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free fortnightly

How can the Tamil Diaspora show their support?

PAGE 14

Tigers blunt Sri Lanka offensive



LTTE fighters take a break between battles as the conflict heats up in the North, with almost daily confrontations. Photo LTTE

IANS

SRI LANKAN leaders are gung-ho about capturing by the year-end the country's northern regions the Tamil Tigers now control.

But ground realities do not match the optimism, say military observers who are predicting a military stalemate rather than an outright victory for either party.

Army chief Lt. Gen. Sarath Fonseka has declared he would not hand over the 'terrorist problem' to his successor when he retires at the end of this year. Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, President Mahinda Rajapaksa's brother, has vowed to kill Tamil Tigers chief Velupillai Prabhakaran.

The president claims that the armed forces have notched up 'unprecedented victories' in the past two years, that the bastions of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have been falling rapidly, and that only 'one and a half districts' remain with the rebels.

Indeed, the capture of the eastern province from the LTTE and the destruction of a number of LTTE ships were spectacular achievements. These have helped keep public morale high in the largely Sinhalese-speaking southern Sri Lanka, the key political constituency of President Rajapaksa.

However, since mid-2007, the Sri Lankan ground forces have not been able to show any notable successes, giving rise to fears among military observers that there could be a prolonged stalemate, leading to public disillusionment.

The operations in Mannar in the northwest began Sep 23 last year. The aim was to capture Viduthaltivu, 16 km to the north.

But after four months of fighting, only eight kilometres have been taken, a military expert who did not want to be identified told IANS. "And this is just the periphery of the periphery."

Continued on p13

Dozens die in attacks in the South

VIOLENCE escalated sharply in Sri Lanka's Sinhala south over the weekend before the country's 60th anniversary of independence with bomb blasts killing and wounding dozens of civilians and military personnel.

On Independence Day, February 4th, 14 persons - four Sri Lanka Army (SLA) soldiers and 10 Sinhala civilians - were killed

when a claymore mine ripped through a bus at Kobbekaduwa junction in Manalaaru (Weli Oya) colonisation scheme.

At least 17 wounded in the blast at the junction named after a former SLA commander who had close links with Buddhist priests promoting Sinhala colonization of traditional Tamil areas.

Also on Feb 4th, four SLA

soldiers were killed and three wounded in a Claymore ambush that targeted their tractor at Galge, 25 km southeast of Bhuttala town in Uva Province.

The attackers detonated a claymore mine and opened fire at the tractor on Buttala - Kathirkaamam (Kataragama) Road.

The ambush came as more than eight thousand personnel of

Sri Lankan armed forces are engaged in cordon and search operations in the jungles of Uva and Central provinces, looking for gunmen blamed for a recent string of deadly attacks on military personnel and civilians in the area.

Also on Monday, four members of the home guards, an auxiliary force of the armed forces,

Continued on p13

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NEWS



The Sri Lankan Navy has been upgraded in recent years, with deep sea ships and now distance radar

Canada sells radar to Sri Lanka

A HIGH-FREQUENCY surface wave radar, hailed as the only one of its kind in the world and developed with Canadian taxpayer's money at a cost of \$39 million has been sold to Sri Lanka.

A Canadian defence firm, with the help of a state agency, has sold the high-tech radar system to the Sri Lankan government which, earlier this year, unilaterally terminated the Norwegian sponsored ceasefire agreement that was in place for the past six years plunging the island back into a bloody war.

At the time, the Canadian government denounced the Sri Lankan move describing it as deeply regrettable and expressed concern about the "escalating violence on civilians, humanitarian workers and human rights defenders".

Canada's decision to supply

radar systems to Sri Lanka for military purposes is counterproductive and will fuel the escalating violence on civilians, the very outcome Canada was concerned with, Sri Lankan observers said.

The high-frequency surface wave radar, hailed as the only one of its kind in the world and developed with Canadian taxpayer's money at a cost of \$39 million has been sold to Sri Lanka. This high-tech radar, jointly developed by Canadian defence scientists at Raytheon Canada Limited, is capable of monitoring small boats hundreds of kilometers away.

The federal government set aside \$43 million to build and operate eight radar sites on the East and West coasts as part of its push to improve security in the aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. But the government shut

down the experimental radar sites in Newfoundland, and the program was cancelled after a complaint was received that the radar interfered with civilian communications. The experimental radars had been operating for 10 years without a complaint.

But Raytheon Canada, which builds the high-frequency surface wave radar, is pushing ahead with marketing the system to other nations. It has sold the radar to Sri Lanka with the help of the Canadian Commercial Corp., a Canadian government agency that helps companies market their products overseas. Other international customers are being lined up, said Raytheon Canada vice-president Denny Roberts.

"The technology works," Ro-

Continued on p19

Three foreign bids for Mannar oil exploration

SRI LANKA has received six tenders from three foreign companies for oil exploration in its northwestern offshore Mannar basin, the country's petroleum resource minister said on Thursday.

The blocks being put up for bids are estimated to contain 1 billion barrels of oil and would significantly alter the country's energy sector and economy.

According to the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, the country imports about 15 million barrels of crude each year, and also buys about 15 million barrels of oil products from abroad annually.

"We have got six tenders. They are from Cairn India, ONGC Videsh from India and Nico Resources from Cyprus," Minister A.H.M. Fowzie told Reuters.

"All three companies have bid for the first block, while Cairn India and Nico Resources have bid for the second block. The third block has received only one bid from Nico Resources."

The first block is the smallest out of the three with 3338.1 square kilometres, while the third block is the largest with an area of 4126.5 square kilometres.

Sri Lanka has eight exploration blocks in the Mannar basin, three of which are to be given for exploration once the government decides on a successful bidder.

Two have been assigned to China and India on nomination basis and the government plans to delay bidding on the last three blocks to get higher revenue, Reuters reported.

Oil and Natural Gas Corp (ONGC), which was offered the block nominated to India said in September it was not interested in the assigned block, citing low

Continued on p19

NEWS

LTTE calls on UN to recognise Tamil sovereignty

THE head of the LTTE political wing has written to the Secretary General of the United Nations, urging him to "recognize Tamil sovereignty as a constructive approach to end the unending five decades long, large scale, and serious rights violations against the Tamil people."

"The pace of civilian killing by the Sri Lankan State, after unilaterally abrogating the ceasefire agreement of February 2002, after evicting the ceasefire monitoring mission, the SLMM, and after adamantly refusing to allow UN human rights monitoring body continues to increase," said Mr. B. Nadesan in his letter to Mr. Ban Ki-Moon on January 30.

"The response of the Sri Lankan State to the concerns raised by senior UN officials about the rights violations has been uncivilized to say the least. It has responded to the concerns raised by many senior UN officials by calling these UN officials "terrorists" and "colonizers". In effect the Sri Lankan State is repulsing all efforts by the international community to rectify the appalling rights situation in this island," he noted.

"The Sri Lankan State unilaterally abrogated many of the agreements that were made even within the six year ceasefire period. These include, agreement reached during the early peace talks to address the immediate humanitarian needs of the war affected Tamils, agreement reached on de-escalation according to the ceasefire, and the agreement signed for rebuilding the tsunami affected areas," the letter noted.

Stating that the Tigers have ensured that there were no underage members in the movement and that the LTTE has respected the efforts made by the international community to rectify the rights situation, Mr. Nadesan said the LTTE has "demonstrated its readiness to cooperate with the international community."

"We wish to emphasize to you that all along we have respected the efforts made by the international community to rectify the rights situation and to bring peace in this island. Respecting the international norms we have entirely eliminated those under the age of 18 becoming members of our organization," the letter said.

"We have consistently called for the 100 percent implementation of the internationally supported ceasefire agreement of February 2002 for regaining the rights of the Tamils. We also cooperated fully with the Norwegian facilitators, respecting the wishes of the international community, in drafting and implementing the above mentioned agreements, that on immediate humanitarian relief, that on de-escalation and that on post tsunami reconstruction, that were later abrogated by the Sri Lankan

State," Nadesan said.

"It should be obvious to the international community by now that our organization has demonstrated its readiness to cooperate with the international community. It should also be obvious to the international community that there is only one path open to regain the rights of the Tamil people and that is for the international community to recognize the sovereignty of the Tamil nation," the letter said.

"We, therefore, urge you to consider recognizing Tamil sovereignty as a constructive approach to end the unending five decades long, large scale, and serious rights violations against the Tamil people," Mr. Nadesan concluded.

Mr. Nadesan, in his letter to Mr. Ban, also drew his attention to the claymore attack in Madu and other earlier attacks.

"On 28 January 2008 at 2.30pm, a Sri Lankan military Deep Penetration Unit attacked a civilian bus on the Madhu-Palampiddy road in the Mannar district killing eighteen civilians including twelve children. The attackers would have known that buses at that time carry school children returning home from school. This attack on a bus with scores of children, therefore, deliberately targeted the children. Among the eighteen civilians killed were twelve children aged from 8 to 16.

"Just three weeks ago on 4 January, in an aerial bombing of Uppupukulam village in the Mullaithivu district, seven children ranging in age from 3 to 16 were among those injured. Just two months ago, on 27 November, in another claymore attack on a van arrying school children trained in first aid, six children were among those killed. On that same day in an aerial bombing of the Voice of Tigers radio building three children traveling on the road were among those killed. Just two days prior to this, in an aerial bombing on the village of Tharmapuram in the Mullaithivu district three children were among those killed. On the 8th of that same month one child was killed and another lost his leg in an aerial bombing of the village of Alampil in the Mullaithivu district.

"The deliberate targeting of Tamil civilians by the Sri Lankan State has continued even through the nearly six year period of the ceasefire agreement signed in February 2002. Since the present President of Sri Lanka took office in November 2005, 2056 Tamil civilians including 132 Tamil children have been massacred by the Sri Lankan State forces.

Earlier Mr. Nadesan had reiterated his organisations commitment to the 2002 Norwegian facilitated Ceasefire Agreement (CFA), even as the Sri Lankan government abrogated it.

Noting that the government



LTTE political head Nadesan called on the UN to recognise the sovereign rights of the Tamil nation

has withdrawn from the CFA without any justifications, the LTTE political head said that the Tigers, even at this juncture, stood ready to implement every clause of the agreement and requested Norway to continue with its facilitation role with the support of the International Community.

Even then, he had urged the international community to recognize the right of the Tamil people to live with self-determination in their homeland and remove the

bans the various countries have placed on the LTTE.

The abrogation by the government demonstrated that it will never permit the Tamil people to live with freedom in their homeland, he said then. The LTTE did not withdraw from the CFA even when the government assassinated the leader of the LTTE peace delegation, S P Tamilselvan, in November 2007, he noted.

"The abrogation by the GoSL of the unprecedented nearly six

year long CFA has clearly demonstrated that the GoSL will never permit the Tamil people to live with freedom in their homeland. Therefore, the international community must understand this, and immediately remove the bans it has placed on the LTTE believing the false propaganda of the GoSL, accept the just aspirations of the Tamil people, and recognize the right of the Tamil people to live with self-determination in their homeland," he said then.

Japan will not cut aid

JAPAN has told Sri Lanka that it has no plans to suspend development aid to the island nation as reported in the international media.

Japan's special peace envoy to Sri Lanka Yasushi Akashi told Sri Lankan Foreign Secretary Palitha Kohona over the phone Friday that his country had not changed its aid policy vis-à-vis Sri Lanka and it would stick to the commitments it had made.

