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Loud echoes of a bloody past: Rwanda and Sri Lanka

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Victory now in mid-2009 says Army chief

TamilNet

SRI LANKA Army chief Lt. Gen. Sarath Fonseka this week again revised his timetable for defeating the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam; to mid-2009, from an earlier estimate of June 2008.

Saying that the LTTE had lost its conventional fighting capacity, he told international correspondents Monday that, within a year, most of the remaining Tigers would be dead.

Saying that the objective of the LTTE was to capture the entire island and wipe out the majority Sinhalese community, he vowed: "we will not allow that at any cost, we will fight them."

Lt. Gen. Fonseka made his comments, which were carried in reports by AFP, Reuters, the BBC, IANS and The Hindu, amongst others, to the Colombo-based Foreign Correspondents Association on Monday.

The Tigers would be reduced to nothing more than a "rag-tag terrorist outfit" in a year's time, the Army chief said, in response to questions on the assertion he made in December last year that the military would "wipe out" the LTTE by June 2008.

The Sri Lankan government had earlier

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The Sri Lankan Army is not only being bogged down in intensive fighting in the North, it is also facing declining morale as political deadlines for the 'end of the war' get extended and desertion rates increase.

Photo Lakruwan Wanniarachchi / AFP / Getty Images



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NEWS

Speculation rife following secretive visit by Indian officials

AN unscheduled visit by a high-powered delegation from the Indian defence and foreign affairs ministries to Colombo last week created a stir in political and media circles in Sri Lanka with local media speculating on the purpose of the secretive visit.

The delegation headed by National Security Advisor M. K. Narayanan and comprising Foreign Secretary Shiv Shankar Menon and Defence Secretary Vijay Singh arrived in Colombo on a special flight from New Delhi on Friday, June 20.

During their two-day visit, the Indian officials held separate discussions with Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa, Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, Commanders of Sri Lankan military, the parliamentary group leader of the Tamil National Alliance R. Sampanthan and Minister of Social Services and leader of the paramilitary Eelam People's Democratic Party Douglas Devananda.

None of the visiting Indian officials met the press and a brief statement was read out to the Indian journalists.

"India hopes that Sri Lanka can find peaceful solution to the ethnic conflict within the framework of united Sri Lanka, acceptable to all the communities. There are no military solutions," the statement read.

The conflicting reasons given by Sri Lankan and Indian officials as to the purpose of the visit only did not help.

"Their visit is in connection with the forthcoming SAARC summit," an Indian diplomat told IANS referring to the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit scheduled to open August 1 in Colombo.

A top official of the Presidential Secretariat played down the importance of the visit, labeling it a 'regular one' and said: "It is part of the regular exchange of contacts at the highest official level between the two countries. The latest Indian official visit can be termed as a return visit to a similar mission from Colombo to New Delhi in September last year."

A three-member delegation from Sri Lanka comprising Secretary to the President Lalith Weeraratunga, Gothabhaya Rajapaksa and Senior Advisor to the President Basil Rajapaksa visited India

in September last year.

However, retired Sri Lankan diplomat K. Nanda Godage said the 'very composition of the Indian delegation itself shows the visit is something special and not just a routine one'.

"I don't think it is just a return visit or courtesy visit. It certainly cannot be anything to do merely with the security arrangement for the SAARC summit either," he said.

"We hope this is a visit to convey a positive message from India that it is fully behind Sri Lanka in its effort to solve the ethnic conflict," said Godage.

Sri Lanka's opposition parties demanded the government disclose the reasons behind the 'sudden visit'.

The sudden and secretive nature of the visit raised questions within political circles also with opposition parties demanding details of the visit.

John Amararatunga, a parliamentarian from the opposition United National Party (UNP), claimed there was a 'crucial aspect' to the two-day previously unannounced visit, pointing out that it had come at a time when the country was 'at crossroads in economic and war fronts', the Daily Mirror newspaper reported.

"Today, India is concerned about what is happening in Sri Lanka. The ongoing military campaign will have serious implications (for) Tamil Nadu (and) the Indian government. So we are eager to know the true position of the visit," the paper quoted Amararatunga as saying.

Meanwhile, the radical Marxist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) claimed that the visit by the Indian delegation was 'similar to what happened during the Vadamardchchi operation in 1987' and demanded the government divulge the details of all discussions held.

JVP's parliamentary group leader Anurakumara Dissanayake said India intervened to halt the Vadamardchchi military operation against the LTTE in 1987 and later forced a peace accord on the Sri Lankan government, according to press reports.

"It is the responsibility of the government to disclose the details of the visit as conflicting reports have appeared in the media," said Dissanayake.



Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa with Indian Foreign Secretary Shiv Shankar Menon

Tamils saddened by India's self serving attitude

TAMIL National Alliance (TNA) parliamentary group leader R. Sampanthan, told a visiting delegation of top Indian officials that "Tamils believed all these years that they were the natural allies of India, but it is not so today."

Pointing out even the human rights violations against Tamils, abductions and genocide are largely ignored by India, Sampanthan told the visiting delegation: "India has not been very concerned about Tamil grievances but are only interested in safe-

guarding their own interests".

"We feel very sad about this," he said.

"We thought both Tamils and Indians were together but we believe India do not think that we're together. But today India got the oil tanks in Trincomalee but Tamils, nothing," he told media after the meeting.

"In 1987, the Indo-Sri Lanka accord merged the North and the East but today it has been de-merged. And it guaranteed devolution of powers to the Tamils.

But even after it was de-merged, India is not worried about Tamil interests. Indians are only concerned about their own interests."

After listening to Sampanthan the Indian delegation invited him and his party members to visit Delhi for further talks.

National Security Advisor M.K. Narayanan, Foreign Secretary Shiv Shankar Menon and Indian High Commissioner to Sri Lanka Alok Prasad and two other officials were present during the discussions.

'India helping Sri Lanka to perpetrate genocide' - Vaiko

TamilNet

IN a letter to the Indian Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, Vaiko, General Secretary of the Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK), accused India of "equipping the Sri Lanka Government to help its war machine to perpetrate genocidal attacks against the Tamils ... throwing to winds the farsighted foreign policy adopted by Pandit Nehru and Mrs. Indira Gandhi," and urged the Prime Minister to not participate in the SAARC Conference.

Full text of the letter follows: Dear Dr. Manmohan Singh ji, Vanakkam. The betrayal being committed by the UPA Govern-

ment at the centre against the Tamils, with particular reference to the ethnic Tamils of the island of Sri Lanka has been thoroughly exposed by the statements of the Sri Lanka Government, its military officials and also by the condemnable activities, open and clandestine of the Government of India.

News have appeared in the print media in India and Sri Lanka that a top level Indian official team comprising Foreign Secretary Mr. Sivasankara Menon, National Security Advisor Mr. M.K. Narayanan and the Defence Secretary Mr. Vijay Singh has reached Colombo on 20th June 2008 for consultations with the Sri Lanka Government "on matters of mutual interest".

It is reliably understood that

the Indian team has met the President of Sri Lanka Mr. Mahinda Rajapakse, Defence Secretary Mr. Gotabhaya Rajapaksa and Secretary to the President Lalith Weeraratunga.

The visit was kept a top secret.

A source in the Sri Lanka Presidential secretariat told the press that over Friday and Saturday, the visiting team would discuss an array of issues, including the security in the island, the ongoing military operations against the LTTE in the North, the issue of the intruding Indian fishermen in North-West Sri Lanka, and matters relating to the SAARC summit to be held in Colombo in the first week of August.

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NEWS

India to bolster military assistance to Sri Lanka

FOLLOWING a visit by a high-level delegation of Indian officials to Colombo, India is likely to further bolster military supplies to Sri Lanka and step up security cooperation with the island's government.

Although, following the visit, an Indian official parroted India's stance that there cannot be a "military solution" to the bloody ethnic strife in Sri Lanka, according to reports, the Indian delegation had promised "all help" in the military supplies, intelligence and training arenas.

According to reports, India is alarmed with the way Colombo continues to turn to China, and Pakistan to obtain weapons following India's policy to supply mainly "non-lethal" military equipment to the island nation, due to political sensitivities in the southern state of Tamil Nadu - home to 60 million Tamils.

India is concerned that both China and Pakistan are exploiting its policy and have moved in to fill the vacuum in recent times to quench Sri Lanka's thirst for weapons with "offensive capabilities".

Analysts say, India feels it cannot ignore the deep inroads being made into its own strategic backyard by China, which is providing Sri Lanka with a wide array of "cheap" arms and ammunition to boost its ongoing war with Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

In recent months Sri Lanka has purchased Jian-7 fighters, JY-11 3D air surveillance radars, armoured personnel carriers, assault rifles, machine guns, anti-aircraft guns, rocket-propelled grenade launchers and missiles from China.

"The story of Myanmar is being repeated in Sri Lanka. China is already all over the island nation, with a flurry of arms deals, oil explorations and construction projects like the Hambantota port," said a senior official.

Few months ago, Narayanan agitated Sri Lankan leaders when he publicly told Sri Lanka to desist from seeking arms from China or Pakistan, as India, "the big power" in the region, would meet its legitimate defence requirements.

Since then, apart from supply of weapons, India has introduced "coordinated" naval patrolling with Sri Lanka to curb LTTE activity on the high seas, stepping up its security cooperation with island government.

