

Tamil protesters had legitimate grievances

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Re: Terror-Friendly Tamils on Parade, editorial, July 8.

Tamil Canadians were taken aback by this editorial. Canada is a nation built on immigration; apart from the aboriginals, every Canadian can trace their ancestry to a foreign land.

It is audacious to expect that immigrant communities would simply "leave their baggage behind."

The scars of the armed conflict in Sri Lanka that has been raging for over 25 years is part of the lived experiences of Tamil-Canadians, much like the Holocaust is very much a part of the Jewish diaspora's history or the Armenian genocide is a part of that community's collective memory. These memories and experiences cannot be simply left behind.

The only difference is that in Sri Lanka these atrocities continue to take place and many Tamil Canadians still bear fresh wounds that have not yet healed. When members of the Tamil community in Canada

gather by the thousands to express their discontent at government policies, they are perfectly within their rights to exercise this freedom.

These are rights that were denied to Tamils in Sri Lanka.

Perhaps it should be brought to your attention that Sri Lanka has been ranked as the third most dangerous place for journalists. Sri Lanka has also been condemned for its brutal human rights record by several international actors and was recently kicked out of the UN Human Rights Council.

Canada is world renowned for its peace-building role and the Canadian media is perceived as neutral and objective in portraying foreign conflicts. Not only does this editorial stance run counter to Canadian values, but it is also a dangerous weapon to place in the hands of the government of Sri Lanka, a regime that continues to pursue a military approach to the conflict within its borders.

David Pooplappillai, Canadian Tamil Congress, Toronto.

Terror-friendly Tamils on parade

It's the sort of sight that too often makes Canadian politicians go weak in the spine: ethnic voters rallying for a parochial, unsavory cause.

Over the weekend, thousands of Tamil Canadians gathered in a Toronto park to denounce Ottawa's decision to outlaw the World Tamil Movement (WTM), which the RCMP believes is nothing but a fundraising front for the Tamil Tigers, a Sri Lankan-based terrorist group that has been outlawed in Canada since 2006.

Even by the standards of terrorist insurgencies, the Tigers are a brutal organization -- a creepy cult-like outfit that habitually engages in massacres of civilians, and abducts children to fight on the front lines of its 25-year-old campaign against Sri Lanka's government. Its leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, can fairly be described as the Hassan Nasrallah of South Asia. Since much of the funding that enables the Tigers to fight their war comes from expatriate Tamils, the stakes in Canada are high. This nation is home to several hundred thousand Sri Lankan migrants of Tamil extraction. Many of them, small business owners in particular, have in the past been strong-armed by Tamil thugs into contributing war funds for the Tigers. (Those same entrepreneurs reportedly were told to shutter their stores over the weekend -- to ensure a better turnout at the rally.) Should the Tories give in to the pro-Tiger lobby by legalizing the group, they would reopen the financial floodgates, which would in turn result in more weaponry for the Tigers, and therefore more dead Sri Lankans.

Since 1984, the Tigers have dispatched nearly 400 suicide bombers. The Black Tigers -- the Tamils' suicide-bombing wing -- is not particular about whom it presses into service. Men, women and children are all seen as potential human bombs. Last year, a female suicide bomber walked into Sri Lanka's defence headquarters pretending to be pregnant. But her tummy bulge in fact contained explosives. She missed killing the Sri Lankan chief of staff, but managed to take out 11

others. Just last month, in two separate attacks, Black Tiger bombers killed 27 passengers on civilian buses. This is the sort of cowardly tactic commonly employed by the men and women who were hailed as "freedom fighters" from the podium at last weekend's Toronto rally.

But over the last four months, the Tamils have suffered serious military losses. They have been largely expelled from their strongholds on the country's east coast, while some of their bases and arms depots in the north have been overrun by government forces. One of their senior commanders was sniped by a government rifleman. And over the weekend, 40 Tigers died when Sri Lankan soldiers captured an LTTE operations centre, perhaps their largest.

A contributing factor to the Tigers' poor battlefield performance may be traced to Canada's own government: As Canada, and other nations, have worked harder to shut off the flow of money to the Tigers from inside Western nations, Colombo has been able to establish a decisive advantage for the first time in a decade or more. Stephen Harper and his Conservatives should be proud that they took a stand against Tiger fundraising. The Liberals, under both Jean Chretien and Paul Martin, never had the political courage to stand up to Toronto-based Tamil voters. In some cases, Liberal gladhanders even showed up at Tiger-friendly events.

It is a shameful legacy, one that implicated every Liberal Cabinet member of the era -- including several who loved to speechify against terrorism in other parts of the world. But Mr. Harper is cut from different cloth.

Canada has always been a nation of immigrants, one that welcomes newcomers from all over the world. But traditionally, the price of admission was that newcomers left their murderous old-world disputes at the door. In recent years, we have forgotten to charge this fee. The result: disgraceful displays such as last weekend's rally -- in which a group of Canadians unashamedly shouted slogans in support of a terrorist group.

It is enough to give multiculturalism a bad name.