The international media had reported from Tokyo Thursday that Akashi had warned that Japan would cut off aid to Sri Lanka if the latter continued with its military operations against the Tamil Tiger rebels.

"We could be forced to review our aid policy if military action keeps escalating," AFP quoted Akashi as telling reporters in Tokyo.

Akashi said that Japan welcomed the proposals made by the

Sri Lankan all party panel on devolution of power and commended President Mahinda Rajapaksa for his efforts to find a peaceful solution to the ethnic conflict.

Akashi further said that he remained convinced of the assurances given by the President Mahinda Rajapakse with regard to Sri Lanka's approach to the peace process.

He dismissed the reports in the UNP's official website and also in some newspapers as a misrepresentation of what he said at the press conference, reported the Asian Tribune.

The UNP official website had earlier reported that "Japan's envoy to Sri Lanka's peace talks and who was here recently sternly warned the Govt. yesterday (31 Jan) that it will have to review its financial aid if Govt. steps up its aims for a military solution following the abrogation of ceasefire

agreement. Japan, the major aid donor for Sri Lanka will however continue their bid along with three other Nations, the U.S., Norway and the European Union for a peaceful solution for Sri Lanka."

Earlier, at the news conference in Colombo on January 15, Akashi said the Japanese Government continued to support Sri Lanka in view of achieving sustainable peace based on a political solution. "Peace is not easy to achieve and frustrations are inevitable" Akashi told the press briefing, while emphasising Japan's unwavering commitment to help Sri Lanka.

However, Japan has also previously expressed concern about the Sri Lankan government's decision to abrogate the 2002 Norwegian facilitated Ceasefire Agreement.

Continued on p19

NEWS



Dambulla bus blast leaves scores dead, injured

A POWERFUL explosion tore through a bus at Dambulla in north-central Sri Lanka, killing at least 18 people and injuring 51 others.

Military spokesman Brigadier Udaya Nanayakkara said, on Saturday February 2, a blast inside the private bus that was heading to north-central Anuradhapura city from Kandy occurred at 7.05 a.m. local time at a bus stand in Dambulla town, 148 kms from Colombo.

The ill-fated bus left Kandy at 5:15 am, with around 90 passengers at the time - three of them children - and by the time it got to Dambulla, there were almost 100 people on board. It was then that tragedy struck, which stopped the bus in its tracks, turning it into a deathbed.

The parcel bomb, left on an overhead rack of the long-distance bus, was set off using a mobile phone, a police spokesman said.

"We have information that two people got off the bus before the bomb went off," police Deputy Inspector-General Kingsley Ekanayaka said. "We are trying to track them down. A search is underway."

Bus driver Rohana Wijesiri said he was taking about 100 passengers to Anuradhapura.

"When we were passing Dambulla there was a huge blast and

the door near my seat got blown away," Wijesiri said.

"It all happened very fast. There was an explosion and I could not even stop the bus. It stopped by itself due to the explosion. My door was open and I jumped out," he said.

The top and sides of the bus were ripped apart in the force of the blast. A severed hand could be seen among the blood-stained bags, glass and other debris strewn several yards from the vehicle.

"I do not remember what happened next, but I was running on the road. I saw my conductor fallen on the ground. He, too, got up and started running with me. People were screaming and it was chaotic," Wijesiri said.

"As it (the bus) came near me, I heard thunder. I got thrown away," said Kankearachige Michael, a 52-year-old businessman, who was standing by the road when the blast occurred.

"When I saw blood gushing out of my body, I realised it was a bomb," Michael said at Dambulla Base Hospital where he was being treated.

Mallika Wickramasuriya (72), was one of those travelling to Anuradhapura. She boarded the ill-fated bus, along with her sister, in Kandy.

"My ears are hurting, my chest is also hurting. There was a big

explosion and I saw fire. I tried to get out of the bus, but two people fell on me. They were dead. I saw their wounds bleeding. My sister sustained chest injuries," she said.

"My National Identity Card and all other belongings are in the bus," she added with difficulty. She could barely hear, due to eardrum injuries.

"I heard an explosion and I rushed to the place. I saw a body lying on the ground with an eye missing. Many people were screaming for help. We found 13 bodies immediately and the casualties were taken to the hospital. There were three children in the bus. One was taken to the hospital by us," Channa Priyantha Opatha, an eye-witness told The Nation newspaper.

The bodies were mostly burnt and blackened, with sections missing. Some had gaping holes in their chest and upper body areas.

According to police, 150 people have been interrogated in relation to the incident. Sixteen were taken into custody after searching nearly 280 houses in the Naula area, DIG Central Division Kingsley Ekanayake said.

Condemning the bombing as "an act of savagery", President Mahinda Rajapaksa urged the Sinhalese majority not to be provoked by the "brutality" of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.



Vanni bus blast claims civilians including children

SRI LANKAN military's Deep Penetration Unit targeted a bus ferrying children from a sports event in Vanni killing 20 people including 11 children.

On Tuesday January 29, 20 civilians, including 11 school children, a teacher of Thadchanaamaruthamadu Roman Catholic Tamil Mixed School, the driver, conductor and two hospital workers were killed and 14 wounded when a Deep Penetration Unit of Sri Lanka Army triggered a Claymore mine targeting the bus carrying school children in Madu division of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam controlled territory. Eight school children were among the wounded.

Dr Vettinathan, a local medical official told the BBC News website: "There are about 20 casualties (in hospital)...four or five of the victims are in a serious condition. There is one doctor in the hospital."

Bishop Rayappu Joseph told the BBC that the bus travelling near the town of Mannar was hit by a claymore mine in an area controlled by the Tamil Tigers.

The bus was 1 km away from Madu church, after having picked up the children at Thadchanaamaruthamadu and was on its way to Paalampiddi from Madu.

Bishop Joseph said victims of the attack had been taken to Pallamadu hospital, south-west of Mannar.

The principal of the displaced Chinna Pandivirichchaan school, S.M.G Lambert, 46, was one of the 12 critically wounded, transferred to Muzhankaavil. He was one of the seven severely wounded patients who were later transferred to Kilinochchi hospital. Two of them succumbed to their injuries on the way. Dead bodies

of the two victims were handed over to Akkaraayan hospital.

Rev. Fr. Emilianus Pillai, from Madu Church, told TamilNet that tension prevailed at the attack site as SLA started firing artillery shells after the explosion, causing panic among the civilians who were helping the victims.

The head of the rebels' peace secretariat, S Pulithevan, told the BBC that the children were returning from a sports meeting.

He said that seven adults, including teachers, were among the dead and blamed the Sri Lankan military for planting a roadside bomb.

The Sri Lankan military, however, denied any involvement.

In a letter to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, B. Nadesan, head of the political wing of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), said the army's Deep Penetration Unit had "deliberately" targeted the school bus.

"Since the present president of Sri Lanka took office in November 2005, 2,056 Tamil civilians, including 132 Tamil children, have been massacred by the state forces," he added.

He said the government had not only abrogated the truce it signed in 2002 with the LTTE but had "adamantly" refused to allow UN human rights monitoring in the war zone.

Nadesan claimed that the LTTE had cooperated with Norwegian peace brokers and declared its commitment to the truce pact "100 percent".

"It should be obvious to the international community that there is only one path open to regain the rights of the Tamil people and that is for the international community to recognise the sovereignty of the Tamil nation," Nadesan said.

NEWS

Day of horror

TamilNet

WHILE attempts by Sri Lanka Army (SLA) to breach Tiger defense lines to advance into LTTE territory have become daily occurrences in Mannaar-Madu theatre of battle, civilians have become the silent casualties bearing the brunt of SLA rage.

Hundreds of families have been displaced and live in refugee camps, and many have been traumatized by injuries and deaths to family members due to aerial attacks, SLA mortar fire, and claymore attacks by SLA's Deep Penetration Units (DPUs).

Ms. Mary Consulor from Thadchanaamaruthamadu refugee camp is one such victim.

When her bunker at the refugee camp came under SLA shelling on [January 27], Mary sustained minor injuries, and her child, Rajani Peries, was critically wounded. She faced the crisis with the courage of a mother in a warzone: she admitted her son to Pallamadu hospital and stayed to nurse him. She sent the other children to stay with her first daughter, Shobhana Peries, who is married and living near Madu Church.

On Tuesday, her two daughters, Rosmy Peries, 17, and Shobhana, 23, with her 18-month-old baby boy, J. Pradeepan, and Mary's two other sons, Jeniston Peries, 12, and Antony Peries, 17, went to the Pallamadu hospital by bus to see their wounded sibling.

The bus by which they left was attacked by the SLA's Deep Penetration Unit that triggered a claymore mine. They returned to the hospital as fatally wounded victims, or didn't return at all.

As tears stream down her

face, Mary repeats her tragic tale.

A native of Periya Panndivirichchaan, Mary was displaced and was living in the Thadchanaamaruthamadu refugee camp. When her child was severely wounded in the SLA shelling last Sunday, she admitted him to hospital and was taking care of her wounded son who regained consciousness only on January 28.

Her eldest daughter, Shobana, with her baby, Mary's two sons and another daughter, came to see them at the hospital by the 7:30 a.m. bus. The five of them left the hospital and took the 1:30 bus.

On the way, Shobana's younger sister Rosmy, got off at Thadchanaamaruthamadu. The others were in the bus on their way to Madu when the claymore attack took place. Also on board were schoolchildren returning from a school sports event.

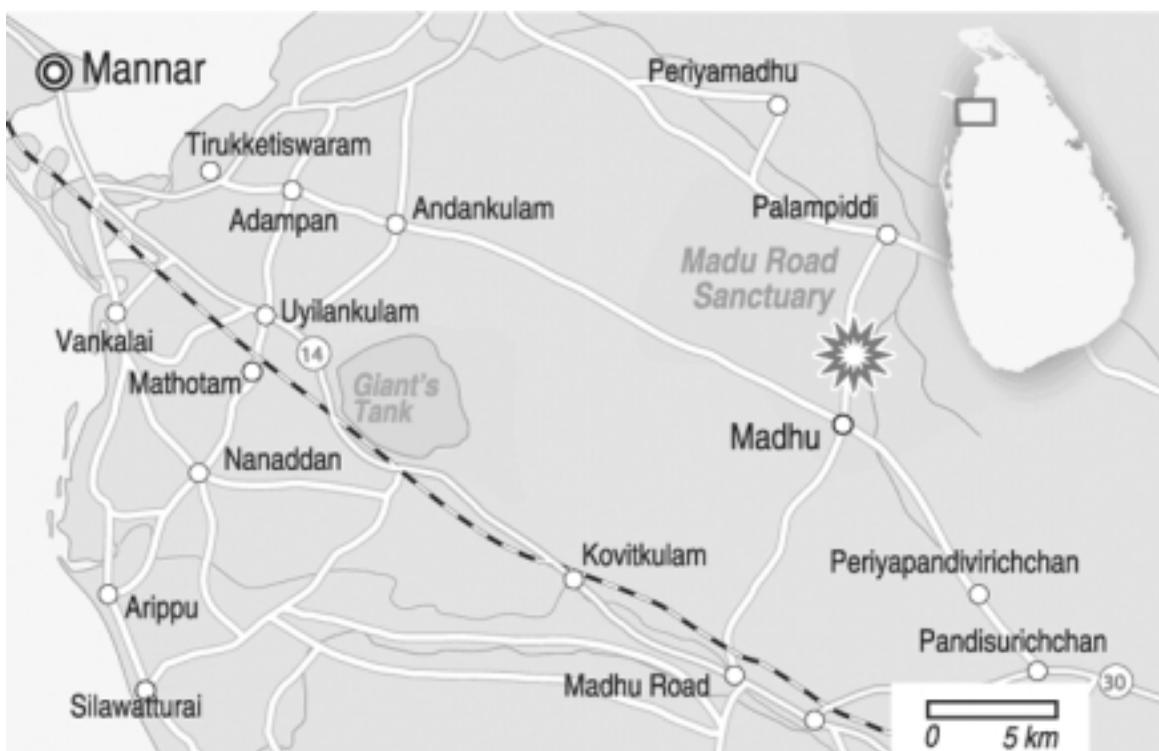
Mary recounts how the wounded in the claymore blast were brought to the hospital in ambulances and private vehicles from Madu.

