

## Why Tamil Eelam is no threat to South Asia?

PAGE 12

MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA

## Diaspora marks 25th anniversary of Black July

TAMILS across the world gathered to commemorate the 25th anniversary of Black July, the week in 1983 that saw a state sponsored pogrom kill over 3,000 of them killed in Sri Lanka.

Events were held in the US, UK, Canada, South Africa, Netherlands, Australia, and New Zealand, among other countries.

Over 2,000 British Tamils gathered in front of the parliament last Wednesday to commemorate the deaths during that week of violence in Sri Lanka in July 1983. Age, religion, and gender were no barrier as the whole spectrum of Tamils, from grandparents to babies in push chairs, attended the candlelight vigil between 8pm and 10pm.

Although the British parliament was in recess, a few parliamentarians turned up to show their support. Leaflets were handed out during rush hour at various points to raise awareness among the British Public of the continuous human rights violations carried out by the Sri Lankan government.

In Canada approximately 350 people filled the Nepean City Hall, Ben Franklin Place, Ottawa, to capacity last Wednesday. The event was marked by a minute of silence for the victims who lost their lives in the pogrom and was followed by the Canadian national anthem sung by children.

Thanks were given to the people and the countries that helped the victims of Black July and those displaced by the pogrom. Canada was thanked by many

speakers for opening its doors to over 250,000 Tamils fleeing Sri Lanka after July 1983.

Prayers were held by multi-faith religious leaders for those who lost their lives during the pogrom.

An audio visual presentation on the Black July pogrom was made, in which the recorded footage of the actual events and testimonials from some of the victims were presented.

Victim testimonials were also presented by prominent community members on their personal harrowing experiences during those fateful days in July.

Members of the Tamil community overwhelmingly signed up for blood donation under the "partner for life" national campaign in gratitude for the kindness offered by Canada in providing a safe haven for Tamils.

Also on Wednesday, Tamils in Netherlands gathered in Amsterdam to commemorate Black July. The event, jointly organised by the Tamil Women's Organisation and the Tamil Youth Organisation, included a photo exhibition showing the suffering of Tamils at the hands of successive Sri Lankan governments and a street drama by the youth to provide further explanation to the locals who were observing.

People for Equality and Relief in Lanka (PEARL), a US-based advocacy group, held a rally at Russell Senate Park, Washington, last Thursday and the rally was

*Continued on p4*





## BLACK JULY

# The Pogrom of July 1983

NAKED and bloodied, the exhausted youth slumps on a bench by the filthy roadside, his head in hands, awaiting the final blows. His casually dressed pursuers gather round.

One be-spectacled young man grins as he raises his right knee in preparation for another blow. This single image, above all others, has come to represent the traumatic events of 'Black July' 1983 for Sri Lanka's Tamils.

The mayhem that erupted across Colombo and other parts of the south when state-backed mobs of rampaging Sinhalese attacked Tamils and their property might seem distant from the now iconic image of the lone victim surrounded by a small group of laughing, even bored, slightly built youth.

Over 3,000 Tamil people were killed in over 6 days of organised anarchy between July 24-30 1983 (the official government figure for the deaths was 358).

The pogrom, organised by Sri Lanka's state forces and carried out by Sinhala mobs targeting Tamils from voters' lists made available to them entered Tamil consciousness as 'Black July' or 'the Holocaust.'

But the image of the lone Tamil boy cornered by a group of Sinhala youth touched a nerve in a community feeling beleaguered and utterly defenceless as the majority community and the state turned on them.

'Black July' triggered a flood of recruits to a myriad of Tamil militant groups, including what has now become a standing army, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Many commentators have thus erroneously linked the July 1983 (and an ambush by Tamil fighters which killed thirteen soldiers which is cited as the 'reason' for the anti-Tamil riots) to the start of the conflict.

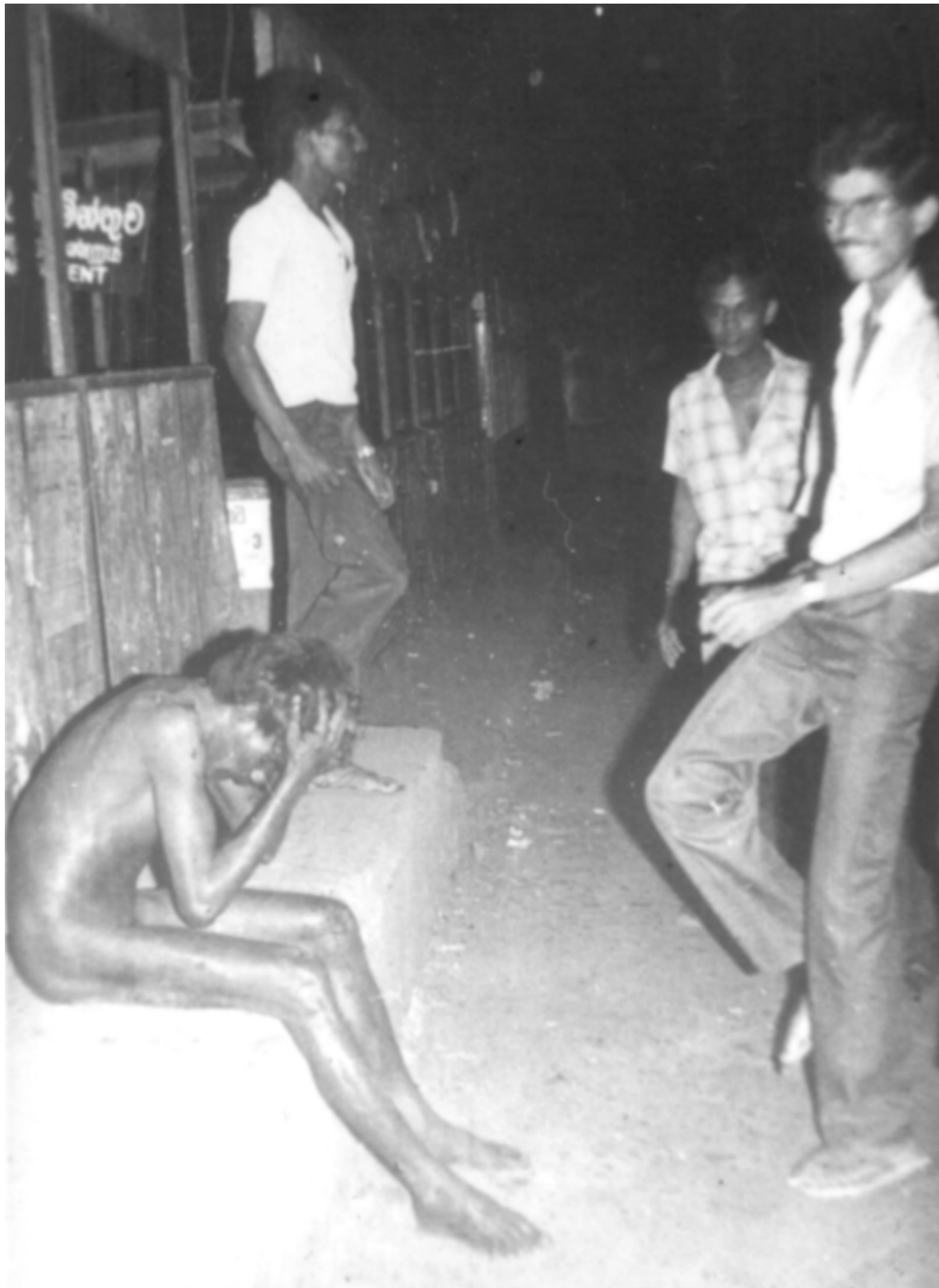
In fact Tamil militancy began in the mid-seventies, but it long remained a shadowy phenomena, eclipsed by (though undoubtedly nurtured in) the mass mobilisation behind the parliamentary Tamil United Liberation Front's non-violent drive for independence for the discriminated Tamils.

Amid the tumultuous changes that have gripped Sri Lanka in the near quarter century since July 1983, that iconic photograph has endured, the moment of racist violence it captures a potent reminder to the Tamils of their vulnerability.

The photograph itself was taken by Chandragupta Amarasinghe, working for a Communist newspaper at the time.

Although fearful of the consequences of photographing state-backed rioters, Amarasinghe and a colleague decided to try anyway. As the Sinhala youth closed in on the Tamil victim, they seized their chance.

Amarasinghe whipped the camera up, snapping a frame before



This iconic photograph of the July 1983 riots by Chandragupta Amarasinghe was made available to Tamil Guardian by Michael Roberts

ore tossing it into an open bag being held open by his friend. They then fled.

In the bag was a captured moment of Sri Lanka's violent history. It is doubtful they were

even aware of its potency.

The photograph is made available by well-known Australia-

based academic Michael Roberts, who acquired it from Amarasinghe.

## BLACK JULY

# July 1983: Anatomy of a pogrom

In July 1983, violence on an unprecedented scale was unleashed against the Tamil community by Sinhalese mobs, assisted and organized by the Sri Lankan security forces. Over 3,000 Tamil people were killed in over 6 days of unrestrained anarchy between July 24 and 30 (the government figure for the deaths was 358). Hundreds of Tamil girls and women were raped before being murdered. Most Tamil owned properties in Colombo were razed to the ground and the entire community fled to the north and abroad. The ethnic cleansing of Colombo was systematic and thorough. The pogrom of July 1983 is referred to by the Tamil people as their 'Holocaust'.

CONTRARY to popular belief, the Holocaust was not a spontaneous reaction to the ambush of a Sri Lankan army patrol by Tamil guerrillas. In a report on the attacks, the International Commission of Jurists said "the suspicion is strong that this organised attack on the Tamil population was planned and controlled by extremist elements in the government UNP party, and that the killing of the 13 soldiers by [Tamil guerrillas] served as the occasion for putting the plan into operation. The reports go so far as to allege that a member of the Cabinet was actively involved in planning these attacks".

Sri Lanka had already seen unprovoked anti-Tamil riots before, albeit in a smaller scale; in 1956, in 1968, in 1977 and 1981. Hundreds of Tamils had been killed in these bouts of island wide violence. The involvement of Sri Lankan government officials in these have been documented, especially in 1981, when ruling party MPs supervised the violence in Jaffna.

