

Tamilnet and the International press:

Global coverage of a radical press.

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Abstract:

The paper provides a systematic analysis of Tamilnet's role as a primary news source in the mainstream international media. It argues the format and content of the web-based news provider has yielded results in generating wider coverage for a self confessed Eelamist narrative that may have otherwise failed to reach international media consumers.

Introduction:

Nearly a decade after it was initially launched there is little doubt the web based Tamilnet news service has carved a unique niche in Sri Lankan media theatre. The self confessed Eelamist news group has frequently been accused of pro-LTTE news coverage and has frequently come under attack from the government and its numerous militant proxies, one of which is believed to have killed the Tamilnet's editor-in-chief Dharmaratnam Sivaram in 2006.

Despite such pressures the internationally based website of the news service has protected it from government censorship, frequently faced by the mainstream press in Sri Lanka. Similarly many of its contributors continue to write 'under cover' often working as journalists in the mainstream while closely guarding their involvements with Tamilnet.

The news services focus on regions largely ignored by the mainstream press, its relationship with the LTTE and prompt coverage of news has made the Tamilnet a primary source for other news agencies including the wire services. However no significant research has been conducted on Tamilnet's success in being cited in the international press, thereby providing greater media exposure which in turn would presumably direct more reader to Tamilnet's own website.

While it is nearly impossible to conduct any meaningful research on Tamilnet's readership figures, there is opportunity to determine the increased levels of international exposure through a study of Tamilnet's citations in international media. In this context, this paper attempts to quantify the citation of Tamilnet as primary source in key news agencies that operate out of Sri Lanka, and subsequently gauge who this information is transmitted to mainstream international media.

Tamilnet as a news source: Tamilnet-Mainstream media interface.

Despite its sub-textual biases Tamilnet has become a leading source on conflict related news, with more than 20,000 reports published since its inception as a website in June 1997, and a significant number of reports prior to its web-presence as an internet based wire-service, with records indicating its existence as a mailing list as early as January 1996¹.

It could be argued that Tamilnet's main success has been its wide and prompt coverage, coupled with the adoption of 'western style' of writing news reports. Reports written by key Tamil journalists including the websites late Editor Sivaram, a journalist with mainstream press experience as reporter for The Island, Sunday Times, the Daily Mirror and the Tamil language Veerakesari. Following Sivaram's death the web site is coordinated by a number of leading journalists who have kept their association with the website secret due to the obvious threats associated with the association. These journalists, including senior Sunday Times news reporter Chris Kamalendran, a journalist with local experience as a reporter for the Sun newspaper and the Sunday Times and a UK based journalist for the Guardian.

¹ A copy of a press release issued by the LTTE international secretariat, 211 Katherine Road, London E6 1BU, United Kingdom, Tel/fax: 0181-470 8593, disseminated through the Tamilnet mailing list transmitted from tamilnet@hibinc.no. The statement issued on January 11, 1996 by the Tiger Political Committee claims "Sri Lankan government refuses to provide relief to refugees in Kilinochi, Mullaitivu, Mannar, Vadamaratchi and Thenmaratchi areas in the North Yesterday the Director of planning a Sri Lankan Government official attached to the Kilinochi district Secretariat expressed concern that the Sri Lankan Government is delaying to release the funds that his department urgently sought for the supply of dry ration to the refugees now living in these areas." The mailing-list transmission is archived at <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/52/068.html>. The accuracy of the tamilnet@hibinc.no mailing address is further substantiated in a report published by the Sweden based academic Professor Peter Schalk of the Department of History of Religion in the Uppsala University in Sweden (www.tamilnation.org/conferences/cnfAU96/Ptrschk.html)

The association of journalists trained in the ‘western style’ of news reportage, in Tamilnet’s production has provided the web site its competitive edge in the international new theatre, particularly as a primary source for subsequent main stream press articles. A search of the Factiva data-base for the key work ‘Tamilnet’ reveals 4861 records,² with 944 reports produced by the BBC Monitoring South Asia since its inception on September 25, 1998; and 402 reports generated prior to that by the BBC Monitoring Service³.

