

Why the international community is silent yet again

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Tamil Tiger guerrillas pictured during a major confrontation with the Sri Lanka army Monday last week. Over 110 SLA soldiers were killed and 380 wounded. Report p11

Aid agencies quit Vanni as humanitarian crisis deepens

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on Wednesday expressed "deep concern" over the escalating violence in northern Sri Lanka and the humanitarian impact of the fighting on civilians - even as the UN agencies and various NGOs announced they were withdrawing from LTTE-held areas following a directive from the Sri Lankan government.

Mr. Ban reminded the conflict parties of their responsibility to take active steps to ensure the safety and freedom of movement of civilians, allowing humanitarian organisations to do their work in safety, as well as to reach those affected by the fighting.

However, on the same day Sri Lankan jets bombed the town of Kilinochch, destroying or badly

damaging two dozen houses

The Asia spokesman for the World Food Program, Paul Risley, has told Radio Australia's Asia Pacific program any withdrawal of aid will equal a humanitarian disaster. "It is an incredibly dangerous environment, and there are many good reasons to suspend many of the food distribution and other humanitarian relief efforts

during periods where there is active conflict," he said.

"But I think the concern that we have is that there are very immediate and critical humanitarian needs in this area, in particular from children, from families that have been uprooted, from the elderly, from people that have been uprooted in the recent fighting, and that there are very clear

needs that have to be addressed."

Mr Risley says the World Food Program's country director has traveled through the affected region in the past weeks, and staff are still able to move back and forth in the affected areas.

But he says the ability to distribute food has become more difficult.

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UN pulls staff from Vanni, aid workers fear 'bloodbath'

UNITED Nations staff have begun leaving Vanni this week after Sri Lanka's government ordered aid workers out of the Tamil Tiger controlled region and told them to remove their equipment with them.

The government move comes after the UN agencies said they were unable to advise civilians to vacate LTTE-controlled areas in compliance with a government directive to this effect.

Over 160,000 people have been displaced in the past two months by Sri Lankan offensives and a humanitarian crisis is fast developing, aid workers said.

And amid indiscriminate bombing and shelling, some aid workers are warning of an impending bloodbath.

Explaining the decision to expel aid workers from Vanni, Sri Lanka's disaster management minister Mahinda Samarasinghe said: "UN and other aid agencies being in the Vanni now is unfavourable to us at this time."

Last week the Sri Lankan government said it wanted Tamils in LTTE-controlled areas to move into government-controlled areas. The government called on the INGOs based in the Vanni to persuade the LTTE to allow civilians to leave for Government-controlled areas, the Sunday Times reported.

"UN officials are in the area only to ensure humanitarian assistance to those in need," UN spokesperson Gordon Weiss told The Sunday Times adding that they were not there to advise the people on which direction they should move.

"Any person has the freedom of movement, and they can move where and when they want in search of safety and assistance," Mr. Weiss said.

"Convincing the civilians on the direction they should take is up to the relevant authorities or the parties to the conflict," Mr. Weiss said.

The UN official confirmed that civilians were moving in large numbers deeper behind LTTE lines as the security forces continue to close in from several fronts.

"It is difficult to persuade people to leave their homes, taking whatever they own and head for a place that will be alien to them," he said, referring to the government-controlled Vavuniya.

Speaking prior to the government's quit order, Mr. Weiss told the Sunday Times the UN agencies had no immediate plans for leaving the Vanni, as their pres-

ence was more important at this juncture when the situation was becoming grave.

Announcing the quit order Monday, Sri Lanka's defence secretary, Gotabhaya Rajapakse, said Monday that as no development work was taking place in the Vanni, there was no need for the aid agencies to continue being there.

If the aid agencies were allowed to operate in the north, the Tamil Tigers would use them as human shields to attack government troops, he said.

Gotabhaya warned the government does not want a similar situation to August 2006, when 17 aid workers of a French agency were killed the town of Muttur after heavy fighting.

International ceasefire monitors blamed Sri Lankan forces for the execution-style killings of the 17 men and women.

The government said the ban would apply to all foreign aid workers in LTTE-held territory as well as their local colleagues who were not permanently resident in the area.

"We can't assure the security of these people," Defence Secretary Rajapaksa told The Associated Press news agency. "We are taking precautions."

Disaster management minister Samarasinghe said Monday said his government could not guarantee the safety of aid workers "given the present situation."

"We asked them (aid workers) to leave the Vanni district immediately with all their resources," the minister said. "They wanted a week or two to comply."

"We have told them that we can still take care of the internally displaced people with our existing network of [government] officials," Samarasinghe said.

The UN said Tuesday it is "now evaluating its operations in the area with a view to relocating humanitarian staff. A precise timetable for the complete withdrawal of all staff is yet to be determined, but relocations will begin this week."

"The UN notes that the Government recognizes it holds primary responsibility for ensuring the safety of humanitarian workers," a statement added.

The Associated Press quoted many aid workers as saying their efforts at feeding and housing some of the 160,000 displaced civilians in the Vanni was crucial to staving off a humanitarian crisis.



The ongoing war and the influx of displaced have made clean drinking water extremely scarce

TRO calls for safe havens as civilians shun government 'safe passage'

AMID disquiet amongst some of the international community, the Sri Lankan government last week announced a safe passage for Tamil civilians living in LTTE administered areas to move to areas under government control.

But few Tamils took up the offer and aid workers questioned the practicalities of the government offer, as civilians would have to travel down the risky A9 highway.

In any case, the government's new found concern for Tamil civilians proved to be short lived as on Friday the government blocked aid agencies entering LTTE administered Vanni with much needed relief supplies and rejected a call by a local aid agency for safe havens within LTTE administered areas.

Sri Lanka's Defence Secretary and brother of President Mahinda Rajapakase, Gotabhaya

Rajapakse told AFP news agency that the military had cleared a route for people fleeing intense fighting in Vanni.

"It's better for civilians to come to government-cleared areas so we can start to resettle them faster," said Rajapakse.

Sri Lankan air force helicopters dropped thousands of leaflets, written in Tamil, stating the LTTE was facing huge defeats and urging civilians to save their lives by leaving for government-held territory.

A spokesman for Sri Lanka's Air force said more leaflets had been scattered in areas of Mullaitivu district, also in the north of the island.

"We plan to give passage to people from Kilinochchi to come to (government-held) Vavuniya. We're dropping leaflets from the air, encouraging people to leave, giving details of routes to take to

safety," Rajapakse said.

However Sri Lanka's record of targeting Tamil civilian population in its military campaigns and the rampant killings, abductions and harassment of Tamils in government controlled areas has meant the civilians have opted to stay in Vanni and move deeper within LTTE controlled in search for safety.

R. Sampanthan the parliamentary group leader for the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), the largest Tamil political party, told the Sri Lankan newspaper Daily Mirror that the lives of such civilians were at risk as it was quite unsafe for these civilians to move around freely once they fled to Government areas.

"I do not think that many displaced civilians are anxious to flee to Government-controlled areas as they know it is unsafe.

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NEWS

LTTE artillery, air and commando attack devastates Vavuniya military headquarters

Radar installation destroyed, Indian operators injured

TAMIL Tiger commandos, supported by artillery and airstrikes, devastated the Sri Lanka Air Force (SLAF) and Sri Lanka Army (SLA) installations inside the Vanni Sri Lankan forces Headquarters on Tuesday.

The brazen attack, which lasted two hours, was initiated when three aircraft of the Tamillelam Air Force (TAF) dropped several bombs on the base in the early hours of Tuesday morning.

Thereafter Black Tiger commandos infiltrated the heavily defended headquarters, called in an artillery barrage from batteries hidden in the Vanni region to the north and then launched a ground attack.

An Indian-supplied and manned radar installation was destroyed at 3.05 am, and thereafter the base's communication facility with its tower, engineering facility, anti-aircraft weapon and the ammunition store at the Sri Lankan base were completely destroyed, the LTTE said.

Two Indian personnel were wounded and airlifted to Colombo, reports said.

The Sri Lankan military however said the attack was foiled and said SLAF jets had pursued the LTTE aircraft and shot one down over the LTTE-held jungle areas of Mullaitivu district in the Vanni.

The LTTE said all Tamil aircraft returned safely to base.

Ten Black Tigers were killed in the attack, the LTTE said, adding twenty Sri Lankan security forces members were killed and many more critically injured.

There were at least 11 explosions that rocked the town and heavy exchange of gunfire was reported till 5:00 a.m.

The government said they had recovered the bodies of ten Tigers and that eleven of their men had been killed - ten soldiers and a policeman.

The government also said the radar, which reportedly monitors the coastal areas of the Northeast, was not damaged.

