

The hunted soul of the Tamil Diaspora

PAGE 6

Remembering another massacre



THE first anniversary of the massacre of fifty three school girls by Sri Lankan Air Force jets was marked in Tamil Tiger-controlled Vanni last week. The school girls were killed on August 14, 2006 when four SLAF jets dropped sixteen bombs in repeated passes over the Sencholai-run children's

home.

Some 100 children were wounded, many critically. Girls from various schools in the nearby district of Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi were staying overnight at the compound, attending a two-day course in first-aid.

Four staff at the institution

were also killed.

"These children are innocent victims of violence," said Ann M. Veneman, Executive Director of the UN children's agency, UNICEF, said in a statement.

The site of the building had been designated a humanitarian zone and the LTTE had passed its

coordinates on to the Sri Lankan military via the UNICEF and the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC).

The Sri Lankan government said it targeted an LTTE training camp, killing "50-60 terrorists" and showed journalists what it claimed was footage of the attack.

But UNICEF's Colombo chief, JoAnna VanGerpen told reporters: "we don't have any evidence that they are LTTE cadres."

However, apart from the lone protest by UNICEF, the Sri Lankan air strike on the school-girls did not draw any international condemnation.

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NEWS

Rains, troop shortages hit Sri Lankan push north

Amal Jayasinghe
AFP

SRI LANKA'S military has been unable to push into Tamil Tiger strongholds in the north due to the threat of monsoon rains and a lack of manpower, defence officials and analysts say.

The government had hoped to build on recent territorial gains in the east of the troubled island by going after guerrilla bases in the northern Wanni region, where the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) run a mini-state.

"Inter-monsoon rains start in October and it will be difficult to move tanks and heavy guns in boggy conditions," said one field commander who asked not to be named. "But in the run-up to the monsoon, there could be smaller-scale operations."

The LTTE last month admitted losing its final bastion in the jungles of Sri Lanka's Eastern province, but vowed to keep up hit-and-run attacks in the area.

One senior officer attributed the victory last month to a combination of superior tactics, firepower and guerrilla-style attacks behind enemy lines.

"What they used to do is send small groups to harass us. We had to tie up a large force to hold our static positions," he said, request-

ing anonymity. "This time, we infiltrated their lines and kept them on their toes."

But for defence analyst Namal Perera, that success may require the deployment of a huge number of troops if the military wants to maintain control over the areas wrested from the LTTE.

"With the manpower commitment in the east expected to be very heavy, it will be a challenge to deploy more men for a new offensive in the north," Perera said. "It will be difficult at this time."

"As long as the army is tied down in the east, the LTTE knows the military will not make a new push in the north."

LTTE spokesman Rasiah Ilanthiriyar admitted the Tigers had suffered a setback with the loss of territory in the east, but said they were bolstering their defences in the north.

"Militarily you can't call this an advantageous situation," Ilanthiriyar said. "Because, if you want to control one region, you may have to lose control over another region."

The Rivira newspaper reported that the Tigers had withdrawn cadres from the eastern front and sent them to the north.

"The next battle which will start in the Wanni will be decisive for both parties," the paper's defe-

nce analyst Tissa Ravindra Perera said.

The military has suffered heavy losses trying to break into LTTE territory in the north of the island in recent weeks, while the Tigers have experienced similar setbacks trying to gain a foothold in the army-held Jaffna peninsula.

A recently retired senior military officer predicted that government forces might not be able to replicate in the north the tactics used in the east because the terrain was different.

"In the east, there are no clearly demarcated areas of control and that helped us to sneak into areas dominated by the Tigers," said the retired officer, declining to be named. "In the north, there is a physical boundary and getting through that is not going to be easy. We have already lost a few groups that tried."

A February 2002 Norwegian facilitated truce is in tatters and some 5,200 people have been killed in fighting in the past 19 months alone, according to government figures.

Sunanda Deshapriya, director of the Centre for Policy Alternatives, an independent think-tank, said neither side was keen on returning to negotiations that collapsed last October and predicted the "war atmosphere" would continue.

Government sidelines Karuna, sets up new Tamil front in East

INA significant shift of strategy and political alliances in the east, the Sri Lankan Government is believed to have virtually dumped the anti-Tamil Tiger Karuna paramilitary Group and is supporting a new Tamil front for local elections in the volatile east later this year, The Sunday Times reported.

The new front is led by the leader of the splinter Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), V. Anandasangaree and includes the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) and the Eelam People's Liberation Front (EPRLF - Pathmanabha Wing). Currently none of these three parties have any parliamentary representation.

The trio are due to function as the Tamil Democratic Alliance (TDA) and is inviting other Tamil parties to join the alliance to contest local elections followed by provincial elections in the east, the Sunday Times said. The TDA is to begin its political activities in the east within the next few weeks, the paper said.

Apparently as a sign of support, the Sri Lankan government this week provided a helicopter to Mr. Anandasangaree, PLOTE leader Dharmalingam Siddharthan and EPRLF-Pathmanabha Wing Gen-

eral Secretary T. Sridharan to visit Batticaloa and have a hurriedly summoned meeting with government officials and representatives of international and local NGOs.

The visiting delegation told the NGO community that the purpose of the visit was to listen to the problems of the people of the area and convey them to President Rajapaksa to find solutions.

Among the grievances which they listened to were issues about continued child recruitment by the Karuna group in the government-controlled areas and the difficulties in travelling to some of the areas newly regained from the LTTE. The delegation was later flown to Vakkarai, where for months tens of thousands of Tamils were subject to indiscriminate Sri Lankan bombardment, before returning to Colombo.

Last Friday night the trio met President Rajapaksa and briefed him about the visit as well as the problems in the area. Mr. Siddharthan who took part in the meeting told The Sunday Times said their plans were to contest the two upcoming elections and their visit was aimed at looking into the grievances of the people in the Eastern Province and the NGOs working in the region.

The move has angered the Karuna faction which is claiming that the step was aimed at sidelining the group, which assisted the military in the recent months. Ganesh Mahesh, spokesman for the Tamil Makal Vidithalai Pulligal (TMVP) - the Karuna Group's political wing - told The Sunday Times that the government was promoting groups which had never sighted the areas when the people were facing difficulties.

The plans to promote the new political front come amidst criticism that the Karuna group has been permitted to move with weapons in government-controlled areas.

The Nation reported that Douglas Devananda, leader of the Eelam Peoples Democratic Party (EPDP), Sri Lanka's largest Tamil paramilitary group cum political party, has urged the government to make sure that the Karuna faction conducts its political activities unarmed. There have been several clashes between EPDP and Karuna Group gunmen in the east in the past few weeks.

For several weeks Sri Lankan press reports have been suggesting the TMVP will not be allowed to contest the Eastern Province elections to be held later this year.

NEWS

Sri Lanka's disappearances continue

NEARLY six thousand outstanding cases of enforced disappearances in Sri Lanka are being reviewed by the United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, according to Amnesty International.

Over a thousand of those have occurred since President Mahinda Rajapakse (pictured, right) assumed power in late 2005, Human Rights Watch said in a separate statement.

In a report published on August 30, Amnesty International, the London based human rights organisation accused both the Sri Lankan government forces and armed groups of responsibility for hundreds of such abductions and disappearances since 2006.

"There are currently 5,749 outstanding cases of enforced disappearances in Sri Lanka being reviewed by the U.N. Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances," Amnesty International said in an article published to mark the International Day of the Disappeared.

"Many cases implicate the members of the security forces, others implicate armed groups including the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the [Army-backed] Karuna Group," it further said.

Amnesty said the victims are often taken in "for questioning" by Sri Lankan security forces and held incommunicado with no records of their detention available.

Amnesty cited the case of the head of the country's Eastern University who went missing in December 2006 while attending a conference in Colombo.

"He was in an area of the capital tightly controlled by the army. It is likely that his captors were military agents," Amnesty said. "He has not been heard from since."

Abductions and disappearances of Tamils both in the north and east and in the capital Colombo has soared under the regime

of President Mahinda Rajapakse.

In a report titled "Return to War - Human Rights Under Siege", the New York based Human Rights Watch earlier this month put the number of disappeared between January 2006 and June 2007 at 1,100.

In its report, which cites a 'credible non-governmental organization that tracks disappearances' as its source, the HRW stated that in the Jaffna peninsula alone, 805 persons were reported missing between December 2005 and April this year.

Inspection of records by HRW showed that the Government Agent (GA) of Jaffna had registered 354 missing persons from April to December 2006.

In addition, in February this year, HRW conducted interviews with the families of 37 persons who had "disappeared" over the previous year.

Of these, in 21 cases the evidence strongly suggested the involvement of government security forces. In two cases the families strongly believed that the perpetrators were members of the EPDP, a paramilitary group that operates along side the Sri Lankan army.

Last week the international ceasefire monitors of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) reported it had received complaints of Sri Lankan army involvement in abductions in the north.

According to the SLMM report the ceasefire monitors had received two complaints on abductions during the week August 6 to 12 alone, where the army was the perpetrator.

The monitors also said that abductions were regularly carried out in broad daylight, and the victim was on one occasion driven blindfolded through military check points.

SLMM stated that nine cases of extortion and harassment were also reported from Mannar during the same week but no payments were made while the police claimed to have made an arrest and



solved the case.

The LTTE Spokesperson for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, Selvy Navaruban, accused the Sri Lankan government of continuing to target civilians, including government servants and school students in Jaffna.

"Sri Lankan Armed Forces and its paramilitaries are responsible for all the killings and abductions in Jaffna. The international community should pay attention to the mass sufferings of the Tamil people in the hands of the Sri Lankan military," she said in a statement.

"The Jaffna military commander Chandrasiri and the members of the Sri Lankan armed forces who are responsible for these grave violations of human rights and international humanitarian laws should be brought to the international criminal justice system," statement said.

The 129 page long Human Rights Watch report published on Monday August 6 focused on abuses by the state and declared the

government's respect for international law has sharply declined.

"The government often appeared indifferent to the impact on civilians in the north and east...the main areas of concern [are], from violations of the laws of war and extrajudicial killings to unlawful restrictions on the media and non-governmental organizations and the widespread impunity enjoyed by state security forces," the report said.

However Sri Lanka rejected the HRW report calling the accusations baseless and a violation of the country's sovereignty.

"It is also regretted that (the) HRW has thought it fit to issue such a largely one sided report weighed so heavily against the legitimate government," said the office of the President in a statement.

The President's office rejected the call by the rights group to create a United Nations human rights monitoring mission in Sri Lanka to end the abuses.

"Largely unconfirmed and

unsubstantiated allegations and outdated information do not justify the demand for a special U.N. Observer Mission on Human Rights in Sri Lanka," the government statement further added.

The government also took issue with charges leveled by HRW relating to abductions and disappearances, saying its numbers on the "disappeared" and displaced were based on "unsubstantiated information."

"The work of government agencies to establish the whereabouts of these persons has been ignored," the government statement added.

However Brad Adams, Asia director at Human Rights Watch said following the publication of the report: "the government has repeatedly promised to end and investigate abuses, but has shown a lack of political will to take effective steps."

"Government institutions have proven unable or unwilling to deal with the scale and intensity of abuse," he added.

Looking for a way out of perilous Jaffna

Poornima Weerasekara and Easwaran Rutnam
Daily Mirror

THE security situation for civilians, especially youth in Jaffna has deteriorated to such a level that families have begun to flee the peninsula to seek refuge in Colombo and make an attempt to send their sons overseas.

The international ceasefire monitoring team (SLMM) in its latest assessment report focuses on concerns of the high prices on essential items, a general halt in the economy, increased difficulties to enter the city of Jaffna, an increase of military round-ups and house searches, emigration of skilled labour and fishing restric-

tions.

