

TAMIL GUARDIAN

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South Africa: No solution without LTTE involved

PAGE 9



The Swiss Tamil Youth Organisation held their fourth annual soccer festival over the 15th and 16th of March to commemorate the 34th death anniversary of Tamil political activist Sivakumaran. Eleven teams participated in the adults competition and thirty-one teams participated in the youth competition celebrates winning a cup.

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NEWS

Abductions increase despite international concern

DESPITE international concern and calls for the Sri Lankan government to rein in the deteriorating human rights situation, abductions and disappearances in war-torn Northeast and in the capital Colombo, blamed on the Sri Lankan security forces, has increased in recent weeks.

The US State Department's Human Rights reports on Sri Lanka, published in mid-March highlighted that "the overwhelming majority of victims of human rights violations, such as killings and disappearances, were young male Tamils."

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbore, also noted that those who disappear are "primarily young ethnic Tamil men."

Backing the US report and the UN high commissioners accusations, both local and international media reported numerous cases of abductions and disappearances that took in the past few weeks alone.

On Sunday March 16, Yoga-rajah Arunrajah, 21, a Tamil youth who had come from Jaffna to go abroad, was forcibly dragged away from his residence at Sangamiththa Mawata by armed men in police uniform, reported TamilNet. His mother complained to Kotahena police, whilst relatives sought assistance from Deputy Minister P. Rathakrishnan, an Up-country Peoples' Front parliamentarian. Though Mr. Rathakrishnan contacted the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and the Terrorist Investigation Department (TID), he was unable to obtain information on Arunrajah's whereabouts.

Another native of Jaffna and student of Moratuwa University, Tharumakulasingam Mayooraan, was abducted on March 4 from

Kolpetty in Colombo, and is still missing.

Veerasingam Benedict, 37, a Tamil family man from Mukaththuvaaram in Colombo was taken away on March 1 by three Sri Lanka Army (SLA) soldiers, a home guard and three men in civil clothes at Kathiranawaththe in Colombo. He is yet to return home.

There is also no information available on Jotheeswaran Sivananthakumar, 29, a Tamil youth abducted on March 9 around 11:00 p.m. by armed men in a white van.

Whilst there was no information on the whereabouts of the many of the missing youths, some of the abductees are reported to be languishing in Sri Lankan police custody without being charged.

Engineer Akilan, a Tamil, 'abducted' by the white van squad, is reportedly detained at the 'Fourth Floor', the police interrogation division in Colombo.

Poolagarajah Sasikaran, a Tamil youth from Wellawatte, 'abducted' by armed men who arrived in a white van, is still detained at TID division at Wattale Police station.

Sithiravel Sivanantham, another Tamil youth 'abducted' in Wattale is also being detained in Colombo.

Whilst the Sri Lankan government denies any hand in the abductions, relatives of abductions victims interviewed by Al Jazeera blamed government forces and associated paramilitary groups.

Kaaviya Sepaja, a Tamil housewife, told Al Jazeera her husband has been abducted by a group thought to be affiliated with the capital's police force.

"One evening, in December

Continued on p15



EU Troika Director for Asia and External Relations James Moran warned that renewal of Sri Lanka's trade status is jeopardised over human rights abuses. Photo Sanka Vidanagama/AFP/Getty Images

Europe warns over rights abuses

THE European Union has expressed "very serious concerns" about human rights violations in Sri Lanka and warned that existing trade concessions could be at risk if the rights abuses continue. The EU also requested diplomatic access to Vanni to deliver key messages to the Liberation Tigers.

"The EU continues to harbour very serious concerns about continuing reports of human rights abuses," said a statement issued at the end of a three-day visit by a six-member group representing the EU's current president Slovenia and future president France, as well as the European Commission and the EU Council of Ministers.

Speaking at a media conference at the European Commission office in Colombo, representatives from the EU reiterated their concern over the human rights situation in the country.

"Respect for human rights is one of the key principles underpinning Sri Lanka's relations with the European Union" said Janez Premoze, head of the three-member EU delegation.

"Nonetheless, the EU continues to harbour very serious concerns about continuing reports of human rights abuses" Premoze told reporters.

Concessions at risk

The statement issued on Tuesday, March 18, also warned of the possibility of the EU withholding trade concessions from Sri Lanka due to the island's worsening human rights record.

The delegation noted Sri Lanka's key clothing export industry has benefited by doing business with the EU, where trade concessions are given based on

sustainable development and good governance.

Sri Lanka's existing tariff concessions end this year and nations wishing to renew must show high labour, environment and human rights standards when they reapply.

James Moran, Asia Directorate at the European Commission linked trade concessions to human rights record and said that the extension of the GSP-plus concessions for Sri Lanka were yet to be considered.

He further added that concession requests would only be assessed when the concerned countries reapplied for the facility by October this year and would be governed by objective criteria including linkage between trade preferences and Human Rights.

Regret over IIGEP

Delegation head, Premoze, expressed regret that the Independent International Group of Eminent Persons (IIGEP) had decided to terminate their work with the Presidential Commission of Inquiry because of concerns about its compliance with international standards and institutional lack of support for the work of the Commission.

"The EU underlines the seriousness of calls by the IIGEP and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, for the government to deliver concrete results through taking cases to court," he said.

IIGEP, headed by P. N. Bhagwati, a former Indian Chief Justice, was invited by President Mahinda Rajapaksa to monitor the workings of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry, set up in November 2006 to investigate 16

of the most serious rights abuses.

But the IIGEP resigned en masse in late February after declaring it was unable to carry out its work.

Meanwhile, the Commission of Inquiry has yet to prosecute anyone in any of its 16 cases.

Access to Vanni

Mr. Premoze also said the EU remained committed to its present role as one of the Co-Chairs of the Tokyo process and, therefore, continued to believe in the importance of guaranteeing access to Killinochchi for diplomats.

He insisted that the Sri Lankan government should allow the Co-chairs of the 2002 peace process and the Norwegian facilitators to travel to the LTTE administered Vanni to meet the LTTE leaders to deliver key messages - including a request to resume the peace process, to observe humanitarian access and to respect human rights.

However, according to local reports the Sri Lankan government had rejected the EU request, citing the prevailing security situation in the areas administered by the LTTE, which is under attack by the military.

The EU delegation which was in Sri Lanka for three days met, among others, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Ministry Secretary, Minister of Disaster Management and Human Rights, Minister of Science and Technology and Chairman APRC, President's Advisor Basil Rajapaksa, Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, the leader of the Opposition and leaders of other political parties including the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna and the Tamil National Alliance.

Kidnappings 'nothing to fuss about'

Daily Mirror

SRI LANKAN Foreign Affairs Minister, Rohitha Bogollagama has said that kidnappings are normal in society and no one should make an undue fuss about such incidents.

He made this statement in reply to a question posed by a journalist at a news conference last Wednesday, when a journalist asked for his comments on the kidnapping of two women, one

Sinhala and one Tamil, in Batticaloa on March 10.

Stating that investigations are underway, the Minister said it was unlikely that there would be a link between the kidnapping and the Batticaloa local council elections.

"Kidnapping is something very common and therefore there is no need to fuss about it," he asserted.

He also said that it was not the first time that a kidnapping had taken place in the country and therefore, there was no reason to be excited about it.

NEWS

US says LTTE ending use of 'child soldiers'

Policy of recruiting one person from each family targets those 18 or older

TamilNet

THE Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) "is eliminating the recruitment and use of child soldiers," the US State Department said this week in its annual human rights report. The LTTE had not complied with its promise to end the practice by end of 2007, but its policy of recruiting one person from each family targeted those 18 years or older, the report said. Sri Lankan government forces were complicit in conscripting children for the TMVP (Karuna Group), "which used coercion, extortion, rape, and murder to force children and adults to join their ranks," the report said.

The text of the 'Child Soldiers' section of the State Department's Country Report on Human Rights for Sri Lanka follows:

"Both the LTTE and the Karuna group (also known as TMVP, or Pillaiyan group) used minors in battle. The Karuna group and the LTTE also continued to recruit child soldiers forcibly, while intimidating and

using violence against civilians.

"The LTTE instituted a "one family, one fighter" policy, forcing each family to provide at least one member, including children, to the LTTE. By year's end most sources indicated that the "one family, one fighter" policy targeted those 18 years or older. The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) noted a significant reduction in reported child recruitment by the LTTE. While the trend indicated that the LTTE was eliminating the recruitment and use of child soldiers, it had not complied with the promise to end the use of all minors by year's end. UNICEF reported that the LTTE forcibly recruited (or rerecruited) 160 children during the year with an average age of 16 years. At year's end 205 children remained in LTTE custody, including 1,224 who were recruited as children but were over 18 at year's end.

"According to UN sources, there was limited progress during the year in the release of children recruited by both groups. A



Tamil Tiger soldiers pictured training in Vanni, which Sri Lanka's military is struggling to capture.

UNICEF supported action plan sought to rehabilitate former LTTE child soldiers through release and reintegration. Under this program there were to be three UNICEF-supported transit centers. Two of the transit centers, in Batticaloa and Trincomalee, never opened because of a lack of releases by the LTTE. By mid-year the LTTE no longer controlled these areas. UNICEF supported the establishment of a transit center in Kilinochchi for child recruits released by the LTTE, which remained open, but UNICEF noted that its use was limited and declining.

"The Karuna group continued to recruit children, some forcibly after abduction. Karuna cadres used coercion, extortion, rape, and murder to force children and adults to join their ranks. Karuna operatives often bribed parents to allow their children to join the Karuna group, and punished parents or children if they resisted.

"Unlike the LTTE, UNICEF statistics indicated that child recruitment by the pro-government Karuna group did not decline. The UN Special Rapporteur (UNSR) on Children and Armed Conflict reported and cited evidence that government forces were

at times complicit in the recruitment of children. During the year, UNICEF reported that the Karuna group recruited and rerecruited children for use as child soldiers, especially in Batticaloa district for a total of 251. This was more than in 2006, although the rate of recruitment was down from its peak in late 2005. Some previously recruited child soldiers reached 18 years of age while continuing to serve in the Karuna group. UNICEF figures show that at the end of the year, 160 children were still serving in the Karuna forces, and 69 who were recruited as children were now over age 18."

Sri Lanka slams US for Human Rights report

THE US State Department accused the Sri Lankan government of abuses including unlawful killings, abductions, arbitrary arrests and the denial of fair public trials in its latest Country Report on Human Rights Practices in Sri Lanka released last week.

The Sri Lankan government, however, rejected the US report and claimed it presented a distorted and exaggerated view of the situation, triggering a diplomatic row.

The US Human Rights Report published on March 11 cited "numerous reports" that the army, police, and pro-government paramilitary groups had "participated in armed attacks against civilians and practiced torture, kidnapping, hostage-taking, and extortion with impunity."

"The government's respect for human rights continued to decline due in part to the escalation of the armed conflict," the report said.

The annual US report further added that more than 1,000 civilians had been killed in Sri Lanka

last year as the government stepped up attacks against the LTTE.

The United States also blamed the government for making slow progress in investigating alleged serious human rights abuses.

Irritated by the accusations, Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama called US envoy to Sri Lanka Robert Blake to the foreign ministry office to "strongly protest" the allegations of abuses in the State Department's human rights report, a government statement said.

"The report presents a distorted view of the actual situation in Sri Lanka during the year 2007 and is unfortunately a litany of unsubstantiated allegations, innuendo and vituperative exaggerations," it statement added.

"The report presents a distorted view of the actual situation in Sri Lanka during the year 2007 and is unfortunately a litany of unsubstantiated allegations, innuendo and vituperative exaggerations".

