freedoms committed to defending the world's downtrodden.

At a fundamental it merely reiterates the 'rightness' of the dynamics above: armed struggle is not acceptable irrespective of the oppression it resists, independence is not an option, also irrespective of the oppression.

The report is thus simply a continuation of the 'war on terror' and the policy of containment of the LTTE by other means. We should not be duped by its 'soft' positions.

The LTTE, for example, is condemned as not being democratic. But compare US policy towards Sri Lanka where the Tamil voice is silenced by law, by censorship, by state intimidation and, more effectively, by murder and abduction.

Lunstead's lament about the



lack of US 'engagement' is intended to suggest that Tamils may be able to yet secure the international recognition we have long sought whilst actually drawing concrete Tamil support away from the cause of self-determination.

The projected international concern for Tamil well-being is a sham. If they care for us, the first thing they should commit to is our right to self-rule.

Indeed, if the US was serious about engaging honestly in Sri Lanka's peace process and genuinely wanted the LTTE to participate in Washington and Tokyo Donor conferences, then the necessary legal undertakings to reverse the proscription in the US would have been easily lifted. Which is more important - the war on terror or the search for peace?

Moreover, if they prioritised the pursuit of a just solution above the containment of the LTTE, the US and the other Co-Chairs would not have allowed so many missed opportunities slip by.

Instead they would have ensured the Sri Lankan government implemented its obligations under the P-TOMS and ensured Colombo negotiated an interim administration for the Northeast.

Instead the US administration undertook the complete opposite policy, no doubt, partly, on the assessments provided by their embassy in Sri Lanka.

Thirdly, if the US was gen-

uine about its concerns for a lack of a place for Tamils in the current political setup in Sri Lanka and the international community they should have openly placed the blame for a failure of the peace talks on the Sri Lankan Government, as the saying goes: it takes two to Tango.

Instead, as is evident by their actions both in relation to Sri Lanka and elsewhere, the US and the wider international community, appear more concerned with maintaining the international status quo than with righting the wrongs inflicted on the Tamils.

Was there really no scope under an interim administration for the Northeast to lead to a peace process that could have delivered a federal solution? Why was an interim administration not worth pursuing, but a federal solution was?

Or, rather, was it all a sham to buy time for the containment of the LTTE to run its course?

It is not the US alone, of course. The 'war on terror' and misguided notions of 'standing together' have clouded the thinking of other leading states too.

Therefore one can only surmise that American and European concerns for Kosovo's well being are not the result of general sympathy for oppressed minorities, but rather the pursuit of geopolitical and geoeconomic interests.

For some Europeans the major pre-occupation is prevent-

ing return of war to the continent, a reaction to the horrors of the Balkan conflict.

But it should not be forgotten that it was the successful exercise of the right to self-determination by Bosnia and Croatia that ultimately ended the bloodshed.

However that lesson is quietly dropped in the rush to stabilise 'failed' or 'weak' states like Sri Lanka. Instead, whole communities, like the Tamils, are condemned to await international salvation from their oppression.

In short, such peoples are expected to accept the interests and priorities of the international community as naturally more important than their own freedoms.

If this were not the case, how do we explain international attitude and actions towards Sri Lanka until today?

If indeed there really is an international commitment to the lofty ideals of democracy and freedom and so on, would we not have seen active international intervention, not to protect the Sinhala state from the Tamils, but rather the Tamils from the state?

The point here is that international commitment to these principles is merely rhetoric, it is futile, even suicidal, for the Tamils to await liberation by the international community.

Ultimately, to be free, to be independent, we must first be self-sufficient, self-reliant.

NEWS

GENEVA



GENEVA



TORONTO



Tamils rally in Geneva demanding independence

THOUSANDS of Tamil diaspora members from across Europe gathered in Switzerland Monday and marched towards the United Nations in Geneva urging support from the World Community for Tamil people's right to Self Determination and State-hood.

Tamils from across Europe gathered "demanding that the international community recognize an independent Tamil state in the island of Sri Lanka," said Shan Thavarajah, co-president of the Swiss Tamil Forum, which organized the rally. The demonstration was planned to coincide with the start on Monday of the fifth session of the U.N. Human Rights Council, which ran through June 18 in Geneva.

The procession started at Gropettee park, Geneva at 2:00 pm, and ended in front of UN at 3:30 p.m. According to Swiss police over 9,000 people assembled in the main square in front of the UN headquarters in Geneva.

"We are here to express our unyielding support to our brethren struggling for freedom in the homeland of our origin," said K. Ampalavanar, the patron of Swiss Tamil Forum that organized the confluence march. He was speaking to media after the event describing the march as a successful in conveying the intended message.

"The participation of thousands of Tamils living in Switzerland and all over Europe shows the seriousness and the urgency of

the situation," the organizers said in a statement, blasting the "genocidal intentions" of the Sri Lankan government.

People marched with Tamil Eelam flag, voicing support for the armed struggle for Tamil independence, spearheaded by the Tigers. The marchers also carried placards with Sea Tiger and Air Tiger emblems.

"We have not come to this symbolic place to beg for inalienable rights of our people," said Thavarajah. "We have come to urge the U.N to exert pressure on its member state, the Sri Lankan government, to adhere to international standards of human rights enshrined in the International law."

"And we urge solidarity from

the world community, as our brothers and sisters are taking the struggle forward in our homeland."

He and Thampippillai Namasivayam, secretary of Tamil Forum Swiss, handed over a memorandum addressed to Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to Aida Nejad, a representative from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Sriskantharajah, a father of a fallen Tiger fighter, hoisted the Tamileelam flag.

Dr Brian Seneviratne from Australia, a Sinhala expatriate physician supportive of Tamils right to self-determination, Ms. Karen Parker, a Human Rights activist from U.S., Mr. Karl Grunburg, the founder and president of SOS Racism, Ms. Deirdre

McConnell, Director International Program of Tamil Centre for Human Rights (TCHR), V. Kirubakaran of TCHR, Tamil Nadu based Tamil Nationalist Movement leader P Nedumaran, Tamil National Alliance Parliamentarian M. K. Sivajilingam, Ms. Dorrit Bruselivs, the Secretary of Danish Federation of Tamil Associations, Professor John Neelson, Anna Annor Urech, a Human Rights Activist from Switzerland, Ms. Verena Graf, the General Secretary of the International League for the Rights and Liberation of Peoples addressed the gathering.

The declaration of the event, sounding "our nation, Tamileelam, will be ours forever," was read by Krishna Ampalavanar.

NEWS



GENEVA



TORONTO



TORONTO

Tamil Canadians back independent state

MORE than 10,000 Tamil Canadians gathered at the Scarborough Albert Campbell square to urge the International community to accept an independent Tamil state through Tamil people's right to self determination applicable under International law.

Traffic in major roads came to a standstill in Scarborough as thousands of men, women, children and elderly flocked to the streets to converge on the Albert Campbell Square in Scarborough to voice their solidarity with their brothers and sisters to win back their rights in Sri Lanka.

The square reached the maximum capacity when it began and therefore crowd started to gather

around the Civic Center area and the adjacent buildings.

Participants were holding placards displaying the messages "Recognise Tamil Nation", "Isolate Sri Lanka" and "Prevent another Dafur".

"Our Leaders have signed more than 12 pacts and treaties with the Sri Lankan Political Parties within the last 60 years, only to be torn by them as soon they were signed." Said Sujani Krishnalingam, a student leader from the University of Toronto.

