

# TAMIL GUARDIAN

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## Fraying Fabric

### Kumaratunga is successfully delaying direct talks

Amid the protests last week by the Sinhala far right against the Norwegian peace initiative in Sri Lanka, we cautioned that Oslo's efforts faced a key challenge in the form of a concerted campaign to block the de-proscription of the Liberation Tigers. We reiterated that the influence President Chandrika Kumaratunga wields over the military could also prove problematic in implementing the terms and conditions of the permanent ceasefire. Regrettably the events of the past week have proved this to be case - much earlier than many had anticipated.

As the officials of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) will no doubt concur, a plethora of problems emerged in rapid sequence in the past few days. Some were serious. The standoff between the Sea Tigers and the Sri Lanka Navy last Wednesday could easily have resulted in heavy loss of life and irreparable damage to the ceasefire and the Norwegian initiative. The planned interception by the Navy of an LTTE convoy whose path and timing had been prearranged with the SLMM was undoubtedly intended to raise tensions - as it duly did. The sudden and arbitrary declaration by the Navy of the islands off Jaffna's west coast as a 'military zone' which the LTTE's political cadres could not enter is as absurd (the islands are home to tens of thousands of Tamil people) as it is provocative. As this edition goes to print, the SLMM's ruling on the matter is outstanding. There are numerous other incidents against the letter and spirit of the ceasefire initiated by the Sri Lankan military across the north and east.

The Sri Lankan military's demonstrable aggression in the past week has placed other problems with the implementation of the ceasefire agreement in a new context. The LTTE informed the Norwegian government on April 17 that it was not happy with the sluggish pace of the military's implementation of several key aspects of the agreement. Sri Lankan troops should have vacated the temples and places of worship within 30 days of the truce coming into effect on February 23, but most still remain occupied. There has been no move to remove armed forces personnel from occupied schools and hospitals. Tamil paramilitaries have not been disarmed by the military, the rhetoric and the showcasing of some weapons surrenders notwithstanding. The persecution of the large Tamil fishing community is continuing unabated.

There is no doubt that President Kumaratunga, the commander in chief

of Sri Lanka's armed forces, is - whilst publicly extolling the virtues of peace - rolling out her strategy to torpedo the Norwegian initiative. The reckless actions of the military in the past week along with the slipping of most deadlines stipulated in the truce agreement are successfully thwarting the establishment of conditions of normalcy. The cumulative effect of the military's actions is therefore to push back the convening of direct talks between the United National Front (UNF) government and the LTTE. Meanwhile the SLMM is clearly feeling the strain, with additional monitors being sought from suitable European countries.

In a second line of assault on the Norwegian peace initiative, the Sinhala far right is mobilising itself for further protests against actions the government needs to take to pave the way for talks. The extremists are insisting on the maintenance of the ban on the LTTE. They are demanding that the interim administration proposal - designed to provide a 'cooling off' period before negotiations of core issues - be discarded and the military campaign against the LTTE resumed. The scare mongering that the country is about to be split has panicked Sri Lanka's fanatical - and influential - Buddhist clergy. The Sri Lanka Army this week also put a dent in confidence in the peace process when it suddenly announced it was going to recruit thousands of new soldiers and train its units harder than ever before.

Premier Ranil Wickremesinghe has been scrambling to contain the fallout, soothing the prelates ruffled feathers and assuring them of his Sinhala credentials - and thereby raising Tamil suspicions in the process. Although his government is belatedly preparing its ground to challenge the President's powers, with key legislation scheduled for debate in Parliament later this month, Mr. Wickremesinghe is clearly under rising pressure. But to stabilise matters he needs to rein in the military immediately. The question of requisite authority is irrelevant. The Premier enjoys considerable international and domestic support for his policies - support he needs to actively invoke. The indefinite ceasefire is the first agreement between the new Sinhala government and the Tamil leadership. Its status now deserves the scrutiny of all concerned with establishing lasting peace in Sri Lanka if it is not to be eventually consigned to the scrap heap of earlier deals subsequently destroyed by the implacable Sinhala-Buddhist supremacists.

## Helping Hands

### Rebuilding the Tamil homeland is a community effort

In the wake of the indefinite ceasefire in Sri Lanka and the lifting of the economic embargo on the Tamil areas, a new determination to rebuild our shattered homeland has emerged amongst the Tamil community. But after decades of neglect, deprivation and destruction, there is much that needs to be done. The Tamil Diaspora distributed across many countries has, over the years, collectively acquired much expertise and skill, the deployment of which can considerably improve the lives of many of our people. From the construction of roads and bridges to the provision of medical care and establishment of information technology infrastructure and communication networks, there is much that the Diaspora can achieve in the Tamil homeland.

