

What does 'responsibility to protect' mean for us?

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'Recognize the sovereignty of the Tamil people' - LTTE urges UN

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Velupillai Pirapaharan, leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), paid his respects (above) on Sep 26 at one of the events commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the death of Lt. Col. Thileepan, a political leader who fasted to death in 1987 protesting India's failure to protect the Tamils under the terms of the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord, and the sixth anniversary of the death of Colonel Shankar, founder of the LTTE air-wing, who was killed in an ambush by Sri Lankan commandos in 2001.

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NEWS

Focus on terrorism, Rajapakse tells UN

SRI LANKAN President Mahinda Rajapakse told the United Nations this week that his government's military campaign in breach of the 2002 Ceasefire Agreement was aimed at convincing the Tamil Tigers they cannot achieve a military victory.

Speaking in Sinhala, he called on the international community to help his government consolidate its gains in the east of the island against the LTTE, whom he repeatedly denounced as terrorists.

Addressing the UN General Assembly at its headquarters in New York Tuesday, Rajapakse called on the world body to conclude talks on a comprehensive convention on international terrorism.

His government's recent military operations had been launched only to convince the Tigers that it would not be possible for them to obtain a military victory, he said.

The government's recent military victory over the Tigers in the east and the clearing of the region of terrorism has opened the way to make the province "a model for development and rehabilitation," he said.

"There is a clear opportunity for the international community to play a vital role in breaking the cycle of conflict by focusing on development," he said.

A committed Buddhist nationalist, the President's address was heavily laced with references to



President Rajapakse and his wife visited a (Sri Lankan) Buddhist Temple in New York. He is committed to Sinhala Buddhist ideals.

Buddhism and assertions of victory over the LTTE.

"I am proud to inform you that despite the significant challenge posed by the ongoing conflict with a ruthless terrorist group in the North of the country, we have freed the Eastern Province from terrorism, and restored law and

order there," he said.

"We launched military operations only to exert pressure on terrorists in order to convince them that it will not be possible for them to obtain a military victory. Our goal remains a negotiated and honourable end to this unfortunate conflict."

In a pointed rejection of widespread international criticism of rights abuses of Tamils by his military, the President declared: "Sri Lanka's ancient civilization was rooted in the Buddhist principles."

Echoing an argument made a few hours earlier by Sri Lanka's

Ambassador to the UN in Geneva, President Rajapakse attacked critics of his military's rights abuses as neo-colonialists.

"Guided by the principles of Buddhism, We have long respected the rights of our fellow human beings," he said.

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'Get out whilst ahead' - US urges Sri Lanka

THE United States Ambassador to Sri Lanka, Robert Blake, cautioned the Colombo government, saying its victories were 'tactical' and urged resumption of talks. In short, Blake told the Sri Lankan government, which has been waging war against the LTTE for over a year now, to quit its military campaign whilst on a strong footing.

He also told the government to abandon 'divisive' words like 'federalism' and 'unitary' in formulating a proposals for a solution to the island's long running ethnic conflict.

Mr. Blake made his comments whilst addressing a seminar titled "Sri Lanka: the Way Forward," in Colombo last Friday organized by Fullbright Association.

The Ambassador observed that the Colombo government faces significant risks if it fails to seize its opportunity in the East. He was referring to orderly transition from military to civilian control, consultation with elected representatives of Tamil, Muslim and Sinhala communities and control on the paramilitaries.

Mr. Blake also cautioned against resettlement and development plans that change the ethnic composition of Eastern districts,

restrictions on livelihood, and slow economic development.

"We hope that all parties in the APRC will frame the final APRC proposals in a manner that avoids the use of divisive, emotive terms like 'federalism' and 'unitary'," the Ambassador said, urging negotiated settlement to achieve lasting peace for the crisis in Sri Lanka.

Extracts of Mr. Blake's speech, later issued by the US Embassy in Colombo, follows:

"The Government of Sri Lanka has achieved some important victories in the last several months. The expulsion of the LTTE from the East and the recent sinking of several LTTE ships carrying arms and other provisions mark important military successes.

"But these tactical successes should not tempt the Government to re-consider whether Sri Lanka's conflict can be won by military means. It cannot.

"While the Government must continue to defend the nation against terrorist attacks, the way forward lies in continuing to lay the basis for a negotiated settlement that will meet the aspirations of all of Sri Lanka's communities: Tamils, Muslims and Sinhalese.

"A key part of that equation will be for the All Parties Representative Committee to complete its important work on a power-sharing proposal. From all accounts the APRC has made substantial progress.

"But difficult issues remain that will test whether all of Sri Lanka's parties can work together

'The United States, as a friend of Sri Lanka, stands ready to assist in any way we can.'

to arrive at a just and equitable proposal that will receive the support of Tamils, Muslims and Sinhalese. To achieve a compromise that will lead to lasting peace will require statesmanship from all sides and the will to put the national interest above narrow party interests.

"The governing coalition must demonstrate it represents the

interests of all Sri Lankans, not just southern Sinhalese.

"The opposition UNP, which deserves much credit for the important steps it took to advance peace in 2002-2003, should, for the sake of all Sri Lankans, build on that record of achievement and work responsibly with the Government to ensure a successful APRC outcome.

"And we hope that all parties in the APRC will frame the final APRC proposals in a manner that avoids the use of divisive, emotive terms like "federalism" and "unitary."

"Let me say a word about the stabilization and reconstruction process in the east, which also is an important part of the way forward.

"Now that conflict has subsided in the east, the Government has a significant opportunity to stabilize and develop the east in a manner that would demonstrate to all Sri Lankans, but particularly Tamils and Muslims, that they have a bright future within a united Sri Lanka and that the Government is serious about ensuring their rights and providing opportunities equitably within a pluralistic state.

"In short, a successful transi-

tion in the east can be an important confidence builder and a building block for a future negotiation process.

"Conversely, the government faces significant risks if it fails to seize its opportunity in the east. Specifically, a failure to effect an orderly transition from military to civilian control, a failure to consult elected representatives of the Tamil, Muslim and Sinhalese communities on the development and other programs now being devised for the east, and a failure to rein in paramilitaries are all likely to destabilize the east and harden minority attitudes about prospects for negotiated settlement.

"Likewise, resettlement and development plans that change the ethnic composition of eastern districts, restrictions on access to means of livelihood, and slow economic development will produce similar negative effects.

"In conclusion, let me emphasize that a solution to Sri Lanka's conflict is in reach. But it will require Sri Lanka's government and parties to work together to put the national interest first. The United States, as a friend of Sri Lanka and a Co-Chair, stands ready to assist in any way we can."

NEWS

Recognize Tamil sovereignty, LTTE urges UN

POINTING to the 'genocidal war' the Sinhala-dominated state is waging against the Tamils of Sri Lanka, the Liberation Tigers this week urged the international community to "recognise the sovereignty of the Tamil people, and support the peace process in accordance with this principle."

The world should "provide appropriate opportunities to the Tamil people to express their aspirations, as have been given to the people of East Timor and Kosovo," the LTTE also said.

The LTTE statement, released to coincide with hardline Sinhala President Mahinda Rajapakse's address to the United Nations General Assembly, said the Tamil people's voice had been marginalized.

"As the LTTE and Tamil people are denied a fair chance to interact directly with the International community, we choose to submit this statement," the LTTE said.

"We strongly believe that the international community understands that the Tamil liberation struggle against oppression has been taken up according to international norms. And it cannot be compared to aimless, intolerant causes of violence: terrorism," the LTTE said.

"Further, we expect the international community recognize that it is always the LTTE that keeps the doors wide open for peace talks."

"Whereas the LTTE continued to respect and urge for a full implementation of the [2002] ceasefire agreement (CFA), the Rajapaksa regime eventually embarked on its war of occupation."

"Since elected to office, President Mahinda Rajapakse has been systematically weakening the internationally-backed CFA and has blatantly ignored all the promises that were made at the Geneva talks."

The Rajapakse government was insincere in its claims to be prepared to negotiate a solution, the LTTE said, adding: "GoSL has made schizophrenic public statements that ranged from, the intention to 'wipe out the LTTE' and give a political solution to the Tamils, and to 'weakening the LTTE' in order to 'force' it to come to the negotiating table."

"The tactic of appointing 'All Party Representative Committees' and 'Round Tables' to resolve the national conflict are an established deceptive habit of the successive Sri Lankan governments."

"But some members of the international community had shown confidence in this latest APRC and have been assuring

everyone that it would come up with a framework for the resolution of the conflict. This misplaced confidence has not brought any constructive outcome to date," the LTTE said.

Meanwhile, "the growing statistics of [Tamil] civilian casualties amply prove beyond doubt that this war conducted by the Sri Lankan armed forces is indeed a genocidal war against the Tamil people," the LTTE said.

"Oppressive laws sanctioned by a majoritarian Sinhala government are legitimizing its brutality. The Emergency Regulations give cover and impunity for unlawful arrest, torture, killing, and disposal of bodies without investigations."

A few days before their formal statement, the head of the Tigers' Political Wing, Mr. P. Thamichelvan, said that amid international apathy, the Sri Lankan government is waging a genocidal war against the Tamil people.

He warned that the LTTE's military restraint in the face of continuing military offensives by the Sri Lankan state should not be taken as weakness.

"Without caring for international policies and [their] passive requests [for an end to conflict], the Government of Sri Lanka is continuing its genocidal war against the Tamil people," the LTTE's Political Head S.P. Thamichelvan said last week.

"The concerns raised by the International Community have failed to make any dent on the ethnic cleansing by Colombo government which has proved itself a terrorist-state."

Moreover, "some International governments, without understanding realities, give aid to the deceitful purposes of the Sinhala government," he said.

This "will only escalate the island's ethnic conflict to hitherto unseen heights," he warned, without elaborating.

"The LTTE is maintaining patience and is still restricting itself to a defensive war," he said.

"By doing so, it wishes the International Community to realize the futility of achieving peace by dealing [in negotiations] with such a government."

Every form of international assistance given to the Government of Sri Lanka is "cunningly misused" under the cover of "development" to convert the Tamil homeland into a land of refugees and disrupt its contiguity and for Sinhala colonization, he said.

