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Embassy Row

By James Morrison

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Sri Lanka frustrated

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A suicide bomber who was thought to have been five months pregnant when she blew herself up last month in a military hospital in Sri Lanka was the final provocation that brought a targeted response from the country's navy and air force against rebel positions in a port city.

However, the rebel Tamil Tigers skillfully manipulated reporters into blaming the government for the latest violation of a shaky four-year-old cease-fire, said **Sri Lankan Ambassador Bernard A.B. Goonetilleke**.

Goonetilleke.

"Their well-oiled propaganda machine went into effect. The rebels even used the word genocide," he said over lunch this week at The Washington Times.

The ambassador expressed his frustration over the press that reported the rebel version of the military response but failed to provide equal coverage to an investigation by Norwegians who monitor the cease-fire. **Maj. Gen. Ulf Henricsson** reported that the armed forces "definitely targeted military positions and offices" of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. He said 10 to 12 persons were killed in the attack on the port city of Trincomalee, about the same number killed in the April 25 suicide bombing at the hospital.

Gen. Henricsson, head of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission, has held the rebels responsible for 3,500 violations of the 2002 cease-fire and the government responsible for 170.

Mr. Goonetilleke accused the rebels of repeated attacks against both military outposts and civilians in attempts to force the government to overreact. The rebels said the government itself was mounting the attacks or that other armed groups were responsible.

"They blame others. It is like we are fighting against ghosts," he said.

The Tamil Tigers have a long history of human rights abuses documented by independent groups over their 20-year brutal struggle for an independent homeland for the ethnic Tamil minority on the South Asian island nation.

The rebels, led by **Velupillai Prabhakaran**, are responsible for "gross abuses," including suicide bombings, assassinations of rival Tamil leaders and attacks against Tamil critics living in other countries, according to Human Rights Watch. The group also denounced the government for past "massacres of Tamil civilians."

The United States, which includes the Tamil Tigers on its list of terrorist organizations, accused the rebels of "politically motivated killings, disappearances, torture, arbitrary arrest" and other human rights violations in the areas under their control in the north and east of the island.

Mr. Goonetilleke, who helped negotiate the cease-fire, complained that the rebels always find a last-minute excuse to avoid reaching a permanent peace accord.

"Frustration, yes, but you have to have much patience dealing with this group," he said, adding that his government wants to avoid a return to full-scale civil war.

"We know the cost of going down that road again," he said.

Failing grade

The German ambassador surprised students at a suburban Maryland school this week when he told them he went to college in Idaho and failed his first English exam.

"I thought my English was pretty good, but on my first English test, I got a straight 'F,' " **Ambassador Klaus Scharioth** said Tuesday when he visited Springbrook High School in Montgomery County.

Mr. Scharioth, who attended the College of Idaho in 1967, said the experience of attending school in the United States "changed my life."

"I was the first German ever to be there after the Second World War, so you can imagine the questions I got," he said.

Mr. Scharioth encouraged the students to study other languages.

"If you really want to convince someone, it is much easier if you speak their language," he said. "In the global world, you need to communicate with people who have totally different backgrounds."

Mr. Scharioth is one of 26 ambassadors and top diplomats acting as substitute teachers at area schools this month to celebrate Europe Day.

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