

# Moving forward

## Editorial

The liberation of Kilinochchi has prompted some extreme reactions, but these have been by the Tigers, suggesting how wedded they are to terrorism. Chauvinism, which would be equally dangerous, seems to have been silenced by the commitment of the President to the pluralist vision he enunciated in his manifesto, and which he has asserted consistently since.

This commitment to all our people has been apparent too in the approach of the Security Forces, who have sacrificed so much in overcoming such a ferocious enemy. Despite this, they have shown a care for their fellow Tamil citizens that seems to be unparalleled in contemporary struggles against terror.

At the same time, they have made it clear that such care also means thinking of the future. This was the message of the Exhibition organised by the Security Forces in Jaffna in the very week that Kilinochchi was freed. Aimed primarily at young people, the 'Future Minds of Jaffna' drew massive crowds, testifying to the eagerness of those who have escaped from the LTTE to enter fully into the modern life of a unified nation.

The Peace Secretariat was honoured to have been invited to assist in the organisation, and was able to facilitate private sector participation in the event. The ready enthusiasm of a range of firms again made clear how well entrepreneurs understood the opportunities that would be available to them.

In addition to stress on education and English, and IT and communications equipment, the Exhibition also featured support for agriculture. Thus, whilst the need for contemporary skills was emphasised, the traditional strengths of the area were kept in view too, bringing to mind also the urgency of restoring the road and rail links that have sadly been disrupted for so long. For too long, Jaffna and its products were separated from the rest of the nation by the shocking neglect of infrastructural development, but happily that is an area in which the Government has shown itself determined to move.

Jaffna has always been in the forefront of education and enterprise, and its full participation in the life of the nation will bring prosperity to the country as a whole, as well as to the people of Jaffna. But it is important that these developments are not confined to Jaffna. Fortunately, modern technology will allow for rapid extension of facilities also to the newly liberated areas of the Vanni, whilst the enormous richness of the agricultural lands there can benefit from better techniques of processing and marketing to maximise benefits to all sections of the community.

The coincidence of these two events, the highlighting of the opportunities available to the young in Jaffna, and the liberation of Kilinochchi, was not then fortuitous. It remains for us to build on both these, to promote a peaceful, pluralistic and prosperous Sri Lanka.

### About this newsletter

The Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process, otherwise known as SCOPP, is the governmental body set up to build confidence in a negotiated settlement to the conflict in Sri Lanka. This is the fourth issue of the SCOPP Quarterly, launched to keep interested parties informed about the work done by the institution.

More information can be found on our website at [www.peaceinsrilanka.org](http://www.peaceinsrilanka.org).

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# Future Minds of Jaffna

## Educational and Industrial Exhibition

Jaffna received a welcome boost from the Educational and Industrial Exhibition and Trade Fair organised by the Security Forces and the Peace Secretariat in December. Leading private companies from Colombo joined local businesses in displaying the latest technology, providing information on vocational training opportunities and offering bargains in consumer goods and food ahead of the Thai Pongal festival, demonstrating their confidence in the future development of the Jaffna peninsula.

The event was held at the Vembadi Girls School and Jaffna Central College. Both establishments were presented with computers by Dialog Telekom as a mark of gratitude for their collaboration in hosting.

At the invitation of the Commander of the Security Forces in Jaffna Maj. Gen. G.A. Chandrasiri, Minister of Social Services and Social Welfare Hon. Douglas Devananda and Secretary General of the Peace Secretariat Prof. Rajiva Wijesinha declared the proceedings open on the morning of December 27th. The

occasion was also graced by the Bishop of Jaffna Thomas Saundaranayagam, Jaffna High Court Judge R.T. Vicknarajah, Jaffna District Secretary K. Ganesh and the Commander of the Security Forces in Jaffna town Brigadier Ruwan Kulatunga, amongst others.

Over 300,000 people attended during the three days. The Security Forces arranged free transport on 40 private and 30 state-owned buses to ensure that residents from outlying areas could also participate, and they provided a total of 10,000 lunch packets to the visitors. Indicating their desire to see the focus of Government efforts shift from establishing and keeping the peace to creating opportunities for development and employment, the Security Forces and Police refrained from carrying weapons inside the venue.

Businesses participated with great enthusiasm, demonstrating their confidence in the improved security and excellent future prospects of Jaffna. Some 168 companies were present at the event, including 22 top brands.

*'It is time to forget the  
unfortunate developments  
of the past. We shall take action  
to restore to the people of Jaffna  
and the North all they have lost'*  
- President Rajapaksa







### President speaks to the people in Tamil

President Rajapaksa addressed the crowds via satellite link towards the close of the proceedings on December 29th. This historic speech, which was the first ever by a Sri Lankan Head of State or Government to his people in Tamil, was also broadcast live on Nethra TV. He called on Sri Lankans to live together in unity, as past leaders from Jaffna like Sir Ponnambalam Ramanaden had wanted as they struggled for independence from the British colonial system. He said, 'There is a distance between you and the South, but I promise you this distance will soon vanish.'

The crowd received the speech enthusiastically, cheering loudly at times. President Rajapaksa undertook to do everything possible to help turn things around for them as soon as possible: 'It is now time to forget the unfortunate developments of the past. We shall take action to restore to the people of Jaffna and the North all they have lost.'

### Latest technology on show

The Exhibition focused on education and industry, targeting young people who have been deprived by long years of conflict of the necessary opportunities to develop their skills and find decent employment. Jaffna has to all intents and purposes been cut off from the rest of the country, and certainly from the heart of business activity in Colombo. The local economy has somehow managed to keep going, but technology and knowledge readily available to many citizens elsewhere has not filtered through to the North.

Stalls were run by a number of big names in industry. Richard Pieris, Abans, Solex, Lanchem, Caltex, Elephant House and many others were present at the event. Amongst the highlights were the exhibits of Hayleys Agro and CIC Agribusiness. Farmers came to hear about the latest techniques, while a group of Agriculture students from Jaffna University explained to the stallholders that they had never seen the equipment and chemicals on display, although they had read about many of them in books.

The Sri Lanka Telecom Mobitel and Dialog Telekom stalls were also very popular. Jaffna residents spend as much as 12% of household income on telecommunications, with high spending on making and receiving international calls.

Educational institutes were present in force too. The Sri Lanka Institute of Marketing (SLIM), the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA), the Informatics Institute of

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Technology (IIT), the British College of Applied Studies (BCAS), the Institute of Data Management (IDM) and the Sri Lanka Institute of Tourism and Hotel Management (SLITHM) all ran stalls. A significant number of young people enrolled in their courses on the spot. English and Information Technology were the most sought after disciplines.

In keeping with the theme of promoting knowledge and technology, several publishing houses from Colombo took their books up for display and sale. Meanwhile, the Information and Communications Technology Agency set up a permanent Nenasala IT centre for Jaffna, which was unveiled during the event, bringing the total number of Nenasala IT centres in the Jaffna district to five. Students and young people thronged to this section of the Exhibition, demonstrating their enthusiasm for technology and knowledge.



### Bargain prices on food and consumer goods

One of the major grievances of the Jaffna people is the high cost of essential food items and household basics, due to the lack of road linkages out of the Jaffna peninsula. They have long been hoping for the A9 and the A32 to be opened up again, because this will allow goods to be trucked in at regular prices, as well as making it possible for Jaffna agricultural produce to be marketed outside the peninsula and for Jaffna workers to seek employment in other areas.

Companies have often remarked at the difficulties of trading in Jaffna while their products have to be transported by sea. One representative explained that the cost of insurance for consignments destined for Jaffna has skyrocketed in the aftermath of LTTE attacks on ships.

*Crowds were seen taking full advantage of the lower prices on offer at the Trade Fair, with one of the most important Tamil festivals of the year just around the corner.*

*Young people from all over the Jaffna peninsula took part in the search for the most talented singer, with the preliminary rounds being held in 15 divisions in the weeks leading up to the Exhibition.*

Essential food items were also subject to a temporary increase in prices after the floods that affected the Jaffna district last month. Large extents of vegetable, paddy and other crops were destroyed, and this had an immediate effect on the market prices of these commodities.

The Trade Fair provided some much needed relief from these problems. The Security Forces handled the shipping of goods from Colombo free of charge and therefore passed on a huge cost advantage to the people of Jaffna. Some companies were also selling at a discount, in view of the special occasion. For example, Hayleys were selling a tractor worth Rs. 240,000 at only Rs. 184,000.

Crowds were seen taking full advantage of the lower prices on offer, with one of the most important Tamil festivals of the year just around the corner.

### Entertainment part of the package too

The Future Minds of Jaffna offered plenty of fun and games in addition to the Exhibition and Trade Fair. The Vembadi Girls School and Jaffna Central College grounds were full of carnival rides, the like of which the majority of Jaffna children had never seen before.

Crowds were entertained by local artistes performing alongside their South Indian counterparts, organised with the assistance of the Hon. Douglas Devananda, Minister of Social Services and Social Welfare. The music and dancing went on late into the night, with the normal curfew in Jaffna town having been lifted for the occasion.