"Terrorists, intending to strike on the air force radar station continued to direct artillery rounds on the area, but radars and other vital stations escaped unaffected and remained intact," the Army said in a statement.

However, in parliament Tuesday, the main opposition United National Party said the radar had been completely destroyed and that fourteen soldier and several policemen had been killed.

Reports said 15 soldiers, nine police and seven air force personnel with injuries were taken to civil hospitals and nine of them

were admitted to Vavuniya hospital.

One civilian, a girl, was wounded and rushed to hospital, medical sources in the town told TamilNet.

Two Indian radar operators were earlier airlifted to Colombo and at least one was taken to India, press report said.

However, the Indian High Commission in Colombo was quoted by press reports as saying the two were not seriously injured.

The Sri Lankan military, which has been embarrassed by Tamillelam Air Force (TAF) raids in the north, south and east of the island over the past two years, claimed it had shot down one Tiger plane with an air-to-air missile.

Squadron Leader Sanjaya Adhikari, who coordinated the government air strike, told reporters that fighter pilots had confirmed hitting the Tiger plane but that no video footage was available.

"The (LTTE) aircraft has been shot down in the Mullaitivu skies while running away following a failed mission," the defence ministry said, referring to the district where Tigers operate air fields.

TamilNet quoted sources in Colombo as saying that there were also a few Indian Air Force (IAF) personnel at the base, which serves as the Sri Lankan military HQ for Vanni operations.

The sources further alleged that there were also military experts from another country outside South Asia, who used to train the Sri Lanka Army Special Forces (SF) at the base.

In retaliation for the attack, Sri SLAF bombers and surveillance aircrafts stepped up flying missions over Kilinochchi and Mullaitheevu districts from 4:00 a.m. and attacked two localities.

The first SLAF attack was reported in Puthukkudiyiruppu, three times, between 4:20 and 5:10 a.m.

The attack had taken place in densely populated area and the premises of a school, Puthukkudiyiruppu Subramaniya Vithiyaalayam, was among the target, according to initial reports from Puthukkudiyiruppu.

A 50-year-old woman, identified as Ms. Sulojana, was wounded. Shops in the town have also sustained damage in the SLAF attack.

At 6:40 a.m., a locality in Poonakari (Pooneryn) was bombed by the SLAF bombers. Casualty details were not available.



LTTE artillery was involved in the attack which damaged radar stations and injured operators

Sri Lankan opposition challenges Colombo's war progress claims

HOURS after a devastating Tamil Tiger attack on the Sri Lankan military's headquarters in Vavuniya, the main opposition Tuesday questioned the government's claims of progress in the war against the LTTE, press reports said Wednesday. "The Air Force base and the Police HQ of Vavuniya was attacked using heavy artillery. Radar defence system is completely destroyed. This happened in an area that government has always claimed has been liberated a long time ago, and cleared of any LTTE activity," United National Party (UNP) parliamentarian Lakshman Seneviratne was quoted by The Bottom Line newspaper as saying.

"In the last PC elections, the state media claimed that the fall of Kilinochchi was near and the military is close to capturing the

town," he said.

"But it was only on September 4th, that they captured Mallavi town. We ask the government not to mislead people," he said.

"In the last two years, over 1800 soldiers were killed while 9901 were injured," he added.

According to the UNP MP, more than 5000 have lost their limbs, making it impossible for them to work in the military.

Seneviratne also added that the government of President Mahinda Rajapakse is embezzling vast quantities of money reserved for military operations.

"They bought F 27 and [Mig]29 planes to destroy the LTTE planes. But we all know how much the ministers pocketed from these funds. The LTTE Aircrafts are still air borne," he said.

The UNP also claimed that 14 military personnel were killed and 29 were wounded while the radar system at the Vavuniya Air Force base had been destroyed by yesterday's LTTE attack.

"Also, several policemen were killed during the attack," said UNP parliamentarian Range Bandara.

"Two Indian nationals who were working as radar operators were also injured during the attack," he added.

The UNP MP claimed that in the recent attack on Anuradhapura UNP candidate, Dr. John Pulle, the police used tear gas canisters that did not go off. "That was because they were duds, so I wonder whether the government is providing the military with the same quality equipment," Bandara added.

NEWS

Defining moments in Eelam War IV

Both the Sri Lankan forces and the Tamil Tigers are now poised for fiercer offensives

Iqbal Athas
Sunday Times

THE most decisive phase of Eelam War IV began last week. The Security Forces and Tiger guerrillas fought some of the bitterest battles on Monday and Tuesday. Guns have fallen silent since then. Both sides are reviewing their options.

The worst fighting was in the western flank of the Wannu. Troops that had re-captured vast chunks of territory further north and east of Mannar in the past many months and weeks are now on the doorsteps of guerrilla strongholds. They are meeting with stiff resistance on two important fronts.

One is a column of troops from the Army's Task Force 1 trying to break through fortifications south of Nachchikuda, until recent weeks, home for a major Sea Tiger base. In the light of the Security Forces' advance, the guerrillas had, weeks earlier, dismantled equipment and removed all their logistics supplies to Kilinochchi.

Since the re-capture of Vidattativu in July, where a Sea Tiger base existed, the one at Nachchikuda had gained greater significance. It was the transit point for landing military and medical supplies across the Gulf of Mannar from secret bases in Tamil Nadu.

With the loss of the two bases, the guerrillas have been denied the use of any coastal facility for unloading and distributing supplies to their cadres from India.

However, unconfirmed reports spoke of small cargo boats unloading unknown contraband in a coastal area south of Devil's Point (located north of Nachchikuda) last month.

Troops have seized control of parts of the guerrilla outer defences at Vannerikulam on the southern outskirts of Nachchikuda.

Their advance beyond Nachchikuda, if successful, would bring Pooneryn within their reach. It is from here that a ferry service operated at one time from Sangupiddy to Karativu. Years ago, that was a popular mode of transport from mainland Sri Lanka to the Jaffna peninsula.

A re-capture of the area would mean a military controlled land based route to the Jaffna peninsula all the way from Mannar.

This is why the guerrillas have

offered stiff resistance on this front pushing back attempts by the troops to advance at least on two different occasions. The confrontations in this area led to a considerable number of casualties and loss of some military hardware.

Fighting in this terrain in the coming weeks will become more difficult with the full onset of the North-East monsoon in the next few days.

The other significant achievement for the Security Forces is the re-capture of Tunnukai, and more importantly Mallawi. From 1996 to 1998, Mallawi and its environs including Tunnukai was the nerve centre of all military, political and economic activity of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Colombo based diplomats, UN officials and International Non Governmental Organisations (INGOs) then visited Mallawi to meet LTTE leaders.

Kilinochchi was captured by the Security Forces in 1996, soon after wresting control of the Jaffna peninsula in 1995 through a string of operations codenamed Operation Riviresa.

The military offensive to take control of Kilinochchi was code-named Operation Sath Jaya.

The fall of Kilinochchi to guerrilla hands came on November 26, 1998 when they launched Operation Oyatha Alaikal (Unceasing Waves).

Since then, the guerrillas have retained Kilinochchi as their centre of power. Using the town as a major sphere of activity, the LTTE set up headquarters of its own organisations such as "police, courts, prisons, revenue collection, telecommunications" etc.

From Mallawi, the Army's 57 Division has moved to the outer areas. In a bid to stall their advance further the guerrillas offered stiff resistance this week. Thus, besides the troops of Task Force 1, personnel of this Division fought bitter battles with the guerrillas on this sector before it ceased temporarily.

Amy sources say the guerrillas were making defensive preparations including the laying of mines to stall their advance on a number of fronts.

This included the Mallavi-Mankulam Road and the Mallavi-



Sri Lankan forces (above) have been engaged in numerous offensives against LTTE forces (top) as Eelam War IV wages across the north of the island, just weeks before the onset of monsoon rains.

Kokavil Road. A troop advance on these roads would take them to the main A-9 highway. From there, it would be a short distance northwards to Kilinochchi.

Independent of the 57 Division's move, troops of Task Force 2 were also advancing in an easterly direction from Moonrumurippu towards the A-9 highway. They had already seized the village of Palamoddai forcing guerrillas to back out from their fortifications there.

Besides the western part of Wannu, the other main theatre of battles is the area north of the Weli Oya sector.

In this sector, troops of the Army's 59 Division have made gains. This is by extending the

new areas seized on the western flank up to the southern edge of Thannimuruppukulam.

On the east they have moved to the coastal area of Kokkuduwai located north of the Kokilai lagoon.

However, the troops would have to advance a considerable distance northwards, traversing thick jungle, before they reach the fortifications of the guerrillas that lay beyond Olumadu, Odusudan, Kumalamunai and Alampil axis.

