

Why Tamils' suffering is inconsequential

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Humanitarian situation worsens

WHILE the Sri Lankan government 'celebrates' the 'liberation' of the east, observers predict that the conflict, and the humanitarian crisis in Tamil areas, will only deteriorate.

In the east many of the displaced have been able to return home, although aid workers fear some may have been sent back against their will.

However many have not returned to their traditional homes, and others continue to move, citing local insecurity and fears of armed groups.

Tamil residents have been stopped from returning to what used to be the LTTE areas in Sampur, near the strategic north-eastern port of Trincomalee as the area has been declared a high security zone for the military.

"The residents are still stuck in camps," one Western aid worker told Reuters. "The fear is that it could eventually amount to ethnic cleansing."

The Sri Lankan military is also blocking shipments of cement, steel, fuel and other items from reaching LTTE territory, Reuters reported.

This has forced aid groups to shelve post-tsunami housing projects as well as plans to build schools and hospitals in the Tamil areas most impacted by the war and the 2004 tsunami.

And NGOs are to be closely supervised in the east, with the Sri Lankan military announcing that regional authorities will be "supervising" all development work by NGOs in the region.

In the north, the shortage of food and essential items is biting hard, with rising levels of acute malnutrition being seen in Jaffna.

Livelihoods and markets have been disrupted by conflict and

displacement, the closure of a major highway, and security-related restrictions on farming and fishing, IRIN reported.

"Food assistance for the internally displaced and other vulnerable groups has been in short supply for months," the agency said.

The Jaffna District Government Agent, K. Ganesh, says 51% of the Jaffna population, who are dependent on farming, have had their productivity impacted by the lack of fertilizer and no access to farmlands, which have been declared security zones.

Another 9% are impacted by the fishing restrictions, with estimates that their production is 10% of the pre-conflict levels.

About 165,000 people in Jaffna are highly reliant on food assistance, including internally displaced people (IDPs) and other vulnerable groups.

The Sri Lankan Commissioner General of Essential Services says it provides government food to 45,000 of these IDPs and vulnerable people and the UN World Food Programme (WFP) is responsible for 120,000 more.

But WFP says it has been a challenge to meet its food-assistance goals for Jaffna.

Meanwhile, along with civilians, aid workers are continuing to be targeted, with a field officer of the Danish Refugee Council, an international humanitarian organization in Jaffna, being shot dead last week. Arumainayagam Alloysius, 26, had been with the Halo Trust, another INGO, but had switched to the joined the Danish agency when the Halo Trust discontinued its work in the peninsula recently. More than 13 Halo Trust staffers have been either killed, abducted or gone missing in the recent past.



A mother who lost her child cries and curses as Sri Lanka Army soldiers ride past in a South African made Buffel Armoured Personnel Carrier. The military has been accused of complicity in abductions and disappearances by young men who have been released after being abducted. *Photo TamilNet*

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NEWS



The Representative Committee, which does not have representatives from the third and fourth largest parties in parliament, is expected to release its report in mid August. *Photo TamilNet*

APRC set to report

THE final recommendation of a panel appointed by the Sri Lankan President to find a political solution to the island's conflict is expected later this month.

The All Party Representative Committee (APRC) report is expected to be prepared in concurrence with all political parties represented in the Committee.

APRC chairman Prof. Tissa Vitharana said that the Committee was planning to come up with the final draft by the middle of August.

Commenting on the progress the APRC has made in formulating the proposals so far, Vitharana said that the process was at the intermediate level.

"We have many areas agreed upon by all political parties as of now," the professor said.

Asked to reveal what the areas were, he said he did not want to declare them until the draft is complete.

"We have had a considerable number of meetings over the last few weeks regarding the matter, and were able to reach a consensus in many areas," he explained.

Asked if there were any disparities between the government coalition and the main opposition over the unit of devolution, Vitharana said there were different opinions and views regarding some matters.

"But all parties represented in the APRC, can come to a settlement regarding these issues by way of discussion, which the APRC is doing at the moment," he said.

"The APRC is meeting on a regular basis to discuss these matters. I think we can reach a consensus over these outstanding areas in the next few weeks to conclude the final draft," he said.

Meanwhile, a majority of the APRC have rejected the SLFP proposals on the unit of devolution and the nature of the State and have decided to drop the word 'unitary', the Daily Mirror

reported.

Vitharana said the political parties have reached consensus on the three main co-issues of a future power-sharing structure, leaving half of its workload finished.

"We have reached consensus on three of the most controversial co-issues," Vitharana was quoted by the Daily News as saying.

But he declined to spell out the three areas the political parties reached a consensus on.

The Parties which were having a marathon of weekly meetings for the past four weeks, after submitting their individual proposals a month ago, were taking up each co-issue to weigh among themselves and reach common ground.

"We have dealt with the most difficult ones and others will be easy to cope as we move along," he was quoted as saying.

Vitharana offered 20 main proposals, that could be used as a basis of a future constitution, prepared based on the past discussions of the representatives, on January 8 and subsequently invited the 13 political parties in the APRC to submit amendments.

The proposals in his document outlined the State - as free sovereign and independent, form of government, electoral system, supremacy of constitution, power sharing at the centre/in the provinces, unit of devolution (9 provinces), judiciary, distribution of funds, defence and national security among other things.

While the Tamil parties represented on the APRC welcomed the Vitharana proposals, some Sinhalese parties criticised the proposals as creating the ground for a federal structure.

The third largest party in parliament, the Marxist nationalist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), and the largest Tamil party in Parliament, the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), are not involved in the APRC.

Meanwhile, the co-chairs have decided not to get actively involved in Sri Lanka's conflict until the country finds a lasting solution through the APRC, the Daily Mirror newspaper quoted a diplomatic source as saying.

The US, EU, Japan and Norway had taken this stance to enable Sri Lanka to decide by itself, a top Western diplomat told the Daily Mirror.

"Once the parties find a common solution, then the Co-chairs can actively involve in helping the country to implement it," he said.

Soon after the last meeting of the Co-chairs in Oslo, the donor nations urged both President Mahinda Rajapakse and Opposition Leader Ranil Wickremesinghe to find a solution through the APRC.

During the Oslo meeting on June 26, it was agreed to put pressure on Sri Lanka in this regards as well.

He said some donor members had sounded negative on the role of the APRC, claiming it might be a one-sided proposal.

However, the four nations had finally decided to insist on both the President and the Opposition Leader to speed up the finalization of the APRC proposals.

However the government dismissed any delay by the co-chairs.

"There is no truth in reports that the Co-Chairs of the Peace Process have decided to distance themselves from Sri Lanka until the All Party Representative Committee finds a solution," Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama said last Wednesday.

"As far as we are concerned, there is no such intimation from the Co-Chairs," Bogollagama told the Daily News.

"The Government is going ahead with the peace process and the international community is fully aware of the Government's commitment for peace," the Minister said.

NEWS

Discord grows as opposition rallies

THOUSANDS of opposition activists and ruling party dissidents in Sri Lanka commemorated the signing of an alliance pact by holding the first of a series of anti-government rallies over high living costs and alleged human rights violations.

But the government dismissed the rally, saying it had no reason to be concerned over 'meaningless rallies'. Meanwhile, former President Chandrika Kumaratunga spoke out against the government for the first time, charging that its actions were against the interests of the country.

Massive rally

Former Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera led the dissidents in Colombo last Thursday in a massive show of force with a rally starting at Colombo's Campbell Park and winding its way to the nearby Hyde Park.

The main opposition United National Party (UNP) also provided activists for the rally, marking a deal between the party and the ruling group's dissidents to mount a challenge to President Mahinda Rajapakse's government.

The new-born "National Congress" vowed to establish a new order in the island nation.

The estimate of the crowd at the first public show of strength of the Congress varied from 50,000 to 100,000.

Political and diplomatic observers in the Sri Lankan capital believe that it is an impressive start, reported The Hindu.

The Congress, forged by the UNP led by former Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party - Mahajana Wing (SLFPM) leader Samaraweera, intends to mobilise all like-minded parties and individuals to fight against the policies of the Rajapakse government.

The activists denounced the government over its human rights record as well as for the high living costs.

The leaders at the rally charged Rajapakse with manipulating the 2005 presidential election by influencing the Tamil Tigers with monetary inducements. The contention of the opposition is that the LTTE gave a call for boycott of the poll at the last minute as part of deal with Rajapakse, a charge the government denies.

"When the last UNP government was (very) close to bring the LTTE leader to the negotiations table, the government was dissolved suddenly" said S.B. Dissanayake, UNP chief organiser, addressing the protest rally.

"No ethnic conflict in the world has been solved by military means. Not even the East Timor issue in Indonesia nor the Irish problem. All these were solved by power sharing" Dissanayake said.

"The cost living today is unbearable. This war is not going



Thousands protested in Colombo in support of the new 'National Congress' and opposing the government's economic and rights records

to help" he said.

"We worked so hard to bring this government to power-day and night. Minister Jeyaraj Fernandopulle has now become the top communicator for this government!" Samaraweera said.

"I thank all the SLFP MPs who helped to organize this rally," he said.

The former Minister arrived with "large cut-outs of SLFP pioneer SWRD Bandaranaike", news reports reported.

Agreement

The UNP and SLFPM had signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) the previous week.

The MoU said the parties want to protect human rights and democracy, fight corruption, strengthen the economy and end the country's more than two-decade-old civil war.

Samaraweera was a political foe of Wickremesinghe's until he was fired from the Cabinet in February. Last month, Samaraweera joined the opposition, saying the hawkish president was taking the country in an "extreme direction."

As per the arrangement, in the event of the combine capturing power, Mr. Wickremesinghe would be the Prime Minister and Mr. Samaraweera is to be designated as Deputy Prime Minister.

The pact also provides for sharing of ministerial portfolios between the two parties.

No snap polls

The rally was the first in a series challenging the government and came after Rajapakse said he will not hold snap elections despite the pressure mount-

ed by dissidents.

Rajapakse ruled out snap elections and early dissolution of parliament, claiming that his ruling coalition was commanding a "comfortable majority" in the 225-member House with more oppositions legislators defecting to the government.

Rajapakse said he was keen that the current parliament serve its full six-year term. It was elected in April 2004, while the president came to power in November 2005.

Addressing a political rally at Nawalapitiya in the central Kandy district, Rajapakse said, "There will be no parliamentary polls till 2010 and the presidential poll till 2011."

"I am not interested in calling a snap election," the president said July 22 on the sidelines of his first public rally in Nawalapitiya.

Refuting the allegations by the Opposition parties that his government was so fragile that it depends on the 17 breakaway members of the opposition parties to survive, the President said his government did not face the risk of fall.