"It is indeed a matter of con-

cern that the report, based on hearsay ... has resulted in throwing a lifeline to the LTTE (Tigers) at a time when it is struggling to maintain its position both militarily on the ground and internationally."

However, the U.S. Embassy responded to the government statement with its own statement.

The US statement said: "Our goal ... is always to be fair and objective," and added that the U.S. government stands by the Human Rights report.

This is not the first time the Mahinda Rajapakse regime has rowed with foreign diplomats over the country's human rights record. Last December, Sri Lanka summoned a number of Colombo-based Western and Asian diplomats and faulted them for criticising the country's human rights record.

The government has in the past accused international diplomats who raised rights concerns of being "terrorists" and supporters of LTTE.

ICRC says Colombo misquoted its report

AFP

THE International Red Cross has angrily accused Sri Lanka's government of releasing confidential communications and manipulating information from the organisation to defend its rights record.

In rare public criticism of a government, the Geneva-based International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said Colombo has been "misrepresenting its findings" to stave off allegations it was behind abductions and disappearances.

The row surrounds Sri Lanka's use of a confidential report by the ICRC, which did not give a figure for disappearances on the war-torn island, to dispute ongoing allegations that hundreds of people had gone missing on the island.

The Sri Lankan government is locked in a bitter war with the Tamil Tigers, and is under increasing international criticism over a spate of murders, abductions and

disappearances.

The ICRC, known for its strict rules of confidentiality and neutrality, said it "deplores" Sri Lanka's "publication and sharing of confidential reports submitted exclusively to the Sri Lankan authorities." Turning the tables on the Sri Lankan government, the organisation also said extra-judicial killings and disappearances were part of a pattern of abuses in Sri Lanka that need to be stopped.

"The ICRC strives to bring this about through its confidential and direct dialogue with the authorities concerned. For this reason, we prefer not to enter into a public debate on the number of disappeared in Sri Lanka," said Jacques de Malo, ICRC's head of operations in South Asia, on Wednesday.

Colombo has come under fire for its rights record, with Human Rights Watch saying recently that at least 1,500 people "disappeared" between 2006 and 2007 - mostly Tamils living in the island's restive north and east.

NEWS

Concerns as former Army General to head State TV

INTERNATIONAL and local media rights organizations last week, expressed deep concern at the attacks on journalists and militarization of state television by the Sri Lankan state.

In the past three months staff members of the Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation (SLRC) have been hunted and attacked on the roads of Colombo as well as in their homes.

The attacks began after Labour Minister Mervin Silva and several of his bodyguards forced their way into the organisation last December and assaulted senior members of the SLRC for not telecasting a speech the minister had made at a public function.

Events took a turn for the worse last week when, on Monday March 17, the army seized control of the SLRC after workers who threatened to strike unless the violence against them stopped were sent off on 'holiday'.

The Sri Lankan government then announced the appointment of a retired military officer Major General Sunil Silva as deputy director general of SLRC, the most widely watched TV station in the country.

Local media rights organisation, the Free Media Movement, said the move would give the government more control over the station during a crisis.

"It's very clear, the government wants to control the media and journalists," said Sunanda Deshapriya of the Free Media Movement commenting on the attacks and intimidation of journalists.

Deshapriya added that Maj. Gen. Silva's appointment was "part of the general militarization of the country".

"This is unprecedented," he said. "No retired military person has been appointed for the top post in the last 20 years."

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), in a statement released last week said it is "deeply concerned that Sri Lanka's government has appointed a recently retired army Major General to a senior position at the troubled state broadcaster, SLRC".

"The IFJ is also very concerned for the safety of all journalists in Sri Lanka. For example, the series of attacks and threats against SLRC staff since December have been permitted to continue without any intervention by authorities", IFJ Asia-Pacific Director Jacqueline Park said.

"In times of conflict and insecurity, a military appointment to the state broadcaster raises concerns about restrictions on freedom of expression and association at the state broadcaster.

"The appointment of Maj. Gen. Sunil Silva to the SLRC does nothing to allay concerns for the well-being of SLRC staff and press freedom in general in Sri Lanka," she said.

"Rather, the IFJ is disturbed that the appointment of someone closely associated with the military has been made immediately following the in-house union's demands that staff be protected, as is their right."

Reporters Without Borders in a statement called for an explanation from President Mahinda Rajapakse after the military takeover of the state television.

"The head of state should immediately order the army to withdraw from the station. This is in no way a good solution for ending escalating violence against SLRC staff since December 2007," the international press freedom organisation said.

"Right now, working at the Rupavahini Corporation means that we are not sure of our lives. There is an organised witch-hunt and it is no secret that Minister Mervin Silva's henchmen are behind it," a senior member of organisation told Inter Press Service on condition of anonymity fearing retribution if he is named.

Minister Silva has denied having any part in the attacks.

Among the SLRC staff members, who were assaulted, were assistant director of supplies, Arunasiri Hettige, who was beaten with iron rods on March 14 and the TV station's librarian, Ranjani Aluthge, who was slashed with a razor blade as she returned home from work by bus on March 5.

Lal Hemantha Mawalage, a journalist, was attacked by two men on a motorbike as he travelled home from work late on January 25 and another journalist Priyal Ranjith Perera was stabbed a month later.

Sunethra Athugapura, a female reporter with the Lakkima Sinhala newspaper had her house ransacked on March 16 days after she interviewed Minister Silva.

The attacks come amidst a background where police have arrested and interrogated several media personnel for being sus-

Continued on p15



Manoharan Rajeehar was one of five students killed by the Special Task Force in Trincomalee

Human Rights Minister tried to bribe massacre witness

THE Commission of Inquiry hearing into the killing of five Tamil students in Trincomalee in January 2006 took a dramatic turn when the exiled medical practitioner father of one of the student victims revealed that a prominent Cabinet Minister in Mahinda Rajapaksa's government offered a bribe in return for his silence.

Kailasapillai Manoharan, a physician currently living in the United Kingdom, appearing as a witness from UK via video conference to Colombo, said Disaster Relief and Human Rights Minister Mahinda Samarasinghe offered a house in Colombo and admission to a city school for his remaining children if he did not pursue his complaint over the slain son.

The allegation came from Dr. Manoharan giving evidence before the Presidential Commission inquiring into human rights violations when sittings were held at the Sri Lanka Institute of Development Administration (SLIDA) office in Colombo on Thursday March 20.

On 02 January, 2006, five high school students who had gone to spend the evening near Dutch Bay sea beach were shot dead in execution style allegedly by the Sri Lankan Special Task Force personnel at the roundabout junction in front of the beach. The killers exploded hand grenades in the vicinity and planted a grenade in the pocket of one of the victims.

The police told media that the 'deaths' were caused when a hand grenade in the possession of the youths exploded.

Dr. Manoharan's son Rajeehar was one of five massacre victims. Other victims were Thangathurai Sivanantha, Logithasan Rohanth, Shanmugarajah Sajeenthiran and Yogarajah Hemachandran.

Dr. Manoharan in his evidence said he had no confidence that he would get justice from the Sri Lankan government. He said the killing of his son and others was pre-planned.

However Minister Samarasinghe denied the accusations and told Sri Lankan newspaper Sunday Times "I chair the inter ministerial committee on human rights and when it was brought to the notice of the committee that there were threats to the life of Dr. Manoharan, the house and additional security were offered to him."

The public inquiry into the killing of five Tamil youth is now under way before the Presidential Commission and evidence is being gathered from witnesses who are living abroad via video conferencing.

No one in Sri Lanka agreed to appear as a witness against the Sri Lankan forces and the establishment due to the lack of a witness protection programme, as documented by various Human Rights watchdogs.

The families of the five victims have all left Sri Lanka to foreign destinations.

During the hearing, when asked by President's Counsel Ranjith Abeysuriya to repeat the statement made in paragraph 42 of the written testimony made by the witness, Dr. Manoharan said: "The Minister said, you must release yourself from this trauma

as you have other children also. It may be that the forces may have mistaken these children as the LTTE and shot them. We are attempting to give you some sort of compensation from the government. If you consider that in Trincomalee there is no security for you we can provide you with a house in Colombo and we can make arrangements for the education of your children."

"He asked me not to create a big issue over this and wanted me to get out of this trauma and return to my normal life. I said I didn't want anything and asked whether they could give my son back," a tearing Dr. Manoharan said.

When PC Abeysuriya asked "how sure are you that it was the minister himself who called you?", Dr. Manoharan justified his claim saying he had followed speeches made by the Minister.

"I have also mentioned the telephone number on which he asked me to call him back. I gave this number to a Sinhala gentleman, who is a family friend. He confirmed that it was the Minister's number," he said when asked if he was sure it was the Minister.

"I have no confidence and trust that I will get justice from the government of Sri Lanka. There are several reasons for this. The minister who spoke to me said 'you are trying to approach international human rights organisations and create an issue and trying to tarnish the name of the country.' Even this commission could be dissolved before the proceedings come to a proper conclusion," he said.

NEWS

Jaffna: beseiged by terror

N. Malathy

JAFFNA, a peninsula surrounded by sea, except for a narrow strip of land joining it with the rest of the island of Sri Lanka, has always had a special history of its own. For more than one and a half years now, this peninsula has been cut off from the rest of the island, after the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) closed the only land route through the narrow strip of land, thus isolating its more than 400,000 residents. This one and half year history of isolation adds to the already unique history of this peninsula in a spectacularly terrifying manner.

People have been "marked, stalked and hunted for pleasure" in this period as described by one writer. The other aspects of this one and half year history are what ought to be studied, for it gives not only staggering lessons on how to "manufacture consent," it also exemplifies how the world can turn a blind eye to such staggering "consent manufacturing."

An understanding of this life in the Jaffna peninsula can be gleaned through what the Jaffna residents face at home, on the road, through their vehicle ownership, and how they can contact their relatives elsewhere.

At home

The concept of home being a person's own castle is well and truly abolished in Jaffna. The military will enter homes at anytime of the day. They need not enter by knocking and waiting for the door to open. They could just break open the door. They jump the fence from front or back. It is just called "checking."

The military often orders people to cut off or break down the fence surrounding their homes so that it is easier for the military to observe their homes.

Such military orders are obeyed without question because there is no other authority to which appeals can be made. What an individual military person orders must be obeyed or else.

The vast majority of homes in Jaffna are supplied by water from wells in their own yard. The residents bathe at their own wells. The perimeter fence provides privacy as there are no "bathrooms" as such for most homes. When the perimeter fences are cut down, the women in the homes lose their privacy even during bathing.

All residents at every home must take a group photo and have it ready when the military comes to "check." If there is a person in the home who is not on the group photo, that person immediately becomes a suspect and is arrested. Thus, even close relatives cannot stay overnight at other relatives' homes. The acute problems faced

by people, in the context of arbitrary curfews as described below, is easy to gauge.

On the road

There are three aspects to people's lives on the road: the military checkpoints every 100 meters, the randomness of curfews, and the convoy time. The military can stop anyone they fancy at any of these checkpoints. People are totally at the mercy of the military personnel.

The randomness of curfew causes untold hardships to travelers. If one takes a bus destined to a location, the different curfew times at these various locations must be taken into account. As if this is not enough, these curfews can be suddenly changed. It is common for people to be stuck on the road in the bus throughout the night because they can neither go to their destination nor to the starting point because of sudden changes in curfew times.

It is a common sight to see small business people waiting with their stocks at junctions early in the morning, waiting to take their stock to the market. These people are used to starting work very early in the morning, and the curfew forces them to delay their business activities. They come and wait at junctions to start their business activities without delay and are held back at the junctions by the military.

Perhaps most interesting is the introduction of new terminology to describe how people can get stuck because all traffic is blocked for military convoys even outside curfew time. "Konvoyapochchu" has become part of the Jaffna lingo to say how people were delayed for hours by this phenomenon.

