

Tamils begin boycotting SriLankan Airlines

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War spreads to south

SHORTLY after Sri Lanka's militarist government tore up the 2002 Ceasefire Agreement with the Liberation Tigers, violence continued to rise with intensified clashes along the northern frontlines and, surprisingly, a number of attacks in the deep south.

The Sri Lankan government poured thousands more security forces into the Moneragala region in the Sinhalese-dominated south this week after a string of attacks blamed on the Tamil Tigers left dozens of civilians and several police dead.

"We are sending several senior officers together with reinforcements to bolster security in the area," a police official told AFP, adding that several thousand additional security personnel had been deployed.

The authorities were also hurriedly recruiting more Sinhala men to guard vulnerable areas while police stations in other areas have been asked to release constables to beef up security in the south, the official said.

The government appeared shaken by the attacks. President Mahinda Rajapakse, who visited Moneragala after the bloody attacks, even said some of the attacks were not by the LTTE.

His remarks were in sharp contrast to statements from the military and even the president's brother - defence secretary Gotabhaya Rajapakse - who have stated their intention to seize the Tamil mini-state in the north and destroy the LTTE.

International donor nations, led by Japan, the U.S., the European Union and Norway, called on Rajapaksa's government to seek a political settlement after the cease-fire was formally terminated Jan 16.

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SLA soldiers stand alert following the roadside bomb attack on a bus in Moneragala. Photo Lakruwan Wanniarachchi/AFP/Getty Images

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NEWS

India admits helping Sri Lanka Navy

TamilNet

A DAY after Colombo praised the Indian Navy for its role in "breaking the LTTE's backbone", India on Wednesday acknowledged, for the first time in recent years, its active role in countering the Tamil Tigers. Sri Lanka Navy Vice Admiral Wasantha Karannagoda had told the Colombo Post on Tuesday that Tiger supply vessels and floating warehouses containing 10,000 tons of war-like material had been destroyed

thanks to Indian help.

His Indian counterpart, Admiral Sureesh Mehta spoke in sync and said, "We support by checking our activities on their coast and their activities on ours. In this way, we help ourselves by helping them."

"Co-operation with India has been extremely successful in countering the LTTE. Every year, the Indian Navy with the Indian Coast Guard and the Sri Lankan Navy holds four bilateral discussions. We are conducting coordinated patrols with the Indian Navy as well," Navy Chief

Wasantha Karannagoda said.

"The Navy has destroyed almost all LTTE vessels that could have assisted the Tigers in attacking the armed forces," he said adding, "Within one year we have destroyed eight floating warehouses, which had carried more than 10,000 tons of war-like material including artillery, mortar, dismantled parts of three aircraft, bullet proof vehicles, underwater delivery vehicles, scuba diving sets, and radar, among other things."

He also added that the SLN had acquired ships and boats, apart from building indigenous vessels to counter the LTTE threats.

SLN Vice-Admiral Karannagoda also said that earlier the LTTE warehouses were stationed off the island, around 2800kms away in the high seas and whenever need arose they came up to about 300kms from the coast and transferred the arms cargo on to trawlers that brought them to land. He said the Navy has been successful in putting an end to this type of arms transfer.

India, which stepped up naval patrolling in Palk Strait and Gulf of Mannar by deploying more warships under 'Operation Tasha', has now come out in the open to acknowledge its role in the successes of the Sri Lanka Navy.

Chief of Indian Naval Staff Adm Sureesh Mehta spoke about the coordinated patrolling between the two navies. "We support by checking our activities on their coast and their activities on ours. In this way, we help ourselves by helping them," he said.

He also added that the Indian Navy was keeping a tight vigil on the coast and "closely watching the situation in the neighbouring country."

According to Indian media reports, Sri Lanka recently provided a long list of "urgent military requirements" to India, ranging from air defence weapons, artillery guns, Nishant UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles) to more radars and even laser designators for PGMs (precision-guided munitions).

Domestic political compulsions arising out of inflammable Tamil sensitivities have ensured the Indian Government remains hesitant in stepping up Sri Lanka's offensive military capabilities.

New Delhi has not only been hesitant, but has also been clearly tight-lipped about its support to Sri Lanka. Reportedly India continues to supply its neighbouring island with a wide array of military equipment, including new low-flying detection radars.

The process began with the transfer of a Sukanya-class offshore patrol vessel in 2002, with the primary aim of countering Pakistan and China's inroads into the wartorn island as merchants of death.

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NEWS

Mayhem in Moneragala

AS the 2002 ceasefire agreement came to an end, having been unilaterally abrogated by Sri Lanka's militaristic government, and in the midst of the ongoing targeting of civilians in the Vanni, the conflict spread south, claiming over 40 casualties in two days in the central district of Moneragala, east of the capital Colombo.

On the day the ceasefire agreement ended, a roadside bomb ripped through a bus killing 27 people and wounding dozens in the town of Buttala. A second claymore targeting an armoured personnel carrier injured 3 soldiers.

In yet another incident, two farmers were killed by a group of armed men in the Buttala area on the same morning. The following day, ten armed home-guards were gunned down in two separate incidents.

Thirteen women and school children were among the victims of the bus bomb, which went off at around 7.30 a.m. Hospital officials said they were treating seven children for minor injuries while a 14-year-old girl who suffered a head wound was flown to Colombo and was in intensive care. They said no children were killed, reporter Reuters.

One bus passenger described hearing a firefight after the bus blast.

"I was on my way to take my 1-1/2-month-old baby to the doctor. I heard a loud noise and I thought it was a bomb, so I went under the seat of the bus with my baby and we heard firing for about five minutes," 27-year-old housewife T.M. Lalani told Reuters from Buttala hospital.

"Everybody was screaming and I saw people on the ground in a bloodbath," she added. "My leg got injured from pieces of glass. Luckily my baby has not got any injuries."

Sri Lanka's Ministry of Defence said a large number of

schoolchildren were on the bus at the time of the blast.

The Defence Ministry posted photographs of blood-soaked corpses of some victims on its Web site. Local television broadcast footage of the bus, showing bloodstains on the floor and personal belongings strewn inside and out.

The blast came amid reports the Sri Lankan military leadership was trying to convince the government to shut down schools in the South for extended periods, ahead of major offensives, including bombardments likely to cause heavy civilian casualties, into the Vanni.

Sri Lanka's bourse fell 2.1 percent on the news to six-month lows, though traders said investors had been expecting violence.

"We expect the market to come further down after today's end of the ceasefire agreement as more incidents are expected," said Harsha Fernando, CEO at SC Securities in Colombo.

The second blast targeted an army armoured personnel carrier 20 km south of the first attack, wounding three soldiers, the military said.

Men in uniform had been seen in the area for days preceding the attacks the Sunday Times reported. On January 15 a villager saw three people in uniform crossing the road. He thought they were Sri Lankan military personnel, and reported the sighting to Buttala Police, who questioned the villager and searched for the men with no success.

On the morning of the blasts a group of men, assumed to be military personnel as they were in uniform, had waved civilians away from their position. "One of the men in Army uniform signalled with his hand not to come closer and to go away. They gave the impression that they were on some ambush," the Sunday Times reported.



After the blast which targeted the bus, the men had opened fire on the bus passengers.

"On Wednesday afternoon Army commandos entered the jungles ... to conduct a full search. Hours later, the search operation was to trigger off reports that they had exchanged fire with the fleeing guerrillas. There was no such incident," reported the Sunday Times.

"One of the commandos had stepped on a trap gun accidentally. He was injured and rushed to hospital. The guerrillas had fled and the search in that area was called off."

The next day, Thursday ten persons who accompanied home guards on a cordon and search operation into the jungle area of Moneragala district were gunned down by armed men in two separate incidents.



The bus damaged in the blast and a map of the region where the blast and subsequent attacks occurred. Courtesy Daily Mirror

In the second incident, three people, including a home guard, were wounded in Thanamalwila in the Uva Province. The victims were youths who joined the homeguards in search of an armed group, as part of a Sri Lankan government initiative to

arm civilians and form a Civil Armed Force in Uva.

A week earlier, four charred dead bodies were located by Sri Lanka Army (SLA) in Ranminikanda jungle, bordering Kataragama in Buttala police division of Moneragala district.

Eyewitness accounts

The Sunday Times Situation Report of January 20 provided witness accounts of the lead up to the blasts in Moneragala

TUESDAY, January 15 - A villager saw three persons in uniform crossing the road. This was at Welipara Junction, located on the road from Buttala and the gemming town of Okkampitiya. The village is more towards the Okkampitiya end. He thought they were Army personnel. An hour later, the villager met the Grama Sevaka of the area when he was passing by and told him about it. The villager said he was half a kilometre away from the junction when he spotted the three persons.

The Grama Sevaka had told the Officer-in-Charge of the Buttala Police. The OIC and 12 police officers had arrived at the scene later. They questioned the villager, took him to Welipara junction and asked him to show the direction in which the suspected Army officers walked. The Police party then trekked the path for a little distance and returned. There were no signs of the "Army" men.

Wednesday, January 16 - Around 6.45 a.m. Manel Wijesinghe, a minor employee

attached to the Okkampitiya Hospital, was going to work in a bicycle. At the Welipara junction she saw what she thought were a group of Army men. Some were standing whilst others had crouched behind trees. She alighted from her bicycle and tried to walk towards them. One of the men in Army uniform signalled with his hand not to come closer and to go away. They gave the impression that they were on some ambush.

According to the minor employee, one of the men in Army uniform had a communication set strapped to his back. It had a long antenna. (This makes clear that the group of men were in radio contact with a base or

THE international community reacted to the bombing of a bus in the central district of Moneragala, with the US condemning the blasts and the United Nations calling for dialogue as the only way to stop further violence.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon "strongly condemned" the attacks that coincided with the formal end of a truce between the Government and the Liberation Tigers. "The only way to stop further violence in Sri Lanka is through dialogue," Mr. Ban said in a statement.

He urged the parties "to undertake genuine efforts to achieve a peaceful negotiated solution."

Earlier this month, Mr. Ban had expressed his concern with the Government's decision to end the 2002 Ceasefire Agreement

that suspended a decades-long conflict. The announcement also sparked concern from High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour, who called on both parties to abide by their obligations under international law to protect civilians.

Meanwhile, the Embassy of the United States of America in Colombo, in a press release, said it "strongly" condemned the attack on a civilian bus.

Expressing condolences to the victims and their families, the US statement said "the targeting of civilians serves to foster fear and cause further suffering among the Sri Lankan people".

"Only a political solution to the country's conflict offers a way out of the current cycle of escalating violence," the statement said.

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NEWS

SLMM bids farewell

ON January 16, Maj. Gen Solvberg, the head of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission, issued a press statement thanking the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE for inviting them to serve them.

The head of the Nordic Monitors, whose functions were terminated by the unilateral abrogation of the Cease Fire Agreement by the Sri Lanka Government, said "Future heroes in Sri Lanka will be those who recognize the complexity of the situation, and prove able to manage this complexity in a way that reduces rather than increases human pain, fear and hopelessness - those capable of respecting people with different perceptions, and bringing them together."

