

NEWS AND EVENTS
IN TAMIL
PERSPECTIVE

SAVE 7 TAMIL CAPTIVES

This is an urgent appeal to you in the name of humanity to use your personal and official influence and goodwill to save the lives of ten TRO volunteers, abducted and reported missing in two separate incidents in government controlled areas in East Sri Lanka on 29-30 January. The government denies any knowledge of the incidents. The denial has increased risk of danger to ten lives. Please pay heed to our plea and save these lives.

International Federation of Tamils
ift@bluewin.ch

*For Information and detailed reports/
www.tamilnation.org/indictment/continuingwar/060130tro.htm
<http://www.troonline.org>*



International Federation of Tamils, is deeply dismayed at the lack of progress in the release of the humanitarian aid workers from the TRO, held captive. It is now well over 15 days and the fate of 7 of the 10 aid workers kidnapped, is not clear.



The kidnapping of these workers took place in close proximity to the Sri Lankan Army camps, in two separate incidents. It is believed that either the Sri Lanka armed forces or the paramilitary groups working in tandem with SL military intelligence were behind this abduction.



Meanwhile, the Sri Lanka Government has sought to evade all responsibilities for this heinous act by issuing misleading statements in the media. (Ref: Minister For Foreign Affairs, dt. 02. 02. 06)



The actions taken by the Government do not match its commitment to rescue the captives. Instead, it reveals a cynical attempt to hoodwink the international community with reference to the part played by the paramilitary groups in the abduction. IFT calls upon the President of Sri Lanka to use all his resources to obtain the release of the captives, early. 15 feb.2006

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PEACE FRONT

“Ground conditions will dictate process forward” - Thamilchelvan

source:TamilNet, January 17, 2006

Unless there is a marked change in the ground conditions currently dominated by violent conduct by the Sri Lankan Armed forces and the paramilitaries, the patience of the Tamil population, facing killings on a daily basis in the SLA controlled Tamil homeland, will be put on a serious test, LTTE's Political Head S.P. Thamilchelvan, told media following the meeting in Kilinochchi with the Norwegian Ambassador to Sri Lanka Hans Brattskar and the Head of the Scandinavian truce monitors in Sri Lanka, Hagrup Haukland.

Civilian life in the Sri Lanka Army controlled areas is greatly disturbed and fear of life has gripped our people as never before in the almost four-year Ceasefire period, the LTTE Political Head said.

"Tamil civilians are being killed on a daily basis, the Human Rights violations by the Sri Lankan armed troopers are at a record high, Tamil civilians in their thousands are moving to safer LTTE areas. There are also reports of civilians fleeing to Tamil Nadu."

"It is the ground realities that would dictate the process forward," LTTE's Political Head said adding that the LTTE leadership would convey its stand in clear terms to the Norwegian facilitators in the crucial meeting scheduled at the end of January.

“State terrorism rising in NorthEast” Joint declaration of Tamil Parliamentarians

source:TamilNet, January 17, 2006

"Violence and terror unleashed by the State armed forces is on the increase in the North East province. Fifty Tamil civilians have been abducted in the Jaffna district within few months. From December 1 to January 12 the State armed forces and para military groups in Jaffna have killed thirty-one Tamil civilians. Forty-two Tamils have been killed in other districts of the province," said leaders of Tamil political parties addressing a press briefing after their protest in parliament Tuesday morning.

"We will be launching protest campaigns in and outside of the parliament until the terror activities of the State armed forces are stopped," declared Tamil parliamentarians, sources said.

"Sri Lanka Army (SLA) is inciting Tamil people to violence. SLA is using the Emergency regulations to arrest Tamil civilians without any reason even while the ceasefire agreement is in force. Para military groups in collaboration with the SLA are responsible for the abduction of several Tamil civilians. Tamil people are arrested in Colombo and other areas in the south during nights and taken to police station for interrogation.

The Sri Lanka President and his government have failed to stop these atrocities committed on Tamil civilians. Tamil people cannot expect any justice from the President who is having anti Tamil political parties, Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) and Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) for his political survival, said Tamil parliamentarians.

Peace process has come to a standstill. Tamil people have lost confidence in the peace process due to atrocities by SLA on Tamil people," said Tamil parliamentarians and other party leaders at the press briefing.

Retired Navy Chief of Staff appointed NorthEast Governor

source:TamilNet, January 21, 2006

Retired Rear Admiral Mohan Wijeyawickrema Friday assumed duties as the sixth Governor of the NorthEast Province at the sub-office of the Governor's Secretariat in Colombo. Mr Wijeyawickrema retired as the Chief of Staff of the Sri Lanka Navy (SLN) prematurely as his seniority was overlooked when Ms Kumaratunge appointed Rear Admiral Vasantha Karanagoda as the Commander of the SLN in 2005. The new Governor is scheduled to pay his first official visit to the Secretariat located in

Trincomalee facing the Trincomalee harbor next week, officials of the Secretariat said.

Lieutenant General Nalin Seneviratne, former Commander of the Sri Lanka Army was appointed first Governor of the North East Province with the creation of North East Provincial Council (NEPC) under the 13th Amendment to the Sri Lanka Constitution in August 1987. Mr. Lionel Fernando, a senior civil servant and who served as the Government Agent of Jaffna and Trincomalee succeeded Lt. General Nalin Seneviratne as the second governor. Mr. Gamini Fonseka, a popular film actor and politician later succeeded him. Major General (Retd) Ashoka Jayawardene was appointed the fourth governor of the province. He relinquished his governor post on being appointed the Defense Ministry Secretary. Mr. Tyronne Fernando, a former Foreign Minister under the UNP government and later joined the government led by former Sri Lanka's President Ms Chandrika Kumaratunge was appointed fifth governor of the province.

Rear Admiral Mohan Wijeyawickrema has been appointed the sixth governor this week following Mr. Tyronne Fernando being appointed as the senior advisor to the Foreign Ministry by President Mr. Mahinda Rajapakse.

Disarm Karuna before talks, says UNP

Sassanka Samarakkody, gulf-times.com, Thu 2nd Feb

UNITED National Party (UNP) leader Ranil Wickremesinghe has said the scheduled talks in Geneva, between the government and the LTTE, would fail unless the government agrees to disarm the LTTE break-away group led by Karuna Amman.

Addressing UNP Galle and Matara organisation recently, Wickremesinghe said the LTTE would demand disarming of the rebel group and the government must be ready to face this issue.

SLA attempt to enter LTTE area in Mannar thwarted

source: TamilNet, January 21, 2006

A seven-member group of the deep penetration unit of the Sri Lanka Army (SLA) fled leaving their bags inside the LTTE controlled Adampan area when members of the Civil Volunteers Unit and LTTE cadres counter-attacked them Saturday morning around 6:00 a.m., LTTE sources in Mannar said. The bag recovered by CVF volunteers and LTTE cadres was found with army uniforms, military boots and food packets, according to the sources.

SLA deep penetration group had entered the LTTE held Adampan through Papamodдай via Thiruketheeswaram area. Papamodдай area is also held by LTTE.

The sentry of the CVF and LTTE which is located at the entrance of Adampan Saturday early morning noted a group of persons walking towards their sentry in suspicious manner and started attacking them with small arms.

The DPU group thereafter dropped the bag and fled from the area, sources added.

Colombo lacks will to resolve Tamil National question, says Banu

source: TamilNet, February 08, 2006

"Disarming the paramilitaries, their expulsion and the creation of normalcy in people's daily life are the essential prerequisites for the continuation of peace talks. But Sri Lanka is unlikely to agree," said Colonel Banu, Batticaloa district military commander of Liberation Tigers, in the first memorial

For News updates and Tamil perspectives:

www.Tamilnet.com

www.Tamilinsight.com

www.Tamilnation.org

www.Tamilcanadian.org

www.Tamilguardian.com

www.sangam.org

anniversary held in remembrance of Kowsalyan on Tuesday in Kowsalyan Education Centre at Ampilan in the Paduvankarai region of the Batticaloa district.

"Our cadres have foiled all attempts by traitors who tried to hurt our national unity for selfish motives. When disciplinary actions were to be taken, they opted to turn against their own people," Col Banu said.

"Kowsalyan involved himself in the struggle for the liberation of our people early in his life, and later joined the armed resistance to work hard and efficiently. He will remain permanently in Tamils people's memory," said Banu.

