

WEDNESDAY JUNE 24, 2009

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NEWS

100,000 Tamils march in London over Sri Lanka's concentration camps

TamilNet

OVER one hundred thousand expatriate Tamils in Britain marched Saturday, June 20, through central London to express their outrage at international inaction over Sri Lanka's massacre of tens of thousands of Tamils and the suffering of hundreds of thousands more enduring starvation, disease, disappearance, rape and torture in Colombo's internment camps.

Dressed in black, carrying placards and several hundred Tamil Eelam flags, the protesters marched from Hyde Park to rally at Embankment. The event was organised by the British Tamil Forum.

The protestors began forming up at midday and began their march at 2:00 p.m. By the time the lead protestors reached Haymarket, the hundred thousand-strong column stretched the mile-long length of Piccadilly and up Park Lane. The rally began at 5.30 p.m. To facilitate the march, the Police closed off traffic in one direction along the three-lane Park Lane and Piccadilly roads and along Haymarket, past Parliament Square and one direction of the thoroughfare along the Embankment.

Hundreds of red and yellow Tamil Eelam flags fluttered in the summer breeze as the marchers chanted slogans, handed out leaflets to tourists and spectators crowding the pavements and balconies of central London. Several Union Jacks were carried by the protestors.

"The protests we have been doing [in the Diaspora centres], at last has opened the conscience of the Western world," a BTF spokesman said. "For example, the mainstream media has begun to expose the scale of the tragedy suffered by our people."

"Our struggle has now shifted to the hands of the Diaspora," he said. "We have gathered here today to begin the next chapter of our long struggle to come."

Tamil expatriates were joined by delegations from Colombian, Kurdish, Palestinian and some Indian communities in Britain, as well as civil liberties and social justice groups.

At the front of the protestors' column were mobile street theatres depicting Sri Lanka's militarized concentration camps where hundreds of thousands of Tamils are detained without access to sufficient food or medicine and suffering escalating abuse.

Groups of Tamil people, including - elderly, children, families, dressed in blood-stained clothing and bandages marched within squares of barbed wire bearing signs with names of

known concentration camps. Other protestors dressed in military uniform threateningly wielded batons to symbolize the ongoing brutality.

Leaflets handed out set out the protestors' demands about Sri Lanka's abuses: "[1] Stop the disappearances, rapes and torture occurring daily at the internment camps, and find all those who have already gone missing [2] Free people from the camps immediately so that they can return to their normal way of life [3] Bring the perpetrators of the genocide against the Tamils to justice."

Another leaflet stated: "The Tamil community, disappointed and embittered by the failure of the UK and other international powers to prevent the recent carnage despite constant and repeated warnings, are demanding that the international community must at least now act decisively to save the estimated 300,000 civilians in these camps, who remain in grave danger."

The protestors gathered on Embankment by Blackfriars Bridge where a stage had been set up, decorated in Tamil colours of red and yellow and a banner demanding "Free Tamils from Nazi style concentration camps! Prosecute the war criminals of the Sri Lankan State!"

The rally was addressed by British political personalities, including Tony Benn, Simon Hughes MP and Jeremy Corbyn MP, as well as Tamil and British human rights and social justice activists.

Veteran politician Tony Benn condemned the Sri Lankan state's violence against the Tamils as crimes against humanity in which Britain continues to play an unacceptable. He also criticised the British media for the woeful lack of coverage the conflict in Sri Lanka has received, compared to similar conflicts around the world.

Raji Nesaraja, representing the Tamil Youth Organisation (TYO), said the recent events in Sri Lanka were "nothing short of genocide".

In a stirring speech that illustrated the strong feelings amongst young Tamils in the UK, she went on to say that, following repeated and desperate warnings of an impending bloodbath, young Tamils were left dumbfounded and disappointed by the UN's complete lack of response.

She however expressed her optimism in the awakening of all sections of the British Tamil community in the past few months,

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Tamils in the UK marked the end of their long protest in Parliament Square with a march through the streets of central London that denounced the conditions in which 300,000 Tamils currently live

Parliament Square protest ends after 73 days

A 73-DAY protest involving thousands of people demonstrating over the plight of Tamils ended on Wednesday, June 17.

The protest featured hunger strikes, mass sit-ins blocking central London roads and people throwing themselves into the River Thames, reported the BBC.

One of those involved, Ambi Seevaratnam said: "After 73 days, nothing has worked. The Tamils have been betrayed by the international community."

Participants had put up sever-

al tents in the centre of Parliament Square. The number of protesters varied over the 73 days from a handful to more than 15,000 as events in Sri Lanka drew varying numbers to the square. Surges in activity followed developments in Sri Lanka.

About 200,000 demonstrators joined a march and rally organised in early April and 100,000 again turned up for the march the Saturday following the end of the protest. The march on 20 June was organised by the British

Tamils Forum.

The UN believes that nearly 7,000 civilians may have been killed and another 13,000 injured in the war since January, while other reports put the number killed in 2009 alone between 20,000 and 50,000. More than 300,000 people have been displaced from their homes in the north.

Suren Surendiran, of the British Tamil Forum, said: "I am

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NEWS

'End illegal detention' - rights group

HUMAN Rights Watch called for the end to the illegal detention of nearly 300,000 ethnic Tamils displaced by the recently ended conflict.

For more than a year, the Sri Lankan government has detained virtually everyone - including entire families - displaced by the fighting in the north in military-run camps, in violation of international law. While the government has said that most would be able to return home by the end of the year, past government practice and the absence of any concrete plans for their release raises serious concerns about indefinite confinement, said Human Rights Watch.

"Treating all these men, women, and children as if they were Tamil Tiger fighters is a national disgrace," said Brad Adams, Asia director at Human Rights Watch. "Displaced Tamil civilians have the same rights to liberty and freedom of movement as other Sri Lankans."

While the Sri Lankan authorities are expected to screen persons leaving the war zone to identify Tamil Tiger combatants, international law prohibits arbitrary detention and unnecessary restrictions on freedom of movement.

Although human rights law permits restrictions on freedom of movement for security reasons, the restrictions must have a clear legal basis, be limited to what is necessary, and be proportionate to the threat.

Since March 2008, the government of Sri Lanka has detained virtually all civilians fleeing areas controlled by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam at so-called "welfare centers" and "transitional relief villages."

A small number of camp residents, mainly the elderly, have been released to host families and institutions for the elderly. The vast majority, however, remain in detention.

As of June 5, the United Nations reported that the authorities were keeping 278,263 people in detention in 40 camps in the four

northern districts of Vavuniya, Mannar, Jaffna, and Trincomalee.

This is still tens of thousands short the initial figure of detainees - 300,000 - leading to concerns about killings and disappearance from within the camps.

"Many people are in the camps not because they have no other place to go," said Adams. "They are in the camps because the government does not allow them to leave."

Before the recent massive influx of displaced persons, the government proposed holding the displaced in camps for up to three years. After international protests, the government said that it would resettle 80 percent of the displaced by the end of 2009.

But the government's history of restricting the rights of displaced persons through rigid pass systems and strict restrictions on leaving the camps heightens concerns that they will be confined in camps much longer, possibly for years.

Conditions in the camps are inadequate. Virtually all camps are overcrowded, some holding twice the number recommended by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Food distribution is chaotic, there are shortages of water, and sanitation facilities are inadequate. Camp residents do not have access to proper medical services and communicable diseases have broken out in the camps.

Since May 16, the military camp administration has imposed numerous restrictions on humanitarian organizations working in the camps, such as limiting the number of vehicles and staff members that can enter the camps, which has delayed the provision of much-needed aid.

The military does not allow organizations into the camps to conduct protection activities, and a ban on talking to the camp residents leaves them further isolated. The military has also barred journalists from entering the camps except on organized and supervised tours.



Tamils live behind barbed wire and in constant fear of disappearances, killing, rape and extortion

200,000 Tamils imprisoned in Manik Farm camp

Catherine Philp
The Times

"WE are in an open jail," Kumar whispers, his skinny shoulders shaking as he looks around to check who is watching "Help us, we want to be free."

He is one of over 200,000 Tamil civilians being held against their will behind the razor-wire coils that surround Manik Farm, the largest displacement camp in Sri Lanka - one of the largest in the world.

Camp is not the word its inmates use for it. A prison and a concentration camp were two of the descriptions The Times heard on a rare visit to the camp on the sidelines of the visit by Ban Ki Moon, the United Nations Secretary-General.