Security Cooperation

In addition to agreeing to 'all help' on Sri Lanka's war against the LTTE, the visiting delegation

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Indian governments are extra cautious about security in Sri Lanka after former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had to duck a rifle butt attack by a Sri Lankan naval rating during an honour guard in Colombo on 30 July 1987. Photo Sena Vidanagama / AFP / Getty Images

India tells Sri Lanka to do more on devolution, but no stop war request

INDIA has urged the Sri Lankan government to work towards a broader devolution that goes beyond the 13th amendment to the constitution that devolves powers to provincial councils.

India's message to Colombo was conveyed by a high level delegation comprising National Security Advisor, M.K. Narayanan, Foreign Secretary Shiv Shankar Menon and Defence Secretary Sri Vijay Singh, who were on a two-day visit to the island.

"The Indian delegation made it clear that they did not believe a military solution was possible," a diplomatic source close to the delegation said.

"The delegation was keen that there should be a political solution."

However this should not be interpreted as India wanting the

Sri Lankan government to stop its war against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), as Sri Lanka categorically announced that no request to end the war was put forward by the visiting delegation.

The Sri Lankan Media minister Lakshman Yapa Abeywardane said that India did not request the government to end the military offensive against LTTE and New Delhi only sought a peaceful solution to the decades-long problem.

"Sri Lanka is maintaining a strong relationship with India. As a neighbouring country, India is requesting peace talks but it did not compel the government to stop the war," the state-run Daily News quoted Abeywardane as saying.

In closed-door talks with Sri

Lankan President Mahinda Rajapakse and top officials, Narayanan informed Rajapakse of New Delhi's growing impatience on the slow progress made with regard to a political solution and urged the Sri Lankan government to speedily submit a viable devolution package within a united Sri Lanka to resolve the ethnic crisis.

According to local reports, the Indian delegation called on the APRC process to be fast tracked and a political solution placed on the table at the earliest.

They had also stressed the importance of developing an all party consensus.

The delegation was also concerned about the hardships of the Tamils in the north due to the escalating military conflict and the impact it would have on India if there was a refugee outflow to

the southern Indian state.

In addition to the slow progress of political solution, the Indian delegation also expressed their displeasure at Sri Lanka's shift towards China and Pakistan on military matters.

Bolstered by the military support received from its Asian neighbours including India, Sri Lanka formally withdrew from a Norwegian-arranged truce in January this year and launched a military offensive to capture LTTE administered northern regions.

Tamils are unhappy with New Delhi's silent diplomacy, reports said.

They point out that it is not possible to spot the dividing line between India's limited but open military support to Colombo and the desire to prod Sri Lanka towards a negotiated settlement.

NEWS

China doing a Myanmar in Sri Lanka?

B. Raman

South Asia Analysis Group

IS CHINA doing a Myanmar in Sri Lanka by capitalising on the policy of President Mahinda Rajapaksa of diversifying Sri Lanka's geo-political options even while professing close friendship with India?

That seems to have been one of the concerns of the Government of India, which prompted a two-day visit to Sri Lanka by a team of senior advisers of Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh consisting of Shri M. K. Narayanan, the National Security Adviser, Shri Shivsankar Menon, the Foreign Secretary, and Shri Vijay Singh, the Defence Secretary, on June 20 and 21, 2008, for talks with Mr. Rajapaksa and senior Sri Lankan officials and important Tamil leaders.

Officially, the visit was projected as a return visit to reciprocate a similar high-level visit to New Delhi in September last by a Sri Lankan delegation headed by Mr. Gothabaya Rajapaksa, the Defence Secretary, and as a preparatory visit before the forthcoming 15th summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) to be held at Colombo from July 27 to August 3, 2008.

Originally, the summit was to have been held at Kandy where the security-related problems would have been less than in Colombo. In March last, the Sri Lankan Government decided to have it in Colombo since, in its view, the infrastructure at Kandy would have been inadequate to host the summit. The shifting of the venue to Colombo has enhanced the security concerns of India.

Sri Lanka had successfully hosted the 6th SAARC summit at Colombo in 1991 and the 10th in 1998 and had provided effective security to the leaders of the participating countries. The 15th summit will be held at a time when a large number of the Sri Lankan security forces are engaged in an operation to re-capture the control of the Northern Province from the LTTE. Facing increasing pressure from the security forces, the LTTE has stepped up attacks with explosives on soft targets in areas in and around Colombo. Moreover, its bringing into action its planes for air strikes since March last year and the inability of the Sri Lankan security forces to identify where these planes are kept and wherefrom the air attacks are being launched and to intercept them have made the pre-summit security scenario in Colombo worrisome.

While the LTTE is unlikely to target the summit or its participants, the summit could provide it with an opportunity to create drama in order to prove its prowess and disprove the claims



The 'Shenzhen', one of the Chinese Navy's best missile destroyers, was recently on a visit to Japan as China shores up its relations in Asia

of the Government that the LTTE has been weakened beyond recovery. Will the Sri Lankan security forces be in a position to provide effective security to all the participants in general and to the Indian Prime Minister in particular? One of the purposes of the visit of the Indian team seems to have been to make an assessment in answer to this question.

Another purpose seems to have been to assess the implications to India of Mr. Rajapaksa's policy of bringing in other external state actors into Sri Lanka in order to give Sri Lanka a more geo-political wriggle room. In the past, India had to worry only about China, Pakistan and the US. Now, Mr. Rajapaksa has started courting Iran, Saudi Arabia and Malaysia. Iran has started playing an important role in the oil refining sector and it is only a question of time before it starts demanding a role in the retail sale of oil, a sector in which the Indian Oil Corporation presently has a pre-eminent role. To counter the fears of the US and the Sunni Arab states over his flirting with Iran, he has also been trying to bring in Saudi Arabia in the oil sector. Malaysia emerged last year as the largest foreign investor in Sri Lanka. As a result of his moves, India is likely to find its political and economic influence in Sri Lanka gradually shrinking.

In view of India's improving relations with the US, it is not concerned as it would have been in the past over the increasing US activities in Sri Lanka and the increasing interest of the US Pacific Command in Sri Lanka. The US Navy is eyeing Colombo as a fall-back option in case the continuing use of the Karachi port for logistics and other purposes becomes difficult in view of the

anti-US feelings in Pakistan. Presently, India is not highly concerned with the growing economic ties between Sri Lanka and Malaysia either. It can live with it.

What India is concerned is over the increasing activities of China and Pakistan, the entry of Iran and the expected entry of Saudi Arabia into Sri Lanka. While Pakistan's relations with Sri Lanka are largely focussed on military supplies and training, China's relations have greater strategic implications for India - covering military supplies and training, the construction of a modern port at Hambantota in the South and oil exploration in the Mannar area. The expected semi-permanent stationing of an increasing number of Chinese experts in these areas for carrying out these projects will add to the concerns of the Indian security bureaucracy.

The action of the Government of Myanmar in allowing the Chinese to have a semi-permanent presence in the Coco Islands brought the Chinese within monitoring distance of India's space establishments on the Eastern coast. The semi-permanent presence, which the Chinese are now getting in Sri Lanka, will bring them within monitoring distance of India's fast-breeder reactor complex at Kalpakam near Chennai, the Russian-aided Koodankulam nuclear power reactor complex in southern Tamil Nadu and India's space establishments in Kerala.

Reporting on the visit of the senior Indian officials to Colombo, the "Times of India" of June 23, 2008, quoted an unnamed senior Indian official in New Delhi as stating as follows: "The story of Myanmar is being repeated in Sri Lanka. China is already

all over the island nation, with a flurry of arms deals, oil exploration and construction projects like the Hambantota port."

The "Times of India" also reported as follows: "Colombo has signed a US \$ 37.6 million deal with the Beijing-based Poly Technologies for a wide variety of arms, ammunition, mortars and bombs. Sri Lanka is also getting some Chinese Jian-7 fighters, JY 11-3D air surveillance radars, armoured personnel carriers, T-56 assault rifles (a copy of AK-47), machine guns and anti-aircraft guns, rocket-propelled grenade launchers and missiles."

The work on the Hambantota port is progressing fast with typical Chinese efficiency. Sri Lankan sources assert that it will be only a commercial port and not a potential naval base. One has to wait and see.

The Hambantota port construction is estimated to cost US \$ one billion to be lent by the Exim Bank of China. The entire project is expected to be completed in 15 years in four phases. The first phase of construction, which was started in October, 2007, is estimated to cost US \$450 million. The entire project, inter alia, provides for the construction of a gas-fired power plant project, a ship repair unit, a container repair unit, an oil refinery and a bunkering terminal. The bunkering terminal, which is expected to be completed in 39 months, provides for the terminal to handle up to 500,000 metric tonnes (mt) of oil products a year.

The "Daily News" of Sri Lanka reported on June 19, 2008, as follows: 'A project proposal sent by the China Huanqiu Contracting and Engineering Corporation for building the bunkering facility and tank farm at the

Hambantota harbour has been approved by the project committee and the cabinet-appointed negotiations committee. "The total value of the project would be \$76.5 million and it would be completed by 2010. A set of fuel tanks, bunkering facilities, aviation fuel storage facilities and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) storage facilities will be built under the project at Hambantota, about 230 km south of Colombo. The media has also reported that although the Hambantota port was initially planned as a service and industrial port, it is expected to be developed as a trans-shipment port at a later stage to handle 20 million containers per year.

Neither India nor China has so far started oil/gas exploration work in the one block each in the Mannar area awarded to them by the Rajapaksa Government without bidding as a gesture of goodwill.

The Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC), which was offered the block allotted to India without bidding, said in September last that it was not interested in the assigned block, due to low prospectivity and the fact that Sri Lanka was asking for a big bonus in return for this gesture. The Sri Lankan Government said it would negotiate with the ONGC for a new oil block with greater prospectivity. It is not known whether the Chinese are satisfied with the block offered to them without bidding and, if so, when they would start the exploration.