A Wellawatte lodge manager said of the inmates, more than half were from Jaffna seeking security for themselves or their children, mostly young boys.

Driven out of their homes by a 3 decade-long civil war, extrajudicial killings, abductions, a high cost of living and little hope for a normal life, these families have trickled into Colombo on boats and via planes, after the closure of the A9 highway.

"We charge between Rs. 300 and Rs. 1,700 per day. However, meals are not provided and cook-

ing is banned inside the rooms due to the lack of facilities.

At present there are about 120 individuals occupying the 50 rooms we have," the manager of the 'Ideal' lodge in Wellawatte said.

"We give a daily update to the Wellawatte police about new arrivals and those who leave our lodge. Some people come and stay for a few days to get passports or ID cards. Others are staying for months or even years," he added.

A 23-year-old youth has been stranded in this lodge for more than one and a half years, attempting to go to Sweden. He had come to Colombo, abandoning his advanced level studies as the situation in Jaffna deteriorated.

"My visa applications to

Sweden were rejected twice. Now I am trying to go to the West Asia through an agency. I can't go back to Jaffna under the current circumstances although my parents and younger brother are still there. Each family must have at least one member working abroad to send money. The cost of living there is unbearable, with a kilo of rice priced at Rs. 200, while chicken costs Rs. 1,500," he said.

In the mean time, he has been arrested on suspicion and released three times. He was compelled to leave his job because of this and is now finding it difficult to find employment.

"I want to continue with my studies. However much the applications are rejected I will stay and keep on trying because there is no

other alternative," he said.

64-year-old Rasamma is waiting for the Police clearance for her son. She says the whole process will take about two months. She has been living in the lodge for about 9 months, trying to join her other son in Canada.

This new delay was caused by the surprise eviction of 385 Tamil lodgers from Colombo on July 7. Rasamma and her son were also evicted and promptly allowed to return. However, she has to get the police clearance reports again.

"I had all the documents ready at that time. Now we have to wait again. My house was situated between two army camps and I was caught in between the cross fires. I feel at peace at the lodge. I don't want to go back," she said.

NEWS

APRC 'dead in the water'

THE troubled multi-party committee appointed by Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapakse to derive a southern consensus on the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka collapsed last week with his ruling party calling for an indefinite adjournment and two more parties, including the main opposition party, walking out.

The stated purpose of the All Party Representative Committee (APRC) is to reach a southern consensus on what power-sharing arrangement to offer the Tamils.

It has, however, been criticized as a ploy by the hardline Rajapakse government to avoid returning to negotiations with the Tamil Tigers.

Earlier this month, the APRC announced that a final draft of a proposed solution to the protracted conflict would be submitted to President Rajapakse on August 15.

The APRC convened a series of meetings in early August with aim of meeting the deadline. But as with past deadlines, it passed without result.

The opposition United National Party (UNP) promptly set a target of August 20 to finalise the draft report and linked its continued participation in future APRC proceedings to the committee meeting the new target.

However the ruling Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP) representative Minister Vishwa Warnapala and a ruling coalition party Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP) representative Nalin De Silva attending the APRC meeting on August 19 called for the indefinite adjournment of proceedings.

They informed APRC Chairman Tissa Vitharana that the proceedings had to be adjourned in keeping with a 'request' made by the President and no further meetings of the APRC should be held until Rajapakse met with all party

leaders in the APRC who are members of the ruling coalition.

With no agreement on a draft proposal, on August 20 the Working Committee of the UNP decided to withdraw from the APRC citing the latest adjournment.

A spokesman for the UNP said with the decision to adjourn the APRC indefinitely the "process is dead in the water."

The UNP had been vindicated as "they have been proved correct that the entire APRC process was an eye wash," he said.

The UNP further announced that it will not participate in any further deliberations until the parties in the ruling coalition come up with a common stand regarding the resolution of the national question.

As the UNP withdrew from the APRC proceedings, Jaathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), the hard line monks party led by a fire-brand cabinet minister, also distanced itself from the APRC.

The JHU is opposed to the very notion of power-sharing with the Tamils.

According sources close the APRC proceedings, the sudden decision to move for an adjournment came following representations made by the JHU to the President.

Earlier, the APRC had taken the position that the unit of devolution should be the province and the nature of the state should be "united" as opposed to unitary.

However the ruling coalition parties including SLFP, MEP and the JHU had opposed this position, insisting the word unitary must be retained, thereby entrenching the impossibility of sharing power.

According to the Sunday Leader newspaper, the government is now planning to delay finalising the APRC proposals until the conclusion of the budget vote in November.

This is following a threat by the right wing Janatha Vimukthi Perumana (JVP), Sri Lanka's third largest party, to defeat the budget if the APRC proposals did not include a unitary state devoid of any federal features.

Last week the JHU complained to the media that the APRC proposals being discussed would have dire consequences on the country and is a step to impose a federal system even exceeding the parameters of the Indian and US constitutions.

"According to these proposals, the constitution cannot be amended without a two-thirds majority in Parliament in addition to obtaining the consent of the Provinces to be set up," the party's APRC representative Udaya Gammanpila said.

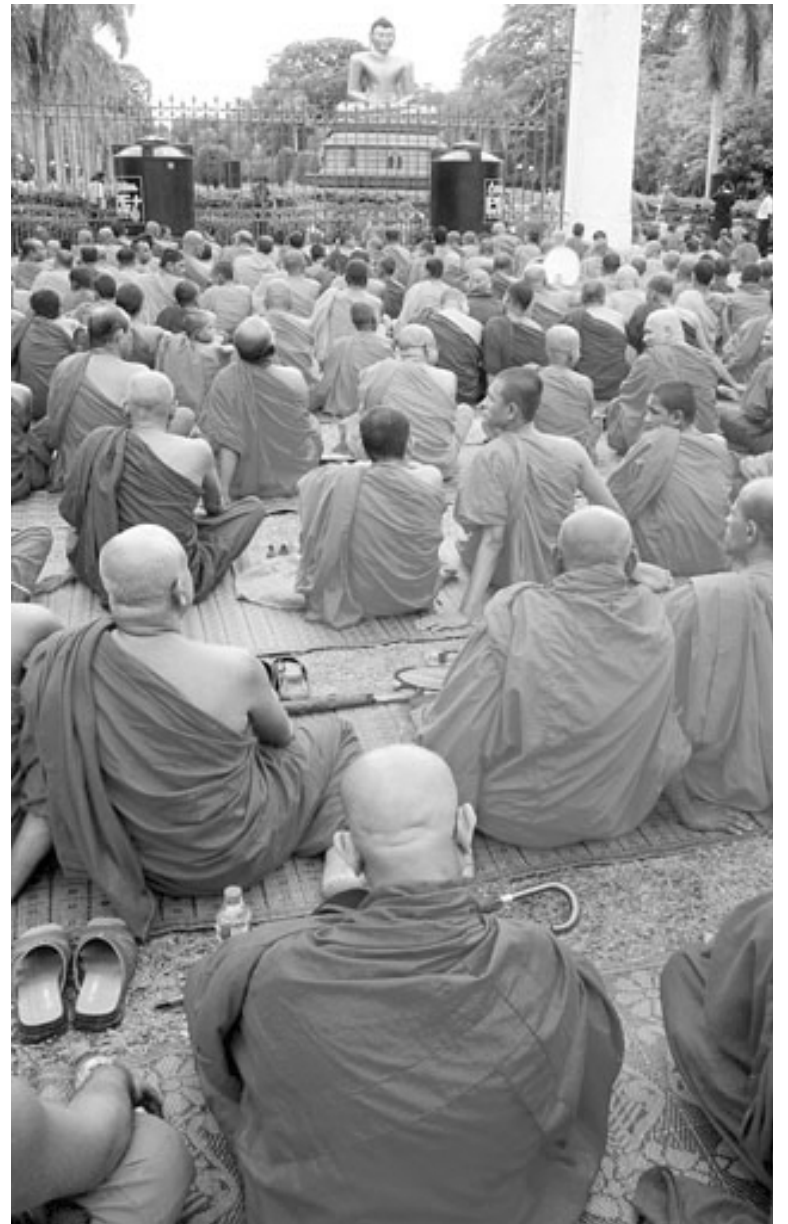
"Today, the government has a problem in amending the present constitution because of such a clause included by President J.R. Jayewardene who introduced it."

"In the US, the centre has the power for revenue collection. Then, the government distributes collected revenues among its 50 states. This has helped the US government to prevent secessions," he said.

"Sinhala, Mulsim, Tamils of Sri Lanka origin and Tamils of Indian origin have been mentioned as ethnic groups. Then the Malays and Burghers will never get representation in the country's top posts according to these proposals," he further grumbled.

The JHU founder and current Environment Minister, Champika Ranawaka, launched a verbal tirade against the APRC Chairman Tissa Vitharana accusing him of conspiring against the Rajapakse government to undermine the military victories in the Eastern province.

Ranawaka told journalists that even the SLFP and the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP), which



Sri Lanka's hardline Buddhist monks are opposed to any form of settlement with the Tamils, and the political party of monks walked out of the all party constitutional conference. Photo Daily News

were parties of the ruling coalition had not agreed to this set of proposals, along with the Muslim parties, which some reservations about these proposals.

"The APRC is an expert panel representing political parties in the House. It was appointed by the All Party Conference assigned with the task of seeking consensual approach to resolve the national question. It has no post called chairman. Prof. Vitarana has been assigned only to chair its meetings as the most senior Cabinet Minister in it."

"He has no right to issue statements as the chairman," Mr. Ranawaka added.

"Today, we have gained a military victory in the East [against the LTTE]. Plans are in place to push northwards," Mr. Ranawaka said.

"According to information, LTTE leader Prabhakaran has instructed his field commanders to recapture the Vadamarachchi area before November. He has emphasized his desire to die in his home town rather than in Wanni."

"There is a [therefore] a conspiracy to reverse the military victories. We wonder whether Prof. Vitarana is playing a part in this conspiracy," Mr. Ranawaka

asked.

In another move to undermine the APRC, according to local reports, the president has appointed another committee comprising of southern political parties under the chairmanship of Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickramanayake.

The aim of the new committee, according to the report, is to 'iron out the differences' between the parties on the on the controversial matters such as nature of the state and the limit of devolution.

In March 2007, Vitarana, announced that the consensual APRC proposal, which was hoped to be ready by February, had been delayed because of the ruling Sri Lanka Freedom Party's (SLFP) delay in submitting its proposals.

On March 22, the Minister said he wants the "exercise to be completed over the next 60 days," again moving the deadline to end of May.

The JVP, third largest political party represented in parliament with 39 parliamentarians, has boycotted the APRC since early December saying it is not interested in formulating a political package based on federal concept. **Editorial, p6**

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NEWS

Rajapakse and human rights abuses

Sri Lankan governments have become famous failing to hold abusers accountable.

Charu Lata Hogg
International Herald Tribune

IN 1990, Mahinda Rajapaksa was arrested at Colombo airport trying to smuggle dossiers on the "disappeared" out of Sri Lanka to the United Nations in Geneva. Rajapaksa, then an rising politician from the country's south, worked to organize the mothers of the "disappeared" during an insurrection of 1988-90, when more than 16,000 people went missing.

Today, Rajapaksa is Sri Lanka's sixth president, leading a government accused of egregious human rights abuses. Since fighting between government forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam resumed in full vigor in mid-2006, civilians have become the primary target - not just in direct clashes but in the insidious "dirty war" fought by both sides.

