

Why Tamil-Muslim unity is essential for peace

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## Starvation and security biggest fears as displaced denied international aid



Shortage of food and water have made life more precarious for displaced Tamils across the north, especially after international aid agencies left the region. *Stories pages 2-4*





## HUMANITARIAN DISASTER



The hundreds of thousands of Tamils displaced by the fighting will suffer further as even the little aid provided by international NGOs disappears with their withdrawal from the war zones.

# Humanitarian disaster warns NGO head

TamilNet

THE director of an Australian non-governmental organisation (NGO) has warned of a humanitarian disaster in the war zones of Sri Lanka in the absence of foreign aid workers.

The extreme humanitarian situation of Internally Displaced Persons, including thousands of children, who are already malnourished, would deteriorate dramatically as clean water is not available for all the IDPs and they have been deprived of medicine by the Sri Lankan government, said Executive Director Paul O'Callaghan of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID).

ACFID has had 25 member organisations working in Sri Lanka over many decades.

Mr. O'Callaghan expressed fear of a blood bath as foreign aid workers of UN agencies and NGOs packed their bags following the orders by the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) to leave the Vanni region.

"Apart from the direct military conflict we would expect that many, many people will die or be in extreme circumstances if humanitarian workers are not able to access this area," Mr. O'Callaghan told Australia's ABC Radio last week, after Colombo's decision to exclude foreign work-

ers.

According to UN estimates, 40% of all children in the North are currently malnourished and don't have access to any prospect of food, he noted.

In response to the Sri Lankan government's statement that it did not want to see a repeat of the 2006 massacre of 17 local aid workers employed by French agency Action Contre La Faim, Mr O'Callaghan said the circumstances of that incident were never clear.

He reiterated that by clearing Tamil areas of foreign aid agencies, the Sri Lankan government is also ensuring no independent sources exist to comment on ground realities.

"If you exclude all foreign humanitarian workers then you won't have any, not only the immediate support for those communities but also those who can actually see what's happening on the ground," he said.

Accusing the government of having received the highest number of complaints of any government in the United Nations Human Rights Commission over recent years, O'Callaghan said Sri Lanka had as result been reviewed recently by the commission.

In response, the government

had made commitments to the commission only a few weeks ago to protect civilians.

"[Sri Lanka] undertook at that point to make special efforts to ensure that the situation for citizens who are not involved in the conflict would be taken care of, and that those citizens would be able to be safe and obtain food and water and medicine and so on," he told ABC Radio Australia.

He added that it is worrying to see the government's change in policy after only recently pledging to protect civilians.

"So this does worry us - that we could see very quickly a very large scale disaster occurring, quite apart if you like from what the civil war is directly involved in," he concluded.

ACFID is an independent national association of Australian NGOs working in the field of international aid and development.

Paul O'Callaghan, who is the Executive Director of ACFID, also serves on the Foreign Minister's Aid Advisory Council, is a member of the National Nonprofit Roundtable and the Australian Collaboration and is a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Management.

While in government (1982-2000), he served as Australia's High Commissioner in Samoa (1997-2000) and had earlier diplomatic appointments in Malaysia and Thailand.

# Fears as UN agencies pull out of warzone

Peter Foster

The Telegraph

THE news that UN agencies and other international NGOs have been ordered to pull out of the Tamil-controlled areas of northern Sri Lanka should be greeted with great foreboding.

Some international observers fear their departure clears the way for Sri Lankan forces to act with unrestrained ferocity against the Tamil Tigers and their civilian populations now caught up in the fighting.

In recent weeks, one US-based rights group, Tamils Against Genocide, has even used the "G" word in the Sri Lankan context, engaging former US associate attorney general Bruce Fein to seek international war crimes indictments against three senior Sri Lankan officials, including the army chief, Gen Sarath Fonseka, who hold US green cards.

The Sri Lankan government of Mahinda Rajapakse, a Sinhalese hardliner elected on a 'war ticket' in November 2005, denies such charges (as you might expect) but his government's track record gives little cause for confidence that the basics of the Geneva Convention will be observed as this conflict intensifies to a new level.

Over the last three years, Sri Lanka's police and security forces have waged a campaign of terror against both its Tamil enemies and dissenting Sinhalese, with abductions, beatings and extrajudicial killings being documented in considerable detail by both UN agencies, independent human rights groups and the US State Department.

The Sri Lankan government protests its innocence, but time and again it has deliberately obstructed or simply ignored all attempts by the international community, including the US and British governments, to force it to act with greater restraint.

Even the Sri Lankan government's own international panel of experts, set up with much fanfare to investigate alleged atrocities - including the massacre of 17 local aid workers for the French charity Action Contre le Faim in August 2006 - quit last March in disgust at the lack of co-operation it received, urging Sri Lanka to 'achieve the full implementation of the rule of law and respect for fundamental human rights'.

If the Sri Lankan government has nothing hide, it might seem reasonable to wonder why it obstructed its own commission of inquiry. In May of this year, in yet

a further sign that Sri Lanka was fast becoming a pariah on the international stage, Sri Lanka lost its seat on the UN's Human Rights Council and all requests by the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights to set up a permanent office in Sri Lanka have been denied.

When Louise Arbour, the UNHCR chief, visited last October she described the weakness of the rule of law and the 'prevalence of impunity' as "alarming".

Against this background of disregard for the international community, the removal of UN and other agencies from the Vanni in northern Sri Lanka is extremely ominous. The Sri Lankan government and its hardline Sinhalese supporters have made little secret of the fact that they regard these groups as little more than a frustrating obstacle to implementing a final, crushing victory over the Tamil Tigers.

I was in eastern Sri Lanka at the time of the ACF killings and remember reading a headline in the local newspaper describing i-NGOs as 'The four letter word' of Sri Lankan politics, accusing them of 'sponsoring' Tamil terrorists by allowing their resources, deliberately or otherwise, to strengthen the Tigers' hand.

With the eyes and ears of those organizations and the international community now being forcibly withdrawn, there is good reason to fear a period of terrible blood-letting in northern Sri Lanka.

Whether or not that constitutes 'genocide' is for the moment a matter of legal debate, but given the record of the Sri Lankan government it is legitimate to fear that a space is now being created in Northern Sri Lanka for a bout of ethnic score-settling, should Sri Lankan forces break through to Kilinochchi.

The Sri Lankan government will protest its 'honourable intentions'. It will say that it is eradicating the 'scourge of terrorism' from Sri Lanka and that its aim is simply the military defeat of the Tamil Tigers. It will pour scorn on those human rights groups who talk of genocide.

But given the performance of the Rajapakse government these last three years - and the grim litany of cruelties committed by both sides during Sri Lanka's 25-year vicious ethnic war - the outside world has alarmingly little reason to taking the assurances of the present Government of Sri Lanka at face value.

## HUMANITARIAN DISASTER

## United Nations agencies withdraw from Vanni...

THE Tamil Tigers last week accused the government of planning a genocidal campaign against Tamils as UN agencies began pulling out of the LTTE-held Vanni regions in the island's north.

The United Nations pulled its staff out of the LTTE-held northern region after being ensured safe passage by government troops and the Tamil Tigers.

Other aid agencies have also left, after being initially prevented from doing so by displaced people.

Residents had gathered outside the offices of the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the World Food Programme on 12 September in an effort to prevent the pullout, demanding that the agencies stay behind and continue their humanitarian work for the Vanni people facing a humanitarian crisis.

The agencies' move comes as the army continues a major offensive against the LTTE in northern areas of the island.

The government ordered aid workers out of the north earlier this month saying they could not guarantee their safety.

Kilinochchi is the town where aid agencies in the north have been based.

A convoy of some 20 vehicles carrying UN and other staff set off from the town on 16 September travelling south along the A9 highway.

Later the convoy arrived in Omantai town in government-controlled territory.

UN spokesman in Colombo Gordon Weiss said a total of 40 UN staff had now pulled out. Some local employees had decided to stay.

"We are pulling out reluctantly" because of aerial bombing and artillery shelling, he told the BBC Tamil service.

A spokesman for the Roman Catholic aid agency, Caritas, said that it was "not possible to get the church out of the north" and its staff would remain.

UN agencies say at least



Local residents and displaced people in Kilinochchi gathered in front of UN offices in an attempt to prevent the pullout, but only succeeded in delaying the departure by three days, as over 40 UN staff left after the Sri Lankan government said it could not guarantee their safety

160,000 people have been displaced in the past few months in the districts of Mullaittivu and Kilinochchi. Some 70,000 people have fled due to fighting in the past two months alone.

Leaflets have been dropped urging them to move out, but Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) noted that there is little evidence that civilians have been able to move to safety.

According to the Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies, 11 UN and other agencies have been working in the Vanni area.

Colombo wants to avoid troops being accused of killing

aid workers in a repeat of the August 2006 massacre of 17 local employees of the French aid agency Action Against Hunger in the east of the island.

Meanwhile, MSF expressed concern about the possible consequences of ongoing hostilities for the population still living in the area, and the impact of displacement on the health of the population.

The organisation urged both parties to the conflict to ensure that all possible measures are taken to protect civilians from the impact of the conflict, and to allow assistance to resume as

soon as possible.

Apart from potential exposure to shelling and bombardment, those who have been forced to leave their homes lack adequate shelter, sanitation facilities and access to clean drinking water, the organisation noted.

"The potentially serious health impact will only be worsened by the arrival of the rainy season begins in roughly a month's time. Existing hospitals and clinics have also been affected by the fighting, and though the system is compensating for the moment, if the situation is prolonged there will be serious shortages of medi-

cines and supplies, as well as qualified medical staff," MSF noted.

"MSF is prepared to return to Kilinochchi as soon as possible," the organisation said, adding that in the mean time, "the withdrawal should not affect programmes in other parts of Sri Lanka's conflict-affected north, including Vavuniya, Point Pedro in the Jaffna peninsula, and Mannar".

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is being allowed to remain in the area. It operates a checkpoint between government and LTTE-held territory.

## ... but Sri Lanka says Ban-Ki Moon helping LTTE

SRI LANKA'S hardline government criticised United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon for expressing deep concern about Tamil civilians in the Vanni region.

Sri Lankan human rights ministry official Rajiva Wijesinghe told reporters that there were no civilian casualties in the Colombo government's ongoing offensive and that the UN Chief's comments were helping the LTTE.

"The secretary general expresses his deep concern over the increased hostilities in northern Sri Lanka, and the grave humanitarian consequences for civilians," UN press office said in a

statement released on Wednesday, September 10, in New York.

The statement came as Colombo told all local and international relief workers, including UN and Red Cross staff, to vacate the region within a week, saying the order was for their own safety.

"In light of the [Sri Lankan] Government's request for the relocation of UN humanitarian staff in affected areas, he (Ban Ki-moon) reminds all concerned 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 persons

affected by the fighting who need humanitarian assistance," the statement said.

"The Secretary-General reminds all concerned of their obligations under international humanitarian law, especially in regard to the principle of proportionality and the selection of targets," the statement also said.

Sri Lanka's government, which customarily bristles at foreign criticism of its military's human rights record, flatly rejected the UN Secretary General's comments.

"Since there have been hardly any civilian casualties during the recent offensives in Sri Lanka, it

is possible that the Secretary General was prompted by reports of large numbers of civilian casualties in other theatres of war, which misled him into believing that all forces fighting terrorism are alike," Wijesinghe said.

"It is to be hoped however that, even while he might want to send a message to other countries, he will study the Sri Lankan situation carefully in the future. Perhaps, with knowledge there will come wisdom, and he will publicly acknowledge the extraordinarily good record of the Sri Lankan forces in this regard, their careful selection of military targets, the paucity of even collateral dama-

ge," Wijesinghe said.

"Unfortunately, the Secretary General may not have realised that his remarks could be used to advantage by the LTTE, who will use any weapon to hand, including an innocent Secretary General, to halt the advance of Sri Lankan forces," the statement said.

He said the LTTE "will relish that he made these remarks".

According to UN agencies, at least 160 000 people have been displaced in the past few months in the LTTE-held districts of Mullaittivu and Kilinochchi. More than 70 000 people have fled due to fighting in the past two months alone.

