

NEWS

'International norms have become a joke'

THE LTTE doesn't obstruct the civilians of Vanni or instruct them on what direction they have to take in fleeing the current phase of war, but people want to stay in LTTE areas for security reasons argues the head of a Vanni welfare organisation.

"Allowing the war to continue, leaving Tamil civilians in the hands of the preying Sinhala army, which we dread, demonstrates only the cruelty of the few minds that determine the course of the war from outside of the island and how international norms evolved through civilisation have become a joke," said P. Kanakalingam, the president of Vanni People's Welfare Organisation, last Thursday.

Describing the civilian movement as the second exodus of Eezham struggle, Mr. Kanakalingam said around 100,000 civilians were on the move.

But, a large section of the civilians have considered that their security, even now, lies in the LTTE held areas in the eye of war, and are spontaneously moving towards that direction, he said.

The movement has continued for days as Tamils from Vadamaradchi East, Chundikkulam and Vaddakkachchi, and from Tharmapuram, where the civil administration was centred after the displacement from the Kilinochchi town, all move further into LTTE controlled territory.

This is in contrast to the 1000 civilians the Sri Lankan military claims have moved into military controlled territory.

A driver, who was returning in his vehicle to Tharmapuram from Kaiveali, said it took 10 hours to pass one kilometre.

"The Establishment of the International Community by assenting to Colombo's conspiracy of sending away the U.N. Agencies and the International Non Governmental Organisations from Vanni and by remaining silent when it has to act, has become a party to be indicted in the genocide of Eezham Tamils," said Kanakalingam.

"Which norms of liberal democracy preached by the International Community accord with not attending to expulsions of civilians, exodus and genocide?" he asks.

People were struggling to take cover from the artillery shells that were exploding continuously. Very few volunteered to help the wounded. It was difficult to get an overview of the casualties, TamilNet reported.

Shells exploded in refugee settlements in Puththadi, Thoddidiyadi and Vinaayakar koayiladi

near the hospital.

The makeshift hospital at Visuvamadu Maha Viththiyaalayam was struggling to function as shells were exploding at a one kilometre distance in both the directions.

Vehicles were piled up throughout the road from Tharmapuram to Kaiveali, a suburb of Puthukudiyiruppu. It takes two days and two nights to pass through the whole stretch of around 16 km road distance, locals estimated.

Last Wednesday heavy rainfall added to the woes of the people on the move with their belongings in tractors and other vehicles.

The following day the road was dusty as hundreds of vehicles were moving on both the directions. The rugged road caused vehicle breakdowns, which added to the misery.

There were no government officials from the district or divisional secretariats to help the civilians. Most of them had gone to Vavuniya, Tamil Net reported, adding that it was not known whether they had been instructed by the government to do so.

The TRO and civil personnel of the Tamileelam Administrative Service were engaged in helping the civilians at some locations, where the volunteers were seen providing cooked food.

Civilians were seen in all the jungles areas from Thearaavil towards Kaiveali and on both sides of the road.

Many complained that they had no cloths to change after the rain and that they had no meal for more than 60 hours. They were living under the trees with their belongings.

"These are IDPs in Vanni. They wish to remain in Vanni in an area without Sri Lankan military and its bombardment," said the president of the Vanni welfare organisation.

Kanakalingam argues that it is unfair of the International Community to refer to them as IDPs of Sri Lanka. Such a reference, in his argument, technically implies that they could be displaced further to any part of the island.

"We should be treated as IDPs of Tamil territories resisting capture from the Colombo government," he argues.

Only a few thousands of civilians, mostly trapped in the peninsular part captured from the LTTE, were taken by the SLA.

To discourage civilians of the peninsula moving towards the LTTE held areas in Vanni, the Sri Lankan forces attacked them while crossing the land bridge by artillery and aerial bombardment.



Recent rains have worsened matters for refugees fleeing Sri Lanka's continual shelling of Tamil areas

At least 40 civilians were wounded in these attacks, press reports said.

The whereabouts and the fate of nearly 200 civilians reportedly captured by the Sri Lanka Navy in the seas off Vadmaradchi East, are still not known.

"Look at the plight of the civilians who live in Sri Lanka Army occupied Jaffna, where more than 800 have been reportedly killed within the last 3 years, another 800 disappeared and more than 250 languishing in prisons after seeking humanitari-

an protection with the Human Rights Commission," said Kanakalingam.

"We are also reminded of hundreds of those who were killed and buried in Chemmani in Jaffna after the Sri Lankan occupation of Jaffna in 1995," he says.

Vanni civilians under deadly siege

TamilNet

"THERE are no words to describe the plight of the civilians who say that they prefer to face death on the spot rather than succumbing to serious injuries or ending up in the hands of the invading Sri Lankan forces, which many of them regard as genocidal military and fear that their young men and women would be 'filtered' away, tortured or killed by it," reported a TamilNet correspondent from an outskirt of Puthukudiyiruppu last Sunday evening amid artillery fire.

The indiscriminate fire was targeting areas where there were no hostile military activities. The fighting was going on in a few corners, but the artillery barrage by the Sri Lankan forces was targeting all the areas, threatening to cause civilian carnage, completely ignored by the International Community.

As nearly all of the civilians are displaced, they are unable to conduct proper funeral with rites. There are dead bodies unattended due to artillery siege, only some of those killed are buried hurriedly before the remaining have to choose fleeing onwards

from the onslaught of the indiscriminate shelling.

Ambulance drivers said they spotted at least 10 dead bodies on Sunday. 6 of the bodies were transported to hospital mortuary. But, there were reports of more bodies lying in areas inaccessible by the ambulances. The casualties were reported in Valluvarpuram (Redd Barna settlement), Mayilvaakanapuram (2 dead bodies recovered), Thearaavil and Maanikkapuram. 12th Mile Post in Visuvamadu, Punnaineeraavi and areas close to Chundikkulam, which have come under continuous artillery barrage.

At least 18 civilians were killed within the last 24 hours and 42, including many children, women and elderly, wounded in the indiscriminate artillery barrage by the SLA, according to available data from the medical sources, as reported earlier.

But, many more are feared dead, wounded and trapped in areas not accessible for medical assistance.

On Saturday, the premises of Punnaineeraavi school, one of the few remaining localities where Ki'linochchi hospital is functioning, came under artillery barrage. All treatment at the hospital

stalled and there was no medical transport available to approach the injured. Civilians were screaming and running in all directions, confused and shocked by the indiscriminate bombardment.

Medical authorities said they had repeatedly urged protection for medical installations and provided coordinates through the ICRC.

Two civilians were killed and six wounded while they were fleeing from their house in Punnaineeraavi, while the hospital was under artillery barrage on Saturday. Three of the wounded, with serious injuries, had to wait for hours for medical assistance.

Many of the wounded civilians were only managing with the first aid knowledge that they now possess.

At Piramanthanaaru, at least two civilians were killed when their tractor, hit by artillery shelling got fire and burnt down on the spot on Saturday. Also on previous day, the shelling by the SLA killed 3 civilians who were fleeing with their belongings on Piramanthanaaru - Visuvamadu Road.

"Deaths by artillery shells have become all too common."

NEWS



The humanitarian catastrophe that is unfolding in the Vanni has seen almost the entire population of the region on the roads in order to escape artillery and aerial bombing

Humanitarian tragedy in Vanni getting deadlier

INDISCRIMINATE fire by the Sri Lanka Army from all corners of a shrinking territory already overcrowded with civilians has worsened the humanitarian disaster unfolding in the Vanni.

Deaths and injuries to civilians fleeing the Sri Lankan military onslaught are daily occurrences, while hospitals to treat the injured are also coming under attack.

The civilians are trapped in territory centering on Puthukkudiyiruppu town, its suburbs and adjoining jungles in the Mullaitheevu district. This is the same area that the Sri Lankan military is targeting with its shelling, air strikes and multi-barrel rockets.

There are deaths and injuries caused to the civilians fleeing the onslaught of the SLA.

Medical authorities have said the situation was beyond control and that hospitals have come under attack.

Ambulances are also not operating as access route from Vadamaraadchi East have been cut off by the SLA, while the Mullaitheevu Puthukkudiyiruppu land route has also been blocked by the indiscriminate mortar attacks.

The entire area with civilians has come under artillery range. Gunfire was heard in all the directions. Unless the shelling is stopped, every shell being fired into the overcrowded area would cause civilian casualties, local reports said.

The access route for civilians to cross over into Vanni mainland from Vadamaraadchi East has been blocked by the SLA, according to initial reports.

Medical personnel at the hospital in Visuvamadu said the situation was pathetic as SLA-fired shells were exploding in the close vicinity.

The hospital at Tharnapuram

has been displaced and the streets were full of vehicles with displaced civilians trying to move further away from the attacks.

The adjoining areas of makeshift hospitals in Visuvamadu and Puthukkudiyiruppu hospital have also come under artillery fire by the SLA, which is driving civilians away from Tharnapuram and Vaddakkachchi by intensifying bombardment.

Meanwhile, hospital authorities in an urgent appeal issued Tuesday afternoon urged the Red Cross to at least take efforts to safeguard the hospital premises from the Sri Lankan shelling.

Twenty eight civilians have been killed within the first 13 days of the year and at least another 185 wounded, local reports said.

Blood was not available at Puthukkudiyiruppu and makeshift hospitals, TamilNet reported.

As hospitals were displacing to relatively safer areas, there are more wounded from all corners being rushed to the makeshift hospitals functioning in schools and under trees.

There are reports of civilian deaths and casualties in Visuvamadu town being vacated by the civilians. Multi-Barrel Rocket Launcher attacks targeted Athisaaya Vinayakar temple in Visuvamadu, causing panic among the fleeing civilians.

Detailed reporting and verification of casualties have become difficult under the prevailing circumstances.

There have been no reports of fighting in densely populated areas. However, the SLA has been continuing artillery attacks and gunfire.

There have also been reports of civilians moving towards Vadamaraadchi East, recently occupied by the Sri Lanka Army.

Civilians fleeing fighting have no safe passage: ICRC

TENS of thousands of people, on the run because of fighting between Sri Lankan government troops and the LTTE, have no safe passage, the Red Cross said Friday.

Aid workers and diplomats have expressed growing concern over the fate of the civilians trapped in LTTE-controlled territory in the northeast after months of fighting, especially with increasing reports of civilian casualties.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said it was "extremely concerned" that the warring parties had not agreed on a safe route for civilians since

January 9.

"For the last five days for example, there has been no aid that has reached this population at all because of the fighting," Paul Castella, the ICRC's head of delegation, told Al Jazeera.

