

We wish our readers a Happy and Peaceful New Year

Sri Lanka quits 2002 ceasefire

All out war
now certain

Norway,
Canada 'regret'

US 'troubled',
wants talks

EU wants
'substantial
devolution'

Australia
'fears'

LTTE vows
2008 will be
decisive



Tamil Tigers train in the Vanni for forthcoming battles with the Sri Lankan armed forces. Daily clashes are becoming intense. Photo LTTE

'Pervasive fear' amongst Tamils - UN

WHILE stressing that there is a 'pervasive sense of fear' among the thousands displaced by the ongoing war between the Sri Lanka army and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka, a top UN official has urged parties concerned to find

peaceful solutions and prevent fresh displacement of people.

"The predominant concern among internally displaced persons (IDPs) is physical security," Walter Kalin, the UN secretary general's representative on human rights of IDPs, said last Thursday

in his report following a visit to war-affected parts of northeast Sri Lanka.

Mr. Kalin said the refugees, whose officially registered numbers in the island had swelled to 300,000 since 1980, feared continued violence.

There have also been abductions, lootings and attacks on individuals by the Tamil Makkal Vidhuthalai Puligal, a group led by a small group of renegades that had broken away from the LTTE in 2004 and has been operating in the eastern districts of Batticaloa

and Amparai with the backing of the Sri Lankan armed forces.

Incomplete mine clearance, round ups by Sri Lankan security forces and detention of people without notification to their fami-

Continued on p11

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NEWS

'LTTE will bring clarity in 2008'

TamilNet

THE International Community has been vacillating in taking decisive actions on Sri Lanka because they are unable to relate their own interests to the chaotically unfolding political and military situation in Sri Lanka and only the demonstration of military strength by the Tigers can bring sufficient clarity for the international community to correctly relate their interests and assertively engage.

This was the assessment of Mr. K. V. Balakumaran, a top official of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), speaking on a political analysis program, Nilavaram, in National Television of Tamil Eelam (NTT), last week. NTT: Sri Lanka has taken the east, and continues attempts at capturing areas in Silaavaththurai, Mannaar. Liberation Tigers have stopped close to 60 attempts by the SLA to encroach into LTTE held territory. How do you see the military confrontation progressing?

Balakumaran: The real objective of the attacks in the West, Silaavaththurai, the East in Manalaaru and in the north Mukamaalai, are to get inside the Tiger den of Vanni, and attack the heart of the Liberation Tigers.

Sri Lanka's military plan is not different to previous attempt to capture the A9 in 1999, 70 miles of which goes through Vanni. The attempt to capture A9, described as highway of death, resulted in dismal failure to the Sri Lanka security forces where they lost close to 6000 troopers, and we lost nearly 3000 of our fighters.

In my view, currently Sri Lanka is trying to enter through A-32 to Pooneryn or use A-34 to advance through Oddisuddaan; One of these highways will result in being renamed as highway of death.

Whichever path Sri Lanka chooses to enter into Vanni, they

have to directly confront our fighters. As a precursor to the anticipated battle, the SLA is trying to chip away the strength of the LTTE, as well probing the LTTE strength through small scale skirmishes at the periphery. We understand their tactics, we



(l) Mr. Balakumaran, senior LTTE official (r) newly trained Tamil Tigers on parade in the Vanni. 2008 will be decisive, the LTTE says.

haven't underestimated their strength either.

Security Forces are waiting for an opportune moment to break through a high way. This reminds me of old times; then there was Indian intervention, and currently there is some international intervention; Tiger military resistance eventually determined the conflict resolution phase that followed.

We are similarly waiting for their eventual SLA offensive. We are cognizant of the enormity of the possible disaster that can unfold, and bloodbath waiting to happen. Tamil people have no other option, except to face these possibilities.

Once the fire of freedom is lit, there is no turning back; sacrifices are part of this decision, and our people fully understand this. We are confident of our strength to achieve our goals.

NTT: From 2006, the government has prevented visits of international diplomats to Vanni. What

do you think of the International community's approach to resolve Sri Lanka's conflict?

Balakumaran: We have to have a clear view of what diplomacy

'We are waiting for the Sri Lanka Army offensive. We are cognizant of the enormity of the possible disaster that can unfold. But we are confident of our strength to achieve our goals.'

means. Whether Sri Lanka allows diplomats to visit, or when Sri Lanka stops diplomats visiting Vanni, Sri Lanka is trying to achieve the same objective. That is to find ways to advance the

self-interests of Sri Lanka and the host countries of the visiting diplomats. It is wrong to think that allowing diplomats to visit Vanni is in the interest of LTTE; we should not entertain such delusions.

Tigers were led into diplomacy by Norway, and not through LTTE's initiative. 2007 is a year where diplomacy is in the forefront. In our long walk to freedom, this is an inclusive part.

In my opinion, how we are looking into this is, in 1987, there was regional intervention into the conflict from India. LTTE leader Pirapaharan acted in accordance with the political climate of that time. In his Chuthumalai declaration, he started the speech by saying "we are friends of India." His 2007 Hero's day speech, has stated the same sentiments. We can consider the speech as another Chuthumalai declaration.

We expect diplomatic pressures in this time period. We are not troubled by Sri Lanka allow-

ing the international diplomats to visit us or stopping them from visiting us. What we are really troubled by is the indecision of the International community. India is indecisive, the international community is indecisive; they are unable to relate their interests to unfolding situation in Sri Lanka. Even Russia has shown interest; they say Iran is also interested. The diplomatic front is muddled.

Only the demonstration of military strength by the Tigers can bring clarity to the situation, for the international community to correctly relate their interests, and assertively engage.

Consider the countries Somali land, Kosovo, and Montenegro. The west will intervene when their interests are impacted. But they are reluctant to enter forcefully in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka has state power, which [Professor Jayadeva] Uyangoda has summed

Continued on p15

Sri Lanka president vows to crush Tamil Tigers

SRI LANKA'S president has repeated a vow to crush the Tamil Tigers before conducting "peace talks" to end Asia's longest-running ethnic conflict.

President Mahinda Rajapakse, addressing a public rally in this southern heartland of the majority Sinhalese on December 26, said the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) will not resume peace talks without first being militarily defeated.

"We are for a political settlement. But there is no point in talking about a political settlement without first defeating terrorism," the president said during a ceremony marking the third anniversary of the Asian tsunami.

sary of the Asian tsunami.

"The LTTE is not interested in negotiations. They must be made to realise that problems cannot be solved through the barrel of a gun," he said, adding that the Tigers must be forced to lay down arms.

He said security forces had already scored major victories against the guerrillas in the past year and hoped to build on them.

"Like we overcame the tsunami tragedy, we will face the threat of terrorism and overcome it soon," he said at the tightly guarded Sanath Jayasuriya grounds in a coastal town 100 miles south of Colombo.

The president, who is also the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, said the military wrested control over the eastern province from the Tigers in July after heavy fighting and there would be no let up in the military drive.

Rajapakse's brother Gotabaya, who is the country's defence secretary, had earlier announced that security forces will move to dismantle the mini state of the Tigers in the north of the island.

Heavy fighting in the north of the island has claimed a high death toll among combatants since a Norwegian-arranged truce began to unravel since December 2005, according to both sides.

"We have recorded unprecedented military gains and they will pave the way for a political solution," Rajapakse said.

"There is no point in talking about a political solution without militarily crushing terrorism."

The Army chief said the leader of the LTTE could be dead within six months and the military's aim is to kill 10 Tigers a day, a newspaper report said.

Meanwhile, Sri Lank Army Commander Lt. General Sarath Fonseka was quoted by the state-run surrounded the northern LTTE held Vanni and that there were only 3,000 Tigers left.

"The LTTE could not prevent

losing their remaining 3,000 cadres and there is no assurance that the LTTE leader would survive for the next six months as the Air Force plans to attack all the LTTE bases," Fonseka said.

"Our daily target is to kill at least 10 LTTE terrorists and for the last few months over 500 LTTE ... have been killed by the armed forces," Fonseka claimed.

"We have weakened the LTTE by 50 percent or more and we are confident we can go that extra mile in the coming year."

The LTTE has been outlawed as a terrorist group by a host of nations, including the United States, Britain and the EU.

NEWS

Sri Lanka tears up 2002 ceasefire

THE Sri Lankan government formally withdrew from the 2002 Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam on Wednesday, January 2, saying it now has the upper hand in the decades-old ethnic conflict.

Sri Lanka also signaled Friday it wanted to end Norway's position as the island's peace broker as international concern mounted over Colombo's decision to end the truce with the Tigers.

Norway was instrumental in persuading the government and the Tamil Tigers to sign a truce in February 2002, and has since then tried but failed to secure progress at successive rounds of negotiations.

Accusing the government of "war-mongering", the main opposition party, which signed the CFA, claimed the decision to scarp the truce had benefitted LTTE's aspirations for an independent state, weakened Sri Lanka and "disappointed" the international community, including India.

"This self-serving decision of President Mahinda Rajapakse has weakened us (Sri Lanka) both internationally and domestically; it benefits only the LTTE's aspirations for a separate state," the United National Party said in a statement.

The UNP said military assistance to Sri Lanka from the US, India and the UK "symbolised the international community's faith in the ceasefire agreement and their backing for the ongoing peace initiative".

"It is clear that not only have the blood-thirsty and war-mongering rulers of this country lost touch with reality but they do not have the capacity to learn from past experiences -- both internationally or locally," the UNP said.

Sri Lankan Cabinet spokesman, Keheliya Rambukwella, said that the "foremost thing in the country is to uphold national security" which was why the gov-

ernment had taken the decision.

"National security is threatened at every corner," he said.

Rambukwella said the government had also decided to formally end any negotiations with the LTTE.

"The government sees no point in having any attempt to come to a settlement with a terrorist outfit,"

Under the ceasefire that went into effect from February 23, 2002, both the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE had the option to pull out after giving two weeks' written notice to Norway, the facilitator of the peace process and the ceasefire agreement.

Fighting has escalated in recent months, and the government now believes it has the upper hand and is in a position to capture the Tamil Tiger defacto state in the north.

Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama said the Sri Lankan government will press ahead to crush "the scourge of terrorism," while working on a "practical and sustainable political solution."

He also said the truce deal was "flawed from the start," although he stopped short of calling for Nordic diplomats - frequently accused by Colombo of being sympathetic to the Tamil Tigers - to go home.

The Nordic countries responded by saying they were "deeply concerned" by the worsening situation in Sri Lanka and they are worried that "the violence and human suffering will now further escalate".

"During the first three years (of the truce) ... as many as 10,000 lives may have been spared," the foreign ministers of Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Iceland said in a joint statement.

The Sri Lankan government lashed out at the Nordic countries, saying their claim was 'dubious.'

Meanwhile, Nordic ceasefire monitors from the Sri Lanka



President Mahinda Rajapakse (with scarf) is confident of crushing the Tamil rebellion. Photo TamilNet

Monitoring Mission (SLMM) began wrapping up their six-year mission to Sri Lanka.