Advancing troops in this sector have only confronted smaller groups of guerrillas, some of them using hideouts to conduct surveillance on troop movements and on their gun positions.

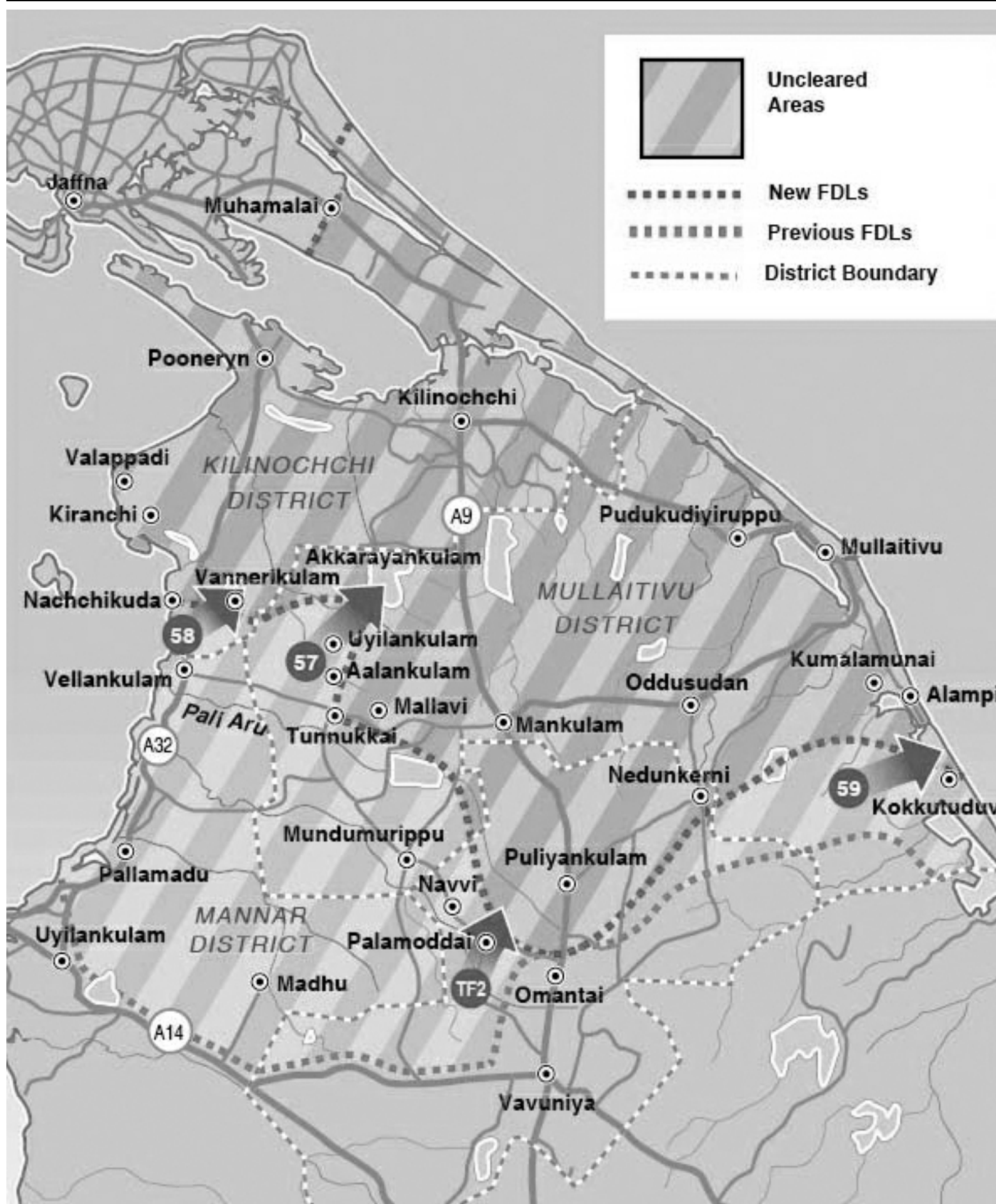
Here again there were reports this week of guerrillas laying mines and other booby traps to stall troop advance.

It is of interest to note that the flight path used by Tiger guerrilla aircraft to attack the Navy's eastern naval area headquarters in Trincomalee on August 26 was over these re-captured areas.

This is both to carry out the bombing raids and to return. However, being a cloudy night visibility over the area was very poor.

This week's battles have clearly defined locations now being held by the Tiger guerrillas. To the north, they still hold the heavily fortified Muhamalai defences. The east is flanked by the Indian

NEWS



A map of the battle areas shows changing forward defence lines as territorial control shifts amid offensives and fierce resistance

Ocean and largely secured both in land and at sea by the Sea Tigers.

This week's battles have shown that on the western fringes troops are just outside the general areas of Mallavi, Velankulam, Murkandi and Akkarayankulam. To the south, the troops are yet to reach the LTTE's heavy fortifications. It is this landmass the guerrillas have to defend with their fighting cadres and resources now.

In any protracted war, the fact that a vast amount of men and material are lost by the warring sides is no secret.

The Army launched the battles in the Mannar sector on July 2, last year. Since then, it re-cap-

tured the area in an around the Madhu Church in April, this year. Thereafter, it seized control of the Vidattaltivu area, where a Sea Tiger base was located, on July 16. Since then they continued their advance to seize control of areas in and around Vannerikulam (south of Nachchikuda), Tunnukai, Mallavi and villages adjoining them.

The military offensive north of the Weli Oya sector began on January 7, this year and led earlier to the re-capture of a vast extent of land, most of them a stretch of "no man's zone." Now, the 59 Division has added more areas earlier dominated by the guerrillas.

Though the guerrillas fought a delaying battle in the past many months avoiding any major close quarter confrontations with a conventionally much more superior Army, they did lose some cadres and military hardware. So did the Security Forces.

The fact that the guerrillas threw in their hard core cadres to delay a troop advance on two flanks in the in the Wanni this week raises some pertinent questions. This is both in the zone south of Nachchikuda and in areas outside Mallavi, Tunnukai and Yogapuram.

Are they now using their hard-core cadres to fight intense close quarter battles to prevent the fall

of their remaining strongholds? That naturally raises questions on their role in the past months in the western part of the Wanni. Here, they avoided major confrontations largely fighting artillery and mortar duels. Was it a "delaying war" which they could not sustain for long? Was this the reason why they ceded important locations like the Madhu Church or Vidattaltivu without last-ditch battles?

That is not to say the guerrillas did not suffer damage, both in terms of men and material. They lost substantially though some of the cadres were said to be new recruits, both young boys and girls. A large number of injured

have also been left out of battle. Exacerbating those losses were the vast number of air attacks carried out by the Air Force, some of them on their weapons and fuel storage facilities. It is known that the guerrillas have launched a hurried recruitment campaign in the past weeks and urged civilians to prepare air raid shelters in their homes.

For the Security Forces, the question of deserters has assumed some importance. Whilst the Police have begun arresting them, military courts sitting at a hall in the Army's Volunteer Force Headquarters in Pelawatte, Kotte, have been sentencing them to jail terms. Some have already been moved to the Welikade Prison. Security sources say a few thousand deserters would be arrested to deliver a strong message to their colleagues to return to service.

Besides those killed in action or injured and left out of battle, there was a new development this week over others. Those who are marginally injured in infantry units have been re-inducted to service. This saw the creation of a new Vanni Re-inforcement battalion this week. They are being deployed for non-direct combat related tasks in the Wanni sector.

In this backdrop, both the Security Forces as well as the Tiger guerrillas are now poised for fiercer offensive roles. For the former, it would not only be re-capturing guerrilla strongholds and dealing a blow to their leaders. Besides those in the military, to most Sri Lankans and even some in the Colombo based diplomatic community, this is now a matter of weeks than months. They strongly believe the guerrillas would be defeated. But a trillion dollar question remains.

For the LTTE, defending territory encompassing Muhamalai, the outskirts of Mallavi, Tunnukai, Yogapuram, on the west, Odusuddan, Kumalamunai, Alampil axis on the south and the Indian Ocean in the east is a sine qua non for its survival. Ceding those areas would be anathema to them.

Since the separatist campaign by the guerrillas exacerbated after the ethnic violence of July 1983, successive Governments have fought military campaigns to defeat the guerrillas. This time, they face a new challenge with their strongholds surrounded on three different fronts on land and one at sea.

If the guerrillas have retained their hard-core cadres for fierce battles that are looming, their sea going arm, the Sea Tigers, remains almost intact. So is their primitive air capability demonstrated again last month amidst all sophisticated counter measures.