Full text of the press release follows:

Status

Today, January 16 2008, marks the final day of the Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) period in Sri Lanka, that has lasted for almost six years.

The Agreement signed by the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in February 2002 outlined the mandate for the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission, as a tool to watch the CFA implementation.

Thus, the abrogation of the CFA also implies the termination of the SLMM. In practical terms, this means that the Nordic monitors will leave Sri Lanka today and early tomorrow morning, leaving behind only a few personnel to wrap up administrative obligations related to the closing down of the mission.

A short recap of history

During the first years of the CFA period, there was seemingly a general spirit of cooperation between the Parties. Violations were relatively few. But lack of progress on critical issues nurtured distrust between Parties, giving set backs in the peace process. Gradually the conflict level increased, involving more military activities, more violence affecting civilians, more signs of insecurity, and more displacement of people. Today, the ground situation displays a reality very far from what is outlined in the CFA.

The SLMM reality

The purpose of SLMM presence in Sri Lanka has all the way been to support the peace process. Defining how best to implement the potential of the SLMM mechanism, has however at times been a huge challenge. As the conflict level gradually increased, the mission re-evaluated its approach, pursuing strategies and working procedures relevant to the situation.

The Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission has been appreciated and slammed, loved and hated, over

these six years. Some have expressed their support, saying; "Without the SLMM we will be doomed", or "Without the SLMM many more lives would have been lost", or "We are scared for what will happen if SLMM leaves Sri Lanka". Others have preferred to portray SLMM as powerless, inefficient and utterly biased.

The final report

The SLMM has been present in the North and the East of Sri Lanka, as well as in the capital, every single day for nearly six years. Through on the ground monitoring, we have learned to recognize and respect the complexity of the conflict. Based on this knowledge, the final report from the operation is this:

The SLMM is absolutely convinced that this complex conflict can not be solved by military means. The Head of Mission finds it to be his duty to draw this conclusion as the operation is about to be terminated. It is not a task for the SLMM, however, to advise the parties to the CFA, nor other actors, how to find viable solutions. This has to be left to the people of Sri Lanka themselves - supported by facilitating actors of their choice.

Concluding remarks

The Head of the SLMM uses this final opportunity to thank the GOSL and the LTTE for inviting SLMM to serve them, in their search for a negotiated solution to the conflict between them. It is with sadness that we leave this resourceful and beautiful country at this point of time.

It is hard to leave behind people all over the island that we have learned to know, and come to love and respect. We will miss out on the opportunity to further adapt and contribute in the present situation, - and we would like to believe that Sri Lanka misses out on something valuable too.

In the time to come, fortunately, many actors both inside and outside Sri Lanka, will continue to contribute to the search for a solution to the conflict. Hopefully, wise choices will be made at all levels by those who possess the power to make decisions.

Future heroes in Sri Lanka will be those who recognize the complexity of the situation, and prove able to manage this complexity in a way that reduces rather than increases human pain, fear and hopelessness - those capable of respecting people with different perceptions, and bringing them together. The SLMM will close its operation at 1900 hrs today.

To the people of Sri Lanka; Thank you and farewell

Colombo, 16 January 2008

Lars J Solvberg

Major General

Head of Mission

Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission



The Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission closed down its offices as the ceasefire agreement came to an end

Japan 'reviews' aid to Lanka

THE Japanese peace envoy to Sri Lanka, Yasushi Akashi, has said that the breakdown of the ceasefire may make it necessary to review Tokyo's aid.

Mr Akashi said he was worried that the end of the ceasefire may lead to more violence and more civilian casualties.

Japan is Sri Lanka's largest foreign donor, giving about \$9bn in grants, loans and aid since 1985, including around \$400m in 2007. Sri Lankan finance ministry figures show that Japan gave nearly \$200 million of that between January and September last year.

"The termination of the ceasefire agreement may prompt the pursuit of a military solution of the conflict, with dire humanitarian consequences," Mr Akashi said, speaking during a trip to Sri Lanka just prior to the end of the Cease Fire Agreement on January 16.

The 2002 Norwegian brokered agreement came to an end after the Sri Lankan government unilaterally withdrew from it.

"A devolution package on which the government of Sri Lanka had been exerting considerable efforts must be drafted as soon as possible and be offered to the relevant parties, including the Tamil Tigers."

The Japanese envoy - who has visited Sri Lanka 15 times in an effort to end the conflict - said that his government was "gravely concerned" over Colombo's decision formally to scrap the six-year ceasefire with the rebels.



Japanese Special Peace Envoy Akashi with President Rajapakse

He was speaking at the end of a three-day visit marked by fierce fighting in the north.

Mr Akashi said that the future of Japanese aid would be taken "on the basis of very close monitoring and observation of the situation" which he said would be the subject of "continuous review".

"What the government does, does not do, will be important considerations," he said.

During the visit Mr Akashi had met with the Marxist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), the main left party, for an hour-long discussion.

"While Japan and other international donors give a lot of aid to Sri Lanka, Mr Akashi indicated that donors may call off aid, given the current ground situation," the JVP said.

Japan has so far not pledged any aid for this year, but it has also not halted any existing aid.

Japan provides nearly two-thirds of all international aid to the island - but has so far has not linked financial assistance to the fighting or to human rights despite mounting international concern over the country's rights record.

Tokyo and the island's other major donors had the previous Saturday voiced concern over Colombo's decision to scrap the truce, saying they feared it would

lead to more bloodshed and stall peace efforts.

The financial backers, who include the United States, the European Union and Norway, also sought access to meet the Tigers in their territories in the north and urged Colombo to allow a UN presence to monitor rights abuses.

There was no immediate comment from the government. Sri Lanka has repeatedly rejected previous calls for a UN rights mission.

In Saturday's joint statement, the donor quartet urged warring parties to protect civilians and allow humanitarian agencies access to people in need.

Sri Lanka announced it would formally pull out of the six-year truce on January 16, saying the LTTE had used the ceasefire as a cover to rearm, recruit and attack troops.

The government now says that it is intent on defeating the Tigers militarily, while at the same time promising to finalise a long-delayed political devolution proposal within weeks.

However, the Tamil Tigers said last week that it was "shocked and disappointed" by the Sri Lankan government's decision and appealed to Norway, which brokered the truce, to remain engaged.

NEWS

'Pathetically unenforceable' - response to UN war crimes warning

SRI LANKA'S militarist government reacted furiously last Tuesday to warnings by UN Human Rights Chief, Louise Arbour, that human rights abuses in Sri Lanka left perpetrators and their commanders at risk of international war crimes charges.

Rejecting Ms. Arbour's comments as "pathetically unenforceable threats," Sri Lanka's embassy to the UN said the Colombo government "will not be deterred by thinly veiled threats attempting to undermine the morale of its military, deter its military campaigns and save separatist terrorism from elimination." It also challenged the transparency of funding for Ms. Arbour's office and the extent to which it represented the "world's peoples."

Earlier Tuesday, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Arbour, noting that Sri Lanka's abrogation of the 2002 Ceasefire Agreement comes into effect Wednesday [January 16], reminded the Sri Lankan government (GoSL) and the Liberation Tigers of their responsibilities under international humanitarian law towards civilians.

A UN statement noted that international law "obliges all parties to protect civilians without discrimination and includes prohibitions against the arbitrary deprivation of life, arbitrary detention, forced displacement, enforced disappearances, torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. It also forbids the recruitment and deployment of children as soldiers."

Ms. Arbour warned that "violations of these rules by any party could entail individual criminal responsibility under international criminal law, including by those in positions of command."

In a prompt response to her comments, the Sri Lankan mission to the UN in Geneva, which is headed by Ambassador Dayan Jayatilke, slammed Ms. Arbour's comments and rejected her warnings.

"Sri Lanka was not in violation of international criminal law in the years of armed conflict before the signing of the CFA and after, is not now, and will not be in the future," the GoSL statement said.

"Sri Lanka is firmly committed to a political solution to the legitimate grievances of the Tamil people, based on the devolution of power."

"It will not be deterred by thinly veiled (if pathetically unenforceable) threats, attempting to undermine the morale of its military, deter its military campaigns and save separatist terrorism from elimination."

"Reading her statement, Sri Lanka is curious to know whether similar warnings (as distinct from

statements of concern or condemnation) have been issued by the High Commissioner to other States in their conduct of wars much more serious both in scale and impact on International Humanitarian Law than the Sri Lankan situation."

"In the light of this obvious bias, Sri Lanka feels strongly that the OHCHR should be more transparent in its funding and decision-making and more representative of the world's peoples and regions in its composition, all of which have been repeatedly called for by the member States of the UN Human Rights Council."

In statement, Ms. Arbour had warned of the impact on Sri Lankans as a result of the conflict worsening.

"An intensification of hostilities will likely have a devastating effect on the human rights of many Sri Lankans from all communities," the High Commissioner said in the statement.

"The High Commissioner visited Sri Lanka in October 2007. In her dialogue with the Government she has stressed the critical need for independent, public reporting on the human rights situation in Sri Lanka and the readiness of her Office to assist in this regard," the statement noted.

Following the Sri Lankan reaction, UN Watch, an NGO, expressed concern.

Hillel Neuer, executive director of the Geneva-based NGO, said it was legitimate to debate statements by the world body but was "disappointed that a vice-president of the Human Rights Council would negate a core duty of the UN's highest human rights official."

"We regret the use of ill-advised language and the disputing of the UN's jurisdiction to monitor the events in Sri Lanka," said Neuer.

Neuer said Sri Lanka's latest statement against High Commissioner Arbour's office "only underscores the dangerous attempts by repressive regimes to eliminate all forms of independent human rights scrutiny."

The office of Ambassador Jayatilke had repeated a charge often levelled by China and other countries who oppose scrutiny of their records, saying the "OHCHR should be more transparent in its funding and decision-making" and "more representative of the world's peoples and regions in its composition."

China, Iran, Sudan and other members of the "Like Minded Group" successfully introduced a Human Rights Council resolution (HRC 4/6) in March 2007 that imposed geographic requirements, instead of merit, as the basis for staff hiring by Ms. Arbour's office, and sought to curb her independence.



Louise Arbour (right) was critical during a visit to Sri Lanka last year but the situation has worsened since her visit, with human rights campaigner Mano Ganesan (left) forced to flee the country

Vow to finish war this year

TamilNet

SRI LANKA Army Commander Lt. Gen. G.S.C Fonseka, due for retirement this year, has claimed that he would not leave the war to his succeeding commander, at a New Year party hosted by him on January 11 to select local and international journalists at his residence at Baddhaloka Mawatha in Colombo.

Fonseka (right) was being tactfully upbeat as news of an explosion inside Fort Railway station threatened to dampen spirits at the cocktail party.

Sarath Fonseka told journalists that January was going to be a news-worthy month to them. Meanwhile, news of the explosion at Fort Railway station reached the commander, so he downplayed the seriousness of the security lapse. He told curious journalists that it was a "minor blast" and that the LTTE would not stoop down to do such a small work.