Since 1981, the violence by the predominantly Sinhalese Sri Lankan security forces against the Tamil populace had enhanced the public support enjoyed by Tamil guerrillas fighting for a separate state, and attacks on the security forces escalated. President J. R. Jayawardene responded with draconian security measures, giving his forces sweeping powers.

Scattered, but continuous anti-Tamil violence had taken place in several parts of the island in the months preceding the Holocaust.

Through early 1983, the predominantly Sinhalese Sri Lankan army was deployed in strength in the Tamil areas of the island. There was a sharp escalation in violence and abuses. Sinhalese troops shot Tamil civilians on the streets, entered houses and raped Tamil women, arrested and tortured at will, with complete impunity.

In early July 1983, Sri Lankan

troop levels in Colombo were increased. At the same time, the notorious 'Public Security Act' was introduced. This law permitted security forces' personnel to dispose of dead bodies without post mortem examination, inquest or judicial inquiry. In effect, it allowed for killing with impunity provided under the guise of 'maintaining security'.

President Jayawardene was quoted in the Daily Telegraph of 11 July 1983 as saying: "I am not worried about the opinion of the Tamil people.. now we cannot think of them, not about their lives or their opinion ... Really if I starve the Tamils out, the Sinhala people will be happy".

On July 19th 1993, the movement of (foreign) journalists was abruptly limited and strict press censorship imposed throughout the island. All the factors neces-

**'While all this was going on, a line of Buddhist monks appeared, arms flailing, their voices raised in a delirium of exhortation, summoning the Sinhalese to put all Tamils to death.'**

sary for a crackdown on the Tamil populace were, it seems, in place.

However, on July 23rd, Tamil guerrillas carried out their first major attack on the Sri Lankan security forces. An army patrol on night duty in the northern Tamil town of Jaffna was ambushed and 13 Sinhalese soldiers killed - an unprecedented number.

The attack stunned the Sinhala populace. The government, however, saw the incident as an opportunity to mobilise support amongst the Sinhala people. The deaths of 13 Sinhala army pri-



A Sinhala mob looking for Tamils confronts and surrounds a mini-bus in Colombo. Police stood by.

vates were treated as a national tragedy and a state funeral planned.

On July 24, the bodies of the dead soldiers were brought to Colombo. Attacks on Tamil residents started, almost on cue, in several parts of Colombo on the night of July 24. There was also violence by the security forces in Jaffna, where over 50 Tamils were killed, and in other locations on the island.

The Lawasia Human Rights Standing Committee Report said: "The violence had broken out in different parts of Colombo almost simultaneously on the night of July 24th and on July 25th, extended during the course of the next few days to different centres throughout the country."

Despite the increased possibility of world condemnation, the Sri Lankan government remained silent as anti-Tamil rioting escalated to horrific levels on July 25.

The Sri Lankan security forces openly assisted the Sinhalese rioters. Sri Lankan army lorries moved gangs of armed Sinhalese from district to district in Colombo. As they arrived in each area, the attackers were given the local voting lists. The addresses occupied by people with Tamil names were systematically 'cleansed'. Defenceless residents were hacked to death, women were raped, often in front of their relatives. Many young girls were raped before having their throats cut. Sri Lankan army lorries removed heaps of Tamil corpses for destruction, and supplied the gangs with refreshments.

London's Daily Telegraph (July 26) wrote: "Motorists were dragged from their cars to be stoned and beaten with sticks. Others were cut down with knives and axes. Mobs of Sinhala youth rampaged through the streets, ransacking homes, shops and offices, looting them and setting them ablaze, as they sought out members of the Tamil ethnic minority. A mob attacked a Tamil cyclist riding near Colombo's eye hospital. The cyclist was hauled from his

**'A Tamil woman was desperately trying to erase the kumkum on her forehead as the thugs bore down. The woman's belly was ripped open with a broken bottle and she was immolated as people clapped and danced.'**

bike, drenched with petrol and set alight. As he ran screaming down the street, the mob set on him again and hacked him down with jungle knives."

In his book, 'The tragedy of Sri Lanka', William McGowan wrote: "While travelling on a bus when a mob laid siege to it, passengers watched as a small boy was hacked 'to limbless death.' The bus driver was ordered to give up a Tamil. He pointed out a

woman who was desperately trying to erase the mark on her forehead - called a kumkum - as the thugs bore down on her. The woman's belly was ripped open with a broken bottle and she was immolated as people clapped and danced. In another incident, two sisters, one eighteen and one eleven, were decapitated and raped, the latter 'until there was nothing left to violate and no volunteers could come forward,' after which she was burned. While all this was going on, a line of Buddhist monks appeared, arms flailing, their voices raised in a delirium of exhortation, summoning the Sinhalese to put all Tamils to death."

The London Daily Express (29 July) wrote: "Mrs. Eli Skarstein, back home in Stavanger, Norway, told how she and her 15 year old daughter, Kristen witnessed one massacre. 'A mini bus full of Tamils were forced to stop in front of us in Colombo' she said. A Sinhalese mob poured petrol over the bus and set it on fire. They blocked the car door and prevented the Tamils from leaving the vehicle. 'Hundreds of spectators watched as about 20 Tamils were burnt to death' Mrs. Skarstein added: 'We can't believe the official casualty figures. Hundreds, may be thousands, must have been killed already. The police force (which is 95% Sinhalese) did nothing to stop the mobs. There was no mercy. Women, children and old people were slaughtered. Police did nothing to stop the genocide.'"

*Continued on p8*



## BLACK JULY

USA



USA



MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA



## BLACK JULY

NEWZEALAND



NETHERLANDS



SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA



SOUTH AFRICA



LONDON, UK



# Tamil Diaspora marks anniversary of

# Black July

Continued from p1

attended by over 600 participants from several U.S. States.

Two U.S. Congress members, through letters of support read at the rally, recognized the American Tamils' effort highlighting the human rights crisis in Sri Lanka.

The rally was held in partnership with the U.S. Campaign for Burma (USCB), which commemorated the "8.8.88 Uprising" in Burma, in which thousands of peaceful protestors calling for the restoration of democracy were killed by that country's armed forces.

Participants called for the U.S. government's help in ending the human rights crisis in Sri Lanka by advocating for U.N. human

rights monitors on the ground.

The rally concluded with a vigil to commemorate the victims of Black July, in which survivors of the pogrom shared their experiences. Others read the testimonials of survivors, performed commemorative songs and recited poems in honour of the victims.

More than 600 South African Tamils assembled at the Kharwasan Temple Hall in Chatsworth, South Africa on Friday to observe the 25th anniversary. African National Congress (ANC) parliamentarian Sisa Njikelana from Gauteng Province, delivered the key note speech, comparing the developing situation in Sri Lanka to those in Rwanda and Brundi.

An audio visual presentation of events that unfolded in July

1983, and clippings illustrating the human rights violations against the Tamil people were shown to the audience. South African Tamil youth gave dance and music programs that included Tamil Eelam songs.

Asserting that South Africans are prepared to express their opinions publicly, Mr Sisa said: "[t]he looming tragedy of global inertia in situations such as Sri Lankan conflict is a matter of grave concern. The same occurred in Rwanda and Burundi - the world was just watching and dilly-dallying whilst humans were butchering each other. There are times whereby my observation leads to one conclusion i.e. the conflict in Sri Lanka is not a priority to some of the key global players and

therefore may just have to be "shelved" for the time being."

Australian Tamils held three events, beginning with a rally at the heart of Sydney Friday morning, followed by a protest meeting, and on Saturday afternoon a photographic exhibition in Melbourne at the State Library forecourt, opposite the Melbourne Central Railway Station.

More than 200 Australians assembled in Sydney City on Friday to protest the Sri Lankan State sponsored genocide towards Sri Lanka's Tamils.

Police cordoned off main roads in the city as the demonstrators made their way beating drums at 10:30 a.m. Covering their mouths with black cloths to symbolise the oppressed cries of

the Tamils' and participants finished the demonstration with the cries of "The charge is genocide; the struggle is for freedom!"

The rally shut down several key transport arteries as it moved from State Parliament House towards Sydney Town Hall.

The rally commenced with a testimony from Mrs Nalayini Santhra who shared her experience of Black July, where rioters supported by the government threw burning tyres upon her father and brother, burning them alive. She was 17 years old at the time.

After the rally, participants moved to a Sydney suburb, where many Tamil organisations of Sydney, under the leadership of the Australasian Federation of

Tamil Associations, held a peaceful protest meeting.

Speaking at the event representing the Eelam Tamil Association, Dr. Victor Rajakulendran said, "Eelam Tamil association believes, a political solution, recognising the Tamils of Sri Lanka as a Nation, their entitlement to claim the territory they have historically occupied as their homeland and their right to self-determination can only, put an end to this, 60 years long suffering of the Tamil people in Sri Lanka. Therefore on this important day for the Tamils, I appeal to the Australian government and all the peace loving Australians, to make every effort to find that political solution and save the Tamils in Sri Lanka from State

sponsored Terrorism," he said.

On Saturday afternoon Tamils in Melbourne gathered at the State Library Four Court, in front of the Melbourne Central Railway Station to commemorate Black July and draw the attention of the Australian public to the plight of Tamil people in Sri Lanka. A photographic and video exhibition organised at the steps of the Library Four Court attracted the attention of the Australian public. A Tamil youth band provided the entertainment at the exhibition site.

In New Zealand also the New Zealand Tamil Medical Association and the Tamil Youth Organisation organised a blood donation drive, and on Friday held a vigil marking the event.

MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA





## BLACK JULY

# Deserving victims, just violence

The pogrom against Tamils in July 1983 was supported by deeply held ideological assumptions that still inform the political logic of the Sinhala people and leadership.

**Vidya Kumaraswamy**  
Tamil Guardian

THE 1983 anti Tamil pogrom marked a critical turning point in the political history of the post independence Sri Lankan state. The violence consolidated the sense amongst the Tamil people that their security and future well-being could never be guaranteed in a unitary state dominated by a Sinhala Buddhist ideology. By August 1983 there had been a massive increase in recruitment for the Tamil independence movement as many began to feel that separation was the only viable option that remained open to the Tamils on the island.