The SLMM, which kept a tally of violations of the truce agreement, became increasingly ineffective as its access in conflict areas was hampered and fighting escalated. Its role ends with the ceasefire.

In a statement on January 3, SLMM said: "The Government of Sri Lanka has decided to abrogate the Ceasefire Agreement of 2002 ... effective as of 16 January 2008. Thus the SLMM will terminate its current operational activities in Sri Lanka effective 16 January at 1900 hrs."

Earlier government spokesman and media minister Anura Yapa said that the decision to abrogate the ceasefire agreement was taken at a cabinet meeting presided by President Mahinda Rajapakse on Wednesday.

According to Yapa, Prime Mi-

nister Ratnasiri Wickremarajapakse proposed that the Ceasefire Agreement of February 2002 be abrogated. It was approved unanimously with no lengthy discussion.

Yapa said that the government viewed the 2002 truce agreement, which was backed by the international community, as a "flawed document."

"The government does not want to be a party to a non-functioning ceasefire agreement," Yapa told reporters. "But, it does not imply that the government has shut the door for negotiations."

He said that if the LTTE were to lay down their arms - an unlikely event - the government could resume talks facilitated by Norway which broke down in October 2006.

The Sri Lankan government also said it wanted Oslo to have a "redefined role" in the country where tens of thousands of people have been killed in protracted eth-

nic conflict.

"Now that there are new circumstances, we naturally expect the Norwegians to have a redefined role," Bogollagama told reporters.

"We will tell you what that role is when the (Sri Lankan) government decides."

Sri Lankan military chiefs have said 2008 will be a turning point in the war and have vowed to eject the LTTE from their defacto state in the island's Northeast.

The decision to abrogate the CFA comes amidst both political and military leaders making declarations in the past weeks that the war to crush the LTTE would be intensified this year.

Last week, Sri Lankan Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa said in public that the truce between the two sides was "moribund" and that the CFA was a "joke".

International reaction: regret, concern and anxiety

THE Sri Lankan government's decision to unilaterally withdraw from the internationally backed ceasefire agreement with the Tamil Tigers (LTTE) brokered by Norway was met with concern and regret from foreign governments and international organisations.

Whilst all the countries were unanimous in declaring that there is no military solution to the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, unlike the United Nations and an array of western states, India pointedly refrained from expressing regret or concern at Sri Lanka's decision to withdraw from the ceasefire agreement.

Also, unlike western states, India along with Japan expressed confidence in President Mahinda

Rajapakse submitting devolution proposals in the near future.

United States

The United States, one of the co-chairs of peace process facilitated by Norway, said it was troubled by Sri Lanka's decision to end a 2002 cease-fire agreement with Tamil Tigers.

"Ending the cease-fire agreement will make it more difficult to achieve a lasting, peaceful solution to Sri Lanka's conflict," said a statement by State Department spokesman Sean McCormack.

"We call on both the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam to avoid an escalation of hostilities and further

civilian casualties."

"All parties to the conflict share the responsibility to protect the rights of all of Sri Lanka's people," the statement further said.

Norway

Norway which brokered the ceasefire agreement in February 2002 and facilitated the peace process regretted the government's decision in statement released by the foreign ministry.

"I regret that the government is taking this serious step," Eric Solheim said in a statement released by Norway's foreign ministry. Solheim, Norway's government minister in charge of the environment and international

development was instrumental in bringing about the ceasefire agreement.

"This comes on top of the increasingly frequent and brutal acts of violence perpetrated by both parties."

Solheim said: "It must be made clear that the responsibility for peace on Sri Lanka lies with the parties, if they don't want peace, there's very little Norway can do."

Canada

Canada's Foreign Affairs Minister Maxime Bernier also expressed deep regret over Sri Lanka's decision.

"Canada deeply regrets the decision of the government of Sri

Lanka to withdraw from the 2002 Ceasefire Agreement," Bernier said in a statement.

"Withdrawal from this important agreement will make the search for a durable political solution more difficult, and only increases the likelihood that the incidents of violence being carried out by both sides will increase," he said.

"We remain deeply concerned about the impact of the escalating violence on civilians, humanitarian workers and human rights defenders. Violence will not produce solutions, it will only bring more tragedy to the people of Sri Lanka," Bernier said.

"We call on all parties to

Continued on p14

NEWS



Bomb blasts in Sri Lanka capital, minister killed

A SRI LANKAN government minister was killed this Tuesday in a powerful roadside bomb attack by suspected Tamil Tigers, followed hours later by a powerful blast in the heart of the capital Colombo, police said.

D. M. Dassanayake, the 51-year-old minister for nation building, suffered severe head injuries and died while undergoing surgery, said doctor Lalini Gunasekera at the Ragama hospital here.

He was killed near the island's capital and international airport, when his jeep (pictured left) was caught in claymore fragmentation mine blast.

In a separate later incident, the bomb which went off at the Regent Flats complex in Colombo Fort did not cause casualties, police said.

Police said they were probing if the Tuesday night bomb had been aimed at a military commander travelling in the area. Senior officers frequently use the road by the Regent Flats, which are opposite the Colombo Hilton.

The night blast rocked the city as it emptied of workers. Local news channels were running footage of the morning assassination when they interrupted to bring news of the second blast.

Earlier, President Mahinda Rajapakse condemned the assassination of the minister and vowed to step up efforts to fight terrorism.

"This sad event is a further reminder of the need to redouble our efforts to rid our country of terrorism and the use of violence to achieve political ends," the president said in a statement.

"His assassination in a Claymore mine attack by the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) is yet another example of its continued commitment to terror and violence to achieve its separatist goals," the president added.

The defence ministry said the minister's personal bodyguard was also killed and 10 others were wounded in the attack.

Police said the Tuesday morning mine - a device packed with explosives and ball bearings - was detonated as the minister's convoy passed the town of Ja-Ela.

Dassanayake was notorious for his alleged underworld links and once attended parliament in handcuffs, having been allowed out of a remand prison to take part in a key debate.

Sri Lankan police and security forces have been on high alert for Tamil Tiger attacks following the government's announcement that it was pulling out of a tattered ceasefire agreement from Jan 16.

On Sunday, security forces also conducted a major search operation in the entire Western province which covers the capital and airport area - questioning tens of thousands of Tamil people and arresting nearly 200.

The killing of the minister came less than a week after a similar roadside bomb in Colombo targeted a military bus, killing five people. The authorities blamed the LTTE for that attack.

The Tigers are yet to formally respond to the government's decision to pull out of the truce. The government believes it has the upper hand over the Tigers and is in a position to capture the north.

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HRW says monitors needed urgently

HUMAN Rights Watch (HRW), the international rights watchdog, has called for a UN human rights monitoring mission in Sri Lanka in the wake of the Sri Lankan government quitting the 2002 ceasefire agreement with the Tamil Tigers.

The New York-based group said Thursday new monitors were needed to replace the Norwegian-led Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM), hitherto tasked with supervising the truce and which is pulling out due to the abrogation of the ceasefire.

"The SLMM was deeply flawed, but its monitors helped to minimize abuses against civilians," said HRW's deputy Asia director Elaine Pearson.

"Now the need for a UN monitoring mission is greater than ever," she said. "Civilians caught up in the fighting will have a

harder time finding safety once the monitors have withdrawn."

Writing in a Sri Lankan newspaper this week, James Ross, Legal and Policy Director of HRW, said the Sri Lanka government has failed to "seriously investigate and prosecute those responsible for the horrific abuses of the past two years - the unlawful killings, the 'disappearances,' the paramilitary Karuna group's abduction of children.

"The cover-up is the government's determined effort to keep the issue off the international agenda," he said. "The cover-up machinery has been in high gear."

"Cover-ups work only so long as they can be kept secret, but Colombo's tactics are hard to hide.... Either the Sri Lankan government can unilaterally address the problem - which it has thus far

Continued on p14

NEWS

'Colombo is removing witnesses to the coming carnage' - Ponnambalam

TamilNet

SRI LANKA'S government tore up the six year old ceasefire agreement to remove the presence of the international monitors who have been exposing human rights abuses, Tamil parliamentarian Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam said this week.

Moreover while the blatant targeting of the island's Tamils by the government of President Rajapakse is taking place in the full glare of the International Community, the latter is able to only make verbal condemnations and remains largely ineffective in stopping the Sinhala state.

The full text of Mr. Gajendrakumar's interview with TamilNet follows:

TamilNet: Last week the Government served notice of its formal withdrawal from the Ceasefire Agreement (CFA). The Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) has informed that it will be terminating its mission from the 16th of January. What do you see as the reasons for this decision by the Government particularly when it was well known that the CFA remained merely on paper?

Gajendrakumar: Despite the ineffectiveness of the CFA, the presence of SLMM has been a major factor in containing Rights abuses in the NorthEast. The SLMM continued to come out with its reports on a regular basis. Of late, the SLMM has been exposing the Government's activities in the East.

In my view, the Government had to disable the SLMM before it starts intensifying its military project. The Government will want to rid the Northeast of any witnesses of the carnage that it intends to unveil on the Tamil people in the name of safeguarding the Sovereignty of the State. It wants to have a free hand. It will also want to create the ground conditions where only its versions of events come out of the Northeast.

There is also an image factor. The CFA and the SLMM are seen as creations of the Western Nations. By taking steps to negate these, particularly amidst the Sinhala Nationalist frenzy the South finds itself in, Rajapakse and his Government will come across as standing up to the West and will project an image of strength. Naturally, the Government will see these as scoring strong points from its constituency.

TamilNet: But if the intention is to rid the Northeast of witnesses, and have a monopoly on the information, surely the SLMM is not the only source?

Gajendrakumar: I agree. The SLMM was only one such potential source. There are many

INGOs, Media Institutions, Civil Society activists, religious leaders, intellectuals and political actors who could serve similar purpose.

But it is also true that these actors have also been systematically targeted over the last two years, to the point that all of them are finding it near impossible to function freely and safely. It is well known that the Government is making it very difficult and unsafe for the INGOs to work.

Many INGOs that used to work in the Northeast, no longer function. There have been targeted killing of other actors. The space for independent actors to work in the Northeast has been successfully curtailed to the extent the Government would consider them ineffectual. Getting the SLMM out was the icing on the cake, if you like.

The strong need to keep witnesses out, and have its version of events go uncontested, are also reasons why the Government would never agree to have a UN Monitoring Mission to have a presence on the island.

When the Government is about to violate every conceivable human right of the Tamils in pursuing a military solution, and is relying increasingly on its military agenda to garner support from amongst the Sinhala people for its political survival, it would be only logical for it to ensure that there are no independent witnesses of its crimes; and for it to ensure it has a monopoly on the information that comes out of the Northeast to project it in a positive light vis-à-vis its electorate.

TamilNet: The effect of the Government's actions on the INGOs for example, has also worsened the humanitarian situation facing the people in the Northeast. What steps has the TNA taken in this regard?