"The Government of Sri Lanka is not willing to listen to the International community but bent on violating all human right codes of the UN including repre-

hensible human right abuses, indiscriminate bombardment, killing of International Humanitarian workers, starvation by embargo, disappearances and extra judicial killings. The International Community has an obligation to provide fundamental security to the Tamil people from a failed and corrupt state," she added.

The rally had to be closed one hour ahead of schedule, as it had exceeded its capacity of the venue and the organizers had to ensure that the large number present would not overcrowd the Public Transit system and the adjoining major shopping centre.

Number of federal and local

parliamentarians, union leaders and human rights activists addressed the rally including the Leader of the Provincial NDP Howard Hampton, Hon. Jim Karygiannis MP for Scarborough-Agincourt, Brad Duguid, MPP for Scarborough-Centre and Raymond Cho, Toronto City Councillor. Tim Dobson, Chuck Konkel and George Khourie of the Conservative Party of Canada also spoke.

Hon. Jim Kariyanis speaking at the gathering blasted the Canadian federal government's inaction on Sri Lanka and proscribing the Tamil Rebels while they were participating in negotiations.

Hon. Judy Sgro spoke to crowd on telephone from the Parliament Hill in Ottawa. In today's session in Parliament Judy Sgro urged that "It is time for the Canadian government to step up and take on a leadership role in finding a resolution to this conflict once and for all."

According to organizers many speakers including Hon. Albina Guarnieri Liberal MP for Mississauga East - Cooksville, Hon. Dan McTeague Liberal MP for Scarborough East-Pickering, Mark Holland Liberal MP for Ajax-Pickering and Derek Lee Liberal MP for Scarborough-Rouge River could not be accommodated due to time constraints.

NEWS

Democracy to farce

“...there is no room anymore to assist terrorism directly or indirectly, and talk about democracy. This is because they use this democratic space to design the destruction of the entire society. The democracy that creates an opportunity for terrorism is a joke. It is no simple joke but a deadly joke.” - President Rajapakse, address to the Nation, 6th December 2006

Sanjana Hattotuwa
Daily Mirror

THE President's statement is a chilling reality of what democracy is in Sri Lanka today. There is no cognition of diversity in the timbre of democracy, or what passes for it, in Sri Lanka today. Indeed, it is the democratic space itself that is a threat to "national security" - since my own voice, and that of others not in line with the government, is seen, branded and subsequently eliminated as those directly or indirectly supportive of the "terrorist threat".

So the overt war on terror is covertly also about defining the art of the possible within a democracy. To paraphrase Fareed Zakaria writing in the late 90's on the rise of illiberal democracy, Sri Lanka's emergent socio-political cancers are those within democracy. This makes them more difficult to handle, wrapped as they are in the mantle of legitimacy given by peoples kept largely in the dark. In Sri Lanka today, there is single Chintanaya - an omnipresent and omniscient vision - that trucks no dissent or question.

Like Chavez in Venezuela, this President preserves democracy only to gradually and inexorably eviscerate it. In an incredible yet revealing move, there is now even a special police unit formed to monitor any public admonition of the Chintanaya in particular and the government in general. Free speech, it seems, is increasingly an unwarranted appendage to what is required of true patriots in a time of war - blind faith, a slavish subservience and supine acceptance of Truth as determined by a coterie not known for their intellectual rigour.

A case in point of this singular dullness was the President's recent interview with Al-Jazeera. It is a confused and confusing riot. Reading it, I was almost convinced that all one really needs to do to secure peace, and indeed, for the LTTE to take the upper hand in global media stakes, is to stay silent and watch the ignominy of this government

drowning in a quagmire of its own confusion. And yet, some of that which the President asserts is so outrageous, so incredible, that to allow them to pass without question is untenable. For example, the President on human rights in Sri Lanka:

Are you willing to accept that there are violations of human rights occurring?

Knowingly, a state will not violate human rights, abduct people. That must be stated very clearly.

But Human Rights Watch has documented at least 700 and more abductions during your term.

Many of those people who are said to have been abducted are in England, Germany, gone abroad.

To reiterate the gravity of the human rights situation in Sri Lanka at present is really to flog a dead horse - the damning facts and figures are a matter of public record.

They have made complaints that they were abducted, but when they return they don't say. Some talk of a few people abducted from Colombo. We do not know whether they are fighting in Killinochchi, we have no way of finding out. This is all against the government.

The first answer gives rise to all manner of glorious possibilities as to how human rights violations grow apace without the knowledge of the head of the state. Plausible deniability after all is a centre-piece of diplomacy and especially when one has trusted family to take care of the unpleasantness of contrary opinions voiced against one's thought and actions. But it is the second that is really incredible.

Clearly, my erstwhile colleague Vijayan, abducted from



President Mahinda Rajapaksa pictured with his military commanders in a file photo. Photo TamilNet

the heart of Colombo recently and transported some 200km to Badulla - traumatised and more than a little lucky to be alive - must have been attempting passage to Europe. And the hundreds of persons who have been meticulously documented by the Civil Monitoring Committee and human rights groups local and international, as having been abducted, missing or killed over the past year alone, are quite possibly enjoying the dolce vita on the French Riviera.

This is farcical and to reiterate the gravity of the human rights situation in Sri Lanka at present is really to flog a dead horse - the damning facts and figures are a matter of public record. Multiple parties have been involved in the violations and they are growing unabated in a culture of total impunity. We are fighting terror with terror, with democracy, or what little is really left of it, blind and powerless. As the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) recently said in response to an accusation that it was harder on the Government and softer on the LTTE which is a greater violator of human rights "...that the point here simply is that a democratically elected government that functions under the law is obviously to be held to higher standards of behaviour than an organisation recognised to be terrorist in nature. The point is not who is the greater offender. It is bad enough that the government is an offender."

During the course of the interview with Al-Jazeera, the President contradicts himself ("As a government we cannot have talks. We say that we are ready for talks always"), confuses ("Like I said before, [Prabhakaran] thought that we were weak, that the state is weak, that he is strong. But now, he has come to a point, where he has

accepted that"), perplexes ("For the people, LTTE, peace - the people want peace, that is the truth, without defeating the LTTE, without defeating the terrorism of the LTTE. There is no politics in this"), and ends up undermining his own war against terror ("If they do not attack me, I will not attack. If they stay where they are, keeping their arms, I have no problem with that"). Out of a confounded farrago of befuddlement, we are left with the suggestion that an armed terrorist group in Sri Lanka is not a prob-

In Sri Lanka today, there is single Chintanaya - an omnipresent and omniscient vision - one that trucks no dissent or question.

lem if they stay where they are and don't bother "us". Question obviously is what we make of the recent hue and cry of "liberating" the peoples of the North and East from the clutches of the LTTE?

Quite frankly, the problem here is not even one that is based on the significant differences of opinion with the President on matters of conflict transformation and peace building. Fundamentally, it is one of communication. Except through coercion, outright terror, spin and disinformation (in Sinhala primarily) this government, like any other illiberal regime, is unable to secure and strengthen support for its war against terror domestically or internationally. A coherent, principled articulation of and for war requires an intelligence, moral authority, strategic vision and process design well beyond the capacity of this government.

Ignorance is bliss and an electorate enveloped in bliss is one that will countenance economic depravity, corruption, nepotism and a further erosion of rights.

But for how long?

