

## NEWS

# Eelam Tamil refugees suffer at the hands of Tamil Nadu

OVER 100,000 Eelam Tamil refugees, who fled genocide in Sri Lanka and sought refuge in neighbouring India, are now facing increasing persecution in Tamil Nadu. The latest in a string of such reports is the case of a 28 year old Eelam Tamil woman who committed suicide after allegedly being sexually abused by three Tamil Nadu policemen.

Mrs Kumar Pathmathevi was held at the Karur refugee camp in Tamil Nadu when she set herself ablaze unable to come to terms with the sexual abuse. In a statement made on her death bed to a human rights activist, Mrs Pathmathevi detailed how the three policemen, claiming to accompany her to the police station in order to question her regarding her husband, instead took her to a private house and sexually molested her. She died, from severe burns, two weeks later at Karur government hospital.

Civil organisations have expressed alarm at the police's swift cremation of the body before statutory investigations could take place, claiming such actions only serve to raise suspicions against the policemen concerned.

A protest march, organised by the Protection Committee for Human Rights (PCHR), to highlight the tragedy and alleged police complicity was blocked by the Tamil Nadu Government.

The leader of PCHR, Mr Kolathoor Mani, called upon the government to transfer the responsibility of the inquiry of her death from the Tamil Nadu



Even as more arrive in Tamil Nadu, Sri Lankan Tamil refugees have been targeted by the state recently, with women especially harrassed

police force to the Police Crime Intelligence Branch.

The harassment of Eelam Tamils by the Tamil Nadu police was also highlighted by the case of six Eelam Tamil refugees arrested by the Indian Navy and handed over to the Tamil Nadu police after being found abandoned and marooned at sea.

The six young refugees, P.

Dharmar, S. Ilanchezian, N. Veera Vijayan, Shanta Kumar and C. Anjenya, held at refugee camps in Erode, Karur and Thiruchi districts, had attempted to flee back to Sri Lanka by boating, finding the circumstances in the camps unbearable.

Living conditions at the refugee camps have frequently been criticised by human rights activi-

sts such as Amnesty International. The group severely criticised the lack of adequate water supplies and sanitary facilities. The US's country report for 2008 stated that the housing, water and hygiene facilities were of 'poor quality'.

India is not party to the international refugee convention and therefore has no international obligation to recognise the

refugees. As such the Indian constitution restricts freedom of movement and choice of residence of all refugees and asylum seekers. This includes prohibiting refugees from leaving India without permission.

Over 100,000 Eelam Tamils are currently held in 115 to 130 refugee camps situated across the state of Tamil Nadu, India.

## Perumal instructs Tamils to 'win hearts of the Sinhalese'

### TamilNet

THE former 'chief minister' of the north-eastern provincial council, Varatharaja Perumal, addressed a press conference in Jaffna after two decades and stated there was no longer a need for a separate state because that is no longer what the people want.

Cautiously avoiding the use of the word 'Eelam', Perumal reportedly said, "Among the Jaffna population, I think people are not asking for it. People are asking for a political solution."

With only 18-20% of eligible Jaffna Tamils having cast their votes in the recent parliamentary elections, it appears his audience felt otherwise.

"All the Tamils in Sri Lanka together should strive to win the

hearts of the Sinhalese," Perumal, also the leader of Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), went on to add.

The people of Jaffna now expect India's assistance in finding a political solution, he explained; a claim justified by anecdotal evidence. "That expectation is here... Wherever I go, people ask 'can you ask the Indian government to help us?'"

"The pre-90s mood cannot be repeated," he said. "We have to think in a new method. Sri Lankan and Indian governments are on good terms. We should not [return] to a conflict relationship between Sri Lanka and India."

"If all the Tamil factions agree on a common solution for the ethnic issues India will exert its pressure on Sri Lanka to implement it," he clarified.



"Tamil factions should adopt a lenient attitude at least in the future, understanding the reality and this is what the Indian journalists and politicians expect."

Perumal, who currently resides in Southern India, under Indian state protection, is hoping to return to Sri Lanka in June. Despite making a request to meet with President Mahinda Rajapakse, he has reportedly received no appointment as of yet.

## Economic decline

SRI LANKA'S economy is facing further setbacks as the Central Bank releases a statement saying that exports. Hopes were high that Sri Lanka's exports would improve after December saw the first rise in a year, but weak overseas demand for the island's textiles, which contribute a major part of the nation's industry, has seen trade fall further, in January, the Central Bank said.

Shipments abroad fell 3.9% to \$472 million from a year earlier following a 6.4% increase in December, the Central Bank of Sri Lanka said in an e-mailed statement. "The decline in textile and garment exports is attributed mainly to the lower export volumes compared to January 2009 amidst lower global demand and higher competition from other countries," the central bank statement said.

The EU's preferential trade benefits, known as GSP+, have also been suspended from Febru-

ary 15, due to a lack of progress in addressing human rights abuses, purportedly committed by the government during the civil war and after. This may result in a further decrease in exports, as the loss of GSP+ will hit the textiles industry especially hard.

Interest rates are held at a 5 year low to encourage spending and support economic growth, a move which was designed to counter any loss in exports to the EU. The value of Sri Lanka's main industrial exports, such as clothing, jewelry and rubber based products have fallen 16.9% to \$320 million in January, the Central Bank's statement said.

Sri Lanka's economy looks towards a gloomy future as trade deficit in January more than tripled to \$689 million from last year owing to increasing expenditure on imports, which increased by 70.1% to \$1.16 billion. This is mainly due to high petroleum and rice prices.