Gajendrakumar: Well, the TNA for some time now has been warning the International Community that the humanitarian crisis faced in the Northeast is not a byproduct of the military actions of the Government, but that it is in fact a part and parcel of the Government's military strategy itself.

Our warnings have been proved correct by the way the Government carried out military operations in the East, where humanitarian aid agencies were prevented from reaching the affected people. The result was the colossal human suffering that innocent civilians had to face. All those people are continuing to suffer even today. The Government's intended future operations in the North will be no different from what happened in the East and will make the humanitarian situa-



Sri Lanka is forcing foreign observers out ahead of new offensives against Tamil areas. Photo TamilNet

tion many times worse.

It is in this backdrop that some Countries have been applying pressure on Tamil Diaspora humanitarian initiatives. This is very unfortunate. At a time when the International Community through its own INGOs are unable to deliver to the suffering Tamil people, the fact that Tamil Diaspora humanitarian institutions are also being prevented from helping their own suffering people, we find is particularly cruel.

Whatever the intentions of these Countries might be, there can be no doubt that their actions are only helping the Sri Lankan Government in its war efforts, and it is the innocent Tamil civilians who are made to suffer. We would therefore continue to appeal to these Countries to at least allow space for the Tamil Diaspora to provide the much needed humanitarian assistance to their own people.

TamilNet: You have talked about the Government's intentions regarding the Northeast. Mr. Maheswaran was assassinated in a Kovil in Colombo, in the South. Mr. Mano Ganeshan has complained of threats to his life. These are actors based outside the Northeast. What are your views on these developments?

Gajendrakumar: I think there are a number of reasons that would have had a cumulative effect in driving Governments actions on Tamils in the South.

Firstly, both Mr. Maheswaran and Mr. Mano Ganeshan are Tamils. As far as Sri Lankan Governments are concerned, Tamils are an easily expendable lot.

Secondly, both Maheswaran

and Mano Ganeshan have been critics of the Government. As stated earlier, the Government will work hard at silencing its critics. Them being Tamil, makes the Governments job that much easier.

Thirdly, I also think that there is a larger project of the Government at play here. When the Government intensifies its military project, it will want to make sure that the South is kept stable. For this, the Government will see every Tamil as a potential threat. To eliminate this threat, the Tamils will either have to be removed from the South, or at the very least, be terrorized to the extent that they are neutralized.

The forced eviction of Tamils from Colombo a few months ago, along with continuous rounding up and arrests of Tamils, is for this reason. Targeting prominent Tamils who have been elected in the South also serves this purpose - if high profile Tamils can be got rid of so easily, the message to the ordinary Tamil people living in the South is very loud and clear indeed.

Fourthly, I also think the Rajapakse regime would be keeping an eye on the possibility of having to face an election. His is a coalition Government that is not completely stable. The recent drama during the budget would have driven home this point.

If elections are to be held, Rajapakse will want to ensure that his opponent's chances are reduced. Since he is certain that the Tamils in Colombo will not vote for him, he needs to ensure that their votes will not benefit his opponents. By Targeting opposition Tamil MPs based in Colombo

who work with his opponents, he will make a prospective Tamil candidate at future elections think twice before putting his or her name forward. The sense of impunity that is created by such targeting, he will hope, will also keep the Tamil voter from getting out and voting, which will only be to his Government's benefit.

TamilNet: So under these circumstances, where do the Tamils stand?

Gajendrakumar: Fundamentally what the Tamils are facing is nothing new. However, since the Rajapakse regime came to office, the anti-Tamil actions of the Sri Lankan State have been unparalleled. All of this has been happening in the full glare of the International Community. Unfortunately, other than for statements that have been issued from time to time, the International Community has been ineffective in restraining the Sri Lankan State.

Under these circumstances the Tamil people would believe that the only way the Sri Lankan Government could be brought to its senses is through enforced reversals on the battlefield. But the TNA will continue to engage with the International Community in the hope of trying to convince it to take meaningful steps against the Sri Lankan State that would convince the latter to abandon its current single-minded pursuit of a military solution to the conflict.

Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam is a Tamil National Alliance (TNA) parliamentarian for Jaffna district, and is a Member of the Parliamentary Consultative Committee of Constitutional Affairs.

EDITORIAL

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WEDNESDAY JANUARY 09, 2008 No. 364

Eyes Tight Shut

International community struggles to face Sri Lanka's reality

The Sri Lankan government of President Mahinda Rajapakse (finally) tore up the 2002 Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) with the Liberation Tigers last week. Whilst the truce existed only on paper after almost two years of high-intensity war, the move was not without its consequences. The ejection of the Nordic ceasefire monitors, a key set of international eyes on the ground, was one. The smashing of the vestiges of Norway's once much lauded peace process is another. The most important, however, is the Rajapakse regime's brazen demonstration of its contempt for international opinion.

As with all of Sri Lanka's odious actions, the reaction of the international community, broadly defined, has been inexcusably muted. The United States is 'troubled.' Australia 'fears' for the future. Norway 'regrets' Sri Lanka's action. Contrast this with the howls of rage that would have followed had it been the LTTE that had opted to exit the CFA. Indeed, despite the brazenness with which the Sri Lankan state is abducting, murdering and disappearing Tamils, the international community's reactions have so far been limited to temporarily stopping a fraction of aid flows to the country. Compare this to the haste with which the EU and Canada rushed to proscribe the LTTE in early 2006. Indeed, since that point the newly emboldened Sri Lankan state has waged relentless and indiscriminate war in the Northeast.

The fundamental problem here is the international community's stubborn refusal to accept, even when it is thrust in their faces, the racist oppression that underpins ethnic politics in Sri Lanka and, consequently, the impossibility of reforming the Sinhala state. In the past eighteen months the claim that Tamil-Sinhala relations are amicable, disturbed only by the agitation of 'extremists', has been exposed for the fiction it is. The vast majority of Sinhalese are behind President Rajapakse's militarist project which is as much about 'crushing Tamil rebellion' as 'defeating Tiger terrorism.' And yet, for three decades now, even as the Tamils have been protesting state terror, the international community has repeatedly called for a solution "within a united Sri Lanka." Indeed, the adamant refusal to see the violence in Sri Lanka as a cycle of oppression followed by resistance was reflected again last week. Sri Lanka's abrogation of the ceasefire, Erik Solheim, Norway's for-

mer Special Envoy, lamented, "comes on top of the increasingly frequent and brutal acts of violence perpetrated by both parties." It is this ready equating of the violence of the oppressor with the resistance of the oppressed which reveals the international mindset.

Eager to pursue joint interests with the Sri Lankan state, international actors (and their local partners) have long sought to mischaracterise the island's conflict as one of opposing extremist demands (a unitary state versus independence) and, of late, the protagonists (the state and the LTTE) as mirrors of each other. Sinhala and Tamil nationalisms are equated and denounced alike. The vast majority of civilians who have died in this conflict are Tamils - mown down by Sri Lanka's military machine or diseased and starved amid government embargos. Yet, as much as the Tamils rage against Sinhala chauvinism, the international community serenely assures us it is merely poor governance. The violence of the LTTE ('terrorists') is the problem, we are repeatedly told, not state oppression. Our demand for Eelam is a quest for 'ethnic hygiene' as one US Ambassador told us (we doubt he would address the people of Kosovo or Somaliland in such terms).

There was a time when such name-calling, the labeling of Tamil resistance as terrorism, the mischaracterization of the Tamil freedom struggle as 'extremism' was both hurtful and alarming. That was when the Tamils still had faith in the international community's preparedness to stand up for principles of justice and humanity and were eagerly, even naively, trying to make their case. However, the lethargic response of the international actors to the Sri Lankan state's ongoing brutality and its defiance of international norms have revealed - to both the state and the Tamils - the limits of international commitment to principles that were, not that long ago, brandished as justification for denying the Tamils not only urgently needed humanitarian aid, but a peace process on our terms. In short, we have become accustomed to being blamed for our own suffering. Especially under the prevailing conditions in Sri Lanka, the equating of the state's violence against our people with the LTTE's resistance to the state says less about the moral standing of our freedom struggle than the strategic imperatives of those making this argument.

The futility of human rights monitoring

The current pattern of human rights violations reflects the new dynamics of war.

Vidya Kumaraswamy
 Tamil Guardian

THE most significant consequence of Sri Lanka's formal decision this week to withdraw from the Norwegian mediated ceasefire is the termination of the mandate for the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM). This has intensified calls for a United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission to formally continue the human rights work that had, by default, fallen to the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission. The demand for a UN mission has become the standard liberal response to Sri Lanka's fast deteriorating human rights situation.

However, it is unclear whether the language of human rights and humanitarianism can actually capture or address the issues that are driving Sri Lanka's dismal slide to lawlessness and brutality.

To argue that the solution to Sri Lanka's problems might not be found in the language and techniques of human rights and humanitarianism seems in the current climate at least counter intuitive, perhaps even demonstrating a callous disregard for the victims of this violence.

However, the point here is not to argue that violence and brutality are inevitable, simply to suggest that the human rights / humanitarian paradigm cannot provide the means to explain the dynamics of violence and consequently is incapable of establishing the conceptual foundations for a different, positive form of politics.

Despite the deep ideological divisions on the Sri Lankan political scene all shades of opinion can nominally agree that the current situation in which politics is conducted through assassination, extortion, bombings, rapes, enforced starvation, displacement, ethnic cleansing and abduction is abnormal. It is not that politics has been marred by brutality rather politics is coercion, fear and violence.

The human rights / humanitarian paradigm appears at first sight to be eminently capable, if not absolutely essential in these conditions of abnormal politics.

The current situation is one where human rights are violated with gay abandon and in which humanitarian norms have lost all force as guiding or restraining

principles.

However, there is a circularity to the human rights / humanitarian paradigm that explains its inability to provide a viable strategy that can move Sri Lankan political dynamics away from abnormal politics.

The human rights / humanitarian paradigm describes the current situation in terms of violations of its norms: so many abductions, so much displacement, the numerical dimensions of humanitarian need. However, it also explains the current crisis in terms of its own norms - thus producing circularity:

Q: What is the problem in Sri Lanka?

A: The LTTE and the Sri Lankan government are committing human rights violations.

Q: Why is this?

A: Because they are human rights violators.

Using the same terms to describe and explain a problem produces circularity that can be compared to explaining flooding in terms of too much water.

Q: What is the problem?

A: The room has flooded?

Q: Why is this?

A: Because there is too much water.

Just as the flood is caused by some other problem that cannot be explained solely in terms of water levels so Sri Lanka's problems require a language that moves beyond the metrics of human rights violations and humanitarian needs.

A significant proportion of human rights violations in Sri Lanka are related, in the organic and causal sense, to the ongoing civil war. Nothing demonstrates this better than the reduction in human rights violations in the months immediately following the ceasefire agreement of February 2002.

The ceasefire recognized the civil war as a military conflict between two protagonists and consolidated a mutually agreed balance of forces. It was thus an expressly political and pragmatic document that it in its immediate wake produced a noticeable improvement in the human rights / humanitarian metrics.