Human Rights Watch researchers spent months investigating allegations of abuses, publishing a report this month that uses eyewitness accounts to show how security forces have subjected civilians to "disappearances," indiscriminate attacks, forced displacement and restrictions on humanitarian aid. Critics of the government - as Rajapaksa was in the 1980s - have been threatened and demonized as national traitors and terrorist sympathizers.

The situation has deteriorated dramatically in the past couple of years. A cease-fire agreement in February 2002 had put a halt to serious fighting. While the Tamil Tigers continued to recruit child soldiers and assassinate moderate Tamils, the situation was relatively calm for a country that had been at war since 1983. The government still committed abuses, but it was able to claim the moral high ground against an opponent that pioneered the use of suicide bombings.

The government has lost that high ground. Since it resumed serious military operations against the rebels last year, 315,000 people have had to flee their homes due to fighting. The government has forced some to return home in unsafe conditions against their will. Since January 2006, more than 1,100 "disappearance" cases have been reported. Almost all of the disappeared are Tamil men between the ages of 18-50, and in a majority of cases witnesses allege complicity of security forces.

The government continues to cooperate with the Karuna group, a breakaway faction of the Tamil Tigers headed by the LTTE's former eastern commander leader. Like the Tamil Tigers, the Karuna



Over 1100 Tamils have disappeared since January 2006, with many bodies dumped in brushlands.

group is notorious for abducting and forcibly recruiting boys and young men, sometimes as government forces stand by and watch.

Despite numerous promises from President Rajapaksa and others to investigate, the government has done nothing to shut down Karuna's child recruitment.

Even aid workers face threats. One year ago, gunmen killed 17 local workers from the Paris-based Action Against Hunger. Despite evidence linking soldiers to

the murders, the government has failed to hold anyone to account. The same goes for two Red Cross workers murdered in June.

Since the renewed outbreak of fighting, humanitarian groups have faced severe restrictions on access to the embattled northeast and the government is cutting the number of work visas it grants to international nongovernmental organizations.

The government has arrested journalists, Tamils and Sinhalese,

under recently reintroduced Emergency Regulations, which allow the authorities to hold a person for up to 12 months without charge.

Eleven media workers have been killed since August 2005. The government has arrested no one for those crimes.

Successive Sri Lankan governments have become famous for pledging to investigate abuses, setting up commissions, and then failing to hold abusers account-

Continued on page 15

Dangers to life as the rule of law collapses

The real situation is worse than anything any critic might portray

Asian Human Rights Commission

IN RECENT months spokesmen for the Sri Lankan government have become quite aggressive towards the country's critics.

The Attorney General severely attacked the International Independent Group of Eminent Persons (IIGEP) regarding its two reports; the president and other spokesmen have attacked the report by Human Rights Watch and now Action Contra La Faim is being attacked and accused of being responsible for the deaths of their 17 aid workers last August, about which no successful investigation has been carried out and no one has been prosecuted.

The government fearing that international reports on violations of human rights may lead to the sending of UN human rights monitors or other forms of intervention, rather believes that silencing critics is the way to

avoid the situation.

Thus, aggressive rhetoric has become a characteristic of spokesmen for the government.

However, what no amount of aggressive rhetoric can erase is the people's frustration throughout the country with a state that has failed to perform its basic functions. One of these basic functions is to provide security for the people and this requires that the investigations into crime and gross abuses of human rights are carried out promptly and efficiently.

This is not simply possible, not only for politically loaded incidents, but even for ordinary crimes.

Sri Lanka's system of criminal justice is at its lowest depths and this has been widely acknowledged. In 2001, on the acknowledgement of this fact the 17th Amend-

ment to the Constitution was adopted. By now even the operation of this limited measure to restore the rule of law and to make the dysfunctional apparatus of the state function, has been given up.

None of these government spokesmen talk about the state of Sri Lanka's constitution.

What had begun as the erosion of democracy in Sri Lanka through constitutional means by President J.R. Jayawardene has now reached a point of ruling without reference to the constitution at all. The 17th Amendment was buried and all attempts to exhume it have been brushed aside.

In a country such as Sri Lanka now, what is it that the government finds fault with in the criticism relating to human rights?

The real situation is worse than anything any critic might portray. Every citizen in the country has within themselves a far bleaker image of the situation than what any external critic might aptly portray.

One criticism that is being vilified is the statement by Sir John Holmes, United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator and Under

Secretary General of Humanitarian Affairs, to the effect that for aid workers, Sri Lanka is one of the most dangerous places in the world. This is no exaggeration since Sri Lanka is one of the most dangerous places to live for anyone.

The criterion of whether a place is safe to live or otherwise is the prevalence of the rule of law; a place where the rule of law has collapsed is not a safe place to live.

What the government of Sri Lanka should try to do is what any government is expected to do, which is to investigate crimes irrespective of who the culprits of such crimes might be.

However, this has not been proved possible except in a few rare instances in Sri Lanka since 1971.

The killings by security forces and the police during the decades beginning from 1971 go into the tens of thousands. However, if these were to be investigated it would cause a serious political crisis.

Whether any government that would try to investigate the

human rights violations by the military and the police could survive is perhaps one of the most crucial political questions that need the attention of anyone who is seriously concerned with the improvement of human rights in Sri Lanka.

The strategy needed by concerned persons within Sri Lanka itself and others in the international community who are concerned with the human rights situation in the country, is to address the complete failure of both the justice and political systems.

The problem about justice in cases like that of the 17 aid workers is that such investigations risk serious repercussions. A government that is unwilling to face up to such repercussions will neither be willing or capable to deal with such a situation.

A solution to the human rights problems in Sri Lanka requires a strategy that absorbs the totality of the crisis that the country is immersed in.

It is this reality that the aggressive spokesmen for the government are trying to divert attention from.

EDITORIAL & OPINION

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WEDNESDAY AUGUST 29, 2007 No. 355

Now What?

The APRC legitimized international support for Rajapakse's war.

The collapse of the All Party Representative Committee (APRC) earlier this month was an inevitability. The best that this sham at 'reaching a consensus on the ethnic question' could have ever done was to drift along indefinitely. That, in any case, was its real purpose. President Mahinda Rajapakse set up the APRC in early 2006, a few months before he resumed the war against the Liberation Tigers. Ideologically committed to Sinhala-hegemony, President Rajapakse and the southern majority that swept him to power are opposed to any sharing of power with the Tamils. Reviving the notion of an all party conclave was to forestall pressure for him to come up with a credible power-sharing proposal.

Such a proposal is, after all, only necessary if there is strong LTTE - without the Tigers' military pressure, no Sinhala government would need to take Tamil political demands seriously. Even Sri Lanka's international allies are urging state to share power with the Tamils to end the conflict, not because they see the long-oppressed community as having a right to it. The APRC was thus a very thinly disguised delaying tactic, intended to buy Rajapakse enough time to smash the LTTE. And even though the leading international actors knew this, they have continued to back the APRC as some sort of panacea for Sri Lanka's now glaringly apparent ills. Meanwhile, they backed Rajapakse's war to the hilt.

Things have not gone according to plan. For well over a year the Sri Lankan military has thrown itself into an all-out effort against the LTTE, but the movement remains a potent and latent challenge to Sinhala hegemonic ambitions. Rajapakse crowed about capturing the 'entire east' from the LTTE. The LTTE has certainly withdrawn the bulk of its forces - and redeployed them in the north where, if Sri Lanka wants to destroy the Tigers, the crucial battles will have to be fought. The east has meanwhile become a militarized wasteland where hundreds of thousands of people are engulfed in a humanitarian crisis as army-backed paramilitaries predate at will. As Sri Lanka struggles to find the extra troops it suddenly need to both hold the east and attack the north, there are efforts to raise Sinhala militia. All manner of officially-sanctioned gunmen prowl the 'liberated' east. Meanwhile, a massive effort is underway to eradicate Tamil and, to their consterna-

tion, even Muslim identity from the east. Tamil and Muslim places are being given Sinhala names. Tamil and Muslim areas are either being appropriated by the state - as 'High Security Zones' and 'Free Trade areas' - or are being colonized by Sinhala settlers.

The international community is well informed on all these developments - as they have been from the time Rajapakse began his war. But instead of restraining him, they have encouraged and supported him. The EU and Canada banned the LTTE. Japan and multi-lateral donors like the ADB and World Bank continued to provide funds. The US and UK sold more weapons, while traditional arms suppliers Pakistan and China kept up their flow. They helped Colombo prepare the misery that has been visited on our people while telling us that they were for peace, for a negotiated solution 'acceptable to all', for Tamil grievances being redressed.

The APRC was the fig leaf. Knowing full well the main Sinhala parties are united only on minimizing accommodation with the Tamils, international actors sustained Rajapakse's charade. Despite the pleas and protestations of the Tamils - articulated by the parliamentarians, civil society and other 'non-terrorist' folk - and even the Sinhala liberals terrified by the rabid chauvinism that has become the mainstream of southern politics, the international community has cynically continued to tell us to wait for the magic pill Rajapakse's APRC, they assured us, was bringing forth.

The show is over. The main opposition UNP has seized an ideal opportunity and quit. The ultra-nationalist JVP left long ago - apparently it doesn't want to be part of anything that weakens the unitary state. International actors have been insisting for years that 'the majority of people in Sri Lanka want peace.' This is true - but they also want a very specific peace. The majority of Sinhalese want a unitary Sri Lanka with a Lion flag where Buddhism is the 'first and foremost' religion. None of the Tamils, despite the best will of the international community, want that.

So the question is, now what? Is the international community going to act decisively to restrain the Sri Lankan state and ensure a just solution or is it, as it has been for a long time, going to continue to assist the Sinhala chauvinists in their efforts to retain power over the Tamils?

We think we know.

The hunted soul of the Tamil Diaspora

The Tamils will never have a voice in legislation that threatens their physical and political safety. For everywhere but in Eelam, they are a minority.

J. T. Janani
 Tamil Guardian

I START with an admission. For many years, I have been a British Tamil. Britain has been good to me, I had taken on the citizenship of this country and I thought the matter ended there. One could say, broadly, the moral choices of Karna, having eaten of the bread of the Kauravas.

But last year has shaken the foundations of this identity. And it must do so for the tens of thousands of others who, by some accident of birth and luck are, like me, part of the Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora. For now as never before the words of the anti Nazi activist, the Rev. Martin Niemoller come to mind:

*First they came for the Communists,
 and I didn't speak up,
 because I wasn't a Communist.
 Then they came for the Jews,
 and I didn't speak up,
 because I wasn't a Jew.
 Then they came for the Catholics,
 and I didn't speak up,
 because I was a Protestant.
 Then they came for me,
 and by that time there was no one left to speak up for me.*

For the Diaspora, there is a version of the Niemoller poem:

*First they came for the plantation Tamils
 I didn't speak up because I am not a plantation Tamil
 Then they came for the Colombo Tamils
 I didn't speak up because I am not a Colombo Tamil
 Then they came for the Eastern Tamils...
 I didn't speak up because I am not an Eastern Tamil
 Then they came for the Jaffna Tamils...
 I emigrated, I am no longer a Jaffna Tamil...*

By definition the Diaspora are those who have at some point chosen to walk away. To walk

away from the conflict of Sri Lanka, seeking for themselves and their children, safety, stability, prosperity and even happiness.

But this year, we need to ask - what sacrifices did they intend to make, what did they believe they could take with them, and what leave behind?

As for the homes and land that has almost invariably been in families for generations, did they intend to never return, or if to return, under what conditions?

For those who walked away from the violence, did they intend to leave behind their hope and dream of Eelam? If they walked away from politics, did they intend to repudiate their friends, relatives, and colleagues who still believed in Eelam?