Similarly 2414 reports are attributed to major wire sources which include the Associated Press newswire, Agence France Presse, Reuters News, The Press Trust of India, and Xinhua News Agency. The breakdown of the figures are as follows:

Total number reports for key word Tamilnet: 2415

Associated Press newswire	634
Agence France Presse	503
Reuters News	258
Xinhua News Agency	147
The Press Trust of India	139

A Factiva search of the wire services also revealed 52209 reports containing the key words ‘Tamil Tiger’ or ‘LTTE’, however a more refined search for reports containing the key word between June 7, 1997 and January 17, 2007⁴ reveals 43,880 reports thus suggesting 5.5% of the wire stories directly quoted and sourced Tamilnet as a primary source.

Total number reports for key word ‘LTTE’ or ‘Tamil Tiger*’: 43880

Associated Press newswire	5538
Agence France Presse	13345
Reuters News	10432
Xinhua News Agency	3821
The Press Trust of India	3027

The percentage distribution, use of Tamilnet as a primary source: 5.5%

Associated Press newswire	11.45%
Agence France Presse	03.77%
Reuters News	02.47%
Xinhua News Agency	03.87%
The Press Trust of India	04.59%

In this context it should be noted that the figures represent only direct sourcing of Tamilnet in wire-service reports and does not quantify the web-based news services’ full impact in shaping wire service reports on the ethnic conflict.

² The search was conducted for all dates in the data base from inception to January 17, 2007

³ BBC Monitoring is also known as the British Broadcasting Corporation division which monitors worldwide mass media and the British Government's provider of open source intelligence (OSINT). Located at Caversham Park in Caversham, in southern England, with overseas offices in Moscow, Nairobi, Kiev, Baku and Tashkent, BBC Monitoring selects and translates information from radio, television, press, news agencies and the Internet from 150 countries in more than 70 languages. According to BBC Monitoring’s homepage (www.monitor.bbc.co.uk/aboutus.shtml) its external subscribers include “media organisations, universities, governments, embassies, multinational companies and charities around the world”

⁴ Tamilnet commenced coverage on its website on June 7, 1997.

It should also be noted that the Factiva data base contain full coverage of the Associated Press reports from December 3, 1985; and Reuters newswire from May 27, 1987; while only selected coverage of reports are presented for Agence France Presse from September 9, 1991, Xinhua News Agency from March 1, 1989 and The Press Trust of India (PTI) from November 30, 1999. Therefore with the exception of PTI, Factiva wire service reports predate the inception on Tamilnet providing opportunity for comparative analysis.

Selective coverage of AFP and Xinhua reports present some problems in conducting a direct statistical comparison of the wire reports. However it could be argued that Factiva's rate of story selection, would equally apply to reports containing the key word 'Tamilnet' and those containing the keywords 'LTTE' or 'Tamil Tiger'. Therefore while the number of reports contained in the Factiva database may not necessarily represent the exact number of report covered by AFP and Xinhua, the percentage of direct Tamilnet use would prove a statistic comparable with AP and Reuters.

Both Reuters and Associated Press enjoy wide international coverage, with corporate statistics suggesting a significantly higher penetration of AP wire reports to recipient media groups when compared with Reuters. AP homepage claims: "founded in 1846, The Associated Press is the backbone of the world's information system serving thousands of daily newspaper, radio, television and online customers", the page also provide a statistical overview claims the company maintain 242 bureaus in 121 countries, serving "1,700 U.S. daily, weekly, non-English and college newspapers; 5,000 radio and TV outlets; 8,500 International subscribers who receive AP news and photos" (Associated Press, 2007). Based on information provide in the Reuters homepage the wire service operates 196 bureaux in 91, servicing more than "330,000 professional users" – the site provide no information on its use as news source by subsequent media producers (Reuters, 2007).

