

Remembering Anton Balasingham

PAGES 2, 7

Misery for thousands in East hit by floods

OVER 30,000 people in eastern Sri Lanka have been displaced by flash floods following incessant rains in eastern Sri Lanka earlier this week.

The hardest hit have been thousands of Tamil people who had earlier been displaced by Sri Lankan military offensives and the Muslim community.

The eastern districts of Batticaloa and Amparai, a largely flat agricultural area which suffered in the 2004 tsunami, has taken the brunt of the monsoon.

8,300 families from Chengkaladi, Kiraan in Batticaloa district and Aalayadiveampu area in Amparai district were forced to leave their homes and seek refuge in schools, after rising floods threatened to engulf their homes, Batticaloa Additional Government Agent K. Mahesan said.

Hundreds of families from Chengkaladi area have been located at Chengkaladi Maha Viththiyaalayam.

In Trincomalee district, people who were already internally displaced due to Sri Lanka Army (SLA) offensives and, before that the December 2004 tsunami, and lodged in temporary shelters, are undergoing severe hardships caused by rain and floods.

Temporary structures located at Killiveddy and Iruthayapuram in Moothoor division sheltering displaced Tamil families have been inundated with flood water due to heavy rain with gale force winds in Trincomalee district since Sunday. Families are now living with great difficulties under leaking roofs without enough food and other essential needs, local sources said.

Key roads connecting the east with the rest of the island have also been damaged along with 400 acres of paddy fields by flood waters up to two feet deep.



Bharathanatyam dancers perform at memorial event in London on Dec 23 for Anton Balasingham, the LTTE's late ideologue and Chief Negotiator, who passed away in 2006 after brief battle with cancer. Mr Balasingham represented the Tamils in five peace processes. See p2

Major war looms in Sri Lanka

THE Sri Lankan government is building up to large scale war in the north of the island and has stepped up operations with the stated aim capturing Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) administered Vanni by August next year.

Earlier this month, the Sri Lanka Army (SLA) Commander Lt. Gen Sarth Fonseka addressing his high ranking officers in the Army Headquarters declared that he would wipe out the LTTE by August next year. He requested

the officers' fullest commitment towards this goal.

Skirmishes along the Forward Defence Lines (FDLs) have intensified in the past month with the SLA trying to breach LTTE defences on a daily basis.

The attacks on three fronts around Vanni: through Muhamaalai- Nagarkovil FDL in the Jaffna peninsula in the north, Mannar in the southwest and Manalaaru in the southeast.

The southern FDL running on either side of Omanthai, dividing

the Sri Lankan government controlled territory and the LTTE administered Vanni which lies north of Vavuniya, links Mannar and Manalaaru.

Some of these incursions have resulted in severe casualties on the Sri Lankan side.

On Saturday 22 December, LTTE thwarted a major SLA offensive towards Uyilangkulam in Mannaar. Backed with heavy artillery and Multi-Barrel Rocket Launcher fire, the SLA troops attempted to enter LTTE con-

trolled area on two fronts, but were defeated after 12 hours of fierce resistance in which 17 SLA troopers were killed and 54 wounded.

Previously on Tuesday 11 December, the LTTE beat back another major two-pronged offensive by the Sri Lankan forces in the Mannar region killing at least 20 soldiers and injuring more than 75.

LTTE military spokesperson,

Continued on p15

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NEWS



LTTE leader Vellupillai Pirapaharan paid his respects to late Mr. Balasingham in Vanni on Dec. 14.



Balasingham memorial held in London

EXPATRIATE Tamils in London held a one year memorial event Sunday for Mr. Anton Balasingham, the LTTE's former theoretician and Chief Negotiator, who passed away in December 2006 after a brief battle with cancer.

Traditional bharathanatyam dancers were amongst the performers who marked the event at the Walthamstow Assembly Hall in Northeast London.

Mrs. Adele Balasingham lit the lamp of remembrance before a thousand mourners from the different regions of London filed past a portrait of Mr. Balasingham and paid their respects by placing flowers in front of it. They included many of London's Tamil councilors.

The keynote address was delivered by Mr. N. Vithyatharan, the editor of the Jaffna-based Uthayan newspaper. In his hour long speech, he reflected on Mr. Balasingham's wide-ranging political abilities and experience and the veteran negotiator's per-



sonal qualities.

Mr. Balasingham represented the LTTE at five peace processes with the Sri Lankan state, including the 'Geneva 1' negotiations in early 2006.

Long a diabetes and kidney patient, he was compelled by ill health to retire shortly afterwards. He passed away from cancer on December 14, 2006.

Mrs. Adele Balasingham was another negotiator of the LTTE in peace talks since the mid-eighties.

The LTTE leader, Vellupillai Pirapaharan, in his condolence message described Mr. Balasingham as a "source of unwavering

strength in the political and diplomatic efforts of our freedom movement." In recognition of Mr. Balasingham's enormous contribution to the Tamil struggle for self determination, the LTTE conferred the title 'Voice of the Nation' on him.

Editorial, p7

(above, left) Mr. Anton Balasingham. (top) Tamils at a memorial on Dec. 23 in Lodnon for Mr. Balasingham. (above) N. Vith-yatharan, the editor of the Jaffna - based Uthayan newspaper pictured with Mrs. Adele Balasingham at the event.

NEWS

Misery and fear in Jaffna

‘Anyone can come into your home and kill you, or shoot you while you are out on the street.’

Asia News

A 'CAGE', a 'narrow prison' where one can wait for hours just for the army's permission to cross the street, where one can die of hunger if the authorities decide to block supply channels for "reasons of security", and where a culture of violence and oppression is growing more fierce.

The general misery compels the suicide of fathers of families who cannot pay for their children's medicines.

This is Jaffna, a small peninsula to the north of Sri Lanka, a place where civil war has been underway for 24 years, and about which "the world knows nothing, since news does not spread from here even to the rest of the country".

Recounting the dramatic situation of Jaffna is the provincial superior of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI) provincial superior in Sri Lanka, Fr S.M. Selvaratnam

AsiaNews interviewed him while he was visiting Colombo. He recounts the dramatic situation of the Tamils in the northern part of the country: the widespread culture of war, the paralysis of education, the impossibility even of crossing the street without the permission of the army, the absence of an authority to guarantee the rights of citizens.

Father, can you review for us the living conditions of the population of Jaffna?

Next year will be the 25th year that this small piece of land has lived with an absurd war between the Tamil Tigers and the government forces. It is too much; the people cannot endure it anymore: too many parents have lost their children, too many children are orphans, too many women widows, too many tears have been shed.

Apart from the psychological factors, there are concrete difficulties with carrying on daily life and meeting its necessities. Food and medicine can arrive only by boat or by helicopter, because the land routes have been blocked for over a year.

Everything is under the control of the military, so that when they decide to interrupt supplies, perhaps for reasons of "security", the people die of hunger.

But even when food is available the prices are so high, because of the costs of transporta-



Sinhala troops patrol the streets of Jaffna. They are suspicious of the residents, all Tamils. Photo Lakruwan Wanniarachchi/AFP/Getty Images.

tion that many cannot afford to buy it. The only means of subsistence would be farming and fishing, but both of these have been halted: kerosene is impossible to find, and fisherman cannot go out to sea, because the navy maintains that this is too dangerous. One can grow a little rice, but only for domestic consumption.

It is also difficult to travel from Jaffna toward the south: the passenger ships do not guarantee regular service, while flights are reserved far in advance and cost too much (125 euro for Colombo).

The people live in terror, because - and I am not exaggerating - anyone can come into your home and kill you, or shoot you while you are out on the street. Every 10 metres there is a soldier with a pistol aimed at you. Just to cross the street you may have to wait three or four hours for permission from the military.

Does the average citizen have the opportunity to obtain justice?

There is no such possibility, because there is no reliable authority that can be approached. If one of my relatives is killed and I go to claim the body, I am required to state that the person was a member of the Tigers, which means that his killing was justified. The authorities maintain, a

priori, that the Tamils of Jaffna are all members of the Tigers.

But the government and the military do not know that many of us are opposed to the Tigers and their actions. Moreover, there are so many groups involved in fighting in the area, that you never know who might be responsible for a homicide: the navy, the police,

‘The authorities maintain that the Tamils of Jaffna are all members of the Tigers’

the army, the Tigers, or the so-called paramilitary groups. It could be said that here is no order, no law here. We know that recently a grand tribunal has been opened, but we ask ourselves why . . . even the lawyers are afraid, and refuse to work.

Doesn't anyone appeal to the security forces in the area?

It is very sad to admit this, but there is a real problem of communication. The Tamils of Jaffna are

unable to speak with the Sri Lankan soldiers, who - for the most part uneducated young men from the villages - do not speak English or Tamil. Most of the military personnel have a very harsh attitude, but among them are also very humane, good persons who are likewise incapable of explaining the reason why we are at war.

This fact becomes even more dramatic if one considers that our daily life depends on the army: it can be said that one cannot move in Jaffna without a long string of permissions from the military authorities. And now they have introduced the so-called "military identity card", which practically makes useless the national identity card that we all possess. The army issues this card only after the citizen has provided a photo of his family, a photo of himself, and all of the information requested, down to the smallest details. But if, in order to comply with regulations, a citizen must possess a military identification card, then one is no longer under a civil government, but under a military government.

What can the Church do to alleviate the sufferings of these people? Are there any elements within civil society in Jaffna, any spokesman for the needs of Tamils?

Very few people know anythi-

ng about what is happening in Jaffna. There is no freedom of expression, and even the priests, who were once the only ones who dared to speak out against oppression, have been silenced. The disappearance of Fr Jim Brown more than a year ago intimidated and frightened them. So the voice of the inhabitants of Jaffna has been silenced, both within the peninsula and in the rest of the country and in the world.

What hope is there for a better future?

The people have no more hope. A culture of war has become rooted in Jaffna, and an entire generation has been born and raised amid the bombs. Education has been paralysed; young people are unable to go to school. The culture is destroyed. Economic difficulties destroy entire families.

There are fathers who go to buy medicine for their sick children or wife, discover that it is too expensive, and don't even return home, because in desperation they would rather kill themselves.

No one trusts any of the politicians anymore: for Jaffna, it makes no difference who runs the government, they all behave in the same way. There is widespread pessimism; we have seen too many ambassadors and presidents come here from outside without changing anything.

NEWS

Terror reigns in the East

AS Army-backed paramilitaries run amok terrorizing the Tamil and Muslim communities of the east, the Sri Lankan government is arming tens of thousands of Sinhalese, reports said this week.

The Sri Lankan government is stepping up the militarization and Sinhala colonisation of the eastern districts of Batticaloa and Amparai with the arming and settling of tens of thousands of civilian militia in the region, reports said.

Sri Lankan Media Minister Lakshman Yapa speaking at a cabinet press briefing on 20 December announced that 250,000 civil defense personnel have been recruited for the security of the Eastern Province in addition to the three armed forces, police and home guards.

According to Lanka-e-News, the Government provides salaries, firearms and ammunition to these personnel who work attached to temples and village offices etc.