It is the Colombo government is dictating the use of international aid, he pointed out.

The core theme of the government's development plans - and the "most cruel part" of the agenda - are to dismember the contiguity of the Tamil homeland in the island's Northeast.

"The Tamil people wonder in what way this [outcome] serves the interests of the donor countries," said Mr. Thamichelvan.

The Rajapakse regime was "desperately" trying to cover up its human rights abuses, by preventing news from reaching the outside world and by using all its resources for false propaganda, he said.

"We expect the International Community to make its own assessment by visiting the affected areas and gathering information through its own sources," the LTTE's political head said.

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Back Tamil self-determination, Tamil MPs urge world

PROTESTING that the Sri Lankan government had discarded negotiating a settlement to the island's ethnic conflict, the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) urged the international community to take a principled stand on the Tamil people's right to self-determination.

The TNA is a coalition of Sri Lanka's four largest Tamil parties.

Outlining the humanitarian and human rights crisis that has emerged in the wake of Colombo's military project, the TNA said: "the Sri Lankan State's objective is to resolve the Tamil National question by military means."

"We strongly submit that the Sri Lankan State will not conform to international norms or standards," the TNA said.

"Only by the International Community taking a principled stand on the question of the right to self-determination of the Tamil people and by taking meaningful steps, can the Sri Lankan State be made to realize that it cannot continue with the present disastrous trend," the TNA argued.

"Since 1956, the democratic verdicts of the Tamil people in the North-East, at every successive election, have overwhelmingly supported this demand for self-determination. All activities by the Tamil people in support of this demand were non-violent and peaceful."

But the Sri Lankan State "has consistently denied the right to



Tamil parliamentarians pictured last year protesting against the Sri Lankan state's indiscriminate violence against Tamils in the east.

self-determination to the Tamil people, and through the 1972 and 1978 Constitutions enacted without the consent of the Tamil people, enshrined the unitary system of government which is the antithesis of the right to self-determination."

"Racial pogroms were unleashed against the Tamil people. Moderate Tamil political leadership over a period of three decades, despite valiant efforts failed to achieve positive results," the TNA pointed out.

"It was in these circumstances that armed struggle by the Tamil people commenced to defend the themselves from the genocidal intent of the Sri Lankan State and to further the struggle to realize the right to self-determination."

Saying that Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) "are at the forefront leading this struggle for self-determination of the Tamil people," the TNA argued: "due to the intransigence of the Sri Lankan State, the struggle yet continues."

The Sri Lankan Armed forces are over 99% Sinhalese, the Police forces are over 95% Sinhalese, and are openly hostile to the Tamil people, the parliamentarians said.

"The Tamil people look upon the Sri Lankan armed forces as an Army of occupation and have every reason to fear [them]," the TNA said.

"The Sri Lankan State's objective is to resolve the Tamil

National question by military means," it said, adding that since President Mahinda Rajapakse came to power, he has pursued military operations in flagrant violation of the ceasefire agreement signed in 2002 between the Sri Lankan State and the LTTE.

Meanwhile "violence against Tamil civilians has been a continuing phenomenon, and has escalated since 2006," the TNA said.

The military uses heavy weapons indiscriminately against Tamil residential areas, the MPs said. "Though the Government claims that such attacks were directed against identified LTTE targets, the victims have very frequently and mainly been Tamil civilians."

The Sinhala government was blockading Tamil areas and stopping international aid agencies from providing humanitarian relief, it said.

"Supplies of food and medicine to the civilian population have been obstructed by the Armed Forces, thus using food as a weapon of war. International and domestic NGOs and aid workers were denied access to these areas."

Military attacks by the Rajapakse regime have displaced over 300,000 Tamils with another 20,000 fleeing to India. Apart from these, "over 250,000 Tamil civilians displaced by Tsunami and over 300,000 displaced during the earlier phase of violence have not yet been resettled."

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NEWS

Why Sri Lanka is unfazed by criticism as abuses soar

DESPITE coming under strong criticism at the 6th session of United Nations Human Rights Council, Sri Lanka is showing no signs of acknowledging rampant abuses by its military or intent to taking measures to rein in the forces.

Instead, Colombo, is bluntly rejecting all charges made against by international human rights organisations.

Since the President Mahinda Rajapakse came to power in November 2005, the number of extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances and abductions by the security forces has increased savagely.

According to a report jointly compiled by three reputed civil society organizations - The Law & Society Trust, the Civil Monitoring Commission and Free Media movement - at least 547 civilians have been killed and 396 gone missing in government controlled areas in Sri Lanka this year alone.

In the past two UN human rights council sessions also, Sri Lanka's human rights record came under intense criticism and the council was urged by rights group to pass a resolution censuring the island state.

However, with Sri Lanka making last minute promises to improve matters, the council backed away from taking any action against the state.

At the time Sri Lanka prom-

ised a political package aimed at ending three decades of ethnic conflict within a month and assured the international community to improved human right record.

Foreign minister Rohitha Bogollagama at the time stated that an all-party consultative committee had emerged with several proposed constitutional reforms to be refined into a "final" plan "within a few weeks from now," setting the stage for what could be devolution of power in Sri Lanka.

However, no solution has been put forward so far and the All Party Representative Council (APRC) on which the international community placed all their hope on has collapsed with president Rajapakse indefinitely suspending it last month.

This time around, in addition to the number of human rights groups including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch voicing concerns and urging action against Sri Lanka, an international panel of eminent persons has published a scathing report dismissing Sri Lanka's own presidential enquires into the abuses and the European Union is considering its own resolution condemning the state, adding further pressure.

However, according to the Daily Mirror newspaper in Sri Lanka the Bogollagama is confi-

dent of avoiding any sanctions this time around too.

Whilst admitting a 'negative sense' prevailing in the international circles he was quoted as stating "We should be okay".

The paper further quoted him as saying "There are always two stages in a debate of this nature. They will first go straight off into the ultimate conclusions, and then they will stop short of that and look at optional arrangements. We can always play within these two determinations."

Sri Lanka remains confident of stalling international action against it whilst continuing to wage a dirty war in which killings and disappearing of disappearances are a daily routine.

Many international voices including the European Union continue to call for United Nations monitoring.

However the detailed reports compiled and presented by rights group such Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International clearly shows that lack of monitoring is not the issue but lack of incentive for Sri Lanka to cease the abuses is.

Whether a resolution in the human rights council is passed against Sri Lanka or not, as long the Sri Lankan state enjoys total impunity against the human right violations it perpetrates against the Tamil people the abuses can be expected to continue.

Colombo 'lacks credibility' on human rights - critics

**Simon Gardner
REUTERS**

BESET by censure over a rash of civil war human rights abuses, Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa set out his case at the UN General Assembly this week -- but critics doubt it will wash.

Rights groups say hundreds of people have been killed or abducted since last year, when the civil war resumed after a near four-year lull. Some abuses have been blamed on state security forces.

The government says the reports are overblown and designed to tarnish its image, and has vilified United Nations envoys for voicing concerns and slammed foreign governments and rights groups for criticism.

"The government is denying what is happening on the ground," Jehan Perera of non-partisan advisory group the National Peace Council said on Friday.

"All the government's denials lead to is an erosion of credibili-

ty."

Relatives of the murdered and disappeared -- some of the abuses blamed on state security forces or paramilitaries seen allied to the government, others on the Tigers -- want answers and accountability, and critics say they are getting neither.

Some government officials have said many who have disappeared have gone abroad on holiday or eloped with lovers.

One even accused aid group Action Contre La Faim of being responsible through negligence for the deaths of 17 of its own local staff, whose murder Nordic truce monitors have blamed on the military.

The government has also rejected calls from rights groups and aid workers for a United Nations human rights monitoring mission, saying it would infringe on its sovereignty and that it is capable of probing abuses itself.

International experts observing a presidential commission probing a raft of abuses including the aid worker murders, say the

commission is not cooperating fully with them, is failing to meet international standards, and is proceeding so slowly the probe is on course to fail.

"We have never been as isolated internationally as we are now," said Mangala Samaraweera, a former foreign minister who was sacked from the cabinet in February amid a political spat with Rajapaksa and is now allied to the main opposition.

"A government which obviously doesn't want to mend its ways and is determined to fight terrorism at the level of terrorists, I think they have a lot to answer for now."

The government is forging on with military offensives to evict the Tigers from territory they control, justifying its actions by pointing to how the United States is waging its own "war against terrorism".

Political and military analysts say seeking to annihilate the Tigers militarily will only result in more bloodshed, and see no

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NEWS



Sri Lanka's security forces enjoy a 'climate of impunity' human rights groups protest. Photo TamilNet

International rights panel slams 'cover up'

A TOP international panel has accused Sri Lanka of failing to honour promises to investigate grave human rights violations and accused the government of a virtual cover-up.

Miffed, the Sri Lanka's Attorney General's department asked the panel headed by former Indian Chief Justice P N Bhagwati not to issue statements "that affect public confidence" in the country's institutions.

The 11-member International Independent Group of Eminent Persons (IIGEP) said a government probe into 16 high-profile cases, including mass murder, had failed to make headway since being launched in November 2006.

"The IIGEP concludes that the investigation and inquiry process to date fails to comply effectively with international norms and standards," a statement said last Wednesday.

The group asked a Presidential Commission of Inquiry to take urgent steps to address the concerns, including serious conflict of interest by hiring state lawyers to look into the collusion of state employees in atrocities.

"The IIGEP reiterates its opposition to the leading role of the officers of the (state) Attorney General's Department in the Panel of Counsel to the Commission, which involves serious conflicts of interest.

"This situation lacks transparency and compromises both national and international standards of independence and impar-

tiality that are central to the credibility of and public confidence in the Commission," the statement said.

The panel led by Bhagwati handed in a report raising serious concerns to President Mahinda Rajapakse on Tuesday.

Rajapakse appointed the IIGEP to supervise another Presidential Commission that was probing the violations following concern that the investigations would not meet international standards.

'This situation lacks transparency and compromises both national and international standards of independence and impartiality'

Human rights activists had expressed fears that the government would use the IIGEP to whitewash its tainted human rights record.