Journalists who attended the party, quoted him as saying, "My term of office is coming to an end this year and I will not leave this war to the succeeding army commander." He called upon them to imagine the successes of the SLA, based on its performance in the last one-and-a-half years.

The SLA commander also expressed his hope that the LTTE could be eradicated within another



er year. He added that in the past three months, about 500 Tigers had been killed every month and that presently at least 20 Tigers were being killed every day, he claimed. He predicted sure-fire military success if the trend continued.

Fonseka also boasted that the SLA was ten times mightier now than it was when it captured the East. However, he also admitted that in the past one-and-a-half years, 800 soldiers have died fighting and about 4000 have been injured.

Lt. Gen. Fonseka came to prominence in the peace process when, in December 2002, he issued a public letter defying the CFA and refusing to withdraw from High Security Zones (HSZs) as stipulated in the February 2002 agreement between the GoSL and the LTTE.

Fonseka, who joined the SLA in 1970, was appointed the Commander of the SLA in December 2005. He was seriously wounded in a bomb explosion in front of the military hospital in Slave Island on 25 April 2006.

EDITORIAL

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Emerging Mayhem

The world will come to face a choice: perpetual conflict in the island or a two-state solution

In the wake of the Sri Lankan government's abrogation of the 2002 Ceasefire Agreement earlier this month, there has been increased activity by the international community. The self-styled 'Co-Chairs' - United States, European Union, Japan and Norway - broke their year long silence to reject a military solution and call for negotiations. To this end they called on the militarist regime of President Mahinda Rajapakse to "to finalise a politically sustainable devolution plan." Meanwhile, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, warned that human rights abuses in Sri Lanka left perpetrators and their commanders at risk of international war crimes charges (she earned a sneering retort from the Sri Lankan government for her trouble).

Although it is clear to all that President Rajapakse's administration is wholly uninterested in a political solution to the island's ethnic crisis, the international community - and they're the only ones who do - has long treated his All Party Representative Committee (APRC) with inexplicable gravity. As a consequence, the APRC has provided President Rajapakse with a convenient excuse, no matter how implausible, to ignore international calls for him to seek a political solution to the Tamil question. However, and most importantly, the APRC has also provided the international community with a plausible excuse for doing nothing while the Sri Lankan state wages a brutal war in the Northeast.

This is why the APRC, whilst considered nothing more than a political circus in Colombo (and it is not the first in the history of the ethnic crisis), is treated with such reverence in the international arena. Countries like Britain - a great power whose colonial links supposedly gives it greater insight and others into the Sri Lankan crisis - continues to insist the APRC must be given a chance. In a Parliamentary debate last week, British junior foreign minister Kim Howells, again calling for a political solution, reminded President Rajapakse that "the world is watching and waiting..." Unfortunately, as everyone, including Rajapakse, is aware, Britain and the rest of the international community are doing only that: watching and waiting.

For all the hectoring about human rights by the Co-Chairs during the Norwegian peace process, for over two years now, there has been no international action - save the temporary halting of a fraction of Sri Lanka's foreign aid - as the Sri Lankan state forces and their paramilitary arms have sustained a murderous campaign against the Tamils. Lest we forget, the prime targets of the state's dirty

war have not been the LTTE's fighters, but Tamil journalists, politicians, political activists and aid workers. The fact of the matter is the Sri Lankan state is quite confident that the international community will not take steps of any consequence (despite the assurances some states have been giving to Tamil expatriates).

Indeed, for over the past eighteen months we have seen the international community standing encouragingly by as President Rajapakse unleashed an all out war in the Tamil homeland. It began in April 2006, notably, with a bombardment that displaced 43,000 Tamils from Sampur. Since then, 300,000 Tamils have been displaced and thousands of civilians killed in aerial and artillery massacres, extra-judicial killings and abductions. Yet the world is still issuing pathetically unenforceable warnings.

Last week Mr. Howells quoted the UN Human Rights Chief, Ms. Arbour, as being alarmed by the "weakness of the rule of law and the prevalence of impunity for those abusing human rights" which she found when she visited Sri Lanka last year. She makes it sound as if this is something new. We refer her to the numerous reports on Sri Lanka published by Amnesty International and other international human rights groups during the past few decades (material she ought to have made herself familiar with before flying to Sri Lanka for her whirlwind walkabout). Indeed last week, Ms. Arbour was the latest senior UN official who had to swallow a contemptuous riposte from the Rajapakse regime. Her threats of war crimes charges against Sri Lankan military commanders, Colombo, quite rightly said, were 'pathetically unenforceable.'

The confidence underpinning the rhetoric and conduct of the Rajapakse regime, along with the demonstrable empty threats by the international community, should bring home to the Tamils that nothing fundamental has changed in international perspectives on the Sri Lankan state. It is the international community's proclivity for forgiving abuses by states they wish to pursue shared interests with that Colombo is counting on as it continues with both conventional war and brutal counter-insurgency. In short, if the Sri Lankan state can crush the LTTE and put an end to Tamil agitation, then business can continue as usual.

Moreover, the Tamils should remember that the international community's insistence on 'the need for a solution' to the Tamil question only began in the late nineties when President Chandrika Kumaratunga's 'War for

Peace' backfired spectacularly, forcing the conflict into the calculations of the donor community in Sri Lanka. As with all the Presidents before him, Rajapakse will only pursue the peace option when his military project fails. It has been the consistent practice of Sinhala leaders to tide over crises by making whatever undertaking are asked of them and simply tearing up the agreement when conditions are more propitious for their Sinhala-hegemonic project to advance. Moreover, Sinhala leaders have always preferred violence to accommodation in dealing with Tamil demands. In these ways, President Rajapakse is no different to his predecessors.

Every time Sri Lanka's conflict has resumed anew, the violence has been more destructive than ever before. The fighting in this latest phase of the war continued this week with heightened confrontations on the northern frontlines and, in an unexpected development, a sharp rise in attacks on Sinhala civilians and security forces in the deep south, which the government has blamed on the Liberation Tigers. The government's response has been to begin handing out weapons to the Sinhala population and training local youth as paramilitary guards. During the eighties and nineties, such 'Home Guards', recruited in their tens of thousands, were responsible, alongside the security forces, for massacres and ethnic cleansing of Tamils from areas subsequently colonized by Sinhalese.

President Rajapakse's government has long been mobilizing the Sinhala community behind its planned war by training paramilitaries and conducting a campaign of demonization of the LTTE (i.e. Tamils). Those concerned with such matters have long warned about consequences for long term peace and security of the militarization of Sri Lankan society and the ready availability of military weapons across the island (on the assumption a lasting solution is negotiated, in the first place). However, given the specific understanding of the trinity of people, government and military within the Sinhala nationalist project, such measures are inevitable. The nature of the war to come is likely to irrevocably deepen ethnic antagonisms in the island. We can confidently argue that, in the absence of decisive international actions, the ethnic antagonisms and other dynamics that the Sinhala leadership will unleash across the island in the coming years will ultimately result in a simple choice for the world: perpetual conflict in the island or a two-state solution.

OPINION



Bidding farewell to the SLMM

Can the war against LTTE be a pathway to Eelam?

Dinesh D. Dodamgoda

THE Sri Lankan government decided to abrogate the Ceasefire Agreement and the President Mahinda Rajapaksa has stated that his strategy is to achieve 'Peace through War in Sri Lanka'. This article aims to assess Sri Lankan government's present strategy, the War of Attrition, against the LTTE in terms of achieving Peace and challenging the idea of Eelam which aims at secession.

Given the liberal democratic framework of governance as the basis of Sri Lankan government it is government's political obligation either to consider secession or to provide evidence for why it is not an option.

In this regard, the public declaration made by Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa which categorically denied An Eelam as an option in Sri Lanka can be seen as a fulfilment of this political obligation to some extent.

Nonetheless, when declaring secession is not an option, the government has an additional political obligation to provide weighty evidence to prove government's claim against secession. Both the claim and the evidence should be presented especially to the international community which in this

case is instrumental in recognising or refuting Tamil Eelam as a new state.

In this respect, the Sri Lankan government has neglected its additional political obligation and this negligence is deemed to be problematic at least for two reasons. First, it implies government's inability to assess international community's decisive role, power and authority in recognising or refusing Tamil Eelam as a new State. Second, it implies government's erroneous assessment that secession is an unlikely objective to be achieved in contemporary international legal context.

As Dr. Karsten Frey (Institute Barcelona d'Estudis Internacionals [IBEI]) observes, "successful secessions are always, [in broader terms] enforced by creating political facts but not by meeting legal requirements". His observation precisely mirrors two fundamental factors of secession: First, the absence of a consensus definition under international law on secession. Second, despite this absence, many forms of secessions have been emerged and recognised by the international community.

The growth of the United Nations membership, for exam-

ple, elaborates this point. The increase of the membership from 151 in 1990 to 191 at present has been essentially due, broadly speaking, to secession. In other words, international community's recognition and their attitude with regard to a new entity are important factors than to international law in recognising a new state.

Therefore, any declarations to be made and evidence to be produced against Tamil Eelam should essentially have the ability to shape international community's recognition and their attitude against Eelam. For this reason, an ideal socio-political reality should mirror a sincere and honest context where co-existence exists and possible in Sri Lanka.

In this international backdrop, the President Mahinda Rajapaksa made another declaration via Al Jazeera Television to emphasise the government's aim, 'Peace through War in Sri Lanka'. His declaration created a paradox at least due to two reasons. First, the on going war of attrition against the LTTE which aimed at weakening them before talks will not make them weak because, a war of attrition against terrorism is counter-productive. Second, it will make the socio-ethnic polarisation wider and deeper. Therefore, the

situation will not allow government to portray a socio-political context where co-existence exists and this will degrade government's claim against secession.

The objective of a war of attrition is to destroy an adversary's 'will' to fight by bringing destruction to his fighting or combat 'capability'. Nevertheless, the process creates undesired effects (such as collateral damage and casualties, human rights violations, destruction of democracy, socio-ethnic polarization) as it's by products and they are counter-productive especially against terrorism.

The UK Joint Doctrine and Concept Centre (JDCC) that gives strategic guidance to the British military in May 2003 concluded, "An attritional campaign may have an increasingly negative effect in terms of achieving a strategic goal."

After the 9/11 New York World Trade Centre attacks, the United States Government adopted an attritional approach, in Afghanistan and toppled the Taliban regime that hosted Al-Qaeda. Nevertheless, the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) in London found that the campaign made the Al-Qaeda a more virtual and protean organisation and, therefore, even harder to identify and neutralise.

The impact of an attritional campaign on public opinion also is counterproductive. A White House panel in October 2003 reported, "Muslim hostility towards the USA has reached shocking levels, and is growing steadily."

Furthermore, a survey released by Euro RSCG Worldwide in September 2003 showed, "Two years after the 9/11 attacks, most Americans felt no safer from terrorist threats, more distrustful of many longstanding allies, and increasingly anxious about the future."