"With the military victory of capturing the entire Eastern province from the LTTE, we can easily go in for a quick election now and win handsomely," Rajapakse said. "But I don't want to go for another general election and spend \$18 million to conduct that election."

"Instead, I can use the money for development projects in the East," he said, adding that the government has undertaken a 180-day rapid development programme to rebuild the war-ravaged Eastern province.

"I can build a few more roads with that money. We have a stable

government and I want other parties too to unite and move forward," he added.

Local media reports had speculated that Rajapakse may opt for an early election to capitalise on the government's recent military successes in the East.

Government reaction

In response to the National Congress protest, the ruling combine has planned to host a series of meetings all over the nation to educate people on the achievement of the Government in the "liberation of the east" by ousting the Tigers and various other "pro-people" programmes.

The government also put a brave face declaring that it had no reason to be concerned over "meaningless rallies with narrow political objectives".

Chief Government Whip Jeyaraj Fernandopulle claimed at a news conference the day before the rally that the President who obtained a "great victory over the LTTE" was not going to lose sleep over such demonstrations.

The government attempted to portray the alliance as a grouping of political elements jealous of the military successes.

Separately, the dissident group within the UNP which joined the government in January questioned the MoU reached between the UNP and the SLFPM.

Dissident UNP member and Minister of Media Lakshman Yapa Abeywadana told a news conference that his group had already legally challenged the validity of the MoU.

Chandrika supports

Meanwhile former President

Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, hit out at the policies of the Rajapakse Government as being inimical to the interests of the country.

The newly-formed National Congress led by Wickremesinghe and Samaraweera was the need of the hour, she said.

In a letter to Samaraweera, Ms. Kumaratunga said, "The stated objectives of the Alliance seem to reflect the essential need of the hour. I have believed for a long time that the country's problems can be solved effectively, only through a Grand Alliance of all honest, patriotic forces."

In her first elaborate public statement through the letter on the Rajapaksa regime, Ms. Kumaratunga complained that the SLFP had changed several important policies which were followed since 1993 and lead the country to "great, new heights".

"This is a style, wholly alien to the SLFP."

She recalled that her Government in 1994 succeeded to a great extent in bringing into the Government or to support the Government, all parties representing the minority groups, and all major parties, except the UNP and the JVP.

"I made continued efforts to bring the UNP too, to work with us. So, I am very glad to see that the UNP and an important section of the SLFP, have agreed to work together in a formally constituted Alliance."

Ms. Kumaratunga said the "strange new policies" that were being implemented with regard to the economy, the Tamil question and rampant corruption would not resolve the prevailing problems in any of these spheres and might even worsen the situation to a point of no return.

NEWS

“Struggle to achieve self-rule will continue” - American Tamils

TamilNet

IN a peace rally attended by nearly one thousand American Tamils from several states across the United States in front of the Capitol Building, in Washington D.C. Monday last week from noon to 3:00 p.m., the participants said: "We, the Tamil Americans, hereby proclaim that Eelam Tamils constitute a Nation. We resolve that our struggle to establish the right of Tamil people to Self-Determination, and to establish self-rule in the territories Tamil people have made their home for centuries will continue until our goal is achieved," in a declaration released to the press at the conclusion of the rally.

"We appeal to the legislators, the Administration and the people of the United States who fought and won their freedom to empathize with the Tamil people, and help to establish our right to Self-Determination from the remnants of the Sinhala colonial State," the declaration further said.

Mrs Kandaswamy, 80, braved 200 mile bus-ride to attend the rally from New Jersey. She said she had stood in front of the Parliament in Canberra in 2003, in front of Britain's Houses of Parliament in 2005, and that she is happy stand in front of the Capitol Building with her adult son at the rally today.

Expatriate Tamils, including a large contingent of second generation American Tamils, from far-away states including Florida, Ohio, California, and Boston, and from several other states attended the peace rally.

Participants carried colorful placards, wore sun-visors and T-shirts carrying the message of



American Tamil travelled from far and wide to the US capital, Washington DC, to express their support for Tamil Eelam. Photo TamilNet

peace and the right of Tamil for self-determination, and shouted slogans throughout the rally.

Tamil youth group which has organized a pre-, post-rally congressional lobbying campaign, read messages of support from several Congresspersons between the speeches by International Human Rights Lawyer, Karen Parker, New York Attorney Visuvanathan Rudrakumaran, Ellyn Shander, a Medical Doctor

from New Canaan, Connecticut who had visited the NorthEast to provide care and grief counseling to the tsunami survivors, and several others to the participants.

Chris Gaston, Senior Aide to Congressman Rush Holt from New Jersey met with the contingent that attended the rally from the Congressman's home state.

Ms Parker said: "Because of the right to self-determination, the Tamil areas belong to the

Tamils. It is their land. The civilian government and the military force - the LTTE - have a right de jure (by law) to this State. Tamils presence in their own land is not de facto and their government is not a de facto one.

"The Sri Lankan government's occupation of part of the historic Tamil Eelam is de facto. They are there by the clear facts on the ground but they don't have the legal right to it," Ms. Parker

added.

The declaration read at the conclusion of the rally also noted that 100,000 Tamils have died and more than a million have been internally displaced during the struggle, and that Tamils did not participate in Sri Lanka's 1972 and 1978 constitutions which "institutionalized discrimination" and "denied Tamils effective role in decision making process."

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NEWS

British deportations continue as hunger strikers weaken

TamilNet

THE health of several of the dozens of Tamil asylum seekers on hunger strike at British detention centers is deteriorating rapidly with some being rushed to hospital, detainees and lawyers said Friday.

However, enforced deportations from the centers are continuing regardless of the now week-long protest, they said.

Pointing out that Britain has cautioned her citizens against traveling to Sri Lanka, the hunger strikers want the authorities to halt forcible returns of asylum applicants. They also want Tamils to be taken off Britain's asylum processing 'fast track' so as to allow sufficient time for appeals against deportations to be conducted.

A hunger strike against enforced removal to Sri Lanka begun earlier this month by Tamil asylum seekers at one British holding centre has spread to other locations.

There have been isolated protests in the past, but not on this scale. At least one asylum seeker has attempted suicide.

The first recent hunger strike began on July 9 when two Tamils at one location refused to eat unless deportations are stopped.

But there are over seventy people on hunger strike now at seven locations.

28 people are on hunger strike at the Harmondsworth Immigration Removal Centre in London along with 23 others at Oakington in Cambridgeshire and 10 at Haslar, Hampshire.

Small groups of Tamils are on hunger strike at other locations, detainees say.

Pointing out that Britain has cautioned her citizens against traveling to Sri Lanka, the hunger strikers and immigration lawyers want authorities to halt the forcible deportations of asylum applicants to Sri Lanka.

The protestors also want Tamil applicants to be taken off Britain's asylum processing 'fast track' so as to allow sufficient time for appeals against deportations to be conducted.

They cite the cases of several Tamils who had either been arrested or 'disappeared' after being forcibly deported.

One youth, Sivaruben, who was deported on July 18, was arrested at Colombo airport. His parents are being refused access to the prison.

Sivaruben's case spurred other inmates at Harmondsworth to join Tamil protestors elsewhere on hunger strike.

Two other Tamils deported recently are known to have gone missing from their residences in Colombo within weeks of arriv-

ing back in Sri Lanka, inmates quoted relatives there as saying.

Inmates say the fate of several others is unknown as they (inmates) do not know their relatives to contact.

Despite the hunger strikes, the deportations from Britain are continuing, protestors and immigration lawyers said Friday.

People are being taken to planes in handcuffs screaming, an inmate on hunger strike told TamilNet Friday. Three people from one location were deported last week.

One Tamil man seeking asylum was deported Thursday, even though his wife and 4 year old child are in UK (not in detention), others said.

Several others are being prepared for deportation as scheduled and have been told to make arrangements with their lawyers.

At one location, Harmondsworth, immigration offices have warned asylum seekers they would be put on planes regardless of their protest.

"They tell us we will be sent back regardless of whether we eat or not," an inmate at Oakington Reception Centre said.

"The doctors who check our health are also telling us to give up and return to Sri Lanka," he said. "There is simply no human sympathy in these places," he said. "We are kept like criminals. What have we done wrong in this country to be locked up like this?"

At another location, Haslar, the immigration officers are simply ignoring the hunger strikers, inmates said.

Doctors are checking the protestors' condition and urging them to abandon their protest and return peaceably.

"Many of us have been held here for a long time. They won't tell us the status of our applications, but we are locked up," one inmate said.

"Sometimes we get letters about our cases that won't make clear what will happen to us. They refuse appeal after appeal, telling us all the time we will soon be sent back."

"We are in a constant state of tension and anxiety. It is a form of mental torture," he said.

One youth, Sujeevan, attempted suicide this week soon after receiving his latest monthly status report, fellow inmates said. He was taken to hospital and is being held in isolation, they said.

They said following weeks of anxiety, the report simply didn't indicate whether he would be sent back or allowed to remain.

Protestors interviewed by local media say they are seeking asylum in UK to escape the killings and human rights abuses



Guards stand outside a British immigration detention centre where Tamil refugees on a hunger strike are asking the authorities to consider the dangers they face in Colombo before deporting them.

in Sri Lanka that Britain and other Western countries have condemned.

Pointing out that Britain is amongst the countries that have recently cut aid to Sri Lanka in protest at rights abuses by the security forces, the asylum seekers say they are seeking sanctuary in Britain only until the island's conflict is resolved. "We are not fortune seekers. Tamils are being killed every day there. We will definitely go back home if there is peace, we want to be allowed to stay till it is safe," one asylum seeker told local radio.

The Tamil Lawyers' Association (UK) has urged the British

authorities "to suspend all deportations of Tamil asylum seekers to Sri Lanka and give primacy to safety of asylum seekers."

In a press release issued this week, the Association pointed out that Britain has cautioned against travel to Sri Lanka.

The Association also quoted the United Nations refugee agency, UNHCR, as urging that all asylum claims of Tamils from the North or East should be favourably considered.

They also cite the UNHCR as arguing that where the individual does not fulfil the refugee criteria under the 1951 Convention, "a complementary form of protec-

tion should be granted in light of the prevailing situation of armed conflict and generalised violence in the north and east."

Meanwhile the protestors say they will continue their hunger strike until the Home Office (Britain's Interior Ministry) changes its policy on 'fast tracking' and deporting Tamils to Sri Lanka.

"Those of us in here will not give up our hunger strike," an inmate at Harmondsworth said.

"People who return [to Sri Lanka] are being killed like animals there, they are being killed on the roadside. It is better to die with dignity here."