Stunned by the wounded and dying young and the rivers of blood, Mary Shobana as she was brought by ambulance to Pallamadu hospital.

Shobana was wounded in her legs and hand, and was in a state of shock. When Mary asked her the fate of her baby Pratheepan, Shobana said she was unaware of what had happened to the infant, or even to her two brothers.

Jeniston was brought to the hospital with wounds a while later. Antony and baby Pradeepan are still missing.

Mary is now at Kilinochchi hospital looking after Jeniston and Shobana. Her youngest child wounded two days earlier is still at the Pallamadu hospital.



Bus attacks across the island claimed civilian lives with two major attacks in Dambulla (opposite page left top and bottom) and in Madu (opposite page right and above). One of those injured in the Madu crash was Mary Consulor's teenage son Jeniston (top). Photos TamilNet, Daily Mirror

TRO condemns claymore attack on civilians

The Tamils Rehabilitation Organisation released a statement condemning the claymore attack on a civilian bus in Madu and listing the history of attacks against civilian vehicles carried out by the Sri Lankan Army. The full statement follows:

TAMILS Rehabilitation Organization (TRO) condemns, in the strongest possible terms, the gruesome, terrorist attack by a Sri Lanka Army (SLA) Deep Penetration Unit (DPU) on a civilian bus travelling to Paalampiddi from Madhu at 2:25 on 29 January 2008.

The attack killed 20 people, 11 of whom school children, and injured 14, eight of whom were children.

As the victims are buried, TRO wishes to convey our condolences to the victims and their families.

This attack has plunged the population of the entire region

into mourning and is a grave breach of the most fundamental tenets of humanity.

Such targeted attacks on civilians are forbidden under international humanitarian law and are never acceptable.

The Government of Sri Lanka must stop any direct or indiscriminate attacks on civilians.

It is unfortunate that the Co-Chairs (United States, Japan, Norway, European Union), international human rights and humanitarian organization and Sri Lankan Civil Society have chosen to remain silent and not vociferously condemn this attack.

The international community

seems to have given the Government of Sri Lanka carte blanche to prosecute its war against the Tamil people.

This is the 7th Claymore mine attack by the SLA DPU's on civilians in the LTTE controlled areas.

These attacks have in total killed 40 persons and injured 22.

Amongst the dead there have been 18 school children, one priest, 1 doctor, 2 nurses and a TRO humanitarian worker.

The attacks, which are described below, have targeted ambulances (twice), humanitarian vehicles (twice), a mobile medical health service (twice) and a civilian bus.

SLA DPU Attacks:

27 November 2007: Seven school girls, three male volunteers and the driver of the van who were providing rural first aid service, were killed in a claymore mine attack carried out by an SLA DPU unit while travelling on the Kokkaavil - Thunukkai Road

25 November 2007: An ambulance from the Muzhangkaavil hospital was the target of a SLA DPU Claymore attack at Mudkompan. The driver of the ambulance, Thavaseelan (29), was seriously wounded in the attack. The ambulance was engaged in providing medical service to displaced civilians.

26 September 2007: Rev. Fr. Nicholaspillai Packiyaranjith, 40, the Mannar district coordinator of Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) was killed by a SLA DPU Claymore attack the Mankulam - Vellankulam road.

The Reverend was engaged in humanitarian relief work and was transporting baby milk and other essential humanitarian supplies for displaced children.

09 August 2006: The SLA DPU attacked yet another ambulance killing a medical doctor, his wife, two nurses and the driver.

The ambulance, from Nedunkerni hospital, was hit by three Claymore mines in a row.

08 June 2006: Four health officials, including a nurse and the driver of the vehicle, from the Tamil Eelam Health Service Mobile Medical Service, were wounded at Akkarayan when an SLA DPU team exploded a Claymore mine.

24 March 2006: TRO humanitarian worker Muthuraja Aruleswaran, was killed and 3 TRO directors, including the Assistant Executive Director of the TRO, Vadivel Ravichandran, 38, were wounded in the attack.

EDITORIAL

TAMIL GUARDIAN

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60 Years of Oppression

Whatever suffering the Sinhala state and its international allies inflict on us, we are not going to give up now.

Sri Lanka marked sixty years of independence from Britain this week. As such, February 4th was truly representative of this ethnocracy's sordid state of affairs. The highlight of the 'multi-ethnic' country's anniversary ceremonies was a parade by the all-Sinhala military which President Mahinda Rajapakse and his commanders reviewed amidst tight security. Elsewhere, the island was wracked by armed conflict, extra-judicial violence and humanitarian suffering. Quite appropriately, the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) wasn't even invited to the state celebrations. The main opposition Sinhala parties refused to attend, though this has more to do with their envy of President Rajapakse's near messianic standing amongst the majority community than the protests of poor governance they cited. The main Muslim party, the SLMC, also stayed away: their community is now bearing the crushing deprivations of majoritarianism.

Sri Lanka's quagmire has been aptly described as 'a crisis of the state.' But what is not easily accepted by the international community, in its impatience to bring peace to the island, is that this crisis is the cause and not the consequence of three decades of conflict. Today's abysmal state of affairs is merely an intensification of chauvinist dynamics that, having developed beneath the surface before the colonial handover, erupted into the open soon after the British left. This is not to blame 'ancient hatreds' but to argue that Britain's concentration of power in Sinhala hands enabled a chauvinist project to masquerade as nation-building.

In discussing this, we quote here, with utmost respect, from the work of numerous scholars, whose disparate writings over the years on Sri Lanka's crisis, have largely been ignored in the ahistoric, formulaic and ultimately futile international efforts to reimpose, as 'peace', Sinhala domination of the island and the Tamils.

To begin with, the state is a colonial construct: whilst there is scholarly disagreement as to pre-colonial history, the imposition of a single administrative structure for the entire island was incontestably a British colonial decision, one which came after centuries of incremental (Portuguese, Dutch and British) conquests of its parts. Nonetheless, at independence in 1948, Sri Lanka, with high human development indicators and well-developed infrastructure, was expected - by the colonial power - to become a model democracy. Sri Lanka instead descended into ethnic strife, crisis and vicious conflict.

As such, today's abysmal state of affairs is

merely an intensification of chauvinist dynamics that, having developed beneath the surface during colonial handover, erupted into the open soon after the British left. Which is why in 1956, Sinhala leaders were readily able to seek election by appealing to Sinhala chauvinist sentiment. What is important about the introduction of 'Sinhala Only' in 1956 is not its discriminatory effect, but how it was emblematic of the mindset of the Sinhala majority, exemplified by the popular support it enjoyed.

It is noteworthy that it was democratic logic of the 'will of the majority' that legitimised this and subsequent acts of discrimination. The justification was, as the chauvinists still insist, the Tamils were 'privileged' by the colonial power - though it is not clear why the British should have loved us more than the Sinhalese. Meanwhile it is quietly forgotten that the missionary schools (which turned out the English-speaking natives for the colonial administration) were readily accepted in the Tamil areas and resisted in the Sinhala south.

It is in the first three decades of Sinhala majoritarian rule, rather than in the past thirty years of armed conflict, that the present-day impediments to building a 'liberal peace' in Sri Lanka became entrenched. Even by the mid seventies, before the armed conflict had begun, Sri Lanka 'had regressed to an illiberal, ethnocentric regime bent on Sinhala superordination and Tamil subjugation.' A policy of recruiting only Sinhalese into the military was introduced in 1962, the beginning of today's ethnically pure army. And it was state-sponsored Sinhala colonisation that led Tamils to fear 'they may become a minority in their own provinces.' That the demographic dilution of Tamil-majority areas 'would render any devolution of powers as a solution to the ethnic conflict less effective' was not lost on the Tamils, even as they agitated, peacefully, for an end to the discrimination. This is why the slogan of 'traditional homelands,' is first and foremost a political claim meant to ensure the security of the Tamils and is integrally linked to our demands for autonomy and independence.

The passing of the republican constitution in 1972 - apart from changing the name from 'Ceylon' to the Sinhala-preferred 'Sri Lanka' - removed the safeguards of the previous British-supplied constitution, gave a pre-eminent position to Buddhism, in addition to the Sinhala language, and most importantly, concentrated power further in the Sinhala-dominated legislature. As such, amidst contemporary international insistence that Tamil

demands must be pursued through democratic mechanisms, it should be remembered that it was the failure of democratic processes, for reasons that have become more entrenched today, that both the demand for independence and later armed conflict emerged.

Thus, while antagonistic ethnic mobilization was not an inevitable outcome after 1948, 'what ultimately transpired went beyond what any self-respecting minority would tolerate.' Moreover, the period since independence has been 'punctuated by bouts of annihilatory violence directed against the Tamils in 1956, 1958, 1977, 1981 and 1983' in which thousands of Tamils, including women and children were massacred, Tamil property was destroyed, and hundreds of thousands made refugees.' These periodic explosions of violence against Tamils represent efforts to put them back in their places on grounds they have become too assertive and need to be taught a lesson, as President J. R. Jayawardene bluntly stated in 1983.

It is the insistent ignoring of this post-colonial history that has resulted in the abject failure of international efforts to encourage, foster and ultimately impose a 'solution' on Sri Lanka. 'Decades of potent socialization through familial, religious, educational, and media practices have resulted in a Sinhala Buddhist nationalist hegemony that spans the political, socio-economic and cultural landscape of Sri Lanka.'

However, the international community continues to insist on abstract and manifestly untenable characterizations of the now intractable conflict. Rather than recognize the resilience of entrenched racism within the centralized and fortified Sri Lanka state, sporadic and laughable efforts to knit 'ethnic harmony' amongst people in parts of the island are combined with much pontification on the appropriateness or not of various constitutional models and, more importantly, 'what the extremist Tamil Tigers will settle for.'

As for the Tamils, our ambitions, like those of any decent people are to live free and peacefully with our neighbours. We seek not to restore some ancient glory or fulfil some manifest destiny. We seek not the subjugation of another people or assertion of any racial supremacy. Our demand for the independent state of Eelam is not a quest for 'ethnic purity' but for the irrevocable and irreducible establishment of our security and dignity. After 60 years of unending oppression and violent repression, we are convinced more than ever of this truth. And, whatever suffering the Sinhala state and its international allies inflict on us, we are not going to give up now.

OPINION

The moderate position on Eelam

J. T. Janani
Tamil Guardian

THIS is the moderate position on Eelam: Eelam is your right. It is not a gift, not an act of charity but something that is already yours. As with all things, you can claim it or lose it. Others can try to take it away from you but that would constitute an assault, a theft.