## HUMANITARIAN DISASTER

# 'Pain' of Sri Lanka aid pullout

BBC Online

Fears of a humanitarian crisis are mounting in northern Sri Lanka as the UN and other agencies pulled out of the area, where more than 200,000 people are displaced. One aid worker describes how hard it was to leave.

DURING my last weeks in Kilinochchi there was a foreboding sense of a massive army approaching from the south-west.

The escalating war between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the government was bringing fighting closer to the town. It led to a massive movement of civilians in the region, known as the Vanni.

I never heard gunfire or sounds of close-quarters fighting, instead day and night there were constant thuds and booms of artillery and rockets fired from multi-barrel launchers landing in the distance.

Day after day, the constant rumble of heavy artillery got closer and closer.

Twenty-four hours a day my office, bedroom, kitchen and bunker would be shaking with the thumps of shells landing.

The sensation of the approaching doom was all too real with this kind of warfare.

As an aid worker I had been struggling to provide greatly needed assistance to the ever increasing number of people who had been displaced by the fighting.

They had fled from the unbearable noise and fear of the approaching artillery - at first this was happening mostly in the south-western areas of the Vanni.

With few transport facilities families couldn't go far, just a few tens of kilometres, before they sheltered under trees.

As the military advanced the shelling caught up with them and often they had to move again after a couple of days.

Many of these areas to the south-west of the Vanni were out of bounds for us as aid workers because of the high danger.

But as the military advanced further the people moving ahead of them came closer to Kilinochchi, and we began to meet them and hear their stories of multiple displacements.

They were hungry, tired, afraid and traumatised.

The children had not attended school for months, fathers had



School children block their ears as they shelter during an air raid in Kilinochchi. The sounds of planes overhead and shells falling often traumatised the civilians of the north as Sri Lanka has stepped up aerial attacks. *Photo courtesy BBC Online*

lost their means of making a living, such as fishing boats, nets and engines.

Mothers were dealing with the raw emotion of just not being able to protect, feed and educate their families.

As aid workers we tried our best to provide shelter, water and sanitation facilities to the people; we built emergency camps in areas that we predicted would be safe havens for people to gather, but as the days went by and the army approached Kilinochchi, the distant rumble of artillery rapidly escalated into a constant roar of shells raining down, in and around the town.

Our own security was jeopardised and we were unable to continue to provide further assistance.

The security situation spiralled to emergency levels; artillery and air attacks on Kilinochchi became a frequent event.

The Sri Lankan government had put pressure on us to leave as they could not ensure our safety any more in the town.

We were 10 international staff there by that time and we had to begin the heartbreaking task of trying to close our offices and relocate to government-controlled areas.

## Sheer panic

Emotions were very high through those days, we were dealing with the guilt and frustration of having to leave at the time when humanitarian assistance was needed the most by the com-

## Displaced facing nightmare

AID workers fear uprooted civilians in the north of Sri Lanka could become trapped without enough assistance as fighting intensifies between government forces and LTTE.

All relief agency personnel, except local staff from the area and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) left LTTE Vanni on September 9, after the Sri Lankan government ordered United Nations and international non-governmental organisations to move out of LTTE-held areas in the north, saying it could not guarantee their safety.

The withdrawal has raised questions about the fate of the 167,000 people who have been displaced in the LTTE-controlled districts of Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi since a shaky truce began collapsing in April 2006, most of whom are sheltering in welfare centres.

"The most pressing concern is the plight of the innocent civilians who are trapped in the region and are unable to leave," said an aid officer who declined to be named. "It is the duty of all parties to ensure that these people are given freedom of movement to allow them to move to places of safety."

In the last three months alone, between 70,000 and 85,000 people have fled their homes as the military pushed into the LTTE territory in the north. The poten-

tial humanitarian consequences of civilians being unable to escape fighting in the war zone are enormous, aid workers told AlertNet.

The government has indicated it is prepared for up to 200,000 people to come to Vavuniya, behind the front lines. But aid agencies say there have been no organised efforts to move displaced civilians in Vanni to safer areas.

Even if they reach Vavuniya, it is unclear whether camps will be independently monitored or whether the displaced will be able to move freely, aid workers warn.

The president has said the relocation of most international agencies from the north is a temporary measure. Yet amid uncertainty over when they will be allowed to return, there are concerns over food security, shelter, water and sanitation, and freedom of movement for the displaced population.

Already continuous heavy fighting, including aerial bombardments, in areas close to Kilinochchi town has prompted many to move again, according to the United Nations.

"From our point of view, the trauma of all this for children, to study in an environment where war is going on, is not helpful," said Menaca Calyaneratne, head of communications for Save the Children Sri Lanka.

"For the people as well as the

children, the psychological effects will have to be addressed, and addressed very urgently."

Save the Children, which has pulled out staff to Vavuniya, said at least 30,000 schoolchildren are among the displaced.

In response to the growing fears, Jeevan Thiagarajah, executive director of the Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies, an association of relief groups, told AlertNet there are structures in place to take care of civilians following the withdrawal of most international aid agencies.

He said local aid workers could continue to work with relevant government departments as volunteers, and food and other relief items could be provided through government convoys.

But those directly affected by the fighting in Vanni appear to have less confidence in contingency plans to help them.

Anxiety over their future spilled over on Friday when a hundreds of civilians protested against the relief agency withdrawal and tried to prevent a small convoy of U.N. and other agency vehicles from leaving.

"The consequences are serious," said another aid worker who is familiar with the crisis. "And they will be exacerbated by the fact that these agencies who have the capacity to (provide humanitarian aid) have been banned from conducting their operations."

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## DIASPORA

# Tamil expat addresses British Labour Party conference

THE Leader of British Tamils for Labour, Sen Kandiah, on Monday, addressed the annual conference of the British Labour Party, in front of over 10,000 delegates and the British masses viewing the conference on BBC, urging the Labour Party to note with alarm the increase in violence and human rights violations perpetrated by the Sri Lankan Government against Tamils.

He also urged the party to note that the policies of the successive Sinhala governments and the current Sri Lanka constitution, which was adopted without the mandate of the Tamil people lies at the heart of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka.

Mr. Kandiah, who is also a member of the British Tamils Forum, declared that recognising the Tamil people right to self determination is inevitable and essential in order to safeguard the very existence of the Tamil Nation in Sri Lanka.

Foreign Secretary David Miliband MP opened the afternoon of the Labour Party Conference on Monday, under the banner of 'Britain in the World Debate' in his speech which amongst others, stressed the moral duty of Britain and her Foreign Policy engagements in other parts of the World.

British Secretary of State for International Development Douglas Alexander and the Defence Secretary Des Browne were at the stage. European Trade Commissioner Hon Peter Mandelson was also amongst the audience including Senior Labour Party Officials, Members of Parliament, Members of European Parliament, Business Leaders, former Cabinet Ministers and dignitaries. Mr. Kandiah was called upon to speak on behalf of the British Tamils and pass a resolution.

"I am a British Tamil," said Mr. Kandiah. "In the last two years four democratically elected Tamil members of Parliament have been shot and killed by the Sri Lankan government. Not long ago, seventeen aid workers, who worked for the International Aid Agency, were gunned down by the government troops.

"What action did the government take? None!

"In Northern Sri Lanka the



Mr Sen Kandiah

Government is carrying out genocide, uprooting and causing unexplainable pain and suffering. Tamils are internally displaced, living in fear without food, medicine or shelter. The eyes of the world are not looking and no one is telling this tragic story.

"The government of Sri Lanka is continuing this military strategy to resolve what is, fundamentally, a political problem. Our Tamil struggle for justice and equality began with non violence. When our cry for justice and equality through non-violence was met with violence and oppression, the call for the independent homeland for Tamils became louder and louder. When it became apparent that non violence means were not working the Tamil people were left with no choice other than to pursue an armed struggle. More than one hundred thousand Tamils lives have been lost the last three decades.

"Therefore, I ask you to back the resolution that calls for the conference to note with alarm the increase in violence and human rights violations perpetrated by the Sri Lankan Government against Tamils living in north and east of the country" he said.

"Secondly, we want the conference to note that the policies of the successive Sinhala governments and the current Sri Lanka constitution, which was adopted without the mandate of the Tamil people lies at the heart of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka.

"Thirdly, to acknowledge that the time has come for the labour Government to recognise the Tamil people right to self determination is inevitable and essential in order to safeguard the very existence of the Tamil Nation in Sri Lanka" he concluded.



A training session was held for Tamil teachers in Netherlands on 6 September, 2001. The well attended event saw Tamil teachers receive training in many aspects of communicating with children and methods for teaching the Tamil language.



The Tamil Student Organisation and Tamil Youth Organisation in Toronto, Canada, marked 'Sri Lanka Day' with a protest calling on Canada to send humanitarian assistance and on the International Community to stop the genocide of Tamils in Sri Lanka. Gathering at the Harbour Front Centre, the marchers carried placards that called on Sri Lanka to 'Stop killing Tamils' and on Canada to 'Stop the Sri Lankan genocide of Tamils'. More such protests are planned for the near future, organisers said.

## NEWS

# Global implications of Sri Lanka's civil war

**Peter Foster**  
The Telegraph



**Sri Lanka is supported in its military efforts against the Tigers by India, China, Pakistan and the US**

AT first glance, Sri Lanka's vicious civil war might appear to have little consequence beyond the island's own teardrop-shaped shores. But the conflict has rapidly come to reflect tectonic shifts in global power.

Since hostilities resumed in 2006, Sri Lanka's brutal attempts to crush the Tamil Tigers have brought its government into open confrontation with traditional Western allies and trading partners.

For the last two years America, the UK and the EU have all loudly decried Sri Lanka's atrocious record on human rights, repeatedly accusing the government of failing to live up to basic international obligations.

Last March a US State Department report accused the government, dominated by ethnic Sinhalese, of attacking civilians

and practising "torture, kidnapping, hostage-taking, and extortion with impunity".

All requests to allow the UN commissioner on human rights to set up a mission in Sri Lanka have simply been shrugged off by Colombo, which was last May voted off the UN's high commission for refugees.

There was a time when such stinging rebukes from America and its Western allies in the international community would have forced restraint on a small, aid-dependent country like Sri Lanka. Not any more.

When EU countries, including Britain, tried to pressure Sri Lanka by freezing the development aid on which the country's inflation-wracked economy depends, the government quickly found that less picky friends, in

the shape of China and Iran, were only too willing to help.

While Western politicians, like Britain's Lord Malloch Brown, the minister for south Asia, made statements condemning Sri Lanka at the United Nations, Sri Lanka cut the deals which have enabled it to ignore Western opinion.

After a visit to Beijing by the Sri Lankan President, Mahinda Rajapakse, last year, China's aid to Sri Lanka increased fivefold to almost £500 million a year, a move which deeply unsettled India which already resents China's strategic alliance with its

northern foe, Pakistan.

For America, however, concerns over China's decision to fill the Sri Lankan aid vacuum have been eclipsed by Sri Lanka's blossoming relationship with Iran, which has pledged more than £900m in soft loans, grants and cheap oil, making it Sri Lanka's largest foreign donor overnight.

When President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad visited Colombo earlier this year, the Sri Lankan capital was plastered with billboard photographs of the two presidents, smiling beneath the slogans "The Friendly Path to

Progress" and "Traditional Asian Solidarity."

"In Asia, we don't go around preaching to our neighbours and our friends," said Sri Lanka's foreign secretary, Palitha Kohona, at the time. "This public naming and shaming process that seems to have become so popular in the West is really not so accepted here."

The message is clear. With friends like China and Iran behind them, Sri Lanka no longer needs to allow the human rights concerns of Western powers to stop it fighting to its bitter end by fair means or by foul.

## India sidelined in Sri Lankan war

**Sukumari Surpana**  
Rediff

THE current scenario in Sri Lanka has a striking resemblance to situation prior to the Indian intervention in 1987. The economic blockade on north and east coupled with all out war against the LTTE with no regard to the plight of the civilians caught in the quagmire, pitch forked India into the centre stage of the island nation's ethnic conflict.

The consequent Indo-Sri Lanka Accord, induction of IPKF to take on the Tigers and subsequent withdrawal under humiliating circumstances is all history.

