

By R. Wijewardene

A SEA of lion flags engulfed Victoria's state parliament building last Saturday as more than 3000 Sri Lankans gathered in the heart of Melbourne, Australia to display their support for the government's ongoing offensive against the LTTE.

Drums were beaten, speeches were made and hundreds of banners and placards were waved in an attempt to make the Australian public aware of the atrocities committed by the LTTE.

It has taken a quarter of a century - but it seems the Sinhala diaspora has finally found its voice. Sadly Sinhala rather than Sri Lankan diaspora remains the correct term - as this country's diaspora communities remain perhaps even more divided than the Tamil and Sinhala populations of the mother country.

For decades the LTTE has organised enormous and highly visible demonstrations in the West and the organisation has ruthlessly and relentlessly publicised its cause in every major city in Europe and North America.

The size, the wealth and the organisation of Tamil communities in the West allowed the LTTE to stage spectacular and eye catching displays in support of Eelam, summoning at what appeared to be a moments notice tens of thousands of supporters in Toronto, London or Paris.

While pro LTTE demonstrations lamenting the ill treatment of Tamils by the 'Sinhala



Protesters in Melbourne



The LTTE got a dose of its own medicine



Atleast on the boards the LTTE was written off

# 25 years later, the lion roars

State' were almost every day occurrences in the capitals of the West the opposing view was hardly ever heard.

Divided and disorganised rallies by the Sinhala community were either sorry affairs or failed to take place at all. But no longer. As these photos reveal the Sri Lankan armed forces' march to victory has brought the Sinhalese diaspora together and euphoric at the prospect of the final defeat of the LTTE - Sinhala communities across the world have been rallying to express their solidarity with the government and the armed forces.

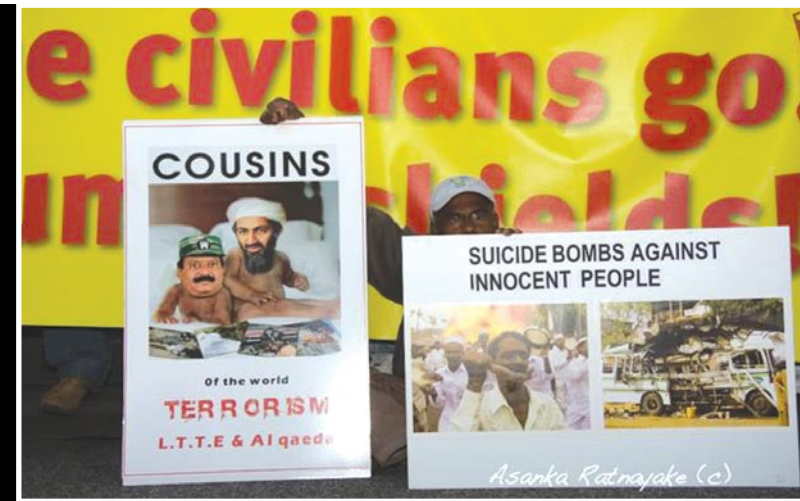
Melbourne's demonstration however was particularly successful and thousands of demonstrators vocally and visibly denounced the LTTE. Prominent Sri Lankan and Australian speakers spoke out against the LTTE, highlighting the inherent ruthlessness of the organisation - its use of child soldiers, suicide bombers and now human shields.

The old, the young, third generation Australians and fresh immigrants all gathered peacefully - and with a common purpose to contradict and correct the one sided version of the Sri Lankan conflict presented to the Australian public by the LTTE's propaganda efforts.

And while it has taken 25 years, from the size, visibility and ultimately peaceful nature of the demonstration it appears that the Sinhala Lion has finally learned to roar.



The protest was one of the biggest by the Sinhala diaspora



The terror "cousins" were featured prominently



Sri Lankans finally seem to have found their voices