There is one more shocking experience that Jaffna people are put through while on the road. The activities of military death squads have been reported. When someone is shot and killed, no one dares to go and assist them for fear of military reprisals. The body will lie on the spot until the judge arrives and clears it for removal to the hospital. This can take several hours during the daytime. School children, workers and shoppers must just walk past the dead body as if it is not there. Close family members could be seen sitting on the road wailing near their loved one, but no one, not even those known to them, dare to go near to console them or offer them any assistance.

Owning vehicles

All vehicles, including bicycles, must be registered with the military with the owner's photo. This is in addition to the usual



Voters in the East cast their ballots in the local polls under the watchful eyes of the police and paramilitaries, who were also competing in the election. Photo Lakruwan Wanniarachchi/AFP/Getty Images

TMVP, UPFA sweep eastern polls as TNA, UNP boycott

AMIDST a boycott by the main opposition and the main Tamil party on the island, the Sri Lankan government party and a paramilitary group allied with it claimed victory in the Batticaloa Municipal Council polls held earlier this month.

Sri Lanka President Mahinda Rajapaksa's ruling United Peoples Freedom Alliance (UPFA), which contested jointly with the paramilitary Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pullikal (TMVP), secured 11 seats while a coalition of other paramilitary groups won 6 seats, and the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) and the Eelavar Democratic Front (EDF) both secured a seat each. Polls were also held for another eight local councils.

The Tamil National Alliance (TNA) and the main opposition United National Party (UNP) did not participate in the election, citing the lack of conditions for free and fair polls.

A TMVP candidate, Pirabakaran Sivakeertha, known as Pathmini, was appointed Mayor of Batticaloa. She is the first woman to be appointed to the post. Her father, Sathiyamoorthy Rajan, was a TNA candidate during the 2004 general elections, and was assassinated on the campaign trail.

Edwin Silva alias Piratheep Master, a TMVP contestant, was appointed Deputy Mayor.

The Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Batticaloa Municipal Council, chairmen and deputy chairmen of other eight local councils and the members of all nine local councils elected on the UPFA and TMVP tickets took their oaths in the presence of Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa at the presidential secretariat on March 18. Key paramilitary operative and TMVP head, Sivanethurai Chandrakanthan alias Pillayan, who was present at the presidential secretariat was greeted by the President.

The seven members elected from the SLMC did not attend the function and will take their oaths in their own area in the presence of their leader Rauff Hakim, the party secretary M.T.Hassan Ali said. Elected members of the other paramilitary and ex-militant groups were also not present to take oaths.

Voter turnout was at 53 percent in Batticaloa city, with around 10% of the voters who turned up casting invalid votes.

Meanwhile, the Special Task Force (STF), which had occupied the Batticaloa Municipal Council office, vacated the premises. The compound had been occupied by the Sri Lanka Army and the STF for over 18 years.

The office, hall, store and 3 guest houses in the Batticaloa MC building complex have been taken over by the Municipal Council Commissioner, who will be inspecting the buildings with a view to commencing their renovation.

civil registration of vehicles. Only the owner can use the vehicle and must carry this military registration. Relatives can be registered to use the vehicle, but their photos are not included. Therefore, if a relative is caught using the vehicle, he/she can immediately become a suspect.

The military will commandeer a vehicle from anyone for their own use. Motorbikes are commandeered while very old people with heavy items are traveling on them, leaving the old person in the middle of the road with their heavy items. After commandeering the vehicle, the owner will be told to come and collect it in a week at a specified military camp. This camp could be very far from the vehicle owner's residence. Besides, a visit to the military camp itself is a blood-curdling

experience for the Jaffna resident.

Contacting relatives

If Jaffna residents have close family members living in Vanni, they better forget making contact with them. This can be a serious source of danger to them. Those who dared to defy the military to contact their relatives have been warned to stop the contact. Even if it is their own child or spouse, they are barred from contacting those living in Vanni.

Young families have remained separated and the military has refused to let those in Jaffna rejoin their family in Vanni. People in Vanni have sought to stop their names appearing even in purely civilian news, fearing for the safety of their families living in Jaffna.

VIPs

Local VIPs like the Government Agent, Jaffna University Vice Chancellor, and the Bishop of Jaffna have been warned by the military not to speak out about the conditions in Jaffna. There have been many international VIPs who have visited Jaffna during these one and a half years. They are not permitted to meet people in private where they can hear their views unmonitored by the military.

This, then, is the context in which the death squads are killing people on a daily basis, rapes are occurring regularly and ransom demands are being made with death threats. The situation is so staggering that most readers will find it difficult to believe what is said here.

EDITORIAL

TAMIL GUARDIAN

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Inescapable Reality

The goodwill of the Sinhala majority is a brittle basis for lasting peace in Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka's violent conflict raged on this week despite repeated calls by different international actors for an end to war and a return to the search for a political solution. However, although heavy casualties and flooding have produced a lull in the Sri Lankan military's efforts to capture the Vanni from the Liberation Tigers, Colombo's determination to achieve a military solution is undiminished. It is against this foil of militarism that numerous international efforts to bring about a solution, even forcibly, are being contemplated.

Although the international community has failed to grasp this, the rationale underlying the Sinhala leadership's commitment to a military solution turns on deep seated ideological conceptions of itself, the Sinhala people, and the island's minorities, especially the Tamils. We have repeatedly argued that the crisis in Sri Lanka is not of two irreconcilable demands - a unitary state and Tamil independence - but of majoritarian state repression of the Tamils. However, the notion that political compromise is the key to resolving these two political, albeit 'extreme', demands has long underpinned international misunderstandings of Sri Lanka's impasse.

To begin with, the Tamil question emerged well before Colonial Britain, quitting South Asia, left Tamils and Sinhalese divided yet locked within a single administration. That was sixty years ago. Majoritarianism emerged almost instantly and ethnic tensions erupted within a few years. The Tamils suffered marginalisation and communal violence sanctioned, if not backed, by the state for at least three decades before the Tamil militants emerged. The demand for political independence, Tamil Eelam, become an overwhelming demand and was endorsed by the Tamil United Liberation Front's sweeping success in the 1977 elections, several years before today's armed conflict erupted. The permissive conditions for 1983's anti-Tamil pogrom emerged through three decades of untrammelled Sinhala power over the minorities.

The point here is that permanently ending Sri Lanka's protracted conflict is not about disciplining the LTTE and/or rewriting the majoritarian constitution, but about creating an unshakable political arrangement on the island that will, once and for all, ensure an end to majoritarian persecution of the Tamils. We, along with many Tamils since the mid-seventies, have consistently argued that the only solution that will ensure lasting peace is a two-state one. For as long as there is state repression, there will be resistance and

counter-violence, a truism underlined by both recurrent and persistent conflict in the Middle East, Sri Lanka and other parts of the world on the one hand and, on the other, the creation of new and stable states in other parts. Peace does indeed come from security.

No matter how much international actors (and some West-backed local actors) may wish - or adamantly insist - that the 'majority' of Tamils and Sinhalese want to live together, Sri Lanka's ground reality, should they care to look, says otherwise: the Sinhalese will not be dissuaded from the notion the Tamils are interlopers in 'their' island. Especially since the Rajapakse regime assumed power, the underlying majoritarian drivers of state repression have become unabashedly open. To be sure, the forceful reemergence of geopolitics has arguably unfettered the Sinhala state's hegemonic project, but it was never in abeyance - that is why Sinhala leaders have never reached any substantive agreement with their Tamil counterparts and why even minor agreements

If the liberal interventionists are right, the apparent weakening of the LTTE should have produced a rush to pluralist accommodation between Tamils and Sinhalese. It has produced exactly the opposite.

have all been abrogated by the state at a moment more convenient. In short, the goodwill of the Sinhala majority is a brittle basis for lasting peace.

The consequent point is, whether there is an LTTE or not, majoritarian state repression will not end. Nor, therefore, will violent Tamil resistance. The utopian vision of a united, multi-cultural country is an impossibility amid the deep-seated majoritarianism that underpins governance in Sri Lanka. Entrenched within the constitution, state structures and political system, Sinhala nationalism is incessantly recycled by powerful processes and actors that no amount of international cajoling or threatening can shift; this is because Sinhala nationalism is not the preserve of an extreme minority in the south, but a powerful, mainstream force.

Meanwhile, the liberal-speak of Sinhala governments since the mid-nineties has engendered a sanguine belief amongst (particular Western) international actors that it is Tamil extremism - i.e. the LTTE - which is standing in the way of liberal peace. However, the blatant lurch towards the Sinhala right by the southern polity that has followed the Rajapakse regime's coming to power has cracked the veneer of lib-

eralism that has cloaked Sinhala majoritarianism since the nineties. Moreover, the undisguised chauvinism that has engulfed Sri Lanka in recent years has undoubtedly stemmed from a confidence the LTTE can be destroyed and hegemony - i.e. a solution within a united Sri Lanka - can be violently imposed on the Tamils. Although Sri Lanka's military has run into serious difficulties in the north, Southern confidence, bolstered by fantastical battlefield claims and media discipline, is undiminished.

If the liberal interventionists are right, the apparent weakening of the LTTE heralded by the state's internationally-backed capture of the East between mid-2006 and mid-2007 should have produced a rush to pluralist accommodation between Tamils and Sinhalese. It has produced exactly the opposite. The international community, particularly the West, is unable to reconcile the 'victories' against the LTTE and the absence of a spontaneous eruption of liberalism. Which is why the increasingly vocal international criticism of the Sri Lankan state is absurdly interspersed with forceful demands of the same state that it must voluntarily share power with the Tamils and thus 'solve' the problem.

Amid these contradictions, the global liberal order is breaking with its habits of recent years and attempting to strong arm the state into being, ironically, more liberal. But these laughably tentative efforts - marked by symbolic cutting of aid and lectures on human rights - has done nothing to tame the Lion. Powerful states are inevitably imbued with a conviction they can forcefully fashion arrangements that suit their goals. However, if it takes powerful intervention to create peace, it will take powerful intervention to make it last, a point underscored by countless such projects since the end of the Cold War.

The alternative, as many of these projects have themselves demonstrated, is to ensure a stable distribution of power among the peoples in conflict. The demand for Tamil Eelam is not a consequence of notions of Tamil cultural superiority, but an understanding that only a state can check a hostile state. Since the Peace of Westphalia, sovereignty has formed the basis for international order. It underpins the United Nations today. However, Sri Lanka is not a stable polity and given the resilience of Sinhala majoritarianism, it does not have the makings of one. The dynamics within the island today forcefully underline the Tamils' assertion, first articulated so clearly in 1977, that independence for the Tamils and lasting peace in the island are one and the same.

OPINION

We never learn

Robert Fisk

The Independent

FIVE years on, and still we have not learnt. With each anniversary, the steps crumble beneath our feet, the stones ever more cracked, the sand ever finer. Five years of catastrophe in Iraq and I think of Churchill, who in the end called Palestine a "hell-disaster".

But we have used these parallels before and they have drifted away in the Tigris breeze. Iraq is swamped in blood. Yet what is the state of our remorse? Why, we will have a public inquiry - but not yet! If only inadequacy was our only sin.

Today, we are engaged in a fruitless debate. What went wrong? How did the people - the *senatus populusque Romanus* of our modern world - not rise up in rebellion when told the lies about weapons of mass destruction, about Saddam's links with Osama bin Laden and 11 September? How did we let it happen? And how come we didn't plan for the aftermath of war?

Oh, the British tried to get the Americans to listen. Downing Street now tells us. We really, honestly did try, before we absolutely and completely knew it was right to embark on this illegal war. There is now a vast literature on the Iraq debacle and there are precedents for post-war planning - of which more later - but this is not the point. Our predicament in Iraq is on an infinitely more terrible scale.

