

Sinhala colonisation in Batticaloa also now

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LTTE commandos smash Anuradhapura airbase

Key spy plane amongst Sri Lankan losses of \$40m

THE Sri Lanka Air Force lost over \$40m dollars worth of aircraft and equipment in the Tamil Tiger ground and air attack Monday, international press reports said quoting Sri Lankan officials.

Amongst the losses was a specialized surveillance aircraft ordered by the then UNP government just before it began peace talks with the LTTE, the reports said.

Twenty one soldiers from the LTTE's elite 'Black Tiger' regiment stormed the SLAF airbase in Anuradhapura in the early hours of Monday. The fighting continued for several hours after the attackers took control of key sections of the base.

The Tigers were supported by at least two aircraft of the Tamillelam Air Force (TAF) which bombed the airbase shortly after the attack began at 3a.m.

Citing the official government statements of two Mi-24 helicopter gunships damaged and one Bell 212 gunship crash landing, the British newspaper, 'The Telegraph' also quoted 'well-placed sources in Colombo' as saying the damage was on a far greater scale than had been admitted.

The LTTE attack had destroyed military planes and equipment worth more than £20 (\$40m) million, the paper reported.

"Among the planes allegedly damaged or destroyed was a Beechcraft surveillance plane worth £14 million, two Mi17 helicopters, two Mi24 helicopters, three unmanned aerial vehicles, a K-8 jet and eight PD6 propeller trainer aircraft," the paper reported.

Earlier, press reports also quoted Sri Lanka's best known defen-



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Among the Sri Lankan aircraft destroyed were a Beechcraft spy plan (top) and two Mi-24 helicopter gunships (above). Photos SLAF

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NEWS

'No' to UN rights monitors

SRI LANKA last week rejected demands for international monitoring of human rights by a top UN envoy who warned of a "disturbing" lack of investigation into reports of killings and abductions.

Human Rights Minister Mahinda Samarasinghe told the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, that Sri Lanka would not agree to her call for UN monitoring of human rights in the country.

"We are not willing to discuss a UN presence in Sri Lanka for monitoring purposes nor are we willing to allow an office of the High Commissioner (here)," Samarasinghe told reporters October 13, at the end of Arbour's four-day visit.

Arbour and Samarasinghe addressed a news conference together, but both made it clear they disagreed on how to tackle the human rights situation in the embattled country.

Arbour slammed Sri Lanka's lack of interest in improving its handling of the human rights of civilians, warning that the humanitarian situation in Sri Lanka continues to deteriorate with possible devastating consequences.

Arbour said the "weakness of the rule of law and the prevalence of impunity is alarming" as far as the armed conflict and the emergency measures taken against terrorism are concerned, BBC News reported.

"One of the major human rights shortcomings in Sri Lanka is rooted in the absence of reliable and authoritative information on the credible allegations of human rights abuses," she said.

The Sri Lankan government refused to use the best opportunity of her visit to put a full stop to the deteriorating human rights abuses against civilians, particularly by the Sri Lankan security forces and paramilitary forces in Sri Lanka, according to the sources in Colombo.

Arbour said the authorities had tried to dismiss allegations of human rights violations as propaganda by the Liberation Tigers, but she believed there were "credible allegations that deserved to be investigated."

"In the absence of more vigorous investigations, prosecution and convictions, it is hard to see how this will come to an end," Arbour said.

"There is a disturbing lack of investigation that undermines the confidence in the institutions set up to protect human rights," Arbour said, adding Sri Lanka's culture of "impunity" was a serious concern.

Arbour cited the lack of confidence in a presidential commission tasked to probe abuses, such as the killings of 17 workers in August 2006.

Arbour also expressed dissatisfaction over the denial of the Sri Lanka government for the UN request to visit the LTTE-controlled area in the north to talk



Tamil families who have lost members to disappearances or abductions met the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour when she visited Jaffna, but Sri Lanka's refusal to accept a UN presence means there is little that she can do to alleviate their suffering.

about the human rights situations in the area.

"Throughout my discussions, government representatives have insisted that national mechanisms are adequate for the protection of human rights but require capacity-building and further support from the international community," Arbour said.

"In contrast, people from across a very broad political spectrum and from various communities have expressed to me a lack of confidence and trust in the ability of existing, relevant institutions to adequately safeguard against the most serious human rights abuses," she noted.

"In the context of the armed conflict and of the emergency measures taken against terrorism, the weakness of the rule of law and prevalence of impunity is alarming," she said.

"There are a large number of reported killings, abductions and disappearances which remain unresolved... While the government pointed to several initiatives it has taken to address these issues, there has yet to be an adequate and credible public accounting for the vast majority of these incidents."

In response Sri Lankan Human Rights Minister Mahinda Samarasinghe said his government will not accept any foreign official on its territory, adding that the government's own

Human Rights Commission can do the job.

Many activists have however questioned the Commission's work and transparency. Four of its members resigned (see box story) accusing the government of not doing enough to stop violence and abductions.

One former member of the Commission said the agency set up by Minister Samarasinghe in response to international pressure has never been a priority for the government which is instead more interested in pursuing its war.

Meanwhile, the UN has also been critical of Sri Lanka's rights record in a confidential note prepared by senior UN officials for Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

"Any offensive against the LTTE in northern Sri Lanka would have major humanitarian consequences, including displacement of up to 400,000 civilians," the Sunday Times quotes the note as saying.

"The space for UN and NGO humanitarian operations in Sri Lanka is also under continued pressure from the government which seeks to control relief activities through imposition of bureaucratic obstacles."

The government is also accused of "helping create a climate of fear among UN and humanitarian staff in Sri Lanka."

The note accuses the Foreign Ministry of refusing visas to offi-

cials of the UN Office for Coordinating Humanitarian Activities (OCHA) "and demanding that OCHA hire government officials instead of our own international staff in sensitive locations such as Jaffna in the northern Tamil region."

A senior UN official told the Sunday Times that visiting Sri Lankan ministers and officials had made promises and pledges but had failed to deliver on them.

The note to the secretary-general also blasts the government for "continuing to deny the existence of a humanitarian crisis or human rights violations in Sri Lanka."

"Outside comment on the situation in Sri Lanka, however constructively packaged, is usually labelled by the government media as support to the LTTE while international pressure is diverted through such devices as the establishment of commissions of inquiry which have little chance in practice of properly investigating abuses."

The meeting between Ban Ki-moon and President Mahinda Rajapaksa has been dismissed as inconsequential because the President's response has been described as "essentially evasive, sheltering behind the difficulties (genuine though these of course are) of dealing with a determined terrorist movement."

"The tone of the conversations

was warm, but there was no acceptance that the negative statements of his ministers and government-owned newspapers have a serious impact on the safety and effectiveness of UN and NGO operations in Sri Lanka, or that they are systematically reducing our ability to help those in need."

Nevertheless, "we should continue to impress on the government the need for them to take proactive steps to improve the working environment, including in practical areas such as visas and the free import of essential security and communications equipment."

The Sri Lankan government has committed a wide array of human rights abuses such as illegally detaining some opponents, secretly abducting others and waging battles with little regard for the safety of civilians, a human rights group said.

At least 5,472 people were killed, over 1000 people were abducted and over thousands disappeared including hundreds of children in the enforced violence according to another rights group.

Many rights groups and rights activists said, that the Sri Lankan Security forces in Jaffna chased the relatives of the abducted and disappeared people who gathered at the UNHCR Jaffna office to meet with the UN Commissioner when she visited the northern town.

NEWS

Sri Lankan rights panel falls apart

JUST as the UN Human Rights Commissioner Louise Arbour concluded her fact-finding mission to Sri Lanka, four of the 10 civil society members, part of an advisory committee set up by the Human Rights Minister to address human rights concerns resigned from the panel citing differences with the government.

Award winning Human Rights advocate, Sunila Abeysekera, Nimalka Fernando, Rohan Edirisinha and Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu, in a letter to Minister Mahinda Samarasinghe Friday, said they were resigning from the panel as they felt their advice was not taken seriously, reported the Daily Mirror newspaper.

The administration "is not serious about protecting human rights

or eliminating the culture of impunity," Dr. Saravanamuttu said in an interview.

"There is no window of opportunity left to hold talks with the government on the issue."

He noted that another reason for the move was some members of the government delegation who attended the recent UN Human Rights Council sessions in Geneva had publicly questioned the credentials of Ms. Abeysekera, who just last week was recognized by Human Rights Watch for her contribution to protect human rights.

Samarasinghe, while expressing disappointment at the decision of the four members, asserted that the process would continue with the remaining six members while

four new members would be invited to replace the vacant slots.

"The whole idea of having a committee was to give the opportunity to civil society leaders to sit together with others and discuss issues face to face. Just because of some differences they should not resign. You can have differences but you should sit down and iron out things through dialogues," he was quoted as saying.

Samarasinghe acknowledged there were "shortcomings" in the government's human rights efforts.

However, the panel had several successes, including persuading President Mahinda Rajapakse to reissue directives to security forces on the proper procedures for arrests and detentions, he said.

The panel was also able to make surprise visits to police stations to ensure they were complying, he said.

"This is such a pity that these four individuals have decided to opt out of this panel - because despite differences, despite disagreements, despite shortcomings, this gave them an opportunity to air their grievances," he said.

The Human Rights Minister asserted that the process would not be weakened by the withdrawal of the four members from the panel and reiterated that he would be compelled to appoint four new members if they fail to reconsider their decision.

However, Saravanamuttu said participation in the panel had become counterproductive: the government was ignoring its advice, while using the existence of the body to fend off international criticism.

Saravanamuttu said the government has shown no commitment to reining in security forces and did not appear committed to constructive engagement with local activists.

"The government objective is military victory, and human rights concerns and humanitarian concerns are at best secondary," he said.

"We were not achieving anything.... We served the committee for one and half years, the human rights situation is getting worse," said Edirisinha, another of the activists who quit the government's advisory panel.