These militia men who are referred to as a Civil Defense Personnel is entitled to Rs. 13,000 salary (\$130), a mobile phone and Rs. 300,000 loan to build a house.

At present almost all the Buddhist temples in the Eastern Province are being used for military purposes. Each Buddhist temple in the region is provided with a four wheel drive jeeps, communication equipment and 40 armed personnel of Civil Defense Force.

With a total population of 1.5 million, one in six persons in the Eastern Province is a Sinhalese militia person from the Civil Defense Force.

Lanka-e-News further reported no one is allowed to photograph these areas that are under strict control of Army.

Just as the government militarized the east with armed Sinhalese militia, the government backed paramilitary group, Tamil Eelam Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal (TMVP), too was accused of forcibly arming abducted civilians, further militarising the east.

According to one leading Sri Lankan newspaper, the TMVP is "running riot in the Eastern Province, especially in Batticaloa, turning the entire district into a virtual hell hole for the civilians living there."

The Nation paper quoted sources as saying that the situation in the east at present is far worse before the province was 'liberated' from the LTTE by the government.

"The situation has become extremely severe that even civilians who are harassed by the Pillayan gang have now stopped

complaining to the police, as law enforcement officers also turn a blind eye to the growing phenomenon, the paper said.

Sources from the province charged that Pillayan cadres wear half masks and enter houses at night to take away valuables and warn the victims if they utter a word, they will have to face the consequences.

The Pillayan problem has also affected the Muslims in the province, with sources claiming that Pillayan is now encroaching into the lands that belong to Muslim civilians by force and is settling his supporters in those lands.

In its weekly report, covering the period 10 December to 16 December, the international monitors of the Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission (SLMM) said that on December 11 two men (ages 19 and 20) and one boy (age 17) were abducted, reportedly by the TMVP, in Thirukovil, in Amparai.

"The SLMM received information that they were given guns and forced to patrol the area on motorbikes," the mission said.

It also stated that, on the same day, another 18-year-old man was abducted in Thandiady in Amparai. "It was reported that the perpetrator was the TMVP, and the man was forced to do armed street patrolling," SLMM said.

According to the SLMM report at least 18 persons were abductions during first week of December alone by the Pillayan group.

SLMM Spokesman Pia Hansson told The Nation newspaper, "We have noticed a large number of killings and abductions in the east and we are concerned about this trend."

According to the Nation, grave atrocities, including murder, abductions, extortion and land grabbing continue unabated in the east, with civilians living in Batticaloa having to bear the major brunt. Also, the activities of Pillayan and his cadres have now even begun to spread to Amparai.

Pillayan, who has now been nicknamed 'Billa' (child snatcher), took over the TMVP leadership after overthrowing its founder, renegade LTTE leader Karuna Amman, who is now in British custody.

However, Pillayan's rhetoric to put an end to all atrocities committed before his time, now appears to be an utter farce, with reports emanating from the eastern districts disclosing that Pillayan's activities are as bad as Karuna's, if not even worse," sources from the east, who spoke on condition of anonymity claimed, reported the Nation.



Newly trained Sinhala militia with ultra-nationalist minister Champika Ranuwake, one of the ideologues behind the aggressive land grabs and colonisation of Tamil and Muslim areas in the east.

Tamil civilians are 'human shields' for Sri Lankan troops

HAVING closed the land route to Jaffna, the Sri Lankan government is using Tamil civilians traveling to and from the northern peninsula as human shields on ships transporting military personnel and material to and from Jaffna, the Liberation Tigers warned this week.

The full text of the statement by LTTE Spokesperson for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs follows:

The Geneva II talks in October 2006, between the LTTE and the Government of Sri Lanka, broke down because the Government of Sri Lanka refused to open the A9 route to allow Jaffna civilians land access to the rest of the island and the world.

Prior to the permanent closure of this A9 route, it served as a life line to the people of Jaffna as well as Vanni. Seriously ill medical cases from Vanni were taken in ambulances to the Jaffna hospital. Every day ambulances plied seven to eight times a day, carrying around six patients in each trip. This is necessitated by the poor medical resources in Vanni. Even the Jaffna hospital resources are very poor in comparison to what is available in the south of island. Many very seriously ill patients were taken to Colombo for treatment through the A9 route.

Presently the Jaffna civilians

have no land route even to seek emergency medical treatment. The only option available to them is the "passenger" operated by the Sri Lanka Navy. It is a well known truth that each time this "civilian passenger" ship plies to and from Jaffna and Trincomalee, invariably the Sri Lankan military personnel traveling in the ship is many times more than the number of civilians in the ship.

It is also well known to the Jaffna population the difficulties one must go through to first obtain a pass from the military to travel and then obtain a seat in the ship. Reports of the Sri Lanka military demanding every civilian

wishing to get a seat in the ship to give the military a name of an LTTE supporter in Jaffna have surfaced many times.

Indeed, innumerable violations of the Fourth Geneva Convention is taking place as a result of the closure of A9 route and the cutting off of the 500,000 civilians in Jaffna from the rest of the world. Denial of humanitarian access to the children is also a violation that comes under the monitoring of Resolution 1612 of the Security Council. Transporting military personnel using civilians, especially the ill, is also a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention.



NEWS

Aggressive foreign policy pays off

P.K. Balachandran
IANS

SRI LANKAN President Mahinda Rajapakse's foreign policy based on an aggressive display of nationalism appears to be paying off.

In the two years Rajapakse has been in power, the government has taken on the UN and the West and has rapped multilateral bodies on the knuckles for being soft on the Tamil Tigers.

It has also demonstrated closeness to China and Pakistan regardless of how India, the only neighbour, may view it.

But Colombo has been none the worse for all the boldness, even if it has smacked of adventurism and abrasiveness at times.

There has been consistent and strident international criticism of the way the regime is handling the ethnic crisis, especially the huge humanitarian problem unending fighting has triggered.

But foreign governments and multilateral organisations have been reluctant to translate expressions of displeasure into corrective action.

As an analyst put it, 'The international community has barked, but not bitten.'

Western governments and West-based international organisations had got into the habit of making unsolicited comments on the internal affairs of Sri Lanka, often lecturing to its leaders on good governance, democracy and prudent political management.

Not surprisingly, Sri Lankans find this condescending and annoying.

Under the regime of Rajapakse, the popular trend here is to launch hostile campaigns against foreign governments and international bodies including those affiliated to the UN. At times, cabinet ministers and leading lights in parliament spearhead these campaigns.

Surprisingly, the responses of the affected governments and organisations have been tepid.

There has been no threat of withdrawal from the country by any group. Nor has there been any significant reduction of aid, on which Sri Lanka is so heavily dependent.

Some time ago, Britain and Germany had announced cuts in their aid, citing the continued conflict and slow progress in the peace process. But the amounts were small.

And Japan, the single largest donor, has stated that it will continue to aid Sri Lanka despite the human rights violations, because stoppage of aid will only harm the innocent poor in the country.

Although depending on the US for help to fight the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) globally, Rajapakse recently paid a

state visit to Iran, America's enemy. The visit was a success in terms of project aid, as Iran gave Sri Lanka what Rajapakse asked for.

At the Commonwealth summit at Kampala, the Sri Lankan stand on Pakistan's expulsion was at variance with that of the others, including Britain, Canada and Australia whose help too is vital to break the LTTE's global links.

Sri Lanka went out of the way to tout Pakistan's case even at the risk of alienating India. But Colombo was none the worse for all that. It was made part of a group charged with the task of talking to Pakistan.

Rajapakse's highly publicised support to Pakistan at Kampala was an expression of gratitude for helping out Sri Lanka with urgent military aid in 2000 when the LTTE was knocking at the gates of Jaffna and India failed to respond to cries of help.

Sri Lankans never tire of pointing out that it was to India that they had turned first but all that New Delhi offered was help to evacuate the beleaguered Sri Lankan troops.

The president has cleverly made use of both Pakistan and India in his fight against the LTTE.

While the Indians have been made to supply 'defensive' equipment like radars, Pakistan has been involved in the enhancement of the strike capability of the Sri Lankan Air Force. Successful air actions have helped curb the LTTE.

Regardless of possible repercussions for India, Rajapakse had got China to fund a major development project with international strategic implications. Chinese help for a mega international port at Hambantota in the south did set off alarm bells in India but New Delhi did little to prevent the president's lurch towards Beijing.

The success of Sri Lanka's aggressively independent stance was reflected in the outcome of the 6th session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva that concluded Friday.

To the great embarrassment of Sri Lanka, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, declared that the Colombo government's human rights enforcement machinery was ineffective and urged the setting up of a UN rights monitoring office in the country.

Arbour's call came in the context of the fact that, through 2006 and 2007, 290,000 civilians, mostly Tamils and some Muslims, had been displaced by the war and over 3,500 were killed.

Attacks, extortions, abductions, disappearances and arbitrary detentions were going on, sometimes with state backing and



President Mahinda Rajapakse's militarist government easily fends off the mild international criticism.

aided by the tough anti-terror law made in December 2006.

The delegations of the US, EU, France, South Korea, Sweden, Canada and New Zealand voiced support for Arbour's call to set up a UN monitoring office in Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka seemed to be isolat-

There has been no threat of withdrawal from the country by any group. Nor has there been any significant reduction of aid, on which Sri Lanka is so heavily dependent.

ed, but it fought the move tooth and nail -- and succeeded in scuttling it.

Talking the battle into the adversary's territory, its ambassador to the UN in Geneva, Dayan Jayatilake, said his country did not want to be 'preached' by states whose human rights record was 'far from perfect'.

Sri Lanka would take advice from international bodies only when these had 'transparency of funding' and when their agendas were 'not donor driven', he declared brazenly.

Sri Lankan officials had kept hammering the point that their country could not be asked to observe Queensberry Rules in a war-cum-insurgency situation in which a beleaguered state was battling one of the most ruthless and well-organised insurgent groups in the world.

They accused the UN agencies and international rights organisations of not taking adequate note of the LTTE's rights violations or rapping it hard enough.

To the delight of Sri Lankan delegation and disappointment of Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, the UN council concluded its deliberations without passing the expected resolution castigating Sri Lanka.

Japan, India and the Philippines had thrown their weight behind Sri Lanka at the council.

Clearly, the LTTE's behaviour since the Norway-sponsored ceasefire agreement in 2002 had helped the Sri Lankan government bolster its case against censure.

The LTTE had scuttled peace talks, provoked the government to take military action, bombed civilians outside the war zone and assassinated political leaders by using suicide bombers.

While Colombo's case at the Human Rights Council may have some merits, the persistent attacks against UN organisations and international NGOs seem to be needlessly confrontational.

But here again, there has been no backlash of any kind from the affected parties.

UNICEF has come in for much flak both in parliament and outside for having, in its offices,

'Ready to Eat' food packets supplied by a French military contractor. It was alleged that the packets were meant for the LTTE's fighting units!

UNICEF explained that such packets were routinely distributed among its offices in conflict areas across the globe as part of a survival kit. But the government remained unconvinced and police sleuths were told to probe the allegation.

International NGOs working in the conflict zone routinely face hostility, both in word and deed.