## Searching for the 'North Star'

One of the main attractions was the 'North Star' competition organised by Derana TV, aimed at finding the most talented singer in the Jaffna peninsula. This followed the nationwide success of the Derana TV 'Dream Star' competition.

Young people from all over the Jaffna peninsula took part, with the preliminary rounds being held in 15 divisions in the weeks leading up to the Educational and Industrial Exhibition and Trade Fair. Some 78 competitors were chosen to go through to the finals, which were put on from December 25th to 28th. The Grand Final, judged by the most popular artiste in Jaffna and five others was held on December 29th. It was a very positive conclusion to the event, and Derana TV transmitted the scenes to many people outside the Jaffna peninsula.



Dharani Ranjan, 27 years old and a Fine Arts student at Jaffna University, won the competition. She was closely followed by 24 year old Kulendran Jagadeesan, a visually impaired young man, and 22 year old Mahalingam Thayaparan, another student of Jaffna University from the Sociology department.

Prizes worth over Rs. 3 million were donated by leading companies. AMW provided a Maruti car to the winner, while the first and second runners up received a Landmaster tractor from Hayleys and a Bajaj motorcycle courtesy of Ceylon Biscuits respectively. Cheques for Rs. 20,000 were presented to each of the other ten finalists, thanks to the Security Forces.

The competition is slated to become an annual event in the Jaffna peninsula, following the enthusiasm demonstrated by the local people.

## Jaffna looks to the future

This event followed on from the Carnival organised by the Security Forces in May, which attracted over 65,000 people. The Educational and Industrial Exhibition and Trade Fair has certainly been even more successful, with a large turnout on all three days, and with families making full use of all the stalls and activities on offer. The achievement of bringing 168 companies, including 22 top names from Colombo, is an indication of the private sector interest that must be tapped. No doubt the people of Jaffna hope to see another such event being held again soon.

*'Once the A32 and A9 roads are cleared, we will be able to establish an industrial park in Jaffna, with the help of Government institutions.'*

*- Maj. Gen. Chandrasiri*

The organisers of 'The Future Minds of Jaffna' are already in the process of reviewing the feedback received from the participating companies on their perceptions and experiences of this event, how and why it benefited them, what barriers they faced and what improvements could be made for the next one.

The Security Forces are also working on plans for an Industrial Zone in Jaffna, which they hope to launch once roads are open linking the peninsula with the rest of the country. Progress on that front is already being made, as mine clearance on the A32 is underway, and construction is expected to be finished by April. Work on the A9 will follow soon after.



# Jaffna economy:

## Poised for revival

Historically, Jaffna has been a vibrant economic hub in the North of the country, with an educated population and an entrepreneurial workforce. Conflict has affected it badly, and the Jaffna people have faced untold hardships over the years, but a revival of its past glory no longer seems an unrealistic or distant hope.

The Jaffna economy has changed significantly due to the conflict. People have left in droves, and there is now also a sizeable group living in welfare centres. The Jaffna population stands at 559,619, down by a quarter since 1980, while there are 27,647 IDPs.

Agriculture makes a relatively small contribution to GDP. Production has fallen sharply in all field crops. Between 1990 and 2005, paddy output dropped from 34,000 to 14,000 MT, red onion production was down from 31,400 to 11,400 MT, and chilli output fell from 6,116 to 1,301 MT. Other sectors coped a little better. Milk production actually showed a marginal increase between 1990 and 2005. Fisheries is a shadow of its former self, with the total fish catch having declined from 54,000 to 34,000 MT between 1980 and 2004. The tsunami caused this figure to plunge even further to 13,000 MT in 2005.

Manufacturing has been hit badly too. The number of industries fell by 10% and the number of jobs was cut by half between 1980 and 2005.



In terms of GDP, the single biggest contributor to the Jaffna economy is now the category described as 'public administration and defence'.

### The importance of agriculture and fisheries

Agriculture has the capacity to grow almost exponentially in the years ahead. Today, it accounts for no more than 20% of the Northern Province GDP, but it employs over 50% of the workforce, while another 12% of the working population is involved in fisheries. Red onion, chilli, rice and potato are key sectors, in addition to milk and eggs, while tobacco has traditionally been profitable too.

Market linkages are going to be key to the revival of fortunes. Jaffna farmers will not be able to achieve their potential without proper infrastructure. Opening up the A9 and A32 is obviously vital. After this is done, the priority should be to establish a dedicated economic centre for agriculture, similar to the one in Dambulla, with improved storage facilities to reduce wastage of perishable goods. Efforts to promote Jaffna products under a brand like the 'Peace Collection' will also be important.

Furthermore, there needs to be a push towards greater efficiency, improving agricultural productivity using lessons from other areas of the country, and facilitating easier access to micro-funding and small business loan guarantees. Yet a word of caution is necessary here, for borrowing already constitutes a significant proportion of household income in the Northern Province. Surveys have put this figure at about 39%, compared to a national average of 22%.

Jaffna farmers have already started to turn things around, with increases in production for most crops in the last few years in which there has been relative security in the area. Fisheries were in a similar position before the tsunami, with the total fish catch having recovered from 14,000 to 34,000 MT between 2001 and 2004. Efforts must be made to ensure that they are able to build on these successes in the years ahead.

### Mining opportunities still untapped

Mineral extraction also promises to be another profitable area for companies wanting to move into the area. Little work has been done so far.

The Vadamarachchi East area of the Jaffna peninsula is said to be endowed with large deposits of silica sand, which can be used in the manufacturing of glass products. Some of the limestone deposits in the Kankasanthurai area are already being tapped by the cement factory situated there, but more is possible. Jaffna can further benefit from its proximity to the Pulmodai mineral sand deposit and the Seruwavila iron copper deposit. Large deposits of construction sand in Jaffna have not been systematically tapped, but will be a very useful resource when the revival of the Northern Province takes off.

### Fulfilling the aspirations of youth

It is important to bear in mind the changing aspirations of the Jaffna youth. According to a recent opinion poll, their interests lie in the services industry, rather than in agriculture, fisheries or even manufacturing. Their enthusiasm for more skills and vocational training and for higher education must be catered for, but there is also a need to provide suitable jobs.





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Having traditionally enjoyed high levels of educational achievement, knowledge-based companies may be the way forward for Jaffna. BPO and similar industries could be established and function effectively.

Tourism is another sector that would benefit from attention. Jaffna boasts a number of historically important sites, as well as places of religious worship that attract thousands of people, like the Naagadeepa Vihare and the Nallur Kovil. Domestic tourism to Jaffna has increased significantly in the last few years, thanks to improved security, but there has been little effort to develop the necessary infrastructure to support a fullscale revival of tourism.

### **Resuscitating the education system**

The conflict has impacted on the education system as well, although performance is still very good in comparison with the rest of the country. Confirmed literacy rates and statistics on net enrolment in Grade 1 are not available, because in depth household surveys have not been conducted of late, but estimates indicate that literacy stands at around 92.5%, which is only lower than the Western and North Western Provinces. The survival rate from Grade 1 to 9 is the second lowest after the Eastern Province, but performance at O Level and A Level is encouraging, and Jaffna student pass rates are similar to those recorded in more prosperous regions.

Jaffna has always been one of the most important centres of knowledge here, and steps need to be taken to ensure that the admirable results we see today become excellent tomorrow.

### **Focusing on neglected infrastructure**

Infrastructure needs serious attention if any of these ideas is to be implemented successfully. Roads have been mentioned elsewhere already, but Jaffna has only 75,000 electricity connections out of 3,206,892 throughout the country, and around 8,000 out of 1,243,994 land phone connections, demonstrating its relative lack of connectivity.

Steps are being taken on this front already. Mobitel and Dialog are now in the process of rolling out broadband internet facilities to the Jaffna peninsula, which is going to improve the business environment tremendously.

### **Northern spring to match Eastern dawn**

The Government has planned the 'Uthuru Wasanthaya' or 'Northern Spring' programme aimed at reviving the Northern Province, similar to its 'Neganahira Udanaya' or 'Eastern Dawn' programme for the East. Rs. 3 billion has been allocated to rebuild 80,000 houses and Rs. 500 million has been set aside for resettlement programmes. Jaffna will benefit from this in addition to the other three districts of Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu and Vavuniya. Donor agencies are also enthusiastically involved in the Northern Province revival, and the World Bank and Asian Development Bank have both worked out dedicated projects for the conflict areas.

Some attention could usefully be placed on innovative measures to attract investment and business interest from the Jaffna diaspora, converting the accumulated financial and human capital among the diaspora into assets in the development process and turning the 'brain drain' into a 'brain gain'. Anecdotal evidence suggests that as much as 75% of the Tamils who left Sri Lanka for Western countries are from the Northern Province, particularly from the Jaffna peninsula.

Jaffna has proven itself to be resilient, and will undoubtedly find its way back to its past glories with a little help at this crucial juncture. Estimates indicate that it has a per capita income of around Rs. 3,208 per month, which is already higher than that of the Eastern, Uva, Sabaragamuwa and even Southern Provinces, while the national average is some Rs. 3,969. The challenge facing the Government today is to see how the public and private sectors can work together to accelerate the process of economic development, which is the best way of achieving a lasting peace in the Jaffna peninsula.