While the previous governments of the United National Party (UNP) sought to explain the violence in terms of a master conspiracy by leftists and the provocation of Tamil separatists, its rival, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), simply blamed the

failings of the then UNP administration. The UNP government promised firm action against the leftists and militants while the SLFP-led People's Alliance government pointed its fingers at the UNP while echoing the latter's rhetoric of fighting terrorism.

The objective of both methods is to reassure the Tamils that the conditions and motivations that made the 1983 violence possible have long since disappeared. The explanations also seek a cause somewhere outside the Sinhala polity and thereby remove any form of collective responsibility.

Whatever the precise anatomy of events that led up to the unrestrained violence against the Tamils, it is clear that even a momentary unleashing of collective madness requires the prior existence of certain conditions. An examination of the conditions and assu-

mptions underlying Sinhala attitudes to the violence, as expressed by both rural villagers and politicians, uncovers certain common themes. These themes and the supporting worldview provide the context with which the Sinhalese perceive violence against the Tamils.

As Jonathan Spencer, writing on popular Sinhalese perceptions of the violence suggests, it is not possible to explain the 1983 events by referring exclusively to events outside the Sinhala populace and worldview.

"While no one has disagreed with the government's claim that there was a large element of organisation in the rioting, this does not mean that events can be explained solely in terms of manipulation by a few ring-leaders," he says. "It may be possible to argue that the violence could have been perpetrated without widespread popular support but it is just as valid to point out that it would have been impossible had there been any measured show of opposition from the Sinhala population."

During the July 83 violence Spencer was working in a village on the southern edge of the central highlands where he was able to ascertain the "popular mood." He suggests that the violence was

made possible by the existence of "very wide-spread anti Tamil resentment." This led most Sinhalese people to either deny that the Tamils had been the victims or suggest that their suffering had been deserved: "Thus as I was again and again reminded throughout my stay, in Sinhalese eyes the Tamil is an inherently violent and dangerous creature whose

**'I was again and again reminded throughout my stay that in Sinhalese eyes, the Tamil is an inherently violent and dangerous creature whose excesses from time to time try even the saintly patience of the majority Buddhists'**

excesses from time to time try even the saintly patience of the majority Buddhists."

"Why were people doing this," I asked. "It's like this," explained a young man who was staying with my friend. "This country is a good, straight Buddhist

country. Yet these Tamils are always making trouble, killing people."

The observations of Elizabeth Nissan from her experience in Anuradhapura confirm that most Sinhalese people blamed the Tamils for the 83 violence. A Sinhalese man whom she spoke to on the evening of July 26, when a curfew had finally been imposed, blamed the Tamils for the inconvenience. "Yes there's curfew. If those Tamils want to come and live in our country they should help us. But they cause us all this trouble. How are we to work and buy food? It's those Tamils cause us problems."

Even when it was accepted that the Tamils had been the targets of the violence, this was justified as a natural reaction by the Sinhalese to the extreme provocations to which they had been subjected. Nissan collected some of the more commonly heard statements: "... but they killed thirteen of our soldiers, so what do they expect," "they came here and now they are trying to divide the country; that's why it happened," "...we have given them a lot but they always want more."

According to Nissan the logic of the arguments given above are supported by an ideology that outlines a specific type of rela-

## July 1983 and the Tamil armed struggle

**D.B.S. Jeyaraj**  
The Sunday Leader

THE violence unleashed against innocent and unarmed Tamils in July 1983 brought in its wake many unintended and unforeseen consequences. Chief among them was the rise of the Tamil armed militancy. Those responsible for the anti-Tamil pogrom and the Sixth Constitutional Amendment disavowing separatism may have expected the Tamil people to be cowed into submission through brute force. It was the opposite that happened. The Tamil Eelam demand and related armed struggle received a massive fillip.

Twenty years have passed since the July '83 pogrom. The Tamil armed struggle has reached epic proportions today. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam organisation has become the premier politico-military force of the Tamils.

### Tamil force

It has raised militias modelled on a conventional army and is perhaps the only guerrilla force in the world that has a naval wing. It controls swathes of territory in the north and east. It is also a force to be reckoned with in areas under the nominal control of the Sri Lankan armed forces. The Tigers' reach extends even to

Colombo and other places in Sinhala majority regions.

Given the size and power of the LTTE today, it would be very hard to believe that this formidable entity was a very weak outfit in comparative terms 20 years ago. However unpalatable it may be to the hawks south of Vavuniya, the simple truth was exactly that. The LTTE had only 29 full time members when it launched the attack on the army patrol at Thirunelvely on July 23. It also had another 20 to 30 people as helpers and active supporters in the Northeast. The July '83 pogrom however changed all that.

### Tamil Upsurge

There was a collective upsurge among Tamils after 1983. Almost every young Tamil felt that force had to be met with force. They began flocking to the existing movements like the LTTE, People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO), Eelam People Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) and Eelam Revolutionary Organisation (EROS). In addition to these several new organisations emerged over-night. Some were splinters from existing groups. There were 34 identifiable groups at one stage.

The phenomenon of young Tamils outraged by the July violence chanting the mantra of

"aayuthap porattam" (armed struggle) received two terrific boosts. Firstly India entered the scene and began providing arms and training to the new recruits. Boatload after boatload of youths crossed the Palk Strait and received training in north and south India.

**Young Tamils outraged by the July violence chanting the mantra of armed struggle received two terrific boosts: India provided arms and training - and the Diaspora began sending money.**

Secondly there was a massive exodus of Tamils to foreign countries. The Tamil diaspora grew rapidly in size. These Tamils began collecting and sending money to the armed movements. Thus began growing the Tamil armed struggle.

The LTTE, PLOTE, TELO, EPRLF and EROS together had only about 275 to 300 cadres when the July violence erupted. The numbers began swelling in the aftermath of the pogrom. The combined strength of the groups reached five digits within a year. This rapid increase caused its own problems. Later fratricidal

conflicts transformed the nature of the Tamil armed struggle. Nevertheless there is no denying that the 1983 violence effectively laid the foundation for a widespread conflict that is yet to be resolved.

### Idealism

There was a tremendous sense of idealism among Tamils after 1983 July. Almost every Tamil living in southern Sri Lanka was affected directly or indirectly. The scale of deaths, destruction and displacement was massive. Apart from the devastation there was the feelings of wounded pride and injured self-respect. The urge to prove that Tamils were not a cowardly people was predominant.

There was also the insecurity factor. Tamil consciousness underwent a significant change as a result of the July pogrom. One event that fired many young Tamils was the Welikada Prison massacre that resulted in the gruesome deaths of 52 Tamil political prisoners. Thirty five were killed on July 25, and 17 on July 27th.

Tamils had hitherto laid great emphasis on education. It was seen as the avenue to upward mobility. A white collar job was the overwhelming desire of young Tamils. This created a book-wormish image of Tamil youths.

Even worms turn. This is exactly what happened after 1983. Many highly qualified Tamils

holding good jobs left them and took up arms; many undergraduates joined; so too did brilliant students doing their advanced levels. Another feature was the number of youths studying in India and Western countries to take up arms. Later Tamil girls too started joining the movements. Violence against Tamils has been continuing since 1956. Force had been systematically deployed against Tamils to suppress their nonviolent struggle for equality.

### Two kinds of pain

The violence was of two categories. One was the mob violence encouraged and fostered by the powers that be. The second was the use - official and unofficial - of police and armed forces to crush legitimate Tamil aspirations. This continuing process peaked during July 1983. Organised and disorganised mobs wrought havoc with active collusion by sections of the police and armed forces.

That pogrom was the turning point for Tamils. The armed struggle thereafter became inevitable.

That tragic period in the last week of July became the defining moment for Tamil militant consciousness. The consequences of July 1983 prevail still. The important question is have the correct lessons been learnt?

(Published July 20, 2003. Edited)

## BLACK JULY



tionship between the Sinhalese, the Sri Lankan state and the Tamil speaking people.

"Implicit in all such statements is the fundamental premise that Sri Lanka is inherently and rightfully Sinhalese state; and that this is, and must be accepted as, a fact and not a matter of opinion to be debated. For attempting to change this premise, Tamils have brought the wrath of the Sinhalese on their own heads; they have themselves to blame."

### Reinforced

This view was echoed and reinforced by the Sinhalese leaders through their official speeches broadcast to the nation throughout the period of the violence. The popular consensus was reiterated: the Tamils had started the violence by demanding too much; the Sinhalese position in the island needed to be reassured; responsibility for the violence lay with outside forces and the Sinhalese people had been the righteous victims.

For five days as the violence raged, the President, J. R. Jayawardene, said nothing. When he finally made an appearance, there were no words of sympathy for the Tamils. Instead, he said that because of attacks by Tamil separatists against the military, the Sinhalese people as a whole had reacted. He would ensure that the Sinhala people would not be so affronted again by passing legislation that made the pro-motion of Tamil independence a crime. In justifying the legislation, Jayawardene said that his government, "cannot see any other way by which we can appease the natural desire of the Sinhala people to prevent the country being divided."

In similar vein, the Minister of

Trade and Shipping, Lalith Athulathmudali, bemoaned the suffering the violence had caused the Sinhalese while seeking blame it on some malevolent cause outside the Sinhala populace. "A few days ago, my friends, I saw a sight which neither you nor I thought we should live to see again. We saw many people looking for food, standing in line, greatly inconvenienced, seriously inconvenienced ... We now know there is a hidden hand behind these incidents ... It may be terrorists of the North, extremists and terrorists in the South."

### Natural right

The implications of this train of thought are obvious. The guarantee of the Tamil people's safety and well-being in a unitary Sri Lankan state can only come about when the Sinhala people come to see that their political culture is undermined by this logic and then start systematically to reject it. The central tenet of this worldview, that the Sinhala people have a natural right to the island and that Tamil existence on it can only be tolerated as far as it does not threaten Sinhala Buddhist hegemony, will inevitably lead to a sense of righteous collective violence against any group that is perceived as threatening this.

Although the SLFP President Chandrika Kumaratunga started her term in power in 1995 by declaring her intent to depart from this logic in both act and deed, the events of subsequent years suggest that nothing had changed.

The years since 1995 are rich with incidents and missed opportunities that suggest that the ideology of Sinhala Buddhist dominance set the limits to her expres-

sed commitment to multi cultural pluralism.

