

**Monthly Report of
International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research**

SRI LANKA

Trends

- Two locals in Syria

A Sri Lankan, for the first time, was reported to have been an Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS) fighter. Sharfaz Shuraih Muhsin, also known as Abu Shureih Seylani (alias), was killed in Syria during an air raid on 12 July 2015.¹ Muhsin is believed to be the first Sri Lankan ISIS fighter. He was a 37-year-old Sri Lankan Muslim from Galewela in the central Kandy district.² At the same time, it is now known that at least one other Sri Lankan man has travelled to Syria, and he presently lives in Damascus.³

- LTTE elements in Tamil Nadu

On 20 July 2014, three Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) operatives were arrested with large quantities of cyanide (75 cyanide capsules and 300g of cyanide powder) and communication equipment (four global positioning

¹ Sulochana Ramiah Mohan, "First Sri Lankan ISIS Member killed in Airstrike in Syria", *Ceylon Today*, July 19, 2015, accessed August 5, 2015, <http://ceylontoday.lk/51-98710-news-detail-first-sri-lankan-isis-militant-killed-in-syria.html>;

"Sri Lankan PM orders police to investigate into ISIS member's family", *Colombo Page*, July 23, 2015, accessed August 5, 2015, http://www.colombopage.com/archive_15B/Jul23_1437674118CH.php.

² Sulochana Ramiah Mohan, "First Sri Lankan ISIS Member killed in Airstrike in Syria", *Ceylon Today*, July 19, 2015, accessed August 5, 2015, <http://ceylontoday.lk/51-98710-news-detail-first-sri-lankan-isis-militant-killed-in-syria.html>;

"ISIS militant's family leave for Pakistan", *Daily Mirror*, July 28, 2015, accessed August 5, 2015, <http://www.dailymirror.lk/81165/isis-militant-s-family-leave-for-pakistan>.

³ Sulochana Ramiah Mohan, "First Sri Lankan ISIS Member killed in Airstrike in Syria", *Ceylon Today*, July 19, 2015, accessed August 5, 2015, <http://ceylontoday.lk/51-98710-news-detail-first-sri-lankan-isis-militant-killed-in-syria.html>.

system and seven mobile phones) in Uchipuli in the Ramanathapuram district of Tamil Nadu, India. They were carrying both Indian currency and Sri Lankan currency.⁴ One individual was identified as K. Krishnakumar, an LTTE member from Killinochchi, northern Sri Lanka. His two associates, R. Sasikumar and N. Rajendran, were Indian citizens from Uchipuli.⁵ Just a few days later, A. Kumaraguru, a former LTTE operative from Sri Lanka was arrested at the Tiruchirapalli International Airport in Tamil Nadu, India on 25 July 2015.⁶ He was attempting to travel to Switzerland via Malaysia to claim refugee status in Switzerland.⁷

Analysis

- Sri Lankan jihadists' links to Pakistan

Investigations into Muhsin's personal and family background point to a close connection with Pakistan. Although links between Muhsin and Pakistani terrorist groups have not been established, Muhsin is known to have travelled to Syria from Pakistan. He also graduated in Sharia Law from the International Islamic University, Pakistan.⁸ It is likely that Muhsin was first exposed to extremist ideologies during this period. Many of his family members, including his wife and five kids, have been residing in Pakistan since several years ago.⁹ It is pertinent to state that Sri Lankan jihadists were recruited by Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) (along with those from other countries) for the 2014 foiled plot to attack the U.S. and Israeli consulates in southern India. The number of Sri Lankan jihadists with connections to Pakistani terrorist networks seems to be growing gradually.

- Tamil Nadu as an LTTE hub

⁴ "Arrest of three raises suspicion of LTTE operatives regrouping", *The Times of India*, July 22, 2015, accessed August 5, 2015, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/madurai/Arrest-of-three-raises-suspicion-of-LTTE-operatives-regrouping/articleshow/48167261.cms>.

⁵ "Arrest of three raises suspicion of LTTE operatives regrouping," *The Times of India*, July 22, 2015, accessed August 5, 2015, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/madurai/Arrest-of-three-raises-suspicion-of-LTTE-operatives-regrouping/articleshow/48167261.cms>.

⁶ R. Gokul, "Former LTTE operative, who lost leg in Sri Lankan civil war, arrested in Tamil Nadu for acquiring fake passport", *The Times of India*, July 26, 2015, accessed August 5, 2015, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Former-LTTE-operative-who-lost-leg-in-Sri-Lankan-civil-war-arrested-in-Tamil-Nadu-for-acquiring-fake-passport/articleshow/48225970.cms>.

⁷ R. Gokul, "Former LTTE operative, who lost leg in Sri Lankan civil war, arrested in Tamil Nadu for acquiring fake passport", *The Times of India*, July 26, 2015, accessed August 5, 2015, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Former-LTTE-operative-who-lost-leg-in-Sri-Lankan-civil-war-arrested-in-Tamil-Nadu-for-acquiring-fake-passport/articleshow/48225970.cms>.

⁸ Sulochana Ramiah Mohan, "First Sri Lankan ISIS Member killed in Airstrike in Syria", *Ceylon Today*, July 19, 2015, accessed August 5, 2015, <http://ceylontoday.lk/51-98710-news-detail-first-sri-lankan-isis-militant-killed-in-syria.html>.

