

NEWS

Tortured past ...

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off," said Siva.

After two incidences of these days-long questionings without a warrant, Siva ran away to Batticaloa to live with his uncle, then to Colombo, then to Canada.

Siva told me the worst stories. "I know someone who almost died," he said, adding that these kinds of torture happened on a regular basis in Sri Lanka during the civil war.

"They hung my cousin Kamma* from his thumbs, with just his toes touching the floor. Then they hung him upside down from one ankle and beat him with PVC pipes filled with sand," Siva continued.

"They do that so that you don't get scars. You just bleed inside." Kamma was hospitalized for three months and, to this day, still gets chest and back pain from the beating.

When asked about the validity of these claims of torture by the

Sri Lankan government to the Tamil people, Toronto consulate general of Sri Lanka Bandula Jayasekara defended his country.

"I deny these claims," Jayasekara told Excalibur. "People can say anything.

They can show scars, but that's not a solid proof. They could've gotten that anywhere." Jayasekara said that, with the civil war ending last May, there is now peace in Sri Lanka. "We have defeated the rebels, and child soldiers are now being rehabilitated. It's now safe there."

Jayasekara further emphasized the optimism he has for achieving unity between the two ethnic groups, and ensured that Tamil-Canadians will be met with equality if they decide

to go back to Sri Lanka.

"I don't like saying 'Sinhalese' and 'Tamils,'" he added. "We're all Sri Lankans. We have to move forward. We need to forgive and forget."

Some Tamils in the York com-

munity are not as optimistic as their consulate general. Vithu Raman, president of the York University Tamil Students Association, told Excalibur about his hesitation to go back to Sri Lanka, even now that the civil war is over.

"When a Tamil activist goes back, anything can happen. I feel terrified," said Raman.

Raman further stated that, though the violence between the government and the rebels is over, the cause of the conflict is far from resolved.

"I would love to hope that there would be peace now, but displaced victims of the war will be resettled away from their original homes and still stripped of rights," he said.

"I think it's going to take decades because the problems are not solved. Until all the voices in the country are heard, true peace can't be achieved."

**Names have been changed to protect identity*

Resignation ...

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ers another contender who also represents winning the war, said analysts.

The incumbent president had been expected to capitalise on the defeat of the LTTE and announce a quick poll.

At his Sri Lanka Freedom Party's annual convention, Rajapakse, said only that he would decide "in due course" after more than 100,000 party stalwarts urged him to call the presidential poll before the parliamentary elections due in April 2010.

Human rights activists have condemned the conduct of the last days of the war, alleging gross abuses of human rights and the commission of war crimes.

A US State Department report on possible war crimes in Sri Lanka criticised Fonseka in particular for having "overlooked the rules of war".

Since the end of the war, the Sri Lankan government has been criticised by international community and human rights organisations for failing to resettle the hundreds of thousands of Tamils locked up in camps surrounded by barbed wire.

In Fonseka's letter of resignation, which reads like an election manifesto, he adds his voice to the criticism.

"Your Excellency's government is yet to win the peace in spite of the fact that the Army under my leadership won the war," he said. "There is no clear policy to ensure the security of the Tamil people thereby leaving room to ruin the victory attained, paving the way for yet another

uprising in the future due to lack of security arrangements in the resettled areas."

Rights activists reacted with disbelief.

"It is an irony of ironies that Fonseka is talking about human rights when he was our target of attack in the past," Nimalka Fernando, a human rights activist told the media.

Following the victory against the LTTE, Fonseka is rumoured to have clashed with the Rajapakse brother over who should take the credit for winning the war.

Since Fonseka's resignation from of the office, many posters of Fonseka around Sri Lanka have allegedly been ordered to be removed.

"Fonseka says politicians are taking credit for a war won by the soldiers while Rajapakse [and his brothers] say it is the Rajapakses that won the war," opposition politician Wijedasa Rajapaksa (not related to the President), told the National.

"People now have realised who the real hero is ... and that's Fonseka", he said.

It is not clear yet which party Fonseka may join in the presidential election, with some speculation of a three-way contest between incumbent President Mahinda Rajapakse, main opposition leader Ranil Wickremesinghe and Sarath Fonseka.