EDITORIAL & OPINION

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Not So Simple

Why development-led pacification will not work in Sri Lanka

No sooner had Sri Lanka's military announced it had occupied the Thoppigala region, described as the last stronghold of the Tamil Tigers in the eastern province, the President Mahinda Rajapakse's government called for international aid to develop the territories newly captured by the military. Japan, Sri Lanka's biggest donor, was swift to respond. Meanwhile, the military has declared that relief and developmental non-governmental organizations operating in the eastern province must do so through its administration. The logic behind these moves is pacification. Counter-insurgency theory calls for the consolidation of military gains by foreclosing further resistance to occupation forces by transforming the mindsets of the population (winning hearts and minds) through a combination of coercion and incentives.

Working in a framework which unquestioningly declares ethnic harmony can be fashioned out of the present Sinhala-dominated Sri Lankan state if only the LTTE can be destroyed, several international actors are backing President Rajapakse's war against the Tigers. They also intend to support his pacification program in the eastern province. Denying the fundamental problem in Sri Lanka - oppression of the Tamils by the Sinhala dominated state - these international actors believe all the government needs to do to win Tamil hearts and minds is carry out development. Once provided with hospitals, schools, etc., the argument goes, the Tamils will drop their outlandish political demands for self-determination and, more importantly, desert the Tigers.

The Sri Lankan state has embarked on pacification programs several times in 25 years of war. None have succeeded. For those less sanguine about the prospects of refashioning the Sri Lankan state, the reasons are obvious. On the ground, the Sinhala military cannot win the trust of the Tamil population, as evidenced by the day to day interaction between troops and the majority of civilians in any of the government controlled areas. The indiscriminate and often deliberate violence the military unleashes on civilian centers during its offensives establishes the fundamental relationship between the Sinhala state and the Tamil citizen. Civilian suffering continues under occupation amid routine human rights abuses restrictions on trade (fishing, farming, etc) by a military which views the Tamil population with suspi-

cion. The fundamental problem is clearly visible in today's Sri Lanka: the military is carrying out rights abuses at will and with impunity - even though the international community has a grandstand view.

Nevertheless, for most of the conflict international aid has been supplied to support the military's counter-insurgency efforts. Colombo's embargoes on Tamil areas outside its control, including the blocking of food and medicine, have always been tacitly supported by the donor community. Relief and rehabilitation aid has instead been tantalizingly made available on the government side of the front line in a bid to tempt the population, also being pressured by indiscriminate bombardment, to cross from LTTE areas to government ones. Once an area has been captured, international aid has been brought in to rebuild and develop.

The theory has failed due to inept execution by the racist, corrupt Sri Lankan state. Its character was exemplified by its conduct after the 2004 tsunami, when it diverted most aid to the Sinhala south, blocking aid and media from the North-east. Three days after the waves Rajapakse, then Prime Minister, was shrilly protesting that international aid shouldn't be allowed to Vanni. This is the leadership the international community now believes will develop the east and woo the people away from the guerrillas. On top of this racism are Sri Lankan officialdom's all pervasive corruption and entrenched political clientilism.

Jaffna is the quintessential failure of pacification in Sri Lanka, though no program has been more determined. The peninsula was captured by the military in 1996. Aid was pumped in by the donor community in an undisguised and integral role in Sri Lanka's counter-insurgency strategy. Yet a decade later Jaffna remains a heavily armed enclave under military administration where paramilitaries prowl at will. All development efforts in Jaffna have foundered due to corruption and patron client networks. A top World Bank official, addressing Sri Lanka's donor forum in 2000 marveled she could not find a single person that had been helped by the Bank's projects there.

The confidence with which international actors are today preparing to fund development in the newly captured eastern is misguided. It is a cliché that those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it. It is also a truism.

Why Tamils' suffering is inconsequential

The international community wants to be seen to be 'concerned' - but without hindering the Sri Lankan government from carrying on with its war against the LTTE.

Naren Nagarajah
 Tamil Guardian

THE International Community (IC) is fast losing credibility among the Tamils, both within Sri Lanka and in the Diaspora. Despite the unprecedented level of human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law by the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) the IC remains unmoved.

Even the farcical proposals the ruling SLFP put forward as a political solution have not stirred the IC into reconsidering.

Other than a few vague statements and token suspension of some aid, there has been a peculiar silence that is frustrating and unsettling, not only for the Tamils, but also humanitarian and human rights advocates involved in Sri Lanka.

Notably, there has been no condemnations of the GoSL - unlike, say, Zimbabwe - for its gross abuses from the IC.

The lack of concrete plans for international action - or even a meaningful statement - at the conclusion of the recent meeting in Oslo of the 'Co-Chairs' of the Sri Lankan Donors - US, EU, Japan and Norway - is the most recent, and most regrettable, missed opportunity to ensure the protection of human rights and drag Sri Lanka back from the abyss.

Why this silence from these, the most vociferous advocates of human rights during the peace process?

There is a convincing argument spreading amongst the Tamils that the IC's responses thus far have been limited to weak statements because this serves their ends: to be seen to be 'concerned,' but without hindering the GoSL from carrying out its military operations to destroy the LTTE.

IC statements of late have been limited to criticising specific incidents and urging 'investigations' - by the GoSL itself. These gentle admonishments may be intended to encourage GoSL to fight its war more cleanly. But these also intended as a sop to the powerless Tamil Diaspora that feels deliberately ignored by the IC.

In addition, the lack of any

coherent tangible international policy or long-term plan to bring about a solution reinforces Tamil suspicions that vested international interests are driving policy, not - as is often proclaimed - altruism.

There is a certain preoccupation amongst key members of the IC to deal only with the symptoms and not the underlying cause - oppression of the Tamils by the Sinhala-dominated state.

Meanwhile, there is surprisingly little focus on the thinking of the LTTE itself.

The LTTE is a proscribed organisation in many of the countries involved in the Sri Lankan situation. The proscriptions in EU and Canada, in addition to those of US, UK and India, have resulted in the silencing of a key actor in the conflict and peace process.

The bans preclude the engagement with the LTTE by which solutions can be explored, confidence built and tensions reduced.

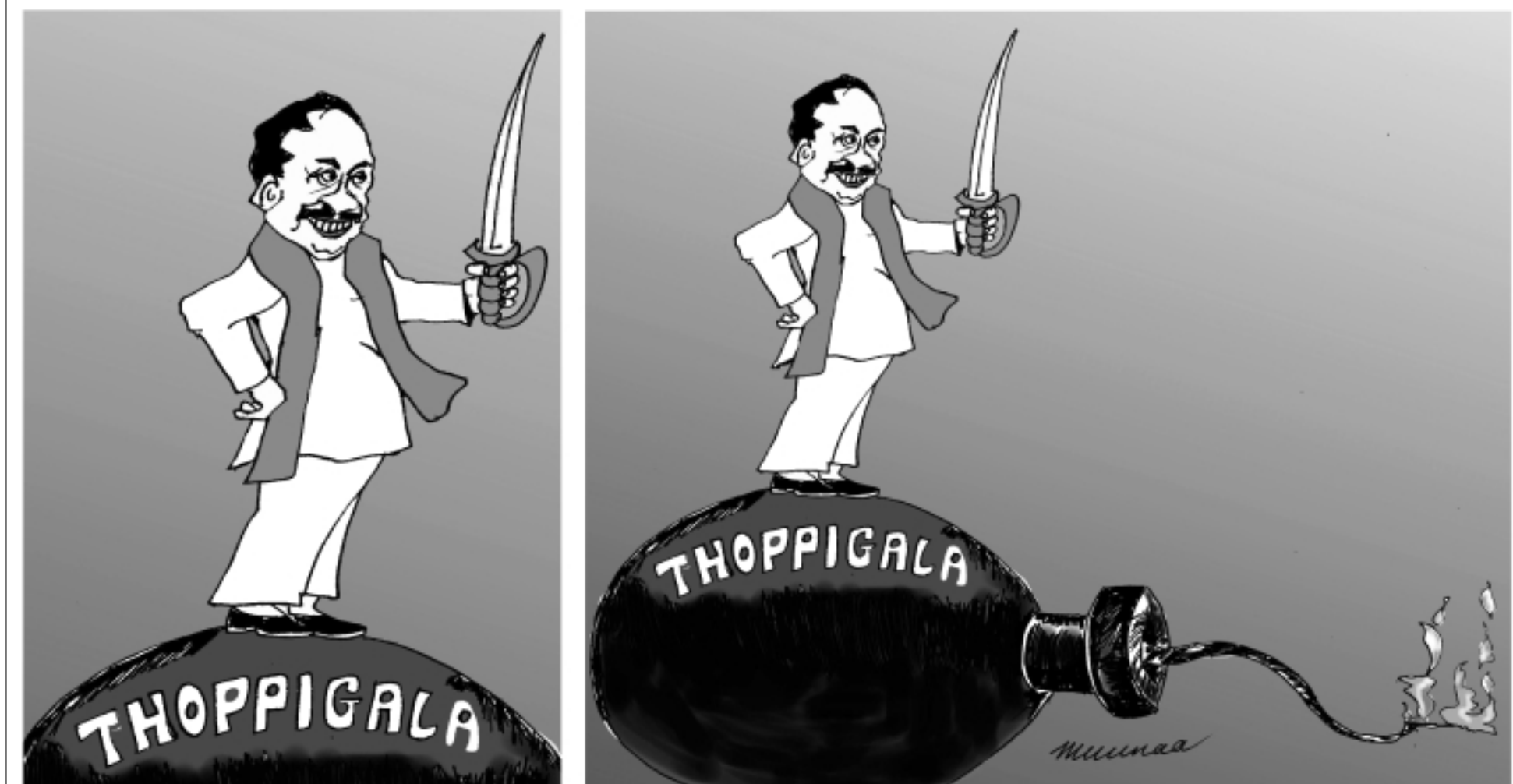
The vacuum of international engagement with the LTTE along with the war euphoria in the south, shenanigans of Sinhala politics and, especially, the ruling SLFP's mocking proposal to the All Party Representative Committee (APRC) has served to reinforce the LTTE's belief that meaningful negotiations towards political solution are virtually impossible now.

Furthermore, this perceived attempt by the IC to marginalize the LTTE is entirely in keeping with the IC's track record of not viewing the LTTE as an equal partner in the peace process.

The Tamils' bitter post-tsunami experience as well as their experiences during the past 40 years also tells them that the possibility of an agreement (even if reached) being implemented is utterly remote. The LTTE is well aware of the depth of this scepticism amongst the Tamils.

Meanwhile, from their comments, it is clear that the Tigers are interpreting current events, including the lack of any meaningful international reaction, as the IC turning a blind eye to the plight of the Tamils in the

EDITORIAL & OPINION



NorthEast and providing the GoSL with the space to destroy the LTTE militarily, despite the attendant humanitarian costs.