As the Americans came storming up Iraq in 2003, their cruise missiles hissing through the sandstorm towards a hundred Iraqi towns and cities, I would sit in my filthy room in the Baghdad Palestine Hotel, unable to sleep for the thunder of explosions, and root through the books I'd brought to fill the dark, dangerous hours. Tolstoy's *War and Peace* reminded me how conflict can be described with sensitivity and grace and horror - I recommend the *Battle of Borodino* - along with a file of newspaper clippings. In this little folder, there was a long rant by Pat Buchanan, written five months earlier; and still, today I feel its power and its prescience and its absolute historical honesty: "With our MacArthur Regency in Baghdad, Pax Americana will reach apogee. But then the tide recedes, for the one endeavour at which Islamic people excel is expelling imperial powers by terror or guerrilla war."

"They drove the Brits out of Palestine and Aden, the French out of Algeria, the Russians out of Afghanistan, the Americans out of Somalia and Beirut, the Israelis out of Lebanon. We have started up the road to empire and over the next hill we will meet those who went before. The only lesson we learn from history is that we do not learn from history."

How easily the little men took

us into the inferno, with no knowledge or, at least, interest in history. None of them read of the 1920 Iraqi insurgency against British occupation, nor of Churchill's brusque and brutal settlement of Iraq the following year.

On our historical radars, not even Crassus appeared, the wealthiest Roman general of all, who demanded an emperorship after conquering Macedonia - "Mission Accomplished" - and vengefully set forth to destroy Mesopotamia. At a spot in the desert near the Euphrates river, the Parthians - ancestors of present day Iraqi insurgents - annihilated the legions, chopped off Crassus's head and sent it back to Rome filled with gold. Today, they would have videotaped his beheading.

To their monumental hubris, these little men who took us to war five years ago now prove that they have learnt nothing. Anthony Blair - as we should always have called this small town lawyer - should be facing trial for his mendacity. Instead, he now presumes to bring peace to an Arab-Israeli conflict which he has done so much to exacerbate. And now we have the man who changed his mind on the legality of war - and did so on a single sheet of A4 paper - daring to suggest that we should test immigrants for British citizenship. Question 1, I contend, should be: Which blood-soaked British attorney general helped to send 176 British soldiers to their deaths for a lie? Question 2: How did he get away with it?

But in a sense, the facile, dumbo nature of Lord Goldsmith's proposal is a clue to the whole transitory, cardboard structure of our decision-making. The great issues that face us - be they Iraq or Afghanistan, the US economy or global warming, planned invasions or "terrorism" - are discussed not according to serious political timetables but around television schedules and press conferences.

Will the first air raids on Iraq hit prime-time television in the States? Mercifully, yes. Will the first US troops in Baghdad appear on the breakfast shows? Of course. Will Saddam's capture be announced by Bush and Blair simultaneously?

But this is all part of the problem. True, Churchill and Roosevelt argued about the timing of the announcement that war in Europe had ended. And it was the Russians who pipped them to the post. But we told the truth. When the British were retreating to Dunkirk, Churchill announced that the Germans had "penetrated deeply and spread alarm and confusion in their tracks".

Why didn't Bush or Blair tell us this when the Iraqi insurgents began to assault the Western occupation forces? Well, they



There are now twenty-two times as many Western troops in the Muslim world as during the Crusades

were too busy telling us that things were getting better, that the rebels were mere "dead-enders".

On 17 June 1940, Churchill told the people of Britain: "The news from France is very bad and I grieve for the gallant French people who have fallen into this terrible misfortune." Why didn't Blair or Bush tell us that the news from Iraq was very bad and that they grieved - even just a few tears for a minute or so - for the Iraqis?

For these were the men who had the temerity, the sheer, unadulterated gall, to dress themselves up as Churchill, heroes who would stage a rerun of the Second World War, the BBC dutifully calling the invaders "the Allies" - they did, by the way - and painting Saddam's regime as the Third Reich.

Of course, when I was at school, our leaders - Attlee, Churchill, Eden, Macmillan, or Truman, Eisenhower and Kennedy in the United States - had real experience of real war. Not a single Western leader today has any first-hand experience of conflict. When the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq began, the most prominent European opponent of the war was Jacques Chirac, who fought in the Algerian conflict. But he has now gone. So has Colin Powell, a Vietnam veteran but himself duped by Rumsfeld and the CIA.

Yet one of the terrible ironies of our times is that the most bloodthirsty of American statesmen - Bush and Cheney, Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz - have either never heard a shot fired in anger or have ensured they did not have to fight for their country when they had the chance to do so. No wonder Hollywood titles like "Shock and Awe" appeal to the White House. Movies are their only experience of human conflict; the same goes for Blair and Brown.

Churchill had to account for the loss of Singapore before a packed House. Brown won't even account for Iraq until the war is over.

It is a grotesque truism that today - after all the posturing of our political midgets five years ago - we might at last be permitted a valid seance with the ghosts of the Second World War. Statistics are the medium, and the room would have to be dark. But it is a fact that the total of US dead in Iraq (3,978) is well over the number of American casualties suffered in the initial D-Day landings at Normandy (3,384 killed and missing) on 6 June, 1944, or more than three times the total British casualties at Arnhem the same year (1,200).

They count for just over a third of the total fatalities (11,014) of the entire British Expeditionary Force from the German invasion of Belgium to the final evacuation at Dunkirk in June 1940. The number of British dead in Iraq - 176 - is almost equal to the total of UK forces lost at the Battle of the Bulge in 1944-45 (just over 200). The number of US wounded in Iraq - 29,395 - is more than 9 times the number of Americans injured on 6 June (3,184) and more than a quarter of the tally for US wounded in the entire 1950-53 Korean war (103,284).

Iraqi casualties allow an even closer comparison to the Second World War. Even if we accept the lowest of fatality statistics for civilian dead - they range from 350,000 up to a million - these long ago dwarfed the number of British civilian dead in the flying-bomb blitz on London in 1944-45 (6,000) and now far outnumber the total figure for civilians killed in bombing raids across the United Kingdom - 60,595 dead, 86,182 seriously wounded - from 1940 to 1945.

Indeed, the Iraqi civilian death toll since our invasion is now greater than the total number of British military fatalities in the Second World War, which came to an astounding 265,000 dead (some histories give this figure as 300,000) and 277,000 wounded. Minimum estimates for Iraqi dead mean that the civilians of Mesopotamia have suffered six or

seven Dresdens or - more terrible still - two Hiroshimas.

Yet in a sense, all this is a distraction from the awful truth in Buchanan's warning. We have dispatched our armies into the land of Islam. We have done so with the sole encouragement of Israel, whose own false intelligence over Iraq has been discreetly forgotten by our masters, while weeping crocodile tears for the hundreds of thousands of Iraqis who have died.

America's massive military prestige has been irreparably diminished. And if there are, as I now calculate, 22 times as many Western troops in the Muslim world as there were at the time of the 11th and 12th century Crusades, we must ask what we are doing. Are we there for oil? For democracy? For Israel? For fear of weapons of mass destruction? Or for fear of Islam?

We blithely connect Afghanistan to Iraq. If only Washington had not become distracted by Iraq, so the narrative now goes, the Taliban could not have re-established themselves. But al-Qa'ida and the nebulous Osama bin Laden were not distracted. Which is why they expanded their operations into Iraq and then used this experience to assault the West in Afghanistan with the hitherto - in Afghanistan - unheard of suicide bomber.

And I will hazard a terrible guess: that we have lost Afghanistan as surely as we have lost Iraq and as surely as we are going to "lose" Pakistan. It is our presence, our power, our arrogance, our refusal to learn from history and our terror - yes, our terror - of Islam that is leading us into the abyss. And until we learn to leave these Muslim peoples alone, our catastrophe in the Middle East will only become graver. There is no connection between Islam and "terror". But there is a connection between our occupation of Muslim lands and "terror". It's not too complicated an equation. And we don't need a public inquiry to get it right.

NEWS

Stop aid to Sri Lanka military - Tamil Nadu

POLITICAL parties in Tamil Nadu, including ones in the India's coalition central government, have said that military aid to neighboring Sri Lanka should be stopped.

The Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) and Viduthala Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK), constituents of the Dravidar Munnetra Kazhagam -led DPA in Tamil Nadu, on March 13 accused the Central government India of functioning in contravention to Tamils' expectations on the Sri Lankan issue.

"Tamils in India wanted an amicable solution to the ethnic crisis in the island nation. But the Union Government's activities are contrary to their expectations," PMK founder S Ramadoss and VCK general secretary Thol. Tirumavalavan said in a joint statement after holding a meeting to discuss the issue.

They alleged that the Sri Lankan government was attempting to resolve the problem through military means, by launching a 'brutal attack' on the Tamils in Sri Lanka.

Calling for a change in the Central government's approach to the issue, they said India should stop providing assistance and training to the Sri Lankan Army.

Ramadoss said both the PMK and the VCK would raise the Lankan issue in the coming budget session of the state Assembly.

"We are prepared for any sacrifice on the issue," he added.

Further commenting on the issue, G.K. Mani, president of PMK, which has five members in the lower house of Parliament, said an offensive by the Sri Lanka Army in the north is a matter of 'grave concern' as ethnic Tamils are the main target and civilians are being killed.

"All the people who are being massacred in Sri Lanka are Tamils. They are our brethren," he said. "They have already killed a lot of Tamil people. India should stop this."

India must stop "training officers of the Sri Lankan army and should not supply weapons," Mani said. "India has a lot of members belonging to the Tamil community. People who are being killed in Sri Lanka are Tamils. People living in Tamil Nadu feel the pain. They feel as if their own people are being killed."

TamilNadu, the mainly Tamil state is India's sixth-most populous with 62 million people, according to the 2001 census.

India "should ask the Sri Lankan government to find a

political solution and end its military offensive," Mani said.

"If Norway can step in and try to solve the crisis then India should not shy away. India is Sri Lanka's neighbour."

In the interview, Thol Thirumavalavan, the founder of VCK, said: "India is giving moral and military support, it must stop at once."

"It even gave a warm welcome to the Sri Lankan military chief. This is not appropriate from our viewpoint," he said.

India's ban on the LTTE should be removed by holding a referendum in Tamil Nadu, Thirumavalavan said. "Some bureaucrats took the decision without consulting the people."

The Communist Party of India (CPI) also took up the issue of Indian military assistance to Sri Lanka during Question Hour in the Rajya Sabha (Upper House of the Indian Parliament).

The National General Secretary of the CPI, D. Raja, launched a no-holds-barred attack on the Central government, deploring the Indian government for "not uttering a word against the deployment of sea-mines by the Sri Lankan government" in the Palk Straits and for giving training to the Sri Lankan army in a "clandestine" manner.

"What is the policy of the Government of India, and why is the Government of India keeping quiet on the question of sea-mines? Why the Government of India is extending all kinds of military support to the Sri Lankan Government?" he asked.

He sought to know why New Delhi was keen on helping a rogue nation that was "violating various international conventions" relating to land and sea mines, and asked the Indian government to declare its policy.

He noted that "the military offensive in Sri Lanka has been gradually turning to be a war against the Tamils" and "all sorts of human rights violations are taking place" in the war-torn island.

Tamil National Movement leader Pala Nedumaran, along with two hundred members of the Tamil Eelam Supporters Co-ordination Committee (TESCC) staged a demonstration Saturday March 22, to condemn the Indian government's military aid to the genocidal Sri Lankan government.

Nedumaran condemned the Indian government for secretly

Continued on p14



South African Indians oppose Delhi's arms to Sri Lanka

TamilNet

CARRYING the red and yellow flag, an impressive number of South Africans of Indian Origin, demonstrated outside the Indian Consulate in Durban on Thursday, March 20, to register their collective opposition to the military oppression of Tamils in Sri Lanka by the Sri Lankan Government.

