

The myth about the Tamils of Sri Lanka

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What does 'territorial integrity' mean now?

Abkhazia and South Ossetia near independence on Russian 'u-turn' after Kosovo



A South Ossetian soldier passes by a destroyed Georgian tank in central Tskhinvali as Russia established control over the region. Photo Dmitry Kostukov / AFP / Getty Images

Jim Headley
Transitions Online

THE label "frozen conflict" as applied to the wars that accompanied the breakup of the Soviet Union implies that, some day, they may well "unfreeze." This is

what happened in Georgia.

Current events in the Caucasus could be blamed on renewed Russian assertiveness, provocation by the Georgian President

Mikheil Saakashvili seeking Georgia's entry into NATO, and support from the West in the stand-off with the powerful neighbor – even on the geopolitics of pipelines.

But the fundamental issue and the immediate spark of what became a wider war was the unresolved status of the breakaway

province of South Ossetia. In this sense, the broader context is the delineation of the borders of the republics of the former Soviet Union and former Yugoslavia, issues which in some cases remain no different to what they were 17 years ago. So what are the implications of the "unfreezing" of the conflicts in Georgia

for other such conflicts? The fate of Abkhazia will most likely be the same as that of South Ossetia. Beyond Georgia, the most direct implications may be for the comparable frozen conflicts of Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan) and Transdniestria (Moldova).

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Territorial integrity...

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These are breakaway regions which asserted their independence leading to war in the early 1990s. They have attempted to create the institutions of statehood, but remain unrecognized. This limbo status has also contributed to isolation, economic decline, poverty, and organized crime.

Recurrent attempts to negotiate solutions run aground on the rock of the irreconcilability of the two sides' demands: on the one hand, the separatists declare the sovereignty of their "state" and recognition of independence as the precondition for any agreement, while the larger state insists that its territorial integrity be preserved and demands that the province be under its sovereignty (albeit with autonomy).

Meanwhile, the status quo is preserved by the balance of forces on the ground: in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh, supported by Armenia, and in the case of Transdniestria, by Commonwealth of Independent States peacekeepers (effectively, Russia).

None of these breakaway regions has been recognized as independent by outside states because so far all governments have operated in line with the principle that the republic borders of the Soviet Union became the international borders when that state dissolved.

Georgia can therefore claim to be asserting its legal right to sovereignty over its territory, by attempting to bring South Ossetia under the control of Tbilisi and to affirm the Georgian state's monopoly on the use of force within its borders. On the other hand, Russia accuses the Georgian authorities of reneging on the original cease-fire agreement and resorting to force, with resulting civilian casualties, after having ostensibly agreed to hold negotiations.

The Balkans Example

There are echoes here of August 1995, when Croatia forcibly reclaimed control of the breakaway Republic of Serb Krajina despite talks being planned for its future. This was supposedly a UN protected area, but UN forces failed to protect it from the Croatian offensive. Western governments urged caution but implicitly condoned the action, noting that the region was part of Croatia, while Russia called on the United Nations to uphold the cease-fire agreements, and suggested that NATO should consider using force to protect the region. As the guarantor of the cease-fire agreement in South Ossetia, Russia is effectively claiming now to do what it said the UN should have done in Krajina in 1995.

Yet, in 1995, Russia's argument was weakened by the fact

that, not long before, it had resorted to force itself to reassert sovereignty over its breakaway republic of Chechnya. That time it failed, but in 1999 it was more successful when it again overrode an interim peace agreement with Chechnya, justifying it in terms of regaining control of Russian territory and restoring order in a lawless region whose actions threatened the security of the rest of the country.

It is therefore difficult to discern any consistency of principles on the part of Russia with respect to observing cease-fires or interim peace agreements and not resorting to force in frozen conflicts. In fact, in relation to South Ossetia, Russia is acting more in line with NATO's response to Serbia's attempts to crush separatism in Kosovo, as shown by Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's use of the term "genocide" to describe the initial Georgian offensive.

Until now, there has been more consistency over the status of breakaway regions. Russia may have provided economic support and security guarantees to places such as South Ossetia, but it has not recognized them as independent (unlike Turkey in relation to Northern Cyprus, for example).

Russian policy-makers have, until now, argued that the principle of territorial integrity should be sacrosanct, thus justifying their action in Chechnya and condemning countries which have recognized Kosovo as independent.

However, Russian policy-makers have long made it clear that if Kosovo did effectively become an independent state there would be implications for comparable breakaway provinces in the former Soviet Union. It is quite possible that this change is now occurring, and that Russia will recognize South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent or incorporate them into the Russian Federation.

Russian policy-makers always accused their Western counterparts of double standards in their application of principles of territorial integrity and self-determination in the Balkans, and attributed the differing outcomes in different political entities of the former Yugoslavia to NATO's selective use of force.

But we may now see the outcomes of secessionist conflicts in the former Soviet Union also being determined by the selective use of force: on the part of Russia, crushing separatism in the Russian Federation itself, but supporting it in neighboring Georgia. And, if these conflicts are beginning to unfreeze, other cases may be settled by relative power if not actual use of force. Where the state is strong, autonomy may be

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Abkhaz soldiers celebrate in Georgia's breakaway Abkhazia region near the town of Chkhalt'a as they drove Georgian forces out and took control of the town. Photo STR / AFP / Getty Images

Russia: Georgia unleashed this war

Vladimir Vinokurov
San Francisco Chronicle

ALTHOUGH there has been widespread coverage in the American media of the tragic events unfolding in South Ossetia, essential background information about the conflict has often been omitted. First and foremost, nearly all of the articles avoid calling Georgia's action on Aug. 7 what it was - a clear act of military aggression by Georgia directed against the residents of South Ossetia and the Russian peacekeepers deployed in the region.

The result is a humanitarian disaster - hundreds of civilians dead, many of them Russian citizens; tens of thousands of refugees; and the destruction of many villages and the capital of South Ossetia.

It also seems to have been largely forgotten in the Western press that this is the second time that such a tragedy has happened. In the early 1990s, President Zviad Gamsakhurdia, then the leader of Georgia, proclaimed a policy of "Georgia for Georgians," abolished the autonomous status of South Ossetia (even though two-thirds of the population of South Ossetia is ethnic Ossetian or Russian rather than Georgian), and launched war against its people.

It was after the resulting bloodshed (more than 1,000 killed

and 2,500 wounded, many of them civilians) that a peacekeeping coalition comprised of Georgians, Ossetians, and Russians was established. Russian peacekeepers have been stationed in South Ossetia since that time to make sure that there is no further violation of peace in the conflict zone. On the opening day of the Olympic Games - a symbol of peace and international cooperation - Georgia for the second time unleashed war in South Ossetia, violating the cease-fire that it had agreed to earlier in the day by attacking Russian peacekeepers, civilians, residences and humanitarian convoys. In this situation, Russia had no other choice but to respond.

One might expect Georgia's violation of the cease-fire and use of force against South Ossetians to be met with strong international condemnation, but this did not occur. Instead, we saw attempts by some American experts and politicians to shift responsibility away from their Georgian ally by attributing to Russia ulterior motives in its response to the attack, such as the wish to restore its domination over this former part of the Soviet Union, to obstruct NATO enlargement, and so on.

Russia has tried for many years to prevent military conflict between Georgia and South Ossetia. When the American program of military assistance to Georgia was initiated despite the unresolved conflicts on its territo-

ry, the U.S. State Department offered us assurances that U.S. trained-and-equipped Georgian military personnel would not be used for military action against South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Our concerns were again ignored when Georgia later started to buy weapons in large quantities (the Georgian military budget has increased by a factor of 30 in the last several years). For many months, we tried to win the cooperation of the United States in convincing Georgia to sign a legally binding document not to use force in the South Ossetian conflict. Unfortunately, we saw no desire on the part of the United States to pressure Tbilisi to make this commitment.

Evidently our Western friends believed Georgia President Mikhail Saakashvili when he said: "It is ridiculous to ask us to do this because Georgia will never use force against its own people. It is as simple as that." We see what has happened. Nonetheless, even now the American media treats everything Saakashvili says as the simple truth and ignores the voices and suffering of the Ossetian people.

On Tuesday, the president of Russia, Dmitry Medvedev, announced an end to the military operation. That's the best proof that the sole purpose of Russia's actions was to enforce the peace and ensure the safety of the people of

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Georgian soldiers escape their burning armoured vehicle on the road to Tbilisi, outside Gori, Georgia, as Russia took control of South Ossetia and moved from the breakaway region into Georgia itself. Photo Uriel Sinai / Getty Images

Global politics ignite dispute

Ellen Barry
New York Times

FOR centuries, the status of South Ossetia has been a nagging irritant on Russia's southern border — sometimes akin to a canker sore, and sometimes an ulcer. The Ossetians, who number about 60,000, are part of the patchwork of ethnic groups that inhabit the mountains of the Caucasus. They have long yearned for separation from Georgia, appealing to Russia, their northern neighbor, for support.

Over the years, ethnic tension became a way of life in Tskhinvali, the provincial capital of South Ossetia, a city ringed by highlands where concrete street barriers were sometimes erected to keep the groups apart. During flare-ups, gangs of young men would ambush convoys on mountain roads. But global politics have breathed new life into the conflict, making it a flash point for resurgent tensions between former cold war rivals. Russia, especially, sees a threat of creeping American influence as its former satellites seek to join NATO.

When Kosovo won Western backing for its bid for independence from Russia's historical ally Serbia, the Kremlin answered by vowing to win similar status for South Ossetia and for the Black Sea enclave of Abkhazia, which fall inside Georgia's borders. Georgian leaders, meanwhile, hoped to quiet the conflict once and for all before applying for NATO membership.