Foreign oil companies have not so far been enthusiastic over the prospects of finding oil/gas in exploitable quantities in the Mannar area. Earlier this year, the Sri Lankan Government invited

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NEWS

Government kills 5000 Tigers but the war goes on

The Sunday Leader

FOR all intents and purposes, the military - according to Defence Ministry figures and claims - has cleaned up the map, and killed the Army Commander's benchmark of 5,000 Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam cadres between January 1, and the end of June.

As of last Friday, the statistics maintained by The Sunday Leader of LTTE cadres claimed killed by the Defence Ministry's official claims, was 4,698.

Given the Rajapakse administration's war on media, we have exercised much caution in maintaining these statistics.

A copy is saved of every article referred to, as is a link to the article's unique identity number on the Defence Ministry website's archive, along with the number claimed killed. In situations where swathes of LTTE cadres are claimed "killed or wounded," we are careful to count less than half the number as killed.

The many instances referring to "ferocious" battles where the military had inflicted "massive casualties" - but no concrete numbers - were omitted entirely.

The effects of air strikes too were omitted entirely as the air force has allowed that it is extremely difficult to indepen-

dently verify the number killed on the ground after an air strike.

And thus we have a number from the Defence Ministry - that cannot be independently verified - of 4,698 LTTE cadres killed in land and sea action.

Theoretically, 302 should be remaining, skulking in the Wanni jungles.

Kept track

However, we have also kept track of the number of air strikes announced by the air force this year on "identified terrorist targets."

Eighty four, separate, aerial bombing raids have been announced this year, most involving more than one aircraft.

Given that at least four bombs are dropped on each target - and they don't come cheap: the cheapest of reliable 'dumb' bombs costing in the region of Rs.100,000 each - from a value for money perspective if no other, it would be sensible to expect that at least four LTTE cadres are killed in each of these "massive" strikes on "LTTE installations."

It is not much to ask that a single military operation costing in

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The stretched Sri Lankan military is facing intensifying fighting along with decreasing morale

'LTTE represents Tamils' - Basil

IN an apparent softening of its stand, Sri Lanka has offered to hold talks with the LTTE after a two-year gap, saying the outfit does represent a 'fair amount' of Tamils but ruled out immediate revival of the ceasefire scrapped in January.

"The (Sri Lankan) President has already announced that he is ready to talk (with the LTTE)," Basil Rajapaksa, powerful Special Advisor to the President Mahinda Rajapaksa, said.

On whether the President has specified that he will not talk unless the LTTE lays down arms, Basil merely said, "Those are conditions that have to be worked out."

"The government is always open to talks but the government needs to have a certain environment in which we can talk," Basil, an MP and brother of the Sri

Lankan President, told the Daily Mirror newspaper.

On being asked whether the LTTE represented the Tamil people, the senior advisor said, "Yes, they represent the Tamil people but they are not the only ones. That has been proved."

"But this doesn't mean they don't have the strength or that they represent no Tamils," he said.

"They (the LTTE) do represent a fair amount of Tamil people. Unfortunately their way of doing it can't be approved. Otherwise the President is always willing to have negotiations and a settlement. The best scenario is where we negotiate and settle it with the LTTE," Basil said.

The two sides had six rounds of talks after the 2002 ceasefire but the LTTE pulled out in 2006 citing bias.

The peace process received a crushing blow in January this year when the government scrapped the tattered ceasefire, a move that unleashed a fresh wave of violence as the military intensified its offensive against the Tamil Tigers in the north.

On whether the government will respond positively if the Tigers offer a ceasefire on Friday, Basil said, "That's like thinking of attaining Nirvana on Friday. That takes time and effort."

"You can't just decide today and go for it tomorrow. It's too far away to think about at this stage. We have to be realistic," he added.

"We are meeting the needs of the people and crushing terrorism while inviting the LTTE for negotiations. We are willing to look into their grievances," Basil Rajapaksa said.

Sri Lankan drive to arrest army deserters

AFP

SRI LANKA'S military has launched a campaign to track down and arrest up to 12,000 army deserters who failed to take advantage of a government amnesty, a spokesman said on Sunday.

"About 5,000 responded to the general amnesty we had from May 2 to the 30th," Brigadier Udaya Nanayakkara said.

"We are now trying to get at 11,000 to 12,000 deserters who did not respond to the amnesty."

He said most of the desertions had taken place several years ago, and asserted that there had been no exodus in recent years despite heavy fighting with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

In 2003, the government moved to legally discharge from the security forces some 51,000 deserters if they agreed to pay any money they owed the military, while those wanting to rejoin were considered for fresh enlistment. However, military officials said despite that offer, thousands were still listed as deserters in the ranks of Sri Lankan security personnel numbering about 200,000.

Sri Lankan security forces are locked in combat with LTTE whose strength is not known, but estimated at between 5,000 to 15,000.

A 2002 Norwegian-arranged truce began to unravel from December 2005 and Colombo formally pulled out of the ceasefire in January this year.

Sri Lanka's revised war dead estimated at 215,000

NEW estimates of war deaths in 13 countries, including Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Ethiopia and Bangladesh, show that previous counts have vastly understated the lives lost to war in the past half century, a study published in the British Medical Journal said last week.

The new estimates relied on data from nationally representative population surveys done by the UN World Health Organisation in these countries earlier this decade to calculate death tolls in wars waged from 1955 to 2002.

In most of the countries, this method pointed to much higher loss of life than broadly cited media estimates had shown, the

researchers said.

The death toll from the conflict in Sri Lanka jumped 3.6 fold during the second half of the 20th century, the study disclosed, adding that wars around the globe have killed people thrice more than previously estimated.

According to the independent study, performed by the University of Washington and Harvard Medical School, in Sri Lanka, the new estimate was 215,000 deaths, compared the previous estimate of 61,000. The estimate may be as high as 338,000 killed taking into account various factors that may have led to under-reporting, and only includes those killed directly

due to violence in the conflict.

The study is careful to point out that their survey's inability "to capture families with no survivors is another source of downward bias" and that their estimates are thus conservative.

According to researchers, random samples of people in the 13 countries were asked about their brothers and sisters, including whether they had died of wartime injuries. The researchers then extrapolated the data to come up with national death toll estimates.

Country by country, on average, the old estimates were about three times lower than the new ones.



GERMANY



GERMA



HOLLAND



HOLLAN



ITALY



SWEDEN



BELGIUM



SOUTH AFR

THAMIL

NY



GERMANY



ND



ITALY



SWEDEN



ICA



SOUTH AFRICA



Diaspora Tamils continue to rally in support of Eelam

EELAM Tamils in the Diaspora countries continued their rallies in support of the Tamils' right to Self-Determination.

The rallies, titled 'Pongu Thamil,' (meaning 'Tamil Upsurge'), are intended as Tamil mobilising through cultural programmes. It resumes a major plank of Tamil political activity.

The very first Pongu Thamil was held on January 17, 2001 by university students in defiance of the Sri Lankan military occupying Jaffna and despite the ongoing fighting in the peninsula.

The Pongu Thamil movement was initiated by university students in the Tamil homeland to serve as a demonstration of the motivation and defiant will of the Tamil people for the cause of Tamil Eelam.

After the 2002 Ceasefire began, the rally was repeated not only in Jaffna, but as a series of events to bring the Tamil people together in a common act of peaceful political agitation in support of the Eelam cause.

In 2003 and again in 2005, Pongu Thamil rallies took place in all the major Tamil population centres in Northeast Sri Lanka and across the Diaspora.

Following rallies in New Zealand, Norway, Denmark, Northern Italy and France, Tamils over the past fortnight also rallied in South Africa, the Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden, Germany and Southern Italy.

In South Africa Tamils gathered on June 21 for a Pongu Thamil rally at the Arena Park Regional Hall, in Chatsworth, where they pledged to support the Eelam Tamils' right to statehood, and urged the international community to voice for the Tamils' rights.

Guest speakers at the event were Deputy Mayor of Ethekwini, Logie Naidoo, and MEC for Sports and Recreation, Mr. A Rajbansi, both of whom spoke out against what they called the "selective morality" of the international community regarding the Tamil freedom struggle.

The key speaker was Dr. Brian Seneviratne, an Australia-based Sinhala expatriate physician, who is supportive of Tamils right to self-determination.

The Program Director was, Mala Lutchmanan, a local radio personality.

A declaration was made, seeking the International Community to recognise Tamils right to self-determination and recognising the LTTE as the legitimate sole representatives also in the future negotiations.

The declaration further urged the international community to seek a just solution and to put an immediate end to the genocide of the Tamils.

On Sunday June 22 over 1,000 Tamils from across Netherlands gathered in front of the Dutch parliament at 2pm to mark Pongu Thamil.

Guests, including Jaffna Tamil National Alliance (TNA) parliamentarian Mr. S. Kajendran and poet Pulamaipithan, were treated to songs, dances and dramas, all on the Tamil upsurge theme.

On Monday last week, Tamils rallied in front of the United Nations office in Brussels. Beginning at 2pm, the event included songs and speeches by guests including TNA Jaffna MP Mr. S. Kajendran.

Last Saturday Tamils from across Sweden gathered in the capital Stockholm to rally as part of the global Pongu Thamil effort.

Those gathered participated in dramas, dances and songs, all focusing around the Tamil Upsurge theme.

Over 8,000 Tamils gathered in Dusseldorf, Germany, last Saturday to participate in the Pongu Thamil rally.