Mr. S. Jeyanandamoorthy, the TNA M.P for Batticaloa district said: "Sri Lanka government while showing interest in peace, has tried to crush the National struggle with the assistance of elements opposed to the struggle. This has been the case from Indo-Sri Lanka accord up to Ranil Wickremesinghe when they cast webs of sabotage to break Tamil peoples determination. But the able guidance of our leadership has made them ineffective."

"All Tamils should unite to strengthen the Leader's hands, if Sri Lanka Government deliberately drags on the peace process without taking decisive actions to resolve the Tamil National question", said Jeyanandamoorthy.

LTTE official killed in Batticaloa

source: TamilNet, January 26, 2006

An LTTE official, Major Kapilan, was killed and at least one cadre was wounded when Sri Lankan Intelligence operatives and paramilitary cadres ambushed a LTTE tractor in LTTE held area in Vadamunai near Welikande in Batticaloa-Polannaruwa border, Thursday around 9 a.m., LTTE sources in Batticaloa said. Sri Lanka Army's 23-1 Brigade camp in Welikande backed up the withdrawing ambush group with 5" mortar fire from their base, the sources added. Meanwhile, S.Puleedevan, the Director of LTTE's Peace Secretariat, speaking from Kilinochchi, condemned the attack on their cadres in the east and accused Colombo for playing "double game, betraying its pledge to cease the violent campaign."

"Despite the gesture of goodwill already expressed by the LTTE, with the release of a policeman in our custody, the attack on our cadres in the East continues with mortar fire from the SLA base," Puleedevan said questioning Colombo's commitment to the Norwegian facilitators.

The attack on LTTE cadres within 24 hours of the much publicized agreement between the LTTE and the Government of Sri Lanka, facilitated by Norwegian Minister Eric Solheim, to hold talks in Geneva does not bode well for building of trust between the parties before talks, he added.

EU commends Solheim, welcomes LTTE, GoSL agreement

source: TamilNet, January 27, 2006

The European Union welcomed the agreement between the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and the LTTE to have talks in Geneva, and praised Norway's Minister of International Development, Erik Solheim, for his "longstanding and untiring efforts" for peace in Sri Lanka, in press release issued Friday.

Preparations ahead of Geneva talks should focus on people's plight - LTTE

source: TamilNet, February 09, 2006

"One of the key issues in the February 2002 Cease Fire Agreement was ensuring a safe life to the civilians in Sri Lanka military controlled areas of the Tamil homeland," Liberation Tigers Political Head Mr. S. P. Thamilchelvan told media, following a preparatory meeting with the Ambassadors of Norway and Switzerland, at the LTTE Peace Secretariat in Kilinochchi Thursday. "It is therefore vital that the team participating in the talks, study the ground situation prevailing in Sri Lanka Army (SLA) controlled areas," he added.

Continued hostile military atmosphere and the abductions of the humanitarian workers who were engaged in post-Tsunami rehabilitation work, have complicated the situation in the minds of the Tamil population, Mr. Thamichelvan told the press.

"The talks need to be conducted in a conducive environment in a constructive manner with positive engagement. It is not a forum to wage a propaganda war," Mr. Thamichelvan noted responding to a question, alluding that Colombo's preparations, as expressed in recent media reports in Colombo, displayed a defensive trend.

Rajapakse's Independence address avoids Geneva talks, Norway facilitation

source:TamilNet, February 04, 2006

Sri Lanka's President Mahinda Rajapakse, in his address at Galle Face on Sri Lanka's 58th Independence Day on Saturday, avoided mentioning Norwegian peace efforts and the critical talks in Geneva on strengthening implementation of Cease Fire Agreement. The Sri Lankan President, who promised "honorable peace" to the people of Northeast at his address, said the independence achieved 58 years ago from the British, was at stake. Meanwhile, districts of NorthEast observed widespread shutdown.

Rajapakse's speech focused on the role and participation of all communities in Sri Lanka in securing independence from the Colonial British rulers in 1948.

Harvard experts too pro-Tiger, too liberal, says Govt. paper

source:TamilNet, February 12, 2006

"It [Sri Lanka Government Peace Team] learnt that two Harvard specialists who were coaching the peace team on some aspects of conflict resolution, for instance, were thought of as being too liberal and possibly too pro Tiger in their views," said Sri Lanka's state-run paper Sunday Observer in its latest edition. The paper also quoted a source close to the consultation process as saying, "Harvard and other institutions of repute, may wittingly or otherwise place Sri Lankan strategy in channels that could be available to the Tigers."

The briefings were held early last week ahead of the sessions by the Harvard Negotiation Project team Thomas Schaub and Elizabeth McClintock on Saturday and Sunday, at the Presidential Secretariat.

"We run the risk of the Tigers knowing what the Sri Lankan strategy is, even before we reach the negotiating table," the paper said.

The paper said the consultants, however, alerted the participants on "possible pitfalls when negotiating with the LTTE," and "mapped out some of the possible sharp practices of the LTTE that might be expected at the talks."

Sri Lanka ruled out "Tamil homeland"

Mon Feb 13, 2006 Reuters

Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapakse on Monday ruled out Tamil Tiger demands for a separate homeland in the island's north and east, but said he would rein in armed groups -- a central rebel demand ahead of crunch talks.

"There's only one country, we can share power. Not a separate state. That idea must be taken off ... it is completely out," Rajapakse told Reuters in an interview ahead of upcoming talks with the rebels in Switzerland to avoid a slide back to war.

"This is a small country, where you can't have two states. I won't allow the country to be divided," he added. "You have to give up the concept of having two nations, or two countries ... There is no Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka. There cannot be an Eelam."

"If any group operates in our area, we will stop it. Any groups carrying arms will be brought under control, whether it is the so-called Karuna group or the LTTE," Rajapakse said at his official fortress-like residence, wearing his traditional Sinhalese dress of long white shirt, sarong and a red sash.

Rajapakse says he wants to solve the conflict within a unitary state rather than a federal one, and said he is looking at the United Kingdom's model of government and devolution.

"Take England ... it is unitary ... That shows that under a unitary government, you can devolve power," he added. "This will be a new Sri Lankan model ... Both sides will have to sit down and decide what they can give up and what we can give up."

"I am a peaceful man. I am not a warmonger," the 60-year-old father of three said. "For two months I was keeping (the military) on a tight leash."

"How long can I just keep my eyes closed? You must never put a government, a leader, and corner him -- push him to the wall. If I am pushed to the wall ...," he said, suddenly stopping himself. "Let us hope that we will achieve peace."

Rajapakse said peace talks would take time.

"One day there must be one country, one nation and one army," he added. "They can have a police force, yes, but there cannot be two armies, two air forces, two navies."

"Homeland, nationhood and self-rule are the three basic and cardinal principles,"

- LTTE respond to Rajapakse's statement -

source: TamilNet, February 15, 2006

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, on Wednesday, responded to SL President Mahinda Rajapakse's recent interview where he rejected the Tamil call for self-rule. "Homeland, nationhood and self-rule are the three basic and cardinal principles," that have been guiding the LTTE in its struggle to find a peacefully negotiated political arrangement, a statement from the LTTE reiterated. If Colombo adopts a political stand ruling out the Tamil homeland concept and insists on a resolution to conflict within the "Sinhala" constitution, the LTTE would be left with "no alternative other than to endeavour hard to respond effectively to the Tamil call for self rule," the statement said.

"The Sinhala rulers are in a dream-psychosis that makes them wrongly perceive that their success in rejecting the Tamil homeland concept would invariably nullify the concepts of Tamil nationhood and self-rule," the statement further said.

"That the North-East part of this island is the traditional homeland of the Tamil people is not a political concept that developed overnight. It has remained the habitat and homeland of the Tamil people for over several thousands of years. The Tamil homeland was well defined and demarcated even at the time of European invasion of this island." "Unitary form of government, if translated into ground reality, means Sinhala Parliament, Sinhala Constitution, Sinhala Judiciary, Sinhala bureaucracy and Sinhala armed forces ruling this country. It is within this conceptually rigid supremacy centred unitary constitution that the Tamil people continue to face a cruel genocide."

(for the full statement ple. visit www.ltteps.org)

HUMAN RIGHTS

Tamil journalist shot dead in Trincomalee

TamilNet, January 24, 2006

Mr.S.S.Rajan, Trincomalee correspondent for "Sudar Oli," a Tamil daily published from Colombo was shot dead Tuesday morning around 6:00 by unidentified men close to his residence while waiting for transport to his workplace.