This is most clearly seen in the manner in which the President conducted the 'war for peace' and the approach she took to the peace process. Her approach to both suggests that she firmly believes that the life of the Tamil speaking people must be consistent with the Sinhala Buddhist claim to culturally and politically dominate the whole geographical space of the island.

The undisguised triumphalism and Sinhala martial celebration with which the PA government marked the capture of the Jaffna in 1995 gave a clear indication to the Tamils that nothing had changed. Whilst half a million Tamils were homeless in the most appalling conditions, an archaic victory celebration was held in Colombo. The deputy defence minister, General A. Ratwatte, gave the President a scroll that symbolised her sovereignty over a territory called 'Yapa Pattuna,' as the now conquered Tamil region of Jaffna is known in the south.

### Jubilation

The general mood in Colombo was that of jubilation and the message of the celebrations was clear: the independent Tamil character of the Jaffna peninsula, that had long been an affront to the dominant people of the island, had now been assimilated into the Sinhala Buddhist hegemony. There were no words of sympathy for the suffering and humiliation endured by the Tamils. This - as in 1983 - was entirely deserved, the feeling went.

The dissonance between the political rhetoric from the south and the experience of the Tamils was a repeat of the events that

took place after the July 1983 riots. The President often congratulated herself publicly on how reasonable she was being to the Tamils compared to previous (UNP) political leaders. In one satellite broadcast to Jaffna, she directly reminded the Tamils of how good she had been to them and how much she had tried to do for them.

### Same, same

However, a closer examination of her speech revealed that she has in no way departed from the assumptions and attitudes that were used by the Sinhala populace, both people and politicians, to explain the July 83 riots. According to the President she entered into negotiations with the LTTE in 1994 because of her own commitment to democracy, which made her go further than the expectations of simple duty alone.

"We are a democratic government ... We deeply believe in democracy and human rights ... That is why as soon as we came into power, I wrote to (LTTE leader) Mr. Prabhakaran inviting him to come to discuss seriously to stop the war. Normally, ahead of a legally elected sovereign does not write or talk to any terrorists who belong to illegal organisation. But I decided to write to the terrorist leader because I wanted very much to bring peace to Jaffna and to North and East of this country. We have offered permanent peace."

### Saintly Buddhist

The President took the position of someone whose tolerance and commitment to peace is the expression of 'a saintly Buddhist patience.' In this, as in 1983, there

is absolutely no recognition of the conditions endured by the Tamils in post independence Sri Lanka and the sequence of events that brought the conflict about: the war has simply appeared without reason and "the LTTE is solely responsible" for the Government's destructive military operations in the Tamil areas.

Furthermore, the Government condescends to talk to the LTTE because of its own commitments to peace. Again peace is not the resolution of conflict through negotiation between two conflicting sides - rather, it is a gift, bestowed by the President on the Tamils.

### Poor us

"I have now spoken to you about ... the strategy employed by my government in order to solve the Tamil people's problems and to end the war ... That has to be achieved through a new constitution legally and politically. The sincere and honest will of the government is to implement what is contained in the new constitution. We have done an immense amount of work to persuade the Sinhala majority people that this has to be done," she lectured Jaffna's people.

The Tamils must therefore understand that the constitutional solution to the conflict is simply presented to them as the "only" means to guarantee their rights. The Sinhala people, however, have to be persuaded that this has to be done. The Tamils have no rights except the ones the President chooses to give them, but the Sinhala people have pre existing rights that clearly have to be accommodated within any solution. The Tamils are simply informed as to the settlement they may have while the Sinhalese have a right to veto, and hence must be persuaded.

### Newcomers

The President's assertion that the Tamils could not have the right to determine the political conditions of their life because they "were not the original people of the island" resonates with the common sense that was used to justify the July 83 pogrom. As Lalith Athulathmudali, Sri Lanka's notorious security minister, said in the aftermath of the July 83 violence, "the Sinhala people feel that they have an important place in this country." By extension, all other ethnic groups are secondary to Sinhala priorities.

As history has demonstrated, this perception will inevitably lead to the justification of collective violence against the Tamils, whether in the form of popular military offensives or mob violence. The dominant consensus in the South remains that the Tamil right to exist on the island is dependant entirely on the goodwill of the Sinhalese. Little wonder then that when the Tamils ever overstep the mark by suggesting that their existence is independent of Sinhala generosity, that they suffer punitive and self-righteous violence.

*Edited, originally published by Tamil Guardian on July 25, 2001.*

## BLACK JULY

# July 1983: Anatomy of a pogrom



Sinhala rioters celebrate as they pause in the destruction of homes and businesses in Tamil sectors of Colombo. The government remained silent through six days of rioting.

*Continued from page 3*

The London Times of 5th August reported how "... Army personnel actively encouraged arson and the looting of Tamil business establishments and homes in Colombo" and how "absolutely no action was taken to apprehend or prevent the criminal elements involved in these activities. In many instances army personnel participated in the looting of shops."

The Economist (6 August) wrote: "...But for days the soldiers and policemen were not overwhelmed; they were un-engaged or, in some cases, apparently abetting the attackers. Numerous eye witnesses attest that soldiers and policemen stood by while Colombo burned..."

According to the London Financial Times, "Troops and police either joined the rioters or stood idly by."

Tamil detainees held in Colombo jails, mostly for political 'crimes' (which usually meant advocating a separate Tamil state), were killed jointly by about 300-400 Sinhalese prisoners and their guards. In Welikande jail, 35

Tamil detainees were killed on 25 July, and another 17 were murdered on 27 July. In a horrific perversion of religious belief, the blood of the victims were reportedly offered to the statue of Buddha in the prison's shrine.

Dr. Rajasunderam, the secretary of the Gandhiyam society (a community workers organisation who had helped resettle people affected in previous anti-Tamil riots) was amongst the detainees killed on July 27.

One imprisoned Tamil leader, Kittumani, was forced to kneel by his assailants and ordered to pray to them. When he refused, he was taunted about his last wish and had his eyes gouged out (Kittumani, a nominated MP, had appealed in court on being sentenced to death, that his last wish was his eyes be donated, that one day a separate Tamil state be seen through his eyes). After watching his agony for a few minutes, the Sinhalese hacked him and wrenched his testicles from his body.

Amnesty International said in their report on Sri Lanka (published June 1994) "Amnesty International has itself interviewed one

Tamil detainee who survived the killing and has received a sworn statement from another survivor, both of whom state that the same prisoners who had come to attack them later told the surviving detainees that they had been asked to kill Tamil prisoners.

**As one busload of Tamils left Colombo, it passed a wall on which the heads of dozens of murdered Tamils had been neatly arranged.**

According to the sworn statement: 'We asked these people as to why they came to kill us. To this they replied that they were given arrack (alcohol) by the prison authorities and they were asked to kill all those at the youth offenders ward (where the Tamil prisoners were kept).'

All Tamil owned businesses and homes were systematically looted and then torched. If the

property had been rented from Sinhalese, it was usually only looted.

Sinhalese shopkeepers attacked neighbouring Tamil businesses. Sinhalese households attacked neighbouring Tamil homes. Tamil patients in Colombo hospitals were murdered, often by Sinhalese hospital attendants.

According to N Sanmugathan, the General Secretary of the Ceylon Communist Party, "In Colombo at least 500 cars some with drivers and passengers inside were burnt. Tamil-owned buses, running between Colombo and Jaffna were burnt. Tamil patients in hospitals were attacked and killed. Some had their throats cut as they lay in their beds."

However, in some cases, Sinhalese residents, horrified at the violence, shielded and hid Tamil friends.

However, a significant proportion of the Sinhala populace joined in the violence, which clearly had the backing of the Sri Lankan army and government.

Many Tamils attempted to flee the city, in whatever transport they could obtain. As the days

progressed, some Tamils emerged from hiding and ran the gauntlet of rioters.

As one busload of Tamils left Colombo, it passed a wall on which the heads of dozens of murdered Tamils had been neatly arranged.

Several refugee camps came to be established as Tamils, driven out of their homes, sought sanctuary in numbers by crowding into schools, temples and churches. The Methodist Church in Kollupitya (an affluent suburb in Colombo) was one such camp. The church was hurriedly converted into a refugee camp by Sinhalese Christians, many of whom risked their lives in the subsequent days to save hundreds of Tamils who had lost their homes or were driven out of their homes and were on the run from marauding mobs.

Despite condemnation and protests from all over the world, the violence continued for several days as the mobs searched Colombo for Tamils who had escaped the initial bloodletting.

*Continued on p9*

## BLACK JULY



Tamil board ships in Colombo to flee the massacres

## Anatomy of a Pogrom

*Continued from page 8*

On the 28th of July, President Jayawardene, in his first public speech since the violence began.

He did not condemn the violence, but sought to placate the Sinhalese and virtually justified the mass killings as the "expected reaction of the Sinhala masses to Tamil demands for a separate state."

Insisting the violence was "not a product of urban mobs but a mass movement of the generality of the Sinhalese people" Jayawardene asserted that "the time had come to accede to the clamour and the national respect of the Sinhalese people."

Furthermore, in keeping with his avowed Sinhala supremacy mandate, he announced the Sixth amendment to the constitution, which declared even politically advocating a separate Tamil state illegal.

Those who supported separatism would not be allowed to sit-in parliament, practice a profession or even to hold a passport. In effect the government itself outlawed any discussions with the Tamil political leaders, many of whom fled the island.

The UK's Guardian in its editorial of 1st August 1983 referred to the Sri Lankan President as someone who has "increasingly come to resemble a dictatorial and racist third World autocrat".

President Jayawardene called an end to the violence on the sixth day. By then, an estimated 3,000 Tamils had died, and the Tamil population of the island was in shock.

Over 200,000 Tamils (including 35,000 Indian Tamils) were displaced. 18,000 Tamil homes and 5000 businesses were destroyed, with economic losses tota-

ICJ: 'The evidence points clearly to the conclusion that the violence of the Sinhala rioters on the Tamils amounted to acts of genocide.'

lating \$300 million.

A publication by The International Commission of Jurists observed: "the evidence points clearly to the conclusion that the violence of the Sinhala rioters on the Tamils amounted to acts of genocide."

George Immerwahr, a United Nations civil servant and a US citizen who had worked in Sri Lanka in the late 1950s wrote to Professor Wilson, the author of "The Break-up of Sri Lanka" that "... the most shattering report came from a friend who was a civil servant; he told me that he had helped plan the riots at the orders of his superiors.