Beginning at 2pm, the rally marched through the streets shouting "Our land Tamil Eelam" and "Recognise Tamil Eelam".

The event included Tamil Eelam songs, dramas and dances.

Special guests included the Batticaloa TNA MPs Mr. S. Jeyanandamoorthy and Mr. E Ariyananthiran as well as Jaffna MP Mr. S. Kajendran.

On Sunday, over 1,000 Tamils in from across Italy and surrounding countries gathered at Piazza Mondello in Palermo to hold their Pongu Thamil rally. Italians also participated in the event.

The chief guest was Batticaloa TNA parliamentarian Mr. S. Jeyananthamoorthy.

The programme ended with a drama in Tamil and Italian, which conveyed the suffering of the Tamils in the homeland to those who had gathered.

EDITORIAL AND OPINION

TAMIL GUARDIAN

TG NEWS, P.O.BOX. 2308, Watford, WD18 1LS, UK

editor@tamilguardian.com www.tamilguardian.com

Tel: 0845 0949873

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False Hope

Which problem are talks expected to solve in Sri Lanka?

Amid louder international calls for negotiations and a political solution to Sri Lanka's crisis, the Sinhala leadership insisted yet again this week that the Liberation Tigers would be crushed and 'peace' established within a year. The Rajapakse government's implicit call on the Sinhala people to keep the faith comes as progress on the battlefield remains painfully slow and the cost of pursuing hegemony over the northeast begins to bite harder, compounded by rising global oil and food prices. Given that the international community has hitherto done - and continues to do - what it can to support the Sinhala state's war efforts, Tamils are justified in being cynical about this renewed international emphasis on negotiations and a solution. We have not forgotten that from 1995 to 1999 the international community stood by while Colombo visited any horrors it pleased on the Tamils (for example, one international legal scholar who studied Sri Lanka's embargo on the Vanni said in 1997 that it classified as a war crime), and only rushed to 'make peace' in Sri Lanka when the LTTE struck back after 2000, bringing the Sinhala state to its knees. Similarly, it is only when the Sinhala state struggles on the battlefield that international interest in 'conflict resolution' has returned.

In short, abstract international calls for negotiations and a 'political solution' do not represent a change of heart or strategy. Last month, for example, the United States' Ambassador to Sri Lanka, Mr. Robert O' Blake emphatically stated that there was no ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. This is not splitting theoretical hairs. It is a wholesale rejection of Tamil grievances. Unless there is an acceptance that the Sri Lankan state is a chauvinist construct that, since independence, has systematically oppressed the Tamils, talks will achieve nothing. The Norwegian peace process was predicated on this logic: that Tamils' grievances are essentially economic and the demand for Tamil Eelam is some sort of fragile ethnic exclusivity. These external claims were conveniently echoed by a number of self-styled liberals within Sri Lanka. Amid the cacophony about 'constitutional reform', 'peace-building', 'conflict transformation' and so on, the essential point was lost: Sinhala oppression must end if there is to be lasting peace. We note that, even amidst the demonstrable and strident racism in Sri Lanka today, there is little new being said in this regard.

However, much has changed now. Not only has geopolitics returned with a vengeance, two decades after the Cold War ended, the powerful liberal democracies that once sought to re-engineer Sri Lanka in their image have quietly given up on that project. It is of no surprise that defenders of the liberal space within Sri Lanka have few audiences abroad of any consequence (and none at home). The point is this: whilst there was a misguided notion amongst a great many Tamils that the international community had engaged itself in making peace in Sri Lanka because it was (finally) concerned about the suffering of the Tamils, international conduct in the recent past has shattered any basis for that claim.

It is very clear, that amid their calls for peace, the international community will not act to restrain the Sri Lankan state. This is because, eager to establish or continue long-term partnerships with Colombo, they simply will not accept Tamil claims of oppression, state-racism or slow genocide. Conversely, telling themselves - and us - that 'there is no ethnic war', that 'most Tamils don't want independence' and so on, they will equate a political solution to their own desires of Sri Lanka - primarily economic reform with, hopefully, but not necessarily, some 'good governance' thrown in.

But as we have argued recently, the Sinhala state is not going to go down this route. Instead, it will strive to expand its hegemony - and primarily by violence and brutality. It is not surprising that the Rajapakse regime, which abducts, murders, tortures, terrorizes the media and other 'traitors' within - all whilst snarling at international criticism, is extraordinarily popular amongst the Sinhalese. Sri Lanka's Sinhala opposition parties know full well that without wrapping themselves in the Lion flag, there is no hope of taking power away from Rajapakse or his SLFP. That is why the desperate recent efforts by some states to shore up the UNP and keep the flame alive have failed - and quite spectacularly. Sinhala nationalism is - now undeniably - mainstream. That is also why the call for Tamil Eelam is embedding itself anew across the Tamil polity. It was the false promise of the Norwegian peace process opened up the space for alternatives. Similarly it was in the false hope of a Sinhala military solution that the international community abandoned that project.

Loud echoes

In the third of our series on genocide, an examination of pre-1994 Rwanda and today's Sri Lanka reveals striking parallels.

J T Janani

Tamil Guardian

WHEN Tamils in Sri Lanka say they are being subject to genocide, the international community brushes off these protests as exaggerations or histrionics. The word 'genocide', is not only powerful and emotive, it carries serious legal obligations for the international community.

The world's worst genocide after WW2 occurred in Rwanda. The case of Sri Lanka's Tamils, it is bluntly suggested, is very different to that of Rwanda's Tutsis. It is not made clear why - except for the sheer scale of the slaughter in three months of 1994.

Admittedly, this has not happened in Sri Lanka. But the parallels between Sri Lanka and pre-1994 Rwanda are striking.

A close comparison of the two situations shows up important similarities, both in terms of the evolving conditions in which a minority comes to be subjected to exterminatory attacks by a majority and, just as importantly, in the conduct of the world's leading states, especially the Western democracies, in relation to the crisis.

Here are a few summary points. The Rwandan genocide of 1994 took place,

- after an internationally (United Nations) sponsored ceasefire and peace talks had led to a tentative 'peace deal' - on 'power-sharing' - had been reached between the majoritarian government and the minority group;

- as the international community continued to remain diplomatically engaged and aware of the deteriorating situation (but refusing to intervene);
- after the government had re-armed its military during the peace talks;

- after large numbers of the majority community had been organised into 'civil militia' against the 'terrorism' of the minority;

- after several decades of ethnic animosity had intensified into communal attacks and pogroms against the minority by the majority;

- after the majority had come, after independence from colonialism, to dominate the state and the armed forces;

- after decades of the international community denying there was an 'ethnic problem';

This article, the last in a three part series looking at the notion of 'genocide' and Sri Lanka - therefore examines the build up to Rwanda's catastrophe,

focussing on the role of the international community.

Not long before a million Tutsis were slaughtered in an organised attempt at extermination, there had been internationally-brokered peace talks between the Hutu government (of President Habyarimana) and the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), representing the Tutsis.

After the talks the Tutsi were on the verge of a credible, internationally-backed power sharing agreement - the Arusha Accords.

That was when the ethnic crisis finally erupted into extermination.

Academic Michael Mann - whose thesis was examined in part 2 (TG375) - explains why: "the danger zone" from which ethnic conflict turns murderous is reached when two rival ethnic groups lay claim to political sovereignty over the same territory; and where both claims appear legitimate and realizable.

As with the majority Sinhala in Sri Lanka, the historical 'grievances' of the majority Hutu included the claim that prior to independence, the Colonial rulers had discriminated against the majority ethnic group in favour of the minority.

Moreover, like the Tamils are positioned in the mythology of the Sinhala, the Hutus considered the Tutsi to be 'invaders'. As Colonel Bagosora, a Hutu commander: "the Tutsis never had a country of their own; they were people who came to Rwanda and were naturalised".

The Sinhalese consider the Tamils to have invaded from south India and 'grabbed' the Northeast. This is the same logic in the Sinhalese people's support once the British had left Ceylon to (1) strip a million Upcountry Tamils of citizenship and (2) make Sinhala - rather than English - the official language.

Both Sri Lanka and Rwanda have a history of pogroms against the minority by the majority. According to academic Linda Melvern (in her 2004 book, 'Conspiracy to Murder, The Rwandan Genocide'), the slaughter of Tutsi in 1959 was the first of several pogroms and, whilst the extent of the casualties varied, the methods used to trap and kill victims would remain largely the same.

Sri Lanka has seen anti-Tamil pogroms in 1956, 1958, 1977 and 1983.

When these pogroms occurred, the attitudes of the

OPINION

of a bloody past

majority rulers of both states, say between President J. R.

Jayawardene of Sri Lanka and President Kayibanda of Rwanda, are eerily similar.

For example, Jayawardene blamed the genocidal 1983 pogroms on the Tamils' intolerable demand for a separate state. He freely admitted: "I am not worried about the opinion of the Tamil people ... if I starve the Tamils out, the Sinhala people will be happy."

President Kayibanda told the Tutsis in 1963: "some of you are causing trouble for your brothers who are living in peace in a democratic Rwanda - and suppose you take Kigali by force ... it will be the total end of the Tutsi race".

Kayibanda also warned that if the Tutsi sought political power, their whole race would be wiped out.

Linda Melvern says of the Rwandan pogroms: "And in each case the role of propaganda and the distortion of history ... were paramount" in paving the way for the violence.

Hutu- and state-controlled media were key to whipping up anti-minority sentiments amongst the majority and portraying the former as violent upstarts who should be put down before it was too late.

(Remember also how the Arusha Accords had given considerable legitimacy to Tutsi demands for power-sharing and further angered the Hutus).