"We began to realise that in a sense serving in an advisory committee wasn't really yielding any

concrete results from the ground when it comes to human rights issues," he said.

More than 1,100 abductions and 'disappearances' have been reported in Sri Lanka since a February 2002 truce with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam broke down 20 months ago, Human Rights Watch said in an Aug. 6 report. Killings and abductions have "dramatically increased," the New York-based group said.

"The human rights situation in Sri Lanka is very serious," said Saravanamuttu, who is also the executive director of the Centre for Policy Alternatives, a research institute based in Colombo.

"In northern Jaffna region there is at least one person killed or abducted every day. Only international pressure can turn the situation around."

Sri Lanka's Human Rights Commission is appointed by the government and the International Independent Group of Eminent Persons, which constantly monitors the situation in the country, government spokesman Anura Priyadarshana Yapa said in an interview.

The 10-member panel, formed last year, hoped to push the government to investigate and prosecute soldiers, police officers and other gunmen blamed for an ongoing wave of assassinations, illegal detentions and disappearances of civilians in the country's civil war.

"The four members who quit have made a colossal mistake," Yapa said. "We have done quite enough to protect the human rights of each person."

UN asked to emulate India

PK Balachandran
Hindustan Times

SRI LANKAN leader, Basil Rajapaksa, had asked the visiting UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, to emulate India and stop "policing" Sri Lanka. The Nation reported on Sunday.

The second most important man in Sri Lanka after President Mahinda Rajapaksa, told the ranking UN official, that India was not acting as the policeman of the South Asian region, but was helping Sri Lanka solve its problems. For example, India had sent food to tackle shortages in Jaffna, he said.

"We urge the UN to assist Sri Lanka and refrain from policing human rights in the country," he told Arbour.

Earlier, the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) leader and Buddhist monk, Venerable Athuraliya Rat-

hana Thero, told her that she should fight for animal rights too. "This is the ideology of Buddhism and the JHU," he said.

Sri Lanka's case, as presented by President Rajapaksa and others in the government, is that the country's primary task is to defeat the LTTE, and that in conflict situations like the one in Sri Lanka, some human rights violations are only to be expected.

The government also contends that the international organizations are exaggerating the rights violations. Cabinet minister Rajitha Senarathne even said that Sri Lanka was being pilloried because it was economically weak, without "a big market like India and Iraq."

So far, Sri Lanka has been ab-

Continued on p15



Relatives of the disappeared staged a peaceful protest outside the UN in Colombo, trying to get the High Commissioner for Refugees to take up their case. Photo Sanka Vidanagama / AFP / Getty Images

NEWS

Colombo escalates war while sending contradictory signals

THE Sri Lankan government continued to escalate the fighting in the north of the island by launching multiple attacks on the LTTE administered Vanni, even as they sent contradicting signals to the international community, offering to make peace overtures to the LTTE and vowing to wipe out the organisation at the same.

Over the past few months the Sri Lankan security forces have been preparing for a major offensive against the LTTE in Vanni and gradually intensifying their attacks, setting the scene for an all-out war in the island's north.

Since coming to power in November 2005, the administration of President Mahinda Rajapakse has launched military operations, one after another, with the aim of capturing LTTE administered territories, whilst reasoning that the offensives were intended to keep LTTE from returning to war.

Whilst the international community has made periodic statements urging the government to seek a political solution to the long drawn conflict, so far no tangible pressure has been applied by the international community, including co-chairs to the peace process - Norway, US, EU and Japan - to persuade the Sri Lankan state to return to negotiations.

Emboldened by the lack of pressure, especially following the collapse of the All Party Representative Committee (APRC), the mechanism through which the western states were hoping a power sharing political solution would be derived, and continuing military support, both training and material, from India and other countries, Sri Lanka is busy preparing for an all-out war.

Comments made by Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapakse, brother of President Mahinda Rajapakse, made it clear where the government's priorities lay - he said a political solution would be impossible without first crushing the Tigers.

However, Sri Lanka continues to make uncommitted peace overtures to the LTTE in an attempt to show its commitment to a negotiated settlement.

Speaking at a conference in New Delhi earlier this month President Rajapakse said he would respond favourably if the LTTE sought a "negotiated and sustainable" settlement in their two-decade-old fight for a separate homeland.

"If those who carry arms against the state are willing to enter a process of genuine negotiation toward a peaceful and democratic solution, the government and the people will reciprocate," Rajapakse said.

"I don't believe in a military solution and I want a political solution," he added.

However last week, answering questions during a television question-answer session, the President vowed to 'liberate' all areas of Sri Lanka from the LTTE and destroy the organisation.

"The government will not tolerate terrorism and it would be fought until total elimination," Rajapakse added.

A few days earlier, the Sri Lankan military commander, General Sarath Fonseka, reflected similar sentiments when he vowed to continue the military operations against the LTTE.

The army would "crush terrorism" to convince the LTTE that the ethnic problem cannot be resolved through violence, he declared.

"The Army will crush terrorism to convince the terrorists that their problems could not be solved through terrorist acts," Fonseka said while addressing the 58th Army Day celebrations at the Army Headquarters.

He cited the army's successes "starting from the Mavilaru operation up to the liberation of Silavatturai".

"In the future too the Army would continue to march forward triumphantly," he said.

Fonseka further said that he expected to chase the Tigers from the north in a year, "maybe less".

Last week saw fierce fighting in multiple fronts with the Sri Lankan military attacking LTTE positions in Muhamaalai in Jaffna, Mullikulam in Mannar and Trincomalee district.

In recent weeks the Sri Lankan Air Force has stepped up aerial bombardment of the Vanni district, targeting densely populated areas like Viswamadhu and Puthukudiyiruppu.

In one of the latest attacks, five SLAF Kfir bombers dropped more than twenty four bombs in two sorties on Friday 19 October, targeting civilian settlements in Veanaavil and surrounding areas, sources in Vanni said.

Artillery barrages have also intensified, with Sri Lankan Army soldiers based in the Jaffna peninsula, Vavuniya, Mannar and Trincomalee regularly targeting civilian settlements surrounding their camps.

Civilian settlements along the northern war-front, in the areas of Mukamaalai, Naakarkoayil, Kilaali, Vadamaradchi East, Palai, Chempianpattu, Iyakkachchi, Maruthankearn, Kaddaikkaadu, Vettalaikearn and Poonakari, along with areas in the Vavuniya and Mannar districts, have been the targets of heavy artillery, mortar and Multi Barrel Rocket Launcher fire from SLA positions in the past few weeks.

On the naval front also there have been increasingly frequent skirmishes between the Sri Lankan Navy and the Sea Tigers.



The Sri Lankan Army has been using its newly purchased equipment, including Buffel Armoured Personnel Carriers like the one above, to aggressively pursue its war against the Liberation Tigers

Sri Lanka can't crush LTTE

Reuters

THERE is no way Sri Lanka's government will be able to crush its Tamil Tiger foes, and giving wide political autonomy to Tamils is the only answer, a leading European counter-terrorism expert says.

With near daily land and sea clashes, ambushes, bombings and air raids amid a new chapter in a two-decade civil war that has killed around 70,000 people, the government is now taking the war to the Tigers with offensives to drive them from territory they control.

But the tactic is flawed and cannot solve an ethnic conflict that has killed around 5,000 people since early 2006 alone, said Dr. Gerard Chaliand, former director of the European Center for the Study of Conflicts.

"No way, you can't crush the Tigers," Chaliand told Reuters in an interview on the sidelines of a counter-terrorism conference in Colombo at which he was a keynote speaker.

"Technically speaking they are the most efficient movement at present in the world."

"Before them I've seen two others which were outstanding.

The Vietnamese, and the EPLF from Eritrea - they won. (The Tigers) are the third one," he added. "You don't crush those guys with the Sri Lankan army, which by the way is not the best in the world."

Sri Lankan Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa, President Mahinda Rajapaksa's brother, disagrees, and says Chaliand does not know the ground realities.

"I don't agree with that at all. I'm sure we are the best when you talk about counter-terrorism, who else has had to do this?" Rajapaksa said.

"He can't make a comment like that, it's not logical."

"He doesn't know the ground situation, he is looking from far away," he added, saying Chaliand did not know what arms the military are using or about the morale of either side.

Chaliand describes the Tigers as a totalitarian killing machine, and says there appears to be little prospect of negotiating a peace deal with the organisation as long as leader Velupillai Prabhakaran remains at the helm.

Removing Prabhakaran from the equation would help, but the

answer is to give significant autonomy to minority Tamils, which the government has so far failed to do, he says.

The government has promised widespread autonomy for minority Tamils and has also vowed to destroy all the Tigers' military assets and "liberate" all areas controlled by the Tigers, including in their northern stronghold.

But a cross-party drive to come up with a consensus devolution proposal has been aground for months, and even moderate Tamils were unhappy with draft proposals the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam have already rejected out of hand.

"The grievances of the Tamils are legitimate, they are part of this country, they should have a place in it as a recognised minority, whether it is in the framework of political autonomy or a federation," Chaliand said.

"If they want Tamils to join them, they have to make a fair offer," he added. "There is no military solution to this business only."

While the government has had the upper hand in recent months, capturing swathes of LTTE-held territory in the east, analysts say there is no clear winner on the horizon and fear the conflict could grind on for years.

NEWS

Colonisation in Batticaloa

THE SRI LANKAN government was once again accused of colonising the Eastern province under the guise of resettlement. Parliamentarians of the largest Tamil party in the parliament this week again accused the government of Sinhala colonization of the Eastern province.

Whilst announcing plans to develop the eastern province and seeking international aid for the purpose, Sri Lanka has continued to militarise the province by involving security forces in administration of the province and aid distribution, the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) charged.