Already, signs are growing of sky-rocketing inflation and economic downturn that will be exacerbated by soon to be introduced insurance surcharges on shipping, which will render unworkable and useless the three year plan of this government for ultimate victory against the LTTE. This is quite simply the inescapable reality of asymmetrical warfare - the LTTE only has to strike occasionally and approximately at key financial, public and military targets to maintain a fear psychosis, whereas the Government has to (in principle) avoid civilian casualties, maintain human rights and regularly drum up significant victories against the LTTE in order to show its local support base, and the international community, of progress in the battle-field. Ultimate victory will be invariably Cadmean in nature - a victory that damages the victors as much as the vanquished. Put another way, there is emphatically no military solution to this conflict - only a political one, founded on a radical, democratic transformation of the State and the manner in which it is imagined, constituted, governed and given expression to in a new constitution.

It is incontrovertibly not a task this government is up to.

I fear that if we as a nation and peoples cannot find expression at all levels of polity and society to that which binds us in a greater humanity and overarching Sri Lanka identity, we tacitly contribute to the emergence of careerist political prostitutes, illiberal regimes and in essence, terrorists, that make a mockery out of democracy.

NEWS

Outcry over expulsion of Tamils

THE Government of Sri Lanka came under severe criticism for forcibly throwing out hundreds of Tamils from the capital Colombo in early June.

International governments including the US, the EU, and India along with opposition politicians and number of international human rights organisations expressed their concern and condemned the exercise.

The US led the condemnations saying the "action can only widen the ethnic divide."

"The United States condemns the forced removal of Tamils from Colombo. Such measures

violate the Sri Lankan Constitution's guarantee that every citizen has the right to freedom of movement and choice of residence within Sri Lanka," the US embassy said in a statement.

"We call upon the government of Sri Lanka to stop the forcible removal of its citizens from Colombo, to make public the destinations of those already removed, and to ensure their safety and well-being," it added.

The European Union in a strongly worded message issued by the embassy of Germany, currently President of the 27-state bloc condemned the government action

as "blatant violation of internationally recognized human rights"

Like the US, the EU also warned that the forced eviction are counter-productive and will further polarize the Sinhalese and Tamil communities.

"Sri Lanka has genuine concerns about internal security, but the European Union believes these evictions will not enhance security and will ultimately be counterproductive. The forced removal of Tamil people from the capital is likely to deepen the rift between the ethnic communities and risks intensifying the conflict," the statement said.

Likewise Norway, the facilitator of the stalled peace process in Sri Lanka and Canada, which hosts the largest Tamil expatriate community also issued statements condemning the forced return of Tamils to the Northeast.

Calling the actions of the Sri Lankan police as a clear violation of international human rights, the Norwegian statement said "The move by the Colombo police is a clear violation of international human rights law. The Government of Sri Lanka has legitimate security concerns. Moreover, it has the right and obligation to take measures to guarantee the

safety of its population. However, such measures should not indiscriminately target Tamils, or any other ethnic group, and should always be in accordance with international human rights law."

It also urged the Government of Sri Lanka to cease any further enforced removal of Tamils from Colombo, and to consider granting immediate permission to return for those already removed from the city.

The Canadian statement said "Canada condemns the forced removal of citizens of Tamil origin from Colombo back to the conflict

Continued on page 15

Bussed out at gunpoint

HUNDREDS of Tamils staying in lodges across the capital Colombo were evicted at gun point and forcibly returned to the Northeast by the Sri Lankan security forces on Thursday, June 7.

In overnight operations, described by human rights organisations as tantamount to 'ethnic cleansing', police raided number of lodges from Kochichkade down to Wellawatte across the city and forced the Tamils dwelling there onto waiting buses to be transported to Vavuniya in the north and Trincomalee and Batticaloa in the east.

The forcible eviction of innocent Tamils drew widespread condemnation from human rights organisations and foreign governments.

Initially the Sri Lankan state attempted to justify its actions citing national security.

"We are doing this to protect the people and because of a threat to national security" Inspector General of Police Victor Perera said prior to the eviction.

However the human right organisations and opposition politicians branded the exercise as ethnic cleansing and gross human right violation.

"This is like ethnic cleansing and we strongly condemn it," said Sirithunga Jayasuriya, chairman of the Civil Monitoring Committee.

"Nothing could be more inflammatory in Sri Lanka's polarized climate than identifying people by ethnicity and kicking them out of the capital," said Brad Adams, of Human Rights Watch.

Following outcry from local and international bodies, the Government defence spokesman Keheliya Rambukwelle tried to portray the operation as 'voluntary' rather than 'forced'. He said the Tamils had "voluntarily come forward to be sent out of Colombo," and that the GoSL was

transporting them "free of charge."

The government then attempted to distance itself from the operation and promised a thorough investigation.

"Allegations that officials exceeded their authority in implementing this initiative will be thoroughly investigated and appropriate remedial action taken, including disciplinary action against any wrong doing on the part of any government official," president Mahinda Rajapakse said in a statement.

However as criticism mounted the government caved in and apologised.

"The government regrets this and it should never have been done," Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickramanayake said at a press conference in Colombo.

"We accept responsibility," he said, and added it would not happen again.

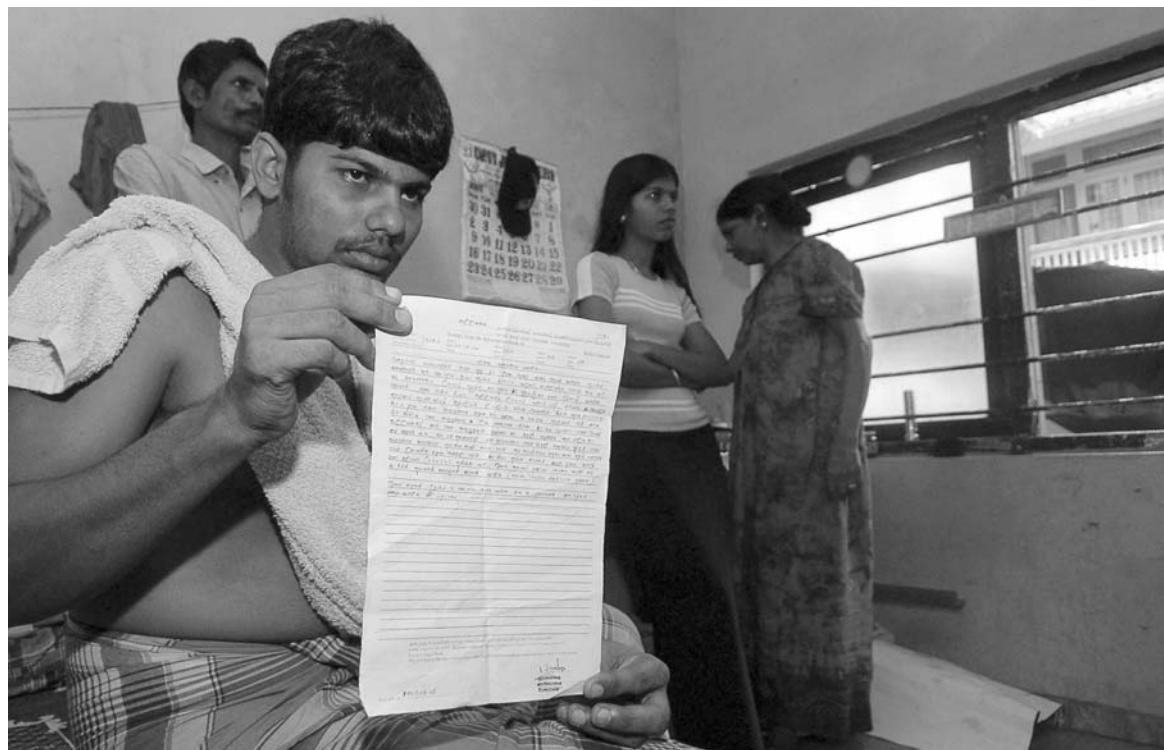
On May 31 the authorities ordered the owners of 68 lodges in Pettah Police Division in Colombo to immediately expel around 5000 Tamil tenants from Northeast and Upcountry to their "native places" within 24 hours.