Similarly, Sinhala- and state-owned media in Sri Lanka, present a particular view of the Tamils, their political demands and the LTTE. For example, that the 2002 Ceasefire Agreement was a 'sell-out', that the Tamils are asking for too much (even in the case of federalism), that they are doing well in Sri Lanka and have no grievances, etc.

It is not accidental that last month, the Free Media Movement and four other media organisations said in a statement republished by the AHRC (Asian Human Rights Commission), that: "[the] language and behaviour of the Rajapakse administration's apparatchiks reminds us of Radio Mille Collines in Rwanda, which laid the groundwork for genocide and large-scale violence."

Just as importantly, as in Sri Lanka, no one from the majority community in Rwanda had ever been punished for past pogroms against the minorities.

Nonetheless, as also in Sri Lanka, the majority-minority relations were seen by the international community as generally good and not disposed to breaking down into mass racism or violence.

As Linda Melvern puts it, Rwanda's reputation in the seventies was that of a "boring virtuous Christian country in the mainstream of benign dictator-

ships" (Rwanda was a one party state then).

There is no basis for this sanguine view. Even by 1959, the United Nations was aware of genocidal tendencies - that year the General Assembly sent a special commission to Rwanda to report on the 1959 pogrom (which had resulted in 2000 Tutsi deaths).

Notably, along with a refusal to countenance mass racism, international engagement with the Rwandan state involved the steady supply of military assistance and provision of economic aid. The only 'counter-balance' was support for the "strengthening" of human rights mechanisms.

Furthermore, in the period 1990 to 1993, there was pressure from the United States and France on the Hutu government of President Habyarimana to implement reforms towards a multi-cultural democracy.

A multi-cultural political opposition was constructed and sponsored by the internationally community. The Belgian government arranged for this new opposition to hold talks with the RPF of the Tutsis.

However, as the International Criminal Tribunal (ICTR) investigations subsequently revealed, even as such reforms were being wrestled with, in parallel, through 1990 and 1991, extremist sections of the Rwandan (i.e. Hutu) army were planning the genocide of the Tutsis.

A critical component of the genocide was the countrywide civil defence network staffed by Hutus and established with military support.

During the eighties and early nineties, tens of thousands of Sinhalese were mobilised into so-called 'Home Guards' and sent into Tamil areas to clear out the minority and establish colonies in the Tamils' homeland.

And in the past three years, as the Rajapakse government has pursued a military campaign against the LTTE, Sinhala civilians are being trained and incorporated into civil-defence groups.

Although, the 1994 genocide in Rwanda is said to have been 'triggered' by the plane crash that killed President Habyarimana, the slaughter of almost a million people in three months (almost ten thousand a day!) had been pre-planned (ironically by Habyarimana himself among others).

In other words, the organising of the death squads and distribution of weapons had been planned and carried out well before the killing started.

As in Sri Lanka, past attempts to make peace in Rwanda had resulted in majoritarian anger. Linda Melvern says of the Rwandan political process: "each time there was a proposal of power sharing, there was vio-

lence. It was aimed not just at political opposition but at the Tutsi."

Every step of the Norwegian peace process in Sri Lanka produced Sinhala anger and sometimes rioting: the 2002 Ceasefire Agreement, the 2002 agreement to explore federalism (note the ferocity the word alone invokes these days), the proposals for and interim administration (ISGA), the Post-Tsunami aid sharing mechanism (PTOMS), and so on.

Indeed, since independence, the numerous efforts by Tamil political leaders (long before Tamil militants emerged) to seek accommodation with the Sinhalese, were met by anger and violence.

Interestingly, in Rwanda, as limited constitutional reform got underway and the media began to open up, President Habyarimana's party lost support. The government's response was to charge that the enemy (RPF) was financing some of Rwanda's newspapers to "poison the political atmosphere."

Habyarimana provided a list of papers and names of journalists who worked for them to the Ministry of Justice for prosecution, prompting condemnation from the Association of Journalists.

Today, the Rajapakse government is recognised as one of the world's most repressive in relation to media freedom. The military establishment's attacks, both physical and verbal, on journalists said to be 'betraying' the country have been so commonplace as to become expected.

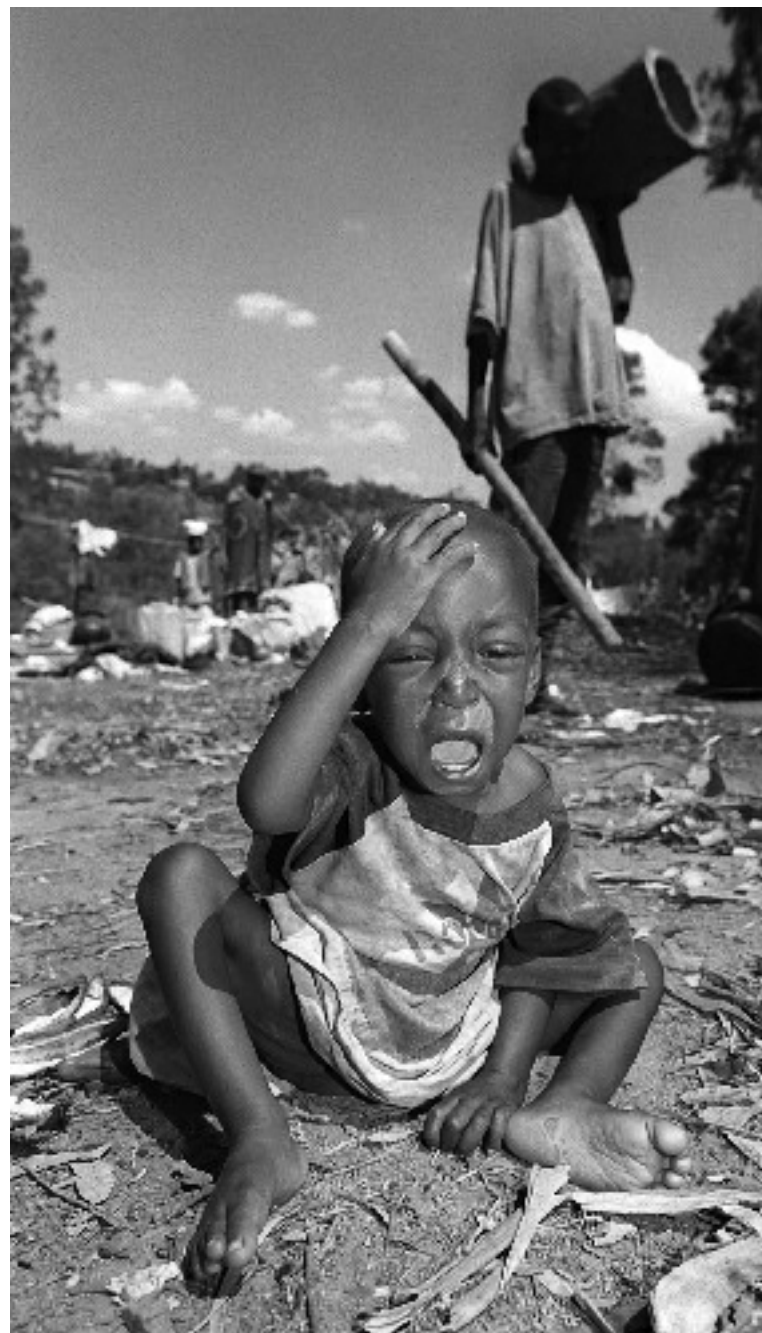
It is the international community's conduct in the years preceding the 1994 Rwandan genocide that is of particular relevance to the Tamil question.

And it should be remembered that Rwanda's mass killings took place long before the present 'War on Terror' began, resulting in struggles against oppression in many parts of the world being lumped together with Islamic radicals targeting the United States and the West.

In the three years that lead to the genocide, France, the former colonial power, continued to train the Hutu military. Even the brutal massacre in March 1992 of 300 Tutsis in Bugesera did not halt the West's military assistance.

Not even when the Director of Amnesty International in France said of the Bugesera and killings elsewhere: "those responsible for the massacres are soldiers with help from the civil authorities."

Similarly, despite the tens of thousands of Tamils who have died in massacres, airstrikes, artillery shelling and embargoes on food and medicine, the West, including former Colonial power, Britain, continues to train, equip and share intelligence with the Sri Lankan armed forces.



This is a file photo of the impact of the Rwandan genocide on a child

While internationally sponsored negotiations were prepared in 1992 between the government and the RPF, violence against opposition parties escalated. Propaganda campaigns accused the new political parties as "fronts" for the RPF.

And as early as 1991, the RPF alleged the President's brother-in-law - a key architect of the genocide - had planned to eliminate political opponents.

In Sri Lanka, Tamil political parties that have stood up for Tamil political rights have been denounced as 'cat's paws', 'lackeys' or 'fronts' of the LTTE.

The latest to suffer this is the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) which has seen several of its parliamentarians, party workers and supporters assassinated by the Rajapakse government.

Linda Melvern says that concern over Rwanda's massive military expenditure and its impact on the economy lead the United States and France to push for a political settlement.

But the French government, which hosted the preliminary talks, simultaneously trained up new Hutu army intelligence units to identify, infiltrate and eliminate targeted members of the RPF. Hutu militias were also trained.

Similarly, just as the United States and other countries have repeatedly called for a political

solution to Sri Lanka's conflict, they have simultaneously trained up and massively re-equipped the armed forces.

In Rwanda, the Arusha Accord was signed in 1993 and UN peace keeping mission (UNAMIR) established. But also in 1993, the Hutu government stepped up arms procurement, primarily through France.