British High Commissioner Dominic Chilcott appealed to Sri Lankans not to demonise UN organizations, but this fell on deaf ears. At any rate, Chilcott had spoilt his case by saying that the LTTE's demand for an independent 'Eelam' was not 'illegitimate'.

The government not only summoned him for a dressing down but also announced that it would complain to the Foreign Office in London.

Earlier, in August, cabinet minister Jeyaraj Fernandopulle called the UN Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, John Holmes, a 'terrorist who had taken money from the LTTE'. Holmes had said that Sri Lanka was a 'risky' place for aid workers.

When UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon described Fernandopulle's remark as 'unacceptable and unwarranted', the minister made it plain that he did not 'care a damn.'

The UN's response to this was silence.

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EDITORIAL

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WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 26, 2007 No. 363

Unavoidable Paradox

What international action would make the Sinhalese share power?

It has been an uncomfortable couple of weeks for Sri Lanka's militarist government. The United States has linked the sale of (some) weapons to an improvement in the human rights situation in the island. The US government agency, the Millennium Challenge Corporation has taken Sri Lanka off its eligible list, pending the same. Britain has made thinly veiled threats about action against President Mahinda Rajapakse's regime. In the meantime the international chorus calling for a UN human rights monitoring mechanism continues. The international panel overseeing President Rajapakse's Commission inquiring into a selection of atrocities has, on cue, declared this exercise in self-regulation a sham. But while these international steps, especially the US and UK, are welcome, they will, almost certainly, have no effect save, possibly, raising optimism that the Sri Lankan state is going to be restrained.

Let there be no mistake. President Rajapakse is not going to be dissuaded by international handwringing from his completion of the Sinhala hegemonic project which began soon after independence under his father's watch. To begin with, he enjoys the enthusiastic support in this regard of the vast majority of Sinhalese. Even the main opposition UNP is not unsympathetic to this project, having also furthered it whilst it was in power (which, incidentally, is why the 'liberal' UNP has never come out in strong opposition to the Sinhala-isation of the state or the rampant jingoism and anti-Tamil xenophobia that has emerged since President Rajapakse took power). Most importantly, the Sri Lankan government is confident that, for all its grimacing, the international community, operating in the logic of the 'global war on terror', will not seriously impede the Sinhala nationalist project which rests primarily on destroying the LTTE. Even the accompanying projects of Sinhala colonization and demographic redrawing are drawing international support (under the guise of advancing 'development').

In the past two years, the Sri Lankan state has launched a full scale war in the Tamil homeland. Military operations have killed hundreds of Tamil civilians and driven hundreds of thousands from their homes. Thousands of Tamils have been abducted and 'disappeared' or extra-judicially killed. Brutalized bodies have been routinely dumped on roadsides for two years now. Yet is only now that the US et

al are taking tiny steps to punish the state. And these are not credible sanctions: Sri Lanka can easily acquire the weapons denied by the West from other sources, including China, Pakistan, India and Russia. Even the symbolism of sanctions has not had the appropriate effect: Colombo's reaction was reportedly to call the envoys of the offending countries in and give them a lecture on sovereignty.

Thus the international community arrives at a curious paradox: the only way to 'reform' the Sri Lankan state is to breach its sovereignty. Indeed, while arguing that there must be a political solution to the Tamil question, the international community has no credible way to ensure such a solution emerges. In an effort to convince, even cajole, the Sinhalese to share power with the Tamils, the international community has concentrated on cracking down not on the state, but on the only reason the state has ever had to share power - the armed struggle of the LTTE. But it has not worked. The more likely it looks the LTTE will be defeated, the less interested the Sinhalese are in sharing power (indeed, it was the military ascendancy of the LTTE that precipitated that, now distant, excitement of federalism in 2002).

Having failed over three decades to reform the Sri Lankan state, the Tamils resolved first to form their own state in their homeland and later, amid unbridled state violence, to do so by arms. We, the Tamils who have to live in a united Sri Lanka, were unable to solicit from the Sinhalese a sense of equitable amity, let alone a common brotherhood. We know the international community will not be able to do it - not without intervention bordering on trusteeship. The Sinhala leadership knows this. Which is why none of them (not even the UNP, the darlings of the international community) will even countenance the involvement of the UN in the 'internal affairs' of the Sri Lankan state. This is why any negative comment by any UN official or agency draws a hysterical reaction from the government and, pointedly, absolute silence from the other Sinhala parties. A liberal polity cannot be wished into existence if the dynamics that oppose it (especially a self-renewing nationalism charged with racial supremacy firmly in charge of the state to be reformed) are not aggressively disrupted. The international community will not surmount this paradox.

What justifies war?

J.S. Tissainayagam
 Sunday Times

The US Government is reportedly withholding military aid to Sri Lanka until the government there had made certain improvements in its human rights practices.

To many Sri Lankans exasperated by the government's deplorable human rights record and its increasing confidence in committing violations with impunity, the strictures are welcome.

The question is however, what lies behind Sri Lankan security forces acting with impunity? Why is it that they commit atrocities that have led Washington to impose a curb on military aid?

We all know that actions of any military are driven by political agenda, whatever such agenda might be. The Sri Lanka army is no exception. From the 1950s it has been called upon to suppress Tamil rebellion demanding equal rights, which has taken different forms over the decades. In other words, a Sinhala-majority military was protecting a state that reflected Sinhala hegemony by suppressing the Tamils' struggle for their rights.

Therefore, it was the Sri Lankan state's project of using armed force to maintain a disparity of status between different communities that has led the present government to violate human rights with impunity, to bar humanitarian workers and the media from accessing IDPs in the North and East, and its cavalier attitude towards permitting a UN a human rights monitoring mission in the country.

So, we have to agree that human rights violations by the security forces in their war against the Tamils, that began in the 1950s and which is today causing much suffering to civilians, is only a product or a consequence of a much deeper malaise.

Therefore, if we want human rights violations to come to a halt, the fundamental problem faced by the Tamils and other communities living in Sri Lanka has to be addressed. This means addressing the core issue of access to political power, which would guarantee the rights of Tamil citizens, as much as the rights of citizens of other communities.

The fact that the American government too believes that a lack of acceptable power-sharing lies at the heart of the ethnic problem in Sri Lanka is exemplified in the numerous US statements.

However, in its denial of military aid to the Sri Lankan government, the US only refers to the Sri Lankan military's continuing record of violating human rights and humanitarian law principles in prosecuting the war, and not to any power-sharing exercise whatsoever, not even the APRC, which all Tamils have regarded as gross-

ly inadequate to address the complexity of Tamil demands.

In other words, hypothetically, if the culture of impunity by the Sri Lanka government comes to an end or even reduces (we should not forget the Rajapaksa government has been killing civilians, starving and abducting them from 2005, but the US has decided to take action against Colombo only now), humanitarian and media access is allowed to the North and East and a UN human rights field presence permitted, the ban on transferring arms to the Sri Lanka government would be withdrawn so that the military option could be pursued against the Tamils.

The primary issue is bringing a halt to the conflict which can only be done by placing on the table a credible set of proposals to share power. But, by making further military aid dependent on fighting the war without large-scale, visible civilian casualties, the impression the US conveys is that it is supportive of a 'clean war' by a professional military.

And, we all know that in any strike by a military outfit - be it the Sri Lankan security forces in the Vanni or the world's most advanced, the US, in Iraq or Afghanistan - civilian casualties are inevitable.

But these are obviously not Washington's concern. The fact that it is not is demonstrated in the Congress bill's qualification, allowing equipment for aerial and maritime surveillance.

To the Tamils, as well as others who support them in fighting for a just solution for Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict, the only effective way of compelling Colombo to address not only human rights issues but also those of power-sharing, is by withdrawing the facility it enjoys - the ability to re-arm, while its opponent cannot.

And the only way of doing that is by placing a strict embargo on the arms supply to Colombo. But, to implement this is to tie arms supply to an effective set of proposals for power-sharing that would eventually bring about a solution and not to make arms supply to Colombo contingent on its military measuring up to professional standards.

War by a state on its own people cannot be justified just because it is fought professionally. The question should be whether it is a just war.

If it is only military professionalism Washington is looking for, it would mean committing the cardinal error of encouraging Colombo to fight, based on the premise that all wars against anti-state forces are justified, without looking into the fundamentals that drive such wars. (Edited)

OPINION

Bala Anna: a remarkable man, adored by the people he loved

On the first anniversary of the death of Mr. Anton Balasingham, we reproduce our sentiments of one year ago.

Editorial

Tamil Guardian

NEWS that Mr. Anton Balasingham had passed away after a brief battle with cancer was met with shock and profound grief across the Tamil community. In the thirty years he was associated with the Tamil freedom struggle, he had truly become a legend in his own time. He was the LTTE's theoretician for thirty years and its chief negotiator for most of that time. In that period, a fledgling guerilla group dedicated to the emancipation of the Tamil people grew and expanded into a national liberation movement with a powerful military and an apparatus of civil administration, while Bala Anna became an icon of the Tamil cause.

Mr. Balasingham was many things to the Tamil struggle. The formal titles of theoretician and chief negotiator do not capture them all. Within the LTTE he was a father figure. His door was always open to cadres and commanders alike. No subject was taboo, confidentiality was assured. Most importantly, of course, he was the struggle's political strategist. Beyond the LTTE, he was approached for advice and guidance by a range of Tamils, from parliamentarians to journalists, supportive of the cause of freedom. He was eloquent in formal Tamil, but he could also address us in the colloquial, unraveling the complexities our struggle faced and bringing every one of us closer to it. Which is why his public addresses were so eagerly awaited.

It was Mr. Balasingham's demonstrably keen intellect and political acumen that compelled LTTE leader Vellupillai Pirapaharan to ask him in 1979 to join the tiny group of young revolutionaries their movement then was. (And it was Mr. Balasingham's recognition of Mr. Pirapaharan's abilities as a leader and the LTTE's institutional strengths that persuaded him to throw in his lot with the Tigers rather than any of the many other Tamil militant groups setting out on the long road of struggle.) The strength of the personal bond that grew between them is reflected in Mr. Pirapaharan's poignant words this week as he awarded Bala Anna that unique title 'Voice of the Nation.'

Nothing captures what Bala Anna meant to the Tamils as that title does. For three decades he spoke for us, the Tamil people. He led LTTE delegations in five attempts to negotiate a political

solution with the Sinhala state. He represented us in our dialogue with the international community, both in public fora and private discussion. He explained the oppression we endure and defended our struggle for freedom. He was a formidable representative, aggressively and adeptly pursuing our interests. He could not be intimidated - though it was often tried. His razor sharp intellect was matched by a powerful personality.

But he was, as one commentator puts it, a quintessential negotiator. Amidst the heat of dispute he could find the sites of compromise. And, armed with the complete trust of the LTTE leadership, he would compromise - but not surrender. Thus he earned the begrudging respect of his interlocutors, both Sinhala and international.

His driving purpose was always the well being of his people, as all those who engaged with him from any side of the table quickly came to understand. It is entirely in character that his final public words in November, confirming his diagnosis with cancer, were mainly about the plight of the Tamil people. He loved us as much as we adored him.