Squalor is less the defining feature of Manik Farm than militarism. The presence of armed soldiers around the camp and its perimeter is overwhelming. New armoured patrol vehicles sit at the entrance to the side of a sand-bagged bunker.

The entire camp is surrounded by seven-foot-high wooden posts, strung with barbed wire and

wreathed with coils of razor wire.

Mechanical diggers have carved out a deep surrounding trench. "These people are not allowed to leave," Gerson Brandao, a UN humanitarian co-ordinator said. "Civilians shouldn't be behind barbed wire."

Father Amalraj, a Catholic priest, was shocked by what he found on his arrival with his parishioners on a military bus (on 18 May). "I read in a book on the Second World War about concentration camps," he says. "I feel we are experiencing that now. The concentration camps of WWII are here in Sri Lanka."

At Manik Farm, the boys - and some girls - of fighting age were separated for screening and have not been seen since. Many are under age and were never willing combatants. Father Amalraj's parishioners clamour to tell of their missing offspring.

"When the children came out, the Government told them that, if they told the truth, they would be safe," said Mahalam, whose 17-year-old daughter, Sathal, was

taken from her and has not been seen since.

The Government says it has taken suspected fighters for "rehabilitation" in special security camps and has refused to allow aid agencies access until the process - begun three weeks ago - is completed.

Mr Ban, who came to Sri Lanka to urge for that access, left without it. United Nations officials admit that they can barely keep up with the Sri Lankan zest for chopping down jungle and throwing up barbed-wire enclosures to house the Tamil civilians, let alone take control of it.

The lack of outside aid unnerves the inmates. "There is no people like you here," Kumar whispers, hiding behind the crowds lined up for Mr Ban's visit. "There is not enough food. There is not enough hospital here."

How long does he think he will be here for? "I don't know. Maybe forever? We are afraid we will be killed. If I tell the truth, I will be killed."

Father Amalraj says his parishioners have been beaten by the soldiers. The Government talks of reconciliation between Tamils and Sinhalese, but there is no sign of it here.

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NEWS

Sri Lanka: 'We won't beg for aid'

SRI LANKA will 'never go after donor countries or agencies with a begging bowl' for aid, the country's Central Bank chief has declared despite waiting for the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to approve a loan request for US \$1.9 billion.

"We will never go after donors or lending agencies with a begging bowl. We are capable of standing on our own and raise funds through capital markets," Central Bank of Sri Lanka Governor, Nivard Cabraal, told AFP.

The urgency of the need for the IMF loan is easing due to inflows from aid flows and remittances

"We have the capability to stand on our own and necessary funds are available locally for the resettlement and reconstruction in the North. With our new found dignity and identity in the international community Sri Lanka does not want to go after anyone for aid with bended knees. But we accept whatever assistance offered without strings and with respect," Cabral added.

Sri Lanka approached the IMF in March in a bid to stave off its first balance of payment deficit in four years after the island's foreign currency reserves fell to around six weeks worth of imports.

Commenting on the IMF loan Cabraal said: "No risk is involved in obtaining the IMF loan as it is entirely a non political transaction between the IMF and a member state. Besides, we have a right to seek IMF funds as a member and the IMF has an obligation to approve it in due course. The IMF

has categorically said the loan will be approved."

However, a decision on the loan has been put off due to political pressure from the US, Britain and other Western nations over Sri Lanka's handling of the final stages of the battle and charges that thousands of civilians were intentionally killed by Sri Lankan security forces in the final months of the war.

Despite pressure from the West, Cabraal said he was confident the rescue package would be approved but added: "Little by little, the urgency of the IMF loan is easing. I am not saying that we don't need it. The threat of a downturn is receding and Sri Lanka is getting some inflows after the end of the war."

According to IMF, the loan for Sri Lanka is still not ready for approval for its executive board.

IMF spokesperson Caroline Atkinson said Friday, June 19 "whenever there is final agreement, then a program would go to the Executive Board."

The World Bank, ADB and several other friendly countries had responded positively for assistance for the reconstruction and resettlement process, Cabraal said. He added that foreign reserves have picked up in the past several weeks, with money coming from aid flows - to meet the humanitarian needs of nearly 300,000 displaced people in the north - remittances and foreign investments.

The central bank was also negotiating a 500 million dollar loan from Libya and another 500 million dollars from an unnamed "friendly country" to help with post-war reconstruction, he said.

"The future scenario is very comforting to our foreign exchange situation," he said.



Do not approve IMF loan, US Senators tell Clinton

TWO influential US Senators have written to Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton requesting that she does not approve a request by Sri Lanka for an IMF loan 'it would send the wrong signal to approve' when Sri Lankan government did not need to heed the world community's concerns.

"With the [Sri Lanka] government still refusing to address any of the major concerns that you [Secretary of State Clinton] and others have raised, we believe it would send the wrong signal to approve the IMF loan. It would suggest that to gain international

support, the Sri Lankan government did not need to heed the world community's concerns; it merely need to win the war. Before receiving major financial support, the government should first take at least some steps to reassure the world that it is adjusting its policies, by allowing access to the conflict area and international monitoring of the screening process," said Senators Patrick Leahy and Robert Casey in a letter to Clinton.

The Government should further assure the world by "placing the IDP camps under civilian con-

trol, releasing IDPs and reuniting them with their families, and pursuing reconciliation with critics rather than squashing dissent," the Senators added.

"Sri Lanka was the first humanitarian and human rights crisis to emerge on the Obama administration's watch, and your response and the President's have been strong and principled," the Senators said, in what appears as an indirect response to an earlier magazine article which said that Obama was failing the test on dealing with the first humanitarian disaster his administration faced.

Sri Lanka hopes for post conflict growth

SRI LANKA is hoping the end of the decades long war will attract much needed foreign investment boosting the ailing economy.

"For a very long time, every time someone spoke about Sri Lanka's economy, they responded saying if not for this war things would be better. Now the war is over and we have a tremendous scope for economic development," Sri Lanka's Central bank Governor Ajith Nivard Cabraal said.

Hoping the post conflict scenario to introduce a fresh influx of investors to the island, the central

bank plans to revise upwards the island's economic forecast for 2009 to between four to five percent, from 2.5 percent to 3.0 percent announced earlier this year.

Sri Lanka's economy posted 6.0 percent growth in 2008, down from 6.8 percent in 2007.

Speaking at a nationally televised ceremony in Colombo, Sri Lankan President, Mahinda Rajapakse, also shared the same view and said: "Reducing the budget deficit, investment promotion and economic development is possible after defeating terrorism".

Rajapakse said the military

had unified the country at great human cost, and the entire country owned a debt to young people who sacrificed their lives and limbs and also their families.

The country has eliminated the 'border villages', Rajapakse said in a reference to areas bordering Tamil Tiger controlled territory. "Our challenge is to remove difficult villages now," he said. "Like we defeated 30 years of war in 2.5 years we have to have a development drive".

"We will be not like any other country," President Rajapaksa said. "We, who were blessed by

Asia when we defeated terrorism, must now be the pride of Asia," Rajapakse added.

Sri Lanka's Board of Investments expects foreign direct investments to quadruple to \$4 billion by 2012, led by investments in ports, tourism, telecommunication and textiles.

With the end of the war, Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau revised its projections and now aims to increase tourist arrivals by at least 20 percent each year, using a \$20 million worldwide advertising campaign to promote the island's attractions.

"The main task we have is that of image building," Dileep Mudadeniya, managing director of the Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau said in an interview in the capital Colombo. "We have an image that has been challenged by war and travel advisories."

However, Jerome Auvity, general manager at Hilton Colombo casted doubts at the Sri Lankan officials optimistic view and said: "There is still this dark cloud, this debate and issue regarding the displaced people."

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NEWS

Calls for UN to probe war crimes

CALLS for investigations into allegations of war crimes by the Sri Lankan government during the final stages of its military offensive against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) appear to be gathering strength.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has called for an inquiry into these allegations, pointing out that "whenever and wherever there are credible allegations of violations of humanitarian law, there should be a proper investigation", reported the Deccan Herald.

Ban's call comes close on the heels of international criticism of the UN's silence on Sri Lanka's conduct of the war, the paper said.