In the three years to the run up to the Accord, Rwanda, one of the poorest countries in the world was also the third largest importer of weapons in Africa, spending an estimated \$100 million. According to Melvern, the money came from international funding - the World Bank, the IMF and the European Union.

In 1993, amid demonization of the minority, the Rwandan state began to distribute weapons amongst the majority. It imported vast quantities of machetes and other agricultural tools - axes, blades, knives, hoes etc. Melvern says there was one new machete for every third male in the country.

The "Interhamwe" or Youth militia was formed in 1991 and began small-scale ethnic killings shortly thereafter.

The militias were also provided with new AK-47s and grenades. By the time the 1994 genocide started, 85 tonnes of ammunition had been distributed

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NEWS

Sri Lanka once again in 'Failed States' list

SRI LANKA has once again been included in the Failed States Index by the Foreign Policy and The Fund for Peace which ranks the countries where state collapse may be just one disaster away.

Sri Lanka has been ranked 20 in the list of 60 failed states with Somalia claiming the number one spot and the distinction of being the state most at risk of failure.

In the fourth annual Failed States Index, Foreign Policy and The Fund for Peace ranked the countries where state collapse may be just one disaster away.

"Whether it is an unexpected food crisis or a devastating hurricane, the world's weakest states are the most exposed when crisis strikes," the Index said.

The rank order of the states is based on the total scores of the 12 indicators. For each indicator, the ratings are placed on a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being the lowest intensity (most stable) and 10 being the highest intensity (least stable). The total score is the sum of the 12 indicators and is on a scale of 0-120.

Sri Lanka scored 95.6, compared to Somalia with 114.2 and the best the 60th state, Indonesia with 83.3.

Founded in 1970 by Samuel Huntington and Warren Demian Manshel, and now published by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington, D.C., Foreign Policy is the premier, award-winning magazine of global politics, economics, and ideas.

Its mission is to explain how the world works-in particular, how the process of globalization is reshaping nations, institutions, cultures, and, more fundamentally, peoples' daily lives.

In 2007, several countries that have long served as the poster

children for failed states managed to achieve some unlikely gains.

The Ivory Coast, which unravelled in 2002 after a flawed election divided north and south, experienced a year of relative calm thanks to a new peace agreement.

Liberia, the most improved country in last year's index, continued to make gains due to a renewed anticorruption effort and the resettlement of nearly 100,000 refugees. And Haiti, long considered the basket case of the Western Hemisphere, stepped back from the edge, with moderate improvements in security in the capital's violence-ravaged slums.

Bangladesh took this year's hardest fall, set off in part by postponed elections, a feuding, deadlocked government, and the imposition of emergency rule that has dragged on for more than 18 months. These political setbacks were followed by greater economic hardships after a devastating cyclone in November flooded large swaths of cropland and left 1.5 million people homeless.

In nearby Pakistan, also one of this year's worst performers, a beleaguered President Pervez Musharraf sparked waves of violent protests when he dismissed the head of the Supreme Court and declared martial law. In a tragic close to the year, the assassination of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto left many wondering about the future prospects of the fragile, nuclear-armed state, the report said.

The year wasn't all bad news, though. Two vulnerable giants, China and Russia, improved their scores sufficiently to move out of the 60 worst states. That is in part due to the fact that 31 additional countries were assessed this year, but some credit must be paid to the countries themselves, it said.



Police used tear gas and water cannons to disperse a group of Buddhist monks attempting to march towards the President's House in Sri Lanka's capital demanding that better hostel facilities be provided for student monks, police said. Some 800 monks clad in saffron-coloured robes advanced towards the President's House on June 26 when they were confronted by police. The monks sat down on a main highway and chanted anti-government slogans. After nearly four hours of protest, police used teargas and water cannons and arrested at least eight monks. The monks are backed by the Marxist JVP (People's Liberation Front), which initially was part of the ruling United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA), but later withdrew its support.

Photo courtesy Daily Mirror

Torture endemic among police says rights group

TORTURE has become endemic in Sri Lankan police stations and there seems to be no political will to stop it, an Asian human rights group said June 25.

The Hong Kong-based Asian Human Rights Commission said torture was standard procedure both in investigating ordinary crimes and as part of the civil war with the Liberation Tigers.

The government said the allegations were baseless.

Despite thousands of complaints, the commission said the attorney general's office had only launched three prosecutions against alleged official torturers.

"Torture is a way of life at all

police stations in Sri Lanka, whether the alleged crimes investigated are those relating to petty criminal offences, serious crimes or offences under the emergency and anti-terrorism laws," the commission said in a statement.

Rights watchdogs have reported hundreds of abductions, disappearances and killings blamed on government security forces and Tamil Tigers since the bloody civil war resumed in 2006.

The commission also said investigations into torture were being politically prevented to protect Sri Lanka's human rights record, and that the lack of political will to eradicate torture affect-

ed the entire administration of justice.

International observers quit the island earlier this year, saying a probe into a string of high-profile killings, including the massacre of 17 local aid staff in 2006, was going nowhere.

The UN Human Rights Council has called on Sri Lanka to investigate allegations of killings and disappearances and prosecute those responsible, including members of the security forces.

Fighting between government forces and Tamil Tiger guerrillas has intensified since the government formally pulled out of a six-year-old ceasefire pact in January.

JVP dissidents form alliance with TMVP

THE National Freedom Front (NFF), the breakaway faction of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), and the Thamil Makkal Vidudalai Pulligal (TMVP) have formed a political alliance to contest future elections together and cooperate in other matters.

The NFF, led by JVP dissident Wimal Weerawansa, and TMVP leader and Eastern Province Chief Minister Sivanthesathurai Chandrakanthan agreed on June 28 to the formation of the alliance after talks at the NFF office in Battaramulla.

"We have the power in provincial level, the NFF have power in Parliament. We joined hands to

march ahead in the democratic process. Today, the East is experiencing the dividends of democracy and we are happy to cooperate with the NFF to further the democratic cause," Chandrakanthan told press immediately after the meeting, reported The Island newspaper.

Chandrakanthan told The Sunday Times that in future elections the two sides will contest together and that further discussions will be held between the two sides on political co-operation. "It may be provincial elections or parliamentary elections that we contest together," he said.

"This is the first of a series of

talks between our two parties in seeking a political alliance. We are so happy that the first round was very successful. We would meet again and would conduct several rounds of talks aiming at political cooperation. Both parties agreed to further strengthen our ties," Weerawansa said.

The NFF was represented by Wimal Weerawansa, NFF General Secretary MP Nandana Gunatillake, MPs Anjan Umma, Mohammed Musammil, Central Committee member Raja Gunaratne, and NFF National Organizer Kamal Deshapriya. The TMVP delegation comprised CM Chandrakanthan, TMVP Coordinating

Secretary Azad Moulana and CM's interpreter G. Rahul.

Weerawansa at the end of the talks pinned a miniature national flag on Chandrakanthan's shirt and said: "This is our present."

Chandrakanthan said Weerawansa, during the run up to eastern provincial council elections last month, had defended his party's position of continuing to carry arms and contest elections.

"We have an obligation to support his party," he added.

Chandrakanthan, also known as Pillayan, said they also hoped to have discussions with other parties who wished to join this alliance.

NFF General Secretary Nandana Gunatillake said the cooperation with the TMVP would help to establish democracy in the east while the two sides would work together in future elections.

Gunatillake said that since the TMVP had entered the political mainstream, the NFF had discussed ways and means of helping the TMVP to develop the east.

"All parties should understand our position. We expect people to understand the reality," Chandrakanthan said in response to a question as to why TMVP members continue to carry weapons.

NEWS

ACF calls for international probe into Muttur massacre

FRENCH charity Action Contra la Faim (ACF or Action Against Hunger) has begun to approach international donors to Sri Lanka to establish an international inquiry into the killing of 17 of its local staffers in Muttur in August 2006.

France has allegedly already come out in support of the initiative. French Foreign Affairs Minister Bernard Kouchner has the non-governmental organisation that France would explore the possibility for such an inquiry, an ACF official said.

Head of ACF communications Lucile Grosjean told The Sunday Leader that coinciding with the launch of a new campaign over the Muttur murders on June 17, the organisation had first made its appeal to France.

"As the event on the 17th was the official launching of the campaign aimed at obtaining an international inquiry, ACF requests the support of France, European Union, Co-chairs of the Tokyo conference at this specific moment. We decided to go step by step asking first for the support of France," she said adding that the French government had reacted positively.

"As requested by ACF, we are going to explore with our international partners the possibility of setting up an international commission of inquiry," French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner said in Paris on June 17 according to transcripts made available by the French Foreign Ministry.

It is likely that a series of discussions would be held between representatives of France and other EU countries, after France takes over the European Union Presidency on July 1, reported the Daily Mirror.

"France is not going to take the aid agency's request lightly as



Having lost faith in Sri Lanka's ability to provide justice for its murdered aid workers, ACF is now seeking an international review

the organisation's 'Justice for Muttur' campaign has caught the attention of the French government. Discussions will be held after July 1 and an international inquiry into the Muttur massacre is likely," the paper quoted French sources as saying.

Grosjean however said that the organisation had only received the French response and was however not aware as to how the other countries would react to the idea of an international inquiry.

Grosjean told the Daily Mirror that while the organization was

relieved at the step taken by the French government, it would continue with its international public awareness campaign in France under the slogan - 'Justice for Muttur' - to dramatize and underscore the savagery of the massacre.