Although Abkhazia has far more strategic importance to both sides, the city of Tskhinvali is in a valley ringed by Georgian-held villages, on terrain easily navigable by tanks. Mountains seal off the region to the north, toward Russia, so separatists rely on a single key route — the Roki Tunnel, which cuts deep through the mountains — for commerce, military aid and evacuation to the north. Georgian leaders have long felt they could take the enclave swiftly, pushing north in one or two days to the Russian border. "Without heavy reinforcement from Russia, the general sense is that Tskhinvali is not defensible," said Svante E. Cornell, research director of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute at Johns Hopkins University.

Ossetians have long held themselves apart from ethnic Georgians, who make up more than 80 percent of Georgia's people; the Ossetian language has Persian rather than Caucasian roots, as Georgian does.

Reproach for the West on its role in Georgia

Anatol Lieven
Financial Times

THE bloody conflict over South Ossetia will have been good for something at least if it teaches two lessons. The first is that Georgia will never now get South Ossetia and Abkhazia back. The second is for the west: it is not to make promises that it neither can, nor will, fulfil when push comes to shove.

Georgia will not get its separatist provinces back unless Russia collapses as a state, which is unlikely. The populations and leaderships of these regions have repeatedly demonstrated their desire to separate from Georgia; and Vladimir Putin, Russia's prime minister, made it clear again and again that Russia would defend these regions if Georgian forces attacked them.

The Georgians, like the Serbs in the case of Kosovo, should recognise reality and formally recognise the independence of these territories in return for a limited partition and an agreement to join certain Georgian-populated areas to Georgia. This would open the way either for an internationally recognised independence from Georgia or, more

likely in the case of South Ossetia, joining North Ossetia as an autonomous republic of the Russian Federation. For the Georgians, the resolution of their territorial conflicts would make it more likely that they could eventually join Nato and the European Union — though after the behaviour of the Georgian administration, that cannot possibly be considered for many years.

Western governments should exert pressure on Georgia to accept this solution. They have a duty to do this because they, and most especially the US, bear a considerable share of the responsibility for the Georgian assault on South Ossetia and deserve the humiliation they are now suffering. It is true that western governments, including the US, always urged restraint on Tbilisi. Mikheil Saakashvili, Georgia's president, was told firmly by the Bush administration that he must not start a war.

On the other hand, the Bush administration armed, trained and financed the Georgian military. It did this although the dangers of war were obvious and after the Georgian government had told its own people that these forces were intended for the recovery of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

The Bush administration, backed by Congress, the

Republican presidential candidate John McCain and most of the US media, also adopted a highly uncritical attitude both to the undemocratic and the chauvinist aspects of the Saakashvili administration, and its growing resemblance to that of the crazed nationalist leader Zviad Gamsakhurdia in the early 1990s.

Instead, according to European officials, the Bush administration even put heavy pressure on international monitoring groups not to condemn flagrant abuses by Saakashvili's supporters during the last Georgian elections. Ossete and Abkhaz concerns were ignored, and the origins of the conflict were often wittingly or unwittingly falsified in line with Georgian propaganda.

Finally, the US pushed strongly for a Nato Membership Action Plan for Georgia at the last alliance summit and would have achieved this if France and Germany had not resisted. Given all this, it was not wholly unreasonable of Mr Saakashvili to assume that if he started a war with Russia and was defeated, the US would come to his aid.

Yet all this time, Washington had not the slightest intention of defending Georgia, and knew it. Quite apart from its lack of desire to go to war with Russia over a

place almost no American had heard of until last week, with the war in Iraq it does not have an army to send to the Caucasus.

The latest conflict is humiliating for the US, but it may have saved us from a catastrophic future: namely an offer of Nato membership to Georgia and Ukraine provoking conflicts with Russia in which the west would be legally committed to come to their aid — and would yet again fail to do so. There must be no question of this being allowed to happen — above all because the expansion of Nato would make such conflicts much more likely.

Instead, the west should show Moscow its real will and ability to defend those east European countries that have already been admitted into Nato, and to which it is therefore legally and morally committed — notably the Baltic states. We should say this and mean it. Under no circumstances should we extend such guarantees to more countries which we do not intend to defend. To do so would be irresponsible, unethical and above all contemptible.

The writer is a professor in the War Studies Department of King's College London and a senior fellow of the New America Foundation

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NEWS



Cordon and search operations are common in Sri Lanka, where an area is closed off and all people inside questioned and searched. Tamils form a disproportionately large percentage of those arrested in such operations, even when they occur in the southern parts of the country. *Photo TamilNet*

Scores of Tamils arrested, 1200 still detained not charged

AROUND one hundred Tamils were arrested by the Sri Lankan security forces in cordon and search operations around Colombo and the south of the country in the space of 5 days.

The arrests comes as a Supreme Court filing showed that about 1200 Tamils are languishing in Welikade prison without being charged.

On Monday August 4, 61 Tamil civilians were taken into custody in overnight cordon and search operations conducted by the police and the Sri Lanka Army (SLA) in several parts of Negombo, 40 kilometers north of Colombo.

Although the police sources claimed that the arrested had been residents of North, East and upcountry in the central province, relatives of the arrestees told civil rights groups and activists that police had taken into custody several residents who had been residing in Negombo and its suburbs for several years and who possess national identity cards and valid documents to prove their identity.

Five days earlier, on Wednesday, July 30, 11 Tamil civilians were arrested in a cordon and search operation conducted between 6:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m. in the

Mt. Lavinia area of Colombo by the Police with the assistance of about one hundred members of the Civil Volunteer Force (CVF).

Police used sniffer dogs and metal detectors to trace explosives in vehicles and in public places.

Over five hundred vehicles entering into the Colombo city were subjected to thorough search during the operation.

The search operation covered several areas including Ratmalana bus and railway stations and bus stations at Kattubedda and Mt. Lavinia.

Police said most of the arrested had failed to prove their identity and provide valid reason for their stay in the location.

On the same day, 11 civilians including two Tamils and a Muslim were taken into custody in a cordon and search operation conducted by the SLA in the Gampaha town.

A day earlier, on Tuesday, July 29, 17 Tamils including three women were taken into custody in a cordon and search operation in Wellawatte area in Colombo, by the police with the assistance of the SLA.

All of the detainees were natives of north and east provinces

and had been working in shops and staying with their relatives, friends and some in lodges in Wellawatte to go abroad, TamilNet quoted human rights sources as saying.

Prior to these arrests, on Monday July 28, Sri Lanka's Supreme Court was told when a fundamental rights violation petition filed the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) was taken up for further inquiry, that about one thousand two hundred Tamil civilians are still being detained in Welikade prison without any inquiry.

The counsel for the petitioner begged the court to take steps to release these Tamils.

The Chief Justice Sarath Silva, presiding over a three-member bench directed the Attorney General to appoint a special committee comprising a State Counsel and a police officer to expedite the inquiry against them.

The CWC filed the fundamental rights petition against the indiscriminate arrest of Tamil residents of Colombo and suburbs without any reason.

The petitioner cited the Defense Secretary, Inspector General of Police and several police officers as respondents.

NEWS

Civilian population centers targetted

AT least five civilians, including an eighteen-month old baby, were killed and more than 25 wounded in artillery and air-strikes on Friday and Saturday last week as Sri Lankan security forces stepped attacks on civilian population centers in Vanni, including 2 hospitals, in their ongoing military campaign.

Sri Lanka Army (SLA) launched an indiscriminate artillery barrage in the early hours of Friday, August 8 targeting the Mullaiththevu hospital. The artillery barrage killed an 18-month-old baby and caused injuries to 16 civilians, including the Mullaiththevu District Secretary (Government Agent), Ms. Imelda Sukumar, who was at her official residence and Medical Superintendent Dr. V. Shanmugarajah's wife.

The Director of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) Peace Secretariat, S. Puleedevan, blamed the Sri Lankan government for repeatedly violating the Geneva Conventions during its offensive.

Puleedevan condemned the Sri Lankan government for violating the Conventions by 'deliberate and direct targeting' of civilian hospital premises and the residences of its own officials who were also responsible for the humanitarian assistance and monitoring in the district.

According to medical officials in the area, one child and four females wounded in SLA shelling were transferred to Vavuniyaa hospital and the injured government agent and others were admitted to Puthukkudiyiruppu hospital.

Many civilians were seen moving from the area after the SLA barrage, which was launched from Manalaaru (Weli Oya) area.

On the same day, SLA also targeted another hospital in LTTE administered Vanni by launching an artillery attack targeting the area near Akkaraayan hospital, killing a 49-year-old internally displaced person from Mannaar, who was residing in Vanneari.

Sinnaththamby Arulanantham, 49, was killed on the spot at Vannearikkulam where three artillery shells hit the location of an IDP settlement. Two artillery shells hit the grounds 400 meters near the Akkaraayan hospital. Two more shells exploded at Aanaivizhunthaan.

The attack in Vanneari and Aanaivizhunthaan in the Karaichchi division of Kilinochchi district caused the IDPs temporarily residing in the area to flee the area again.

A day after the attack on Mullaiththevu hospital, Sri Lanka Air Force (SLAF) bombers attacked a populated village, known as 'Redd Barna' settlement, in Visuvamadu around 10:20 a.m. on Saturday killing three civilians and wounding six.

A teacher and a mother were killed in Iranaippaalai located along the Puthukkudiyiruppu - Maaththalan Road in Mullaiththevu district.

Another civilian, Thevarajah, succumbed to his injuries while he was being rushed to Tharmapuram hospital with six other civilians, Thavapalan, Thusanth, Kokulan, Kannan, Sangaralingam and Mathiyaparanam.



Civilians are injured almost daily as Sri Lankan planes drop shells on villages and schools

Government officials urge SLA to observe safety zones

TamilNet

THE target of the artillery attack of the Sri Lanka Army in the early hours of Friday, August 9, in Mullaiththevu was a residential enclave located within 500 meters radius of the Mullaiththevu General Hospital, housing the Mullaiththevu Government Agent, the Medical Superintendent and many other government officials, who coordinate the essential services of the district.

The attack was timed before a token protest scheduled for Friday by the government servants

to voice against the killing of the Deputy Planning Director, Poonakari, in a claymore attack two weeks ago.

