

SCOPP Monthly Bulletin

February 2009

Editorial

Attention has been focused on the fighting in the Vanni this month, with the Security Forces advancing slowly but surely towards our goal of reuniting the country. The LTTE has been confined to a tiny sliver of land in the jungles north of Mullaitivu, giving us plenty to celebrate on the 61st anniversary of Sri Lanka's independence.

It is at times like these that the danger of triumphalism is greatest. Relief at the progress being made on the battlefield can lead people to forget that the conflict began, and terrorism became so powerful, because problems were left unsolved.

This is something the Government is determined not to see happen under its watch. The need for a political solution to the grievances of the minority communities has been explicitly recognised by the President in his manifesto, and his commitment to the full implementation of meaningful reforms has been reaffirmed many times since.

The Peace Secretariat is happy to report on a number of projects already on their way to solving problems. In particular, the new centre for the rehabilitation of former cadres at Senapura is making excellent progress in helping those who once saw terrorism as their sole option to return to their families and start new lives. The former cadres, young people who broke away with the Karuna group and more recent arrivals from the Vanni, study together to learn the skills they will need to support themselves when they return to society.

We were also pleased to join a delegation of Government, United Nations and NGO officials to visit the IDP welfare centres in Vavuniya this month, which made very clear the hollowness of the propaganda being spread by the LTTE and others about arrangements for IDPs in Government controlled areas. Basic needs are certainly being provided for, while the Government has also started a range of training programmes to ensure that people benefit from the time they will have to spend in the IDP welfare centres while demining and reconstruction work is underway in the Vanni.

The Government is looking forward to holding elections in the North, after long years of terrorist domination of the local polity. As in the East, this will provide the means for people, particularly the minority communities who constitute the majority in those areas, to take control of their future again.

While the military phase of the conflict appears to be drawing to a close, there is still a long way to go in establishing a durable peace in this country. Fortunately the Government has made a very good start towards this end already, and there are plenty of initiatives on which to build once the threat from the LTTE is neutralised.



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About this bulletin

The Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process, otherwise known as SCOPP, is the governmental body set up to build confidence in a negotiated settlement to the conflict in Sri Lanka. This is the second issue of the SCOPP Monthly, launched to keep interested parties informed about the work done by the institution.

More information can be found on our website at www.peaceinsrilanka.org.

Next steps for the IDPs

Report of a visit to the Vavuniya centres



More than 35,000 people have escaped from the Vanni in recent days, despite the best efforts of the LTTE to keep them back as a human shield. In mid-February, the Peace Secretariat joined a delegation of Government and United Nations officials and representatives from the Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies in visiting the welfare centres in Vavuniya, with the objective of both assessing the current situation and discussing plans to look after these IDPs until they can go home.

The IDPs are being provided with their basic needs. On arrival, they are checked by doctors so that any people with medical problems can be treated or sent to hospital, if necessary. They get a special energy pack, given the exhausting journey they will have made from the Vanni, plus a hot meal, drinks, fruit and other snacks. Special categories of IDPs such as old people are also taken care of at this early stage, being allowed to move into homes for the elderly, while priests and any orphans are moved to churches.

All the other IDPs are then taken to the transit sites, where they are expected to stay for up to a couple of weeks. Many of

these are in schools. The Government is already working to augment the water and sanitation facilities, and IOM has provided additional shelters for those who cannot be accommodated within the premises. Ample food and other necessary supplies such as soap, sarongs and so on are provided to all the IDPs as well.

There are some problems, but these are in the process of being addressed, and on an urgent footing. The main issues highlighted during the visit were the quality of the food and the question of locating family members in other transit sites.

To ensure that food quality is of the appropriate standard, those supplying the meals are being urged to also handle distribution, so that concerns can be dealt with immediately. Further, the Government is this week trialling a system of the IDPs cooking their own meals on site.