The UN secretary general, Ban Ki-moon, briefed Security Council members behind closed doors on Friday, telling journalists outside of the need for an "impartial and objective" investigation into wrongdoing by the Sri Lankan military and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Activists now say the UN must go further and launch its own investigation into war crimes because neither the Sri Lankan government nor the world body's Geneva-based Human Rights Council willing or able to shoulder the responsibility, reported The National newspaper.

"I think we need to have some very clear signal from the secretary general that we cannot simply put this behind us, thinking we can gain stability by closing the book on what happened," the paper quoted Steve Crawshaw, a UN expert for Human Rights Watch, as saying.

"I hope Mr Ban will make explicit his backing for the creation of a commission of inquiry, and that the Security Council will wake up in a way that it has failed to wake up during the last three months."

A special session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) recently passed a resolution on Sri Lanka that not only failed to call for independent investigations into violations of international human rights and humanitarian law by the armed forces but also, did not express concern for the plight of civilians facing indefinite detention in government camps. In fact, the resolution praised the government over its war against the LTTE.

At the height of the conflict, John Holmes, the UN's humanitarian chief, described a "blood-bath on the beaches" with mass civilian casualties.

The UN has since proved reluctant to investigate the human

tragedy and even stands accused of being complicit with the Sri Lankan government in obscuring the actual number of civilians killed.

The UN came under criticism for 'deliberately underestimating' the civilian death toll and for covering up the enormity of the crisis in Sri Lanka. Ban's call appears to be an attempt to undo the mistakes the UN has made on the Sri Lankan war, the Deccan Herald said, before going on to call for investigations into all war crimes, including those committed in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Security Council has been deadlocked on the issue, with roughly half the 15-nation membership arguing for Sri Lanka's sovereign right to quash an insurgency within its own borders.

Members have only met "informally" at the UN, last month announcing "grave concern" over civilian deaths while also recognising the "legitimate right of the government of Sri Lanka to combat terrorism".

Sir John Sawers, Britain's ambassador to the UN, said pressuring other council members to shift their positions would be difficult and unlikely to yield "any real difference on the ground" in Sri Lanka.

After briefing the council on Friday, Mr Ban told reporters that he called on "the Sri Lankan government to recognise the international call for accountability and full transparency" and suggested a "proper investigation".

Sri Lanka's ambassador to the UN, Hewa MGS Paliakkara, said he would "follow up" on Mr Ban's request, although the country's president, Mahinda Rajapaksa, has openly rejected calls for a war-crimes investigation.

Rights watchdogs are not convinced that Sri Lankan officials will ever investigate the allegations fairly, with Mr Crawshaw, of the New York-based lobby group, calling on Mr Ban and the Security Council to step in.

"The government saying it will investigate doesn't solve the problem, because the government has stated in advance that it has committed no crimes and they are only interested in investigating the crimes of the Tamil Tigers," he said.

"We can't have any more of everyone looking away, which is what the world seems depressingly eager to do at the moment."

Amnesty International has likewise called for an "international, independent inquiry" established under the auspices of



The indiscriminate targetting of civilians is one of many war crimes that international agencies have claimed that Sri Lanka was responsible for during the final stages of the conflict in May 2009

Twenty years of impunity mandates international commission - Amnesty

AN independent international commission must be set up to investigate human rights violations in Sri Lanka over the last 20 years, as successive governments have failed to account for abuses such as torture, enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings during its civil war, Amnesty International said.

According to a report published by the London-based human rights group, serious human rights violations have been occurring in the Indian Ocean Island for many years.

"As the Sri Lankan people contend with the most recent abuses committed by both sides of the recent conflict, particularly during the last few months of the fighting, the reality is that they have been haunted by injustice and impunity for years," said Sam Zarifi, Amnesty International's Asia-Pacific Director.

The report titled "Twenty Years of Make-Believe: Sri Lanka's Commissions of Inquiry" said that over the last 20 years, there have been assassinations of public figures, killings of aid workers and other civilians, and enforced disappearances.

It cited various examples of violations including the massacre of 17 aid workers from Action Contre la Faim (ACF) in the town of Muttur in 2006. Fifteen bodies were discovered lying face-down on the front lawn of the charity's office, with bullet wounds to head and neck, indicating that they have been shot at close range, execution style. Two more staff members were found in a car

nearby, possibly trying to escape.

The report also mentions the case of a lawyer tortured to death in police custody as well as the mass "disappearance" of 159 people from a camp for displaced people.

Ad hoc commissions of inquiry established by the government over the last two decades have lacked any real credibility and delayed criminal investigations, said the study.

Authorities had failed to protect victims and witnesses, said Amnesty, adding that state agents had even intervened directly in some cases to eliminate witnesses through bribes, threats, harassment, intimidation and violence, including murder, to discourage police investigations.

The study added that the country's "glacially slow" criminal justice system - which is subjected to political pressure - is so degraded that the vast majority of human rights violations over the past 20 years have never been investigated, let alone heard in court.

"The Sri Lankan authorities have had little success in providing accountability for abuses against civilians committed by the LTTE; they are even less likely to effectively investigate and prosecute their own forces for violations of human rights and humanitarian law," said Zarifi.

"Given the scale of the problem of impunity in Sri Lanka, accountability can only be achieved with the active commitment of the Sri Lankan government, supported by systematic

and sustained international human rights monitoring and technical assistance."

However, Sri Lanka has repeatedly resisted calls for international scrutiny, on the basis that it would jeopardize the country's sovereignty.

"These things take time, and we can't allow any possibility of injustice to happen," Rajiva Wijesinha, secretary at the Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights said in Colombo.

The government's own commission into allegations of human rights abuses is proceeding, albeit slowly, he added.

All rights groups have been particularly critical of the last months of the war, where they say both the government and Tigers showed a wanton disregard for human life with between 10,000 and 20,000 people killed during this period alone.

The military has been accused of continuously using heavy artillery to shell a tiny strip of land where Tigers were trapped along with hundreds of thousands of civilians, while the LTTE were accused of holding civilians hostage and using them as human shields. Both parties have rejected the charges.

However, the government remains under pressure to recognize calls both domestically and internationally for accountability and transparency, with the U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon saying earlier this month that any credible accusation of human rights violations should be investigated.

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EDITORIAL

TAMIL GUARDIAN

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Hostages

Sri Lanka is - again - trying to make money through Tamil suffering.

Sri Lanka is demanding international aid whilst at the same railing against foreign 'interference' in its 'internal affairs' and hurling abuse at those who speak of human rights and political solutions. The latter include the very donors Colombo is pressing. The paradox is striking. In addition to the acute suffering it is consciously inflicting on hundreds of thousands of Tamils incarcerated in militarized prison camps, the government of President Mahinda Rajapakse is systematically wearing down those stumps of liberal governance still standing after sixty years of ascendant Sinhala-Buddhist rule in the island. Democracy, political pluralism, the rule of law and press freedom - long distorted so as to entrench Sinhala dominance over the other communities - are under further violent attack. Yet Sri Lanka is brazenly justifying its demands for international assistance - sought mainly from Western donors - on the grounds it is a fledgling market democracy. The international community must challenge this fiction. Sri Lanka must be subject to international isolation and sanctions until the state complies - in concrete steps - with international humanitarian and human rights norms.

Six weeks ago the Sinhala-dominated state declared it had totally defeated the Liberation Tigers and ended the war. It then embarked on a protracted victory dance, spending lavishly on celebrations which emphasized how the Sinhala had (again) defeated the Tamils. International observers who thought Sri Lanka a multi-ethnic democracy may have found this behaviour bizarre, but those familiar with the racism institutionalized in state, polity and society in Sri Lanka would have understood, even anticipated this. Some liberal commentators optimistically saw President Rajapakse's inclusion of a few Tamil words in his victory speech as signs of him 'reaching out' to the Tamils. If such simplistic thinking need be taken seriously, the government's ongoing brutality towards the Tamil population and the Sinhala triumphalism engulfing state action and rhetoric speaks for itself and provides adequate response.

Firstly, despite international entreaties and demands, the government continues to intern almost 300,000 Tamils in militarized, barbed-wire ringed camps where they are openly subject to 'disappearance', torture, extortion and rape. Amid government restrictions on adequate food and medicine into the camps, disease has broken out. These are not mere 'Tamil claims'. Human Rights Watch and international media investigations have

detailed and condemned the ongoing horrors. Visiting international officials, including UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon and Japan's Special Envoy, Yasushi Akashi, have highlighted the acute suffering in the camps. The Sri Lankan government's response to international criticism - mild as it is - has been to further restrict aid agencies' access and accuse them of telling lies. At least two UN agency staff have been abducted by gunmen and later turned up in government custody.