Sri Lanka's Attorney General C. R. De Silva, responding to the charges said: "I urge the IIGEP not to make public statements that directly and unnecessarily affect public confidence in the Commission of Inquiry and on other public institutions of Sri Lanka such as the Attorney General's Department."

France's new Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner, a former member of the IIGEP, had warned of criticism if Sri Lanka failed to make progress in the investigations.

The cases include the massacre of 17 aid workers employed by the French charity, Action Against Hunger, or ACF, in August last year.

Other members of the panel include experts and professionals from Australia, Britain, Canada, Japan, the Netherlands, and the US as well as the EU and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

More than 5,400 people have been killed since December 2005 as fighting in Sri Lanka's bitter ethnic war escalated despite a ceasefire agreed in 2002.

Rights groups accuse the government and LTTE of extra-judicial killings and scores of disappearances of civilians and political activists.

Colombo 'lacks credibility'...

Continued from p4

clear winner on the horizon. An estimated 5,000 people have been killed since early 2006 alone, including many civilians caught in the crossfire.

Sri Lankan officials say the international community is being too soft on the Tigers, who have mounted repeated bombing and suicide attacks on troops and the

Sri Lanka warns EU over criticism

THE Sri Lankan government this week warned the European Union (EU) that any action against it at the United Nations Human Rights Council will adversely affect its 'constructive engagement' with the UN rights mechanisms.

In note to the Resident Representative of the EU in Sri Lanka Dominick Chilcott, also the British Ambassador, on Thursday September 20, the Sri Lankan government said any action would be 'counter productive' and 'negatively impact' future engagement.

"Such action will go against the letter and spirit in which Sri Lanka has been cooperating with UN human rights mechanisms. This is also a counter productive measure as it would negatively impact on the government of Sri Lanka's position aimed at maintaining a constructive engagement with the UN human rights mechanisms," read the memoir.

Earlier the European Union called for the setting up of a United Nations human rights monitoring group in Sri Lanka and proposed a resolution against the country in the Human Right Council in session now.

In addition to the EU number of human rights activists are calling for UN presence in Sri Lanka to stop abuses. Activists say UN could act as a neutral body to record and look into complaints of kidnappings, disappearances and other abuses in the civil war.

"The national mechanisms don't work," Sunila Abeysekera, executive director of the Sri Lankan rights group INFORM, told a Geneva news conference.

Criticizing the "culture of impunity" in Sri Lanka Abeysekera said it was impossible to report a human rights abuse to police or other authorities there without fearing for one's safety.

"We desperately need some outside mechanism that has the agreement of all parties," she said, adding that the government and the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) would need to accept the office's

presence for it to work well.

In the past the LTTE has welcomed the proposition of UN monitoring in the island to curb human rights violation.

Speaking the UNHCR session on September 20, Portugal which holds the EU presidency said Sri Lanka should invite UN human rights monitors to record and report on serious HR violations taking place in the country as a result of the fresh offensives by government troops.

Reacting to the Portugal's call, Sri Lanka's ambassador in Geneva Dayan Jayatillake stated that Sri Lanka was open to the idea of a field presence in the country in the form of a regional office but insisted Sri Lanka would not give in to outside pressure.

He further cited President Rajapaksa's invitation earlier this year to Human Rights High Commissioner Louise Arbour to visit the country as a spirit of respect for human rights.

Bogollagama, who met Ambassador Chilcott to handover the memoir outlined the steps taken by his government to address human rights issues and asserted there had been a positive improvement in the situation.

In an attempt to stave off any action against the island state, Bogollagama is reported to have offered to subject Sri Lanka to the Universal Periodic Review mechanism of the Human Rights Council.

The Sri Lankan letter protested that any action against Sri Lanka would be 'abused by the LTTE for its own propaganda purposes' and appealed to international agencies to avoid providing the terrorist organisation a lifeline at a time when it had come under pressure.

"In view of the above, it is the position of the Government of Sri Lanka that there is no rationale for the EU to initiate any action on Sri Lanka within the context of the HR Council, at this stage," said Bogollagama.

EU backs off p2

authorities in their campaign for a separate state in the north and east.

They say abuses by the Tigers, widely outlawed internationally as a terrorist group, are being overlooked.

"By and large (the criticism) is unfair, because all the factors in Sri Lanka are not being taken into consideration," an official in Rajapaksa's office said, asking

not to be named.

"In the rest of the world there is supposed to be a war on terror. We are carrying out our own war on terror."

"The government is taking and has taken as many steps as possible to ensure that human rights are safeguarded," he added. "There could be shortcomings, but what is being said internationally is largely overblown."

EDITORIAL & OPINION

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WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 26, 2007 No. 357

Transition

The effects of today's dynamics on Sri Lanka's sociopolitical fabric will be powerful and long lasting.

As human rights abuses by the Sri Lankan security forces continue unabated, the government of President Mahinda Rajapakse has come under severe international criticism - but nothing more painful. Indeed, the collective reaction of the international community to the soaring brutality of the state has been to do nothing - except for the obligatory hand wringing. Since last year it has been an open secret that the United States, which has been actively supporting the Sinhala armed forces since the mid-nineties, gave the Rajapakse regime a clear green light to militarily weaken, if not destroy, the LTTE. The rest of the international community has been content to watch or assist in other ways. It is with this international support behind it that the Sinhala state planned and unleashed a new war in the east last year, displacing 300,000 Tamils, blockading and starving large areas for months, and indiscriminately killing hundreds of civilians. The confidence with which the Sri Lankan military on two separate occasions shelled the chief of the Nordic ceasefire monitors, the SLMM, underscores the impunity Colombo enjoys today.

The point is that international criticism of Sri Lanka's human rights abuses is just that - mere words. This week the EU again dumped its' much talked about resolution on Sri Lanka at the United Nations Human Rights Councils - just as has in the two other sessions in the past year. However, even if the EU resolution had been passed (and there was no real expectation that, even if tabled, it would) it would have had no real impact in restraining the Rajapakse regime. This is primarily because the critics are the same international community which is ensuring Sri Lanka has the financial, political and, especially, military assistance to prosecute the war against the LTTE. International dismay over the abuses is genuine - if only Colombo would fight a clean war, their moral dilemmas would end. But the priority for the US and other like-minded states, as President Rajapakse reminded the United Nations this week, is 'fighting terrorism.'

Whilst pledging its continuing 'friendship' the United States this week urged the Rajapakse regime to come up with a political solution to the conflict. Any solution, apparently, would do - the word 'federalism' could even be left out, the US helpfully said, tacitly endorsing Rajapakse's declaration last month that this much hailed compromise on 'separation' had now become a 'dirty word.' The irony is that whilst the LTTE is vilified for seeking independence ('extremism'), the Sri Lankan state is encouraged to offer even

less than the international community was advocating it had to in 2002. The only reason for this abandonment of federalism is misguided confidence that (i) the LTTE can be militarily marginalized and (ii) without the LTTE, the Tamils would (have to) accept anything going. Whilst the US et al continue the mantra that 'there is no military solution,' this is precisely the option they are encouraging and supporting the state to pursue.

Sanguine belief

This approach turns on a belief, as we have argued before, that the Tamils have no sense of shared political community and would be satisfied with 'more development' of the Northeast. Furthermore, the Sinhala leadership and, now, the international community explicitly link the viability of the Tamil liberation struggle with the LTTE's military standing. The LTTE, it is argued, has 'lost' the east and is under military pressure. Ergo, the Tamil struggle is weakened and the Tamils will accept a much lower extent of power-sharing. As ever, we will not join the burgeoning ranks of military analysts on Sri Lanka, but simply point out that the LTTE has been written off (and written out) many times in its 30 year history.

The irony is that amid this sanguine belief in (even anticipation of) a military victory, there is no consideration of what is rapidly happening to Sri Lanka's socio-political fabric - or what this means for the future of war and peace in the island. The Sinhala chauvinism that successive southern leaders have concealed to varying degrees is now naked. From the abandon with which the all-Sinhala military blasts Tamil villages at will to the arrogance with which Tamils and Muslims areas in the east are being systematically colonized by state-backed Sinhalese, the racism endemic to the Sri Lankan state is now uninhibited. At no stage in Sri Lanka's past has the polarization of Sri Lanka's ethnic communities been more acute; the Sinhalese versus the minorities (all of whom speak Tamil).

From the outset, the Tamils have been arguing that their grievance is (Sinhala) state oppression. The demand for a greater say in running the post-colonial state was not to get better access to resources, but to halt the Sinhala chauvinism that was rapidly permeating it. The 1956 Sinhala Only 'revolution', as President Rajapakse proudly refers to it, was not about a problem of economics, but of identity - who is a legitimate inheritor of the island and who is not. The Sinhalese have collectively failed to acknowledge the Tamils

as founding race of the island and, more importantly, the post-colonial state. The initial Tamil demand for power-sharing at the centre was an effort to secure their birthright. The escalation to a demand for federalism was an effort to prevent the dismemberment and colonization of their homeland. The demand for outright independence (and that was made long before the militants took charge) was a final bid to escape the total institutionalization of Sinhala supremacy in the 1972 constitution.

Abstraction

However, some members of the international community have opted to see Sri Lanka's conflict simply as one of two abstract extreme demands - the 'Sinhala nationalist' insistence on a unitary state and a 'Tamil nationalist' demand for independence. Based on this abstraction they have urged both sides to 'compromise' and have proposed all manner of solutions based on a different points in a perceived continuum between these two extremes. But, to reiterate, the Tamils began demanding independence as a means to escape (Sinhala) state oppression, not as an arbitrary political ambition in itself.

In a misguided belief the LTTE can be forced to negotiate (and there is curiously no consideration of the sustainability of a 'solution' induced thus) for something short of independence, the international community has allowed the full blown emergence of the very state racism that triggered the Tamil freedom struggle in the first place. The past two years have been critical ones; Sri Lanka's state, politics and communities are being slowly but steadily transformed. As the ethnic polarization escalates, the limited communal linkages that survived through the three decades armed conflict are snapping. Ethnic hierarchy is being writ large - from the ceremonies of state to interaction on the street, what else explains when 'the army' becomes, for ordinary Sinhalese, 'our army'?

