

# NEWS WRAP

AGD

The Sri Lankan Government is determined not to have a ceasefire, and also determined to eradicate terrorism in Sri Lanka. Severe humanitarian costs have arisen from the military advances by the Sri Lankan government against the LTTE. Horrific conditions prevail in the conflict zone, as a humanitarian crisis unfolds. The twenty-five-year-old civil war is ending with a violent conclusion. More than 250,000 frightened Tamil men, women and children have been encircled by the Sri Lankan army and the rebel Tamil forces in a no man's land in northern Sri Lanka. Families are living in makeshift tents and ditches in the jungle. Heavy artillery bombardment has killed hundreds of civilians. Medical supplies, food and shelter are non-existent. With the eight-month drive onslaught by the Sri Lankan army to smash the Tamil Tigers—LTTE, thousands of Tamils have fled east of the island. At a "security zone" where refugees are supposed to gather, missiles have been falling, and about two thousand people have died. Tamil nurses are working in outdoor clinics, and bandaging women and children. Under trees, bodies are spread in rows. People in the Northern Vanni area are enduring indiscriminate bombing. Injured civilians are admitted in guarded hospitals.

Civilians are trapped in Northern Sri Lanka, in an area 24 miles by 12 miles. With their backs to the sea, the civilians face artillery firing and mortars from three fronts, fired by the Sri Lankan army. There is apprehension that if the army overruns the LTTE forces, the Tamil Tigers may revert to guerrilla warfare.

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The global market for ship breaking is estimated to be worth up to £3 million. For years docks in India, have been quietly disposing off retired fleets of western navies and shipping firms. Women and children at Indian ports, working under appalling conditions, have been dismantling and stripping ships for scrap. Recently the Environment Agency (EA) and Health and Safety Executive (UK) have approved the scrapping of large numbers of contaminated ships at a purpose-built dock in Hartlepool (UK). The facility at Hartlepool on Teesside, can recycle up to thirty ships a year, and provide initially two hundred new jobs, in a region, which was once famous for ship building. Smaller facilities are operated at Belfast and Liverpool, which possess similar licenses. While Hartlepool area suffered the ill effects of polluting industries, the EA feels that provision of facilities to recycle vessels safely in Britain, would reduce the environmental destructions, created by scrapping ships in the third world, like India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

After the EA granted permission, the notorious, contaminated, toxic vessel, the French aircraft carrier Le Clemenceau is in a process of being tugged to Hartlepool. The "toxic ship" was earlier sent away from docks in India, Turkey and Greece. The French vessel is laden with asbestos, mercury and PCBs. The Clemenceau will be recycled at a bill of £9 million. Four second world war era US warships which are moored at Hartlepool since 2003, are waiting permission to be broken up, and sold for scrap. "Toxic ships" will now be dumped in Britain.

Environmentalists fear that the process will release asbestos and toxic chemicals. The EA is of the view that careful management of the asbestos and the utilization of a seabed dry dock would prevent chemicals leaking into the water system.

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Foreign money is pouring into the construction of monasteries by expatriate Tibetans, in Siliguri and Jalpaiguri areas of North Bengal. Around fifteen monasteries have been constructed in the area. The Chinese Consulate in Kolkata has taken up the issue with the union government of India, and the West Bengal state government. While Tibetan activists stage sporadic demonstrations in protest against alleged Chinese excesses at Lhasa, there is still no evidence that the monasteries are being used for political activities, which are against the interests of China.

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The former Chief Election Commissioner, TN Seshan had contested for President's office, with the support of the Shiv Sena, and fought the Lok Sabha Polls. One of his successors, MS Gill represented the Congress in the Rajya Sabha. The CPI(M) politburo is in favour that Election Commissioners should be legally debassed from enjoying any office, after retirement, either under the government or as a governor, or as member of Parliament, to eliminate possible conflicts of interest. Failing to obtain the Election Commission's full backing, the current EC chairman, N Gopalaswami has proposed by himself, the denial of post-retirement public offices, for the commission members.

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The French Nuclear giant, Areva, will supply two European pressurised nuclear reactors of 1650 mw each for the nuclear plant to be constructed at Jaitapur, Maharashtra. The French company will supply Nuclear fuel, for the lifetime of the reactors, estimated around sixty years. The fuel requirements will be obtained from Areva's Uranium mines in various countries, like Australia, Kazakhstan and Niger. The orders for the Nuclear reactors may be raised to six reactors later. Areva will be building a nuclear park at Jaitapur, for the reactors. A nuclear reactor is estimated to cost \$5.2 billion to \$7.8 billion, each.

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With the worsening economic slowdown, the forecast growth rate for 2008-09 for India, stands at 7.1%. The two fiscal stimulus packages announced in Dec 08 and Jan 09, contain several budget like initiatives, including tax cuts and large public expenditures. Under a monitoring committee under every chief secretary of each state, there would be a "lead bank" representative and a RBI representative, to ensure low interest rates and more lending. □□□