The ceasefire, initially at least, checked and contained the activi-

OPINION



ties of the army backed paramilitary death gangs that had stalked the Jaffna peninsula spreading murder, gang rape and abduction in their wake.

It gave the Vanni a respite from constant aerial bombardment, displacement and saw the ending of President Chandrika Kumaratunga's cruel, not to mention illegal, embargo that had brought the population to near starvation and deprived it of medical essentials including pain killers and anti snake venom. (As an aside, the needless distress and indignity suffered in death by Vanni civilians is one of the many inhuman aspects of Chandrika's war not fully captured by humanitarian metrics.)

In return for greater stability and security in the north levels of insecurity in the south declined and the economy started to recover from the negative growth it experienced in 2001.

The brief period of military security gave the LTTE the confidence to engage with international actors on key issues such as under-age recruitment, police reforms and development amongst others. Although all sides have since expressed dissatisfaction with the process, the current situation is clearly by all metrics a deterioration from a dynamic of limited if not entirely satisfactory engagement.

The breakdown of the ceasefire and the consequent deterioration in human rights / humanitarian standards cannot be explained in terms of the metrics alone. There is an increase in human rights violations not because the LTTE and the Government suddenly rediscovered their human

rights violating tendencies but because the ceasefire has broken down and both sides are pursuing a military option.

The ceasefire broke down for a number of reasons but principally perhaps the international backers lost sight of the mutually recognized military balance that had created the conditions for the ceasefire in the first place.

Instead a narrow minded determination to contain and

It is not that politics in Sri Lanka has been marred by brutality rather politics is coercion, fear and violence.

weaken the LTTE led to a deterioration of the military balance, eroded political parity and the culminated in a resurgent and vibrant Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism revival that is again pursuing war - with international backing.

The current pattern of human rights violations reflects the new dynamics of war. Abductions and extortions of Tamils in Colombo, Jaffna and the East are a consequence of this government's greater reliance on paramilitary groups. These acts are carried out by army backed groups and the ransom money is used to fund paramilitary activities, mainly in the East. Tamil politicians are being assassinated to clear the space for paramilitary politicians.

These activities cannot be explained in terms of the anti human rights tendencies of Douglas, Pilliyan or Karuna alone. Rather abductions in Colombo are fuelling paramilitary activities in the east, precisely so as to free up the army to capture the north.

Abductions were not a major feature of Chandrika's regime as she did not need a large paramilitary group to control and pacify the east and could fund paramilitaries like the EPDP in the north through the ministries channeling the generous financial assistance given to redevelop military-controlled Jaffna.

Counting, condemning and monitoring abductions and assassinations simply describes the dimensions of the problem, it cannot explain why they occur or produce a viable strategy for building a different kind of politics.

In short, the distressing dimensions of Sri Lankan human rights / humanitarian matrices simply reflect larger military and political strategies. The matrices will not improve until these larger issues are addressed. These larger issues require political concepts such as justice, security and stability that have become almost alien to Sri Lankan political thinking.

Thinking about justice cannot turn on the individual citizen but must incorporate the historic and ongoing oppression of the Tamil people and their exclusion from meaningful access to public, legitimate power.

Security cannot just mean, as it presently does, the security of the Sinhala state and polity and

the larger international community but must be the physical, political and economic security of the Tamils.

Finally stability refers to the long term stability of any solution that must include the idea of military balance. A political condition that effectively addresses these issues of justice, security and stability would also be one where there was a noticeable and qualitative improvement in

Counting abuses simply describes the dimensions of the problem, it cannot explain why they occur or produce a different kind of politics.

human rights / humanitarian matrices.

However, the matrices would simply describe the situation, they cannot help create it.

The ceasefire was the first meaningful step in this direction and as such brought a brief respite in the deterioration of the human rights matrices. It addressed the questions of security and stability and might have provided a means to addressing questions of justice.

UN monitoring as envisioned by its advocates does not address any of these issues and will therefore be unable to check the rising tide of human rights violations.

No doubt the international community hopes that independent human rights monitors would be able to collect informa-

tion that could be used to bring or threaten war crimes charges against both the government and the LTTE. The possibility of war crimes could conceivably act as a threat that shapes the behavior of both protagonists.

However, neither protagonist is fighting the war to avoid war crimes trials. Both are fighting to win and are convinced - with good reason - that war crimes charges can be avoided through military victory. All past political experience suggests that war crimes trials are simply victor's justice that can be completely avoided by the very powerful, notably the United States of America.

The international community's moral authority is also severely tarnished by the activities of its most powerful members. Both sides in Sri Lanka can justifiably point to the aberrations of the 'war on terror.' Moreover, the Sri Lankan states can - and successfully does - use this particular rhetoric to deflect all criticism.

Conversely the West's unqualified military and political support for Sri Lankan state terror means that the LTTE's refusal to recognize the moral authority of these states will - and demonstrably does - resonate with the Tamil polity.

The international community's reliance on the human rights / humanitarian paradigm will exclude fundamental issues of justice, security and stability from political consideration and thus fuel the war which will then fuel a further deterioration of the human rights / humanitarian matrices fuelling calls for UN monitoring.

Thus will the cycle continue.

NEWS



Blast in Colombo security zone

TWO Sri Lankan soldiers and three civilians were killed, ten soldiers and 14 civilians were wounded last Wednesday in a blast in Colombo's High Security nerve centre at Slave Island, 200 meters from Sri Lanka Army headquarters and the Sri Lanka Air Force (SLAF) headquarters. A claymore fragmentation mine was triggered targeting a bus carrying soldiers. There are at least 7 checkpoints in the location with business establishments and hotels with civilian traffic.

According to the defence officials, the bomb was placed under an external unit of an air condi-

tioning unit of Hotel Nippon. The explosion was triggered off as the army bus and another public bus were passing the location.

"We believe that the mine was placed on top of the trough shortly before the explosion and thereafter triggered by a remote controlled device from a side," Police officials said. "Since the road is frequently used by military and Air Force vehicles, regular search operations and patrolling are carried out along the road making it extremely difficult to plant the mine in the mornings. At nights the road is closed to traffic."



LTTE military intelligence chief mourned

Hundreds of people attended a ceremony Sunday at Puthukkudiyirippu in Vanni to pay their respects to Colonel Charles, Head of Liberation Tigers' Military Intelligence, who was killed Saturday evening in a random mine attack by Sri Lanka commandos in Mannaar district.

Col. Charles had been in charge of internal intelligence within the ranks of LTTE ground forces and led an external operations corps as well as a regular combat force that has been deployed in Mannaar district, was killed together with three LTTE lieutenants in the ambush while they were riding in a van between Iluppaikkadavai and Pa'llamadu at 3:10 pm.

MICol Charles (Shanmuganathan Ravishankar, Jaffna) was on a mission inspecting his regular forces in Mannaar, informed sources said.

The lieutenants killed in the ambush were identified as Sukanthan (Sivapalan Sreetharan) from Jeyapuram, Lt. Veeramavaran (Pararajasingham Suthan) from Mallaavi and Lt. Kalaa (Sinnaththamby Kangatharan) from Vaddakkachchi.

Col. Charles, who joined the LTTE as a full-time member in December 1985 was taken into its Intelligence Wing following his military performance in Jaffna district and later in Vanni during the LTTE - India war.

He served in a key position in LTTE Intelligence Wing between 1991 and 2004, also as the head of LTTE Intelligence in Batticaloa-Amparai district between 1997 and 2000. He had commanded a number of key military operations, officials said.

Col. Charles was appointed as the Head of newly established Military Intelligence wing in 2004 by the LTTE leader V. Pirapaharan.

Col. Soosai, Special Commander of the Sea Tigers paid trib-

ute to Col Charles at the event held in the Heroes Cemetery Hall in Puthukkudiyirippu. The event was presided by C. Ilamparithi, Puthukkudiyirippu region Political Head of LTTE.

Col. Soosai, during the eulogy said "It is difficult to accept losses but without losses we cannot achieve liberation."



LTTE Colonel Charles

'It is difficult to accept losses, but we cannot achieve liberation without losses' - Col. Soosai

Extracts from his speech follow:

"Col. Charles was known only to a few but the enemy knew his identity.

"When the enemy occupied Jaffna peninsula and was roaming around freely, it was difficult for our cadres to find accommodation and meals. It was during that difficult time Col. Charles functioning under the leadership of Captain Morris who was in charge of Point Pedro area, faced the military offensives of Indian Peace Keeping Forces (IPKF).

"He was later sent to Manaluru where he coordinated a

number of attacks. A short while later he returned to Jaffna peninsula and continued his activities together with LTTE Intelligence Head Poddu Ammaan.

"In 1990 Col. Charles who was in charge of Vadamaraadchii area up to that time of withdrawal of IPKF was identified by Poddu Ammaan, as the ideal candidate to prepare a base in the South to stage attacks from there.

"Stationing himself in the South Col. Charles staged a series of successful attacks.

"He successfully led a number of daring attacks but once he sensed that he was being wanted by the enemy he quickly changed his place of operation to Batticaloa from where he continued to launch many more successful attacks against the enemy.

"In 2001, the Katunayake Airport attack which was flawlessly executed making sure none of the civilian passengers including foreigners were not hurt, this great hero Charles who led the attack proved to the world how effectively he trained the Black Tigers under the guidance of Poddu Ammaan and also showed to the world community the great power of and discipline of our fighters.

"But for our people he was a fearless commander.

"During early stages of his involvement in our movement, Charles functioned under me. At that time while executing his own responsibilities he created a team of Black Sea Tigers to function incognito for attacks to be staged not only in the North and East but also on certain targets in the South.

"Today, this great hero is not with us. However, the fighters trained by him will carry his dreams and continue the military attacks.

"He was not only an expert in

Continued on p15

NEWS

Sinhalese settled in areas emptied of Tamils

Military expulsions pave the way

KADATKARAICHENAI in Trincomalee was a thriving Tamil village less than a year ago. The Sri Lanka military onslaught on 2006 forcefully displaced the Tamils from it and the surrounding areas.

Hundreds of Tamils were killed and injured by deliberate military artillery shelling in 2006 - even as the international community looked on impassively.

Once the area was emptied of Tamils by such ethnic cleansing, the Sri Lanka Government declared the area as a military High Security Zone and prevented the original Tamil residents of the area from returning to their homes in their villages.

However, over the past week, 25 Sinhalese families were settled in Kadatkaraichenai, the so called High Security Zone.

This development has all the hallmark of earlier Sinhala settlements in the east where by a Tamil village is emptied through military violence and then small number of Sinhala settlements is first created with minimal facilities.

This settlement then gradually expands unnoticed to include large numbers of settlers, Buddhist temple and a protecting military encampment.

In the eighties and nineties Tamil people were chased out by

large scale massacres carried out by the Sri Lankan military. The massacre of Tamils in the Thiriyai a village in Trincomalee in 1985 and the subsequent conversion of the area in Sinhala settlement exemplifies this tactic of Sri Lanka Government.