In addition, the Strategy deepens socio-ethnic polarization and spreads hatred. The 'operation eviction' which carried out against ethnic Tamil lodgers in Colombo is a fine example. It indicates government's polarized mind-set especially Defence Ministry's polarized mind-set which led them to categorise Tamils lodged in Colombo as terrorist suspects. It can be seen as a culmination point of a LTTE strategy which aimed at polarizing the Sri Lankan society into two main ethnic groups: namely Sinhalese and Tamils.

The present socio-political context which emerged as a result of on going attritional war against the LTTE is creating a sense of fear, a sense among members of Tamils that their cultural, political, socio-economic situation and fundamental rights are getting deteriorated by the actions of Sinhalese government (as well as affiliated Forces) and within the existing union with the South (as they believe), and a sense of rejection, a sense of being discriminated by Majoritarianism which creates a belief that Tamils have no equal position with Sinhalese majority.

In regard to this, two recent statements made by two Southern politicians (one of them is a government Minister and the other a

Parliamentarian, both of them strong allies of the government) can be seen as symbolic representations of the sense of rejection and fear that are in creating.

One of them stated, "Only Sinhalese live in Sri Lanka" and the other stated, "Tamils do not belong to Sri Lanka and they should fight in Tamil Nadu."

The undeniable consequence of all these statements is a state of a strong sense of confidence a sense among Tamils that they can perform better on their own and that secession is not too risky, and a sense of acceptance, a sense that the Tamil Eelam is the only option which could restore their ethnic integrity. The attitude of international community with regard to the worsening conflict situation as well as human rights violations in Sri Lanka is not positive. All these negative effects (such as collateral damage and casualties, human rights violations, destruction of democracy, socio-ethnic polarization) are inevitable by products or undesired effects of the war of attrition against LTTE.

The problem lies underneath the attritional strategy and, therefore, there is no temporary solution except abandoning the attritional approach against the LTTE. Therefore, any strategy which aims at a permanent solution to the North-East problem should immediately bring the country back to normalisation at least as it was between 2002 and 2004. Then it should aim at creating a socio-political context where co-existence is possible through a period of reconciliation. Then only the Sri Lankan government can make claims and provide evidence against any form of secession to the international community since there is no need for secession.

However, we need lots of patience, courage and wisdom and our fundamental focus should be stand against secession.

In order to achieve this aim, perhaps we lack Abraham Lincoln's cool ability to separate ruthlessly the issue (in his case) of slavery from that of secession. He stated:

"I would save the Union...My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or to destroy slavery. If I could save the union without freeing any slave I would do it, and if I could save the Union by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that. What I do about slavery, and the coloured race, I do because I believe it helps to save the union." [Abraham Lincoln, Works, 5:338-39]

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Genocide, the world and us: lessons from Jaffna

What has the international community been doing in Sri Lanka?

J. T. Janani
Tamil Guardian

"GENOCIDE is a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves."

So said Raphael Lemkin, the Polish Jewish academic, who first coined the term 'genocide' in the context of the Holocaust.

So said Raphael Lemkin, the Polish Jewish academic, who first coined the term 'genocide' in the context of the Holocaust.

The 'paradise' island nation of Sri Lanka, is currently South Asia's wealthiest country on a per capita income basis. Its economy has grown by over 6% in each of the last three years; foreign investment and tourism have boomed despite the civil war.

And yet over the last year hundreds of thousands of people, mainly Tamils, not only faced starvation but have suffered shellings and bombings, abductions and killings, torture and rape.

Jaffna is emblematic of the deprivations faced by the Tamils of Sri Lanka. The foundations life in this northern peninsula have been systematically destroyed to genocidal proportions. For the simple reason that the Tamils an ethnic minority in the Sinhala state of Sri Lanka.

Jaffna has a written history that is over 2000 years old; once a strategic port on the ancient silk route, it has been for millennia the cultural and political capital of the Tamil people of the island.

Jaffna's present woes stem from its pre-eminent historic position as the Tamil cultural capital. And its history of political independence.

In 1983, when the country wide, anti Tamil pogroms erupted in Sri Lanka, Tamils in the south sought safe haven in Jaffna. Later that decade it became the political centre of the movement for Tamil independence.

Jaffna, the cultural and, then, the political capital of the Tamils, was also the home and core support base of the largest Tamil political parties since independence, all of whom as their names so clearly suggest, aspired to autonomy for the Tamil homelands in Sri Lanka: the Federal Party which later merged into the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF).

In the late eighties, when the government of Sri Lanka entered into an accord with neighbouring India to contain the rebellious Tamils, the Indians recognised the importance of Jaffna. It was flooded with troops by the Indian peace Keeping Force (IPKF) in what later deteriorated into a well-chronicled brutal and hostile military occupa-



Jaffna, 'liberated' by the Sri Lankan government 12 years ago, must be considered a show-case of the vision and implementation skills of the government and international community. Today it is an open air prison with a rapidly decreasing number of media and human rights workers and 6 disappearances a day. Photo Lakruwan Wanniarachchi / AFP / Getty Images

tion.

But the Indians were forced to withdraw within two years and Jaffna fell to the control of the the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam).

In the early nineties Jaffna had hope: it saw five years of uninterrupted governance by the LTTE, who though not elected, were undeniably a home grown leadership, a political and cultural product of the city itself. Few dispute that Jaffna was well-governed. The Times of London, for example, berated the LTTE for their "fanatical" commitment to the separatist cause but also described them as "fanatically" committed to law and order, squeaky clean, efficient and innovative. The fabric of life had a foundation of stability on which reconstruction could begin.

But genocide returned to Jaffna in the guise of a "war for peace".

When the next president of Sri Lanka, Chandrika Kumaratunge, the daughter of two former nationalist prime ministers, was elected on a platform of a "final war for peace" against the Tamil fighters, the western political establishment

was keen to give her a chance.

Leading western newspapers, including the editorial of the Times of London reported the all out onslaught of the invasion of the Jaffna peninsula as a "war of liberation". A broad front military invasion is the most destructive of civilian lives and property, as artillery and aerial bombardment supports an all out battle to capture the target town.

It is difficult to find a parallel for these tactics by a government against its "own population" in any other part of the world - for ironically the peninsula of Jaffna still was formally part of Sri Lanka and the people of Jaffna still entitled to the protection of "their" government.

There were previous incidents that met the legal definitions but one may argue that these were not sufficiently concerted.

The 1981 burning of the Jaffna Library and its entire collection, including historic handwritten manuscripts, was also an act of genocidal intent: a deliberate act by the state, no less, that aimed to destroy the history and cultural identity of a

city which prided itself on both its millennia old history and its possession of the second largest library in all of Asia.

The decades long economic embargo of essential items to Jaffna throughout the 90s come close to having as its objective "inflicting conditions calculated to bring about the physical destruction of a people", part of the UN definition. For minimally if the embargo did not prevent births (also part of the UN definition), it also ensured that the children of Jaffna were chronically malnourished and physically undeveloped.

But these stretched foundations of life crumbled in 1995 with the "war for peace". For almost all of the 500,000 inhabitants of Jaffna evacuated before the oncoming government soldiers reached them, one of the least documented, but largest movement of civilians peoples since the world war. The "exodus" of Jaffna is chronicled in the book of the same name, by the then chairman of Sri Lanka's state television network, Vasantha Raja, who resigned and emigrated in protest.

According to the Swiss academ-

ic Julia Fribourg, the term 'genocide' includes the deliberate displacement of national groups from their homelands with an aim of destroying their cultural and habitation grounds.

But if the Sri Lankan state in 1995 achieved the single largest displacement of an ethnic population in the post war world, it went to great trouble to maintain its bonafides internationally and so to avoid the label of genocide.

The government, once its army had occupied the ghost city, invited its citizens back with the promise of protection. For an empty city was worthless in symbolic terms.

Suffering in the harsh openness of the Vanni region, half of the former population accepted the governments offer of return over the next few years. The rest followed the LTTE deeper into the Vanni and established from the jungle new habitats. Others made their way to Colombo and emigrated.

Those who returned accepted military rule as the price of returning home. They would have been aware of the government's military presence, of emergency law and

judged it bearable. Thus the current conditions of Jaffna cannot be blamed on the un-governability or political extremism of its population.

And yet the current conditions in Jaffna are undeniably genocidal. For no reasonable person could claim that they provide the "essential foundations of life".

Today Jaffna is merely an open prison, possibly the world's largest. Never reconstructed from the destruction of the 1995 war, let alone the recent tsunami, it is a derelict and bombed out police city.

The ratio of soldiers of the army of occupation to civilians is higher than in a prison facility: every family is held hostage by one soldier. Then there is the navy, the militarised police and paramilitaries allied to the government.

Any form of social activity with possible political implications - including for example, meeting with visiting community leaders or multi faith religious delegations from Colombo - is photographed and recorded, the participants can expect visits from the state security forces.

Extensive records have been made over the last twelve years of participation in community or political activities. And almost all those who have shown some initiative - participants in local festivals, heroes day celebrations, journalists, student leaders, cooperative store workers who handout food rations, actors or actresses, aid workers, in fact any one who has participated in group activities for the benefit of the community - are a target for extra judicial arrest and disappearances.

To use a public phone one must provide not only ones own identification and address but also the details of the person one is calling, all of which will be recorded by the police state. Mobile phones do not work.

It is impossible to cross roads for up to three hours if an army convoy, filled with heavily armed Sinhala soldiers, is to pass. Ambulances are no exception.

Civilians are arbitrarily assaulted at army checkpoints. They can be arbitrarily subjected to intimate searches. People disappear routinely within a short time frame of having been through an army checkpoint.

Colombia, the kidnap capital of the world averages 700 kidnappings a year. Jaffna with its population of less than 450,000, with its extensive government military presence averages 6 a day. For in Jaffna it is the state which is accused for abducting, torturing and forever disappearing its citizens.

Earning a living has become impossible. Despite the shortage of food due to the embargo, fishermen are forbidden from fishing. When they are given permission of a few hours a day, they may not use their boats but must use their nets from the shore.

In Jaffna, where there is no media left, the entire family of six of a roadside boutique owner was shot for not providing free services to the Sinhala army.

It is increasingly harder to escape from Jaffna. Last year the borders to the Vanni were closed. Sea travel has been suspended.

But Jaffna has been under the control of the government of Sri Lanka for the last twelve years.

If there was ever an opportunity to undo "the destruction of the essential foundations of the life of a national group" then it would have unquestionably the period of the ceasefire: 22nd February 2002 to the 16th of January 2008.

It was a condition of the Ceasefire Agreement that Jaffna and other military occupied Tamil areas be demilitarised: that the soldiers be restricted to barracks, that civilians be able to return to a "normal" life.

It is ironic that the LTTE had to negotiate this "demilitarisation" on behalf of the people of Jaffna. For the conditions imposed on the people of Jaffna, so clearly calculated to "create bodily and emotional

iTRO urges permission for Diaspora help

harm on an entire population", are a violation of UN law on genocide.

But the trigger-happy Sinhala soldiers are everywhere: at temple festivals, exam centres, even at centres for psychological counselling for women traumatised by war.