On the other hand, the lack of even basic facilities in these areas does not justify the supply of work and equipment of unacceptable quality. Our

community is justified in expecting the very best we can contribute. Furthermore, despite the widespread and substantial want, there is a pressing need for concerted and coordinated action. Piecemeal and haphazard efforts by individual organisations will undoubtedly fail to make the meaningful strategic improvements required. Many Tamil charities and organisations established in the Tamil homelands have over the years striven valiantly to provide much needed support and assistance. The Diaspora's efforts should be channelled through their infrastructures for maximum effect.

The abject poverty to which large sections of our community were reduced by the actions of successive Sri Lankan governments will take considerable time to alleviate. But the eventual provision of self-sufficiency - and the dignity this brings our community - is a task that deserves our committed engagement.

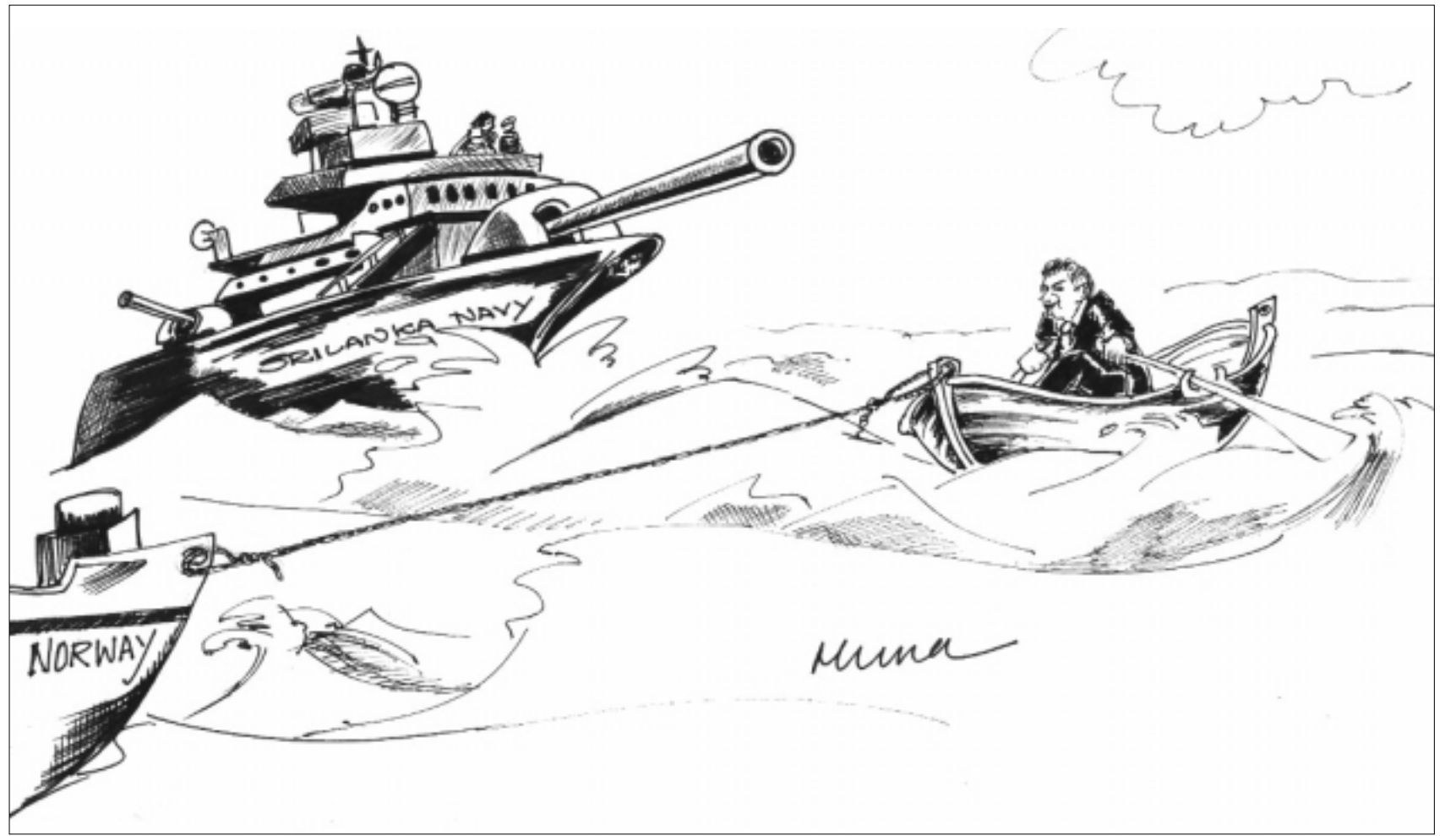
## Social Science

### Tamils seek culturally sensitive order

Having re-established a presence in Jaffna and the other major Tamil population centres, the Liberation Tigers have begun cleaning up. In Jaffna, the dismantling of the local pornographic industry - and the illicit brewing business - began in earnest last week. Since the region came under Sri Lanka Army control in late 1995, the spread of porn, illicit alcohol and even narcotics has been tolerated - and in some cases, even encouraged - by the military authorities. The LTTE's new campaign will undoubtedly strike a chord in conservative Jaffna society. Having lived for many years in the anarchic lawlessness of Sri Lanka Army run administration, many of Jaffna's residents are looking forward to the culturally sensitive security prevalent in areas under

LTTE control.