In this context it can be argued that the Associated Press coverage of the Northern conflict has been significantly generous to Tamilnet as a primary source, where 11.45% of its overall conflict reportage directly sourcing information gained from Tamilnet. Therefore it could be argued that considering AP's wide distribution 'foot-print' more than one in ten stories of the Northern conflict that reach the international press have been initially generated though Tamilnet⁵.

Coverage of Tamilnet: A wire service perspective

While wire service reports generated in Sri Lankan provided significant coverage for Tamilnet, the web site was unable to distance itself from the LTTE, and was frequently referred to as the "pro-rebel" or "pro-Tiger Tamilnet".

In this context it should be noted that a sample of reports taken from a population of 634 Associated Press newswire reports, suggested Tamilnet was used mainly as a primary and secondary source by the AP reporters, and was compatibly weighted in reliability when compared with similar government sources, such as the government Peace Secretariat web site <http://www.peaceinsrilanka.org>; the Army Web site: <http://www.army.lk>, its predecessor www.slarmy.org and the newly formed Media Centre For National Security <http://www.nationalsecurity.lk>⁶

While Tamilnet was cited in 634 AP reports the www.tamilnet.com URL is explicitly recorded as an additional link in 322 reports published between December 20, 1999 and January 22, 2007 – thus 50.79% of the reports sourcing Tamilnet also provide a direct link to the site.

⁵ The Tamilnet sourcing rate in the wire-services also present another dimension of the argument, which may account for the discrepancy between the different news providers. AP since the late 1997 has been headed by Dilip Ganguly, a journalist who was earlier attached to AP New Delhi. AFP is headed by Amal Jayasinghe a celebrated Sri Lankan journalist who has headed the bureau since 1987. Jayasinghe is a Sinhalese national, and is frequently accused of taking a nationalist position in his coverage of the conflict, an allegation which has no bearing on Ganguly, an Indian national.

⁶ The web site is cited as a another "military web site" in AP reports.

An analysis of Associated Press reports for direct URL links suggest Tamilnet is most frequently linked to AP reports, when compared with other LTTE and government news sources. The unofficial rebel site www.eelamweb.com is linked in 275 AP reports published between April 19, 2000 and March 4, 2004; while www.eelam.com is linked in 9 reports published between June 10, 2000 and April 9, 2002. 31 of the 275 eelamweb links are coupled with links to Tamilnet.com (11.27%)⁷. However it should be noted that the LTTE has officially denied any connection with either site, despite extensive publication of LTTE press releases, and have continued to attribute their publication to LTTE supporters (Personal communication with LTTE media Unit chief, Naresh Master, July 2006). In contrast the LTTE's official peace secretariat site at www.ltteps.org is linked in only 84 AP reports while its precursor at www.lttepeacesecretariat.com is linked once in conjunction with a Tamilnet.com link. The statistical analysis suggest an additional 334.12% preference towards unofficial rebel sites (eelamweb.com and eelam.com) when compared with the official LTTE organs (ltteps.org and lttepeacesecretariat.com). The data also show a 87.27% AP preference for [Tamilnet](http://Tamilnet.com), when compared with the LTTE's official websites⁸ - it should be noted the above statistical analysis of [Tamilnet](http://Tamilnet.com) preference is based on the number times the website is directly linked in AP reports and not the higher figure direct reference to [Tamilnet](http://Tamilnet.com) as a news source.

The Sri Lankan government's newly formed Media Centre for National Security at www.nationalsecurity.lk was linked in 69 AP reports published between July 2, 2006 to January 17, 2007; while the government peace secretariat at www.peaceinsrilanka.org was linked in a mere 19 reports, on par with the Sri Lanka army website www.army.lk; while the army's previous URL www.slarmy.org was linked 118. In contrast the government's official web portal www.priu.gov.lk was linked in only 14 reports published between October 29, 2001 and May 21, 2002. Therefore the statistics show the five government sites (www.nationalsecurity.lk; www.peaceinsrilanka.org; www.priu.gov.lk; www.army.lk; and www.slarmy.org received a total of 239 links when compared with the [Tamilnet](http://Tamilnet.com)'s 322, suggesting a 134.73% AP preference for [Tamilnet](http://Tamilnet.com) when compared with government sources.