On 8 June 1985, Sri Lanka military came in vehicles to Thiriyai and told the people to leave the area before they begin shooting. After the people left, 1100 houses were burnt down. Following this incident, displaced people stayed in schools.

Again on 8 August 1985, the Sri Lankan military attacked the displaced in the schools killing ten civilians. Again on the 14 August six civilians were pulled out of a bus in Thiriyai and hacked to death.

Tamils gradually moved out of the area by the constant threat of violence by the military. The area thus emptied of Tamils was then gradually settled with Sinhalese.

With greater international scrutiny and aversion to ethnic cleansing and no longer able to carry out such blatant landgrabs, given greater international involvement in Sri Lanka, the Sinhala government is carrying out the ethnic cleansing under the pretext of 'fighting terrorism' - even as the world looks on.



Mr. Maheswaran's children pictured at the funeral last week of the opposition MP slain by the Army-backed paramilitary group EPDP. Photos Dinuka Liyanawatte(l), Pradeep Dilrukshana(r)/Daily Mirror

Tamil MP shot dead in crowded temple

A TAMIL parliamentarian from the main opposition United National Party (UNP), was assassinated by gunmen at the Ponnambala Vaaneasvarar temple at Kochchikkadai in Colombo on New Year's day.

Colombo district parliamentarian Thiyagarajah Maheswaran, 41, was shot by gunmen while he was paying homage at the popular Siva temple in Colombo around 9.30 a.m. and succumbed to his injuries at the National Hospital in Colombo an hour later.

The shooting, which also

claimed the life of the MP's bodyguard, came a few hours after Mr. Maheswaran announced on a popular television show that he would reveal details on how abductions and killings in Jaffna are managed by the Sri Lankan establishment through the EPDP paramilitary group.

The UNP blamed the hardline government of President Mahinda Rajapakse for paving the way for the killing by stripping the MP of most of his official guards.

Twelve devotees were wounded when gunmen shot at Mr.

Maheswaran. According to media reports one assassin was wounded when a bodyguard returned fire and is also receiving treatment at the National Hospital.

On December 19 the government had reduced the Ministerial Security Division guards provided to the MP from 18 to two, after he heavily criticized the government and voted against the budget.

Later Mr. Maheswaran wrote to defence secretary Gothabaya Rajapakse, who is also the younger brother of President Mahinda Rajapakse, urging his security details to be restored as he faced danger. However no action was taken.

Hundreds of mourners took part in Maheswaran's funeral which took place in Colombo on Thursday, 3 January. UNP parliamentarians took over the casket containing his remains from his family around 2:30 p.m. at his residence in Wellawatte and the cortege, and the funeral procession went along Galle Road and several areas in Colombo to reach Kanaththai cremation grounds in Borella.

Parliamentarians representing various political parties, members of Movement Against War, Free Media Movement, Working Journalists' Association, Tamil Journalists' Association and religious leaders representing Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim and Christian faiths besides hundreds of mourners walked the six kilometer trek from Wellawatte to Borella.

Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslim

Continued on p10

Government blamed

THE main opposition United National Party (UNP) last week accused the Sri Lankan government of the killing of Tamil parliamentarian Thiyagarajah Maheswaran on New Year's day.

"The security of Mr. Maheswaran was withdrawn two weeks ago by the government despite repeated appeals that his life was in danger," UNP general secretary Tissa Attanayake said.

"Mr. Maheswaran himself made a statement in parliament saying that the government must take responsibility if something were to happen to him," Attanayake added.

Earlier, in an interview for popular Minnal program aired on Shakti TV on December 30, Maheswaran himself had expressed fears for his life.

"My life is increasingly at risk after the reduction of my security

from 18 personnel to only one. Even state intelligence has established that there are threats to me. Therefore, the government should take full responsibility," said Maheswaran.

However senior Minister Nimal Siripala De Silva rubbished UNP accusations and said it was unfair to blame the government for the killing of Mr. Maheswaran.

"Even on earlier occasions politicians have been killed in this manner, this is nothing new. These accusations are leveled to tarnish the image of the government. The government condemns the assassination of Mr. Maheswaran and a thorough investigation has already been ordered," Mr. De Silva said.

The suspect, identified as Vasanthan, was admitted to the



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NEWS

Mano Ganesan flees Sri Lanka

THE leader of Western Province Peoples' Front and founder of the human rights group, the Civil Monitoring Commission (CMC), Mano Ganesan announced last week that he has decided to leave the country fearing for his life after the government drastically reduced his security in after he voted against the budget in December.

Mr. Ganesan accused the government of 'setting the stage for his assassination' and lamented that the present dangerous scenario had compelled him to leave the country at least temporarily, as he had no other choice.

Mr. Ganesan, who has led a campaign for investigating the disappearances and abductions of persons, earned the government's wrath after the Civil Monitoring Committee urged the government to allow relatives of missing per-

sons to meet with UN High Commissioner on Human Rights Louise Arbour during her recent visit to the island.

Mr. Ganesan was presented with a human rights award, "Freedom Defender World Wide Award for 2007", by USA in early December.

Mr. Ganesan told media persons that the 'government has been angry with him for being chosen for the first Annual Freedom Defenders' Award' which was given by the US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on December 10.

Presenting the award, Ms. Rice praised Mr. Ganesan for exposing the 'impunity' with which extortions and abductions of Tamils and Muslims were taking place in Colombo.

On December 18, the security given to Ganesan was reduced

from ten to two and his backup vehicle was also withdrawn. No reasons were given.

Mr. Ganesan appealed to President Mahinda Rajapakse, who is Minister of Defence, and the Inspector General of Police, Victor Perera, to take steps to reinstate his security. However, there was no response from the government.

Ganesan appealed to the foreign envoys in Colombo to put pressure on the government but to no avail. 'They seemed helpless, and some of them even advised me to leave the country for my own safety,' he remarked.

'The government had withdrawn the security to ministers who had not voted for the annual budget in parliament. As a leader of the CMC I face a threat to my life from criminal elements whom I had exposed,' he said.



Maheswaran's casket carried in procession. The graphic spectacle of his killing is a chilling warning from the state. Photo Sunday Times

'I saw him firing at Sir, I fired back'

Continued from p9

National Hospital in a critical condition and kept under heavy police and army protection, hospital sources said.

Maheswaran's security officer L. Dharmasiri, who was also injured in the incident, speaking from his hospital bed alleged that MP was shot dead by one of his former security officers.

"I saw him firing at Sir. I shouted and fired back at him. He ran away firing at me and I too fell over. However I was able to identify him at the hospital," Mr. Dharmasiri said.

Maheswaran was also highly critical about paramilitary group-cum-political party EPDP in his interview with Minnal programme and claimed that he would reveal details on how the terror campaign in Jaffna was being managed by the Sri Lankan regime through the EPDP.

The EPDP, is led by Douglas Devananda, a cabinet minister in the present government.

Maheswaran told Minnal program that he would come up with in-depth details of the terror campaign when the parliament resumes its sittings on January 08.

Recently, on 21 December, a UNP candidate, Muthukumar Sivapalan, was shot and killed in Jaffna, allegedly by the EPDP.

Two years ago, a senior politician of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), Joseph Pararajasingham, was shot and killed at St. Mary's co-cathedral church in Batticaloa city, on the night of Christmas eve.

Another TNA MP, Nadarajah Raviraj, was assassinated in Colombo on November 10, 2006.

In both cases, pro-government Army-backed Tamil paramilitaries were blamed.

Blood in the temple...

Continued from p9

mourners participated in the procession and some of them shouted slogans accusing Rajapakse regime and Douglas Devananda, the leader of the EPDP and a cabinet minister for the killing.

Members of the Movement Against War with black cloth covering their mouths and UNP parliamentarians wearing black bands around their necks shouted slogans slamming Sri Lanka government while members of other organizations carried portraits of Maheswaran walked along in the cortege up to the cremation grounds.

The cortege passed through Wellawatte, Bampalappitiya and Kirilappane areas where shops and other business establishments were closed paying respect to the slain leader.

White flags were put up in Fort, Pettah (Peaddai) and Five Lamps junction areas where a general shut down was observed from Thursday morning.

Leader of the opposition and head of UNP, Ranil Wickremasinghe, Minister Fowzi, Western Province Peoples' Front leader and parliamentarian Mano Ganesan, Tamil National Alliance parliamentarian for Jaffna district Sri Kantha, Muslim Congress Leader Rauf Hakeem, Sunanda Dhesapiriya, spokesman of the Free Media Movement and many prominent persons paid tribute to Maheswaran before his remains were cremated.

Maheswaran was a former Hindu Affairs minister and an ex-MP for Jaffna, narrowly escaped an assassination attempt on the final day of the 2004 election campaign in Colombo.

NEWS

Tamils left out of Sri Lanka's tsunami rebuild plans

SRI LANKA'S recovery from the devastating tsunami of December 2004 has been uneven.

Rehabilitation work has notched up significant successes in the Sinhalese-dominated and more peaceful south, but it has suffered greatly in the war-torn northeast, which has a preponderance of the minority Tamils and Muslims.

And it was the northeast, which took the brunt of the killer waves on Boxing Day, which destroyed about 1,21,000 houses and killed over 30,000 in the island.

Sri Lanka's Cabinet spokesperson Anura Priyadarshana Yapa said that 99,497 permanent houses had been built and that work on 19,791 units was in progress. Rebuilding has been 100 per cent in the south, especially Hambantota district, which is the home of President Mahinda Rajapaksa.

In fact, in Hambantota, nearly 3,200 excess houses were built, and these are now occupied by those not affected by the tsunami.

"The northern province still requires completion of more than 9,000 houses and the eastern province more than 12,000 houses," Jeevan Thiagarajah of the Confederation of Humanitarian Agencies told IANS.

"Not even 12 per cent of fully damaged houses in the north have been rebuilt, and only 26 per cent

in the east," says NGO Action Aid in its report titled 'Voice from the Field'. This is so even though 60 per cent of the damage wrought by the tsunami was in the east, especially Amparai district in the southeast.

"Access to some construction sites is restricted and transportation of material difficult or impossible," said a two-year assessment report of the International Federation of the Red Cross. World Vision had to abandon a plan to build 200 houses in Ichchilampattu in Trincomalee district because of military operations.

Government had also put restrictions on the movement of strategic goods like fuel and building material to the areas controlled by the Tamil Tigers, thinking that these would be misappropriated by the rebels. This affected rebuilding greatly.

The ILO reported that in the south 90 per cent of the affected people had returned to work, but in Jaffna district, isolated from the rest of the island, only 55 per cent had. The rest were relying on income from other sources.

As regards the restoration of livelihood, the all-island figures are impressive. About 2,00,000 persons had lost their jobs due to the tsunami.

But according to Thiagarajah, 95 per cent of the men, and 84 per cent of the women, have started



The Northeast bore the brunt of the tsunami but has been neglected by the Sinhala state. Photo Tamilnet

earning again. The Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry had given 1,96,913 grants, and assisted 8,447 micro, small and medium enterprises between 2005 and 2006.

