

# Wahabists make inroads in East

By Ranga Jayasuriya

Last week's lead story of LAKBIMANEWS, which reported the rising Islamic extremism in the East appeared to have struck a hornet's nest. Many in the community are reluctant to accept that wahabism and militancy have made inroads in the east. Yet, hard facts speak of a rise of Islamic extremism in the province.

The latest spate of Tamil-Muslim clashes which engulfed Kattankudy, Eravur and Aaraiyampathi are largely attributed to the power politics between the two communities, which had been aggravated by the tussle between Pillayan and Misbullah for chief minister-ship.

As far as ethnic relations in the East are concerned, competing interests, political rivalries and armed groups have created a fatal cocktail.

However, what disturbed this uneasy relationship was the killing of two TMVP cadres, including its Aaraiyampathi area political leader Shanthan by alleged Muslim gunmen on May 22.

Shanthan and his associate Tharsan were stopped and shot dead by T 56 wielding gunmen in the heart of the town.

Later in the day, enraged TMVP members fired at Muslim travellers passing the predominantly Tamil village



Al Jazeera footage titled Rise of Jihad in Sri Lanka depicts a nascent militant Muslim group in the East

Aaraiyampathi, killing two civilians and injuring four others.

## Violence

Violence continued to the first three days of last week as Muslims protested against the abduction of two youths by TMVP cadres in Eravur.

On Monday, a woman was killed and a youth wounded when protestors clashed with the Special Task Force. The STF claimed that it opened fire after their personnel came under fire from the protestors. These claims can not be independently verified. Three hundred fami-

lies were displaced in Eravur and adjacent Tamil villages.

The rise of Islamic extremism in the East has been a contentious topic. Yet, there are hard facts which speak about the radicalization of local youth.

According to reports, wahabism imported from Saudi Arabia and bolstered by Saudi funds is fast becoming the dominant force in Kattankudy.

A Kattankudy born Islamic leader who is attached to King Khalid University of Abha, Saudi Arabia is the link between the local wahabists and their international funders. An increasing number of youth

returning from religious schools of Saudi Arabia are promoting this strict set of Islamic teaching.

## Local leader

A prominent local leader known as "Colonel" Lateef in Oddamavadi was killed by wahabists in mid August last year after he objected to the activities of Islamic armed groups. No legal action was taken against the murder.

An Islamic society known as All Ceylon Thareekathul Mufliheen, a religious movement based on the Islamic sect Sufi has been at the receiving end of regular attacks by the wahabists.

31 October 2004: Religious extremists torched a mosque belonging to the Sufis led by its spiritual leader late Sheihul

Mufliheen Abdulla, popularly known as Payilvaan in Kattankudy. Police said the angry crowds were mobilised by the loud-speakers from ortho-

dox mosques. Payilvaan was an Islamic scholar who had been critical of wahabism, preached by graduates returning from Saudi religious schools. One person was killed and another wounded when the extremists opened fire at the Sufi follower.

The Sufis claimed that police did not act to curb violence and that Wahabists were aided and abetted by police.

December 2006: sectarian violence engulfed Kattankudy for over a week as orthodox Muslims carried out a spate of attacks against members of the Sufi sect. Violence erupted after the death of Payilvaan.

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Religious extremists demanded that the body of Payilvaan be removed from the cemetery where it was buried.

A protestor was killed and scores of others were wounded when protestors clashed with police. Wahabists set ablaze over hundred houses and business ventures of Sufis. The damage was estimated at 600 million rupees.

Four hundred families of Sufis were chased away from Kattankudy and their attempt to return was thwarted by the wahabists despite a supreme court order to that effect.

## Excerpt from the Special Report (No 29) of University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna)

"Amir Ali, Minister for Disaster Management, who was elected on an SLMC ticket and deserted it for an offer by the Government, has been identified by the local populace as the patron of one section of the armed Muslim militants who enjoy a strong guarantee of impunity. At a meeting to promote communal amity, a Tamil spokesman said that from the

day his community gave birth to armed groups, the community has been cursed and he was certain that the same applies to Muslims. A member of the audience, who did not want to identify himself openly, gave the Tamil speaker a signed letter, which said, "Muslim ayuthakkulukkal naam kattiyavai alla: Kattappattavai" (Muslim armed groups were not created by us. They were imposed).

Amir Ali uses his armed men to intimidate the SLMC and reportedly to settle Muslims on

land in Karuvakkeni where there is a running dispute with the Tamils in which the Karuna group is also getting involved. Reasons why the Government and Amir Ali need paramilitary help, after supposedly having routed the Tigers, is not far to seek. One is that for the government to survive another election, it must capture the minority votes by hook or by crook. It has made an alliance with Pillayan who has no chance in a genuine election and has placed its security machinery at his disposal".