Both the GA and the MS, the apex officials coordinating administration, humanitarian assistance and essential services of the district narrowly escaped the artillery barrage.

The Government agent Ms. Imelda Sukumar and the wife and son of the Medical Superintendent Dr. V. Shanmugaraja sustained minor injuries in the attack that

claimed the life of an 18-month-old child and injured many others.

The residence of the GA was just 25 meters from the hospital premises.

The residences of the District Medical Officer, District Secretariat officials, the office of the Veterinary Surgeon and several residences of government officials were located in the enclave that was targeted by artillery barrage.

Ms. Sukumar said she was blown out of her bed around 1:00 a.m. when an artillery shell hit her residence.

She was alone inside the residence at the time of the attack and

chose to stay inside with injury till the shelling ceased, hoping that somebody would come to her assistance.

Until 8:00 p.m. Thursday night she was discussing with officials the token strike planned for the following day to protest the killing of the Deputy Planning Officer of the Kilinochchi district.

She had instructed them that their protest should not disrupt the basic services in the district.

Amid the insistence by her officials, who argued that they needed to express solidarity with the protesting government officials of neighbouring Kilinochchi

district as the government officials in Kilinochchi had earlier extended solidarity by protesting against the claymore attack that claimed the life of a Mullaiththevu District Secretary Nanthakumar, she had no other option than urging them to keep their protest as short as possible saying that their concerns had already been conveyed to the secretaries of all ministries in Colombo with English translations of their appeals.

Describing the artillery barrage, Ms. Sukumar told TamilNet that around 25 shells hit the area

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NEWS

Sri Lanka sees “victory soon” but casualties mount

THE SRI LANKAN government claims its security forces are making gains in the military campaign against the LTTE in the north of the island, but the soldiers are suffering a loss of morale as a large number have been reports killed.

In recent weeks the Sri Lankan military claimed to have captured number of towns in Mannar district and killed scores of LTTE fighters in the battle field.

Last week the military said it had entered the northern district of Kilinochchi where the LTTE's administrative offices, including the peace secretariat are located.

Sri Lanka's army commander, Sanath Fonseka, said last month the LTTE would lose all its territory in less than a year.

According to latest claims by the Sri Lankan defence ministry 5,625 LTTE fighters have been killed by security forces since January, while 512 soldiers have died in combat within the same period.

Recent weeks have seen pitched battles despite the LTTE offering a unilateral ceasefire between July 24 and August 4 during the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit held in Colombo as goodwill gesture for the success of the conference.

Defence spokesman Keheliya Rambukwella rejected any possibility of a ceasefire or peace talks

at this stage, saying this could only happen if the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam were to lay down arms unconditionally.

"Surely, definitely, positively we are moving forward and we will not turn at any point," said Rambukwella, who is also minister for foreign employment and welfare. "Nor we will accept any ceasefire, nor any peace negotiations unless they accept preconditions that have been laid down by the government," he told a weekly defence briefing.

Analysts say the military had an advantage in the latest phase of the war given its superior air power, strength of numbers and swathes of terrain captured in the island's east. But they still see no clear winner on the horizon and predict the war getting bloodier in coming weeks and months.

This was evident in the high casualties the military suffered from in recent battles.

At least 30 SLA soldiers were killed and more than 60 troopers sustained injuries on Friday August 1, when LTTE defensive formations at Mallaavi thwarted a three-pronged offensive launched from Vavunikkulam and Paalayiadi targeting Mallaavi.

The bodies of 3 SLA soldiers were recovered by the Tigers. An SLA vehicle, one AK-LMG with rounds, one RPG launcher with shells, a mortar, eleven T-56



Despite the LTTE's offer of a ceasefire for SAARC, the Sri Lankan military continued to pursue the war aggressively over the past fortnight but casualties and desertions are having an impact on morale

assault rifles were also seized.

The SLA admitted 11 SLA soldiers were killed in the fighting and that 20 wounded in the clashes that took place on Friday.

Again on August 5, SLA suffered heavy losses when it tried to break through LTTE defences at Vellaangkulam and Paalamoaddai front in Vavuniyaa with at least 10 SLA soldiers killed in Paalamoaddai alone.

The LTTE recovered two bodies of Sri Lanka Army soldiers, including one of an 18-year-old soldier, following intense fighting on Sunday in Vellaangkulam and seized a RPG Launcher, a T-56 assault rifle, ammunitions and accessories.

According to Sri Lankan media reports LTTE have deployed around 700 elite troops from the Charles Antony and Imran-Pandiyan brigades around Mallavi, signalling more fighting in this area in coming days.

Getting tough as desertion increases

AMIDST intense fighting and spiraling casualties Sri Lankan government in its latest attempts to beef up its security forces numbers announced another amnesty to deserters and warned that this would be the last amnesty offered.

Gotabaya Rajapaksa, the powerful Defence Secretary and brother of Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa appealed to over 10,000 soldiers who had left the military for various 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," Rajapaksa, was quoted as saying.

"I request the soldiers who left the military to return without delay to assist the ongoing operations in the North," he said.

"We have spent a lot of money and time on training these soldiers professionally and they had subsequently left for personal reasons. We can expedite the process for them to return and all that they need to do is to come back," he added.

"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," Rajapaksa told the newspaper.

President Mahinda Rajapakse also made a similar public appeal for deserters to return to their ranks.

"We are in the last lap of a decisive war. Therefore, I am appealing to the security forces personnel who have not returned after

their vacation to report immediately to strengthen the hands of the troops who are already in the battle field," President Rajapaksa told a public meeting in Anuradhapura on July 26.

The Sri Lankan military has one of the highest desertion rates in the world and similar appeals in the past have not delivered expected results. According to military sources an estimated seventeen thousand have deserted soldiers are at large.

In their latest drive to persuade the deserters to return to ranks, the military also warned some 12,000 deserters that they will be arrested and court-martialled if they do not return.

Military spokesman Udaya Nanayakkara said the move was aimed at preventing more desertions and getting deserters back to the battle front. He said the government hoped the decision not to offer amnesty in future would reduce desertions and help bring the deserters back to service.

The military is looking at getting back some 12,000 soldiers who have deserted their ranks in the past two years, the brigadier said.

"All these years, we offered amnesty for deserters, because we thought it was better to have trained soldiers than training new recruits. Training is a costly exercise and it takes 16 weeks to train a new recruit," Brig Nanayakkara said.

He said Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Kandy and Kurunegala and certain areas in the south had been identified as areas where there were high numbers of deserters.

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NEWS

Clampdown on international NGOs

Feizal Samath
IPS

ACCUSING international non-government organisations - INGOs - of disseminating 'wrong' information to media on the civil war with Tamil Tigers and rights issues, the government has moved to tighten the visa regime for foreign workers in Sri Lanka.

"The government wants to control the number of people going into sensitive (conflict) areas due to negative stories appearing in the media overseas," said a foreign humanitarian worker who declined to be named.

"We are careful not to criticise the government. There is a kind of subtle censorship. We are careful what we say or visas could get cancelled," she said.

President Mahinda Rajapakse's nationalist government has always frowned on the activities of INGOs, particularly those promoting peace or involved in humanitarian work in war-torn areas where rebels control territory.

Since the December 2004 tsunami, which laid waste to a large part of this island country's coastline, there has been a proliferation of INGOs promising to bring relief to the survivors.

Efforts to bring order to these humanitarian agencies have been complicated by intensified fighting between government troops and Tamil Tigers over the last two years.

Both United Nations agencies and NGOs have raised the issue of civilian casualties from the war coming on top of tsunami resettlement issues, especially in the Tamil-dominated north and east, annoying the government.

In a report released in June, the United Nations Economic and Social Council said that the war was seriously hampering tsunami reconstruction work.

"The most significant challenge to the recovery process in Sri Lanka is ongoing civil conflict. Escalating violence over the past few years has set back reconstruction efforts in the north and east of the country, though it continues largely apace in the south," stated the report.

The ministry of internal administration, responsible for registration and control of NGOs, justifies the 'streamlining' of procedures relating to the grant of visas to expatriates working with NGOs, saying that a large influx of expatriates for 'reconstruction and rehabilitation work' has made the issue of visas complicated.

Gomin Dayasiri, a prominent lawyer, told IPS in an interview that the restrictions on foreign workers are essentially because of a few NGOs.

"The new rules on NGO personnel are the consequence of a cause-and-effect syndrome created by a stupid few in the NGO



Temporary refugee settlements like this one have been overwhelmed by the influx of newly displaced Tamils, but tighter government regulations, increased security concerns and a lack of access mean many more refugees cannot get access to even such basic facilities

mainstream which has unfortunately discredited the silent and substantial contribution made by many in the NGO community in our society."

Dayasiri, who insists he is not anti-NGO or a nationalist as perceived to be, says a 'visible and vocal' few tend to equate the terrorists with freedom fighters and those who fight terrorism as vultures of human rights.

"With the war going against the terrorists now, they (some NGOs) are even worse than terrorists. At least the terrorists fought for a cause they believed in for which they were prepared to sacrifice their lives. The NGO vocalists sang for their supper for which they were rewarded and now the entire NGO community has to suffer being regulated. The bottom line is that the nationalists have now set rules for the internationalists for being unbalanced and getting their equation bizarre," he said.

Recently, Dayasiri appeared for the Sri Lanka army in a court case to defend it against accusations that it was responsible for the massacre of 17 local aid workers attached to an INGO. On Aug. 6, 2007, 17 workers, including four women, were found shot dead in the office of Paris-based humanitarian group, Action Contre la Faim (ACF), in the eastern town of Muttur, soon after the army had captured the town from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

While the government said the LTTE was responsible for the massacre, the Tigers and human rights activists have been pointing fingers at the army.

The issue came into the international spotlight with several western governments backing the ACF's call for an independent investigation.

In June this year, ACF pulled out of a presidential probe into the killings, saying it was disappointed with the way legal proceedings were going and "the blatant lack of will of the Sri Lankan government to establish the truth."