Did they intend, in the event that the international political process has failed, as it was perhaps it was doomed to do, that they would say to their children - now you are British, Australian, American, German, Norwegian, Swiss - forget that there is a place for which people are dying, and for which many thousands have died already, called Eelam.

Did they intend to say to their children - "Well Uncle Bush / Uncle Blair (delete as applicable) knows best ... and as for cousin Krishna who died in the battle for Jaffna in 1995, forget him, because Uncle Bush/Uncle Blair says he is a terrorist", "And remember not to leave a SIM card in any of your cousins houses since who knows what could happen", "And that tee-shirt .. didn't I buy you one with a Panda on it ?.. no I know it's the Chola emblem, dear, but these are difficult times."

This year has seen the arrests of Tamil activists all over the world, from every walk of life, every religion.

It coincides with the failure of the internationally backed negotiations, and the new war of

EDITORIAL & OPINION



aggression of the Sinhala government against the Tamil North and East of Sri Lanka. The timing of these arrests have been nothing short of political.

And so we come to the heart of the dilemma. How far away from Eelam will you walk and where will you find your place of safety?

But this international environment has been made possible by legislation. And we come back to the root of the dilemma.

How will you accept for yourself and the generations to come the legislation of the British (substitute Australian, French, American, etc.) state in relation to issues that are essentially Tamil, in relation also to Eelam?

And so let us look at this legislation. It is an offence under the British Terrorism Act of 2006 to glorify terrorism (whether past, present or future). The praise of the activities of the South African ANC would be conceivably caught under this section. So too any statement in support of Subhas Chandra Bose. Or for that matter, the founding American fathers.

What did the House of Lords have to say when they voted on this act? Lord Thomas of Gresford said: 'In this section . . . glorification' includes any form of praise or celebration'. The word is used to refer to acts committed at any time and in any place in the world, whether going back 2,000 years or moving 2,000 years into the

future, and "any form of praise". Nothing could be more vague than that.

He went on to say: "My Lords, I have made the point before that it refers to William Wallace in Scotland, to the Welsh nationalists in 1937 . . . to the Easter rebellion, and to any movement throughout the world - as I said, this applies to the whole world - where a movement or organisation takes up arms against the recognised government. We may support

If one may not further the activities of a proscribed organisation, but the sole purpose of this organisation's activities is to achieve independence, then may one conduct any activities in support of independence?

that movement, but in these terms we would still be glorifying it."

The government replied that glorification was only an offence if it is about encouraging others to emulate terrorist acts "in existing circumstances".

So battles that are in the past,

which are considered irrelevant to the present - such as the struggle of the ANC or William Wallace (better known as "Braveheart" of the Mel Gibson movie fame) - might be exempt. Baroness Ramsay of Scotland, speaking in support of the government said: "That (its bearing on "existing circumstance") is what makes the difference; it is not about the ANC, William Wallace or any of the other examples given by the noble Lord."

Which is lucky for the South Africans - they may praise Man-de-la for the activities that led him to a South African jail, but only because their struggle may be deemed by the British government to be irrelevant to present circumstance - and for Mel Gib-son, who glorified Braveheart, but not so lucky for the Tamils who are living with the present.

While there are over 150,000 Tamil British citizens in London, there were none present in the commons or the Lords to debate this point. Not surprisingly, for as in Sri Lanka, the Tamils are a minority in the UK, as they are worldwide. And they will continue to be.

The definition of terrorism has now been broadened. It means the use or threat of action, for the purpose of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause, or to influence a government, which involves serious damage to a person or property, endangers a person's life, or create a serious risk to the health

and safety of a section of the public, seriously disrupts an electronic system.

So for example one may not use or threaten violence to a person or property or an electronic system - to influence any government in the world. Nor may one support, or praise a person who does this or who has done this in the past several thousand years (unless their political circumstances are utterly irrelevant to the present circumstances).

Not surprisingly, as in Sri Lanka, the Tamils are a minority in the UK, as they are worldwide. And they will continue to be.

Did Gandhi's effort to take over the salt works at Dharsana threaten damage to the property of British India? Did he cause a serious risk to the health or safety of any section of the public during his marches? What of other political struggles?

The government had initially wished to make it an offence to 'condone' such a past or present person, but the word condone was deleted after parliamentary and Lords debate and we are left with glorification (which means here praise or celebration).

So what does this mean for

the Tamil Diaspora? It means that one may not use or threaten violence against the government of Sri Lanka. Nor praise any person who does this.

Whereas the government of Sri Lanka may use and threaten violence against the Tamil people. And one may praise it for this. Some kinds of violence - such as the bombing of the school children at Senchola may be war crimes. But the praise of war crimes is not an offence in UK legislation. Violence and the praise and support of it, is the monopoly of the state.

One may support the idea of Eelam (and even this right is now open to question) but not support or praise the right to take up arms to achieve it. One may not praise or celebrate any of the rows and rows of dead in the Tamil homeland who have so taken up arms. But one may applaud Jack Straw praising (as he did in a recent Tamil gathering) the rows upon rows of tombstones of soldiers of the British empire from India and Tamil Nadu who fought for the British against the Germans in the first world war.

It is also an offence to support a proscribed organisation. And British Parliamentarians, among whom the British Tamils have until recently had zero representation will decide who is proscribed.

And what does support mean? It means to further the activities of a proscribed organisation. It includes addressing a meeting to encourage support for a proscribed organisation or to further its activities.

But what activities might this include? The legislation does not say. If the LTTE runs the de facto state in the Vanni, would this include all the activities of this Tamil state - the building of roads, the operation of traffic police and the local courts, the Tsunami relief, the provision of medicine at a time when the government is embargoing the North and East?

If one may not further the activities of a proscribed organisation, but the sole purpose of this organisation's activities is to achieve independent Eelam, then may one conduct any activities in support of Eelam?

Presumably one could, as long as these activities in support of Eelam were carried out by some other organisation.

But how long before the British state, for reasons of geopolitical interests, decides to proscribe the new organisation? What would an organisation in Sri Lanka have to do to avoid proscription? It would have to give up arms and, with them, the possibility of self-defence.

Herein is the Kafkaesque dilemma that tears the soul of the Diaspora. As in Sri Lanka, so it is world wide, that the Tamils will never have a voice in legislation that threatens their physical and political safety. For everywhere except in Eelam, they are a minority.

So how far will you walk away from Eelam, and for how many generations to come?

FEATURES



Tamils living in the Vanni region are used to seeing LTTE fighters living and moving freely amongst them.

Photo Lakruwan Wanniarachchi / AFP / Getty Images

Surreal life in LTTE territory

Simon Gardner
Reuters

SOCCER spectators roar with excitement as a goal is scored, children play in a nearby park as adults drink tea and an old man cycles slowly along the road. Artillery shells thunder in the distance.

With the front line of renewed civil war just 20 miles (30 km) up the road, residents here in the Tamil Tigers' stronghold in Sri Lanka's far north live a surreal daily diet of fear, desperation and hope.

On closer inspection, some of the soccer spectators are wearing the Tigers' characteristic striped fatigues and carrying assault rifles. Cyanide capsules hang around their necks in case of capture. Red flags emblazoned with roaring golden Tigers and crossed rifles flap in the wind.

Some of the players are Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam fighters too.

"During the war, we must have a life too," said Anton Anpalagan, a physical education teacher and secretary of the Tamil Eelam Sports Council of the de facto state the Tigers want recog-

nized as independent.

"While the war is going on, at the same time we are looking after the needs of the people and after sports development," he added. "Football is the best kind of counseling for those traumatized by the war."

Residents have had to adapt to a two-decade war that has killed nearly 70,000 people. The sound of war is never far away. Ruins of shelled buildings stand testament to past fighting, sections of wall still pockmarked by bullets and shrapnel.

But a near four-year stint of peace before a 2002 ceasefire broke down last year has given civilians a taste of what life could be like, and they long for the conflict to end.

New buildings have sprouted up housing shops and trappings of the Tigers' de facto state - a law court, customs house and even a consumer price control department.

A government embargo on a host of goods from gasoline to cement coupled with disrupted trade due to the partial closure of

the 'border' that separates government and Tiger-held territory is making life a misery for many.

Some have improvised as in earlier stages of the conflict, running their mopeds or cars on a mixture of kerosene and gasoline. Civilians cook with firewood because cooking gas canisters are also barred. Drinkable beer is another casualty.

Prices have sky-rocketed. Petrol costs 550 rupees (\$4.90) a liter on the black market in a district where 70 percent of the population earns less than \$1 a day. The same liter of petrol costs around 110 rupees in the government-held south.

FED UP WITH WAR

"Business is down because the road is closed," said 57-year-old fruit seller Subramaniam Rajeshwari, tending her stall in Kilinochchi market. "People here are living in fear. Everyone here wants peace. That's what they're hoping for."

Some traders now make just 50 to 60 rupees profit a day, and complain turnover has fallen by more than 70 percent.

The focus of renewed fighting that has killed an estimated 4,500 people since last year has shifted to the north after the military captured vast swathes of territory

from the Tigers in the east.

With daily artillery duels across defense lines that sandwich the roughly seven percent of Sri Lanka the Tigers control in the far north, and sporadic air strikes on rebel territory, residents repeatedly displaced by the conflict are bracing for more pain.

"Life is very difficult. It is a very bad situation," said 57-year-old father of four Perumal Kumaravel, a translator who works for one of the handful of aid agencies still operating in Tiger areas.

"I am very worried about the war, the shelling. Kfir (jets) sometimes attack," he said, as he took one of his daughters to watch a musical show planned after the soccer match. "This is not a normal life. Every day I live in fear."

Behind him, LTTE police marshal traffic along the main north-south A9 artery - nicknamed the highway of death because of the deadly battles that have been fought along it.

Posters on a nearby bus stand depict the silhouette of an elite Black Tiger suicide bomber, revered by the secular Tigers as their most powerful weapon. A Toyota pick-up truck in army camouflage colors whizzes past, bristling with rifle barrels.

Some would like to leave but say the Tigers impose restrictions. But still many minority Tamils say they prefer to stay put in rebel areas, fearing persecution if they move to the Sinhalese-majority south.

Some families also fear their relatives will be forced to join the Tigers' war effort as the LTTE seek to boost their numbers by recruiting civilians, some of them against their will.

The Tigers, who have been fighting troops in the north like a conventional army with artillery guns and rocket launchers, have threatened to switch to guerrilla tactics and strike major economic and military targets.

They say peace is impossible with President Mahinda Rajapaksa, who has vowed to wrest control of all LTTE-held territory. Analysts say that sets the stage for a bloody fight for the north, where an estimated 350,000 people live inside LTTE-held terrain, and see no clear winner.

"Let the Tamil people live in their traditional homeland," S.P. Thamilselvan, head of the Tigers' political wing, said in an interview. "Leave the Tamil people without any military occupation or persecution. That will be the day there is no war."

FEATURES

Lawlessness grows in strife-torn Sri Lanka

Abductions, killings and disappearances are rampant as conflict escalates

Minelle Fernandez

The Washington Post

THE MEN who came to the shop April 7 identified themselves as police officers, from the Criminal Investigations Department. Come with us to the station, they told the proprietor, a member of Sri Lanka's Tamil community. He got into their van, tricked into what turned out to be a kidnapping.

A demand for \$500,000 in ransom arrived a few days later, the man's daughter recounted. After two months of negotiations and threats, the kidnappers let the man go for \$20,000 but have continued to terrorize the family with demands for more money and threats to abduct the man's son.

The family went to the police to seek help following the abduction, the daughter said, and again after the new threats, but authorities took no visible action.

