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# The Times mirrors the Tigers

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The international community was horrified by news reports in the Times of London on July 9th 2009 that over 1,400 people were dying each week in Welfare Centres in Sri Lanka. The Times continues to conceal its sources. This time the allegation is attributed to 'Senior international aid figures', though the figure was decried as 'Ridiculous' by the UN Resident Coordinator in Colombo.

An even more 'senior international aid figure' Sir John Holmes was even more contemptuous of sensationalistic journalism, when he pointed out that Sri Lanka had won a war which many foreign journalists had come out to cover, and therefore they had to produce something, to justify themselves. Thus the Channel 4 stories of rape and sexual abuse and the Guardian Chamberlain assertion that 13 women had been found with short haircuts and slit throats. The Times however has gone further than all these, in conducting a sustained vitriolic campaign against the Sri Lankan government with no regard for either truth or logic. Their use of language too, though skilful, exemplifies their determination to distort, as when they tried to attribute to the UN their claim that there had been over 20,000 civilian deaths during the conflict against the Tigers. And they are obviously terrified of anyone who might contradict them, for they said falsely, in a wholly fraudulent article on May 21st, that 'The Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights, which set up the camps, did not return calls asking for comment yesterday'. I then wrote to the Editor as follows 'In the first place, this Ministry is not responsible for setting up the camps, though we are responsible for protection issues in them. Secondly, May 20th was a public holiday, so perhaps you could ask your correspondent which number he called, at which he left a message asking for comment on his story. You should also ask him why he did not call me on my mobile, on which another correspondent of yours interviewed me at length in February, only to produce a report very different from that of the Indian correspondent who was in my room at the time and listened to the interview. The substance of the article indicates why your correspondent feared to contact either me or my Minister, who tells me he was called up on the 21st, and answered queries on this subject, well after you had gone to print. Of course I did not get a reply, and the Times absolutely refused to meet me when I was in England a couple of weeks later, though four other newspapers found time for me at short notice. Channel 4 and Sky News also dodged, though the BBC kindly slotted me in. But refusal to allow access is of course a well known dodge, which the Times attributes to its enemies whilst sedulously practicing this itself. In short, the Times gets away with lies and refusal to engage or discuss when they come across someone who actually knows what is going on. But such cowardice is understandable in view of the scattershot way they produce arguments. Initially they declared that they had got to a figure of 20,000 by adding - to the 7,000 they claimed the UN had reported from the beginning of the year until April - an average of 1000 a day for the first couple of weeks in May. This begged the question that the 7,000 had only been found in what were claimed to be leaks from the UN, and that nowhere else were there allegations of 1000 deaths a day in May. Indeed the Tamilnet accounts, which would generally present what might be termed the worst case scenario, alleged far fewer casualties. Later the Times changed its story to claim that the figure of 20,000 was based on extrapolations from the number of bodies brought in to health centres, though they also noted that they multiplied the actual bodies brought in by five or so to reach their figure of 20,000. Now, six weeks later, assuming their readers would have forgotten their earlier pitiful justifications, with Sir John Holmes also categorically rejecting the sleight of hand by which they had sought to associate the UN with their lies, they have yet another explanation for their nonsensical assertion. This time they declare that 'Subsequent aerial photographs of beach graves, revealed in The Times, suggested that the figure was more than 20,000.' So they now admit that their first mathematical calculations, based on a fraudulent UN figure for four months with a whimsical average for two weeks thereafter was nonsense. They also doubtless hope that no one will notice that the aerial photographs they rely on are of beach graves, whereas most of the fighting before May took place far away from that beach. They also admit that their next exercise in mathematical fraud, multiplying bodies they themselves never saw to reach the number they first thought of, was also a lie. How the beach graves they revealed amount to the figure they now only suggest is not explained. Instead that figure will simply become a statistic to lurk behind their latest lie, 1,400 deaths a week in the camps, amounting to over 15,000 now if they started counting from the time of the great exodus, when the Sri Lankan forces managed to rescue over 100,000 of those held by the Tigers. No wonder then that one senior Sri Lankan journalist said, 'I have serious doubts over the latest statements. What we're seeing is that the LTTE (the Tigers) and the Times are in some respects mirror images of each other.' Senior incidentally is one of the words the Times uses when it wants to pretend that someone who said what it wanted said is in fact respectable. They trot out phrases like senior journalist and senior international aid worker to clothe their nakedness, hoping that then other papers will take up the claim and ignore that the only evidence for the bizarre lies the Times produces is the fertile imagination of Times journalists. Rajiva Wijesinha Secretary General Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process Courtesy: SCOPP