"And its not just about aid or assistance, but also about health-care for the sick and the wounded," Castella said. "As you know, a number of hospitals had to be evacuated because of the moving frontline."

"This has put at risk the lives of patients who cannot receive suitable treatment on the spot and therefore need to be transferred to Vavuniya Hospital, in govern-

ment-controlled territory," the ICRC said in a statement.

It did not say what type of treatment the patients needed and if they had been hurt in the fighting.

The ICRC said there had been a "massive displacement" of civilians - many of them having already been forced to move numerous times - who were increasingly seeking safety away from the war zone.

"Repeated displacements, often involving the loss of their personal belongings, have taken a toll," Castella was quoted by AFP

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Concerned over the deteriorating situation in east

In a statement on January 9, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) expressed its concern over the situation in the East of Sri Lanka.

UNHCR is concerned over the deteriorating situation in Sri Lanka's east following a significant increase in the number of killings, abductions and injuries in areas of return during the last few months. In November alone, the United Nations recorded 24 civilian deaths in the Batticaloa district.

We're also worried about the negative impact these security incidents may have on the sustainability of the return process.

Most of the more than 200,000 people displaced during fighting between government forces and the Liberation Tamil Tigers of Eelam (LTTE) in the eastern districts of Trincomalee and Batticaloa have returned

home over the past two years.

UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies have been supporting the government in reintegration programmes, principally in shelter and quick impact community based livelihood programmes and through the provision of non-food relief items.

But returnees in the Batticaloa area report they increasingly feel intimidated and face restrictions on their movement, which limits their ability to support themselves and their families.

More than 50 families have already left their villages in some of the return areas in Batticaloa due to fear and insecurity.

Others are no longer sleeping in their own homes, but gather

several families in one house at night.

UNHCR calls upon the Government of Sri Lanka to effectively investigate these security incidents and urges the relevant authorities to provide adequate security to all civilians living in these areas.

We are also concerned over the abduction of four refugee returnees from India in the Trincomalee district.

UNHCR is heartened by the fact that more than 1,500 Sri Lankan refugees returned from camps in Tamil Nadu in southern India in 2008, either spontaneously or with our facilitated voluntary return programme.

We are keen to see this positive trend continue this year.

UNHCR is also closely monitoring the rapidly developing situation in Sri Lanka's north, where some 250,000 people remain displaced due to the ongoing conflict.

FEATURES

And then they came for me

Lasantha Wickrematunge, editor-in-chief of *The Sunday Leader*, who was gunned down in an execution-style shooting on Thursday, January 8, writing from his grave pointed the finger at his killers. Three days after the killing, Wickrematunge's newspaper published a haunting, self-written obituary in which he says he was targeted for his writings and adds: "When finally I am killed, it will be the government that kills me."

NO other profession calls on its practitioners to lay down their lives for their art save the armed forces and, in Sri Lanka, journalism. In the course of the past few years, the independent media have increasingly come under attack. Electronic and print-media institutions have been burnt, bombed, sealed and coerced. Countless journalists have been harassed, threatened and killed. It has been my honour to belong to all those categories and now especially the last.

I have been in the business of journalism a good long time. Indeed, 2009 will be *The Sunday Leader's* 15th year. Many things have changed in Sri Lanka during that time, and it does not need me to tell you that the greater part of that change has been for the worse. We find ourselves in the midst of a civil war ruthlessly prosecuted by protagonists whose bloodlust knows no bounds. Terror, whether perpetrated by terrorists or the state, has become the order of the day. Indeed, murder has become the primary tool whereby the state seeks to control the organs of liberty. Today it is the journalists, tomorrow it will be the judges. For neither group have the risks ever been higher or the stakes lower.

Why then do we do it? I often wonder that. After all, I too am a husband, and the father of three wonderful children. I too have responsibilities and obligations that transcend my profession, be it the law or journalism. Is it worth the risk? Many people tell me it is not. Friends tell me to revert to the bar, and goodness knows it offers a better and safer livelihood.

Others, including political leaders on both sides, have at various times sought to induce me to take to politics, going so far as to offer me ministries of my choice. Diplomats, recognising the risk journalists face in Sri Lanka, have offered me safe passage and the right of residence in their countries. Whatever else I may have been stuck for, I have not been stuck for choice.

But there is a calling that is yet above high office, fame, lucre and security. It is the call of conscience.

The Sunday Leader has been a controversial newspaper because we say it like we see it: whether it be a spade, a thief or a murderer, we call it by that name. We do not hide behind euphemism. The investigative articles we print are supported by documentary evidence thanks to the public-spirit-edness of citizens who at great risk to themselves pass on this material to us. We have exposed scandal after scandal, and never once in these 15 years has anyone proved us wrong or successfully prosecuted us.

The free media serve as a mirror in which the public can see itself sans mascara and styling gel. From us you learn the state of your nation, and especially its management by the people you elected to give your children a better future. Sometimes the image you see in that mirror is not a pleasant one. But while you may grumble in the privacy of your armchair, the journalists who hold the mirror up to you do so publicly and at great risk to themselves. That is our calling, and we do not shirk it.

Every newspaper has its angle, and we do not hide the fact that we have ours. Our commitment is to see Sri Lanka as a transparent, secular, liberal democracy. Think about those words, for they each has profound meaning. Transparent because government must be openly accountable to the people and never abuse their trust. Secular because in a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society such as ours, secularism offers the only common ground by which we might all be united. Liberal because we recognise that all human beings are created different, and we need to accept others for what they are and not what we would like them to be. And democratic... well, if you need me to explain why that is important, you'd best stop buying this paper.

The Sunday Leader has never sought safety by unquestioningly articulating the majority view. Let's face it, that is the way to sell newspapers. On the contrary, as our opinion pieces over the years amply demonstrate, we often voice ideas that many people find distasteful. For example, we have



The Sunday Leader report of the assassination of its editor, and his posthumous editorial. Photo AFP

consistently espoused the view that while separatist terrorism must be eradicated, it is more important to address the root causes of terrorism, and urged government to view Sri Lanka's ethnic strife in the context of history and not through the telescope of terrorism. We have also agitated against state terrorism in the so-called war against terror, and made no secret of our horror that Sri Lanka is the only country in the world routinely to bomb its own citizens. For these views we have been labelled traitors, and if this be treachery, we wear that label proudly.

Many people suspect that *The Sunday Leader* has a political agenda: it does not. If we appear more critical of the government than of the opposition it is only because we believe that - pray excuse cricketering argot - there is no point in bowling to the fielding side. Remember that for the few years of our existence in which the UNP was in office, we proved to be the biggest thorn in its flesh, exposing excess and corruption wherever it occurred. Indeed, the steady stream of embarrassing exposes we published may well have served to precipitate the downfall of that government.

Neither should our distaste for the war be interpreted to mean that we support the Tigers. The LTTE are among the most ruthless and bloodthirsty organisations ever to have infested the planet. There is no gainsaying that it must be eradicated. But to do so by violating the rights of Tamil citizens, bombing and shooting them mercilessly, is not only wrong but shames the Sinhalese, whose claim to be custodians of the dhamma is forever called into question by this savagery, much of which is unknown to the public because of censorship.

What is more, a military occupation of the country's north and east will require the Tamil people of those regions to live eternally as second-class citizens, deprived of all self respect. Do not imagine that you can placate them by showering "development" and "reconstruction" on them in the post-war era. The wounds of war will scar them forever, and you will also have an even more bitter and hateful Diaspora to contend with. A problem amenable to a political solution will thus become a festering wound that will yield strife for all eternity. If I seem angry and frustrated, it is only because most of my countrymen - and all of the government - cannot see this writing so plainly on the wall.

It is well known that I was on two occasions brutally assaulted, while on another my house was sprayed with machine-gun fire. Despite the government's sanctimonious assurances, there was never a serious police inquiry into the perpetrators of these attacks, and the attackers were never apprehended. In all these cases, I have reason to believe the attacks were inspired by the government. When finally I am killed, it will be the government that kills me.

The irony in this is that, unknown to most of the public, Mahinda and I have been friends for more than a quarter century. Indeed, I suspect that I am one of the few people remaining who routinely addresses him by his first name and uses the familiar Sinhala address *oya* when talking to him. Although I do not attend the meetings he periodically holds for newspaper editors, hardly a month passes when we do not meet, privately or with a few close friends present, late at night at President's House.

There we swap yarns, discuss

politics and joke about the good old days. A few remarks to him would therefore be in order here.

Mahinda, when you finally fought your way to the SLFP presidential nomination in 2005, nowhere were you welcomed more warmly than in this column. Indeed, we broke with a decade of tradition by referring to you throughout by your first name. So well known were your commitments to human rights and liberal values that we ushered you in like a breath of fresh air. Then, through an act of folly, you got yourself involved in the Helping Hambantota scandal. It was after a lot of soul-searching that we broke the story, at the same time urging you to return the money. By the time you did so several weeks later, a great blow had been struck to your reputation. It is one you are still trying to live down.

You have told me yourself that you were not greedy for the presidency.

You did not have to hanker after it: it fell into your lap. You have told me that your sons are your greatest joy, and that you love spending time with them, leaving your brothers to operate the machinery of state. Now, it is clear to all who will see that that machinery has operated so well that my sons and daughter do not themselves have a father.

In the wake of my death I know you will make all the usual sanctimonious noises and call upon the police to hold a swift and thorough inquiry. But like all the inquiries you have ordered in the past, nothing will come of this one, too. For truth be told, we both know who will be behind my death, but dare not call his name. Not just my life, but yours too, depends on it.

Sadly, for all the dreams you

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FEATURES

Condemnation pours in after editor killing

ATTACKS against media took a turn for the worse, after President Mahinda Rajapakse brought the media ministry under his direct control, with the killing of the editor-in-chief of one of Sri Lanka's leading English language dailies was killed in an execution style shooting on Thursday, January 8.

Lasantha Wickramatunge, editor of Sunday Leader newspaper, was shot by gunmen on motorcycles in broad daylight as he drove to work in the city suburbs. He died from head wounds after nearly three hours of surgery.

The killing came barely two days after the main control room and studios of a private television station, MTV Networks, were badly damaged in a pre-dawn assault by an armed gang using automatic weapons, grenades and a landmine.

Lawyer-turned-journalist, Wickrematunge exposed corruption and nepotism in the government headed by Mahinda Rajapakse and was a strong critic of the ongoing military campaign. On previous occasions, he had been beaten up, his house fired at and his newspaper presses sealed under emergency regulations.

International rights groups, diplomats and local activists expressed outrage at the attacks, while opposition politicians accused the government of at best condoning the violence and possibly ordering the strikes itself.