With over 200,000 internally displaced in the Tiger dominated areas and hundreds of thousands of others cut off from the rest of the world, history is repeating itself.

Alas, for a variety of reasons and changed geo-political realities of the globe, New Delhi is a staunch ally of the Rajapaksa regime in its war against LTTE.

The hands off Sri Lanka poli-

cy pursued by New Delhi, with a modicum of neutrality, since the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in May 1991 stands abandoned.

The Indian position in Sri Lanka is no different at least theoretically from that of Pakistan, the frontline state of the United States in its war against al Qaeda and terrorism in Afghanistan.

India has little or no say in the conflict management related issues.

The role of New Delhi is reduced to that of a supplier of weapons and provider of material and moral support.

Its pleas for meaningful simultaneous political initiatives along with no holds barred fight against the Tigers for resolution of the ethnic conflict have fallen on deaf ears.

With the verdict of the Sri Lanka Supreme Court in October 2006 de-merging the north and east and refusal of the government to make any move towards

re-merger the fig leaf of Indian factor in the form of the 1987 Accord vanished into thin air.

By holding election to the eastern province in May 2008 against the wishes of India, the Sri Lanka government consigned the accord to the dustbin of history.

Forget about larger issues, the Sri Lanka government has defied polite Indian request to re-open the A-9 highway sealed off since second week of August 2006.

The highway is the only link to the Jaffna peninsula, home to an estimated 6.5 lakh Tamils.

The loss of face in Sri Lanka for India is not just political.

The geo-strategic interests of New Delhi, one of the key factors which drove the Indian Lanka policy, are at maximum stake since the island nation gained independence in 1948.

China and Pakistan are developing constituencies in Sri Lanka at a pace which has left India dumb struck.

Beijing with its deep pockets has set its eyes on some of the strategic projects in the island nation like the Hambantota harbour project.

Islamabad is sticking to its traditional and time tested methods of appeal through religion targeting the 8 per cent Muslim population in the country though there is no evidence as yet of its strategy paying dividends.

India, which fancies itself as the United States of South Asia, quietly acquiesced when Colombo in March 2007 signed on dotted lines of the Acquisition and Cross Servicing Agreement authored by Washington. ACSA allows US war and civilian's ships and planes re-fuelling facilities in the island nation.

It is true that the US has similar pacts with 90 other countries and New Delhi itself is expected sooner than later to join the ACSA club. But the fact is India in the past had assiduously opposed such an agreement invoking its special geo-strategic interests in Sri Lanka.

It must be said to be credit of all-powerful Sri Lanka President that he and his government have mastered the art of pitting one world capital against the other. It is practiced with ease if not finesse with great rewards.

When he wants attention of New Delhi, the President or his administration dials Beijing and Islamabad and vice-versa. The mighty super power is no exception. A highly publicised visit of Rajapaksa to Tehran early in 2008 instantly resulted in goodies from Washington. The CIA emerged as the chief campaign manager of Sri Lanka in painting LTTE as more dangerous than al Qaeda.

The Rajapaksa's village logic has so far worked wonders. So petrified is New Delhi at the prospect of Beijing or Islamabad consolidating their grip in the island nation that in the last two years India has given in to every whim and fancy of the Rajapaksa government.

The two Indian technicians, who were injured in the latest aerial attack on the Sri Lanka Air Force Vavunia air base, best illustrate the point. The technicians, part of a team deployed by India to help Sri Lanka guard its skies from the newly acquired Tiger aerial nuisance value, are on deputation to service and maintain

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## NEWS

# India in Sri Lanka's pocket

**Upul Joseph Fernando**  
Daily Mirror

A FORMER Chief of the Indian secret intelligence service, B. Raman, sometime ago declared that an Air Force Pilot of Pakistan based in Sri Lanka was participating in the attacks launched on the Tamil Tigers from Sri Lankan Air Force bases. It is also no secret that China has been supplying necessary arms and weapons to Sri Lanka to fight the war against the Tamil Tigers.

When the LTTE planes attacked the Air Force base in Vavuniya last week, and two Indian Nationals sustained injuries, it became very evident that India too is directly involved in the war against the Tamil Tigers.

When seen against this background, it is deducible that the super powers of Asia are united in the war against the Tamil Tigers. In other words, Sri Lanka, China, India and Pakistan stand united to fight the war against the Tamil Tigers.

What is specially noteworthy in this is, the two countries, China and India who are arch rivals in the race for leadership in Asia; and India and Pakistan who are involved in a bitter power struggle between them in South Asia have all got together as one outfit to fight the war waged against the Tamil Tigers.

Tamil Nadu Bharathiya Janatha Party Leader, once asked the Congress Govt. whether the Govt. of India granted a soft loan to Sri Lanka to purchase arms from China?

Although India's Congress Govt. did not give an answer to this question, it is a matter of perturbation why India released funds to Sri Lanka to purchase arms from China, the country which manifestly poses a grave

threat to India?

Some view this as India's overwhelming desire to destroy the Tamil Tigers, and if India is to provide arms to Sri Lanka, there will be a public outcry against it in Tamil Nadu.

It is therefore, in order to avert this situation, India released the loan to Sri Lanka to procure the arms from China, and combat the LTTE.

It is difficult to comprehend the motive of India which does everything possible to divert China from eyeing South Asia, is bringing China increasingly close to Sri Lanka on the ground that it is to destroy the LTTE.

It is also inconceivable why India which does not brook Pakistan's domination in South Asia is aligned with Pakistan in relation to the war against the Tamil Tigers.

Pakistan too extended aid to Sri Lankan Air Force to destroy the LTTE.

When the Sri Lankan Air Force with the assistance of the Pakistan pilots launched attacks on the Tiger bases which harmed the civilians provoked the indignation and protests of the Tamil Nadu and India's Opposition parties, the Indian Congress Govt. however, without heeding the protests helped to protect the Sri Lanka civil population and the Air Force bases from the LTTE aerial attacks.

India providing Radar equipment to Sri Lanka to facilitate these protective measures is also no secret to Tamil Nadu and India's opposition parties.

When Tamil Nadu party Leader, Vaiko demanded from the Congress Govt. for the withdrawal of the radar equipment, the



**Some say India has been sidelined in Sri Lanka due to the current regime's support from China and Pakistan. Others say Sri Lankan President Rajapaksa (l) has cleverly drawn Prime Minister Singh's (r) regime further into supporting the war, citing the injured Indian personnel** Photo AFP/Getty Images

Indian Govt. explained thus: they had to take this step because the Sri Lanka Govt. would otherwise procure the radar equipment from China, in which case it would spell danger to India; the other reason is that there was danger to India too from the aerial attacks of the LTTE, and therefore India had to intervene and give protection to Sri Lanka's Air Force.

The Nuclear power reactor complex of India which is being built with Russian aid is situated in Tamil Nadu. Safeguarding Tamil Nadu from the aerial attacks of the Tigers is therefore of paramount importance.

The Sri Lankan Govt. was provided with the radar equip-

ment by India with this in view - the protection of the air space of Tamil Nadu. It is on this account, the Tamil Nadu and Opposition parties ceased questioning further on this issue.

However, after learning that India's engineers have come here, and are in the Air Force bases in the North East of Sri Lanka to operate the radar, Indian Opposition and Tamil Nadu parties have begun raising their objections and protests against the Technical experts and army personnel based in the North East, in the war against the Tamil Tigers.

The Secretary of the Indian Communist party too has leveled accusations against the Indian

Congress Govt. that it is assisting Sri Lanka in the war while deceiving the Indian people by lying that it is not.

At the same time, Vaiko has asserted that India's Defence advisor, Narayanan is plotting a conspiracy jointly with the Sri Lankan Govt. against the Tamil population. He adds that there are 265 in total of Indian Technical experts and Forces personnel in Sri Lanka assisting in the war.

If Vaiko's allegations are true, this is the second of Indian Army's visit to Sri Lanka. On the first occasion in 1987, they came in openly. But, this time they have

*Continued on p19*

## India 'betrays Tamils' by providing personnel

### TamilNet

REFERRING to the news that two Indian radar operators were wounded Tuesday when the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) attacked the Vanni Headquarters of the Sri Lankan military, Vaiko, the General Secretary of the Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK), in a letter sent on Thursday, September 11, to the Indian Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh, said that the Indian Government was "caught red handed in its unpardonable betrayal" of involving Indian military personnel in Sri Lanka's "genocidal war" against the Tamils.

He blamed the top level bureaucrats in India, particularly the national security adviser, for "clandestinely conspiring" with the Sri Lankan government.

Mr. Vaiko urged the Indian Prime Minister to immediately withdraw and call back the Indian technicians and military personnel from Sri Lanka.

He charged that, according to the information he had, there was a large number of Indian technocrats and military personnel, up to 265 persons, were fully engaged and assisting the Sri Lankan military.

"With unbearable agony and resentment I am pained to con-

demn, in no uncertain terms, the atrocious involvement of Indian military personnel and the technical engineers, in the genocidal brutal attacks of the Sri Lankan armed forces against the Tamils in the island of Sri Lanka," Mr. Vaiko said in his letter to the Indian Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh.

The UPA government at the centre in India, immediately after its formation, more or less finalised a defence pact with Sri Lanka. Vaiko's MDMK, which was in the UPA, opposed the move. After Vaiko presented a detailed memorandum in person to Dr. Manmohan Singh, he dropped the move to go ahead with the defence pact.

"But the top level bureaucrats, particularly the national security

adviser, clandestinely conspired with the Sri Lankan Government to supply air force radars and military hardware to Sri Lanka," Mr. Vaiko charged.

"I met you in person and pleaded with you not to extend any military help to Sri Lanka but all my pleadings, sorry to say, were thrown into the dust-bin."

"In my previous letters, I have already accused that India is giving all military aid and soft loan to strengthen her sinful and vicious hands to decimate the Tamils," he noted.

"In the wee hours after midnight a 8th September 2008 LTTE launched an arial attack also the ground attack against the Sri Lankan military head quarters in vanni areas. In this attack LTTE air force planes have destroyed

the Sri Lankan air force radar system which was provided and built by India, and two Indian military Engineers, I.A.K.Tagore, Chinthamani Raut, have been seriously wounded."

"Now the Indian Government is caught red handed in its unpardonable betrayal against the Tamils. The Indian Government without an iota of humanism refused to send food and medicines collected in Tamil Nadu to enable the International Red Cross Society to provide solace to the suffering Tamils," he further blamed.

"I would urge upon the Indian Govt. to withdraw and call back the technicians and military personnel from Sri Lanka and stop forthwith any sort of military assistance direct or indirect."



## EDITORIAL

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## Perpetual War

**International policies strengthen the polarization underpinning Sri Lanka's ethnic war.**

It is widely held these days that Sri Lanka's conflict has reached a 'decisive' stage. This pronouncement turns on the belief that the Sinhala armed forces are on the verge of destroying the Liberation Tigers, whereupon the Colombo government would impose a 'solution' that the Tamils will simply have to accept. 'Peace' is thus close. As ever, we opt not to join the armchair military analysts that are legion Sri Lanka in predicting the future of the battlefield. However, we can confidently assert both that Sri Lanka will not see peace in the foreseeable future and that the Tamil liberation struggle is being reinforced by the very dynamics held to be destroying it. Recognizing that such views are considered by many to be laughably optimistic, if not foolish, our case follows.

Before that, it is worth noting that the demise of the LTTE has been pronounced many times before in the past three decades; in the mid-eighties when the Sri Lanka Army (SLA) was starving and blasting the surrounded Jaffna peninsula, in 1987 when the Indian military began its offensive - projected to last three days - to disarm the LTTE, in 1995 when the SLA attacked and occupied Jaffna city and in 1997 when it pursued the LTTE into the Vanni. In all these instances, the self-evident end of the LTTE was based on two things: the overwhelming firepower it was faced with and the hopelessness of its situation made clear by the changing map. In this context, we suggest that analysis without all the facts is mere speculation and that neither the strategy nor the capacity of the LTTE are any more discernible today than they were in 1985, 1987, 1995 or 1997. (We realize, of course, that few non-Tamils credit the LTTE with any strategic foresight).