The international community is therefore right to insist that international aid agencies must have unfettered access to these horrific camps. Sri Lanka has long exploited international trust and sympathy to acquire and appropriate external humanitarian aid. The intended beneficiaries have rarely been helped, but the state, its corrupt leadership and bureaucracy (both civil and military) and recipients of its political patronage have done exceedingly well. The flood of tsunami aid into the island after 2005 is a case in point. There is nothing in Sri Lanka's conduct vis-à-vis the Tamils and, especially, the inhabitants of these camps, to give cause for optimism. Quite the contrary. The watchwords of transparency and accountability must henceforth condition - in substance, not rhetoric - every

penny of external humanitarian assistance for the Tamils.

It has long been axiomatic of donor thinking that post-conflict countries must receive swift and substantial aid if a relapse into armed conflict is to be avoided. Sri Lanka is not transitioning between war and peace, but between war and anarchy. The state plans further militarization. The Sri Lankan army is to be expanded to a staggering 300,000 soldiers - three times the size of Britain's army. The police and other security forces are recruiting. So, as international rights observers point out, are the Army's murderous paramilitary groups. Meanwhile, despite its smug assurances to the contrary, the government plans to keep the many hundreds of thousands indefinitely in the camps. The only construction taking place in the North is that of new military installations and Sinhala colonies. This, as any scholar of insurgency would attest, is grist to the mill of renewed Tamil militancy.

The Rajapaks regime may be indignant that donors - mainly Western liberal states and associated multilateral organizations - are seeking to link respect for human rights to their financial aid. Colombo's histrionics about infringements of sovereignty are being tacitly or overtly supported by states such as China - which, incidentally, are in no hurry to provide any substantive financial assistance of their own. But sanctions and conditionalities are sine quo non if there is to be a change from dynamics of the past two decades. Having inflicted suffering on the Tamil populace through indiscriminate force and deliberate, scorched earth tactics, the Sinhala-dominated state has then held forth the Tamils' plight as justification for further demands on international largess.

The Sri Lankan state is institutionally racist and corrupt. Aid destined for the Tamils will simply not reach the suffering without close international supervision. It is no accident that the state is seeking to keep international observers blind and away from the camps, both by official restrictions and the violent silencing of domestic critics. Donors' past trust and faith in Sri Lanka has resulted in international aid subsidizing the state's pursuit of Sinhala victory over the Tamils - as the state itself continues to celebrate. If the people in the camps are to be helped, the Sri Lankan state must be compelled to allow international humanitarians, human rights workers, and media ready access to them. Aid must follow, not precede, Sri Lanka's compliance with international humanitarian and human rights norms.

NEWS

International war crimes probe needed

This is the full text of an editorial in the Japan Times titled "What price victory?". Japan is Sri Lanka's biggest bilateral donor.

THE world welcomes the end of the civil war that has ravaged Sri Lanka for decades. Unfortunately, questions have emerged about how the conflict was brought to a close and whether war crimes were committed in the final bloody days of fighting. The Colombo government has dismissed the allegations as unfounded; the defeat of the Tamil Tigers has overshadowed charges that the guerrillas used civilians as human shields. An investigation is required: If war crimes were committed - no matter which side is responsible - perpetrators must be held accountable. No government or rebel group must believe it is immune from the rule of law.

The Sri Lankan conflict was a long civil war that claimed 80,000 to 100,000 lives. Both sides inflicted indiscriminate damage on civilian populations - the government by resorting to artillery and air power, the rebels by their suicide attacks. The guerrillas even used Tamil compatriots as human shields.

During the last weeks of the conflict, the number of civilian casualties increased as the Tigers retreated to an ever-shrinking area. Rebels claimed civilians joined them out of fear of government forces; the government countered that the refugees had been uprooted at gunpoint. The government said civilian-occupied areas were no-fire zones for heavy artillery; the rebels insisted that pledge was a sham, providing various pieces of evidence to support their allegations. No definitive proof was available as the fighting reached its conclusion; the government kept journalists and human rights groups from the war zone, and Tamil Tiger claims were viewed with suspicion and often dismissed as propaganda.

Since the fighting ended, however, independent observers have been able to examine the war zone and what they have found is disturbing. A strip of beach where thousands of civilians retreated was pockmarked by craters that, in the words of one expert, look to be the work of "a very large" shell.

The civilian casualty list is long and growing. The number of refugees exceeds 265,000; some say it tops 300,000. Equally troubling is the death toll. The government says civilian deaths were unavoidable, adding that the military did not use heavy artillery as

alleged while the Tamil Tigers used civilians as shields and in some cases even killed civilians themselves.

Officially, the United Nations has estimated that 7,000 people were killed in the final offensive. Unofficially, however, it has been reported that the death toll for the last month of fighting could exceed 20,000 civilians. The discrepancy has prompted calls for an investigation into whether war crimes were committed. Ms. Navanethem Pillay, the U.N. high commissioner for human rights, rightly noted that "victims and the survivors have a right to justice and remedies." As she explained, "establishing the facts is crucial to set the record straight regarding the conduct of all parties in the conflict." The European Union's human rights commissioner agrees.

The Sri Lankan government has dismissed any criticism of its actions. Officials say they should be applauded, not censured, for ending one of the world's most vicious insurgencies. Mr. Palitha Kohona, the minister of foreign affairs, firmly rejected the allegations, arguing that "We would have finished this war months ago if we hadn't cared about hurting civilians." The local press was even more succinct: "The time has come to tell the salmon-eating international busybodies to go home."

The diplomatic response has been more restrained. When European governments brought a motion before the U.N. Human Rights Council, calling for an international investigation into whether war crimes had been committed by either side, the council instead passed a resolution commending the government's victory and urged it to protect minorities.

Colombo is no doubt aggrieved that its victory has been sullied. It is upset that Western governments, which demanded support in their war against terror while permitting the Tamil diaspora to fund the Tiger rebels, would demand that Sri Lanka be held to account. But the laws of war and the notion of crimes against humanity are premised on the belief that there are limits to how combatants conduct themselves in conflict.

If anything goes, then all conflicts could be ended much quicker. But we insist on standards to restrict the behavior of combat-



Sri Lanka is a dangerous place for journalists, with any criticism of the government deemed support for terrorism and journalists who dare to criticise the government are attacked, killed or disappeared

ants, and it is only the prospect of their enforcement that gives them force and utility. Laws that are disregarded when they are needed most are worse than useless, because they endanger those who rely on them for protection.

If the government is telling the truth, it should have nothing to fear from an investigation. A complete, unvarnished international assessment of its conduct would vindicate its counterclaim that the Tamil rebels are the real criminals. Stepping forward would also demonstrate the government's readiness to reach out to its long-aggravated Tamil community, a vital first step toward true reconciliation and enduring peace in Sri Lanka.

UN probe

Continued from p5

the Security Council or Mr Ban's own mandate.

"According to testimonies, the LTTE was responsible for using civilians as human shields, but there is evidence that most civilians were killed as a result of shelling," the advocacy group said.

"The Sri Lankan military continued to use heavy weapons despite promising on Feb 24 and again on April 27 that it would stop using them. The firing of artillery into an area with a high concentration of civilians violates international humanitarian law."

Farhan Haq, a spokesman for Mr Ban, ruled out launching a UN Secretariat inquiry for the time being, saying the secretary general will monitor first whether the Sri Lankan government's own investigation is sufficient.

Mr Ban "hopes that the Sri Lankan government will follow up to implement the promises that they have made. If they haven't, he will review and act accordingly", the spokesman said.

Sri Lanka ranked worst for journalists' safety

THE Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), a New York based media watchdog, in a special report, said Sri Lanka topped the list of countries that drove the largest number of journalists into exile.

Even after the end of the decades long war, Sri Lankan state has continued to intimidate and attack journalists. Independent journalists in Sri Lanka say they still feel threatened and intimidated. "At least 11 Sri Lankan journalists were driven into exile in the past 12 months amid an intensive government crackdown on critical reporters and editors," the report said, adding the number worldwide totalled 39. Of these journalists, 29 were driven out of threat of violence, 7 threat of imprisonment, and 2 out of harassment, the report added.

"This is a sad reality in countries throughout the world where governments allow attacks on the press to go unpunished." Joel Simon, CPJ executive director said. Sri Lankan journalists have faced severe retribution for producing critical coverage of government military operations against the Tamil Tigers.