# Puttalam

## Evicted Muslims still need help

The Peace Secretariat launched a self employment programme for displaced Muslims in the Puttalam district in December, with the assistance of People's Bank. One hundred young women received loans of Rs. 50,000 to help them start their own businesses. These include dairy farming, brick making, home gardening and livestock development.

People's Bank released a sum of Rs. 5 million for the purpose, and the first cheques were handed over at a ceremony at the People's Bank office in Norochcholai, with the Deputy Secretary General of the Peace Secretariat as the chief guest.

Mrs. Muhammed Salih Januba explained the background to the problems faced by the displaced Muslims. 'I was just 14 years old when the LTTE evicted us from Mullaitivu. I can still recollect how we reached Puttalam with nothing except what we could put in a cloth bag,' she said. It has been very difficult for them to get back on their feet. She continued, 'Over the past 18 years, life has been just plain hell. Most of us are still living in small huts. We are ever so grateful to the Peace Secretariat and People's Bank for coming forward to give us a hand to pull out of what has seemed like eternal deprivation.'

In 1990, the LTTE ordered around 100,000 Muslims to leave Mullaitivu, Mannar and Jaffna areas, giving them only 24 hours

to comply. It was one of the most inhuman acts of ethnic cleansing witnessed in this part of the world. Most people, including women carrying infants, had to walk miles to reach Vavuniya town. They were later sent to welfare centres set up at Norochcholai, Alankuda and Palavi in the Puttalam District.

The only sustenance the displaced Muslims had at that time was the monthly ration provided by the Government. This was supplemented by NGOs. The original residents of Puttalam also helped the people who had come to the area seeking refuge. With the passage of time, the assistance of NGOs waned and the refugees were left to fend for themselves.

The Government has recognised the need to do something to help them now, and a dedicated Resettlement Ministry has been established. Minister Rishad Bathiudeen was himself forcibly evicted by the LTTE, so has firsthand experience of the hardships faced by the displaced Muslims.

Women and children were the most severely affected by the experience, as in so many places. Widows head quite a number of families now. It is for this reason that young women are being targeted in the self employment programme.

The Peace Secretariat has been engaging with the displaced Muslims in the Puttalam district for some time. In February, the Golden Key Hospital and the Ministry of Healthcare and Nutrition joined forces to conduct a medical camp in the area. It provided the opportunity for the Peace Secretariat to interact with people and discuss their needs and interests. In addition, the Peace Secretariat has managed to organise salaries for young teachers who had been working on a voluntary basis in almost 40 local schools for more than one and a half years. Nine students who had been selected for university admission but could not proceed due to a lack of funds have also been assisted to continue their education.

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# Trincomalee

## Supporting tsunami affected women



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Dedunu found the strength  
to build up her life again  
by developing her shop.*

The Peace Secretariat caught up with one of the project beneficiaries in October. Dedunu Jeewanthi, who runs a furniture shop in Trincomalee town, confirmed that the assistance had been a tremendous help.

Dedunu had been facing great difficulties in providing even the basic necessities for her family before joining the sustainable livelihood development project. She has two children – a three year old son and a daughter attending school in Grade Three. The family was affected by the tsunami as well as having suffered from decades of conflict in the Eastern Province. Expenses had been going up, and they had found themselves unable to manage on her husband's income from a small job he does in Colombo.

Having received the Rs. 50,000 loan, Dedunu found the strength to build up her life again by developing her shop. She is now able to buy more furniture, and she feels that business is pretty good. 'It is very profitable,' she said, 'I can even cover the loan - there is now only Rs. 32,000 to be paid off out of the Rs. 50,000 that was given to me a few months ago.' Dedunu has plans for the future too. 'I hope to buy better furniture and expand my business with the profits. I also want to improve my small house into a better living space,' she explained.

Dedunu is a courageous woman. She explained that although life could be difficult, we could overcome many of our problems with commitment and resolve and a little help from others. She called for more donors to get involved in projects like this so that more women and families could have a better future.

Delighted with this progress, the Rotary Club of Windward Oahu in Hawaii has now agreed to provide a further Rs. 100,000 through the Rotary Club of Colombo North and the Peace Secretariat to be given to another two women from the Trincomalee district as no-interest loans. They will receive the money as soon as funds are transferred from Hawaii, which is expected to happen soon.

The sustainable livelihood development project is going well and the women involved are determined to start a new life with the assistance provided. They are very thankful for the support given by all parties to forget their sorrows and look forward to a better life for themselves and their families.

Tsunami-affected women participating in the sustainable livelihood development project initiated by the Peace Secretariat in the Trincomalee district earlier this year are reported to be doing well. Loans they received to develop their businesses are being repaid on time, which indicates that they now have a steady income.

In April, the Rotary Club of Windward Oahu in Hawaii provided Rs. 350,000 through the Rotary Club of Colombo North and the Peace Secretariat to a group of seven women. Each woman received a no-interest loan of Rs. 50,000 to be repaid over a period of two years. The Trincomalee office of the Federation of Chambers of Commerce in Sri Lanka was asked to manage the project because it has an effective follow-up mechanism and a good reputation for handling micro finance. Indeed, timely repayments have already permitted Rs. 50,000 loans to be given to an additional two women.

# Taking care of the displaced



The provision of food and other aid to IDPs in areas under LTTE control has become a controversial topic of late. Critics of the Government throw words like starvation and epidemic around in the hope of generating publicity for their own agendas, and they never admit to having made an error when such disasters fail to materialise. The fact is that IDPs are not being deprived of the essentials they need to survive, despite the best efforts of the LTTE, and logic clearly demonstrates as much.

The Government has always known that IDP figures were exaggerated, for obvious reasons. The LTTE clearly benefited from the extra rations that were sent up. They thus put pressure on the junior officials responsible for the figures, and did not encourage any reduction in numbers, thus ensuring that the Government and UN agencies provided far more assistance than was actually required. The Government did not feel it reasonable to insist on precision, given the situation. Requests were made to international agencies to help clarify matters, but evidently such organisations were under pressure too, and relied on statistics provided by officials. Thus while the Government kept urging greater precision, and there was some response, as for instance in the revelation early last year that there had been double counting of some 40,000 IDPs in a particular area, it continued to supply whatever was requested, with the assistance of UN agencies.

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One reason for the confusion was the system of keeping count, which distinguished between Old and New IDPs. This was mainly because of different responsibilities for providing aid, but it also served to demonstrate the magnitude of the problem the Government had inherited.

It was never clear whether the two categories were distinct. When the recent offensives to liberate the Vanni began at the end of May 2008, there were reportedly 50,000 New IDPs in Kilinochchi and 32,000 in Mullaitivu, that is 82,000 people who had left their homes after 2006. These were supposedly on top of 107,000 people who had moved before 2006, that is 31,000 Old IDPs in Kilinochchi and 76,000 in Mullaitivu. However, there was no means of telling what happened to people who moved twice, that is before and then after 2006. They may well have been counted again without being reduced from the original figure.

The Government provided food for all of these, amounting to 190,000 people. To this figure should be added 25,000 New IDPs and 16,000 Old IDPs in Mannar and 13,000 New IDPs and 53,000 Old IDPs in Vavuniya, parts of which were under LTTE control. Numbers in Jaffna were almost 100,000, but it was easier to keep a proper check on the situation, because only a small portion of the district was under LTTE control. So the Government was providing food to almost 300,000 IDPs in the Vanni before the recent offensives began.

By the end of October 2008, there were apparently 149,000 IDPs in Kilinochchi and 118,000 in Mullaitivu. UNHCR recorded these as arising from IDP movements after 2006, but it is certainly not thought that, on top of these, there is also a need to feed the previously recorded 107,000 Old IDPs, since in any case it is asserted that these have also moved. There are no IDPs recorded as being under LTTE control in Mannar, and it has been in any case specified that all those who were in areas under LTTE control there previously moved with the LTTE when it retreated, and would therefore be included in the Kilinochchi figures. Again, figures for October omit mention of Vavuniya, for which at the end of August 2008 it was noted that there were 5,000 IDPs in LTTE controlled territory. If these



5,000 are assumed to have moved with the LTTE, and if the 7,000 in the small area in Jaffna still under LTTE control are included, the number to whom the Government provides food in LTTE controlled areas comes to 280,000.

A bit of thought is required here. We have to ask ourselves whether the population still controlled by the LTTE can be as much as this. It is quite unlikely, given that the last reasonable extrapolations, at the time of the 2001 Census, referred to about 120,000 people each in the two districts of Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu. Others could have gone in, most notably the LTTE cadres withdrawn from the East, but there has in general been greater movement in the other direction.

It therefore seems obvious that the Government is actually supplying free food to practically the entire population of the areas still under LTTE control, give or take a few thousand. Given that the Government also ensures the provision of food for commercial needs, and this food continues to be bought, it would seem that the free food the Government supplies has been used throughout this period to feed LTTE cadres to their entire satisfaction.

