

CIVILIAN KILLINGS STATISTICS FALSE, SAYS CHAMPIKA TO AKASHI

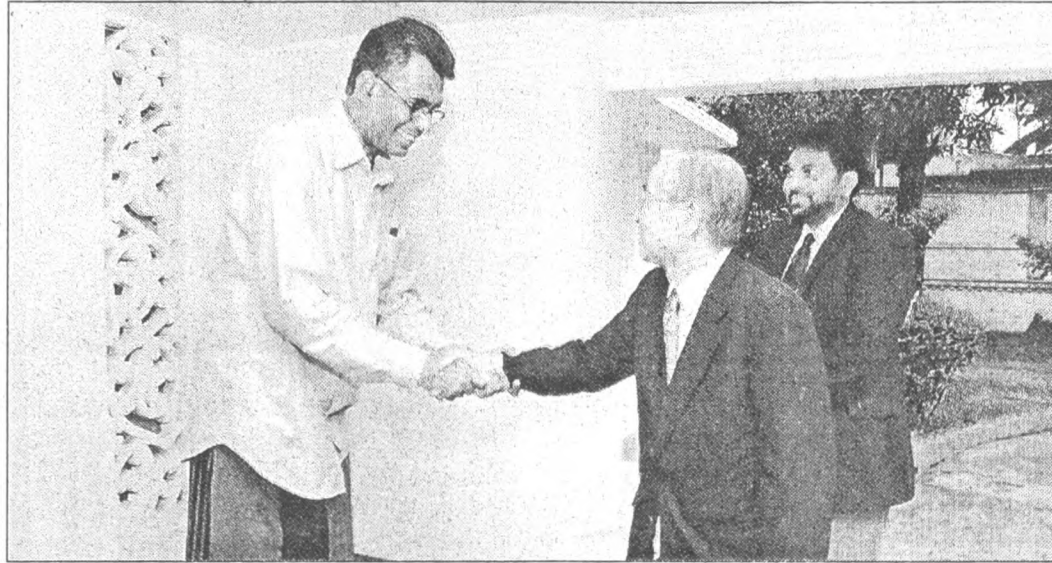
Refuting various reports that claimed 40,000, 60,000 and 146,000 civilians had been killed during the last lap of the war, Technology and Research Minister Champika Ranawaka told Japanese peace envoy Yasushi Akashi that only 7974 persons had died in the Northern Province in 2009 due to unnatural causes, according to the census conducted in 2011.

He explained that the 2011 census was conducted using Tamil officers and the number of dead included around 5000 LTTE cadres, some of whom committed suicide and died under various circumstances.

The Japanese envoy who was in Sri Lanka last week met the Minister a few hours before he left the country on Friday, at the latter's official residence.

Mr. Ranawaka told Mr. Akashi that the LTTE had killed many people during the military operation that was launched to rescue around 300,000 people who had been retained by the outfit as a human shield. He contended that the army could have killed the 11,000

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LTTE cadres who had surrendered to the security forces, had they intended to kill Tamils. “This shows how humanely the Sri Lankan troops have acted during the war victories and it is very unfair to bring in war crimes allegations based on unfounded statistics” he stated.

Minister Ranawaka explained that the Sinhalese population of the north which numbered 20,000 in 1971 had reduced to a mere 800 today, though it had naturally risen up to 46,000 after they were driven out of the province by the LTTE. He stated that the number of Sinhalese chased away from both northern and eastern provinces was 150,000 while 250,000 Tamils lived in Colombo without any harassment even dur-

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ing the war.

He told the Japanese envoy that the percentage of votes received by the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) from the north in 2010 was 37 and it had risen to 80 today, despite the enormous amount of relief to the people of the Northern Province provided by the state. He attributed this support to the TNA to the racist campaign by Tamil Nadu and several western countries and said the main hurdle that reconciliation faced today was this racist campaign.

The Minister said his party was against the Provincial Council system that was imposed on the island in an undemocratic political process by the Indian forces.