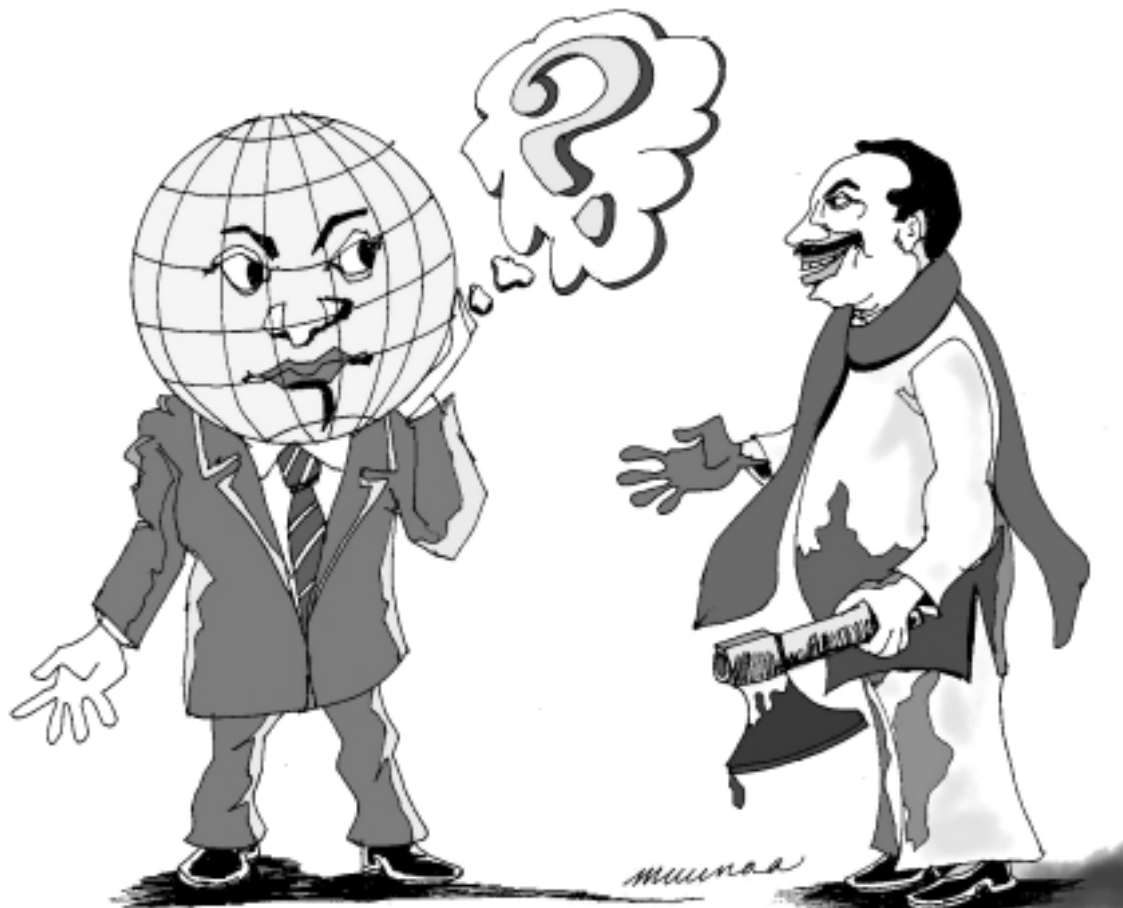
To reiterate, the Tamil struggle emerged as a reaction to (Sinhala) state oppression. Amid the frustrations at the impotence of democratic processes in stemming the racism, the armed struggle emerged (primarily post 1983) as a reaction to state terror. Now both Sinhala racism and state terror are rampant, unrestrained by either international norms or international action. The consequences on Sri Lanka's sociopolitical fabric will be powerful and long-lasting. Amid these dynamics does the argument the LTTE is weakened still make strategic sense?

EDITORIAL & OPINION

What does 'Responsibility to Protect' mean for the Tamils?

Though only recently invested in international law, the world is already facing a rhetoric-implementation gap on R2P.

Kanthavanam
Tamil Guardian



RECENT calls, such as outlined in a International Crisis Group (ICG) report setting out the case for international intervention in Sri Lanka, couched in the language of the doctrine 'Responsibility to Protect' or 'R2P', is a far cry from its embryonic use in Serbia where the wishes of the Kosovan Albanian community have been taken up by the most powerful states.

As an emerging doctrine in international relations R2P defines the responsibility of states as protecting populations from grave crisis and to react to them wherever they occur.

R2P was formerly adopted by the United Nations (UN) in 2005 in the midst of the crisis in Darfur, following its emergence as the doctrine behind NATO's assault on Serbia in 1999 to protect the Kosovans.

However since Kosovo, the architects responsible for framing the legality of the R2P doctrine have aimed to limit such intervention to "tackling the crisis by formulating responses and solutions" that work by nevertheless maintaining the territorial integrity of the offending state.

R2P sets out in international law the primary responsibility that states have in protecting their own populations, whilst conferring an onus on the international community to act when these governments fail to protect the most vulnerable.

However, though only recently invested in international law, the world is already facing a rhetoric-implementation gap on R2P.

Put loosely, states wishing to implement the doctrine are too often likely to do so for divergent and self-serving reasons, so whilst the theory is sound, implementation is often weak or skewed.

Countries like the US may cite its obligation under R2P to intervene to overthrow regimes which

it cites as 'harbouring terrorists' or to 'protect' a government at threat of losing a war to 'terrorists' or that has extremist views.

The same policy however, was not used against governments similar to the Pinochet regime in Chile which killed large numbers of people conveniently labelled as communists. The regime was warmly supported by the US and UK.

The US and other western states, without irony, condemn China which has until recently opposed high-level external intervention in Sudan's Darfur where killings, which many described as genocide, are still ongoing, years after the crisis began.

Therefore opposition to and manipulation of international law and binding UN resolutions means that questions of intervention become more politico-legal and are not as clear cut as advocates of external intervention on behalf of human rights might hope.

Despite the responsibilities of states and the obligations of the international community being clearly stated in the resolutions permitting intervention under R2P this still occurs.

Consequently intervention by the UN or other UN authorized forces often becomes bogged down in the political dynamics of the offending state.

In other words, it depends on what current international paradigm the state in question invokes as its defence. These days it is usually the 'War on Terror' - during the Cold War it used to be 'fighting communism'.

It also depends on the state's allies - if particularly influential or UN veto holding states are friendly with the accused government - and how long the state resists pressure to consent to a UN presence in their country.

Under most aspects of international law the UN may not enter the country unless the recognized

government grants permission. Which is why action without the state's consent is termed 'intervention.'

Therefore, if as some are arguing, the time has come for R2P to be used in Sri Lanka, the question becomes which organization or nation(s) would intervene; what are their motivations, and what would the outcome be?

It is well known and documented that successive Sri Lankan Governments have and continue to undertake acts of violence against the Tamil community. Most manifestly the state not only failed to protect Tamil civilians from Sinhalese mobs in 'Black' July 1983, it actively supported the pogrom.

It did so whilst receiving undisturbed political and financial support from the international community.

Contrast this to Pakistan which was promptly expelled from the Commonwealth when President Musharraf overthrew the elected government of the day - whatever effect that had.

In the Sri Lankan context, the rhetoric-implementation gap is clear.

With the mountain of evidence strongly showing the extrajudicial violence undertaken by Sri Lankan security forces; the proliferation of paramilitaries, ethnic cleansing and colonisation, etc, intervention can be argued under international law as necessary.

Take instances such as the denial of food for three months to the people of Vaharai during the Army's siege of the region last year, reminiscent of tactics from the Balkans in the 1990s. It took massive international pressure to get one convoy in - and only half the trucks got through then.

Therefore, it should be theoretically possible to gain a UN resolution backing intervention to protect Tamil civilians.

However, there have not been any serious follow up by the

international community with credible explorations as to the implementation of R2P.

Instead international support for Sri Lanka is continually extended under the rubric of the 'War on Terror', not least through new proscriptions of the LTTE and the arrest of Diaspora Tamils as 'terrorist supporters.'

By contrast, NATO, even without a UN mandate in Kosovo, was willing to bomb Serbia to stop the genocide, in effect supporting the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) in its fight against the Serbian military.

On the whole though, given in the current international climate around the 'war on terror', the containment policy of the US and others towards the LTTE specifically, obtaining any UN Security Council approved intervention to safeguard the Tamil people is an impossibility.

In any case, what we are seeing is a strong resistance to external pressure on human rights by the Rajapakse regime and indeed other Sinhala parties, such as the UNP, who are either seeking to delay foreign intervention for as long as possible or restricting it to minor 'reforms of the state'.

This is clearly evident in Sri Lankan ministers' confident attacks on leading UN officials, including denouncing them as 'terrorists', whenever they protest human rights or humanitarian breaches by the government.

The stark difference between rhetoric and implementation of R2P and opposition to intervention by key states is not uncommon - UN intervention in Kosovo was vetoed by Russia, citing opposition to UN interference in the 'internal affairs' of its friend and long time ally, Serbia. This continues to today with Serbian-Russian opposition to an independent Kosovo.

Rather than coming to champion the rights of the Tamil people to self-determination, as with

Kosovo, the most generous international intervention will be the imposition of a minimal solution that will maintain the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka, whilst militarily defeating the LTTE.

This can be seen with the suggestion by the European Union that, despite the Rajapakse regime's unabashed rejection of a negotiation process, the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) should come up with its own proposal for a solution to the conflict.

This is nothing more than another attempt to isolate the LTTE from any future peace process or settlement and further weaken the Tamil polity.

In any case, if the Sinhalese establishment is sincere about undertaking the type of reforms the international community envisages, would it not have done so by now?

If the international community sincerely wanted an inclusive peace process and a federal solution that, whilst maintaining the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka also gives Tamils a genuine stake in and ownership of the political process, why did they continue to aid the state despite its refusal to honour the PTOMS agreement or continue negotiations on the interim administration for the Northeast?

Sri Lanka's post-independence history shows that Tamils have no stake in the Sinhala project that is the Sri Lankan state. This is why the Tamil struggle came about.

Amid the multi-faceted brutality being visited on our people, the time has come to realise our right to rule ourselves in an independent state.