A word on general conditions would be useful here. This too has been part of the plethora of allegations made against the Government by those who play on the suffering of IDPs in other countries that do not have a system of the kind Sri Lanka has developed over the years, to imply that the situation here is equivalent. The free health and education services Sri Lanka provides are not common elsewhere, which is what doubtless led international commentators to assert that these services were collapsing with the departure of aid organisations like Medecins Sans Frontieres and Save the Children. Naïve foreigners, pressed into funding such organisations, would not have wanted to hear that Medecins Sans Frontieres had sent in just one doctor last year, for three months, and that apart from a midwife, whose contract was ending anyway, its staff had been largely support personnel, including drivers, security guards, cooks and cleaners.

This does not mean that the work Medecins Sans Frontieres has done is not appreciated. Especially now that the LTTE has begun to target even doctors, we hope some brave medical personnel from overseas will continue to serve our people. Meanwhile, Save the Children, which has of course been more active, made handsomely clear its recognition that all it did was supplement the continuing work of the Government. The manner in which the LTTE treats education services was apparent from the recent rescue of a trained teacher forced to

*The free health and education services Sri Lanka provides are not common elsewhere, which is what doubtless led many international commentators to assert that these services were collapsing with the departure of aid organisations like MSF. Naïve foreigners, pressed into funding such organisations, would not have wanted to hear that MSF sent in just one doctor last year, for three months.*



fight for the LTTE, in order as she put it to prevent her younger siblings from being conscripted. She had been trained as an English teacher at the prestigious Kopay Training College, and even though she was sent to the battle lines, the Government continued to pay her salary.

The International Committee of the Red Cross continues to provide invaluable support for the Government, which includes facilitating the transit of ambulances from LTTE controlled areas. That the ambulance service, which brought down 535 people in October, is provided by the Government is forgotten, as is the fact that care is provided for these by Government hospitals in cleared areas. These services continue despite attempts by the LTTE to transport explosives in an ambulance.

In short, despite the massive hype about other inputs, the real heroes with regard to the services provided to the IDPs of the Vanni are the Sri Lankan officials who go about their duties without any pomp and ceremony. They will have much more to do when the North is liberated, but their enduring commitment now deserves many more plaudits than the world at large is willing to supply.



# Civilian casualties:

## Separating fact from fiction

One of the most common fabrications being spread about by those working against the Government is that a large number of civilians are being killed in air strikes. Nobody likes conflict, and it's easy to conjure up images of death being rained down from the air - we've all seen plenty of war films. It isn't just fiction, of course. Air strikes have a thoroughly ugly past, and people tend to believe these stories without feeling the need to ask for supporting evidence. But they simply aren't true.

Some weeks ago, a British Member of Parliament called for an urgent debate on the conflict in Sri Lanka because of his concern about what he described as 'Government bombing of areas in the North and East of the country.' Barry Gardiner, representing a constituency that is home to a considerable number of Tamil expatriates, demonstrated how uninformed he is - the East hasn't seen violence on anything other than a very local scale for over a year now. And he was almost equally wrong about the North. The LTTE will have fed Barry Gardiner this disinformation in the hope that he would agitate for pressure to be exerted on the Government to capitulate to the separatist demands of the organisation.

It is but one example of the kind. Foreign observers are regularly to be heard pontificating on this topic, spurred on by local propagandists.

The Peace Secretariat has been collecting data on all accusations of civilian deaths and injuries made in Tamil newspapers and websites, including from a number of publications that are known to be intimately associated with the LTTE. While this opens up the possibility of abuse by encouraging the generation of false claims, it also gives a clear indication of the maximum possible extent of any issues.

The findings are highly instructive. In the last two and a half years, the Sri Lankan Air Force has carried out hundreds of strikes against LTTE targets. But Tamil media sources have reported the demise of no more than 109 civilians, while only another 304 civilians are professed to have sustained injuries. This covers almost the entire period in which the Government has been responding to LTTE actions - from June 2006 to November 2008.

It should be noted that all but 48 of these 106 alleged deaths occurred in a single incident at the beginning of the confrontations. The Sri Lankan Air Force hit an LTTE camp in

the jungles of Mullaitivu in August 2006. It maintains that those killed were cadres undergoing military training, and testimony of injured girls who subsequently found their way to areas under Government control backs up photographic and intelligence data supplied by the Sri Lankan Air Force. However, the LTTE claimed that the young women were attending a residential first aid course. Proof of this hasn't been established, and the reputation of the organisation for the recruitment of girls as suicide bombers as well as fighting cadres must surely be taken into account.

The Sri Lankan Air Force can therefore be said to do a good job. Their efforts to safeguard the civilian population compare favourably with those of other countries, including military forces much better equipped than ours.

Human Rights Watch has carried out analyses of the air strikes of the United States Air Force in both Afghanistan and Iraq. They show a far more worrying record.

In Afghanistan, two studies have been conducted. The first looked at the six months from October 2001 to March 2002. Human Rights Watch found evidence of an absolute minimum of 152 civilian deaths, which it put down to the fairly widespread use of cluster munitions. These release a large number of smaller bombs, a proportion of which don't explode on impact and therefore become landmines. The United States Air Force dropped a total of 1,228 cluster munitions containing around 248,056 bombs in the period studied, and Human Rights Watch says that a conservative estimate of the number that wouldn't have exploded on impact is around 5%, which would leave more than 12,400 landmines. Human Rights Watch noted that unexploded bombs from cluster munitions dropped by the United States Air Force and its allies in the first Gulf War eventually killed a total of 1,600 civilians.

The second report on Afghanistan looked at the two and a quarter years from May 2006 to July 2008. Human Rights Watch says that the United States Air Force killed at least 556 civilians in this period. It blamed this very high number of deaths on the tendency of the United States Army to call in air strikes on unverified targets in support of ground troops to avoid casualties on their own side.

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In Iraq, Human Rights Watch didn't attempt to quantify the number of civilians who were killed in air strikes. However, the British medical journal The Lancet published an article suggesting that a total of 601,027 Iraqis died because of the conflict in the three and a quarter years from March 2003 to June 2006, of which 13% or over 78,000 people in air strikes. Human Rights Watch did say that the majority of the civilian deaths in air strikes occurred as the United States Air Force targeted Iraqi leaders, unwisely relying on intercepts of satellite phones that could only narrow down a location to the nearest 100 metres. All 50 of the acknowledged hits on Iraqi leaders failed, and Human Rights Watch claimed that most Iraqis they questioned were convinced that the targets weren't even present at the time of the attacks.

We dwell on these experiences because they demonstrate the restraint with which the Sri Lankan Government is prosecuting its air operations. Tactics that have led to significant numbers of civilian deaths in other theatres of war have not been employed here. It should be remembered that the methodology used by the Peace Secretariat in collecting these figures is rather more prone to overestimation than that used by Human Rights Watch, especially given the well known propaganda capacity of the LTTE.

Civilian deaths and injuries are a truly appalling prospect, and the Government must ensure that they do not occur under any circumstances. This effort by the Peace Secretariat to quantify the instances in which such things may have taken place supplements the routine work done by the Sri Lankan Air Force to monitor the results of its strikes and take action to ensure the safety of our people. This has also borne fruit. Since fighting intensified in the North, only 24 allegations of civilian deaths in air strikes have been made in six months.

Interestingly, Sri Lankan NGOs who are known for their hostility to the Government admit that there have been very few civilian deaths in this phase of the conflict. Kumar Rupesinghe, head of the Anti-War Movement, was quoted in an interview in The Island admiring the introduction of what he called precision bombing to the Sri Lankan Air Force. Planes have been flying very low, so they have been able to study the maps and be very precise about their targets, he said. If the Anti-War Movement

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admits that the Government is succeeding in its attempts to safeguard civilians, others must surely be ready to accept it.

The Sri Lankan Army is similarly restrained. During the liberation of the East, there was only one incident in which civilians are said to have died. The LTTE fired mortars at Sri Lankan Army positions from the vicinity of a school in Kathiravelli that it turned out was being used as an IDP camp. One soldier was killed, while a number of others and a civilian suffered injuries. The Sri Lankan Army returned fire, under the impression, due to the use of mortar-locating radar, that it was hitting LTTE gun positions. Once the mistake came to be known, steps were taken to ensure that similar incidents would not occur again.

In the North, the Sri Lankan Army has been on the offensive for roughly six months. Tamil media sources have reported that 16 civilians have been killed due to shelling.

A closer look at the details of these cases also proves useful. One third of the alleged deaths occurred in a single clash in August 2008. The incident is being looked into, but information is hard to uncover in areas under control of the LTTE. The other accusations of killings of civilians have been made at an average of no more than one per month, and the circumstances have often been understandable if also deeply regrettable. Tamil newspapers and websites have reported several cases of the displaced having gone back to their homes, usually to collect belongings abandoned or forgotten when they moved out in the first place, then getting caught up in shelling, because the Sri Lankan Army thought that civilians were no longer present. While mistakes shouldn't happen at all, it is creditable that we are only talking about a handful of incidents.

The LTTE may equally have been responsible for some of these alleged deaths, as it is often the source for news reports. The information cannot be verified even if the publisher is inclined to try, and some of the Tamil media sources consulted aren't usually inclined to do any such thing. The LTTE is definitely engaged in shelling, and misdirection on their part obviously can't be ruled out either.