Again, while this is impressive, the schemes have been operative only or mainly in the south, and to some extent in the southeast.

The north has been more or less ignored, thanks to the war, which threatens to continue through 2008.

Money has never been a problem. Sri Lanka has received \$1.7 billion of the \$3.1 billion pledged by the international community for post-tsunami work. More money can be got if the Sri Lankan government is serious about the development of the tsunami-affected areas.

But, as in other cases of foreign assistance, the government has tended to drag its feet on submitting suitable proposals.

In fact, indications are that post-tsunami work is winding up.

'Pervasive fear'...

Continued from p1

lies about the reason and the place of imprisonment are some of the major concerns of the refugees.

Kalin felt that the government has made 'considerable efforts' to assist the displaced after the tsunami of December 2004.

But Sri Lanka's recovery from the devastating tsunami of December 2004 has been uneven and other UN officials said the Northeast had not benefited.

And it was the northeast, which took the brunt of the killer waves on Boxing Day, which destroyed about 1,21,000 houses and killed over 30,000.

Thousands of families in the war-ravaged north and east are still living in basic, temporary shelters with palm-frond roofs and corrugated metal sheet sides, their numbers swollen by others displaced by the war.

The ever-deepening civil war between the Sri Lankan state and Tamil Tigers has hamstrung rebuilding work in the east and halted it in parts of the LTTE-held north, where materials such as cement and steel rods have dried up because of a government ban.

"Three years after the tsunami nearly 100,000 families, or around 80 percent of those affected by the disaster, are back living in totally new or repaired houses," said David Evans, chief technical adviser for UN Habitat in Sri Lanka.

"But the conflict has badly hampered or brought reconstruction work to a standstill in some parts of the north and east and another 21,000 houses are still required," he added.

"So a big task still lies ahead in 2008 and progress in parts of the north will be impossible until the fighting stops."

In southern Sri Lanka, away from near-daily artillery duels and land and sea battles, it's a differ-

ent story.

Unhindered by the war that is focused in the north, legions of donors were able to put up housing schemes and fund many self-build projects via grants, though still slowed by red tape and difficulties securing land to build on.

However, without differentiating the ethnic differences, Mr. Kalin reported that over 200,000 displaced people had returned to their homes or had been provided with temporary shelters and were beginning to regain their livelihoods.

'The predominant concern among displaced people is physical security'

hoods.

He said he was encouraged by the government's recognition of the need to attend to the problems of Muslim refugees from the northern Tamil-speaking district of Jaffna.

Several thousand Muslims driven out by the Tamil Tigers and have been living in refugee camps in Puttalam, north of Colombo, for the past 17 years.

Looking at the future, Kalin urged the Sri Lankan government to take measures in line with international human rights standards and the UN guiding principles on internal displacement in the areas of security, livelihoods and access to humanitarian help.

This was essential if the return of the refugees to their homes was to be sustainable both in the near and the long term, he said. He emphasized the need for providing safe exit routes for refugees during military operations.

Corruption hinders tsunami recovery, \$300m missing

Mel Gunasekera
AFP

GRAFT and renewed fighting has blocked relief to Sri Lanka's tsunami survivors with less than a fifth of money pledged properly accounted for three years later, according to watchdogs.

Sri Lanka's government claims success in rebuilding homes destroyed by the disaster, but international agencies say big problems remain. Huge amounts of foreign cash that poured in did not reach its intended destination.

While the authorities claim they built more houses than

required, many people still live in makeshift dwellings for reasons ranging from poor building standards to fighting in areas where the new homes are located.

"I don't know where the aid money was spent, but we are still living in this wooden house," said Nalini de Soysa, 53, while standing outside her single room house in Galle 112 kilometres (72 miles) south of Colombo.

Some 31,000 people died and one million were left homeless after the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami. Sri Lanka said it got 3.2 billion dollars in foreign aid pledges to rebuild the devastated coastlines.

But out of the promised

money only 1.2 billion dollars was actually received, the government says.

From that only 634 million dollars -- less than 20 percent of the original amount pledged -- was spent by the end of November, according to Transparency International, an international watchdog on corruption.

"It has been virtually impossible to find out what happened to the cash," said Rukshana Nanayakkara, Sri Lanka's deputy executive director of the anti-graft organisation.

An initial government audit in the first year of reconstruction found that less than 13 percent of

Continued on p15

NEWS

For the people of the NorthEast, 2007 was a grim year

SRI LANKA'S security forces and allied paramilitaries intensified their campaign of abductions ('white van' abductions), torture, and murder of Tamil civilians. Tamil civil society leaders bore the brunt of the counter-insurgency campaign. Jaffna remained an open prison with shortage of essential items, east falling under the Sri Lanka Army (SLA) control with thousands displaced as Colombo concocts colonization schemes to make east a Sinhala majority province.

In the North, the paramilitary EPDP (Eelam People's Democratic Party), which has been implicated over the last several years in abductions, murders and rapes, continued its campaign in 2007 with active collaboration from the SLA.

The group's leader, Mr. Douglas Devananda, who serves as a minister in the Cabinet, continued his close relationship with President Rajapaksa and his brother--the Defense Secretary, Mr. Gotabhaya Rajapaksa.

In the East, the paramilitary Karuna group held sway, continuing its brutal campaign of abductions and murders. The group also split, with deputy Pillaiyan taking over the leadership from Karuna.

Karuna was smuggled into the UK by intelligence agencies of the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) under a diplomatic passport but was later arrested by the British immigration authorities and police. He remains under British custody.

The SL armed forces claimed that they had 'liberated' the East from the Tigers, and conducted a continuing campaign of attacks on the Forward Defense Lines of the LTTE as well as attacks by deep penetration units that targeted civilian and medical personnel in the Vanni and Mannar.

The LTTE claimed that it made a tactical withdrawal in the East. The LTTE also claimed, for the most part, that it put up stiff resistance and thwarted the military campaign of the GoSL to intrude into its territory in the Vanni.

The decapitated bodies of many Tamil youths from the North-East as well from the up-country, abducted by the SL military and paramilitary groups, turned up in many locations in both the North and the South.

The LTTE unveiled its Air Wing, the Air Tigers, consisting of modified light planes, with air attacks in the South. The Air Tigers said they conducted successful attacks on the Katunayake Air Force base, on targets in Colombo city, the Palaly military base and the Anuradhapura Air Force base.

The air attacks led to restrictions in flights into and out of the

Katunayake International Airport and a drastic drop in tourism.

Many human rights activists alleged that the international community, including the U.S., U.K, India, Japan and Norway, while calling for respect for Human Rights from all sides, failed to challenge the SL state for its campaign of abductions and murders. Indeed, reports surfaced throughout 2007 of more support to the State from countries such as Pakistan, Iran, China, India, UK and the U.S.

Many Tamil journalists who wrote critically of the Rajapaksa administration were arrested, intimidated into silence or murdered. Sri Lanka was ranked third by a Geneva-based media watchdog in the number of journalists killed.

The abduction of the Eastern University Vice Chancellor, Prof. M. Raveendranath, by state-backed paramilitaries in the heart

YEAR IN REVIEW 2007



of the high security zone in Colombo remained unresolved. Media reports later indicated that the Vice Chancellor had been abducted and killed by the Karuna group, which had the support of the GoSL.

Despite announcements by the GoSL that Scotland Yard would be invited to do a forensic examination and help solve the earlier murder of Jaffna MP, Mr. Nadarajah Raviraj, no progress was made in apprehending and prosecuting his killers. Nor was any progress made in investigating the murder of Sivaram (Taraki), who was an editor of TamilNet.

The Commission of Inquiry (CoI) that SL President Rajapaksa formed to reassure the international community in response to the massacre of 17 Action Action Contre la Faim (ACF) workers in Mutur as well as the murder by Sri Lanka's Special Task Force of 5 Tamils youths in Trincomalee, made no progress. The Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission, after talking to a cross section of the people and witnesses, determined that the SL armed forces committed the Mutur massacre.

The International Independent Group of Eminent Persons

(IIGEP) appointed by Sri Lanka's President Rajapaksa to observe the inquiry by the CoI repeatedly complained about the inquiry being compromised-including the absence of transparency, interference from the Attorney General's department and the Office of the President, and failure to protect witnesses. The IIGEP said the CoI's process fell far short of international norms.

February

February

White van abductions of Tamils, forced disappearances and murders of abducted youths by the SLA and allied paramilitaries increased.

Journalists in Jaffna were in fear of their lives after threats and abductions. Subramaniam Ramachandran a reporter for Tamil dailies went missing.

Indiscriminate arrests of Tamil civilians on a massive scale in Colombo and its suburbs were greeted with outrage by Tamils as well as rights groups.

Sri Lanka's military helicopters carrying foreign ambassadors and UN officials to Batticaloa district came under Mortar attack when the helicopters landed in an Airfield in Batticaloa, causing minor injuries to the US and Italian Ambassadors to Sri Lanka. The LTTE said they were unaware of the diplomat's presence in the SL military helicopters-that the customary procedure for informing them of diplomat's presence in the war zone was not followed by the GoSL, and apologized. The GoSL said that the LTTE had tried to target the diplomats, but the US ambassador, Mr. Robert Blake, insisted that they were not the target.

March

Mr. Managala Samaraweera, the dissident SLFP parliamentarian who became an independent, said at a press conference that the United States should monitor the activities of Mr. Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, the Defense Secretary and brother of the SL President Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa, as the Defense Secretary was in the forefront of denying the freedom of the press and harassing journalists.

Civilians numbering 40,000 were displaced within two days by SLA operations in the East.

Ms. Paremesawary Munusamy was released after Supreme Court heard her fundamental rights petition and ordered her release.

The SLA's heavy use of Multi-Barrel Rocket Launchers paralyzed the Batticaloa district.

The Airwing of the Tigers attacked the Katunayake Airforce base, causing loss of many aircraft to the Sri Lankan Airforce.

The TNA urged the SL President to prevent the SLA from looting IDP's houses in the Batticaloa district.

Human Rights Watch criticized the GoSL for its sponsorship of the paramilitary Karuna group: "The Karuna group's use of child soldiers with state complicity is more blatant today than ever before," the HRW said. "The Karuna group is doing the government's dirty work. It's time for authorities in Colombo to stop this group from using children in its forces...armed Karuna members regularly walk or ride throughout Batticaloa district in plain view of government forces."

April

Citing the State's continued sponsorship of the Karuna group and its forced recruitment of child soldiers (abductions), the HRW called for ban on military aid to Sri Lanka.

Artillery duels along the FDLs in the North between the SL armed forces and the GoSL continued. And in Batticaloa, Multi-Barrel Rocket Launchers (MBRL) fire displaced people on a mass scale.

Selvarajah Rajivarman, 25, a young journalist working at Jaffna's Uthayan newspaper was shot dead by gunmen believed to be from the EPDP paramilitary.

Air Tigers attacked two targets in Colombo, said to be oil storage tanks in Muthurajawela and Kolonnawa.