Such is the symbolic significance of Jaffna to the Tamils, that the Sri Lankan state in 1995, believed whoever controlled Jaffna could claim sovereignty over the Tamil people. The international community agreed and largely endorsed the 1995 "Liberation" of Jaffna.

Jaffna, under the control of the Sri Lankan military throughout the entire period of the ceasefire and for many years prior, must be considered a showcase of the Sri Lankan government's vision for the Tamil people once they are "liberated" from the LTTE. For Jaffna has been "liberated" for over twelve years.

More accurately, Jaffna must be considered the show-case of both the vision and implementation skills of the co-chairs of the peace process - the US, the UK, Japan, the European Union - who are also military and economic allies of the repulsive Sri Lankan State.

Many Tamil Diaspora members have family roots in Jaffna and consequently legitimate interests in the fate of this historic city and its province. The question for us when we engage with the international political and human rights machinery - be it the local member of parliament, the foreign office or the Human Rights Watch or Amnesty International - must be: what is your record of implementation in "liberated" Jaffna? Any promises being made for the "liberated" East must be measured against the actual progress achieved in long "liberated" Jaffna.

While it ought to be the responsibility of all the governments who engage in military and economic aid to the Sri Lankan state to ensure that their military and economic ally is not committing genocide, the co-chairs though long on words have achieved zero in implementation.

By their repeated refusal to impose sanctions on the Sri Lankan state, by their insistence in "constructive engagement" with the already prosperous south while aiding the military machine that daily throttles Jaffna, the United States, the European Union - especially, Britain - are indirect participants in the Sri Lankan state's genocide.

It is important that questions be asked now about the record of the international political establishment that has unashamedly aided and abetted the inflicting of such suffering on the people of Jaffna and the rest of the Northeast

At the very least we need to disillusion both ourselves, and all people of goodwill everywhere, about the combined will and the ability of the international community to "prevent the destruction of the foundations of life" of the Tamil people in the 'paradise' island.

iTRO urges permission for Diaspora help

THE International Tamils Rehabilitation Organization (iTRO) appealed to the governments of Western nations "to allow space for the Tamil Diaspora to provide much needed humanitarian assistance to their people."

"The abrogation of the CFA by the GoSL will plunge the country back into all out war and the effects on the civilian population will be devastating," the iTRO said in a statement.

"This callous act has extinguished any hope that the international community and the Tamil people had in achieving a peaceful resolution to the Sri Lankan conflict and is the culmination of the GoSL's rejection of the legitimate expression of the Tamils' fundamental rights."

"The current environment in areas controlled by the GoSL is well documented and the international community is aware of the atrocious human rights record of the GoSL. The abrogation of the CFA and the departure of the independent Nordic Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) will further exacerbate the situation by removing the one impartial third party witness that was able access the conflict areas of the NorthEast and make regular public reports," the international NGO said.

"After the signing of the CFA the International Community encouraged the Tamil Diaspora to become more directly involved in the peace process and development. The Tamil Diaspora contributed time, expertise and funds to help alleviate the suffering of the civilian population and deliver the expected 'peace dividend'."

"Unfortunately, this is no longer the case and some countries over the past two years have actively sought to restrict the ability of the Tamil Diaspora to provide humanitarian assistance to those in the NorthEast. This is due to the negative campaigns and propaganda of the GoSL that attempt to characterize all Tamil voices critical of the GoSL as being "terrorists" or "terrorist supporters"," the statement said.

The iTRO appealed to Western countries to "allow space for the Tamil Diaspora to provide much needed humanitarian assistance to their people."

"International organizations have been restricted in their ability to access the affected areas and deliver the necessary relief and the GoSL has restricted food, medicine, fuel and construction materials to the Vanni. As a result in many areas TRO is the only organization with access to the war and tsunami affected popula-

tions."

"iTRO wishes to clearly state that the IC, through its policies and the exertion of power and influence, has had a significant degree of influence in engineering and steering the course of this conflict and the failed "peace process" to its current state of affairs and thus is culpable and must accept some responsibility for the impending calamity that is facing the Tamils," the statement noted.

"Over the past two years the GoSL has sought to remove international organizations from the NorthEast so as to reduce the witnesses to the violations of International Human Rights and Humanitarian Law and to restrict the amount of humanitarian aid reaching the Tamil people."

"Over 50 humanitarian workers have been killed over the past two years, the Action Contra La Faim 17 and the TRO 7 were the two major incidences, and there have been numerous attacks on NGO offices and personnel. The GoSL has also sought to hinder the work of the Tamils Rehabilitation Organization (TRO) by first freezing its bank accounts and then by "banning" it.

"The intention of the GoSL is now unequivocal and signals the imminent humanitarian devastation of the Tamils of the NorthEast.

"Over the last 6 years international and local organisations have worked tirelessly to keep the hopes of peace alive despite the numerous threats to their personal safety. Humanitarian workers, media personnel, members of civil society and parliamentarians have been assassinated, executed, abducted and otherwise harassed by the GoSL, its affiliated paramilitaries and the state sponsored media.

"During this period international and local NGOs, parliamentarians, peace builders, and UN executives have been accused of being "terrorists", "terrorist sympathisers" and of "funding terrorism" by the GoSL.

"The unilateral withdrawal by the GoSL from CFA has effectively closed the door to development for the people of NorthEast. The GoSL has also seriously hampered the delivery of relief and rehabilitation to the war and tsunami affected populations over the past 2 years and the Tamils areas lag far behind in tsunami recovery with Transparency International Sri Lanka (TISL) reporting that its investigations reveal that over US\$535 million have gone missing in Sri Lanka," the statement said.

NEWS

Diaspora calls for SriLankan boycott

TAMILS around the world have called for a global boycott of SriLankan Airlines, the island nation's main international carrier, in protest at the Colombo government's decision to unilaterally end the Norwegian facilitated ceasefire agreement between the government and the LTTE.

Announcing the boycott, the London-based British Tamils Forum claimed that £12m in foreign currency earned annually by the airline was being used to reinforce the government's war chest.

Some 30,000 of the 300,000 persons of Tamil origin living in the UK use Sri Lanka's national carrier to fly to the country each year from the UK, the British Tamils Forum (BTF) noted.

"The Sri Lankan government has abandoned all pretence of observing a ceasefire while resorting to an escalating war on the Tamils corralled into an ever tightening military cordon in their traditional homeland," said Ivan Pedropillai, of the BTF.

The Sri Lankan government announced that it was annulling the cessation of hostilities with the Liberation Tigers on January 2, and the agreement came to an end on January 16 at the end of the two week notice period.

"We appeal to our fellow Tamils ... to understand that travelling with Sri Lankan Airlines is tantamount to paying the government of Sri Lanka to buy the weaponry with which to kill our own people in their homeland in Sri Lanka," Pedropillai said.

"We appreciate that flying with other airlines to Colombo may involve some delay in transit stopovers."

Pedropillai also urged Britons to avoid taking holidays in Sri Lanka: "We extend this appeal to our other British compatriots who want to travel on holidays to Sri Lanka to think of the deaths and destruction that their money paid will eventually cause among the Tamils of Sri Lanka and to kindly avoid such travel."

There are an estimated 350,000 Tamils of Sri Lankan origin in Canada and around 100,000 each in the United States and South Africa. The BTF claimed it was supported by counterpart organisations in Europe, Canada, USA, Australia and India to launch the worldwide campaign against SriLankan Airlines.

Sri Lankan Airlines is partially privatised with 43% of the shares owned by the Dubai-based Emirates Airline. The airline declined to comment on the boycott threat.

Sources at the Sri Lankan High Commission, told The Guardian newspaper that such campaigns had failed in the past.

"They have tried many times to request the Tamil expatriate community living in the UK to boycott even Sri Lankan products," the source said, "but they failed. The people did not listen. They are trying to find an opportunity to hit the government."



The boycott calls for Tamils to avoid flying Sri Lankan and other measures to prevent Tamil money reaching the Sri Lankan government

We send them the money

R. Cholan

SO Mahinda Rajapakse has abrogated yet another solemn pact with the Tamils for peace. And, we the Tamil expatriates keep sending his government billions of dollars every year with our spending habits. Our grocery spending is the most grotesque.

There are those who ask why? "Why boycott ONLY the Sri Lankan groceries?" Why not the other ways in which the Tamil expatriates are sending money to Sri Lanka? Good question.

Indeed, we Tamil expatriates do send billions of dollars to Sri Lanka in ways 'other' than with our 'grocery-money'. There are those of us who buy Sri Lankan textiles in Department Stores like John Martins, Victoria's Secret, Bella Italia, John Lewis, Bloomingdales, etc., in Australia, Canada, Europe and the US.

Then there are other Tamils who fly Sri Lankan Airlines (or its partner Emirates), and stay at the 'tourist hotels'. While there, they buy jewellery, saris, gems, textiles, batik, etc. They also do things like eating-out with friends and families at pricey Colombo Restaurants.

Astonishingly, many of them are those who sought 'asylum' in western countries, because it was 'unsafe' for them to be in Sri Lanka!

What is even more troubling is the big-ticket item of luxury apartments in Colombo. The wealthiest among us (fortunately,

only a few) are buying flats in Colombo. I am not sure what motivates these rich Tamils to do this. As an 'investment', it is an obvious loser.

Their losses can be quite big, as many have already found out. Those who bought property in Sri Lanka in the nineties and sold ten years later have lost big sums. With the precipitous decline in the value of SL rupees, their losses have been substantial.

Remember, when less than Ten Sri Lankan rupees used to very easily fetch a US dollar, (in 1973 it was six Sri Lankan rupees to a dollar). At that time more in Indian rupees were needed for a dollar (it was eight Indian rupees to a US dollar).

Now it takes 110+ SL Rupees (and stunningly a third of that amount in Indian Rupees) for that same one dollar. This is mindboggling.

A decline of this magnitude in currency value alone can land these rich Tamil 'investors' in serious trouble. Add to this the unscrupulous builders violating building codes, there is a disaster waiting to happen. But, if these 'investors' want to commit Hara-kiri, it is their business!

But the fact is with all such activities we Tamil expatriates around the world are currently sending enormous sums of money to the GoSL. The GoSL gladly takes all of it, to pay for arms and ammunition to kill our kith and kin. This is disgraceful.

It is difficult for us, who spend

only a few hundred dollars on such items, to imagine that collectively these activities add up to several billions of dollars. But, mind you there are eight-hundred-thousand of us expatriates out there, and even if one or two hundred thousand engage in such activities, it adds up to massive sums of money. This is simple math. You don't need to be an economist to figure this out.

If this is the case, then why single out the poorer amongst us, who spend a mere couple of hundred dollars a month on groceries. When other Tamils are giving so much more to the GoSL, why can't I enjoy my simple pleasure of a measly Sri Lankan meal? You see, I only send a few dollars with my eating habits compared to them. Does this really matter?

Indeed, a fair question.