The UN and foreign governments, including the USA, EU and India, and media rights organisations condemned the attacks as hundreds of journalists and activists took to the streets of Colombo the day after Wickrematunge's killing to demand justice.

In a statement issued by the UN Resident Coordinator's office in Colombo, the United Nations official said: "We respected him as a fearless and indefatigable journalist and an unrepentant defender of freedom of expression. His untimely demise reminds us all of dangers still faced by the media and journalists in exercising the fundamental right to inform and to hold and express opinion."

"The United States strongly condemns the murder of Lasantha Wickrematunga," Deputy Spokesman of the Department of State Robert Wood said in a written statement.

"The murder ... is a shocking blow to independent media in Sri Lanka. This is ... just the latest in a string of incidents against journalists. The United States is deeply concerned that such

attacks undermine efforts to build a united and democratic Sri Lanka where the rights of all people are protected. We call on the Government of Sri Lanka to investigate these attacks expeditiously, bring the perpetrators to justice, and take all possible measures to protect freedom of expression for members of the press." Wood added.

The Presidency of the European Union also issued a statement strongly condemning the murder of Wickramatunge.

"This action deprived Sri Lanka of a person who had contributed greatly to freedom of the media and diversity of opinion in Sri Lanka. The European Union sends its condolences to Mr Wickramatunga's family, friends and colleagues."

"The EU Presidency expresses its deep concern that this and other recent acts of violence and intimidation against media and journalists, including those against the studios of the MTV/Sirasa TV and Radio in Colombo, go against the basic principles of democracy."

"The Presidency calls on the authorities of Sri Lanka to investigate all acts of violence and intimidation against the media, and to bring the perpetrators to justice," read the EU statement.

"We are deeply shocked and saddened to learn of the demise of the well-regarded Editor of Leader group of Publications of Sri Lanka, Lasantha Wickramatunga, following an armed attack in Colombo," an Indian High Commission release said.

"This deplorable incident comes in the wake of the series of attacks on and intimidation of media organisations and personalities in Sri Lanka including the recent bombing of the studios of Maharaja TV," the release said.

"We urge the Government of Sri Lanka to investigate these attacks fully and bring the perpetrators of these reprehensible attacks to justice," the release added.

The campaigning group Reporters Without Borders said: "Sri Lanka has lost one of its more talented, courageous and iconoclastic journalists."

"President Mahinda Rajapakse, his associates and the government media are directly to blame because they incited hatred against him and allowed an outrageous level of impunity to develop as regards violence against the press."

Sunanda Deshapriya, spokesman for Sri Lanka's Free Media Movement, a local media rights group, said harassment of journalists has been common, and cited these examples from the past



Vigils across Colombo protested the killing of Lasantha Wickrematunge, by forces close to the Sri Lankan President according to his own final editorial. Photo Lakruwan Wanniarachchi/AFP/Getty Images

year: two journalists killed, another journalist shot at, more than 50 reports of intimidations and threats, 12 media personnel arrested, 16 journalists physically assaulted, one tortured, one assaulted in an abduction attempt, the circulation of a list with 27 journalists targeted for killings, the proposal of a censorship law, and the naming of some journalists as terrorists or terrorist supporters.

"Sri Lanka prides itself as a functioning democracy. Yet media freedom, a vital pillar of democracy, has increasingly come under attack," said Brad Adams, Asia director of the US-based Human Rights Watch, commenting on the killing.

He added that the recent military victories should not be taken as a signal that dissent could be stifled.

Media groups say that Sri Lanka is one of the most difficult countries in the world in which to report.

According to Reporters With-

out Borders, Sri Lanka was ranked 165th out of 173 countries in the organisation's 2008 press freedom index.

The Paris-based international non-governmental organization which advocates freedom of the press said this was the lowest ranking of any democratic country.

According to Amnesty International, at least 14 media workers have been "unlawfully killed in Sri Lanka" since 2006, the year that the newly installed government of President Mahinda Rajapakse stepped up the anti-LTTE offensive.

"Others have been arbitrarily detained, tortured and allegedly disappeared while in the custody of security forces," the organisation said, adding that more than 20 journalists had left the country after receiving death threats.

Although the government of Sri Lanka has condemned such actions and promised to investigate the crimes, little or no investigation has been done and no one

has been brought to justice.

Following the killing of Wickramatunge, Mahinda Rajapakse condemned the killing, saying it highlighted "the existence of forces that will go to the furthest extremes in using terror and criminality to damage our social fabric".

He said he would initiate an immediate investigation, but the main opposition United National Party called for an international probe, saying it did not trust local investigators to do a proper job.

However, in his column predicting his own assassination, Wickrematunge mocked the president personally and forecast that no one would ever be arrested in his murder.

"In the wake of my death, I know you will make all the usual sanctimonious noises and call upon the police to hold a swift and thorough inquiry," he wrote, addressing Rajapakse. "But like all the inquiries you have ordered in the past, nothing will come of this one, too," he wrote.

And then they came for me...

Continued from p4

had for our country in your younger days, in just three years you have reduced it to rubble. In the name of patriotism you have trampled on human rights, nurtured unbridled corruption and squandered public money like no other President before you. Indeed, your conduct has been like a small child suddenly let loose in a toyshop. That analogy is perhaps inapt because no child could have caused so much blood to be spilled on this land as you have, or trampled on the rights of its citizens as you do. Although you are now so drunk with power that you cannot see it, you will come to regret your sons having so rich an inheritance of blood. It can only bring tragedy. As for me, it is with a clear conscience that I go to meet my Maker. I wish, when your time finally comes,

you could do the same. I wish.

As for me, I have the satisfaction of knowing that I walked tall and bowed to no man. And I have not travelled this journey alone. Fellow journalists in other branches of the media walked with me: most of them are now dead, imprisoned without trial or exiled in far-off lands. Others walk in the shadow of death that your Presidency has cast on the freedoms for which you once fought so hard. You will never be allowed to forget that my death took place under your watch. As anguished as I know you will be, I also know that you will have no choice but to protect my killers: you will see to it that the guilty one is never convicted. You have no choice. I feel sorry for you, and Shiranthi will have a long time to spend on her knees when next she goes for Confession for it is not just her own sins which

she must confess, but those of her extended family that keeps you in office.

As for the readers of The Sunday Leader, what can I say but Thank You for supporting our mission. We have espoused unpopular causes, stood up for those too feeble to stand up for themselves, locked horns with the high and mighty so swollen with power that they have forgotten their roots, exposed corruption and the waste of your hard-earned tax rupees, and made sure that whatever the propaganda of the day, you were allowed to hear a contrary view. For this I - and my family - have now paid the price that I have long known I will one day have to pay. I am - and have always been - ready for that. I have done nothing to prevent this outcome: no security, no precau-

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EDITORIAL

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Peace or Perpetual War?

The moment has come for the Tamils to unite as a people and stand fast

The territorial advances of the Sri Lanka military this month has produced what is said to be an existential moment in the island's sixty-year-old ethnic crisis. The end of the LTTE is confidently predicted by the Sinhala government, as ever, and various pundits who have begun to speculate on the various futures to follow. As always, we will desist from tactical military predictions. Instead, we will confidently state, once again, that Sri Lanka will not see the end of Tamil militancy until and unless Sinhala oppression is permanently checked. By this we do not mean a political solution, but the concrete impossibility of further Sinhala tyranny. The two are, as is often conveniently forgotten, not the same.

To begin with, the LTTE is a product of Sinhala oppression and Tamil defiance. Just as the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) was a product of Israeli oppression and Palestinian resolve. Although the Sinhalese and the West have preferred to see the LTTE as a project unto itself, i.e. an externality to the imperfect 'normalcy' of Sri Lanka, basic political analysis begs the question: what dynamics, exactly, has ensured the LTTE a steady and widening stream of committed fighters, funding and political support from the Tamils for over three decades? And what can be expected of those dynamics in the hereafter?

The Sinhala (and Western) fixation today with eliminating the LTTE and its leader Vellupillai Pirapaharan as a solution to the Tamil question mirrors that of Israeli (and Western) obsession of yore with eliminating the PLO and Yasser Arafat as a solution to the Palestinian question. Observers of the Middle East will recall how the end of the Palestinian struggle was confidently predicted in 1982 after the massive Israeli onslaught into Lebanon 'boxed' the PLO into Beirut. However, Palestinian militancy did not end because Israeli oppression did not end. Instead, the latter escalated and the former kept violent pace (it is worth reflecting, at this juncture, on why the PLO and Arafat later became dubbed 'moderates').

Tamils have never rioted against Sinhalese. But, even before the armed conflict began, our people had been subjected - in 1956, 1958, 1977, 1981 and 1983 - to what Professor Sankaran Krishna has aptly called "annihilatory violence". As he also argues, "these periodic explosions of violence against Tamils represent efforts to put them back in their places on grounds they have become too assertive and need to be taught a lesson." The Sinhala military has taken over

from the Sinhala mobs, but the Tamils, it seems, still refuse to learn their lesson, to accept their rightful place under the Sinhalese, that the island belongs to the people of the lion and we - and other non-Sinhalese - are invading interlopers.

The Rajapakshe government, the other Sinhala parties and the majority of the Sinhala people (save a shrinking handful of progressives) are united in violently teaching the Tamils the lesson begun sixty years ago. Notice how not one Sinhala voice protests the daily slaughter of Tamil civilians in the north. It is not an accident that Sinhala chauvinism is undisguised today: the belief that the LTTE is (finally) being destroyed drives a misplaced confidence that the Tamils can (finally) be subordinated.

The point here is that Sinhala chauvinism is the 'tectonic plate' underlying the island's crisis. The mentality that resulted in 'Sinhala Only' in 1956 is even more entrenched in the fabric of the state and polity today. The reason a federal answer was impossible then is the same reason it is impossible now, a point those preoccupied with 'solutions' ought to bear in mind.

Yet, for the most part, the fixation has been on the LTTE and "its" demand for Tamil Eelam. Many - including even some Tamils - have suggested, especially during the reverie induced by the Norwegian-led peace process, that a federal solution is "enough". But this logic of 'extreme' and 'reasonable' demands suggests that the Tamils are being indulgent while choosing from some kind of constitutional menu. But is that the problem in Sri Lanka, our demand for independence? What came before that to precipitate such a radical demand by our people?

As for a 'political solution', would the Sinhala people - today baying hoarsely for more blood as scores of Tamil civilians are killed and maimed - have ever agreed to a federal solution? Even if it had been signed with one of the Sinhala parties, would it have lasted - what happened to the much-vaunted PTOMS after the tsunami? Even the anemic provisions of the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord were discarded by the Sinhalese when they thought the moment opportune. Why would things have been any different re: federalism?