And on June 7 armed security personnel raided lodgers occupied by Tamils and woke up old and young and ordered them to board buses without carrying any food, clothes or money.

According to press reports 291 men and 85 women were sent off in seven buses to front line districts that are volatile and have seen heavy fighting in recent weeks.

Yathavan, a hotel owner's son said the police often come to the hotel in the early morning to check the registry, particularly on days when soldiers were killed in the country, but this time was different.

"They said, Pack your bags, we have to send you back to your



A Tamil man displays a receipt from the police after they confiscated his national identity card, to prevent him from moving about in Colombo. Photo Lakruwan Wanniarachchi/AFP/Getty Images

own place," he said.

Many people were given less than half an hour to pack all their belongings and board waiting buses.

"Many lodge managers and the remaining tenants complained to us that people were given less than half an hour to pack all their belongings and board the CTB (Ceylon Transport Board) buses that were parked outside these lodges," said the Free Media Movement in a letter to the Sri Lankan President.

"They were also not told their exact destination - only that the return to their homes was being 'arranged'," it added.

A kidney transplant patient was forced out of bed and bundled into a bus despite pleas by his wife that the man needed regular medication in Colombo. Some were not even allowed to change out of their night clothes, use the toilets or take all their belongings.

"We were not allowed to change our clothes or even use the toilet," one of the expelled Tamils told a television station.

Another expelled Tamil, 65 years old Rasamma said she knelt before the four policemen standing at her bedroom door, and touched their feet to ask for

mercy. They didn't listen, reported Associated Press.

"We were not told where we were being taken, she said.

The expelled lodgers were brought to frontline towns where they did not know anyone and in some cases didn't have any money to buy food or pay for accommodation.

The people brought to Vavuniya were taken a school yard and were given mats to sleep on.

According to the Sunday Leader paper, although the police had pledged to make all arrangements to send the Tamils to their home towns, on arriving at the frontline towns, the evictees had to pay Rs.2500 to the army for their voyage to the war-torn Jaffna peninsula.

Lakshmi, one of evictees, said they had been issued orders by the security forces to keep the money ready the day they are taken away, to pay for their bus tickets to Trincomalee, and then for a boat ride to Jaffna, the paper added.

"We can hardly afford to eat and we have to pay Rs.2500 per person. I thought all arrangements were made for us to return," Lakshmi said in despair.

On Friday June 8, Centre for

Policy Alternatives, a Colombo based think tank filed a fundamental rights (FR) application at the Supreme Court against the forced eviction.

The Supreme Court, after preliminary inquiry into the FR application, issued an interim injunction on the law enforcement authority to stop expelling Tamil civilians until the inquiry is completed.

Following the court ruling, in an attempt to defuse the international outrage, Sri Lankan state agreed to return the evictees back to Colombo.

According to Associated Press, human rights organisations visited the evicted on Friday to take down names, and that evening they got back on buses again to return to Colombo - scared, tired, but safe.

"On Saturday, 186 of the expelled Tamils returned to Colombo on government buses from the northern city of Vavuniya," said Rohan Abeywardana, a top police official.

Fearing further harassment by the Sri Lankan security forces, not all evictees returned to Colombo but the ones returned are living in fear.

**Fearful, p12
Lives worsen, p12**

NEWS

'Every night now, I am afraid'

Sam Dolnick

The Associated Press

SRI LANKAN authorities were rounding up hundreds of ethnic minority Tamils in the capital of Colombo, forcing them onto buses to destinations unknown.

They were allowed to return two days later, after an international uproar, but many Tamils are afraid the expulsions could mark the beginning of a new wave of persecution, and that the next knock on the door might be even more dangerous.

"I'm scared about what will happen," said the woman, Sanmugam Rasamma, who came back to Colombo after her expulsion. "I'm scared it could happen again."

For two decades, the Tamil Tigers, a highly secretive, well-armed group labeled a terrorist organization by the U.S. and many European governments, have fought to carve out a separate homeland for the country's 3.1 million Tamils, citing decades of discrimination.

As violence has ratcheted up over the past two years, the harassment of Tamils has increased as well.

Sometimes it's petty harassment. Sometimes it's worse.

There are now far more roadside checkpoints, and Tamils usually take far longer to clear them. Tamils say they have a harder time finding work or gaining entry at universities. After rebel attacks, random Tamils, particularly the poorer ones, are often rounded up and interrogated.

There are plenty of Tamils who do not suffer harassment, a handful of cabinet posts, for instance, are held by Tamils, and there are wealthy Tamil businessmen. But stories about anti-Tamil discrimination are a constant in the minority community.

A retired literature professor recalled passing through a checkpoint without a problem when he was wearing pants and a shirt, but being stopped for hours when he went by wearing the flowing, white traditional Tamil cloak, called a veti.

"It was a nasty experience," said the professor, who asked not to be identified, fearing retribution. "These things happen quite often in Colombo."

The reason for this: "There is a general suspicion that Tamils are potential terrorists," said Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu, executive director of Center for Policy Alternatives, a Colombo-based think tank.

On Thursday, June 6, authorities raided Tamil guest houses in Colombo, saying they were teeming with rebel activity and the move was a security precaution amid violence that has claimed more than 5,000 lives in the past 19 months.

The government has not said if any of the 376 people rounded up were suspected in any attacks. Rights groups called the roundups arbitrary.

The next day, after an outraged international response, the Supreme Court ordered police to stop the expulsions.

Authorities bused 186 of the expelled back to Colombo. The others chose to return to their hometowns, police said.

Thousands of Tamils have left their homes in the north and east, areas that have been wracked by bloodshed for most of the past year as government troops and Tigers battle, and come to Colombo with hopes of securing foreign visas and leaving the island.

They often stay in cheap guest houses run by Tamil families while waiting for their paperwork, a process that can take months, if it happens at all.

Now, despite the apologies for the expulsions, many fear what could happen next.

"We were taken from the lodge so the manager and others knew what happened, but if you're caught alone, no one would know what was happening," said a young man who asked not to be identified for fear of retribution.

"I'll sleep afraid tonight," he said. "Every night now, I'm afraid."

The police often came to the hotel in the early morning to check the registry, particularly after Tiger attacks, said S. Yathavan, the hotel owner's son.

But this time was different.

"They said, 'Pack your bags, we have to send you back to your own place,'" said Yathavan.

Rasamma, who said she was 65 but appeared older, knelt before the four policemen at her bedroom door, touching their feet to ask for mercy, she said.

But they did not listen.

"We were not told where we were being taken," she said.

Twelve hours later, the bus stopped at Vavuniya, the last government-held garrison town south of the LTTE-held areas. Other buses went to Trincomalee and Batticaloa in the restive east.

The group of roughly 30 Tamils were taken to a school yard, where they were given sleeping mats, Rasamma said. Human rights groups came the next day to take down names, and that evening they got back on buses to Colombo, scared, tired, but safe.