The Government welcomes accurate and relevant criticisms of its policies and is very happy to engage with those who can assist it to achieve its objectives of looking after its people. Such healthy dialogue is however at risk of being overshadowed by the current plague of fabrications.

**Allegations of civilian deaths**

	<b>Air Force bombing</b>	<b>Army shelling</b>
<b>June</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>July</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>August</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>September</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>October</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>November</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>

The Government is repeatedly told that there will never be peace in this country without talks involving the LTTE. Yet the record shows the LTTE isn't interested.

It began in 1985. The LTTE and other militant groups attended talks alongside the TULF - the main Tamil political party. Both sides claimed the intransigence of the other was the problem. However, to quote Kethesh Loganathan, who represented one of the militant groups at the time, 'The Tamil organisations took the position that the burden of presenting a broadly acceptable formula lay with Colombo. We instead subjected the Government delegation to a series of lectures on what constituted the ethnic question and why the burden lay with them to come out with a solution worthy of our consideration.'

Even more significantly, the LTTE used this period to strengthen itself at the expense of the other Tamil groups. They decimated the EPRLF and eliminated Sri Sabaratnam, the leader of TELO. By the time it was over, the LTTE had emerged as by far the most powerful of the militant groups.

In 1987, the Government signed onto the Indo-Lanka Accord. The other militant groups joined the political process, but the LTTE, after initial acquiescence, broke with the Indians and precipitated a fierce conflict with the Indian Peace Keeping

*Even if the LTTE genuinely felt that Presidents Premadasa and Kumaratunga weren't serious, the same could hardly be said of Prime Minister Wickremesinghe, who was widely believed to be doing everything possible to appease the LTTE.*

Talks continued until mid-1995. The LTTE again claimed that discussions weren't going anywhere. Though a formal agreement had been signed requiring advance warning of any abrogation of the truce, very sudden notice was followed by a devastating attack on naval vessels in Trincomalee harbour.

Ranil Wickremesinghe's new administration signed the Ceasefire Agreement with Norwegian assistance in February 2002. The LTTE promptly used Government adherence to the



## Failures of peace processes with the LTTE

Force. Unfortunately, President Premadasa's new government, elected in 1988, didn't view the Indian presence kindly and decided to enter into informal negotiations with the LTTE.

The LTTE again regarded talks as a means of weakening other Tamil groups. The main victims were the leaders of the TULF. Amirthalingam, the former Leader of the Opposition, was killed along with the MP for Jaffna, while the Deputy Leader was injured and forced out of active politics. The TULF also lost the most prominent of its MPs in the East, Sam Tambimuttu.

The LTTE continued on what seemed to be good terms with the Government until the Indian Peace Keeping Force was withdrawn and the Northeastern Provincial Council led by Perumal of the EPRLF dissolved. However, it claimed that negotiations were going badly. The LTTE suddenly withdrew from the process and swiftly killed over 600 policemen in the East who were still observing a truce.

Chandrika Kumaratunga won the Parliamentary election of 1994 on a manifesto of peace negotiations, and promptly as Prime Minister dismantled some of the security apparatus. During the Presidential election that followed, her opponent Gamini Dissanayake of the UNP was killed by a suicide bomber during an election rally.

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The Ceasefire Agreement was also supposed to include negotiations, but after six rounds of talks in a period of just over a year, the LTTE withdrew from negotiations in April 2003. Even if the LTTE genuinely felt that both Presidents Premadasa and Kumaratunga weren't serious, the same could hardly be said of Prime Minister Wickremesinghe, who was widely believed - certainly by the Sri Lankan electorate when it voted largely on this issue in April 2004 - to be doing everything possible to appease the LTTE. To quote former LTTE military commander Karuna as to why the LTTE reneged on what seemed the most promising development of the talks, 'LTTE negotiator Anton Balasingham, without consulting Prabhakaran, stated that they were willing to consider a federal system. When he discussed this with Prabhakaran, the idea was rejected. He wanted talks dragged for at least five years while the LTTE built up its arms.'

The LTTE also took advantage of the Ceasefire Agreement to attack its Tamil opponents, namely former militant groups such as the EPDP, PLOTE and the Perumal wing of the EPRLF. The



TULF was now very much under LTTE control, its last independent leader Neelan Tiruchelvam having been killed by the LTTE in 1999. In 2005, the LTTE killed Lakshman Kadirgamar, President Kumaratunga's Foreign Minister.

By then, the Government was again under President Kumaratunga, who had taken over the Defence Ministry from Prime Minister Wickremesinghe's nominee, following a Supreme Court ruling that the President had to be responsible for defence. Attempts at compromise failed, so an election was held in April 2004, and this was decisively won by the President's party. The LTTE refused formal negotiations, but they did engage in informal discussions after the December 2004 tsunami. The resulting agreement was deemed unconstitutional by the Supreme Court but before any further negotiations could take place, a Presidential election was held at the end of 2005.

Though the LTTE seemed to have contributed to President Rajapaksa's victory by forbidding citizens in the areas under its control to vote, soon after his inauguration they launched a series of attacks on the Security Forces, which led the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission to question whether the Ceasefire Agreement still existed. However, they finally agreed to return to negotiations, having insisted that these take place in Europe.



The first negotiations took place in Geneva in February 2006 and seemed positive, but the LTTE refused to participate in the next round that had been scheduled for April. Instead, they despatched a suicide bomber to kill the Army Commander. The LTTE finally agreed to return to negotiations in Oslo in June but having been flown there, they refused to appear. Though various reasons have been adduced, one is that the Norwegian Ambassador had made clear to them that the issue of child soldiers could not be ruled out of the agenda.

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In August 2006, perhaps assuming that their military build-up was satisfactory, the LTTE launched two massive attacks, in the East and the North respectively. Had either succeeded, the capacity of the Government to maintain control of large areas would have been doubtful. However, the Security Forces repulsed the attacks, and then decided that the right to self-defence in the Ceasefire Agreement included the right to ensure that sudden assaults of this kind couldn't take place again.

Thus began the process of clearing the East, which had been largely under Government control in 2002, although the LTTE had succeeded in increasing its influence in the area over the period of the Ceasefire Agreement. Despite these ongoing hostilities, the LTTE agreed to return to negotiations in Geneva in October 2006. However, after what seemed another positive first day, the LTTE withdrew on the second, following what one diplomat described as the famous call from Kilinochchi, the LTTE Headquarters.

Throughout 2007, the Government sought a resumption of talks, but was told by the Norwegian Ambassador, who visited Kilinochchi in August, that the LTTE was unwilling. Attempts at informal talks, through calls from the Government's Peace Secretariat to the LTTE Peace Secretariat, and through messages sent via the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission, were

also repulsed. By then, the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission was down to a shadow of its former self, and unable to issue rulings, since the LTTE had refused to allow nationals of European Union states. It had also fired on a vessel bearing Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission representatives, which led to the cessation of naval monitoring.

In these circumstances, the Government pressed ahead with negotiations with other parties - Tamil parties committed to pluralism and democracy. The Ceasefire Agreement was formally abrogated in January 2008, which facilitated the adoption of interim measures such as the election of an Eastern Provincial Council. Since LTTE hostility to the Indo-Lanka Accord had led to there being no Provincial government in the North or East, this was a historic opportunity for the people in that area to elect their own administration. Unlike in the first election of 1988, when parties divided on ethnic lines, both major national parties led coalitions consisting of Tamils, Muslims and Sinhalese. The Government coalition won, and a Tamil former combatant was appointed Chief Minister.

Current operations to clear the North too of the LTTE are proceeding apace, and success will be followed by Provincial elections. Preceding these, as happened in the East, it is hoped that Municipal and Local Government elections can be held in areas in which normalcy has been restored.

# Political solutions give cause for hope

## Reflections on an appointment



Today, as fighting rages in the North and terror is visited upon the South, it isn't easy for us to reflect on the future of our country. Horrors that we all so dearly wish to avoid literally surround us. Politicians are targeted in suicide attacks, while ordinary people are conscripted to defend those responsible for the bombings who care nothing about the deaths of others as they reject the idea of compromise in favour of prolonging the doomed struggle for Eelam. Nevertheless, we have to keep in mind that there will ultimately be peace, and every step we take in that direction must be valued.

Reconciliation will need time and great patience. A conflict of three decades and more isn't going to be forgotten overnight, nor should it be. Grievances have to be dealt with, and this will

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undoubtedly involve some greater participation by minorities in our governance structures.

It is already happening in the Eastern Province. The TMVP has made significant progress in its efforts to reorient the approach of the group and return to the political mainstream. Free elections were held last year, and Sivanesanathan is now working towards the development of the area from his position as Chief Minister. It isn't perfect, but we are slowly getting there. The TMVP is both committed to and actively engaged in democratic government, and that can only be good for representative politics in the East.

This has to be celebrated, but discussion of the future of community relations cannot only be about this process of empowerment in the regions. Whatever level of devolution is finally agreed, there will always be powers remaining with the central government. Parliament has significant responsibilities and it will continue to be a vital institution.