Thus, in the coming weeks they will have to throw all their lot to ward off defeat. On the other hand, the Security Forces will also have to overcome the final obstacles to achieve their goals. How this will play, only the coming weeks will show.

(Edited)

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EDITORIAL

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WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 10, 2008 No. 381

One Track

The international community has left the outcome of the Tamil question up to the LTTE.

For much of the past decade, the international community, especially the Western democracies, have said much on Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict. 'Peace', they argued, was what 'Sri Lankans' needed - as if the mere absence of violence was the same as justice or freedom. While exhorting the Tamil Tigers to 'show their commitment' to peace (as if the Sinhala state's commitment was a natural given), they explained to the Tamils about the need for peace, not in terms of their economic or strategic interests, but in terms of the suffering of our people. Meanwhile, they rearmed and retrained the Sinhala military whilst lecturing the LTTE on the inevitability of compromise, on the impossibility of independence (given how readily the states all recognized Kosovo this year, it is not clear what this impossibility is caused by), and so on. Above all, they were adamant that the LTTE could not be accepted as the 'sole representatives' of the Tamil interests.

Now, a few years later, the Sri Lankan state is, with overwhelming international support, waging unrestrained war against the Tamils. Of course, the military option is rationalized as 'fighting terrorism', but the tactics and strategies used over the past two years (embargoes and blockades on Tamil areas, indiscriminate shelling and bombing, abductions and disappearances, etc), as well as the Sinhala chauvinist rhetoric that has accompanied all this, leave no doubt that is the crushing of the Tamil aspirations for self-rule as much as the defeat of the LTTE (which, for the international community, are one and the same) that is being sought.

This week the Sri Lankan state ordered international NGOs, including UN agencies, out of the Vanni. As if to make clear what is to follow, barely had the air-conditioned 4x4s begun lining up to leave, the Air Force bombed Kilinochchi town, destroying houses and hitting schools and nurseries. Notably, apart from a murmur of 'concern' from the UN Secretary General, there is absolute silence from the international community. This is not in itself surprising; this is exactly what happened when Jaffna was starved and bombarded in 1995, when Vanni was starved and bombed in the late nineties and when the Tamils of the Eastern Province were systematically driven from their homes which were razed behind them.

The point is this: no one, but no one, is ever going to intervene against the Sri Lankan state on behalf of the Tamils. This has been the central plank of the Tigers' argument as to why they are the sole and authentic representatives of the Tamil people: no



one else will stand up to brutality of the Sinhala state. It should be noted that the LTTE could not make this claim if other actors, especially the self-congratulating liberal states of the international order, actually acted on the fine principles on which they constantly lecture the Tamils on. There can be no doubt that if the international community was actually committed to humanitarian principles or human rights or all those good things it has been extolling, then they would act decisively against the Sri Lankan state - remember the lofty pronouncements that accompanied Western intervention against the pro-Russian Serbian state?

The Tamils have today - yet again - been presented by the international community with a simple choice: stay with the damned Tigers and suffer the consequences you deserve or accept Sinhala majoritarian rule and live - admittedly not with the dignity of a people, but isn't that better than being exterminated? What is interesting is how various international actors, including the UN, its agencies, international human rights groups, and so on, still leave it up to the Sinhala state to decide what is appropriate for the Tamils to endure militarily or receive politically (they were less inclined to let the Serbian

state decide the same for the Kosovars).

The pointed lack of international action is a clear message to the Tamils: yield to Sinhala rule or perish. Yet again, there is a mistaken confidence that the Sri Lankan military will destroy the Tamil liberation struggle and that the whole problem will go away. This international confidence in President Rajapakse today is the same as that placed in President Kumaratunga's 'war for peace' in the late nineties, President Premadasa's counter-insurgency in the early nineties and President Jayawardene's in the eighties. It has escaped most analysts of Sri Lanka who have been prepared to make predictions using maps, Sri Lankan statements and their own prejudices that the relative strengths of the LTTE and the Sri Lankan armed forces has never been narrower.

Nonetheless, the international community, for all its fine words of there being 'no military solution' and a political solution being needed, has - as in the eighties and nineties - opted to seek the military pacification of the Tamil people, rather than a just solution to the sixty-year ethnic question. As such, the international community has - once again - made the Tamil people's future dependent wholly on the LTTE's military performance.

OPINION

A return to 1815 is the way forward

The Congress of Vienna divided Europe into spheres of influence. Similar rules are needed for the 21st century

Christopher Meyer
The Times

THOSE who think that there is such a thing as progress in international affairs - that we are capable of learning the lessons of history - have been brutally disabused by the Georgian crisis. You can have all the rules you like to discipline international behaviour; but they are not worth the paper they are written on if they run against fierce nationalisms and ethnic passion.

Ethnic and nationalist rivalry is as old as sin, and as inextinguishable. As a diplomat in Britain's Moscow Embassy during the Cold War, I spent time in two of the Caucasian republics, Georgia and Azerbaijan. They were then under Moscow's heel as part of the Soviet Union. Their loathing of Russians was palpable.

At the time of my visits, Stalin, a Georgian by birth, was still officially a non-person, air-brushed by his successors from the annals of Soviet history. But in defiance of Moscow his portraits could still be seen in Georgian state farms and government offices. I asked a Georgian official why this was so. "Because he killed so many Russians," came the sardonic reply.

The feeling was mutual. Later in Moscow I related my Caucasian experiences to Leonid Brezhnev's interpreter, Viktor Sukhodrev. "That's no place for a white man," he said with his impeccable North London accent (he had equally good American).

Recent events have shown no weakening in these ancient hatreds. But the Western powers behaved as if caught on the hop. Last year a French diplomat warned me that once Kosovo got its independence (itself the unnatural product of Balkan hatreds), Russia would feel free to make its move in Georgia. And so it has come to pass.

As a Times leader put it recently, history has resumed, leaving Francis Fukuyama, the apostle of its end, trailing in its wake. But Professor Fukuyama was adrift from the very start. Once the iron fists of the former Soviet Union and Tito's Yugoslavia had been removed, nationalist and ethnic tensions broke surface with the murderous velocity of the long suppressed.

Contrary to what [British Foreign Secretary] David Miliband has been telling us, the glacial years of the Cold War were "the period of calm". The years since have been marked by the constant turmoil of history's

march.

Globalisation and interdependence were supposed to have swept aside these ancient feuds and rivalries. Theories of the postmodern state now abound. Tony Blair preached how national interest would be trumped by the spread of "global values". This is self-evident rubbish. For here is the paradox of the modern world. Money, people, culture, business and electronic information cross porous frontiers in ever-increasing volume.

But as national boundaries dissolve in cyberspace, so everywhere the sense of nationhood and national interest strengthens. Five minutes in Beijing, Washington, Tehran or Moscow will tell you that. What is the European Union if not the 21st-century arena for the intense and competitive prosecution of the national interest by its 27 member states?

It is useless to say that nationalism and ethnic tribalism have no place in the international relations of the 21st century. If anything the spread of Western-style democracy has amplified their appeal and resonance. The supreme fallacy in foreign policy is to take the world as we would wish it to be and not as it actually is. In Britain's case, the delusion is compounded when we are powerless to effect the outcome we desire.

This has been particularly the case with Russia, where we have managed to be both impotent and provocative. If we really want to put a halt to bad Russian behaviour, let us do so where we can make a difference, and where it is justified - starting with the expulsion of the vast nest of Russian intelligence officers in London, as Labour and Conservative governments did not hesitate to do in the 1970s.

We can foolishly downgrade national interest within the armoury of British diplomacy, if we wish. But we had better not underestimate its driving force in the international behaviour of others. That is the road to dangerous miscalculation.

Take Russia, China and Iran. Each seethes at the recollection of what it considers historical humiliations visited on it by Western powers. For all three the beginning of the 21st century has opened opportunities for payback - for getting respect as a nation (just look at recent Russian newspapers). You don't have to like or approve of these regimes.



US warships on exercise. The standoff with Russia heralds the 'return' of geopolitics. Photo US Navy

But not to understand their histories is not to understand the mainspring of their external policies - in Russia's case its determination to rebuild its greatness, dismantled, as millions of Russians see it, by Mikhail Gorbachev and his Georgian Foreign Minister, Eduard Shevardnadze, aided and abetted by the West. I would bet a sackful of roubles that Russian foreign policy would not be one jot different if it were a fully functioning democracy of the kind that we appear keen to spread around the globe.

What is to be done, as Lenin once put it? The first thing is to sweep away any rose-tinted illusions left from the Blair-Bush era. For the democracies of North America and Europe, relations with Russia are always going to be awkward and bumpy, at best co-operative and adversarial in

equal measure.