May

The SLFP submitted it proposals to the All Party Representative Committee (APRC). The proposals to solve the conflict in the island, based on "Mahinda Chinthana" were widely condemned as going back to the failed district council proposals of the 1980s, and as outrageously inadequate.

Following the Air Tigers' attack in Colombo, the Katunayake Airport was shut



Thousands of Tamil civilians have been killed in Sri Lankan military violence last year. Photo TamilNet

NEWS



Over 300,000 Tamils were driven from their homes by the army in the past 18 months. Photo TamilNet

down at nights.

Tamils living in lodges in Colombo were ordered to vacate their lodges within 24 hours and go back to their native places.

June

Sri Lanka's police, on orders from the Defense Secretary, Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, ordered lodge owners in Colombo to evict Tamils living in their lodges. More than 500 Tamils, including many old men and women in their 70's were forcibly sent by bus to Vavuniya.

The action brought condemnation from NGOs, who said the expulsion was a disgrace to humanity, and the international community, including the U.S.

Responding to the international criticism, including the United Nations and the UK, the SL Prime Minister, Mr. Ratnasiri Wickremanayake, apologized in parliament. But within 24 hours, Mr. Gotabaya Rajapaksa defended the expulsions, saying "anything is fair when fighting the LTTE."

July

Fifty US Congressmen, led by Rep. David Price and Rep. Rush Holt, wrote to President Bush, asking the US to increase diplomatic involvement in Sri Lanka "to promote strong human rights protections for civilians [and] urge the Government of Sri Lanka to take active measures to end extrajudicial killings and disappearances in government-controlled areas."

An elderly Tamil lady living close to the University of Jaffna was tortured by Sri Lanka Armed forces.

Sri Lanka Navy and the Sea Tigers clashed heavily in the Pulmoddai seas.

The deep penetration unit of the Sri Lanka army targeted a health service vehicle in Mangku'lam, killing 5 civilians.

Two Canadian MPs raised

concerns about the gross human rights violations in Sri Lanka, and asked Prime Minister Stephen Harper to open a Canadian consulate in Jaffna that could provide immigration services and monitor human rights violations there.

Thousands of British Tamils gathered in London to protest the human rights abuses by the GoSL and called for the British government to take measures to halt the abuses and to recognize the right to self-determination of the Tamil people. The event, held at Trafalgar square, was attended by many British parliamentarians.

In an event organized by the SLFP dissident group, led by Mr. Mangala Samaraweera, and the United National party, thousands of Sri Lankan citizens from various parts of the South congregated in Colombo to protest the Rajapaksa administration's policies and to accuse the Rajapaksa government of having secret pacts with the LTTE to win the last general elections.

The Bishop of Jaffna, the Rt. Rev. Thomas Saundaranayagam, speaking at a function of the Catholic charity, Caritas, said: "It is extremely difficult for the people to enjoy their rights and dignity as equal citizens of a country as long as Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism prevails" in the country. "Only when Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism [accepts] the reality and prepares itself to come forward to accept there are other people with whom it should co-exist, peace and prosperity would prevail in this country," the Bishop said.

The Sri Lankan government celebrated what it called the 'liberation' of the East and the 'Dawn of the East' with fanfare in Colombo.

August

Sahathevan Deluxshan, 22, a young media student at Jaffna University, was shot dead by paramilitary gunmen. The youth was allegedly targeted for partici-

pating in the second death anniversary of Sivaram. The same paramilitary had previously murdered another young journalist, Mr. Varman, for participating in Sivaram's first death anniversary.

The Ceylon Worker Congress, the Tamil party supported the Rajapaksa government, decided to walk out of the cabinet, saying Mr. Basil Rajapaksa, the brother of SL president, had insulted a senior CWC leader by calling him, among other things, 'Para Demala.'

Mr. John Holmes, United Nations Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and Relief Co-ordination, visited Colombo, and in an interview said that Sri Lanka has one of the worst records in the world for safety of humanitarian aid workers. Stung by that criticism, Mr. Jeyaraj Fernandopulle, the Chief Government Whip in parliament, called Mr. Holmes a terrorist who had taken bribes from the LTTE. "I would say Holmes is completely a terrorist, a terrorist who supports terrorism. We consider people who support terrorists also terrorists," he said.

The UN Secretary General, Mr. Ban-Ki-Moon, called the reaction of the GoSL "unacceptable" and "unwarranted." But Mr. Fernandopulle responded, "I don't give a damn about what this UN boss has to tell me or Sri Lanka. He can say whatever he wants, but I will still go by what I said and that is, John Homes is a terrorist who takes bribes from the LTTE."

The Human Rights Watch came out with strong criticism of the GoSL, saying that impunity reigned in Sri Lanka and rights record had severely deteriorated. The HRW called on the EU to "establish a human rights monitoring mission under United Nations auspices to investigate abuses by all parties, report publicly on abuses to enable prosecutions, and facilitate efforts to improve human rights at the local level."

Reporters without borders said that the Jaffna media is in the grip of terror and that murders, torture, censorship, threats and kidnappings had made Jaffna one of the world's most dangerous places to work for journalists.

September

Deep Penetration Units of the SLA killed 9 civilians fleeing an SLA offensive in Mannar. The food crisis in Jaffna worsened. 4500 civilians in Mannar became internally displaced.

The phenomenon of Tamil youths and civilians seeking protection from the local Human Rights Commission (HRC), and those seeking to be inside prisons rather than be abducted by paramilitaries and murdered, became much more common in Jaffna.

The Amnesty International called for international investigations into Human Rights abuses in Sri Lanka.

Rev. Fr. Nicholaspillai Packiyaranjith, of the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) was killed when Sri Lanka Army Deep Penetration Unit attackers launched a Claymore attack.

Sea Tigers and the Sri Lanka Navy clashed in Eastern waters.

October

A team of 'commandos' from the LTTE attacked the Anuradhapura Airforce base, destroying Aircraft on the ground. The losses were reportedly more than US \$ 30 million. The LTTE claimed the attack was a success.

Manfred Nowak, the UN's Special Rapporteur against Torture, and Ms. Louise Arbour, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, visited Sri Lanka.

Mr. Nowak said after the visit that torture is widespread in Sri Lanka and prone to become routine in the context of counter-terrorism operations in Sri Lanka.

Ms. Arbour said that prevalence of impunity and weakness of the law in Sri Lanka was a grave concern. "In the absence of more vigorous investigations, prosecutions and convictions, it is hard to see how this will come to an end," she warned.

Murders and abductions by the Sri Lankan military and paramilitary forces in Jaffna escalated, especially in the Vadamaradchi region.

Subsequently in press interviews, Ms. Arbour called for a permanent UN monitoring mission in Sri Lanka.

November

On November 2, the LTTE's political wing leader, S.P. Thamichelvan and some other members of the political wing were killed in an aerial bombing attack on them by the Sri Lankan Air Force. The killing of the political leader prompted widespread condemnation in Tamil Nadu. The chief minister of Tamil Nadu, Mr. M. Karunanidhi, published a condolence message in the form of a Tamil poem praising the services of Mr. Thamichelvan. Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora the mourned the loss of Thamichelvan. Mr. Vaiko and Mr. Nedumaran of Tamil Nadu conducted a protest march

and were arrested and detained by the state police.

The LTTE appointed Mr. B. Nadesan, the chief of the Tamil Eelam Police Service, as the new political wing leader.

In the United States Senate, Senator Patrick Leahy, the chairman of the judiciary committee, said in early November that reports of International Human Rights organizations "contain specific, documented, consistent information indicating a steady increase in serious human rights violations by both Sri Lankan government forces and the LTTE since the collapse of the ceasefire.

Senator Leahy added that, "while the first acts of aggression were attributed to the LTTE, these reports also implicate government forces in attacks on civilians, extra-judicial executions, torture, and forced disappearances.

"There is also evidence that Sri Lankan government forces have stood by while allied paramilitary organizations have carried out abuses, including forcibly recruiting child soldiers. With few exceptions, the Sri Lankan government has yet to bring the perpetrators, including members of government security forces, to justice."

The United States' Ambassador to Sri Lanka supplied radars and dinghies to the SL Navy to fight the LTTE. The U.S. froze TRO-USA's accounts in the U.S. The TRO-USA' president insisted that the charity diligently complied with all U.S. laws, and the action to freeze the funds would only hurt innocent Tamil people in the North-East who relied on it for assistance.

The SLAF bombed the Voice of Tigers (VOT) Radio station in Kilinochchi. The attack on this media service was condemned by the Reporters Sans Frontiers (RSF) as a war crime. The local Free Media Movement(FMM) as well as the Director-General of UNESCO, Koichiro Matsuura, also condemned the attack as unjustified. UNESCO's remarks prompted the GoSL and hard line Sinhala nationalists to protest the statement and demand a retraction, but the UN body stood by its statement.

The LTTE leader, V. Pirapaharan, delivered his annual Heroes' Day speech and said, "None of the Southern parties are ready to accept the core principles for a lasting peace: the Tamil homeland, the Tamil nation and the Tamil Right to self determination. The ruling party is adamant on unitary rule; the red and yellow parties are calling for no solution at all; and the main opposition party, somersaulting from its earlier position, is, on the one hand, saying nothing concrete and using evasive language to support the military actions of the government and, on the other hand, saying it supports peace efforts. All this clearly clarifies our point and proves beyond doubt that all the Sinhala political parties are essentially chauvinistic and anti-Tamil. To expect a political solution from any of these Southern parties is political naivety."

The LTTE leader also said that the "propping up of the geno-

Continued on p15

NEWS

Indian Premier to skip Sri Lanka Independence Day celebrations

TamilNet

AS Sri Lanka increased its military offensives against Tamils in the North following the abrogation of the ceasefire, the Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Monday virtually confirmed that he would not visit Colombo next month for the 60th anniversary of Sri Lanka's Independence Day on February 4.

"I have not made up my mind", he said when asked whether he would be traveling to Sri Lanka next month during an interaction with journalists in New Delhi. According to reports in the Indian media, the immediate provocation for India's ire was Sri Lanka's decision to abrogate the six year CFA without seeking to negotiate with the Tamils.

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh Dr. Manmohan Singh was talking to journalists on the sidelines of a function at Rashtrapati Bhavan, the Indian Presidential Office.

Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama had informed Sri Lankan Parliament that Manmohan Singh would be the chief guest at the ceremony, and the Indian High Commissioner had sought to spare him blushes by saying that the dates proposed by the Sri Lankan side were not suitable.

The Indian prime minister was more candid and his public declaration of his indecision on the visit was a clear signal that he strongly disapproved of the Mahinda Rajapaksa's government's escalation of hostilities.

His response has been described by the India media as "revealing since the prime minister's visits are hardly off the cuff

business and being part of Sri Lanka's Independence Day celebrations would be planned well in advance."

Indian media reports attributed the decision to the "strong pressure on the Indian foreign policy establishment from Tamil Nadu, and the fear that Tamils in Sri Lanka might once again become a factor in domestic politics."