More importantly, we point out - yet again - that the Tamil armed struggle emerged in the context of inexorably rising Tamil outrage and hostility towards the successive Sinhala regimes that have systematically persecuted the Tamils - politically, culturally, linguistically and economically - and unleashed regular bouts of (first non-state and then state) violence against them. The support for Tamil Eelam since the seventies and - separately - support for the LTTE's armed struggle are thus a direct consequence of Sinhala oppression via the mechanisms of the state. We suggest that Sri Lanka's ethnic tensions are a consequence, not of under- or uneven development, but of chauvinistic state policies and practices which are loathed by the Tamils and, just as importantly, enthusiastically endorsed by the Sinhalese. Thus, with the Tamils facing with the demonstrable



impossibility of securing equality by non-violent means, Tamil militancy (what the Sinhalese and the West call terrorism) is here to stay. In that sense, the cycle of oppression and resistance in Sri Lanka is no different to that in Palestine, say, or other parts of the world today. (There was a time when the destruction of the PLO was deemed the way to end the matter.)

Thus, the crucial factor in deciding whether 'Sri Lanka' will be at peace is whether Tamils and Sinhalese can coexist peacefully in the post-colonial state. In the past few years, the ethnic polarization that has underpinned the practices of the state has become especially acute. In that sense, it is worth remembering even after the economic chaos of 2001, most Sinhalese voted for the warlike SLFP and even with the Muslims, Upcountry Tamils and those Tamils outside the Northeast voting for the 'pro-peace' UNP, the party barely scrapped into power. This truth was there for those who cared to look, even though it suited all, including the Tamils, to pretend otherwise. Unfortunately, even making believe that the UNP had a 'peace mandate' couldn't produce the inter-ethnic harmony that the international liberal peace-builders swore was waiting to erupt.

In that sense, the naïve faith that many

Tamils had placed in the liberal forces of the international community has been thoroughly dispelled now. This week, for example, the European Union was once again anxious to reassure the Rajapakse government - the most openly chauvinist Sinhala regime of the past three decades - that they were keen to continue with business as normal. The relentless tide of extra-judicial killings and 'disappearances', the franchising of local governance to paramilitary sovereigns in the Northeast, the ethnic cleansing of non-Sinhalese (that the Muslims, to their alarm, are also suffering) and the naked chauvinism of the state are apparently no impediment to the arch-liberal EU.

In short, at no time before has the Tamils' unifying sense of perilous isolation been more clearly delineated. This, moreover, is a consequence of the actions of the international community as well as the Sinhala state that it is supporting. This is why the wave of popular nationalism spreading through the Tamils - most palpable amongst the Diaspora - is serving to close ranks and swell support for Tamil Eelam and, consequently, the LTTE. The point here is that, for those who look beyond the maps of battlefield to the 'root causes' of war or the 'foundations' of peace, it should be clear where the island is headed.



## OPINION

# Tamil-Muslim unity crucial for peace

**Dr. A.R.M. Imtiyaz**

SRI LANKA'S six-decade old ethnic tension between the minority Tamils and the majority Sinhalese negatively affected both the island's socio-economic progress and ethnic harmony.

This essay, however, attempts to examine relations between the Tamils and the Muslims, particularly the Eastern Muslims and to emphasise the importance of a truth-and-ethnic-reconciliation approach to build unity between these groups.

The Muslims live all throughout the island "in small communities," and maintain smooth ethnic cohabitation with the Sinhalese for some obvious political and trade objectives. However, they claim they are the majority in the Amparai district of the Eastern province, where exist social and political tension between the Tamils and the Muslims. The Northern and Eastern Muslims became victims of a vicious cycle of ethnic instability that led to the ethnic civil war between the Tamils and the Sinhalese. Muslims of the North and East now claim that they have some special problems and seek solutions to their grievances.

## The Tamil-Muslim divide

In Sri Lanka, politicians emotionalize ethnic relations. There had been a trend in the Sinhala political establishment since S.W. R. D. Bandaranaike's time to effectively ethnicize the political system and relations between different ethnic groups and to outbid opponents on an anti-Tamil platform. The politicization of ethnic emotions by southern parties failed to effectively ethnicize the political system and relations between different ethnic groups and to outbid opponents on an anti-Tamil platform. The politicization of ethnic emotions by southern parties failed to effectively ethnicize the political system and relations between different ethnic groups and to outbid opponents on an anti-Tamil platform.

The political establishment of the Muslims supports the Sinhala political leaders for political and commercial purposes: they vigorously oppose the Tamil demand for self-autonomy in the merged North and East and support successive Sinhala-dominated governments' military actions against the Tamils.

A notable feature of the Tamil-Muslim relations in contemporary Sri Lanka is the Muslim desire to develop a non-Tamil identity based on Islam, a religion which strictly calls obedience only to Allah, a profound message that relentlessly resists any forms of obeisance to all other powers.

The Muslims' decision to seek their own identity based on Islam triggered Tamil anger, but the Muslims primarily blame the Tamils for their disinterest in the wider Tamil identity: the Tamil threat for the Muslim existence cited as the key factor.

This goes back to the period of Ponnambalam Ramanathan who attempted to integrate the Muslims into a wider Tamil com-



A highpoint of Tamil-Muslim relations in Sri Lanka was the signing of a memorandum of understanding between SLMC leader Rauff Hakeem and LTTE leader Velupillai Pirapaharan in April 2002, but the momentum has not been maintained

munity, arguing that the Muslims were but Tamils converted to Islam.

Also, the political position of Muslim elites concerning their interests and aspirations directed the Muslims, who speak Tamil, to develop a distinct ethnic identity based on Islam. Besides, the Muslims have fears that a unified northern and eastern province or the ethnic Tamil state aspired to by Tamil nationalists would not protect the interests of the Muslims. This paved the way for what I call the security crisis.

The Northern Muslims were expelled by the LTTE from Jaffna in October 1990. More than 100 Muslims from Kattankudy were killed inside a mosque on August 3, 1990, and land and properties of Muslims were robbed, particularly in the Batticaloa and Amparai districts. All of which goes to show that the irrational approach of the Tamil resistance movement towards the Muslims of the North and East was the key component of the Muslim frustration, and thus some (affected) Muslim youth eventually resorted to violence against the Tamils and joined the state security forces, either as low-level cadres or as informants.

The question is, 'why did the Tamils target the Muslims?' One theory points to the collaboration of Muslim political leaders in the South with the Sinhala political class since the mid 1930s and '40s. The Muslim political class' outright rejection of the fifty-fifty demand, which was the brainchild of G. G. Ponnambalam, their deep distrust in S.J.V. Chelvanayakam's federal demand, their opposition to the separate state demand of the Tamil resistance movement contributed to the growth of Tamil anger towards the Muslims.

Moreover, Muslim political leaders supported the Sinhala-only policy, and the subsequent university admission policies that were clearly detrimental to Tamil interests. During the 1983 riots, a Muslim Minister is said to have disgraced Islam by unleashing his thugs in central Colombo against the Tamils. The Muslims of the Eastern Province were alleged to have got together with the STF in terrorist exploits against the Tamils there.

## Why unity?

Both the Tamils and the Muslims have been facing common challenges and problems. Since independence, the Sinhala politicians and leaders formulated policies aimed at weakening the interests and status of the minorities, and strengthening the unitary state structure, a kind of political symbol of the Sinhalese.

The bottom line is that the minorities in Sri Lanka have some special problems. These problems are associated with the issues of identity and existence, and thus they need special solutions.

The fact is that the problems of the minorities would not generate some reasonable attention and human solution from the Sinhala political class as long as these communities distrust one another.

## Towards unity

Unity between the Tamils and the Muslims is the key to gain justice and peace from the Sinhala ruling class. However, ethnic reconciliation would not occur among the conflicting groups at the masses level unless attempts at elite level help build a bridge to increase confidence and trust both at masses and elites level.

## Tamil role

The Tamils need to recognize the Muslims' desire to seek a non-Tamil identity. They must allay Muslim fears vis-à-vis the merger and power-sharing. LTTE initiatives such as an apology for Muslim expulsion from the Northern Province in 1990, and permission for resettlement, the return of the lands forcibly taken from the Eastern Muslims and negotiations with the Muslim civil society organizations such as North East Muslim Peace Assembly could contribute to building some trust between the Tamils and Muslims.

The Muslims of the East can overcome their fears to some extent if there is consistency in Tamil efforts to arrest Tamil domination. The Muslims of the North and East claim they have some special problems pertaining to their ethnic identity and security, and expect these issues to be discussed at the negotiating table by their own representatives with the major stakeholders -- the government and the LTTE. The point is that since the Muslims seek a non-Tamil ethnic identity, "they wish to be represented clearly and solely on the basis of their own interests whether or not those interests converge with the interests of the Government and the LTTE, and that is what they are asking for"

## Muslim role

The Muslim politicians' demand for a separate representation at the peace negotiations has an ethnic logic. But that logic would not produce any political legitimacy when the Muslims refuse to give voice for a political solution that aims to go beyond the unitary state structure. The political choices and positions of

the Muslims antagonized the Tamils.

It is the responsibility of the Muslim politicians and activists not to feed the Muslim masses with ethnic hatred. They must build a civic political movement to demand power-sharing beyond the unitary state structure.

The problems between the Muslims and the Tamils should be sorted out through a truth and reconciliation approach. Let each side acknowledge the wrongs done to the other. This is the necessary prelude to the reconciliation, without which ethnic harmony will never be restored. Let neither side think of itself purely as the victim of the other's action..

## Road to peace

Both Tamil and Muslim groups are sensitive to their group symbols. These symbols work vigorously at the masses' level, particularly among the economically and socially weakened sections. The mission to weaken the energy of symbols is not impossible. This requires sincere human effort to seek a future of hope and amity, energy to vigorously challenge the nature of symbols that push members of the group to classify the ethnic and the religious 'others' as an enemy or bad group. These efforts should be backed by a truth and reconciliation process. In other words, the road to peace can be opened if the desire for harmony dominates among the subcultures both at elite and masses level.

*The writer is a visiting scholar at the Department of Political Science, Temple University, USA. These are excerpts from a paper presented during a conference on "Ending the war and bringing justice and peace to Sri Lanka"*



# LTTE thwarts military advances, inflicts heavy casualties

THE Sri Lankan army sustained heavy losses and failed to break through Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) defenses as they attempted repeatedly to advance into LTTE territory in Akkaraayan, south west of Kilinochchi and Vannerikulam, south of Naachikuda in Mannar district.

After the debacle it experienced at the hands of LTTE forces on Monday September 1, the Sri Lankan military halted all offensive operations in Vanni to review its operations.

After a brief lull the army attempted to break through LTTE defences in Akkaraayan on September 15 and again on Wednesday, September 17 and through Vannerikulam on Thursday September 18. The LTTE defence formations thwarted all three advances killing 57 soldiers and wounding another 93.

The Sri Lanka Army (SLA), which launched an offensive in an attempt to advance in Vannerikulam on Thursday, September 18 suffered heavy casualties as the LTTE repulsed the move after heavy fighting that lasted for almost four hours, LTTE military officials in Vanni told TamilNet claiming that 25 SLA soldiers were killed in the fighting and more than 40 wounded.

Two dead bodies of SLA soldiers were recovered and the LTTE seized arms and ammunitions from the battlefield. Two Rocket Propelled Grenade (RPG) launchers, one AK-LMG, five T-56 assault rifles, one T-56-type-2 rifle, Claymore mines, grenades and several rounds were among the seized arms and ammunitions left behind by the SLA forces that were pushed back at Vannerikulam.

LTTE military officials also said the SLA was attempting to advance in the southern sector of the Kilinochchi district last Wednesday amid stiff fighting. Around 10 SLA soldiers were killed in action on Wednesday, the Tigers said.

More than 22 SLA soldiers were killed and at least 53 wounded Monday when the LTTE put up stiff resistance against the SLA offensive units that advanced in Akkaraayan area, southwest of Kilinochchi district, the Tigers said.

LTTE officials in Vanni told

media that the SLA advance was repulsed as journalists witnessed Tigers bringing arms seized from the battlefield in several vehicles.

At least six Rocket Propelled Grenade Launchers, five AK-LMGs, four PK-LMGs, two shoulder fired Light Anti-tank Weapons (LAW), more than twenty T-56 assault rifles, grenades and several military equipments were among the military hardware seized by the Tigers, according to earlier reports.