The case is one of a string of abductions, extrajudicial killings, disappearances and detentions that have proliferated in Sri Lanka during the past year as the rule of law breaks down amid escalating civil war. The government of the majority ethnic Sinhala nation is fighting the Liberation Tigers who want an independent homeland for the ethnic Tamil community.

This kidnapping, like many others, remains unsolved, the family said. It's unclear whether the kidnappers were real police officers or impostors, but in today's environment, either explanation is plausible.

Violence has increased despite a 2002 cease-fire agreement, which exists mainly on paper. International observers say both sides are committing atrocities in a conflict that has raged off and on since 1983.

The LTTE army has "continued its deliberately provocative attacks on the military and Sinhalese civilians as well as its violent repression of Tamil dissenters and forced recruitment of both adults and children," the Brussels-based International Crisis Group wrote in a recent report.

At the same time, "the government is using extra-judicial killings and enforced disappearances as part of a brutal counter-insur-

gency campaign," the group said.

Human rights groups have alleged state complicity in common extortion and kidnapping rackets as well, given the ease with which gangs have operated in the capital, Colombo, and in the north and east, the main conflict zones, which are under tight military security.

Human rights workers complain that the government's initial response to the abductions was indifference.

Leading politicians assert that the opposition was exaggerating the situation for political gain. One politician claimed that businessmen were going abroad clandestinely or dropping out of sight "to free themselves from their wives to enjoy with their pretty ones in unknown locations."

But a statement by an opposition lawmaker accusing specific individuals of involvement in the abduction racket appeared to spur the authorities into action. The Criminal Investigations Department has since arrested several former and current military and police personnel, and the investigations are ongoing.

In an interview, government spokesman Keheliya Rambukwella said that "abductions and extortions are not new to Sri Lanka and were common during the southern insurrection of the '80s."

He said the government and President Mahinda Rajapaksa took the issue very seriously and carried out a crackdown June 18. In a July 10 interview, he said there had not been "a single case reported to the authorities" since the crackdown.

But in many abduction cases, victims say they are scared to go to the police.

Mano Ganesan of the Civil Monitoring Commission, which has documented 133 cases of abduction, is cynical about the government's handling of the matter. "The real culprits - the big fish - will not be apprehended," he said. "This government has been appointing committees and commissions to monitor the human rights situation, but there is no action on the ground."



Sri Lankan military personnel have been implicated in the ongoing abductions and killings that have resulted in a breakdown of law and order in the country. Photo Sanka Vidanagama / AFP / Getty Images

The outcry over human rights violations prompted the government to appoint a Commission of Inquiry to look into 16 high-profile cases. Its first case is the killing of 17 aid workers employed by Action Against Hunger, or Action Contre la Faim.

But incidents continue. A recent move by the government to evict Tamils from temporary accommodation in the capital on the grounds that they posed a threat to national security stirred up huge controversy. The Supreme Court later ordered the suspension of evictions.

Tamils are not alone in losing basic rights, though the group is particularly vulnerable.

Vajira Dharmasena is a Sinhalese nurse in the main government hospital in Vavuniya, a garrison town in the north with a majority Tamil population. She lives in the Sinhala settlement of Mamaduwa and says people live in fear of attacks.

"We try to avoid using the bus service that plies between Vavuni-

ya and the village because we're afraid it will be targeted," she said. "We live in fear. At night people living near the forward defense lines come to the town to sleep. Schoolchildren can't study."

Eleven journalists have been killed since August 2005, according to an international media monitoring mission, which was in the country last month.

"Killings and attacks against journalists remained unsolved, leading to fears that media freedom is being deliberately and violently suppressed through threats, abductions and attacks," said Jacqui Park of the International Federation of Journalists.

Some countries have decided to withhold or suspend aid to Sri Lanka until they see the situation in the country improving.

Following the cease-fire, Sri Lanka was declared eligible for aid through Millennium Challenge Corp., set up under President Bush to reward countries that are well governed.

But the U.S. ambassador in

Colombo, Robert O. Blake, said in a recent television interview: "In the context of the collapse of the cease-fire and in the context of the decline of some of the indicators on governance, we unfortunately had to defer consideration of Sri Lanka for the Millennium Challenge Corporation."

"But we very much hope that the president will seize the opportunity to embrace peace now and the [Tamil Tigers] as well, since they are an important part of the process."

A senior official in Sri Lanka's attorney general's department said the state could not file criminal proceedings in cases of violence unless police provided sufficient evidence admissible in court.

Commenting on criticism that the government was violating the rights of Tamil citizens, Rambukwella, the government spokesman, said, "I'm not saying everything is perfect, but 39 percent of Tamils now live in the Western Province," which is controlled by the government.

OPINION

UN cowed by Colombo's fury

RESPONDING angrily to United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon expressions of support for a senior UN official who described Sri Lanka as "the most dangerous place for aid workers," the Colombo government launched a tirade on Ki-Moon, following up its earlier scathing attack against UN humanitarian coordinator John Holmes as a "terrorist" who took a bribe from the Tamil Tigers.

Senior Sri Lankan minister Jeyaraj Fernandopulle launched a scathing attack against Ki-moon, saying that he did not give a 'damn' about whatever the UN Secretary General had to say. The Nation newspaper reported on August 12.

Fernandopulle was responding to Ki-Moon's criticism that Fernandopulle's comments last week calling UN humanitarian coordinator John Holmes a "terrorist" who took a bribe from the LTTE were "unacceptable and unwarranted."

Meanwhile, Sir Holmes has been written to by Sri Lanka's President Mahinda Rajapakse explaining himself and appearing to back off from his earlier criticism of the Colombo government's human rights record.

President Rajapakse has not commented on the controversy.

Fernandopulle, who is also the Chief Government Whip, told The Nation, "I don't give a damn about what this UN boss has to tell me or Sri Lanka. He can say whatever he wants, but I will still go by what I said and that is, John Holmes is a terrorist who takes bribes from the LTTE."

Fernandopulle also said that he had a busy schedule, and had better things to do than waste his time listening to what the UN boss and the likes had to say.

"I do not care what the UN Secretary General says. We cannot allow any foreigner to come to our country and work against us," he said.

"I am a busy man and I have bigger problems to worry about than a statement made by the UN Secretary," he added.

Fernandopulle's tirade was the latest in a week long volley of accusations from the Sri Lankan government against the United Nations.

It also ended the matter, with the UN quietly dropping its protests and Sir Holmes seeking to mend fences.

The whole saga started when Sir Holmes, at the end of his visit to Sri Lanka in early August, gave an interview to Reuters in which he said that the country had one of the worst records in the world for humanitarian aid worker safety.

Sir Holmes told Reuters: "there is a concern ... about the safety of humanitarian workers themselves and the record here is one of the worst in the world from

that point of view."

"We've seen almost 30 humanitarian workers killed over the last 18 months or so," he added, calling on the government to probe civil war abuses and consider an international rights monitoring mission."

The Consortium for Humanitarian Agencies, an umbrella group of 104 aid agencies operating in Sri Lanka, actually puts the number at 34, a figure the government rejects.

Holmes said he had positive and frank discussions with government officials, and had been reassured that abuses would be looked into. He called on the government and the Tigers to ensure aid workers have access to the needy, and called for respect of international humanitarian law.

However, the Sri Lankan government reacted furiously to Holmes's comments. Key government figures accused Holmes of bias and of deliberately seeking to tarnish the government's reputation.

Speaking in the parliament, Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickramanayake said Sir Holmes' comments called into question the ability of the UN to be impartial.

"The government of Sri Lanka, in no uncertain terms, rejects John Holmes' assertion that Sri Lanka is not safe for humanitarian workers," Mr Wickremanayake said.

"The government cannot but feel that Sir John has contributed to those who seek to discredit the government and tarnish its international image."

Defense ministry official Keheliya Rambukwella reacting to Holmes's comments told reporters a formal complaint was lodged with UN officials.

"We have written to our permanent representative in New York to take the matter up," said Rambukwella. He further said Sri Lanka would ask for the UN undersecretary to retract his comments.

However the strongest criticism against the senior UN official came from minister Jeyaraj Fernandopulle who called him a "terrorist" and accused him of taking a bribe from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Fernandopulle, told a media briefing he believed Holmes had deliberately tried to harm Sri Lanka's reputation.

"I would say Holmes is completely a terrorist, a terrorist who supports terrorism. We consider people who support terrorists also terrorists," Fernandopulle told the briefing.

"So Holmes, who supports the LTTE (Tamil Tigers), is also a terrorist. This person tries to tarnish the image of Sri Lanka internationally."

"I think the LTTE has bribed Holmes," he added without giving any proof to back his accusations.

UN Secretary-General Ban



Sir John Holmes was flown to Jaffna by the Sri Lankan military for an official visit. Photo Daily Mirror

Ki-moon reacted to Fernandopulle's accusations and said comments by the Sri Lankan minister calling his humanitarian coordinator a "terrorist" were "unacceptable and unwarranted."

"We believe them (the comments) to be unwarranted and unacceptable and the secretary-general fully supports the work of his emergency relief coordinator, John Holmes." Said UN spokeswoman Michele Montas speaking to reporters.

She also said Sir Holmes, a Briton, has written to Sri Lanka's minister for disaster management and human rights, Mahinda Samarasinghe, saying it was "regrettable that a few words used in an interview have attracted disproportionate attention and have

threatened to overshadow his sincere desire to have the most constructive relationship possible with the government."

In his letter, Holmes said that he was not 'suggesting' either to Reuters or in his discussions with the government that the government was not concerned about human right issues and not trying to protect humanitarian workers "but simply referring factually to the terrible incidents that have taken place and the need to step up even further all our efforts to prevent such things in future. That was my consistent message throughout."

"It is all the more regrettable that one phrase I used in an interview with Reuters, in response to a question, has attracted quite dis-

proportionate attention in some parts of the media and threatens to distort or overshadow the rest of the visit and the discussions, and my absolutely sincere desire to have the most constructive relationship possible with the government. I was certainly not deliberately trying to strike a different or more negative note in this interview, as some have suggested."

"On the contrary my desire throughout the visit was to be consistent in public with what I was raising in private, and I had indeed raised my concern about the safety of humanitarian workers with virtually everyone I met, as you know, and also mentioned it at the press conference with you."

Sir Holmes also called for a

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OPINION

Cash-strapped Sri Lanka seeks loans

THE cash crunch faced by Sri Lanka continued to worsen this month with rating agencies considering downgrading the credit rating for the state following recent escalation in the island's ethnic conflict, a sharp drop in tourism and turmoil in the global credit markets.

Fitch Ratings, which rates Sri Lanka as BB- (or three levels below investment grade), announced that the escalation of violence between the military and LTTE and the mounting losses in US sub prime markets, which is forcing investors to shun low-grade debt could lead to a ratings downgrade for Sri Lanka.

"We continue to regard the negative outlook on Sri Lanka's ratings as appropriate," said Paul Rawkins, London-based senior director of Fitch's sovereign team to an email enquiry by Bloomberg.

"The security situation remains a cause for concern and the macroeconomic policy environment is not encouraging, particularly in the light of current global financial market turmoil," he added.

On August 2, Sri Lanka hired JPMorgan Chase, Barclays Capital and HSBC to help manage bond sales aimed at raising as much as \$500 million overseas.

The launching of offensives by the Sri Lankan forces seeking to drive the LTTE from the eastern province led to an escalation of fighting and has left the cease fire agreement signed in 2002 between the two sides existing only on paper.

With Sri Lankan Defense Secretary Gothabaya Rajapakse, brother of President Mahinda

Rajapakse, reaffirming that the Sri Lankan forces intend to capture the LTTE stronghold of Vanni in northern Sri Lanka next, analysts expect more fighting in the coming months.