While there aren't many people who have become separated from their families during the journey out of the Vanni, this is clearly a very disturbing situation when it happens, and everything possible must be done to resolve it. The Government Agent has been collecting data from all the transit sites, but this is proving a rather slow process. One proposal made during the visit was to adopt a more personal approach, appointing a group in each location to go around and check if the IDPs were looking for somebody. Meanwhile, the Software Association has been working on a special database that will facilitate the collation of what will eventually be a large amount of data, so that even friends and relatives from abroad could locate people easily.

More important than these few areas in which steps are already being taken to resolve problems, there is a system in place. A committee of the relevant ministries and other agencies has been set up, and there is coordination with both the United Nations and NGOs. On the ground, there are daily meetings between Government officials and the Army staff responsible for the management of the transit sites.

The transit sites are currently full, but one of the activities during the trip was to look for a plot of land for UNHCR to put up more substantial temporary shelters that could house people for a somewhat longer period, thus giving people more space and allowing the schools to get back to work quickly.

The idea is to arrange these, as with the welfare villages that have already been put up by the Government, along a more community oriented format than standard IDP centres. This is inspired by what H.E. the President saw in China for victims of the earthquake. It means that the welfare villages should



include plenty of open spaces and many of the facilities that would be available in the IDPs' own homes. For example, each location will have a school, playground, community centre, health centre, bank, post office, IT centre and so on. People are also being organised into groups according to their district of origin to encourage the community spirit.

Critics have attacked the dependence on the military, suggesting who knows what untoward intentions on the part of the Government. But the fact is that the military is both efficient and well motivated to ensure that the gains made at heavy cost to them in terms of blood, sweat and tears, particularly the lives of their fallen comrades, are not in vain. That soldiers have been able to establish a rapport with the people is obvious from the media coverage of the transit sites, and this was in evidence during the visit. Further, people who have for so long been living under the control of the LTTE naturally look to the military for assistance. While civilian staff are also present in numbers, it is usually to soldiers that the IDPs turn.

At the same time, it cannot be denied that there is a need for security. The LTTE has made it clear that everything possible will be done to dissuade civilians from leaving the Vanni. As well as directly shooting at people as they attempt to leave, the LTTE is determined to instil fear in them of being caught up in a suicide bombing or other attack in the Government controlled areas. The LTTE's brutal killing earlier in the month of several dozen people, including women and children, at an IDP rescue point in the Mullaitivu district clearly shows as much.

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The other concern being expressed by some critics is about the length of time people will have to spend in the welfare villages before they can go home. Some imaginative activists seem to think that there are plans to keep them in camps for the rest of their lives. While the situation of old IDPs in other areas has remained unresolved for much too long, it should be remembered that many of these people could not return home because of the continuing occupation of their land by the LTTE. Pretty much all of the IDPs displaced by the fighting in the East returned to their homes very quickly once the area came under the full control of the Government.

Delays are the result of the mines set by the LTTE. While many of the surface mines were cleared by the Army as they advanced, or can be quickly, civilians cannot return until the area has been checked for deep mines. The United Nations requires exploration down to several feet, to ensure that farmers would not be at risk when ploughing, for example. The LTTE had not laid many deep mines in the East, which is why this process did not take very long there, but the Army anticipates finding many more in the Vanni.

While this is going on, other preparatory work for the return of the IDPs is already underway. The Government is working on the reconstruction of the A9 and A32. Meanwhile, the World Bank has agreed to lend money for the rehabilitation and expansion of the power grid in the Vanni, and negotiations are underway with other agencies for funds to repair the irrigation systems destroyed by the LTTE and upgrade them.

The Government is also offering training in the welfare villages so that people will go back with enhanced skills and therefore better opportunities for a livelihood. The Agriculture Department is running courses, and a plot of land has been set aside for a farm, which is hoped will contribute to the feeding of the residents as well as helping in these teaching efforts. A Vocational Training Centre is being constructed, and work has already started on carpentry, masonry and sewing programmes, while there are plans to offer training in food processing, driving and IT as well.