They appealed to the Indian government to stop military assistance to the Sri Lankan government. While the Chairperson of the South African Human Rights Commission received the memorandum of the demonstrators and spoke to them, the Indian Consulate refused to accept it. Except a negligibly few Eelam Tamils, the vast majority of the demonstrators were people of Indian origin. The demonstration was organized

by the Tamil Co-ordinating Committee of South Africa to coincide with the Human Rights Day in South Africa, falling on 21 March. South Africa is home to the largest number of Tamils living outside of India, more than 700 000, of which approximately 340 000 reside in KwaZulu Natal and its surrounds.

Mr D Maduray, member of TCC-SA handed a memorandum to the Chairperson of the South African Human Rights Commission, Mr Jody Kollapen.

Mr Maduray stated, "India as a superpower in the region has done absolutely nothing about the Sri Lankan government withdrawing from the Ceasefire Agreement and we object to the military support that India is giving to the Sri Lankan government to murder innocent people." He also said "the Indian government is demonstrating their contempt

for the Tamil people by refusing to accept the memorandum."

On acceptance of the memorandum Mr Kollapen said "the Universal Declaration of Human rights means that human beings all over the world are regarded as equals and are entitled to enjoy simple rights like living in your country of birth, speaking your language, practising your culture and religion, but 60 years later, millions around the world do not enjoy their human rights like the people in Palestine, Iraq and Sri Lanka, particularly the Tamils."

He also said "South Africa achieved its liberation because millions of people across the world stood with us." "This is not a Tamil issue. Our challenge in South Africa is to take this issue beyond the Tamil community."

"The truth is we cannot be free when people in other parts of the world are not free," he said.

India risks indictment in war crimes, cautions LTTE

TamilNet

THE Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam from its Head Quarters in Vanni March 10 released a statement condemning the Indian 'State welcome' extended to Sri Lanka Army Chief Lt. Gen. Sarath Fonseka and the statements made by Indian military chiefs in this context.

"The Indian State must take the responsibility for the ethnic genocide of the Tamils that will be carried out by the Sinhala military, re-invigorated by such moves of the Indian State," the statement said.

"LTTE wishes to point out to the Indian State that by this his-

toric blunder, it will continue to subject the Eelam Tamils to misery and put them in the dangerous situation of having to face ethnic genocide on a massive scale."

The view expressed by the Indian military chiefs, "India wants to ensure that the Sri Lankan Army maintains its upperhand over the LTTE", just illustrates the efforts of the Indian State to prop up the Sinhala war machine, the LTTE statement said.

The Indian State's move of "propping up the politically-militarily-economically weakened SriLankan State has upset Eelam Tamils."

"We did not leave the ceasefire agreement and we did not start the war. We are only under-

taking a defensive war against the war of ethnic genocide of the Sri Lankan State."

"We still have not abandoned the Norway sponsored peace efforts and we are ready to take part in such efforts."

Full text of the LTTE statement follows:

Is the Indian State attempting yet another historic blunder?

The State welcome given by the Indian State to the Sri Lanka military chief Lt. Gen. Sarath Fonseka, who is heading the Sri Lankan State's war of ethnic genocide against the Eelam Tamils, has deeply hurt them.

Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) strongly condemns

Continued on p14

NEWS

No solution to Sri Lanka conflict possible without LTTE - South Africa

TamilNet

EXPRESSING deep concern over the escalating violence in Sri Lanka, South Africa this weekend called for renewed negotiations to end the protracted conflict and emphasized "no solution to this conflict can be found without the involvement of the two principal parties to the conflict - the government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE."

Speaking in London, South Africa's Deputy Minister of Communications Roy Padayachie assured that his country would render every assistance towards making peace but, in an implicit criticism of approaches by some other countries, said: "we will never ever impose our involvement in any part of the globe."

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of a two-day seminar in London organized by Global Peace Support (UK), a Tamil expatriate organization, Mr. Padayachie said: "South Africa is deeply concerned about the escalating conflict in Sri Lanka and in particular the difficulties ... over the resolution of the Tamil question."

"The South African government is concerned that negotiations between the two principle parties in the conflict - the LTTE and the government of Sri Lanka - have come to a close."

"We believe - and it is the very firm and principled view of the South African community, supported by their government - that every effort must be made to encourage the parties to return to the negotiating table."

"The South African community - and this has been communicated - is very clear that no solution to this conflict can be found without the involvement of these two principle parties to the conflict - the government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE."

The LTTE, he also noted, "is regarded by the Tamil people as their authentic representatives."

"We believe that the international community must escalate its own efforts in supporting a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Sri Lanka," he said.

However, he said, "It is not for the international community to prescribe what solutions are necessary to resolve this problem. We believe very firmly this is a matter for the Sri Lankan peoples on their own."

"That is the view of the South African people, and it is certainly our [South African government] view," he said.

Asked about his views on the proscriptions of the LTTE as a terrorist organisation, Mr. Padayachie noted "you know, when we fought the liberation

war against Apartheid, the African National Congress was described as a terrorist organisation."

"We never accepted that. We fought that and we struggled against it," he said.

"And one of the critical, strategic issues we mobilized around, was to create the right conditions for free political activity. So that the people could participate openly, without fear of any repressive law, in the dialogue, in the debates, that were necessary to forge a free and democratic South Africa."

"We argued strongly that one of the conditions for creating the appropriate conditions necessary for a negotiated settlement in South Africa was the need to unban our organizations that were banned at the time and to release political prisoners."

"Those were all obstacles in the way of our struggle, we had to deal with them squarely; we had to mobilise our community and the international community to remove these obstacles."

"That's the lesson that comes from our experience and I think it has relevance to your struggle," he told Tamil reporters.

Mr. Padayachie was in London to represent South Africa's government at a seminar on Sri Lanka's conflict held at the University of East London on March 22 and 23.

In his address to the seminar on Sunday, Mr. Padayachie reiterated his government's call for renewed negotiations between the LTTE and GoSL and noted the importance of the assistance of a third party.

"At some stage to come back to the negotiating table you may require the facilitation of parties who are sympathetic and parties who are respected by both the protagonists," he said.

"As for South Africa, we cannot be involved in any conflict any any part of the world if we are not invited by both the parties. When we go into Zimbabwe, when we go into Cote D'Ivoire, when we go into Burundi, it is at the invitation of the parties to the conflict."

"We will never ever impose our involvement in any part of the globe," he said.

Drawing on the experience of the ANC with the Apartheid regime, the Deputy Minister said that even before negotiations proper, there had to be "talks about talks."

"We [ANC] initiated the process of talks about talks. And there were preconditions that we set. We said don't expect us to talk to the Apartheid government and



lay down our arms if you do not unban [us and other] organisations, if you do not release the political prisoners, if you don't set conditions for free political activity," he said.

"And if you demonstrate your willingness to do all these things then we are prepared to say we'll suspend the armed struggle and go into negotiations," the ANC had told the Apartheid regime, Mr. Padayachie said.

Noting there was a question in any negotiations as to who constitutes the credible and legitimate

The LTTE "is regarded by the Tamil people as their authentic representatives" - South African Minister

representatives, the Deputy Minister told the seminar: "I received a very interesting pamphlet from colleagues who were part of the Tamil Centre for Human Rights."

"It's really quite a brilliant pamphlet. I want to recommend to everybody. It's called 'The Tamil Peoples rights to Self Determination.'"

"In case any one of you is very unsure of what the South African peoples understanding is of this question about who is the authentic leader [of the Tamils], I want to read something which I thought resonated a lot with the way South Africans think about the Sri Lanka's crisis," he said.

The Deputy Minister noted that the 2002 Ceasefire

Agreement conferred an official de jure recognition, from the Sri Lankan government, of the LTTE as one of the two parties to the armed conflict.

In another recognition of the LTTE as representing the Tamils, the Sri Lankan government also deproscribed the LTTE ahead of negotiating a solution, he pointed out. Colombo also held several rounds of negotiations in international capitals with the LTTE towards forging a final political solution to the conflict.

He also noted that the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) won a resounding mandate in the 2004 elections and "their manifesto stated that the TNA accepts the LTTE's leadership as the national leadership of the Tamils."

Quoting from the pamphlet Mr. Padayachie pointed out: "with the current political climate framed by the War against Terrorism, maybe it is timely for the International Community to reassess and to review its assessment of the LTTE as a terrorist group as it would seem clear that it is resorting to the right to self defence whilst struggling for the right for Self Determination."

"The International Community needs to take a balanced account of this conflict, it also needs to give diplomatic support to the LTTE to negotiate with the Sri Lankan government. If the International Community wants peace in this part of the world it must encourage this particular process."

"So it is clear to all of us what this booklet says captures the hearts and minds of the way peace loving and democratic people throughout the world feel and think about the Sri Lankan situation," Mr. Padayachie said.

"And ladies and gentlemen, today it is absolutely clear that the two most pressing challenges that we all have before us is to ensure that hard work whether you're are



(top and opposite pag): South Africans of Indian origin protesting in Durban against India selling arms to Sri Lanka. (above) Roy Padayachie, South African Deputy Minister of Communications.

located in government, civil society, NGOs or in any community must be directed at supporting a return to the Ceasefire and to the negotiating table between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government, and at the same time to escalate in the International Community our efforts to support and solidarity for peace in Sri Lanka on a permanent basis."

Meanwhile, sources at the University of East London said this week the institution had come under intense pressure from the Sri Lankan High Commission in London to withdraw its provision of the venue for the weekend seminar.

The University had initially withdrawn the venue, citing Sri Lanka's strident objections in writing, but its top management had subsequently met with Tamil expatriates who challenged the decision and having discussed the nature of the event and those attending, the University had decided the contract with Global Peace Support should be honoured, the sources said.

DIASPORA

Politically French, culturally Tamil

TamilNet

AN emerging picture in recent times in Europe and North America is the active and successful participation of Tamils in the local politics. The new impetus seems to be coming from the younger generation of Eelam Tamils.

Twelve candidates of Tamil origins have been elected to the local bodies of Paris and suburbs in the local government elections concluded last Sunday in France.

Seven of them are Eelam Tamils while three are of Pondicheri origins and one each of Mauritius and Guadeloupe background.

The French - Tamil connections are a long legacy ever since the French East India Company was established at Pondicheri in 1664.

The French and the Danish (at Tharangkampaadi) were the two European powers who thought of having their colonial headquarters in the land of Tamils.

A considerable part of the modern history of Tamils had a strong link to the colonial history of the French. Tamils migrated to various French colonies across the world and a representative group are living in France today.

A large number of Tamils who have made France their home are from Pondicheri who migrated to France with the annexation of French territories by independent India.

Even though Tamils have found representation in French politics, new inspirations came with the arrival of Eelam Tamils, shaping and giving form to a common Tamil identity in France.

Around 125,000 Tamils are estimated to be living in France. Of them, around 50,000 are Eelam Tamils.

A significant event that took place in Paris last January was Tamils of all shades jointly celebrating Pongkal as a common festival of Tamil identity.

Another noticeable manifestation of the emerging cultural consciousness is the presence of four Tamil bookshops in the La Chapelle area of Paris.

Fourteen Eelam Tamils contested in the local government elections in early March in Paris and suburbs alone.

Five were elected in the first round.

In addition, two Pondicheri Tamils and Mrs. Lilawtee Rajendram, a Mauritian Tamil married to an Eelam Tamil were also elected in the first rounds.

A striking feature of the concluded elections is that almost all the elected Eelam Tamils belong to left wing political parties.