"ACF sees the launching of an international inquiry as the only reliable means for identifying the perpetrators," ACF executive director Francois Danel said.

Earlier to that on Mar. 31 the

International Independent Group of Eminent Persons (IIGEP), headed by former Indian chief justice P. N. Bhagwati, withdrew from its watchdog role. It charged the presidential probe with failing to investigate 16 high-profile incidents of rights violations in 2006 and 2007 and falling short of international norms and standards. The IIGEP had experts from 11 countries: India, France, Indonesia, the US, the Netherlands, Bangladesh, Canada, Cyprus, Britain, Australia and Japan.

The new rules governing NGOs will not apply to UN agencies and accredited foreign organ-

isations that work with the government.

Sri Lankan authorities, in addition to tightening rules for expatriate workers, also want to reduce the number of expatriates hired by NGOs.

The maximum period of visa for an expatriate worker is three years as against earlier when the period could be extended. The rules permit the head and deputy to be expatriate appointments, but organisations have been told they must advertise all other positions locally and only if unavailable,

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Aid supplies low says UN

THOUSANDS of families displaced by warfare in Sri Lanka's northern region are in danger because of dwindling emergency aid stocks, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said on Friday.

Agency spokesman Ron Redmond said supplies of food, water, sanitation equipment, shelter materials, and fuel "are running dangerously low" amid renewed fighting between government forces and Liberation Tigers, reported Reuters.

"In addition, supplies of food, shelter materials, water and sanitation equipment, and fuel for the transportation of civilians are running dangerously low," he said.

"Efforts by humanitarian agencies to replenish the stocks are hindered by the strict restrictions

on the transport of goods into the region," he told a news briefing in Geneva.

The UNHCR is calling on both the government and Tamil Tigers to take immediate steps to ensure the protection of those affected, reported the Voice of America news.

It says both sides must allow freedom of movement for those seeking safety from the fighting and ensure that the internally displaced are not targeted and not located near areas where there could be fighting.

The UNHCR estimates that more than 12,000 families - 60,000 people in total - were displaced in July alone as a result of shifting frontlines in the 25-year-old Sri Lankan conflict that has frequently ensnared civilians.

Redmond says many of these people have been displaced several times.

He says people move ahead of the shifting frontlines to avoid the crossfire and to stay out of shelling range.

Recently, U.N. access to the majority of the 10,000 displaced families in the Karachchi area was cut off because of security concerns, Redmond noted.

He says camps for the internally displaced are becoming overcrowded, therefore the UNHCR, local authorities and other agencies are trying to find other sites to accommodate newcomers fleeing the violence.

United Nations' access to the most-affected regions has been hindered because of security concerns about aid workers.

EDITORIAL AND OPINION

TAMIL GUARDIAN

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Fragile Fictions

So much for 'sovereignty' and 'territorial integrity'

The sudden outbreak of hostilities between Georgia and Russia took much of the world by surprise - except, of course, the Moscow government, which demonstrably was ready and waiting, and Georgia's staunchest ally, the United States. In what is seen by many as a terrible miscalculation, Georgia launched a military onslaught to end, once and for all, the South Ossetians' independence struggle, but instead triggered a hammer blow from the Russian military. Quite apart from the implications for global power distributions, the events of the past week have important lessons for independence struggles everywhere, not least that of the Tamils. Most importantly, it is a reminder, if one were needed, that notions such as 'sovereignty' and 'territorial integrity' are not cast-iron principles of international politics, but fragile covers for the pursuit of interests by powerful states.

This week's short, sharp war in Georgia is mainly about old-fashioned Great Power rivalry. In short, a resurgent Russia is re-establishing the terms on which other powerful states, notably the United States and the European Bloc, will henceforth have to deal with it. In this context, both Russia's support for South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and America's support for Georgia are merely aspects of the Moscow-Washington tussle. Just a few months ago the United States along with Britain, Germany and a host of Western states, embraced the unilateral declaration of independence of Kosovo from Serbia, over the vehement protests of Russia. The Western states solemnly declared that the will of the majority of Kosovans could not be ignored for the sake of 'sovereignty' or 'territorial integrity' (the same states, in 1999, had launched a military onslaught against Russia-backed Serbia, ostensibly to prevent 'ethnic cleansing' in Kosovo).

This week these roles were laughably reversed. It was the West which backed Georgia's onslaught into South Ossetia to end the rebellion - even though the entire population there, along with that of Abkhazia, clearly want to be free of Georgian rule. And, conversely, this time it was Russia's military that intervened - in the interests, naturally, of 'preventing genocide'. The Russian operation not only drove Georgian forces far from South Ossetia's borders, but also from the fragments of Abkhazia they were still holding. Whilst it remains to be seen how the diplomatic machinations play out in the

future, it is already clear that these two independence struggles have taken important practical steps forward.

The two contrasting situations have revealed the utter hypocrisy of the United States, Europe and Russia when it comes to notions of 'sovereignty' or 'territorial integrity'; they have amply illustrated that whether these are important principles or fragile fictions depends wholly on if and how they suit or frustrate the self-interested maneuvers of powerful states. For decades Sri Lanka and its allies have been lecturing the Tamils on the inviolability of a country's 'territorial integrity' - even as state after state has emerged elsewhere, frequently with the active support of many of these nay sayers. In fact, Sri Lanka's sovereignty and territorial integrity, like those of Serbia, Georgia, Ethiopia, and many others, is - and has always been - utterly contingent on these being sufficiently useful to all the relevant Great Powers, at the same time. In other words, the moment the emergence of Tamil Eelam becomes useful to any of the Great Powers, a new game will begin. Can it be said with any certainty that this will never happen?

Meanwhile, in the wake of strong resistance by many Asian states to Western interventions justified in terms of 'human rights' and 'good governance', it is often suggested that Asian countries have some sort of peculiar proclivity for prioritising the notions of 'sovereignty' or 'territorial integrity' - i.e. 'non-interference' - above universal values. In fact, contrary to this orientalist characterization, Asian states have the same commitment - or lack thereof - to so-called universal principles and, indeed, to sovereignty and territorial integrity as Western ones. Since WW2, many Asian states have waged war on each other, sponsored insurgencies and other allies within their enemies' territories and engaged in the other traditional forms of inter-state rivalry. The much claimed Asian principles of tolerance and harmony, for example, have not permitted the withdrawal of the tens of thousands of American soldiers from Asia, nor have they prevented the expansion of the militaries of a number of major states of all politico-economic persuasions. In short, the calculations that underpin respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity are the same the world over. New states will continue to emerge, the world over, in the decades to come.

Producing
(In)Security

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

Editorial

Tamil Guardian (edition 378)

AS South Asia's political leaderships met in Colombo, Sri Lanka's protracted conflict burns on. President Mahinda Rajapakse's government refused to reciprocate the Liberation Tigers' offer 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.

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. 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 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. 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 insistence to the contrary, that Tamil Eelam will be no threat to the region or spaces beyond. (Edited for brevity)

The myth about the Tamils of Sri Lanka

J. T. Janani
Tamil Guardian

THE first casualty of war, they say, is truth. Sri Lanka has been at war for almost three decades. Hitler famously noted that if you're going to tell lies, then tell a lie so colossal that no one would believe that someone "could have the impudence to distort the truth so infamously."

The greatest lie about Sri Lanka's conflict, the central claim that cloaks international community's amoral support for the Sinhala effort to militarily crush the Tamils, is that the Tamils are happy to be part of Sri Lanka, save for a few 'grievances' about language rights, access to jobs and such.

This is the starting point for most explanations about what is going on in Sri Lanka, interpretations of what the Tamils are saying and what should be done to 'resolve' the conflict.

In the wake of this fundamental claim, the Tamil demand for independence is, therefore, the demand of 'extremists'. There is, of course, no possibility of reasoning with extremists, so the correct response is to attack and destroy them.

On the other hand, the Tamils are not without grievances of course: they want their language rights, access to jobs (i.e. to development) and to have some local government powers. Given all this, they'd be content citizens of Sri Lanka.

It is true that almost a hundred thousand Tamils have perished in the Sinhala dominated state's efforts to destroy Tamil extremists. But the Tamils understand the necessity of this, because, remember most Tamils - 95% according to the US Ambassador - don't want independence. Most just need their small grievances attended to.

Unfortunately, just as the Tamil extremists want independence, there are Sinhala extremists who want to keep a unitary state. The correct solution, therefore, lies somewhere in between. So there is a need to explore power-sharing, devolution, federalism and so on.

Now, the Sinhala extremists are very few - they support the JVP. Most Sinhalese, the majority, support the SLFP or the UNP. But these are also reasonable people because, remember, by

definition, a majority of a people cannot be extremists.

But the most important thing is to destroy the extremists on both sides. As long as the Sinhala extremists (JVP) don't win elections and the Tamil extremists (Tamil Tigers) can be wiped out, then the reasonable, moderate people on both sides can get together and ensure the Tamils have their language rights and get jobs and so on.

The above sums up the logic of the international community.

The central claim, repeated frequently, is that most Tamils "don't want Eelam". To begin with, it is not explained why not. It is not clear what is so appealing about the Sinhala-dominated state that is supposedly making Tamils reject independence. It is simply asserted this is so.

And anything the Tamils say to the contrary is either ignored or, more often, dismissed as the voice of the extremists.

So on the one hand, all Tamil efforts to say no, they do want self-rule, they do want to be independent is ignored. For example, the Ponghu Thamilmass rallies are dismissed as LTTE events. Even if the LTTE was organizing these events - and that is to ignore the hundreds of Tamil community organizations that worked to bring hundreds of thousands of people to these events, then so what? Which mass demonstrations around the world haven't been organized? Again, because we already know "most Tamils don't want Eelam", we know that these people were forced to go to these: what they wanted to really say was not "We want Eelam", but "We want to be Sri Lankans".

On the other hand, those Tamils who contradict this 'most Tamils don't want Eelam' myth, for example, talking about 'state racism' or 'state terrorism' or 'oppression' or 'genocide' are dismissed as extremists - or even 'supporters of terrorism'.