In its latest attempts to colonise the Tamil dominated eastern province, the Sri Lankan state has employed Sinhala prisoners at Maangkerni cashew plantation owned by Sri Lanka Cashew Corporation (SLCC), whilst the locals who were previously employed there have been languishing without any income for the past many years, Batticaloa District TNA parliamentarian S. Jeyanthamoorthy charged in a letter addressed to President Mahinda Rajapakse.

The move to bring on Sinhala convicts will result in Sinhala colonization in future and exacerbate ethnic conflict in the area, Jeyanthamoorthy pointed out in his letter.

"The cashew plantation located in Maangkerni, Batticaloa District, has been long abandoned and is in an unusable state. There is a very large SLA camp constructed at that site and as a result the entire plantation has been destroyed," he notes.

"Those previously employed in the plantation are languishing without any income for the past many years," he wrote.

"Though it is not an appropriate step to be taken under the existing conditions, SLCC has decided to reactivate cashew cultivation in that location. At the same time I learn that the cashew corporation has entered into a contract with the Prisons department to employ Sinhala convicts at this location. I also learn that this scheme is being implemented by your advisor and parliamentarian Basil Rajapakse."

"In Vaakarai region, there are still a large number of former employees of the Sri Lanka Cashew Corporation," he wrote, pointing out that they continue to be unemployed.

"Apart from this, when such an employment scheme is implemented, priority should be given to the youths residing in the region. To bring in Sinhala prisoners to be employed here, without taking into consideration these factors is an undemocratic act and should be condemned."

"This move could be a prelude to permanently keep these convicted prisoners here in order to create Sinhala colonization. In addition, allowing these convicts to move around freely in this Tamil area will instil fear among



Internally displaced refugees are unable to return to their homes, but Sinhalese are being settled in traditionally Tamil areas in the East

the Tamil population and may lead to ethnic conflicts in the future," he notes.

In September this year, Tamil parliamentarian and TNA parliamentary group leader, Rajothayam Sampanthan, brought to light similar attempts by the Sri Lankan state to colonise the eastern province in the Trincomalee District.

He charged the government was giving in to the demands of the extreme nationalist Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), a Buddhist monk party, during an address to the Sri Lankan parliament.

The JHU plans to carve out a Sinhala district between Trincomalee District in the Eastern Province and Mullaiththeevu in the Northern Province, aiming to split the geographical contiguity of the Tamil homeland, he alleged.

Successive Sri Lankan governments have already systematically colonized the traditional Tamil areas of Manalaaru (named Weli Oya in Sinhala), Pathavikulam (named Padaviya in Sinhala), Thiriyaay, and Pulmoaddai between Mullaiththeevu and Trincomalee, he noted.

The areas of Kokkilaay, Thennamaravaadi and Thannimurippu (named Janakapura in Sinhala) are militarized zones.

However since the demerger of the Northern and Eastern provinces earlier this year, the Sri Lankan government has taken

steps to create a new Sinhala district consisting of the above areas.

The aim is to partition the Northern and Eastern provinces,

in order to fulfil its pledge given to the JHU during the last Presidential elections, Sampanthan said at the time.

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Eyewash

Sri Lanka is under no real pressure on human rights

The much heralded visit to Sri Lanka earlier this month by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, was conducted and concluded with much fanfare. Quite predictably, in her final press conference she lamented the dire state of human rights in the island, condemned all participants in the conflict and called for independent (i.e. external) human rights monitoring. When Sri Lanka's Human Rights Minister, Mahinda Samarasinghe, sitting next to her, bluntly rejected external monitoring, she simply got on her plane home. What is of relevance to the Tamils is not Arbour's acquiescence, but the utter silence from the international community after her pointless visit - especially given that the abductions, disappearances and extra-judicial killings are continuing.

The Tamils are apparently to understand that, without the Sri Lankan government agreeing to external rights monitoring, nothing can be done to stop the abuses against them. Indeed, slipped in among the very principled stances that Ms Arbour so passionately espoused - on the universal human rights of each individual, on the responsibility to protect, on the need for international monitors - was that quiet admission that sovereignty still matters. As she made it clear to many during her visit, she was a guest of President Mahinda Rajapakse and, as such, had certain 'constraints.'

However, until she landed, many voices in the international community were hailing Arbour's visit as some sort of landmark event in human rights protection. The European Union - for the third time in a year - dumped its much hyped resolution against Sri Lanka at the UN Human Rights Council reportedly pending the outcome of Arbour's visit, ahead of which, various human rights groups issued calls for monitoring, arguing this, rather than firm action against Colombo, was key to stopping the abuses. Now that the UN has told by Sri Lanka that its presence on the ground would never be welcome, let alone be invited, these voices have all suddenly gone quiet. This is not because the international community is reconsidering its options, but because Arbour's visit has served its purpose: taking the steam out of the human rights pressure on Sri Lanka and buying Rajapakse a little more time for his military project.

No-one seriously expected Sri Lanka

to voluntarily accept international monitors on the ground - that would, after all, have been an admission of incompetence and a surrender of sovereignty no state could reasonably have been expected to make. Sri Lanka, moreover, has always been vocal in its implacable opposition to external interference of any kind - except of course the UNP government of 2001 which was banking on the 'international safety net' to destroy the LTTE and curb Tamil aspirations and was therefore prepared to accept external oversight on any aspect of governance that its international backers deemed necessary (the UNP is paying for that acquiescence now).

But the present international silence is actually not about respecting sovereignty, which, after all, is routinely breached by the world's more powerful states. For the international community, Sri Lanka's sovereignty is not some cardinal principle to be respected but a convenient strategy to be followed. As we have argued before, the international community wants the war it is financially, politically and militarily supporting in Sri Lanka to conclude successfully - although it would certainly prefer the Rajapakse regime to fight it more cleanly. The robust international support for the \$500m bond that Sri Lanka recently launched is a case in point. The bond is meant primarily to support the war effort. Whilst there has been much talk of cutting international aid, in reality, funding has simply been temporarily been put on hold until Rajapakse completes his military project - in any case, not much development can be attempted when a war is also being fought.

Human rights are thus only matters for states and actors out of favour with the international community to be concerned about. The international community is more concerned with stability than with justice. In short, the most important requirement of Sri Lanka's government is that it ends the war, either by talks or by military victory - and Rajapakse isn't preparing a peace proposal to put before the Tamils. The central lesson Tamils must draw from international indifference to their plight is that the only way to be physically secure is to effectively assert their own sovereignty. Indeed, East Timor, Eritrea and, now, Kosovo are standing examples of how new zones of sovereignty can readily be created out of former ones when it suits the international community's interests.

The outlook is for more war

Suren Manoharan
Tamil Guardian

THE Tamil Tigers' air and ground attack Monday against the Sri Lanka Air Force (SLAF) air base at Anuradhapura destroyed or damaged a number of military aircraft.

The attack is a setback for the Sri Lankan military's threatened offensive against the Tigers' northern heartland.

It will also increase pressure on the hardline government which has countered rising public discontent amongst the majority Sinhalese over soaring cost of living with assurances of the LTTE will soon be crushed.

While exact losses are hard to confirm amid an official blackout, informed defence correspondents say the loss of key reconnaissance aircraft is significant as it will hamper intelligence gathering to support future military offensives and has 'crippled' the Navy's deep sea operations.

The Navy has reported a series of successful sinkings of LTTE arms vessels in the past two months and is claiming to have wiped out the Tigers' resupply capabilities - although defence correspondents say they expect the LTTE to acquire new vessels and re-establish its vital supply lines without much delay.

The loss of aerial surveillance, if confirmed, is a significant setback for the Sri Lankan armed forces, particularly as the military has vowed to advance into the LTTE's heartland, Vanni.

In the first six months of this year the military launched a series of offensives against the LTTE in the island's ethnically mixed and volatile eastern province.

The LTTE has pulled out of much of the east, though it maintains a potent presence in the Amparai district and is said to be infiltrating intelligence cadres back into Trincomalee and Batticaloa districts.

The government of President Mahinda Rajapakse celebrated the 'clearing' of the east in an elaborate ceremony in July.

However since then there has been a rise in LTTE attacks in the region, including several ambushes against security forces personnel and assassinations of government officials.

Last week the LTTE even attacked an army outpost in the island's deep south, forcing the closure of a well known national park, just before peak season.

The rise in LTTE activity in the east comes despite a very large number of government troops having been deployed in the recently captured areas, along with significant numbers of Army-backed paramilitaries.

According to a number of international analysts who have

visited the region, the east remains heavily militarized, casting serious doubts on government ability to 'pacify' the region as it has vowed to by following up the expulsion of the LTTE with rapid development and holding elections.

Quite apart from the LTTE attacks, paramilitary violence and, especially, rampant extra-judicial killings, abductions for ransom and 'disappearances' have created a profound sense of insecurity there.

The government badly needs to establish sufficient security in the east to (1) begin the process of normalization/development which can ease the humanitarian crisis its offensives have created if simmering discontent is not to facilitate the LTTE's re-entry into the captured areas and (2) equally important, to be able to redeploy the troops presently in the east for its already announced offensive against Vanni to the north.

Most importantly, President Rajapakse, who was elected in 2005 on a promises of taking a hardline against the LTTE and the Norwegian peace process has made considerable political capital of the capture of the east and can ill afford to allow the region to remain unpacified.

Amid soaring defence expenditures, there have been rises in the prices of essential foods and fuels (including kerosene). Past governments have been readily brought down by public discontent caused by sharp rises in the cost-of-living.

However, citing progress in the country's 'war against terrorism', President Rajapakse has kept simmering discontent under effective check.

An effective management of information flow from the war zones and the delivery of a simple, coherent message, particular in the vernacular (Sinhala) press, that difficulties must be borne for the sake of the country, combined with reports of almost effortless victories against the LTTE has enabled him to avoid past governments' difficulties.

Some opinion polls even suggest his personal popularity has soared since the government resumed successful offensive operations against the LTTE.