The combination of prospects of more war and recent global turmoil in credit markets have it made harder for Sri Lanka, which has the highest borrowing costs in Asia, to raise funds overseas, reports said.

Bond Issue

The Economist, commenting on the Colombo's proposed \$500 million bond issue argued that whilst it constituted a temporary palliative, its long term consequences were serious.

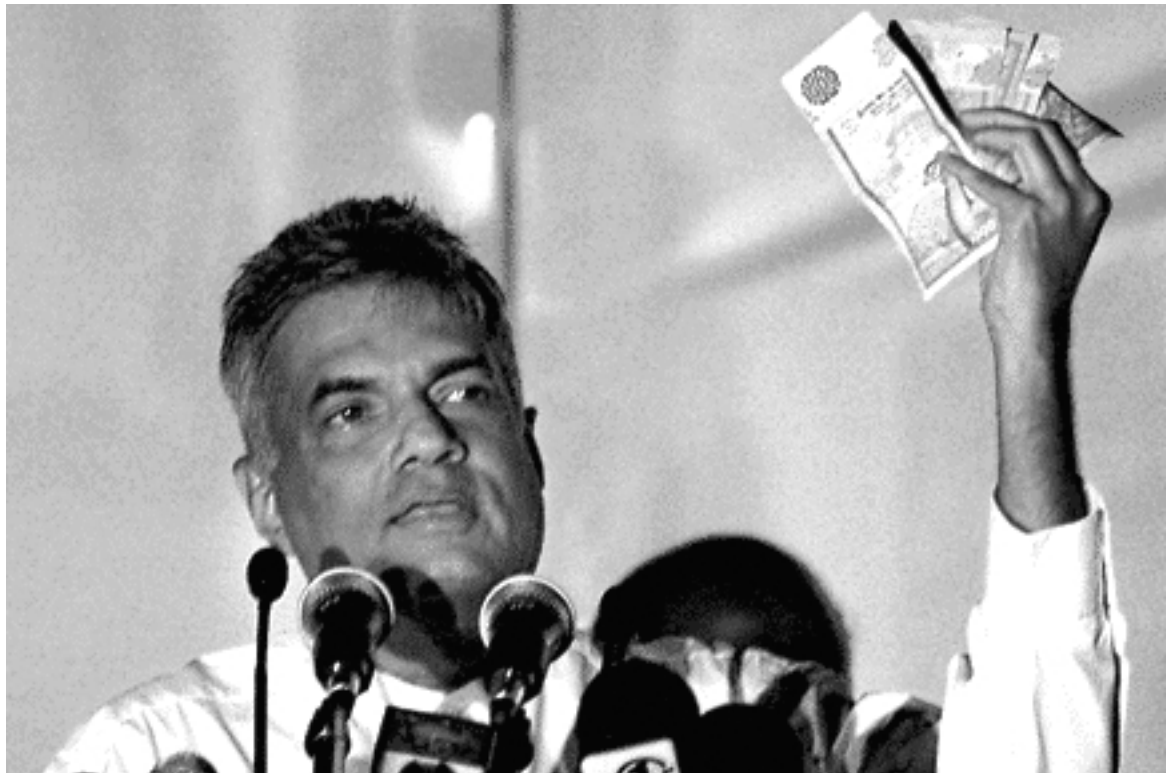
"There is no doubt that an additional borrowing of US\$ 500 million would add heavily to the country's debt burden," the magazine said.

At the end of 2006 the foreign debt had accumulated to Rs. 956,620 million (approximately US\$ 8696 million) and at the end of May this year it had risen to Rs. 1,210,900 million - about 11 per cent higher than 12 months before, it said.

"Therefore the additional debt alone would raise the debt burden to Rs. 1,265,000 million. In addition the country has a higher domestic debt as well. At the end of May this year the domestic debt had risen to Rs. 1,560.8 billion," it said. Public debt had risen to nearly the amount of last year's GDP.

Last year Sri Lanka's debt servicing absorbed about 28 per cent of government expenditure.

In the past owing to the most foreign borrowing being from multilateral agencies at conces-



Opposition leader Ranil Wickramasinghe holds currency notes to protest economic policies

sionary rates the cost of foreign borrowing was manageable - even at the end of 2006 foreign debt payments absorbed only 12.7 per cent of our export earnings.

However, this percentage has been increasing in recent years and the bond issue would raise that as the interest rates are higher than the country has paid in the past when it borrowed little from commercial sources.

The period for repayment is also much shorter than the borrowings from multilateral agencies.

The government has resorted to commercial borrowing as the

government can't meet the conditions of good fiscal management required by these agencies, The Economist charged.

There are also doubts on what the loans would be used for.

The government claims it would use it for infrastructure development. However, the Economist argued that infrastructure development at commercial rates of borrowing is not prudent, as such investments pay off over a long period of time.

Besides, it is alleged that the infrastructure for which the money is to be spent already have been funded.

Therefore, the magazine said, it is contended that the money is in fact for war expenditure.

The bottomline of the bond issue is that the government is passing on a debt burden for the future, the magazine concluded. These questions imply that the borrowing is ill-advised.

Complicating the bond issue further, Sri Lanka's main opposition United National Party has declared that it would not honour the agreement and suspend payments if and when it comes to power.

Furthermore, the UNP is con-

Continued on page 15

Ruling Sri Lanka is a family affair

The 4 Rajapakse brothers occupy the most powerful jobs, and critics are incensed.

Henry Chu

Los Angeles Times

THE Rajapakse family business is virtually everyone's business on this island.

That's because the family's line of work is running the country -- and fighting a civil war, to boot. Between them, the four Rajapakse brothers occupy the most powerful jobs in Sri Lanka's democratically elected government, including the biggest plum of all: the presidency.

Indeed, by appointing his siblings to key posts, President Mahinda Rajapakse has ensured that 70% of the national budget is under the control of his family, critics say. It's an eye-popping figure but, according to observers, a credible one.

Mahinda Rajapakse also hea-

ds the Defense and Finance ministries, two of the government's largest portfolios. Last year, defense alone accounted for 19% of national spending, pushed to so high a level because of the lapse back into open battle between the Sri Lankan army and Tamil Tiger rebels, after the collapse of a fragile cease-fire.

The architect of the government's campaign against the Tigers is the hawkish defense secretary and decorated military officer Gotabhaya Rajapakse. Basil is the president's senior advisor, described by some as the power behind the throne.

The fourth Rajapakse brother, Chamal - the only one besides Mahinda to be elected to office,

as a member of Parliament - is in charge of the Ports and Aviation Ministry.

Under Sri Lanka's Constitution, and throughout 24 years of brutal conflict with the rebels, it has not been uncommon for presidents to retain the Defense Ministry for themselves.

But by vesting so much authority from other areas of government in himself and his brothers, the current president, who was elected two years ago, has indulged in blatant nepotism and overstepped the bounds of propriety, his detractors say.

"Maybe he could have all those ministries and departments that deal with the war, but not something like finance," said opposition politician Lakshman Kiriella. "Under the constitution, he can hold all the ministries. It's not illegal. But it's immoral."

The Rajapakses do not reject complaints that they control most of the state's purse strings, choosing to ignore them. Requests for comment from the president's office and from the prime minis-

ter's office went unanswered.

For months, critics have tried to make political hay out of the near-monopoly the brothers hold on government. Two former presidential Cabinet members crossed over to the opposition this year, partly out of frustration that the Cabinet, though composed of more than 50 people, wielded little real power compared with the Rajapakses.

But Sri Lanka's hapless opposition has been unable to mount a serious challenge. The president's aggressive military push against the Tamil Tigers has also made him a popular figure among his nationalist allies in Parliament and among some sections of the ethnic-majority Sinhalese public.

And so far, although bureaucratic corruption ranks as one of the top grievances of ordinary Sri Lankans, no accusations have surfaced that the Rajapakse brothers have used their public authority for private gain.

But some analysts are worried that the concentration of power sets a bad precedent for democra-

tic governance on the island, which gained independence from Britain in 1948.

"Given the dominance of the president, and his dependence on his brothers, it could be said that 100% of the budget is dependent on them, as they can block anything," said Jehan Perera, executive director of the National Peace Council of Sri Lanka. "This is not healthy."

He said that civil society and businesspeople were "very much alienated by these happenings, and they constantly speak out. But that's about all they can do."

Members of the opposition are trying to overcome internal squabbles and mobilize public opinion against the Rajapakses' lock on government. An anti-government rally last month drew tens of thousands of protesters in Colombo.

But unless the ruling coalition is hit by more defections, or popular discontent swells, change is unlikely. For the time being, the business of governing Sri Lanka is liable to remain all in the family.

FEATURES

The wretched of the earth

The Sri Lankan government may hail the scorching of the east as a victory, but for the civilians of the east it is hell on earth.

Sonali Samarasinghe
The Sunday Leader

IN 1929, in a message to the Negroes of America, Gandhi was to say, 'There is no dishonour in being slaves. There is only dishonour in being slave owners.'

It was this message that later earned him a permanent place in the heart of black America. Indeed it was the power of this message so easily applied to the horror I beheld, that came to my mind, as I walked into an IDP camp in the east, two weeks ago.

The Gandhian words of 78 years past, mediated to the suffering and strife of these disinherited people. So low, yet set up so high, as they attempted to wrest from life some grain of dignity.

Born in dirty tents

It is the despair in the eyes of the mothers as they clutched their new born babies - babies born under a dirty tent, on a mattress of sand, flies and mud - that would surely lift our eyes to the biblical hope of a world where men will beat their swords into ploughshares and their arrows into pruning hooks.

In the realities of Killivetti, a number of women gather near a tent with their young children. Some squatting, others standing. They are collecting their weekly rations of 140 gms of sugar, and 1.4 kg of rice. For those with children under one year, milk is included in the relief assistance.

For those under 18, clothing and even slippers are provided. Nothing is provided to those over 18 years of age.

A wizened old lady is looking distraught. She quickly approaches us when she knows we are journalists from Colombo. "My grandson was taken in by the army last Sunday (July 22)," the 72 year old Somasunderam Muttupillai moans. "His name is P. Chandrakumar. He is 35 years old, he has a wife and children."

For the old woman living under a torn tent in the transit centre, deprived of her familiar surroundings, this is more than she can bear.

Those in the camp are mainly paddy cultivators says one of the



Refugees displaced during the government's military campaign in the East continue to live in poor conditions as a result of the scorched earth policy adopted during the fighting. The refugee camps they live in are over populated, with poor sanitary conditions.

male members of the 900 families presently in the camp. However, there are several divisions within 50 metres. For example, the Ichchalampattu division and the Muttur division where the people are mostly fishermen.

Forcibly brought

He explains that in April 2006 they fled to Batticaloa from Sampur due to the fighting. Then they were brought to this transit centre.

We were brought here by force and through cunning, the man says angrily. Forty buses arrived with boards stating Sampur. Therefore we thought we were being taken back to our villages and our homes. But we were brought here to this transit centre instead, he laments.

"We can't go out. We are like prisoners. We like to at least go to Batticaloa but we can't. We are forced to stay here," he adds.

The children in the camp have had their education interrupted due to constant movement. Now they are attending the Killivetti Maha Vidyalaya close by.

Says one young woman, "We went to Batticaloa empty handed. We came here empty handed."

Later, the rest of the journalists and I proceed on our way in our air conditioned vehicle even as the irony and pathos of our mission hits me hard.

We reach the Alamkulam IDP camp in Vaharai where 480 families and 1615 people mark time endlessly waiting for their lives to be restored. Herded to this camp

about five months after the eastern battle commenced, the IDPs hail from areas such as Vahaneri, Akurana and Kulattumadu.