At the same time, those Tamils - like the paramilitary groups working with the Sri Lanka Army - who echo the 'Tamil don't want Eelam' line, are celebrated as 'moderates' and the 'true representatives' of the Tamils.

Now this myth falls apart if

one looks closely at Sri Lankan politics. There is no 'peace movement' of any standing. Indeed, there never has been.

There are no major rallies drawing Sinhalese and the Tamil speaking communities - Tamils, Upcountry Tamils and Muslims - together in defence of this blissful myth that the international community asserts.

There is not Tamil-Sinhala grass roots movements. There are no Tamil-Sinhala political parties. There are no Tamil-Sinhala civil society groups. Even though, as - in another derivative of the myth - it is repeatedly asserted that 'most Tamils live amongst Sinhalese'.

Of course there is the odd Tamil in the Sinhala entities and vice-versa (there's even a Tamil MP in the Sinhala extremist JVP). Tamils and Sinhalese sometimes purchase at each other's shops.

But, crucially, given the ferocity of the decades long war, there is no shared vision of a future Sri Lanka. There is, however, agreement on the present Sri Lanka; that it is a Sinhala hegemony. And hence the war - the Tamils want to be free of this ethnocracy, the Sinhalese want to maintain it.

This is not a new dynamic. Post-independence Sri Lanka has always been this way.

Which is why in 1977 - almost exactly thirty decades since the British handed power to the Sinhalese, the Tamils declared they'd had enough and voted overwhelmingly for the

Tamil United Liberation Front and its single point platform: Tamil independence.

Which is why within a year of independence, the Sinhalese had enacted racist legislation and alarmed the Tamils - who then couldn't envision the vicious repression coming their way - to ask for federal autonomy.

You notice there is no response when we point this out. Instead we get the repeated assertion that 'most Tamils don't want Eelam'.

The truth, therefore, is plain to see. The Tamils want Eelam. The Sinhalese don't want to relinquish control of our homeland (they would be delighted if the rest of the Tamils also fled the island - so much for multiculturalism). In short, there is no midpoint.

Why do the Tamils want Eelam. It is not because we have a sense of superiority to Sinhalese. It is because we are persecuted by the Sinhalese. We are trapped within Sinhala administration because the British - with typical contempt for all Third Worlders, lumped the 'islanders' together and gave sovereignty to the Sinhalese.

Whilst we continue to make our case, to outline our suffering, to rationalize our demand for self-rule, to appeal for international sympathy, we must recognize that pleas will get us nowhere.

The world's major powers, whilst pontificating about human rights, good governance and such, have readily slaughtered millions of people - mainly in the

Third World - in the pursuit of their own interest. (Recall how they first assisted Indonesia as it wiped out 30% of the East Timorese in a short war of conquest and then, three decades later, suddenly howled about human rights and forced Indonesia to give up its grip on that country - and its vast oil reserves).

Faced with international refusal to accept our claims, for decades the Tamil people have been appealing to reason. They say you can wake someone who is sleeping, but not someone who is pretending to be sleeping.

The international community is ignoring us because they can and there is nothing to benefit them from taking up our case - except to pressure economic and geopolitical concessions out of the Sinhalese.

The only way we can secure our long term survival and well being is by placing ourselves on the international agenda. It is only through our own state that we can secure protection from Sinhala hegemony and, just as importantly, make the world listen to us.

We have to stop worrying about the myth about us. We have to ignore the reality that we are being deliberately ignored. Instead, whilst keeping up our efforts to wake the pretend sleepers, we have to look to ourselves, to our own abilities, to our own capacities, to our own determination.

The liberation of the Tamil people can only come from ourselves. Anything else is a myth.



HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

Hundreds of families without facilities, under trees

TRO

This report for the Tamils Rehabilitation Organisation was written after visiting Vanneri & Anavilunthan earlier this month

Displacement

Extensive shelling is taking place on Mulankavil and Jeyapuram and on the coastal villages such as Iranaimathanagar and Nachchikuda. The sound of barrages could be heard at distant places such as Akkarayan. The night shelling is a real nightmare. The sound itself infuses panic and anguish in the hearts of the people. People try to move to safer places to protect themselves especially their children. The shelling damages their houses, common places such as schools, temples and churches, their paddy fields, fishing boats and their household animals such as cows, goats and poultry.

TRO provides transport facilities to the people who want to get evacuated immediately to save themselves from the shelling. The intensive shelling prevents people from dismantling their houses, gathering their domestic animals and taking their household items with them. They take some bags, stuff them quickly with valuable items, including their livelihood equipment such as nets and fishing gears, and hop into the vehicles provided by TRO with the intention of leaving the places as quick as possible.

TRO volunteers, numbering about 200, work around the clock under the dangerous conditions of heavy shelling and barrages. The route the vehicles travel also can be targeted by Deep Penetration Units of the Sri Lankan Army operating in the jungle areas along the routes targeting any vehicle coming within their killing zone.

The situation of the people coming from coastal villages of Mannar and Kilinochchi is pathetic. Many are experiencing displacement for the first time. There is no preparedness only immediate evacuation with a bag or two.

Life under trees

Hundreds of families were languishing without basic facilities. We saw them in the compounds of Vanneri Maha Vidyalayam, a school and an adjoining church. Many were under the trees. As crowds are expanding rapidly there is competition even for shady trees. We saw many with their bags and baggage scattered around trees without much foliage.

We met a family of eight children - the father is a handicapped

person with lame leg and one of the children, a 3 year old girl, is mentally retarded due to malnourishment. The family keeps their bags under a tree while they try to sit under the verandahs of the school and church. They are not welcome there as Advanced Level Examination is being held in the hall of the school and the school administration wants a peaceful atmosphere for the school children to concentrate to write correct answers in the exam.

We also saw 4 families with 15 members - children, women and adults living under a single tarpaulin borrowed from the neighbour. Sleeping (lying in with heavy heart and worries), cooking and pondering - all activities were going on under that tent. Some families were staying under hot sun using their saris as roof and walls of their so called shelter.

The problem of prioritization: there is a conflict between the proper conduct of the "A" Level exam for the future benefit of the children and the alleviation of the immediate suffering of the IDPs. How many IDPs the small church verandah will accommodate? The solution is to provide a tarpaulin sheet immediately to safeguard from the scorching sun and the threatening thundershowers. We promised the families sheets as soon as possible.

Food

What about food? It's a woman headed family as the head of the family handicapped. She worked as a labourer on the beach assisting in the sorting out fish brought to the shore by fishermen. She had to feed the stomachs of 8 small children, disabled husband and herself.

She lamented: "What shall I do? I don't know any other job. This is a farming area. We don't have any savings. We earned so little that we had to spend the money we earned the same day. We have registered ourselves for dry rations at the Grama Sevaka (local government official) office 6 ago before. But still we didn't get dry ration yet. When children cry even for a morsel of rice I feel horrible. Sometimes I think of committing suicide. I hope that things will change soon."

When I asked an official from World Food Programme, who didn't want to be identified, about this, I was told:

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OPINION

Sri Lanka, sick man of SAARC

Britain has a moral obligation towards Tamils – as much as Kosovans or the people of Darfur.

Ivan Pedropillai
Tamil Writers Guild

THE report of the Asian Center for Human Rights (ACHR) dated 2nd August 2008 in which Sri Lanka has been named as the No. 1 Human Rights violator in the whole of the SAARC region, where nearly 2 billion people live, is a serious indictment of Mahinda Rajapakse, his security apparatus and his government.

But these reprehensible abuses are carried out with utter impunity as the police, the government and the judiciary have actively collaborated to protect the abusers who use torture, death and disappearances as instruments of war.

Usually the Judiciary can be relied on to bring the culprits to book. But in this case, ACHR has reported that the appointment of Justice Sarath Nanda Silva, the former legal advisor to President Chandrika as the Chief Justice, has resulted in a long legacy of political judgements and not legal judgements, that have interfered with the political processes of the country.

The British legal and political establishment has to recognise this authoritative report on the aberration of government and has to give up its thoughtless stand on supporting the commonwealth government of Sri Lanka.

We appeal to the British Foreign Secretary to take the initiative to suspend Sri Lanka from the Commonwealth as it has done with Zimbabwe and Pakistan at various times. If Foreign Secretary Milliband wants to be seen as a political heavyweight and a prospective future Labour leader, now is the time for him to take his stand for human rights and an independent judiciary in Sri Lanka.

The 200,000 or more British Tamils, who form a sizeable vote bank in some of the marginal seats in London and the principal cities, look upon their parliamentary representatives to become better acquainted with the causes of the ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka and the horrendous cruelty visited upon their own relatives and friends remaining in Sri Lanka.

The Sri Lankan government in a calculated campaign of genocide, wants to clear all Tamils from the country by death or

expulsion, in order to make Sri Lanka a Sinhala Buddhist country. The rest of humanity in the world cannot remain indifferent to it, while the expatriate Tamils driven out of Sri Lanka can never close their eyes to the horrific suffering of their own people in Sri Lanka.

The Sri Lankan government has sold a dummy to the West by calling its ruthless war against the Tamils a fight against 'international terrorism' when all that the Tamils are struggling, is for equality and freedom from oppression.

The Sinhalese have chosen war but the liberty of man reposes as much in the heart and the mind as it is in their land. After 60 years of oppression the Tamils have voted and opted for a separate state called Tamil Eelam. The Sinhalese may win a battle of conquest or even a few, but the war can not be won.

The hunger for Tamil Eelam is firmly etched in the hearts and minds of every Sri Lankan Tamil, and ultimately the truth is that freedom will prevail and Tamil Eelam will be born. This is the God-given right of all Tamils and no earthly power however militarily strong shall trample it down forever. Remember that the Jews came back to their home after 2000 years of wandering.