The fighting that ensued amid heavy artillery, MBRL fire and MI-24 fighter was brought to an end in the evening.

Sri Lankan news paper 'The Nation' described the military losses as "bitter sacrifices" and reported that the LTTE have built a elaborate defensive system in Mannar district to hold off the Sri Lankan army.

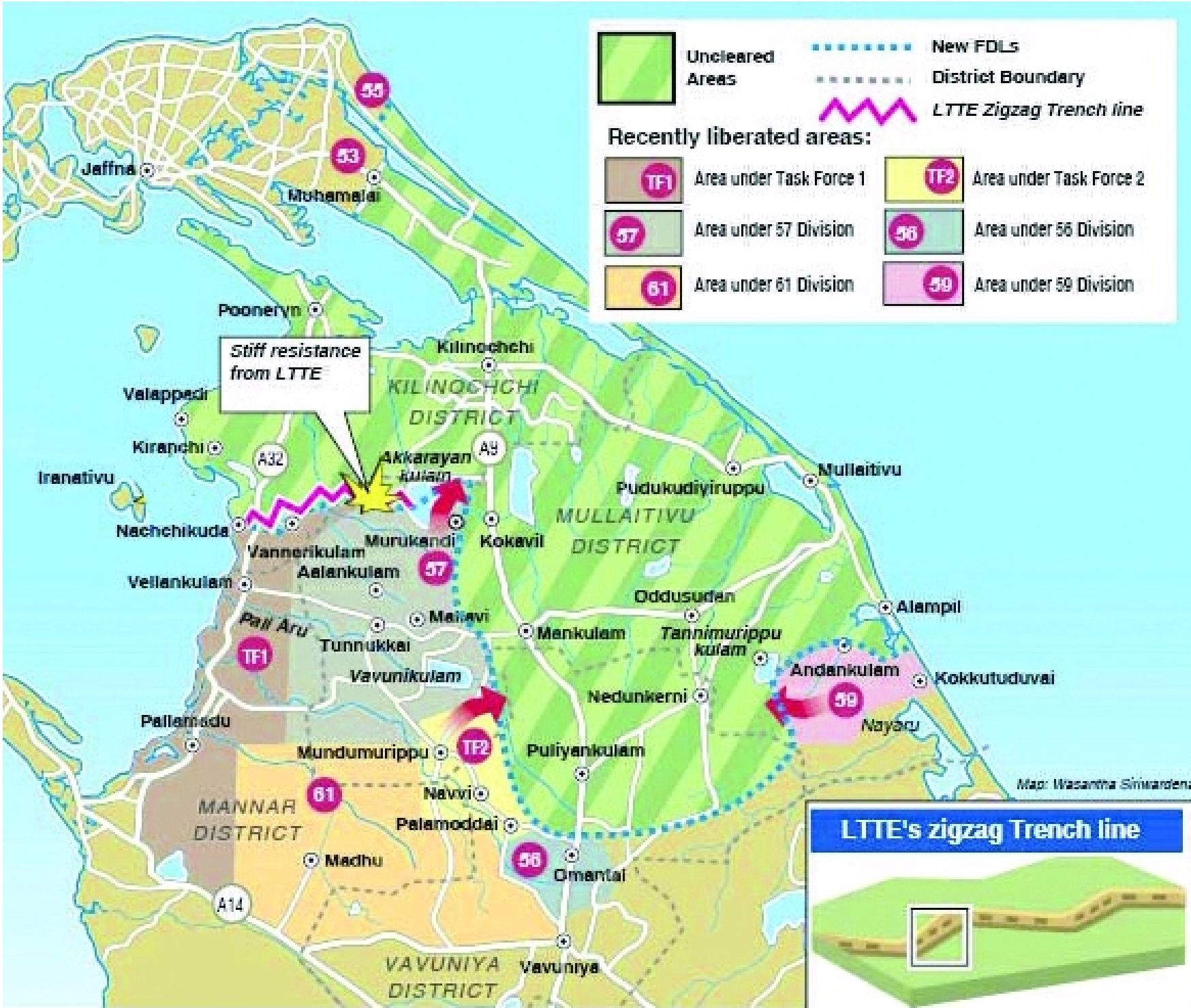
"According to Military sources, the bund cum trench, unlike other LTTE defence lines that the forces overran earlier, is a tried and tested defensive system used by both the Indian and Pakistani armies against each other. To halt the advancing Army, the Tigers have built this formidable trench line for miles facing the south" reported the Nation.

"It had been built, first laying mines on its approaches, then a trench had been cut, especially to prevent crossing of armour and the earth removed from this trench had been used to build a bund above it to a height of eight to 10 feet. Inside the bund are also a series of bunkers, from which vantage the Tigers are able to mow down the advancing Army and call in artillery support, with their clear view of the advancing forces." it added.

Due to political pressure, despite heavy losses the Sri Lankan army is repeatedly attempting to break through LTTE defences with the aim of reaching Kilinochchi which is seen by the Mahinda Rajapaksa administration as the ultimate prize to showcase his administration's achievement.

In a recent interview, asked if he planned to obliterate the Tigers, Sri Lanka's President Mahinda Rajapaksa told foreign correspondents that capturing Kilinochchi is "definite", though it will take some time.

"We are focusing on war,"



Reuters quotes him as saying.

"We can crush them. Why can't we? They are in the jungle at the moment, and our forces are in the jungle at the moment."

Sri Lanka military chief, Lt Gen Sarath Fonseka who has revised the deadline to beat the LTTE several times in the past year, speaking to Reuters last week said: "I don't want to give a timeframe."

Fonseka claimed that the

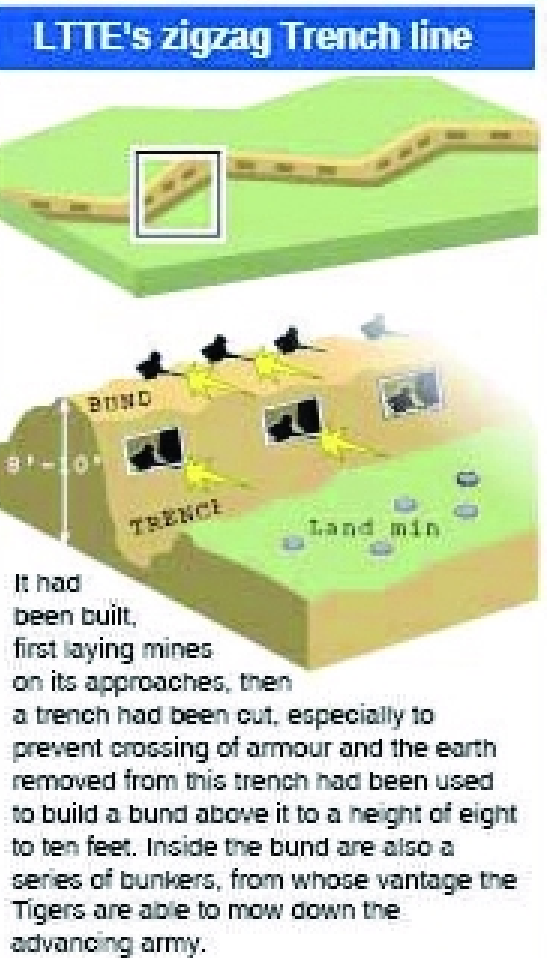
LTTE's strength has been reduced from 12000 cadres to 3000 in the past year. He said that the military had already killed 9,000 LTTE fighters in the north.

"There are over 3,000 cadres, and I don't think they will fight to the last man. When it comes down to a certain level, they will try to go and mingle with the people or resort to other tactics like they are trying in the east," Fonseka said.

"Just now, they [LTTE] are fighting face-to-face because we are fighting the Kilinochchi defense line," Fonseka said.

"The killing rate is very high, so I don't know how long they can afford to resist like this."

However analysts citing past battles, point out that the LTTE fares a lot better in close encounters as the army will not be able to use its heavy weaponry and air power.



**The heavily defended northern fronts have shifted to the Akkarayan area, with the Sri Lankan military facing stiff opposition from embedded Liberation Tiger troops. (above) The map shows the current war zone and the LTTE resistance trenches that are proving difficult for the Sri Lankan military to overcome. (left) LTTE fighters dug into trenches around Akkarayan have been causing heavy casualties to the Sri Lankan military**

# Vavuniya attack: how & why

Iqbal Athaas  
Sunday Times

BARELY two weeks after their foray into Eastern Naval Area Headquarters in Trincomalee, Air Tigers showed up again.

This time they were an integral part of a pre-dawn LTTE ground and artillery assault, on Tuesday, September 11 on the sprawling Security Forces Headquarters - Wanni (SFHQ - W) complex located in Vavuniya.

The defining moments of the attack on this garrison, the northernmost under Government control in mainland Sri Lanka, came thrice in regular intervals of six to seven minutes. First, a group of Tigers infiltrated the area near the Air Force radar unit to spark off a ground battle. Then artillery and mortar shells began to rain. Thereafter, two Czech-built Zlin Z-143 aircraft appeared over the skies to drop bombs.

If sparks lit up the night sky over Vavuniya, vibrations caused by the bombardment shook the doors and windows of many homes. This was in a vast area surrounding this key town, the northernmost in mainland Sri Lanka under Government control. For decades now, Vavuniya has been the gateway to the Wanni where until recently vast stretches of land were dominated by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Military offensives in the past months have seen security forces regain control of large stretches, mostly west of the A-9 highway and some east of it as periodically reported in The Sunday Times.

Within minutes of news of the attack reaching Colombo, everyone who is someone in the country's defence and security establishment was out of their beds. Whilst officials clasped their phones to receive updates, security forces top brass were busy with their respective operations rooms. Minute-by-minute feedbacks were reaching Colombo as the mayhem continued for some five and half hours.

It all began minutes before 3 a.m. Some 14 Tigers infiltrated the Army sector by traversing through private property. This is at a relatively thin stretch, soon after the main entrance, before the complex expands to a much larger ground area. They wore fatigues resembling the Army. They were walking past buildings occupied by two different battalions of the Army's crack Special Forces. It is here that the gun battles broke out. Three female cadres blasted themselves using the 'suicide kits' they wore. Another committed suicide by biting a cyanide phial. Others edged forward to fire their assault rifles and Rocket Propelled Grenade (RPG) at the Indira II radar installed on a knoll or a



Black Tigers who attacked the Sri Lankan SF HQ for Vanni with LTTE leader Velupillai Pirapaharan. Five of the ten Black Tiger commandos are females, headed by Lt. Col. Mathiyazhaki. Photo: LTTE

## A successful attack - LTTE

LIBERATION Tigers of Tamil-eelam (LTTE) claimed that their Black Tigers destroyed the Radar installation inside Sri Lankan military's Vanni headquarters at 3:05 a.m. on 09 September, Tuesday. Thereafter, Tamil-eelam Air Force (TAF) aircrafts and Col. Kittu Artillery formation targeted the Sri Lankan Vanni HQ with the coordination of the Black Tigers, successfully carrying out the operation, the Tigers said, adding that the LTTE aircrafts safely

returned to their bases after completing their mission. The 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.

The Vanni headquarters of the Sri Lankan forces and the headquarters of the Sri Lanka Army Special Forces (SF) for Vanni sustained heavy destruction in the attack, the Tiger statement issued in Tamil further said.

More than 20 Sri Lankan

small hill.

The radar was damaged and two Indian maintenance technicians - A.K. Thakur and Chinthamani Rant - sustained injuries. They were later driven to Anuradhapura and airlifted to Colombo. Another Indira II to replace the radar that was damaged was hurriedly moved by the Air Force on the same day from their main base at Katunayake. The aim of the Tigers was to destroy the Vavuniya air defence radar, the one that was usually the first to locate any LTTE aircraft that is airborne from the Wanni. By moving a replacement Tuesday evening, the Air Force denied the LTTE any freedom of movement over the air in the Wanni theatre without being detected.