Observers identify a subtle message of Tamil unhappiness conveyed to the present right wing government, says writer Ki.Pi. Aravindan in Paris.

Last year, in Norway, eight

Eelam Tamils, five of them women, were elected to the local bodies.

Two of the women were aged 19 and 22 when they got elected.

According to Statistics Norway, a Norwegian government survey, 70 percent of Eelam Tamil women participated in the voting which is the highest among the migrants in Norway.

Political consciousness, education and long established familiarity with the norms of democratic politics are said to be the reasons behind the diaspora Tamil political activism.

The details of candidates elected in Paris and suburbs are:

■ Mme Naguleswary Ariyaratnam, SEINE SAINT-DENIS (93)



Six of the twelve Tamils elected to local bodies in and around Paris, France.

Photo TamilNet

Clichy-sous-Bois

■ Mme Sarmela Sabaratnam, VAL D'OISE (95) Louvres

■ Mme Sophia Soosaipillai, VAL D'OISE (95) Sarcelles

■ Mme Preetty Navaneetharaju, ESSONNE (91) - Evry

■ Mme Asamtathayalini Willam-Reginald, SEINE ET MARNE (77) - Chelles

■ M. Arulasantham Puvanespararajah, SEINE SAINT-DENIS (93) - La Courneuve

■ Mme Kalaiyarasi Raviendranathan, VAL DE MARNE (94) - Villeneuve-Saint-Georges

■ M. Alain Anandane, SEINE SAINT-DENIS (93) - Drancy

■ M. Chandrasegaran Parassouramane, VAL D'OISE (95) -

Villiers-le-Bel

■ Mme Shama Nilavannane, SEINE SAINT-DENIS (93) - Le Bourget

■ Mme Marie Darves-Bornoz, HAUTS DE SEINE (92) - Bagneux

■ Mme Lilawtee Rajendram, SEINE SAINT-DENIS (93) - Bondy

Hurdling chauvinism

In memory of Rohan Rajasingham

TamilNet

EXPATRIATE Tamils in London last weekend held a remembrance ceremony for Rohan Rajasingham, an accomplished sportsman who strove against institutionalized Sinhala majoritarianism to better the conditions for aspiring Tamil sportsmen and women in Sri Lanka. Rajasingham passed away on January 8, 2008 after a brief battle with cancer, aged 50.

Described as outstanding student by his former classmates at Mahajana College, Tellippalai, Rajasingham represented his college at football, hockey, cricket and in athletics, and captained the teams to championship wins in football and hockey.

Led by Rajasingham, Mahajana College team won the all island Singer Shield football tournament at Sugathasa stadium, Colombo, under flood lights in front of a large crowd in 1978, classmates recalled. In 1980, Rajasingham joined Grasshoppers Sports Club, one of the best hockey team in the island.

In 1994, Rajasingham completed his Diploma in Athletics. In 1996 he travelled to Brazil where he acquired a Diploma in Brazilian Football. That year he also gained a Diploma in Coaching and Training in India.

However, in Sri Lanka itself, Rajasingham, along with other Tamil sports players, struggled against entrenched anti-Tamil chauvinism in national sports bodies.

"He was amongst the first to experience the darker side of sports in Sri Lanka; his experience is very much that of today's

youngsters," classmates at the Mahajana Old Students Society said.

Rajasingham's ability to speak all three languages - Tamil, Sinhala and English - allowed him to overcome hurdles other Tamil youths could not.

Starting his career as a Sports officer in 1986, Rajasingham attended the Sports Officers programme offered by the National Institute of Sports Science (NISS).

The nine-month course was conducted in Sinhala as prescribed in the 1973 Sports Law which specifies that the medium of instruction should be Sinhala.

Along with others, Rajasingham agitated for changes. It was only a decade later, in 1996, that the NISS agreed to hold its examinations in Tamil as well. However lectures and field instruction are in Sinhala still.

His experiences of discrimination spurred Rajasingham to strive for the development of sports training in the Northeast. "His dedication to improve the education of sports officers and physical education teachers continued until his untimely passing away," a classmate said.

In the early nineties, Rajasingham coached Northeastern teams in netball, football, hockey and athletics, many taking championship trophies.

In 1997 he took up a role in the Sports Planning Office in the North, at the same time coaching the Northeast football team which took third place in national competitions in 1998, 2001 and 2002.

The period coincided with the height of President Chandrika Kumaratunga's 'War for Peace'.

Rajasingham also sought to establish the Sports Science Institute (SSI) in military-occupied Jaffna with the intention it would be affiliated to the NISS.

In 1999 he submitted a proposal to the Director of NISS. After two years of silence, Sri Lanka's Director General of Sports rejected the proposal.

Dismayed, Rajasingham turned to battling other aspects of the state discrimination that aspiring Tamil sportspeople were facing, notably the lack of facilities, funding and opportunities in the Northeast.

He reached out to the Tamil Diaspora for support and encouragement and was welcomed.

In 2002 he helped to put together a cricket team from the University of Jaffna to visit Britain.

The next year, he trained and brought a netball team from the Northeast to the UK; it sparked, beating all rivals pitted against it.

Rajasingham was instrumental in establishing a sports academy for Northeast. The initiative was enthusiastically supported by the Tamil School Sports Association (TSSA), UK, which welcomed the idea and worked on a comprehensive plan and budget.

As a consequence, the Sports Academy of the NorthEast (SANE) was registered as an NGO in Jaffna and later in Kilinochchi.

After 2004's devastating tsunami, SANE, with the help of international NGOs, established sports fields near the clusters of temporary shelters in the coastal



Rohan Rajasingham

areas in Vadamarachchi East and Mullaitivu.

Planning began for permanent sports facilities next to proposed sites of permanent resettlement.

Amid the scramble for international reconstruction funding, Sri Lanka's Ministry of Sports came up with a proposal to build a stadium in Kilinochchi. But nothing came of it.

In 2006, Rajasingham took up the position of District Sports Officer in Kilinochchi and moved there with his wife and three young children. He designed and built a modest building to host all of SANE's operations. The project was funded by TSSA(UK).

Rajasingham trained sports officers as well as athletics and netball teams and organized sports tournaments.

The goal, he insisted, was to develop sports in the Northeast to an international level and for that, a foundational cadre of dedicated and well trained instructors was essential.

NEWS

Colombo property market slows as expat Tamils stop investing

The Morning Leader

THERE has been a general slow-down of the number of apartment buildings coming up in Colombo. The latest sector to be hit by Sri Lanka's swelling economic crisis is the Colombo real estate market, which has been plagued by a cocktail of negative developments.

After an unprecedented 176 companies were forced to close in 2007 (the highest ever in this decade) redundant corporate offices now up for sale have flooded the market, and buyers are scarce.

Out of the many mushrooming apartment complexes in Colombo, only the super-luxury category are seeing high sales, with development of complexes targeted at the middle classes slowing down due to the reduced purchasing power of buyers and rising interest rates for housing loans.

Estate agents speaking to The Morning Leader detailed the drop they have experienced in sales recently, and provided insights into the reason for the lack of buoyancy in the real estate market. In recent years, most apartment complexes for middle income buyers mushroomed around the Bambalapitiya and Wellawatte areas according to an agent who dealt with initial sales of apartment units in these buildings.

The agent told this newspaper that most of the apartments were bought by Sri Lankans who have migrated abroad, to provide homes in the city for their parents. As most of these buyers were of Tamil origin, the deteriorating security situation and resulting persecution of ordinary Tamil citizens in areas such as Wellawatte led to a dramatic decrease in sales in these areas, said the agent.

Arresting of Tamils

"They are scared for their parents. Because they live abroad, with the white van abductions, and all of the searching and arresting of Tamil people, most are not happy to risk their parents living alone in Colombo.

"Local residents too have been hesitant to invest in property, for fear that their savings had best be held back for a rainy day, and possible migration. This is not just about the security situation. Even before, we had to deal with bombs going off all over, and strict laws. Now the fear of what will happen to the economy and the falling value of the rupee seem to be affecting people. A huge number of people who were in the process of finalising purchases backed down towards the end of last year," the agent said.

Some are also waiting for a situation similar to what has taken

place in the US, hoping that property prices will plummet with a lack of buyers.

Apartment complexes depend on sales to finance their construction. When a potential owner buys an apartment, he usually pays an initial down payment before the construction begins. The rest of the money is paid in stages whilst the construction of the building goes on. With sufficient sales, developers can avoid costly bank loans, and complete an apartment complex with minimum investment.

Ground to a halt

However in the current situation where sales have all but ground to a halt, developers are stuck to foot the bill for completing the construction of their buildings. They are then forced to reduce prices in order to try and spur sales. "There are several apartment blocks up for sale. The prices get lower. Therefore, the people wait for the prices to drop further," said Managing Director, Lanka Land Exchange (Pvt) Ltd., Rajendra Prasudi.

Prasudi lamented that most agencies find it more difficult to sell properties than they have in the past, and properties in categories that once "sold like hot cakes" are now firmly on ice due to a lack of interested buyers.

Speaking on the dearth in activity of the commercial property market, Prasudi said that the agents today find it hard to sell properties, which not long ago sold like hot cakes. He feels that the reason for the downturn is a reluctance of potential business buyers to invest on these properties on a long-term basis. "Earlier, we used to sell at least 10% of the properties with ease. Today even that is difficult," he said.

Parents to migrate

Lanka Land Exchange has noted a similar trend in the sale of apartments. Prasudi believes that Sri Lankans living abroad have largely given up on buying flats in apartment complexes due to the prevailing instability. Families living in foreign countries who initially planned to send money to Sri Lanka for their parents to buy a house in Colombo, have instead largely shifted to trying to coax their parents to migrate as well, taking out temporary accommodation in Colombo until such arrangements could be made.

Prasudi has noticed that several potential property buyers living abroad have decided not to visit Sri Lanka and are turning away from their homeland out of fear.



Sales of high rise flats in Colombo have fallen as expatriate buyers fear for the safety of their parents

"The people in foreign countries also do not come to Sri Lanka due to the prevalent situation" he said.

Sharp rises in the prices of fuel and building materials have had the effect of driving the prices of apartments up far higher than most people can afford to pay. However, Prasudi has a gut feeling that developers, despite the difficulties will continue with plans for new buildings. In the short term, values may fall, however it would be better in the long run to finish a building now than to have to cope with potentially staggering construction prices in later years.

More optimistic

However, apartments continue to come up despite difficulties in selling them. The prices of building materials also are on the rise, which is a reason for companies to continue building apartments. "They know that the prices will anyway go up," Prasudi said.

Some developers are more optimistic. "Although we have increased our prices due to high material costs, still there is no decrease in the purchasing rate but since late there is a slight delay for reservations. Hope this tendency is a direct result of price hikes and also due to the present economic state," a pair of leading property developers told The Morning Leader.

They said that despite the current price hike in the construction field, which compelled some condominium developers to increase their prices, some property developers and real estate companies are still happy over the high demand for their houses.

The sales manager of one leading property developer in Colombo however was far less optimistic. On the basis of anonymity, she told The Morning Leader their sales have dropped by 43% due to the present economic situation in the country. "The purchasing rate has dropped enormously and if this trend continues it would badly impact the industry.

Luxury apartments

"Apartment sales at high end condominiums in the heart of the commercial hub are not so affected since most of their clientele are foreigners or business travellers. It is the developers who have targeted the upper middle class that have found it difficult to sell their apartments," she further added.

One developer building a complex aimed at upper middle class buyers told The Morning Leader that out of the six storeys to be constructed, several apartments on the first and second storeys are still up for sale, despite the higher floors being sold out. The developer, Good Hope Property Developers (GHPD) expressed

confidence that they would be able to sell their apartments in time. "We have been in this field for quite a long time and we are happy as it is not a difficult task for us to sell the apartments as we have earned a name in the field," a GHPD manager said.