"We didn't do anything wrong," said Rasamma, who is hoping to join a son in Canada, and is more determined than ever to leave Sri Lanka.

"Until then, I hope nothing bad happens again," she said.



Protests in Colombo against the expulsions of Tamils were relatively small. Photo TamilNet

Tamils' lives worsen

Mel Gunasekera

AFP

EVERY time 16-year-old Suresh Subramaniam steps out of his home in Sri Lanka's heavily-guarded capital, his father says a silent prayer for his son's safe return.

The Subramaniams are ethnic Tamils, and run a grocery store in Colombo. They have lived in the city all their lives, and have little connection to the north and east where government troops are fighting Tamil Tigers.

But they say life for ordinary Tamils in Colombo is getting worse.

"I can't step out of the house without my identity card and police papers. If I don't have them, I will be detained," Suresh said.

Tamils, whose national identity cards are written in Tamil, are instantly segregated at checkpoints for a sometimes lengthy grilling. Members of the majority Sinhalese community have an easier time from the Sinhalese-dominated security forces.

Tamil visitors to Colombo also need to register with police, who are fearful of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) suicide bombers or assassins infiltrating the city of around 650,000 people.

The collapse of a 2002 ceasefire agreement over the past 18 months has also brought with it a

spate of unsolved abductions and murders. International rights groups have said that more than 1,000 people, almost all Tamils, have "disappeared" in the past year.

"There is a climate of fear hanging in the air, we seem to be sliding into lawlessness," said 30-year old Joseph Sunderalingam, a financial analyst and ethnic Tamil who works in the city.

"My parents feel things are getting worse and they would like me to leave."

Tensions reached a head on Thursday, when armed police swooped on low-budget hostels in an operation that saw hundreds of Tamils expelled back to the war-torn north.

Rights groups and opposition politicians said the move was tantamount to dealing out "collective punishment" to Tamils.

Although authorities have backed down in the face of stiff international criticism, community members said Thursday's operation was merely a small part of a wider pattern of abuses they have to endure.

"I'm often asked if I support the LTTE, when people realise I am a Tamil," said 23-year-old Krishnan, who only gave his first name.

Krishnan shares a cramped room with three others on the outskirts of the city in Ratmalana while he works as a cleaner.

The night raids have got worse, he said, since nine people were killed in and around

Colombo in two blasts last month by suspected Tamil Tigers. The government says the bombings are hatched in low-budget hostels.

Tamil populated neighbourhoods in Colombo are also periodically cordoned off and swept by security forces, and Tamils have complained of mass arrests.

"It's like going back in time to the late 1980s and the 1990s," says S. Subramaniam, a lodge owner in Colombo.

"Tamils and some Muslims have been the main target of recent kidnappings, disappearances and assassinations. People are scared."

Still, many Tamils from the embattled northern and eastern regions look likely to continue to pour into Colombo -- a stepping stone out of a country where they either face Tamil Tiger extortion and forced recruitment in the north or state intimidation in the south.

Sharing a tiny room with his parents, S. Yoganathan, 27, from besieged Jaffna peninsula in the far north, sips tea as he counts the days to emigrate to Canada and get married there.

Yoganathan has been living in Colombo for the past seven months, was expelled in the sweep but has returned again to try to sort out his immigration papers.

"Write something about our plight so that the Canadian embassy will process my papers quickly," he pleaded. "I can't live like this."

OPINION

And then they came for me...

Editorial

Sunday Leader

SECULAR Sinhalese hung their heads in shame last week as government storm-troopers rounded up the Tamil citizenry of Colombo and herded them into busses, to be taken to God knows where. Young and old, shy and bold, they were equally affected: no one was spared. Grandmothers separated from their grandchildren, sisters separated from their brothers, diabetics separated from their insulin. In scenes reminiscent of the Final Solution, the Mahinda Chinthanaya swung into action, leaving no one in doubt that Sri Lanka's is a government of the racists, by the racists, for the racists. It is but a short step from here to requiring Tamils to wear a mandatory arm-band with a 'T' (in black, of course) emblazoned on it.

No one knows how many Tamil people were bussed out of Colombo last Thursday. Guesstimates varied from 200 to 800. The government, however, made it known that "20,000 Tamils have taken up lodgings in Colombo", a clear signal that more is to come unless the justices of the Supreme Court (bless their hearts) continue to step in and stop it. The government's claims that the deportees had always wanted to return to wherever it was they had come from, but could never find the bus fare, brings to mind the picture painted by the Third Reich, of Jews stepping voluntarily into the gas chambers of Buchenwald and Auschwitz, arm in arm, gaily whistling Hava Nagila.

In a sense, last Thursday must have come as a relief to Sri Lanka's minorities. The state has now shorn off its whiskers and made it patently clear that this is no longer a battle against the LTTE, or even against terrorism: it is a battle against Tamils. Ethnic cleansing has begun, and no Sinhalese can be safe until the last Tamil has been evicted from their midst.

For its part, the Rajapakse Administration, having hidden behind a variety of colourful euphemisms all this while, has finally come out in the open, calling a spade a spade, a Tamil a Tamil: the Sinhala nation can never be safe until the Tamils in its midst have been evicted. In doing so, and deporting Colombo's Tamils thence, Rajapakse has finally accepted the reality of Eelam, a Tamil homeland in the north and east. It defies irony that the first seed of Tamil secession has been sown not by Pirapaharan, but by Rajapakse. Little must Rajapakse realise that the insult and humiliation he cast on those citizens (most of who, no doubt, refrained from voting in the last presidential election so as to secure his

victory), would not lightly be forgiven or forgotten. They aren't likely to turn the other cheek. No one would be surprised if many of them would in time to come number among the LTTE's suicide cadres, determined to get even with the Sinhalese. In a move of almost touching imbecility, the government has given the cause of terrorism an unprecedented shot in the arm.

It is only a sick and cynical society that can countenance so brazen an assault on human rights and look the other way. It is gratifying that all Sri Lanka's political parties, barring the SLFP, JHU and CWC, vociferously opposed Rajapakse's action. No one knows what brand of Buddhism it is that the monks of the Urumaya profess to follow, but it is evident from their action that it is not that advocated by the Gautama Buddha. The CWC's silence, however, is more ominous; evidently a signal that its leadership wishes to distance itself from the cause of Tamil emancipation as a whole. After all, if the upcountry Tamils were to be emancipated, they'd be out of a job.

The past two years have seen Sri Lanka slipping inexorably into an abyss of intolerance. There is about the Rajapakse administration a sick and fathomless cynicism to which we run the danger of becoming inured: blatantly false propaganda in the state media; intimidation of the free media; widespread abductions, disappearances and murders with nonchalance bordering on the blasé. So accustomed are we to this, that we are no longer shocked by any of it. We take it in our stride. In doing so, however, we need to remember that each blow the Rajapakse Brothers deal on secularism and liberal values is a blow against each one of us individually. Our turn - your turn - will come. And when it does come, who will speak for you?