It is worth noting that Tamils' faith in an 'internal' solution - whatever it may be - was based entirely on the international community's integrity as its underwriters. Indeed, in 2003 US Ambassador Ashley Wills even confidently assured the Tamils in a media interview that "now that the international community is watching" they no longer have any

need of the LTTE. Well, the West is certainly watching today - just as they did in Sebrenica, in Rwanda or, if the point needs need underlining, in Gaza.

The history of Sri Lanka's armed conflict has been marked regularly by Colombo's confident predictions of 'the end' of Tamil militancy. Even when much detail of the battlefield was available, escaping the censors best efforts, as in President Chandrika Kumaratunga's time of 'War for Peace', for example, those analysts daring or foolish enough to predict the course of history have been consistently wrong. Yet today, despite an extraordinary blackout, confident predictions abound.

These flow, moreover, primarily from a 'self-evident reality' marked out by the Sri Lankan military-supplied binary colored map. The LTTE, SLA commander Lt. Gen. Sarath Fonseka asserts, has been 'boxed' into Mullaitivu. Perhaps. But the LTTE has been so cornered before, in Jaffna and in Mullaitivu. It is precisely in this situation that the true colours of the Sinhala have come out, on the one hand, and the Tamils have stood closer together, on the other. In other words, this is when the Tamil project of nation-building and liberation has moved forward.

There are those who ask what the Tamils have achieved after sixty years of conflict. That is self-evident. Lest it be forgotten, this is not a war not of our choosing, but one forced upon us by the murderous ethnocracy the British left behind. Yet we have not been subdued. We have not accepted a place as second-class citizens in our own homeland or surrendered our dignity as a people. No matter what deprivations the Sinhalese and their international allies have visited on our people, no matter how they have sought to erase our national identity we have resisted. We have made defiance our hallmark.

The Tamil struggle for self-determination is at a crucial moment today. This is not about the armed struggle - the will to resist embedded in the LTTE will ensure that Sinhala hegemony remains an impossibility. Rather, it is about how to the Tamil nation moves beyond the myth we have been laboring under, that of peaceful co-existence as equal with the Sinhala nation being possible. The Sinhala nation is today making its greatest effort yet to annihilate the Tamil nation, politically and physically. Having made this possible, the international community is watching and waiting. The moment has come for us to unite as a people and stand fast - until we can never be put in this situation again.

OPINION

Traumatised children and a disordered society in Tamil Eelam



Tamil children are being traumatised by the war in their homelands and the effects will be longstanding

Children can be more traumatized by the war than adults, but there are things we can do about it.

Janani Barathy

AS the fireworks thundered above our heads welcoming 2009 in Sydney, despite the magnificent display, my three year old son was terrified - clutching my shoulders and burying his head - only occasionally having the courage to look up while his older sister looked on gleefully.

I remember him being terrified at the age of one when we had brought him along to watch the fireworks - but he still seemed very fearful of sudden large noises. Standing under that colourful night sky, I felt sad thinking about the outcomes of traumatised children in war situations. How many bombs Sri Lanka would have dropped in Tamil territories since I first saw an aerial bombing back in 1986, I wondered.

A day later when the Army entered Kilinochchi, I plunged further into depression and had to remind myself of the power of proactive deeds of individuals and positive visualisation.

One cannot fathom the hardships that the Tamil youth would have endured in fighting a highly equipped army that advanced from many sides, backed by Pakistani and Chinese weaponry and Indian radar operators!

It's almost like, it is the rest of world vs. Tamil Eelam. If only India had done something.

These kind of "if only" scenarios ache our hearts. One simply cannot eliminate the sick feeling of having Kilinochchi - a prototype of a free and fair Eelam of the future, an infant model of our statehood - crushed before our own eyes.

Anyway, leaving political and military outcomes aside, in this article I have attempted to highlight two long felt concerns of mine - disorder in society and the effects of trauma in children.

While lamenting about the loss of land, we need to focus on the survivability and wellbeing of future generations in Tamil areas.

In this article, I am not talking about the relatively small middle class populations, but the vast

majority of poverty stricken people in the war torn Tamil areas - the poor or those who have become poor, keeping in mind the many years of medical and economic embargo and the prolonged war.

What are the future outcomes for a young IDP (Internally Displaced Person or Refugee) child who has been a refugee for most or whole of his/her life? What are the outcomes for children living on hand-outs or in prolonged poverty and insecurity?

What will happen to children with interrupted schooling or no schooling? What about the subset of children who are more timid in nature and have less coping skills? Add to that, the trauma of a physical injury or losing a parent? These are some of the questions that come to mind.

First of all, when looking at trauma in children, one can acknowledge that given the right support systems, many children have good chances of bouncing back to their normal physical, emotional and cognitive developmental milestones.

Many of us have grown up to be well balanced individuals even after experiencing traumatic aspects of the war. But, what about repeated and prolonged exposure to traumatic events?

The traditional society of Ilankai Tamils has had many support systems or "safety nets" such as: the extended family system; strong religious beliefs, strong spiritual beliefs and de-stressing techniques and rituals; an ecologically friendly way of living or living off the land with a great awareness for environmental conservation and sustainability.

But, prolonged unrelenting war can pound and pound until holes are created in these safety nets! Children are especially prone to the disorders associated with trauma.

Maybe excepting teenagers, many children neither have the cognitive ability to make sense of why the war is happening nor the

emotional ability to cope up with family, social break down and disruptions to normal way of living, normal education etc.

The intensified horrific war that we are seeing now in Tamil areas, has reached new levels in the destruction of society.

While Sinhalese children wake up to go to schools, the scared, displaced Tamil child rotting away without schooling in a dismal shelter, wakes up to the sound of shells in the middle of night.

Take a young toddler who gets scared by the noise of the thunder or fireworks and put him/her in Vanni war zone, and the child would not cope with the bombs, cluster bombs and shells, let alone the constant running from one place to another, lack of food, lack of family and school routines etc.

Now, if there is the added trauma of injury or death - the child's sense of security and well

being is seriously damaged.

For a child, the parents and caregivers are powerful people. Seeing powerful people rendered powerless, can be very traumatic to the young child.

To compound the issue even further, the surviving parent or family member might be occupied with getting or providing very basic needs, that the emotional needs of the child can easily go unanswered.

Brooks and Siegel (1996), two experienced psychologists who worked with traumatised children talk about different kinds of trauma - death, illness and injury, abuse, natural disasters and trauma by proxy.

They talk about children who had been in car accidents who refuse to go back into the car, children who had seen buildings collapse due to earthquakes refusing to be inside buildings etc.

They talk about how different age groups react differently to trauma (see box for summary).

It's easy to deny or turn away from the psychological and mental problems that can occur in war situations especially since stigma is attached to such happenings.

We need to be aware of these problems among vulnerable groups especially children, just as we are aware of loss of lives, limbs, property and a way of life, that is taking place in the Tamil homeland.

The Sinhalese government is well aware of the benefits of creating a disordered Tamil society. One can clearly see it has an agenda of creating "reserve" like areas or pockets of fragmented IDP populations who are often reduced to living on handouts.

It is effectively waging a psy-

Continued on p14

Reaction to trauma in various age groups

Summary of Brooks, B. & Siegel, P. (1996) The Scared Child - Helping Kids Overcome Traumatic Events US: John Wiley & Sons Inc

Age group - 0 to 2

- Are unable to articulate how they feel (limited vocabulary). May fuss more.
- May lose developmental steps already acquired
- May fail to learn new and expected developmental tasks

Preschoolers : Age group 2 - 5

- Preschoolers combine reality with fantasy/make belief. The very self centered outlook at this age may cause them to think that they caused the events.
- May lose developmental steps already acquired
- May become aggressive in their interactions with others
- May express non-realistic ideas about an event ("Father was taken away because I was bad")

- May become anxious and clingy
- Playing the same game over and over again maybe a sign of post traumatic stress
- May get angry, sullen or intense with play

School age children: Age group 6 -12

- More realistic thinking of this age group, makes the world a very frightening place for them - "Even Mother and Father can't protect us". "Mother and Father are just as frightened and vulnerable".
- Tends to put a brave face while still traumatised inside
- Lack of control over trauma may make them feel that the future is unsure. Hence, some children might engage in reckless behaviour
- Significant change in School performance - may find it difficult to concentrate and to perform
- May blame themselves
- Sleep disturbances, difficulty

- sleeping
- May show fear of supernatural things
- This age group believes in rules. When bad things happen even when they have been good and have obeyed rules, children may become oppositional and defiant

Teenagers

- They feel whatever they are working for or studying for, can be destroyed in a minute - So planning for the future is pointless.
- May develop a negative self image because they are not able to avoid or alter a situation
- Engages on revenge fantasies but then feel guilty about their feelings.
- May experience a shift (either an intensification or withdrawal) in the normal developmental tasks of their age - such as love, friendship, sense of autonomy ie They can become obsessive or withdrawn

TAMIL DIASPORA PROTESTS

Sri Lanka targets Tamil Diaspora, but they too resist

FOLLOWING the capture of Kilinochchi and Elephant Pass Sri Lankan defence establishment started psychological operations targeting the Tamil Diaspora spread across the globe, according to informed sources.

But the result has been the opposite of what the Sri Lankan government hoped, with an increasing number of Tamils taking to the streets in support of the liberation struggle and those dying in the Tamil homelands.

Expecting the Tamil Diaspora to be demoralised by the Sri Lankan military's territorial gains, and in an attempt to further demoralise the Tamils living in North America, Europe and Australia, the Sri Lankan military has been portraying a bleak picture of the fortunes of the Liberation Tigers.

Whilst political leaders and the military chiefs are claiming the end of LTTE and projecting total victory within weeks, the defence establishment has been leaking stories of disarray, defection and discontent within LTTE ranks, hoping these messages would alienate the Tamil Diaspora and the LTTE, say informed sources.

Sri Lankan military spread rumours include LTTE leader Velupillai Pirapaharan escaping Mullaitheevu, LTTE Commanders Bhanu and Theepan defecting to side with the government and LTTE Intelligence wing head Pottu Amman being imprisoned by the LTTE.

However, Tamil sources say that Sri Lanka efforts have not had the anticipated impact on the Tamil Diaspora.

They have had the opposite effect, observers claim, coming as they do on top of Sri Lankan government organised celebrations over the capture of areas like Kilinochchi.

Instead of being demoralised by false stories being propagated by Sri Lanka, Tamil communities across the globe are actively engaged in highlighting the plight of fellow Tamils in Sri Lanka.