Naturally, the movement's detractors have been quick off the mark with alarmist tales of the impending imposition of Taliban-like Puritanism and suggestions of a threatened 'cultural revolution' - one newspaper this weekend even claimed that the wearing of sarees would be made mandatory for women. The idiocy of the scaremongers will no doubt be amply demonstrated in the coming period. But the obvious logic underpinning the concept of 'hearts and minds' - that a grass roots movement will inevitably adopt the policies that will earn it the broadest swathe of support from its surrounding population - seems to have escaped the self-appointed - and somewhat premature - defenders of individual choice.



## Developing Jaffna alone is not enough

The development of Jaffna to the detriment of the rest of the Tamil homeland will prove a misguided attempt to divide and rule, argues Vino Kanapathipillai.

IT HAS been just over two months since the indefinite ceasefire agreement between the Sri Lanka government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam was signed. In that time, the Tamil people have begun to enjoy some of the benefits of peace. These include the easing of a severe economic embargo which deprived the people of the essentials of life and the slackening of restrictions of travel allowing for easier movement between areas controlled by the two parties to the agreement. However life for the people in the north and east can definitely not be classified as 'normal', as they will be the first to point out.

One interesting point to emerge in the months following the signing of the agreement is the approach taken, not only by the Sri Lanka government, but also by the international community to the redevelopment of the Tamil homelands as part of the process of rebuilding the war torn areas.

In the aftermath of the indefinite ceasefire agreement being signed, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe flew to Jaffna and met the US Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs, Christina Rocca in the peninsula. Subsequently, about 40 international diplomats, representatives of non-governmental organisations and businessmen flew to Palaly to view the destruction of the towns in the peninsula for themselves. This was followed by Colombo businessmen, who traveled to the north to analyse profitable opportunities in the aftermath of two decades of war.

The process of proving the war is over has not been limited to high profile visits, but has also included financial promises. The Asian Development Bank last week announced Rs40 million to the Jaffna peninsula to develop health, education, agriculture and water supply facilities in the war ravaged north. Earlier, the United Nations Food and Agricul-

ture Organisation revealed plans to assist the agricultural and fisheries industries in the peninsula to the tune of US\$13.4 million.

As the financial and other assistance offered so far is tallied together, a clear picture emerges of a redevelopment programme that is being targeted at one (government controlled) part of the Tamil homelands to the detriment of all the other areas. In effect Jaffna is exclusively drawing the attention of the Sri Lanka government and the international community, leaving the Vanni and eastern areas to limp along as the poor relations.

While businessmen from Colombo seek to enter into exploitative agreements with their counterparts in Jaffna and gain the profits from a closed economy that has long been used to paying exorbitant prices for limited goods, there have been no such visits to investigate the Vanni. International diplomats have toured the peninsula, gawking at the sight of flattened Chavakachcheri town, but no foreign diplomat or aid worker has made the effort to visit the Vanni and view the suffering of the people there for themselves in the aftermath of the ceasefire agreement.

Other, indirect assistance to the northern peninsula has also been put forward. The World Bank has offered the Sri Lanka government US\$1.3 million in assistance to de-mine areas under its control. Other international organisations offering assistance include the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) which has made US\$300,000 available and Mine Action Services which has provided a further US\$38,000. The United States has sent a team of more than twenty to provide expert advice.

Sri Lanka's Country Researcher for the Land Mine Monitor, an Initiative of the International Campaign to Ban Land Mines Saliya Edirisinghe told the state owned Daily News that it costs around \$1000 to deactivate a single landmine. While Edirisinghe estimates that there are 100,000 mine in the north, Yogan of the LTTE's de-mining section estimates that there are 1.4 million unexploded mines in the Vanni. Yet no international government or organisation has to date come forward to offer assistance to those engaged in de-mining the much vaster tracts of land in the Vanni.

There has been a narrow

perception that Jaffna is the capital of the Tamil homelands, especially residents of the peninsula - and those amongst the Diaspora hailing from the region. Even the international community has expressed this view, as evidenced for example by the reaction to the fall of Jaffna to government forces in 1995. Successive Sinhalese governments have used this impression to maintain the divide between the Tamils from Jaffna and those from the other parts of the island. This practice seems to continue with the current government - with the collusion of the international community.