If international intervention is to take place in Sri Lanka it should mirror the Kosovo intervention, recognizing the crimes being committed against our people and accepting that independence from Sinhala rule is the only solution for the Tamil question.

BOMBING CAMPAIGN

Sri Lanka jets hammer Vanni civilians

Bombs explode near hospitals, schools and markets

THE Sri Lankan Air Force has intensified its bombing raids on Tamil Tiger-held Vanni region in the past week, targeting populated areas.

Several civilians have killed and injured in five separate air raids since September 11. The Sri Lankan military insists it is attacking LTTE bases and cadres.

Some analysts suggest the increased aerial bombardment signals an imminent offensive by the Sri Lankan security forces into the region.

On Saturday September 22, for the second day in a row, Israeli-made Kfir jets bombed Viswamadhu, bordering the Kilinochchi and Mullaitheevu districts, killing an 85-year-old man and injuring 14 people including elderly and children including a six-months-old baby and a 9-year-old girl.

Civilians at the Visuvamadu market, situated 350 meters from the attack site, fled in panic as the bombs tore through the village.

On Friday September 21 two Kfir bombers dropped eight bombs in two sorties just after midday on Visuvamadu junction, behind the shops in the area.

A 65-year-old man and a three year old child were wounded.

Five students in a school located 800 meters from the bombed area fainted in shock when the bombs exploded.

However the Sri Lankan military claimed to have bombed a LTTE military complex targeting a meeting of top leaders.

Over 400 students from Punnai Neeravi Viththiyalam, and 900 students from Visuvamadu Maha Viththiyalayam narrowly escaped death and injury in the bombings.

Had the schools been hit in the indiscriminate bombing, a tragedy of the magnitude of the massacre of schoolgirls in Vallipunam last year would have been inflicted again on residents of Puthukkudiyiruppu.

Over fifty school girls were killed in August 2006 when SLAF jets bombed the Senchola children's home where a residential first aid course was underway.

According to Air Force spokesman Group Cap. Ajantha Silva, the air strike badly damaged an LTTE complex west of Puthukkudiyiruppu.

On the previous day,

September 20, six civilians were injured and rushed to Puthukkudiyiruppu hospital after SLAF bombers dropped bombs near Puthukkudiyiruppu town, targeting the Tamil Rehabilitation Organization (TRO) Mullaitheevu district office and the civilian settlements in the area.

The TRO buildings were damaged, and a civilian house was fully destroyed in the attack when the bombs exploded on the air and the ground, 1 km near the town on A-35 highway.

Tension prevailed in the town as civilians at the market and other locations fled in panic.

Patients at the Puthukkudiyiruppu hospital ran out of the hospital as doors and windows of the building rattled. An average of four hundred people attend the hospital each day.

Following that bombing, the Sri Lankan Media Centre for National Security (MCNS) said that the Air Force jets had bombed a weapons and ammunition storage site of the LTTE.

The MCNS even claimed the airstrike had set off a wave of explosions that lasted more than 90 minutes. The MCNS did not comment on injured civilians or the damaged TRO offices.

A week earlier on Thursday September 13, SLAF bombers dropped 12 bombs on Puthukkudiyiruppu. The bombs exploded for twenty minutes, between 8:30 and 8:50 am, shaking the buildings in the town.

The students of Puthukkudiyiruppu Central College were out in the grounds at the time, assembled for morning prayers. Many students fainted in fear while the rest of the students and teachers scattered in panic. In the ensuing scramble many students were injured.

Out patients and those warded in Puthukkudiyiruppu hospital also fled from the hospital premises fearing attacks on the hospital area.

Following this attack, Sri Lankan defence sources claimed to have accurately hit a vital strategic operational base of LTTE's financial wing leader, Mr. Thamilendi.

Two days earlier, on Tuesday September 11, four SLAF Kfir jets bombed Vaddakkachchi area in Kilinochchi district Tuesday



NEWS

Tamil Tigers still dangerous foes

Sri Lanka's most well known defence correspondents warns that whilst the government claims successes against the LTTE, the military balance remains unchanged.

Iqbal Athas
Sunday Times

THE undeclared Eelam War IV, now raging, has seen a slow but sure increase in the military thrust by the Security Forces against Tiger guerrillas. Since the Government's official claims that the guerrillas have been "completely driven away" from the East, the focus of military actions has been almost entirely in the North.

That is not to say the East has fallen silent. Small groups of guerrillas, mostly intelligence operatives, have re-appeared in some parts of the Batticaloa district. In the adjoining Ampara district, there has been a string of skirmishes with the Police Special Task Force (STF) commandos. They are also moving around in some parts of Trincomalee north.

In the North, the Security Forces have continued their efforts, particularly ahead of their defended localities west of the Omanthai entry-exit point, located some eight kilometres north of Vavuniya. Moves to seize guerrilla-dominated territory are meeting with heavy resistance.

Yet, their efforts continue. Air Force fighter jets have been bombing several locations in the North including Pooneryn, a guerrilla staging area where there has been a reported build up for the past several months. This is for a foray into the Jaffna peninsula.

It is against this backdrop that the Sri Lanka Navy made what is easily one of its biggest achievements - the interception and destroying of three cargo vessels of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

Since the re-capture of Toppigala [in the Batticaloa district], there have been no major guerrilla attacks. It came amidst a relative lull in the form of any significant retaliatory response. This drew further attention after the Navy's attack on the LTTE ships.

This situation led to many conclusions by influential sections in the Government, both political and military. Some declare that the guerrilla military strength has been completely weakened. They even estimate that it is by over fifty per cent.

This has diminished their capability to strike at targets outside the North and East, they argue. Others contend that in the light of this, a military thrust towards the North would virtually finish the LTTE's military capability. Yet others also say the guerrillas were now incapable of staging any attacks in the City of Colombo, suburbs or other outstation areas.

No doubt the Security Forces and the Police (including the Special Task Force) have played a major role in curbing Tiger guerrilla attacks. However, has the military capability of the LTTE been completely weakened? The question requires a dispassionate appraisal.

There have been many such occasions in the past where such underestimation and a consequent "underestimated" response have led to unpleasant consequences.

Before examining these aspects, first to the Navy's success story as recounted by a high-rank-

ing officer. The intelligence had come from different credible sources. The background data were available from confessions made by captured Sea Tiger cadres. Yet, the LTTE ships were operating in the high seas, off the Sumatra coast in Indonesia.

The next day (Monday September 3) SLNS Suranimala, the Israeli-built Fast Missile Vessel (FMV) set sail from the Eastern Naval Area Headquarters at the Dockyard in Trincomalee. Also heading out from the same port was SLNS Sayura, the Indian built Advanced Offshore Patrol Vessel (AOPV). Departing from the Navy's SLNS Rangala base in Colombo was SLNS Samudura, the former United States Coast Guard vessel "Courageous." This vessel was a gift from the United States and was refurbished in that country at a cost of US \$ 10 million (over Rs 100 million).

The Sri Lanka Navy flotilla sailed for almost a week. They had to resort to mid sea re-fuelling to continue their voyage. Arriving at a location in the international waters off Sumatra, the flotilla began their search operations for LTTE vessels beginning midnight on Sun-day (September 9). Officers and sailors on board were well briefed on logistics movements of LTTE vessels and the sea-lanes they used.

The first encounter with MV Manyoshi, an old cargo vessel with a crane on board, came at noon on Monday (September 10). Upon confirming that it was one



Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa and Navy Commander Wasantha Karannagoda at a ceremony at the Trincomalee Naval Base last week to welcome the ships that reportedly sank three LTTE arms ships. Photo Dinuka Liyanawatte/ Daily Mirror

of the LTTE cargo vessels, 76 mm guns on board the SLNS Suranimala began to fire. Others followed engulfing the aft of the vessel in a ball of fire. The second to be hit on the same day was MV Scishin shortly after dusk had set in. Its aft too was enveloped in black plumes of smoke. It was only before dawn the next day (Tuesday September 11) that the Navy flotilla spotted MV Koshiya, said to be a tanker that was carrying fuel for the LTTE. Navy

officials say it was hit and sank early morning. There were no signs of the vessel after the crack of dawn.

A fourth cargo vessel, MV Matsushima, high ranking Navy officials said, could not be located in the vicinity. It was known through intelligence information that this vessel was one of those operating in the deep seas off Sumatra. However, efforts to trace it had not been successful.

According to high-ranking Navy officials, MV Manyoshi was carrying a large quantity of 120 mm mortar shells, fuel for aircraft, a variety of spare parts for vehicles, boats, communication equipment and striped Tiger guerrilla camouflage uniform material. On board the MV Scishin there had been three 120 mm mortar launchers, mortar rounds for them, medical supplies and a variety of canned food items.

But it must be remembered that despite the heavy losses to the LTTE, last week's deep sea encounter in itself does not alter the military balance.

Replenishing their military supplies, where the LTTE is concerned, is an ongoing process. In March 2003, just over a year after the Ceasefire Agreement between the then Government and the LTTE, the Navy sank a guerrilla tanker in the deep seas northeast of Mullaitivu. The vessel was identified as MV Koimar and had been carrying large stocks of ammunition and artillery shells. Thereafter, in June 2003 the Navy



One of the ships the Sri Lanka Navy says was destroyed off the coast of Indonesia whilst carrying arms for the LTTE. Photo SLN

NEWS



Col. Soosai back in charge of Sea Tigers

Colonel Soosai, the top commander of the LTTE's naval wing, the Sea Tigers, resumed duties this week after recovering from his injuries in a boating accident that killed his youngest son. In his first public appearance following the accident two months ago, Col. Soosai on Sep. 26 praised the military medics of the LTTE the speedy recovery that has enabled him to resume his duties.

"During the Indo-Eelam war, I was injured. Our medics didn't have enough facilities at that time. Seriously injured cadres were transferred overseas for treatment. But, our medics are capable of treating serious injuries now," he told a public gathering at Puthukkudityiruppu, in LTTE controlled Mullaitivu.

sank two more LTTE cargo vessels, each with a deadweight of 600 tons. This was some 200 nautical miles northeast of Trincomalee.