When Mahatma Gandhi decided on his now famous Salt March to Dandi (March 12, 1930), he too faced a similar dilemma. India had declared to be free on 26 January 1930, and nothing happened for a few months after that. The British Government simply ignored the declaration. Winston Churchill was bleating about how he was working so hard to "Save India from Gandhi!" Gandhi needed something that would invigorate the masses.

Under the British law, the production or sale of salt by anyone but the British government was a criminal offense punishable by law. But defying this law would have had minimal effect on the

British economy. The tax on salt was miniscule, mere pennies. Not much different from the pennies we spend on things like Seeni Sambol and Katta Sambol.

Other areas of British trade with India were much more lucrative and much more vulnerable. A boycott of the British textiles, for example, bought by the affluent (but a smaller number of) Indians, would have had a greater economic impact. Gandhi did take on the British textile industry with his trademark handloom, but that came much later.

The brown-sahibs of India at that time were driving around in British automobiles, wearing British clothes and acting like their white masters, eating breakfast of Bacon & Eggs, with Forks & Spoons. As a side issue, the Indians (and Sri Lankans too) for some reason use spoons with forks, instead of knives! The brownies of India were also going to and fro from England in British schooners, hobnobbing with the British elite.

This 'minority' of Indians were spending enormous sums of money on such pursuits, not very different from the 'minority of the wealthy Tamil expatriates' of today. For Gandhi confronting any such activity would have caused greater harm to the British economy. Salt consumed by every Indian contributed so little to the British economy.

And yet, the Mahatma in his infinite wisdom decided on Salt. Why?

NEWS

UK: world must protect threatened peoples

TamilNet

IN a keynote speech Monday during his official visit to India, Britain's Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, called for the shaping of a "new world order" in which the international community intervenes where populations are being threatened by "genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes or crimes against humanity, and the state is unwilling or unable to halt or prevent it." The world has "a responsibility to protect" Mr. Brown said. Last week, in a British Parliamentary debate on Sri Lanka, junior Foreign Minister Kim Howell called for a new ceasefire and for UN monitoring of human rights abuses in Sri Lanka.

Gordon Brown has begun secret talks with other world leaders on far-reaching reform of the United Nations Security Council as part of a drive to create a "new world order" and "global society", British press reports said.

Reform of the so-called international architecture, Britain believes, should include an "expanded" Security Council to include India, along with Brazil, Japan, Germany and another African country as permanent members.

Prime Minister Brown believes the UN is punching below its weight, press reports said.

Mr Brown proposed the UN spend £100m a year on setting up a "rapid reaction force" to stop "failed states" sliding back into chaos after a peace deal has been reached. Civilians such as police, administrators, judges and lawyers would work alongside military peace-keepers.

"There is limited value in military action to end fighting if law and order does not follow," he will say. "So we must do more to ensure rapid reconstruction on the ground once conflicts are over - and combine traditional humanitarian aid and peace-keeping with stabilisation, recovery and development."

The keynote speech sets out the Brown administration's foreign policy vision. Mr. Brown took over the premiership from Tony Blair last year.

Recently British officials raised the theme of 'responsibility to protect' in the context of Sri Lanka, where the UK has been strongly backing the establishment of a UN human rights monitoring mission.

In the wake of the Sri Lankan government's abrogation of the 2002 Ceasefire Agreement with

the LTTE, British parliamentarians last week debated the deteriorating situation in Sri Lanka.

MPs from all three main British parties agreed a UN human rights monitoring mission was needed and criticised the Sri Lankan move, which resulted in the withdrawal of international ceasefire monitors.

Foreign Office Minister Kim Howells said the end of the ceasefire meant "we have entered a dangerous new phase in Sri Lanka."

"A new ceasefire must be constructed as quickly as possible if we are to make progress," Mr. Howells told MPs. "The [2002] ceasefire agreement was not perfect but (it was) a basis for peace and moving forward," he said.

Britain, he said, has "to continue to work with international partners to make it clear that there cannot be a military solution, and to work for a cessation of hostilities."

"We must press the Government of Sri Lanka to address the grievances of Tamils through a credible and sustainable political solution. We must urge the LTTE to change," he said.

"We must work quietly and patiently behind the scenes with all the communities and with civil society in Sri Lanka to sow the seeds of a future resolution of the conflict."

"We must encourage the diaspora to play a bigger role in the search for peace," he also said.

Mr. Howells admitted "there is little substance around which to base negotiations," but said "the international community must clearly continue to stay engaged, stop the violence and help Sri Lanka build a credible environment for a sustainable peace process."

"Having chosen to end the ceasefire arrangement, the Sri Lankan Government have a clear responsibility to live up to their commitment to address the grievances of the Tamil people," he said.

He noted that the All Party Representative Committee (APRC), appointed by President Mahinda Rajapakse had had "a promising start" but had been "bedevilled" by opponents of a peace process and "hindered" by a lack of consensus between the two main parties.

Noting the APRC was due to report shortly, Mr. Howells said "we think it important that those recommendations go beyond the



A cordial visit by British Prime Minister Gordon Brown to Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh included discussions on Sri Lanka and a role for India at the UN Security Council

India UK summit: 'No military solution in Sri Lanka'

A JOINT statement signed by the Prime Ministers of the United Kingdom and India, at the UK-India annual Summit held in New Delhi Monday, said they agreed that there is no military solution to the conflict in Sri Lanka and urged the Sri Lankan government to put forward a credible devolution package as a key contribution to finding a political settlement acceptable to all communities within the framework of a united Sri Lanka.

The joint statement, dis-

current constitutional provisions to protect minority rights."

"The international community will be watching carefully, and we do not want to see another false dawn," he warned.

He said the LTTE "must renounce terrorism and demonstrate a real commitment to democratic principles if it is to be regarded internationally as a legitimate political movement."

"Some Tamils argue that the military pursuit of self-determination is generated by a sense of despair that their grievances will never be addressed in a united Sri Lanka," he said.

"It is vital that the Government of Sri Lanka allay those fears and give them hope."

"For Sri Lanka to find a way forward, we need to see signs of genuine good will from the Government to any proposals for devolution that might emerge and a readiness on the part of disillusioned Tamils to contemplate alternatives to self-determination."

"There needs to be a full debate among the Tamils, free of intimidation and polarisation, on what an acceptable political settlement might look like for the

cussing a range of international issues, also said that the UK reaffirmed its firm support for India's candidature for a permanent membership in an expanded United Nations Security Council.

The joint statement further said that the both countries agreed on the importance of more representative and effective international institutions to address global challenges.

The UK delegation led by Prime Minister Gordon Brown and the Indian delegation led by

Tamil people," he said.

Turning to the theme of human rights, the British Foreign minister said "there is an urgent need to address the culture of impunity that persists."

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour, who visited Sri Lanka recently, "was alarmed at the weakness of the rule of law and the prevalence of impunity for those abusing human rights," he said.

"She criticised the absence of credible systems of public accountability for the vast majority of these deplorable incidents and the general lack of confidence in the ability of existing Government institutions to safeguard against the most serious human rights abuses. Surely that must be the first duty of any Government in any sovereign state in the world," Mr. Howells asked.

At the start of the debate, Simon Hughes, a senior Liberal Party MP, read out extracts of a formal statement issued by the Sri Lankan High Commissioner in London. "The [Sri Lankan] government wishes to avail itself of [this British Parliamentary debate] to restate its opposition to the proposal made by the UN High

Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh, agreed that a reformed UN Security Council that better reflected the realities of the 21st century would enhance global cooperation and security.

The two sides also agreed to intensify practical cooperation in the fight against terrorism, both through bilateral channels and in multilateral forums.

Both the countries noted with satisfaction the growing partnership between India and the European Union.

Commissioner to establish UN field presence in Sri Lanka for monitoring and reporting," the statement said.

"The [Sri Lankan] government wishes to state that, its decision to end the CFA would not be reversed and would be implemented as previously stated, in the best interest of the country and its people", it added.

Commenting on the Sri Lankan statement, Mr. Hughes said: "I have to say that without international adjudication and verification, the Sri Lankan Government will not be regarded as acceptable."

"I understand the arguments about sovereignty, but if they are trying to win credibility in the world after 30 years of civil war, the UN must be represented in the country and able to go about its business there."

During the debate, reflecting what Tamils lobbyists say is a growing sense amongst British MPs, Jeremy Corbyn, an MP of the ruling Labour party, observed "there must be a permanent - that is, for as long as necessary - independent UN representation in Sri Lanka that can go to all parts of the country."

FEATURES

A game that will speak not its name

J.S. Tissainayagam

Sunday Times

THE government has predicted that 2008 would be decisive in its campaign against LTTE separatism and reiterated its ability to defeat the Tigers in their Wanni lair before this year closes.

"We must realise that military victories will surely pave the way to push the LTTE to seek a political solution to the problem... Like we overcame the tsunami tragedy, we will face the threat of terrorism and overcome it soon," said President Mahinda Rajapaksa with imperturbable self-assurance at the national ceremony to commemorate the 2004 catastrophe.

The army commander too echoed these sentiments.

The Daily News on December 31, 2007, said, "Army Commander Lt. General Sarath Fonseka who has already announced his intention of shifting the current battles to a decisive phase in August next year, expressed confidence of achieving the mission"

Statements issued by other senior government figures, too, reflect an upbeat mood.

They suggest that while acknowledging the battle for the Wanni would not be as smooth as clearing the East, it could be achieved by sheer military might.

And why not? According to the military spokesman and the MCNS, Tiger cadres are perishing like flies in the battlefields of the North.

While this might be one way of perceiving on-going military operations, there are alternate perspectives too which we would do well to consider.

The military establishment, assisted by sections of the media, has succeeded in projecting what has been going on in the past three months or so as that of the security forces readying themselves for a frontal assault on the LTTE's armed formations in the Wanni.

In other words, the army is poised to strike on the Tiger heartland but that the operation is yet to begin.

While breaking into the LTTE stronghold appears to be the overall objective, the strategy appears to clear the mainland between Vavuniya and Mannar and cut through the western flank of Tiger territory to link up with Pooneryn.

Control of Pooneryn by government forces is expected to debilitate the LTTE and prevent it from launching attacks across the Jaffna lagoon on the southern part of the Jaffna peninsula.

With the view of executing this strategy, the military began assaults on Tiger bunker lines northwest of Vavuniya from around October last year. Its first 'capture' was Silavathurai.

Though trumpeted by the government as a major victory, those following the conflict know that



Sri Lanka's military has stepped up its war against the LTTE - the government's aim being 'Peace through War' - but by refusing to announce that the war has commenced, the military hopes to avoid in-depth analysis of its manoeuvres in the country's media

Silavathurai was actually no man's land and it offered no strategic benefit to the rebels.

The Tigers, therefore, withdrew from Silavathurai, which the army then occupied.

Beyond that, judged even by the information supplied by the Ministry of Defence, it is clear that fighting is centred round the forward lines, or FDLs.

Recent confrontations of significance include Pandivirichchan, Parappakandal and Mullikulam. Clashes on the FDLs, where there is usually significant loss of lives on both sides, are hailed by the government as major battle gains.

How come that limited progress on the advance into LTTE-controlled areas has not created adverse reactions in the public?