In short, while the IDPs have clearly undergone a very traumatic experience, and the presence of over 35,000 people does lead to some problems, the Government is providing the IDPs with their basic needs and more, and prospects for the near future are good. The Government is determined to get the IDPs back to their homes as quickly as possible, while not compromising on their safety, and meanwhile is making the best of a very unfortunate situation. It should be remembered that the LTTE is responsible for the problems of the IDPs, while the Government is looking after them, as usual.

Former cadres starting a new life



The Senapura centre in Welikanda is home to 74 former cadres. Ranging from 18 to 35 years in age, they are mainly from Batticaloa, Vavuniya, Mullaitivu, Kilinochchi and Jaffna, and the programme they are following spans one year or more. The objective of the centre is to provide the young Tamils with the skills needed to integrate in society and secure employment.

Daily activities are completed to a schedule. Following the hoisting of the national flag and singing of the national anthem, religious observances are made. There is already a kovil and a church in the vicinity, and the ex-combatants are in the process of building a temple as well. The rest of the day's programme, which is a mixture of learning and fun, gets underway afterwards.

'We are being treated well here. This is a good opportunity for us to improve our skills and get some kind of an education before we go back to society. I hope to start a new life by returning to my family and continuing their fishing business,' said one man who has been at the centre for several months.

The young people are taught four courses per year. Carpentry, masonry, electrical work and farming are taught for three months. A driving course will be introduced soon. Mathematics, Sinhala, English, Tamil, Social Studies and General Knowledge are taught on a long term basis, while another subject of their choice in Aesthetics is taught in the short term. In recognition of the importance of computing, the centre has already started training. Officials are even looking at the possibility of teaching foreign languages, because some of the young people who have graduated from the programme at the Senapura centre have already gone abroad.

Facilities are also provided for informal education. The young people have access to books, newspapers and television. To encourage interpersonal skills, the centre provides facilities for the ex-combatants to play games like chess, football and cricket. They are also encouraged to participate in agricultural labour, and neatly planted fruit trees and vegetables are to be

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found all around the site. To develop leadership skills, leaders are appointed for the library, the mess and so on.

At the end of each day, the young people meet in order to discuss and reflect on what they have learnt. Supervisors also conduct daily interviews to assess their progress.

Visits by loved ones are permitted every month. To facilitate this, arrangements have been made to allow the visitors to stay overnight. The ex-combatants are also taken on monthly trips to places such as Kandy, where they recently had the opportunity of visiting the Peradeniya Botanical Gardens.

The official in charge of the centre says that another 100 to 200 newcomers could be accommodated if they were given basic facilities. The training programmes need to be reviewed to ensure that they are relevant to the jobs that are in demand, and there is also a need to equip the staff with better knowledge in areas such as counselling.

Nevertheless, the Senapura centre is up and running. The young people who once knew only the gun and bullet are seeing a different world. Having taken the first steps towards their new lives through the knowledge and skills learnt at the centre, they aspire to become good citizens of Sri Lanka, to contribute in their own way to the development of society.

Fruits of peace for small farmers

Micro irrigation schemes have been implemented in many places across Sri Lanka, but Mr. Visvalingam's vegetable farm in Kaluwanchikudy is one of the first in the Eastern Province to experience the benefits. He participated in a UNIDO funded project to improve agricultural productivity in the region. Often low-yielding, small plot vegetable cultivation in Sri Lanka has been dominated by the use of unsophisticated farming methods, and the Eastern Province has been particularly backward in this regard, owing to the years of conflict.

The UNIDO team found that commercial operators wasted a lot of water and energy due to a lack of knowledge of irrigation techniques and decided that this would be their area of focus. Their biggest challenge was convincing farmers of the potential benefits of new technology.

After vetting potential beneficiaries on the basis of their enthusiasm for new methods, UNIDO selected Mr. Visvalingam. He was badly affected by the war as well as the tsunami and found it very hard to access markets and technology, but he was open to the idea. To ensure sustainability and to guard against a dependency attitude, Mr. Visvalingam had to pay back, in instalments, the cost of the sprinkler kit, so that these funds could be used to purchase one for another selected farmer.