The main Sinhala opposition is counting on an economic crisis, particular amid token cuts of aid by international actors dissatisfied with the government's human right abuses.

However, the government has had little difficulty finding alternative funding - this month it successfully launched a sovereign bond, raising \$500 million in international markets on terms

OPINION



that were not significantly worse than market averages.

This means the government will be able to support subsidies cushioning the public from the worst of the price rises.

The key strategic difficulty is the government's inability, given President Rajapakse's Sinhala hardline electoral legacy and the sentiments the government has itself built up amongst Sinhala voters, to come up with a credible power-sharing proposal that can end the conflict and break the borrow-spend-fight cycle that has sustained 25 years of conflict.

Rajapakse's failure to come up with even remotely credible peace proposal, along with the government's blunt Sinhala nationalist rhetoric and the armed forces brutal campaign of extrajudicial killings, disappearances and torture has further alienated the island's Tamils.

Indeed polarization between the Sinhala majority and the

island's minorities (all of whom speak Tamil) has been increasingly pronounced since President Rajapakse took office.

Amid this, attacks such as that on the Anuradhapura airbase has inevitably served to boost LTTE's standing amongst the Tamils.

Meanwhile, state-sponsored Sinhala colonization in newly captured parts of the east, along with military support for anti-LTTE Tamil paramilitaries has also antagonized the Muslim community.

Muslims, most of whom speak Tamil, consider themselves a distinct ethnic community. They complain of persecution by the TMVP (Karuna Group), paramilitaries led by former Tamil Tigers who split and defected to the military in 2004.

To maintain Sinhala support, President Rajapakse has to deliver on the battlefield.

However, the LTTE's heartland in the north is expected to

prove much more difficult than the government is claiming.

Unlike in the east, where LTTE forces had limited supplies and few fixed defences, in the north the LTTE has built an elaborate system of hard points supported by heavy weapons.

Furthermore, whilst the military has had to spread itself across the newly captured eastern areas, the LTTE has been able to withdraw the bulk of its eastern forces to support its defence of Vanni.

There has been a slow rise in violence along Vanni borders - in Mannar and Weli Oya, the western and eastern ends respectively of the southern frontline and in Jaffna, the northern frontline.

Whilst most public reports have covered border clashes in Mannar, confirmed reports from Jaffna and Colombo say the clashes in the northern peninsula and Weli Oya have been more ferocious and bloody. Interestingly, both sides remain tightlipped on these.

In short, despite the steadily rising cost of living, the government enjoys sufficient stability for the short to even medium term. However, it may face serious public discontent if it does not continue to deliver on the battlefield.

Whilst the LTTE is on the defensive, it is putting up effective resistance to the military and, just as importantly, shown itself capable of 'spectaculars' like the air strikes on the capital earlier this year by its newly unveiled air force.

The LTTE's raid on the Anuradhapura air base serves several purposes including undermining, to a notable extent, the government's military plans for capturing Vanni, increasing the cost of the war (given the loss of expensive but indispensable reconnaissance aircraft) and, by

"We advise you to reconsider your need to travel to Sri Lanka at this time because of ongoing civil unrest, the volatile security situation and the very high risk of terrorist attacks.

Attacks occur frequently and further attacks can happen at any time, anywhere in Sri Lanka. Australians could inadvertently become victims of violence directed at others, in particular Sri Lankan government and military targets.

A recent escalation of conflict in the north and other parts of the country may provoke further terrorist attacks, including in Colombo.

You should exercise extreme caution, maintain high personal security awareness and avoid locations known to be targeted by terrorists in Sri Lanka.

Tensions between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) are high. There has been a significant escalation in the number of serious incidents of politically motivated violence, including in tourist areas in the centre and south.

The security situation could deteriorate further without warning. Further attacks are likely.

Anti-aircraft batteries and their immediate surroundings, including high-rise buildings, should also be avoided. You should stay indoors in a secure location because of the risk of falling projectiles and shrapnel.

Due to the on-going conflict, the international airport could be closed without warning and commercial aircraft could be at risk, particularly at night. In light of the increased threat, some airlines have suspended flights to Colombo or changed flight schedules suspending commercial late night flights.

There is a danger of kidnapping for ransom of foreign nationals in Sri Lanka, including in Colombo.

Due to the volatile security situation in Sri Lanka, Australian government officials and dependants have been advised to avoid using public transport and locations that may be potential targets.

We advise you not to travel to the north of Sri Lanka, including the area north of the highway between Puttalam, Anuradhapura and Polonaruwa, and Wilpattu National Park.

We advise you not to travel east of Polonaruwa town on the A11 road or to points east of the line between Polonaruwa town and Kirinda in Southern Province, including Yala National Park.

Road access between Jaffna and the rest of Sri Lanka has been closed since 11 August 2006. The LTTE has refused to guarantee the safety of shipping in waters around Jaffna. Australians in Jaffna who wish to depart should do so by air."

- Australian Government travel warning, Oct 2007

embarrassing President Rajapakse in the eyes of Sinhala voters, increasing his political difficulties in the south.

Despite international calls for Rajapakse to halt his military's offensives and pursue negotiations, given he has already cap-

tured considerable territory in the east, and not to risk severe losses going after the LTTE's heartland, the fundamental drivers of government military action are, however, likely to intensify and the outlook is one of continuing high-intensity conflict.

"I believe that terrorism is a tool that has been utilized throughout history to achieve certain objectives. Some have been ideological, others territorial. There are personality-driven terroristic objectives.

The bottom line is, you can't lump all terrorists together. And I think we've got to do a much better job of clarifying what are the motivations, the *raison d'être* of terrorists.

I mean, what the Tamil Tigers are fighting for in Sri Lanka, or the Basque separatists in Spain, or the insurgents in al-Anbar province may only be connected by tactics. They may not share all that much in terms of what is the philosophical or ideological underpinning.

And I think one of our mistakes has been painting with such a broad brush, which has not been particularly helpful in understanding what it is we were up against when it comes to those who pursue terrorism for whichever ends they're seeking."

- US Presidential hopeful Hillary Clinton when asked her views on terrorism by 'The Guardian' October 2007

"All of you are seeing for yourself what the Sinhala fascists are up to.

We will certainly achieve our liberation in the times of our leader. But, it needs the contribution of everybody. Eelam can be expedited if you all mobilize yourself with willpower.

We have proved our capability. We now have all the conventional forces.

We are going to meet the Lions who bomb us from the sky, in their own lair. Hereafter, it is you, who have to continue the struggle ahead.

We will continue to strike. Tell those chauvinists that we will never stop.

- Lt. Col. Ilango, an LTTE commandos killed in this week's attack on the Sri Lankan airbase in Anuradhapura, in a letter he left behind.

FEATURES

Sri Lanka parades fallen Tigers' naked bodies

TamilNet

SRI LANKA armed forces Tuesday paraded the naked bodies of Tamil Tiger commandos killed during their devastating attack on a key northern airbase in the early hours Monday, agency reports said.

Amid media coverage of the grisly scenes, the military Wednesday claimed the LTTE troopers' bodies were stripped in order to search for "hidden suicide devices."

The Army claimed the bodies were wrapped in polythene, but photographs of the subsequent procession show the naked bodies being exposed for the public to view. The military also said Wednesday it has now buried the LTTE troopers' bodies.

Media reports said the Sri Lankan authorities had stripped the bodies of the LTTE troopers before putting them on display for the mainly Sinhalese residents near Anuradhapura airbase.

Two farm tractors pulled trailers loaded with the naked corpses and mutilated body parts to the Anuradhapura hospital mortuary, AFP reported Tuesday local journalists and residents.

"The tractors stopped outside the hospital where there was a large gathering of people," one journalist told AFP. "People took pictures while others were even filming."

"The bodies were taken from the camp to the mortuary. One tractor trailer contained naked bodies, bodies in the other were in plastic bags," said a journalist known to Reuters who was at the scene and asked to remain unnamed for fear of retribution.

Witnesses told Reuters the tractor trailers, used normally to collect garbage, were accompanied by military personnel and stopped for several minutes at a junction where a crowd of dozens of people had gathered in the rain as word of the trip to the mortuary got around.

The hospital mortuary, where the bodies were being taken, was just 100 metres away. There was no traffic.

According to the opposition Lankadissent.com website, the bodies were displayed to "prevent the mentality of defeat from entering the public mindset in the aftermath of this major military debacle."

The website also published photos of the tractors in procession.

The Sri Lankan Defence Ministry on Tuesday posted pictures of some of the slain LTTE fighters sprawled on tarmac at the airbase, some charred, one with eyes wide-open and one with a

gaping hole in his head.

The dead were then stripped, their naked bodies piled into the back of tractor trailers, and driven along the road in full view of the public, Reuters reported.

Amid outrage sparked by the media reports, the Sri Lankan Army said Wednesday: "many of those wearing Air Force-type camouflage LTTE uniforms had to be stripped off in order to remove their hidden suicide devices or other explosives tied around their person and waists. Afterwards those corpses were covered with polythene."

The military has denied any of the bodies were naked, and said the pictures had been doctored.

"Somebody has taken (those photographs) to tarnish the image of the (armed forces)," military spokesman Brigadier Udaya Nanayakkara said on Wednesday, without specifying who.

"We are professional soldiers. We do not want to do (things) like that," he was quoted by Reuters as saying.

"I can assure you we wrapped all those bodies in black polythene bags ... and sent it to the hospital," he added. "Some photographer who is interested in tarnishing the image of the army has done this purposely."

The display of mutilated bodies echoed the Sri Lankan military's display of the naked bodies of LTTE women fighters killed in an abortive attack on the Army's Ma'nal Aa'ru (Weli Oya) camp in 1995.

The bodies of the women were reportedly mutilated with knives before being handed back to the LTTE in body-bags.