Four Indira II radars (named after late Indian Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi) were gifted to Sri Lanka. This was after it became

known that the LTTE had acquired air capability by procuring Zlin Z-143 light aircraft in 2005. Radars are used to detect aircraft, vehicles, ships or other objects through the transmission of electromagnetic waves, which are reflected back by the object. A 2-D radar gives distance and direction whilst 3-D radar would also

provide the (height) or altitude in the case of aircraft.

The Air Force area that was under attack lay near the Army's 211 Brigade. Also located in the same vicinity are the second and third battalions of the Special Forces. There is no doubt the Tigers would have carried out months and months of surveillance piecing together all the information about this target they were to attack. They would have also practised with sand models to prepare their cadres before launching last Tuesday's attack.

This was much the same as the land and air attack on the Air Force base in Anuradhapura on October 22, last year. However, it appears that the Tigers may have either not known or failed to take into consideration the presence of the Special Forces (SF) troops in the area they infiltrated. The measures the SF adopted to protect their troops and installations evidently took the attackers by complete surprise. Besides those who committed suicide, SF troops shot dead within a short time the majority of the Tigers who had infiltrated and planned to wreak further havoc.

Within six to seven minutes of the ground attack, heavy artillery and mortars began to fall in the same area. Highly placed security sources said the Tigers had shifted two 130 mm artillery guns to an area closer to Puliyankulam,

Continued on p13



## NEWS

# History rejects military defeat of liberation movements

Sunday Leader

"WE have been told many times and by many governments of Sri Lanka that the war will be won and that the LTTE will be defeated...I am yet to come across an instance when a national liberation movement in any part of the world has been militarily defeated," said Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam, a Tamil National Alliance (TNA) parliamentarian from Jaffna, responding to a question on year-end dead line set by the Sri Lankan government to defeat the Liberation Tigers.

Mr. Ponnambalam was speaking in an interview with the Colombo weekly, The Sunday Leader, published on 14 September.

*Full text of the interview follows:*

**Q:** About how many civilians are likely to be trapped in the LTTE controlled areas due to the current military engagements? The Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC), estimates the figure to be around 238,831 in the entire northeast.

**A:** Our information is that there are about 500,000 civilians living in LTTE controlled areas purely in the Wanni. Of this figure, over 200,000 civilians are Internally Displaced Persons. Of these IDPs over 130,000 have been displaced several times over since early June due to the aerial bombardment and artillery fire conducted by the GOSL. These IDPs are living under trying conditions. There are some 50,000 individuals living under trees.

**Q:** Do you accept the notion that the LTTE is losing ground?

**A:** The fact is that when compared with the situation that prevailed in the northeast in 2002 when the CFA was signed, there is no denying that the government has gained territory and that the LTTE has lost territory.

The real question is whether that is a demonstration of one side's strength and the other side's weakness. I am not a military analyst. To try and understand what is happening now. I look at what happened over the past 30 years. There have been instances when one side lost and another side gained territory in the past too. In the late 1990s the GOSL had gained a lot of territory but that situation changed dramatically by the time the CFA was signed in 2002. I think it is a mistake to

look at it as a territory debate.

One should not lose sight of the fact that the LTTE in the eyes of the Tamil people is a national liberation movement. That is what is most important. The Tamil people are more behind the LTTE today than they have ever been in the past.

If persons are assessing the situation based on gained and lost territory, my perception is that such people have not learned from the past and are likely to repeat some of the historical mistakes all over again.

**Q:** The government has set a year-end deadline for the capture of Kilinochchi and to eradicate terrorism. Is this feasible in your view?

**A:** In the first place, I don't accept there is a terrorist problem in this island. The Tamil people are fighting for national liberation against an oppressive state. The Tamil National Struggle commenced long before the advent of the LTTE. The truth is that the LTTE is a national liberation movement and is very much alive.

Why the LTTE's presence cannot be discounted is because it is built on popular support.

We have been told many times and by many governments of Sri Lanka that the war will be won and that the LTTE will be defeated. This is also not the first time that deadlines have been given by governments. From the little I know, I am yet to come across an instance when a national liberation movement in any part of the world has been militarily defeated.

**Q:** Unlike other Tamil political parties, the TNA has not called upon civilians to leave the LTTE held areas despite a worsening situation. Why?

**A:** It is clear that the government wants the Tamil civilians to leave LTTE controlled areas and to move to the government controlled areas.

The Tamil civilians in the Wanni know what is happening to the Tamils in the east despite over a year having lapsed. The Tamils continue to suffer immensely in the east. The situation is far from the so-called 'liberation' that the government claims. That does not make it easy for the civilians to enter government areas. On the contrary, they fear the fate that befell the Tamils in the east would now be theirs if they crossed over.

The Tamils have never felt a



The government is deliberately precipitating a humanitarian crisis says Jaffna parliamentarian

sense of belonging to the Sri Lankan State. The Tamils consider the state as hostile to their interests. As to where the Tamil civilians want to move to avoid the fighting is something that should be left to them to decide. But I agree with my colleagues, I believe the civilians would not want to enter government held areas. Currently there are Tamils living in government-controlled areas. The whole world knows how hostile the government treats them.

Therefore the Tamil people in LTTE controlled areas will have natural fears about leaving.

I doubt the civilians in the Wanni think that they can trust a government that has been deliberately bombing civilian targets. I doubt the Tamil civilians in the Wanni are ready to trust a government that has been imposing embargoes and denying humanitarian aid to them and has been using food and medicine as a weapon of war.

**Q:** So your perception is that civilians would not leave LTTE held areas to enter government controlled areas on their own accord?

**A:** Yes. This is my understanding of the situation.

**Q:** Is the government likely to guarantee safe passage to the affected civilians?

**A:** Well the TNA has been meeting the UN and other humanitarian agencies recently. They inform us that the government has indicated that they are willing to agree on a 'humanitarian corridor' to facilitate the movement of the Tamil civilians from LTTE controlled areas to GOSL controlled areas. The government is obviously giving a very narrow interpretation to the 'humanitarian corridor' concept. Since it is very unlikely that the Tamil civilians in the Wanni will want to leave LTTE controlled areas for the reasons that I mentioned earlier, our view is that the 'humanitarian corridor' concept should be given a more realistic interpretation, whereby the government should

permit safe passage to all humanitarian assistance, that is, to all humanitarian workers and the aid they carry to where the affected civilian population is.

**Q:** Following the air attacks by the LTTE, the government claims that one of the aircraft were intercepted and attacked. What is the ground information you have in this regard?

**A:** I know only what I hear from the media and that is, that the government claims that an aircraft belonging to the LTTE was brought down, and the LTTE denying it. But really, I think what is more important is to understand, that the fact of the matter is that there cannot be a military solution to the conflict. This struggle is steeped in the deep political aspirations of the Tamil Nation to be a free people.

Everything that is happening should be viewed in this background. The LTTE has the support of the Tamil population. Besides the local civilian support, it enjoys tremendous diaspora support. The truth is that the LTTE has gone from strength to strength.

I find it difficult to believe that they have suddenly lost this strength, just due to the advent of the Mahinda Rajapakse regime.

**Q:** The LTTE is being accused of using civilians as a human shield. What are your views?

**A:** The LTTE has a lot to lose by using civilians as human shields. The last thing the LTTE would want is to deliberately put the civilians at risk and thereby jeopardise its own support base. The LTTE will not put the people in harm's way, knowing fully well that the people remain their strength. It is a movement built on the people's strength. It is a people's movement and derives strength from the people. Why would it want to put civilians at risk and risk its own future? It is ridiculous even to suggest that.

**Q:** Is it your contention that the LTTE still enjoys massive mass support, despite 30 years of not

being able to deliver to the Tamil people?

**A:** I strongly believe so. There is no disputing that the LTTE is strongly supported by the people.

**Q:** Do you feel that the current situation merits UN or international intervention? In fact the government has requested both NGOs and INGOs operating in the Wanni to move out.

**A:** The TNA has always maintained that the international community must come forward to provide humanitarian assistance to the affected people. We make this point to every foreign actor that we meet, whether it be foreign governments or INGOs.

We also tell them that the GOSL is deliberately precipitating a humanitarian crisis for precisely the reason of getting the Tamil civilian population to leave LTTE controlled areas. They did it in the east and now they are doing it in the north. In other words the creation of this humanitarian crisis is a part and parcel of the government's military strategy. This is obvious to everyone. What we have been telling the international community is that, their not restraining the Government of Sri Lanka when Tamil civilians are being so blatantly targeted will have consequences with regards to their own credibility vis-à-vis the Tamil people. The Tamil people are watching closely as to who is doing what in the international community at this important time for us.

**Q:** The Tamil National Alliance (TNA) is about to make a visit to India and meet Indian leaders. What's the purpose of this visit?

**A:** We would like to go to India. India is an important country. The Tamil people have always wanted good and strong ties with our neighbour. The Tamil homeland is a very short distance away from India. The Tamil people have viewed the people of India even more closely. A lot is happening here. We wish to keep India informed of our views.

## NEWS

# ‘Pain’ of aid...

*Continued from p4*

munity that we had all got to know and develop strong relationships with.

Stopping our programmes was professionally hard, but our staff became the focal point of our emotional state.

The LTTE has a pass system for those who want to leave the Vanni for government areas. Many of our staff members were simply refused a pass for one reason or another.

The passes are granted to individuals, not families, so those who were granted one had a heartbreaking decision to make, whether to leave their spouse and children behind under a barrage of shells and air attacks to come with us to continue to work and earn money, or to stay behind with their family.

To manage, advise and counsel our staff through this process was the hardest thing emotionally I and many of us had ever dealt with.

**The sensation of the approaching doom was all too real. As aid agencies we have concrete fortified bunkers, but the population of Kilinochchi has muddy holes in the ground.**

As the roar of the shells got ever closer to Kilinochchi the urgency of the decision-making increased and staff had to begin to move to government areas, leaving their loved ones behind.

I remember one morning when an air attack happened very close to me. I managed to get into the bunker quickly and narrowly escaped being hurt.

I will never forget the noise of that fighter jet, the unbelievable sound of the engine as it swooped from the sky and the explosions of the bombs dropped close by.

But the lasting image I have is of the sheer panic and traumatised people when I emerged.

As aid agencies we have concrete fortified bunkers, but the population of Kilinochchi has muddy holes in the ground. I saw children shaking with fear and mothers trying to calm them while they themselves were shaking with fear.

We were scheduled to leave Kilinochchi on Friday, 12 September but large-scale protests were held outside our compounds.

The people were chanting "Don't Leave, Don't Leave".

The demonstrators were so polite and respectful to us.

They were not angry, they were desperate.

They understood that we needed to end our operations, and told us that they would manage themselves with shelter and water.

It was the prospect of our physical departure that terrified them. With no international presence and no witness to the conflict, they believed that many atrocities would occur and no one would see this.

For three days the protests continued. We all understood and felt their fear but our hands were tied.

The situation was becoming incredibly dangerous; some international aid workers had to leave their compounds and move to "safer areas" as artillery shells were landing within a few hundred metres of our compounds.

For the final two days in Kilinochchi we spent much time in our bunkers as the artillery and air attacks intensified in and around the town.

The sound through these days was tremendous, everything would shake and the air implode as the shells landed.

In the near distance we could hear the terrifying sound of helicopter gunships, firing rockets.

The residents of Kilinochchi town began to leave, moving further north, away from the approaching artillery.

It was clear we would have to go too the following day or we would be stuck there.

## Shame

On the morning of 16 September we lined our vehicles up at our compound and under heavy shelling and air attacks, wearing bullet-proof vests and helmets, we drove out of Kilinochchi town and headed for the government areas.

We left a number of our staff, who could not get passes, behind. We shared tears, we shared the feelings of terror and intense guilt, and we left.

I remember feeling deep shame as I drove past civilians who were watching me from the side of the road, in my ballistic vest, heading for safety, as they stood there in their trousers and shirts and saris.

We drove through the site of a fresh air attack on the A9 road and once again saw the devastation it caused and understood what may come for Kilinochchi and its civilian population.

Although I appreciate and respect the security rules that govern aid workers and understand why we had to leave, I still have to deal with a great sense that I abandoned those people.

There is the pain and guilt of saying goodbye and good luck to our staff who had worked so hard and with such passion for the victims of war in the Vanni - and leaving them behind.