The October appointment of TMVP leader Vinayagamoorthis Muralitharan as a Member of Parliament thus gives us another reason to hope for a peaceful future. Disputes over the procedure for including representatives on the national list after an electoral partnership has been dissolved were inevitable, but we should focus on the important principle behind the move.

Minorities have long been represented at the centre of politics here. The Tamil National Alliance, Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, Ceylon Workers' Congress and others all play meaningful roles in the national legislature. Non-sectarian parties, including both the Sri Lanka Freedom Party and United National Party, have significant representation from the minorities too, although far too many of their Tamil members have been killed at the hands of their so-called liberators in recent times. Lakshman Kadirgamar, Jeyaraj Fernandopulle and T Maheswaran all died for their identities as, in other circumstances and rather longer ago, did the likes of Appapillai Amirthalingam and so many others who refused to bow down to the LTTE. Tamil and Muslim representation at the centre isn't something new, but it is nevertheless a major advance for the TMVP to join parliamentary governance, because they can speak in a far more authoritative voice for the Eastern Tamils.

Vinayagamoorthis Muralitharan gave up the armed struggle at least in part because of a feeling that Eastern Tamils weren't getting a fair deal within the LTTE. Amongst a couple of dozen at the top of the LTTE hierarchy, he was the sole leader from the East. Eastern cadres were sent in huge numbers to the frontline - he says that more than 6,000 of his people were killed defending the North. The LTTE discriminated against Eastern Tamils, and Vinayagamoorthis Muralitharan saw a better future for his people in breaking away and engaging with the State.

It is therefore somehow fitting that he should now further advance his entry into the democratic mainstream and the transformation of his followers into a non-violent party by coming into the very heart of our existing governance structures. It is



essentially common sense. Eastern Tamils ought to have as strong a representation in Parliament as they do in their own areas now. We should view it as a positive move not only for them but for the country as a whole.

The appointment is significant for other reasons too. It sends a message to those in the LTTE who are still engaged in their armed struggle that it is not impossible to give up terrorism and adopt a different way of life. The LTTE needs to understand that it is not too late for them either.

Vinayagamoorthis Muralitharan is setting an example, and it is a powerful one. Not only is he undertaking to work in a purely democratic and non-violent manner to improve the lot of his people, but he is showing that it is possible to do so at a level that cannot be dismissed as mere window-dressing. Parliament is the ultimate authority, and he is there.

Amnesty International stuck its nose into the issue, as usual. It called for Vinayagamoorthis Muralitharan to be prosecuted as a war criminal and urged Parliament to reject his membership. Amnesty International said that to do otherwise would generate a dangerous climate of impunity, for people would interpret this as an open invitation to recruit child soldiers, torture their neighbours and murder police officers. It doesn't sound likely. Vinayagamoorthis Muralitharan could probably explain the losses and suffering that he and his colleagues had to undergo in the last few decades that would surely dissuade them and most others from embarking on such adventures in future.

Taking such action could only lead to unravelling of all the good work that has been done so far to normalise life in the East. The TMVP might even decide to take up its guns again, although that seems an unlikely prospect today. Sivanethurai Chandrakanthan was as much a part of the crimes mentioned as anybody else, and the Eastern Province might therefore lose its Chief Minister. The TMVP should not be deprived of its key leaders at a time when it needs them so desperately to keep its cadres in line while the development process gets underway and other forms of employment are found.



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It would certainly result in the end of any possibility of resolving the ongoing conflict with the LTTE through negotiations. Prabhakaran could not be let off those crimes either, for he is ultimately responsible for all that has been done by the LTTE. It is a totalitarian outfit, and cadres follow orders without question. The LTTE must not be told that it has no option but to fight to the end, because that will condemn even more of our people to die. It only shows how little use Amnesty International is to our people today.

Amnesty International should really think of changing its name. No longer does it seem appropriate for people to assume that the organisation is some kind of global advocate for the concept of pardon and reconciliation. Amnesty looks as though it has gone out of fashion in London. Fight-or-Die Worldwide appears to be the order of the day. It is a shame.

The Government has made it clear that its approach to those who abandon terrorism is going to be conciliatory. Too many people have been involved in this conflict, and a good deal of them from much too young an age, for punishment of even the most appalling of crimes through the regular legal system to be thinkable now. Too many lives are still being lost in the fighting. Our top priority must be to put a stop to terrorism and restore peace, with all other objectives secondary to this. It doesn't mean that no responsibility will ever be assigned for the crimes that have plagued us in this country for so long, but such accounting will have to contribute to the healing process. It should also take place at a more appropriate time.

We cannot forget the past, but we have to put it behind us and concentrate on the future now. Those who are keen to change their ways must be encouraged to do so, and as soon as possible. There has been far too much suffering already.

# Indian visitors highlight broad consensus on relations with Sri Lanka



A group of senior public figures from India visited Sri Lanka for the inaugural seminar of the Sri Lanka India Pragathi Sansadaya initiated by Presidential Advisor Mr. Sunimal Fernando at the Sri Lanka Foundation Institute in October. They addressed a media briefing held at the Peace Secretariat the following day.

The idea was to reflect on the future of the relationship between Sri Lanka and India. Two retired diplomats - former Foreign Secretary Ambassador K.P.S. Menon and former High Commissioner in Sri Lanka Ambassador N.N. Jha - and two intellectuals and senior members of the largest national political parties - Dr. Ravni Thakur, academic and Joint Secretary of the Foreign Affairs Cell of the All India Congress Central Committee, and Dr. Seshadri Chari, economist and former Editor of the official journal of the Bharatiya Janata Party - participated.

Sri Lanka and India share many thousands of years of history. Culturally, religiously and economically, the two nations have so much in common and are probably closer than any other pair of countries in the world. The visitors all stressed the need to go forward and build on this to set an example of successful bilateral relations for the region and elsewhere. Following such a path was said to be the means of ensuring peace and prosperity for all. There was keen enthusiasm for deepening and expanding cooperation of all varieties, and particularly in the cultural, religious and economic spheres.

The visitors also spoke about the current situation. Indians are understandably worried for their brethren over here as the fighting intensifies in the Vanni, but Tamil Nadu politicians have recently gone beyond these quite reasonable concerns to push for some kind of intervention by the Indian government to stop the military campaign against the LTTE.

Ambassador Jha said that the Tamil Nadu parties were simply getting ready for the upcoming elections to the Lok Sabha,

which are due within the next six months. And Ambassador Menon agreed that they were only acting to try and gain the political advantage in Tamil Nadu. Dr. Thakur and Dr. Chari both agreed that the move was opportunistic.

All of the speakers felt that the situation was different to previous agitations on Sri Lanka. Ambassador Menon suggested that people weren't responding in the way that the Tamil Nadu parties had expected. There had been no real outcry, he said. People were beginning to understand the difference between hardships faced by civilians due to military action and atrocities committed by the security forces. Ambassador Jha felt that the Tamil Nadu parties were now looking for a way out. He drew attention to the fact that the AIDMK hadn't taken up the issue, which he said it would have done if that had been politically expedient. Dr. Thakur felt that the situation wasn't particularly grave and noted that the

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*Dr. Chari emphasised the very broad and definite consensus against terrorism. The visitors also said that India was now completely decided on a policy of non-interference in the affairs of other countries, including Sri Lanka.*

politicians who had submitted their resignations had done so only to their party leaders. Dr. Chari added that the DMK was already toning down its statements, having received only a lukewarm response from people in Tamil Nadu.

Ambassador Jha reminded the audience that the Union government retains control of foreign affairs, so it is the position taken by Delhi that is important. Dr. Thakur and Dr. Chari stressed that the two largest national political parties in India were agreed on the approach to be taken with Sri Lanka. Dr. Thakur highlighted the statement made by the head of the Congress Party in Tamil Nadu, speaking out against those making propaganda for a terrorist group who assassinated one of their most important leaders. Dr. Chari confirmed that the message coming from Tamil Nadu was not by any means delivered on behalf of all parties there, for a number of the major Tamil Nadu parties and some of the national groups had boycotted the All Party Conference. Dr. Chari emphasised the very broad and definite consensus in India against terrorism.

The visitors also said that India was now completely decided on a policy of non-interference in the affairs of other countries, including Sri Lanka. Ambassador Menon added that any encouragement they may like to give towards working out a political settlement would have to be completely unobtrusive in order not to give cause for arrangements to be labelled as pro- or anti-Indian. As he said, anything that happens behind the scenes rarely stays there. If India were to push for something, Ambassador Menon felt that it might only lead to greater difficulties in Sri Lanka.

Ambassador Jha stressed that it was generally felt that President Mahinda Rajapaksa was already convinced of the need for a political settlement to resolve the grievances of the minority communities for good. The visitors referred as an example to President Mahinda Rajapaksa addressing the United Nations General Assembly in Tamil. Ambassador Jha described it as very brave and worthwhile.

Ambassador Jha urged Sri Lankans to understand the problems faced by the Indian government. Coalition politics is there to stay, and partners cannot be ignored if they have genuine concerns. He suggested that getting through accurate information on the situation here would be useful in containing the pressures from Tamil Nadu.