When the founding fathers of America made the case for their nation, they did not rely on a cultural identity that had evolved over thousands of years. They did not rely on a common language, let alone a few thousand years of a shared literary heritage. They did not even rely on the concept of a traditional homeland. For, they had none of these on their side.

They relied instead on something more intrinsic and universal. They relied on the rights of man.

And so to quote from Thomas Paine, who articulated the concept most clearly in his seminal book of the same name:

"The fact therefore must be that the individuals themselves, each in his own personal and sovereign right, entered into a compact with each other to produce a government: and this is the only mode in which governments have a right to arise, and the only principle on which they have a right to exist ..."

It follows that, by these principles, the nation of Eelam, can have and does need only one form of legitimacy: a compact entered by the people who choose to belong to that nation.

Of course, those of us, who have a few thousand years of historical cohesion as a "civilisation", a common culture and heritage, and more recently a shared history of oppression and injustice, to bind us together, may not feel the need to explicitly enter into a "compact" with each other; we may take it for granted that it exists and that it has done so implicitly for millennia.

Nevertheless it important to remember that this "compact" or agreement is all that is required. Think of it as similar to saying "I do" in a wedding ceremony, except there is no officiating priest, only ourselves.

Eelam exists because we do.

Furthermore, according to the principles of Paine, where a government arises which contradicts the compact, it is illegitimate. So if the Tamils of Sri Lanka have an agreement with each other to form a government, then any claim by the Sinhalese that they are the "appropriate" government for us is illegitimate.

Eelam exists because we can.

It follows that one nation cannot be "given" to another. So for example the British colonial administrators could not have "given" the Tamil nation to the

nation of Sri Lanka. It was not theirs to give. Neither can the International community, today, give us Eelam. It is not theirs to give. Neither is it theirs to deny.

Thomas Paine went on to elaborate on why he believes this right to form a government exists. He argues that in their natural state, humans are social creatures; that it is in their best interests to congregate in societies.

One reason for this is the diversification of talent: it is in man's best interest to specialise in his area of talent and to rely on the different talents and abilities of others. So a social structure where each person contributes something useful to society: a doctor, a priest, a teacher and so forth arises naturally. It is in man's best interests to trade with each other and to regulate trade in some manner.

In fact that governments are hardly required except to fulfil certain duties that might in exceptional cases be otherwise neglected.

And so he says: "The more perfect civilisation is, the less occasion has it for government, because the more does it regulate its own affairs, and govern itself."

And from here, we can see that those geopolitical actors who do not benefit from the existence of Eelam, but whose own forms of government, and in the case of the United States, whose very existence is based on the principles enunciated by Paine, have only one line of attack:

They can say that the Tamils, do not really want Eelam. We can call this the "Only we know what you want" argument.

They can say that the Tamil "civilisation", to use Thomas Paine's formulation, is not ready to govern itself, that we lack 'capacity'. We call this the "you are too primitive" argument.

But because the second argument cannot stand on its own, the first is the foundation to their attack.

For the international bureaucrats, the foreign secretaries, ambassadors, ministers - the Robert Blakes, Kim Howells etc - of this world know, that the basis of their own legitimacy, the legitimacy of their states and governments arise from Paine's principles.

Hence they also know they have no right to deny the people of Eelam their right should they wish to claim it.

However, in pursuit of their own selfish interests, they tell us that we don't really want Eelam. They tell us that the "moderate" Tamil has entered into a "compact" (to quote Paine) to be governed by the brutal Rajapakse government, the Wickremasinghe government or in the past the



Massive Tamil rallies have demonstrated our united desire to belong to the nation of Tamil Eelam

Jeyawardene government, the numerous Bandaranaiques (SW, Sirimavo, Chandrika) and so on.

They then point out all the disadvantages of Eelam. Junior minister Kim Howell told the British Parliament last month that partition would be bloody, for example.

Some roll out a number of other issues: the borders are too long, the future will be unstable (as if it could be any more unstable than it currently is); there will be anarchy because "you" do not know how to run a government (as if it is easy to form a government worse than the current, unchosen Sinhala chauvinist one); it will not be economically viable (as if the current semi starvation in Jaffna or chronic displacement in the East is a state of economic well being).

There are other ways in which they tell us that the "compact" for Eelam is a bad idea. They say that the pro-Eelam position is "extremist".

Extremist? Holocaust denial is extremist. The denial of some Israelis of the Palestinians' right to exist in their own homelands might be extremist. A belief that we should all live under a new global "caliphate" or Islamic government with Islamic law, the Al Qaeda position, might be extremist. The belief that one may arbitrarily invade another people's land and take control of their

resources, otherwise known as the "Bush Doctrine", might be taken as extremist.

In short, what is extremist is to take away from others what belongs to them.

But asserting the rights of man? The same rights asserted by the founding father of the United States of America? Claiming a right which according to all the current norms belongs to us already? This is extremist?

Well even for a propaganda war aimed at a "primitive" people incapable of forming a government, this is a little disingenuous.

And further, in line with the "too primitive" argument, they tell us that the Tamils do not have a feasible government in waiting. They say that the LTTE is "authoritarian", that it will be too unacceptable to the international community.

But, the point is that the Tamils have a right to choose their own government and they will exercise that right once Eelam is declared, perhaps even making mistakes along the way. But that too is the prerogative of the people of Eelam.

Meanwhile, the 'extremists' can be subject to ruthless violence. The international community is silent as the Sinhalese silence those who speak for Eelam: journalists, members of parliament, rights activists, aid workers. They may support the

stationing of an occupying Sinhala army in Jaffna so the people there can understand what good governance is.

Yet for all their dissembling, the "international community" know they have no right to deny the people of Eelam their right should the people of Eelam stand up to claim it.

For Eelam is not a gift. It is not something one begs for or pleads for, or lobbies for. It is an agreement between a people. A right cannot be granted or revoked, but it can be exercised. Eelam is a decisive act.

Consequently, the United Nations cannot "give" us Eelam. They can merely decide, after the event whether they will "recognise" it: by this is meant whether they will allow it to vote in their resolutions, or sit on their committees such as the Human Rights Committee on which Sri Lanka, laughably, has a membership.

So there is only one answer from the moderate Tamil to the international community, which cuts through the fog of deception:

"We understand that Eelam is our right and the right of our children. We decide to claim it, on behalf of ourselves, and our generations to come. We and only we decide its existence. We will not be deceived by 'compromises' or cowed into not claiming that which is ours. We, the people, are Eelam. Accept it."

NEWS

Living dangerously: journalists in Sri Lanka

P.K. Balachandran

IANS

SRI LANKAN journalists are going through a trying period. Government leaders are taking a hard line on media freedom, with even senior media persons facing death threats and murderous assaults.

Media watchdogs, both national and international, have publicised serious incidents of intimidation by the state and other agencies directed against media organisations. But President Mahinda Rajapaksa denies any repression.

'The media here is free. Newspapers are full of criticism against the government,' Rajapaksa pointed out recently. However, incidents of intimidation abound.

The latest scary case was the stabbing of Suhaib M. Kassim, the associate editor of the state-owned Tamil daily 'Thinakaran' at his house here Monday. The watchdog Free Media Movement (FMM) said the attack on a senior journalist like Suhaib demonstrated the 'vulnerability' of journalists in 'highly militarised' Sri Lanka.

Last week, two men stabbed journalist Lal Hemantha Athula Mawalage of the state-owned TV station 'Rupavahini' while he was on his way home.

Mawalage had come into the limelight when he delivered a fiery speech against the controversial Deputy Labour Minister Mervyn Silva, who had stormed into the TV station and assaulted news director T.M.G. Chandrasekhara on Dec 27. Angry TV station staff then beat up minister Silva. The incident was shown on all TV channels to the embarrassment of the Rajapaksa government.

While the minister went scot-free, Chandrasekhara was transferred to the post of director of research. The media reported that Chandrasekhara sought the transfer 'citing threats to his life'.

The FMM said that on Jan 7, three leading journalists with MBC TV and Radio Network that covered the Rupavahini episode were threatened with death by the underworld. MTV head Chevaan Daniel, Sirasa TV director Kingsley Ratnayake and its news director Susil Kedelpitiya lodged complaints with the police about the threats.

Earlier, a journalist with 'The Sunday Leader', Arthur Wamanan, was arrested for exposing the minister's alleged corruption.

Two top journalists of the Jaffna-based Tamil daily 'Utha-

yan' are too scared to go home because they face threats. The resident editor and the news editor have had to practically live in the office since May 2006. 'I can go out only with police escort,' news editor Kuhanathan told IANS.

Tamil journalists who get into trouble are routinely suspected of being supporters of the Tamil Tigers. Over all, critical journalists, no matter what the ethnicity, are dubbed 'traitors'.

Indeed, some Sinhalese journalists have been arrested for suspected links with the LTTE, leading to a new term 'Sinhala Koti' or 'Sinhalese Tigers'.

In a letter to President Rajapaksa this month, the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) said the charge of 'traitor' was made against Tamil TV journalist Sri Ranga Jeyaratnam by Tamil cabinet minister Douglas Devananda.

Army commander Lt.Gen. Sarath Fonseka told the state-owned media Jan 2 that a few scribes were indeed traitors and that they were the 'real obstacles' in the war against terror.

Last year, the defence ministry's website had for many days carried an article making insinuations against Iqbal Athas, the defence correspondent of 'The Sunday Times'. Athas was accused of 'assisting in the psychological operations of the LTTE terrorists'.

The CPJ told President Rajapaksa: 'Verbal, written and physical assaults on journalists are attacks on the very fabric of a democratic society. We call on you to make sure that members of your government desist from such acts.' This has had no impact.

And in an interview to the Sinhalese daily 'Irida Lankadeepa' last week, Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa - a brother of the president - called for censorship on military news.

'I think there is no need to report anything on the military. People do not want to know the quantity and kind of arms we acquire. This is not media freedom. I will tell without fear that if I have power I will not allow any of these things to be written. Everything in this country has become prostituted. Like peace, even the media is completely prostituted,' Gotabhaya thundered after naming two leading media institutions as the principal culprits.



Kidnappings, followed by the dumping of bodies have increased the apprehension among all civilians but especially media personnel in government controlled areas who have been specifically targeted

'Democracy cornerstone eroding'

THE safety of journalists in Sri Lanka is in serious jeopardy as several serious attacks and anti-media statements by government officials demonstrate a lack of respect for the value of media freedom in the country and international media watchdog said this week.

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) said it is alarmed by Sri Lankan Defense Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa's brazen public call Sunday to censor the media and reintroduce criminal defamation laws.

Gotabhaya, who is the brother of Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa, told the Sunday Lankadeepa that he advocated press censorship, harsh punishments for "critical" reporting on the military and military expenditures, and a criminal defamation law.

"I told the President that we need to exercise press censorship from the beginning. I have been telling him that we need to bring in laws that stipulate harsh punishments for such reporting," he said.

"If I have the power I will not allow any of these things to be written," the defence secretary said in reference to reporting on the military.

"This is an open intimidation of the media," said CPJ Executive Director Joel Simon. "The Sri Lankan press sorely needs space to report independently on the escalating instability in the country, free of government intimidation."

Also protesting Gotabhaya's threats, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) said Sri Lanka's democratic stability was being eroded by attacks on journalists.

"Continuing attacks and harassment are intended to send a message to the media community and to spread fear," IFJ Asia-Pacific Director Jacqueline Park said.

