

Taming the Tigers

By Mahinda Rajapaksa

In Sri Lanka, the terrorists who first brought suicide bombing to the world are intensifying their reign of terror. Despite a cease-fire, recent weeks have seen a series of brutal atrocities perpetrated by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, popularly known as the Tamil Tigers.

In April, a pregnant suicide bomber blew herself up in the heart of our capital Colombo, killing not only her unborn child but also several civilians. That's typical of the callous disregard for the lives of even our youngest citizens displayed by the Tamil Tigers, who have press-ganged thousands of children into its ranks.

Again and again, they have tried to provoke a civil war between the island's different religious groups. Christians have been assassinated in church during Christmas mass. Good Friday this year was marred by violence. Most recently, the Tamil Tigers attacked a ship carrying 700 unarmed troops together with international cease-fire monitors on May 11, the eve of one of the most sacred dates in our calendar, when Sri Lanka's Buddhist-majority was celebrating the 2,550th anniversary of the birth of Buddha.

The Tamil Tigers' strategy is to take control of the sea off the areas they control in northern and eastern Sri Lanka. Displaying a contemptuous regard for world opinion, the Tamil Tigers even warned the international monitors that they had the right to

attack any vessel which passes through their waters. That alone makes it abundantly clear that the Tamil Tigers are no longer interested in pursuing the peace process. Instead, they seek to foment intercommunal strife through unprovoked acts of aggression, in order to boost their support among the Tamil community and raise further funds from exiles.

But the Tamil Tigers' efforts have foundered in the face of the tremendous restraint shown by the people of Sri Lanka, including our security forces. We have not fallen into the trap of venting our frustration through reprisals against Tamil civilians. And the May 11 attack, which might have provoked such actions if it had led to major loss of life, was successfully repelled by our navy.

That has left the Tamil Tigers resorting to the lamest of excuses to avoid resuming negotiations with my government. Their leaders even accuse us of not disarming *their* own rebel faction, who recently launched attacks on the Tamil Tigers' leadership. Having initially insisted these divisions were its own internal affair, the embattled Tigers now want the government's help.

Unfortunately the international community has been slow to recognize the seriousness of the situation. Never let it be forgotten that the world's failure to help combat

the first suicide bombings in Sri Lanka in the late 1980s and early 1990s allowed the tactic to grow into a popular technique, now copied by other terror groups around the world, which poses a threat to almost every major city.

The Tamil Tigers have long been exporting terror to other countries. They were responsible for assassinating former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1991, and have been training and supplying terrorists from northern India to Nepal, as well as engaging in gun-running in Thailand. In today's global war on terror, every terrorist is a threat to the world as a whole, and our struggle against the Tamil Tigers should be seen in this context.

While I welcome the condemnations of the Tamil Tigers' recent atrocities from the United States and European Union, as well as our international cease-fire monitors, words alone are not enough. Some countries took far too long to appreciate the true nature of the Tamil Tigers as a terrorist organization. Canada, for instance, only banned the Tamil Tigers earlier this year. And although the European Union last year imposed a travel ban on the Tamil Tigers' leaders, it only this week imposed a full-scale ban. I urge other countries to follow suit, particularly those in the Middle East, where many Tamil expatriates work and are often forced to illegally donate funds to the

The world can do more to help Sri Lanka combat its terrorist threat.

Tamil Tigers. These citizens are extorted by Tamil Tiger agents in their workplaces, who beat up workers who refuse to make regular contributions from their wages.

Foreign governments could do more to crackdown on the Tamil Tigers' illegal purchase of weapons from places such as Afghanistan and East European and Central Asian republics, as well as their arms-smuggling operations in Thailand. They could also condemn more strongly the Tamil Tigers' repeated massacres of innocent villagers. The enforcement of proposals already before the U.N. Security Council for sanctions against organizations such as the Tamil Tigers, that force children to carry arms, would be a good first step.

Despite my critics' attempts to portray me as a hawk, I have shown by my actions since taking office that I am far from a war-monger. My government has shown enormous restraint in the face of these repeated provocations. I am a man of peace. I do not believe in war as a solution to the Sri Lankan situation and I am committed to walk the extra mile to achieve peace.

However I can not accomplish this task alone. So I call on friends of democracy everywhere to do their utmost to assist Sri Lanka's democracy—and the Tamil people themselves—to face up to the terrorist threat and advance human rights, dignity and pluralism throughout Sri Lanka.

Mr. Rajapaksa is the president of Sri Lanka.

Timor's Avoidable Tragedy

By Paul Cleary

The saddest thing about East Timor's current crisis is that it was avoidable—for the descent into violence and mayhem is largely of the government's own making.

The current dispute has its roots in what should have been a trivial, manageable internal army dispute. Around 600 officers and soldiers from the western part of the country complained that officers from the east were discriminating against them. The east-west divide had never before been a major source of conflict. Yet this time, the soldiers incited machete-wielding gangs and hundreds of armed rebel soldiers to swarm the capital, Dili. International troops have been deployed by the thousands. The death toll continues to rise, Dili has undergone weeks of rioting, and now, President Xanana Gusmao has declared a state of emergency and seized control of security forces. How did this happen?