# Vavuniya attack...



**The LTTE's gunners have been part of the strong resistance to Sri Lankan military offensives stepped up after the Tigers successfully attacked the Sri Lankan forces headquarters in Vavuniya**

*Continued from p11*

located a few kilometres away from the LTTE checkpoint at Omanthai. Mortars had been fired from locations nearby. These guns had been used earlier from the general area of Pooneryn to periodically direct artillery fire at the Security Forces Headquarters in Jaffna. There were occasions when such attacks forced the Air Force to call off temporarily all military and civilian flights to Palaly.

Police later learnt that a Tiger cadre atop a tree and carrying a walkie-talkie gave directions to their artillery gunners to fine tune their targets in the area.

The same sources said the Army directed counter artillery fire destroying one LTTE artillery gun. However, independent verification of this claim is not possible.

The Tigers had fired some 70 to 80 heavy artillery rounds during the pre-dawn attack. Later, on Tuesday afternoon two more rounds fell on the military complex. This was when troops were on a clearing operation within the area as well as ahead of their defended localities.

Another six to seven minutes later, two Air Tiger Zlin Z-143 aircraft were over the military complex. First reports said they dropped eight bombs - four near the Air Force installations on the relatively narrow stretch of land just after the main entrance. The other four had been dropped on the large area that encompasses many buildings including administrative blocks of the SFHQ-W. Three had not exploded. Investigations thereafter have raised doubts on the number that exploded, whether it was only three or less and whether only

five or six bombs were dropped.

The ground, artillery and air attack had begun just before 3 a.m. Tuesday. Within an hour it had ended. However, the search operations for more possible LTTE infiltrators continued until 7.30 a.m. It is only thereafter that the damage caused and the casualty counts became clear.

Initial reports to the media by Army officials said bodies of ten Tiger cadres, including five females, were found within the military complex. As this news spread worldwide, the LTTE repeated the same figure in a news release. Their idea was to hide the exact number of cadres who were assigned to carry out the attack. Later on Tuesday, another male Tiger cadre's body was found bringing the LTTE death toll to 11.

Preliminary investigations by the Police revealed that 14 Tigers entered the military complex and three later got away. They left behind assault rifles, RPGs, grenades, communication sets, a machine gun, a global positioning system, ammunition, chocolates among other items.

The 14 Tigers who took part in the attack Police believe is in addition the one who was atop a tree serving as a forward observer to direct artillery fire. This is not the first time the LTTE had juggled with numbers to give the impression that all their cadres assigned for attacks had been killed.

They did so during the attack on the Air Force base in Anuradhapura. Last Tuesday's attack is no exception.

Thirteen soldiers, a civilian attached to the Army and a policeman were killed at the scene. Another police officer died at the Vavuniya hospital bringing the

death toll to 16. Those wounded were: Army 24, Air Force 7 and Police 9.

The Sri Lanka Air Force claimed later on Tuesday that one of its Chinese built F-7 interceptor jets had destroyed one of the Air Tiger aircraft. Two officers of the Air Force, a security source said, were on hand at last Wednesday's National Security Council meeting to provide a brief on how the attack occurred.

Though the Air Force has no pictorial evidence either of the attack or the debris of the destroyed aircraft on the ground, an Air Force source told The Sunday Times "the pilot activated the firing mechanism only after his on board radar locked on the target. That was how the air-to-air missile was discharged. Thereafter, when he was taking a turn, he saw a huge ball of fire some 600 metres away."

The source claimed the missile would not have been released automatically if the lock-in mechanism did not home in on the target.

However, the LTTE said its aircraft had "returned safely." Independent verification of both claims is not possible.

The attack on Vavuniya military complex has once again highlighted the woefully inadequate measures to ensure perimeter security in military installations.

Like during the attack on the Air Force base at Anuradhapura, the Tigers succeeded in infiltrating a major headquarters complex. With that, directing artillery fire and using aircraft primitive compared to the assets of the Air Force, they succeeded in creating an impact as they came under heavy pressure on the battlefronts in the VVanni.



## NEWS

# Crime without punishment: the strange case of Karuna

Lee Salter  
Ohmy News



**The British government failed to charge Karuna (c) with war crimes, citing lack of evidence, but human rights groups say plenty of evidence was presented to the police**

THE trial, imprisonment and release of a former Tamil Tiger leader raises some tricky and potentially embarrassing questions for the British government. The former leader of the Tamil Tigers in the east of Sri Lanka Commander Vinayagamoorthy Muralitharan alias Karuna was arrested for travelling to the UK on a false passport in November 2007 and sentenced to 9 months in prison at the end of January 2008.

He was released from prison on May 9 and transferred to an immigration detention centre. He was deported at the beginning of July having escaped charges of war crimes and human rights abuses committed in Sri Lanka.

For the past 25 years the Tamil Tigers have been fighting for a homeland in what is now north and east Sri Lanka. During this time Karuna, proved himself to be an adept guerrilla leader. He quickly rose through the ranks of the Tigers to become Special Commander of the eastern region of the Tamil Eelam, in eastern Sri Lanka. Shortly after his promotion Karuna broke from the Tigers to form his own army, the Tamil People's Liberation Tigers.

After switching sides he began to associate with members of the Sinhala establishment, the dominant ethnic group in Sri Lanka. Tamils allege that the association was so strong, and Karuna's army so important in the fight against the Tamil Tigers, that the Sri Lankan army and Special Forces aided his missions against the Tigers.

Throughout this period Karuna has been accused of being behind some of the most abhorrent abuses of human rights in Sri Lanka. Amnesty UK alleges such abuses include torture, hostage taking, the use of child soldiers, and crimes against humanity.

Human Rights Watch refers to Karuna as having a "long and horrific record of abuse", and claim he is "one of the worst human rights abusers ever to end up in custody in the UK". However, few Tamils believed he would become the first person to be suc-

cessfully convicted in the UK for war crimes or human rights violations.

Shortly after arriving in the UK Karuna was charged under Section 25 of the Identity Cards Act for the possession of a false identity document, but the circumstances of his arrest and imprisonment are shrouded with secrecy and intrigue, raising questions about the role and competency of the British government.

At Isleworth Crown Court Karuna pleaded guilty to travelling on a fraudulent passport, but said he did so with the backing of the Sri Lankan government. Karuna's lawyer, David Philips, told the court that Karuna "entered the United Kingdom using a diplomatic passport ... it contained a six month multiple visit visa, issued at the British High Commission" in Colombo.

"The Sri Lankan government gave him the passport and sent him to the United Kingdom" and it was the Sri Lankan Defense Secretary, Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, also the Prime Minister's brother, who organised it.

He went on to say that Karuna did not go to the British High Commission to collect the documents and was merely following the instructions of the Sri Lankan government.

Karuna's lawyer told me that none of Karuna's allegations were investigated, and no questions about them have been asked in Parliament. He went on to tell me that his attempts to investigate were met with closed doors and a "wall of silence".

Despite Karuna's claims of a change of heart, his break with the Tigers was generally regarded as opportunistic. Very few sources are prepared to talk on the record about Karuna for political or safety reasons. However, Nadesapillai Vithyatharan, a prominent Tamil newspaper editor in Sri Lanka, and a friend of Karuna's when he was in the Tigers, explained that Karuna jumped before he was pushed. Karuna had allegedly embezzled money from the Tigers, infuriating their leader, Velupillai

Prabhakaran. Karuna was a marked man.

His relations with the Sri Lankan government did not fare much better. By 2007 it seemed that Karuna's usefulness to the government was beginning to ebb away. In June of that year, the editor of the Asia Tribune, K.T. Rajasingham, met with the President of Sri Lanka, Mahinda Rajapakse and his Minister for Social Welfare, Douglas Devananda, in Geneva to discuss Sri Lankan affairs, including the "problem" of Karuna.

The minutes of the meeting show Rajasingham's stance on Karuna: "Unfortunately, I supported Karuna thinking that though he started his career as a terrorist, he could be rehabilitated", made to respect human rights and be repositioned in the democratic mainstream of politics. He went on to explain that Karuna was a liability to the Sri Lankan government, "a spent force".

Three years after leaving the Tigers, "he has no more real stories to narrate and will be of no use to anyone". Rajasingham's most chilling comment is that Karuna's former deputy and political rival Pillayan "is planning to arrest Karuna" but is hesitating due to opposition from the Defense Ministry. "I suggest the government get rid of Karuna, a liability and work with Pillayan and his men who are more popular in the east than Karuna".

Pillaiyan has since become the government's man in the east. Banda (not his real name), a Sinhala, and a Sri Lanka expert for a major international news organisation explains, on condition of anonymity, that, "due to fratricidal animosities between Karuna and Pillaiyan, Karuna sought the help of the government to get out of the country".

Karuna was, then, willingly removed from Sri Lanka, but given allegations of serious war crimes and human rights abuses hanging over him, it is unlikely that he could have wished British

authorities to hear of his escape.

In addition to Rajasingham's evidence, independent sources have confirmed that, as Karuna alleged in court, Sri Lankan officials helped him through the airport, bypassing customs, and delivering his passport to him onboard the plane.

The British government seemed to have been convinced enough by Karuna's evidence to call the Sri Lankan High Commissioner to the Foreign Office for an explanation. The Sri Lankan government has denied all allegations of assisting Karuna.

The question is, however, if the Sri Lankan government wanted rid of Karuna why go through such a convoluted process? This is Sri Lanka after all, where disappearances are part of daily life. A number of explanations exist. Vithyatharan suggests that assassination or disappearance was out of the question, for it would have heralded a "victory for the Tigers".

Banda explains that Karuna is considered something of a folk hero amongst the Sinhala community in Sri Lanka for turning the tide of the 25-year civil war against the Tigers. He is a "Sinhala hero, remember that. He's the one who helped the government army to chase Tigers off the East". Any obvious action against Karuna would have been deeply unpopular.

It is highly probably that Karuna would not have been able to leave the country without the help of the Sri Lankan government. Visas from Sri Lanka, especially those issued for diplomatic passports, are not given out without government assurances that the application is genuine. Further, all persons entering and exiting embassies and high commissions, especially in war zones, are logged for security reasons. Although identity fraud is common in Sri Lanka it is rare for diplomatic passports to be forged.

Karuna could not have picked up the passports himself. The

journalist who broke the Karuna story in Sri Lanka for the Sunday Leader, Ranjith Jayasunderas, explains that British embassy officials he spoke to are "certain that his passport was delivered to them by regular Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry channels".

The question remains, however, of the competence of the British High Commission in Colombo and perhaps even the Foreign Office. One British member of the European Parliament with an interest in Sri Lanka said, off the record, that the British government issued the visa "on the basis of support" from the Sri Lankan government, and was "stitched up by the Sri Lankan government" in a way that was "alarming to say the least".

However, Karuna's face is rather well known in Sri Lanka and among the diplomatic community in Sri Lanka - at least as well known as Martin McGuinness's is in the UK.