"Media freedom requires respect for the right of differing and critical opinions to be voiced, particularly in times of conflict. Freedom of expression is the cornerstone of any civil democracy, but attacks on journalists are eroding Sri Lanka's democratic stability."

The international groups joined local groups the Free Media Movement (FMM), the Sri Lankan Working Journalists' Association (SLWJA), the Federation of Media Employees Trade Union (FMETU), the Sri Lanka Muslim Media Forum (SLMMF) and the

Sri Lanka Tamil Journalists' Alliance (SLTJA) in condemning all attacks on journalists.

Ever since President Mahinda Rajapakse came to power in late 2005, intimidation and harassment of the media, not unusual in Sri Lanka, has steadily worsened.

In July last year, the International Media Group (IMG) noted that since August 2005, 11 media workers have been killed, including Subash Chandrabos of the Tamil monthly, Nilram, and Selvarajah Rajivarman, of the Tamil language Uthayan newspaper. Both men were murdered in Sri Lanka government-controlled areas.

"Pressures on the media have multiplied over the recent months with increasing fears for the safety of journalists, especially those operating in the embattled North and East", the IMG said after visiting Sri Lanka in June 2007 to discuss issues related to media freedom in the country.

"There appears to be complete lack of progress in the investigation of cases of murdered and attacked journalists, and no suspect in such attacks has been taken to court since the current president came to office," the IMG report noted then.

NEWS

Killing and abduction of civilians increase in Jaffna

VIOLENCE against Tamil civilians continues to escalate in the Sri Lanka military controlled Jaffna peninsula with 10 people killed and 15 injured in the last week alone.

Most of the killings were carried out in southern Jaffna peninsula, Thenmaraadchi, close to the Forward Defence Lines at Muhamaalai. In each case unidentified armed men who carried out the attacks escaped through Sri Lanka Army's (SLA's) High Security Zones and checkpoints without being challenged.

Last Saturday night gunmen riding a motorbike pursued a Tamil man riding his motorbike along Raja Veethy, Koppay, towards Jaffna town. The gunmen sprayed the victim with bullets near the LTTE Heroes Cemetery in Koppay and fled from the scene. The man killed was identified by his wife as Francis Rohan, 26, from Chulipuram, who had been paying a visit to relatives in Kopy East when he was gunned down.

The previous day armed men shot and killed two civilians in Kodikaamam unleashing panic among the people in Thenmaraadchi. Friday morning around 7:30 a.m., a 24-year-old female was shot and killed at her house on Jaffna-Point Pedro-Kachchaay road and a 26-year-old male was gunned down, 1 km away, around 10:00 a.m. on Allarai-Kachchaay road in Kodikaamam.

The young woman killed was identified as Sivarasa Suki, an unmarried woman living with her parents. The killers forcibly entered her house, near a Heroes' Cemetery, and sprayed her with bullets, while her mother was watching. Suki's mother, who fainted in shock, was rushed to Chaavakachcheari hospital in critical condition.

The male victim was identified as Uthayan, a family man.

Two days prior to that, on Wednesday 30 January, Kodikaamam witnessed a massacre of three siblings by a motorbike squad allegedly operated by the SLA. Around 8.00pm, armed men on motorcycles shot and killed three siblings at Choalaiyamman Koayiladi in Manduvil. The attackers, alleged to be members of the SLA Field Bike Squad, surrounded the house, ordered the members of the family to go inside a room for inquiry and sprayed

bullets on them, killing two, including a mother of two children. The children narrowly escaped from the bullets.

The victims were identified as Palasundaram Baskaran, 30, Thushyanthan Paleswari, 21, mother of two, and Palasundaram Parthipan, 19. Baskaran and Paleswari were killed on the spot. Parthipan succumbed to his injuries hours later, due to the inability to get him timely medical assistance.

The killings took place in the same area where three bodies of youths abducted and shot dead had been dumped by the killers.

Whilst the killings have spiralled, abductions too have been on the riser. In the latest incident, on Monday 28 January, the families of two men lodged complaints with the Sri Lanka Human Rights Commission (SLHRC) in Jaffna.

A young family man, Balasingam Yasotharan, 21, was forcibly abducted at gun point from his house in Oorelu on Friday afternoon by two men on motorcycles, according to complaint made by his wife with SLHRC.

Selvarajah Gajendran, 31, an Internally Displaced Person (IDP) who was a labourer by profession, living in IDP camp at Oadakkarai, Changkaanai was feared abducted Thursday after leaving for work in Jaffna town, his family members noted in a complaint registered with the SLHRC. Gajendran was displaced from Kaangkeasanththurai in 1990 due to SLA offensives.

Whilst the spate of killings and abductions have terrorised the locals, a bomb explosion on Thursday 31 January around 10:30 a.m. on Aadiyapaatham Road in Thirunelveali, Jaffna, killed four civilians and injured at least fifteen. The injured were rushed to Jaffna Teaching hospital. There were no SLA troopers or vehicles at the spot when a claymore mine attached to a bicycle exploded, civilians in the area said. Three of the dead were identified as Ponnuththurai Krishnakumar, 32, of Koandaavil, Sankarappillai Muththukumar, 60, from Urumpiraay South and Thirunavukkarasu Pagnchaadcharanathan, 44, of Koandaavil East. The fourth body, in a charred and disfigured state, was proving difficult to even identify. The bomb, believed to be a claymore mine, was attached to a parked bicycle.



Disappearances, killings and abductions continue across Jaffna, adding to the difficulties of civilian life

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60 YEARS

Frayed ethnic relations, but Sri Lanka says winning war

SRI LANKA'S president insisted Monday his government was winning the war against the Tamil Tiger as the country marked its 60th anniversary of independence after a bloody weekend of violence.

Kicking off a display of military hardware along Colombo's sea front promenade ringed by stiff security, President Mahinda Rajapakse also brushed off threats of foreign aid cuts due to the worsening ethnic conflict and human rights situation.

Interestingly, Sri Lanka's main opposition parties were conspicuous by their absence at the main government function.

The United National Party (UNP), Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) boycotted the event.

The Tamil National Alliance (TNA) was not invited.

Monday's celebrations went ahead despite threats blamed on the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), and following two weekend bomb attacks that killed 34 civilians and wounded nearly 200.

Because of the tense situation in Colombo, the government closed all schools for a week. An Independence Day exhibition popularly known as 'Diyata Kirula' was postponed to Thursday.

Thousands of troops drawn from the three services and also the police were deployed to keep a watchful eye on all pedestrians and vehicles in practically every nook and corner of Colombo.

Mobile phone operators, apparently under instructions from the security agencies, had barred the SMS facility because terrorists could use it to convey messages.

In his speech before a select audience of ministers, officials, political leaders, diplomats and select members of the public, President Rajapaksa claimed that the world supported his war against terrorism and separatism.

"Our neighbours trust us and the international community's confidence in us has not been reduced one iota," he thundered. "The civilised world understands that we are fighting terrorism, the most ruthless terrorist group in the world."

International aid had not been stopped as alleged by some, he said, and added that neighbouring India and also the developed world empathized with Sri Lanka

because they themselves were facing the scourge of terrorism.

Promising a speedy annihilation of the LTTE, Rajapakse made an appeal to the Sinhala public to bear up the present situation of heightened attacks by the Tigers which he claimed was only a temporary impediment to the country's progress.

The president said the "challenge bestowed upon us by history is the defeat of terrorism," and asserted government forces had cornered the Tigers in the northern part of the island.

"We faced this challenge squarely without avoiding it. Our security forces are today achieving victories against terrorism unprecedented in history," he said in an address to the nation from Colombo's Galle Face road.

"Terrorism is receiving an unprecedented defeat," said Rajapakse, whose government pulled out of a tattered Norwegian-brokered truce with the Tigers last month.

According to the Sri Lankan defence ministry, the LTTE - who are fighting for independence for the Tamil homeland in the island's Northeast - have lost at least 908 fighters since the beginning of the year, compared to just 36 government soldiers killed.

The Freedom Day celebrations were marked by a heavy security operation, with thousands of additional police and troops called out and mobile phone text messaging cut.

Sri Lanka's navy also stepped up patrols to prevent sea-borne attacks by the Sea Tigers, the LTTE's naval unit, and air defence systems were on alert amid fears of a attacks by the Tigers' light aircraft.

Two hours before the ceremonies got underway here, suspected Tigers set off a bomb and destroyed an electricity transformer in a Colombo suburb, police said, but there were no casualties.

They said a more powerful bomb was found and defused hours earlier in the same area.

To prevent the smuggling of bombs, police said they had imposed new restrictions on vehicles travelling from areas near the LTTE's controlled areas in the north.

"The fear has really got into people's minds," student Janani Wijetunge told the BBC News

Continued on p13



The Sri Lankan government celebrated the war (this page) as Tamils overseas protested (opposite page)

British Tamils mark Sri Lanka's '60 years of Oppression'

TAMIL expatriates in Britain marked Sri Lanka's independence day with protests and publicity campaigns highlighting '60 years of oppression'.

Hundreds of Tamils participated in a lively demonstration outside 10 Downing Street, the Prime Minister's official residence.

Another group of expatriates hosted a major photo exhibition of Sri Lanka's post-independence history highlighting the state's repression of the Tamils.

The British Tamils photo exhibition, staged with the professed aim of informing the second-generation of Tamils in the UK about the past six decades of 'oppression, ethnic cleansing and discrimination that the Tamil community has faced at the hands of the sovereign state of Sri

Lanka, was staged near the British parliament.

The exhibition highlighted the destruction and suffering of the post-independence anti-Tamil riots, the state's crushing of Tamil democratic protests, the outlawing of democratic articulation of independence, the destruction of Tamil homes, places of worship and cultural icons, like the Jaffna library.

The all day event at the Methodist Central Hall in Westminster drew curious visitors from the British public as well as several MPs, including Joan Ryan MP (North Enfield), Jeremy Corbyn MP (Islington North) and Robert Evans MEP (London), organisers said.

"Over a thousand visitors from various communities walked patiently viewing the photos

that were explained by volunteers," the BTF statement said.

The Sri Lankan High Commission had put extreme pressure on the venue's management to cancel the event, claiming the exhibition was supporting terrorism, sources said.

However the venue had pointed out that British security forces had not objected to the Tamil event, sources said.

A British Tamils Forum statement said the organisation "intends to organise the same at various major cities in the UK, Europe and through our Sister Associations in countries like Canada, Australian, US and South Africa."

Meanwhile, hundreds of Tamils protested outside the British Prime Minister's residence, 10 Downing Street.

Chanting slogans and holding

60 YEARS



banners protesting Sri Lanka's "state terror" and "60 years of Oppression", the protestors handed out leaflets to the passing public.

"Whilst Sri Lanka celebrates independence, hundreds of thousands of our people are suffering in the Northeast at the hands of this state," a TYO representative

told media. The event, from 11am to 3pm was organised by the Tamil Youth Organisation (UK). A memorandum appealing to

Britain to act to end the Sri Lankan state's oppression was handed over to the authorities during the demonstration, TYO (UK) representatives said.

The protestors were entertained by a street drama with actors parodying the statements of Sri Lanka's militarist President, Mahinda Rajapakse.

NEWS

Back to the future: APRC reverts to 1987

UNDER heavy pressure from the international community to put forward a credible political solution to the long-drawn ethnic conflict in the island, the Sri Lankan government finally unveiled its proposal to devolve power - a recommendation to go back 20 years.