There are those among the Sinhalese who see the Tamil question in terms of a military victory against the LTTE. It defies reason as to how soon they have erased from their minds our post-independence history. Even the JVP accepts that we must accept the Tamils of this country as equal citizens: they have as much historic right to this land as the Sinhalese. From even before independence, however, the Tamils quite sensibly asked that the Tamil language be given parity with Sinhala, and that the areas in which Tamil was the predominant language spoken be administered in Tamil. Then, in 1956, just eight years after independence, the Sinhalese majority fired the first shot, making Sinhala the official language of the state,

From 1956, the slide into the

abyss was both steady and inexorable. The Sinhala alphabet was introduced for car number-plates, the national anthem was to be sung only in Sinhala, the country's name was changed to the Sinhala name (in law, even when spoken or written in Tamil) and, in a bizarre diversion from secularism, Buddhism was awarded constitutional precedence ("the foremost place") over any religions Tamils might choose to espouse. So effective were these devices in achieving their aims that Tamils were almost totally purged from the armed forces and reduced to trivial minorities in the police and government service. Added to all that were the anti-Tamil pogroms of 1958 and 1983, in which Tamils were burnt alive,

Now we seem slowly to be discovering that there simply are too many dissident Tamils (= 'terrorists') to kill: therefore we are deporting them back to their homeland.

their shops and homes looted, and the Tamils finally recognised the impossibility of peaceful cohabitation with the Sinhalese.

Sinhalese people who laugh these off as trivial pinpricks should imagine what life would be like were the tables turned. What if the official language of Sri Lanka were Tamil - together with the national anthem, car

number plates etc.? What if Hinduism was constitutionally recognised as having "the foremost place" in our state? What if every time you were stopped by a policeman, he addressed you only in Tamil? How long would you tolerate that before you looked to extreme remedies?

What messages were the Tamils supposed to derive from this systematic assault on their heritage? They, after all, saw themselves as having an equal right to be Sri Lankan (or at any rate, Ceylonese), as the Sinhalese. For 30 years - a generation - from 1948 to 1977, fought for their rights through purely political means. But the Sinhalese just did not listen and things got steadily worse, with, for example, J. R. Jayewardene's infamous Constitution of 1978 and before that of Colvin R. De Silva in 1972. Then, slowly, a minority of Tamils concluded that parleying with the Sinhalese was futile, and took to arms. It was the wrong thing to do - but then again, it was the only thing they could do to try to get the attention of the Sinhalese government. Then, when they did that, rather than recognise the frustration of the Tamil minority, successive Sri Lankan governments chose to respond with a bullet for a bullet.

In the last couple of years we have taken to bombing the villages in the north that are thought to harbour Tigers. One rarely meets a Sri Lankan, however, who sees how utterly bizarre this is - bombing your own people. When the JVP attacked Colombo, did the air force bomb Akuressa and Hambantota, its strongholds? What would people think of a government that bombed Sinhalese? Yet, the Tamils are bombed daily as a matter of routine, and not one Sinhala voice of

protest, be it ever so small, is heard. Now we seem slowly to be discovering that there simply are too many dissident Tamils (= 'terrorists') to kill: we are deporting them back to their homeland.

Tragically for Sri Lanka, the Rajapakse Brothers have neither the collective wit nor the wisdom - there isn't, after all, a university degree among them - to see the struggle for Tamil emancipation for what it is. Even if they did, so steeped in Sinhala-Buddhist dogma are they that they could never bring themselves to undo the original wrongs that gave aid and succour to the cause of Tamil militancy from 1956 to 1978.

Terrorism is horribly wrong, and there is no gainsaying that the LTTE are a bunch of terrorists. Moderate Tamils - if there could persist such a breed after the events of last Thursday - may believe there is yet hope. But they are a minority within a minority, and for fear of the Tigers, for the most part mute. Thanks to Sinhala intransigence, it is only the LTTE that is left to negotiate with us.

And it is time those Tamils and members of other minorities who sit on the government benches in parliament searched their souls for their reasons for doing so. What truck do they have with an administration such as that presided over by the Rajapakses? For their part, the Rajapakse Brothers need even now to recognise that Tamil liberation is not a question of law-and-order: it is a profoundly political issue that demands calm, mature reason and a genuine embracing of democratic values. By adopting the gehuwoth gahannan (if you hit, then I'll hit) attitude he publicly espouses, Rajapakse, as he has done from the beginning of his presidency, is simply missing the plot.

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NEWS

Misery and death stalk the north

Somini Sengupta

International Herald Tribune

THE nights are broken again by artillery fire across the black lagoon.

The road out of this peninsula has been closed since last August, making the area nearly inaccessible. Today, though food and fuel manage to arrive, the town market shuts by afternoon, and shopkeepers are reluctant to keep stocks, not knowing when they might have to close up and run.

By 7 p.m., barely sundown, stray dogs have the run of the streets of Jaffna. Its people are indoors, doors locked, well before an 8 o'clock curfew, which is the most liberal in 10 months. Sri Lankan soldiers linger in the edges of the alleys. Flashlights come on when a car passes. All is still, except for the dogs.

This is Jaffna, the picturesque prize of the quarter-century-long Sri Lankan ethnic war, girding for a new storm.

The army commander for the area, General G.A. Chandrasiri, said he expects a major battle for Jaffna before the August monsoon.

A 2002 cease-fire, which had stanching the bloodshed for a time, has collapsed. For a year, fighting has spread across the island between the Sri Lankan military, dominated by the ethnic Sinhalese majority, and the separatist rebels, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

According to the Sri Lankan Defense Ministry, more than 4,800 people, civilians and fighters, have been killed in the past 18 months, and though the number is not entirely reliable, it points to a significantly lethal epoch in this long, ugly war.

It is likely to continue for a while. Gotabhaya Rajapakse, the influential Sri Lankan defense secretary, says the military is under instructions to eliminate the rebel leader, Vellupillai Prabhakaran, and eradicate his organization once and for all.

"That's our main aim, to destroy the leadership," Rajapakse said in an interview late last month. The job, he went on, would take two to three years.

Peace talks are nowhere on the horizon. Pressure from abroad, including suspensions of aid from countries like Britain and the United States, have done little to temper Sri Lankan military ambitions. The Tamil Tigers, banned in many countries, including the United States, upped the ante this spring by conducting air raids with the aid of modified two-seater propeller planes.

The weapons of war are dirtier than ever today. Targeted killings and land mine attacks in crowded civilian areas are common.

Journalists, diplomats and aid workers face hostile scrutiny for any criticism of the security forces. On a Sunday morning in April,

a young reporter for a Tamil-language newspaper in Jaffna was shot and killed as he rode his bicycle to work. In May, fliers appeared at Jaffna University, containing a hit list of alleged rebel sympathizers.

At least 15,000 people are waiting to get on government ships to the relative safety of Colombo, the capital. Those who remain dare say little. "Anytime, anything can happen," offered Ravindran Ramanathan, a tailor. "People are afraid of everything."

Jaffna is no stranger to war. Its temples and churches bear the pockmarks of battles past. Its people are familiar with running and dying. No other place is so scared because no other place carries Jaffna's special curse: it is the heart of the homeland that the Tamil Tigers have fought to carve out, and the trophy that soldiers and rebels have fought over all these years.

Lately, a new fear stalks Jaffna, and it is more ominous than anything its people recall from their grim past: a spate of mysterious abductions usually carried out during curfew, when soldiers and stray dogs rule the streets. No one is quite sure who is being taken, for what reason, by whom. Sometimes, corpses turn up on the street. More often, they don't turn up at all.

One night in May, well into the curfew, C. Kuharajan's son, Kanan, 18, was watching television on the floor of his parents' bedroom when four armed men

The Sri Lankan Human Rights Commission, a government agency has received 805 complaints of abductions in Jaffna from December 2005.

pushed open the front door of their house and demanded that Kanan come with them for questioning.