Interestingly, the government has managed to ward off such criticism by not declaring full-scale operations have already commenced.

The public is made to believe that what has been going on from October last year are no more significant than border clashes.

This is at variance with the army's approach under President Chandrika Kumaratunga.

Operation Jayasikurui was

launched from Vavuniya and Weli Oya (Manal Aru) with the intention of establishing a main supply route (MSR) to the North by taking the A9 highway.

A secondary objective was to split the LTTE-dominated Wanni through the middle.

Since the government was in control of areas north of Kilinochchi it meant clearing a mere 45 mile strip between the two towns.

The launching of Jayasikurui on May 13, 1997 was attended by great fanfare.

The then Minister of Defence, Anuruddha Ratwatte, belting out words of defiance and taunts at the Tigers became routine.

But while the fanfare might have been elixir to the ego when the going was good, the setbacks that began to occur as the army approached Pulliyankulam found the media and the public beginning to criticise the government on its inept handling of the operation.

The present government has learnt from its predecessor's mistakes.

It is able to fend off adverse criticism by not declaring formally that a military operation has already begun.

The public is made to believe

that all that is taking place is a series of armed clashes on the FDLs with the great 'push' yet to come.

While on the subject of Jayasikurui - the last major assault on the Wanni - comparisons are inevitable.

Initial battlefield victories of the security forces during Jayasikurui were quite imposing.

Despite a counterattack by the LTTE on the Thandikulam camp soon after the operation began, the military was able to overcome Tiger resistance and advance up to Omanthai (from Vavuniya) and Nedunkerni (from Weli Oya) in around five weeks.

It was only as the army approached Pulliyankulam that the Tigers launched a major counteroffensive, which served to alter the whole complexion of the operation. With its armour bogged down by the monsoon rains and fierce resistance by the LTTE, Jayasikurui began floundering.

Judging from the government's accounts of the fighting in the past weeks and a glance at an atlas, it is evident the advance to link up with Pooneryn has been confined, in the past three months, to fierce clashes at the FDLs stretching between Vavuniya and the north-western

coast.

As far as battlefield losses are concerned, each side makes different claims and I leave it the reader to investigate the veracity of the respective assertions.

Unable to advance significantly on this particular front, the military's strategy seems to be opening other fronts with the intention of dispersing the LTTE units away the northwest line.

Thus there have been clashes on the Muhamalai and Weli Oya (Manal Aru) FDLs too.

Meanwhile, the LTTE clashes with the STF regularly in the Amparai jungles; two zones of insecurity have been created by civilian killings in areas near Yala and, from this week, Moneragala.

If they intensify it would take away the government's ability to concentrate its forces on advancing on the Wanni, while also resulting in civilian displacement from these areas. There is also access to the Eastern Province through Moneragala.

All this might very well change in the coming weeks with the army surging forward from the northwest FDLs.

Its self-imposed deadline for completion of this Operation Without a Name is August this year.

NEWS

Clashes continue in Mannar

CLASHES continued in Mannar over the past two weeks, with over eighty fighters killed in the region according to the claims by the Sri Lankan Army (SLA) and the Liberation Tigers.

On Saturday January 19, a massive ground operation, by the SLA against LTTE bases in Paalaikuli and Adampan, was defeated after fierce resistance by LTTE cadres.

The initial SLA offensive commenced in the morning when the SLA attempted to penetrate into LTTE-held areas in Paalaikuli with the support of artillery fire. But the Sri Lankan military was unable to face the stiff resistance from LTTE cadres and withdrew to their camps with heavy losses.

The troops staged a second attack in the afternoon in Adampan area supported by heavy artillery fire. After a 20 minute intense duel, the SLA troops were once again forced to withdraw with losses.

Apart from these two offensives SLA also staged intensive artillery attacks in Mullikkulam and Thampanai areas. The SLA attacks were abnormally intensive, TamilNet reported.

Last Wednesday, a SLA unit that was lured into a booby-trapped minefield in Mullikkulam abandoned its ground movement. Meanwhile, a group of SLA soldiers engaged in setting up claymore mines in the area were counter-attacked by the Tigers.

Two claymore mines with remote controls and explosives were seized in the LTTE's clearing mission, without LTTE casualties.

On January 14, the LTTE claimed to have thwarted a major SLA push into Parappaangkandal. The SLA movement was thwarted after almost 8-hours of stiff resistance.

At least 30 SLA soldiers were

killed and more than 100 soldiers were wounded, the Tigers said. One SLA dead body was recovered by the Tigers who seized three AK-LMG guns, one RPG, two disposable Light Anti-tank Weapons and five T-56 type-2 assault rifles. 10 military kit-bags, explosives and rounds were also seized in the clearing mission after the fighting. Three LTTE fighters were killed in action.

Bullet and artillery riddled bodies of SLA soldiers were seen across the field in decomposed state, the Mannar command of the LTTE told media in Vanni.

On January 12 a two pronged ground movement by the SLA was thwarted at one front in Pandivirichchan by the Tamil Tigers after almost 6-hours heavy fighting in which 17 SLA soldiers and five LTTE fighters were killed. Sri Lanka Air Force (SLAF) helicopters landed at least 10 times, transporting wounded soldiers from the SLA defence line.

Meanwhile, three SLA soldiers were killed in Vilaathikkulam fighting a day earlier when a group of retreating soldiers ran into a booby trap. Many soldiers were wounded as an SLA unit had entered the booby trapped area, the Tigers said.

Another clash was reported in Mullikkulam when a SLA unit attempted to infiltrate LTTE controlled territory. There were no Tiger casualties in that clash, according to the LTTE.

Also on January 11 there were heavy clashes on two fronts in Mannar when the SLA launched ground movement towards Uyilangkulam in Mannar and towards Paalamoaddai along the Vavuniya - Mannar border. The SLA units were pushed back to their old positions after counter

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Parents fled with their children as the Sri Lanka Air Force dropped bombs near schools in Kilinochchi

Civilians targeted in Vanni, schools remain closed

SCHOOLS in Kilinochchi closed last week after a Sri Lanka Air Force bombing mission narrowly missed a primary school, forcing parents, children and teachers to flee to bunkers.

790 schoolchildren and 22 teachers at the Kanakapuram Maha Viththiyaalayam narrowly escaped as four Sri Lanka Air Force (SLAF) fighter jets dropped bombs barely 100 meters away from their school in the Kilinochchi suburbs Thursday morning.

Terror gripped the town as more than 5000 students from the five schools in Kilinochchi (Central College, Kilinochchi Maha Viththiyaalayam, Mother Teresa Girls College, Kilinochchi Hindu College and Kanakapuram Maha Viththiyaalayam) started fleeing to save their lives.

On Friday, two schools closed

completely, while in the other three, students failed to show up. Many students chose to stay home near bunkers fearing another SLAF bombing raid.

A repeat of the gruesome Chencholai massacre was avoided as civilians sought shelter inside bunkers and managed to flee the area. One civilian was killed and seven wounded in the air strike.

Tiger anti-aircraft gunners rushed to the spot and started firing, which ensured that SLAF bombers stopped with two rounds of bombing, reported TamilNet.

Three more attempts of pinpoint dive bombing had to be aborted by the SLAF because of this immediate intervention.

Kanakapuram Maha Viththiyaalayam, which has more than 1123 students, remained closed

until Tuesday.

The principal of Kilinochchi Mahaviththiyalayam, Mr. Sritharan said that his school was closed as there is no space near the school to construct bunkers for the more than 2200 students attending his school.

Anxious mothers in the settlement were seen running helter-skelter as the bombs started to target their houses.

Six homes were reduced to rubble in the aerial attack. Nine more houses sustained heavy damages. More than 15 families were displaced and left without shelter as a result of the bombing.

Passer-by vehicles and NGO vans were seen helping residents who were fleeing to escape the SLAF bombardment.

Private and public offices and shops were closed in the town.

Alarming increase in Mannar abductions

TamilNet

AS conflict continues in Mannar, with ongoing clashes between the Sri Lankan military and the Liberation Tigers, unofficial violence against civilians have also increased, with an increased rate of disappearances, with locals accusing government forces of having a hand in the abductions.

In the past three weeks, Mannar has witnessed the abduction of five Tamil civilians, including a leading businessman and a young mother, in broad daylight. In at least two of the cases, the victims had received mysterious phone calls asking them to come to an appointed place at a

particular time.

Distraught families have been running from pillar to post to trace their missing relatives, but a hostile police force has ensured that they remain groping in the dark.

Leading businessman and social activist Soosaippillai Anton, 54, of Murungkan in Mannar has been reported missing since January 16. Anton, a father of three, owns a fuel station and a wine shop apart from running several successful business establishments in Mannar and Vavuniya. He was also a building contractor and owner of cultivable land.

His last known whereabouts are that he was travelling to Vavuniya on a motorbike. When

he didn't return home on Wednesday night, his family attempted to trace him through relatives and business contacts in Vavuniya. As their efforts proved futile they lodged a complaint with the Mannar Police and ICRC officials.

In a similar incident, a young widow, Arulvaasagam Rosani, 31, was abducted in front of the Mannar St. Sebastian Cathedral on Friday. She had reportedly received a phone call asking her to come to the Church at 2:30 p.m. that day.

Rosani is the mother of a 9-year-old daughter. Having lost her parents early and her husband some years back, she had been living with her relatives.

Speaking on conditions of

anonymity, an official of an international agency providing protection and assistance to conflict victims told TamilNet that the Mannar Police had refused to record Rosani's abduction when her relatives sought to lodge a complaint. He hinted that the inaction of the police revealed the active role played by the government forces in carrying out these abductions.

Likewise, two fishermen Charles Joseph Rosanraj, 24, and Masanat Gilbert Dharsan, 22, living in the Joseph Vaz settlement in Thoaddaveli near Erukkalampiddi, have been reported missing since December 15.

They were returning home from their jetty (Koanthaipiddi

jetty in Uppukkulam) by cycle on the Mannar - Thalaimannar Road near the Youth Corps Centre, a Sri Lanka Navy camp, 2 km from Mannar city, an official who visited Vavuniya told TamilNet.

Both the fishermen had been displaced from Vidathaltheevu in 1999 and were living in the Thoaddaveli Joseph Vaz resettlement colony.

Yet another abduction occurred on December 24, 2007. Antony Thadruze Christine, 26, a carpenter hailing from a poor family in Thoaaddaveli had received a telephone call asking him to come to Konnaiyan near Thaarapuram, a Tamil settlement 3 km away. He kept the appointment on Christmas Eve, but never returned.

CULTURE

The Thirukkural

The first of a three-part series looking at a Tamil treasure

Cultural Editor
Tamil Guardian

THE 2000 year old Kural is often described by classical scholars, such as Professor George Hart of the Berkeley California, as one of the world's greatest works on ethics.

Widely attributed in terms of authorship to Thiru Valluvar, a weaver of cloth, who is said to have lived circa 30 BC, this is a secular work that cuts across religion, class and race. Its earliest translators were like Rev Pope, Christian missionaries to Tamil Nadu, who fell in love with the literature of the region.