The Secretary General of the Peace Secretariat Prof. Rajiva Wijesinha commented that the Sri Lankan government was now making a real effort to do this. He highlighted the fact that there had been only 48 civilian deaths in two and a half years of air strikes, excluding the Sencholai incident. The Air Force maintains that the girls who died there were cadres undergoing military training, and evidence from survivors appears to confirm this. Artillery shelling has also been very restrained, he said. There was only one incident in which civilians were killed during the entire campaign to liberate the East. Since fighting intensified in the North, four months have seen only two allegations of shells hitting civilian locations. UNHCR has already dismissed one of these claims with respect to the Mullaitivu hospital.

The Ministry of Disaster Management and Disaster Relief, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Nation Building and the Commissioner General of Essential Services have come together to brief the press regularly on the humanitarian assistance being delivered to the Vanni, and they are also working hard to communicate statistics to demonstrate the excellent record of the Security Forces.

Prof. Wijesinha added that the LTTE was actually helping to clarify the situation by taking actions such as a few days previous when it launched suicide attacks on food ships travelling up to Jaffna. The LTTE has previously attacked the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission, denied access to the ICRC, and hijacked a Jordanian ship carrying food destined for the North. The Government has gotten over all of these hurdles in time, and it is now obvious who is putting them up again.

Prof. Wijesinha welcomed the suggestion from the Indian government that they contribute to the effort to send food into the Vanni. He said that it would be a very positive development that would show that neighbours were now determined to help each other.

All of the speakers were full of praise for the Sri Lanka India Pragathi Sansadaya. They said that it would provide a forum to discuss issues and map out a path for the two countries to expand and deepen their relationship in the years to come. Complementary strengths would thereby be used to greater effect. Dr. Chari highlighted Sri Lanka's strategic position, while noting India's size. Dr Thakur and Prof. Wijesinha spoke of the education sector, in which Sri Lanka is far ahead at lower levels but a long way behind at the very top.

A number of specific proposals were advanced too. Ambassador Jha suggested that India help Sri Lanka improve the quality of its English teaching and Information Technology education, and mentioned a suggestion he had made while serving in the Indian High Commission here to help set up institutions on the lines of the Indian Institutes of Technology and Management. Working together in publishing and the production of high quality school books was also discussed. Communications Director of the Peace Secretariat Senaka Weeraratna called for the establishment of an Indian Studies Centre in Sri Lanka, and the visitors concurred that a Sri Lankan Studies Centre would be very useful in India too.

The Sri Lanka India Pragathi Sansadaya provided an opportunity for scholars from the two countries to get together and think beyond the current issues. Participants felt that it had a bright future.

# Better communication as a key to peace

Though the Government has managed to achieve significant military victories of late, it has always been known that settling political differences requires other measures. Language has been one of the key factors driving communities apart, and despite the efforts of the Ministry of Constitutional Affairs and National Integration to bridge the gap, turning this situation around hasn't proved easy. The Government is committed to the idea of building an inclusive nation in which both Sinhala and Tamil speakers can go about their everyday business without hindrance, but practical implementation of the measures needed to deliver on this commitment has been lacking so far.

The Peace Secretariat recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding to assist in these efforts and try to accelerate the process. Focus is being put on organising language

training for Government servants and members of the Armed Forces and the Police. Proficiency in Tamil is woefully inadequate in these institutions, and this causes serious problems for ordinary citizens, particularly in the North and East. If a lasting peace is to be established, this situation must change, and quickly. Sri Lanka needs to ensure that people in authority have the support of all communities, and this can only be achieved if they have the ability to communicate in both Sinhala and Tamil.

Language policy is clear as far as Government servants are concerned. Proficiency in both Sinhala and Tamil is required. Current employees are given incentives to learn the other language, while new recruits don't qualify for promotions until they've reached the necessary level. The Official Languages Department runs classes for Government servants, and staff are being categorised to help guarantee the effectiveness of the instruction.

However, the rate at which progress can be made is constrained by the availability of resources. This was one of the issues highlighted by the Secretary to the Minister of Constitutional Affairs Ms. M. Wickramasinghe at a meeting to canvass support for language training from international partners held at the Peace Secretariat in December. Representatives of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund and the embassies of Norway, France, Switzerland and the United States participated.

The Secretary General of the Peace Secretariat Prof. Wijesinha stressed the need for a rethink in strategy. He explained that the Official Languages Department wasn't properly equipped and still functioned on a traditional basis, with the uniformity of the syllabus and the lack of practicality being key problems. He urged radical change, which he

*The Peace Secretariat is working to encourage the acceleration of this process, in particular by developing and identifying funding for concrete initiatives to train Government servants and members of the Police and the Armed Forces.*

emphasised would have a major impact on overall results. But Prof. Wijesinha concurred that little could be achieved without money, and called on the agencies present to consider backing such activities.

As the Police and the Armed Forces have regular and often sensitive contact with the public, targeted efforts to improve their grasp of Tamil would have a significant effect on the quality of life for many people in Sri Lanka, and this would be an important contribution to the peace process. Prof. Wijesinha highlighted the need for a practical approach that focused on speaking and listening competency rather than the ability to







read and write. He noted that the Police were already thinking of introducing role plays and other interactive methods to their Human Rights training programme, depending on the success of a forthcoming pilot project, and expressed a hope that this would lead to improvements in Tamil too.

The other area of focus at the Peace Secretariat with regard to language policy is the promotion of English. President Mahinda Rajapaksa has declared 2009 to be the Year of English and Information and Communications Technology, and a Presidential Task Force has been appointed to coordinate work on the subject, with a subcommittee for the North and East chaired by Prof. Wijesinha.

English proficiency has slipped considerably over the years, another of the unfortunate effects of past decisions. While Sinhala and Tamil will always be the priority as the first languages of Sri Lankan citizens, there is also a need to improve capacity in the English language. The prospects of English being used as a link between Sinhala and Tamil speakers are limited, but the opportunities created for people able to communicate in English in terms of acquiring knowledge, finding employment and interacting with the rest of the world cannot be ignored.

Unfortunately, the quality of English teaching has deteriorated too, so one of the objectives of any interventions ought to be to train new instructors and provide opportunities for the retraining of existing teachers.

The Peace Secretariat has also made efforts to support the Government policy of reintroducing the option of English medium in schools in deprived areas. At the first gathering of the Presidential Task Force on English and Information and Communications Technology in December, Prof. Wijesinha

recalled a meeting he had had with principals of three schools in Muttur on a visit to the East some months earlier. He explained that they currently had to provide both Sinhala and Tamil medium, the latter in two small schools, and finding enough teachers was a serious problem. He said that they wanted the schools to be merged into a single schools that would function in the English medium, demonstrating the potential and enthusiasm for this idea.

Prof. Wijesinha explained that the presence of English medium schools would be one of the criteria used in assigning the status of the Cities of Excellence, a new initiative proposed to accelerate the spread of practical English skills. Other criteria would include success rates in English at A Level, the

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development of a public library with English facilities, encouragement for staff of local government organisations to be proficient in English. English medium schools would also be encouraged to develop mechanisms of promoting English amongst other institutions, by twinning and starting paid for classes to which scholarships would be awarded to students from deprived schools.

As concerns the North and East, the Subcommittee of the Presidential Task Force on English and Information and Communications Technology has already identified a list of specific interventions.

Priority is being given to courses for young people, both former cadres and those whose education had been interrupted due to the conflict. These are to be directed towards O Level qualifications that will help them to find jobs, in the public service, security forces, vocations with the possibility of foreign employment, higher studies including teaching and so on. In addition to English and Information and Communications Technology, they will study Sinhala and Tamil, Mathematics, an Aesthetic and a Vocational subject, plus Sports. To speed up the process, it is anticipated to use teacher training colleges and other buildings that are currently underutilised to conduct residential and day courses. Such an approach will clearly help to reduce the danger of young people with little to do and few means of supporting themselves deciding to opt for violence and disturbing the hard won peace.

Communication is key to mutual understanding, while more exchanges also contribute to greater prosperity. The Peace Secretariat hopes that all those genuinely concerned with peace and the promotion of unity will assist endeavours to promote national integration through improved techniques of and facilities for the teaching of languages.

# Commemorating the Muslim evictions

## Secretary General's speech in Puttalam



I am honoured to be here on the 18th Anniversary of the forced eviction of Muslims from their homes in the North. Over the last half century, some of our citizens have suffered at the hands of others on many occasions, and there is a need to make amends for all of this. But what happened to the Northern Muslims is the worst, because it was an open and unashamed avowal of racism by those in authority. It was ethnic cleansing.

This is why I believe it is time there was a formal inquiry. The enormity of what the LTTE did when it had a significant part of the Northern Province under its control must be clearly documented. It is important to go into details, because this will show that ordinary Tamils in the North didn't participate. They, like ordinary Muslims and Sinhalese, wanted to continue with the age old pattern of co-existence and co-operation.

That Tamils in general regret what happened seems clear. Earlier this year, when a Muslim who had been evicted brought up the point at a meeting in Oslo, all Sri Lankan Tamils in the audience agreed that it was appalling. Tamils opposed to the LTTE were forthright in their criticism, seeing it as typical of the organisation. But Tamils supporting the LTTE also regretted it, and suggested that the LTTE now realised it was wrong. One of them even claimed that the LTTE leadership had apologised.

