

We are not bombing 'civilian targets'. (1999, September 19). *The Sunday times*.

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Excerpts from Thursday's cabinet news conference held at the Department of Information.

Q: At Wednesday's cabinet discussion was there a discussion as to the appointment of a new Chief Justice and was a decision taken?

A: The new Chief Justice is even at this moment taking oaths. He is Sarath Silva.

Q: While Supreme Court Justice Ameer Mallik has been asked to review a petition which queries why Mr. Silva's name should not be struck off the roll of attorneys-at-law, what is your comment on the appointment as Chief Justice of an individual on whom this is focused against?

A: Your question is not relevant. Mr. Sarath Silva has been appointed as Chief Justice of this country. There is nothing more that I need to say.

Q: The ICRC has confirmed that 21 civilians were killed by airforce bombing yesterday in Mullaitivu. Why is the government now bombing civilians? What details do you have on this?

A: We are not bombing any civilians. We have selected bombing targets, that is, LTTE targets which have been identified by several

camps in that area.

Q: Could you have made a mistake? Could it be that the air force had missed the target and then bombed the civilians?

A: No, I cannot comment on that.

Q: Will there be an investigation?

A: It is up to the Ministry of Defence and probably the Secretary of Defence will decide once he receives further information.

Q: Brigadier, what action is the Army taking about infiltration of the Army?

A: Infiltration in what sense?

Q: The Minister said there was infiltration of the Army.

A: (Minister Samaraweera): We were not talking of infiltration into the Army in terms of personnel. What I mentioned was that certain ministers pointed out that there is a certain group within the United National Party which consists of retired police officers and retired Army officers who have been surfacing from time to time even during times of elections who have been assigned to use some of their contacts within the Army and the police. At the same time it was pointed out that the majority in the Army and the police are doing an excellent job today. In fact, Tamil friends of mine are telling me that they are very courteous and civil, and it is only the odd one who is not. In fact, the Brigadier says they re-

Q: But you are not answering.

A: Yes, the right to answer and not answer is both mine.

Q: I am asking a very clear question. How did the government decide to appoint someone who is under investigation and may have his name struck off the attorney-at-law roll as the Chief Justice of this country?

(Minister): Next question.

Journalist: Minister, are you not duty-bound to answer questions on behalf of the government?

A: No, this did not come up during Cabinet discussions, and for another thing, apart from what I told you I don't have any more information.

Q: No, that was not my question, minister. When journalists ask questions regarding high officials appointed by the government, are you taking the stand that the government won't answer those questions?

A: No, I didn't say I wouldn't answer questions. I said very clearly this instance that you have a right to ask, and I too have a right to not reply, especially in this instance since I don't have the facts to reply with. We also can talk for the sake of talking, we don't do that, unlike some people. We can