His captors refused to identify themselves - "none of your business," Kanan's father recalled them saying - nor explain where they were taking him or why. The gunmen, all in civilian clothes and with pistols, promised to return him soon.

That was on May 4. Kanan, a high school senior, has not been heard from since.

According to his family, Kanan had been active in a high school group affiliated to the student union at Jaffna University, which security forces describe as a den of anti-government activity. But the father says his son was under strict instructions to avoid



Tamil children in Jaffna continue to face worsening malnutrition as the military ban on fishing and lack of access to farmlands, together with the closure of the A9 resulting in little food getting into the peninsula, have cut off the amount of food available to civilians in the region. File photo. Photo TamilNet

anything political. He planned to send Kanan abroad to study next fall.

After a month of waiting and searching, Kuharajan wondered why those who abducted his son did not come to the house and interrogate him, or at least arrested him and taken him to jail. "That's the terrible thing," he said, "snatching children from parents' hands."

The Sri Lankan Human Rights Commission, a government agency, says it has received 805 complaints of abductions in Jaffna from December 2005 to April 2007; the army says they are aware of 230 abductions.

Occasionally, someone survives to tell of the horror. In January, Arunagirinathan Niruparaj, a university student, was plucked from his village, taken to what he later identified as a series of military camps and interrogated about his rebel links.

He said his captors hung him upside down from the ceiling and beat his feet. They covered his head with a plastic bag soaked in gasoline. They rammed a stick into his anus.

After seven days, they left him on the side of a railway track. By then, his kidney had failed, one of his ears was damaged, and he could not keep down any food. In April, Niruparaj, 26, fled to Madras, in southern India. He maintains he has no links to the

rebels. No one has been arrested for his kidnapping.

Chandrasiri first blamed the abductions on pro-government Tamil paramilitary groups who, as he put it, try to "eliminate" Tamil Tiger operatives. He later acknowledged that some in the security forces could also be complicit. "I'm not saying all our people are clean," he said. "Our duty is to catch them and punish them."

Most of those abducted, he added, are not innocent civilians, but known Tamil Tiger operatives.

As for Kuharajan's son, the Chandrasiri said he had personally resolved to find him. "I don't want internationally anybody to think everyday we are killing people," he said.

Reports of abductions have been sharply criticized by even Sri Lankan allies like Richard Boucher, a U.S. assistant secretary of state who met with Chandrasiri during a visit in May. In the weeks after Boucher's visit, reports of abductions fell.

Not far from the general's office, another kind of uncertainty hovers over a Catholic church, now home to refugees from Allaipiddy, a fishing village just west of the town. The United Nations estimates that there are roughly 300,000 people displaced across Sri Lanka.

At this church, some families have fled their homes as many as

four times since the war began. The last time was in August, after rebels and soldiers clashed in Allaipiddy, driving its residents into a local church. When it, too, was shelled, the Reverend Jim Brown knelt before the troops and, waving a white flag, led the villagers here.

Brown, who had rebuked the Sri Lankan Navy for attacking the village, disappeared days later. He has not been heard from since.

The families here somehow carry on. The men cannot fish any more because the coast is occupied by soldiers. Food aid has not come for weeks. Women have sold their gold bangles for rice. Or they have gone without eating, saving what little there is for their children.

So little had one mother, Sathiyaseelan Thilaka, been eating that she could no longer produce enough breast milk for her youngest child, a boy of 4 months born in this camp.

Sathiyaseelan, 39, said she raised four children through this war. Never before had she been without milk. This morning, she sent the older children to school without breakfast. She had eaten nothing herself, and it was almost sundown.

An emergency assessment by the United Nations found signs of more child malnutrition in Jaffna. The government has blocked the study's release.

NEWS

Outcry over evictions...

Continued from page 11

ct zones in the north and the east".

"Whilst Canada acknowledges that the Sri Lankan government has the right and the duty to protect itself and its citizens against potential terrorist attacks, such as the reprehensible bombings in Colombo Fort and Rathmalana in recent weeks, the heavy-handedness of this sweeping action will only alienate the vast majority of innocent Tamils and further complicate the search for a durable peace settlement."

Whilst the US, the EU and Norway three of the four co-chairs of the Sri Lankan peace process issued statements of condemnations, Japan, the other co-chair remained silent.

India also refrained from publicly condemning the actions of the Government of Sri Lanka. However the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was quoted as saying he was "pained" by the expulsion of Tamils from Colombo and expressed the hope that "better sense will prevail" upon the Sri Lankan government.

In addition to leading western governments, number of international and local human rights organisations also came down heavily against the expulsion describing it as "collective punishment" on Tamils.

"Nothing could be more inflammatory in Sri Lanka's polarized climate than identifying people by ethnicity and kicking them out of the capital," said Brad Adams, Asia director at Human Rights Watch.

"This operation clearly provokes and aggravates ethnic divisions. As citizens of Sri Lanka,

Tamils need not provide any specific reason to justify their stay in any part of the country. This also applies to Sinhalese, Muslims and others who have equal entitlement on the basis of common citizenship," the Asian Human Rights Commission said.

Speaking on the eviction of Tamils from Colombo at the parliament opposition leader Ranil Wickremesinghe compared the plight of the Tamils under the Rajapaksa administration, to that of the Jews in Germany during World War 2 and of Black Africans during the Apartheid era.

Rajothayam Sampanthan, leader of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), the largest Tamil political party in Sri Lanka called the actions of the government 'a

blatant violation of the fundamental human rights of innocent Tamil people who had committed no offence'.

"Not only is the action of the government, in transporting innocent Tamils like cattle against their will, illegal, it is also inhuman", said Sampanthan.

Suresh Premachandran, TNA Jaffna district MP said government was creating conditions that would justify the creation of a separate state.

"With such policies Tamil Eelam is a possibility. The policy makers have proven that the North and East is the homeland of the Tamils, and we should live there. If you accept that the North East is a separate country, we will secede", he said.

Visa bar to rights abusers

WESTERN diplomats in Colombo said yesterday Sri Lankan security forces members may be denied visas if they have human rights abuse charges against them, after one senior police officer said a European country had rejected him, the AFP reported.

"The checking on any reports of abuses was something that was done even before, but now there is a new urgency to screen more thoroughly," an official at a Western embassy said.

He said all visa applicants were routinely subjected to interviews, but in the case of military personnel and police any adverse rights record would be grounds to deny a visa.

An inspector involved in expelling minority ethnic Tamils

from Colombo this month told reporters at the weekend he had been denied a visa to an unnamed European country because of the action.

The Supreme Court on Friday restrained police Chief Victor Perera and all officers in charge of stations in Colombo from carrying out any more evictions of minority Tamils. All military personnel and police would also face tight screening and could be denied visas if they faced court charges for rights abuses in the country's bitter ethnic war, other Western diplomats said.

Human rights organisations have already called for foreign travel bans on Sri Lankan officials implicated in rights abuses. **Editorial, p6**

Britain: war is unwinnable

Continued from page 4

tions would be met, but did not receive a satisfactory response. Following discussions between officials and ministers in DFID and FCO as well as No 10, we have decided to release half of the funds. A decision on payment of the rest is subject to consultation with GoSL over our concerns about continuing hostilities, rise in military expenditure, and the human rights situation.