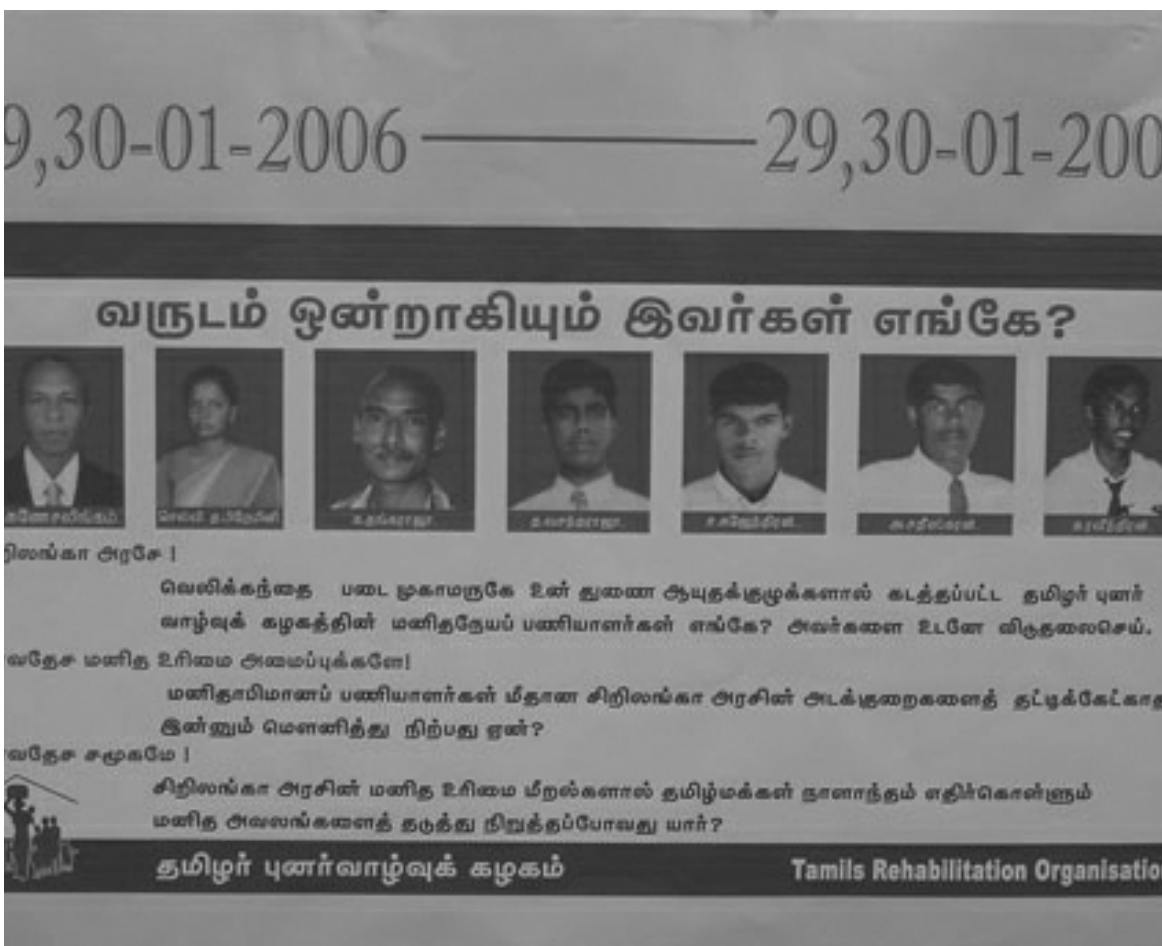
There is little chance that Britain's High Commission staff did not recognise Karuna's photo on the passport when issuing the visa. It would be remarkable if at least one official in the High Commission had not recognised Karuna's photograph.

A senior British MP said, on condition of anonymity, that the "history of Tamil Tiger participants is that clearly there have been various covert and sanctioned exercises where individuals have left (Sri Lanka) over the years". "I guess that our man in Colombo and the Foreign Office and other governments would not find themselves in unknown territory to allow free passage".

Banda suggested that the Foreign Office may have intervened on behalf of the Sri Lankan government to ensure Karuna's safe passage. "My contacts within the HC in Colombo didn't know this went through until it blew up they were not aware ... so it looks like someone high up was really involved".

Whether or not they were,

## NEWS



One of the many crimes Karuna is alleged to have ordered is the abduction and killing of seven TRO aid workers in Batticaloa in January 2006. Their remains have never been found, but an investigative journalist revealed that the staff had been executed, with the sole female gang-raped before being killed.

there have been few if any questions asked about the conduct of the High Commission staff. As Jayasunderas points out, "this need not have been Karuna. It could very well have been Bin Laden with plastic surgery, smuggled in by the Sri Lankan government. He would have gotten through just the same".

The Home Office refused to comment on the case. The High Commissioner at the time, Dominick Chilcott, told me that the questions raised here are "all very good" but that he cannot comment on the matter.

Perhaps the most disappointing element of the debacle, especially for human rights activists, was the inaction of the British government when they may have had the opportunity of securing a conviction of an alleged war criminal.

Both Amnesty and Human Rights Watch petitioned the UK government and the Metropolitan police to charge Karuna but the case was not pursued. Yolanda Foster, Amnesty International's expert on the case, claims that there was a collection of evidence from NGOs presented to the Metropolitan police, including a large number of credible cases of human rights abuse.

Human Rights Watch has gathered considerable evidence of Karuna's role in human rights abuses, including the abduction of children to serve as child soldiers, in the form of case studies, witness statements, maps and photographs. Evidence gathered by the Norwegian Sri Lanka Monitoring Project and UNICEF confirm the allegations. UNICEF alone has documented evidence of more than 200 cases of child soldier recruitment by Karuna's militia.

Amnesty is unhappy that despite the quantity of evidence,

the police sent only a limited number of cases to the Crown Prosecution Service. The CPS says it dropped the case because it felt the information presented by the Met was insufficient. It says there was "insufficient evidence to provide a realistic prospect of conviction for any criminal offences in the UK".

The reasons for the lack of evidence presented to the Crown Prosecution Service are still unknown. The Guardian made a freedom of information request, which was not fruitful. The Met have failed to respond to letters from Amnesty and the chair of Parliament's Sri Lanka Group, Andy Love, attempted to find out more from the Home Office, but it refused to divulge details of the case.

"The claim about lack of evidence seems spurious" Chandra Sriram, the director of the Centre on Human Rights in Conflict told me. The real issue for Sriram given the abundance of available evidence against Karuna "is the absence of political will to carry a case forward".

"The British government blew it," says Brad Adams, Human Rights Watch's Asia director. Adams accuses the government as a whole for the failure to prosecute, from the police to the Home Office. The police and CPS seemed not to understand who they had and lacked the resources to pursue the case. For Adams, the government's stated commitment to human rights is "not matched by its actions".

Amnesty's Yolanda Foster told me, "We are very disappointed that the UK government did not pursue the case".

"There were very serious allegations made against Karuna but he has been returned to Sri Lanka where there is a culture of impunity". Amnesty is concerned that

Sri Lankans who did come forward now face retaliation.

Having now been deported, Karuna's fate in Sri Lanka remains uncertain. Whilst some who know him, including his lawyer, are impressed by his "fierce loyalty", others believe that suspicion and in-fighting may spell the end of Karuna one way or another.

The Tamil People's Liberation Tigers's political wing, part of the the United People's Freedom Alliance, contested and won elections in the former Tiger strongholds in the east earlier this year.

Although the victory was tainted by claims of intimidation and fraud, leading to the withdrawal of the largest Tamil party, the Tamil National Alliance party, the result has been accepted by the government.

Sri Lankan media have reported that Karuna has been reinstated as the leader of his party, leaving activists to bemoan a missed opportunity for the British government to show its commitment to human rights.

Karuna's was, however, a pyrrhic victory, for in his absence his rival Pillayan was offered the post of Chief Minister of the Eastern Provincial Council. Just in time to meet the British Foreign Office minister, Lord Malloch-Brown during his four-day visit to Sri Lanka. Karuna remains on the sidelines.

Karuna still has many enemies, both among Tamils and Sinhalese. His fate hinges on his continued worth to the Sri Lankan government. The only certainties are that the human rights situation in Sri Lanka will continue to deteriorate and ordinary Sri Lankans will continue to suffer.

*Dr. Lee Salter is a lecturer in Journalism and Media Studies at the University of the West of England, Bristol.*

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## DIASPORA

# Tamil Australians hold vigil in Canberra

TamilCanadian

AUSTRALIAN Tamils living in Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra gathered in Canberra on 17 September to hold silent vigils in front of the Parliament House and the Indian High Commission urging them to express their opposition to the genocide of Eelam Tamils.

The protest was organised by the Australasian federation of Tamil Associations (AFTA), the peak body representing the Tamil community that migrated from Sri Lanka.

AFTA submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister of India through the High Commissioner in Canberra. While in Canberra, an AFTA delegation also met with the Acting Director of the UN Information Centre for South Pacific Region and submitted a memorandum to the UN Secretary General.

Eelam Tamils from Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra started to gather in the Lawns of the Parliament House from 9.30 am and started the vigil at 11 am. Ladies and gentlemen, old and young, lined up silently at the edge of the lawns next to the main road in between the Parliament House and the Lawns, holding a banner which read "Australia ! Break Your Silence Against Genocide of Eelam Tamils", and many placards carrying pictures of the displaced suffering under trees and on roadsides, with appropriate slogans written on them.

AFTA placed an advertisement in the National news paper "The Australian" to appear on the day of the vigil, publicising the human rights violations of the Sri Lankan government and carrying a demand by the Australian-Tamils for action from the Australian government through the UN and the Commonwealth to bring a halt to Sri Lanka's military aggression and a return to the internationally facilitated peace process.

The advertisement covered half the page in the middle section of the news paper and copies were distributed to the Australians who were visiting the Parliament house during the vigil.

Speakers after speakers, in both English and Tamil, addressed the gathering, condemning the Rajapaksa government's action of expelling the UN and other 11 NGO aid agencies.

Professor Brian Senewiratne an ardent supporter of the Tamils' struggle for self determination, who wanted to be there but could not come due to work commitments, sent a message which was read out. In his message Professor Seniwiratne described how the Sri Lankan governments have systematically and slowly involved in the genocide of Tamils. He qu-

estioned the Australian government, what has it done about this? "It prefers to take in refugees but not address the problem that has made these people refugees - the brutality of a murderous regime in Colombo" said Professor Seniwiratne.

While this was going on in the Lawns, as both members of Parliament and Senators were busy debating key issues inside the Parliament House, and were not allowed to get out to, come to the Lawns and speak to the protestors. Therefore several delegations of AFTA were received by MPs and Senators, whenever they could find a break, and the members of the delegations explained the situation on the ground in Vanni and urged the politicians to persuade the Australian government to break its silence and act to prevent a disaster. Separate submissions were made to the offices of the Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Opposition Leader too.

By 2 pm, the protestors wound up the vigil in front of the parliament house and proceeded to the Indian High Commission. Here the protestors held a banner which read "India ! Stop Betraying Tamils - Your True Allies. Recognise Their Right to Self-Determination". Protestors used the same placards to show the hardship the displaced Tamil refugees are facing.

A three member AFTA delegation was received in to the High Commission building by the Personal Secretary to the High Commissioner, Mr. Hari Prasad where the Chairman of AFTA Dr. Raga Ragavan, assisted by the Secretary Mr. Murugesu Paramanathan and Executive Council member Dr. Victor Rajakulendran, explained the ground situation that has been created by the recent military operations and the expulsion of the NGOs.

The delegation expressed AFTA's concern over the military assistance, particularly using Indian personal in combat areas. At the end of the discussion the Chairman submitted a submission to the Indian PM, Hon. Manmohan Singh.

During the day, an AFTA delegation met Ms. Julia Dean, who is acting for the Director of the UN Information Centre for South Pacific Region (pending a new appointment) and discussed the crisis that has arisen due to the expulsion of NGOs. She was well aware of the situation and handed in to the delegation the latest report on the situation regarding this matter. An AFTA submission to the Secretary General was also handed in by the delegation.

# Varnangal 2008 celebrates multiculturalism



TYO-UK'S North Eastern division held their annual programme, Varnangal 2008, on Saturday 13 September, at the Chingford Assembly Hall in London.

The chief guest for the night was Tamil National Alliance (TNA) parliamentarian Pathmini Sithamparanathan.

Locals turned out in force to support the youngsters and raise money for charity.

The programme included a combination of acts from different cultures.

Different cultures represented included Kurdish folk music to Middle Eastern and Egyptian belly dancing, Brazilian Capoeira and British street dance.

Billed as the first multicultural show for TYO, most of the acts were non-Tamil, with only a traditional Barathanaatyam dance and a dance to some cinema songs having a connection to the Tamil identity.

But Tamil youth were also part of the Capoeira and the street dance crew, drawing appreciation from the audience for their efforts.

The audience was treated to a fashion show, provided by Casipillai Collections, creating a platform for glittering girls in sparkling saris.

There were also a massive unintended sing-alongs, where the audience chose to participate in solo singers' performances, and spur them on.

TGT (Tamils Got Talent) presented a fresh, innovative and highly amusing twist on Tamil talent shows.

Dance acts such as ATM<sup>2</sup>, 'Kiss this', Phoenix Girls, Bhagavathy Crew and many more put on a display that competed with the TV professionals.

The organisers considered the show a success.