"When I heard him say this, I was so shocked I told him I simply couldn't believe him, but he insisted he was telling the truth, and in fact he justified the Government's decision to stage the riots.

"When I heard this, I telephoned an official in our own State Department, and while he declined to discuss the matter, I got the impression that he already knew from our embassy in Colombo what I was telling him."

The Sri Lankan government of the time rejected demands for a proper judicial investigation by international organisations, including Amnesty International and the International Commission of Jurists. Subsequent governments have also done so.



Colombo's Sinhalese on the battered streets after the riots. All the Tamils had fled the south.

## Slaughter in the cells

Over fifty Tamil detainees in Welikade prison were massacred by Sinhala inmates and jailors.

The Guardian (UK)

(5th August 1983) It is the massacres in the Welikade gail which are attracting the most attention. There is a particular interest in circumstances in which two alleged guerrilla leaders were killed.

The two men, Sellarasa "Kuttimani" Yogachandiran, leader of the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TE-LO) and a political writer, and Ganesanathan Jeganathan had been sentenced to death last year for the murder of a policeman.

In speeches from the dock, the two men had announced that they would donate their eyes in the hope that they would be grafted on to Tamils who would see the birth of Eelam, the independent state they were fighting for.

Reports from Batticaloa gaol, where the survivors of the Welikade massacre are now being kept, say that the two men were forced to kneel and their eyes gouged out with iron bars before they were killed.

One version has it that Kuttimani's tongue was cut out by an attacker who drank the blood and cried: "I have drunk the blood of a Tiger."

The two men were among the 35 Tamils killed in the Welikade gaol on July 25. Another 17 were killed in the gaol two days later and the Guardian has obtained a first hand account of part of the fighting in this incident, including the circumstances in which

the circumstances in which Sri Lanka's Gandhian leader, Dr. Rajasunderam, died.

Dr. Rajasunderam was one of nine men, including two Catholic priests and a Methodist minister, who were moved out of their cells immediately after the July 25

**'Kuttimani, an MP, was forced to kneel by his assailants and ordered to pray to them. When he refused, he was taunted about his last wish... He had willed that his eyes be donated to someone so that at least that person would see an independent Tamil Eelam. His assailants then gouged his eyes... He was then stabbed to death and his testicles were wrenched from his body.'**

**- Hindu 10 August 1983**

killings-to make way for survivors moved into their cells on security grounds-into a padlocked hall, upstairs in the same block.

The nine, convinced that further attacks were coming, made repeated representations to the prison authorities on July 26 for better security. Assurances were given that they would be protected, but nothing was done.

At 2:30 pm in July 27, hearing

screaming and whistling outside, one of the priests looked out of a high window and saw prisoners breaking in from a neighboring compound, wielding axes, iron bars, pieces of firewood, and sticks. There was no sign of the prison guards.

The mob, which was later found to have killed 16 prisoners in the downstairs cells, ran up to the hall and began breaking the padlock. Dr. Rajasunderam then went to the door and cried out: "Why are you trying to kill us? What have we done to you?"

At that moment, the door burst open and Dr. Rajasunderam was hit on the side of the neck by a length of iron. Blood was seen to spurt several feet.

"At that juncture, we thought we should defend ourselves," one of the prisoners related. "We broke the two tables in the hall and took the legs to defend ourselves."

"We kept them at bay. They threw bricks at us. We threw them back. Pieces of firewood and an iron bar were thrown at us. We used them to defend ourselves. It went on for about half an hour. They shouted: 'You are the priests, we must kill you.'"

The killing was eventually ended by the army, who moved in with teargas. An inquest has been opened into the Welikade massacres, but the above details did not emerge. Prison warders claim that keys to the cells were stolen from them.

Lawyers for the prisoners who have accused the warders of having participated, claim that they were not given the opportunity to bring evidence despite representation to the Government.



## HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

# Looming humanitarian crisis in Vanni

OVER 45,000 people have been displaced in the past four weeks due to shelling and aerial bombardment by Sri Lankan Security forces, a Sri Lankan based NGO said. 45,338 additional persons have been displaced in Mannar, Vavuniya, Kilinochchi, and Mullaitivu districts, due to the shelling and aerial bombardment by the Sri Lanka Security Forces in the last four weeks, adding to the Internally Displaced People (IDP) population of 107,048 in Vanni, said a report by the Tamils Rehabilitation Organization (TRO).

Already schools and public buildings are overflowing with people seeking shelter, while those unable to find accommodation are gathered under trees and along the streets in large numbers.

The TRO report warned that the restrictions imposed by the Government of Sri Lanka to humanitarian agencies to attend to the IDP needs have created conditions for an imminent humanitarian crisis in Vanni.

"Prior to the recent displacement most sectors had the minimum stocks necessary to address the needs of the IDPs but there was limited amount of contingency stocks available for any new IDPs. Stocks available in the Vanni are now dangerously low, especially in the food, shelter, water & sanitation and health (WASH) sectors," the report said.

"The ability of all humanitarian organizations operating in the Vanni to provide humanitarian assistance to IDPs and other vulnerable populations is greatly compromised by the GoSL fuel quotas," it added.

The embargoes and restrictions are violations of International Humanitarian Law, International Human Rights Law and the Geneva Conventions, the report pointed out.

"Entire schools have also been displaced as a result of the return to war. The teachers and principals of these schools have also been displaced and have had to leave without their educational items (books, chairs, desks etc.) These schools are, where possible, functioning on the premises of existing schools in the areas into which the IDP population has displaced.

"Classes are conducted under the trees and in temporary classrooms constructed from locally available natural materials. Due to the parents' fear of shelling and bombing many parents are reluctant to send their children to school and as a result attendance is down in many schools," the report said.

TRO urged the International

Community to "hold the GoSL accountable for violations of IHL and IHRL and ensure that humanitarian assistance and access are unimpeded," and thanked the Tamil Diaspora for "its ongoing support."

The report also requested the Diaspora to continue to provide necessary support, and to raise awareness among the developed nations of the suffering of the people of the NorthEast.





## EDITORIAL

## TAMIL GUARDIAN

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

editor@tamilguardian.com www.tamilguardian.com

Tel 0845 0949873

WEDNESDAY JULY 30, 2008 No. 378

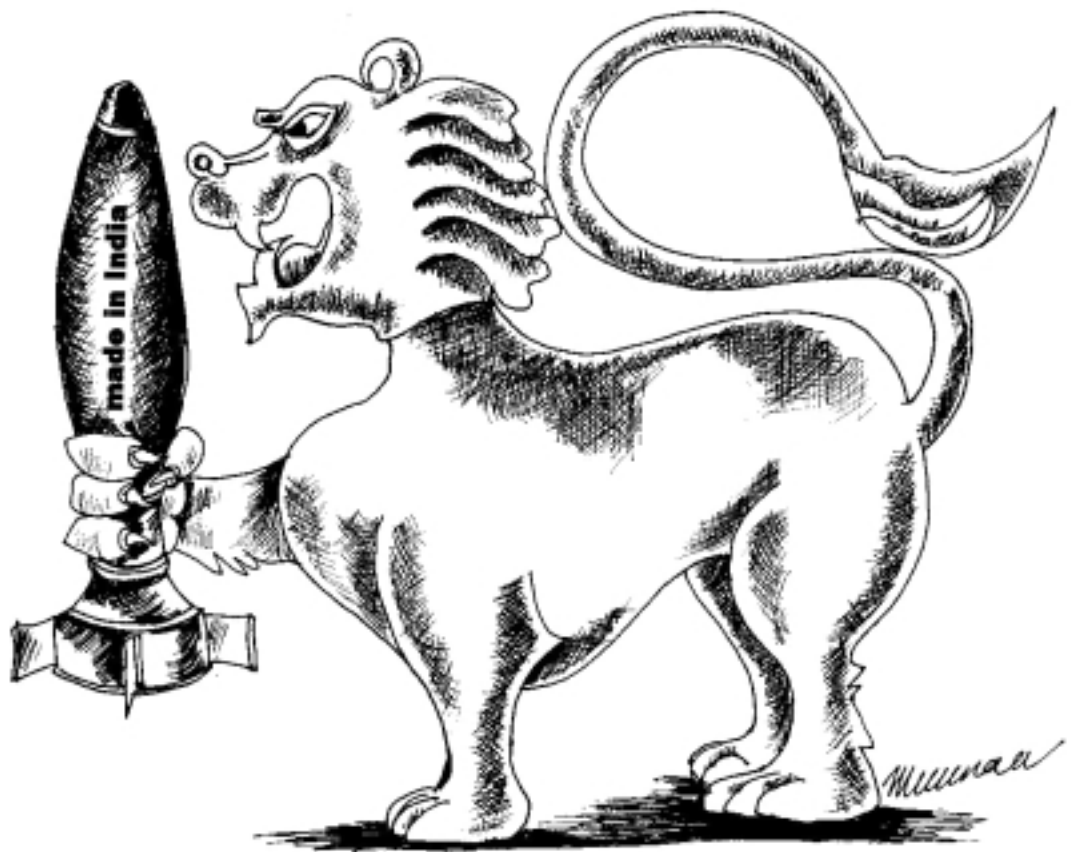
## Producing (In)Security

**An independent Tamil Eelam is no threat to the community of states - in the region or beyond.**

As South Asia's political leaderships meet in Colombo this week and next, Sri Lanka's protracted conflict burns on. President Mahinda Rajapakse's government refused to reciprocate the Liberation Tigers' offer last week of a unilateral ceasefire and has instead continued its offensive. But the Tigers' diplomatic maneuver has served the purposes for which it was intended. To begin with, the LTTE's message of goodwill to the SAARC conference has further embarrassed Colombo. These are, in any case, not the conditions under which the Sinhala state had expected to play host to South Asia's leaders this year. There is no historic triumph over the Tamil rebellion to showcase to neighbours. Instead there is the ignominy of India not being prepared to entrust the safety of its delegation to the Sinhala armed forces. Despite Colombo's hysterics, Delhi does not envisage a threat from the Tamils. Rather, it is Sri Lanka's problematic dalliance with Pakistan and the shadowy Islamic radicalism which Islamabad is said to be stoking in the island's east which is at the forefront of India's concerns. That and, of course, Sri Lanka's heightened engagement with rising power China. If it needed underscoring, the two Indian warships off Colombo's shore will remind SAARC delegates on whose terms the future security of South Asia - and the Indian Ocean - will be based.