The Free Media Movement (FMM) says that the government should take responsibility for the recent spate of attacks on the media. The group accuses the government of failing to take any concrete action against the killings, abductions and threats.

"We have to point the finger at the government as it has a huge responsibility to stop these

attacks but has failed to do so," FMM Secretary Sunil Jayasekara told the BBC.

However, the government says it does not intervene in police investigations.

Media minister Lakshman Yapa Abeywardene admits the investigations over attacks on the media sometimes are lacking in progress and focus.

"As a person who is regularly in touch with journalists I am genuinely shocked," he told the BBC Sinhala service. "But it is up to the security services to investigate and we do not intervene."

At least nine Sri Lankan journalists have been murdered this decade without a single conviction being won against an assailant, according to CPJ research.

Following the end of the war, in a television discussion, Sri Lankan police Chief Jayantha Wickramaratne said there was evidence that some journalists, especially Sinhala nationals, were on the payroll of the Tamil Tigers.

"Although the police are aware of this treason I do not like to reveal the names as it might obstruct our investigations. They betrayed the noble profession and not only distorted and misreported against Sri Lanka but also worked for cash and other benefits," Wickramaratne said on 28 May.

Many leading journalists are yet to return and the fear is such that many do not wish to speak even while living in exile.

100,000 TAMILS MARCH THROUGH LONDON STREETS





வோல்தம்ஸ்ரோ ஸ்ரீ கற்பக விநாயகர் ஆலயம்

WALTHAMSTOW SRI KATPAHA VINAYAGAR TEMPLE

03-06-2009 புகன்குமை ஏகாதசி லக்ஷ்மி நாராயணதீர்த்த நாமாச்சனை

04-06-2009 வியாழன் பித்தோசம் ருத்ர தீர்த்த ஹோமம் பித்தோசகவாரி புரப்பாடு

05-06-2009 வெள்ளி வைகாசி வீசாகம் காலை 9.30மணிக்கு கணபதி ஹோமம், 10.30 ஸ்கந்த ஹோமம், மாலை 5மணிக்கு கப்ரமணியமாலா மந்த்ரஹோமம், 7மணிக்கு முலமுர்த்தி பூசை 8 மணிக்கு வசந்த மண்டப பூசை தொடர்ந்து முருகப்பெருமான் வீதிபூசை

07-06-2009 தூயிறு பெளர்ணமி மீனாட்சி அம்மனுக்கு விசேடபூசை

08-06-2009 தங்கள் முலம் அனுமத் பூசை

11-06-2009 வியாழன் சங்கடஹ சதுர்த்தி திருவிழா காலை 10.00 மணிக்கு அபிசேகம் பூசைமாலை 5.30 க்கு அபிசேகம் தொடர்ந்து பூசை திருவிழா நடைபெறும்.

மங்கள வாத்திய தேவைகளுக்கு தொடர்புகொள்க 020 8527 3819

2-4 Bedford Road, Walthamstow E17 4PX. Tel: 020 8527 3819, Charity No: 1092252

ஆலயம் தொழுவது சாலவும் நன்று

NEWS

Sri Lanka rejects Tamil Diaspora aid



The ship carrying food from Europe was turned away in Colombo, despite government calls for aid

GOVERNMENT of Sri Lanka turned away the ship, MV Captain Ali, carrying relief supplies to the Tamils held in internment camps, after keeping the ship under Sri Lanka Navy (SLN) custody for nearly 4.5 days, and after admitting that the ship carried purely humanitarian supplies, a press release from the Mercy Mission Head Office in the UK said.

While the Government of Sri Lanka has been appealing for funds from the International Community to provide food and other assistance to the 300,000 Tamils being detained in the camps, it is surprising that Colombo would reject 800 tons of relief supplies, the Directors of the Mercy Mission said.

"This Mercy Mission ship, the product of the hard work of thousands of volunteers in the UK and Europe and donations from tens of thousands of Tamils throughout the world, could have been, and in fact, should have been, used by the GoSL as an opportunity to show it's bona fides and engage with the Tamil Diaspora as a means to begin the process of reconciliation in, in the govern-

ment's words, "post-conflict" Sri Lanka," the press release said.

An ex-Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) monitor, Mr. Kristjan Guðmundsson, from Iceland, doctors, and humanitarian workers have accompanied the humanitarian relief on board the ship.

The Captain Ali, a Syrian-registered ship, was seized as it entered Sri Lankan waters on June 4 by the country's navy, who suspected it contained logistical equipment for Tamil Tigers.

After escorting the ship to Colombo, Sri Lanka detained 13 crew members and 2 passengers - including one Briton - for questioning.

"The ship had tried to enter Sri Lankan waters without following the proper procedure," a military official told reporters in Colombo.

However, later Sri Lankan authorities admitted the ship only carried a cargo of food and medicine.

"We are extremely disappointed that the Sri Lankan government has turned away this mercy mission that was only carrying

aid," said Arjunan Ethirveerasingam a spokesperson for Mercy Mission.

"There are 300,000 people in internment camps in the north of the island who desperately need this aid."

"The ship is currently headed westerly away from Colombo. When it reaches international waters we will work out how we can get the food and aid into Sri Lanka. Whether we take it to another country and ship it in containers or work with a partner organisation, we will have to decide, but we will find a way of getting the food to the people who need it," Ethirveerasingam added.

Earlier, Mercy Mission made a public appeal to the Sri Lankan

government, urging it to allow Tamil Diaspora relief to be distributed to the Tamils held in internment camps in northern Sri Lanka.

"Mercy Mission (UK) implores the Government of Sri Lanka to engage with the Mercy Mission in order to overcome any paperwork errors and ensure that the emergency humanitarian relief (food & medicine) donated by the Tamil Diaspora are delivered to the internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the camps." The appeal said.

"To that end, Mercy Mission seeks the GoSL's permission to allow the ship and her cargo to enter into Colombo Port, be cleared appropriately, and handed

over the Government Agent - Vavuniya, a local NGO, or a GoSL Ministry for distribution to the IDPs."

"The GoSL has itself repeatedly pleaded with the international community for assistance with the humanitarian catastrophe that has overwhelmed them. With the sole objective of providing this desperately needed emergency humanitarian relief to the 300,000 IDPs in the camps and in the spirit of "engaging", "reconciling" and "building bridges" with the Tamil Diaspora, Mercy Mission (UK) appeals to the Government of Sri Lanka to please let this assistance reach those who are in such desperate need." The statement further said.

Record result for Tamil candidate, but not MEP

TamilNet

JAN Jananayagam, an independent candidate contesting the European Parliament elections in London, secured over 50,000 votes, an unprecedented result, and a record for an independent candidate in an EU election.

Reporting on Jananayagam's results, BBC said, Jananayagam gained more votes than some political parties in the London region and more than all the other independents in the UK put together.

Jananayagam gained 2.3% of the vote in the London region, where she was standing. That was more than established parties such as the English Democrats, the trade union-backed No2EU, the Socialist Labour Party, Libertas and Jury Team, a new umbrella group for Independents, all of which were running national campaigns and had the benefit of party political broadcasts, the BBC added.

Though Jananayagam failed to secure a seat, her campaign team said they were delighted with

the results. Despite having decided to contest only days before voter registration closed and four weeks before the polls, the Tamil candidate had amassed more votes than some well-established small parties in Britain, and more than twice all other independent candidates combined, they said.

Apart from Tamil expatriates, her campaign, conducted by students and volunteers, had drawn support and donations from British voters and other minority communities.

Out of the eight London seats, the main opposition Conservative Party took three (and almost 480,000 votes) and the ruling Labour Party two (with almost 373,000 votes). One seat each went to the Liberal Democrats, the Green Party and the UK Independent Party.

The proportional representation system used to allocate MEP (Member of European Parliament) seats meant that in this election Jananayagam could have secured one with 100,000 votes,

analysts felt.

Jananayagam, a Jaffna-born British citizen, had agreed to contest a few days before voter registration closed on May 19th. The UK polls were held on June 4.

"Unfortunately we were unable to get many Tamil voters registered in time. However, for four weeks of campaigning this is a great result," a campaign leader told TamilNet.

"Also, we faced challenges in our door-to-door voter campaign as the attention of the Tamil community in London drawn to protests and to Colombo's slaughter of Tamils in Mullaitheevu," he added.