The victim, 35-year old Subramaniam Sugirtharajan, a father of two, has been working in the Sri Lanka Port Authority.

His residence is located along the Lower Road facing the Trincomalee harbor in the suburb of Orr's Hill in Trincomalee.

The Governor's secretariat is situated close to the scene of crime.

Police rushed to the site and began investigation into the crime.

Residents in Trincomalee said that Rajan was instrumental in exposing the involvement of Sri Lanka Army (SLA) in the recent execution style killing of the five Trincomalee students.

SLTMA urges action on journalist killing

TamilNet, January 25, 2006

The Sri Lanka Tamil Media Alliance (SLTMA) in an urgent letter to the Media Minister Mr. Anura Priyadarshana Yapa has asked him to reveal his proposed actions to prevent future killings and harassing of Tamil media journalists following the murder of Tamil journalist on Tuesday in Trincomalee. SLTMA condemned the murder of Sudar Oli Trincomalee journalist Mr. Suhiratharajan on Tuesday about two weeks after the Media Minister guaranteed the safety and security of Tamil media journalists.

Journalist killed for reporting on paramilitary abuses - RSF

TamilNet, January 24, 2006

Reporters sans frontières (RSF) in a press release issued said that Subramaniam Sugirdharajan, a correspondent of the Tamil-language daily Sudar Oli was killed for writing about "abuses committed in his region by Tamil paramilitary groups," and that in Sri Lanka, "the impunity enjoyed by the instigators and perpetrators of these murders encourages more violence against the press."

FMM condemns killing of Tamil journalist

TamilNet, January 24, 2006

Expressing shock and dismay at the killing of Tamil journalist Mr. Sugirdharajan, the Free Media Movement (FMM) in a press release issued Tuesday in Colombo said, "It is time to put a complete stop to the impunity which has been the hallmark of attacks on the freedom of expression in this country and ensure that culprits are arrested and held account for their crimes."

TSL Intelligence, paramilitaries responsible for Manipay, Kodikamam killings - NESOHR

TamilNet, January 25, 2006

NorthEast Secretariat on Human Rights (NESOHR) in the case histories of Manipay killing of three members of the same family and the killing of a 15 year old youth in Kodikamam, released this week, provides details of involvement of Sri Lanka Intelligence operatives and paramilitary cadres belonging to Eelam Peoples Democratic Party (EPDP) in the killings.

With several Sri Lanka Army (SLA) soldiers wearing black bands covering their faces, clearing Kanagasabai Road leading to Bojan's family, nine members of EPDP paramilitaries scaled the fences of the two storied house at 10 p.m. and killed Renuka, 30, Shannuka, 23, and Arthanareeswary Bojan, 51, NESOHR said in its report after interviewing residents of Manipay and family members who escaped death. The killings took place on 14 January.

In the shooting death of student Thambirajah Arulajanthan, 15, of Kodikamam on 28 December, NESOHR report said, EPDP cadres and SLA Intelligence operatives had visited the house three times in search of Arul's brother-in-law Kirubakaran. Kirubakaran was an LTTE member and had left the movement six years ago, the family told NESOHR.

The family said the SLA for planted two grenades in their backyards to implicate the family for possessing arms. The report said, on the day of shooting, gunmen had entered the house at 10.15 p.m. and when the family was awakened by the noise the invaders ran away after firing three shots. Arulajanthan was killed by the gun fire.

EPDP threatens Jaffna government workers

TamilNet, January 23, 2006

In a letter addressed from the Eelam Peoples Democratic Party (EPDP) office, Sridhar Theater, Jaffna, to selected government officers, the EPDP threatened with death those who defy EPDP's call to attend a meeting in Vathiri, Karaveddy on 23 January, sources said.

Excerpts from translation of the letter written in Tamil follows:

"We are aware that you worked closely with the Liberation Tigers who practise terrorism and who are destroying the culture, justice and administration of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka. "Since you have not fled to Vanni and continue to live in Jaffna, we are keen to include you as part of our force. We are holding a meeting on the 23 January at 3.00 p.m. in Vathiri Pradeshya Sabha offices. "If you attend your family's and your future will be safe. If not I like to remind you the fate that befell the family of Bojan in Manipay and expect your attendance."

SLA trooper present during Katkovalam killing - NESOHR

TamilNet, January 22, 2006

Sri Lanka Army (SLA) trooper identified as Jegath was one of the men who shot to death Iyathurai Baskaran, 27, on 6 January in Kudathanai, NorthEast Secretariat on Human Rights (NESOHR) said in the case history released Sunday. The NESHOR report produced after interviews with residents and relatives of the deceased said, armed SLA soldiers stood guard at the adjoining houses while a group of men including Jegath went to Baskaran's house to commit the murder.

Journalists complain to SL Defense Ministry about harassment

TamilNet, January 19, 2006 1

The official media accreditation issued by the Government Information Department has been disregarded, under Emergency Regulations, not only when detaining Tamil media journalists but also when they carry out their official duties, five media organisations said in a joint memorandum urging the Sri Lankan Defence Ministry's Secretary, Gothapaya Rajapakse, the brother of the SL President Mahinda Rajapakse, to provide an opportunity to meet him and place before him the harassment meted out to Tamil media journalists under the Emergency Regulations, media sources said.

Sri Lanka Tamil Media Alliance, Sri Lanka Working Journalist Association, Sri Lanka Muslim Media Forum, Free Media Movement and Federation of Media Employees Trade Union Thursday warned that the trend is not only hampering journalists but also place their lives at risk. The memorandum further states that the Emergency Regulations have been used to detain journalists and arrest them and search media institutions.

Sexual assault at Kopay SLA camp suspected, says TNA MP

TamilNet, February 01, 2006

Tamil National Alliance (TNA) Jaffna district parliamentarian S Gajendran brought to the attention of Sri Lanka President Mahinda Rajapakse that residents in Kopay strongly suspect sexual assaults on women are taking place inside a Kopay Sri Lanka Army (SLA) camp, the parliamentarian told the local media, Tuesday. Several residents of the area had complained to the parliamentarian that they had heard a woman screaming for several minutes inside the camp at 5 p.m. Tuesday.

Underage paramilitary recruit attests to SLA-Karuna link

TamilNet, February 03, 2006

A 15-year-old boy, recruited by the paramilitary cadres of Karuna Group, later sent on vacation, and who managed to move with his family into the Liberation Tigers held area in Ayithiyamalai, addressed a press meet at Solayaham in LTTE controlled Kokkaddicholai Friday. The underage youth, Arularaj, has revealed details on how he was abducted, transported to Thivuchenai and trained at the training camp of the paramilitary group at Thivuchenai in Welikande. Arularj, who was on leave, managed to escape as his "guardian", an EPDP cadre Rama Ranjan, who accompanied him to Batticaloa from Welikande, was gunned down by unidentified gunmen in mid-January.

SLA violates detainees rights- HRC

TamilNet, February 02, 2006

Sri Lanka Army (SLA) soldiers in Jaffna has grossly violated the fundamental rights of arrested Tamil youths by sending them to the Terrorism Investigation Division (TID) in Colombo for interrogation without adhering to proper judicial procedures, said Human Rights Commission (HRC) in Jaffna Wednesday. In the past 45 days five Jaffna youths, presumed disappeared after arrests by the SLA, have been sent to the TID unit in Colombo, according to Jaffna Police.

Jaffna Police told the HRC officials Wednesday that Murugathas Theeparooban, 19, from Kaithady East, Nunaval, who was arrested on 22 December at his home by the SLA, and Ratnam Anandarajah, 33, another married man arrested by SLA have been sent to TID in Colombo on Wednesday. Earlier, SLA had denied arresting either of the men and Theeparooban's parents had filed a missing report with the HRC office in Jaffna soon after he was arrested. SLA handed over Theeparooban on 15 January to the Chavakachcheri Police, after keeping him in detention for nearly 20 days, and the Police later left him in the custody of the Kankesanthurai Police at their Special detention center. Meanwhile, Packianathan Kamalakannan, a trainee at the Palaly Teachers Training college, who was arrested by the Sri Lanka Army (SLA) following the claymore mine attack in Point Pedro that killed twelve SLA soldiers on 27 December, and two other Jaffna youths arrested earlier and presumed disappeared, were already with the TID in Colombo, Jaffna Police told the HRC officials.