Firstly, the Tigers' offer of a unilateral ceasefire has underscored yet again that it is the Sinhala state, not the LTTE, which is determined to pursue a military solution to the Tamil question. Some international actors have sought to blame 'both sides' while others have preferred to blame the 'terrorists' for the violence and to back the state. The refusal to pursue even a temporary cessation of hostilities - which plausibly could have led to a permanent ceasefire and perhaps international diplomatic efforts towards peace (indeed, the Norwegians have made it clear their good offices are still available) - has once again demonstrated, as many Tamil voices, including this newspaper, have repeatedly argued, that Sri Lanka has no interest in either negotiations or power-sharing with the Tamils.

Secondly, the silence of the international community to both the LTTE's offer and Colombo's rejection of ceasefire speaks volumes of their own commitment to negotiations and a just peace. Had Sri Lanka made the offer of ceasefire and the LTTE refused it, the howls of protest from the self-styled peace-builders amongst the international community would have deafening. (Ironically, the silence which appears from a



Tamil perspective to be unequivocal support for the Sinhala state will seem in the eyes of the Sinhala nationalists to be international complicity in the Tigers' treacherous ploy.) Either way, the pointed message for those Tamils still awaiting international intervention on their behalf is not to hold their breaths. In this regard too, the LTTE's ceasefire offer has served its purpose.

The third aspect of the LTTE's offer is the message to the countries of South Asia. Sri Lankan leaders have long projected the Tamil resistance to their vicious repression of the Tamils as a threat to 'the region'. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is Sri Lanka's obsession with establishing Sinhala hegemony, rather, that has sparked and escalated war and insecurity off peninsula India. The LTTE does not pose a threat to any country except the chauvinistic Sinhala state. Indeed, the LTTE pointedly does not involve itself in the quarrels of the region. Nor is it a conduit for geopolitical tensions into the region.

Moreover, the Tamil demand for independence will no more spur separatism in the region than would those of the Kosovans', say, or the East Timorese'. Indeed, the LTTE's message - enunciated recently in both the message to SAARC and LTTE leader Vellupillai Pirapaharan's Heroes Day

addresses, including last year's - is that an independent Tamil Eelam would be a responsible member of the regional and international community of states.

Which is more than can be said for Sri Lanka. For all its Buddhist pretensions, the Sinhala state is not identified with peace, non-violence and communal harmony, but with vicious violence towards its own citizens, with religious and ethnic persecution and contempt for the views of the international community. Certainly Sri Lanka has been able to enlist in the 'Global War on Terror', but, underlying the real undercurrents of that international project, which state has not been able to? Moreover, which state - in the region or elsewhere - can count the Sinhala state amongst its unswerving and loyal allies? This is not to deny that competing interests guide the actions of all states, but there are more or less principled ways for a state to pursue its own. The long-running Tamil rebellion, for example, pursues the safety of an independent state without interfering in the affairs of future neighbors and international allies. In short, it has consistently demonstrated, despite Sri Lanka's apocalyptic insistence to the contrary, that Tamil Eelam will be no threat to the region or spaces beyond.



## OPINION

# 'Neighbours', but so what?

Ashanthi

Tamil Guardian

ONE oft-asserted claim in reference to Sri Lanka's ethnic crisis and especially the Tamil demand for independence on the grounds of persecution by the Sinhala-dominated is that most Tamils live outside the Northeast, i.e. "amongst" the Sinhalese.

In short it is implied, Tamils and Sinhalese have basically amicable relations, because, firstly, Tamils are "happy" to live amongst Sinhalese and, secondly, there is no communal, majoritarian violence.

But these assertions are wrong as they are based on untenable assumptions.

To begin with, no communal violence today is no guarantee it will be so in future.

Secondly, many Tamils have no choice but to accept the risk of communal violence and come to the south. Not only are the central mechanisms of administration and economic life in the south (Colombo) and not in the Tamil areas, but the conflict-stricken Northeastern areas are already dangerous for Tamils.

## Past Tense, Future Imperfect

The first assertion that because they are presently living safely in the south amongst the Sinhalese the Tamils have nothing to fear is plainly challenged by the histories of communal violence in numerous places - including Sri Lanka, itself.

Here are a just few instances where once apparently 'peaceful' neighbours have turned on neighbours:

**India/Pakistan:** Hindus and Muslims lived "amongst one another" under centuries of British rule, but the imminent formation of the independent states of India and Pakistan resulted in both mass movement and widespread communal violence between them;

**Yugoslavia:** In post WW2 Yugoslavia, Serbs, Croats and Muslims lived "amongst each other" without major communal violence until the end of the Cold War. But ethnic and religious violence on a massive scale erupted within a couple of years (resulting, ultimately, in the formation - sometimes peacefully - of several new ethnically-defined independent states);

**Rwanda:** In 1994, the Hutu majority turned on the Tutsi minority in genocidal violence - notably, shortly after a power-sharing pact had been signed;

**Iraq:** Sunnis and Shiites lived 'peacefully' together under

Saddam Hussein's dictatorship - even though his Sunni-dominated regime was persecuting Shiites along with the (Sunni) ethnic Kurds. It didn't take much, after the US invasion, for whole slaughter between Sunnis and Shiites to erupt, resulting in the present ethnic enclaves across the country. (Moreover, the present 'peace' has involved the US arming the Sunnis militia while the Shiites - and Kurds - dominate the new armed forces.);

**Kenya:** earlier this year, simmering ethnic animosities erupted into violence that resulted several deaths (and ultimately required forceful international intervention to fashion even the present fragile accommodation);

**Tibet:** China sent in the military this year to quell rioting by Tibetans. Their mobs' target? Not the Chinese state apparatus, but ethnic Han Chinese who have been increasingly settling in Tibet over decades;

**South Africa:** also in 2008, ethnic riots between South Africans and migrant workers erupted on a scale that has embarrassed the self-styled 'Rainbow nation'.

**Germany:** large numbers of Jews opted to remain "amongst the Germans" even as the Nazis assumed power and formalized their persecution.

Whilst all these instances of communal bloodletting of course have different contexts and dynamics, on what basis of distinction can it be guaranteed mass violence against Tamils will not happen in Sri Lanka?

## Tamils in the South

Whilst most Tamils originating from the Northeast (even many of the 'Colombo Tamils' have their familial roots there), large numbers have indeed lived in the south, amongst Sinhalese. But they have also suffered communal violence from the Sinhalese - condoned and sometimes openly supported by the Sinhala-dominated state.

As Prof. Sankaran Krishna points out it, the period since independence in 1948 has been "punctuated by bouts of annihilatory violence, often called pogroms, directed against the Tamils in 1956, 1958, 1977, 1981 and 1983".

And in his seminal 1984 essay titled 'The Open Economy and Its Impact on Ethnic Relations in Sri Lanka', Sri Lankan academic Newton Gunasinghe described the period from 1977 to 1983, as "one of incessant ethnic rioting" by Sinhalese against Tamils.

Prof. Krishna has written a



key text on underlying dynamics of Tamil-Sinhala relations, titled 'Post Colonial Insecurities: India, Sri Lanka and the Question of Nationhood'.

He points out that, viewed against the Sinhala nationalist ideology of a majority-minorities hierarchy, these "periodic explosions of violence against Tamils represent efforts to put them back in their places on grounds they have become too assertive and need to be taught a lesson" (p54).

This month marks the 25th anniversary of the 1983 anti-Tamil pogrom, when those Tamils 'living amongst the Sinhalese' were systematically massacred and driven from their homes in the south, including the capital, Colombo, often by their Sinhala neighbours.

As has often been pointed out, the Sri Lankan state did nothing to stop the bloodletting. In fact, electoral lists were released to the rioters and army trucks moved groups of armed thugs from neighbourhood to neighbourhood.

Six days after the mobs began their killing, President Junius Jayawardene made his first announcement in a radio broadcast.

He did not apologise, comfort or promise protection to the Tamils. Instead he blamed the pogrom on the desire of the Tamil people for separation, which, he said, began in 1976.

## Ever present danger

It has sometimes been pointed out that since 1983 there has been no repeat of such Sinhala-on-Tamil violence.

But, firstly, that is to ignore the racial dynamics of the armed conflict in the Northeast: the Sri Lanka armed forces are overwhelmingly Sinhala-dominated. Today's efforts to "teach the Tamils a lesson and put them in their place", as Prof. Krishna puts

it, is now the preserve of the Sinhala military.

Secondly, it is to ignore the latent "threat" of Tamil self-defence or counter-violence: during the previous pogroms or riots, there was no sizeable organized Tamil militancy.

In any case, the possibility of future communal violence cannot be discounted. Indeed, the threat is sometimes raised openly by Sinhala leaders and politicians.

In early 2006, Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister, Mangala Samaraweera, on a visit to the United States, told the press that if attacks on Sri Lankan troops by the Tamil Tigers continued, his government "may not be able to restrain" the Sinhala people.

(Samaraweera, having split from the government of President Mahinda Rajapakse, has not styled himself as a champion of human rights.)

Also, in early 2006, Champika Ranawake, a senior minister in the present ruling alliance declared: "in the event of a war, if the 40,000 government troops stationed in Jaffna are killed, then 400,000 Tamil civilians living in Colombo will be sent to Jaffna in coffins."

In Feb 2007, Ranawake, who is also the ideologue of the ultra-Sinhala nationalist monks' party, the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), openly urged the murders of critics of his government's critics, saying: "If they can't be dealt with existing laws we know how to do it. If we can't suppress those bastards with the law we need to use any other ways and means!"

This attitude is reflected in a myriad of state practices when it comes to engaging with the Tamils; from the security forces at the checkpoints to the courts to the seeking of employment.

Given all this, there is the question as to why Tamil "choose" to live in the south amongst Sinhalese. The answers are: escaping the warzone, pursuing

basic economic life and transit.

For many Tamils, the areas outside the Northeastern warzone are comparatively safer places.

Whilst disappearances, indefinite detention, torture, etc are a risk in the south, the risks of these are far greater in their home towns and villages in the Northeast (consider the situation in Jaffna, for example, which has been under state control for 13 years). By the way, the imminence of (Sinhala) violence is referred to as 'impunity' by the international community.