They have also stepped up shows of solidarity with the liberation struggle through protests and vigils, with younger Tamils at the forefront of organising events.

In London, more than 9000 Tamils gathered in front of the Prime Minister's residence on January 17, urging British Prime Minister Gordon Brown to exert pressure on the governments of Sri Lanka and India to call for an

immediate ceasefire in Sri Lanka. 'Stop the war!', 'Stop Tamil genocide!', 'Mahinda! Stop the war!' and 'We want Tamil Eelam!' were some of the slogans shouted during the protest, along with the beat of drums.

"The worsening humanitarian tragedy unfolding in Vanni where Tamil civilians are pounded with indiscriminate artillery barrage and aerial strikes killing even infants and children has energized the Tamil Youths in UK to rise in protest," protestors said.

This was the third of a series of events organised by the Tamil Youth Organization (TYO) in United Kingdom as part of an 'Awareness Campaign'.

The protesters said they hoped the campaign would grow into force that will bring British Tamils to act in unison to find a just and honourable solution to the Tamil struggle.

In a similar series of events, nearly 300 Norwegian Tamils, along with Norwegian Members of Parliament and political leaders, gathered on the premises of the Norwegian Parliament on January 16, appealing to the Norwegian government to save Tamils in the Vanni.

The demonstrators urged Norway and the International Community to immediately act to bring about a ceasefire in Sri Lanka.

Separately, on January 20, around 400 Norwegian Tamils gathered in front of United States Embassy in Oslo, urging the US government to help stop the genocidal war on the Tamils in Vanni in Sri Lanka.

They also urged the US to exert pressure on the Sri Lanka government to bring about an immediate cease fire. A memorandum submitted by the demonstrators was accepted by a representative of the American Embassy.

'Bring about a ceasefire in Sri Lanka!', 'Urge the Lankan govt. to stop the genocide!', 'Help us Obama!', 'Work for paradigm shift in Sri Lanka!', 'Focus on Tamils' plights!', 'Act promptly!' and 'End Tamils' sufferings!' were the slogans the participants kept shouting throughout the demonstration, which was timed to coincide with the swearing in of Barack Obama as the 44th President of the United States.

Meanwhile, in Sydney, the TYO there organised a token fast in support of those starving in the Vanni, and to highlight the humanitarian tragedy unfolding there.



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FRANCE



OSLO, NORWAY



LONDON, UK



LONDON, UK



LONDON, UK



NORWAY



SWEDEN



SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA



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NEWS

Army suffers casualties but continues offensive

THE Sri Lankan military continued its military offensive towards Mullaitheevu in Vanni with the support of heavy aerial and artillery fire despite suffering casualties.

Following the withdrawal of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) from Elephant Pass and then from southern parts of Jaffna peninsula including Muhamaalai, Kilaali and Naagarkovil, Sri Lankan security forces took control of the whole of A-9 and moved further east of the highway, laying siege to LTTE controlled Mullaitheevu, where over 300,000 displaced Tamils have taken refuge.

With seven Sri Lankan Army (SLA) offensive formations trying to breakthrough LTTE defences in Mullaitheevu, there have been fierce clashes in the past week with heavy casualties to the SLA.

Heavy aerial and artillery fire has been used by the Sri Lankan military to assist their advance into the regions around Mullaitheevu, which are now heavily populated due to displacements

35 SLA soldiers were killed and at least 60 wounded when LTTE defensive formations pushed back the SLA from Neththaliaattup paalam Monday, January 19, according to LTTE sources.

SLA suffered similar losses few days earlier when its attempt to advance into LTTE territory was thwarted by LTTE defensive forces.

On Friday, January 16, 51 SLA soldiers were killed and 150 troops sustained injuries when the advance by the SLA from Tharmapuram on three fronts were repulsed by LTTE fighters in a confrontation that lasted for 14 hours from the early hours.

Despite suffering losses Sri Lanka is confident that it can take control of the remaining LTTE held territory in the northeast of the island and is continuing its military offensive pouring all its military might into the offensive.

According to Sri Lankan military sources, there are 50,000 troops belonging to seven military divisions and or task forces are deployed around Mullaitheevu.

Meanwhile, on Monday January 19, LTTE Sea Tigers attacked a convoy of Sri Lanka Navy (SLN) off the coast of Mullaitheevu, sinking a Super Dvora Fast Attack Craft, LTTE officials told media.

A flotilla of Sea Tigers intercepted a convoy of SLN Dvora FACs. Fierce sea battle ensued. One Super Dvora FAC was sunk by Black Sea Tigers.



A Dvora sunk by Black Sea Tigers was among other instances of the heavy losses the Sri Lankan military has faced as it pushes on

3,000 troops killed, Only 1,000 Tigers left, war almost over - Fonseka

THREE thousand Sri Lankan soldiers were killed fighting the Liberation Tigers in the past three months, the Sunday Island newspaper reported this week, quoting government Defence spokesman and Minister Keheliya Rambukwella.

He was responding to opposition charges that 15,000 troops had been killed in the battles since October last year.

Asked about opposition claims of heavy SLA casualties in the heavy fighting in the Vanni, Rambukwella told the Sunday Island, that the figure of 15,000 soldiers dead was exaggerated and not correct. "According to our estimates, around 3,000 soldiers have been killed in action since October 2008."

Meanwhile SLA commander Lt. Gen. Sarath Fonseka wants to eventually double the size of the SLA to 300,000 soldiers to hold areas captured from the LTTE. The SLA has an official strength of 160,000.

The Nation newspaper added that Lt. Gen. Fonseka is of the view that at least 300,000 personnel will be needed to ensure security in the areas recaptured by the

SLA in the Vanni operations.

The Sri Lanka Army already has eight divisions deployed to fight the LTTE, The Nation said, adding that another, Task Force V, which was raised as the ninth fighting division was deployed a week ago for holding operations of crucial areas already cleared and the security of A-9 Highway.

As the SLA commander unveiled plans to expand the numbers of troops, Minister Rambukwella said that there are only two thousand Tamil Tiger fighters left.

Asked about the whereabouts of LTTE chief Velupillai Pirapaharan, Rambukwella told the Sunday Island: "He is in Mullaitheevu and being guarded by the 2,000 cadres that the LTTE has left. It is a matter of time before its last bastion is also overrun."

Asked if he thought the remaining LTTE cadres could regroup and operate as an effective guerilla organization, the minister opined: "No, they might be able to cause some damage occasionally, but the LTTE, as an organization, has lost its effectiveness and the morale of their cadres is very low. They can no longer pose a serious threat."

TamilNet

SRI LANKA Army (SLA) commander Lt. Gen. Sarath Fonseka on Sunday January 18 said that as there were only a thousand Tamil Tigers left and they were "boxed" into a small jungle area in Mullaitheevu, the war would soon be won.

The Tigers could not resist the 50,000 SLA soldiers surrounding them, he said.

His shirt was adorned with a dragon strangling a tiger

Lt. Gen. Fonseka, who spoke at an annual dinner he hosts for defence correspondents at his residence, joked that he expected most of them "to be out of work by this time next year."

He wore a black shirt, adorned with a dragon strangling a tiger, Reuters reported.

"It would be extremely tough

for the 1000-odd LTTE cadres to take on Sri Lankan army of 50,000 personnel, deployed in areas around Mullaitheevu," Fonseka said.

At least 200,000 people who fled towards Mullaitheevu from Sri Lankan Army advances in recent months, along with almost a similar number of residents are enduring relentless and indiscriminate shelling from the SLA's heavy guns and rocket artillery and the Air Force's bombing.

Fonseka said the LTTE now only hold an area of 30 km (18 miles) by 15 km (9 miles). The LTTE controls 40km of coastline, the military says.

"When the war started, I used 50 map sheets to plan it. Now I only need one sheet to plan it," he boasted.

Lt. Gen. Fonseka suggested LTTE leader Vellupillai Pirapaharan may even have fled the island, unable to face the advancing Sri Lankan army.

NEWS

Sri Lanka denies FX crisis, banks on 'patriotic Diaspora'

TamilNet

SRI LANKA'S foreign exchange reserves have fallen to little more than enough for six weeks of imports. And Japan, traditionally the island's biggest donor, is cutting aid globally.

But while local economists say the situation is critical government will inevitably have devalue the rupee by 20% this year or accept a conditions-laced bailout package from the IMF, the Central Bank is adamant neither is necessary, the Sunday Times reported.

Instead, the government is to launch a campaign on February 4, Independence Day, to attract Sinhalese expatriates to invest in Sri Lankan treasury bills and bonds.

The Sunday Times quoted a top Colombo economist as saying foreign reserves of around 1.5 months worth of imports was precarious and immediate solutions needed to be found.

"Any level below two months is worrying while three months is the acceptable level," he said, adding that even if tea prices rise and oil prices continue at low levels, petrol bills have to be paid (at least \$2 billion a year) while the CB will be compelled to eat into the depleted foreign resources to defend the rupee in the money markets.

Another economist said Japan, Sri Lanka's largest donor, was cutting aid globally.

Sri Lanka's overall balance-of-payments was negative, which the CB was hiding from the pub-

lic by not disclosing the (correct) figure, according to Dr Muttukrishna Sarvananthan, Principal Researcher of the Point Pedro Institute of Development and currently Fulbright Visiting Research Scholar in the US.

He however feels a depreciation of the rupee at this moment is too little too late and says approaching the IMF is the only realistic option.

The last time Sri Lanka got an IMF standby credit facility was in 2001 which was required to buy costly military equipment after the Elephant Pass military camp was taken over by the LTTE, and due to high oil prices. Last week Elephant Pass was re-captured by government troops.

Most economists contend that the government is left with few options - either devalue by 20%, seek an IMF package or enforce import controls similar to the 1970-77 era, the Sunday Times said.

However, currency dealers told Reuters the central bank called a meeting with bank treasuries on Monday to assure them the rupee will not be devalued and to explain plans to build up reserves and meet its external borrowing needs this year.

Economists and exporters say the rupee should be depreciated to about Rs 128-130 in relations to a US dollar.

It is now around Rs 114, after a marginal float of the rupee some weeks back by the CB. The rupee hit an all-time low of 114.15 a



The government continues to spend foreign reserves to keep the Sri Lankan rupee artificially inflated

dollar on Jan. 5, while it hit a life closing low of 113.85/114.00 on Friday, Reuters said.

However, Nandalal Weerasinghe, chief economist at the central bank, confirming the meeting with bankers, told Reuters the Times' report was false.

"There is no necessity for central bank to devalue the currency by 20 percent and this is an erroneous, politically-motivated news report," he said.