The fall of the Soviet Union did not wipe the slate clean. The Russia that we are dealing with today, with its fear of encirclement, its suspicion of foreigners and natural appetite for autocracy, is as old as the hills, long pre-dating communism. It is a Russia that will never be reassured by the West's protestations of pacific intent as it pushes Nato and the EU ever eastwards.

Most important of all, Russia and the West need to draw up rules of the road for the 21st century. Mr Miliband and others have condemned the notion of returning to the geopolitics of the Congress of Vienna which, in 1815 after the Napoleonic Wars, divided Europe into spheres of influence between empires and nations. They perhaps forget that what was agreed at Vienna held at bay for almost a century a gener-

al European war.

Something similar is needed today, based again on spheres of influence. Nato must renounce the provocative folly of being open to Georgian or, worse, Ukrainian membership. This strikes at the heart of the Russian national interest and offers no enhanced security to either Tbilisi or Kiev. As for Russia, it must be made unambiguously clear where any revanchist lunge westwards would provoke a military response by Nato.

This may sound shocking and anachronistic to the modern sensibility. But, there is no other way to remove the scope for miscalculation, the mother of far too many wars.

Sir Christopher Meyer was Britain's Ambassador to Washington, 1997-2003. This comment was published in The Times on September 2, 2008

IN PICTURES



The Nallur temple Charriot festival was conducted August 29 with thousands of devotees accompanying it being drawn with Nalloor Murukan seated on the flower decked car around the temple. Though the crowd of devotees was comparatively less than the previous years during the Cease Fire Agreement period, people kept coming from 6:00 a.m until noon. The SLA-imposed night curfew was lifted Thursday night and soldiers and policemen were seen posted near the main entrances to the temple on Point Pedro road and Nalloor Temple road. More than fifteen devotees sustained injuries when a flaming torch held in front of the car, during its passage around the temple, fell down. Report, photos TamilNet



Buddhist monk smashes Hindu statues in Colombo

A Buddhist monk and three of his associates broke into a Hindu temple in Sri Lankan capital Colombo in the middle of the night and desecrated the temple by climbing on the Kopuram and destroying devotional statues.

The monk and his group got into the Sri Muththumariamman Hindu temple at De Mel Mawatte in Grand Pass, Colombo during the early hours of Sep 5. Climbing on to the roof they defaced and damaged the newly built Sivalingam and statues of Amman and Vishnu.

On Tuesday, the consecration (Kumpaapisheakam) ceremony



was held in which hundreds of devotees took part. During the night that followed, the Buddhist monk and three of his associates got into the temple through the roof and smashed devotional statues.

Colombo Additional Magistrate Ajith Anawaratne Wednesday ordered to remand the Chief Incumbent of Grandpass de Mel Watte Buddhagaya Viharaya, Sri Sapug-asyaye Dhammanada Thero and three of his associates for destroying the adjoining Sri Muththumariamman Hindu temple which is located in the predominantly Muslim populated Khettrama in Grandpass.



Tamil expatriates in the Netherlands held a sports festival last week, including a football tournament, tug of war sack races and athletics events. Prizes were awarded for winners in events for both young adults and youngsters

NEWS

Displace or die: choices in 'democractic' Sri Lanka

Peter Ratnadurai
Sangam.org

VANNI is a region blessed with fertile land and sea. Little surprise then that competition for control of this territory has played a major part in both igniting and maintaining Sri Lanka's Sinhala-Tamil ethnic conflict. Seasoned peacemakers are adamant that restitution and reparations are essential for realising peaceful ends to violent conflicts. Yet, Sri Lanka's government has spent the past week warning the nearly half a million Tamil inhabitants of the Vanni to displace or get killed.

Since independence from Britain, successive governments of Sri Lanka have been attempting, sometimes successfully, to colonise the Vanni at the expense of her native Tamil population. The now-sprawling Sinhala colony of Welioya at the south-eastern fringes of Vanni was, only a generation ago, known as Manal Aaru and home to around 75,000 Tamil-speaking people. Since 16 April 1988, when they were forcefully displaced from their homes, on the back of a government gazette, many of the original inhabitants of Manal Aaru, and their children, have been without any fixed address.

Events witnessed in the east of the island, under the rule of the current regime, only add to fears of a repeat of the era when the state exercised monopoly over violence. According to the UN, some 315,000 people, almost all Tamils, were displaced from their homes in the east of the island between August 2006 and July 2007. There is no comprehensive record of how many have been allowed to return to their homes since military operations came to an end, more than a year ago. One certain fact is that 56,000 people who were recorded as displaced from Muttur and Sampoor have been denied access to their properties because the state has since declared the areas high security zones.

Events in the north, put in perspective, also make grim reading: an army consisting of 99% ethnic Sinhalese is on a violent march into the Vanni; the region's half a million Tamils are being warned to leave their homes or face death. Abandoning one's land and livelihood, which are - after all - fundamental human rights, for the safety of tents and handouts is no easy option. Given past experiences of grinding colonisation, many Tamils are rightly sceptical of the state's intentions.

International rights groups also have plenty of reasons to be sceptical over the actions of Sri Lanka. Under the UN Charter, there are only two exceptions to the prohibition of displacement, for reasons related to conflict, of a civilian population: their security or imperative military reasons. Sri Lanka's warning to the Tamils in Vanni does not fall under either of the exceptions: the Sri Lankan military is the only threat to civilians' security and the only actor intending on military action.

A recent commentary by the ICRC read: "Clearly, imperative military reasons cannot be justified by political motives. For example, it would be prohibited to move a population in order to exercise more effective control over a dissident ethnic group." Even when forced displacements are allowed, International Law requires "the prompt return of the evacuees to their homes as soon as hostilities in the area have ceased"; a measure not taken by Sri Lanka in the case Muttur and Sampoor. Should rights groups bother to take Sri Lanka's current rulers to the ICC, current President Mahinda Rajapaksa will have a lot of explaining to do.

Above all, the effects of forced displacements have been widely studied, and none of the findings bode well for hopes of a lasting solution to the Sri Lankan civil war. Forced mass displacement only adds to the economic, social and cultural woes of the population concerned; these grievances give way to, or maintain the cycle of violent conflict. Given that decades of warfare have cost thousands of lives and impeded a generation from development on par with neighbours, exacerbating the causes of conflict may only serve a very few.

Forced displacement of groups of people, be it in their hundreds or millions, is not the resolution to any conflict. The Sinhala-Tamil conflict has been shaped by displacements; a reminder to which will only foster even more resentment. The current Sri Lankan regime is playing with war crimes by its excessive use of force to achieve political ends, to satisfy a tyrannical majority. This strategy may yet backfire by militarising even more Tamils and failing to strike chord with accepted international norms of fundamental human rights.



Displaced by fighting, Tamils have been forced to flee their homes with only goods they can transport

TRO calls for safe havens...

Continued from p2

They are aware that they can be branded as LTTE cadres once they arrive," he said.

Suresh Premachandran, another TNA member of parliament, also reflected Sampanthan's views and said people were reluctant to move into government-controlled areas because they feared abductions and killings and being confined in camps.

Amidst increasing civilian casualties Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation (TRO), the main relief agency assisting Tamils fleeing from the indiscriminate artillery and aerial bombardment by the Sri Lankan forces urged the international community to pressure the warring parties to safe havens in LTTE administered Vanni for civilians take refuge.

However there was no reaction from Sri Lanka or the international community.

On Friday September 5, the Sri Lanka Army (SLA) at the Omanthai exit point blocked vehicles belonging to Non Governmental Organisations from passing through into Vanni. The move comes after SLA shells have begun targeting Kilinochchi and the A9 Road, as well as commandos who have been laying landmines targeting civilian vehicles.

Only last week a vehicle belonging to Forut, an NGO, was damaged as it got caught in an unexplained blast 20 kilometres south of Vavuniya while it was heading into Vanni. The driver sustained minor injuries.

FORUT spokesperson Antoinette Ludowyk told The Sunday Times that the incident had not

changed their plans and that their humanitarian work was continuing in the area with the assistance of the authorities.

However, this week Sri Lankan ordered all aid workers out of the Vanni.

The blocking of relief and the increased bombardment are attempts to drive the civilian population away from the LTTE areas and into government controlled territory, reports said.

According to UN aid agencies 135,000 people have been driven from their homes due to fierce fighting between Sri Lankan forces and the LTTE in the past two months. Other reports put the number at 160,000.

In the past few years, over 800,000 Tamils - one if four of the population - have been displaced or made refugees.

UN pulls staff from Vanni...