In the wake of 'victory' in the east, the calls in the south for further ('final') military action against the Tigers are growing louder. The IC seems less convinced than before, but is largely going along with Sri Lanka's war.

But it is imprudent to interpret the lack of a more violent response from the Tigers to recent events as weakness or inability, rather than part of a calculated design.. The history of the LTTE tells us to expect the unexpected. And even if the Sinhala hawks are right, were the LTTE were pushed against the wall its response could be devastating.

Although the Diaspora is as much a stakeholder in the Tamil question as the residents of the Northeast, the bans have deliberately curtailed the LTTE's interaction with it - even though many of the skills essential to forging a political solution are located in it.

Tamil pleas for the bans to be lifted fall on deaf ears.

In Britain, the Diaspora seems to have found some space for engagement with the London government, especially through the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Tamil affairs. The absence in other countries of such institutional avenues has served to completely silence and marginalize the equally distressed Tamil communities there.

The 'war on terror' and the associated complexities of the application of terror laws in the UK, the EU and elsewhere are causing moderates in the Tamil community to refrain from expressing their views publicly

for fear of violating these laws.

This has led to a shrinking in the spectrum of political discourse on Sri Lanka. Non-participation by moderates also has the potential to permanently damage prospects for a negotiated settlement in the future. Any peace initiatives will undoubtedly require the involvement of the Diaspora at all levels.

The GoSL has effectively dealt a severe blow to such possibilities by marginalizing the Diaspora through intimidation, harassment, and by branding all those who speak of Tamil aspirations or grievances or who attempt to provide assistance to the Tamil community in Sri Lanka as "terrorists".

The marginalization and dem-onizing of an entire community by the Sri Lankan government has been institutionalised in the proscription of the LTTE by the US, EU, etc. Seeking to curtail professional expertise from reaching the LTTE, the bans have also rendered the Diaspora incapable of engaging with the LTTE on a solution.

The current strategy being pursued by GoSL is clearly focused on military initiatives - ostensibly with the stated goal of "weakening the LTTE to get them to the table".

But the limit of political devolution being offered is incredibly at the district level. The preservation of a unitary state is further entrenched by the 'power-sharing proposal.'

Though these are the stated goal and stance of the ruling party, it is by no means an isolated view unique to the ruling party; rather it is the well subscribed, mainstream view of the Sinhala majority.

Hence the chorus of Sinhala

calls for further attacks on the LTTE, even though Sri Lanka's increasingly severe military initiatives of the past twenty five years have not borne results.

The GoSL is completely cognisant of the consequences (such as adverse international opinions, should they occur) of pursuing a military solution and obviously sees these as inevitable challenges that must be endured and managed. Clearly the government, assisted by Sinhalese bureaucrats with extensive international experience, does not consider the consequences of upsetting the international community as unmanageable.

Thus GoSL's undeclared but open war is a carefully thought through and crafted strategy built from a clear understanding of prevailing international sentiments and an awareness of the limitations on international actors.

GoSL is also taking full advantage of existing bilateral and multilateral differences among key states and state blocs of the

IC.

The 'war on terror' provides fertile linkages for GoSL to seek assistance from 'friendly' countries that have similar internal challenges and, frequently, are also human rights abusers. This can be seen in the GoSL's effective dismissal of criticism and action at the UN Human Rights Council.

Exploiting the advantages of being a state, the GoSL also has mustered resources to manage propaganda, co-opting the local and sometimes international media. Despite the frequent gaffes, significant progress has been achieved in projecting Colombo's case and viewpoint abroad.

Sri Lanka also has clearly demonstrated that demands to meet international norms of conduct can be disregarded with negligible consequences. Indeed, it is the accusers who are often put on the defensive by GoSL's counter-attacks. All manner of tactics are used to discredit, delay, expel or intimidate each

critic until they go away or be silent. This has included personal attacks on senior foreign personalities such as UN investigator Alan Rock or Ambassadors in Colombo.

President Rajapakse has taken it upon himself to destroy the Tamil challenge to Sinhala rule once and for all.

His ambition is apparent in his undisguised strategy: destroy the LTTE and impose a solution that entrenches the unitary character of the state. When he says he is prepared to go that extra mile to find a solution, he means it. It is just not the solution that the conflict resolution advocates have in mind.

The appalling conditions being endured by the people of the NorthEast should have by now triggered international outrage and the strongest condemnation - which the IC has levelled at other states for far less.

But their misery is seen simply as a necessary part of the global 'war on terror.' Hence the silence.

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Diaspora Tamils commemorate Black July, support struggle

TamilNet

THOUSANDS of diaspora Tamils joined protests in several world capitals to commemorate 24th anniversary of Black July and to express support and to continue the struggle "to establish self-rule in

the territories Tamil people have made their home for centuries ... until the goal is achieved."

Diaspora Tamils join demonstrations and protests in numbers despite coordinated crackdown on Tamil activists by Western states. In the peace rally attended by nearly one thousand American

Tamils from several states across the United States in front of the Capitol Building, in Washington D.C. on July 24 from 12:00 noon to 3:00 p.m. The participants said: "We, the Tamil Americans, hereby proclaim that Eelam Tamils constitute a Nation. We resolve that our struggle to establish the right of

Tamil people to Self-Determination, and to establish self-rule in the territories Tamil people have made their home for centuries will continue until our goal is achieved," in a declaration released to the press at the conclusion of the rally.

Nearly five thousand British Tamils demonstrated on July 15 in

central London calling on the UK to apply pressure to halt human rights abuses by Sri Lanka's security forces and to recognize the right to self-determination of the Tamil people. The rally in Trafalgar square was organized by councilors of Tamil origin in the London area. More than 5000 Tamils attend-

ed the Markham Civic Centre, July 27 evening at 6:00 p.m. to attend a rally to commemorate the pogrom of July 1983 and to pay homage to the hundreds of Tamils who lost their lives during the state sponsored violence. Mr. Anton Philip Sinnarasa, a survivor of the 1983 Welikada prison massacre, said that

53 Tamils killed during orgies of violence on 25th and 27th of July, lived for their conviction and their dream, and died in pursuit of a just cause.

Several hundred South African Tamils filled the Bayview Arutpa Kazhagam Hall in Chatsworth in Durban July 28 evening to express

solidarity with the NorthEast Tamils, and to pay respect for the victims of the pogroms against Tamils in Sri Lanka in July 1983.

Belgian, Australian, and Swiss Tamils also joined other expatriate Tamil communities worldwide in remembering the Black July event.

On July 25, Swiss Tamils

assembled in front of the United Nations Building in Geneva.

Belgian Tamils assembled in front of the European Parliament in Brussels between 2:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m. to pay respect for the Tamils who perished during the 1983 July state sponsored violence and to highlight the current human

right abuses against Tamils in Colombo and across NorthEast.

Australian Tamils in Melbourne convened in Melbourne City Square to mark the event, with 24 traditional lamps to mark the 24 years since the July 1983 violence, during which time no action has been taken against anyone over it.

OPINION

Rajapaksa - the liberator of the east?

The President's victory celebrations are contributing towards the further polarisation of Sri Lankan society along ethnic lines.

Ameen Izzadeen

Khaleej Times Online

THE victory at Thoppigala brought the Eastern Province, one of Sri Lanka's nine administrative provinces, under the control of the government. The defeat of the LTTE in the east is, no doubt, a victory for the security forces.

But the ultimate victory is not nigh. The path to that elusive victory is strewn with many an obstacle. The journey along that path requires courage and sacrifice, both at military and political level. Whether we will see that victory during the present regime of President Mahinda Rajapaksa is a big question now.

The victory in the east has hardened the ultranationalists' resolve to continue the fight and conquer the north. Yes, conquest

is the goal of these ultranationalists whose ideology has fuelled the ethnic flames and driven the country towards destruction and the disgruntled Tamil youths towards violence.

On the eve of the Thoppigala victory, I had a casual conversation with a few senior military officers at a defence academy. One senior officer told me that the real victory could come only when the Tamils in the east also join with the rest of the country to celebrate the military's feat.

He was talking like a liberator - not a conqueror. "The more we harp on our victory, the more hurt we will be heaping on the Tamils," the Sinhala said.

Yes, the Tamils are hurt. Not

because the LTTE, which is claiming to be the sole representative of the Tamils, has been driven out of the Eastern Province. But because the victory is being projected as a conquest by the government and its ultranationalist allies.

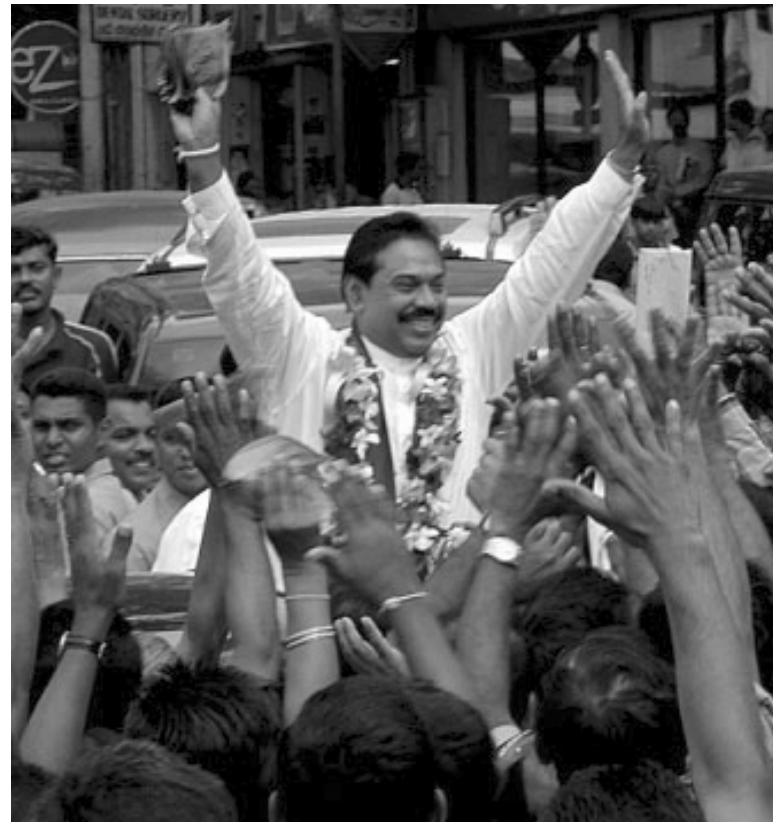
And no one in the government has thought it fit to look at the victory from the Tamils' point of view. There is none in the government to drive the point that one has to be humble and magnanimous in victory.