HRC condemned the long incarceration of the detainees without adhering to internationally accepted procedures that guarantees safety of life, and said that by sending the detainees to the TID before producing them before a judge, SLA stands accused of attempting to place false charges on the detainees through forced confessions at the TID.

Batticaloa farmers discriminated in compensation payments - TNA MP

TamilNet, February 09, 2006

Mr.T.Kanagasabai, Batticaloa district Tamil National Alliance (TNA) parliamentarian, made an urgent appeal to the Minister of Agriculture not to show racial discrimination in paying compensation to farmers whose paddy crops had been destroyed due to flood by heavy rain during the end of last year, sources said.

MISCELLANEOUS

Too few Tamil speakers in SL Govt service

The Hindustan Times - Colombo, February 12, 2006

Sri Lanka's Official Languages Commission has reported that there are far too few Tamil speakers in government service and has suggested measures to correct the glaring imbalance.

The Tamil-speaking population in Sri Lanka comprises Sri Lankan Tamils, Indian Origin Tamils and Muslims. Together they are 26 per cent of the island's population.

But in the 9,00,000-strong public service, Tamil-speakers are just 8.3 per cent. The rest are Sinhala-speakers.

Out of the 36,031 employees in the Police Department, 231 are Tamils and 246 are Muslims.

Since Sri Lankan Muslims are also Tamil speaking, the total number of Tamil speakers in this vital department is just 477.

Wellawatte, a suburb of Colombo, is an overwhelmingly Tamil area, with 21,417 of its residents out of a total population of 29,302, being Tamil speaking. But in the Wellawatte police station, out of the 156 personnel, only 6 are Tamil speaking.

The Sri Lankan armed forces are also almost completely Sinhala or Sinhala speaking. The few Tamil-speaking personnel there are Muslims, rather than Tamils as such.

There is a such a shortage of Tamil-speaking senior and competent officers that in the predominantly

Tamil-speaking North Eastern districts, officers are asked to stay on after retirement.

There are Government Agents and Assistant Government Agents (counterparts of the Indian District Collectors) who keep serving well past their official retirement age.

There are only 166 official translators in Sri Lanka. And out of these, only 58 are Tamil-speaking.

But translators are required in large numbers because of the existence of a massive linguistic barrier in the country.

Speaking to Hindustan Times on the state of affairs, the Chairman of the Official Languages Commission, Raja Collure, said: "Successive governments have failed to implement the constitutional provision in regard to the use of Tamil as the second official language."

This is regrettable especially in view of the fact that Tamil had been made the second official language of the country, through the 13th amendment, 18 years ago, following the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord of July 1987.

At that time, it was presumed that the acceptance of Tamil as an official language would automatically lead to the recruitment of more Tamils and that there would be no glaring ethnic imbalances.

Speech damages credibility of US role in SL peace, say Tamil Americans

TamilNet, January 21, 2006

Tamil Americans in a letter to United States Ambassador in Sri Lanka, Jeffrey Lunstead, commenting on the Ambassador's speech on 9 January, and his subsequent clarification of 17 January, expressed concern that "his partisan message has done immense damage to the peace process and to the credibility of US role in it."

The Tamil Americans in their letter through Tamil Sangam, USA, observe that Ambassador's speech is "just one more example of his approach as US Ambassador in regard to the peace process, which has engendered a widespread perception among Tamils, at all levels, including elected representatives, that US policy is not only biased against them in their search for a just and enduring solution, but is insensitive even to their basic human rights and needs."

Tamil Americans in their letter also underscore his threat only to the LTTE and the Tamil people of US action: "we want the cost of a return to war to be high," and accuse the Ambassador of insensitivity to Tamil perceptions and suffering, and especially in linking that cost to a "more capable and determined SL military." They note that Tamils know only too well the high cost of war and the killings, disappearances etc committed with impunity by those forces in war. They also accuse the Ambassador of "being oblivious of the basic fact that the SL military is really and truly a Sinhala military."

They welcome at the same time his clarification of 17 January, acknowledging that blame for the deterioration lies with both the Government and LTTE.

In welcoming his reiteration of the Co-chairs call on the Sri Lanka Government to disarm the paramilitaries, the letter notes that the killings and counter killings associated with the paramilitaries have been the single most important cause of the escalation of violations of CFA since 2004. "It is incumbent on the US and co - chairs to insist that the SL Government take immediate and concrete steps to disarm paramilitaries. Such action by itself will quickly unwind the violence and CFA violations."

Tamil Americans welcome his clarification of his partisan "threat," that his comment was simply "to make clear that a war will be more costly and unsuccessful." However, they request that he "does everything he can to correct the perception of a "threat."

The letter expressed serious concern about "an apparent disregard for Tamil lives," shown by the continued public silence of the ambassador about the widening and serious human rights violations by the military, admittedly often under provocation. There has no public comment even on the murder of Mr. Pararaj, or of any of the high profile and incidents like the execution like killings in Trinco, assault on University students, and abusive mid night search of Tamil families in Colombo. They point out that "the ideals that US stands for demand" that he speak out.

Donors skip talks with Sri Lanka rebels after protests

Fri Feb 3, COLOMBO (AFP)

Sri Lanka's key international lenders postponed a meeting scheduled with Tamil Tiger guerrillas after protests from pro-government Buddhist monks and Marxists, officials said.

A party of Buddhist monks and the main Marxist party -- key backers of the Colombo government -- had protested to officials of the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and the International Monetary Fund about the planned meeting with the rebels.

The three international lenders said their meeting with the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has been rescheduled until after the guerrillas and the government hold talks in Geneva later this month to save their truce.

The monks and the Marxists argued the meeting would have given official recognition to the Tigers and legitimised their alleged attacks against security forces.

Donors say successful peace talks crucial for Sri Lanka's growth

Sri Lanka AP feb. 06

Major international donors pledged their commitment to upcoming peace talks between Sri Lanka's government and Tamil Tiger rebels but warned that recent violence could hamper development projects. In a joint statement, the World Bank and Asian Development Bank said that a successful outcome to the talks - slated to take place later this month in Switzerland - will be essential for Sri Lanka's growth and post-tsunami reconstruction. "The two country directors wish to reiterate their commitment to playing their appropriate roles in supporting the peace process in Sri Lanka," Peter Harold of the World Bank and ADB chief Alessandro Pio said in the statement. Pio told reporters that, despite recent unrest, the banks have kept up their projects to help rebuild Sri Lanka in the wake of the massive December 2004 tsunami that ravaged much of the coastline and killed some 35,000 people.

"But it is more difficult for larger scale projects, uncertainty makes it difficult," he said, adding that he hopes the talks in Geneva will resolve the lingering conflict, making it easier for the agencies to proceed with their projects.

LTTE confers Maamanithar award to stalwart at Niedharsanam

[TamilNet, January 21, 2006 13:41 GMT]

Leader of Liberation Tigers, V Pirapaharan conferred Maamanithar (Great Humanbeing) award to Mr V Satchithanathanthasivam (also known as Gnanatharan) a tamil activist, journalist, political thinker, and later the key force behind the LTTE's visual media division Niedharsanam. He was 65-years old when he died on Wednesday after a prolonged illness. Gnanatharan, who began his literary career as a novelist in 70s, directed the first short film in 1992 and the first full length film of Niedharsanam, LTTE media sources said.

OPINION

Sri Lanka continues to violate state obligations towards Tamils

(memorandum submitted to the President by the Tamil Parliamentarians)

"We write to you further to the Satyagraha campaign that the members of parliament of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), CWC, UPF and WPPF carried out within the Chambers of the Parliament on January 17th, 18th and 19th and the meeting TNA parliamentarians had with you and some Ministers at your request on the evening of the 18th of January 2006.

"During this meeting the grave situation pertaining to the Tamil people in the NorthEast and in all parts of the country was discussed at length.

"We appreciate your desire to meet with us and ascertain the reasons for the Satyagraha campaign staged within the chambers of Parliament.

"We brought to your notice that none of the assurances given to us earlier on the floor of Parliament pertaining the assassination of Mr.Chandra Nehru, Mr.Koushalyan, Mr.Sivaram when you were Prime Minister, and rape and murder of Ms Eliyathamby Tharshini, had been honored or implemented.