Mr. Visvalingam saves a lot of time due to the new technology. He used to spend four and a half hours watering his half acre of chilli and quarter acre of onion using a hosepipe and kerosene water pump, but now needs just two hours. With the extra time on his hands, he planted a quarter acre of brinjal, which now brings him an additional Rs. 12,000 per month.

Savings come in terms of water and fuel used as well. While earlier he used a five litre can of kerosene a day for the water pumps, a can now lasts three days. Following the extension of the national grid electricity to cover his area, he shifted from kerosene to an electric water pump, moving from spending Rs. 800 a month on kerosene to Rs. 567 a month on electricity. He also saves on an extra worker he used to hire to help with watering. A rather unexpected benefit is that fertiliser application is also reduced by as much as half, because fertiliser now doesn't seep below the reach of the plants roots or get so easily washed away, as it did when watering by hose.

The most significant benefit is the increase in yield. Mr. Visvalingam produced around 1,500 kg of onion before installing the sprinkler kit, but now produces 2,000 kg. He also noticed that the weight of a sack of chillies had increased from 48-50 kg previously to 55-58 kg, translating into Rs. 16,000 in additional income per month.

The overall results are impressive. With an initial cost of Rs. 55,520 on the sprinkler kit, Mr. Visvalingam has made an additional profit of over Rs. 210,000. He is now the best ambassador to speak to other farmers on the benefits of shifting to higher productivity farming methods. Mr. Visvalingam also says he can easily help other farmers install the new technology as he is now quite familiar with it.

Despite his optimism, Mr. Visvalingam echoed the gripes of other farmers in the area, remarking that getting micro loans from local banks is nearly impossible. This is despite him



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having land to provide as collateral and the apparent introduction of special micro loan schemes for farmers. He asked that the fertiliser subsidy be extended to vegetable cultivators too. Along with improving access to markets, these are concerns that need to be addressed soon, if farmers like Mr. Visvalingam are to see the full benefits of technology.

There is immense potential, and it is hoped that UNIDO and other agencies will take note of this. If the revenue increases seen in Mr. Visvalingam's vegetable farm could be replicated throughout the Eastern Province, over Rs. 5 billion could be earned. This would raise its GDP by nearly 4.4%. Moreover, if Mr. Visvalingam's success in increasing yield on his quarter acre of onion could be matched, the Eastern Province would supply an additional 3,200 MT per year. In this way, the Rs. 61 billion spent on vegetable imports could be reduced.

Time for renewal

Reflections on Independence Day

The 4th of February this year will be a very special occasion. It will mark the first time in about two decades when Sri Lankan sovereignty will extend over practically the whole country. From 1987, when the LTTE rejected the Indo-Lankan Accord and began their battle against the Indian army, they held sway over a wide swathe of territory. That was reduced but, when they were on the verge of extinction, different opinions in India as well as the Sri Lankan government coming to terms with the LTTE gave them a new lease of life that was accompanied by control again over substantial areas.

Though the Kumaratunga government managed to regain Jaffna in 1995, its other offensives were less successful. The loss of camps at Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu led to domination of those two districts, an arrangement officially accepted in 2002 with the CFA. Indeed that agreement led, though it could not have been the intention of those who signed it, to an extension of LTTE control over several other districts, and the decimation of other Tamil groups that attempted to resist this hegemony.

All that changed from 2006 when the LTTE withdrew from peace talks and launched two intensive assaults in the North and East respectively, expecting that the extent of their infiltration during the CFA, the arms they had brought in and stockpiled, the strongholds they had built up, made their victory inevitable. The Forces however managed to repulse them, both in Muttur and in Muhumalai, and then proceeded to ensure that they would never be subject again to such surprise assaults.