Continued from p2

The UN says it "remains fully committed to addressing the humanitarian needs of the civilian population in the affected areas, and will continuously monitor the situation to assess how this can be done under the circumstances."

However, it is not clear what the UN can or is prepared to do, especially given its standing deference to host government's wishes.

Meanwhile the executive director of the Australian Council for International Development, Paul O'Callaghan, told Radio Australia, he expects a sharp increase in casualties.

"This situation is likely to become a bloodbath in the next several weeks," he said.

"Apart from the direct military conflict, we would expect that many, many will die or be in extreme circumstances if humanitarian workers are not able to access this area."

"It was an extreme [humanitarian] situation even before the decision [Monday] by the government to exclude foreign aid workers."

Meanwhile, the International Committee of the Red Cross urged "both parties to the conflict to do their utmost to spare civilians the effects of ongoing hostilities."

"We are committed to staying

close to those in need of humanitarian aid and to meeting their most urgent needs regardless of whether they seek refuge in government or LTTE-controlled areas," said Toon Vandenhove, the ICRC's head of delegation in Sri Lanka.

Health-care facilities in the Vanni continue to operate for the moment, albeit in ever more difficult circumstances, the ICRC says.

Saying clean water and sanitation were the most pressing needs of the displaced, the ICRC quoted local government officials in Vanni as expressing concern about there not being enough shelter available for the displaced.

NEWS

Tigers crush new Sri Lankan push

OVER 113 Sri Lankan soldiers were killed and 326 wounded in the space of four days last week, as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) stepped their resistance against the Sri Lankan military offensive in Vanni.

The fierce resistance, in which a Sri Lanka Army (SLA) regiment was badly mauled, prompted analysts to suggest that the LTTE is permitting the Sri Lankan military to advance in certain areas and putting up stiff resistance at others.

After a brief lull in the Vanni battle front, on Saturday August 30, the Sri Lankan military again attempted to break through LTTE Forward Defence Lines (FDLs) and move towards Aalangkulam in Thunukkaay division.

LTTE fighters confronted the SLA advance from 9:40 a.m. till 4:00 p.m on Saturday and seized 7 T-56 automatic rifles and recovered 3 dead bodies of SLA soldiers after heavy fighting.

According to LTTE field officials 20 SLA soldiers were killed and more than 32 wounded in the clashes.

Following the failure of this attempted the SLA opened a new front in Naachchikkudaa in Mannaar district and Vannearikkulam which resulted in heavy casualties to the Sri Lankan military.

45 Sri Lankan soldiers were killed and more than 51 wounded in Naachchikkudaa when the LTTE confronted the SLA in a stiff fighting throughout Monday night.

On Tuesday, 40 more SLA soldiers were killed and 50 wounded in another front, when LTTE fighters confronted the SLA units that simultaneously attempted to advance from 8th, 9th and 10th Mile Posts, located between Vannearikkulam and Akkaraayan.

19 bodies, 12 from Vannearikkulam and 7 from Naachchikkudaa, were handed over to the ICRC by the Tigers on Wednesday, September 4. Arrangements were under way to hand over the remaining 10 bodies, on Thursday, according to the LTTE officials.

LTTE defensive formations also seized large number of arms, ammunition and military accessories in the two-days fighting south and west in Kinnochchi district in Vanni.

Seven Light Machine Guns (LMGs), four RPG launchers, more than 25 AK assault rifles, hundreds of LMG rounds, more than 120,000 of 7.62 mm rounds, more than 60 RPG shells, two Light Anti-Tank Weapons (LAWs), around 80 hand grenades and 15 Claymore mines were among the arms being stockpiled by the Tigers, according to the reporters who were allowed to photograph the collection.

Magazines with rounds, booby traps, and military accessories such as bullet-proof jackets, kit bags, helmets and holsters



were among the seized items after the clashes in Vannearikkulam and Naachchikkudaa fronts.

A day after the debacle in Vannearikkulam and Naachchikkudaa fronts, the SLA again attempted to move from another front with no success.

LTTE on Wednesday repulsed a ground movement by the SLA at Paalamoaddai into LTTE territory. The Tigers claimed that eight SLA soldiers were killed and more than 14 wounded in their counter-attack.

The SLA had launched the movement, backed by heavy artillery fire, at 7:00 a.m. and fighting went on for 12 hours before the Sri Lankan forces were forced to withdraw, according to LTTE officials.

The fighting in Vanni has intensified as the Tigers, who avoided stiff confrontations against the advancing SLA for a while, stepped up defensive engagement on Monday.

The high toll was not anticipated by the top brass of the SLA, which deployed elite Special Forces (SF) with high-powered rockets and explosives during the offensive push at Vannearikkulam on Monday.

The SLA hierarchy has instructed the field commanders to submit an in depth evaluation of the debacle at Vannearikkulam.

A retired brigadier general, Vipul Boteju, commenting on the current situation told AFP: "They will have to rely more on infantry... We are getting to the stage of close-quarter fighting and that is when we can expect more casualties."

According to press reports, the SLA soldiers were equipped with anti-tank rockets, high explosive anti-tank RPGs and were instructed to use extensive explosive and fire power.



However, the Tigers managed to engage in close fighting, causing heavy casualties.

LTTE laid booby traps have also caused high number of amputations and deaths among the SLA soldiers.

Despite military hospitals in south getting full of SLA soldiers with serious injuries, the Rajapakse administration is intent on continuing the war, the sources further added.

On Thursday, the Sri Lankan Naval Commander, Vice Admiral Wasantha Karannagoda, in an interview to the state owned Daily News, claimed that his navy played a vital role in denying the LTTE of their supplies and noted: "if we cannot win this war at this stage, we will never win this war."

Sri Lanka has poured a record 1.5 billion dollars into the war effort this year in a bid to secure a military victory over the LTTE.

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SLA HQ smashed, p3
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Retreating in the face of stiff resistance from the LTTE (top and above), the Sri Lanka forces were forced to leave behind weapons, arms and ammunition (centre).

NEWS

More attacks inside Jaffna peninsula

AS the fighting in Vanni intensified, attacks against Sri Lanka Army (SLA) soldiers in the Jaffna peninsula have also increased, reports said. In the past two weeks there were three separate attacks against SLA troopers deep inside the government-controlled peninsula.

On Wednesday September 4, two claymore mines were exploded targeting Sri Lankan military personnel. The first attack in the afternoon targeted a Buffel Armored Personnel Carrier killing one soldier and injuring three in Kapoothu area. The second one, just hours later, targeted an SLA vehicle on the Point Pedro- Chaavakachcheari main road. The blast at Viraali, on the boundary between Vadamaraadchi and Thenmaraadchi, killed a soldier and injured others.

Vehicles were not permitted to use Point Pedro-Chaavakachcheari road from Thursday morning in a search which continued until afternoon. Even NGO demining workers and governments officials on their way to work were not allowed by the SLA either to enter or exit the areas under its cordon and search. The search was concentrated particularly in the mangrove land stretch between Charasaalai and Kapoothu.

A week earlier, on Saturday

August 23, a group of unidentified armed men opened fire and hurled hand grenades on the SLA camps in Yaakkarai and Kalikai areas in Karaveddi in Vadamraadchi killing two soldiers and seriously injuring two. The attack continued for 15 minutes in which heavy gunfire and explosions were heard, Karaveddi sources told TamilNet.

Thousands of SLA troops deployed in the above area launched a cordon and search operation, immediately after the attack, that continued till Sunday evening. Residents remained in their homes while an atmosphere of fear and tension prevailed.

In addition to attacks on military personnel, there have also been attacks on electricity transformers in the peninsula. Armed men opened rapid fire Monday August 27, during curfew hours on an electricity transformer at Kachchaay, Kodikaamam in Thenmaraadchi causing damages to it. Electricity supply was cut off in the area and SLA launched a cordon and search Tuesday in the area.

Electricity transformers in Madduvil in Themaraadchi, Karaveddi Arasadi Chanthi in Vadamaraadchi were fired upon by gunmen while one in Kokkuvil was set on fire earlier in August.



The Army in Jaffna has increased defences around transformers after a number came under attack

Casualties as Tigers step up attacks in East

AS fighting rages on in the north of Sri Lanka, LTTE units in the Eastern province have stepped up attacks against Sri Lankan forces in the region, with several 'friendly fire' incidents adding to the death toll.

Tuesday this week LTTE guerillas triggered a landmine at Sri Lankan soldiers on road patrol in Bakmitiyawa, 30 km southwest of Ampa'rai Tuesday morning around 9:05 a.m. Two were killed and six wounded, three seriously.

On Saturday, three Special Task Force (STF) troopers were wounded in an LTTE booby trap explosion when they were on a search operation in Kagnchikudichchaaru area.