"We strongly believe that the Government has failed to carry out any proper and meaningful investigations into these crimes and bring the offenders to justice. We also strongly believe that the Government's failure to take appropriate action to prevent the recurrence of such crimes has led to further crimes, some of which are referred to below:

"The conduct of the security forces towards Tamil civilians has been particularly aggressive in the recent past. 42 Tamil civilians have been killed within the Jaffna district, around 20 Tamil civilians have been killed in other districts in the NorthEast, and around 50 Tamil civilians have disappeared in the NorthEast. Tamil civilians are being increasingly manhandled, threatened and assaulted in the NorthEast. They are being deprived of the opportunities to carry on their occupation particularly farming and fishing. Many Tamil families have begun to flee to India. Many have sought refuge in LTTE controlled territory..

"We wish to refer specifically to the following crimes involving the security forces.

1. Mr. Joseph Pararajasingham, a senior Member of Parliament of the TNA was gunned down within the premises of the St.Mary's Roman Catholic Church at Batticaloa in the early hours of 25th of December 2005 on Christmas night while he was at prayer. The road leading to the church was manned by armed forces while police personnel were on duty outside the church. This is in government-controlled territory. It is clear that the assailants carried out the assassination with the involvement of some section of the security forces. Though the identity of atleast one assailant is ascertainable, no steps have been taken to apprehend anyone.
2. Five innocent Tamil youth, all students engaged in higher education, were deliberately shot and killed in clod blood at Trincomalee by an identifiable group of the security forces sent to Trincomalee without due authority around 7.45 p.m. on 2nd January 2006. This was in government-controlled territory. On the evidence available, both direct and circumstances the offenders can be identified and brought to justice. The judicial inquest has ruled that these young men came by their death as a result of gunshot injuries and directed that the crime be investigated. More than two weeks after the crime there is hardly any credible progress in the investigative process.
3. On the night of 16th January at Manipay, Jaffna within the government-controlled territory members of the security forces and Tamil paramilitary groups functioning together have shot five members of a family, three female members fatally, while the other two have been admitted to the Jaffna general hospital with serious injuries. The father Mr.Bojan was the President of the Northern Region Scouts Association.
4. On the 23rd of December 2005 four Tamil civilians were shot and killed and the bodies burnt in their house by security forces at No: 44, Victoria Housing Scheme at Pesalai, in Mannar. The four persons belonged to one family, father, mother, son and daughter. This was an unwarranted attack by the security forces against the Tamil family inside the government-controlled territory.

"The above stated matters reveal that the Tamil people in the NorthEast are facing a grave and serious situation. Members of he Tamil civilian population have been indiscriminately arrested in large numbers, many females in their nightclothes without any reasonable suspicion or justifiable reason, purely on the ground of their ethnicity, photographed in their nightclothes and released after questioning at various police stations. This is a blatant violation of their fundamental human rights. This has happened in the Colombo city. Tamils in the upcountry areas have been similarly arrested.

"The presence of the armed forces in large numbers in civilian inhabited areas in the NorthEast, particularly in Jaffna and in Trincomalee, is most oppressive and humiliating to the Tamil people. In Trincomalee this situation has continued for more than eight months causing immense inconvenience and discomfort. We strongly urge that the armed forces be replaced by the police in these areas.

"These were the reasons that compelled us to perform us to perform a Satyagraha campaign within the Chambers of parliament. "At our discussion with you on the 18th of January 2006 evening you indicated that these matters would receive your attention and that you would take appropriate action.

"We strongly urge that you take adequate action to ensure the safety to life and property of NorthEast Tamils.

"We look forward to early action on your part."

The Asian paradise, Sri Lanka, could lose it all

(BY TOM PLATE 13 February 2006)

IF THERE is one country in Asia that can serve as a metaphor for all the good and the evil in the world, it may well be little Sri Lanka, formerly known as Ceylon. This physically gorgeous island nation off the coast of India is a mess. A few years ago, after some two decades of vile civil war, its people experienced an unaccustomed respite: a rather well observed, virtually unprecedented, long-overdue cease-fire.

How long would a cease-fire really last - a few months, a year or two or perhaps four at most? But while it did last, it suggested that Sri Lanka had a splendid future, that it could mature into a gem like Switzerland or Singapore, that it could offer the rest of the world an exemplary measure of hope that our planet is moving toward a higher level of civilisation rather than descending into a Hobbesian state of nature wherein life is 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short'.

You have to understand, this is a nation of tremendous promise. Its people are, by and large, talented, educated and ready for the globalisation experience. Why else would the Japanese, always so savvy about investing their time and money in a prospect, have invested so much in trying to help all parties maintain the cease-fire? And why else would those near-saintly Norwegian peace negotiators be so prodigiously devoted to mediation efforts? Sri Lanka, everyone realises, is well worth the attention.

But to realise its potential, it has to begin helping itself if others are to realise success in permanently helping it out of its nightmare. If it does not, then all of the outside parties - which include the United States and other nations and organisations that came to its aid after last year's horrid tsunami - are going to walk away from Sri Lanka as if it has never existed. For at a certain point, it is only rational to say that it is impossible to help someone who so stubbornly will not help himself.

Right now, in the former Ceylon, things are getting worse. Its new, recently elected President, Mahinda Rajapakse, is demonstrating astonishing ineptitude. Paramilitary forces allegedly - repeat, allegedly - linked to the SL government have just abducted a handful of non-violent humanitarian aid workers and have stored them who knows where (assuming they are still alive). And the various warring parties practically had to be begged by the international community to send representatives to Geneva where the next multi-party peace chat has been scheduled.

Since December more than 100 people have died in the renewed round of fighting. Some 60-80 Sri Lankan Sinhalese troops have died, as have some 40-60 Tamil civilians. The latter is from the minority ethnicity of Sri Lanka that largely inhabits the northeast portion of the island-nation. Its inhabitants, fearful of oppressive rule by the Sinhalese leadership, by and large would settle happily for some kind of Quebec-like federal status in a bicultural Canada-like Sri Lanka.

In two decades of conflict, more than 60,000 people have died. Land mines, grenade attacks and what-have-you have converted this tourist postcard island into an Asian Gaza Strip.

The US embassy in Colombo, the capital, should be congratulated for playing a steady mediator's hand. When the ten aid workers of the nonprofit, Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation were abducted last week, the embassy, issued a forthright statement expressing Washington's alarm and urging all the parties to show up in Geneva later this month to attend to the business of making peace.

An ominous recent study, made public after a renewed effort by the governments of Britain, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden (backed by the World Bank and the Asia Foundation), declared that "the potential for a return to war is inherent in the current situation. The study's authors, who include a University of London expert, argue that the key to peace in Sri Lanka is to be found in a renewed effort in Colombo by the majority Sinhalese government to magnanimously accept many of the expressed wishes of the minority in the northeast.

The study calls for "a more inclusive approach to conflict resolution," including a recommendation for greatly increased humanitarian aid to the minority northeast, the hardest hit region by the tsunami: "Sri Lanka's current situation may be characterised as a pause in conflict." The pause seems about to end, and the country would appear to be on the precipice of a decent into hell like that of a Darfur.

Prof. Tom Plate, a member of the Pacific Council on International Policy, is a veteran journalist who has worked at Time, The Los Angeles Times, Newsday and CBS)

"Bring Back The Status Quo Of Two Nations"

TIME talks to Tamil rebels spokesman Suppiah Paramu Tamilchelvan

BY Alex Perry Monday, Feb. 13, 2006

TIME: How close are we to war? Can we pull back?

Tamilchelvan: There is a war environment. The government is seriously engaged in provoking people and creating an environment that looks like war. On a daily basis, three or four people are being killed and in places that are fully under military occupation. Even a Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission office outside a military base was attacked. This shows the degree of government involvement. The Tigers are not engaged in any [similar] effort. Our commitment to take things forward as we have done in the last three to four years remains the same.

Time: Do you have any doubt about who is carrying out the attacks?

TS: We don't need to think of rogue elements in the Sri Lankan army forces. It's very clear that the military structure under [Sri Lanka President] Mahinda Rajapakse is made up of hardliners who believe in war. They have a history of it. They are hawks. These things come from the top. On one hand, the government makes statements that it is committed to peace. On the other, it openly commits atrocities.

Time: To be absolutely clear, you say there's no link between the Tigers and the deaths of more than 70 soldiers, mostly in claymore mine attacks?