But our government is planning grand-scale celebrations throughout the country, except in the LTTE-controlled areas in the north. The functional value of these celebrations in promoting national harmony is a big zero.

Of course, they will help President Rajapaksa to salvage his slumping popularity.

The LTTE, I am sure, won't be displeased with the celebrations, either. The victory celebrations with pomp and pageantry are contributing towards the further polarisation of society along eth-

Continued on page 12



Tamils are ignored as Sinhalese celebrations mark the 'liberation'

I am a Tamil; I am not a terrorist

July '83 may have been the 'start' of the war, but the freedom struggle and the oppression it resists pre-dates that moment.

Loga Prasanna Chandrakumar

Tamil Guardian

I BELIEVE the Tamil people have been, and continue to be, systematically discriminated against by the Sri Lankan state.

I am not a terrorist.

After decades of non-violent, political struggle was met with violent repression by Sri Lanka, I believe that armed-resistance was the only choice left to the Tamil people.

I am not a terrorist.

I believe a just peace can only be achieved in Sri Lanka if the Tamil people's right to self-determination is recognised.

I am not a terrorist.

The conflict in Sri Lanka is not on the radar of most people in the West. The media only pick it up when there is something particularly horrendous or spectacular, or when it impinges upon the cricket or the beaches.

The media coverage surrounding the recent arrests in Australia, the UK, France and the US reflects a global climate where the advocacy of minority rights and armed resistance to state-oppression is condemned. People who do so are labelled 'extremists' or 'terrorist sympathisers'.

The Colombo government has been able to use the language of

terror to criminalise the Tamil population in Sri Lanka and in the Diaspora. Today the words Tamil and tiger go together as easily as Islamic and fundamentalist; as easily as Vietnam and war; as krispy and kreme.

Like many young Tamils in the Diaspora I have struggled to reconcile my people's armed struggle for freedom with the liberal values of my adopted home.

It is a reflection of the times that I feel the need to say upfront that what I seek is peace with justice.

Also, this is not a comment on matters currently before the courts.

However, I hope this article will help form a more nuanced picture on what is being currently played out in the Diaspora.

They need to be understood in the context of a foreign struggle. A struggle that the Western media seek to interpret through the lens of terror.

I do not claim to speak for the entire Tamil community, like any community there are a range of views and voices.

My ideas about the conflict have been shaped in two phases - the 'angry brown man' phase and

the 'intellectual brother' phase.

The 'angry brown man' phase lasted from my teens through to my second year of university. Feelings of teenage social exclusion and 'otherness' were fused with stories passed down through parents and grandparents. As a young man - mine is a gendered experience - I turned to the hip hop of Public Enemy and the romanticised resistance of the Tamil freedom struggle.

However, I could not relate to the fiery passion of the older men; my liberal arts education made me question violence. I feared the label 'radical' or 'extremist'.

Then I did some post-graduate study on the conflict - what I like to call the 'intellectual brother' phase. Here I gained a deeper understanding of the roots of the conflict and was able to form an almost dispassionate position on the struggle. In 2002 I visited Sri Lanka for the first time in eighteen years.

First the basics - the Tamils are fighting for an independent homeland in Sri Lanka following decades of discrimination. Over 70,000 of our people have been killed. A 2002 cease-fire brought a brief respite, but fighting has resumed since 2005.

For many the history of the conflict begins in 1983 with the ambush of 13 Sri Lankan soldiers, for others it is the anti-Tamil race riots in the wake of that ambush. This may have been the start of the war, but the freedom struggle and the oppression it resists pre-dates this iconic moment.

Today, the Sri Lankan govern-

ment refers to 'Tamil separatism' and dare I say it 'Tamil terrorism'. But these are but responses to the root cause of the problem - a racist ideology.

It began in 1948 when the newly independent Ceylon deprived a million Tamils, who had worked the tea plantations for about 150 years, of their citizenship and then the vote.

In 1956, the government passed the Sinhala Only Act declaring that 'the Sinhala Language shall be the one and only official language of Sri Lanka'.

Frustrated by the government's failure to redress Tamil grievances, Tamil politicians stepped up their campaign of civil disobedience and protests.

In 1971, the Government raised university entrance marks for Tamils. A Tamil had to score 250 marks to enter medicine or dentistry, while Sinhalese needed only 229. The logic was that the Tamils were over represented at university.

In many Western countries, students of Asian origin are significantly over-represented in tertiary education. We do well because our parents see it as the only way for minority ethnians to get ahead in the white man's world. Imagine if fifty years from now the white man feels discriminated against and ethnians have to get higher marks to get into university.

Amid heightening tension and increasing militarism anti-Tamil violence erupted when 13 Sri Lankan soldiers were killed in an

ambush by Tamil militants in July 1983. More than 3,000 Tamils were killed.

These events have left a deep scar on the Tamil psyche. While the violence was not on the scale of the Holocaust - its effect on the Tamil people has been similar.

Tamil militancy led in turn to increasingly ferocious crack-downs, arbitrary and retaliatory killings of Tamils and the disappearance of young Tamils in custody.

As Tamils became vulnerable to 'state terror', more and more took to arms.

In February 2002 the Sri Lankan Government the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam signed a ceasefire agreement (CFA) that brought to a halt two decades of war. The CFA had held for the best part of four years. However in the past 18 months Sri Lanka has slid inexorably into an undeclared, but all out war.

The Tamil people have paid a high price for their dreams of freedom. The social fabric built on family and kin, music and dance, and an ethic of hard work has been torn to shreds as families have been separated by death and forced migration. Their homeland is dotted with orphanages and a whole generation has missed out on basic education.

Why don't I leave my war where I came from? I am burdened by the knowledge that it is a random twist of fate that has me fighting with the pen and not a rifle. The angry brown man phase would surely have taken me there.

We are not terrorists.

OPINION

Cafe d' APRC: for foreigners only

The attitudes amongst the Sinhala community is cause for cynicism amongst those attempting to bring about a new constitution and thereby find a solution to the protracted ethnic conflict.

Pradeep Peiris and Anupama M. Ranawana
Daily Mirror



There is no evidence that the government or its ministers are enthusiastic about the APRC and its recommendations.

Photo TamilNet

THE All Party Representative Committee (APRC) reminds one of a sunny Parisian cafe where a bunch of retired bored men and women gather to engage in casual deliberations about various political issues, and, in the meantime, enjoy a good cup of coffee.

President Mahinda Rajapaksa set up the APRC six months after assuming power with the express wish of finding a political solution to the decade old ethnic problem. Irrespective of whether it is a Trojan horse or a genuine one, the president's choice of the jockey, Prof. Vitharana, is commendable.

Though the APRC was set up by the Government with the participation of other political parties, there is hardly any evidence to prove that the government or its ministers are enthusiastic about it - with the exception, of course, of the leader of the Lanka Samasamaja Party, Prof. Tissa Vitharana.

And the members of the international community.

Despite endless criticism, some analysts tend to believe that the APRC is perhaps the final glimmer of hope for the desperate situation in the country. It may not be the most desired route to take but surely it is the only presently available one. Speaking at the "Nagenahira Navodaya", a function organised by the Government to celebrate the recapturing of Eastern province, President Rajapaksa reminded us that he established the APRC so that all parties could come together to formulate a political solution to the burning ethnic problem.

In this context, it is interesting to examine the probability of the APRC being able to deliver. Providing a political solution to the Sri Lanka's ethnic problem is a formidable task.

The APRC has a much greater battle than simply working with the LTTE. This is because; in order to find a permanent solution one cannot simply satisfy the needs of the LTTE- what is more important is the inclusion and

consideration of Sri Lanka's many and varied ethnic groups.

The only pragmatic answer is to draft an entirely new constitution. Constitutions are made through both constitutional and non-constitutional means. According to the second republican constitution of 1978, to change the present constitution, one needs to have a two-thirds majority in parliament and a simple majority from a referendum.

Winning the support of a parliamentarian is more a matter of rupees and cents rather than convincing him or her of the rationale and desirability of the issue.

Of course, President Rajapaksa will find less trouble than the opposition leader, Mr. Wickremesinghe in advocating a meaningful proposal that is appealing to the minority communities if he (Rajapaksa) is already enjoying the favour of 53% of the opposition UNP's MPs- as Minister Fernandopulle claims.

On the other hand, the Rajapaksa regime will have to employ many resources if it is serious about creating any progressive proposal through the APRC.

Prof. G. L. Peiris, one of the architects of the political package put forward by President Chandrika Kumaratunga in 2000 and the government's chief negotiator of 2002 - 3 peace talks who agreed to explore a solution within a federal structure is a member of the Rajapaksa camp now.

Interestingly, the biggest critics for any power sharing arrangement with minority communities, the NMAT (National Movement Against Terrorism) and JHU (the Buddhist monks' party) are with the Government and will certainly give Rajapaksa their unconditional support so long as they are able to retain their Ministerial portfolios.

However, what we are inter-

ested in and would like to discuss in this article is to inquire into the possibility of receiving mass support for a constitutional change that would give equality and justice to everyone irrespective of their ethnicity, religion or region.

In order to make this inquiry into such public attitudes on the APRC and the other related issues, the authors used data from the latest Peace Confidence Index (PCI), published by Social Indicator, the survey research unit of the Centre for Policy Alternatives.

President Rajapaksa's professed reason for setting up the APRC was to craft a proposal on southern consensus that one would then present to the LTTE. Therefore, it is vital that the two main political parties and all members of the Sinhala community are able to first come to perfect accord with each other, else, the peace process cannot continue.

The results of the PCI survey of February 2007 show that it is only 14% of the Sinhala community who are aware about the APRC even after six months of its existence. Levels of awareness amongst the same group regarding the APRC's majority and minority reports were even lower.

We are certain that if one conducted a survey awareness of the happenings of some of the Sinhala dubbed Indian teledramas, one would see 2 to 3 times the amount of awareness than the APRC, a mechanism that has been setup to design the future of the country.

It is hard not to believe that this is what the Government wants. If one analyses most of the speeches of Rajapaksa and his ministers, it is quite clear that war and military victory is the message for the local audience while peace process, APRC and political solution are just the window display for the international audiences.

As it shown in the latest PCI (PCI - June 2007) 51% of the Sinhala community do not know or cannot decide what type of constitution they prefer.

In point of fact, they could not make a decision regarding this matter even after they were provided with different options such as retaining the present state of the constitution, changing the present constitution without changing the unitary structure and the position given to Buddhism, decentralizing of power within a unitary state structure or establishing a federal structure within a united Sri Lanka.