"We are a BOI project and we use the correct material which we import duty free. That is why our projects have been successful for the past few years and we give a one year guarantee period but if any structural defects are reported we take corrective action.

Up to now we are not affected due to the present situation in the country although there is a decline in the purchasing rate reported from other developers," he added.

The general trend observed in our enquiries was that property developers gave a more positive outlook of their sales situation as they were focusing on the prospect of selling the apartments in their particular building. However, agents dealing with many properties on a more detached level, generally painted a darker picture of a severe drop in property sales.

Whatever the reality of the current situation one thing is certain. Unless Sri Lanka changes its trajectory where citizens of all ethnicities feel safer in the capital, and the community at large see light at the end of the tunnel, the worst is yet to come.

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NEWS

Aid from China - and no questions on Human Rights

Somini Sengupta
New York Times

FOR 25 years, the dirty little war on the island in the Indian Ocean has stretched its octopus arms across the world. The ethnic Tamil diaspora has provided vital funding for separatist Tamil Tigers; remittances from Sri Lankan workers abroad have propped up the economy; the government has relied on foreign assistance to battle the insurgency.

Today, a shifting world order is bearing new fruits for Sri Lanka. Most notably, China's quiet assertion in India's backyard has put Sri Lanka's government in a position not only to play China off against India, but also to ignore complaints from outside Asia about human rights violations in the war.

The timing is propitious. The government jettisoned a five-year cease-fire this year, and is now banking on a military victory over the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. In so doing, it has faced a barrage of criticism over human rights abuses and has lost defense aid from the United States and some other sources. And, in recent months, government officials have increasingly cozied up to countries that tend to say little to nothing on things like abductions and assaults on press freedom.

Sri Lanka's foreign secretary, Palitha Kohona, put it plainly when he said that Sri Lanka's "traditional donors," namely, the United States, Canada and the European Union, had "receded into a very distant corner," to be replaced by countries in the East. He gave three reasons: The new donors are neighbors; they are rich; and they conduct themselves differently. "Asians don't go around teaching each other how to behave," he said. "There are ways we deal with each other - perhaps a quiet chat, but not wagging the finger."

The Tamil Tigers, for their part, have succeeded in getting themselves classified as a terrorist group in many countries, including the United States, Canada and the European Union, making it harder for the guerrillas to raise money abroad.

At the same time, according to Mr. Kohona, Chinese assistance has grown fivefold in the last year to nearly \$1 billion, eclipsing Sri Lanka's longtime biggest donor, Japan. The Chinese are building a highway, developing two power plants and putting up a new port in the hometown of the president of Sri Lanka, Mahinda Rajapaksa.

Sri Lanka also buys a lot of

weapons from China and China's ally Pakistan.

Chinese diplomacy in South Asia, grounded as it is in a policy of "harmony" and deep pockets, is of obvious concern to India. So are the sentiments of Tamils at home. Overt support from India for the Sri Lankan counterinsurgency program can be explosive among India's Tamils. But coming down hard on the government here could push Sri Lanka deeper into China's embrace.

"There is little choice," said Ashok Kumar Mehta, a retired general who was a leader of an Indian peacekeeping force in Sri Lanka nearly 20 years ago.

"India's policy is virtually hands off."

Mr. Kohona, the Sri Lankan foreign secretary, noted that India's contributions had also grown, to nearly \$500 million this

**If you are neutral in
situations of injustice,
you have chosen the
side of the oppressor.
If an elephant has its
foot on the tail of a
mouse and you say
that you are neutral,
the mouse will not
appreciate your
neutrality' - Desmond
Tutu, clergyman**

year. India is building a coal-fired power plant and Indian companies have been invited to build technology parks and invest in telecommunications. New Delhi, like Washington, has shut the tap on direct military support, but it can still help with crucial intelligence, particularly in intercepting weapons smuggled by sea.

The picture in Sri Lanka is emblematic of a major shift from 20 years ago, when India was the only power center in the region. Now come China's artful moves in India's backyard. As C. Raja Mohan, an international relations professor at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore, points out, China has started building a circle of road-and-port connections in India's neighboring countries, and it has begun to eye a role in the Indian Ocean, as its thirst for natural resources makes it more important to secure the sea lanes.

That offers countries like Sri Lanka ample opportunities. "Now the smaller countries have increasingly turned to China to influence India's strategic interests, and thus silence it on human rights issues," said Meenakshi

Ganguly, South Asia researcher for Human Rights Watch. She cited Burma, where, in the 1990s, India pressed for democracy and watched the military junta sidle up to Beijing. "Now India is concerned about China's role in Sri Lanka because of control over the Indian Ocean," she said.

Iran is the latest entrant. Late last year came the promise of a whopping \$1.6 billion line of credit, primarily to help Sri Lanka buy Iranian oil.

Washington still counts. Sri Lanka is sore at losing American military aid and development assistance. The United States has also irritated the government by pressing for United Nations human rights monitors after the visit last October of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour. She said at the end of her visit that "the weakness of the rule of law and prevalence of impunity is alarming."

That infuriated the government. Sri Lanka's mission in Geneva sent out acerbic opinion pieces published in Sri Lankan newspapers.

One, an editorial in the pro-government newspaper, The Island, declared that "those U.N. knights in shining armor tilting at windmills in small countries should be told that the protection of human rights is next to impossible during a fiercely fought war."

Still, criticism over human rights continues to dog Sri Lanka.

Last Thursday, a report by Human Rights Watch blamed the government for a pattern of disappearances. The same day, an international Group of Eminent Persons that the government had invited to monitor Sri Lankan investigations into human rights violations said it was leaving; it cited "a lack of political and institutional will."

The attorney general's office responded by saying that the government would reconstitute the panel with "an alternate group of eminent persons."

But however free Sri Lanka feels to dismiss Western concerns about human rights these days, there are still long-range costs it may find itself confronting one day. The real Achilles' heel for the government is looming economic trouble, as its war chest expands and inflation reaches double digits.

And in that, the world matters. For its failure to ratify certain international conventions, Sri Lanka already risks losing trade preferences with the European Union at the end of this year. And, however much China has risen in importance, Europe remains in this country's largest trading partner.

NEWS

Heavy losses and floods force lull in Army offensives

HEAVY casualties and flooding of battle zones due to heavy rain has forced a pause in Sri Lanka Army (SLA) operations in the north, specifically in north-western Mannar region.

Over 55 SLA soldiers were killed in heavy fighting between the SLA and the LTTE on Saturday, March 22 at Iththikkandal in Paalaikkuzhi, Mannar.

Around 120 SLA soldiers were wounded in the heavy fighting that lasted from 4:20 a.m. till 5:00 p.m. on Saturday in Paalaikkuzhi battlefield, according to the LTTE Operations Command in Mannar.

The fighting intensified as SLA captured some LTTE points in Paalaikkuzhi. The Tigers recaptured the points from the SLA and the fighting raged on as both the SLA and the LTTE were fight-

The real Achilles' heel for the government is looming economic trouble, as its war chest expands and inflation reaches double digits.

ing for the control of the points.

Finally, at 5:00 p.m., the SLA was forced to retreat after 10 hours of fighting in which the SLA sustained heavy casualties.

On the same day, elite Black Sea Tigers, engaged in a confrontation with a Sri Lanka Navy (SLN) fleet in the seas off Mullaiththevu, attacked and sunk a SLN Dvora Fast Attack Craft (FAC).

At least 14 SLN sailors were killed in the clashes. LTTE announced that three Black Sea Tigers, Lt. Col. Anpumarana, Major Niranjani and Major Kaninila, were killed in action in the fighting that lasted for 45 minutes.

The SLN claimed that the FAC had hit a sea mine and was completely destroyed before it sank. Denying confrontations in the sea, the SLN said it had launched a search operation to locate the missing sailors.

The next day, on Sunday, 4 SLA soldiers were killed and 7

wounded at Paalamoaddai in Vavuniyaa district, according to LTTE Vavuniyaa Operations Command. The fighting lasted for more than an hour.

Fighting was also reported on three fronts in the Northern Front at Kilaali, Naakarkoayil and Mukamaalai on Sunday. At least one SLA soldier was killed and several others were wounded when the Tigers counter attacked the SLA soldiers.

According to Sri Lankan military sources, other than the heavy casualties, another factor that is impeding operations is the flooding of battle zones in the north-west Mannar district.

Military spokesman Brigadier Udaya Nanyakkara said the offensive against the Tigers was continuing, but flooding had caused supply bottlenecks.

"Rain has created problems with some of the bunkers filled with water," Nanyakkara told Reuters. "The movement of vehicles and supplies are restricted to main roads, although much of the fighting relies on ground troops," he said.

Heavy rains have also prevented the army using helicopter gunships against the LTTE, who were digging new fortifications along the frontlines of their northern strongholds, according to Sri Lankan news paper, Sunday Times.

Ground forces were also held up by knee-high floodwaters and marshlands, with only sporadic artillery and mortar fire.

The Sri Lankan military, which has been battling to break through LTTE defences in Vanni from three fronts, has had no significant gains in over eight months of continuous attempts.

With no significant shifts in forward defence lines, the Sri Lankan military has resorted to claiming wildly exaggerated casualties for LTTE to claim the upper hand in battles.

According to the Sri Lankan government, it has killed 2,343 Tigers since January against the loss of 136 of its own troops.

In the latest news release the military claimed clashes on Saturday and Sunday in the districts of Mannar, Vavuniya and Manal Aaru left at least 100 LTTE and five soldiers dead.



Sri Lankan soldiers have been bogged down in fighting in the north, but continue to implement the government's plans to colonise Tamil areas in the East. Photo Sanka Vidanagama / AFP / Getty Images

SLA accelerates colonization

THE Sri Lanka Army (SLA) is involved in planned encroachment of lands belonging to Tamils in Koaraalaipattu North in Batticaloa district, and colonization of other Sri Lanka government controlled areas by resettling Sinhala civilians, local residents of affected areas in Koaraalaipattu said.

Sinhala fishermen, brought from western littorals including Puththalam and Negombo, are being settled in Maangkea'ni and Vahaarai centre by SLA troops under the direction of Major Bertie Perera, civilians coordinator, the local fishermen said.

Since 14 March, Sinhala fishermen brought from elsewhere have set up temporary huts and have begun fishing in the sea in the vicinity of the Christian church located in Vaaharai centre, sources said.

Similarly on 18 March, a large

number of Sinhala fishermen with fishing gear arrived in 9 Lorries at the SLA military base and, Major Perera is providing necessary accommodation and initial support to make a living in the new area, according to local fishermen.

Under existing rules, one has to obtain permission from the District Secretariat before commencing drag netting, and once the permission is granted an area of 350 metres will be allocated to the applicant.

However, the newly brought in Sinhala Fishermen, without approvals, have already begun fishing activities in the area of their choice with the assistance of SLA troops. In addition, military officials provide required facilities to these fishermen, overriding the administrative activities of the district secretariat, local civilians said.

Soon after the 2005 Tsunami, Sinhala fishermen from elsewhere arrived in Maangkea'ni and Kalkudaa but due to opposition from local fishermen and complaints made through the Federation of Fishermen's societies to Fisheries department, the new comers vacated the area.

Meanwhile, when officials from Koaraalaipattu District secretariat officials complained that SLA has begun interfering with the administration, Military officials had informed the representatives of Governmental and Non Governmental Organizations (NGOS) that all administrative activities in the area are now being handled by the military.

Major Perera has also told the area civilians that they should extend their cooperation to the newly brought in Sinhala fishermen.

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NEWS

Stop military aid...