Secondly, following decades of state exclusion from investment, even by the early eighties, the Northeast had little prospect of economic life outside state employment.

Which is why, despite, as Prof. Gunasinghe puts it, the period from 1977 to 1983, being described as "one of incessant ethnic rioting", large numbers of Tamils remained in the south. Their luck ran out in 1983.

Yet, there is little choice for Tamils trying to survive today. Attempting to secure a basic economic life, many accept the latent risks of living in the south. Their desperation is heightened by Sri Lanka's rampaging inflation.

Then there are those Tamils trying to get out of Sri Lanka, either for safety or to seek employment abroad to support families in the Northeast.

But with the state administration (travel and other papers), international embassies (visas) and the island's sole international airport being in Colombo, large numbers of Tamils have come to Colombo and languish in squalid 'lodges' or crowd relatives' homes while they try to arrange their departures.

Hardly the idyll of ethnic harmony claimed by those who abstractly point out that "most Tamils" - and that, incidentally, is also an uncorroborated claim - "live amongst the Sinhalese."



# K & K Stationers & Printers Ltd

**Supplier of Stationery, Art, Craft  
and Computer Printer Accessories**

**94 Mitcham Road  
London, SW17 9NG  
Tel: 020 8767 5149 / 2398  
Fax: 020 8767 3210  
e-mail: kandk@kandkstationers.com**

**Associate Company  
Partridges**

**295-297 Lavender Hill  
London SW11 1LP  
Tel: 020 7228 7271 / 8204  
Fax: 020 7978 4148  
e-mail: partridges@kandkstationers.com**

# SHAUN FOODS & WINE

**229, STREATHAM ROAD  
LONDON  
SW16 6NZ  
TEL: 0208 769 3105**

*With Compliments*

# SELVARAJA GOLD HOUSE

**Retailer & Wholesaler of  
Designers Jewelleries**

*Specilised in 22CT. Gold Jewellery*

**162 B Mitcham Road  
London  
SW17 9NJ  
Tel: 020 8767 3795**

## NEWS

# Sri Lanka's east still in shadow of war

**Swaminathan Natarajan**  
BBC Tamil service

A YEAR after troops overpowered the Tamil Tigers (LTTE) in Sri Lanka's eastern province and took control of the area, normality has yet to return.

The government called the victory the "dawn of the east" and held a nationwide celebration on 19 July 2007, days after the last Tiger stronghold fell.

It announced a host of development measures, and in May this year provincial elections were held for the first time.

A leader of a breakaway group from the Tigers was appointed chief minister after helping fight against the LTTE.

But a year on, troops are still just as visible in major cities, towns and even in villages in the east.

**"Fear of return of war prevails among the aid donors and it is preventing the flow of funds for large housing construction plans"**

Military checkpoints and stop and search operations are aimed at preventing "infiltration" by the Tamil Tigers - locals say such massive troop deployments in civilian areas increase their feeling of insecurity.

"All those who got training from the LTTE went with them to northern areas. Yet the military views all Tamils with suspicion," says one resident of Batticaloa.

In some places the military are camped on private property. The army insist they pay compensation for using the land, but those affected say that is not the case.

Locals say many people have been randomly picked up for interrogation, on suspicion of having links with the Tamil Tigers.

Most are released after a day or two but some end up in prison.

"They arrested my son on suspicion that he might have received armed training from the LTTE. He has been in prison for the past seven months," says one man in the village of Echilampattu in Batticaloa district.

"All my efforts to bring him out have failed."

Analysts believe the LTTE's intelligence wing and other elements continue to operate in the east - officials say that is why security needs to be so tight.

Since last summer violence has continued.

The chief secretary of the

eastern province was assassinated last July and this May a naval transport ship was sunk in Trincomalee harbour, hours before the start of voting.

Tamil political parties backed by the LTTE boycotted the election.

The military's victory was achieved after months of heavy fighting resulting in huge human cost.

In many cases entire villages were abandoned.

More than 200,000 people became internally displaced refugees.

According to the government, about 110,000 people have been resettled in Batticaloa district. Nearly 12,000 others are still waiting.

In the district of Trincomalee the picture is similar.

Internally displaced people living in the refugee camps say they lack basic facilities like toilets and clean drinking water.

Those who have been resettled say they have still to receive support from the government.

Most villagers in resettled areas now live without electricity.

Many school buildings damaged or destroyed in the war are yet to be rebuilt.

In many places students sit under temporary shelters made of asbestos.

"These sheets increase the intensity of the heat. As a result the students suffer from a number of health problems," one headmaster told the BBC.

Damage to property has been immense.

Many houses have been partly or totally damaged by different kinds of bombs, shells and bullets.

Kavita Malar, a young mother who lives with her daughter, received a house worth 300,000 Sri Lankan rupees (about \$2,900) as compensation after the 2004 tsunami.

It was badly damaged in the fighting, with some holes created by shells big enough to allow a dog to pass through.

"This house is not stable. Whenever there are strong winds I leave my house and go to my father's house which is nearby," she says.

"I am scared the house may crumble - I am living with fear."

According to the chief minister of the eastern province, Sivanethurai Chandrakanth (better known as Pillaiyan), 130,000 houses are totally or partly damaged.

He says the government has plans to repair and rebuild all these houses and to complete the

rehabilitation work in the next 18 months.

The government is giving 325,000 rupees (about \$3,000) to rebuild completely ruined houses.

But there is a widespread perception that not many in need actually receive this financial help.

Sri Lanka's disaster and resettlement minister, Abdul Risath Bathiyutheen, told the BBC that \$80m from the World Bank and \$40m from the European Union had been used to build houses in areas affected by war.

He added that talks were continuing to secure a further \$43m from the World Bank.

Yet he is not sure how many houses are being built.

"There are a number of ministries and NGOs (non-governmental organisations) doing this work. So it is not possible to give an exact figure."

A senior official from a local NGO says continuing insecurity is the major obstacle in the devel-

**A year on, troops are still just as visible in major cities, towns and even in villages in the east and continuing insecurity is cited as a 'major obstacle' in redeveloping the area.**

opment process.

"Fear of return of war prevails among the aid donors and it is preventing the flow of funds for large housing construction plans," he says.

Apart from housing, fishing was also badly hit.

Villages dotting the eastern coast were battered by the tsunami in December 2004 and most of the relief work since then has been undone by the war.

Kantaiya Padmanabhan is a fisherman from Vaharai in Batticaloa district whose mother died during the tsunami.

He was given a new boat by an NGO but war erupted when he was rebuilding his life. He abandoned the boat and ran away.

When he came back after a year in various refugee camps, his home was damaged and his boat was completely destroyed.

"A shell might have fallen on top of it - a direct hit might have destroyed my boat. They have not given me any compensation to buy a new boat, nets etc, I have no work to do," he says.

In some places the government has built roads and hospitals. But the operation to win hearts and minds, it seems, has a long way to go.



## NEWS

# Sri Lanka rejects LTTE truce offer

A UNILATERAL ceasefire offer by the Liberation Tigers, to cover the period of the SAARC conference in Colombo, was rejected by the Sri Lankan government, a day after it was made.

But senior officials of the Colombo government gave different responses as to the government stance on the truce offer, announced formally by the LTTE Political Wing on July 21.

"The Government of Sri Lanka is not prepared for ceasefire with the LTTE", the state controlled Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC) announced in all three languages, quoting Gotabaya Rajapakse, the Defence Secretary and brother of President Mahinda Rajapakse.

"The ceasefire announcement is a ploy by the LTTE when it is being militarily weakened in the war front, to strengthen it militarily under the guise of holding negotiation. There is no need for the government to enter into a ceasefire agreement with the LTTE" the SLBC quoted as Gotabaya Rajapakse as saying.

"If we have to believe the LTTE they should first disarm themselves and then surrender," the Defence Secretary was also quoted as saying in the government media.

Meanwhile Dr. Rajiva Wijesinghe, Secretary General of the Government Peace Secretariat was quoted as saying that the government would wait and see if the LTTE's offer would come through peace-facilitator Norway.

"We need peace. We will wait and see if they will make the offer to us directly or through Norway (the peace facilitator), if they (LTTE) are serious about it," Wijesinghe told AFP.

The Rajapakse government had earlier rejected continued involvement in the Sri Lankan conflict by Norway and had denounced Oslo's six year peace facilitation.

The day after the public announcement, Norway officially passed on the unilateral ceasefire offer.

Meanwhile Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollegama vowed in parliament that the government would not even respond to the LTTE's offer of a ceasefire.

The government would not enter into any agreement with the LTTE, the Sunday Time quotes him as saying.

The leader of the House Nimal Siripala de Silva said the guerrillas would have to lay down arms and then come for talks. He added that the Government would not fall into "an LTTE trap" which was intended to buy time, re-arm and re-group.

The LTTE's formal offer a ceasefire for the SAARC conference (between July 26 and August 4) comes after senior leaders of the movement gave assurances they would not disrupt the event, being held in Colombo amid the Rajapakse government's all out war against the Tigers.

"We believe that the other countries in the SAARC group



British Foreign and Commonwealth (Asia, Africa and UN) Affairs Minister Malloch-Brown held talks with Sivanethurai Chandrakanthan alias Pillayan, leader of the paramilitary-cum-political party TMVP, on July 16. The meeting was held at the Chief Secretariat of the Eastern Provincial Council in Trincomalee town. The talks lasted for about two hours, but the media was not allowed to cover the proceedings. The British Minister was received by Pillayan when he arrived at the Chief Secretariat complex with the UK High Commissioner in Colombo, Dr. Peter Hayes.

will support us in our just struggle for the freedom of the Tamil people," the Head of the LTTE Political Wing, P. Nadesan, told The Sunday Leader newspaper.

Amid Sri Lankan government claims that the LTTE was hostile to India, the regional hegemon, senior LTTE leader K. V. Balakumaran, told the Australia-based Cheyithi Alaikal radio:

"We have said clearly Tamil Eelam is not against India; we will uphold Indian welfare as our own. India will change its current policy towards us one day.

"We believe firmly, our strong cultural ties to our brothers and sisters in India will help their policy makers to select a just and fair path towards our people.