On Friday night, a Sri Lanka Army (SLA) troopers lying in ambush in Vadamunai village in Koaralaippattu South District Secretariat's administrative area, mistaking another group of SLA soldiers as Tamil Tigers, fired at the troopers, killing four of them.

The confrontation took place near Miniminthave'li, a border village in Batticaloa.

In August, 23 SLA troops were killed when LTTE cadres triggered a claymore device targeting troops traveling in a military vehicle in the same area.

Unidentified armed men in STF uniforms abducted Friday four Sinhala villagers who had

gone to collect honey in Paa'namai Aa'lavai jungle area in Poththuvil police division in Ampa'rai district, according to the complaint made Sunday to Poththuvil police by one of the four abductees who had managed to escape.

The jungle where the abduction took place is an area frequented by both STF commandos and Liberation Tigers, Poththuvil residents said.

Last week at least 10 Sri Lankan security personnel were killed and another 16 wounded in attacks carried out by LTTE forces in different locations.

On Thursday September 4, a claymore fragmentation mine was exploded around 5:00 p.m at Aayiththiyamalai in Vavunatheevu police division in Batticaloa district, seriously injuring an STF commando, attached to 3rd Mile Post STF camp, who had gone to bathe in a well 200m from his camp.

A day earlier, two units of STF commandos, who were deployed in a search operation after an STF commando was slain on Tuesday by a LTTE laid booby trap at Udumpangkulam in Kagnchikudichchaaru area, mistakenly fired on each other. Three STF commandos were killed and four wounded.

The booby trap explosion,

which took place around 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, also caused injuries to 3 STF commandos.

The same day, four STF troopers were killed and two wounded at Sannasi Malaiyadi near Ukanthai, bordering Ampa'rai and Hambantota districts in an LTTE ambush.

According to LTTE officials in Ampa'rai, a Colt Commando rifle and a T-56 assault rifle with ammunition were seized by the Tigers.

Meanwhile, Sri Lankan police said one STF sergeant and a home-guard were killed at a police point at 10th mile post in Paanama area.

In the latter attack, the Tigers said four hand grenades, four T-56 magazines, five Colt Commando magazines, 180 rounds for Colt Commando rifle and 150 rounds for T-56 rifles with Holsters and water cans were also seized by their fighters.

There were further STF casualties on the same day when STF commandos got caught in the booby traps of the LTTE in Kanchikudichchaaru jungles in Ampa'rai district

One STF commando was killed and three injured Monday morning. Another two were injured in the same manner the previous Monday evening, sources in Ampa'rai said.

Colombo blast wounds 45

AT least 45 people were injured when a small bomb exploded in a busy market area in Sri Lankan capital Colombo. The time bomb placed underneath a makeshift shelter of a watch repair shop along the pavement facing Olcott Mawatha in the Pettah, the main commercial hub of the capital, a short distance away from the main bus station and the railway terminal, exploded around 12:15 p.m. on Saturday August 30.

At the scene, there was little evidence of a large explosion, but small items sold in wooden stands in the market were strewn onto the street and some blood spattered the pavement. The bomb exploded close to two busy bus stops, a report from Reuters said.

Dr. Anil Jansinghe, a director at Colombo National Hospital, told reporters 45 people had been admitted, among them two boys and four women. Most of the wounded suffered minor or mod-

erate injuries, from burns and the blast's shock waves.

"We received 45 people injured in the blast," Jansinghe, said.

"There are four women and two children among the wounded. Only two or three need surgery, others have light to moderate injuries."

The Sri Lankan military as always blamed the LTTE even before any investigation was carried out. "This was definitely the LTTE. They are desperate and taking civilian targets since they are being defeated on the northern battlefield," Military spokesman Udaya Nanayakkara said.

According to local media, an explosive expert who investigated Pettah bomb, cast doubts as to whether it was in fact the work of the LTTE citing the weight of explosive device - just around 100 grams - and the way it was placed.

NEWS



Sri Lanka's President Mahinda Rajapakse(r) promised victory this year, but his military commander Maj. Gen. Sarath Fonseka (l) thinks it will take a lot longer for a military solution to the conflict

Peace a distant prospect

Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu
The Morning Leader

THE decision by the government to ask the INGOs and UN to leave the Wanni, ostensibly on the grounds that it cannot ensure their security and wants to prevent a Muttur type atrocity, heightens expectations that the final battle for the Wanni is nigh and that the war will soon be over.

The UN it is reported, will be allowed in with supplies. The LTTE according to some reports has joined battle in earnest and the betting of pundits is that whilst casualties will be high, the end result is a foregone conclusion. The security forces will win and the LTTE will either be vanquished in toto or remnants of it will scupper off into the jungles to attempt guerrilla resistance and terrorist attacks into the future.

Whilst all of this goes on, there is the burgeoning crisis of displacement. The LTTE stands accused of preventing the movement of people and of using them as a civilian shield; the government on the other hand, wants to empty the Wanni of civilians so that it can wreak havoc on LTTE military infrastructure and capability. The civilians of course are caught in the middle - fleeing from and further into the LTTE controlled area to escape the fighting.

Tens of thousands are involved. There has been talk of civilian corridors to let people out and criticism that the people will have to languish in what are effectively "detention centres" once they come out. And since it is likely that most of them would have undergone some training by the LTTE in civil defence, there is concern that they could be con-

sidered suspect, with all the unpleasant consequences that could entail.

It would be prudent of the regime to recognise that it is in such situations that the seeds of future conflict are sown and likewise, in such situations that the first and firm steps of reconciliation can and must be taken.

The acid test of the regime's professed commitment to civilian welfare and of its understanding of Tamil sensitivities - shortcomings in respect of which the Defence Secretary himself has conceded - will be on the ground in the Wanni and not in the corridors of power and diplomacy in Geneva or New York. It will of course also be in the deliberations of the APRC, the regime's chosen forum for political issues, and the proposals the regime will endorse, if any, at all, for a political settlement of the conflict.

All of this holds even if victory though certain, persists in being imminent. There is every likelihood that the LTTE will do its damndest to inflict as much damage militarily, before it is, itself destroyed.

That it was able to launch an air and ground attack on the security forces and police in Vavuniya - the first such attack in government held territory in the current phase of fighting which has been reported as one in which the LTTE has lost or ceded large chunks of territory to the security forces, indicates that it has not lost its capacity for daring and for damage.

Whilst some may contend that this was a flash in the pan or a desperado raid by a desperate foe,

this is not a conclusion that can be taken for granted.

Yet, it is a question as to what the LTTE hopes to be able to achieve at this juncture in the hostilities. Is its strategic objective a hurting stalemate, which will force another round of talks or is it some notion of international intervention to force negotiations and a political deal?

The latter, were it to be at all a possibility, will depend on the political winds prevalent across the Palk Strait as India moves toward a general election. The chances are higher though that intervention will be avoided rather than embarked upon, leaving the LTTE with the 'hurting stalemate' as its best and only option.

The last time it achieved this was in 2000/2001 in different circumstances in which they held the upper hand. They were able to hit the airport and port and move around with greater ease than they are at present. They also faced a regime that was ideologically committed to a political settlement, with them if there was no alternative, but preferably without them.

If there is to be another time around for them, the balance of power will be different. It will revolve around their ability to exact leverage from their demonstrable destructive potential as opposed to their control over territory and the pretension of a state in the state of becoming.

Defiance and the confidence that all states have regarding their access to resources will stiffen the resistance of the Rajapakse regime to try yet again to defeat the LTTE, as they firmly believe they can and must and will.

It looks like military victory will be delayed, perhaps temporarily, but conflict resolution, perhaps indefinitely.

How did Norway perform?

A view on Oslo's peace-making efforts in Sri Lanka.

Menik Wakkumbura
Daily Mirror

INTERNAL conflicts that have a deep structural asymmetry and powerful protagonists are less likely to reach a quick political settlement, due to their protracted and long-term nature.

Norway's peacemaking attempts in Sri Lanka, spanning six years of negotiations from 2001 to 2007, ended when the 2002 Cease-Fire Agreement (CFA) was abrogated in early January 2008.

It was the longest spell of negotiations between the Sri Lankan Government (GoSL) and the LTTE (hereinafter used as 'both parties'). The lessons learnt from Norway's facilitation are worth recalling if Sri Lanka hopes, in the future, to seek any third-party assistance in a mediation process.

Norway's 'facilitation' essentially combined shuttle diplomacy with multi-faceted reconciliation endeavours. No other Scandinavian country would give such a bulk of their money for development and humanitarian assistance. In this context, wealthy Norway's entry into the Sri Lankan peace process was welcomed by both parties, at the early stages of negotiations.