Instead of East Timor's policy-makers listening and resolving the problem, Defense Minister Roque Rodrigues and army chief Brigadier-General Taur Matan Ruak ignored the soldiers' complaints and simply ordered them back to their barracks. When the soldiers rebelled, the Alkatiri government sacked them, creating a hostile mob.

A small army tiff isn't enough to send a country into chaos. Dili's recent mishandling of the army crisis fits into a larger pattern of questionable governance under Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri. Since coming to power in 2002, the new government, led by the leftist, pro-independence Fretilin party, has been abrasive and divisive. And Mr. Alkatiri, as Fretilin's secretary-general, has been at the center of many of the decisions that have provoked unease across large swathes of East Timor's population.

The most serious cause for concern centers around Mr. Alkatiri's lack of respect for free speech and elections. Last year, the government produced a penal code that made defamation a criminal offence, accompanied by heavy prison sentences. This was achieved via a waiver of parliamentary scrutiny. Some arrests have already been made under these provisions, that are yet to be approved by President Gusmao.

The slow pace of development and high rate of unemployment have also stirred discontent. Mr. Alkatiri is credited with rebuild-

ing state institutions from scratch and introducing an outstanding system for the management of the country's petroleum revenues. In 2005, he achieved a budget surplus of around 20% of GDP, with ongoing surpluses projected at around 10%. But instead of distributing the gains, he kept a centralized rein on spending because he did not believe that local administrators could be trusted to manage their own budgets. Thus, expenditure only trickled into the regional areas outside the capital.

There have been other serious blunders. In March last year, the Cabinet tabled a plan to make religious education optional in state schools, provoking a tense, three-week demonstration by the powerful Catholic Church. The demonstration, which came close to being hijacked by other malcontents, largely came about because Dili failed to consult the church beforehand, even though it had played a pivotal role in the independence struggle.

East Timor didn't have to go down this chaotic path. Its citizens voted for independence in a 1999 referendum, following 24 years of Indonesian occupation. After an interim period of United Nations administration, it achieved statehood in 2002. At times, the country's prospects looked bright. World Bank President Paul Wolfowitz visited East Timor in April this year, just two weeks before the recent violence erupted, and remarked on a palpable sense of progress and stability. "The bustling markets, the rebuilt schools, the functioning government—and above all, the peace and stability—attest to sensible leadership and sound decisions," he said.

Donor countries and aid agencies had thought that the lessons from East Timor's post-independence peace could even be applied to Iraq, as well as to troubled countries in the region—Papua New Guinea, Fiji and the Solomon Islands. The United States Government late last year acknowledged East Timor's recovery by putting it on a select list

of developing countries eligible for funding from its Millennium Challenge Account. East Timor joined the International Monetary Fund in 2002.

Despite the progress, fragile democracies like East Timor are especially vulnerable to government abuses. Most worrying of all, Dili's autocratic leadership style shows diminishing respect for basic democratic principles. Furthermore, pre-existing fault-lines



Nowhere to go in Dili.

were deepened, rather than mended, by a government dominated by exiles who lived in Communist Mozambique during the occupation. Known as the "Mozambique clique," this group, which has its tentacles in the defense, interior and justice ministries, among others, has clung to power through the protection of Mr. Alkatiri, who is part of this clique. Many people perceive the group—and the government, as a whole—to be foreign and culturally insensitive.

While elections for the national parliament are due by May 2007, the government is yet to introduce a new electoral law or establish an independent commission to oversee the process. Mr. Alkatiri has said pub-

licly that he wants the U.N. to supervise the election. But privately he and other ministers have flatly contradicted that vision, saying the U.N.'s presence is not necessary.

Opposition parties fear that an election without the U.N. could be manipulated, and that the government will introduce an election law at the last minute that would favor Fretilin. One key measure to eliminate opposition would be a minimum voter threshold of 5%, which would eliminate as many as eight of the smallest opposition parties from Parliament. At worst, the government appears to have set its sights on a Cuban-style, one-party "democracy."

It remains unclear how effective Mr. Gusmao's declaration of emergency will be, or how it might affect the tenure of Mr. Alkatiri, who stubbornly refuses to step down. Mr. Gusmao's action was based on legal advice, although Mr. Alkatiri claims it was unconstitutional. The first priority is to restore order to the country. After that, the focus should turn to next year's elections, and ensuring that the opposition parties have enough funding and attention to create a viable choice for the East Timorese.

The current crisis has pushed East Timor virtually back to where it began in 1999. The lesson? Newly democratic countries that don't respect democracy are likely to lapse back into conflict.

Mr. Cleary worked as a consultant to Prime Minister Alkatiri from 2003-2005 on a project funded by the World Bank. This role involved public consultation on draft petroleum development laws and Timor Sea negotiations in more than 40 district and sub-district centers. He is now writing a book on East Timor for Allen & Unwin.

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