It is inevitable that Mr. Balasingham's passing has brought joy to our enemies. Reflecting the character of some of them, there has been public jubilation at his death in parts of the south - just as when his illness was announced last month. This ugliness is characteristic of the oppression we fight.

It also reflects a misunderstanding of what Mr. Balasingham's multi-faceted role was, of where the LTTE now is as a movement and where the Tamils are as a nation. The growth of LTTE over the past three decades has been inexorable, despite the ferocious violence unleashed on it and the Tamil people by the Sri Lankan state and its allies. Mr. Balasingham contributed immeasurably to that growth. His analytical, calculative approach has been institutionalized. Every arm of the LTTE routinely weighs its decisions before committing to a course of action, the long-term benefit to the Tamil cause the overarching priority. As the LTTE's multi-faceted international engagement has grown in scale and complexity, new capabilities have emerged, both in the LTTE and wider Tamil nationalist movement. Mr. Balasingham guided



many of these, devising strategies and advising key individuals. As deepening illness precluded a frontline role for Mr. Balasingham for much of this year, he was able to rest, secure his many tasks were being competently carried forward by others. The extent of his legacy will only be discernible in the fullness of time.

This newspaper and its staff are privileged to have had a very special relationship with Bala Anna. It began soon after he arrived in London in 1999. He readily agreed to meet the volunteers of the Tamil Guardian when we asked. Our discussions quickly became regular and frequent. We always met at the study in his home, where we were warmly welcomed by him and his wife, Adele. An experienced journalist, Mr. Balasingham had a passion for media. He also appreciated that we were committed to articulating the Tamil cause. He spent

considerable time with us in prolonged discussion on the ethnic question, on the Tamil struggle, on international affairs, and many other subjects. The depth of his knowledge was unfathomable. A warm, convivial and humorous man, he was a patient tutor. He scrutinized our work and was generous with his praise and scathing in his criticism. Yet he never constrained us, encouraging us to write freely on the Tamil cause. As with a handful of other Tamil correspondents, he took us into his confidence in exchange for our discretion. In March 2000 we were privileged to be exclusively granted his first media interview after leaving Vanni. He gave many of his infrequent subsequent interviews to us.

Our relationship with the Balasinghams went beyond the production of the newspaper. It was individual, personal and very affectionate. They took an active

interest in each of us, inquiring of those who met them about those who were not there. Bala Anna encouraged us to develop our individual interests and offered welcome advice on our academic and professional pursuits. We drew much inspiration and not a little courage from him.

Being close to Bala Anna, we were, for a long time, acutely aware of his health difficulties. His health declined rapidly this year, but only until recently were we unable to converse regularly with him. His death comes as a devastating personal loss to each of us. Our hearts go out to Adele Aunty, his beloved wife and constant companion. Her loss is the deepest. We will all miss him very much. We, at the Tamil Guardian, couldn't be more proud of our close association with Mr. Balasingham over the past seven years. He was, quite simply, a remarkable man.

Teaching the Tamil Tigers

Dr. John S Whitehall

The Medical Journal of Australia

FOR OVER two decades, there has been savage conflict in Sri Lanka between a minority group of Tamils who claim traditional rights for land in the north-east and the majority, Sinhalese, government in Colombo.

The conflict has consumed tens of thousands of lives, displaced hundreds of thousands, sown agricultural land with mines, laid waste plantations, and stunted a generation of children.

It could be argued that the only rule of warfare is the respect each side has for the capacity of the other to terrorise: the desire for self-preservation has tended to restrict the number of civilians being bombed.

Nevertheless, human rights organisations have reported over 4000 Tamil deaths in recent months. The conduct and cost of the conflict is obscured by suppression of the press on the government side and lack of access of the press to the other.

The Ceasefire Agreement in 2002 between the leaders for Tamil autonomy, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, and the government in Colombo, and the effects of the Asian tsunami in 2004 have combined to reduce hostilities and permit greater access to the north-east by foreigners.

In this time of relative peace, I visited the region in January and again in May 2005, delivering antibiotics and then ventilators and surgical equipment to hospitals throughout the island, supplied through the generous response of North Queensland to the tsunami.

Driving north from Colombo to Jaffna, I was struck by the poverty on the Tamil side of the armed border, the lack of facilities in the hospital in Kilinochchi (the administrative centre of the "Tamil" land) and the dilapidation of the tertiary hospital in Jaffna.

Only the crowds in the corridors and the patients on the floors obscured the filth on the walls and passageways. Nothing obscured the suffering of apparently half-dead people being carried on bare metal stretchers at perilous angles up and down the stairs, buffeted in the surge. I was struck by the whites of their fingers as they clung to the metal.

Nothing prevented the recycling of dengue through unscreened windows from sullage that pooled from broken pipes alongside the wards. One piddling tap leaned vainly against cross-infection in the crowded children's barn.

Why was this hospital so different to the many I had visited in the Sinhalese areas? I later learned of economic sanctions and underfunding by Colombo.

I volunteered to return to Sri Lanka in September 2005, originally to work as a paediatrician on the east coast, but diverted by my hosting organisation to work in Kilinochchi for a couple of weeks and teach "some students who had missed out because of the war". I remembered the needs of Kilinochchi and was willing to comply. About three weeks later, I discovered that my students comprised the medical wing of the "terrorist" Tigers!

I met them in a shed whose walls reached halfway to a roof of corrugated iron that creaked in the heat of the sun, then roared with the monsoon rains as the weeks extended to three months, and I swapped tales of sick children for tales of my students' lives.

We began awkwardly. As I entered, there was a sudden scraping of chairs on the concrete floor and then a silent standing to attention. I was further surprised by how many there were - 32 - and their being perhaps a decade older than I had expected. I introduced myself and asked them to sit. There was more scraping of chairs. Now they were sitting stiffly and silently. "Does anyone speak English?" I asked, and began to try to work out what they knew and what they needed. I had no idea I would grow to love them.

I realised they needed grounding in the old-fashioned approach of taking a history, examining methodically, and making provisional diagnoses and plans of management, though I soon sensed they had had profound experiences in triage and trauma. They had seen a lot of sick children but were thin on theory, so I decided to prolong my stay and start at the beginning.

After about two weeks, we had worked our way to the examination of the respiratory system and it was then that I discovered how close my students had been to the acute end of medicine. I invited a man to remove his shirt and a woman to demonstrate her method of examination and was surprised by the divot out of the man's shoulder. Asking him what had happened, I noticed a similar deformity in the woman's forearm. Shrapnel and a bullet, they explained, and everyone began to laugh.

"Well, who hasn't been shot?" I asked, and, to my astonishment,

only about a third raised their hands. "Didn't you notice our wooden legs?" someone asked and, adding to my foolishness, three were waggled for my inspection, with the class now in uproar. Who are these people? I wondered, and began the journey of discovery.

They comprised the medical wing of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and were the remainder of an original group of over 70 who had been chosen from the ranks of the infantry because their commanders had concluded they had the potential to become doctors.

The struggle for a Tamil homeland, Tamil Eelam, had entered a violent phase in the late 1980s, and the problem of casualties had originally been solved by taking them in small boats to sympathisers in nearby Tamil Nadu, in India. As the numbers increased and the political situation altered, they were taken to the hospital in Jaffna. But lives and limbs were lost in transportation through jungles or around the coast from distant front lines, and the need for the movement's own medical wing became obvious.

In time, I asked them all why they had joined the Tigers and learned of the deaths and torturing of family members, of schools bombed, of the bodies of neighbours washing ashore, of mobs rampaging against Tamils and of discrimination in education and language. Each one had a saga and each had joined the Tigers because "they spoke less and did more" to protect their race against what they were all convinced was genocide. They had all been trained as infantry, but none had forgotten the speech by their leader, who had asked them to forego fighting for the greater goal of healing their people.

The course had started in 1992, with some students needing preparation in maths, chemistry and English because they had not finished high school. Others had graduated in biology from university. The course paralleled the curriculum at Jaffna University but had been interrupted by long periods of service in field hospitals, in public health campaigns against cholera and malaria, in the manning of general hospitals, and by the needs of the tsunami, which had wrecked the north-east coast.

The Ceasefire Agreement of 2002 had allowed them to catch up on formal education, but they were lacking a module on paediatrics, when I turned up out of the



blue. My 32 students were those who had stayed the course. Others had been unable to resist the call of the armed struggle, some had failed academically, and five had been killed on active duty.

It was obvious they needed tuition that emphasised infectious diseases and malnutrition and it was easy to gather cases for presentation from my rounds in the ward and from outpatients.

The days began with a lecture or two, then moved to cases, and included examination of the newborn and resuscitation. The poverty in the nursery was painful - mothers used old handkerchiefs for nappies.

They had never performed any formal research and were keen to be divided into groups to review perinatal outcomes, nutrition, causes for acute admission, snake bites and emotional effects of the tsunami. We found mothers and children to be wasted and stunted, road accidents to reflect the dangerous driving through the town, snake bites to be handled well, and counselling to be effective for grief. The findings were presented on a special research day, which evolved into an emotional ceremony of graduation.

As the weeks progressed, I learned more of their lives and could not rest until one began to translate short stories he had written about their experiences. We began to meet every night in a small gazebo, sometimes curtained with rain, and went over his stories, line by line, paraphrasing from Tamil and amplifying for a wider audience in English. My mind was fascinated by the stories of medicine, my emotions drawn by their humanity.

I learned of the development of the medical wing from first aid to reconstructive surgery, encompassing the triage of mass casual-

'I began to realise what some people are prepared to endure for freedom.'

ties, blood transfusions on the front lines, and end-to-end anastomoses of arterial wounds with ketamine anaesthesia by torch light under artillery fire that thudded shrapnel into the coconut-trunk walls of their bunker.

I learned of organisation and secrecy that could construct a hospital overnight in preparation for a battle in the morning... and of my students who had worked and worked until the casualties stopped coming - in their uniforms stiff with blood, on legs that could barely stand and under the sustained threat of sudden death.

I could scarcely believe accounts reminiscent of the First World War, and insisted on interviewing all the students mentioned, by name, others not mentioned, and particular patients, cross-checking the details. I went to battlefields to see if the layout was as described.

It was. Though overgrown by jungle, the bunkers that had contained the operating theatres were still visible, confirmed by half-buried vials of empty medical containers. Mounds of dirt confirmed former protective walls, and abandoned paraphernalia confirmed the fighting. Bones and shredded uniforms confirmed casualties.

Why they continued to fight still puzzled me, especially as I visited war cemeteries and pondered the carnage in which over 17 000 Tamil young people have died in the past two decades.

Understanding began on the afternoon of 27 November, their

A dentist from the LTTE's Thileepan Medical Unit treating civilians in Batticaloa earlier this year. Photo TamilNet.

equivalent of Anzac Day. My students collected me and, for the first time, I observed them in uniform, making their way through the cemetery, squatting here and there with parents of the dead who had begun to arrive in droves to festoon the graves with garlands and food for their young men and women who "were living on in the spirit of Tamil Eelam".