The established parties had been campaigning for several months, sometimes years, using long-established campaign machines and with substantial budgets, he pointed out.

Candidates for the main parties, gathered with those of smaller parties and the independent candidates to hear the official announcement, expressed shock that an independent candidate could amass fifty thousand votes in London.

The next largest independent

candidate was Steven Cheung, who campaigned mainly amongst London's Chinese community and got a shade under five thousand votes.

Jananayagam had campaigned on a platform of getting the UK and EU to take action to stop genocide abroad and protect human rights and civil liberties, both at home and elsewhere. She is the UK representative for the pressure group Tamils Against Genocide (TAG).

Tamil activists said Jan's election campaign had helped them reach out to other political forces and communities in Britain.

In the three weeks before the elections, students and volunteers campaigned door to door and also met with organisations and media from several other communities, including the Jewish, Kurdish and several Indian ones, they said.

"We were able to build strong networks with many British political groups and other communities in London, relationships that will strengthen our future advocacy work," a student leader said.

The theme of 'stopping genocide' had struck a special cord with Jewish voters, some of

whom also made welcome financial contributions towards the campaigns costs, he said.

Other minority communities had declared their support for Jananayagam and her campaign goals via their media, they said.

Jananayagam was not available for comment in the early hours of Monday, but a campaign representative spoke to reporters.

"Jan is grateful for the enthusiastic support extended by London's Tamils, particularly at this crucial and difficult time for the Tamil people," he said.

"She is especially grateful to the many, many volunteers who put so much time and energy into a campaign launched at the last minute and to everyone who spread the word through their social and professional networks."

"She is also grateful to the many non-Tamil people who voted for her, recognizing that genocide is ongoing even in 2009, and the gap between international rhetoric and practice when it comes to human rights and civil liberties is alarmingly big. She will of course continue to campaign tirelessly on these fundamental issues."

It may be the worst of times but it is also the best of times for Phoenix-like regeneration.

NEWS

Sri Lanka deports Canadian MP

SRI LANKA denied entry to Bob Rae, a prominent Canadian politician outspoken in his criticism of Colombo's military campaign and then Chair of the Forum of Federations, the constitutional NGO advising the Norwegian peace process during 2002 and 2003.

Sri Lanka's Immigration Commissioner P. B. Abeykoon said "intelligence reports" meant Mr. Rae should not be admitted and was therefore detained when he arrived at Colombo airport and put on a leaving flight on Wednesday June 10.

"We got some intelligence reports on this gentleman and the instructions were not to allow him into the country, so he is detained at the airport and he will be deported by the next available flight," Abeykoon told Reuters.

Sri Lanka's intelligence services deemed Rae's visit "not suitable" and former Ontario premier was forced to leave on another flight, AP said.

Rae said he was given a paper to sign agreeing that he made statements about the Sri Lankan situation without full knowledge of the facts, but wasn't told which statements it referred to.

"I refused to sign such an Orwellian document," he said.

The Toronto Centre Liberal MP and former Ontario premier arrived in Colombo, the Sri Lankan capital, late on Tuesday June 9 armed with an entry visa and flanked by two officials from the Canadian High Commission.

But he was flagged by a border agent upon arrival at Bandaranaike International Airport. Fifteen minutes after the customs official took his Canadian passport for further investigation, Rae learned he was being denied entry to Sri Lanka.

There was no reason given. Appeals to senior immigration officials were fruitless.

"We finally got a message saying that if I admitted that I had made statements that were ill-informed or something like that - and they gave me a thing I could sign - that they might reconsider the decision," Rae, who has travelled 10 times to the country in the past decade.

Rae was travelling to Sri Lanka to meet with aid groups and officials from the United Nations' refugee agency, as well as to assess the physical and emotional wreckage one month after the end of a 25-year civil war with Tamil separatists.

Rae had called on Canada to be more outspoken in its criticism of the recent offensive by the Sri Lankan government against the

Tamil Tigers, which left thousands of civilians dead. He had also urged Prime Minister Stephen Harper to help the Tamil Tigers and Sri Lankan government forces negotiate a peaceful end to the conflict.

In a written statement, Rae said Sri Lanka's decision to expel him was based on false and defamatory conclusions officials appear to have reached about his sympathies in the conflict.

"I have to say this decision reflects on them and not on me. I have fought against violence and extremism all my life. Everyone knows that," he wrote.

"What they now also know is that the government of Sri Lanka is afraid of dialogue, afraid of discussion, afraid of engagement. All I can say is shame on them. If this is how they treat me, imagine how they treat people who can't speak out and who can't make public statements."

Canadian government called the decision to bar Rae "unacceptable" and absurd. It is that, and more. It also follows an incident in which a Colombo mob vandalized Canada's high commission office while police stood by.

"It is absurd to suggest that Mr. Rae represents a threat to Sri Lankan national security, or is a supporter of the Tamil Tigers," Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Emma Welford said in an e-mail.

"We have registered to the Sri Lankan government our dismay and displeasure concerning this unacceptable treatment of a Canadian parliamentarian." A Canadian government statement read.

Politicians of all parties called the incident an insult to Canada.

A spokesman for the Canadian Tamil Congress, David Poopalapillai, said the Sri Lankan government is trying to hide widespread human-rights abuses from both sides, and the fact that it barred an MP who is an acknowledged expert on the country should finally sound alarms.

"We see it as a slap in Canada's face," he said. "We urge our government to take strong measures to retaliate."

Some believe, however, that that is unlikely to have any effect. Former Conservative foreign minister Barbara MacDougall said Canada will have to work with other countries to put international pressure on Sri Lanka to listen.

"The Sri Lankan government is flexing its muscle. It doesn't feel any need for international approval of any kind," she said.



Sri Lanka accused Bob Rae of the Forum of Federations of being a Tiger supporter and deported him

Aid from Asian friends

IN the latest demonstration of Sri Lanka's strengthening relationship with Asian and anti-Western regimes, Myanmar has donated USD50,000 as relief aid for the 300,000 internally displaced people in the north of the island.

Mayanmar's Foreign minister Nyan Win handed over the donation at a meeting with Sri Lankan ambassador Newton Gunaratna at the foreign ministry in Yangon, according to the English language New Light of Myanmar.

Myanmar's junta, in power since 1962, is subject to economic sanctions from the U.S. and European Union over its poor human rights record and lack of democracy.

In recent years, Sri Lanka has opted to align with countries that provide assistance without ques-

tioning the government's gross human rights violations.

Earlier, Beijing, a staunch supporter of Sri Lanka's war against the Tamil Tigers, pledged USD1 million aid for the rehabilitation of the displaced civilians housed in the relief camps in the country. Lt Gen Ma Xiaotian, Deputy Chief of General Staff, People's Liberation Army said China pledged to extend the assistance to the IDPs in Sri Lanka and that it would be willing to further assist Sri Lanka particularly in areas of rehabilitation, resettlement and social advancement.

He also highlighted the importance China places on bi-lateral relations, territorial integrity and sovereignty of both the nations and expressed his appreciation of Sri Lanka's position on the "One-

China Policy".

Another, country that has congratulated Sri Lanka is Iran. Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki telephoned his Sri Lankan counterpart to extend his warm congratulations on defeating LTTE terrorism, Sri Lanka's government officials said. Iran has invested heavily in Sri Lanka in the past two years and according to a recent Sri Lankan state media announcement, Iran will grant USD600 million to expand Rural Electrification Schemes in the island. This is in addition to a USD1.2 billion project to upgrade Sri Lanka's sole refinery at Sapugaskande, outside the capital Colombo.

Sri Lanka has also negotiated a USD500 million loan from Libya.

Congressman criticized for falling prey to propaganda

REPUBLICAN Congressman Heath Shuler has come under criticism from Human rights advocates for taking a trip to Sri Lanka, paid for by the Sri Lankan government, during which he praised the treatment of Tamils held in internment camps.

On returning to the USA, Shuler defended his trip in an interview and repeated comments he made while in Sri Lanka about the treatment of hundreds of thousands of refugees who were held in camps.

"I congratulate the Sri Lankan government on their victory against terrorism in their country," Shuler said in a statement. "I also commend the remarkable work and efforts of the government of Sri Lanka in putting together the

camps in such a short period of time."

However, the Congressman's statements fly in the face of reports from Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and Physicians for Human Rights, which have all criticized the government for intentionally shelling its civilian population and denying foreign media and non-governmental aid organizations access to the camps, where conditions are reportedly deplorable and inhuman.