Kouchner was an original member of the International Independent Eminent Group of Persons (IIEGP) that was set up to assist the Special Presidential Commission of Inquiry. He resigned when he was appointed as the Foreign Minister of the Nicolas Sarkozy

administration.

The IIEGP pulled out of Sri Lanka in March, followed by ACF which had maintained a single member presence in the country to handle the matters relating to a commission of inquiry into the Muttur massacre.

However Commission of Inquiry Chairman N. Udulagama told the Daily Mirror that the commission would not extend support to France to conduct an international inquiry as ACF was no longer functioning in Sri Lanka.

Udulagama said that while

ACF was entitled to its views and to seek support from the international community, there was nothing much the Sri Lankan government could do to be of any assistance as ACF had withdrawn from the country before the conclusion of the local investigations, the paper reported.

"ACF left the country two months after the CoI began its sittings without assisting the investigations. Now it seeks an international probe. What does it now expect us to do?" Udulagama queried.

NEWS IN BRIEF

No federal mandate says JVP

The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) last Thursday stressed President Mahinda Rajapaksa did not get a mandate from the people to implement a federal solution but rather only to safeguard the unitary status of the country. JVP Leader Somawansa Amarasinghe also slammed India for what he described as 'its invasive dictatorial foreign policy' and urged the government to reveal the contents and outcome of talks it held with the high level Indian delegation which visited the country. The JVP said neither the Indian government nor the Sri

Lankan government had so far issued even a statement on the outcome of the talks. "During the talks, the Sri Lankan side was confined to the Rajapaksa family because it is now virtually running the entire country by handling everything from defence, economy to foreign affairs. Even though the President has failed to mention what they discussed we have received information from local and Indian sources as to what had transpired during the talks," he said. Mr. Amarasinghe stressed President Rajapaksa did not get a mandate from the people to implement a federal solution but to safeguard the unitary status of the country. (Daily Mirror)

Court restrains Muslims' resettlement

Sri Lanka's Supreme Court extended the term of a restraining order on last month to prevent members of the Muslim community from being settled in an area the Sinhalese have claimed as a historical religious site in the Eastern Province. The court issued the restraining order in May. On June 19 the court extended the term of the order till mid-September when the case would be taken up for hearing. Some 500 houses have been built in the Deegavapi area of the Eastern Province meant to settle Muslims affected by the December 2004 tsunami dev-

astation. The all Buddhist Monk party Janatha Hela Urumaya (JHU) or the National Heritage Party has petitioned the Supreme Court and sought a restraining order to prevent the Muslim settlement at Deegavapi. The JHU said the area has been identified as a Buddhist religious site of historical importance. (Xinhua)

Pastor attacked by home guards

An evangelical pastor in eastern Sri Lanka was admitted to hospital June 24, a day after he was attacked by militant government forces because of his Christian activities. Reverend Fernan-

do from the Methodist Church in Ampara was apparently attacked in the area while returning home from a church group meeting. The National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka, a major umbrella group, said in published remarks that the pastor "sensed that the men were trying to lure him into a trap, and asked them to come to the church instead if they wished to discuss Christianity. The men then attacked him, and warned him not to return to the village." The attackers are believed to be members of the Gramarakshaka Niladhari, or 'Home Guards', an auxiliary force established by the government to assist the police and military. (CSW)

MANNAR MAP





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COMMENT

Loud echoes of a bloody past...

Continued from p9

through the country.

Post-genocide investigation showed flagrant misappropriation of funds, but there has been no explanation as to why five World Bank missions failed to question the level of military expenditure relative to the stated development goals of funds provided.

A senior defector from President Habyarimana's party alleged massive corruption by radical sections in the military: "these oligarchs are treating the country like a private company from which maximum profits can be squeezed."

In Sri Lanka, it is an open secret that the top leadership of the military establishment and other key parts of the state are appropriating state funds, either directly or by trading with the state through private companies.

The point here is that even in the context of peace negotiations, the international community donated or lent the money that the Rwandan - and Sri Lankan - state needed to buy vast quantities of weapons and equipment from abroad - from Western states.

Just as importantly, the Western democracies indirectly funding and directly providing weaponry, were well aware of the weapons' potential in the context of an attempted genocide.

Indeed, the g-word was not far beneath the surface in Rwanda.

One Rwandan human rights group had already labelled the 1993 Bugesera massacre of 300 Tutsi as genocide. But the International Commission of Inquiry that investigated Bugesera considered the word "too politically charged" for its report (interestingly, the Commission's press officer disagreed and the word "genocide" appeared in the title of the press release accompanying the report).

The 1993 report of the UN Rapporteur for Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions noted that in the previous two years, some two thousand Rwandans, mostly Tutsi, had been murdered.

The UN Rapporteur was also concerned at the mass arrests of Tutsi following the first RPF attack, and the government's use of propaganda to create a situation where all Tutsi were portrayed as complicit.

Nonetheless, the ethnic question was so sensitive that the Arusha negotiations avoided framing Rwanda's conflict in terms of Tutsi versus Hutus - even though this is exactly what it was.

In today's Sri Lanka, as in the past, the mass arrests of Tamils by the Sinhala armed forces takes place with unremarkable routine and the "terrorism" label is used readily in such contexts.



The many unburied skulls of the Rwandan genocide now serve as a monument to the 1994 event but the international community does not seem to have learned any lessons from the events that preceded the three month rampage.

Moreover, the kind of war being fought by the Sri Lankan military - mass bombardment of Tamil areas, the driving of hundreds of thousands of Tamils from their homes, the abduction and murder of thousands of civilians, etc - makes the context plain to see.

Compared to Rwanda, Sri Lanka has a longer, more sustained history of ethnic pogroms - 1956, 1977, 1983 being the major ones with smaller massacres in between.

Yet, a decade after Rwanda's genocide, the international community flatly rejects any suggestion of state racism in Sri Lanka.

As the above and previous articles in this series have, drawing on the academic literature on genocide, argued, Sri Lanka, like Rwanda, has most of the requisite conditions for genocide: a supremacist ideology among the ruling elite, a climate of impunity, the presence and increasing use of militias, rapid rearmament in the context of a ceasefire, mass arrests and murders of ethnic minorities, corruption, international funding without adequate supervision and government intimidation, of the media.

Simply put, Sri Lanka meets the standard that was determined in 1993 as appropriate for use of the word genocide in the UN Rapporteur's 1993 report on Rwanda.

In other words, there is no difference between what is happening in Sri Lanka now and what was happening in Rwanda shortly before the 1994 genocide

there.

But in Sri Lanka, as in Rwanda in 1993 and 1994, 'ethnic conflict' and 'genocide' are the two things the international community simply will not accept (last month, for example, the US ambassador to Sri Lanka, Robert O' Blake, was emphatic that there was no such thing as an ethnic conflict there).

Any period of transition from war to peace is a dangerous time, especially when it involves a majoritarian state begrudgingly sharing power with a hated minority.

But the US and UK governments insisted on a narrow mandate for the United Nations peace-keeping mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR). (Whilst the US had lost 18 soldiers in Somalia a year earlier and reportedly was wary of 'intervention', the context in which UNAMIR was going in was very markedly different).

As Melvern notes, UNAMIR's mandate in Rwanda (UNAMIR) excluded protecting civilians, collecting illegal arms or taking action against armed gangs - the very things that precluded UN intervention in a vicious project which had been built up in the preceding three years. 'Security' of the country, moreover, meant security in the capital, Kigali.

An American foreign policy specialist, Samantha Power, provides an illuminating analysis of the international and in particular, US, role in the Rwandan genocide.

Her 2001 text ("Bystanders to Genocide") is based on a three year investigation and sixty interviews with US officials.

Samantha Power identifies three weaknesses in the international strategy that accompanied the Arusha Accords.

Firstly, whenever the negotiations were not going well, the international community threatened to pull out the UN troops. Not only was this exactly what the newly rearmend Hutu extremists wanted, such a threat only makes sense if the UN troops were there for purposes other than to protect the Tutsis.

Secondly, she says, "before and during the massacres U.S. diplomacy revealed its natural bias toward states and toward negotiations. Setbacks were perceived as 'dangers to the peace process' more than as 'dangers to Rwandans.' American criticisms were deliberately and steadfastly levelled at 'both sides,' though Hutu government and militia forces were usually responsible."

Thirdly, the international community was happy to accept a certain level of ethnic violence in the region. When the genocide started, "US regional specialists initially suspected that Rwanda was undergoing 'another flare-up' that would involve another 'acceptable' (if tragic) round of ethnic murder."

In short, adamantly refusing to accept the ethnic basis for Rwanda's conflict, inherently biased towards the state and tolerant of the country's proclivity for violence, the United States

simply ignored the unfolding genocide.

The parallels with Sri Lanka are, once again, striking.

Throughout the Norwegian peace process, the international community, refused to blame the Sri Lankan state for its role in the gradually escalating cycle of violence. They refused to accept the role of the state and the LTTE as straddling a deep ethnic faultline. They either blamed the LTTE ('terrorists') or "both sides" when the Sri Lankan state escalated its military campaign against the LTTE.

Just as importantly, the international community was more concerned with "the peace process" than the plight of the Tamils. Which is why over eight hundred thousand Tamils continue to remain displaced while the Sri Lankan military - in direct contradiction of the 2002 Ceasefire Agreement - continues to occupy their homes, farmland, schools, places of worship, etc.

In Rwanda, as the genocide began, the international community can be seen to have demonstrated appalling indifference, at best, and active support for the state, at worst.