Significantly, the only person who defended the action, on the grounds that Muslims were traitors to the Tamil struggle, was the Indian politician Vaiko. His outrageous claim was oddly satisfying, because it showed he didn't understand Sri Lanka at all, whereas Sri Lankans were anxious to go back to the inclusiveness that was the hallmark of our country, not the othering and infliction of suffering that Vaiko seemed to relish.

It is a disgrace that successive Sri Lankan governments permitted that suffering to go on for 18 long years. In a sense, the government of the time was also responsible for what happened, though not directly. When the LTTE was close to defeat, thanks also to the efforts of Indian forces, the Sri Lankan government gave it support. Decimation of the Tamil forces that had joined the democratic process followed, then ethnic cleansing of the Northern Muslims. This shouldn't ever be allowed to recur, and the current government will stand firm against such indulgence to terrorism.

We must thank the Hon. Minister, and H.E. the President, for reversing the policy of neglect that the evicted Muslims had to endure. This government has set itself to find durable solutions to the problem, by facilitating return as soon as possible, or else allowing for resettlement. To this end, this government has initiated a housing project with the World Bank, and has made sure that benefits will be shared with the host community who provided so much to make your lives less oppressive.

But we also need to work harder to provide you with livelihood opportunities. Previous governments have neglected this area in terms of investment, so it is good that a decision on the Norochcholai Project has finally been taken. I was very pleased to see the start of the Kalpitiya Road too, an initiative that should have begun many years ago. I hope this government will work with you to ensure more and better jobs, and also the education you will need to take advantage of new investments.

Finally, even in the midst of your own troubles, I would like you to spare a thought for our Tamil brethren who continue to suffer under the LTTE. Just as they evicted you from the North, they are now forcing Tamils to leave their homes. They have forced Tamils to leave northern parts of Mannar, as they forced you to leave southern parts 18 years ago. They are now forcing Tamils to leave Kilinochchi. Instead of letting them remain or move to cleared areas, from which they can soon return home as in the East, the LTTE is inflicting continuous suffering on them by forcing them into ever smaller enclaves.

I would therefore ask you, as Muslims who suffered forced eviction, to call on the LTTE to spare the Northern Tamils from this continuing process. They must let them move to the shelter that their fellow citizens, whether Tamil or Muslim or Sinhalese, will offer them. And we must, through our sympathy and understanding for the Tamils who now suffer so badly at the hands of the LTTE, build up our spirit of co-operation again.

In all the sufferings so many have undergone, only this was deliberate publicly acknowledged brutality on an ethnic basis. That is why it must be studied and understood, so that it will never be repeated. But we also need to work together to ensure that other forms of suffering, attacks and even discrimination do not occur, so that we can move forward as equal citizens of a united Sri Lanka to the peace and prosperity we all deserve.

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# Celebrating 60 years of the UDHR

## Secretary General's speech in Geneva

Sri Lanka is honoured to contribute to the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. Under the current leadership of the Human Rights Council and with the guidance of the new High Commissioner for Human Rights, we have no doubt that the Universality of the Declaration will be even more productively affirmed in coming years than it has been during the last six decades.

Ms. Pillai has explained how we can ensure that more people in more places have the Rights that the UN has recognised. We must stress the need to promote all Rights, and we welcome the upcoming discussion on Education for Minorities. Sri Lanka provides free education and health facilities to all our citizens, even in areas now under terrorist control. Last week, we held the O Level exams in spite of attempted disruptions, which were resisted by parents who continue to appreciate our adherence to Social and Economic Rights.

In this regard, we welcome interventions such as that of the Non-Aligned Movement that draw attention to certain lacunae in the Declaration. We believe that the policy of making up for such omissions was implicit in the spirit of the Declaration.

In particular, we need to pay attention to the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights that are sometimes ignored in this Council. When we consider the poor, we should think not only of poor countries, but of those who suffer in countries that pride themselves, because of their affluence, on their seeming adherence to Human Rights. The plight of the homeless there, vividly brought home to me landing in a freezing Switzerland yesterday, may need the attention of this Council, and the establishment of Special Mechanisms to alleviate the situation.

We are also committed to Civil and Political Rights, and do our best to uphold them, despite having to cope with terrorism. The Universality of Human Rights is best exemplified with regard to terrorism, and we hope not to have to put up with any more selective critiques on the topic. Though the record of our Armed Forces is exemplary, we refrain from drawing attention to the sufferings of civilians elsewhere, because we would not wish to appear sympathetic to terrorism in itself. But we urge all countries engaged in the struggle against terror to treat everyone in areas in which they operate as their own citizens.

The Universality of Human Rights has been questioned. There are claims that some cultures preclude adherence to particular Rights, while there are those who see their cultures as the interpreters of all Rights, and engage in judgments and definitions that do not conform to the simple rule of thumb set 60 years ago that Universal Human Rights should be obvious. There will always be grey areas, but whether we go with Aristotle or Kant, we need what is readily comprehensible, rather than a Platonic concept of elite guardians, accountable to nobody but themselves, and even then, not consistently.

We need to confirm our adherence to democracy too. Though democracy is flawed, there is no substitute for it, especially when accompanied by safeguards against majoritarianism, a constitutionalist approach that is based on Universal Human

Rights. In our struggle in Sri Lanka to restore democracy to areas so long deprived of it, we welcome help from this body.

But we also need precision about violations. Genocide and ethnic cleansing are ugly actions, and we need to guard against using them just as words to pursue unrelated aims. Recently, one of the many indices that have sprung up produced an alert about possible genocide in various countries. It transpired that amongst the criteria used to judge the possibility of genocide was openness to trade. Such attempts to politicise Human Rights, to attack particular countries on the basis of economic choices, must be resisted if values we respect are not to become tools in the hands of interventionist manipulators.

There have been too many double standards based on self-interest and personal agendas of late. We must never allow the victims of egregious violations to become violators in turn, which has become common. We must be wary of using yardsticks to promote attacks on the very principles of the United Nations, including the sovereignty of its members.



It is double standards that worry those of us trying to seek principled solutions to the problems all of us face. We must eschew simplistic solutions and half-baked arguments designed to achieve political goals. We need to deal in specifics, to address problems with the help of those genuinely committed to Human Rights, with the support of instruments that belong to all of us.

We in Sri Lanka are especially pleased that the Office of the High Commissioner will assist us next month with a trainer training programme for our police. This is the first of a series that we have been requesting for some time, to help in ensuring better adherence to Human Rights. Meanwhile, our National Human Rights Commission too looks forward to a renewal of assistance to build up its local offices, to better serve the large numbers now seeking its assistance.

Our commitment to the Universal Declaration will continue, and we look forward to enhancing its impact in our country, our region, and the world.

# Religious leaders gather in the name of peace

## Deputy Secretary General's speech in Anuradhapura

I am happy to participate on behalf of the Peace Secretariat at this historic fourth meeting in the series 'Peace through Religions'.

I am thankful to the organisers - the Religions for Peace, the Inter-Religious Council and the National Peace Council of Sri Lanka - for continuing to organise this awareness programme and discussion with the participation of several leading religious dignitaries to bring a lasting peace to our island nation. Members of the Christian, Hindu, Muslim and Buddhist faiths are with us today on this journey.

Sri Lankans by nature are very religious, no matter what faith they belong to. At a certain point in our history, ethnicity and language played a major role in dividing the community. But religion has never caused rifts like this.

We must ask where we lost our way. I don't think I'm wrong to cautiously mention that religion speaks of non-violence, a peaceful life and service to others. But the importance of this



particular aspect of religion has not been driven into the minds of our people by our religious leaders.

I believe that religious leaders also have not contributed enough to bring our people together. All religious teachings are conducted separately and in the language of the adherents, which makes it difficult for people to understand and get closer through religion. For example, Hindu teachings are conducted mainly in Tamil, while the majority of Buddhist teachings are recited in Sinhala.

Although there are certain places where all our people congregate irrespective of their religion, such as Kataragama, Madhu, Munneswaram, Dalada Maligawa and Anuradhapura, this is insufficient at the present juncture.

Our people are always generous to give and to lend a helping hand to others when they need it. But whether it is humanitarian assistance of peace building, it is the local leaders of the major religions in Sri Lanka who must come forward, irrespective of their political beliefs, for no religion in the world is aligned to an ideology or party.

I believe that peace can be achieved in our country. Being a multi-religious nation, it is in the hands of our religious leaders to bring our people together, and to bring our political leaders together, to provide humanitarian assistance, to put a stop to killings and to achieve a lasting peace. No religion ever taught or had a philosophy on killings.

In this context, I would like to quote an opinion expressed by the late Bishop of Kurunegala Lakshman Wickremesinghe for your thoughts: 'The urgent demands of our national crisis must overcome personal, party and petty interests. We must pray for and support those who are trying to build convergence in the midst of divergence.'

We must continue to hope. As the late D.T. Niles used to say, 'Hope in God arises out of the ruins of our expectations.'