Shuler, who is not on the House Foreign Relations Committee, said he visited Sri Lanka to check out concerns he had been hearing from church groups that genocide was going on in the camps.

Shuler acknowledged the trip was paid for by the Sri Lankan

government through an exchange program that involved the U.S. State Department.

He said he was briefed in advance by the department and met with U.S. Embassy officials in Sri Lanka.

"The State Department highly encouraged us going," said Shuler, the first member of Congress to go to the country in several years.

Shuler said he met with charitable groups working in the country as well as with President Mahinda Rajapaksa and other government officials. He also visited the camps.

Commenting on Shuler's visit Tom Malinowski, Washington director of Human Rights Watch said: "He just got used".

NEWS

JVP wants to scrap 13th amendment and APRC

SRI LANKA'S third largest political party has demanded the abolition of an all party group setup to devise a solution to the ethnic conflict and suspension of the implementation of the 13th Amendment, which devolves power at provincial council level.

The Marxist-nationalist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) put forward a set of proposals to Sri Lanka's president Mahinda Rajapakse aimed at 'post conflict development'. The JVP proposals stated 'The Proposals of the All Party Representative Committee (APRC) should not be taken into consideration and a new discussion that assures the unity and rights of all people must be held.'

The action plan for the rebuilding of the country in the aftermath of the war also included proposals to reduce the Cabinet to 30 and replacing provincial councils powers with 'a strong unitary government policy'.

Commenting on the plan JVP General Secretary Tilvin Silva said: "The President promised to overcome all the other challenges faced by the nation and our plan of action would offer a practical approach in this regard."

The JVP Leader accused the Rajapakse regime of handing over half of the task of resettlement to India and demanded the Sri Lankan government takes control of resettlement.

Warning that the separatism is yet to be defeated and would come out through the international community, Silva said this should be defeated immediately.

"Separatism still exists though terrorism is defeated and it can become more dangerous if not defeated soon," Silva said.

The APRC, appointed in early 2007 by Rajapakse has so far held 116 sessions but is yet to propose a final plan for a solution. Most political parties have already expressed their reservations about the government dragging its feet on the APRC without working out a comprehensive power devolution formula. The main opposition parties do not participate in its proceedings currently.

TNA, the largest Tamil political party, is not allowed to participate in the APRC and Tamils do not believe that the Sinhala polity would come out with any meaning for solution the Tamil question. The latest APRC update said that the Committee was supposed to finalize the report on April 28, to be handed over to Rajapakse, but there was a delay in the process due to the proposal to establish constitutional courts.

Sinhala heritage 'basis of demerger'

THE Supreme Court of Sri Lanka ruled to demerge the north and east after considering the Sinhala heritage in the provinces, according to the country's Chief Justice.

Sarath Nanda Silva told a gathering in Trincomalee that the court carefully studied the Sinhala heritage in the region before making the judgment.

The Supreme Court ruled in October 2006 that the merger of the north and east provinces in 1987 under the Indo-Lanka accord was against the country's constitution.

Following an agreement between India and Sri Lanka, the then Sri Lankan government introduced the 13th amendment to the Sri Lankan constitution and merged the traditionally Tamil northern and eastern provinces and devolved some authority to the newly formed entity.

The ruling was made after considering petitions by the Sinhala nationalist political parties, the Jathika Hela Urumaya and Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna.

Silva, who is retiring after serving more than a decade as the most senior judicial officer, said Sinhala nationals have long been involved in developing Buddhist religious sites such as Somawathie and Seruvila in the north and the east.

The Chief Justice, who declared open a series of new buildings made the remarks at the Seruvila Temple on Saturday.

Senior Presidential Advisor Basil Rajapakse, MP, who took part in the event described how Silva and President Rajapakse have been close friends for decades. He said the Silva helped Rajapakse family in troubled times.



Mahinda Rajapaksa should be President for life says an SLFP member, who thinks his party will get the numbers in the next parliament to ensure that the necessary constitutional changes can be made

President 'in power forever'

BBC Sinhala

MAHINDA Rajapaksa will be the executive president of Sri Lanka for life after next general elections, a senior leader of the ruling party said.

Chief Minister of north central province Berty Premalal Dissanayake said that nobody will be able to change President Rajapaksa becoming the lifetime president in Sri Lanka. He made the remarks addressing the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) Central Committee in Seruvila electorate on Sunday, June 21. "It is very

clear that Mahinda Rajapaksa will be the lifetime president of this country once we amend the constitution following a victory in the general elections," he said.

Any change to Sri Lanka's constitution needs to be approved by a two thirds majority in parliament. However, any extension to the term of office of the president should be approved by a referendum. The chief minister of the north central province was confident that the ruling party will be able to get a two thirds majority in a future general election.

Earlier, Local Government Minister Janaka Tennakoon has

told Sunday Times newspaper that the government plans to extend the term of the president without holding a presidential election.

However, in a statement, Media minister Anura Yapa has said the government has no such plans. "We believe in people's mandate and the democratic right of the ballot and this we have demonstrated many times. The people have positively responded in large majorities to elect representatives to all bodies in a democratic manner," the minister was quoted by the government Information Department.

Two Army ammunition dumps explode

RESIDENTS of Vavuniya reported hearing loud explosions, and seeing fire from the ammunition dump of the 211- Due Command of the Sri Lanka Army (SLA) in Vavuniya from 6:00 p.m. Tuesday, June 9.

The explosions continued for more than an hour, according to reports from Vavuniya.

The ammunition dump is one of the largest used by the SLA, military observers said.

The explosions reverberated around the town of Vavuniya, 260km (160 miles) north of Colombo.

Sri Lankan police say they suspect an accidental fire at the armoury may have triggered the explosions.

Similar explosions were also

reported in Jaffna at Mayiliddi SLA camp on Saturday, June 6.

Residents in the SLA occupied Mayiliddi area in Valikaamam North said that they heard deafening explosions from the SLA High Security Zone across Thondaimana lagoon on Saturday from 10:30 a.m to 11:00 a.m as if artillery shells were exploding.

Whilst a Defence Ministry spokesman in Colombo, however, said that it was an accidental bomb explosion, SLA sources claimed that ammunitions recovered in Vanni were being destroyed in Mayiliddi.

SLA launched a search operation in the area following the explosion and beefed up the security measures in areas including

Thondaimanaaru, Valvedditthurai and Mayiliddi.

Meanwhile, Sri Lanka's government extended tough anti-terror laws, arguing that remnants of the defeated Tamil Tigers could still try to stage a comeback.

Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickremanayake told parliament that the government wanted to extend the state of emergency by a month despite last month's defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

"There could be fire beneath the embers," he said. "If there are elements who still support terrorism, we will deal with them."

The state of emergency allows the government to arrest and detain suspects for indefinite periods without trial.

NEWS

'Our hands are tainted with blood,' admits Suryanarayan

TamilNet

"OUR hands are tainted with blood", admitted professor V. Suryanarayan, a member of India's national security advisory panel during Vanni war, in a conference organised by International Tamil Centre, Chennai, on Monday, June 8.

He also implied the connivance of the Tamil Nadu government when he said in this context that "during the last two three years New Delhi will not take any action without consulting Tamil Nadu".

However, Tamil circles found his criticism of India's Sri Lanka policy leading nowhere to justice but was harping only on Indian aid conditioning Sri Lanka so that "a Tamil can be a Tamil but at the same time a loyal Sri Lankan".

A diplomatic failure of India according to Suryanarayan was that the fear that India can intervene has been removed.

"And the consequence of it took place in the human rights council when we were in the illustrious company of Pakistan and China. As an Indian I feel ashamed the voting behaviour of New Delhi. We should have abstained from voting", he said.

In the opinion of international observers it was India that orchestrated votes in favour of Sri Lanka in the human rights council.