The Sri Lankan Army also released photographs of the women's naked bodies heaped in piles, some with their legs spread.

The photos resurfaced in 1999 during the Presidential election campaign, when the then PA government mistakenly used them in a poster campaign under the banner "Remember?" to discredit the UNP opposition by reminding voters of the horrific abuses during of the UNP's crushing of the JVP in the late 1980s.

Criticizing the poster, by President Chandrika Kumaratunga's PA, one Sinhala language newspaper noted: "This photograph is of women LTTE soldiers who died in the Welioya attack. Using such a photograph in the election campaign against the opposite party is against social ethics."

"But what is more unacceptable, is that the President, who is a mother, has come forward to disrespect motherhood by displaying and popularising such a barbarian photograph," the Irida Peramuna said.



(above) Sri Lankan forces put the naked bodies of LTTE fighters killed in the raid on Anuradhapura airbase on display for the local Sinhala residents. Photo Lankadissent.com (top) A Chinese K8 training jet was amongst the aircraft destroyed. Photo SLAF (middle) During the fighting on Monday, a Bell 212 helicopter was shot down by Tigers who captured an anti-aircraft gun at the airbase. Photo SLAF

LTTE commandos...

Continued from p1

ce correspondent, Iqbal Athas said the destruction of the propeller driven naval reconnaissance aircraft had "crippled" the Navy's deep sea operations.

12 to 18 aircraft might have been damaged or destroyed, Athas told the Hindustan Times.

The Sri Lankan military said it lost fourteen servicemen killed in the fighting, including the four man crew of a Bell 212 gunship which was shot down. Amongst the dead were an Air Force Wing Commander and a Squadron Leader. Twenty two other servicemen were wounded.

The Beechcraft 200 HISAR surveillance aircraft is said to be equipped with a Hughes synthetic

aperture radar system which the manufacturer, Raytheon, says can track low flying aircraft in addition to ground and sea targets.

In July 2002 Raytheon reported it had won a 10 million dollar plus order from an 'unspecified South Asian customer' to supply one of these surveillance aircraft.

Under that contract, Raytheon was to provide one Beech King Air 200 turboprop aircraft, a HISAR radar system, ground station, spares, training and technical support.

The aircraft was delivered in late 2002 to the then United National Party (UNP) government, which was engaged in Norwegian facilitated peace negotiations with the LTTE. Since then the Beechcraft has often been spotted

patrolling over LTTE controlled Vanni, amongst other areas, earning itself the apt local nickname 'Vandu' (Bug or Beetle).

The Tigers, in their first combined air and Black Tiger ground attack targeted the airbase, the largest Sri Lankan military installation in the Main Supply Route between Colombo and Vavunniyaa, at Saliyapura in Anuradhapura in the North Central province, in the early hours of Monday.

The Tigers also released photos of the 21-member Black Tiger attack team that included three female Black Tigers and the Air Tiger personnel who took part in the attack. The photos were taken when LTTE leader V. Pirapaharan sent the commandos on their mission, the Tigers said.

FEATURES



The 21 Black Tiger commandos pictured with LTTE leader Vellupillai Pirapaharan before setting off on their mission deep behind Sri Lankan lines. Photo LTTE

‘An act of unbelievable determination, bravery and precision’

B. Raman
SAAG

RELIABLE details of the combined air and land attack launched by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) on the Anuradhapura air base of the Sri Lankan Air Force early in the morning of October 22, 2007, indicate that it was neither an act of desperation as projected by the embarrassed Sri Lankan military spokesmen nor an act of needless dramatics as suggested by others.

It was an act of unbelievable determination, bravery and precision successfully carried out by a 21-member suicide commando group of the Black Tigers - significantly led by a Tamil from the Eastern Province - with the back-up support of two planes of the so-called Tamil Eelam Air Force.

Reliable Western sources say that no other terrorist organisation in the world would have been capable of organising such a raid, which had been preceded by painstaking intelligence collection, planning and rehearsal.

The commandoes, divided into groups, infiltrated into the air base from two directions and, within 20 minutes, took the security guards by surprise, overwhelmed them, seized their weapons and communication

equipment, neutralised a radar and an anti-aircraft gun position and then intimidated their headquarters that they were in effective control of the air base.

Only then the two aircraft of the LTTE's air wing flew to Anuradhapura and dropped two bombs on the base and flew back safely to their hide-out.

The commandoes remained in effective occupation of the base from 3 AM to at least 9 AM. During this period, they blew up three helicopters, two fixed-wing aircraft - one of them a trainer - and three unmanned drones.

After losing communication with the air base, the Sri Lankan Air Force base at Vavuniya sent one of its helicopters to Anuradhapura to find out what had happened. As it was approaching the air base, it was shot down by the LTTE commandoes manning the anti-aircraft gun in the air base.

The commandoes also blew up an ammunition storage depot in the air base and damaged its runway.

It is learnt that the Black Tiger commandoes remained in communication with their headquarters till 9 AM. Thereafter, all communications ceased, indicating

thereby that all of them had either been killed by the Sri Lankan Security Forces or had committed suicide to avoid falling into the hands of the Sri Lankan security forces, who had counter-attacked the base.

Thirteen SLAF personnel were killed, nine inside the base and four in the helicopter crash.

The LTTE has been silent on the fate of the commandoes. However, it has released their personal particulars.

Two Lieutenant-Colonels, six Majors, 12 Captains and one Lieutenant rank Black Tiger members took part in the operation. A Lieutenant-Colonel who led an attack team was from Trincomalee, two of the members, a Major and a Captain, were from Batticaloa, one from Mullaiththeevu, one from Mannaar, three from Ki'linochchi and eleven members from Jaffna. Three Captains were women.

Initial reports of the raid had indicated that the raid started with an air attack by the LTTE's aircraft and that it was only thereafter that the commandoes had infiltrated into the air base by taking advantage of the confusion.

Subsequent reports, however, indicate that the Black Tigers initially infiltrated the base and took control of it and that it was then that the air raid was launched more to test the capability for co-

ordination between the air wing and the Black Tigers than to cause damage to the base. Since the Black Tigers were already in effective control of the base, they did not need any air support.

Embarrassed by the spectacular display of the LTTE's prowess, the Sri Lankan authorities have been trying to play down the successes of the LTTE operation.

They claim that only two helicopters and one fixed wing aircraft were damaged and another helicopter was destroyed when it crash-landed due to technical reasons.

The Colombo correspondent of the "Daily Telegraph" of London has reported that the Black Tigers destroyed an expensive Beechcraft surveillance plane worth £14 million, two Mi17 helicopters, two Mi24 helicopters, three unmanned aerial vehicles, a K-8 jet and eight PD6 propeller trainer aircraft.

The Anuradhapura air base was essentially used by the SLAF as a training base. The training command of the SLAF was located there.

In addition, it was also providing intelligence support to the SLAF and the Navy through the sophisticated Beechcraft plane fitted with equipment for aerial photography and the collection of electronic and technical intelligence and the unmanned drones.

Instructors from Pakistan, China and Israel were periodically attached to the base.

The helicopters destroyed by the Black Tigers were being used as helicopter gun ships or for VIP transport. While the damage sustained by the SLAF is considerable in money terms and reduces its capability for intelligence collection for air and naval operations, its impact on the SLAF's capability for air strikes over the LTTE controlled areas would be limited.

The successful operation would seem to have been launched by the LTTE in retaliation for the recent operations of the Sri Lankan Navy against the transport ships of the LTTE and the air strikes of the SLAF over LTTE positions in the Northern Province.

It once again underlines the LTTE's reputation as an organisation with a tremendous tenacity of purpose, grit and sophistication in thinking and planning. Its recent set-backs have not weakened its morale.

They have only redoubled its determination to keep fighting for its political objective unmindful of the losses in the Eastern Province.

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FEATURES

Torture rampant in Sri Lanka once again

**Aliya Frostick
Medical Foundation**

THE scale of the resumption of torture in Sri Lanka following the breakdown of the cease-fire between Tamil insurgents and government forces, and the emergence state-sponsored paramilitaries such as a breakaway Tamil group led by Col Karuna, is revealed in the number of cases seen recently by the Medical Foundation.

A survey of 140 Sri Lankan clients referred to the MF in the past year shows that all parties to the conflict have reverted to human rights abuses after a lull of several years in which torture was largely confined to police investigating criminal matters.

Despite the upsurge, the Home Office last year removed 385 Sri Lankans who had been unsuccessful in claiming asylum, among the largest number of people returned to any one country in 2006. Many had spent their time in the UK in detention as part of the "fast track" asylum process.

In 2007 removals have continued, as well as the fast tracking of some cases, although the conflict has steadily worsened.

The Home Office's Operational Guidance Notes (OGN), which inform immigration decisions, still state that the capital, Colombo, is a viable location for returning failed asylum seekers, although the latest travel advice issued by the Foreign Office reports "widespread disruption".

That disruption largely takes the form of raids and street checkpoints to guard against insurgent infiltration. Emergency regulations implemented in 2005 permit the detention without charge of anyone suspected of "terrorist activity".

Tamils from outside Colombo are particularly suspected, yet the OGN continues to vouchsafe that "claimants who fear persecution at the hands of the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) in LTTE dominated areas are able to relocate to Colombo or other government controlled areas".

Now more international human rights organisations are highlighting the abuses resurfacing in a country where Tamil militants took up arms against the Sinhalese majority more than 25 years ago in attempt to carve out their own territory in the North and North East.

In August, Human Rights Watch accused the Sri Lankan government of unlawful killings, enforced disappearances and other serious human rights violations, and called for a UN mission to monitor events on the ground. Amnesty International has urged the UN's Human Rights Council to call on the Sri Lankan govern-



Many still bear the scars of the torture they suffered at the hands of the Sri Lankan military or police

ment to address the "grave violations of human rights and international humanitarian law by all parties to the conflict". The Asian Human Rights Commission has described the Sri Lankan government's commitment to investigating human rights abuses at present as no more than "mere words".