The evil Sri Lankan war machine supplied by China, Pakistan, India, Israel and Eastern Europe is used to slaughter innocent Tamil women, children and elderly men. The West had a conscience during the racist reign of Milosovic and Karadic in the Balkans and assembled a mighty force to bring them down. The whole world rejoiced in this triumph over evil that set the standards of punishment for all racist thugs in power.

Are the Tamils any less human beings than the Muslims of Serbia? If President Bashir of the Sudan can stand indicted as a human rights criminal for atrocities in Darfur, why is Mahinda Rajapakse not indicted for worse human rights crimes against the Tamils in the North and East of Sri Lanka? In the name of justice and with the cries of over 100,000 innocent dead Tamil souls from

Tamil separatism survives on the strength of Sinhala nationalism

Kusal Perera
Daily Mirror

REMINISCING "Black July" is almost over. There were plenty of articles in most of our print media and in web portals with differing points of view on "Black July".

Yet what was missing in most of that discussion was a reading about the LTTE psyche, 25 years after the Black July. Does the LTTE work towards achieving any justification or sympathy from the South for their struggle, liberation or separatist war or what ever label one may wish to stick on it in the South? This is the single most important question the South needs to ask itself. The southern political leadership had from the very beginning of the conflict opposed this Tamil homeland complete.

All governments since 1977, except the Ranil Wickremesinghe government (Dec 2001) have fought a war to defeat this separatist movement. Madam Chandrika Kumaratunga who in 1994 braved a racist campaign to win both the Parliamentary and the Presidential elections on a platform of conciliatory politics, also went to war within 06 months of assuming power as President.

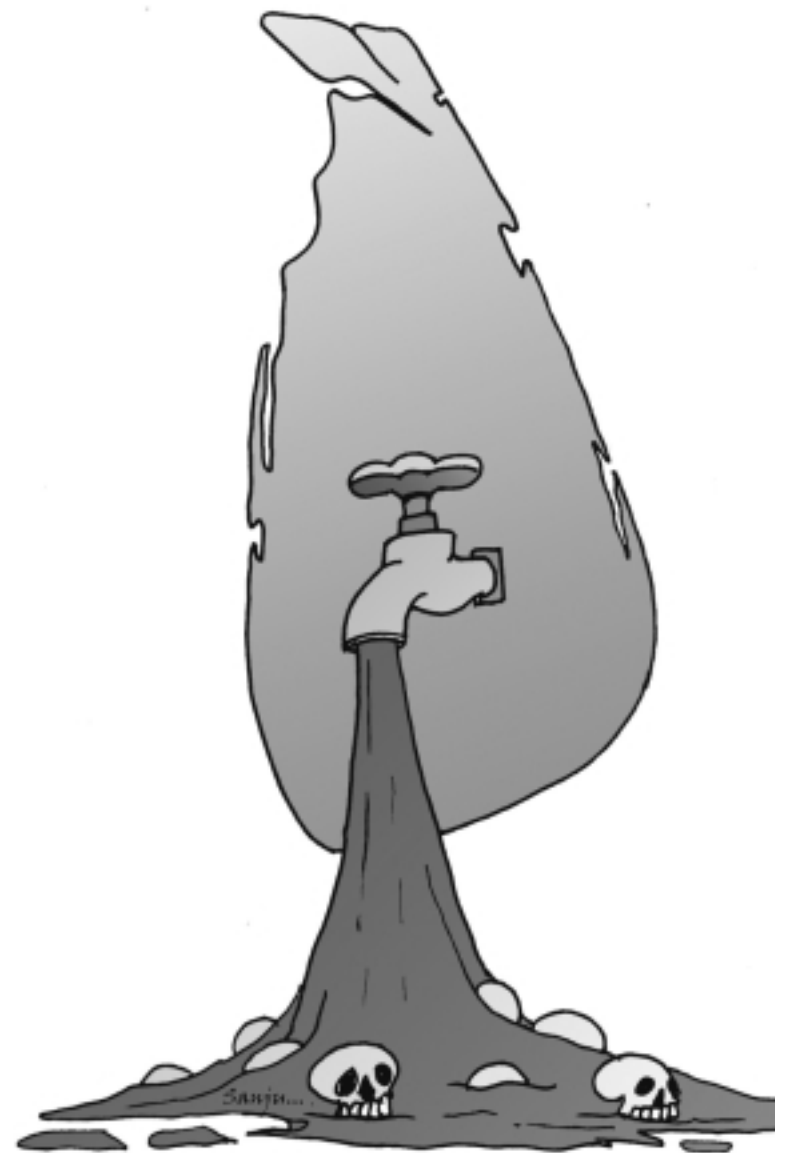
Under her, the heavily fought and much emphasised "Jaya Sikurui" military campaign that lasted 18 months and drained off billions of rupees to capture some parts of Northern territory, failed to dislodge the LTTE from their Wanni base. Much hyped "Jaya Sikurui" military victory was turned into a national event. The government's euphoria over that victory couldn't last long.

The LTTE launched their most vicious onslaught ever called the "Unceasing Waves III" in 1999 November and within a fortnight had even run over the heavily fortified Elephant Pass military base.

Ever since then, the LTTE assembled their State structures, in areas under their control. To run them as civil systems, the LTTE needed money from society and they have imposed taxes, the percentages and totals not very important right now, except for the fact that they have an Inland Revenue collecting system of their own.

Close upon 10 years for now, all these have evolved into more systematic structures. This is what the LTTE leadership is grappling with, now. Their concern is the ability to guard the area they have now brought under their administration.

What they therefore pursue now is recognition as a State and the opening for such legitimacy.



Do they need a Southern approval or a Southern justification for that?

They simply don't and they also know they wouldn't get such Southern accreditation. It has been moulded to think that the majority Sinhala society has a right to offer and the minority Tamils would have to accept what is offered under a unitary system. Any rejection of what is offered gives way for oppression and that had been our history in settling the issue.

With every attempt at negotiating answers to justifiable Tamil aspirations given a dud coin by the Sinhala leaderships, emergence of a Tamil psyche that opted for a separate Tamil State was unavoidable.

The LTTE emerged as the decisive force within Tamil politics from among many others. More ruthless and fanatical the Southern approach is in forcing a Unitary State, the bigger their space would be in arguing that the Sinhala leadership is not prepared to share power.

If the South needs to live in a united country with a single constitution, that is also possible. But for that the South needs to reach a broad consensus to re-structure its old, inefficient and corrupt State that is exclusively a Sinhala State. A State that has for 60 years since independence not given even the Sinhala people a space to better their lives. A State, against which even the Sinhala youth waged war twice within the past 35 years.

The nationalistic desire to establish a nation state based on one (Sinhala) language gives way for political coercion over both societies. The logic behind the "Separate Tamil State" is the failure of the Sinhala society to understand this pluralism in modern day nationalism.

Understanding and accommodating that pluralism within a new democratic State provides the only possible answer in defeating separatism, which the South refuses to accept and thus provides for the LTTE to exist and fight for their ideal separate State.

NEWS

Sri Lanka worst rights violator in SAARC - ACHR

TamilNet

ASIAN Center for Human Rights (ACHR), a New Delhi-based human rights watchdog, in a rights report covering the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), released Friday, said "Sri Lanka ranks South Asia's No.1 human rights violator."

"Sri Lanka's human rights indicators must be considered within a context of very high levels of impunity which tend to suggest a worsening over the human rights picture over the long term," the report added.

ACHR determination of ranking "is based on comparative assessment of records of the governments in 2007 on nine thematic issues crucial for enjoyment of

Sri Lanka scored the highest negative points for the right to life, the rights of the child, attacks on human rights defenders and violations of the rights of the minorities

human rights: political freedom, right to life, judiciary and administration of justice, status or effectiveness of National Human Rights Institutions, press freedom, violence against women, violations of the rights of the child, violations of the rights of the minorities and indigenous / tribal peoples and repression on human rights defenders," the report said.

In ACHR's analysis, "Sri Lanka scored the highest negative points for the right to life, the rights of the child, attacks on human rights defenders and violations of the rights of the minorities."

On press freedom, it [Sri Lanka] ranked No.2 violator only after Bhutan - which has no independent press - because of the systematic attacks on the freedom of expression and journalists, the report said.

"Discrimination lies at the

heart of the problem and the introduction of restrictions on Tamils travelling to Colombo are a powerful symbol of government intent."

"The political ramifications of the exclusion - not least in terms of prospects for a peaceful settlement of the conflict - of an entire ethnic group from the nation's capital are of deep concern," the report added.

Documenting that "540 persons disappeared across Sri Lanka from January to August 2007," the report pointed out that, "Tamils again suffered disproportionately from disappearances."

Criticizing the judiciary and the endemic lawlessness, the report said, "[t]he rule of law had weakened since the appointment of Justice Sarath Nanda Silva, former Attorney General and Legal Advisor of former President Chandrika Kumaratunga as the Chief Justice. Justice Silva has a long legacy of political, rather than legal, judgements and has regularly interfered with political processes in Sri Lanka."

Commenting generally on the worst rights violators that included, in the order of decreasing rank, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Pakistan, Maldives, Nepal, and India, the report said, "[d]iscrimination is endemic, institutionalised and in many cases legalised. Human rights violations are integral to counterinsurgency operations conducted by the military in the sub-region."

"Human rights are routinely violated in police detention including the routine use of torture," it said.

"National security laws tend to be poorly framed, routinely abused and used as blanket cover to silence legitimate dissent rather than tackle security. These are not the assertions of one organisation but repeatedly confirmed by national and regional and international NGOs and the various UN bodies established to monitor human rights."

Asian Centre for Human Rights is dedicated to promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the Asian region, according ACHR's website.



The Sri Lankan government being accused of human rights abuses, including murders and disappearances, has not prevented the ongoing killing of civilians, especially Tamils, across the country

Prevent abuses, US warns

SRI LANKA must act to prevent human rights abuses including abductions, the intimidation of media personnel and the recruitment of child soldiers as it fights a 25-year civil war against Tamil Tigers, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Richard Boucher told reporters in Colombo last week.