Sanitary conditions

Approximately 3000 displaced persons live in three camps in the area.

A temporary school has been arranged for those in the camps in and around the vicinity. NGO activity is a little more prevalent in this camp. At least a mobile medical service visits them once a week.

The Regional Medical Officer (RMO) Dr. Vivekandarajah paints a sorry picture of the situation in the camps. He says due to poor sanitary conditions and weak water supply diarrhoea is most prevalent among the IDPs. As with IDPs across the globe it is malnutrition that poses the biggest threat. The closest hospital is in Valachchenai. For an ailing IDP, sick in body, mind and soul, that's a lifetime away.

Having spent the night in Polonnaruwa, the next morning on July 27, we drive along the A15 road passing Kayankerni bridge towards Vaharai and Verugal.

Scorched

We see jungles scorched to the ground by the military as it gets ready to hold on to land it has captured. This method of clearing the jungle area to prevent hideouts, we saw in endless succession - black stretches of land

where before tall grasses swayed gently in the breeze sheltering under forest cover.

A forlorn tree sprouting a green leaf or two stands like a sentinel on the blackened stretch of land. Under the tree a soldier desperate to hide from the scorching sun above and weighed down by ammunition, stands guard.

Poetic irony

There is a poetic irony to the scene. The very hand that has been compelled by regime policy to destroy the tree in the name of war, now seeks its comfort in the name of humanity.

The flora and fauna, the habitats destroyed by this method of clearing the east, was heart wrenching to see.

But more devastation and despair were to meet us along the way juxtaposed with hope as we also saw sandwiched between the destruction, clusters of newly built houses. Little enclaves of hope and security - the work of several NGOs.

Houses destroyed

And then we saw it as we entered Panichchankerni. A row of houses built for the victims of the tsunami. Easily recognisable as tsunami houses, the villages had barely been resident in the houses for 10 days before all hell broke loose. They were bombed from above. We drove past houses peppered with the multi-barrel guns; a mortar embedded in the bark of

a tree.

We later passed Panichchankerni bridge over Upaar lagoon and approached the Vaharai hospital.

The Senior Nursing Officer Jayeswaran and the visiting physician Dr. Daniel both explained that it was malnutrition and hepatitis which were most prevalent while there were many who came in complaining of vomiting blood.

The area including the hospital was under the control of the LTTE before March 15. Now, a few yards away, a large army camp and check point prevailed.

Sections of the hospital had been damaged by the tsunami while a maternity ward had been aerially bombed causing a large section to collapse, allegedly killing some 10 patients.

Aerial bombardment

There was ample evidence of aerial bombardment all around. Close to the ward was what appeared to be an abandoned bunker. Hospital staff vehemently deny it is an LTTE bunker. Civilians took refuge in the hospital premises during the height of the military offensive says a member of the hospital staff who did not wish to be named. The bunker was dug for their safety during bombardment.

Opposite the hospital a Catholic church stands as if in eternal memory of the suffering and strife of its people. The church had been damaged by the tsunami. Sure

FEATURES



The Sri Lankan military bulldozed LTTE cemeteries in Batticaloa after capturing the area.

as they are that the bunker is not an LTTE one, they are also firm the church was not damaged in the bombings but only by the tsunami.

On the way towards Valachchenai and Batticaloa we see newly built tsunami reconstruction houses bombarded with shells. The roofs had caved in, the walls dotted with fire. Imagine for a moment the plight of those mothers, those school children who had entered their new homes with hope after losing everything to the tsunami only to lose it all once again.

As I said last week in the first installment of this eyewitness account of the east, little wonder the people of the east speaking to us from badly maintained IDP camps have lost faith in humanity.

Karuna dominates

I also saw the office of the Karuna boys standing by the wayside. A few metres away was an army camp. Side by side for the moment, it was obvious despite the stout and even asinine denials of certain members of President Rajapakse's cabinet, that the government was working with Karuna Amman and his men.

Meanwhile P. Karunakaran, claiming to be head of education and based at the Batticaloa office of the TMVP at Govindhan Road tells us that some 165,000 refugees have fled the LTTE in the north and have come to the east. He says the TMVP together with the NGOs are now helping to resettle these people.

Amidst government plans to develop the east, Karunakaran says they do not want big projects. 'We want to be with the people and win them over. We want to be like the south. We will rule here and help the people through elections,' he says.

Dressed in a white tunic, looking a little like the southern politician and speaking Sinhala with only a slight accent, Karunakaran talks of winning the children over.

How, I ask him, can you plant a tree with one hand while you hold a gun in the other?

We won't go to the schools with guns, he tells me, rather

facetiously I think.

However outside the room where Karunakaran is speaking to us, young chaps stalk the surroundings, armed with guns. Karuna and his men it seems, have no intention of giving up their most vital tool to power.

Karunakaran however praises President Rajapakse as a man of vision. A journalist in the group cannot help but ask how Karuna, if he claims to work for the welfare of the eastern people, could get together with a government that is seen to have inflicted so much pain and suffering on the people of the east through its aerial bombardment and its scorched earth policies.

There is a muttering under the breath and no real answer ensues from Karunakaran.

However he is eager to remind us that the east always suffered under the Wanni leadership which never gave a place to the eastern people. It is because of the burden Karuna had for his people that he broke away, says Karunakaran defiantly.

Untold suffering

Be that as it may, we beheld untold suffering in the camps both in Trincomalee and Batticaloa.

In all the camps we visited the water supply was poor and suspect despite a tank installed. Some lived in tents ravished by the weather even as others lived in shacks made of wooden planks. Many of the makeshift roofs did not keep the rain from beating down into the shack where grandmother to grandchild lived partitioning the tiny space with saris.

One enterprising man had set up a shop in one of the camps while many said their husbands who had been fishermen couldn't continue their livelihood anymore due to the restrictions.

Divisional Secretary Muttur, M.C.M. Sheriff said 17,000 families in 42 grama sevaka divisions had been displaced. After the war all department schools had remained shut for one and a half months and only in the latter part of September 2006 that people started to return to their homes in dribbles.

State of neglect

Why, we were to ask him was it that despite the large amount of tsunami aid, survivors still languished in camps which were now not only run down and in a state of neglect but ill serviced with bad water supply.

Sheriff confirmed that 1249 houses had been allocated to be built and upto now only 343 were under construction. Only 193 had so far been handed over.

Sheriff confirmed that 11 divisions come under the high security zones in Muttur east or Sampur as gazetted by President Rajapakse. About 4000 families have been displaced he says. Most are in the Batticaloa District - in IDP camps, with friends and relatives.

Sheriff said he has not received any direction from the authorities on what to do with these people displaced by the HSZ. He however said that out of the 4000 families the government had established a transit camp in Pattithidel and Killivetti housing 324 families with 1050 members, and 548 families with 1798 members, respectively.

Some families still remain in Batticaloa where they fled to safety while others have winged it to India Sheriff said.

The GA has identified 105 acres of land in Ralkuli, Muttur west, and the Land Reform Commission has handed over to the Divisional Secretariat this jungle area to be cleared to build houses and relocate 500 displaced families, Sheriff added.

This remains to be said. As the pictures will demonstrate more than a thousand words, the people of the east are suffering. If they have been liberated from the Tigers as the government says they are now imprisoned by poverty and strife. They are not allowed to leave their IDP camps which are surrounded by armed personnel.

The government may hail the scorching of the east as victory under its belt for political mileage but for the innocent civilians of the east it is hell on earth.

(Edited) *This article was originally published by The Sunday leader on August 12, 2007*

Military administration in eastern Sri Lanka

Nanda Wickremasinghe
WSWS

THE Sri Lankan military has quickly demonstrated its intentions regarding the capture of the island's eastern province from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Far from "liberating" the people of the East, the security forces are establishing a military occupation over the entire area in preparation for stamping out any opposition to the government and its continuing communal war.

Following the army's conquest of the LTTE's last major eastern stronghold, President Mahinda Rajapakse ordered a victory celebration on July 19 at which he declared that a "new dawn" was opening up for the East of the country. The ceremony, which evoked little popular enthusiasm, was an unabashed glorification of the renewed civil war that has already resulted in thousands of deaths and turned 200,000 into refugees.

Just days later, Major General Parakrama Pannipitiya, the military commander of the eastern province, issued a circular under the rather deceptive title of "directives for rural development work". In reality, the document is a blueprint for the imposition of a military-dominated administration through the province, right down to the village level.

The circular declared: "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". (These "humanitarian operations" were in fact offensive operations in flagrant breach of the 2002 ceasefire agreement between the two sides.)

Village-level committees are to be chosen, not by a free vote, but by the police and army. "It will be mandatory," the circular explained, "to include in these committees a member of the armed forces/STF [police paramilitary units], a police officer, and Grama Niladhari [village official] serving in the respective village".

The president of the villages committee is to be either a member of the police or the military. Meetings to discuss "rural development" are to be held fortnightly,

but the committees will have no independent budget or means for implementing projects.

All proposals will have to be submitted to higher levels-divisional or provincial secretaries. Reports of the meetings will be sent to the headquarters of the eastern military commander.

If the real purpose of the committees were to develop backward rural areas in the East of the island, the involvement of the security forces would be unnecessary.

The Rajapakse government, however, has no more intention than its predecessors to end the decades of neglect that have produced widespread poverty and lack of basic services.

Far from addressing the needs of villagers, these committees are instruments of the security forces for spying, intimidation and repression.

In the North and East, the security forces work in close collaboration with Tamil paramilitaries such as the Karuna group in suppressing dissent.

Hundreds of people have been "disappeared" or murdered over the past year-in all likelihood by death squads operated either directly or indirectly by the military. It would not be at all surprising if members of these paramilitaries were appointed to the newly established village committees.

The military has also placed severe restrictions on the activities of various non government organisations (NGOs)-local and international-one of the few sources of assistance in many areas. According to the circular, village committees may identify projects but NGOs will require approval from the district secretarial offices before any involvement.

"Please note that in future NGOs should not be permitted to do as they please in these areas as before. In order to fulfill this work effectively, the relevant District Secretary, the Provincial Secretary and the Commanding Officers of different Army units in these areas, STF and SPs [police superintendents] have to be well coordinated," the circular stated.

The military and its Sinhala

Continued on page 15

NEWS

Opposition seeks momentum against Rajapakse government

SRI LANKA'S newly formed opposition alliance this week continued its mass protest campaign against the government of President Mahinda Rajapakse amid speculation former President Chandrika Kumaratunga was going to reenter the southern political arena with it.

The National Congress, created from the tie up between the main opposition United National Party and a splinter from the ruling Sri Lanka Freedom Party, called the Mahajana Faction, held another regionally rally this week.

The fourth in of a series of protest rallies labeled the 'Peoples' Wave' organised by the new alliance, it was held in Nittambuwa near Horagolla, the ancestral home the Bandaranaiques, on Friday August 25.

The Bandaranaike family had dominated the leadership of the SLFP since its founding. President Kumaratunga was the last with her mother and father (who founded the SLFP) having previously been leaders.

President Rajapakse is thus the first leader of the party not from the family and his ascension has left seething tensions in the party between those loyal to the family and those seeking reform.

According to local media reports several Bandaranaike loyalists teamed up with the SLFP Mahajana Wing (SLFP-M) at the Nittambuwa event. The SLFP-M is led by Mangala Samaraweera, a Kumaratunga loyalist who has split from the SLFP citing differences with Rajapakse.

The location of the rally, chosen to show Samaraweera's strength in the heart of SLFP, gains significance with the return of former president Kumaratunga to

the island's political scene.