TS: The sophistication in which the attacks have been carried out does not necessarily mean the L.T.T.E. is involved. All the battles we had with the Sri Lankan army [during the 1983-2001 civil war] were done with the full participation of civilians. Over 100,000 underwent training and without them we would have not been successful.

To understand who's attacking the army, look at the background. A humanitarian disaster [the Dec. 2004 tsunami] that necessitated joint action did not bring about a change of attitude in Colombo. So in July 2005, the Tamil people, in an uprising of their own involving hundreds of thousands of people, [demonstrated] their disappointment at the [government's failure] to deliver normalcy. The government had failed miserably to fulfill its obligations under the ceasefire agreement, such as minimizing their military presence. The military is abducting females, raping them, killing them, killing families. These are people battered by two decades of war, who expected normalcy and who were not given anything through the joint mechanism [for tsunami aid]. Expecting those people to remain calm forever is simplistic. People were forced to take matters in their own hands because they are so frustrated. But, yes, we accept they have been trained.

TIME: The Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission says your denial of involvement is "unacceptable."

TS: We are prepared to cooperate in any investigation. Today we're going to meet the Norwegian ambassador and we are going to put forward our resolution to cooperate in any proceedings they deem fit to satisfy them that we are not responsible.

Time: If you feel the government is trying to provoke you, to create an environment for war, are you going to be provoked?

TS: As a responsible political organization, we're not provoked. We have a commitment to the ceasefire agreement and the international community's concern for peace in Sri Lanka. What [worries] us is the grave risk to the ceasefire by the civilians who are being killed, tortured and arrested, and kept under military occupation, people made to feel helpless, who are resorting to actions that any normal human being would take.

We read the statement put out by the UN Secretary General which says that both parties should stick to the ceasefire agreement. And what does the agreement say? Deliver normalcy to people affected by war for two decades. Who are these people? They are the Tamil people. Those people need peace. This is the message. They have not specifically mentioned that the government has failed, but it is very clear that this is what the international community feels.

Time: If I accept your insistence that this is a people's uprising, will there come a point at which the L.T.T.E. feels it has to join in?

TS: We would like to join the people, but not in the way you suggest. We would like to join them in the peace process and alleviate their hardship. But if people continue to be harassed, we will definitely defend them.

Time: Why is Sri Lanka's history so often one of wasted potential? It has a booming tourist industry,

a population of smart and educated people, and billions of dollars pledged in development and tsunami aid. There's a golden future within reach. But it all depends on peace. Why throw it all away?

TS:We appreciate your realistic assessment of the situation. Yes, this island is blessed with such potential in manpower and material resources. Why are we unable to tap this potential? Well, look at countries that are prospering. Those countries too have different nationalities, traditions and cultures. But they commingle. There is a dignified approach to governance. The people, whichever race they belong to, consider themselves rightful citizens and contribute towards the country's prosperity.

A similar thing can definitely happen in this island as well. But that's if there is a change of attitude in Colombo and arrangements are made to bring back the status quo of two nations, Tamil and Sinhalese, living side by side.

Time:Two separate nations living side by side? Is this a hardening of your position from accepting federalism?

TS:You may be correct. But our position is based on historical fact. Both nations have their own way of life, culture and language. If all that is restored, and respected, and we are returned our dignity and right to self-determination, then moving away from federalism will be ruled out. We can have a relationship and political arrangements can be worked out. But first, accept the sovereignty of our people.

Time:There can few more blighted places on earth than one which has suffered two decades of war, a tsunami, and now looks to be tumbling back into war. Where is the compassion?

TS:We are not a separate entity from the people. When you say 'you' and 'the people', that is inaccurate. We are part of the people. I and other L.T.T.E. members came from the people. Our families were affected by the war and by the tsunami. To ask about our compassion for the people is irrelevant. We are part and parcel of the same unit. The L.T.T.E. spearheads the freedom fighters, but we are the same community.

Also, in the Tamil homeland, there is deprivation in material needs, yes, but people are living in peace and not under subjugation and that is a wholly different quality of life from people who are under military occupation. Why are people from military-occupied areas coming here? Why are they leaving their homes and jobs? Because they are prepared to undergo difficulties, but not live under military occupation.

Should fighting resume, many people think there's so much frustration, that it's going to be even more bloody than before.

War is not gentle and nice. It's definitely going to be cruel. We hate war and we do not see it as an option that will produce a political solution. But we were forced into war. The decision to avoid such bloodshed, to avoid the killing of thousands of people, is for the occupying military power, the prosecutor of war, not the oppressed.

What can the international community do to help prevent this tragedy?

The international community is serious and relentless in its pursuit of peace and we appreciate that. But they are finding it very difficult to handle the situation in the south, because of the hardliners. Our opinion is that the international community has to bring about sanctions on a rogue state.

The Tamil boycott during the November presidential election helped elect Mahinda Rajapakse, the more hard-line candidate. Why do your enemies a favor?

[Laughs] Boycotts are nothing new to the Tamil people. They are born out of frustration and the Tamils have always given Sri Lankan presidential elections a lukewarm response. If Mahinda is a hard-liner, the Tamil people do not see [losing opposition candidate] Ranil [Wickremesinghe] as any different. He didn't do anything for us. The Tamil people had no reason to participate in the election.

Why donors failed to bring peace to Sri Lanka

((PK Balachandran February 6, 2006 the Hindustan Time))

In the past four years, the international donor community has pledged billions of dollars to Sri Lanka with the aim of promoting peace and economic reform. And a lot of it has already gone into the country's kitty. Yet, aid has not met its objectives.

The necessary preconditions of peace still do not exist and Sri Lanka continues to be perched

precariously on the edge of war.

According to studies sponsored by The Asia Foundation, the reason for this failure is that the donors have not addressed the political issues.

The issues, which underlie the conflict are poor governance, an un-accommodative state and political structure, and perceived ethnic and regional grievances.

The donors expected economic inputs and macro level economic reform to trigger political change as desired by the Western world.

But the changes never happened. In some ways, these external inputs even helped reinforce the existing political divide and accentuate the ethnic conflict.

"The development cart has been put before the political horse," say Goodhand, Klem et al, in *Aid, Conflict and Peace Building in Sri Lanka 2002-2005* (The Asia Foundation, Colombo, 2005).

"Economic imperatives were never likely to override political and strategic interests in a conflict that is primarily about governance and the nature of the state," they observe.

Differences between donors

However, all international donors cannot be put into the same basket.

There are crucial differences in the way in which the donors have approached Sri Lanka and the issues in it.

And the differences in this regard have impacted the international aid effort and its results very significantly.

According to Goodhand and Klem, the first distinction is between the Asian and Western donors, and the second is between big donors like the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and the smaller bilateral donors.

The Asian donors (principally Japan and India) have been concerned primarily with trade and geo-strategic objectives.

But the Western donors, comprising the US, EU and individual European countries, have had a "menu of concerns" including democratization, human rights and the liberalisation of the economy.

Unlike the Western donors, Japan, India and the IFIs have been apolitical, preferring to work through the government of Sri Lanka rather than seeking other channels to disburse their aid or carry out their projects.

The difference between the large and the small donors is also of importance. The IFIs and Japan are the largest donors.

According to Adam Burke and Anthea Mulakala (*Donors and Peace Building-2000-2005*, The Asia Foundation, Colombo, 2005) these large donors account for 75 to 80 per cent of the aid flows into Sri Lanka.

And because these large donors have been largely indifferent to the conflict in the island and its social, economic, and political underpinnings, foreign aid has not had a significant impact on the pattern of governance and the peace process.

It is not denied that the post-2000/2001 Sri Lankan and international scenario did bring about a change in the outlook of the previously apolitical or indifferent major aid giving countries and institutions.

The conflict-affected Tamil North and East did begin to get substantial aid from the IFIs and Japan. Tokyo even appointed a Special Peace Envoy (Yasushi Akashi) to tie economic aid to peace building.

But the impact has not been commensurate with the expectations.

According to Burke and Mulakala, this is because the ethnic conflict has only been a "secondary factor" in the process of deciding resource transfers from the development banks and Japan.

"Given that these donors represent some 75 to 80 per cent of donor funds, this is significant," they say.

Their plans are based on the theory that greater deregulation and economic openness will eventually remove the "impediment" of ethnic conflict.

The IFIs did strive to bring about policy changes in the government of Sri Lanka towards this end.