"We have been concerned about the continuing reports of abductions, disappearances, the detention of some people and reports of intimidation against the media," Boucher said.

"All these things need to be stopped. The government needs to take action against the perpetrators," he said.

Boucher was in Colombo as an observer at the 15th summit of the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC), from July 27 to August 3.

Asked if the US was disappointed as the peace process between the government and the Tigers now seemed to have hit a roadblock, Boucher said, "We've had these periods before. It has

not always been positive and with great momentum. We've had periods when it looked frozen, we've had periods when they were fighting and killing -- I hate to see it, I mean these bus bombings are horrible and the things that are happening to ordinary Sri Lankans and what they have to put up with..." reported Sunday Times newspaper in Sri Lanka.

However, he added, "Whatever is going on in the peace talks, the democratic government has a responsibility to all of its citizens. As military gains are made, as the areas are opened up and come under government control, all citizens in the area need to benefit from democratic government and respect for their human rights -- Tamil community, Muslim community."

"The government needs to reach out to them", Boucher said and argued, "It is pushing forward in military areas. It needs to push forward in political areas as well, in the end the political arrangements in the island need to have a

place for all citizens", the paper quoted.

Sri Lanka was ranked the world's third deadliest place for journalists last year, after Iraq and Somalia, by the World Association of Newspapers (WAN), a Paris-based organisation promoting media freedom worldwide.

This year alone, 12 journalists have been attacked, with one hacked to death. Media groups say the government has failed to apprehend any of the attackers.

"We have made it clear we are concerned about the human rights situation here," Boucher said, saying reports of abuses should be fully investigated and legal action taken. Boucher also urged Sri Lanka to demobilise its paramilitary forces and stop the recruitment of child soldiers.

United Nations officials recently accused the Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Puligal (TMVP), a paramilitary group operating with the Sri Lankan army, of aiding the Sri Lankan military in recruiting under-aged combatants.

NEWS

One billion in aid with Iran, Denmark topping list

DESPITE its allegedly horrendous track record on human rights and allegations of contempt for international laws and practices, Sri Lanka received USD 1.05 billion in the first five months of the year in foreign aid according to a fiscal report published by Sri Lanka's treasury.

Although western donors have been threatening to cut aid to Sri Lanka because of worsening human rights abuses and escalating violence in the civil war, the report shows Sri Lanka had no problem attracting funds.

Iran emerged as Sri Lanka's biggest donor this year, knocking Japan from the position of being the war-torn island's main benefactor. But Denmark was also among the most generous to Sri Lanka, according to the Treasury report.

The treasury said foreign aid would have almost halved if Iran had not chipped in with USD 450 million to build a hydro power project and upgrade the island's sole oil refinery.

The Uma Oya Multipurpose Development Project, to be funded by Iran, will provide 100-150 MW of hydro power and irrigate around 4,000-5,000 hectares of dry land near central Sri Lanka.

Other key donors included Denmark, which contributed USD 155.2 million and India with

USD 109.2 million. The Asian Development Bank (USD 90 million), World Bank (USD 43.1 million) and Japan (USD 42.2 million) were also important donors.

Government of Denmark committed USD 155 million for Kelani Right Bank Water Treatment Plant Project and Olivil Port Development Project.

The Kelani Right Bank Water Treatment Project will improve the water supply around 350,000 people who are presently experience an unsatisfactory supply and provide new water supply connections around 100,000 people, the Treasury report said.

Danish assistance will also be utilised to construct Olivil Port as a transport and fishery harbour and thereby promoting the development in the Eastern region, the report said.

Government of India committed USD 109 million, of which USD 100 million is to finance imports from India and USD\$ 8.5 million for the construction of a district hospital in Dickoya, Hatton consisting of 150 beds. The remaining USD 0.5 million is for the improvement of facilities at Rural Vocational Training Centre at Nagawillu, Puttalam.

The report classed USD 959 million of the money as being for projects and another USD 90 million as grants.



Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad with Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa as the country's strengthen their "solid friendship that has stood the test of time"

Iran 'willing' to share nuclear technology with Sri Lanka

TamilNet

IRAN is willing to share nuclear technology for peaceful purposes with Sri Lanka, Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki told The Island newspaper.

Mottaki, who was in Colombo to attend the 15th SAARC Summit told The Island, that Iran and Sri Lanka are long standing friends and Tehran was willing to assist Colombo in all fields, including uranium enrichment for peaceful purposes.

He also called for the establishment of an Asia parliament on the lines of the European Parliament as a first step towards regional integration.

Asked about allegations that Iran, was helping Sri Lanka because it has no friends in the world, Mottaki dismissed them as ridiculous.

"Ours is a friendship based on mutual trust and understanding. To impute ulterior motives is mischievous to say the least" he said.

"Iran is sincerely committed to the development of Sri Lanka, whom we consider to be a true friend," he said.

"Our commitment has already been proved by a pledge of over US\$ 450 million in assistance for several Sri Lankan projects, including the Sapugaskanda oil refinery and Uma Oya irrigation scheme," Mottaki said.

The reciprocal visits of Presidents Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Mahinda Rajapaksa to each others' countries, bear ample testimony to the solid friendship that

has stood the test of time, he observed.

"Iran, wants to expand economic and commercial ties with all SAARC members including Sri Lanka. We can help the region develop its energy resources and food production among other things."

Calling for the establishment of an Asian Parliament on the lines of the European Parliament, he said that it could be the first step towards greater integration, which is so vital for development.

"The Asian unions including the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) should strengthen convergence within the framework of an Asian parliament with the aim of playing a greater international role," he told reporters.

SAARC was established in 1985 to provide a platform for the peoples of South Asia to work together in a spirit of friendship, trust and understanding. It aims to accelerate the process of economic and social development in member states.

Senior officials from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives Islands, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka are attending the two-day SAARC summit. China, Iran, Japan, Mauritius, South Korea and the US are taking part as observers.

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NEWS

Tamil Nadu opinion poll calls for independent Eelam

AN independent Tamil Eelam is the solution to the Sri Lankan crisis, decided a majority of voters in a Tamil Nadu poll last week.

54.25% of the respondents said that they have always supported the Tigers and their goal of a separate Tamil homeland in Sri Lanka, in the results of a survey published in last week's Ananda Vikadan, which tops the circulation among weeklies in Tamil Nadu, said that

Although it is known that support for the Tigers is rising in Tamil Nadu, as seen from the large attendance of people, especially youths in meetings addressed by pro-Tiger leaders like Vaiko, the amount of support for the banned outfit, revealed in a survey conducted by a media group, which is considered respected for its neutrality is quiet stunning, reported The Statesman.

The fact that the magazine chose to publish the results showing support for a banned organisation is itself surprising, the Indian published Statesman publication noted.

The outcome of the poll and its appearance in an influential media, foretell shifting paradigms in Tamil Nadu scenario, assessed TamilNet.

Out of 12 issues raised by the weekly, 4 gained absolute majority opinions: India to retrieve Katchatheevu from Sri Lanka (65.76%), urging India to involve in Sri Lankan crisis (62.9%), independent Tamil Eelam as correct solution (55.44%) and support to LTTE (54.25%).

To a question on continuing the ban on the LTTE, 47.65% respondents wanted the ban to be lifted, while 27.43% were for continuing it.

The rest of the respondents said that the central Indian government should wait for some time before thinking of lifting the ban.

83 percent of the respondents held LTTE chief Velupillai Pirapaharan responsible for the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi.

However, about 50% of those convinced of LTTE's hand in the assassination felt that Pirapaharan should be condoned, the survey claimed.

To a query on the growth of LTTE as an organisation with air capabilities, 46.24% of the people

felt that it was a matter of pride for Tamils, while only 18.59% said that it was dangerous for India's security. The rest did not have any opinion.

While 55.44% favoured a separate Tamil homeland for Sri Lankan Tamils as the only solution for the conflict in the island, 34.63% of respondents said that an autonomous state for Tamils within a federal structure would solve the problem.

Only 13.61% of the respondents said that the pro-LTTE stand of Tamil Nadu leaders like Vaiko and Nedumaran was dangerous, while 49.36% of them felt that it was correct.

About the stand of Tamil Nadu's leading DMK on the Sri Lankan issue, 47.48% said the ruling party should support the Tigers without worrying about losing its government, while 22.71% of the people said that the DMK should oppose the Tigers.

A considerable number of voters (43.14%) disagreed with LTTE's assassinations of dissenting Tamil politicians, while the remaining either felt that it was inevitable or that they were not in a position to pass a judgment.

Most of the respondents, 62.59%, favoured India's intervention in the conflict. An overwhelming majority of 79.28% favoured release of Nalini, convicted in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case.

The survey taken at a time when resentment against the Sri Lankan government was high due to the killing of Tamil Nadu fishermen by the Sri Lankan navy, found that a large number of people, 65.76%, supported the retrieval of Katchatheevu island, ceded to Sri Lanka, and 29.65% said the Indian navy should attack the Sri Lankan navy if Tamil Nadu fishermen were fired at.

On the fishermen issue, 34.89% of people favoured a dialogue with the Sri Lankan government, while 35.44% said that India should raise the issue at the international forum.

The weekly said that it approached 4195 people, selecting them from various areas and sections of the state.

As such, it asserted that it is a true reflection of the people's mood in Tamil Nadu about issues concerning Sri Lankan Tamils.



Pro-Eelam rallies in Tamil Nadu draw huge numbers, reflecting the popular support in the state

Sri Lanka doesn't have Tamils on side - India

TamilNet

SRI LANKA may win the battle against the Tamil Tigers but not the war as 'they haven't got the Tamil population on their side', India's National Security Advisor M.K. Narayanan said in an interview with the Straits Times newspaper published Tuesday.

Saying India understands the Tamils, Mr. Narayanan asked of Sri Lanka, "Do they want a situation like many countries have faced?"

His comments come after a survey in a leading Tamil Nadu weekly suggested the majority of

people there support the LTTE and want Indian intervention in Sri Lanka.