⁹ "ISIS militant's family leave for Pakistan", *Daily Mirror*, July 28, 2015, accessed August 5, 2015, <http://www.dailymirror.lk/81165/isis-militant-s-family-leave-for-pakistan>;

"Lankan ISIS member's family, gone abroad", *Sri Lanka Mirror*, July 25, 2015, accessed August 5, 2015, <http://www.srilankamirror.com/news/item/5355-lankan-isis-member-s-family-gone-abroad>.

K. Krishnakumar is believed to have served as a secretary to the ruthless leader of the LTTE, Velupillai Prabhakaran.¹⁰ Krishnakumar is believed to have resided in Tamil Nadu since 2009, first having been in a camp for Sri Lankan refugees which Indian police believe is home to many suspected (former) LTTE operatives and LTTE sympathisers.¹¹ Kumaraguru, who was arrested later in the week in a hurry to leave India on a fake passport, is suspected of having connections with Krishnakumar.¹² Kumaraguru was an active LTTE operative until May 2009,¹³ and arrived in Chennai in 2014 to stay with G. Thirumurugan, a member of a Tamil ethno-nationalist group from Tamil Nadu.¹⁴ It was also Thirumurugan that helped Kumaraguru to get a false passport.¹⁵ The continued presence and activities of Sri Lankan LTTE operatives in Tamil Nadu, and their links with Tamil Nadu LTTE supporters and criminal networks, continues to present a grave national security threat to Sri Lanka. There is popular support for the LTTE in Tamil Nadu, a factor which has complicated and exacerbated the Sri Lankan conflict since its inception. The LTTE also established an office and a network in Tamil Nadu from the beginning.¹⁶

Implications

- More locals may travel to Syria and possible exploitation by Sinhalese extremists

Sri Lanka was, until now, considered one of the few countries from which individuals have not been recruited to fight in the Syrian conflict. The news of Sharfaz Shuraih Muhsin suggests that there could be more fighters from Sri Lanka in the future, and also indicates that there could be other Sri Lankan

¹⁰ "Suspected LTTE operative arrested in Ramanathapuram", *Deccan Chronicle*, July 21, 2015, accessed August 5, 2015, <http://www.deccanchronicle.com/150721/nation-current-affairs/article/suspected-ltte-operative-arrested-ramanathapuram>.

¹¹ "Suspected LTTE operative arrested in Ramanathapuram", *Deccan Chronicle*, July 21, 2015, accessed August 5, 2015, <http://www.deccanchronicle.com/150721/nation-current-affairs/article/suspected-ltte-operative-arrested-ramanathapuram>.

¹² "Investigators question LTTE operative on links to outfit", *The Times of India*, July 29, 2015, accessed August 5, 2015, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chennai/Investigators-question-LTTE-operative-on-links-to-outfit/articleshow/48259154.cms>.

¹³ "Investigators question LTTE operative on links to outfit", *The Times of India*, July 29, 2015, accessed August 5, 2015, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chennai/Investigators-question-LTTE-operative-on-links-to-outfit/articleshow/48259154.cms>.

¹⁴ "Investigators question LTTE operative on links to outfit", *The Times of India*, July 29, 2015, accessed August 5, 2015, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chennai/Investigators-question-LTTE-operative-on-links-to-outfit/articleshow/48259154.cms>.

¹⁵ R. Gokul, "Former LTTE operative, who lost leg in Sri Lankan civil war, arrested in Tamil Nadu for acquiring fake passport", *The Times of India*, July 26, 2015, accessed August 5, 2015, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Former-LTTE-operative-who-lost-leg-in-Sri-Lankan-civil-war-arrested-in-Tamil-Nadu-for-acquiring-fake-passport/articleshow/48225970.cms>.

¹⁶ "How difficult is life in camps of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees", YouTube, accessed August 5, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4R1-ccbYRKs>.

fighters presently in Syria. Future fighters are likely to be those who have connections with Pakistani networks and those who belong to the extremist Wahabbi movement that has been spreading from the east of Sri Lanka since 2009. It is also possible that the incident of the Sri Lankan Muslim ISIS fighter could be exploited by Bodu Bala Sena (BBS), the Sinhalese extremist group that demonises the Muslim community and draws support from a segment of the Sinhalese. This may lead to communal tensions between the Sinhalese and Muslims.

- LTTE regrouping in Sri Lanka

There have been more than a dozen attempts to revive terrorism in Sri Lanka by the LTTE international network since the war ended in 2009. Some of these attempts are likely to have received support from the networks in Tamil Nadu, due to its close proximity. The apprehension of K. Krishnakumar while he was en route to transport large quantities of cyanide to the conflict-affected north of Sri Lanka, along with communication equipment, is the most alarming indication that the LTTE is continuing its attempts to regroup in the north of Sri Lanka to date. Cyanide capsules were a trademark of the LTTE organization and its suicide ideology. In the past, members of the LTTE committed suicide by swallowing the cyanide capsule which they wore around their necks, if they were about to be captured by government forces. Thus, this incident makes it clear that security measures in the conflict-affected north must be strengthened. There is a need for renewed focus on securing the northern coastline, as the proximity of Tamil Nadu makes it easy for people and goods to illegally cross or be smuggled into Sri Lanka – a practice which has been common since the rise of militant groups in the 1970s.