But this approach was not founded on a correct appreciation of ground realities and ground level

popular concerns.

Oslo and Tokyo conferences

Undoubtedly, there was political awareness among the donors at the top level.

And this was reflected in the decisions taken at the Oslo (December 2002) and Tokyo (June 2003) conferences.

Oslo got the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE to agree to try and find a "federal" solution within a united Sri Lanka.

But Tokyo was the "high water mark" in the convergence of aid, security matters, and liberal ideological objectives, observe Goodhand and Klem.

USD 4.5 billion was pledged at Tokyo, with the top most donors being Japan, the ADB and World Bank.

And they saw to it that political conditions for the delivery of the whopping aid package were put in place.

"Assistance by the donor community must be closely linked to substantial and parallel progress towards fulfillment of the objectives agreed by the parties in Oslo," paragraph 18 of the celebrated Tokyo Declaration said.

The Declaration called for compliance with the Ceasefire Agreement (CFA); participation of the Muslim minority in the talks; promotion and protection of human rights; gender equality; and progress towards a final political settlement.

Economic reform was another key aim of the major donors. They found the United National Front (UNF) government led by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, to be attuned to this objective.

Both the donors and the UNF believed that economic growth through liberalisation and foreign investment would automatically blunt social, economic, ethnic and regional conflicts.

Donors over play development card

But the UNF regime and the international donors over played the development card.

First of all, the Tokyo conference was held without the LTTE. The LTTE had withdrawn from the talks process earlier in April 2003, complaining of slow progress and "over internationalisation" of the peace process. The rebel outfit did not want to give up the option of fighting for total independence, under international donor duress.

It also wanted to take on the Sri Lankan government on a footing of strategic equality.

It feared a state shielded by a strategic and economic International Safety Net (ISN), which the UNF was assiduously putting up.

The Sinhala South too was not happy with the internationalisation of the conflict, albeit for different reasons.

Here, it was felt that the CFA was a Norwegian-inspired sell out to the LTTE. The South feared that in its bid to find a quick fix solution to the conflict, the West might have no compunction about yielding to the separatist demand of the LTTE and dividing the country.

Commenting on the Tokyo declaration and its aftermath, Goodhand and Klem say: " Arguably this was a case of international actors pushing ahead with their own time frames and agendas (encouraged by the UNF government) without taking into account the changed ground situation."

Not surprisingly, the international donors could not implement the Tokyo Declaration.

A popular mood in the Sinhala South against the peace process as it was going, resulted in the defeat of the pro-peace and pro-donor UNF in a snap election in April 2004.

Power went into the hands of the United Peoples' Freedom Alliance (UPFA), a Sinhala nationalistic grouping which was opposed to almost everything the peace process stood for, including international involvement and the new economic policy.

The UNF government's enthusiasm for radical economic change, as per the Western model, endeared it to the donors no doubt, but it resulted in the government's getting alienated from the masses.

A poverty alleviation scheme called "Samurdhi" was denied to 300,000 recipients; fertilizer subsidies were curtailed; electricity charges were hiked; and efforts were made to restructure the public sector.

A major nationalised bank, providing cheap credit to the poor, was to be privatised.

"In the main, these reforms were done by stealth and there was very little public consultation," observe Goodhand and Klem.

As for the LTTE, it too resisted the Western concepts of development administration.

While the donors wanted decentralized decision making, the LTTE was "extremely statist" and "hierarchical". The donors wanted the Tamil North East to enter the globalised market, but there was resistance to this, given its immediate economic costs to the common man there.

Both the Sinhala South and the LTTE felt that the other was getting pampered by the donors.

The donors had only exacerbated existing ethnic tensions.

Goodhand and Klem say that policy formulation did not appear to be conflict sensitive and to adequately take into account the need for balanced assistance to the Tamil North East and the Sinhala South. And the attitude remains the same to this day.

"In spite of the evidence that shock therapy and a growth-first model are politically destabilising, donors do not appear to have changed their thinking on this matter," the authors say.

Fate of SIHRN, NERF and P-TOMS

Between 2002 and 2005, the donors, Sri Lankan regimes and the LTTE did put up proposals for institutionalising the new democratic development and aid utilisation strategies.

But these did not survive or even come into existence, because of underlying political conflicts.

With the backing of the donors, the government and the LTTE set up the Sub-committee on Immediate Humanitarian and Rehabilitation Needs (SIHRN) and the North East Rehabilitation Fund (NERF).

But both SIHRN and NERF lacked legal status and the requisite independence, which the LTTE insisted on.

Political opposition in the Sinhala South to any institutional recognition of the LTTE or to the grant of powers to organisations in which the LTTE was represented, prevented the UNF government from going the whole hog in implementing its agenda to co-opt the LTTE into Sri Lanka's administrative structures and wean it away from terrorism, separatism and armed struggle.

Not surprisingly, SIHRN and NERF fell by the way side.

Later in mid 2005, the internationally backed and funded post-tsunami rehabilitation organisation for the North East (P-TOMS) also did not come into existence because of political opposition in the South.

Conflict over "normalisation"

Both the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE had agreed that "normalization" of life in the North East was a sine qua non for carrying out any political or economic development plans and having any meaningful peace talks.

But the definition of normalisation differed, leading to conflict.

For the LTTE, normalisation meant the withdrawal of all kinds of movement and fishing restrictions in the North East; the dismantling of checkpoints and the High Security Zones in Jaffna; and the army's quitting public and private places.

But the state had consistently viewed such demands as being extremely dangerous to its security.

The implementation of every good scheme and thought got stymied by underlying political and strategic considerations, an inherited baggage of fears about each other, and deep anxieties about survival.

Goodhand and Klem wonder if there can be normalisation without addressing the underlying political questions.

"Governance" is key

Goodhand, Klem, Burke and Mulakaka, say that the only way out of the current impasse is for the donors to show greater sensitivity to the political dimensions of the Sri Lankan problem and also to see the issues as stemming from poor governance, basically.

"The root cause of problems currently being experienced - such as uneven development patterns, an ethnicised education system, a lack of minority voice in the political process - can be traced back to

the political culture and quality of governance in Sri Lanka," Goodhand and Klem say.

They also point out that donor policies, instead of helping to change the structures to rid them of their maladies, have only reinforced the existing systems. In other words, conflicts have been exacerbated by donor policies. Some donors like Japan do not think of systemic changes, while others like USAID do, and are addressing governance issues at the grassroots level, with some success.

But again USAID touts the Western model, which may not suit local conditions or meet the requirements in Sri Lanka, the authors argue.

The Asia Foundation researchers also recommend that the donors redefine "civil society" and go beyond interacting with "like-minded" civil society groups mainly located in cosmopolitan Colombo, and include "non-like minded" groups outside the metropolis, so that they get a rounded picture of the ground situation in Sri Lanka.

(PK Balachandran is Special Correspondent of Hindustan Times in Sri Lanka)

Shifting the Balance of Power, Capturing the Power of Leverage

(by Chandi Sinnathurai, Dissidentvoice.org, January 2006)

Ten is a number of power. The tenth item on the joint statement released by India and Sri Lanka at the conclusion of President Rajapaksa's state visit has to be viewed with caution. If attempts to water down the current "dust of war" fail, as the Tamil Tiger supremo vowed at the November 2005 Maveerar Nal (November 27, a day in which reflective celebrations and fasting are held in memory of all the fallen Eelam fighters of valor), all other options will run out except to intensify the struggle for self-determination.

The intransigence of the Colombo Government is revealed by a string of serious breaches of the CFA (Ceasefire Agreement): civilian killings, abductions, involuntary disappearances, gang rapes by the SLA (Sri Lanka Army) including the Christmas Eve high profile murder in the Cathedral of Mr. Joseph Pararajasingham by the State-sponsored forces. All these nefarious activities unfortunately seem to weigh opposite to a diplomatic settlement.