"The (Sri Lanka Army) has made a lot of progress in the last few weeks. But even if they win the battle I am not sure they will win the war. I think they haven't got the Tamil population on their side," he said.

"I know the Sri Lankan government will be unhappy (at this advice) but we are not interested in preaching to them and that is the best advice they could get. India can give this advice better than the Norwegians or any other country."

"These are people that we

know, we understand. Do they want a situation like many countries have faced?"

"Obviously the Tamil Tigers have been weakened, they have met with heavier casualties than previously."

"What the Sri Lankans are not factoring in is the great deal of sullenness in the Tamil man. There are accusations of profiling even in Colombo."

"Our argument is: unless you give Tamils a feeling they have the right to their own destiny in many matters you will not succeed. LTTE's capacity to carry out terrorist attacks is not diminished."

'We always have support of the people of Tamil Nadu'

THE latest edition of the 'Ananda Vikadan', an influential weekly from Tamil Nadu, carried an exclusive interview with the head of the LTTE political wing, B Nadesan. Extracts of the interview follow:

What is the current situation in Sri Lanka?

The Sri Lankan government and the security forces have unleashed genocide on the people of Tamil Eelam in a never before seen scale. Tamil homeland is being subjected to aerial bombardment and artillery fires. Tamils are being killed everyday. There is severe shortage of food and medicine here. Sri Lanka thinks it can destroy the liberation struggle by starving the Tamils.

Over hundred thousand people have been displaced in recent times. Against all these odds, the LTTE is fiercely fighting for the liberation of the Tamils.

For how long will this struggle continue?

You cannot define timescales for liberation struggles. However, with the full support of the people we will soon win our freedom.

How is the international community viewing Sri Lanka and the LTTE?

The international community has a good understanding of Sri Lanka. Recently Sri Lanka was evicted from the UN Human Rights Council. Both the international community and human rights groups continue to voice

their concern relating to the continuing human rights violations in Sri Lanka. The international community also has a good understanding of our struggle. They recognise that ours is a legitimate struggle against oppression.

Has India's policy towards Sri Lanka changed?

Sri Lanka's diplomatic manoeuvres have always been detrimental to India. Sri Lanka continues to maintain historic links with forces against India. The foreign policies of Sinhala political parties have always been anti-Indian.

At present the war is moving towards a decisive phase. At this juncture, we are hopeful of a change in India's policy towards Sri Lanka.

NEWS

Global politics...

Continued from p3

In the early days of the Soviet Union, many Ossetians supported the Bolsheviks in suppressing a period of Georgian independence, giving rise to furious and lasting grudges. Ossetians can still reel off the names of villages that were burned by Georgian neighbors in the 1920s, and Georgians like to deride Ossetia as a den of smugglers. Like Abkhazia, South Ossetia declared self-rule after a war in the early 1990s, but its status was never settled. Under a 1992 cease-fire agreement, it was managed by the Joint Control Commission, a body made of Georgian, Russian, North and South Ossetian representatives, with involvement from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Many ethnic Georgians fled, and with Russian and Georgian peacekeeping teams patrolling the region, 12 years followed

with no military confrontation.

In 2004, the Georgian president, Mikheil Saakashvili, began a push to retake South Ossetia, including an antimuggling campaign aimed at shutting down a vast market that fueled much of the local economy. Tensions nearly led to full-scale war.

Hostilities routinely flare in the region late in the summer, when scarce water supplies pit neighbors against one another, said Sabine Freizer, the director of International Crisis Group's Europe program. Though women and children have evacuated Tskhinvali in recent days, many of those who remained were probably prepared to wage urban warfare when the Georgians arrived.

"Basically, they just had to march in," she said. "But I don't know what's going to happen afterwards. Ossetians are all armed, and they're going to fight back."



The regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia had long sought separation from Georgia

Territorial integrity...

Continued from p2

the outcome; where it is weak, or where the separatists are supported by a strong neighbor, independence may result.

President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan, for example, has also threatened to re-take Nagorno-Karabakh by force, and may be more successful than his Georgian counterpart as Russia has no direct interest, Armenia is weak and isolated, and Azerbaijan has a larger, well-equipped and -trained army and, like Russia, huge revenues from energy exports.

Russia always accused Western countries of acting inconsistently and partially in relation to the conflicts in former Yugoslavia, by condoning the use of force by Croatian and Bosnian authorities to reassert control of their territories, yet condemning it in the case of Serbia in Kosovo, and indeed intervening in support of the separatists in the name of humanitarian values. But this present conflict directly contradicts the principles used to justify its previous war (in Chechnya). Rather than look for consistency of abstract principles, it is probably more realistic to understand events in terms of Russia asserting its right to use force in its immediate neighborhood and striving to demonstrate that its influence still counts; indeed, pursuing the Kosovo parallel, Russian credibility

is at stake in Georgia in the same way that NATO's was in former Yugoslavia.

Passport Diplomacy

Most alarming is the deliberate ploy of extending Russian citizenship to the inhabitants of breakaway regions of other states – as was done in both South Ossetia and Abkhazia. This has always seemed to be a step toward legitimizing a potential intervention. Will the model now be applied elsewhere? What, for example, if Ukraine continues to seek NATO membership, and ethnic Russians in Crimea are granted citizenship?

If events in Georgia are an indication of a wider shift in Russian thinking toward reconsidering the borders of the former Soviet republics, then it could have alarming implications. However, there are no clear ethical reasons why the borders should not be changed if a significant majority of the population of a province wish it. After all, the borders were often designed on the principle of divide-and-rule by Soviet authorities or, in the case of Crimea, transferred to Ukraine on the whim of Nikita Khrushchev in 1954. Of course, such moves threaten stability in the former Soviet space; but the existence of frozen conflicts shows that that stability is sometimes only ice-thin.

Georgia unleashed war...

Continued from p2

South Ossetia.

Now it's time for a comprehensive resolution of this conflict. Our position is clear and simple – Georgia must completely withdraw its troops from South Ossetia and make a commitment not to use military force against the reg-

ion in the future. We feel this is a reasonable condition and the best way to move forward in ensuring that no further bloodshed and loss of civilian life will take place in the future.

Vladimir Vinokurov is the consul general of the Russian Federation in San Francisco.

Some early lessons from Georgia

Paul Reynolds
BBC News Online

1. Do not punch a bear on the nose unless it is tied down.

Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili must have thought that Russia would not react strongly when he sent his forces in on the eve of the Olympic games to regain control of a territory he had insisted must remain part of Georgia, albeit with some form of autonomy.

Yet Russia was always likely to respond. It already had forces there, leading the peacekeeping force agreed back in the easier days of 1992 between President Boris Yeltsin of Russia and President Edward Shevardnadze of Georgia, himself the former Soviet foreign minister who helped bring the Cold War to an end.

Russia has been supporting the separatists in South Ossetia and handed out Russian passports to the population, thereby enabling it to claim that it was defending its own citizens.

The result of what many see as his miscalculation is that President Saakashvili might well lose any hope of reasserting Georgian power in the enclave.

2. Russia is in a determined mood, to say the least.

Russia, as it has so often done in the past, sees itself being encircled.

Earlier this year, an adviser to the then President Vladimir Putin, Gleb Pavlosky, said that the Russian leadership had concluded after the Orange Revolution in Ukraine that "this is what we faced in Moscow, that they would try to export this to us, that we should prepare for this situation and very quickly strengthen our political system..."

What applied after Ukraine moved towards the West also applied as Georgia did the same. Moscow wanted to prevent any such internal revolution in Russia itself and therefore saw Ukraine and Georgia as hostile influences.

It is not clear how far Russia wants to push this, but given that it says it wants to re-establish order in South Ossetia, that probably means a permanent presence, with no return to a Georgian government role.

3. Remember Kosovo.

Russia was mightily displeased when the West supported the separation of Kosovo from Serbia and warned of consequences. This might be one of them. Of course, Russia has not argued in this crisis that it is simply doing what the West did in Kosovo – that would undermine its own argument that states should not be broken up without agreement. But everyone knows that underneath, Kosovo is not far from its mind.

4. Georgia is unlikely to join Nato anytime soon.

Georgia and Ukraine were denied membership of Nato in April, although they were allowed to develop an action plan that could lead to membership one day.

The Americans argued for both countries to be accepted, but the Germans and others countered that the region was too unstable for these countries to join at the moment and that in particular Georgia, a state with a border dispute, should not be given formal Nato support.

5. Do not allow a cuckoo to police the nest.

Mr Shevardnadze's decision in 1992 to allow Russia into South Ossetia as part of the peacekeeping force enabled a later and very different Russian

government from the one led by Boris Yeltsin to gradually extend its influence and control. It was not hard for Russia to justify its intervention. It simply stated that its citizens were not only at risk but under attack.

6. The West still does not know how to deal with Russia.

Some of the old Cold War arguments are resurfacing, with no consensus about what to do. There are the neo-conservatives, led by US Vice-President Dick Cheney (and supported by Republican presidential candidate John McCain) who see Georgia (and Ukraine) as flag bearers for freedom which must be supported. In due course, they argue, Russia will be forced to change, just as the old Soviet Union was.

Against that is the argument, expressed to the BBC for example on Sunday by the former British Foreign Secretary Lord Owen, that it is "absurd" to treat Russia like the Soviet Union and that Georgia made a miscalculation in South Ossetia for which it is now paying.

7. Are borders in Europe to be sacrosanct for ever?

It has been one of the rules of post-war Europe – borders cannot be changed except by agreement, as say in Czechoslovakia. Perhaps this rule has been applied too inflexibly. Yet governments like that of Georgia are reluctant to give up any territory, even when the local population is so clearly hostile and might be in that state simply as a result of some past arbitrary decision. It was the Soviet Union that created a semi-autonomous region of South Ossetia in Georgia in 1922. Nikita Khrushchev gave Crimea to Ukraine in 1954. Will this lead to trouble one day?

Extracts of comment published online on 11 August 2008