Norway was convinced by both parties to pursue peace talks in good faith. Even though the CFA has now been abrogated and the SLMM gone, what is noteworthy is that the six-year long peace drive brought about, within the parties, a willingness to cooperate for a political solution.

Facilitation is the least forceful mechanism in 'third-party mediation'. It essentially exchanges information between the conflicting parties to create a conducive environment for negotiations. In practice, however, this is a difficult task. Greater power disparity between the parties and increased militarism of the conflict often hamper successful third-party facilitation.

Norway entered the Sri Lankan peace process as a 'back channel', to establish confidence-building between the parties for intended peace talks. However, its efforts of peace brokering was largely unproductive. Norway was ineffective in removing power discrepancies, reducing tension and gaining public confidence for impartiality.

What were the drawbacks?

The CFA, entrenched as a tool for trust and cooperation, had been used mostly as a tool for argumentation. Even though there was a reduction of political killings in the early phase of the CFA, from the very start, the par-

ties were unable to accept the other in good-faith. The Governments de-proscription of the LTTE was not perceived as a genuine goodwill gesture by the LTTE. Furthermore, the rejection of the LTTE's ISGA proposal, and isolation from foreign funds became a huge concern for the Tigers. The increasing disagreements, mistrust and military antagonism made Norwegian efforts at confidence-building increasingly harder.

The Norwegian facilitation was not sufficient enough to ensure effective communication. The LTTE unilaterally withdrew from the sixth-round, symbolizing Norway's ineffectiveness in confidence-building. The short-term cause for the LTTE decision was a misperception rather than a military matter. The LTTE saw the Washington Conference, prior to the Tokyo Conference, as a clear isolation of their party in front of the 'US-led' donor community. The LTTE claimed that both Norway and the GoSL were fully aware of prevailing legal constraints in the US, which prevented their participation at the parley.

In addition, Norway created doubts of their continuance in the peace process when it re-appeared in Geneva in 2006, after distancing itself from the process for three years, amidst heavy clashes. Norway's efforts to use the 'stick' at this level of argumentation, and 'carrots' in terms of international Donor support were largely ignored by the parties by then.

Meanwhile the parties continued to directly accuse each other of breaking the truce. According to cumulative statistics recorded by the SLMM, from February 2002-August 2006 there were 276 violations by the GoSL and 4176 by the LTTE. Disarmament and disengagement had apparently further heightened asymmetry. In reality, both parties used military enhancement as a tool for bargaining during the talks.

The only 'stick' the Norwegians could offer, to encourage cooperation and engagement in refinement, was the SLMM and Donor contributions. But did the SLMM perform overall as a confidence-building tool? And were the Donors supportive in peace-making? The fact is that the SLMM just kept for 'monitoring' and 'reporting' and kept urging the parties to adopt peaceful cooperation.

This was ineffective in eliminating the gross ceasefire viola-

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NEWS



Sri Lankan military commander Maj. Gen. Sarath Fonseka greets senior ICRC officials. Despite allegations of human rights abuses, experts predict that the EU will renew Sri Lanka's GSP+ status

Sri Lanka likely to get GSP+

A US trade law expert last week expressed confidence on the European Union (EU) renewing Sri Lanka's GSP Plus trade concessions despite the Rajapakse government's unabated human rights violations.

Kevin Kennedy, a professor of law at the Michigan State University in the USA, speaking at a seminar on opportunities to compete in the US market for Sri Lankan exporters organised by the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce said it is highly likely the EU would extend the concessions but is adopting a 'carrot and stick' approach.

"My prediction is you are going to get GSP Plus," he told the seminar audience. "What the EU is doing is what the US does too. It's a very familiar pattern - pushing and pushing and pushing. I'd be very, very surprised if you're denied GSP Plus," Kennedy added.

The GSP Plus, preferential trade scheme from the EU allows Sri Lanka to export 7,200 items duty free into the EU and is credited with helping to boost Sri Lankan exports. The scheme is to be reviewed this year for its extension for another three years.

Sri Lanka is the only South Asian nation to enjoy Generalised System of Preferences duty free trade concessions from the European Community.

For eligibility, recipient countries need to have ratified 27 international conventions on human rights, labour standards, environmental protection, and governance principles by 31 December 2008.

Kennedy believes the EU would grant the concessions irrespective of the island state's compliance to the 27 international conventions specified and then apply a carrot and stick policy. However, analysts point out that once the concessions are renewed there would be no incentive for Sri Lanka to ratify the conventions.

The EU will "grant GSP Plus

and then the carrot and stick will start," Kennedy said.

"They'll say 'if you want to continue to get GSP Plus you need to do better in this area or that area'."

Kennedy further told the seminar audience that Sri Lanka needed the EU Market. "For Sri Lanka, you really need the EU market - you need that duty free benefit to stay competitive."

"The EU will say if you really want this additional benefit - you have to comply with and ratify all these conventions," he added.

A recent study by economists at the University of Sussex concluded that losing GSP Plus would lead to a 4% cut in Sri Lanka's garment exports, and overall, it would cost 2% of the island's GDP.

Whilst the west continue to remind Sri Lankan how much it needed the GSP Plus, the Sri Lankan political leader are not too concerned about losing the EU trade concessions.

Speaking at an election rally last month, Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapakse snubbed the West and said the country no longer dependent on western hand outs. Rajapakse proclaimed that the era of rulers who were dependent on the West was over with his regime in Sri Lanka.

Given the widespread allegations of human rights violations by the Rajapakse government, there has been much speculation recently that the European scheme may not be extended to Sri Lanka after the end of this year.

Observers point out that whilst the GSP Plus is a generally seen as a trade concession for developing countries, where the local manufacturer is owned by a European business it becomes a way of importing subsidised goods into the EU for the European business.

This is true for firms like Marks & Spencer's which own garment factories in the island.

In a visit to Sri Lanka earlier this year, Marks & Spencer's boss, Stuart Rose, hailed the country's "ethical standards" and assured that he will do 'everything possible to support Sri Lanka's application for the GSP+ concessions'.

Some European Union officials also have shown similar enthusiasm in renewing Sri Lanka's GSP Plus.

This is visible in European Commission's stand that whilst the continuation of the GSP Plus scheme depends on the implementation of the 27 conventions, it does not expect "absolute compliance."

"No one expects absolute compliance. This would be unfair but we need to be clear that there would be an objective assessment on the implementation of these conventions," said Peter Maher, Head of Operations of the Delegation of the European Commission to Sri Lanka and the Maldives, recently.

Julian Wilson, EU ambassador in Colombo, earlier this year, criticised newspaper reports on the continuation of GSP Plus being linked to human rights abuses as 'rubbish'.

The 'Daily Mirror' newspaper at the time quoted him as saying at a function on the issue of GSP Plus that "I will only say that a lot of melodramatic rubbish has been written about the renewal of GSP+ in the local press. The truth is simple if somewhat banal--the EU wants Sri Lanka to receive GSP Plus again for the coming three years," he said.

Among the "core human and labour rights UN/ILO Conventions that must be ratified and effectively implemented for GSP Plus to apply" are the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

NEWS

How did Norway do?...

Continued from p13

tions, and continued military accumulations. Furthermore the SLMM had to verify facts with a limited staff, and faced technical difficulties. The SLMM having to function from staff from Norway and Iceland only, from 2006 onwards, weakened the mission further.

Interestingly, Norway's neutrality was often questioned during their time in the peace process. While some refused to accept the theory that neutrality exists in the real world of politics and others were skeptical about Norway's impartiality.

However, criticism over Norway's role had an obvious nega-

tive impact in maintaining consistency between the parties. The outspoken view of southern politics in Sri Lanka - known to be the fundamental nationalist led by the JVP and JHU - labelled Norway as "pro-Tigers" and as "New-Imperialists".

Mostly, the arguments about Norway's role have provided a political platform for those struggling in the political panorama of Sri Lanka. Therefore, even the few logical criticisms they presented had limited opportunity to be constructive in the society.

When looking at the six years of Norway's facilitation in the Sri Lanka peace process, the active period of Norway's facilitation has been limited for about one

year during the six-rounds. Norway became passive and inefficient during the rest of the four years in terms of confidence-building and cessation of violence.

The only enforcement that Norway used was the international Donor pressure, which was also not used as a pacifying approach in the long run.

Finally, it is important to note that recalling these lessons will impact future international third-party mediation to be productive in peacemaking efforts in Sri Lanka.

The writer holds a M.Phil. in Peace and Conflict Studies in the University of Oslo, Norway.

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The LTTE released photos of some of the ammunition captured after they defeated a Sri Lankan offensive in the Vanni, during which 20 soldiers were killed. Story p11



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