In June 2003, the Navy received credible intelligence information that two guerrilla cargo ships were each towing heavily laden boats. These boats, it was later revealed, had been built in a boatyard in Indonesia. They were being towed until it reached closer to Sri Lankan shores. Thereafter, their engines were powered and the boats were moved to a Sea Tiger base. Among the cargo on board the two vessels were 23 mm anti-aircraft guns, assorted ammunition and artillery shells.

[Last week] There was a grand welcome ceremony at the Gun Boat Pier in the Dockyard in Trincomalee for the Sri Lankan Naval flotilla that took part in the attack on these two cargo ships. The flotilla included the Navy's Israeli built former Fast Missile Vessel (FMV), SLNS Nandimitra, SLNS Ranawickrema, SLNS Ranajaya, SLNS Prathapa and SLNS Udara. Navy Commander Vice Admiral Karannagoda was on hand at the ceremony to receive the return to port of the flotilla.

There have also been instances where inclement weather or other obstacles prevented the Navy from tracking down guerrilla logistics vessels. One such event, where they were almost on the verge of closing in on a big cargo vessel came in May 2003 in the deep seas some 150 nautical miles off the shores of Mullaitivu. This cargo vessel was also towing a heavily laden boat. However, Naval craft lost track of it after trailing it for days.

As is clear from the above events, it has been a practice for the LTTE to change the modus operandi of its logistics movements periodically. More so, after the latest attack by the Navy

bared detailed information of its operational activities.

For over two years now, there has been considerable concern in the defence and security establishment that the LTTE was using hideouts in Indonesia.

Last year, Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickremanayake flew to Jakarta for a meeting with Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhono. As a special envoy of President Rajapaksa he raised issue over this matter. The Indonesian authorities had assured co-operation but urged that specific instances be made available to them. Government sources said that a full dossier that will include details pertaining to the Navy's recent attack was now being formulated.

An instance where the pattern of LTTE logistics movements changed became known recently. This was after reports that the guerrillas were using hideouts in the neighbouring southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu as a "transshipment facility." After stockpiling military supplies there, they were using the shallow Gulf of Mannar to smuggle them into Sri Lanka across the western seaboard. The Sea Tiger base at Viduthalivu is known to play an important role in this regard, according to intelligence sources. This is causing considerable concern to the Security Forces in view of the induction of some quantities of military supplies through this sector.

Another was the shores of Silavathurai, located north of the Wilpattu National Park. Here the Tiger guerrillas had regularly maintained a mobile presence to take delivery of military supplies smuggled from Tamil Nadu. They considered it safe since larger Navy patrol craft could not traverse the Gulf of Mannar due to the shallow seas. The fact that there was no major permanent guerrilla presence in the area was

proved after the Security Forces conducted a complete sweep of the area.

This came after the LTTE demonstration of its air strike capability early this year. During the recent military offensive, an LTTE intelligence cadre and a member of the political wing were among those killed. A "suicide boat" and 39 other boats were seized. Now Security Forces are to return the boats said to belong to the civilians.

The fact that the Tiger guerrillas have not engaged in any major military attacks in the recent months, particularly after the recapture of Toppigala in July this year, means they have not expended vast quantities of ammunition. Even the use of mortar and artillery has been less.

The main reason for this is the undivided attention to meet a military thrust to the North, either from south of the Jaffna peninsula or northwards from the defended localities astride the entry-exit point at Omanthai. The latter would be either from the Mannar side or from the Weli Oya end. That pre-occupation has been militarily uppermost to them.

That is why a considerable strength holed up in the jungles of Toppigala were ordered to return to the North. These cadres were earlier on the hop when the Security Forces seized Sampur, Vakara and later made their foray into Toppigala. Intelligence sources confirm that in the light of this triggering off any major incidents, be it in the North, East or areas outside including the City

of Colombo became low priority. Stepped-up efforts to stockpile more military supplies, needed when they come under heavy pressure from the Security Forces, are also for the same reason.

LTTE's Political Wing leader S.P. Tamilselvan broke silence during past months to tell Tamilnet that it has been intentional. It may be rhetoric.

But it is not rhetoric that is to be dismissed. Despite the attacks on the ground, at sea and by air, Tiger guerrillas retain a military capability. Whilst strongly acknowledging the brave role of the Security Forces and Police to deal with them, the truth of the threats posed by the guerrillas should not be buried by heaps of propaganda. Those who do so are fooling only themselves.

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NEWS

Sign of the times in Tamil Nadu

VETERAN Tamil Nadu activist Pazha Nedumaran's attempted crossing of the Palk Straits in a bid to deliver emergency relief to Sri Lanka's Tamils was thwarted last week when he and hundreds of volunteers were arrested. Whilst the attempted crossing and its 'failure' has been dismissed, especially in Sri Lanka's south, as a stunt by mavericks on the fringe of Tamil Nadu's politics, the event has both highlighted and boosted resurgent support in the south Indian state for the Sri Lankan Tamils' cause.

Nedumaran began his protest fast last Wednesday after he was arrested, along with 300 volunteers from the Tamil Eelam Supporters Coordination Committee (TESCC) as they attempted to cross the Palk Straits at Nagapattinam.

On Saturday he called off the fast after Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi wrote to him assuring that all steps would be undertaken to ensure that the relief supplies reach the Sri Lankan Tamils.

Whilst media reports in Sri Lanka have generally interpreted the attempted crossing as a failure in light of the early arrests of Nedumaran and TESCC activists, who have been portrayed as maverick figures of the political fringe attempting an illegal entry into Sri Lankan waters, the impact of the event in Tamil Nadu has been quite different.

Although the activists failed to make the crossing, their protest was well planned and had drawn the support of parties and figures representing a wide spectrum of the political mainstream in Tamil Nadu.

None of the local or national parties in Tamil Nadu opposed or criticised the TESCC's declared intent to enter Sri Lanka.

The TESCC's efforts have also been successful in generating further publicity and political attention for the Eelam issue.

Indeed, the events surrounding the attempted crossing and the responses from other political actors in Tamil Nadu to the TESCC's humanitarian efforts reveals a great deal about the place of the Eelam issue in Tamil Nadu politics.

Furthermore, these events and reactions suggests that Tamil Nadu's press, which routinely covers the Eelam issue in neutral or even hostile tones, is not a good indicator of popular sentiments - sentiments which Tamil Nadu's parties are well aware of.

The TESCC, an umbrella group comprising a number of Tamil organisations, had collected relief material worth Rs. 1

crore (\$2.5 million) for Tamils living under Sri Lankan government imposed embargoes in the north eastern areas of the island.

After repeated attempts to deliver the humanitarian supplies through the official channels of the Indian Red Cross failed, the TESCC declared in August this year it would cross the Palk Straits itself to deliver the aid.

Even as it organised the crossing, the TESCC openly acknowledged that the act would be illegal and the probability of arrests.

The TESCC's main objective in courting arrest was to raise awareness in Tamil Nadu of the humanitarian crises facing Sri Lanka's Tamils and to keep the Eelam issue firmly in the public eye.

TESCC volunteers attempted the well - publicized crossing after travelling across Tamil Nadu and holding public meetings to explain the intent of their protest.

Volunteers from the TESCC were divided into two groups, with one group led by Nedumaran, traveling from Trichy to Nagapattinam while a second group proceeded from Madurai to Rameshwaram to attempt the crossing to Mannar.

While addressing a public meeting at Thanjavore, en route to Nagapattinam, Pazha Nedumaran made it clear that the volunteers expected to be arrested.

"We know what will happen to us. But we are ready to make any sacrifice to save Sri Lankan Tamils," Nedumaran said.

Some analysts said the publicity of mass arrest was the TESCC's central objective.

They referred to Mahatma Gandhi's flagrant violation of the Colonial 'Salt Laws' which prohibited Indians from mining salt - an activity deemed a British monopoly. In the famous 1930 'Salt March', Gandhi led a group of Indians to the salt plains at Dandi to mine salt in defiance of the laws. They were all promptly arrested, triggering widespread anger and a civil disobedience campaign.

It is not accidental, analysts said, that Nedumaran and the TESCC were using the language of 'civil disobedience' to describe their planned crossing when publishing it.

What is notable about the event, therefore, is how Nedumaran and the TESCC have also won support from parties across the Tamil Nadu political scene.

Parties like the MDMK, PMK and the Dalit Panthers of India, that are known for their solidarity with the Eelam Tamils took part in the TESCC's efforts.

Although small, these parties



74 year old Nedumaran (speaking) has long been campaigning for the rights of Eelam Tamils.

play an active part in politics both at the State and Union level. The PMK is a member of India's current United Front Government and holds the important Health Ministry.

Similarly, the MDMK was a member of the previous BJP led ruling coalition, the National Democratic Alliance.

The Dalit Panthers of India represents a new and important force in Tamil Nadu politics and

visited Nedumaran during his fast.

The MDMK, PMK and DPI were actively involved in the TESCC's event.

While the Madurai campaign was launched by PMK leader Ramdoss, the Tiruchirappalli campaign was launched by MDMK leader Vaiko. DPI General Secretary, Thol Thirumavilavan received the group traveling to Nagapattinam while the second group was received in Rameshwaram by the Indian National League leader Basheer Ahmad.

The Indian National League is an all India Muslim based political party that is beginning to have an important presence in Tamil Nadu, entering into coalition agreements with both the DMK and the AIADMK.

The fluid coalition politics of Tamil Nadu has meant that there is no simple line dividing the parties on the Sri Lankan Tamil issue.

The PMK and the MDMK, have both joined coalitions headed by leading parties and arch rivals AIADMK and the DMK.

Although the AIADMK, particularly its leader J. Jeyalalitha has a reputation, especially in Sri Lanka, as being strongly anti Eelam, in the 2006 state assembly elections stridently pro-Eelam MDMK contested as part of the AIADMK led coalition.

The DMK led coalition during the 2006 State Assembly elections included the INC, CPI and the pro-Eelam PMK.

Importantly the Dravida Kazhagam, the intellectual source of all the Dravidian parties and the moral guardian of the Dravidian movement as a whole, has been an active advocate of the Eelam Tamil issue.

Senior members of the highly respected DK have led agitations and protests against the Sri Lankan government's treatment of the Tamils there.

Paradoxically, while political parties which have been vocal in their support of the Eelam issue are part of the Tamil Nadu politi-

cal mainstream, the press coverage of the Sri Lankan conflict is generally either neutral or unabashedly pro Colombo.