In 2000, the MF published research highlighting the use of torture by both the Sri Lankan forces, and the LTTE, which documented the methods used. Today, a new wave of clients bears witness to its resurgence.

The current client caseload suggests that increasingly it is civilians with no real political connection who are the targets of the Sri Lankan security forces, the LTTE and state sponsored paramilitaries such as the "Karuna Group."

The overwhelming majority of clients seen at the MF were Tamil, with just three giving their ethnicity as Sinhalese. In 79 cases out of 115 where the perpetrator was named, the Sri Lankan Army were alleged to be responsible for the torture. The LTTE were implicated in 15 of those cases, the Sri Lankan Navy in 14, and the Karma Group in 11. In a number of cases, once targeted by one faction, victims subsequently fell under suspicion from other groups because of speculation about what they might have said

while being held.

Some of those Sri Lankans interviewed reported being coerced into working for the LTTE as an alternative to having family members "conscripted". Others said they were targeted as suspects, often because of the activities of spouses or relatives. Several women who were detained by security forces or paramilitary groups while seeking to find their husbands were raped by the very authorities they sought help from.

The torture techniques reported by this recent group of arrivals to the UK match those found by the MF in its 2000 findings. The prevalence of rape, with at least 24 female clients and 22 male clients reporting they fell victim.

Fifty-five clients reported being beaten with implements ranging from truncheons to electric cable, 30 reported being burnt with cigarettes, and 20 said they were partially suffocated by a plastic bag soaked in petrol being placed over the head. Suspension by the ankles was also common.

Those interviewed by the MF remind us once again of the ongoing strife in Sri Lanka. It also reminds us of why we must impress on the Home Office the urgent need to identify torture survivors early on in the asylum process so that they are not detained, and are adequately supported and cared for.

FEATURES

Tamils traumatized by war - study

Feizal Samath

Sunday Times

WHILE residents in Colombo and areas outside the conflict zones often grumble about the cost of living, opportunist politicians and the lack of accountability by state institutions, their counterparts in war-torn Jaffna are a community virtually on the run.

Every family has a bag packed with all the essentials, ready to flee at a moment's notice, a new research study has revealed.

"When displaced to a refugee camp, they are systematic in getting themselves organized. They immediately find a corner, hang up screens with sarees, and start arranging their belongings for an indefinite stay," says Prof. Daya Somasundaram, a well-known Sri Lankan psychiatrist, in a new, path-breaking study on collective trauma.

The author, who fled Sri Lanka fearing for his and his family's safety and now resides in Adelaide in Australia, says the long-running civil war is causing more mental health problems and a social breakdown than the catastrophic 2004 tsunami.

"People have learned to survive under extraordinarily stressful conditions. A UNHCR official observed that in Jaffna people have become professional in dealing with complex emergencies from previous experiences," noted Somasundaram, Clinical Associate Professor in Psychiatry and Australia's first 'refugee scholar' at the University of Adelaide under the Scholar Rescue Fund.

Unfortunately, just like the words of that perennial American classic, "Where have all the flowers gone - When will they ever learn; when will they ever learn", this study - like many others will go unnoticed and disregarded by policy-makers, and those who matter (from both ends of the spectrum) and end up - like many other serious discourses on the need for urgent peace - in an office cupboard gathering dust, an aging computer or a pen drive.

Prof. Somasundaram's study on "Collective trauma in northern Sri Lanka: a qualitative psychosocial-ecological Study" recently published in the International Journal of Mental Health Systems, however has come in for praise by other researchers, some of whom are his students or colleagues.

Ananda Galappatti, a Medical Anthropologist and an editor of Intervention, the International Journal of Mental Health, Psychosocial Work and Counselling in Areas of Armed Conflict, said Prof. Somasundaram's study is a valuable contribution to the discussion of mental health and social suffering in Sri Lanka, as it argues that chronic situations of conflict can result in 'collective trauma', serious psycho-social



Having to live all aspects of their lives under the oversight of the military has changed behaviours among the Tamil population. Photo AFP

consequences that extend beyond individuals and impact on families and key social relations within affected communities.

"He argues for an understanding of suffering that is considerably broader than that allowed by conventional psychiatry, which tends to limit its perspective to psychological disorder or dysfunction in individuals," he said adding that Somasundaram built on insights gained through his work in post-Khmer Rouge Cambodia.

Jaffna has been the seat of Tamil militancy where the cry for self rule or the call from non-violent Tamil political parties for more powers to the region from the centre, emerged. The Tigers have said they are preparing for a major offensive by government troops in the north leading to uncertainty amongst the northern population.

Apart from death and destruction the psychosocial impact of the war has been severe in the conflict-affected areas in the north and east. The tsunami added to the woes of war-ridden societies.

The tsunami was a one-off catastrophic event that left a trail of destruction and loss, says Prof. Somasundaram.

"But it did not continue to exert a prolonged effect (unlike the war). As a result the severity of the collective trauma was much less. In fact, having lived through a prolonged war situation has meant that Tamil communities have learned skills and strategies that make them better able to cope with disasters."

Several surveys of individual level trauma and its effects in the

context of war have shown widespread trauma but this is the first study done of collective trauma.

The situation is getting worse amidst a daily diet of killings, abductions and robberies in Jaffna.

"We are seeing a lot of patients with psychological problems arising out of a situation of helplessness and uncertainty. No one knows what is going on and what would happen," said Dr. S. Sivayokan, Psychiatrist at the Jaffna Teaching Hospital.

Sivayokan, a student of Prof. Somasundaram who took over the author's position in this hospital, said a large number of robberies by unknown groups during the night have resulted in residents being fearful of nights and having sleep problems.

"A new (psychosocial) situation is developing. We see more patients unlike before who have hallucinations and imaginary situations related to the current context (uncertainty)," he said by telephone from Jaffna, where there has been a night curfew since last year.

He said this situation could be the added effects of suffering trauma over and over again during more than 20 years of conflict. In the high security zone in Jaffna, residents have been displaced for over 17 times while in the city itself, the average family would have been displaced at least twice.

Dr. Sivayokan said if there was continuous war, things would have been different.

"But in this case, there was a period (during the recent ceasefire) where there was peace, cul-

tural exchanges and hope. Now there is uncertainty and worry about families, children," he added.

Prof. Somasundaram says the phenomena of collective trauma first became very obvious to him when working in the post war recovery and rehabilitation context in Cambodia.

During the Khmer Rouge regime, all social structures, institutions, family, educational and religious orders were razed to 'ground zero' deliberately (so as to rebuild a just society anew), he said.

"The family unit has been included (in this study) as it is paramount in most parts of the traditional world. When the family is affected, the members too are affected, while if the family is healthy the individual is either healthy or recovers within the family setting," his report showed.

Prof. Somasundaram's study deals extensively with the war and tsunami impact on the family unit and traditional cultures which has triggered much of the psychosocial conditions now prevalent.

From the loss of one or both parents, separations and traumatization in one member, pathological family dynamics adversely affected individual family members, particularly the children, he says.

The cohesiveness and traditional relationships are no longer the same.

Compared to before the war, children no longer respect or listen to their elders, including teachers.

The study reveals that Tamil parents quickly change their behaviour and tone (in contrast to what the child has seen at home or elsewhere) when dealing with the security forces.

They, perhaps unconsciously and with the best of intentions (to safeguard their children and to avoid unnecessary hassle), assume a submissive posture (removal of hat, bent head and body, low and almost pleading tone of voice, pleasing manner with a smile) when accosted by the security forces (e.g. at check points).

The children will observe this change without comprehending the full purpose (perhaps to avoid the child being detained) comparing it to their demeanour at home and in time loses faith in his or her parents, it said.

"A strong influence has been the contemptuous way elders and community leaders have been treated by the authorities and the submissive way they have responded. Elders are perceived as being powerless and incompetent in dealing with war and its consequences, a point often made by the young militants. Elders have also been traumatized by the war, affecting their functioning, relationships and parenting skills," it said.

Prof. Somasundaram said the high incidence of mental health problems, alcohol and drug abuse, physical and sexual violence, child abuse and family disharmony found among indigenous populations around the world can be the result of the break up of traditional culture, way of life and belief systems.

FEATURES

Fear of partition may lead to peace

Dr. A. R. M. Imtiyaz
Sunday Times

THERE was speculation in Colombo that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the major ethno-political movement of the Sri Lankan Tamils, is planning to declare the formation of a separate state for the Tamils in Sri Lanka's violent North and East on January 18, 2008.

Sri Lanka's violent conflict between the Tamils and the Sinhalese has denied its people an opportunity to embrace ethnic peace.

Peace is the key to the stability of the island and security of ethnic groups, particularly the conflicting Tamils and the Sinhalese.

The question here is what we have to do to begin to make peace right?

The simple but the right answer can suggest only two alternatives - power-sharing and partition.

Sri Lanka has witnessed a few power-sharing deals between the Tamils and Sinhalese since 1957. These pacts represented a wide ranging and comprehensive devolution of power to alleviate ethnic disharmony.

Sadly, but as expected, these pacts could not defy the Sinhala opposition.

For instance, when S. W.R. D. Bandaranaike signed what is popularly known as the B-C pact with Federal Party leader S. J. V. Chelvanayakam on July 26, 1957, the UNP opposed it saying that it would lead to the collapse of the unitary state.

A senior UNP politician, Junius Richard Jayewardene organized a "peace-march" to Kandy making his way through the Sinhalese heartland.

What Sri Lanka's five-decades old post-independence history evidently proves is that the Sinhala political class whether they hail from the UNP or the SLFP, employ the emotions of the Sinhalese to outbid their opponents on anti-Tamil and/or anti-devolution programmes.

The JVP and the JHU which vehemently oppose political power-sharing to end the ethnic conflict are the latest addition to this Sinhala ethnic club.