After meeting 63 times and deliberating for over 250 hours, the All Party Representative Committee (APRC), which was set up by President Mahinda Rajapakse to derive a political solution to the conflict essentially proposed the implementation of the 1987 13th Amendment to the Constitution.

The APRC, which include neither the main opposition United National Party (UNP) nor the third largest political party in Sri Lanka, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) nor the largest Tamil political Party in the parliament, the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), was simply ordered by President to restrict its recommendations to the implementation of the 13th amendment.

Any proposal based on the 13th amendment would maintain the unitary framework of Sri Lanka and not devolve any meaningful power to the Tamils, keeping the President's hardline allies the Sinhalese Marxist JVP and the JHU (Buddhist nationalist Jathika Hela Urumaya) happy, whilst allowing the President to buy time with the international community for his military agenda.

However, the APRC recommendation for 'the full and faithful' implementation of the 13th Amendment conveniently leaves out some of the powers vested in the province under that amendment, such as police and land in addition to health and education.

This is 'nothing short of a massive political fraud perpetrated on both the Sri Lankan people and the international community' The Sunday Leader, a Sri Lankan newspaper, noted of the whole exercise.

Under pressure

The Sri Lankan government's unilateral abrogation of the Norwegian sponsored Ceasefire Agreement and increasingly worsening human rights violations, together with the absence of any political solution had resulted in increased pressure on President Rajapakse to do something.

The international community, lead by the Co-chairs to the peace process, were threatening to freeze aid, while international rights organizations were becoming more vocal about the need for external human rights monitoring on the island.

In these circumstances, President Rajapakse assured the diplomatic community that a political package evolved through the APRC would be released before the end of January.

Further pressures was added when the visiting Japanese Special Envoy, Yashushi Akashi, hinted that his country too would have to reconsider any further financial assistance to Sri Lanka - though he later denied that was the intent of his statement.

The Prime Ministers of India and the UK also called on the government to put forward a credible devolution package, ruling out a military solution, in a joint statement they released on January 21.

Inherent in the British and Indian statement was a call for something more than what is already in the statute books.

Reaction

Lakshman Kiriella, a leading member of the UNP said the proposal by the APRC was only made to the liking of President Rajapakse. "The APRC did not consider recommending the full implementation of the 13th amendment (of the constitution) before the president requested it to do so," he pointed out.

The TNA also dubbed the APRC recommendation to stick to the 13th amendment a 'farce'.

Rajapakse had arm-twisted the APRC to submit a report suggesting the implementation of the existing 13th amendment of the constitution and not go beyond it, Mavai Senathirajah, a senior TNA MP, told IANS.

"The idea was to create confusion in the political sphere and buy time. Otherwise, what was the need to make the APRC do this, when it was well on its way to drafting a new (quasi federal) devolution package?" Senathirajah asked.

"It was meant to satisfy the JVP and JHU," he said.

By talking of implementing the 13th amendment, the president was trying to "hoodwink" India, Senathirajah charged. He alleged that Rajapakse would not implement even the 13th amendment. "Ours had been a history of broken promises."

Even the pro-government Tamil parties like the TULF, PLOTE and EPRLF-P were disappointed with the APRC proposal, saying the proposal could only be a 'first step' and that a final solution to the ethnic issue would have to be a federal constitution.

"The 13th amendment of 1987 was a treatment for ulcer. But 20

Eastern polls lead to increased violence

THERE has been an increase in the levels of violence experienced by civilians in the east, following the Sri Lankan government's decision to go ahead with polls in the volatile region, despite cautions and warnings against the plans by local politicians and political groups and boycotts by the major opposition groups.

Late last year the Sri Lankan government announced plans to hold elections in the eastern province to elect 101 members to the Batticaloa Municipal Council and nine Pradeshiya Sabhas. The election is scheduled for March 10 and the deadline for filing nominations closed on January 24.

In July last year the Government of Sri Lanka announced the 'liberation' of the east and claimed that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam have been driven out and it is in control of the province.

However the continuing attacks on the Sri Lankan military by LTTE forces and violent human rights abuses perpetrated by Army-backed paramilitary groups have raised questions about the government's claims.

Even though the ground situation is not conducive for free and fair elections, the government believes that holding elections would send a positive image of the east to the international community and attract foreign funding.

However, the United States has already expressed doubts if the upcoming local elections in district of Batticaloa would be free and fair.

"The US does not believe that free and fair elections can be held if some (political) parties are armed," US Ambassador Robert O. Blake speaking at a function organised by USAID in Batticaloa said.

He further said that if "paramilitary" groups carrying arms illegally were allowed to intimidate others, it would hamper private investment that is so much needed to develop war-affected Batticaloa.

The US believes that groups like the Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Puligal (TMVP), headed by breakaway LTTE leaders Karuna and Pillayan, should not be permitted to bear arms while fighting elections.

However, Sri Lanka's ruling United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) has gone into an alliance with the paramilitary TMVP, which is accused of gross human rights abuses including, abduction, extortion and murder.

The largest Tamil political party - Tamil National Alliance (TNA) and the main opposition party - United National Party (UNP) have both cited the ground situation and are boycotting the election.



The accord between Pillayan and the Sri Lankan government has contributed to the increased poll related violence in the East

The TNA Parliamentary Group Leader, R. Sampanthan noted that it was easy to predict that the poll would take a violent and undemocratic turn with paramilitary groups ruling the roost.

Terming the elections as a 'political fraud' Sampanthan said: "We believe in the democratic process and elections are a vital part. But there is no chance of people electing their representatives of their own free will. The show is run by armed thugs."

The paramilitary TMVP, which has in the past killed TNA supporters and abducted relatives of TNA parliamentarians, has threatened to kill any TNA parliamentarians from the eastern province if they returned to their constituencies.

Sampanthan believes that non-contesting would not cause the TNA to lose electoral ground simply because the TMVP has appeared on the scene.

"The Tamil people won't be fooled. The community since 1956 has voted for a certain political stance. That has not changed. The TMVP is not likely to change it, with or without guns," he added.

UNP General Secretary Tissa Attanayake said his leadership has serious concerns about the deteriorating security situation in the area. He added some armed groups operating in the area were also posing threat to the conduct of a free and fair election.

He further added that the election is simply geared towards conferring legitimacy upon the TMVP for overtly and covertly supporting the government.

"The conditions are not conducive. There is widespread violence, a breakdown in the law and order situation and political unrest. This is an attempt to hold

a poll in an area that is yet to begin true resettlement," Attanayake observed.

The Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) has fielded candidates in five councils. However, with attacks on its candidates and supporters, it has already complained about harassment and violence by the TMVP.

Two weeks before nominations closed, M. Hisbullah, a senior member of SLMC was attacked by a group of unidentified men and a van belonging to him was torched.

SLMC Leader Rauf Hakeem reacted angrily to the attack and demanded that the government plays its role in protecting candidates and ensuring normalcy.

"We predicted a blood bath. We also said there were different warlords ruling different areas of territory in the east despite the government's rhetoric about conducive conditions for polls. The SLMC is the key party in the fray and our candidates are getting attacked," Hakeem remarked.

According to latest reports, with continuing attacks, the SLMC is also considering boycotting the elections.

The SLMC General Secretary told The Nation newspaper that unknown men have emerged suddenly in Batticaloa to harass SLMC candidates. He said these strange men might be from the underworld. "We do not know who is behind this. But we are targeted," he said.

He said his party will not like the candidates face such high risks to contest elections in areas, especially where militants operate with state assistance.

"So, we might take a decision to withdraw our candidates if the situation turns out to be too bad," he said.

Continued on p17

NEWS



Sri Lankan officials investigate after a bomb exploded on a north-bound train at the Colombo Fort Railway station. Photo TamilNet

Frayed ethnic...

Continued from p10

website.

"You don't know when the next bomb is going to go. We still live in it. We go to school, to work, but everyone who leaves home in the morning is never totally sure if they will come back home."

"We are fearing the big one," one resident said. "I can sense it is on the way, the tension is building up."

The worsening fighting, as well as mounting international concern over the human rights situation, has led to threats of cut in foreign aid to the island.

Rajapakse, however, appeared to brush off such warnings by asserting that Sri Lanka has "established new relations with our neighbouring states, Arab states, and Buddhist states."

"Our neighbouring states trust us. Our problems and issues are also problems and issues of our neighbouring states," he said.

His remarks followed a thinly veiled warning from Japan, the island's main financial backer, that it may review its aid policy unless there was a decline in the level of violence.

The United States and Britain, Sri Lanka's former colonial ruler, last year announced aid cuts to the island citing human rights violations and high defence spending by the government.

The US has also stopped selling military hardware to Colombo.

"We have been able to obtain and use aid that is beneficial to the development of the country," the president said at the military parade, which featured multi-barrel rocket launchers, and Israeli-built Kfir and Russian MiG-27 war planes.

The return to violence has created a climate of fear and suspicion which has taken its toll on inter-ethnic relations.

"Colombo may be multicultural but it is still divided on ethnic lines," said Dr SI Keethapongalan, a political scientist at Colombo University.

"On the surface, you see the ethnic communities getting on very well. But underneath you have a sense of suspicion and animosity. They are living in one city but mentally and psychologically they are definitely divided"

Wealthy Tamils and Sinhalese tend to have a lot in common and get on very well on the surface said Dr Keethapongalan. But ethnic nationalism does prevail, he argues.

Late night army search operations have also created a climate of fear among Tamils in the city.

"Colombo is really not friendly," said one Tamil clerk from the east who lives in Colombo. "I am always scared to go out. People know we are Tamil because of my name and when that happens we get asked so many questions."

Dozens die ...

Continued from p1

were killed in an attack in the Yala jungles in the south-east of the island.

The home guards were patrolling in the Yala jungles when they were gunned down. The attackers seized the guards' assault rifles.

On Sunday 14 people were killed and around 100 wounded in a bomb explosion on a platform situated in the High Security Zone in the capital. The blast, which occurred soon after the Matara-Vavuniya train reached the 3rd platform at the station, was blamed on a suicide bomber.

Earlier in the morning an explosion inside Colombo zoo slightly wounded six persons, including a pregnant mother. The zoo has been closed down until further notice.

The blast in Dehiwala zoo, one of the major attractions in Colombo, comes in the wake of a number of blasts and killings in Sri Lanka's most popular wildlife sanctuaries, including Yala.

The recent attacks have caused the Sri Lankan defense authorities to deploy armed forces to protect jungles and remote hamlets adjoining the sanctuaries in the south at a time when troops are urgently needed for offensives against the LTTE heartland.

Meanwhile, reports said foreign tourist visits to Sri Lanka have declined by 20 per cent in 2007. Tourism is Sri Lanka's fourth largest source of foreign exchange, next to remittances from Tamil and Sinhala diaspora and overseas workers.

Two days earlier, on Feb 2nd,

20 civilians were killed and 72 wounded when a bus was caught in a claymore blast at Dambulla in the central Matale district.

Dambulla district borders with six districts, Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Amparai, Badulla, Kandy and Kurnegala, and is located in Central Province.

The attack comes amid thousands of Sri Lanka Army, Special Task Force and Civil Defence Force home guards were searching for armed men in the jungles located in these districts.

All the attacks in the south are blamed on the LTTE.