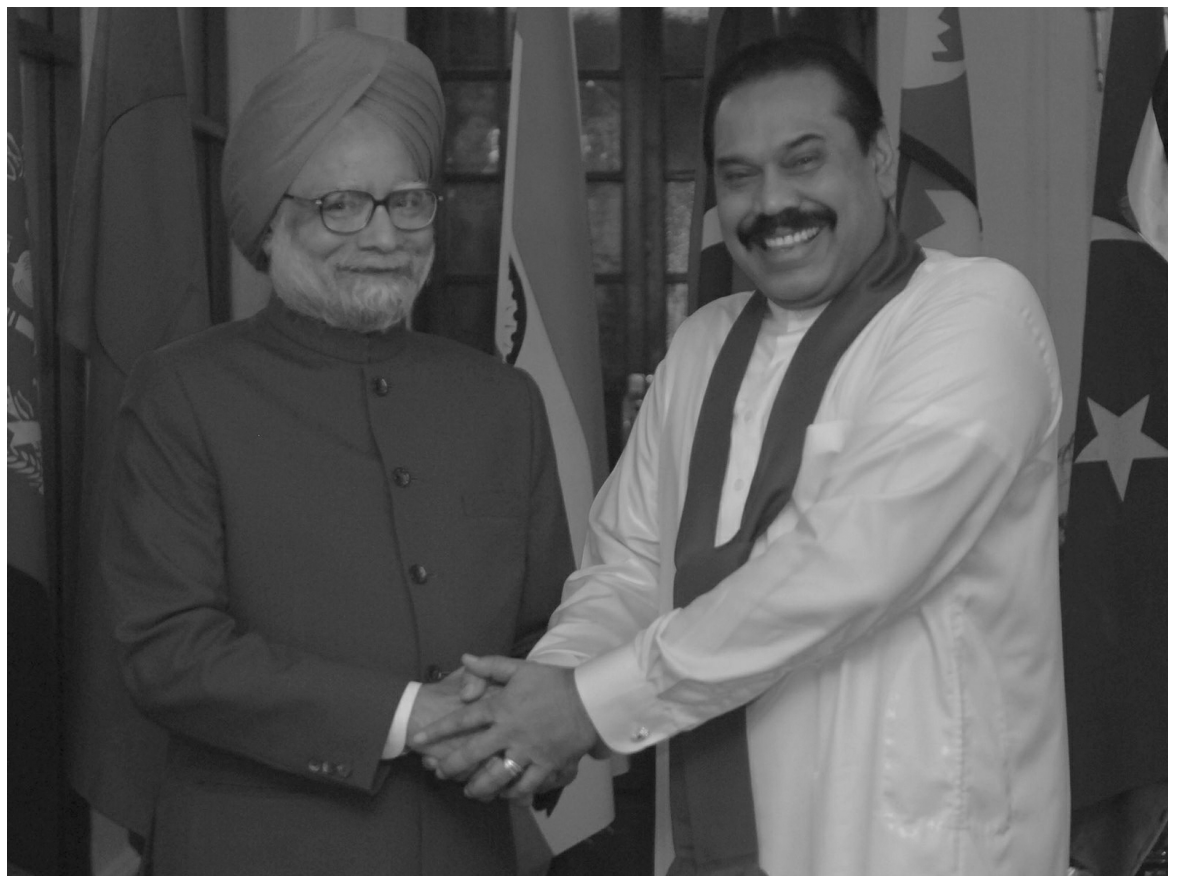
Many viewed it as an academic post mortem when Suryanarayan said, "I also express my feeling with a great sense of sorrow that there is no transparency in India's policy towards Sri Lanka". For many years now, people outside of India have been pointing out the handling of India's Sri Lanka policy by a few, biased, extra parliamentary elements.

Coming hard on Sri Lanka, Suryanarayan said, "Sri Lanka has the unique distinction of one of those countries, which bombs its own citizens. Not just bombing but savage bombing".

"And the bell tolls not only for Mahinda Rajapaksa, the bell tolls for all those who directly or indirectly helped in the most atrocious deeds that were happening in Sri Lanka for the last three months", Suryanarayan said.

In an interview to The Week Magazine, Rajapaksa said that he had fought 'India's war'.

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India has sent \$100 million in aid to Sri Lanka but is reluctant to ask that Tamil rights be respected

India won't tell Sri Lanka what to do

ACKNOWLEDGING that India had fought a proxy war in Sri Lanka with the Tamil Tigers, the country's foreign secretary has said that India won't tell its neighbour what to do to find solution to the decades long ethnic conflict.

Speaking to a group of visiting Sri Lankan editors, Indian Foreign Secretary Shiv Shankar Menon said President Mahinda Rajapakse was 'in a way right' when he said that he had fought India's war since it was the LTTE that had killed Rajiv Gandhi and also because the security of Sri Lanka was interlinked with that of India.

"India would not remain a safe place if Sri Lanka's security is threatened, as the spill over effects of terrorism always put the security of those who are around in danger" said Menon.

Toeing Sri Lankan President's line that any solution to the Tamil national question should be a 'home grown one', Menon said "it is neither the job of India nor of Norway to prescribe what is best for Sri Lanka".

"I am quite impressed by what President Mahinda Rajapakse has explained as his plan towards this. India will always back him in whatever decisions he thinks best suited for Sri Lanka" he added.

Tamil political observers point out that in the current climate, India has no leverage against the Sri Lankan state which is leaning towards China and therefore it is not a case of 'won't tell Sri Lanka what to do' but a case of 'can't tell Sri Lanka what to do'.

As a friendly neighbour Ind-

ia's duty and task is to extend its fullest cooperation to Sri Lanka to find a solution suitable for her, Menon was quoted as saying.

The 13th Amendment is a result of the Indo - Lanka Accord. It is part of the Sri Lankan Constitution now. It is only Sri Lanka that should decide whether to provide a solution on the lines of 13th Amendment or go beyond it, Menon told reporters.

Claiming that the war in Sri Lanka had made Indo-Sri Lanka media reports 'mono-focused,' Menon said that he hoped there would be a diversification of subjects now that the war was over, according to reports.

"Sri Lanka has a huge market here in India. It should exploit the opportunities. Also we should work together in many areas, like garment industry, where Sri Lanka is known for its expertise on high end products, whereas we are known for lower ends due to cheap labour. Together we can do wonders" Menon was quoted as saying.

Meanwhile, India was kept updated about the situation in Sri Lanka's north "from day one" of the security forces' final assault against the Tamil Tigers till the eventual defeat of the LTTE, the powerful Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa revealed.

"From the very beginning, from day one, we kept India very well briefed and we prevented any suspicion being created whether it was because of our relationship with China or Pakistan or anybody else," said Rajapaksa, who played a major role in the

victory against the LTTE.

"We created a mechanism with India, away from the contacts of the Foreign Ministry, for us to develop a close relationship mechanism between the officials," he said in an interview to the Sunday Times newspaper.

From India, the "trio" comprising Foreign Secretary Shivshankar Menon, National Security Adviser M K Narayanan and Defence Secretary Vijay Singh were part of the mechanism, Rajapaksa said.

"On our part we had President's Secretary Lalith Weeraratunga, (President's Special Adviser) Basil Rajapaksa and myself. We developed two teams and we were exchanging views and meetings," the Sri Lankan Defence Secretary said.

Rajapaksa, the brother of President Mahinda Rajapaksa, said the Sri Lankan team visited India many times to discuss the issues that were coming up.

"Tamil Nadu was putting pressure. We understood that and did certain things that helped them (India)," Gotabhaya Rajapaksa said.

"Throughout these years (of LTTE war) we developed this friendship and worked very closely," he said, adding, "whatever other pressures there were, we knew that these friendships will help us overcome that."

He said when the Sri Lankan security forces advanced to the later stages of the war, they tasted many military successes, giving them confidence about winning the battle against the Tigers.

India pledges USD 110 million aid

INDIAN Prime Minister Manmohan Singh told the Indian Parliament that his government had committed Indian Rs 5 crore (USD 110 million) for the rehabilitation and resettlement of the IDPs, and that, if Sri Lanka government asked for more financial assistance, his government would be willing to provide that as well.

The Indian premier said his government was keen to see that the IDPs get an opportunity to go back to their places of origin as soon as possible, and hoped to help the process in every possible ways. "The Tamil problem is larger than that of the LTTE. We hope Sri Lanka will show imagination and courage in meeting the legiti-

mate concerns and aspirations of the Tamil people to live their lives as equal citizens, and with dignity and self-respect," Dr. Singh said in the Lok Sabha, while replying to the debate on the Motion of Thanks on the President's address at the joint sitting of parliament.

He said India was taking an active part in the relief and rehabilitation of the internally displaced people in Sri Lanka. "I have already earmarked Rs.500 crore for this purpose," he said. Dr. Singh said the Indian government was willing to do more to restore normalcy and to return people to their rightful homes.

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