However, given the current dispersion of Jaffna Tamils in the mainland and the fact that demographic maps have been redrawn as a result of the population movements caused by the war, to continue the policy of divide and rule in the current climate of resurgent Tamil nationalism carries the risk of alienating the majority of the local population. Even if the northern peninsula benefits, albeit temporarily, even the Tamils there feel that a thriving Jaffna alongside a woefully underdeveloped Vanni is the least desirable scenario.

## Kumaratunga's strategy for sabotage

President Chandrika Kumaratunga put in motion a strategy to pull the rug under the government's feet on the peace agenda last week, writes Suranimala in *The Sunday Leader*.

WITH the noose slowly but surely tightening around her over the actions of the Presidential security Division, President Chandrika Kumaratunga has now given the nod to launch an island-wide campaign against the peace process to her party, though publicly taking up a posture of supporting Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's peace efforts.

It is a culmination of the PSD problem and the government's intentions to introduce a constitutional amendment not only for a conscience vote but also to prune the powers of the president with regards to the powers of dissolution of parliament that have got Kumaratunga activated. The president now realises unless she ousts the United National Front (UNF) government in the short term she will be marginalised and has said as much to her Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) hierarchy.

The strategy worked out by the president therefore is to offer conditional support for Prime Minister Wickremesinghe's peace efforts and the constitutional amendments whilst activating the hardline Sinhala groups and the JVP to launch an all out offensive on the peace process, bidding time till December before dissolving parliament.

It is with the same objective that the president undertook her mission to India where she impressed upon the Indian leaders and the media the importance of ensuring the proscription of the Liberation Tigers remaining in force, realising fully well, the talks between the government and the LTTE

hardliners launching a tirade against the media. To make matters worse the Asgiriya Mahanayake the following day publicly stated he supported the peace process.

But the president was undeterred and took with her a copy of the letter to India and it later came to be published in the Hindu newspaper, widely regarded as a pro Chandrika anti LTTE publication when it comes to issues concerning Sri Lanka.

However before leaving for India on Monday, the

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President convened a meeting of the SLFP Central Committee to discuss the current political developments with a view to evolving a strategy.

Prior to the meeting itself, the President, former Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar and opposition leader Mahinda Rajapakse met with the visiting Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister Vidar Helgessen where once again the president said she would support the process but that deproscription should come only after the talks resume and progress is made.

It is after this that the Central Committee met to discuss plans to counter the UNF. Chief Minister of the Western Province Reginald Cooray struck a note of caution stating they were faced with a dangerous political situation and unless the SLFP took a clear stand on the peace process, the Marxist Janatha Vimukthi Perumana (JVP) will capitalise on it and seize the party vote bank.

Former Deputy Minister of Higher Education, Vishwa Warnapala said the party must take a strong stand that ensures the rights of the Sinhalese are protected. Kegalle District MP, Athauda Seneviratne said the UNF government was planning to introduce constitutional amendments to take away the president's powers with a view to charging her in courts and deterrent action should be taken.

The President said the party should engage the UNF in dialogue with a view to buying time and that the SLFP should write to the prime minister and state the party position on the numerous issues based on which the SLFP will offer its support in a spirit of co-habitation. "We will say we will cooperate subject to our concerns being addressed. That way we will engage them in dialogue and obtain time till we are ready," the president said.

Accordingly the committee did a draft wherein it was stated, there should be no de-proscription until such time the talks progress and that the SLFP is against the concept of traditional homelands and cannot agree to such demand by the LTTE being recognised on the basis, Sri Lanka belongs to all its people.

Since the proposal for an interim administration stems from LTTE's position that the government of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesi-

nge is not stable [to offer a permanent solution], the SLFP would give the necessary strength to the UNF government to negate the necessity for an interim administration. Instead, the SLFP proposes in the draft that the government should go for a final solution without introducing an interim administration.

Of course the SLFP strategy on this occasion is to create a situation where it would be difficult for the Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe to negotiate with the LTTE by queering the pitch early on, especially based on the very requests made by the LTTE with regard to de-proscription and the Interim Administration.

In such a situation, having unleashed the extremist Sinhala groups led by the JVP to oppose the peace process, the SLFP is setting the stage to join the bandwagon as and when the campaign picks up by stating the UNF did not heed its proposals for co habitation, knowing fully well, if the premier concedes to Kumaratunga's demands, the peace talks will be a non starter.

It is clear from the SLFP strategy that there will be no co operation coming from the President and the SLFP in real terms. At the same time, the strategy is based on the assumption the UNF cannot muster sufficient numbers without the open support of the main opposition to obtain the required 2/3rd majority to pass its constitutional amendments into law and take away the president's power to dissolve parliament.

Against that backdrop, having created sufficient waves in the country, the president having bought time by offering co habitation believes she will be in a position to dissolve parliament and go for elections anytime after December. At least that is the strategy.