Analysis of the brilliance of the strategy that was employed, the intensity of the concentration, the excellence of the discipline that contributed to so signal a victory must be done elsewhere. There will in time be enough experts in military history to write about the most successful struggle against terrorism in recent years by a small country subject to so much pressure. The achievement of India against Sikh terrorism and that of Russia against Chechen terrorism were impressive, but no one would have dared to interfere with India or Russia.

We have learned lessons from those two operations too, the need to be firm against terrorists, but ensure that we do not engage in othering, that we work together with moderate forces amongst the minority group that sought separation. We must acknowledge that terrorism developed because those minorities felt discriminated against, and we must work together with those amongst them committed to a united country to remove all causes of complaint. But there should be no compromise on our sovereignty, because we saw in the case of Kosovo how urges to compromise, on the basis of guarantees, lead to splintering, with guarantees forgotten in a paean of self-righteousness.

So, on this the 61st anniversary of our independence, we have reason to be immensely proud of what might be termed our regained sovereignty. But there is more, for we can also congratulate ourselves on what might be termed a renewal of independence too.

Sri Lanka is used to such variations on the theme of independence. There are those who say we did not really get our independence in 1948, because we still had British bases on our territory. The Soviet Union certainly thought so, and vetoed our membership of the UN for several years, though in fact they yielded well before the Bandaranaike government politely asked the British to take away their troops.

But then there was the fact that we continued as a Dominion, with the Queen still our titular Head of State. That problem was got over only in 1972, with the proclamation of the Republic. So, if you read the rather facile notes reproduced every year by tutors of politics for A Level, you find assertions that we only got independence properly in 1972 (or in 1956, because that was when we got a government that got rid of British bases).

Neither of those deficiencies are serious, because in both cases there was no question about who made the decisions, the British government very properly agreeing promptly to both our requests to remove themselves. Contrariwise, we have been in much greater danger in recent years of losing our independence, to a very strange mindset that developed after the CFA, which sadly we allowed to hold sway without challenge.

This refers to the fact that, after the CFA, the impression grew that there were somehow two equal parties in Sri Lanka, between whom a balance had to be maintained. The CFA lent itself to this type of approach, and the Wickremesinghe regime failed to insist on interpretations that would have accorded with its position as an elected government, willing to negotiate with a terrorist group for the sake of peace. Had it not been for the Americans asserting their principles and not allowing the LTTE to attend the 2003 Washington Conference, there is no doubt that by the end of that year the whole world would have been thinking of the LTTE as an equal partner of the government.

Fortunately for us the LTTE, encouraged by the indulgence shown them, turned intransigent after this supposed insult, and refused to attend further talks, making clear what their final goal was. This allowed President Kumaratunga to attempt to restore some balance, and the electoral support she then received made it clear that the country at large had no sympathy for the appeasement practised by the Wickremesinghe regime.

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But, if the country owes President Kumaratunga for her courage in dismissing first a Defence Minister and then a government that had allowed our sovereignty to be eroded, she then lost the plot and allowed an equally serious challenge to our independence. This occurred after the tsunami, when a whole host of NGOs came in without proper procedures for ensuring accountability or even governmental supervision.

Emergency needs at the time perhaps justified this, and certainly many of the NGOs did much good work, with funds they collected abroad and devoted to the welfare of Sri Lankans. But over the next couple of years the situation changed. We had accepted the presence of what is termed OCHA, the UN body that is supposed to coordinate Humanitarian Aid, but having come in for the tsunami, it stayed and began to think it had a major role with regard to the conflict too.