The attacks on buses come after SLA commandos targeted a bus in LTTE-controlled Vanni on Jan 29th: 20 civilians, including 11 school children, a teacher of Thadchanaamaruthamadu Roman Catholic Tamil Mixed School, the driver, conductor and two hospital workers were killed and 14 other civilians wounded.

Officials at the LTTE's Mannar Operations Command said they had spoiled several attempts by the SLA's Deep Penetration Unit (DPU) teams to infiltrate and place claymore mines along the roads in Mannar district within the last three months.

The government has decided to introduce special security measures for buses that operate in the areas threatened by more attacks.

Transport Minister Dulles Alahapperuma speaking at a media briefing said the buses would be fixed with special armour to withstand claymore attacks.

It was also said that the Sri Lankan military has already started making arrangements to fix the armour onto the buses.

Tigers blunt ...

Continued from p1

The armed forces are actually bogged down in the north over a wide swath of territory, ranging from Mannar in the northwest to Weli Oya and Nagarkovil in the northeast.

The government forces are making determined efforts to break through the first and second lines of defence of the LTTE. The best troops and equipment are being deployed.

But the Tigers are offering 'very' stiff resistance, reliable sources said.

An estimated 50,000 troops are stationed in the Jaffna peninsula in the northern tip.

But, strangely, these are not being deployed to break through Thenmarachchi, in the Jaffna region, capture the Elephant Pass, a narrow isthmus that links Jaffna to the Sri Lankan mainland, and threaten the LTTE hold up in the Vanni, as the northern region minus Jaffna is known.

To relieve the pressure on itself in the north and divert the energies of the government forces, the LTTE is counter-attacking at Weli Oya in the northeast. It has also shelled Palaly, the only air base in the Jaffna peninsula, forcing the government to cancel Jaffna-Colombo flights.

More importantly, the Tigers have been staging small-scale terrorist attacks all over southern Sri Lanka, including Colombo.

Claymore mine attacks and suicide bombing missions have been conducted over a very wide area, from Kebetigollewa and Weli Oya at the northern end, to Buttala and Yala in the deep

south; and from Colombo in the west to Kanjikudichcharu in the eastern district of Amparai.

And although the LTTE is said to have been driven out of the east, it took over the Special Task Force camp in Bakmityawa in Amparai district Monday, albeit briefly.

While the ambitious plan to capture the entire northern province by year-end is keeping thousands of government troops tied up along a wide northern front, the need for fresh troops in the beleaguered south is increasing.

"Apart from an estimated 50,000 in Jaffna, the newly captured 2,000 sq km in the east would need another 100,000 troops. Yala would need about 4,000. All this constitutes half the land area of Sri Lanka," said retired Air Chief Marshal Harry Goonetilleke.

"The total needs could be 250,000 troops, without taking into account the all-important Colombo region that will need another 100,000."

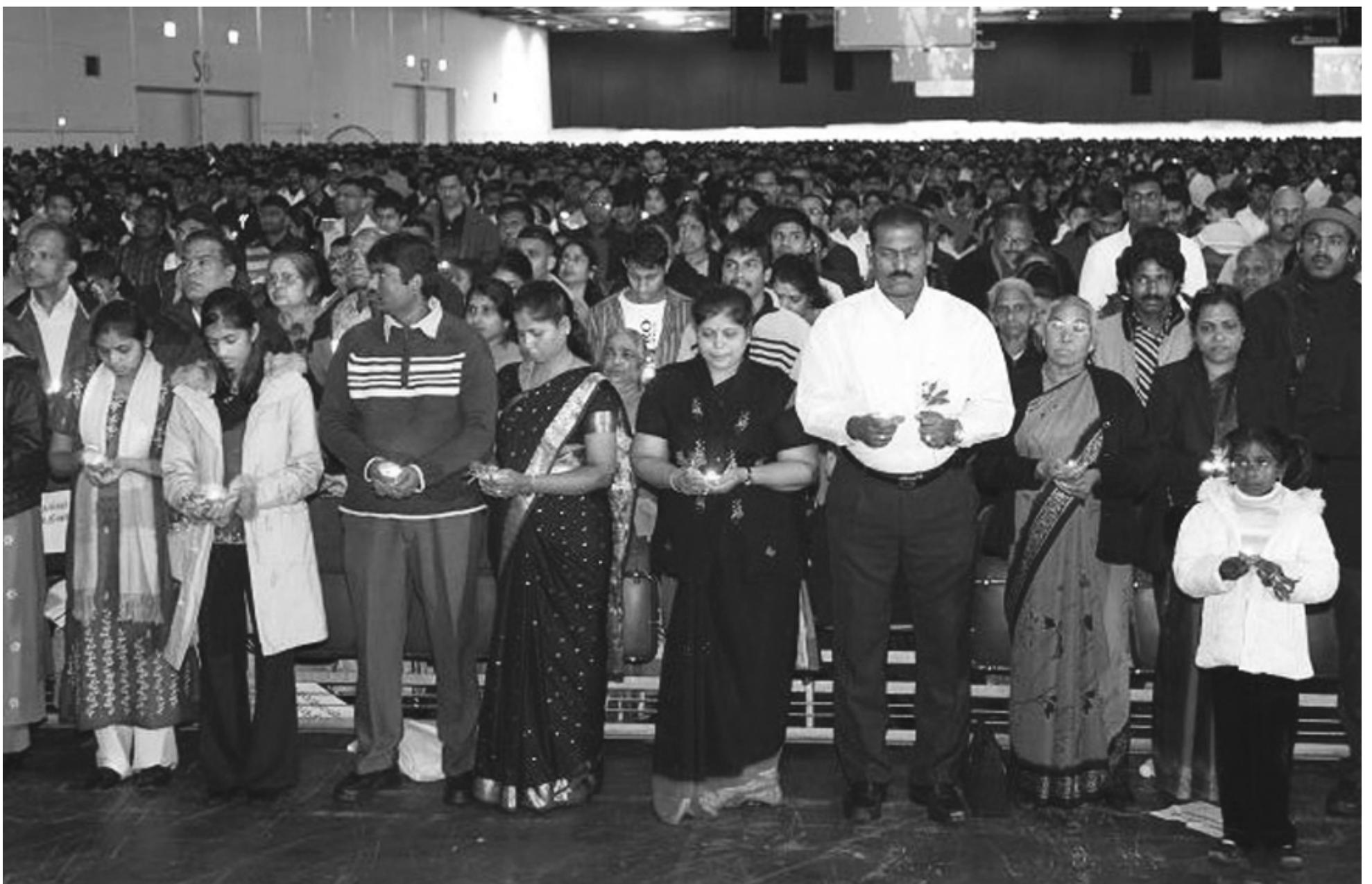
This raises costs.

"In 2007, the defence budget was SLRs. 139 billion (\$1.3 billion). But the actual expenditure was 20 percent more. The spending this year is expected to be SLRs. 166 billion (\$1.5 billion)," Goonetilleke said.

Added Muttukrishna Sarvanathan of the Point Pedro Institute of Development: "And this is happening in the context of aid cuts by several Western countries."

But President Rajapaksa insists that the West and India are backing him and that there has been no aid cut.

FEATURES



One way expatriate Tamils can do something about the plight of our people is by participating in mass events and reinforcing their message of unity and solidarity

“What can I do?” - thoughts for the Tamil Diaspora

Janani Barath
TamilGuardian

THE plight of our people has been steadily reaching newer levels. And, after being an observer with a hands-off approach, I decided to do something about it. I became proactive - in small ways. As a mother of two young children living in Sydney, Australia and having many commitments, it was not easy to change my inaction - but I did. I firmly believe now, that if we all do our little part and started working towards a common vision, that vision will and must materialize. I realise there's spiritual element to this as well, and of course some people are skeptical when it comes to these things. But I still wanted share my simple suggestions at the end of this article, with other ordinary people who, like I used to be, are a bit lost when it comes to how they can help.

It all began in 1983 for me.

Following the horrifying experience of the riots, I remember the first time my family settled in Jaffna. I remember the 3 day ship journey to Jaffna, the light blue waters of the KKS harbour and the village school where my family was given bread and potato curry. How lovingly the senior students - my people - served the food to us. How good the food tasted, especially after being in a crowded ship for 3 days and having experienced sea sickness.

Children are resilient and if given the chance they bounce back. I soon forgot and overcame the bad memories thanks to my people and Jaffna. I was just a little girl and I was swept away by the simple beauty of my hometown Chavakachcheri - the lush paddy fields, the tall palmyrahs, the mango groves and the hot white sand that made me hop and jump when I tried walking barefoot to the kovil close by. Jaffna healed me and my horrific memories of the riots. Jaffna saved me

in many ways. Jaffna taught me culture, the beauty in living close to nature, the importance of an ecologically sustainable living and embedded in me deep spiritual beliefs.

Then I remember how the war started. Little by little and then all in a rush. The many atrocities that happened. I remember the first time a loved one got killed. I remember a friend who was arrested and disappeared. I remember a childhood acquaintance who was later gang-raped and murdered by Sri Lankan soldiers - became to be known as the Krishanthi Kumarasamy case.

I remember proudly waving at Indian soldiers only to be terrified of them a few months afterwards. What a betrayal by India! But more was to come. I remember how stupidly and naively I voted for Chandrika Kumaratunga when I moved back to Colombo, having just turned 18 and got voting rights, trusting the South to deliver peace as they promised. Inste-

ad, the war intensified under Chandrika's regime and I lost a beloved cousin of mine who had just entered University - her body blown into pieces in one of the many aerial bombings by the Sri Lankan Air Force in the North. How naïve I was in hoping that a Sinhalese government would deliver peace to the Tamil people.

Then, now in a new millennium and in another country, I got sadder and angrier as I read the latest news or heard from people who visited Sri Lanka. I could almost feel the terror that our people are experiencing on a daily basis - It was almost palpable. We cannot trust our enemy one little bit nor should we let them get away with what they have done to us. Let our fighters carry on with what they are doing but meanwhile, I decided that I need to do my part - in whatever small ways I can.

When we look at the Tamil Diaspora, some of us still lay our hopes on the International Com-

munity - I am not saying it's a bad thing but it should not be the only thing. Some of us wait for some sort of miracle to happen. Some of us feel absolutely hopeless and pessimistic. Some of us feel tortured to live this way - reading the news of our homeland, feeling angry and depressed - then only to get distracted by trivial things in daily life. Only a rare few Tamils undertake the weight on their shoulders and do more than their part in helping our homeland. They are the dedicated people who though living abroad have not forgotten their duty. These people of the Tamil Diaspora are true leaders and beacons of hope.

However, most of us do nothing. I have friends who simply sigh and change the topic or don't talk about it anymore. Even worse, I have friends who don't even give it a second thought. They like to believe that they have lots of rights in Australia. They thrive in the small things of daily lives and happily chat in English with

FEATURES

their kids. One part of our future generation is being utterly traumatised in Sri Lanka, while the other part (or to be fair, the majority of other part) is growing up oblivious to what's happening to their brethren back home. So I put together a simple plan on how I (a housewife and a mother) can change my habits, and then I acted on it. It was a very liberating experience for me. Small things can make a big difference. Hence, I share my thoughts with and for the people who might have adopted a "hands-off" approach (like I did before) or "looking the other way" approach.