Kumaratunga, who sent a congratulatory note to Samaraweera after the signing of the SLFP-M's agreement for a common alliance with the UNP, took a swipe at the Rajapakse government on her return. Speaking to journalists after her meeting with Civil Monitoring Commission (CMC) on Extra Judicial Killings and Abduction convener Mano Ganeshan and its senior member TNA MP Suresh Premachandran she said the government should not act like terrorists.

"A government which is fighting a terrorist organization has to work tactfully and with a clear vision and should not act like a terrorist organization," she said.

"The government is a government. Terrorists are terrorists and therefore the government cannot behave like terrorists."

Speaking at the third rally held in Anuradhapura on August 17, Samaraweera, a former Foreign Minister, told the participants that international community should not punish innocent people with aid cuts instead should punish the Rajapakse brothers for violation of human rights and corruption.

Gotabaya Rajapakse was appointed by the President as Sri Lanka's Secretary of Defence and is in charge, along with Army commander Lt. Gen. Sarath Fonseka of prosecuting the war against the LTTTE.

Basil Rajapakse has emerged as a powerful figure in the Rajapakse administration is accused of overseeing rampant corruption by the family.

"Basil should not be allowed to return to the US and Gotabaya should be taken to task over the

killing of innocent civilians. There is no point in cutting aid and making the rest of the country suffer for their misdoings," Samaraweera said.

Addressing the crowd, leader of the opposition UNP, Ranil Wickramasinghe, accused the Rajapakse brothers of pushing the country into debt by taking loans at high interest rates. He also blamed the media for unquestioningly toeing the government line.

"There are three Buddhist editors in three Sinhala newspapers, but they observe pansil every morning now by reciting the names of the three brothers," he said.

The first Peoples' Wave rally was held in the Sri Lankan capital Colombo on Thursday July 26 and was attended by an estimated 100,000 people.

The main slogan of that event was "The Great Betrayal of the Great Buddhist", which referred to the alleged secret deal between Rajapakse and the LTTE on the eve of the presidential elections in 2005.

Speaking at the Nittambuwa event Samaraweera invited the ultra-nationalist Janatha Vimukthi Perumana (JVP), Sri Lanka's third largest party to join hands with him, to bring down the Rajapaksa regime.

The JVP is reported to have rejected the call. The UNP government to President R. Premadasa, of which Wickremesinghe was a member, was responsible for crushing the JVP's second and last armed insurrection by mass killings of JVP supporters and innocent villages suspected of supporting the Marxist-nationalist part.

The second National Congress rally was held in Uyanwatte



Former President Chandrika Kumaratunga is rumored to be in discussions with the National Congress. Photo Daily Mirror

esplanade in Matara, the Samaraweera's electorate. According to local reports thousands of people attended the event which took place in the southern province on Friday August 10.

The National Congress is organising series of rallies across the Sinhala districts to protest against the increase in cost of living under the Rajapakse administration. The final rally in the series is scheduled to take place on September 8 in Hambanthota, the home district of the President Rajapaksa.

In addition, the opposition party also announced plans to hold a special national convention in Kandy on September 9, the day after the last Peoples' Wave protest rally in Hambanthota.

With pressure on the Rajapaksa government continues to grow, the ruling alliance almost lost its slender majority in parliament on Thursday August 2 when the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC), the largest upcountry Tamil party resigned ministerial posts its members held and announced that it was pulling out of the government.

The ruling alliance which has 119 seats in the 225 seat parliament is dependent on nationalist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna party and Buddhist monks led Jaathika Hela Urumaya.

According to the Sunday Leader newspaper the CWC which

has five members of Parliament decided to walk out of the ruling alliance after a meeting where Basil Rajapakse, presidential advisor and brother of president Mahinda Rajapakse, insulted CWC parliamentarian and Deputy Minister Muththu Sivalingam as 'Para Demala'.

The word 'para' is a derogatory word in Sinhala. 'Para Demala' is a much used racial slur against Tamils.

However, on Wednesday August 8, the CWC law makers met Highways and Road Development minister Jeyaraj Fernandopulle and pledged to continue supporting the government.

Fernandopulle speaking after the meeting stated that the conflict was settled amicably and the portfolios of the resigned Ministers would be retained in the coming weeks.

Affirming its allegiance to the government, the CWC parliamentarians voted with the government on Thursday August 9 when the proposal to extend the emergency regulations by another month was taken up for voting.

CWC and the JVP voted with the government in support of the motion whilst the Tamil National Alliance and the Western People's Front voted against it. 107 MPs voted in support of the proposal while 15 opposed. The opposition UNP abstained and stayed out of the chamber during the voting.

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NEWS

Cash-strapped Sri Lanka ...

Continued from page 11

sidering an unusual course of action, of writing to HSBC, JP Morgan Chase and Barclays, the three joint lead managers of the bond issue, questioning their 'collusion' in the corrupt activities of the Rajapakse government.

Opposition leader Ranil Wickremesinghe, addressing a public rally at Matara this month said the government was seeking commercial loans for infrastructure projects that are said to be funded by China (Norochcholai power and Hambantota harbour), southern highway (Japan), Colombo harbour (ADB).

He said for 22 projects the government has requested US\$500 million in foreign aid, reported the Sunday Times newspaper in Sri Lanka.

"Then why is the government seeking US\$ 500 million in a bond issue when some of these projects have already got foreign aid?" he asked.

Mean while Sri Lanka's rupee weakened further to an eighth

consecutive life closing low as importers bought dollars to settle trade bills.

Some analysts expect the rupee to weaken to as much as 118-120 per dollar by the end of the year. Others are expecting 114 per dollar. The rupee has depreciated over 4 percent so far this year, after weakening by around 5 percent in 2006.

The rupee is steadily depreciating mainly due to trade-related moves in an economy that runs a hefty trade deficit because of costly fuel imports and the impact of inflation.

The Colombo All Share index fallen around 20 percent since life highs in mid-February amid escalating war between the state and LTTE and high interest rates, which have prompted some investors to turn to fixed deposits and bonds.

The bourse is down around 11 percent so far this year, with renewed war between the state and LTTE hurting sentiment.

Further worsening the island's

economy, the Sri Lanka tourist board announced that tourist arrivals fell 20.3 percent in July from a year earlier.

The renewed war between the government forces and the LTTE reduced arrivals by 23.7 percent in the first seven months of the year and many hotels struggling with low occupancy are discounting rooms in a bid to lure clients.

Tourist arrivals in July totalled 44,142 compared to 55,354 a year earlier. Arrivals in June were down 30 percent.

"The arrivals have come down because of the country's security situation but the (performance) has improved," said S. Kalaiselvam, director general of the Sri Lanka Tourist Board.

"July is an off-season, so arrivals of more than 40,000 tourists is a considerable achievement amid the current situation."

A number of foreign embassies have advised nationals to avoid traveling to Sri Lanka citing the escalation in fighting.

Military administration

Continued from page 13

chauvinist supporters have been bitterly critical of NGOs, denouncing them as supporters of "LTTE terrorism" for exposing some of the army's worst atrocities.

Last August the military was implicated in the cold-blooded murder of 17 aid workers from the French-based Action Contre la Faim (ACF). The bodies were found lined up outside the ACF office, shot in the back of the head after the army reentered the town of Muttur.

Jeevan Thyagarajah, executive director of the Human Rights Consortium, an umbrella organisation of the NGOs, questioned the intervention by the military in development work.

"Is there going to be a civil administration in the east or a mil-

itary administration? People are already suspicious about government plans," Thyagarajah told the BBC on July 22.

The military has bypassed normal civilian channels. The Sunday Times noted in its "Situation Report" on July 29 that the circular has been sent directly to the police heads in the eastern districts of Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Ampara, the commandant of the STF in the province, army brigade commanders and district secretaries. The Daily Mirror reported that the eastern military commander called a meeting of NGOs and government officers in late July to explain its new directives.

Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapakse told the Island on July 14 that "the task of the armed forces [was] to keep the areas and strategic strongholds ... which

were captured from the LTTE terrorists, safe from infiltration".

Some 50 new police stations and posts are to be set up throughout the East. In May, the government established a new high security zone in the Sampur and Muttur area to coincide with a new Special Economic Zone.

The establishment of a military administration in the East is a sharp warning to working people throughout the island. Determined to prosecute its unpopular war and to put the economic burden on the masses, the Rajapakse government is increasingly reliant on the military and anti-democratic measures. It will not hesitate in placing other areas of the country under military rule in order to shore up its shaky rule.

This article was published by the World Socialist Web site on 10 August 2007

Rajapakse and rights

Continued from page 5

able.

In response to this downward spiral, foreign governments haven't done much. Sri Lanka has little strategic or economic importance to most countries. Foreign governments mostly limited their criticism to "private messages" and minor aid cuts.

The Sri Lankan Army has warm ties to the US military. Britain has close historical relations with its former colony and is a major aid provider. Sri Lanka receives 40 percent of its foreign assistance from Japan. India is the big neighbor with the greatest

influence. Indians have not forgotten their failed military intervention in 1987 or the Tamil Tigers' assassination of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. Sri Lanka relies heavily on India for naval intelligence to counter arms procurement by the rebels.

While in private these governments have raised concerns about human rights abuses with President Rajapaksa, they have not exerted concerted pressure to make abuses stop.

These allies should work to set up a UN human rights monitoring mission tasked with protection, monitoring, capacity-building, and public reporting of abus-

es by all sides. Such a mission would - unlike the government or Tamil Tigers - be committed to protecting the rights of all Sri Lankans - Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim - from extrajudicial killings, abductions, intimidation and indiscriminate military attacks.

As important, President Rajapaksa should remember his days as a human rights activist and confront the rampant abuses taking place on his watch.

Charu Lata Hogg is a South Asia researcher at Human Rights Watch and co-author of the report "Return to War: Human Rights Under Siege."

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Rs 100,000 donated to kid disabled by Sri Lankan bombers

THE Liberation Tigers have donated Rs. 100,000 (about US\$900) as a trust fund for a six year old boy whose right leg was blown off when a Sri Lankan Air Force (SLAF) jets bombed his village in Padahuthurai in Mannar district in January 2007.

At least 14 civilians, including seven children, were killed and over 30 injured when SLAF jets blasted 25 houses in Padahuthurai on January 2.

Six year old Antony (right) lost his right leg including the thigh and barely survived. His father, A. Jegan, lost his right leg from knee while his mother and one and a half year old sibling received serious injuries.

Jegan's four year old child was killed.

Mr. S. Thangan, Deputy Head of LTTE political wing, gave a Tamil Eelam Certificate of deposit for Rs.100,000 to Antony at a ceremony (pictured above)

held at the family's new home in Naachchikkudaa, Poonakari.

The LTTE leader, Mr. Velupillai Piraphakaran, authorized release of the funds to help the youngster, TamilNet reported. The money has been deposited in Muzhangkaavil branch of Bank of Tamil Eelam.

The Bishop of Mannar Diocese, Rt Rev Rayappu Joseph, who visited Padahuthurai hamlet, which was completely destroyed by the jets, condemned the attack a crime against humanity," urged the International Community to send independent observers to NorthEast.

There was no condemnation by the international community. The UN expressed 'concern'.

Sri Lankan airstrikes and artillery bombardments are routinely directed at Tamil civilian areas in Vanni and, before they was captured by the military, in Batticaloa and Trincomalee.



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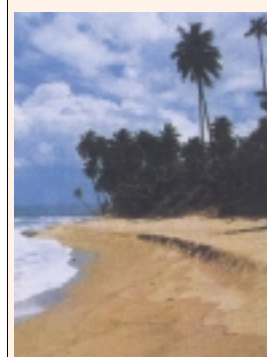
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