There were about 3000 graves and soon the cemetery was pulsating with grief. The burning sun sank beneath a row of palms and I anticipated some kind of communal eruption of emotion as candles were lit on the graves and flickered on distorted faces. But there was nothing. No hymns, no chants, no catharsis. Just a speech on the necessity for more sacrifice. Silently, the crowd shuffled away, leaving the garlands and the candles to the moonless night.

I began to realise what some people are prepared to endure for freedom.

I had a farewell meal with my students before I left and before they were dispersed to look after the population of their Tamil Eelam and the casualties of a war that has escalated. We made speeches, and they presented me with what was clearly a special gift: a Tiger flag (which caused anxiety clearing Customs on the way out).

Private possession of a Tiger flag, I am informed, is not "recklessly supporting a terrorist organisation", but detectives from the counter-terrorism team of the Australian Federal Police were keen to explore why I stayed in Kilinochchi when I learned the identity of the students. I figured teaching doctors how to resuscitate children was in the interests

of the people, whoever controlled them, but wondered if my career had reached a crossroads!

Subsequently, I did not mind going over all our overseas phone calls with the police or explaining why my bank had sent money to England (for a course on radiation biology), but I was a bit unnerved by the attention I received from immigration officials when I recently left for New Guinea.

Being profoundly Australian, I found it unsettling to be perceived as being on the "other side"! I hear, however, that the Department of Public Prosecutions is not proceeding with my case, which is good news.

The bad news is that it is unlikely I will ever be able to return to Sri Lanka, and the needs of the north-east weigh heavily. Tamil friends assure me that publicity for the situation is the greatest help I could offer Sri Lanka. With that in mind, the collection of short stories I paraphrased will be published in the near future.

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India was arming rival groups as the Tigers disarmed - IPKF General

RAJIV Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, ordered an Indian General to kill LTTE leader Vellupillai Pirapaharan in cold blood when the latter attended a meeting under a white flag in September 1987.

In a new book, the then chief of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF), Major General (retd.) Harkirat Singh, says he refused to carry out the order as "good soldiers do not shoot an adversary in the back."

He also says that as the Tigers began disarming in 1987, but India's intelligence service, RAW, on Rajiv Gandhi's orders, began arming anti-LTTE militant groups, triggering inter-Tamil violence.

Maj. Gen. (retd) Harkirat Singh published his book 'Intervention in Sri Lanka: The IPKF experience retold' (available through Vijitha Yapa Publications) earlier this year.

The book is the commander's first hand account of the initial induction and operations of the IPKF in Sri Lanka. Maj. Gen. (retd) Harkirat supports his accounts and assessments of the events of two decades ago with reproductions of internal communications between Indian commanders.

He begins his account with his meeting in early August 1987 with the LTTE leadership at which the Tigers agreed to surrender their weapons to the IPKF. On August 4, 1987, Pirapaharan addressed a huge crowd in Jaffna to announce and explain their decision.

Below are extracts from Maj. Gen. (retd) Harkirat's book:

"The Tigers continued to surrender their weapons till 21 August 1987. At this point of time, RAW, under directions from the Prime Minister's Office, commenced the rearming of the other militant groups. Evidence regarding the rearming of some defunct militant groups was brought to the notice of all concerned, including the Indian High Commissioner (J. N. Dixit). I had shown the High Commissioner and his Military Adviser in Colombo a videotape on the induction of small arms with Indian markings. The rearming of militant groups other than the LTTE resulted in inter-group killings among the Tamil militants and the surrender of weapons came to a virtual standstill by the end of August 1987." [p47-48]

"Dixit wanted my assessment of the various militant groups that had become defunct and had now suddenly become active again. I explained that the ENDLF, PLOTE, and TELO had been lying dormant and it was only after the middle of August 1987 that they had re-surfaced with



How one Indian newspaper reported Gen. Harkirat's story.

newly acquired arms. ... Moreover, the LTTE knew that RAW had an active hand in encouraging these groups." [p49-50]

"According to Dixit, the ultimate objective of the IPKF was to discredit the LTTE in the eyes of the local Tamil population. In short, the IPKF was expected to play a double game. I realized that these tactics would not work since the Tamils had already understood that their aspirations for Eelam could be met only by the LTTE." [p48-9]

"[Later] the EPRLF, prior to the withdrawal of the IPKF, was equipped with rifles under orders from Lt. Gen. A.S. Kalkat, it was not realized that the EPRLF cadres had no fighting potential and handing weapons to this group was an ill-advised venture." [p50]

"In September 1987, a political dialogue between the LTTE and an Indian delegation took place at Palaly and a peaceful solution seemed to be in sight. The creation of the [Interim Administration Council] was to be thrashed out. The date set for

the meeting to be held at my headquarters at Palaly and chaired by Dixit, was 16-17 September 1987." [p57]

"On the night of 14/15 September 1987, I received a telephone call from Dixit, directing me to arrest or shoot Pirabakaran when he came for the meeting. Telling Dixit that I would get back to him I placed a call to the [Overall Forces Commander]. Lt. Gen. Depinder Singh." [p57]

"Lt. Gen. Depinder Singh directed me to tell Dixit that we, as an orthodox Army, did not shoot people in the back when they were coming for a meeting under the white flag. I then spoke to Dixit in Colombo and conveyed the message emphasizing that I would not obey his directive." [p57]

"I pointed out that the LTTE supreme had been invited by the IPKF in order to find a solution to the problems in the implementation of the Accord. Dixit replied, 'He Rajiv Gandhi has given these instructions to me and the Army should not drag its feet, and you as the GOC, IPKF will be responsible for it.'" [p57]

NEWS

War budget passes easily

K. Ratnayake
WSWS

THE Sri Lankan government managed to pass its war budget in the third and final parliamentary vote on Friday December 14. To do so, it depended on the support of the (ultra-Sinhala nationalist) Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), which came to the rescue of the shaky ruling coalition by abstaining rather than voting against the budget, as it had done in the second round.

The final vote was 114 in favour and 67 against, with the 37 JVP MPs abstaining. The JVP, which continually postures as a defender of workers and the poor, is now politically responsible for a budget that will not only intensify the country's reactionary civil war, but place its full burden onto the backs of working people through rising prices and cut-backs to subsidies and services.

The government, which began launching offensives against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in July 2006, has allocated a record 166 billion rupees (\$US1.5 billion) on military spending—a 20 percent increase over last year's record. To pay for the war, President Mahinda Rajapakse, who holds the defence and finance portfolios, has imposed a number of new indirect taxes and cut social spending.

With the exception of the pro-LTTE Tamil National Alliance (TNA), all the opposition parties back the war in one way or another. At the same time, the right-wing United National Party (UNP) opposed the budget in order to ca-

pitalise on growing popular anger over deteriorating living standards. Supported by two senior defectors from Rajapakse's Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), the UNP was hoping to defeat the budget and force new parliamentary elections.

The key to the parliamentary equation was the JVP. While the JVP did not have the numbers by itself, a clear stance against the budget would have encouraged wavering members of the ruling coalition to cross the floor. The budget has thrown the JVP into crisis—on the one hand, it stridently demands an intensification of the "patriotic" war, but, on the other, it demagogically calls for measures to alleviate the plight of working people and claims on occasions to be socialist.

The issue opened up divisions in the JVP, which prevaricated for weeks prior to the second reading on November 19. The government narrowly won that vote after the JVP voted against. Prior to the third reading, the JVP issued a series of demands, not to ease the economic burdens, but to demand a tougher stance on the war, including the illegalisation of the LTTE. The JVP insisted in particular that Rajapakse tear up the 2002 ceasefire agreement, which, while a dead letter in all but name, allows the government to claim it still supports the so-called international peace process.

Behind the scenes, the government was compelled to bribe and bully its own MPs to prevent



them voting against the budget. Four days before the vote, a paramilitary group allied to the military kidnapped the relatives of three TNA MPs and announced it would kill them if the parliamentarians voted against the budget. The three—P. Ariyanethan, K. Thangeswari, and S. Jeyanandamoorthy—were not in parliament for the vote.

The UNP was also working overtime to woo government MPs. Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) leader Rauf Hakeem and three deputy ministers resigned and joined the opposition. Hakeem accused the government of discriminating against Muslims, particularly in the East. Last Friday, the day of the final vote, Anura Bandaranaike a leading

SLFP member and cabinet minister, defected to the opposition.

There were also signs that the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) and Up-country Peoples Front (UPF), which are based among Tamil-speaking plantation workers in the central hills districts, were preparing to cross the floor. UPF member V. Radhakrishnan told parliament that "people wanted them [his party] to oppose the budget," which would have meant the loss of another two votes.

In these conditions, the defeat of the budget hinged on the JVP's vote. Right up until the last minute, JVP leaders were declaring that they would vote against, as they had done last month. Even on Friday, JVP general secretary Tilvin Silva speaking on the party's radio station, V-FM, confirmed that the leadership had decided to vote with the opposition.

On Friday afternoon, however, after talks with the president's brother Basil Rajapakse, the JVP changed its stand. "A closed door meeting in Parliament at 2 p.m. on Friday between the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) Parliamentary hierarchy and Presidential Advisor Basil Rajapakse had led to the JVP announcement that they would abstain from Friday's crucial budget vote," the Nation reported.

Those who were considering switching sides rapidly changed their minds. The CWC and UPF were not about to quit the government, give up their ministerial privileges and take a stand, if the budget was going to pass anyway. To underscore its support for the war, the JVP actually voted for the defence allocation, which was taken as a separate item prior to the final vote. After the budget was ratified, Basil Rajapakse made a point of thanking the JVP.

Justifying the JVP's stance, JVP leader Somawansa Amarasinghe told the press on Saturday: "A UNP triumph would have a catastrophic impact on the ongoing security forces campaign against the LTTE. There would have been chaos, political instability and th-

at would have been to the advantage of the enemy. The JVP's desire to ensure stability, particularly in view of the successful military campaign, surpassed the need to defeat the budget, thereby bringing the government to its knees."

Amarasinghe's statement speaks volumes. This party is for deepening the war and maintaining the stability of capitalist rule and the Sri Lankan state. Amarasinghe is simply rephrasing the JVP's longstanding chauvinist slogan "Motherland First". Those who will be forced to sacrifice their lives and living standards for this 24-year communal war are working people and their sons and daughters.

The JVP's stance is completely in line with a chauvinist press release from the defence ministry, hailing the vote for the budget. "[I]t was none other than terror chief, V. Prabhakaran, [LTTE leader] who had the greatest desire to see the government lose in the budget vote. Failure of the terror sympathisers, treacherous politicians and media manipulators is certainly a great victory of all peace loving Sri Lankans," it declared.

The JVP's decision to support the budget has exposed its posturing among workers. On December 11, prior to its decision to abstain, JVP parliamentarian K.D. Lal Kantha demagogically told the annual meeting of Lanka Postal Services Union (LPSU) that the Rajapakse government was the "most corrupt, inefficient and tyrannical government ever to come to power in Sri Lanka's political history. The entire hierarchies from the very top to the very bottom are corrupt and guilty of mismanagement."

This government is now even more dependent on the JVP, which has been weakened by its support for the budget. Far from stepping back, however, the JVP will intensify its communal "Motherland First" campaign and will not hesitate to use threats and physical violence against anyone who opposes the war—as the JVP has in the past.