Against this background, one should read the tenth item in the Joint Statement:

The two leaders welcomed the bilateral understandings being reached on identifying joint ventures for the development of the eastern Sri Lankan port city of Trincomalee, and its surrounding region. They noted the need to prepare a Master Plan for realizing, including through the building up of the necessary infrastructural support, the full economic potential held out by Trincomalee and its environs. It was agreed in this context that a coal based power project of capacity 2x250 MW will be set up in the Trincomalee region of Sri Lanka, as a joint venture between the National Thermal Power Company Ltd, a Government of India enterprise and the Ceylon Electricity Board, a Government of Sri Lanka entity. The Government of Sri Lanka will have the responsibility of facilitating and extending all necessary help in setting up this project. A detailed Memorandum of Understanding for setting up the Power Project is to be signed separately." [italics added]

India, the US proxy in the region, negotiating a Master Plan for setting up a Power Project in the Eastern Port city is not without its strategic, geopolitical interests. Hence the open secret remains that the US cannot be twiddling its thumbs while a power deal of this magnitude is seemingly in full flight. From the evidence at hand, one might also deduce that this so-called power project may just be a cover-up operation for US expansion into the region. For this program to succeed, the control of Trincomalee (Trinco) harbor is pivotal. Trinco is renowned as the world's second best sanctuary for ships. Historically, it has been known that Trinco played a crucial role in the imperialist expansion of the Western powers. The British aircraft carrier Hermes, sunk by the Japanese, is still at the bottom of Trinco harbor. The Japanese takeover of the island was missed by only a whisker because of an intelligence failure. That control of Trinco is alluring to imperialist powers is a fact that has not escaped the radar of the Tamils.

If the CFA collapses and a full-scale war erupts again, there is no way that the Tamil Tigers are going to ignore Trinco (the Tamil Eelam Capital). All the foreign powers that are paying lip service to peace in Sri Lanka have shown very little concern thus far to the fundamental grievances of the Tamils. There is obviously a valid reason for such an international position.

The Tamil Tigers have not abandoned the Tamils' right to secede, nor have they dismantled their military system. On that basis alone, the international community's rationale in this regard is rudimentary. However, should the Tamils regain control of Trinco Harbor, the Tamils would also gain leverage over geopolitical concerns in the region. So, in order for that to NOT occur, a waylaying tactic is underway to "keep talking peace." In the meantime, under the very nostrils of the international community, the State Forces are unleashing a program of systematic liquidation of the Tamils and occupation of more Tamil territory.

The Tamil Tigers have a keen insight into these geopolitical plans. The following reasons (and more) make Trinco a geopolitical jewel in the crown:

- a) the strategic harbor
- b) 99 oil tanks now leased to India
- c) the country's largest Prima flour mills
- d) a large air base.
- e) as well, the "Coal-based power project" along with the other geopolitical ambitions, etc.

Seasoned analysts have already spilled much ink on their prediction that, if an Eelam war were to begin today, the Tamil Tigers' plans to lay siege on Jaffna would unfold.

The Tigers had control of Jaffna from 1990 to 1995. Reclaiming the cultural capital of the Tamils would undoubtedly be a morale boost to the Tamils. None, on the other hand, should underestimate the psychological shift that would cause among the Sinhalese. However, in the same breath one could argue that the capture of Trinco would yield a seismic shift to the Tamils in the balance of power nationally and would accrue powerful leverage in terms of international and regional geopolitics. Achieving such an advantageous posture on the part of the Tamils would truly gain a lion's share in terms of the Eelam pie.

If the Tamil Tigers should regain control of Trinco, of course, like a domino effect, the Tamils would inevitably gain total control of Jaffna. This unprecedented move would, without any doubt, paradoxically equal in impact the Gandhian "Salt March" in terms of dismantling alien rule.

If that becomes the reality-on-the-ground, the Sinhalese State will be well advised to respectfully walk out from Tamil homelands.

We say this because of an historical precedent. Many will remember that the British Empire began to tumble as a consequence of the Salt March. The British took the cue and invited Gandhi to London, as decency would call for gentlemen to act at the Round Table Conference to "hand back" power. In the eyes of Churchill, of course, the Mahatma was a "seditious middle temple lawyer." When this "half naked fakir" met the immaculately attired Viceroy, Lord Irwin, Gandhi chuckled: "I have caused a great deal of trouble for your government. But as men, we can set aside our differences for the welfare of the nation." Gandhi went on to explain India needed to be as completely free and independent as the English.

Wresting Trinco out of Sri Lankan Government control will be a deciding factor of the presence of State security forces in the peninsula. If the Sri Lanka Military loses control of Trinco, it will have a knee-jerk-effect on Jaffna. The ultimate result of such scenario would be that the Sri Lankan troops (over 45,000) in Jaffna peninsula would be confining themselves to the Camps and literally starving of inaction in a time of fierce conflict.

Available "Tactical Surveillance" (2001 reports) from the US Army Pacific Command (USARPAC) in anticipation of a Regional Tiger threat, perceived or real, observed the following:

- * 13 Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) camps have been set up around the Southern perimeter of Trinco from Ilankantai in the Eastern direction.
- * The 14th LTTE camp is erected in Kurangu-Pachan-Kulam
- * Ilankantai camp is situated within about 4 miles of Trinco Bay, close to Foul Point. This would form a chief launching pad on Trinco.

USARPAC chief Admiral Dennis Blair, in his July 2001 meeting with the Sri Lanka President and the Military counterparts, warned of such an imminent "worst case scenario" presenting itself from the LTTE.

No one wishes for war -- even on their worst enemy. War is dirty and bloody. Equally, Ceasefire/semblance of peace in Sri Lanka is also obscene and bloody -- the killing of non-combatants,

including serious breaches of human rights, continues. It appears that the Tamils are currently caught in a dark cul-de-sac. That could very well be just an optical illusion.

In the event of a “final” Eelam War IV, it appears that the sea Tigers might have to play a dominant role, synchronizing maneuvers with the Tiger Air power. In these battle formations, of course, one cannot be too ingenious or too cocksure.

If Colombo decides to reignite the war machinery, the Tigers are at an advantage. They would be in total control of the battle strategy. The pouncing of the Tigers is believed to be sharp, but short. Putting it differently, the war of independence is not expected to be a long-drawn-out one. The final war operation would reveal the meticulous planning and tactical genius of Mr. V Prabaharan. The capture of Elephant Pass Garrison from the state forces in 2000 exposed the truth that the Tamil Tigers have well-honed skills to deflect Colombo’s airpower. Coupled with that experience, it is asserted that the precise execution of a crack commando unit and the deployment of complex maneuver warfare is deemed to achieve, in all probability, its desired aim; that is, 1) to shift the balance of power nationally 2) to capture the power of leverage geo-politically.

The Tiger supremo is both a brilliant military leader and a patient diplomat. The tackling of the National Question involves an equation of 20% military and 80% political. It is, however, the Tamil Tigers’ military power that predicates essentially the Tamils’ dexterity to negotiate their political rights. Therefore, it is illogical and biased for the international community to insist on the disarmament of the Tamil military system under the guise of “terrorism.”

War or peace, either way the Tamils will have to fight for their corner. Fight they must for their political and human rights, and of course for their mere survival. The reality is that the workings of the international system would unlock the door of endorsement SOLELY to the one who owns the master key to leverage.

It is reasonable to assume that international recognition of Tamil sovereignty will follow suit only after these maneuvers have successfully reclaimed the bulk of the lost territory including the “Jewel in the Crown.”

The West is cautiously watching what sort of leadership and governance Tamil independence will come up with. It must be noted, apart from Tamil Nadu, that the majority of the exiled Tamil Diaspora are in the West. Owing to the pressure/veiled threat from the international community, the Tamil Tigers cannot endorse an evil system of racist Gestapo-type governance in Sri Lanka. For the sake of talking peace, the Tamils cannot cooperate with evil.

Frankly, the so-called peace process is a waste of space and time, a costly distraction, and a media circus! I say this advisedly. Colombo is not interested in peacemaking, period. The talks are simply based on duplicity. Succumbing to such illicit closed-door activities will only betray the aspirations of a wounded Tamil nation. It might irrecoverably damage the trust of the freedom-loving (Viduthali Virumbigal) masses. The Colombo government knows that! By doing so, not only will the moral weight of the Tamil struggle be seriously compromised, but it also will undermine the altruistic ethos of the liberation movement!

The slow holocaust of the Tamils must end today. The humiliation of the Tamils must end soon. Eelam Tamils are among the most persecuted human beings of the world. At the conclusion of hostilities, honorable peace must descend on all hearts and minds.

The Tamils have learned from world history that new nation states are never given; they are always won.

Reverend Chandi Sinnathurai, currently residing in Thondaimanaaru, wishes to humbly dedicate this piece in memory of the slain Tamil legislator Joseph Pararajasingham: “Though he is dead, he still speaketh.”