It is important to point out that war and anti-Tamil policies have been the serious agendas of the Sinhala political class rather than brokering an honorable peace and genuine democracy.

President Mahinda Rajapaksa is not ready to retract his 2005 election policies, which rejected a federal solution, in order to outbid Mr. Wickremesinghe who favoured a federal solution to win the trust of the minorities, particularly the rebelling Tamils.

Mr. Rajapaksa knows that he would face tough opposition from his constituencies and Sinhala nationalist groups if he negotiates

a political solution based on a federal system.

In fact, this is the phenomenal consequence of symbolic politics which is a new term in political science meaning the use of ethnic symbols to win or hold on to votes.

When politicians employ such a deadly strategy to lock votes, they can certainly win the votes of the lower middle and working classes, but that strategy hardly would allow them to secure harmony and reconciliation among the different ethnic groups.

One alternative to improve the situation is to bring global pressure upon the key actors who like to break the circle of violence.

It seems there are some forces prepared to do this and have been making some efforts to carve out a political solution to the three-decades-old deadly ethnic conflict.

It is, indeed a good sign as far as Sri Lanka's peace is concerned, because a liberal peace is convincingly a better option than an inhuman war, which only helps strengthen ethnic and religious identity, as well as give breathing space for ethnic mobilizers to manipulate ethnic and religious symbols.

The question here is whether the global community can win its quest for a political solution based on substantial and sustainable autonomy and power-sharing in Sri Lanka?

The Sinhala political class is doing pretty good job in defying global concerns and pressures.

This is another side of symbolic politics which is capable of producing leaders like Iran's Mahmoud Ahmadinejad who thinks the existence of Israel is an "insult to human dignity" and suggests that Jews do not deserve Israel and should be relocated to parts of Europe or even Alaska.

Those who cuddle symbols for their political profits would use all their political capital, just to consolidate power and to resist external pressures.

Hence, it is highly unlikely that the political class in the South would easily abandon its symbolic ethnic agenda which has roots in Mr. Bandaranaike's 1956 Sinhala-only slogans.

However, all is not bad.

Power-sharing democracy still can shine as the only viable alternative even though it confronts strong resistance from the Sinhala political class for electoral gains.

Scholarly studies on Sri Lanka's violent ethnic conflict suggest different reasons for the failure of the peace accords administered by the Sinhala political class.

One major reason is that the Tamils in the past, particularly before the inception of the violent movements, did not have a strong



The conflict in Sri Lanka is felt mainly in the Tamil areas, where civilians in government controlled areas live in 'open prisons', with constant military vigilance over civil life

and territorially well-established leadership to challenge the Southern political class.

Mr. Perumal, the leader of the EPRLF briefly demonstrated cohesive leadership in 1990, when President R. Premadasa drastically reduced the devolved powers under the 13th amendment. Mr. Perumal, who was frustrated with the behaviour of the UNP regime, declared Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) at the end of his tenure.

Sadly, Mr. Perumal was not

We have only two alternatives to confront the continuing vicious war - an ethnic partition or power-sharing

politically and ideologically strong enough to challenge Mr. Premadasa and his clique. Also, he neither represented territorial control nor mobilized a mass movement to run the Tamil state under UDI.

Winning meaningful power-sharing is tough political business. But the Tamils need a strong leadership to resist the Sinhala people's unwillingness to share power.

The current brutal war against the Tamils can be understood in this theoretical understanding.

Mr. Rajapaksa, who won the elections in 2005 on an anti-Tamil and anti-federal programme,

would love to negotiate a peace solution with a politically and militarily enfeebled Tamil leadership for an obvious political reason.

Hence, it is highly unlikely that marginalized Tamils would get a sustainable and substantial power-sharing arrangement that addresses the grievances and aspirations of the minorities, particularly the Tamils if the current war continues without international intervention.

Practically speaking, power-sharing can produce good progress provided it deals with those strong actors who have territorial control with the ability to establish an independent state.

In other words, territorial domination by an ethnic movement can become an important factor for any power-sharing leading to a successful solution.

This understanding has been well proved in South Sudan (2005) and hopefully would be confirmed in Kosovo which has been exercising UN administered autonomy for a while from Serbia.

This success exercise recommends "a loose integration model" to facilitate "more than autonomy, less than independence."

The point here is that both in South Sudan and Kosovo, ruling elites have agreed to give substantial autonomy in the face of fear that territorially based (rebellious) movements would disintegrate the state.

The major problem with the Sinhala political class is that they neither have any serious respect for the minorities of the island nor

entertain any fears that refusal of respect could lead to the collapse of the state.

This mentality is dangerous, and would never lead to any meaningful solution accommodating the interests of the minorities. Thus, it is the duty of global actors to pressure the ruling class for a substantial political solution. If not, global actors ought to extend tactical support for Tamil aspirations.

The global community's support to the Tamil struggle could build some genuine fears. Such a mental-pressure from the fears of opposition to the state in its own backyard, may compel the Sinhala political class to negotiate a sustainable political solution through the channel of power-sharing democracy.

Sri Lanka's ethnic civil war needs a peaceful political solution. We have only two alternatives to confront the continuing vicious war. They are (1) an ethnic partition or ethnic un-mixing, and (2) a power-sharing.

The latter can best serve as a viable solution provided the dominant actor realizes the fact that the failure to accommodate the reasonable aspirations of minorities would strengthen the hands of ethnic partitionists who are sufficiently able to run an ethnic state.

This would answer the basic question - will fear of partition engineer sustainable peace through power-sharing?

(The author is a Sri Lankan political scientist who is currently affiliated as a visiting scholar at the Department of Political Science, Temple University, USA.)

FEATURES

Are the Tamils are a people?

J. S. Tissainayagam

Sunday Times

THE visit of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour was preceded by two important events in Sri Lanka.

On 24 September, the LTTE issued a statement that coincided with the sessions of the United Nations General Assembly. The statement urged the international community to recognise the concept of the sovereignty of the Tamil people and to give them the opportunity to express their aspirations as in the case of the peoples of Kosovo and East Timor.

The Tiger statement also called the government of Sri Lanka to "accept the aspirations of the Tamil people and come forward to find a resolution that is based on the right to self-determination of the Tamil people."

The second event was the UNP announcing the need to amend the CFA and that its new policy towards a political solution to the ethnic problem would be "...based on a credible power sharing proposal acceptable to all communities."

This, in effect, declared the party's repositioning on power-sharing from what it had agreed to in the Oslo Communiqué, which was "founded on the principle of internal self determination in areas of historical habitation of the Tamil speaking peoples, based on a federal structure within a united Sri Lanka."

The visit of the UN official was in response to human rights violations taking place in Sri Lanka such as, extra-judicial killings, disappearances, abductions, atrocities on IDPs, short-comings in the freedom of expression etc. Nearly all these violations are closely related to the armed conflict in the country.

Arbour made no bones about the fact that the human rights mechanisms in Sri Lanka were so ineffective that an international human rights monitoring mission was required to be present on the ground if rights were to be effectively protected.

While the violation of rights that brought Arbour to Sri Lanka was mainly due to the war that had led to the government suspending the usual safeguards available to the citizen, we have to go a step back to see why armed conflict emerged in this country at all.

The reason for militant movements to take up arms in the 1970s was because of a systematic and relentless campaign by successive Sri Lankan governments to violate the collective rights of the Tamils - the right to language, to equal opportunity in education, employment and livelihood, to culture and security (among others).

The war did not begin because of the LTTE or the other Tamil



Tamils have gathered in large numbers across the globe to demand their collective rights, including all those due to a people

militant movements; it began because of the abuse of the collective rights of the Tamil people and when attempts at peaceful redress of those violations were unfruitful.

It is important to note that what were being violated were the rights of a 'people.' According to international law, a group that could be described as a 'people,' if they believe that their right to live as equals within the state is being challenged, have a right to self-determination.

Are the Tamils a 'people'? Justice Marcus Enfield speaking at an international conference on Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict in 1996 said "There appears to be an underlying assumption that 'peoples,' in the sense used in international instruments, is the same as 'the minority,' and that they have the same rights in international law. A group which may fit within the definition of 'peoples,' cannot cease to be such merely because (as) a result of demographic or territorial change it becomes a minority of the population."

"This has been recognized to be the case for the Tamils by the widely respected International Commissions of Jurists, a representative of which is stated:

"The Tamils could be considered to be a 'people.' They have a distinct language, culture, a separate religious identity from the majority population, and to an extent, a defined territory.... The

application of the principle of self determination in concrete cases is difficult. It seems nevertheless, that a credible argument can be made that the Tamil community in Sri Lanka is entitled to self determination...

"What is essential is that the political status of the 'people' should be freely determined by the 'people' themselves."

Violations of collective rights are the basis of the conflict, and long-term, sustainable solutions will not be possible unless they are addressed

(Proceedings of the International Conference on the Conflict in Sri Lanka: Peace with Justice 1996)

The right to self-determination enshrined in the UN Human Rights Charter, is a foundational document of the organisation which Arbour represents.

The substance of the Charter was subsequently incorporated

into the ICCPR and ICESCR: "All peoples have the right of self determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development."

The evolution of the right to self-determination becoming part of international law is too long to describe here, but suffice it to say that it was used extensively in the 1950s and 1960s by anti-imperialist movements against colonialism.

However, once these new nation states were born, dominant groups within such post-colonial states began pursuing policies of discrimination against vulnerable communities within the state, such as the Tamils in Sri Lanka.

The right to self-determination allows a people to adopt a political status so that they may "freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development." This means they have the right to choose a political organisation within which they can freely express their economic, social, cultural and other aspirations.

The basis of the struggle of the Tamil people is the systematic discrimination they have faced, facilitated by power relations prescribed by successive constitutions from the time of independence.

They have all been unitary constitutions that placed effective control of political institutions at

the centre - the president, parliament and judiciary - that have been traditionally Sinhala dominated.