Colombo expects extra \$486m from T-bonds

SRI LANKA will see an additional \$486 million inflow through the central bank's decision to increase foreign investment in rupee denominated treasury bonds, Reuters reported, citing central bank data. However, currency dealers said the decision will hit exporters and increase the trade deficit in short term.

"If all bonds are bought by foreigners in near future, the rupee might fall down to 105 per dollar, which will not be attractive to exports," Chirantha Caldera, a currency dealer in Commercial Bank of Ceylon, told Reuters.

"Exporters will get hit and trade deficit will widen, because of a sudden appreciation of the rupee."

Central bank decided to increase foreign investments in rupee denominated bonds to 10 percent from 5 percent of the total outstanding amount of t-bonds from Nov. 30.

The new directive will allow

foreigners to buy an additional 53 billion rupee worth of rupee bonds, which is 5 percent of the total outstanding of t-bill worth 1,060 billion rupees as at now, central bank data showed.

The rupee rose 2.1 percent to 108.15/20 last week alone on speculation of a dollar inflow through the central bank's decision to double the foreign-held rupee bonds.

However, central bank data showed foreign investors held only 47 billion rupees worth bonds out of 106 billion rupee worth maximum permitted level.

The rupee has risen just over 4 percent to nearly 109.00 per dollar from a record low of 113.57/113.62 hit on Sept. 18, after central bank sold a \$500 million sovereign bond in October in addition to increased foreign investments in rupee-bonds.

The central bank's decision to relax the capital account to foreigners came after it rejected all

bids in three straight bond auctions, citing yields demanded by investors were higher than what is warranted, given the current macro economic situation.

Weekly bond auctions have been cancelled during the last two weeks, which has created pressure on treasury bill rates.

Sri Lanka's benchmark 91-day T-bill rate rose to a six-year high by 96 basis points to 18.99 percent at Wednesday's weekly auction and the central bank rejected the high yields demanded for longer dates, preferring not to sell the paper.

Last week, the 182 T-bill rate rose 94 basis points to 19.73 percent and the 364-day rate rose by 89 basis points to 19.96 percent. Both were at their highest level since April 2001.

Sri Lanka's trade deficit narrowed slightly to \$2.85 billion in the first ten months of 2007 from \$2.96 billion in the same period last year, the central bank said.

NEWS

Pakistan to step up assistance to Sri Lanka

'No third country can impose any limitations on Pakistan's assistance to Sri Lanka for its fight against terrorism'

THE Pakistan Government is considering another US \$31 million military assistance to Sri Lanka for its fight against the Tamil Tigers, apart from the US \$ 50 million assistance to the Sri Lankan Government to purchase military hardware.

The announcement was made Pakistan Foreign Minister Inam ul Haque when he met a visiting Sri Lanka media delegation in Islamabad.

The Pakistan Foreign Minister, however did not elaborate what kind of military assistance they were going to provide Sri Lanka through this assistance. He said Pakistan has always assisted Sri Lanka in its fight against terrorism and will continue with its assistance to eliminate terrorism from Sri Lankan soil.

He said Pakistan accommodates 250 to 300 military officials from Sri Lanka in various military training schools including the highest military training school, the National Defence University of Pakistan.

Sri Lankan military personnel are trained annually and the number can be increased if there is request from the Sri Lankan Government, the Minister said.

"If there is a request from the Sri Lanka side to increase the training slots, that can be arranged," the Foreign Minister added.

He said a defence pact is not

necessary for Pakistan to support Sri Lanka for its fight against terrorism since it is no longer a bilateral issue and it has become part of global terrorism.

Haque said the issue of suicide bombing started in Sri Lanka by the LTTE has spread to Iraq, Afghanistan and now Pakistan. (In fact 'suicide bombing' as presently known was being practiced by Middle Eastern militants in the early eighties long before the first Black Tiger attack was in 1985. Lebanese militants driving truck bombs destroyed the bases of US and French in Beirut in 1983, killing hundreds of troops).

"There is an element of transnational terrorism and it is no longer a bilateral issue," the Pakistan Foreign Minister said. Pakistan as a sovereign country is always concerned about the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka and it will continue to support Sri Lanka to safeguard its sovereignty and territorial integrity, Haque said.

"No third country can impose any limitations on Pakistan's assistance to Sri Lanka for its fight against terrorism," the Minister said.

Haque said Pakistan strongly backed Sri Lanka's proposal to hold the 2008 SAARC summit in Sri Lanka in view of the 60th anniversary of Independence.



The Indian Air Force commander meeting Sri Lanka's Army commander (l) last year. Photo TamilNet

India to bolster Sri Lanka air defences

AN INDIAN defence delegation visiting Sri Lanka has offered assistance in the form of "joint air-defence exercises" to face any threats posed by the aerial capability of the Tigers, press reports in Colombo said.

India which has stepped up its military support to the Rajapakse administration in recent months sent a high level delegation to Colombo to review the ongoing bilateral defence cooperation.

Indian Defence Secretary Vijay Singh who called on Sri Lankan Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa in Colombo earlier this week has made the offer.

The delegation met with the Commanders of the Sri Lankan

Army, Air Force and Navy.

The eight-member Indian delegation, comprising several top officials from the Indian Defence and External Affairs ministries, had told Sri Lanka that India was concerned since the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) now had its own air wing.

Following the successful night time air raids carried out by LTTE's Tamil Eelam Air Force (TAF), SLAF upgraded its night flying capability. However it has not assisted in defending targets against LTTE air crafts. The LTTE air crafts have been able to repeatedly attack targets in deep south and return to base safely.

Indian defence establishment is said to be of the view that SLAF night operational capability is vital for meaningful and fool proof air defence.

Indian News service, IANS, reported that efforts are on to equip SLAF aircraft with night fighting capability but these are yet to bear fruit because of the expenditure involved and the reluctance of countries to part with the appropriate technology.

According to IANS both India and Pakistan are keen to help out Sri Lanka to improve its air defence. It is in this context that the current visit of an Indian military delegation to Sri Lanka assumes significance.

Speaking before the visit an Indian high commission spokesman said, 'among the issues which will be discussed is air defence,' while downplaying the visit as a 'routine one' meant to discuss administrative and other issues related to defense cooperation.

The spokesman said the Indian radars given to Sri Lanka were working 'extremely well'.

Two weeks ago, the IAF conducted its largest-ever war exercise in south India involving the Army, Air Force and Navy. An official statement by the IAF detailed the use of French-made Mirage-2000s, Russian-built Su-30s, Mi-8 helicopters and unmanned aircraft in the exercise.

According to Indian media the objective of the exercise, code-named 'Dakshin Prahar', was to defend military, strategic and economic targets in south India against air attacks by regular and rogue air forces.

Reports further added that India may like Sri Lanka's cooperation in any system it may put together in the near future, indicating further cooperation between the two forces in future.

On the naval front also India has stepped up cooperation with the Sri Lankan Navy and has begun coordinated patrolling.

Indian National Security Advisor M K Narayanan said Delhi was 'careful' about the activities of LTTE and that round-the-clock vigil was being maintained all along the coastline.

"We are always careful about LTTE activities in Tamil Nadu or anywhere else in India," he said after a meeting with Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M Karunanidhi.

Asked whether they was any move for joint patrolling between the Indian and Sri Lankan navies in the Indian ocean, he said there was coordinated patrolling, wherein both navies were patrolling in their respective areas.

Russia, India to sell arms

SRI LANKA met with Indian and Russian delegations last week on possible arms purchases including air defence weaponry as clashes with Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) escalate.

Defence officials from India and Russia held separate talks with Sri Lankan authorities on improving systems used against the low-flying Czech-built Zlin Z-143 operated by the LTTE.

The Sri Lankan military is seeking to upgrade its fleet of Mi-35 helicopter gunships and talks with the Russian delegation focused on buying a "major consignment" of Russian-made weapons.

According to Sri Lankan newspapers, the military delegation from Russia offered to help Sri Lanka by exporting a variety

of military hardware through its state-owned trading arm, Rosboronexport.

The nine-member Russian delegation led by Mr. Glushchenko Vasily Andreevich, Deputy Director of the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation.

The delegation also included representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, the General Prosecutor's Office and of the Federal Service of the Russian Federation for Narcotic Traffic Control.

According to an official statement released during the visit, Sri Lanka and Russia have decided to join hands in fighting international terrorism, drug trafficking and other forms of organised crime.

The two sides were working

on finalising a bilateral treaty on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters during two days of bilateral negotiations and substantial progress has been made on the draft text of a mutual legal assistance treaty, and the two sides have agreed to meet again soon with a view to finalising the outstanding issues, the statement further stated.

India which has provided a radar system to Sri Lanka's military held talks on upgrading the equipment and improving Colombo's air defence capability.

Sri Lanka has been trying to upgrade its weapons and air defences since Tamil Tiger earlier this year began flying light aircraft smuggled into the country in pieces to be later re-assembled.

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NEWS

Sri Lanka reprimands western envoys

SRI LANKA'S militaristic government said last week it had hauled in the envoys of countries calling for UN human rights monitoring of the island's dirty war against the Tamil Tigers, AFP reported.

The ambassadors of the United States, the European Union, France, Korea and Sweden were summoned for a dressing down by foreign ministry secretary Palitha Kohona.

Diplomats from Canada and the Netherlands were also to be summoned Friday, the ministry said, adding a complaint over remarks made at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva this week will be forwarded to New Zealand's Delhi-based envoy.

The foreign ministry in Colombo said it had conveyed its "serious concern" that Sri Lanka, which has categorically rejected the presence of foreign monitors, was being subjected to escalating international criticism.

Colombo also expressed its "deep displeasure" to Britain's high commissioner to Sri Lanka, Dominic Chilcott, over comments interpreted as being sympathetic to the Tamil demand for independence.

The foreign ministry "drew attention to the high commissioner's comment, 'I am not saying that the political aspiration for Eelam (separate Tamil state) is illegitimate' and expressed the

government's deep concern," the statement said.

"At a time when the painstaking process of evolving a negotiated political settlement was under way, such sentiments would have a negative impact and send confusing signals," the Sri Lankan foreign ministry said.

"We would tell the British high commissioner not to interfere in the internal affairs of our country," IANS quoted Cabinet Minister and Chief Government Whip Jeyaraj Fernandopulle as saying before the meeting.

'Chilcott still thinks that Sri Lanka is a colony of Britain,' said Fernandopulle.

Giving a hint of what might happen if Chilcott continued to do what he had done, Fernandopulle said that in the late 1980s, Sri Lanka had expelled British High Commissioner David Gladstone for overstepping his brief.

Gladstone had entered a polling station at Dikwella and publicly complained about the malpractices taking place there.

In his Dudley Senanayake Memorial Lecture, Chilcott said: 'Let me be clear, I am not saying that the political aspiration for Eelam is illegitimate, any more than I would argue that the Scottish National Party's goal for an independent Scotland is illegitimate.'

'Similarly, I see nothing illegitimate in some crackpot

demanding that Yorkshire or some other English county should become an independent state.'

