

Kallarawa killings: LTTE's claims

The International Secretariat of the LTTE has taken note of the concerns expressed by Amnesty International at the attack on the Kallarawa settlement and army camp near Trincomalee in the East of the island of Sri Lanka. We would, at the outset, reiterate that which we said in an open letter to the Sinhala people in October 1991:

"The Tamil national liberation struggle is the armed struggle of an oppressed people against the tyranny of a Sri Lankan regime which has sought to subjugate them. Nothing can be further from the truth than to suggest that our struggle is directed against the Sinhala people. We have no hatred towards the Sinhala people. It is one of the fundamental principles of our struggle that we respect and safeguard the rights of every individual, irrespective of creed, religion, sex or ethnic origin."

We, therefore, welcome Amnesty International's recognition of the existence of an armed conflict in the island and the need for the parties to the conflict to comply with common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions of 1949 which prohibits "violence to life and person, in particular murder of all kinds" against persons taking no active part in hostilities.

In February 1988 the LTTE publicly declared its commitment to act, at all times, in accordance with the humanitarian law of armed conflict and the LTTE has taken care to instruct its cadres accordingly.

We regret that in its haste to issue an Urgent Action Bulletin on the Kallarawa attack (within a couple of days of the attack), Amnesty has failed to consider the background of armed Sinhala settlements in the East and take care to sift the truth from the partisan assertions of so called "survivors". This was all the more necessary, where, given the short time frame, Amnesty's sources of information may well have had their own hidden

agenda to advance the cause of the Sri Lanka government. Amnesty states: "According to survivors, between 200 and 300 members of the LTTE approached Kallarawa around 9.30pm on 25 May. They first attacked a small local army camp situated in the hamlet. However, the army camp was deserted as the 55 soldiers present had reportedly gone out on operations."

The ugly fact is that Sri Lanka government has for a number of years used 'Sinhala settlements' in the East, sometimes as a buffer, and sometimes as a cutting edge, in its war of aggression against the Tamil nation. The Sri Lanka government has armed these settlers - some of them ex-convicts - and often uses them to attack Tamil villagers in the surrounding areas. The Sri Lanka government has used these settlers as expendable pawns in its war of aggression against the Tamil nation and as a recruitment base for its para military forces called Home Guards. The additional longer term purpose of these 'settlement schemes' was to change the demography of the Tamil homeland and in this way, make the Tamils a manageable minority in their own land.

That these efforts at Sinhala colonisation were the outcome of a strategy carefully planned by the Sinhala government, was established beyond doubt by the frank statements of the Sinhala Mahaveli Ministry Official, Herman Gunaratne in the Sinhala owned Sri Lanka Sunday Times on 26 August 1990:

"All wars are fought for land... The plan for settlement of people in Yan Oya and Malwathu Oya basins was worked out before the communal riots of 1983. Indeed keenest minds in the Mahaveli, some of whom are holding top international positions were the architects of this plan. My role was that of an executor... We conceived and implemented a plan which we thought would secure the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka

for a long time. We moved a large group of 45,000 land hungry (Sinhala) peasants into the Batticaloa and Polonnaruwa districts of Maduru Oya delta. The second step was going to be a settlement of a number of people, opposed to Eelam, on the banks of the Malwathu Oya. By settling the (Sinhala) people in the Maduru Oya we were seeking to have in the Batticaloa zone a mass of persons opposed to a separate state... Yan oya if settled by non separatists (Sinhala People) would have increased the population by about another 50,000. It would completely secure Trincomalee from the rebels...."

We regret that Amnesty did not consider it necessary to point out in its Urgent Action Bulletin that the Kallarawa settlement was a recent Sinhala settlement intended to be part of Sri Lanka's 'war for land' in the East. We believe that Amnesty should have examined the extent to which such an armed settlement was protected by Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions of 1949. Again, if as the evidence shows, the Kallarawa settlers were part and parcel of Sri Lanka's war for land in the East, Amnesty should have been more cautious in relying on statements made by the so called 'survivors' as to the details of the attack.

Amnesty has also stated in its Urgent Action Bulletin: "Amnesty International's concern that the massacre at Kallarawa may mark the beginning of renewed attacks on unarmed civilians has been heightened by another report on 26 May that the LTTE members killed Buddhist priest known for his stand against them."

Here again, it is a matter for regret that Amnesty considered it sufficient to simply describe the 'Buddhist priest' as one 'known for his stand against them (LTTE)'. But what are the facts? The Sinhala Mahaveli Ministry official, Gunaratne, has this to

The London-based human rights organisation Amnesty International has expressed its concern over the massacre of 42 Sinhala villagers in the Trincomalee district in May.

The LTTE's International Commission has identified the massacre and the Kithalagama Sri Seelalankara Thero as a violation of the Law.

Amnesty International said the Kallarawa civilians could be considered as legitimate targets under International Law.

The Sunday Times today published a report between the LTTE and Amnesty International.

say of this Buddhist priest, also known as the Dimbulagala priest and as Matarā Kithalagama Sri Seelalankara Thero. Writing in his book "For a Sovereign State", Gunaratne says:

"The warrior lord, Rev. Dimbulagala had headed the convoy of settlers (in September 1983) in a vehicle equipped with a loud speaker. He had been chanting the most soothing melody of 'Seth Pirith' and flying the banner of the Buddhist flag on his vehicle. He was playing on the emotions of the Sinhala people. 'One race, one religion, one language,' seems to be his battle cry. The mendicant monk had used the time tested slogan of galvanising the Sinhala people - 'the battle cry of Prince Abaya Gamini of Ruhuna.'

Rev. Dimbulagala was using all the weapons in his arsenal... Then he started his sermon to his people. 'You are assembled here today, not only to get a piece of land for you to live on, but for a more lofty purpose. This country is going through her worst period in history. We are being threatened from all sides by the separatists.

What the separatists want is land. A contiguous block of land which they propose to call Eelam. You are going to break that contiguity. United Lanka should be defended to the last drop of blood of her people. That is your task. You are not to return from this journey. You are going to be the frontier men. Remember your eternal hero, King Dutugemunu. We are going on a holy mission. Now let us go on our journey,' he said to the loud and high pitched chanting of "Sadhu, Sadhu, Sadhu".

We believe that Amnesty should have examined with greater care the question whether the Dimbulagala priest was a 'non-combatant' or a 'war lord'.