Continued from p8

imparting training to Sri Lankan Army personnel who were carrying out a genocide against Tamil people. He pointed out that any military support to Sri Lanka would be used only against innocent Tamils.

Slogans condemning the Indian government, and the Tamil Nadu government were raised.

Several leaders of various political and non-political organizations took part in the agitation: Periyar Dravidar Kazhagam Presidium Committee Member Anoor Jagdeesan, Devendra Kula Vellalar Kootamaippu President Pasupathi Pandian, Tamil Desa Podhuvudamai Kadchi President Mani-
arasan and Tamil Desa Viduthalai Iyakkam Secretary Thiaygu.

Dravidar Kazhagam also registered its protest against Indian military assistance to the Rajapakse regime and passed a resolution demanding a change in Indian government policy. The organisation also announced plans to stage state wide protests on March 28 to express their solidarity with Tamils in Northeast of Sri Lanka.

The resolution further said the 80 million strong Tamil community in TamilNadu and around the world are disappointed and condemn India's military support to Sri Lanka which contradicts with its stated policy of negotiated settlement for the island's long dragging ethnic conflict.

No military solution

The central government of India, which provided \$500 million aid to Sri Lanka in additional military assistance including training, repeated its customary call for negotiated political solution.

"The way forward lies in a

peacefully negotiated settlement within the framework of a united Sri Lanka acceptable to all communities, including Tamils," Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said in a letter to MDMK General Secretary Viako.

In the letter dated March 5, 2008, the Indian premier further said the interests of the Tamils in Sri Lanka was of particular significance to India in the country's dealings with the island nation.

In his letter, Mr. Singh also endorsed Sri Lanka's move to implement the 13th amendment and refused to take action against the Sri Lankan Navy for routinely killing Indian fisherman in Palk Straits.

Responding to the Indian premier's letter Viako condemned Indian naval officers for endorsing "atrocious, false statements" of the Sri Lanka Navy.

"Our naval, army and air-force officers are working hands in glove with the Sri Lanka military officers. Because of this factor, our navy officials deliberately do suppress the real facts and make false statements furnishing wrong information to the government, which is glaringly exposed in your letter," he said in a letter.

Vaiko questioned why the Indian government had failed in its duty to "give stern warning" to the Sri Lankan government to stop attacking Indian fisherman. He charged that by failing to protect the lives of the Tamil Nadu fishermen from the SLN, India had betrayed the Tamils.

Responding to Manmohan Singh's endorsement of the 13th amendment to the Sri Lankan Constitution, the MDMK leader pointed out that New Delhi had been easily hoodwinked by the Government of Sri Lanka.

India should have raised serious objections when the Sri

Lankan government moved Supreme Court for a demerger, he said and added that the Tamils had long ago rejected the 13th amendment.

He pointed out that the Sri Lankan government had "sabotaged" the Norway-initiated peace talks, and was presently perpetrating a "genocidal murderous attack" on the Tamils by acquiring arms from various countries.

On the other hand, the Tamils in Sri Lanka were dying of hunger, starvation and lack of medical aid, and yet, India had refused to give clearance to send food and medicines to the suffering Tamils.

Vaiko also noted that it was a "matter of sorrow and shame" that the Indian government had not condemned the murder of four Tamil Members of Parliament by the Sri Lankan forces whereas its strategic help to Sri Lanka, through the supply of radars and military hardware, only enabled the Sri Lankan government to pursue military attacks. He labeled the red-carpet welcome to Sri Lankan Lt Gen Sarath Fonseka by the Indian government as a black day for the Tamils.

However according to a leading Indian academic, India's government isn't going to change its policy on Sri Lanka because of demands from Tamil political parties. India is providing 'non-lethal' weapons and trains Sri Lankan military officers, N. Manoharan, senior research fellow at the New Delhi-based Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies said.

"This government is at the last lap of its mandate," Manoharan said, referring to general elections due to be held next year.

"I do not think the government will take any serious steps based on the statements made by these parties. They are going to stick to the stated policy."

India risks indictment...

Continued from p8

the Indian State action of extending a State welcome to the military chief of the Sinhala State which has unilaterally abrogated the ceasefire agreement and has launched widespread military offensives in the Tamil homeland.

The Sri Lankan State is facing many warnings and condemnations for its attempt to seek a military solution and for its enormous human rights violations.

Despite this, the Sinhala State ignores these warnings and condemnations and continues with its abductions, killings, and arrests of Tamils.

The Sinhala State, keen to cover up this truth, is blaming the freedom movement of the Tamils, the LTTE, for the continuation of the war and is seeking assistance from the world for its war of ethnic genocide.

Many of the European countr-

ies, understanding this hidden motive of the Sinhala State, have halted all assistance that could support the ethnic genocide of the Tamils.

The Indian State also knows this truth. Yet, while pronouncing that a solution to the Tamil problem must be found through peaceful means, it is giving encouragement to the military approach of the Sinhala State. This can only lead to the intensification of the genocide of the Tamils.

LTTE wishes to point out to the Indian State that by this historic blunder it will continue to subject the Eelam Tamils to misery and put them in the dangerous situation of having to face ethnic genocide on a massive scale. On behalf of the Eelam Tamils, LTTE kindly requests the Tamils of Tamil Nadu to understand this anti-Tamil move of the Indian State and express their condemnation.

We did not leave the ceasefire

agreement and we did not start the war. We are only undertaking a defensive war against the war of ethnic genocide of the Sri Lankan State.

We still have not abandoned the Norway sponsored peace efforts and we are ready to take part in such efforts.

In this context, the Indian State's move of propping up the politically-militarily-economically weakened Sri Lankan State has upset Eelam Tamils.

The view expressed by the Indian military chiefs, "India wants to ensure that the Sri Lankan Army maintains its upperhand over the LTTE", just illustrates the efforts of the Indian State to prop up the Sinhala war machine.

The Indian State must take the responsibility for the ethnic genocide of the Tamils that will be carried out by the Sinhala military re-invigorated by such moves of the Indian State.

NEWS

Media concerns...

Continued from p4

pected 'supporters' of the LTTE.

"All these incidents are linked to what happened on December 27," Poddala Jayantha, secretary of the working journalists association, told IPS.

"The attacks on Rupavahini employees continue because authorities have been slow to go after those responsible... instead Rupavahini workers are being questioned on the December 27 incident."

Jayantha, too, was threatened by unidentified men, who had come to his house in the middle night soon after the Rupavahini incident.

He was present in the Rupavahini compound when Silva was escorted out and spoke out against the government minister for trying to intimidate media.

"Sri Lanka's government must take concrete steps to ensure the safety and protection of journalists in the conduct of their work, starting with public reprimands for government members who verbally and physically attack the media, and give directives to local authorities to investigate and act on attacks against journalists across the island, including the attacks on Rupavahini staff," Jacqueline Park said in a statement soon after the latest attack.

In addition intimidating and attacking journalists, the Sri Lankan police has also been arresting and detaining journalists and media persons without any charges.

'Attacks and threats against media personnel have been permitted to continue without any intervention by authorities' - IFJ

In the latest disturbing incident for the local media was the arrest of five media workers for their links with 'Outreachsl.com' a recently launched website focusing on current affairs related to the on-going ethnic conflict.

Among those detained by the Terrorism Investigation Division (TID) is Jayaprakash Tissanayagam, a columnist for the 'Sunday Times,' a respected independent English-language weekly, and the editor of 'Outreachsl.com'.

Tissanayagam has been held by the TID since March 7, along with four others who were involved with the website.

No formal charges have been pressed and access to legal repre-



Detained: Tissanayagam

sensation has been denied.

Whilst three persons have been released in the last week, Tissanayagam and N. Jasiharan, the owner of E-Kwality Printers and a writer for the website, are still detained.

Tissanayagam has filed a fundamental rights petition alleging discrimination based on his ethnicity as a Tamil and alleged mistreatment by the TID officers while under custody, and demanded compensation and punitive damages for the violation of his fundamental rights.

Police arrested Jasiharan and his wife, Valarmathi, on 6 March. His laptop computer and printed material from the printing press were also confiscated.

Tissanayagam was arrested when he went to the TID to inquire about Jasiharan the following day.

Three other employees at Outreach, Uthayanan, Ranga, and Wijesinghe, were also arrested by the TID on the same day.

The three were released Wednesday 19 March, after being held nearly two weeks in detention.

IFJ demanded "authorities make transparent the reasons for the arrests and follow due legal process in the cases of Tissanayagam and Jasiharan".

The current attacks on media freedom in the country will only add to Sri Lanka's worsening rights record.

In 2006, for instance, the island had dropped to 141st in the annual media freedom rankings published by Reporters Without Borders, from an impressive 51st ranking in 2002, when there was a ceasefire in operation.

The government, however, sees the reality in different light.

"President Mahinda Rajapakse ... asserted that there was absolute media freedom in the country and the government is not bound to be answerable for isolated incidents as and when they occur," said a front-page story in Saturday's edition of the 'Daily News,' a state-run English-language paper.

Abductions increasing...

Continued from p2

last year, my uncle and my husband were coming back from visiting my aunt. There was a white van waiting in the road. Then some people got out of the van and grabbed my husband. They forced him into the van and drove off," she told Al Jazeera.

"I haven't seen or heard of him since."

Akshana Kumaran, another Tamil woman whose husband was abducted told Al Jazeera the police denied they knew of her husband's whereabouts after he had been abducted by the occupants of a white van.

"We went to the police station

to ask why they had taken him, but they said he wasn't there. We went to another police station and saw the van outside, but the police said he wasn't there either."

But government officials dismiss many of the claims of abductions as lacking in evidence or elopement.

Contrary to government claims of improvement in rights situation, the Civil Monitoring Commission (CMC), an independent rights organisation that helps victims and relatives of abductions and disappearances, paints a grim picture. According to CMC, it has documented 210 cases of abduction and kidnapping in the capital Colombo alone.

"They come in a white van," Ragunathan Muralitharan, an inspector at the Commission, told Al Jazeera.

"There are no number plates or proper identification marks. They take one or two family members. If they find the family has money, they exchange them for ransom. If not, they are taken out of Colombo and killed or otherwise go missing."

As Bhavani Fonseka of the Colombo based think-tank, the Centre for Policy Alternatives, told Al Jazeera: "There is a growing culture of impunity here, as we haven't had any convictions of serious human rights violators, not for killings or abductions."

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British Tamil athletics meet in UK



An athletics meet organized by the Tamil diasporas in Britain is to take place on April 13. Organisers say the event will be a competition between houses, with best performing athletes accumulating points for the respective houses. This is a format followed commonly back home in meets between clubs or schools. Each 'house' will consist of Tamils living in different areas in the UK. Although this is a first for the British Tamil community, organizers say they have worked hard to make it of a high standard both in terms of organization and competition. The venue will be a newly revamped center for athletics that has been designated an Olympics training centre by the UK ministry for sports and leisure. The athletics meet will be an example of the Tamil peoples' unity and sporting excellence, said a volunteer involved in trials being held locally over the coming two weeks. Many former sportsmen and sportswomen as well as enthusiasts have been instrumental in getting the project off the ground. Advice has also been forthcoming from organizations involved in British athletics. The opening ceremony will showcase Tamil peoples' heritage and culture and will be eye-catching. Around 250 men and women will perform a march past. Competition will be age and gender based. Relays, tug-of-wars and children's events will also feature. Sports competitions aim to engender a culture that looks beyond just victory and accept both success and failure with equal heart. They help build a fine society that is both disciplined and united. Therefore, meets such as these are vital for Diaspora community, be it for young or old. At a time when the Tamil peoples' culture and identity are being intentionally destroyed in their homeland, events such as these will help them prosper and revitalize. More details on the athletics meet can be found on www.bt-sc.com and Tamil media.

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