"One fact should be clear, no one should doubt our friendship, and strong ties to India."

## Kilinochchi, Mullaitheevu, soon - President

IT is "not too far away," to "liberate the people of Kilinochchi and Mullaitheevu" and make them live under a "democratic set up" now being "enjoyed by the people of the eastern province," declared Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa, addressing a provincial election campaign meeting in Anuradhapura on Saturday.

The statement comes after Sri Lanka Army officials in Colombo told media that their forces were making "rapid progress" in Vanni, claiming that the SLA recovered 37 dead bodies of LTTE fighters together with arms as the Sri Lankan forces were engaged in consolidating an offensive line south of Mallaavi.

"Like capturing the LTTE territory, the UPFA would also capture the power of the NCPC and Sabragamuwa Provincial Council," he said.

The Sri Lanka Army is determined to free the peoples of the two districts under the LTTE control, Mr. Rajapaksa further said.

According to the SLA claim, 33 LTTE dead bodies were recovered in Vavunikkulam, south of Mallaavi, with arms including a mortar, 23 T-56 assault rifles and one Rocket Propelled Gun (RPG).

A further 4 bodies were recovered at Kalvizhaan, northwest of Vavunikkulam, according to the SLA.

Meanwhile, LTTE officials in Vanni said 26 Sri Lankan Special Forces commandos were killed

Friday and that the Tigers had recovered one body of the SLA soldier.

One RPG, one PK-LMG, two T-56 assault rifles were also seized by the Tigers at Kalvizhaan on Friday when heavy fighting ensued between the advancing SLA and the LTTE defensive units.

More than 45 SLA soldiers sustained heavy wounds, according to the Tigers.

The SLA was engaged in offensive attacks on Saturday, the first day of the unilateral ceasefire announced by the Tigers in connection with the SAARC conference being held in Colombo.

Meanwhile, the Defence Secretary called on Army deserters to return to their posts.

Gotabaya Rajapakse appealed to over 10,000 soldiers who had left the military for various personal reasons during the past four to five years to return to fight for their motherland, the Sunday Island newspaper reported.

"This is a very decisive juncture when the security forces have got the upper hand and need all the help they can get", he told the Sunday Island during an interview on July 26.

The Tigers are in disarray - they are falling apart like a pack of cards and fleeing for safety leaving behind heavy guns and artillery as never seen before, the Defence Secretary and brother of the President asserted.

## LTTE ceasefire announcement

ON behalf of the people of Tamil Eelam, we extend our sincere good wishes to the fifteenth conference of SAARC that aims, to improve the economic development of the vast South Asian region and to create a new world order based on justice, equality and peace.

For sixty years, the Sinhala leadership is continuing to refuse to put forward a just solution to the national question of the Tamil people. The Sinhala nation is not prepared to deal justice to the Tamils. The politics of the Sinhala nation has today taken the form of a monstrous war. Because the chauvinistic Sinhala regime is putting its trust in a military solution, the war is spreading and is turning more and more intense. Sinhala nation is intent on occupying and enslaving the Tamil homeland. Our military is only involved in a

war of self defence against this war of the Sinhala nation.

Behind the smokescreen of war, the Sinhala regime is heaping misery on the Tamil people and is killing them in large numbers. The brutal truth of the gradual destruction and oppression of the Tamil people is being blacked out. The just struggle of the Tamil people is being hidden behind an iron curtain in the name of news censorship. A false propaganda is being spread to tarnish, the freedom movement of the Tamil people and the path it was adopted for its self. This has resulted in misleading views and incorrect opinions about our freedom struggle. We are deeply saddened by this.

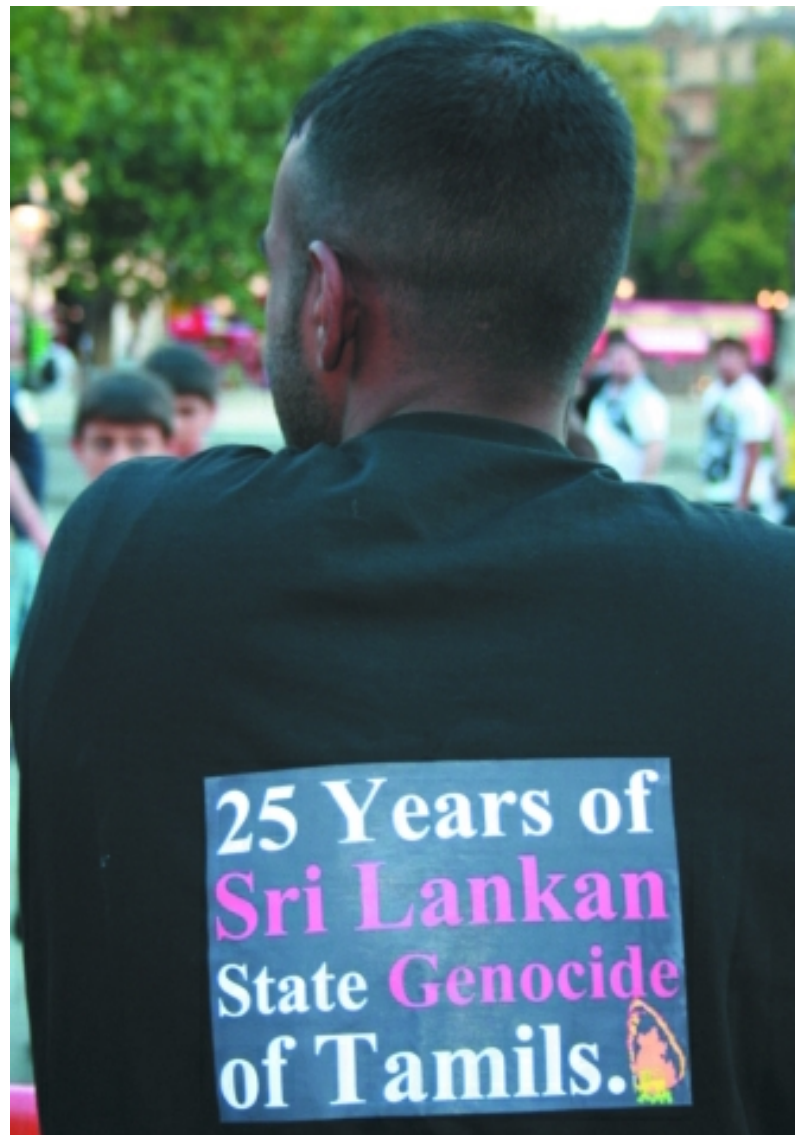
We are always keen to develop friendship with the countries of the world and our neighbouring countries in our region. We are sincere in our efforts to create

the external conditions in order to build these friendships. We wish to express the good will and trust of the Tamil people. As a sign of this goodwill, our movement is glad to inform that it will observe a unilateral ceasefire that is devoid of military actions during the period of the SAARC conference from 26th July to 4th August and give our cooperation for the success of the conference. At the same time if the occupying Sinhala forces, disrespecting our goodwill gesture of our people and our nation, carry out any offensives, our movement will be forced to take defensive actions.

We wish for the success of the SAARC conference and we also extend our goodwill and support to the countries of our region, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and Maldives.



## BLACK JULY



## Tamil youths in UK fast to mark Black July



THE Tamil Youth Organization of Canada, in partnership with the Canadian Tamil Congress and The Academy of Tamil Arts and Technology, held a youth conference titled "In Search Of our roots" at the University of Toronto in Scarborough on July 27. The conference was as part of a series of events remembering the Black July riots of 1983.

"The event was a means for our youth to be better informed and educated about the 'Past, Present and Future' of the Tamil

Community," the TYO said.

The keynote speakers included Dr. Yamuna Sangarasivam, Dr. Joseph Chandrakanthan, and Dr. Ellyn Shandler, who all shared their experiences and knowledge about the pre and post 1983 riots that marked the lives of Tamil people so deeply.

The TYO, supported by Toronto based lawyer Harini Sivalingam also facilitated the workshop titled "Addressing Negative Portrayal of Tamil Canadian Youth," which tackled current

issues that Tamil youth and the general Tamil community face with the media as well as within the Education and Justice system.

The day wrapped up with Beate Arnestad's documentary titled "My daughter the Terrorist" which was well received by the youth. The conference came to a conclusion with the three partnering committees highlighting the importance of youth engagement and participation within the Canadian and Tamil communities.

SEVERAL Tamil expatriate youths in Britain observed 25 hours of fasting last Friday and Saturday to mark the 25th anniversary of the Black July state-backed anti-Tamil pogrom in Sri Lanka. The protest, organised by the Tamil Youth Organisation (TYO - UK) and supported by the British Tamil Forum (BTF) was staged in London's famous Trafalgar Square, two days after a candle light vigil on July 23 - the day the racial massacres began in 1983.

That event, held in Parliament Square, Westminster, by the BTF, drew two thousand people, overflowing the space permitted for the protest.

The 25 hour hunger strike Friday by three dozen Tamil youths began at 5pm and took place amid the heat wave sweeping Britain for the past few days. Well wishers who stopped by joined the protesters for short periods too.

Alongside the fast, the TYO-UK and BTF held a photographic exhibition to illustrating the Tamil struggle for freedom from Sinhala rule, the organisers said.

"We are staging the protest to highlight to the British people and government the suffering of our Tamil people in Sri Lanka," one protestor told journalists.

"Almost six decades after

Britain granted the island independence, the Tamils are still struggling for their freedom as the Sinhala majority have taken control of the state and are persecuting them," she said.

"The international community, including Britain, are tolerating the abuses being carried out by the all-Sinhala military," she said. "Meanwhile abductions, extra-judicial killings, sexual harassment and torture continue to escalate."

"We are protesting here to help expose the true plight of the Tamils in Sri Lanka," another protestor said as he handed out leaflets. "We want to challenge the pretence that all is fine in Sri Lanka, that Tamils are safe there. This fiction is maintained to justify the deportation of hapless refugees from safe countries like Britain."

A member of the TYO-UK said the organisation was organising events like the 25-hour fast to raise awareness of the Tamils' yearning for independence from the Sinhala state.

"The Tamils have a right to self-determination, nothing will prevent us exercising it," he said.

"If life in Sri Lanka is so good, why don't they allow the international media, aid workers and other foreign eyes to go to our homeland and see for themselves."