The Indian government has been under increasing pressure from all quarters, specially the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), the Congress party's major southern ally. There were also spontaneous protests against the prime minister's proposed visit from pro-Tamil nationalist groups in Tamilnadu.

Another major ally, the Communist Party of India (CPI) has also been vociferous in condemning the Sri Lankan government's decision to pull out of the almost six-year-old ceasefire with the LTTE.

CPI National Secretary D Raja on Saturday had said that "military solutions cannot defuse tension" in the island nation. He had noted that the Withdrawal of ceasefire was tantamount to declaration of war and hence the step was "not proper" and deserved to be "condemned in the strongest terms."

Reportedly, there was "a sense of relief" even in Congress circles that the PM was not likely to travel to Sri Lanka. They saw it as an apt decision because if the controversy snowballed, the party would have to face "belligerent allies" who were concerned about the genocidal persecution of the Tamils in the island.



Indian Premier Manmohan Singh (r) is in a dilemma after President Rajapakse quit the 2002 ceasefire.

International reaction...

Continued from p3

respect human rights and to work urgently toward political solutions that will bring peace to Sri Lanka," he said.

Australia

Reacting to the Sri Lankan government announcement, Australia warned Sri Lanka it was taking a backwards step by withdrawing from its ceasefire with the Tamil Tigers.

Foreign Minister Stephen Smith said he was concerned by the decision.

"This is a step backwards which Australia fears could lead to further escalation of violence, including against civilians," he said in a statement. "I appeal to all parties to the conflict to protect the human rights of all Sri Lankans."

Mr Smith further said that 'Sri Lanka's conflict cannot be resolved militarily' and 'only a negotiated settlement can bring lasting peace'.

"I urge all involved parties to submit to democratic processes and the rule of law and to work towards a political solution that meets the aspirations of all Sri Lankans."

France

France also expressed its regret over the Sri Lankan government decision and urged Colombo to improve its human rights performance.

"[Junior Foreign Minister] Madame Rama Yade expressed France's regrets faced with the rupture of the cease-fire signed in 2002. She recalled it was more than ever time for dialogue and a political solution, the only option capable of guaranteeing a fair and lasting peace in Sri Lanka," a statement said.

India

Although India did not issue a formal statement on Sri Lanka's withdrawal from the ceasefire, Indian External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee, during an interaction with reporters, said there could be no military solution to the island nation's problems which have to be addressed by fulfilling the "legitimate aspirations" of ethnic groups.

"Military solution is not the solution. Solution has to be found through dialogue and discussion," he said.

At the same time, he said, India condemned terrorism, for which it has a policy of "zero tolerance".

Mukherjee added India was encouraging the Sri Lankan government to resolve the problem through dialogue and implementation of a devolution formula and the "legitimate aspirations" of all people should be fulfilled within the "arrangements in Sri Lanka within its territorial integrity and framework of Sri Lankan constitution".

Mukherjee said "some steps", including evolving a devolution formula, have been taken towards fulfilment of the aspirations of various ethnic groups.

Japan

Japanese Foreign Minister, Masahiko Koumura, said Tokyo was deeply concerned that the Sri Lankan decision may lead to the escalation of the conflict by way of increased level of violence and greater civilian casualties, and leave the peace process at a standstill.

Japan further said it expected a devolution package, "in line" with Sri Lankan President Rajapakse's previous commitment.

United Nations

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon also expressed regret and said he is "deeply worried" as withdrawal from the accord comes amidst increasing violence across the country.

He urged all parties to ensure protection of civilians and humanitarian assistance to people in conflict-affected areas. He also underlined the urgent need to end the bloodshed through a political dialogue.

**'2008 decisive' p2
Editorial, p6**

HRW: Sri Lanka responding like pariah state

Continued from p4

failed to do. Or it can genuinely work with the UN to do so."

"The Sri Lankan government understandably does not want to see itself lumped together with international pariah states such as Sudan and Burma, both of which were subjects of UN resolutions. So it is all the more disconcerting to see Colombo respond in the same obstructionist manner as these countries instead of adopting a constructive approach."

"More than a year ago, Sri Lanka talked the major donor states into believing that the Presidential Commission of Inquiry would bring about tough-

minded investigations and prosecutions of the worst cases of the past two years. ... Now, not only are the international "eminent persons" on the verge of giving up on this commission, but initial supporters like the United States and the European Union are expressing serious doubts."

Last month, HRW said its 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.

HRW officials said the 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 with HRW, was amongst rights activists who toured the US last month to raise support for action against Sri Lanka.

Tamil men between ages 18-35, are being abducted or killed at a rate of four persons a day, he said. Men are often taken in for questioning, interrogated, tortured; some of them are held in detention facilities but the government does not release their names; the abductees are not charged and can be held for long periods of time, he said.

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NEWS

2007: a grim year in review

Continued from p13

cidial Sinhala State by the international community through economic aid, military aid and subtle diplomatic efforts will be counterproductive."

A bomb explosion in Nugegoda killed 18, including a policeman and wounded over 40.

December

Sri Lankan forces conducted mass arrests of Tamils, herding more than 1500 Tamils in the South into overcrowded detention camps with facilities. Rights groups condemned this 'collective punishment' of Tamils.

India and the EU reiterated their positions that there can be no military solution to the conflict.

A claymore attack in Kebitigollawe killed 14 civilians and 2 SLA personnel.

Mano Ganesan, the Colombo

district parliamentarian representing the Western Province People's Front (WPPF), was selected as first runner up for the Freedom Defenders Award from the U.S. Mr. Ganesan "founded the Civil Monitoring Commission on Extra-Judicial Killings and Disappearances (CMC), based in Colombo, and continues to serve as the CMC Convener. He has shown enormous personal courage and dedication in exposing crimes against Sri Lanka's several minority communities, including the country's Muslims. Relatives of those abducted, "disappeared" and killed often turn first to the CMC to try to obtain information on their loved ones or secure their release," said the press release from the U.S. embassy in Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka's ruling SLFP government, in order to pass its budget and prevent a collapse of its

hold in parliament, conducted a campaign of secret deals with opposition and JVP parliamentarians as well as intimidation of TNA MPs. The state used its allied paramilitaries (the Pillaiyan group) in the East to abduct relatives of the eastern TNA MPs and thus prevent them from voting. In the end, despite the resignation of some SLMC MPs led by Rauff Hakeem, and the crossing over of Mr. Anura Bandaranaike, the JVP's decision to abstain from voting helped the SLFP pass its budget.

Immediately after the budget passed, however, the SLFP government started a campaign of minimizing the security provided to many MP's including Mr. T. Maheswaran of the UNP, Mr. Mano Ganesan of the WPPF as well as the TNA MPs. Maheswaran was assassinated on the New years day.

Tsunami corruption...

Continued from p11

the aid had been spent, but there has been no formal examination of accounts since.

More than 350 tsunami survivors have complained to the graft-buster this year, with allegations made against local and international aid agencies.

"There has been no proper accounts kept on the money and we believe only a fraction of aid trickled down to the real victims," said Nanayakkara.

While 8,865 people still remain in temporary shelters, official figures show that 119,092 houses had been built. In theory, that number is 20,000 more houses than needed.

While there is an excess of supply in the island's Sinhalese-majority south, people in the conflict-hit north and east, dominated by minority Tamils and Muslims, remain in makeshift shelters.

Fighting between government troops and Tamil Tigers escalated in December 2005 making tsunami reconstruction even more difficult.

"Progress has been slow in the north and east and reconstruction activities have been stalled in some areas of the north due to the escalated conflict," said the World Bank's Toshiaki Keicho.

The International Labour Organisation, meanwhile, said Sri Lanka's tsunami housing programme "cannot be considered to be completed", as many of the new settlements lack access to roads, water, electricity and basic health services.

The government, however, claims success.

"Sri Lanka has performed a tremendous job in its relief, rehabilitation and re-settlement process, with an overall 80 percent success," media minister Anura Priyadarshana Yapa said.

'Clarity in 2008'...

Continued from p2

succinctly - the basis of the conflict in Sri Lanka is State power.

Rajapaksa is giving an image that he can eliminate the LTTE. The international community appears to have accepted this. The situation is very close to what happened in Sudan; China tried to deviate from the international community's attempts to resolve the Sudanese situation, but the international community put pressure on China to toe the line.

India is acting similar to China in Sri Lanka's situation, but International Community appears to be giving a free hand to India. Diplomats are trying to show they have concern for the Tamils by visiting Vanni, but this is the like cat playing with the mouse before it's ready to eat.

During the [last phase of] war, to open A-9, up to 6000 Sri Lankan soldiers perished, and nearly 3000 Tigers sacrificed their lives. The international community accepted the results of that war, and recognized the LTTE's strength. The question is why they are not responding the same way now. In order to change the international community's view, we are called to suffer more sacrifices of life.

We expect 2008 will be the year where we can overcome the diplomatic hurdles that confront us. In 2003, we proposed ISGA (Interim Self Governing Authority) as a framework with which will satisfy us, our minimal requirements for power-sharing. So based on this, the international community cannot call us obstinate, or terrorists. Hilary Clinton also identified us when she articulated a more nuanced definition of terrorism.

We expect in 2008, the Tigers will bring clarity to Sri Lanka's conflict.

Interview published Wednesday 2 January 2008

Col. Charles mourned...

Continued from p8

staging military offensives but he also had a talent of freely mixing with each and every one. He developed a very cordial relationship with our national leader.

"He did not restrict his unique type of attacks to the south but making use of the cadres of the newly created Liberation Tigers Military Intelligence (MI) he led attacks in Mukamaalai smashing the Forward Defence lines (FDL).

"It is difficult to accept losses, but without losses we cannot achieve liberation.

"Let us carry forward the dreams of Col. Charles and continue our freedom fight greater vigour," Special Commander of the Sea Tigers said.

The remains of Col. Charles were later taken in procession at

12:00 noon from his home in Ki'linochchi in a decorated vehicle to Puthukkudirippu, and residents along the way offered flowers paying their last respects to Col. Charles.

Col. Pirapa, one of the colonels of LTTE Military Intelligence, lit the Common Flame, while the wife of Col. Charles garlanded her husband's remains.

Col. Soosai, Col. Athavan, Special Commander and the head of the LTTE Military Initial Training Schools, Thamilkumar, the Head of LTTE Finance Wing, and Dr. Sivapalan garlanded Col. Charles' remains.

Paranthaman, who had been Col. Charles' school teacher, spoke at the event highlighting Charles' outstanding qualities as a leader.

NEWS



A Tamil devotee receives blessings from a Hindu priest as he joins others in offering prayers at temple in Colombo on New Years Day. In another Colombo temple, the Ponnambala Vaaneasvarar temple at Kochchikkadaï, a Tamil parliamentarian from the main opposition United National Party arajah Maheswaran, 41, was shot by gunmen from the pro-government, Army-backed paramilitary group, EPDP. See report, photos p9 Photo Sanka Vidanagama/AFP/Getty Images

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