It was they who made it available to the rest of India, including to Mahatma Gandhi who later said: "I wanted to learn Tamil, only to enable me to study Valluvar's Thirukkural through his mother tongue itself.... There is no one who has given such treasure of wisdom like him."

The German-born Nobel prize winner, Dr Albert Schweitzer described the Kural thus: "On the most varied questions concerning the conduct of man to himself and to the world, Thirukural's utterances are characterised by nobility and good sense. There hardly exists in the literature of the world a collection of maxims in which we find so much lofty wisdom...".

In Tamil the word Kural means "couplet" and also "voice", whereas the prefix Thiru means "Sacred". But equally in Tamil - a language which exudes courtesy -

"Thiru" is the equivalent to the English "Mr", an everyday honorific prefix.

The Kural is hence a set of 1330 couplets organised in chapters of ten, each chapter dedicated to a single concept. The concepts are wide ranging from "Possessing Love", "Truthfulness", "Rain" to "The Avoidance of Tyranny". Each chapter explores different facets of the concept to which it is devoted, starting simply and becoming progressively more complex. There is often a link between chapters where concepts are related: so for example there are five consecutive chapters on friendship entitled "Friendship", "Testing fitness for friendship", "Old friendship", "Harmful friendship" and "False friendship". It is often said of the Kural that there is no aspect of life not covered by it.

The last 25 chapters are split into two parts, premarital and marital love, separately, yet because of their different style there is controversy whether these chapters were part of the original work. Nevertheless there is a line of thought that the inclusion of sensuality in works, which are otherwise philosophical is part of the tradition, the ancient Tamils being of the view that sexuality was conducive to spirituality: witness the sculptures that adorned the ancient temples.

The Kural follows a disciplined poetic structure. Signifying

its comprehensive intent, the first couplet begins with the first letter of the Tamil alphabet, A and the last couplet ends with the letter N, completing the alphabet. Each couplet consists of seven cir: a cir is a word or combination of words joined together (a compound word). And so the Kural begins, with a couplet praising "God Primordial":

Akara muthal elluthellam aathi, Bhagavan mutharae ulaghu

"A, as its first of letters, every speech maintains; The 'Primal Deity' is first through all the world's domains." (Translation of G U Pope)

And, perhaps unexpectedly, it concludes with the last of ten couplets on the benefits of sulking (in the chapter entitled "Wedded love")

"Uuduthal Kamathitku inbam, athatinbam kuudi mayanga per-rin"

The joy of love lies in sulking, for that joy is realized While embracing in union. (Translation of NVK Ashraf)

The structural organisation of the Kural also reveals much about the values and philosophy of Tamil society. The chapters of ten couplets are grouped into three themes or "books", namely "Virtue", "Wealth" and "Love".

The introduction to the book on virtue contains 4 chapters: "Praising God", "The Importance of Rain", "Greatness of Renunciates", "Asserting Virtue". These four concepts are a foundation to the whole work and not just the book on virtue - they are the core horizontal themes, across which the weaver weaves his multitude of vertical threads, each thread being a concept.

In the first of the four introductory chapters, Valluvar, acknowledges "God Primordial" and places his values in the context of the whole. So for example he says on learning and the limits of rationalism:

"What has learning profited a man, if it has not led him to worship the good feet of him who is pure knowledge itself"

He says of the concepts of "good" versus "evil", that these opposites are illusionary and one may transcend these opposites by meditating on that which is immutable:

"Good and bad, delusion's dual deeds, do not cling to those who delight in praising the immutable, worshipful one"

Note the non-sectarian references to "God" referred to as "infinity, the immutable one, the gracious one" etc.

Having set in place the limitations of reason, good, evil and so on, the weaver, focuses on the importance of the ecology and man's relation to it:

"It is the unfailing fall of rain that sustains the world therefore, look upon rain as the nectar of life

Rain produces man's wholesome food And rain itself forms part of his food besides"



Emphasising the cyclical destructive and creative powers of nature, he says:

"It is rain that ruins and rain again that raises up those it has ruined"

On man's reliance on nature, and the importance of nature relative to human functions such as charity and spirituality:

"Unless the heavens grant their gifts, neither the giver's generosity nor the ascetic's detachment will grace this wide world"

Following on after the importance of the primal spirit and nature, are the qualities and importance of spiritual leaders or "renunciates". This echoes the ancient Tamil belief that the world is sustained not just by the forces of the physical plane (i.e. the force of nature such as rain) but also by spiritual forces, an imbalance in either could lead to destruction of the world. As with the rest of the Kural, which is a secular work, the chapter makes no reference to organised or institutionalised religion, merely noting by way of definition of spirituality that:

"Pious men are called the priestly ones for they are clothed in robes of compassion for all life"

The final introductory theme is the nature of virtue, outlined in broad brush strokes, across the ten couplets in this chapter. For example the alternative interpretations of virtue include:

"Virtue is living in such a way that one does not fall into these four: envy, anger, greed and unsavoury speech" and

"Virtue is merely that which should be done in life and vice merely that which should be avoided."

The body of the book of virtue, following on from the introduction is structured into the following themes: "the way of the householder", "the way of the renunciate" and "destiny".

The second of the three books, the book on wealth, has the following themes:

"Royalty", "Ministers", "Qualities of a country" and a general section on the qualities of people and miscellaneous other aspects of wealth. The Kural concludes as mentioned above with the book on love.

While "The way of the householder" is a description of the core personal values of Tamil culture, the book on wealth addresses themes of leadership and group structures.

Thus, on what it takes to be a "householder", the Kural says:

"He alone may be called a householder who supports students, elders and renounces pursuing their good paths"

By way of example, in discussing the functions of a householder, the Kural has an entire chapter on hospitality, that most familiar of Tamil values:

"The whole purpose of earning wealth and maintaining a home is to provide hospitality to guests"

"When a guest is in the home, it is improper to hoard one's meal, even if it happens to be the nectar of immortality"

"Charity's merit cannot be measured by gifts given. It is measured by the measuring the receiver's merits"

Thus the Kural is more than a book on ethics or philosophy. It is a description of a way of life. So much so that the Rev. G. U. Pope, one of the early Christian missionaries to Tamil Nadu who translated the Kural to English described the work as: "an integral painting of a civilization which is harmonious in itself and which possesses a clearly recognizable unity."

In the second of the series, due in the next edition, Kural we will consider in more detail each of the three books: virtue, wealth and love.

Suggested references

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NEWS

Eyewitness accounts...

Continued from p3

individuals some distance away). They were all carrying assault rifles. When she reported to work, Manel Wijesinghe told her colleagues at the hospital that the Army was planning to do something at the Welipara junction. She said they would soon round up some terrorists and the news would be out thereafter.

At 7.25 a.m. A bus with some ten passengers passes the Welipara junction. Immediately thereafter, some villagers walking past Welipara junction see the same group and believe they were Army men waiting for an ambush. The armed men signal with their hands asking the villagers to walk fast from that area.

At 7.35 a.m. a packed bus approaches the Welipara junction. A claymore mine explodes. Tiger guerrillas who had by then taken up position in a hillock nearby open fire at the passengers who dismount the bus and try to run. Thereafter, the guerrillas descend the hill to fire at more passengers. One of them entered the bus through the front door and shot dead those inside. It transpires that the claymore mine had only injured ten passengers. A total of 27 passengers were killed and 51 were wounded.

At 11.00 a.m., the guerrillas who fled into the neighbouring jungle had entered a Chena cultivation. Farmers were busy tilling the field. They shoot five of them dead. At 9.55 a.m., the news of the incident had reached an Army Special Forces training camp at Galge. It is located on the road between Kataragama and Buttala.

An officer musters three soldiers and decides to rush to a neighbouring camp in a Unicorn armoured vehicle to warn troops there of the incident. A powerful claymore mine hits the vehicle injuring three soldiers. They were rushed to the Hambantota Hospital.

Investigators suspect that this claymore mine was meant for another bus carrying passengers. The lethality of this claymore mine could be seen from how the pellets in it penetrated from one

armour plated side of the Unicorn and exited through the other armour plated side. Quite clearly, this means, armour plating passenger buses would be of no avail unless the sheeting used is thicker. In such an event, the buses would be so heavy it would not only consume more fuel but also move slowly.

On Wednesday afternoon Army commandos entered the jungles near Welipara junction near Okkampitiya to conduct a full search. Hours later, the search operation was to trigger off reports that they had exchanged fire with the fleeing guerrillas. There was no such incident. One of the commandos had stepped on a trap gun accidentally. He was injured and rushed to hospital. The guerrillas had fled and the search in that area was called off.

However, that was not the end of guerrilla activity in the area.

The next day, Thursday (January 17) guerrillas entered two villages, Kalaweligama and Hambegamuwa. They are located in the Tanamalwila Police area in the Moneragala district. They shot dead two Grama Sevakas and eight civilians.

In just two days, the guerrillas had taken 42 lives, that too in the Deep South.

Yesterday (January 19), the Government was examining the feasibility of appointing a DIG (Operations) for the Moneragala District. Strongly tipped for this post is K.M. Sarathchandra, DIG who was formerly in the Special Task Force (STF) of the Police. He is now DIG (NWP -West).

The hunt for the guerrillas by Security Forces and the Police, whose strengths were increased since guerrilla related incidents in the Yala National Park continues. Guerrillas attacked the Army Detachment at Talgasmankada (inside the park) on October 15. Seven soldiers were killed and six were wounded in the attack. The next day (October 16), an Army commando lost his leg when he stepped on a pressure mine. Two range officers of the Department of Wild Life Conservation were also injured in this incident.



Soldiers stepped up patrols in Moneragala following a series of attacks in the central province

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Mannar clashes ...

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attacks that were carried out amid heavy artillery fire, the LTTE said. The SLA sustained heavy casualties in Uyilangkulam, the Tigers said. The SLA claimed 13 Tigers were killed in Uyilangkulam fighting, and handed over 3 dead bodies of females to Murungkan Police claiming that the bodies belonged to LTTE fighters.

The Sri Lanka Army has handed over three dead bodies of females to Murungkan police Friday noon with gunshot wounds to their heads, with their hands and feet tied, saying that the

females were LTTE fighters. The bodies were recovered in a search operation in Periya Neelaava'nai, the SLA officials told the police.

One SLA soldier was killed and many wounded in the counter attack that lasted for 25 minutes at Paalamoaddai where LTTE had no casualties, the Tigers said.

Previously, on January 8, the LTTE thwarted a ground movement by the SLA at Mullikkulam after 3 hours stiff resistance by the Tigers. The LTTE claimed ten soldiers were killed in the clash. Another four SLA soldiers were killed, trapped in a booby trap, while they were retreating with their casualties, the LTTE said.

NEWS



Hindu devotees and priests cook a ritual 'Pongal' dish - rice cooked with several other pulses and sweets -, in the premises of a Hindu temple in Colombo, 15 January to celebrate the 'Pongal' harvest festival, an annual Tamil thanksgiving celebration. Photo Sanka Vidanagama / AFP / Getty Images

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