Wickremesinghe was considering contesting as the UNP candidate while Fonseka could be a candidate from the opposition People's Liberation Front (JVP), the National cited local newspaper reports as saying.

Can't say we didn't know ...

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countries that supported the GoSL at the UN Human Rights Council in May 2009, and members of the Commonwealth to express these same concerns.

In addition, we congratulate Baroness Ashton on her appointment as High Representative of the European Union for Foreign and Security Policy, and urge her to stand by her recommendation, made in her previous capacity as Trade Commissioner, that Sri Lanka's "GSP+" status should not

be renewed so long as the GoSL has not conformed to the agreed conditions, especially those concerning human rights. We further call on all EU member states and the European Commission to stand firm on these conditions, and to evaluate any deal with the GoSL in terms of how it improves the basic human rights of those who are illegally detained.

In years to come, we will not be able to say that we did not know what was happening. Or that it was nothing to do with us. Now that the fighting has stopp-

ed, people who have lived through so much violence and lost so much deserve at the least to be able to go home, resettle in their communities and play their part in building a new and peaceful Sri Lanka. As well, the right not to be tortured, as well as other core human rights, apply to all human beings, regardless of their proven or suspected past conduct; as such, the situation of the 12,000 suspected LTTE detainees cannot be ignored and their conditions of detention must be rigorously monitored.

Request ...

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ing manner disregarding threats to my life, on conclusion of the war I have absolutely no intention to endanger my life. Thereby, I am compelled to entrust you with my security which is requested for life.

7. Furthermore, I would like to emphasize on a statement made by me during my tenure as the Commander of the Army. In that, I mentioned my dislike to be in command forever and also I would ensure that my successor would not be burdened with the task of fighting the same war, which I abided with. Hence, as I have already overstayed my retirement date by 4 years, I wish to proceed on retirement without further delays.

Kicked ...

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stayed his date of retirement by four years and that he should retire with immediate effect, in keeping with his request for resignation.

"This decision has been arrived at having giving anxious consideration to the fact that you yourself believe that the president and the government have lost the trust and faith bestowed upon you, as the senior most serving military officer in the country," the letter to Fonseka said.

Fonseka has been replaced as chief of defence staff by the Sri Lankan Air Force commander. Air Chief Marshal Roshan Goonetilleke was made the new chief of defence staff in addition to his duties as head of the air force.

UN ...

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was evidence of troops committing human rights violations, Monuc would withdraw its support.

He added that more than 30 army personnel had been prosecuted for crimes against civilians this year, and more such cases were being prepared.

The head of UN peacekeeping, Alain Le Roy, said Monuc would suspend support to army units it believes killed at least 62 civilians during the operations, reported The Guardian newspaper.

But he stressed the move would not affect the UN's broader support for the army.

With a budget this year of \$1.3bn and some 20,000 peacekeepers, Monuc is the world's largest UN peacekeeping mission.

Games ... Releases...

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However, they added that they do not necessarily wish for games to become less violent. It claimed that, while most players are unlikely to become real world combatants, such games could influence what people believe war is like and how real soldiers conduct themselves.

Rock Paper Shotgun's Jim Rossignol countered the study, saying: "Whether or not the rules of war are included in the game should be based entirely on whether that improves the experience for the player."

He added that there was plenty of evidence to show that gamers "fully process" virtual violence as fantasy. He also cited studies of soldiers in Iraq who reported being a gamer had not desensitised them to the atrocities of war.

"Perhaps what this research demonstrates is that the researchers misunderstand what games are, and how they are treated, intellectually, by the people who play them."

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"We'll just have to see how far this will be implemented ... As far as we understand now, it's not total freedom," De Vries told IRIN. "It will be a pass system where people will be allowed to leave for a fixed period of time ... but then will have to return to the camp."

The decision received a qualified welcome from the humanitarian agency Unicef, whose spokeswoman Sarah Crowe said it was "to be welcomed without any doubts" but cautioned that those who had been locked up for months would need time to adjust. "It means people now have a chance to live a normal life and it must be a huge relief to them," she said. "But the next step will be reunification. That clearly has to happen and there is a need for trauma counselling, particularly for children who have lived through horrid, horrid times and seen things they should never see, really the stuff of nightmares, that will live with them for a very long time."