'What is crucial is what methods are used by the SNP or the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) to achieve their goals. And the LTTE's methods are simply unacceptable.'

Chilcott also said that the Sri Lankan government should stop branding all support for human rights and a peaceful solution to the ethnic conflict in the island as 'unpatriotic'.

He demanded that the government stop demonising international organizations like the UNICEF. He went on to say that in Sri Lanka, ministerial posts were being created not to do better work but to secure political support.

Foreign Secretary Palitha Kohona summoned the envoy and told him that his remark on the legitimacy of the Eelam demand was 'unacceptable' to the Sri Lankan government, given the British government's categorical rejection of a separate state in Sri Lanka.

However, despite the chiding, the British high commission Friday issued a press release in its capacity as the local representative of the European Union, condemning the abduction of some relations of opposition MPs, ahead of the critical vote on the annual budget in parliament.

Sri Lanka ticks off UNESCO and UNICEF

SRI LANKA last week continued its hostile stand against UN institutions by charging UNESCO of issuing ill-advised statements and summoning and telling off the UNICEF country representative for meeting the LTTE's political head.

UNESCO had earlier released a statement condemning the Sri Lankan air force attack on the Voice of Tigers radio station which killed three editorial staff workers at the station and eight civilians. 15 civilians, including four editorial staff, were wounded in the attack.

"I condemn the bombing of the Voice of Tigers radio station," UNESCO Director General Koichiro Matsuura declared. "Regardless of the content of the broadcasts aired by the Voice of Tigers, there can be no excuse for military strikes on civilian media."

"Such action contravenes the Geneva Convention which requires the military to treat media workers as civilians."

"Killing media personnel is

not going to help reconciliation and I urge the authorities to ensure respect for the basic human right of freedom of expression."

The UNESCO condemnation enraged Sri Lanka.

According Sunday Times newspaper, Sri Lanka's Permanent Representative to UNESCO and Ambassador Chitranganee Wagiswara has written to the UNESCO Director General stating that the country is deeply distressed at his 'ill-advised' statements.

Ambassador Wagiswara said UNSECO did not have the mandate or competence to express views on complex political such as the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. She said UNESCO activities should be limited to the "UNESCO domain" and demanded Mr. Matsuura withdraw his condemnation.

UNESCO - the UN's Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization - is specialized United Nations agency, which promotes freedom of expression

through access to information and knowledge.

In response, UNESCO released a second statement expressing "strong condemnation of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, committed by whomever, wherever and for whatever purposes."

But despite the demand from Colombo for an apology, the UNESCO chief failed to do so in his second statement.

Even as the UNESCO row continued, Sri Lanka summoned the head of UNICEF in Sri Lanka to express its "concern" over his visit to LTTE administered territory in Vanni.

Philippe Duamelle called upon the Tamil Tiger Political Head B. Nadesan on December 13, 2007 at LTTE's Political Headquarters, LTTE peace secretariat officials in Kilinochchi and had an introductory meeting. The meeting was described by both sides as "very constructive".

However, Mr. Duamelle was

Continued on p14

NEWS



A ceasefire monitor in Vavuniya examines the bodies of Tamils who had been abducted. Photo TamilNet

US slows aid over continuing abuses

WHILST the US Congress has proposed stringent conditions on Washington's future military aid to Sri Lanka, one of America's key aid mechanisms, the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), has suspended further funding to the country citing ongoing security concerns.

"In light of the ongoing security concerns in Sri Lanka, MCC will consider a resumption of compact due diligence activities when there is a greater prospect for success of our mission," the MCC said.

This means proposed US aid of nearly \$590million, to be disbursed over several years, is on hold pending improvement in security situation.

Sri Lanka was one of 16 countries that had been selected as eligible to request development assistance funds from the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) according to a May 6 2004 press release from the U.S. government-funded MCC.

Mean while according to reports from Washington, the US Congress has stipulated that the Secretary of State will have to certify that the Sri Lankan government has taken certain specified steps towards ensuring human rights in the war-torn country before further military aid is given.

An amendment to the bill, however, allowed equipment sales for the "limited purposes of

maritime and air surveillance and communications."

If President George W. Bush signs the bill, Sri Lanka will not get any appreciable military aid from America unless the Secretary of State certifies that it has prosecuted military personnel alleged to have helped recruit child soldiers and committed extra-judicial executions; and provided humanitarian groups and reporters access to the Tamil areas of the country.

The Department of State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2008, seeks to appropriate funds for programs and initiatives that represent the non-military priorities of the U.S. across the world.

In the bill, military aid is included through programs that provide loans and grants to purchase U.S. military aid and services, training and support of peacekeeping operations and anti-drug efforts.

The US also wants to know if Sri Lanka had agreed to allow the UN to establish a human rights monitoring office in the country.

The text relating to Sri Lanka from the section of the H.R.2764 bill of the 110th Congress of U.S.A., Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act follows:

SEC. 699G. (a) None of the funds appropriated by this Act under the heading "Foreign

Military Financing Program" may be made available for assistance for Sri Lanka, no defense export license may be issued, and no military equipment or technology shall be sold or transferred to Sri Lanka pursuant to the authorities contained in this Act or any other Act, unless the Secretary of State certifies to the Committee on Appropriations that-

(1) the Sri Lankan military is suspending and the Sri Lankan Government is bringing to justice members of the military who have been credibly alleged to have committed gross violations of human rights or international humanitarian law, including complicity in the recruitment of child soldiers;

(2) the Sri Lankan Government is providing access to humanitarian organizations and journalists throughout the country consistent with international humanitarian law; and

(3) the Sri Lankan Government has agreed to the establishment of a field presence of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Sri Lanka with sufficient staff and mandate to conduct full and unfettered monitoring throughout the country and to publicize its findings.

(b) Subsection (a) shall not apply to technology or equipment made available for the limited purposes of maritime and air surveillance and communications.

International panel slams Sri Lanka abuse probes

SRI LANKAN President Mahinda Rajapaksa's office has interfered with a commission probing civil war rights abuses and murders that include some blamed on state security forces, international observers said on Wednesday.

The International Independent Group of Eminent Persons (IIGEP) says the presidential probe into abuses, including a massacre of 17 aid workers last year that Nordic truce monitors have blamed on security forces, lacks transparency and fails to meet international standards.

Recent developments have served to "reinforce the IIGEP's prior assessment that the Commission of Inquiry's process falls short of international norms and standards," the panel said.

"The Commission's work also lacks transparency," the IIGEP said, noting "all sessions conducted by the Commission have been held to the exclusion of the public, the victims and their families and, on occasions, the IIGEP."

"In addition, there continues to be a lack of full and timely disclosure of information to the IIGEP. The IIGEP reiterates its concerns regarding the Commission's lack of independence, ineffective witness protection measures and shortcomings in the investigations."

At its November meeting, the IIGEP concluded that "the persistent disregard for its observations and recommendations by the Government of Sri Lanka and the Commission of Inquiry tends to render the IIGEP's continued role irrelevant."

There was no immediate comment from the president's office.

However, the presidential commission countered the criticism with a statement of its own, accusing the panel of experts of failing to properly observe its work and of lacking transparency itself.

The two bodies have been at loggerheads for months.

"The COI (commission of inquiry) does not comprehend how the IIGEP came to hold the opinion that the COI's investigations are not transparent," it said. "The observation by the IIGEP that there has been no full and timely disclosure by the COI is not acceptable."

In a detailed statement, the

IIGEP said the president's office wrote to the commission last month clarifying that it was not necessary to probe the conduct of the Attorney General or his department regarding investigations relevant to the probe.

The government letter said the IIGEP should not "in any way to consider, scrutinize, monitor, investigate or inquire into the conduct of the Attorney General or any of his officers with regards to or in relation to any investigation already conducted into the relevant incidents",

"The IIGEP ... questions the need for this specific clarification and is of the opinion that this statement at the very least constitutes an interference in the independence of the commission," the panel said in a statement.

It noted that the commission had in fact not shown any intention to question the officers of the Attorney General's department on the investigations into rights abuses following the instructions from the president's office.

"In the circumstances, this communication from the President's office erodes the independence and neutrality of the commission, and could impede the search for the truth," the panel said.

The panel, which includes experts from India and France among other nations, was set up to observe the presidential commission's probe following calls by international rights groups.

"State officials have refused to render the required answers to relevant questions by invoking 'national security' issues," the IIGEP protested.

The panel's criticism comes against a backdrop of increasing tension between the Sri Lankan government and international rights groups over abuses blamed on both sides of renewed civil war between the state and Tamil Tiger rebels.

Rights groups say hundreds of people have been killed or abducted since last year when the civil war resumed after a near four-year lull.

The eminent persons group is also concerned at the lack of witness protection legislation, and says the presidential commission has not properly shared information.

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NEWS

UN monitoring 'essential' to curb rights violations in Sri Lanka - HRW

HUMAN Rights Watch (HRW) officials currently touring the United States lobbying for a UN mission to monitor human rights violations in Sri Lanka, told the Chicago Public Radio that their current focus is on the "shocking" disappearances and killing in Sri Lanka where the Sri Lanka Government has done "shamefully little" to investigate the cases.

They added that Democratic Institutions that would otherwise be capable of highlighting human right abuses, infringements to freedom of speech, and erosion in independence of judiciary in Sri Lanka, have collapsed under an ineffective Parliament.

Fred Abrahams, Senior Researcher for Emergencies, Human Rights Watch (HRW), and Sunila Abeysekera, Director of INFORM human rights documentation center in Sri Lanka, honored as a Human Rights Watch Defender at the 2007, Voices for Justice Dinner Worldview, spoke with Chicago Public Radio, Producer Andrea Wenzel when they were in Chicago last Saturday.

Mainly Tamil men between ages 18-35 are being abducted or killed at a rate of four persons a day, it emerged.

Men are often taken in for questioning, interrogated, tortured; some of them may be held in detention facilities but the government does not release their names; under Emergency Regulations the abductees are not charged and can be held for long periods of time, Mr. Abrahams said.

The abductions are often done in a way to terrorize the entire

community, Ms Abeysekera said. White van abductions by armed men take place in broad day light in public places, and these have many witnesses, but there is no possibility to push for an investigation.

Proliferation of armed groups have further complicated the situation, Ms. Abeysekera said.

In the north, it is possible to place the blame on the security forces as many abductions take place inside high security zones close to the presence of Sri Lanka security sentry points, Ms. Abeysekera said.

In the east, complicity of the Sri Lanka Government with the Karuna faction in the abductions, has been pointed out by the HRW, and UN ambassador Allan Rock, she said.

However, in Colombo businessmen have been abducted for huge ransom, and although security forces, army deserters and individuals are involved, it is difficult to pinpoint the blame on any one, Ms. Abeysekera added.

Ms. Abeysekera said that she was sad that political manipulation of identity has destroyed tradition of of harmonious co-existence between communities.

Since the power is concentrated between two individuals, Sri Lanka's President Rajapakse on one hand, and the Liberation Tigers leader Pirapaharan on the other, there is little space for compromise.