The current reserves position is similar to 1975-76 during the controlled economy of the Sirima Bandaranaike regime, when however there weren't much imports, according to a retired World Bank

economist.

However, Governor Ajith Nivard Cabraal said there was no cause for alarm and thus the need for IMF support did not arise. Instead the government would turn to Sri Lankans abroad, he said.

"The general assessment from our envoys is that with interest rates falling and a patriotic feeling amongst [Sinhala] people, there is a lot of interest to invest," Mr. Cabraal told the Sunday Times.

"The Tamil diaspora also wants to invest in the north and east," he said.

The campaign to raise up to

\$500 million this year will be launched on February 4, Independence Day, in North America, Europe, Asia and West Asia, The Sunday Times reported.

Teams led by CB Deputy Governors, Asst' Governors and other CB officials along with the six lead banks will go on roadshows across the world with the initial phase in February.

The campaign will take teams to the US and Canada; Qatar & Dubai among others in West Asia; Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Norway, Netherlands and the UK in Europe; Singapore, Malaysia, Korea and Japan in Asia; and Australia and New Zealand.

Sri Lanka spends over USD1 billion defending rupee

THE Sri Lankan government which is adamant that the local currency, Sri Lankan Rupee, will not be devalued continued spending large sums of its already dwindling foreign reserves trying to prop up the Rupee at its current levels against the US Dollar.

Since peg defence began by selling dollars and injecting liquidity to sterilize cash shortages, a total of 1,182 million dollars had been spent, reports Lanka Business Online (LBO).

In December alone, Sri Lanka spent 125 million US dollars defending the rupee in foreign exchange markets, LBO reported citing the latest data.

In early December the peg was loosened and the rupee moved steadily from 110 to over

113 to the US dollar. However in the latter part of December, the central bank spent 160.20 million US dollars in the month and also bought 34.50 million from the market., LBO reported.

The highest amount of 587.7 million US dollars was spent in October when the rupee was tightly pegged to the US dollar at just under 108 rupees, according to Central Bank data, LBO reported.

In the past week however a new dollar peg had started to develop around 113.87 rupees to the US dollar, and reserve losses have again started to pick up, dealers told LBO. According to LBO, excessive sterilized intervention of a dollar peg usually snowballs into a severe currency crisis, a process which some mon-

etary economists call 'amplification.' According to official data end-November foreign reserves were 2,029 million dollars.

Since the end of November to mid January the central bank's Treasury bills had increased from 92.8 billion to 151.0 billion rupees or 510 million dollars at an average exchange rate of 113.80 rupees. The monetary base of the country (reserve money) was at 259 billion last week from 253 billion rupees at the end of November indicating an increase of around 50 million US dollars over the same period.

At the 2,029 million dollars level at end-November, the Central Bank said foreign reserves were enough to cover 1.7 months of imports, reported LBO.

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NEWS

VCK leader drops fast, plans 'change of strategy'

THOL Thirumavalavan, leader of the Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK), ended his fast-unto-death after four days citing the concerns and pleadings of his cadres.

The VCK President commenced his fast on Thursday, January 15 to pressurize the Indian Government to put an immediate end to the genocide of Eelam Tamils in Sri Lanka.

On the fourth day he said he was forced to reconsider his decision to continue the fast because of the emotional pleading by his frenzied cadres, particularly women cadres who threatened self-immolation, and the shoot at sight orders that had been given by the state police department.

"At this stage, I have to ensure that those who lay their love and trust in me should not lose their lives," Thirumavalavan said, ending his fast on Sunday, January 18.

He added that henceforth the VCK had snapped all ties with the Congress party.

Thirumavalavan regretted that there was no indication of his ceasefire-and-talks demands being met even four days after his fast.

His decision to withdraw from the fast comes after the steering committee of the VCK decided to press its leader to drop the fast after meeting twice as their leader fainted and was taken to an ambulance for health check.

The district and state-level office bearers of the VCK, in a

meeting held on that Sunday morning resolved that the fast should be dropped and that the VCK should adopt some other strategy to ensure that its demands are met.

"We knew that the Indian Government would not relent to us. They never budged even when Lt Col Thileepan lay dying in Jaffna, so we know how hard-hearted and merciless New Delhi is.," Thirumavalavan said.

Thirumavalavan requested PMK leader Ramadoss to advise him on how to change the strategy and mode of his protest and added that he would resume his fast otherwise.

"We need to go to the next stage of the protest because my fast does not seem to have any effect on the Indian Government. At the same time, I am also burdened with the responsibility of the safety of the lives of my cadres."

"The Sinhala military had experienced heavy losses and was running away from the battle. But, India had sent its lethal weaponry and its military personnel to chalk out a strategy, to direct and to conduct the proxy war," Thirumavalavan alleged.

PMK founder-leader Ramadoss began his speech saying that Tamil people's blood was boiling when they read that India and Sri Lanka shared a relationship that was "so deep, so close, so warm."

He was referring to statements

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VCK cadres kept their leader company as he conducted his fast-unto-death, but he called it off after 4 days citing concern for his supporters and a belief that Delhi would not do anything anyway.

Tamil Nadu gears up for mass agitation

POLITICAL parties from across the political spectrum announced plans for mass agitation in support of the Eelam cause and demanded the central government to intervene immediately to stop the ongoing war in the neighbouring island.

Even as Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK) general secretary Thol Thirumavalavan called off his indefinite fast for a ceasefire in Sri Lanka

on Sunday, January 18 evening, Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) founder Dr S Ramadoss called for an indefinite hartal in Tamil Nadu.

"Tamil Nadu will come to a standstill. Except basic services like milk and health, nothing should move in the state. Until the Centre intervenes to effect a ceasefire in Sri Lanka, the state will be paralysed," Ramadoss said

after Thirumavalavan gave up his fast in Maraimalainagar in the city suburbs.

As chief minister M Karunanidhi had requested his allies to find ways to end the ethnic cleansing of Lankan Tamils, the PMK founder came up with the idea of a hartal and appealed to Karunanidhi to participate not as chief minister but as DMK president.

"If Karunanidhi comes up with a better idea, we will follow it," he said.

Earlier, Thirumavalavan announced that the VCK would not have any truck with the Congress in the state.

Describing the party as utterly unhelpful for the Tamil cause, he vowed to work tirelessly to eliminate Congress from the state.

Meanwhile, the MDMK announced it would hold State-wide demonstrations on January

28 to protest against the central Indian and Tamil Nadu governments for not bringing about a ceasefire in the north of Sri Lanka where the island military and the LTTE are engaged in a war.

In a statement, MDMK chief Vaiko said External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee was yet to undertake his visit to Sri Lanka to hold talks with the island government as assured by the Centre to an all-party delegation led by Chief Minister M Karunanidhi in December last year.

He said the Tamil Nadu government was equally doing nothing to pressure the Centre and therefore workers of MDMK, an ally of AIADMK, would stage demonstrations condemning the State and Central governments at district headquarters on January 28.

Delhi unmoved by Tamil Nadu sentiments

EVEN as Tamil Nadu leaders called for Delhi to take a hard stand against Sri Lankan state and intervene immediately to stop the war that's raging in northern Sri Lanka, an unconcerned Delhi despatched an envoy to "reaffirmed India's cooperation with Sri Lanka in the attempts to eliminate terrorism from Sri Lanka".

Shivshankar Menon, India's Foreign Secretary, who arrived in Colombo on Thursday, January 15 on a two-day visit further

insulted the southern state, home to over 60 million Tamils, by stating that "relations between India and Sri Lanka have never been so close, so warm and so deep", at a time when people and leaders of Tamil Nadu are angered by the bloody war Sri Lankan government is thrusting on the Tamils.

President Rajapakse met Mr. Menon in Kandy, the ancient seat of Sinhala power, rather than in

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Disconnect between Delhi and Tamil Nadu

WHILST political parties in Tamil Nadu, including the main opposition Bharathiya Janatha Party (BJP), called for the removal of the ban on Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, the Congress led central government again requested Sri Lanka for the extradition of LTTE leader Velupillai Pirapaharan from Sri Lanka.

According to reports, India has laid down the grounds with Sri Lanka to seek the extradition of Pirapaharan and Colombo is open to the idea.

The news of a formal request

for Prabhakaran's extradition being confirmed by the Foreign Secretary Shiv Shankar Menon himself on the eve of his visit to Colombo.

Menon said, "We have already made the request, several times in fact."

The Sri Lankan High Commissioner for India commenting on the issues said, "We're willing to consider India's request."

LTTE Chief Prabhakaran has been wanted by India for the past 18 years for his alleged role in Rajiv Gandhi's assassination.

Meanwhile, according to local media reports India is keen to assist in the development of Kilinochchi, recently occupied by the Sri Lankan Army.

Analysts point this as further evidence of the disconnect between Tamil Nadu and Delhi.

Whilst the people in Tamil Nadu are disappointed by the occupation of Kilinochchi by Sri Lankan Army, Delhi is delighted with the development and is ready to fund reconstruction of the town abandoned by its residents, they say.

OPINION

Barack Obama - a hope of a hope?

Sivan

IN his dream of monumental importance in the modern human history, Dr. King declared that all men are created equal and that they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character.

Yes! His hopes and dreams have finally materialised in the form of an energetic human being called Barak Obama in the very country called United States of America. The presence of a Black President entering into the gates and doors of the White House, a historical symbol of universal apartheid since 1800, was watched, observed and recorded by the world with amazement and admiration.

This unique phenomenon of 2008 brought tears to the eyes of millions of people of this globe who prayed for a world of real democracy, peace, and justice. Questions were being asked by the international community to fully understand the dimensions of this change.

Is this an effect of a national mentality change towards humanity in America? Is this an effect of a global awakening to the call of justice and truth? Or, is this a result of all the global unpopularity built by the so called leaders of our time?

Whatever the reason behind this, no doubt this has brought hope to nations and people like the Tamils of Sri Lanka, who have been suffering under oppression and military action for more than sixty years.

At a time when the United Nations has been losing its credibility over its failure to solve the political problems of our world through peaceful means, the rise of Obama has brought light to the human race as a whole for peace, justice and democracy.

At a time, when the meaning of self determination was being abused and ignored, in order to safe guard the regional interests of the powers of the world, Obama appeared as a messenger of humanity and hope.

'All people have the rights of self-determination. By virtue of that they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development,' says Article 1.1, of the international covenant on civil and political rights of 1966.

'The principle and fundamental right of self-determination is firmly established in international law,' states the Barcelona UNESCO convention of 1998.