It is interesting to note that 13% of the Sinhalese do not want to change the present constitution while 25% agree to amending the present constitution without changing the state's unitary nature and the supreme position given to Buddhism. Regrettably, Prof. Vitharana, only 5% of the Sinhala community would agree to a federal state within a united constitution- a proposal that you made in order to combine the majority and the minority reports presented to the APRC. Not only that, only 6% of Sinhala community are willing to consider a decentralised power even within a unitary structure.

So, it is clear that if the Government decides to hold a referendum to consult citizens on their choice of constitution the result would not show any progress from the present one - a unitary structure where Buddhism is constitutionally recognized as the preeminent religion and a central power that decides what other regions need and what is good for the rest of the country.

Does this mean that over 50 years of democratic struggle of the minority communities which has now evolved into a military struggle has completely been wasted? What happened to the

good work of some of the politicians who strived to advance the constitution? What happened to the countless seminars and advocacy meeting of the NGOs?

A majority of the people who identify themselves with specific political parties are not sure about what their choice is for a new constitution. However, self-identified JVPers want the present constitution to be amended while retaining the unitary character of it and preserving the status given to Buddhism.

Since independence it has always been the UNP or the SLFP that headed the country's governments. During President Chandrika Kumaratunga's regime, the SLFP created a political proposal that has been commended by many scholars as the most progressive we ever had. Under the leadership of Ranil Wickremesinghe the UNP agreed to explore a political solution within a frame of federal structure.

But, majorities of the people who identify themselves with either party were unable to state what their desired constitution is. Ironically, 36% of the SLFPers and 45% of the UNPers, under the present political context, prefer either a continuation of the present constitution or amending it without changing the unitary structure and Buddhism's prime position.

What happened to the devolution and federal debates that were initiated years ago by the leadership of SLFP and UNP? Only 9% of the UNPers support a federal type of constitution while 7% want to decentralize power under a unitary structure.

Choice for the SLFPers - whose leadership once claim that 76% of Sri Lankans support federal constitution - brings further

Continued on page 15

OPINION

Those who fled within

Liberator?

There are 750,000 IDPs in Sri Lanka. The humanitarian situation is critical and worsening by the hour.

**Arjunan
Ethirveerasingham**
Tamil Rehabilitation
Organisation

AS we honor the 14 million refugees on World Refugee Day, 20 June 2007, TRO would also like to highlight the plight of the world's Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). According to UNHCR figures there are currently 24.5 million IDPs worldwide, who have been displaced by conflict.

The conflict in Sri Lanka has resulted in over one million Tamil refugees leaving the island to Canada, Western Europe and other parts of the world. Currently, approximately 100,000 Tamils live in camps in the South of India.

Those that have left the island of Sri Lanka and found refuge in other countries are protected by the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, but there is no similar convention or system of international protection for IDPs.

As a result the plight of the IDPs in the NorthEast is left to the "goodwill" of the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL). Military offensives over the past 18 months by the GoSL have been the primary cause of the displacement of 300,000 IDPs.

Currently there are approximately 750,000 IDPs in Sri Lanka. These include:

- 300,000 IDPs displaced over the last 18 months as a result of military offensives by the GoSL

- 350,000 IDPs from the pre-2002 Cease Fire Agreement (CFA) who have not been able to return to their homes due to a variety of reasons, which include the designation of their former towns and villages as High Security Zones (HSZ)

- 100,000 Tsunami IDPs who still live in temporary shelters or have been displaced once again due to the conflict

These IDPs have been subject to multiple displacements (some have been displaced up to 10 times) shelling, bombing, murder, rape, torture, and loss of livelihood.

The children have been deprived of access to education and fear abduction and harassment by paramilitaries affiliated to the GoSL. Some IDPs, as witnessed by the UN and other international organizations, have also been forced by the GoSL and its security forces to return to areas from which they were displaced.



Tamils displaced within the country are dependent on the 'goodwill' of the Sri Lankan government, even as it continues to displace more Tamils.
Photo TRO

TRO and TRO supported Community Based Organizations (CBOs) currently care for or provide humanitarian assistance for 85,000 of these IDPs despite the obstacles, restrictions and embargoes imposed by the GoSL.

TRO wishes to raise awareness of the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Sri Lanka. The situation is critical and worsening by the hour.

TRO would like to emphasize that it is the responsibility of the Government of Sri Lanka to protect, uphold and enforce the national and international humanitarian standards and International Humanitarian Law. These include not using food and medicine as a weapon of war.

TRO petitions the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and the International Community to address the Humanitarian issues affecting IDPs in Sri Lanka:

1. End all embargos, restrictions and other impediments to the flow of humanitarian relief items and construction materials (for temporary shelters for IDPs) to the NorthEast

2. Allow local and International NGOs to freely access areas affected by the conflict in a timely manner

3. End restrictions on international humanitarian agencies and their international staff: denial of visa renewals, refusal of visas, the controversial work permits and limiting the mandates of iNGOs

4. Adhere to the international Guiding Principles of Internal Displacement - GoSL should stop forced eviction of civilians by tar-

geted shelling / bombing of villages

5. Ensure that the prior incidents of "Forced resettlement" (as verified by the UN and others) do not recur and that human rights and human dignity are respected.

- (a) Ensure that IDPs are informed of their rights and that there is transparency regarding the development and implementation of humanitarian policies

- (b) Ensure that all affected communities are consulted at all stages from initial displacement to resettlement

- (c) IDPs have a right to choose when to return and should be allowed to visit the areas of return prior to return

- (d) Ensure that resettled IDPs receive compensation and assistance to restart their livelihoods and have access to their properties in the High Security Zones (HSZs)

6. Ensure free access to education for IDP children

Thousands of children, some as young as 6 year old, have to pass through numerous checkpoints close to their camps and schools on their way to school everyday.

7. IDP Camp management

- (a) Most camps in the East do not currently meet internationally accepted SPHERE minimum standards. The GoSL and the international community must ensure that these standards are maintained

- (b) Camp Security in the East - ensure that the abductions and harassment of youth and children by paramilitaries and security

forces are stopped

8. Decentralize the decision making and bureaucracy to the ground level and away from Colombo. Currently, there is a lack of coordination and a confusing number of governmental ministries and authorities mandated to work with IDPs.

9. Ensure that IDP camps are not attacked by armed forces as happened in November and December 2006 when IDP camps in Vaharai were shelled and 86 IDPs killed

10. Ensure that all affected communities are treated equally and that there is not discrimination in the disbursement of relief assistance and compensation

11. Remove the GoSL freeze on TRO bank accounts. TRO is the largest local NGO in the NorthEast and has access, staff and volunteers to areas that iNGOs and the GoSL have limited access.

12. Ensure the safety of local and international humanitarian workers so that they may better serve the needs of the IDPs and other war and tsunami affected persons. In the last 18 months 33 humanitarian workers have been killed: This includes 7 TRO, 17 ACF, and 2 SLRC humanitarian workers. NGOs are also maligned in the state and private media and by the political parties. This reduces the space available for them to operate and restricts their ability to deliver humanitarian relief to the affected communities.

Further details are on www.troonline.org

Continued from page 10

nic lines, for they bring out Sinhala nationalism, which is like oxygen to the LTTE, rather than Sri Lanka nationalism, which is like cyanide to the Tigers. The posters of ultranationalists and the government proclaim that the LTTE's dream of setting up of a separate state in the north and the east of Sri Lanka has been dealt a deadly blow by the security forces. The posters also urge the army to conquer the north as well.

The propaganda campaign by the government and the nationalists is so effective that people are unwilling to believe the allegations made by the opposition United National Party and two sacked ministers that Rajapaksa paid millions to the LTTE before the presidential elections in return for a boycott call that prevented the Tamil from voting and eventually cost UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe the presidency.

The allegations have become a damp squib in the Thoppigala euphoria. Rajapaksa is a hero today - a leader who has liberated/conquered the east. The Rajapaksa campaign is so effective that people in the south believe that it is he who, for the first time in the 25-year history of the ethnic conflict, has liberated the east.

But the fact is that the armed forces took the entire Eastern Province, including Thoppigala, under their control in 1992 and the then government successfully held elections to the local council.

The east became once again a stronghold of the LTTE during the Kumaratunga regime, in which Rajapaksa was a minister.

The Thoppigala euphoria has infected the people in the south with myopia. For them, it does not matter how the east was won. The armed forces moved into Tiger-controlled areas in the east - Mavil Aru, Mutur, Sampur and Manirasakualm and eventually Thoppigala - first launching aerial attacks on LTTE targets which incidentally were located in civilian areas. As a result 300,000 civilians were displaced. Hundreds were killed. The subsequent exchange of fire, artillery and multi-barrel rockets, destroyed their houses, fields and whatever facilities that sustained livelihoods.

As area after area was liberated, some internally displaced were resettled. But thousands of them found to their horror that they could not enter their villages that had become part of a high security zone while they were away in refugee camps.

Since the victims were largely Tamils, the pain is less in the south. Coinciding with the celebrations, the government is launching a development programme called Neganahira Navodaya. The English translation of the Sinhala phrase means New Dawn of the East East is a predominantly a Tamil-speaking province with Muslims and the Tamils constituting more than 70 per cent of its population. There is no attempt to name the programme in Tamil and to dismiss charges of racism.

NEWS

'Liberated' east to be further militarized

Activists in the East are deeply concerned at the level militarization taking place in the province recently captured by the Sri Lankan government.

THE administration of President Mahinda Rajapakse has moved to stamp its authority in the Eastern province through the implementation of a stringent military administration.

The militarization is compounded by the increasing activities of paramilitary groups working with the government.

In recent days, the Sri Lankan government announced several initiatives for the Eastern province, including plans to disarm paramilitaries, conduct elections and fast track development activities in the eastern districts.

The government has also sought foreign aid citing its development plans for the province.

But the militarization of the east will also continue. "Both the Army and the Police will be involved at the grassroots level in all projects and programmes," the Sunday Times newspaper reported. "One of them is to head committees tasked with development work."

Last week, the Eastern military commander called for close monitoring and control of the activities on non-government organizations (NGOs).

Commander Major General Parakrama Pannipitiya issued a circular to security chiefs and civil administrators ordering them not to allow any NGO to start projects "according to their will" in the region.

"Rural development of areas liberated by the forces after the humanitarian operations, where there is a civil population must be done under the supervision of the Police stationed in the area as well as the Armed Forces," the statement read.

"As the initial step, village level Committees must be established in each village for its development, and the membership of these Committees must be chosen from among the villagers. It will be mandatory to include in these Committees a member of the Armed Forces/STF, a Police officer, and Grama Niladhari serving in the respective village," the statement continued.