The coverage of the Sri Lankan conflict by The Hindu, an important south Indian English language paper, is generally recognised to have a strident anti Eelam bias.

And even whilst not so openly biased, the mass circulation Tamil language dailies tend to take a neutral or slightly pro Sri Lankan government position on their reporting of the war.

This discrepancy between the sentiments towards the Eelam issue on the street and press coverage is, according to by south Indian political analysts, an accepted part of the political landscape.

As one analyst put it, 'everyone knows that what actually happens in Tamil Nadu and what gets reported in the Tamil Nadu press are two different things.'

The Tamil Nadu press reporting of the Eelam Tamil issue is widely thought to be influenced by both political and economic pressures.

The politics of the press, as much as the politics it reports is a favourite topic of politically literate conversation amongst both the middle classes and at the ubiquitous and popular tea - shops.

Tamil journalists say fear of breaching India's anti terrorism legislation was important in checking the tone of their reporting on Eelam-related issues.

Interestingly, reports of local journalists being paid handsomely by EPDP leader Douglas Devananda to adopt an anti Eelam bias are regularly heard. The paramilitary leader makes regular private visits to Chennai and operates out of five star hotel suites, some journalists say.

Despite the press coverage, the Eelam issue continues to be live in south Indian politics stemming from what analysts say is widespread sympathy for the suffering of the Sri Lankan Tamils.

In December 2005, the then

None of the Tamil Nadu political parties criticised the decision to make the illegal crossing to Sri Lanka.

is currently supporting the DMK government in the Tamil Nadu State Assembly.

Significantly, the TESCC protest and Nedumaran's fast also drew vocal support from a number of major local and national parties.

Alongside the Tamil Nadu Parties, national parties like the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the formerly ruling BJP expressed their solidarity Nedumaran. His protest also received support from the Communist Party of India (Marxist) CPI-M, well known for its stand against Tamil Eelam.

State CPI-M secretary N Varadarajan in a statement urged the Centre to allow relief material to be sent to the island Tamils.

The veteran CPI leader R Nallakannu, state CPI secretary D Pandian and BJP leader and former Union minister S Thirunavukkarasar, besides some Tamil scholars and film directors, also

NEWS



Hundreds of TESCC volunteers rally near the Tamil Nadu coast, shortly before they were arrested.

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister J Jeyalalitha cancelled a meeting with the newly elected Sri Lankan President Rajapakse who was on his first official tour to India.

According to sources close to the AIADMK leadership, the meeting was cancelled with a view to the forthcoming Tamil Nadu State Assembly elections in May 2006; it was felt that meeting the hard line Sinhala nationalist President would not play well with the Tamil Nadu electorate.

Political parties in Tamil Nadu have often found it difficult to ignore public sentiment on the Eelam issue.

In August 2006, when the Sri Lankan Air Force bombed the Chencholai children's home in Sri Lanka, killing 52 school girls and wounding 129 others, the Tamil Nadu state assembly, reflecting widespread public anger, passed a resolution condemning the act as 'uncivilized and inhumane.'

With no official reaction elsewhere in the world, some Tamil observers noted the similarity in reactions to the 1983 anti Tamil pogrom. The event provoked widespread protests in Tamil Nadu amidst complete silence from the rest of the world.

The DMK has also been publicly supportive of the Eelam Tamil cause. Then Mozhli, daughter of the DMK chief minister Karunanidhi and currently Rajya Sabha member was vocal in the protests against the Chencholai massacre.

DMK leader and current Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, M. Karunanidhi, as the then leader of the opposition, visited Vaiko, the leader of the MDMK, in November 2002 while he was serving a prison term charged with making speeches supportive of the banned LTTE.

Senior MDMK sources say Karunanidhi's visit was intended to demonstrate sympathy with the MDMK stance on the Eelam issue.

Then recently, the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister sent a warm note

of condolence to Adele Balasingham, wife of Anton Balasingham after the LTTE Chief Negotiator and Political Strategist's demise in December 2006.

The widespread support from mainstream political parties extended to Pazha Nedumaran and the TESCC protest last week reflects the importance of the Eelam issue in Tamil Nadu.

Their attempted crossing of the Palk Strait unveils the complex relationship between Tamil Nadu politics and the Sri Lankan conflict.

Whilst successive Sri Lankan governments have focused exclu-

sively on building a good relationship with the press, it is the suffering of island's Tamils that underpins sympathy and support in south India.

It is in that context the attempted crossing should be understood. The event has heightened sentiments in Tamil Nadu around Colombo's denial of food and other emergency supplies to the Tamils of Sri Lanka.

Conversely, the high profile agitation in Tamil Nadu is serving to ameliorate what many Tamils see as their deliberate isolation by the rest of the international community.

BJP wants food and medicine for Tamils

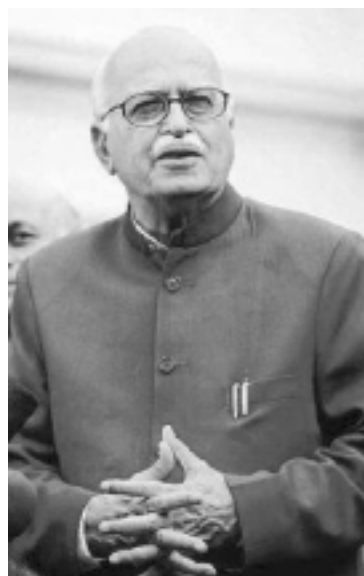
EXPRESSING concern over the "deterioration of situation" in Northeastern Sri Lanka due to prolonged embargo imposed by the Colombo government, senior Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Lal Krishna Advani last week that the Indian government should send humanitarian aid to the Tamils by despatching food and medicine.

Advani (pictured) told reporters that the aid, in consultation with the Sri Lankan government, should be routed through the Red Cross.

Opposing the Tamil Tigers' demand for an independent Tamil Eelam, to safeguard the Tamils from Sinhala oppression, Advani said a solution to the ethnic problem should be found within a unified Sri Lanka.

He admitted, however, that ensuring justice for the Tamils of Sri Lanka was important in solving the ethnic strife there.

The Indian government should deploy the full weight of its political and diplomatic resources to ensure justice and dignified living for Tamils within



the framework of a united Sri Lanka, he said.

The Tamils should be reassured that the government in Colombo would care for their welfare without discrimination. Unfortunately, there had been widespread grievances about discrimination in the tsunami relief work, he said.

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NEWS



LTTE soldiers pictured in Vanni training with 120mm heavy mortars. Shelling exchanges are a daily occurrence in Jaffna. Photo LTTE

Sri Lanka offensives in Mannar thwarted again

HEAVY fighting erupted in northwestern Sri Lanka when the Sri Lanka Army (SLA) attempted another offensive into Vanni, the swathe of territory held by the Liberation Tigers.

The SLA launched an abortive offensive on Sunday evening and again on Monday morning.

The first attack, staged in the Thampanai area on Sunday 23 September, was brought to end after the SLA took heavy casualties, the LTTE said.

A second ground offensive launched at 5.30am on Monday September 24 was also repulsed by the LTTE after 9 hours of intense fighting. Sri Lankan troops were compelled to withdraw to their original positions with heavy casualties, military spokesperson of LTTE, Irasaiah Ilanthiraiyan said.

The LTTE said six of its fighters were killed in fighting.

SLA wounded were airlifted in Sri Lanka Air Force (SLAF) helicopters from the battlefield.

The SLA offensives were preceded by heavy artillery fire from SLA bases in Chemmantheevu, Kaddaikkaadu and South Bar.

SLA guns targetted the Parappukkadantha area in LTTE controlled Maanthai West, according to local reports.

The LTTE retaliated with artillery fire targeting SLA controlled territories.

Civilian traffic on the Mannaar Madawachchi road was interrupted and villagers in SLA controlled Uyiriththaraankulam have moved out to seek shelter at the St. Anthony's church.

The Sri Lankan military has launched numerous offensives in Mannar district since March this year with the aim of capturing LTTE administered territory in the region but has been unable to overcome stiff LTTE resistance.

On September 2, the Sri Lankan military said it had ousted the LTTE from a key coastal area in Mannar district.

But this area is located along the coast deep inside government-controlled areas.

LTTE military spokesman R. Ilanthirayan responding to the military's claims told reporters the government fooling the people in the south that military victories were being secured in the north.

He challenged the Sri Lankans to attack the LTTE stronghold of Vanni, warning they had several surprises waiting.

"The government is beating around the bush without looking into the core issues. It is not targeting our main areas at all. It is just another eyewash," he said.

Clashes escalate in Jaffna

AS Sri Lankan Defence secretary Gothabaya declared that crushing the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam with military force is the only way to end the island's civil war, skirmishes between the security forces and the LTTE have increased in the northern Jaffna peninsula.

LTTE field officials on Wednesday September 19 said that they repulsed a Sri Lanka Army (SLA) ground offensive into the no-man's area at the northern border at Naakar Koayil, after 12-hours of intense fighting.

The SLA suffered heavy casualties, the LTTE said. Two LTTE fighters were killed in action.

The SLA website claimed one SLA soldier was killed and four injured in the artillery and rocket fire duel between SLA and LTTE at Forward Defence Line (FDL) positions in Naakarkoayil.

SLA troops had attempted to capture a Listening Post (LP) night position, forward of the

Tiger FDL, the LTTE said. The SLA had attacked backed by heavy artillery and Multi-Barrel Rocket Launcher (MBRL) fire, during the night. The SLA offensive was finally thwarted on noon on Wednesday.

On Friday September 14, the SLA in Jaffna said that its troops attacked LTTE combatants in the FDL positions at Arukuveli and Kearatheevu area Thursday.

Whilst claiming that it had recovered weapons in the search conducted in the said areas, SLA also said that its troops attacked LTTE fighters found to be moving in Poonakari and Kearatheevu area.

Gunfire and artillery fire were heard from Kearatheevu area from morning till afternoon Thursday, Themaraadchi residents said.

A week earlier, on Friday September 7, the LTTE and SLA exchanged heavy artillery fire for nearly 3 hours at FDL in the northern province during the

morning. Shells launched by the LTTE fell inside SLA bases in Naakarkoayil and Manattkaadu, according to sources in the area.