16. At the Sri Lanka May 2, Adjournment debate, Mr. Keith Vaz, MP, announced an initiative to establish an all-party parliamentary group for Tamils. He also announced that he would hold a peace conference in London with the President, the LTTE and the Norwegians. Subsequently, all three parties expressed surprise at this announcement. We have been responding to -enquiries on this by referring to the Ministers' speeches and pointing out that this is a personal initiative of Mr. Vaz, and that his comments do not represent UK policy.

NGO concerns and statistics

There are 100,000+ displaced persons in Batticaloa in the east. They face threats of violence and abductions by the LTTE and pro-government armed groups. Some displaced persons have been returned to Vaharai against their will.

The Karuna Group abducts and uses children as soldiers, with complicity of the Sri Lankan forces. Armed Karuna cadres roam the streets in Batticaloa District in sight of/alongside security forces.

There are 700+ recorded cases of missing persons in the Jaffna peninsula since December 2005. There have been 50+ abductions in and around Colombo over the previous year.

Emergency regulations give security forces wide powers of search, seizure of property, arrests without warrants and unacknowledged detention of individuals for up to 12 months.

There has been an increase in anonymous death threats against NGO workers (in 2006 according

to OCHA).

Recently nine NGO workers died, and no one was charged. There has been Karuna Group death threats to some distributors of Tamil-language newspapers.

There are over 600,000 internally displaced people created by the current fighting, the tsunami and legacy IDPs from the 1980s and 1990s. Over 300,000 have been created in the last year, causing pressure on delivery systems. Threats to people's safety, human rights violations, widespread displacement and the destruction of livelihoods contribute to the humanitarian situation.

A major concern is the diminishing humanitarian space as fighting intensifies and attitudes harden towards humanitarian agencies. There are frequent reports of forced displacement, abductions and targeted killings. The humanitarian co-ordination system, led by the UN, is characterised by systems and forums developed during the co-operative period of immediate response to the Asian tsunami.

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NEWS

Sri Lanka slammed at EU hearing

THE Sri Lankan government came under severe criticism for human rights and humanitarian abuses at a public hearing in Brussels of the European Parliamentary Development Committee Wednesday. The Tamil Tigers were also criticized. Whilst representatives of the European Commission and Council of External Affairs slammed the lack of respect for international humanitarian laws in Sri Lanka, NGOs, including Human Rights Watch and aid agency Action Contre la Faïm decried the continuing abuses of human rights.

The Development Committee's two-part hearing looked at the impact of the post tsunami reconstruction in Sri Lanka and Indonesia and the human rights and humanitarian situation in Sri Lanka.

The HRW researcher, Ms. Charu Lata HOGG particularly express concern that

"As the conflict intensifies and government forces are implicated in a longer list of abuses, from arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances to the war crimes, the government has displayed a clear unwillingness to hold accountable those responsible for serious crimes under Sri Lankan and international law," said Ms. Charu Hogg, the HRW representative.

"Government institutions have proven inadequate to deal with the scale and intensity of abuse."

Outlining the human rights, media freedom and humanitarian situation in Sri Lanka, Ms. Hogg

said: "the Sri Lankan government's human rights track record over the past year ... has taken a decisive turn for the worse."

The state was accused of participation or complicity in large numbers of 'disappearances.'

HRW warned that new anti-terrorism laws issued in December 2006 was framed too broadly and had led to the criminalization of a range of peaceful activities.

"The government's respect for Sri Lankan and international law has sharply declined," she further said.

HRW said the international community should work with the government and the LTTE to establish a United Nations human rights monitoring mission.

The director of the ACF, Mr. Francois Danel, made an emotionally charged presentation which was acknowledge by the chair of the meeting, Mr. Josep Borrell Fontelles, former head of the committee.

Last August seventeen ACF aid workers were massacred in the eastern town of Muttur. International ceasefire monitors blamed Sri Lankan government forces for the execution style killings. One victim was Muslim, the others were all Tamils.

Mr. Danel accused the Sri Lankan state of restricting humanitarian access to the island's northeast of the island and of serious breaches of international humanitarian laws.

He pointed out that three different investigations had been launched into the Muttur mas-

sacre of ACF workers but none had made any progress. He urged the EU to take note of the Sri Lankan authorities' refusal to allow the Australian ballistics experts report.

He was deeply pessimistic about Sri Lanka's investigations and urged the EU to take up the issue and ensure the perpetrators of the crime were punished.

However the Sri Lankan representative to the session, Ambassador Aruni Wijewardane, refused to acknowledge the hearing on human rights and human rights issues by the Development Committee.

'The Sri Lanka government's respect for Sri Lankan and international law has sharply declined'

She also blamed LTTE for all happenings in Sri Lanka and asked EU member states to implement the ban on the group by closing down all propaganda and branch offices of the LTTE.

British MEP Nirj Deva, a long-standing and vocal supporter of successive Sri Lankan governments supported Ambassador Wijewardane. Mr. Deva was sup-

ported by his Conservative Party colleague, Mr. Geoffrey Van Orden.

They blamed terrorism for Sri Lanka's problems and argued there 'are no human rights in Vanni' - the LTTE's northern stronghold.

Their interventions were challenged by another British MEP, Robert Evans who pointed out that he had been to the Vanni and had observed the administration there.

He also reminded participants of the long list of assassinations of prominent critics of the Sri Lanka state, including the All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC) party leader Kumar Ponnambalam, senior Tamil parliamentarian Joseph Pararajasingham and others.

He slammed Sri Lankan propaganda institutions for attacking him whenever he raised issues of concern to the Tamil people.

Mr. Evans called participants attention to the Montenegro type of solution and suggested Sri Lanka also needed a political solution.

Meanwhile European Commission and External Affairs Council officials expressed concerns about the worsening human rights and humanitarian law situation in the island and urged both the Sri Lanka government and the LTTE to respect the international humanitarian laws.

The officials also express their reservation on the progress of the Commission of Inquiries (CoI) appointed by President Rajapakse and the work of the Eminent

Persons' Group (IIGEP).

Contrary to reports that Sri Lankan ministers would be stating their case at the Brussels forum, Colombo's delegation was led by Ambassador Aruni Wijewardane, Sri Lanka's Ambassador to Austria. Mr. Shavindra Fernando, Deputy Solicitor General, Dr. Jayantha Samarasinghe of Reconstruction and Development Agency (RADA) and Mr. Gamini Hettiarachchi were amongst others in the delegation.

In Sri Lanka, the government suppressed reports of criticism in its media outlets and instead claimed a thumping endorsement from the EU.

"The meeting brought a great victory to the country despite all the allegations made by some political parties and organisations that tsunami funds should be stopped and that the Government is misusing the tsunami funds and human rights violations have increased," Defence Spokesman Minister Keheliya Rambukwella told reporters.

However, he protested, "no one spoke a word about the LTTE and their terrorist activities. Instead they sanitised the LTTE and suppressed talk about terrorism. But their attempt failed and the Government achieved a huge victory."

Given the interventions of Mr. Deva and Mr. Van Orden, Mr. Rambukwella told reporters: "Several members of the European Parliament condemned terrorism by the LTTE treating it as a cause of concern."

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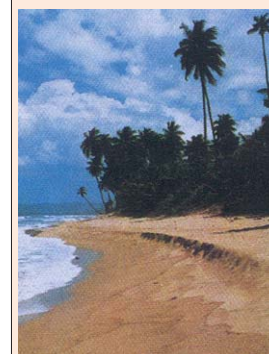
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