According to the circular, the president of the committee would be a member of the Police or Security Forces and all committee meeting minutes would be sent to the military head quarters.

"Since the liberation of eastern province it is the responsibility of military and police to provide security to the resettled people," Sri Lankan military spokesman Brigadier Prasad Samarasin-

ghe told the BBC World Service's Sinhala language Sandeshaya.

"Now we have a proper supervision on NGO projects and they have to get the approval from the district secretariat to operate in the area and the local area commander must be acknowledged about the project" he added.

Some NGOs questioned the circular. "Out of five ministers for Nation Building, two work for the development in the east. Why do we need special committees?" the Executive Director of the Human Rights Consortium and director of Eastern Development, Authority Jeevan Thyagarajah, asked in an interview with Sandeshaya.

"Is there going to be a civil administration in the east or a military administration? People are already suspicious about government plans," he queried.

Whilst some humanitarian agencies are concerned with the military interference some, like US military medics, have already started working under the plans announced by the military.

A US Marines team is now in the east to carry out a fact-finding mission in preparation for an upcoming visit by high level US military medics as part of a humanitarian assistance programme, the Daily Mirror reported.

"A high-level medical team will be here in September for one week to conduct a series of medical assistance programmes for the eastern people, especially in the newly captured areas," a senior defence official told the Daily Mirror.

This assistance is to be given to eastern people in consultation with the Army, Navy and the Air Force, the paper quoted him as saying. "Medical camps would be set up in several areas including Sampur and Vakarai," the official said.

A visiting four-member medical team from the US Marines led by a Colonel is now in Trincomalee monitoring the area to set up medical camps and find out other requirements for the scheduled programme, the official said.

In addition to military intervention in development and humanitarian operations, paramilitary activities too have intensified in the eastern province, fuelled by speculation of polls.

The government is planning to conduct local government elections in the east later this year, analysts note, pointing to a bill to conduct local government elections in East passed in the Sri Lankan Parliament on July 19.

This has created tension between two paramilitary groups that operate along side the Sri Lankan Army, reports said, as the Karuna Group, headed by former LTTE Eastern Commander Vinayagamoorthy Muralitharan (alias Karuna), pits itself against the Eelam People Democratic Party (EPDP), another paramilitary group, headed by Minister Douglas Devanada, for power in the east.

The turf war between the two groups surfaced when armed Karuna Group cadres attacked an EPDP camp in Chenkaladi, Batticalo. A Karuna Group cadre was killed in the gunfight, which lasted for an hour and only ceased when the local police intervened. Both groups were warned to refrain from further violence.

However, hours later the Karuna Group issued notices banning the EPDP from operating in Batticaloa. But Devanada dismissed the Karuna Group threat and said his party was going ahead with plans to contest the local elections.

The Karuna Group is also considered to have assisted the military in capturing the East by providing valuable intelligence, ground knowledge and taking part in offensives, Colombo press reports said.

The group is also suspected to behind a series of intimidations and abductions against the local population.

Following the announcement by the government that the east was "free of the LTTE", international governments, opposition parties and civic groups have begun to pressure the government to disarm the paramilitary groups, especially the Karuna Group.

Even the pro-war Wimal Weerawansa, the parliamentary group leader of Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) said he felt there is no longer a role to play by an armed Tamil group and is calling for the disarmament of Karuna Group. Mr. Weerawansa said the paramilitary forces had to take up arms because of the LTTE and if they continued to operate in the East even after the Tigers were no longer in existence, it would create other problems.

"We call on the government to dismantle these groups gradually because we understand that such a process cannot be done overnight," he said.

However, in an interview with the BBC Tamil service Karuna refused to disarm. The paramilitary group leader said LTTE intelligence personnel were still operating in the east of the island, even though it had been taken by government forces. "If we disarm now, it will be dangerous for us. We want to carry arms for self-protection," he told the BBC.

In the interview Karuna contradicted himself by first rejecting



An aerial view of the partially constructed Trincomalee - Sampur 'expressway', which is being used to consolidate the militarization of the east.
Picture Chaminda Hittetiya Daily News

claims that his forces and government troops have co-operated in the fight against the Tigers and then saying his fighters had taken part in the battle for Thopigalla.

Commenting on the disarmament of Karuna Group, Devanada told a website "all leaders, including Karuna, are given security by the armed forces of Sri Lanka. Karuna is being secured in his residence as well as wherever he moves by the Security Forces of Sri Lanka. All his offices are pro-

vided security by the Sri Lankan police."

Analysts note that comments by Karuna and Devananda show the close ties between the military and Karuna Group and do not anticipate a move by the military in the near future to disarm the group.

On the contrary, they expect the militarization to continue as the government sees it as the easiest way to control the territory - by ruling it as enemy ground.

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NEWS

Violence shifts north

FOLLOWING the Sri Lankan government's announcement of the 'liberation' of the east from the LTTE, the military activity and violence have intensified in the north. The military stepped up its operations, with direct offensives and Deep Penetration Unit (DPU) missions into LTTE controlled territory along the Mannar-Vavuniya border.

Attacks against the Sri Lankan forces also intensified, with over 30 Sri Lankan soldiers killed in fighting and ambushes in the last two weeks alone.

On July 24, a bus transporting military personnel from Mannar to Mathavachi was ambushed by attackers who triggered a claymore mine, killing at least 10 Sri Lanka Army (SLA) soldiers and wounding more than 8 others.

On the same day four homeguards were killed in a pre-dawn attack by the LTTE on a security post in Aluthgama, Vavuniya.

Three days earlier two SLA troopers on road patrol were seriously injured when attackers triggered a claymore mine on the Vavuniya-Mannar Road.

And on July 20, the LTTE launched a pre-dawn raid on a SLA mini-camp near Uyilangkulam entry/exit point in Mannar, killing 10 soldiers and seizing all the weapons from the camp.

The LTTE seized military hardware including a Medium Machine Gun (MMG), a Light Machine Gun (LMG), a 60 mm mortar, four automatic rifles, 25 hand grenades and an ammunition cache.

The LTTE fighters returned to

their positions after "successfully neutralizing the threat posed by the hostile enemy camp from which infiltration units were operating," LTTE military spokesman Rasaiah Ilanthiryan said commenting on the mission.

Earlier this year the Sri Lankan military made public its intention of capturing the Northern LTTE stronghold of Vanni.

"After eradicating the Tigers from the East, [the military's] full strength will be used to rescue the North," SLA Commander Gen. Sarath Fonseka declared at the time.

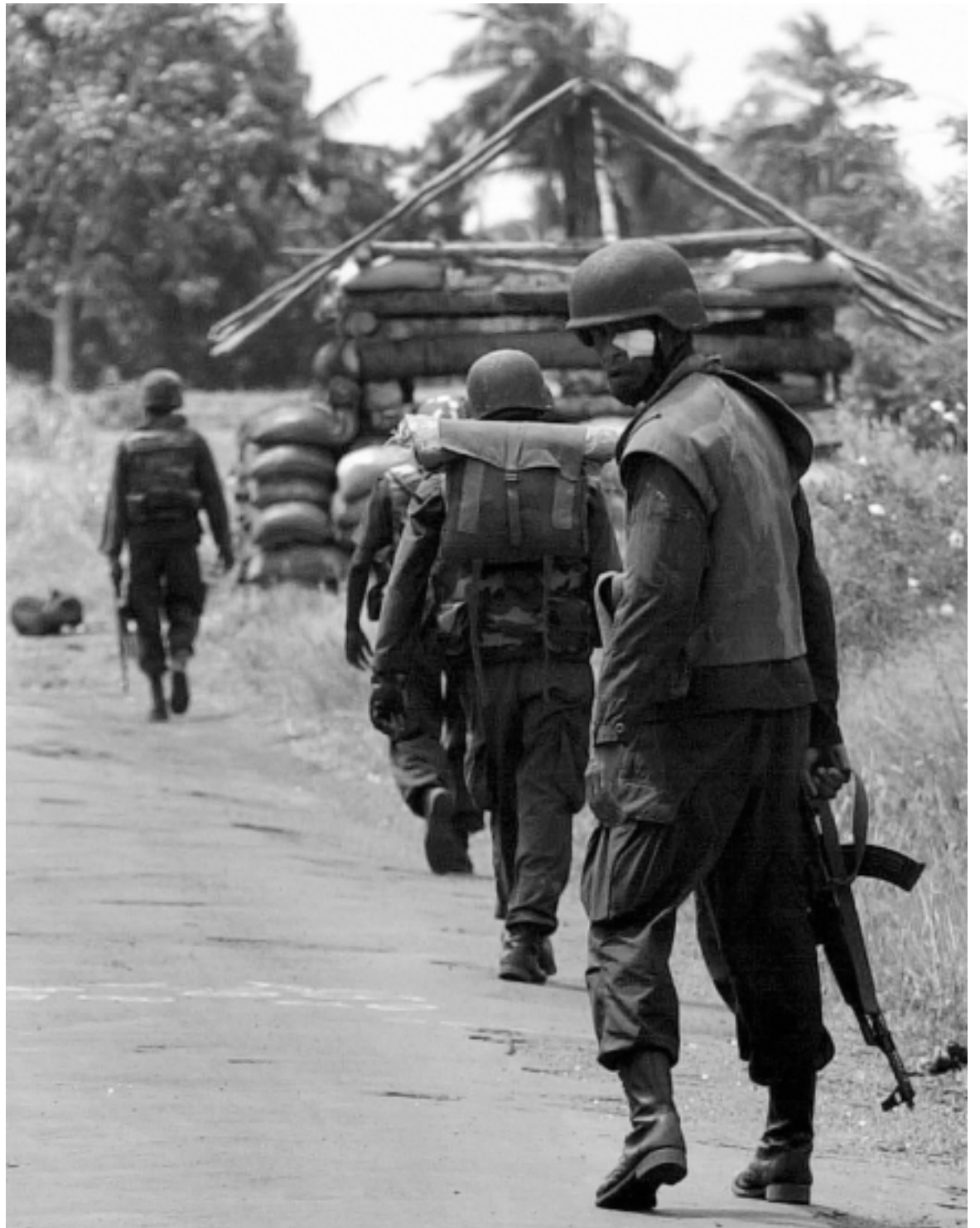
At the same time, the military made several intermittent attempts to breakthrough the LTTE Forward Defence Lines (FDL) and into Vanni. Initially the SLA attempted to enter Vanni by breaching the LTTE FDL in Jaffna. As part of this plan the military carried out two massive onslaughts on the LTTE defence positions in Jaffna last year.

In the first offensive, on September 9, hundreds of SLA troops launched an offensive from three locations along the front lines against the LTTE territory in the northern Jaffna peninsula. On the ensuing battle at least 25 Sri Lankan soldiers were killed and around 125 wounded.