Worse, it set up the Inter Agency Standing Committee, based on a UN General Assembly decision to set up such a body in New York. Our Foreign Ministry at the time did not put a stop to this, nor comment on the fact that the so-called IASC in Sri Lanka is nothing like the body envisaged in documents, not as yet ratified by the UN, that suggest the setting up of what are termed IASC Country Teams. The current decision makers at the Foreign Ministry are aware of the problem, and have tried to make adjustments. However, despite understanding on the part of current UN officials too, the international NGOs who are resentful of what they see as diminishing influence keep trying to flex their muscles. And this is not surprising, because the way OCHA works means that these NGOs benefit by funds that are raised in country, from bilateral or multilateral donors, in terms of UN prepared plans. Far from bringing in funds they have raised on their own, as happened initially during the tsunami, they can benefit from a large pot, on which they are able to lay claims more easily than local NGOs.

And to continue to derive these benefits, they have to claim to be indispensable. Thus the ridiculous claim in Britain that, with the departure of Save the Children, education in the Vanni had collapsed - though the Sri Lankan office later issued a categorical statement that they only supplemented the work of the Government. But, while some corrections are made, as a matter of course they have, like Emily Dickinson's Somebody, to proclaim their importance to the surrounding bog.

Thus, a recent report by UN staff who took assistance into the Vanni was described as a report by an IASC team. The UN Resident Coordinator, who was extremely positive about the visit, to the extent of saying that Sri Lankan Health and Education authorities deserved prizes for the manner in which they had kept services going, could only grant that the introduction of the term IASC was a mistake. It could not have arisen purely out of carelessness however, since the Government had made it very clear that, while it welcomed UN help and would facilitate UN personnel accompanying convoys, there could be no question of NGOs being given similar concessions.

But it is not only in their own interest that the term IASC keeps recurring, that these NGOs are considered so vital to external involvement in the conflict. Very simply, the introduction of bodies that are not accountable in any way to the Sri Lankan government allows for an erosion of sovereignty, setting up what might be termed a parallel system of authority. Thus, two years ago, there were attempts to draft what was termed an agreement on Modes of Operation for assistance, which

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suggested that those providing assistance held the balance between government and terrorists. When the offending clauses were cut, interest in this agreement seemed to lapse.

Again, the Common Humanitarian Action Plan has for the last few years not been monitored by government. The UN has now accepted that the clause suggesting the plan was to be monitored by the IASC should be removed but the very fact that, for several years, it implied that government was not in charge of all projects and programmes undertaken for the Sri Lankan people, is a measure of how dependent we had become.

All that now seems to have changed. But to ensure that insidious interference does not continue, we need to be firm about asserting the primacy of government in relief operations that are essential. We have failed to give proper publicity to the magnificent work of the Commissioner General of Essential Services, who kept commercial supplies going up to Jaffna as well as to the Vanni despite desperate LTTE efforts to disrupt these, by attacking food ships, by withdrawing guarantees from the ICRC, by restricting the number of days on which the A9 was kept open. We have failed to record the dedicated work of our Ministries of Health and Education that provided to LTTE controlled areas better services than most countries at our economic level provide to citizens in their capital cities.

And above all we have allowed continuing slurs on our Forces, who have a better record in terms of humanitarian commitment than any others in similar situations. The conditions for IDPs in centres that they have set up recently are much better than those in centres that are supposed to have benefited from international assistance for a decade and more. But we allowed the claim that these were not up to what were termed international standards, which allowed the LTTE to claim that the people they were forcibly holding back had other reasons not to flee to the safety of government controlled areas. And we continue to be subject to sanctimonious pronouncements about proportionality when there has been no claim ever that anything other than that principle has been apparent.

Independence celebrations this year will hopefully herald our ability to put a stop to all this nonsense. Of course this must be accompanied by clear indications that we can look after ourselves, and deal seriously with the real problems we have. Unsolved killings in the south, instances of torture, must be dealt with firmly, and we must welcome all assistance in the training that will help us to avoid such incidents. But we must not allow those deficiencies to be used to prevent us from eradicating terrorism and working together with our fellow Tamil citizens to promote a prosperous and pluralistic future for an independent sovereign united country.