What is more, the passage of these constitutions through parliament was not with the consent of the Tamil people.

It is very important to note, however, that the right to self-determination does not necessarily mean secession, though misinformation by vested interests has portrayed it as such. Internal self-determination (which was an element in the Oslo communiqué) refers to structures of autonomy within a state. Only external self-determination signifies secession or a separate state.

Arbour and the international community have been absolutely forthright in condemning human rights violations that circumscribe the freedom of the individual.

That is because for historical and pragmatic reasons she and all her tribe from the west lay greater emphasis on individual human rights.

But if the international community is sincere about evolving a rights-based solution to the national question in Sri Lanka, doing patch-up work on individual human rights violations will not do.

Violations of the collective rights of the Tamils and Muslims are the basis of the conflict, and long-term, sustainable solutions will not be possible unless they are addressed.

NEWS

Bonds' over subscription trumpeted

SRI LANKA'S debut foray into the sale of international sovereign bonds has drawn significant interest from overseas investors, attracting \$1.25 billion of orders for a \$500 million bond offering, according to an e-mail sent to investors.

The Sri Lankan government Thursday trumpeted the over-subscription of its controversial bond for USD500 million as a firm vote of confidence in the resilience of the island's war-torn economy.

The President's Office had said in a press release that the bond was over-subscribed three times when the bids closed last Wednesday.

Forty per cent of the investors were from the US, while Europe, Middle East and Asia accounted for 30% each, the Hindustan Times reported.

The press release claimed that international investors were clearly impressed with Sri Lanka's 7.4% growth in 2006, despite the fuel price shock, adverse weather conditions and the continuing war.

"Whatever way you look at it and depends who you talk to -- it's either a good boost for the government or a costly exercise to the country," a senior, respected banker, who declined to be named, told the Sunday Times.

On his part, he believed the oversubscription meant "the international investor was confident in the Sri Lanka economy but was paying a higher price because the

political risk is higher."

Explaining this, he said because of the United National Party's (UNP) opposition to the bond and fears that repayment could be a problem if interest rates rose to over 8 percent (when bonds like this may have attracted a rate of around 7 percent).

The main opposition UNP had criticized the bond as being an expensive way to raise funds and even threatened that it would cancel the issue if it came to power.

"Having said that I believe this issue has shown that foreign investors are confident of Sri Lanka. However there is bound to be a debate on the good and bad side of this issue," the senior banker told the Sunday paper.

Other bankers agreed that the interest rate of over 8 percent for the US\$ 500 million bond which raised offers of over US\$ 1.2 billion came because the risk was higher, the Sunday Times reported.

"The bond carries 8.5% interest over a five year period which is the costliest loan that the Sri Lankan state has ever taken in its history," Dr Harsha de Silva of the Colombo-based think tank LIRNE ASIA told Hindustan Times.

"The subscribers have got a very good deal even as it shows how desperate the government has been to get money," he said.

Dr de Silva and other critics, including the opposition UNP, wonder if the expensive money,



Foreign traders view Sri Lanka as a good place to invest, especially in government bonds

got in such a hurry, was meant to tide over the cash crunch the government was facing, to meet the budget deficit, or finance the ever escalating war in the North and East, the Hindustan Times reported.

Bankers and economists agree with the opposition criticism that the bond is not for the stated reasons like financing infrastructure development projects, the Sunday Times added.

"If it was for this reason, the government would have easily gone in for cheaper credit (ADB, etc) at 1-2 percent or even less. Here we are paying 8 percent in a short term (five years)," a Colombo banker was quoted by the Sunday Times as saying.

"That's a huge cost to the people and something stinks in what the government is saying," the banker told the paper.

Sri Lanka's defense expenditure is to go up from SLRs 139 billion (\$ 1.27 bn) in 2007 to SLRs.166 billion (\$ 1.46 bn) in 2008, and the inflation rate is currently at 17.5%.

"Everyone knows that despite what the UNP says it won't keep to its word," another banker, asked to comment on whether the UNP, if and when in power, would stop the repayments as announced, told the Sunday Times.

This was also a view expressed earlier by Fitch Ratings.

Media analysts said one of the problems in analysing politically-sensitive issues like this was that

commentators from the political, business, economic or banking sectors were often polarised on political lines.

"They are either reflecting a pro-government view or a pro-UNP view and speak with some kind of bias and often don't come up with a rational or unbiased view on national issues," one analyst said. "So it's difficult to get an independent comment."

Hunting new oil reserves

SRI LANKA is seeking international expertise to conduct seismic surveys off the southern tip of the island in a hunt for new oil deposits, a senior minister said Friday.

"Initial seismic surveys shows that there are prospects for oil deposits in the southern seas and we are calling for international tenders to conduct a two dimensional seismic survey," Petroleum Minister A. H. M. Fowzie told AFP.

The survey is expected to cost about 6.5 million dollars, he said. Sri Lanka has also sought international investors to explore oil off its northwestern shores.

Seismic surveys conducted by Norway's TGS Nopec have shown that there was potential for oil and gas in the Cauvery basin off Mannar. Officials estimate the basin to carry oil reserves in excess of one billion barrels.

Fowzie said over 40 foreign firms showed interest when the government shared data on three out of eight blocks earmarked for exploration, during roadshows held in London, Houston and Malaysia last month.

Successful bidders have to pay the Sri Lankan government a 10 percent royalty fee on oil produced and a 35 percent tax on profits in return for an eight-year

license to prospect for oil, he said.

Two blocks in the basin out of the eight have already been allocated to the governments of China and India, which have to pay a 100-million-dollar deposit each for the privilege.

In the early 1970s, Sri Lanka drilled seven wells in the Mannar region with help from the former Soviet Union, but found no oil.

The country continues to import all its petroleum.

Meanwhile, an Indian oil company has announced plans to explore prospects for oil in Sri Lanka.

India's premier Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Ltd (ONGC) will be investing INR75,000 crores, and 35 per cent of that is for exploring new ventures.

"We have made nine hydrocarbon discoveries in the current year, out of which three are in Cambay Basin, one each in Mumbai Offshore, Assam Shelf and Cauvery basin and three in the East Coast deepwater" said ONGC chairman and Managing Director R.S. Sharma addressing a press conference in Chennai Friday, the Asian Age reported.

He said that ONGC is in talks with Sri Lanka to explore opportunities there. "If there are any good prospects, we would enter that area," he added.

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NEWS

India ups military support to Sri Lanka

A CHANGE in policy in India has seen the south-Asian giant step up its support for the Sri Lankan military by supplying 'offensive' weapons.

In the past India had declared that it will only supply 'defensive weapons' to Sri Lanka. However the latest reports confirm that the island's giant neighbour has now shifted to supplying 'offensive weapons' to the Sri Lankan government to fight the LTTE.

According to Indian press, New Delhi has supplied Colombo advanced automatic 40mm L70 anti-aircraft guns to guard against aerial attacks by the LTTE.

"The Ordnance Factory Board, for instance, has just received another \$40,000 order for supply of L-70 gun barrels to Sri Lanka. Among other things, four 'Indra' low-flying detection radars have already been supplied to Sri Lanka," the Times of India newspaper quoted a source as saying.

Playing upon India's fears about China and Pakistan making strategic inroads into Sri Lanka,

the government of President Mahinda Rajapakse has asked India to supply more air defence weapons and radars, artillery guns, Nishant UAVs and even laser designators for PGMs (precision-guided munitions).

Indian analysts believe the altering of policy by India is aimed at preventing Sri Lanka turning to Pakistan and China to meet its military need.

"Overall it looks like India is inching closer to the type of role Sri Lanka would like to see it play," a Sri Lankan diplomat opined.

With Sri Lanka's record of indiscriminate aerial and artillery bombardment, India has in the past always treaded a careful line with Sri Lanka, fearing that any weapons supplied by India being used to kill civilian Tamils would result in uproar in the southern state of Tamil Nadu.

According to Indian press reports, an encounter between the Sri Lankan Navy and the Sea Tigers off the coast in north-east-

ern Talaimannar revealed an LTTE arms stores in India.

The LTTE ship detected by the Navy had been carrying a remote-controlled LTTE plane which military officials said was very likely to have been ferried from Tamil Nadu in India, reports further added.

"Pressure is on Delhi to prove that it is taking tough measures against the LTTE's terrorist activities which has an impact not only on the sovereignty of Sri Lanka, but also on that of India," a senior Indian military official said.

Some analysts point to these military reasons as being behind India's decision to step up its weapons supply to Sri Lanka and take a forceful stand against LTTE activities.

However, others suggest that a lack of opposition from Tamil Nadu, particularly from current ruling party in the state, the Dravida Munetra Kalakham (DMK), would have encouraged India to increase its military support to Sri Lanka.

UN asked to emulate ...

Continued from p3

le to prevent the international community from taking any action against it, despite a consistent and high voltage campaign by international and domestic rights organisations.

The European Union chose not to introduce a resolution against it at the recent Human Rights Council meeting in Geneva. Jap-

an, one of Sri Lanka's principal donors, had made it clear that sanctions were not the right way to get a point across.

The US periodically expresses concern about the rights situation in the country, but the White House is not contemplating any punitive action.

India, which wants to build strong economic ties with Sri Lanka, has never made a strident

comment on the rights situation in the island, despite a past of supporting the Tamils, the victims of rights violations.

In fact, today, Colombo enjoys New Delhi's full support. While New Delhi is shy about trumpeting this, powerful elements in the Sri Lankan government like Basil Rajapaksa and the Defense Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, make no secret of it.

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A distraught relative of a Tamil who has disappeared in Sri Lankan government custody in recent months pictured taking part in a peaceful demonstration outside the United Nations (UN) office in Colombo, 11 October 2007, during a visit by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour. Photo Sanka Vidanagama/AFP/Getty Images

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