'All too often self-determination is a right to be defended in lofty terms when it is politically advantageous or to be rejected when it is not.'- Rupert Emerson stated in his work, 'Principle of self determination' of 1964.

It is in this same way the international community and world leaders wanted to resolve political



Barack Obama, sworn in as the 44th US President on Tuesday, has promised change but does it include hope for the Tamils? Photo AFP

problems in the post millennium era. They have even gone to the extent of encouraging military action and allowing military dictators under the cover of democracy, to massacre, murder, bombard and shell civilian populations; to destroy schools, hospitals, houses, places of religious gatherings and to violate all international laws.

World leaders became deaf, blind and dumb with out the ability to stop the human right abuses in countries like Zimbabwe and Sri Lanka, when parliamentarians, reporters, journalists were subjected to kidnapping, torturing and killing.

The years which followed the millennium brought with them the darkness of fear and sounds of global death bells. Military action was being chosen by states to solve national freedom struggles and political issues.

The so-called 'peace-makers' smashed our world into micro pieces. The concept of humanity and world unity were put to test by the mere ignorance and arrogance of self-centred and regionally originated leaderships.

In his speech in the annual six-week session of the security commission at its Swiss Head quarters, in 2005, Kofi Annan said, "Unless we re-make our human rights machinery, we may be unable to renew public confidence in the United Nation itself. We have reached a point at which the commission's declining credibility has cast a shadow on the

reputation of the united nation systems."

Kofi Annan in his speech, on 19th.June 2006, at a conference on Human Rights violations, also expressed his frustrations through these very words: "No state can be secure if its people are condemned to poverty without hope. And no nation can be secure or prosperous for long, if the basic rights of its citizens are not protected. Lack of respect for human rights and human dignity is the fundamental reason why the peace of the world today is so precarious, and why prosperity is so unequally shared. I am glad to say that the world leaders, at the summit last September endorsed this vision.

"Never allow this council to become caught up in political point-scoring or petty manoeuvre. Think always of those rights are denied whether those rights are civil and political, or economic, social and cultural; whether those people are perishing from brutal treatment by arbitrary rulers or from ignorance, hunger and disease.

"The truth is that those denials go together. All too often, it is those who seek to improve the welfare of their communities who become the victims of oppression; and it is the lack of freedom and of legal safe guards that inhibits economic and social development."

Hence, at a time when fear and deprivation were being used as tools to terrorise the human

minds for the suppression of human aspirations and rights, Obama came to the international arena as the head of a super power.

When this globe was screaming aloud for a leadership which firmly believes in values, virtues, honesty, truth, love, and justice and world peace, Obama raised his vision.

'All virtue is summed up in dealing justly,' said Aristotle.

At a period in our life time when justice, peace, and democracy have become meaningless and void of value, when free speech and expressions of opinion became targets of bullets and knives, and when media and journalism have been brought under unprecedented scrutiny and persecution, Obama has come to lead.

He has refreshed the minds and hearts of ordinary human beings who lived under threatening dictators' rule; of those who were longing for a change which can bring the dreams and hopes of real freedom and liberty.

Let us all hope again that Obama, a Professor-President, will influence world leaders to join him to bring peace, justice, democracy and prosperity to all their citizens, for whatever race, country, colour, and creed they belong to.

Let us all hope that Obama, a highly cultured and charismatic President, will empower and enlighten the world leaders to identify and recognise the difference between international terrorism

and national freedom struggles.

Let us Tamils hope that Obama will take every political step to stop the genocide which is currently going on in Sri Lanka and to help our nation to enjoy the fruits of justice, peace and democracy under self-determination in their homeland, 'Tamil Eelam'.

Dr. King once dreamt about a world of his choice: "I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.'"

And Dr. King concluded his famous historical speech with these words: "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last."

Let us all hope that like the hopes and dreams of the African-American people came true, those of our people will also come true.

Let us all continue to shed sweat and tears to lay the foundation for world peace and unity by understanding the great importance of national aspirations and human rights.

Let us all work hard to stop racial genocide, destruction of civilisations and cultures which were brought into this planet by our beloved ancestors.

To finish with a quote from the former US President to whom Obama is most often compared - John F Kennedy - "We should never negotiate out of fear, but we should never fear to negotiate." Let us hope Obama shows similar sentiment.

NEWS

Civilians fleeing... Traumatized children...

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as saying.

Castella said fighting had prevented relief supplies from reaching the refugees.

"Tens of thousands of displaced civilians are concentrated in an area so small that there are serious concerns for their physical safety and living conditions, in particular in terms of hygiene," ICRC said.

"Families heading westward in search of safety are encountering other families moving eastward with the same aim," Castella said.

The ICRC is among the few international relief agencies allowed to operate in LTTE-held areas. The Sri Lankan government ordered most of the others out, citing security concerns.

Aid groups say about 230,000 people are trapped in an area of no more than 330 square km (127 square miles), and that they are under increasing attack from air strikes and shelling.

Foreign journalists are prevented from entering the conflict zone, but Al Jazeera said it had exclusive pictures showing civilians fleeing the fighting as buildings burn and craters from heavy shelling pockmark the earth.

"We lost everything, our property and all," one fleeing civilian told Al Jazeera. "It was the same at the last place we were staying,

we lost everything there too."

"We don't have any property now, we have lost everything. We are now worse than before, we don't have anything to eat."

Aid agencies say at least 30 people are being either killed or wounded daily in the violence, and getting food and emergency medical supplies to the area is also becoming impossible.

But the Sri Lankan military denies shelling civilians. President Mahinda Rajapaksa has said he had ordered the army to avoid all civilian casualties - even if it means slowing down the offensive.

The Sri Lankan government and rights groups have accused the LTTE of forcing Tamil civilians to stay in the war zone to be conscripts or labourers. The LTTE denies that and even the military admits that in the past civilians have largely ignored government appeals for them to cross into military-held areas.

Selvamalar Ayadurai, who runs an aid organisation helping civilians in Sri Lanka's north, says the term genocide may be justified.

"They use the term genocide - it may be right because the definition for genocide is a systematic and planned destruction of a social, racial or political group. So this is the destruction of a racial group, which are the Tamils of northern Sri Lanka," she told Al Jazeera.

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chological warfare. It is aiming for breakdown of family, cultural and social structures. This can be seen in all parts of the Tamil homeland.

Coming to the long term effects of disorder in society, some time ago I wondered about the alcoholism and self destructive behaviours found among Indigenous communities in Australia.

In Canada and US, similar problems were seen in "reserves" for Indigenous people. Though some of you may rightfully argue that the indigenous situation was socio-culturally different to Tamils, I think its worth looking at the cycle of events that has contributed to their present social disorder.

Theoretically, parallels can be drawn with the forced relocation of indigenous people (who were made refugees in their own land), forced removal of indigenous children and destruction of indigenous languages and culture.

The destruction of indigenous cultures also occurred with the trauma due to forced relocations, European renaming of land, losing access to sacred sites and traditional food sources.

In Tamil areas, refugees who are internally displaced or evicted, are herded from one area to another - often aerial bombings and shellings are used to make people flee, to kill them off or to relocate them to suitable positions for the government.

Internment of refugee families and in worse cases, killings of refugees are taking place. Children are being injured or killed in aerial bombings. Teenagers are vulnerable to detention, torture and death in custody.

These are the aspects of war regardless whether the people are in "liberated areas" or war zones. In all these cases, children are put into situations which are very traumatic.

We can see that in the East, destruction of culture is taking place through a gradual process of colonization and "Singhali-sation". Young students are particularly vulnerable to government propaganda and their version of history based on Mahavamsa.

Professor Tatz (1999) in his report on youth suicide among indigenous communities, talked about how experiencing extreme forms of racism creates a disordered society for the victims. Initially, feelings of frustration are followed by a sense of alienation, of not belonging, then withdrawal from society, and finally, the threat of, or actual, violence.

Tatz mentions that violence could be 'coercive violence' or 'appealing violence' - 'Coercive violence' is when a person uses violence in a premeditated and controlled manner (this could be directed towards the enemy); 'Appealing violence' is about harm to self or to kin such as domestic violence and child abuse.

In the case of Indigenous peo-

ples, a society that was living off the land was made to become heavily dependent on handouts and subsequently State Welfare.

A culture that had strict tribal laws on family duties, incest prohibition etc became a common place for abuse of children.

Petrol sniffing, drug addiction and alcoholism permeate day to day living.

Family gatherings and funerals are often accompanied by extensive drinking through the night where children are left to their own devices. The social decay among the youth is heart wrenching. Loss of culture and loss of a way of life became almost a social suicide in the case of Indigenous societies.

Some of you may claim that the Tamils are more advanced than that, but one would need to consider the poor and the continuously battered people in low socio-economic conditions.

John Campbell, a World Food Program official, recently got into trouble for comparing the conditions in Vanni to Somalia.

However, interestingly, the Tamils in North East have not yet shown any serious signs of self destructive behaviour - at least within the family unit. But there are warning signs.

Recently, a relative from Jaffna informed me that one green chilli costs 2 rupees there - One green chilli! A meal of bread and sambol would cost about 200 rupees. How can the poor afford it? My relative also reported that thefts have become so widespread with poverty stricken people stealing coconuts, mango, chicken and whatever they can get their hands on.

Yet these problems sink into background when compared with what the displaced populations in the East and Vanni are going through.

The increase in thefts, increasing number in orphanages, refugee camps and "rehabilitation centres", prolonged disruptions to schooling, increasing number of armed groups etc are alarming indicators where the once stable Tamil society is heading towards.

The Sinhalese government is getting shrewder and shrewder with this kind of destruction to ways of living. In fact, what we are seeing is not just genocide but a well planned genocide.

The "70 million strong Tamil Diaspora" as been in called upon often. This can be a waste of time and wishful thinking.

The bottom-line is that the Iankai Tamils living abroad are the ones who can't go back to their home towns; are the one whose brethren are being massacred; are the ones whose unique ancient culture and language form is being destroyed. They are the stakeholders here.

The estimated 1 million Iankai Tamils living abroad is the current lifeline to Tamils in Sri Lanka. This is the vital connection that can help prevent a disordered Tamil society in Sri Lanka until peace comes.

Recently I met a 2nd generation Tamil youth who is very involved with humanitarian and political work and whose father went back to Vanni few years ago. There is a small dedicated group of volunteers (local and expatriate Tamils) on the ground in Sri Lanka who is willing to take on aid work and rehabilitation work.

The effects of post traumatic stress in children can be reversed with proper support, nurturing and debriefing - which consists of four steps: preparing, having the child tell the story, sharing the child's reactions, survival and recovery.