Amnesty reaches new levels of lunacy

Over the last few months, Amnesty International has, contrary to its previous more balanced approach, been running a campaign of increasing intensity to denigrate the Sri Lankan government. Its latest recruit to this game is a man called Jim McDonald, who has now emerged as its spokesman. He did not earlier seem to have much of an identity because, unlike the infamous Yolanda Foster and Sam Zarifi, he was never quoted in their releases, but now the reason for this is clear. Unlike those two, who are clever but devious, it is obvious that when he opens his mouth it is only to put his foot into it.

This emerged in his extraordinary justification for the Amnesty piece that 'denounced the reported use of cluster bombs in a civilian area by the Sri Lankan military as a serious violation of international humanitarian law. According to a UN spokesperson, the main hospital in Puthukkudiyiruppu, was hit by cluster bombs and had to be evacuated.'

The implication of the statement was that Amnesty had received reports that the Sri Lankan military used cluster bombs, and that a UN spokesperson was responsible for these reports. However, when the UN acknowledged that it was mistaken, and a Sri Lankan asked McDonald also to apologise, he got a very weird justification for the Amnesty statement. It is worth quoting in full -

'It is interesting to read that the UN apologised, when they never accused the Sri Lankan military in the first place of being the one to use the cluster bombs. Nor did the AI press release say that the UN had accused the government of doing so. Do the army commanders in Colombo know for a fact that some lower ranking officers or troops in the north didn't use the cluster bombs? If the army says that they've never ordered the bombs so they couldn't have used them, therefore the LTTE must have been the ones responsible, is it possible that some lower ranks used captured LTTE cluster bombs? I'm not at all saying that this is what happened. But if the LTTE had the bombs and if the army's been capturing lots of LTTE equipment lately, is it possible? If you were the army commander, wouldn't you want an investigation done to make sure that none of your forces up in the north could have been responsible?'

I don't see any reason for AI to apologise for our Feb. 4 press release. I hope this responds to your concerns.'

This is casuistry combined with rank idiocy. McDonald first asserts that the UN did not accuse the Government of using cluster bombs. It was therefore obviously deliberate sleight of hand on the part of Amnesty to juxtapose the two sentences in its original statement so as to suggest to readers that what the UN spokesperson said justified its denunciation. If it is now saying that the reports were from elsewhere, perhaps it could come clean by telling the world on whose word it was denouncing Sri Lanka.

But McDonald then goes madder. He assumes – contrary to the UN clarification that cluster bombs were not used at all – that they must have been, and therefore continues to insist that it must have been by the Sri Lankan military. He now acknowledges, on the strength of what the UN spokesperson said, only that the Forces did not order cluster bombs –



He assumes - contrary to the UN clarification that cluster bombs were not used at all - that they must have been, and suggests that lower ranks may have captured them from the LTTE. It would seem the man has no idea that cluster bombs are usually dropped from a plane.

therefore, since in the strange world this old McDonald inhabits this means the Forces are saying the LTTE must have used cluster bombs, he thinks it possible that the Forces captured these bombs from the LTTE and then used them.

Of course, as he so clearly puts it, he is not saying this is what happened, he only wants to repeat that, if the LTTE had such bombs, then it is possible that lower ranks used captured LTTE cluster bombs. It would seem the man does not realise what a bomb is, and has no idea that cluster bombs are usually dropped from a plane – though he may have watched enough action films to think that the lower ranks of the army clambered into an aeroplane and fitted the bombs they had captured and flew off into the night to drop the bombs on the PTK hospital.

Of course he might have assumed that these putative lower ranks were actually able to use the bombs as shells. Such technical expertise would be of a piece with that of the UN officials who, on the basis of a description of sounds over the telephone, first deduced that cluster bombs had been used and then changed their diagnosis to air-burst fragmentation munitions. There too the UN attributed the diagnosis to staff sheltering in the grounds, before admitting that the diagnosis was by people far away from the scene.

I have no idea where Amnesty finds such diagnostic geniuses, but they really should do better. They should also cease from pretending they have UN authority for their claims, and come clean about from whom they get these reports which they then propagate so avidly.