In the second offensive on October 11, SLA troopers launched a large scale ground troop-movement into LTTE administered territory with heavy artillery and MBRL rocket fire.

SLA troopers who broke thro-

Continued on page 15



After repeated attempts to break the LTTE's defences in the north, exhausted SLA troops continue to have little success. Photo Lakruwan Wanniarachchi/AFP/Getty Images

Sri Lanka off the hook as violations ignored

AS the international community eased off the limited constraints it had placed on Sri Lanka over its human rights abuses, analysts speculate that this, especially in the light of the government's recent military successes, is an indication of not so covert support for the ongoing military effort.

Acknowledging the increasing human rights violations in Sri Lanka, the US Human Rights, Democracy and Labour Assistant Secretary nevertheless merely urged both sides to uphold the 2002 Norwegian brokered ceasefire agreement.

"Together with our allies, we will continue to work towards brokering a lasting peace agreement between the government and the LTTE and urge both sides to uphold the cease-fire and eliminate human rights abuses," Mr. Krilla said while participating in an online web chat organised by the US State department.

"We are aware that the return to conflict in Sri Lanka has con-

tributed to a deterioration of human rights conditions in the country. Reports of torture, extra-judicial killings, and curtailment of media freedom are on the rise," he noted.

But there was no condemnation of this, except to note that "The US government is also concerned about reports of disappearances and the large number of internally displaced persons."

Mr. Krilla also noted that there were numerous reports that paramilitary groups linked to government security forces participated in armed attacks, some against civilians.

However analysts observe that after the Thoppigala victory the Sri Lankan government is in no mood to listen to International Community's calls for peace.

Speaking at the 'Dawn of the East' ceremony held to mark the capture of Thoppigala jungles by the Sri Lankan army in the eastern province at the Independent Square in Colombo on July 19, Sri

Lankan President Mahinda Rajapakse warned the International Community "not to obstruct this New Dawn of the East by raising false slogans, and not engage in globe-trotting to betray the Sri Lankan State."

"I wish to ask the international community and even some of our own politicians, not to obstruct this New Dawn of the East by raising false slogans, and not engage in globe-trotting to betray the Sri Lankan State," he said.

The president's defiant speech followed a decision by the co-chairs of the Sri Lankan peace process not to get actively involved in the conflict until after the All Party Representatives Committee finds a permanent solution.

The US, EU, Japan and Norway had taken this stance to "enable Sri Lanka to decide by itself," the Daily Mirror newspaper reported, quoting a top Western diplomat.

"Once the parties find a common solution, then the co-chairs

can actively involve in helping the country to implement it," the diplomat told the paper.

At the time of the co-chairs meeting the Sri Lankan government was considering putting on hold a donor forum on funding development projects in the Eastern province as donors, specifically the European Union, were reluctant to provide new aid.

However the EU this week said it would provide 15 million in humanitarian aid.

The aid will help provide access to clean water, shelter, food, basic health care, education and sanitation for refugees living in Tamil Nadu and in Sri Lanka.

Commenting on the current situation in Sri Lanka, EU Development Aid Commissioner Louis Michel said the European Commission was "extremely worried by the increase in violence" in Sri Lanka, which has put thousands of civilians and international aid workers at risk.

She described the lack of ac-

cessibility and safety of aid workers in the conflict zones as "totally unacceptable."

"Aid agencies need to have access to victims with full security and protection for their personnel. I urge all parties to respect international humanitarian law and condemn any attack against humanitarian operations and workers," she added.

Prior to last co-chairs meeting there were signs of a concerted effort on the part of the International Community to apply pressure on the Rajapakse administration.

There was increased focus on the human rights violations of the Sri Lankan government, with international media and governments criticising the government.

In June, Sri Lanka came under severe criticism for human rights and humanitarian abuses at a public hearing in Brussels in the European Parliamentary Development Committee.

Whilst representatives of the

Continued on page 15

NEWS

Violence ...

Cafe d' APRC: foreigners ...

Continued from page 14

ugh the LTTE FDL positions in Kilali and Muhamalai were defeated, leaving around 75 dead bodies of Sri Lankan soldiers inside the LTTE territory in Kilali. Three tanks were damaged and one destroyed. The SLA confirmed that more than 300 troopers were wounded in the offensive.

Following the heavy defeats in the Jaffna offensives, this year the military shifted its focus onto the Southern Vanni FDL that runs along the Vavuniya-Mannar road.

In past three months the SLA has tried number of times to enter LTTE controlled territory in Mannar and Vavuniya regions with no success.

In the latest of a series of attempts by the Sri Lankan forces to capture LTTE administered areas in Vanni, a team of the SLA Special Forces attempted to breach into LTTE territory in Palamodai on the Mannar-Vavuniya border on July 16.

LTTE forces retaliated killing four and wounding 6 troopers and recovering 3 T-56 rifles, explosives and military hardware including night-vision equipment.

The operation came to an end with the SLA withdrawing the Special Forces team, which had sustained heavy casualties.

The SLA first launched an offensive into Vanni on March 16 with the aim of capturing Palamodai, northwest of Vavuniya but retreated following 3 hours of heavy fighting.

On March 23 the army tried to

advance into LTTE territory using 120 villagers as human shields, but in 15 hours of fierce fighting the LTTE rescued the hostages and pushed the troops back to their original positions in Thampalai and Chinna Pandivirichan. The army lost 60 soldiers in this operation.

Two weeks later on April 11 another attempt by the army to move towards Palamodai was thwarted by the LTTE forces.

Retreating SLA troopers left behind their dead soldiers, arms and ammunition, including a Rocket Propelled Grenade Launcher and 15 automatic guns.

Following the fighting LTTE forces clearing the area located eight bodies of SLA troopers which were later handed over to the ICRC.

Again on April 25, the LTTE repulsed another ground offensive at Parisankulam inside LTTE administered Madu. More than 10 SLA soldiers were killed and around 50 sustained injuries, Ilanthirayan told reporters afterwards.

SLA troopers who moved from Iranai Iluppaikkulam camp were locked in a five-hour jungle clash where Tigers engaged sniper units inflicting casualties on the SLA troopers, Ilanthirayan added.

Since then a number of SLA pushes into LTTE-held areas of Mannar district, including the Madu region, have failed.

Following the failed attempts the frustrated military had resorted to indiscriminate artillery barrage on civilian targets.

sure on Sri Lanka by suspending some, though not all, development aid it provided Sri Lanka through the Millennium Challenge account. Citing "a deterioration of human rights on the island", the US government stressed that the government must rein in paramilitary forces, which are fighting the LTTE alongside security forces.

However all these efforts came to abrupt end following the co-chairs meeting on June 25. Further sanctions against Sri Lanka was discussed at the meeting, but Japan and the US argued strongly against such a move, and as a result, the co-chairs agreed to give Sri Lanka more time.

The co-chairs decisions to not take punitive measures against the government and to keep off the peace process is sending a signal to the Rajapakse administration to continue on the war path, Sri Lankan analysts speculated.

The government has no need to rein in the daily abductions, extrajudicial killings and discriminate bombings, because there is no pressure to do so, one analyst said. "The international community is certainly no longer sending the message that this is unacceptable."

Continued from page 11

disappointment to someone like Prof. Vitharana as only 4% support a federal type of constitution and 5% agree to decentralization within a unitary state.

The attitudes and perception we see amongst the Sinhala community might cause a degree of cynicism amongst those who attempt to bring about a new constitution and thereby to restructure the Sri Lankan state and find a solution to the protracted ethnic issue.

This is because it clearly articulates the fact that the country has not been able to progress, instead it had actually regressed alarmingly. The latest PCI shows the perceptions of the Sinhalese on federalism in terms of some of the criticism.

Addressing the party leaders of his coalition government in Kandy, President Rajapaksa rejected a federal solution. His rationale was that people voted him in for the preservation of a 'nobeduna ratak' (undivided country). Therefore, he will not explore the idea of a federal solution.

It seems he has indirectly acknowledged that he too shares the anxiety of nationalist political parties i.e. federalism will lead to secession.

However, according to the opinion poll, one fifth of Sinhalese think federalism would lead to secession and 10% think it will ensure the unity of the country. Nevertheless, 65% says that they do not know whether federalism will lead to secession or create unity.

Further, amongst the Sinhala community 19% believe a federal solution would be disadvantageous to their community; 17% believe it will threaten the status quo of the Buddhist community; 10% think federalism will impact the economy negatively.

Interestingly, that for all these anti-federal arguments more than over two third of the Sinhala community do not which is the correct one. Therefore, Prof. Vitharana, we must tell you that, at present, there is no clear support base for you to support your opinion that the future constitution will be some form of federal constitution. None the less, take heart in the fact that the Sinhala community does not reject your idea outright.

One should not ignore the substantial degree of unawareness and the indecisive nature of the Sinhalese with regards to constitutional choice. The degree of ignorance and confusion on the issue of constitution is crucial as it provides space for supporters of

progressive constitutional reforms as well as the advocates of such constitutions to win their support base.

The present media campaign that followed the military campaign will certainly dim the enthusiasm amongst the Sinhalese for finding a political solution.

The present speechifying of the ruling party on the military's might will certainly undermine the communication of the APRC's proposed political solutions to the Sinhalese. Therefore, the undecided are more likely to lean towards war than peace. And Prof. Vitharana will then have no other employment but playing maitre d' at the "Café d' APRC - exclusively for foreigners".

Sri Lanka off ...

Continued from page 14

European Commission and Council of External Affairs slammed the lack of respect for international humanitarian laws in Sri Lanka, NGOs, including Human Rights Watch (HRW) and aid agency Action Contre la Faim (ACF), decried the continuing abuses of human rights.

Also in June 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 were also small scale aid freezes with Germany leading the effort by announcing an aid freeze on all new projects in October 2006. As long as both sides engage in intensive conflict, "it is not meaningful for the German government to commit additional funding that cannot reach the people of Sri Lanka," a statement at the time said.

The UK followed suit in May by freezing £ 6 million in aid citing concern that government forces have been responsible for violence against civilians in government-controlled territory.

The US also put tangible pres-

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Troops involved in the Thoppigala battle were treated to lunch by Buddhist priest Ven. Muttetuvegama Ananda Thera, with the priest preparing the meal himself at the Commando Brigade Headquarters Thoppigala. Photo Rukmal Gamage, Daily News



The SLFP held countrywide demonstrations condemning the National Congress, an alliance between the main opposition UNP and Mangala Samaraweera's SLFPM. Demos in Galigamuwa, Kandy and Kurunegala, captured by Daily News photographers.

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