UNAMIR was even warned by an informer of a plan to exterminate the Tutsi. And that was in January 1994, 4 months before the killing began. The informer revealed the existence of plans and stockpiles of weapons for this purpose.

Major General Romeo

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NEWS

Victory now in mid-2009 says Army chief

Continued from p1

revised that deadline to a new one of the year's end.

The BBC said the timescale is important because President Mahinda Rajapaksa's popular support is largely based on his claim he can militarily defeat the Tamil Tigers and thereby bring peace to Sri Lanka.

Moreover, the Army chief's comments come two months after one of Sri Lanka's most celebrated Army officers criticized the Rajapakse government's war strategy.

Saying that the government's self-imposed deadlines "were not realistic", Maj Gen. (ret'd) Janaka Perera questioned the wisdom of waging protracted war against the LTTE and warned that battle fatigue would set in and sap the military's will to fight.

Maj. Gen. (ret'd) Perera also questioned the veracity of the massive claims of LTTE casualties being made by the defence establishment.

Lt. Gen. Fonseka insisted Monday that the government was on its way to destroying the LTTE, which he said was "willing."

"From about the beginning of the year, the LTTE has lost its conventional capability," Fonseka told Colombo-based foreign correspondents.

"They are no longer fighting as a conventional army."

"You can see they are weakening. They don't have the same capacity and the willpower to fight now," he said.

"We have already defeated them (as a conventional army). They have lost that capability. Although they are fighting with us, it is not in the same manner."

"I'm sure in...less than one year, the LTTE will totally lose even their present territory. Then they will resort to totally different type of tactics."

"They should not be able to maintain their present control over the population, to be able to resist the army in the way they are resisting now. They would have to lose all that capability."

Lt. Gen. Fonseka said the military had killed over 9,000 Tigers since August 2006 and had gained much territory. He said 1,700 soldiers had also died, but that LTTE resistance was crumbling.

Asked about the present LTTE strength, Lt. Gen. Fonseka said: "as per the intelligence reports, the current cadre of the LTTE in the worst-case scenario is 5,000."

"Most of the new recruits in the past two years are underage conscripts," he said.

The Army chief's comments contradicted the US State Depart-

ment's 2007 Human Rights report which suggested: "by year end most sources indicated that the 'one family, one fighter' policy targeted those 18 years or older."

The UNICEF noted a significant reduction in reported child recruitment by the LTTE. ... the trend indicated that the LTTE was eliminating the recruitment and use of child soldiers."

The Army Chief admitted that previous military estimates of the Tiger strength had been too low. Lt. Gen. Fonseka was quoted by state media in December as saying there were only 3,000 Tigers left.

Claiming that government troops fighting the LTTE in the Vanni jungles over the past one year had become "one of the best jungle fighters in the world," Fonseka said his men "are now working on the overall plan of completely defeating the LTTE militarily," not just capturing fresh territories.

"We do not just go for terrains, but we go for the kill. This is the difference between the military operations in the past and the present," he said.

He added that the military had got 'the right guidance and leadership' from President Mahinda Rajapaksa and his government.

Fonseka was named the army chief in December 2005, a month after Rajapaksa took power.

"Even if the army finished the war and captured the whole of north, the LTTE still might survive as long as there are people who believe in Tamil nationalism and with Tamil diaspora who are supporting them."

"The LTTE might survive another even two decades with about 1,000 cadres. But we will not be fighting in the same manner. It might continue as an insurgency forever."

The Tamil Tigers have not commented directly on Gen Fonseka's claims to have defeated them as a conventional force.

But earlier they rubbished the military's reports of battlefield successes and said the casualty figures being put out by the government were false, intended to retain support for the war in the Sinhala south, the BBC reported.

Lt. Gen. Fonseka's upbeat reading of Sri Lanka's war progress comes as spiraling inflation (28% up from last year) is starting to erode at hitherto very strong support amongst the majority Sinhalese for the military destruction of the LTTE.

The governor of the Central Bank, Ajith Nivard Cabraal, told the BBC the main reason for high inflation in Sri Lanka was the global rise in oil prices, combined with the government reducing



Delays result in loss of concentration and soldiers losing the will to fight says Maj. Gen. (ret'd) Perera

fuel subsidies.

In an interview to The Sunday Leader newspaper on March 16 this year, retired Army General Janaka Perera pointed out that though military offensives against LTTE-held Vanni began in July 2007, there had been little tangible progress.

"If [the fighting] drags on and spreads over a year, the soldier suffers both mental fatigue and physical exhaustion. Both these factors combined with his home problems are going to impact on him. If he continues to remain in the battlefield, it is difficult to get the quality of a focused soldier from a fatigued and pressurized man," Maj. Gen. Perera said.

Lt. Gen. Fonseka admitted the fighting had been intense in Mannar, which the government clai-

med to have captured entirely on Sunday - and which was later contradicted by the military spokesman.

"It took nine months to capture Mannar district, the so called 'rice bowl'. The terrain was open and for two months it was flooded," he explained.

Meanwhile, last week the Army launched a campaign to track down and arrest up to 12,000 deserters who failed to take advantage of a government amnesty - about 5,000 returned in the month long amnesty in May.

Sri Lanka's armed forces officially number over 200,000.

In recent weeks, there have been persistent reports of low morale, especially amongst young recruits in Jaffna amongst whom several suspected suicides

have been reported.

According to the Maj. Gen. Perera, the LTTE is engaged in a protracted campaign: "the LTTE's strategy is to drag it on and play for time. Delays work in their favour."

"Just put yourself into the soldier's position. You don't see a tangible goal being achieved making things really tough. Then you lose concentration and the will to fight."

"Come September, the north-east monsoon will set in. Then, added to the physical and mental exhaustion, the weather will also conspire to keep the troops down. That means, the sick rates will go up with malaria and fever attacks," he said.

"It is going to be a nightmare if the war drags on."

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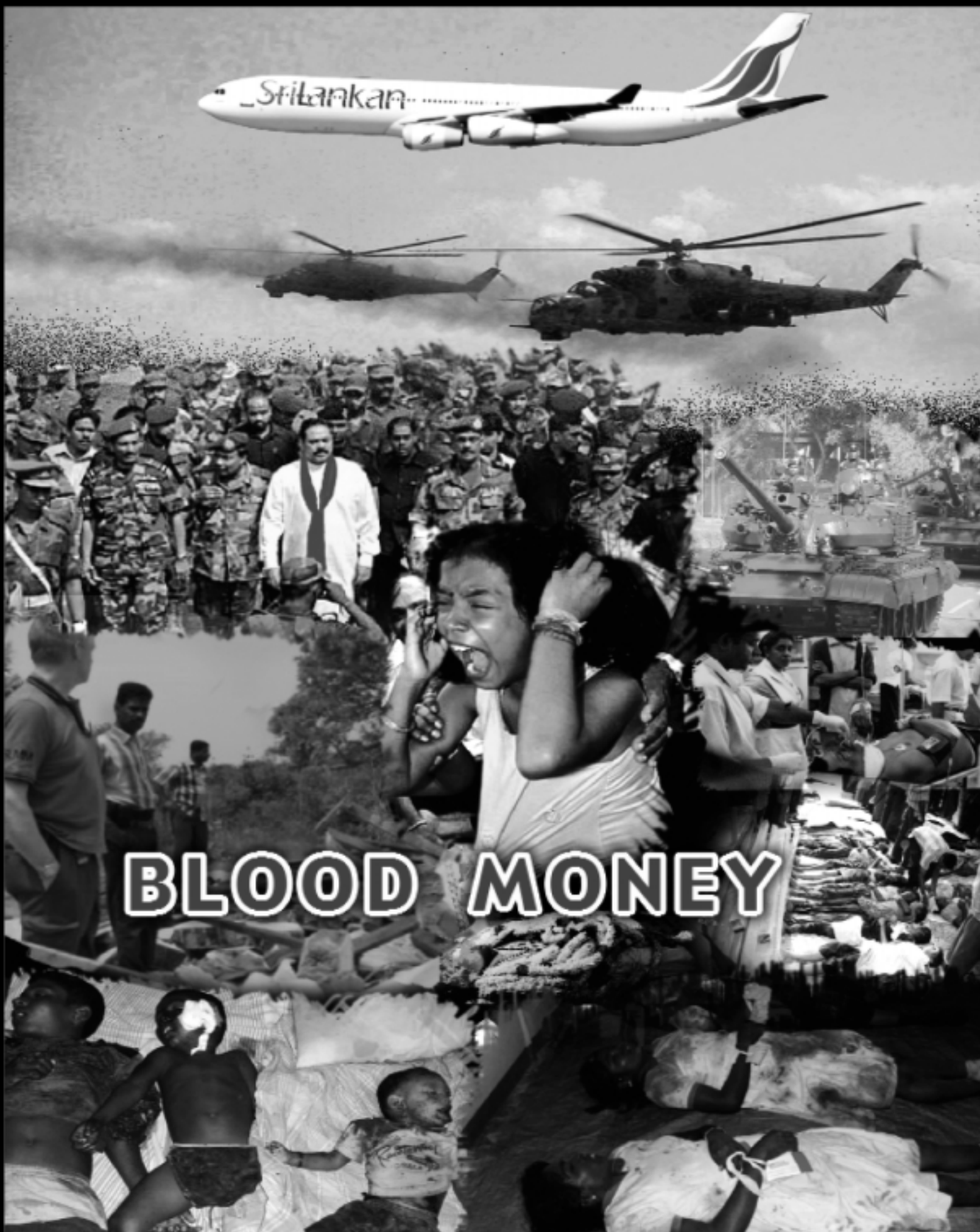
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