During the exchange, helicopters, possibly evacuating casualties, flew in and out of the SLA bases. SLA artillery bases in Manattkaadu and adjoining area kept firing shells in support of an attack on the LTTE from Naakarkoayil SLA FDL position.

No information on casualties, injuries, or outcome of the exchange was released by either side.

In addition to skirmishes near the FDL there have also been ambushes inside the army controlled peninsula and surrounding seas.

Amid increasing number of incidents along northern front lines including Muhamaalai, Naakarkoayil and Kilaali, on Saturday September 15, LTTE and Sri Lanka Navy (SLN) clashed in Kilaali seas for nearly an hour starting from 8:00 am, the Palaly military command said.

Tiger ambushes kill 13 STF troops

THE Tamil Tigers have stepped up attacks on the Sri Lankan security forces in the east of the island, barely two months after the government declared that the LTTE had been completely driven away from the region.

In the last past two weeks thirteen commandos from the Special Task Force (STF), an elite police unit have been killed and at least six injured in separate attacks by LTTE guerillas.

Military analyst Iqbal Athaas writing in the Sunday Times newspaper this week says small groups of guerrilla cadres, mostly intelligence operatives, continue to operate in parts of the Batticaloa

district and parts of Trincomalee north.

On Monday September 17, LTTE fighters ambushed an STF patrol unit at Bakmitiyawa in Amparai district, killing two and seriously injuring three of the troops.

On the same day, three STF troops were injured when their unit began an operation in an attempt to penetrate into LTTE held territory in Ampaarai district, assisted by heavy artillery and mortar fire said LTTE's Amparai District political head, Kaviyarasan.

Exchange of fire between the STF and the LTTE continued into

Tuesday Kaviyarasan added.

The bodies of the troopers killed were handed over to Amparai base hospital.

In the previous week, eleven STF troopers were killed and four others were injured in four separate LTTE attacks in Amparai district on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, Kaviyarasan told media on Friday last week.

Two STF troopers were killed and two others injured when a claymore exploded near a tractor carrying STF personnel at Kagnchikkudichchaa'ru around 5:30 am Friday. The tractor was completely destroyed.

In another incident, one STF

soldier were killed when a unit attempting to infiltrate into the LTTE controlled territory at Vammiyadi Friday came under fire. Two soldiers were also were injured in the incident.

Meanwhile, a STF foot patrol came under attack at Rubesh Kulam Thursday where two more STF troopers were killed.

Four STF troopers were killed and two seriously injured when another STF foot patrol came under attack at Bakmitiyawa on Wednesday. The injured troopers later succumbed to injuries later.

LTTE says its fighters suffered no casualties in any of the attacks.

NEWS

US and EU 'ready to recognize Kosovo independence'

THE United States and the European Union will recognize Kosovo if the Balkan province declares independence from Serbia in early December when last-ditch negotiations end, news reports quoted senior US and European officials as saying this week.

The officials spoke to the International Herald Tribune as the Serbs and Kosovo Albanians prepared to sit down this week at the United Nations for talks that diplomats have billed as part of a final effort to get agreement on the issue.

The issue has turned into a confrontation between the West and Russia, which has threatened to veto any Security Council resolution approving independence for Kosovo.

"The game plan is set," a senior European diplomat who requested anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue told the newspaper.

"The talks end on Dec. 10. If there is no sense then that Serbia and Kosovo can agree on the province's future, then Kosovo will make a unilateral declaration of independence. The US will recognize that independence, and the Europeans, as far as they can remain united, will follow, too," he said.

The EU will support the US stance despite a clear preference for a UN-backed solution. But it will find it difficult to speak with one voice for all the 27 member states, diplomats said.

Illustrating the thorniness of the issue, President Nicolas Sarkozy of France said in an interview last week that Europe must stay united on Kosovo, but that the Russian position must be taken into account.

"Kosovo's independence is unavoidable in the long term," Sarkozy said, adding that President Vladimir Putin "must understand that no one wants to humiliate him."

Romania and Slovakia, fearful that ethnic Hungarians in their countries could seek greater autonomy, are expected to come under heavy pressure from Washington to accept the EU position.

Greece and Cyprus, however, could break ranks.

Greece, a close ally of Serbia, is concerned that its neighbor Macedonia could become unstable because the ethnic Albanians in the former Yugoslav republic might call for independence. Cyprus, divided between the Turkish north and the Greek Cypriot south, fears the Kosovo example might be used by the

Turkish Cypriots.

With so much at stake for EU unity, diplomats, while not holding out much hope, said all efforts would be made this week at the United Nations in New York where the Kosovar and Serb leaders meet for the first time since a new round of talks started last month. The issue is one of the last unresolved disputes left from the Balkan wars of the 1990s.

"I think it is best that we work through the United Nations Security Council," Ivan Vejvoda, director of the Belgrade office of the German Marshall Fund of the United States, told the International Herald Tribune.

"It would ensure full solidarity and democratic legitimacy in the region."

Until now, the EU has been seeking an end to the impasse through the UN, too, but it is los-

'Kosovo will make a unilateral declaration of independence. The US will recognize that independence, and the Europeans, as far as they can remain united, will follow, too.'

ing patience with the struggle to find a consensus in the Security Council over granting Kosovo independence, according to EU diplomats.

Putin, who wants the issue kept inside the UN, has opposed independence. As a member of the UN Security Council, Russia can veto or block any resolution calling for Kosovo to be independent.

Russian diplomats have repeatedly claimed that independence without Serbia's approval could set off a chain reaction in other regions that are seeking independence, particularly Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia and Transnistria in Moldova - which are supported by Russia.

European and U.S. diplomats said the status of Kosovo could not be left in limbo indefinitely.

Since 1999, when NATO bombed Serbian targets to stop the ethnic cleansing of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo by Serb

forces, the province of two million people has been governed by the UN as an international protectorate.

During this time, it has received over 3 billion, or \$4.2 billion, of aid while NATO still has 17,000 soldiers deployed there.

Wanting to end this precarious status, the United Nations last year appointed former President Martti Ahtisaari of Finland to draw up a plan in which the Serb community in the province would be granted a wide degree of political and cultural autonomy once Kosovo was independent from Serbia.

The EU agreed to monitor closely the implementation of the Ahtisaari plan by replacing the UN protectorate there with a strong police and judicial system in which EU officials would supervise Kosovo's independence for a limited period. NATO forces would remain in the province.

While the Kosovo leadership overwhelmingly accepted the Ahtisaari plan, Boris Tadic, the Serb president, and Vojislav Kostunica, the Serb prime minister, openly rejected the plan, saying they would never agree to Kosovo becoming independent from Serbia.

Russia insisted on giving the diplomatic track another chance, which the U.S. and the EU accepted but only under conditions. The talks, which started last month, would last 120 days.

Rajapakse ...

Continued from p2

"Therefore, it had not been necessary for us to experience global wars or the deaths of millions to, learn to recognize their value."

"My country has no record of inflicting misery on fellow human beings for the purpose of empire building, for commercial advantage or for religious righteousness," he said pointedly.

Since Rajapakse came to power in late 2005, over two thousand Tamil civilians have been killed and a thousand more have 'disappeared' after being taken into custody, local and international human rights groups say.

Some rights groups have called for strong actions, including sanctions, against Sri Lanka in a bid to halt the rampant abuses.

"Human rights are too important to be used as a tool to victimize States for political advantage," he argued however.

"It is essential that international action to facilitate compliance with human rights standards is fair and even handed. Human rights have to be protected and advanced for their own sake, not for political gain."

Meanwhile, earlier, Sri Lanka's ambassador to the UN in Geneva, Mr. Dayan Jayatilaka, lashed out at international critics of Colombo's human rights policy, saying he saw no "moral asymmetry between Sri Lanka and those critics."

Rajapakse also fell back on the customary and well worn arguments put forward by other governments accused of repression: that the need to fight 'terrorism' was paramount.

He warned representatives of the UN's 190 odd states of the dangers they all face.

"Even as we gather here, State sovereignty, civil society and the

rule of law are increasingly being threatened by terrorism and other illegal and illicit activities in many countries," he said.

"There are many Member States represented in this Assembly today who have first hand experience of the havoc caused by brutish terrorism which has stretched out its claws to many corners of the globe to mar innocent lives," he said.

"All terrorist attacks whether in New York, Mumbai, Cairo, London, or Colombo are acts that threaten the democratic way of life and must be condemned unreservedly," he said.

"Terrorism anywhere is terrorism. There is nothing good in terrorism. Sri Lanka has taken an upfront position in the global community's efforts to deal with terrorism."

"We think that the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism, which in our view remains a priority, is only limited to endless discussion. I emphasize that we must conclude these negotiations soon."

President Rajapakse suggested that his Sinhala nationalist values, enshrined in his 2005 election manifesto 'Mahinda Chinthana' were, in fact, global development goals.

"We have reached the Development Decade declared by the General Assembly of the United Nations. My country has declared the 'Mahinda Chinthana' ten year vision to usher a new Sri Lanka consonant with those goals," he said.

He concluded by telling the UN: "I believe that our obligation as global leaders is to commit ourselves to programs that will eradicate terrorism, establish human welfare oriented development, establish democracy and ensure there is hope for lower income groups for economic development."

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NEWS



President Mahinda Rajapakse with expatriate Sinhalese at a reception organized by the Sri Lankan mission to the United Nations. Report p2 Photo Sudath Silva

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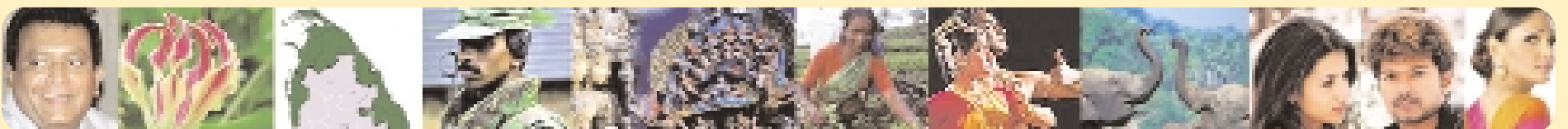
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