

## NEWS

# Lectures and warnings stoke fear and hate



(above) Counter-insurgency officials teach schoolgirls about suicide bomber's jackets. (inset) A blast outside frightens the volunteer. Photo *The Morning Leader*; (top) Gory videos of aftermaths of bombings exacerbate fears. Photo *Sanka Vidanagama/AFP/Getty Images*

AMID rising fears of a renewal of Sri Lanka's protracted ethnic conflict, the authorities are stoking anti-Tamil amongst the majority Sinhalese and building the case for war. Schoolchildren are at front-line of this exercise in 'manufacturing consent' with frightening lectures by security officials on suicide bombings interspersed with false bomb alerts in schools.

Last week *The Morning Leader* reported how "school children at Visakha Vidayala were taught how to deal with suicide bombers" by member of the elite counter-insurgency unit, the Special Task Force (STF).

ASP Gamini Walgama from the STF demonstrated how a suicide jacket is worn and how it is assembled to around 500 teenage students at the school auditorium.

ASP Welgama told the gathering that he had conducted more than 1000 such workshops already.

Videos showing the gory aftermath of past suicide bombings were screened for the children to look at.

A suicide jacket was put on a student and its functions explained. Flashing lights indicated the functions of the jacket and at the moment of the detonation a loud sound was heard from the outside. The frightening blast had been stimulated to give the real effect.

The students were then advised not to panic during a bomb scare and follow instructions.

The STF demonstration also included details of various types of explosives including claymore mines, the extent, speed and power of various explosions. Samples of various explosive were sent around for the students to have a closer look.

Some schools have been issued with metal detectors as "a security measure to prevent terror attacks on schools."

Last month several schools in Colombo shut following warnings circulated that Tamil Tiger bombers were targeting schoolchildren in the south.

School buses were turned away at key colleges while even some international schools, where mostly children of expatriates study, were also closed amid the bomb scare, officials told AFP.

**'It all contributes to a gnawing anxiety in the south and, inevitably, deeper loathing for the Tamil Tigers.'**

Parents were seen rushing to schools to take back their children who had made it to school at opening time.

"There is panic, total panic," one government security official said. He claimed "it is the work of some pranksters who had been calling hospitals and warning that there would be bomb attacks against schools."

AFP spoke to one parent, Chandana Wijenaike who said he did not send his daughter to Colombo's Museaus College as several other parents had telephoned him early morning saying they were not sending their children to school because of a bomb threat.

Students who went to the Asian International School were

turned away.

That bomb scare came ahead of the funeral of Sri Lanka Army General Parami Kulatunga, who was killed in a suicide bomb attack. Two months earlier, the Army Chief, Lt. Gen. Sarath Fonseka was seriously wounded in another bomb attack.

But these two blasts, along with another in 2004 reportedly targeting the leader of the anti-LTTE paramilitary group EPDP, have been the only suicide bombings in Colombo.

Neither has there been a history of schools in the south being targeted during the decades long conflict - even in retaliation for the bombings by the Sri Lanka Air Force of numerous schools in the Northeast.

However, the lectures at southern schools by senior counter-insurgency officials, false alarms and even issuances of metal detectors are all contributing to a gnawing anxiety and, inevitably, deeper loathing for the Tamil Tigers.

This, some believe, is the purpose of the substantial effort the government of President Mahinda Rajapakse has thrown into the information campaign.

Colombo is a city on edge, and regular bomb scares keep it there.

In the past two weeks alerts sparked evacuations at the Immigration and Emigration Office, Sri Lanka's main hospital and the headquarters of the National Savings Bank. Searches have turned up no suspicious objects.

But the waves of terror passing through ordinary Sri Lankans are quietly stoking animosity for the apparently ever-present enemy in the North. An enemy suspected to be aided and abetted by fellow Tamils in the south.

## British 1948 safeguards 'proved inadequate'

BRITAIN'S trust in the safeguards built into the constitution of Ceylon at independence was misplaced and their weakness is to blame for the island's present problems, the British High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, Mr. Dominic Silcott, said in an interview with the *Sunday Virakesari*. In a wide-ranging interview last weekend, Mr. Silcott said that LTTE and the Sri Lanka government must now negotiate an end to the conflict. The UK and the United States were in agreement on their policies on Sri Lanka, he also said, adding that India also wants a negotiated solution to the conflict.

The UK High Commissioner was asked to comment on accusations that 'divide and rule' policies of the British colonial administration precipitated the present ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka.

"When the British came to Ceylon in 1796 there were three distinct kingdoms. The British

made it one country for purposes of administrative convenience," Mr. Silcott explained.

"In over half the number of countries in the world the British colonial rulers adopted a 'divide and rule' policy. In that regard this policy was not unique to the island alone."

"If one were to truly examine Britain's role one important aspect deserves special mention. That is the constitutional arrangement that Britain left behind. It left behind the Soulbury Constitution. Britain considered the Soulbury Constitution as having the necessary arrangements to provide for safeguards for minorities."

"Britain thought that the rights of the Tamils in particular would be safeguarded by these arrangements. However history has proved otherwise that these safeguards were inadequate and not robust enough. I regret that Britain's policies have to such an

extent been the cause for the problems," the High Commissioner said.

Asked about present British policy, the UK wanted the Sri Lankan government to engage the LTTE in negotiations, the High Commissioner said.

"There is an imperative not only for the Liberation Tigers but also the government of Sri Lanka to move forward to arriving at a negotiated settlement."

"In the end, the final settlement that's reached must be satisfactory to both parties. The present impasse must not be allowed to continue. The government of Sri Lanka and the Tigers must both dedicate themselves to peace. By some means, both parties must return to peaceful negotiations. There is no other way."

Saying "there have to be changes to [Sri Lanka's] political system," as part of a solution to the conflict, the High Commissioner

said: "although we cannot say much in this connection, Britain's view is to move forward to a political settlement that's based on the 2002 Oslo Declaration ... on federal lines in a united Sri Lanka."

Asked about the position of the United States, Mr. Silcott said: "the US has, from time to time, taken a contrary view from Britain in world affairs. However in Sri Lanka's conflict, Britain has been in agreement with America."

"It's noteworthy that India is [also] fully in favour of a political settlement achieved through peaceful means," he added later.

Given the present climate of international opposition to the use of violence to pursue political goals, the LTTE "could achieve more through negotiations than through violence," Mr. Silcott said.

If the LTTE returned to the negotiating table then Britain could ask the EU to reconsider its proscription of the LTTE, the High

Commissioner said.

Meanwhile, Britain's proscription of the LTTE in 2001 was not an impediment to direct contact between the UK and the Tigers, Mr. Silcott said. British policy was that direct contact was necessary to move the LTTE towards peace.

Asked about the status of Mr. Anton Balasingham, the LTTE's Chief Negotiator and Political Strategist who resides in London, the High Commissioner said: "Mr. Balasingham is a British Citizen. He has the right to live in Britain. Britain had banned the LTTE way back in 2001. It's been five years since the ban was imposed. As such the ban does not affect Mr. Balasingham."

"I do not think there would be any change in respect to Britain's attitude to Anton Balasingham," Mr. Silcott added. "Similarly, there would not be any significant change in this respect in view of the ban imposed by the EU."