Sometimes, debriefing could be simple as telling the child that it is not his fault. For example, Brooks and Siegel talk about a 4 year old child who saw his father being shot to death by intruders. The child told the counselor that he had shouted at the men to stop and if he had shouted louder, they might have left. According to his mother, the child had not shouted at all!

To help the child understand that he was not responsible, the counselor had to tell the child that even a grown up might not have been able to do anything.

In the above case, the child was suffering from guilt. Debriefing takes the child through the stages of sadness, denial, guilt and anger, shame or stigma and finally acceptance. Anger towards the enemy is understandable but it should never be fostered on guilt or shame - that kind of anger would be self destructive.

Getting a child to tell the story through play, role play and drawing, correcting misconceptions about the events, providing explanations, providing realistic reassurances and explaining that time would heal, are all effective. However, debriefing can also be complex depending on the trauma. Children in Tamil areas of Sri Lanka, whether it is the North and East or Upcounty or other Southern parts stand exposed in this war on Iankai Tamils.

Now is the time to refocus. Now is the time for more humanitarian help. The children of Tamil Eelam need our support more than ever before.

It is very impotent to carry on rehabilitation and humanitarian work at grass root levels even while the war is raging on: this could mean helping out a relative in the North East or contributing to the Tamil charities that work at the ground level.

For example, we have medical organisations helping hospitals, alumni associations helping schools, TRO projects etc.

This could also mean helping out with political work and rallying politicians, media, NGOs etc.

This could mean professionals (such as doctors, lawyers, teachers, psychologists, historians etc) creating support networks. "Siru thuli, peru vellam" - Every thought, prayer, word and action counts.

No defeat is greater than a psychological defeat.

Thiruma...

Continued from p12

by Indian Foreign Secretary Shivshankar Menon during a visit to Colombo last week.

Ramadoss wondered why the Indian Government maintained a stoic silence to the demand of Ceasefire in Sri Lanka.

The PMK leader further said that Thirumavalavan's extremely high pulse rate and abysmally low blood pressure made his cadres very anxious about the state of his health. He therefore appealed to Thirumavalavan to give up his fast unto death.

"If the VCK and the PMK did not exist, they would have built a graveyard for Tamil and Tamil sentiments in this state. Tamils have lost their language and their land, and now our self-respect. But we are not willing to lose it totally. The time has come forward for us to change our strategy of struggle. The next stage of our protest should shake our country," he said.

"Tamil Nadu should come to a standstill. There should be no transport, no movement within the state. Tamil Nadu should grind to a halt and remain together until a ceasefire is effected in Sri Lanka. We should not allow anything other than ambulances and milk vans to ply on the roads. After a

week, or after ten days, the Indian Government will be on its knees. They will have to tell us: we respect Tamil sentiments. We have asked Sri Lanka to stop Tamil genocide. You please stop your protest." We have to ensure that this eerie silence of a graveyard envelops Tamil Nadu," Ramadoss told Thirumavalavan.

"When I and my brother Thirumavalavan called on the Chief Minister, he asked us what could be done? This is our joint decision. We are sure that the 60 million Tamils will cooperate with us." Ramadoss requested Karunanidhi to look into this request.

"If the Chief Minister simply says that the DMK will join our protest, it is enough. We will take care of the rest he said."

Addressing media persons after handing a cup of juice to Thirumavalavan, he made an appeal to Karunanidhi through the media: "Kindly hold an all-party meeting at the earliest at a public place (other than the State Secretariat or your party headquarters). We will propose our plan and let other parties join our protest. This is only idea that I can suggest. If he can suggest a better struggle that will bring Tamil Nadu to complete standstill, let him suggest it, so that we can follow it."

NEWS

British Tamils Football League 2008/2009

Table & Top Scores

Premier Division

| | Team | P | W | D | L | F | A | GD | Pts |
|----|---------------|----|---|---|---|----|----|-----|-----|
| 1 | Mahajana | 12 | 9 | 1 | 2 | 42 | 7 | 35 | 28 |
| 2 | Santos | 12 | 9 | 1 | 2 | 43 | 24 | 19 | 28 |
| 3 | West-3 | 11 | 7 | 2 | 2 | 39 | 14 | 25 | 23 |
| 6 | wembley | 11 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 20 | 21 | -1 | 18 |
| 4 | Watch me | 12 | 5 | 2 | 5 | 27 | 27 | 0 | 17 |
| 5 | kingston Boys | 10 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 28 | 11 | 17 | 15 |
| 7 | Surbiton | 11 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 12 | 18 | -6 | 12 |
| 8 | Sunrise | 12 | 2 | 3 | 7 | 23 | 41 | -18 | 9 |
| 9 | Blues | 12 | 1 | 2 | 9 | 16 | 56 | -40 | 5 |
| 10 | Olimpics | 9 | 0 | 2 | 6 | 6 | 33 | -27 | 2 |

| | Players | Team | Top Scores |
|----|--------------|---------------|------------|
| 1 | Chrishanthan | Santos | 11 |
| 2 | Sean | Mahajana | 10 |
| 3 | Luxman | Santos | 8 |
| 4 | Ahilan | Surbiton | 7 |
| 5 | Vinoth | Wembley | 6 |
| 6 | Similan | Mahajana | 6 |
| 7 | Pira | Kingston Boys | 5 |
| 8 | Shankar | Mahajana | 5 |
| 9 | Roshan B | Santos | 5 |
| 10 | Senthuran | Sunrise | 5 |

Division One

| | Team | P | W | D | L | F | A | GD | PTS |
|---|--------------|----|---|---|---|----|----|-----|-----|
| 1 | E 17 F.C | 9 | 7 | - | 2 | 35 | 17 | 18 | 21 |
| 2 | Srimurugan | 9 | 7 | - | 2 | 25 | 10 | 15 | 21 |
| 3 | MTSSC | 10 | 5 | 1 | 4 | 27 | 26 | 1 | 17 |
| 4 | Harrow Boys | 9 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 16 | 15 | 1 | 13 |
| 5 | 11 Stars F.C | 10 | 5 | - | 5 | 23 | 30 | -7 | 12 |
| 6 | Young rise | 10 | 3 | 1 | 6 | 16 | 30 | -14 | 10 |
| 7 | Valvai Blues | 11 | 2 | 1 | 8 | 13 | 27 | -14 | 7 |

| | Players | Team | Top Scores |
|----|---------|--------------|------------|
| 1 | Mohamed | MTSSC | 17 |
| 2 | Danu | E-17 | 10 |
| 3 | Thanu | 11 Stars F.C | 9 |
| 4 | Tee | E-17 | 8 |
| 5 | Jenu | Srimurugan | 5 |
| 6 | Keeth | Harrow Boys | 5 |
| 7 | Sanjie | Srimurugan | 5 |
| 8 | Sela | Young Rise | 4 |
| 9 | Arujuna | MTSSC | 4 |
| 10 | Naz | Young Rise | 4 |
| 11 | Milson | Harrow Boys | 4 |

And then they came for me... Delhi unmoved...

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tions. I want my murderer to know that I am not a coward like he is, hiding behind human shields while condemning thousands of innocents to death. What am I among so many? It has long been written that my life would be taken, and by whom. All that remains to be written is when.

That The Sunday Leader will continue fighting the good fight, too, is written. For I did not fight this fight alone. Many more of us have to be - and will be - killed before The Leader is laid to rest. I hope my assassination will be seen not as a defeat of freedom but an inspiration for those who survive to step up their efforts. Indeed, I hope that it will help galvanise forces that will usher in a new era of human liberty in our beloved motherland. I also hope it will open the eyes of your President to the fact that however many are slaughtered in the name of patriotism, the human spirit will endure and flourish. Not all the Rajapakses combined can kill

that.

People often ask me why I take such risks and tell me it is a matter of time before I am bumped off. Of course I know that: it is inevitable. But if we do not speak out now, there will be no one left to speak for those who cannot, whether they be ethnic minorities, the disadvantaged or the persecuted. An example that has inspired me throughout my career in journalism has been that of the German theologian, Martin Niem"ller. In his youth he was an anti-Semite and an admirer of Hitler. As Nazism took hold in Germany, however, he saw Nazism for what it was: it was not just the Jews Hitler sought to extirpate, it was just about anyone with an alternate point of view. Niem"ller spoke out, and for his trouble was incarcerated in the Sachsenhausen and Dachau concentration camps from 1937 to 1945, and very nearly executed. While incarcerated, Niem"ller wrote a poem that, from the first time I read it in my teenage years, stuck hauntingly in my mind:

First they came for the Jews
and I did not speak out
because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for the
Communists

and I did not speak out
because I was not a Communist.

Then they came for the trade
unionists

and I did not speak out
because I was not a trade unionist.

Then they came for me
and there was no one
left to speak out for me.

If you remember nothing else, remember this: The Leader is there for you, be you Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslim, low-caste, homosexual, dissident or disabled. Its staff will fight on, unbowed and unafraid, with the courage to which you have become accustomed. Do not take that commitment for granted. Let there be no doubt that whatever sacrifices we journalists make, they are not made for our own glory or enrichment: they are made for you. Whether you deserve their sacrifice is another matter. As for me, God knows I tried.

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Colombo. A statement by Rajapaksa's office said 90-minute meeting had covered a "wide area of relations between the two countries."

Rajapaksa had briefed Menon on current developments in Sri Lanka "including the military victories being achieved by the Sri Lankan security forces against the LTTE" the statement said.

"President Rajapaksa reiterated that the goal of his government was to find a political solution to the problem of ethnic relations in Sri Lanka, and that he would deal with terrorism firmly and militarily, as the situation required," it said.

India's relations with Sri Lanka have reached "an unprecedented level of depth and quality today," Mr. Menon told Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama, the state-owned Daily News said Saturday.

Mr. Menon had observed that it is during difficult times that the true quality of a friendship

becomes most evident, and that the Indo-Lanka relationship is one such friendship that has effectively withstood the test of time and adversity, the paper added.

Secretary Menon extended his appreciation of the proactive role played by Sri Lanka both multilaterally and in the regional context in combating terrorism, and extended the unstinted support of the Indian government in this exercise, it added.

The Indian High Commission in Colombo is yet to make a statement on Menon's meeting with Rajapaksa, IANS reported.

Coinciding with Menon's visit, India Friday announced the second instalment of humanitarian assistance amounting to Sri Lankan rupees 40 million for the war-affected Tamil civilians in Sri Lanka's north, IANS reported.

Menon Friday handed over a token consignment of medicines to senior presidential adviser Basil Rajapaksa as part of the humanitarian assistance by India to the people stranded in the northern battle zone, IANS also said.

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