But she said she has hope; deteriorating economy, and increasing number of bodies coming to the south may generate a shift in attitudes to war in the South, Ms Abeysekera said.

On Karuna's situation (see story this page), Mr. Abrahams said, if Britain extradites the paramilitary leader to Sri Lanka, HRW believes Colombo will not prosecute him.

Colombo will likely engineer the killing of the renegade LTTE commander, and for this reason, and for international justice to be served, Mr. Abrahams said he would like to see Britain prosecuting him.

Democratic institutions have either collapsed or not functioning, Mr. Abrahams said. Police, prosecution, and the courts are not effective. Colombo has taken very concrete steps to undermine the function of the Human Rights Commission.

A UN Monitoring mission is necessary to contain the increasingly hostile engagements between the parties by reigning in on human rights violations, Mr. Abrahams said.

More reports, p12, 13

Sri Lanka ticks off UN agencies ...

Continued from p12

told that his visit to the LTTE political capital of Kilinochchi was unacceptable to the government, the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry said.

The Foreign Ministry statement quoted Duamelle as saying that he was new in the job and was unaware of foreign ministry guidelines, but had cleared his visit with the defence ministry.

There was no immediate comment from UNICEF.

False passports and war crimes - the Karuna saga continues

TamilNet

WHILE the Sri Lankan High Commissioner to Britain, Ms. Kshenuka Senewiratne, toils hard to extricate the Government of Sri Lanka from the diplomatic bungle it made in issuing a diplomatic passport under false name to fugitive Vinayagamoorthy Muralitharan alias Karuna, human rights organizations accused Karuna of "war crimes," and urged British Government to try him in Britain.

Meanwhile, informed sources in Colombo told TamilNet the Canadian Embassy in Colombo had earlier rejected visa application for "Karuna," before the British Embassy was misled by the Colombo government to issue a visa under the name of "Dushmantha Gunawardene, Director General, Wild Life Conservation."

Fred Abrahams of Human Rights Watch (HRW) said in a radio interview in Chicago Saturday that Colombo will likely have Karuna killed if he was extradited to Sri Lanka, adding that the Government is "nervous about what he will say" if he is prosecuted in Colombo.

On the issue of the passport, "British authorities have accumulated sufficient evidence to conclude that the Sri Lanka Government was complicit in arranging for Karuna to obtain a diplomatic passport and thus avoid the rigorous visa procedure at the British High Commission in Colombo, according to sources acquainted with the British inquiries into the case," a column in the Colombo-based Sunday Times said.

"Sri Lanka's official position that it was not aware of any diplomatic passport held by Karuna was conveyed to British authorities when Sri Lanka's High Commissioner Kshenuka Senewiratne was called to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) on Monday to express London's concern," the paper said, adding "Britain has dismissed Sri Lanka's explanation that it had no hand in granting a diplomatic passport."

Karuna applied for a British visa allegedly with the help of Mr Champika Ranawake's Environment and Natural Resources Ministry, pretending to be the "Director of Wild Life Conservation," and obtained his visa on the 5th September for his travel to UK on 18th September.

The timeline indicates Mr Ranawake, member of Jathika Hela Urumaya, extremist Buddhist Monk's party, had attended an environmental con-

Time Line



30 August- Sri Lanka Immigration Department issues diplomatic passport to Karuna under the false name of Dushmantha Guawadene on the orders of top authorities.

05 September- British Embassy issues British visa on the travel document on false name on Third Party Notice (TPN) by Sri Lanka's Foreign Ministry: Mr Dushmantha Gunawardene's designation was Director General, Wild Life Conservation Department.

11 September- Minister Champika Ranawaka submits application for visa to Canadian Embassy after he returns from Japan on the 10th

15 September- Ranawaka cancels trip to Canada, after a disputed delay by the Canadian Embassy to issue visa in time: See Island editorial and Ambassador Angela J. Bogdan's response below.

18 September- Karuna lands at Heathrow Airport and was accompanied to the aircraft at the Bandaranaike International Airport to board the London flight by Airport and Aviation Deputy Chief Shalitha Wijesundera. Minister Ranawaka refutes allegations of complicity in a Sunday Times interview.

22 September- Ranawaka travels with President Rajapakse to New York to attend a climate change conference in New York

02 November- British Immigration Agency arrests Karuna.

ference on the 22nd September in the U.S., and has had a "well publicized" dispute with the Canadian High Commission which resulted in his cancelling a trip to Canada on the 15th September.

On the issue of trying Karuna for war crimes, British courts have set a precedent in a landmark case against Faryadi Zardad, an Afghan warlord also known as Zardad Khan, who was prosecuted in Britain in 2005 for crimes committed in Afghanistan under the British Criminal Justice Act and the UN Convention Against Torture. These statutes established torture as a universal crime against humanity.

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NEWS

Major war looms...

Continued from p1

Mr Ilanthirayan said SLA began retreating in two fronts in Adampan and Paalaikkuzhi after three hours of fierce resistance by the LTTE.

He further added that at 6:00 p.m. the SLA was pushed back to its original FDL position and the LTTE recovered arms and ammunition from the battle field including Rocket Propelled Grenade Launchers, assault rifles and explosives.

With daily skirmishes and no real progress from the military onslaught, the Sri Lankan defence establishment has been twisting casualty numbers, inflating LTTE casualties.

According to Sri Lankan defence ministry 371 LTTE fighters have been killed in battle since December 1, at a rate of 15 fighters a day, whilst only a tiny handful of government troops were reported killed in battle in the same period.

Commenting on the current situation, Indian military analyst and former IPKF intelligence head R. Hariharan said: "They have nibbled into LTTE territory. But persisting along the failed axis will not yield results."

Speaking to Sunday Leader newspaper Hariharan stated that the Vanni is a difficult terrain for the Sri Lankan army and LTTE would be able to retaliate easily against any attack.

"They (Tigers) always bounce back in the Vanni which is a difficult terrain due to trees that grow up to 60 ft. This makes air support difficult and operations, time consuming."

According to Hariharan, the LTTE will hold out without difficulty unless the SLA launches a huge offensive.

Echoing other analysts' opinion that the daily offensives by the SLA is to keep the LTTE

forces from building up for a major offensive against the Sri Lankan military, Hariharan said: "the Sri Lankan army is lulling the LTTE into a routine of skirmishes almost daily and [would] break in suddenly without giving (the Tigers) time to build."

But the battles would be bloody and long, he warned. The Tigers and the security forces maintain a three tier defence line along the FDL, and breaking through the heavily mined line from either side is not going to be an easy task.

However, the government of hard-line president Mahinda Rajapakse believes in a military solution to the ethnic conflict and has been whipping up popular support for its war and building its military capacity through intense recruitment and arms purchasing.

A survey conducted by the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) this month through interviews with 1,600 Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims and Indian origin Tamils in eight of the nine provinces in November revealed that 87.3 percent of Sinhalese - the majority community - were 'satisfied' with the way the government was waging the war.

The Sri Lanka Army has recently raised a new division, the 59th Division, to bolster its strength, bringing the number of such units to thirteen. According to government media the new division has already been inducted into service and are providing back up the troops in the Vanni FDLs from Mannar to Kokkuthuduvai, an area that has seen intense fighting in the past few weeks.

On Friday 14 December, the Sri Lankan parliament approved the 2008 budget which has allocated vast amounts of money for military expenditure with resounding majority.

Armies buys, p11



Sri Lanka Army commander Lt. Gen. Sarath Fonseka, light a lamp at a military ceremony as US Ambassador to Sri Lanka, Mr. Robert Blake looks (2nd left). Sri Lanka's military enjoys the support of the United States, Britain India, Pakistan and several other countries. Photo Sri Lanka Army

Indian intelligence, not LTTE, targeted Pakistan envoy

PAKISTAN'S former High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, Basheer Wali Mohammed said in Islamabad last week that he had "convincing evidence" that a powerful regional intelligence agency, rather than the Tamil Tigers, was behind the August 2006 bid to assassinate him in Colombo.

Dismissing widespread claims that the LTTE executed the claymore mine attack in Kollupitiya while he was returning after attending Pakistani Independence Day celebrations, he said a two-page newspaper article written by a person closely linked to this

intelligence arm made pointed reference to his Colombo assignment shortly before he took over as the High Commissioner.

His comments were a thinly veiled reference to the Indian intelligence service, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW).

Speaking to a group of visiting Sri Lankan journalists at the prestigious Pakistan Club in Islamabad, he explained that he had traveled extensively in Sri Lanka sans any personal security during the major part of his two years as an envoy.

"I even visited the North, and if the LTTE wanted to kill me, they could have struck at any time", he pointed out. "But apparently, they were disinterested in harming me".

At the time, the LTTE was blamed for the assassination attempt on Wali Mohammed, a professional soldier who later headed Pakistan's key intelligence bureau. The LTTE's alleged motive was Pakistan's close military cooperation with Sri Lanka, reports suggested.

"At face value, the LTTE was taken as the perpetrator, but subsequently we were able to establish the involvement of this intelligence agency of a neighbouring country", he asserted.

He was strongly behind Sri Lanka's war with the LTTE.

"It was I who persuaded the President [Mahinda Rajapakse] to crush LTTE terrorism militarily as the government had adequate resources at its disposal", Mr. Mohammed noted. "I am glad the President heeded my advice as terrorism is a global menace".

He pledged continued Pakistani military assistance to fight the scourge the LTTE.

He recalled that his daughter

who generally drives behind his official Mercedes Benz had a narrow shave because he was taking her to a doctor as she was suffering from a severe tooth ache that day. "Otherwise, she would have also been killed".

He also recounted how President Mahinda Rajapakse personally telephoned him minutes after the blast and even sent his official bullet-proof car.

"I think I have seen so much of fighting in my life as a battle-hardened cavalry soldier that I remained calm when saw this ball of fire", he said. "There were two deadly mines".

"I heard my wife scream that we were under attack and when I looked to the rear I saw the jeep of the soldiers guarding me missing", he recalled. "Everything happened within seconds".

"The devastation I saw transported me back to the time when my armoured vehicle was blown up during the war with India, and I was badly injured", he said, showing a scar on his forehead.

Wali Mohammed, now a provincial Minister, said that he personally paid Rs. 200,000 to each family of the five Lankan soldiers killed in the explosion. "It was out of my pocket as the money was not reimbursed by the Pakistani Foreign Ministry".

Later, the Pakistani government also paid another Rs. 400,000 to 500,000 each to these dependents while one family of a soldier, who had a young son, was given a house as well, the former envoy said.

Describing President Mahinda Rajapakse as a "personal friend", he said that he still maintains a close link which took him back to Sri Lanka as a special guest even after his tenure as a diplomat.

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NEWS



Cinnamon farmers carry virgin quills to a temple in the southern Sri Lankan pilgrim town of Seenigama on 22 December 2007 as offering to the gods in exchange for a better harvest and prosperity. Cinnamon farmers revived the tradition of offering their first harvest to the gods three years after the December 2004 tsunami wiped out their plantations along Sri Lanka's coastlines where some 31,000 people were killed and a million were left homeless. Photo Lakruwan Wanniarachchi/AFP/Getty Images.

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