1 - Get in touch with the North East, help relatives and friends

Almost all of my close relatives are living abroad. But I took some trouble to get contact details of distant relatives in Sri Lanka. I contacted my mother's second cousin's family in the North, whom I met only once in my life when I visited them as a child. They were just so happy that I remembered them and called. Now we are in touch at least via mail. I called a long lost relative in Batticola. For two decades, the people of the East have experienced the worst of Sinhalese brutality in terms of large scale massacres. This is due to geographical proximity as well other factors which has made them more vulnerable. My relative in Batticola was ecstatic that I called. As far as I am concerned, a two way communication was helpful to both parties. I feel connected. Also, sending a small amount of money goes a long way. In these horrific times, they need all the help that they can get. Initially, I felt ashamed that I didn't contact these people before. But better late than never.

2 - Help charities that work in NorthEast

About 5 years ago, I realised if I can afford to spend \$20 a month on McDonalds, I can sponsor a child. So I sponsored this little girl through Foster Parents Plan. The country they chose was Bangladesh. 5 years on, I still felt so happy of my decision whenever I got a letter or picture from her. So later, I started to donate to the orphanages in Vanni directly through a friend who is personally involved with the orphanages. I allocated a small percentage of my salary for this purpose. I also started contributing in Tamil events and through Tamil organizations using common sense and a bit of trust. In doing so, I brushed aside a long felt concern - "I really need to know how and where my money is going". A quote from one of my favourite writers comes to mind.

"You often say, 'I would give, but only to the deserving'.

The trees in your orchard say not so, nor the flocks in your pasture.

They give that they may live, for to withhold is to perish" - Kalil Gibran

I felt that if we don't give now

(our time, money and energy) to our people back at home, our culture and our nationhood might perish eventually. Once I started giving my time, money and energy in small ways, I felt more confident in terms of futures results.

3 - Boycott Sri Lankan goods

Self explanatory - just check the label of whatever you buy. For example, I stopped buying MD brand that I used to use a lot.

4 - Write to local MPs, NGOs and to the media

Get details of your local MP and engage them. Write to them regularly or schedule a face to face meeting so that after a while, they get to know you and a relationship can be formed. I started writing to NGOs and the media, and was amazed at some of the responses that I got. They really like to hear from ordinary people. I feel that I doing my part educating people. This takes maybe 1 or 2 hours of my time per week. And I do believe, if many people start doing this, it could be a powerful factor.

5 - Teach our children

Teaching our children the Tamil language and the ancient and recent history of our homeland is a very important point for two reasons. The next generation of children needs to be aware. They will have to carry on the struggle of rebuilding our nation once we are no longer here. Also, teaching our children our language and history is not only beneficial for our people back home, but also good for our children's self concept, self image and identity (regardless of age).

6 - Don't imagine the worst or NOT try something out because of an assumption

I have a friend who says with gloom "even if Tamil Eelam materialises it'll be a bad state. We will destroy ourselves". Would you give a 10 months old child a can of coke just because "he's going to be doing that anyway when he is 18" (I actually heard a father say that and I feel sorry for both him and the kid!). This kind of logic is flawed. We can't give up on things by imagining a bad future. You nurture and nourish a plant so that it'll be bear good fruits. We'll just have to heal with love and hope.

7 - Think collectively

We need to think collectively and truly identify with North East as Tamil Eelam. Our thoughts and actions stemming from this identity will have far reaching consequences. Freedom is ours to take - not something that we need to ask from somebody else. Once we start believing in Tamil Eelam, it will materialize. Meanwhile, I feel better when I introduce

myself as a "Tamil from the North East of Sri Lanka now referred to as Tamil Eelam by us" - a rather long winded answer to the simple question "where are you originally from?" But I still feel good saying it. I used to say "Sri Lankan".

We might have a few dilemmas. For example, we might not have a flag and song that is recognised by others. Recently, the Principal of my daughter's school had a bright new idea. In order to reflect the cultural diversity at the local school, he wanted to display the different flags of the different nations the children's families were coming from. It was an extremely nice thought! But I did not feel like giving the Sri Lankan flag nor could I give our flag with the Tiger emblem on it since it may not be perceived as a national flag. I felt really troubled and at the end had to tell the Principal that we didn't want any representation by flags. So we do have road blocks in this area and we need to work on that but I still rather identify with our unborn nation than to be identified with Sri Lanka - even for formalities. This was an important psychic change.

8 - Positive visualisation

Positive visualisation is not just day dreaming or just hoping, but actually visualising the final goal in mind so that we can work towards it. I have practiced this in my personal life with good results. Once I drew a picture of a goal that I wanted (a seemingly impossible goal at that time), put it in my study room, and every day reflected on it for couple of minutes. This clarified things in my mind. This helped and kept me in focus on what I wanted to achieve and what needs to be done on a daily basis - all the small steps that I had to do in order to achieve this big goal.

Nowadays, I also visualise visiting my hometown (now the home of a big army camp) and see what has to be done from my part in order to achieve this.

This last point (positive visualisation) kind of encompasses all of the above points: Visualise -> Get Proactive -> Act; Visualise -> Get Proactive -> Act.

I visualise my family visiting my mother's cousin's family in Jaffna and having lunch with them. I visualise my kids playing together with theirs! This may seem a bit far fetched but I truly believe that the Universe will respond to my thoughts as well as my actions. I believe we can create our own future if we really want to. We just have to start off this process by being proactive first. The rest will follow.

Some skeptics might call me a dreamer. But I rather dream than despair. I rather believe than be cynical. I rather pray and plead to the Universe, than to turn the other way and pretend everything is fine - as the Tamil saying goes "Prayers that are said for the common good always work". I rather act and consequently feel good about myself for the small yet powerful deeds that I am doing in helping out my people. It's all worth it in the end.

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FEATURE

What liberation in the east?

Bhumi

Ground Views

Based on field trip between 10 and 14 December 2007, the author queries the much heralded liberation of the East in this the first of a three part series.

THE author identifies four dominant themes that seriously impact on the sustainability of resettlement in the Batticaloa district:

1. Lack of consultation & clarity
2. Lack of preparedness & planning
3. Restriction of access & mobility
4. Protection of displaced & resettled communities

This first part looks at the first three, while the second and third parts of this article (to be published in the next issues) look at the fourth theme.

Introduction

The East is 'liberated'. It has been so since last June when the government requested it to be celebrated with 'patriotic joy'. Over 300,000 civilians were displaced in the process and a majority have been 'resettled' since then. But a significant minority still remain in the IDP or transit camps with uncertainty hanging over their future.

This report, based on short visits and a series of discussions with a number of people in the area - including some of the displaced people themselves - is to communicate some pressing issues and concerns in this process. It aims to highlight aspects of the human rights and humanitarian situation in the District with a specific focus on the internally displaced persons (IDPs) and the newly resettled villages in Vaharai and West Batticaloa. In doing so, it hopes to inform and influence concerned policy makers and practitioners to think through solutions.

This is not a general analysis of the political and security situation in Batticaloa. The military and STF are consolidating their recent gains, the LTTE is intent on destabilizing, the security forces are retaliating, the multiple splits in the Karuna faction and their overall 'control and influence' of communities by coercion, their simmering confrontations with the Muslim community and the impending local government elections - all make up for interesting times ahead.

What happens in the next few months could have serious ramifi-



People of the east are kept uninformed about the Sri Lankan government's plans for them and their region, so they can't claim their dues

cations for the future peace process. The situation urgently calls for a thorough social, political and security analysis. But that is not the purpose of this note or the visits. Neither is it a compilation of the severe hardships and harrowing stories.

This is primarily a collection of articulated concerns, observations and reflections of and about the 'displaced' and 'resettled'. It is evident that there are several pertinent issues that need a rapid, effective response by protection and development actors advocating on behalf of these communities that are struggling to cope with simply living in the 'liberated' East. Several complaints and concerns were reported.

1. Lack of consultation and clarity

There are several plans doing the rounds in Colombo - but IDPs in the ground are completely unaware of them. Despite repeated requests the government is yet to come out with a clear policy and guidelines on what each resettling family is entitled to. Not a single family whose members have been killed or injured in the conflict in 2006 or 2007 have been given compensation (compared with the prompt dispensation of compensation to the civilian victims of the Nugegoda blast). It is absolutely essential that at least now the government clearly articulates through effective public information campaigns the entitlements of the displaced who have been resettled.

The most precarious situation is that of the families displaced from Muttur area whose villages

have been declared High Security Zones. Despite the unreasonable disproportionateness of the demarcated areas and dubious intents (where some accounts say that it is to be an economic development zone) what is most appalling is that the displaced villagers have not been told what their fate is going to be. They live in complete limbo. Similarly there have been several instances of military occupying public and private property without providing any alternatives or compensation in the 'liberated' areas. This type of insensitivity on the part of the Government which cannot be explained by the 'fight against terrorism' leads to further alienation of the Tamil population.

It was also noted that despite agreement and repeated reminders about the guiding principles for internally displaced people - the process of resettlement often fell far short of the minimum required standards. After the flagrantly forced resettlement of the Vaharai area, the military and the STF did improve their conduct for the subsequent rounds of resettlement - but still fell short of the agreed upon standards. The hasty endorsement of some phases of the resettlement by UNHCR was also pointed out by some people as having set a bad precedent. One of the common sense suggestion by a displaced community members was - "if the return is voluntary, all they have to do is arrange for regular bus service. We long to go back to our homes. If we know public transport is available, we will go, see the place ourselves, if satisfied, come back prepare, pack and leave". Whereas in almost all the phases of return

the families never got a chance to assess the place - they were dumped there.

The most egregious aspect was that the families returned to find that their houses had been vandalised and looted to the core. Since the LTTE fled without even taking their heavy equipment, the blame is squarely placed on the military that captured and remained in control of the area till the people returned. The list of items lost due to this looting runs into thousands of complaints in the newly established Vaaharai police station.

Now that a majority of the people have been resettled, looking back, it leaves a bad taste about how the process was handled by the military and the civil authorities (who always are relegated to taking orders from the military).

2. Lack of Preparedness and Planning

It came out clearly that the Government was not prepared for this scale of displacement or for the subsequent logistics of resettlement. It could have been. Displacement is never voluntary. The displacement in the Batticaloa District was principally caused by the military operations of Sri Lanka Army in a majority of cases and LTTE in some instances, who also used trapped communities as human shields. It seems to have happened in an environment where the International Community, the UN and others had resigned to the fact, and at times condoned, that causing displacement as a by

product of the 'fight against terrorism' is the sovereign right of the Sri Lankan Government. In this backdrop massive displacement caused by areal bombardment, relentless shelling and blockades was seen as a necessary evil and as overriding international norms on protection of civilians in armed conflict and principles of proportionality.

But the concern aired by many was, if the Government had resolved to pursue the military strategy, it must also have been prepared to take care of its citizens who were sure to be affected. There were no such plans or resources. The military agenda of the Government matched by the counter strategies of LTTE always creates displacement and misery for civilians. In almost all the cases in the East the Government was terribly under prepared and it was left to the UN and other NGOs to rush to fill in gaping holes in the response to IDP situation. If Government is clear on its military strategy of 'defensive offence', 'retaliation' or 'pre-emptive strikes' they must also have a clear strategy and preparedness to take care of its own citizens who are displaced as a direct result of their action. Time and again the Government failed and left it for the external agencies to fill significant gaps. Similarly even when it came to resettlement, the Government was woefully under provided moving back people without even the basic of needs in place. More on this later, but suffice to say that the people see, and justifiably so, the state more as 'military liberators' than as one caring for their needs and looking after their welfare.