The statistical analysis of the Associated Press' use of direct links are as follows:

Sym: [Tamilnet](http://Tamilnet.com)

ltteps.org	84	Dec 28, 2004- Nov 11, 2006	15
lttepeacesecretariat.com	01	Nov 18, 2004	01
www.eelamweb.com	275	Apr 19, 2000- Mar 04, 2004	31
www.eelam.com	09	Jun 10, 2000- Apr 9, 2002	01
www.tamilnet.com	322		
www.peaceinsrilanka.org	19	Aug 21, 2003-Dec 10, 2006	16
www.nationalsecurity.lk	69	Jul 2, 2006-Jan 17, 2007	32
www.priu.gov.lk	14	Oct 29, 2001- May 21, 2002	03
www.army.lk	19	Aug 7, 2003-Jun 29, 2006	06
www.slarmy.org	118	Jan 02, 2001- May 02, 2002	03

It should also be noted that [Tamilnet](http://Tamilnet.com) was linked to only 30 AP reports between January 2, 2001 and May 2, 2002 the same period covered by www.slarmy.org's 118 links. Thus suggesting the army website was linked 393.3% more than [Tamilnet](http://Tamilnet.com). However [Tamilnet](http://Tamilnet.com) was linked 89 times between July 2, 2006 and January 17, 2007, when the governments newly formed defence portal at www.nationalsecurity.lk was linked only 69 times – only a 77.83% preference compared with [Tamilnet](http://Tamilnet.com). It should also be noted that this

⁷ Only one eelam.com link is coupled with a [Tamilnet](http://Tamilnet.com) Link

⁸ $\sum(\text{unofficial/official})\% = (284/85)\%$; $\sum(\text{tamilnet/official})\% = (322/85)\%$; $\sum [\text{tamilnet}/(\text{official}+\text{unofficial})]\% = (322/369)\%$

comparison is significant in that it shows tamilnet's performance directly with the government media apparatus setup explicitly as a counter measure for Tamilnet.

An analysis of AFP reports suggest the French news-service, unlike its American counterpart, has shown a reluctance to cite URLs in its news-copy. Therefore neither the LTTE sites located at ltteps.org; lttepeacesecretariat.com; www.eelamweb.com; www.eelam.com, nor the government's www.nationalsecurity.lk and www.army.lk are cited in the AFP copy. Meanwhile the Army's previous cyber address at www.slarmy.org gets to mentions in AFP copy in reports headlined 'Sri Lanka army takes offensive to cyberspace' and 'Sri Lanka army battles technical glitches in cyberspace'. Similarly the launch of the government peace website make the AFP news on September 9 – one of two references to this URL, while the government's Policy Research and Information Unit at priu.gov.lk is cited in one report on May 11, 2001. In contrast to this poor preference for LTTE websites and a marginally better preference for government cites, tamilnet.com is cited as a URL in 304 AFP reports⁹. Therefore the statistical analysis of APF reports suggest a general reluctance to cite web addresses in AFP copy, with the exception of tamilnet, which is used as primary source in news reports.

The statistical analysis of the Agence France Presse's use of direct links are as follows:

www.tamilnet.com	304	May 16, 2001- Jan 19, 2007
www.peaceinsrilanka.org	2	Sep 09, 2002 - Sep 16, 2003
www. priu.gov.lk	1	May 11, 2001
www.slarmy.org	2	Jan 1, 2001-Jan2, 2001

In comparison to Agence France Presse, was less reluctant to cite URL's but once again websites received significant note on Reuters copy. While the LTTE's new peace secretariat's URL was cited on 15 reports the government peace secretariat at www.peaceinsrilanka.org failed to make the Reuters reports. The Sri Lanka army web site at army.lk and the government's Policy Research and Information Unit at priu.gov.lk were only successful in being cited on daily news briefs. However, once more Reuters poor preference of both government LTTE URL did not extend to tamilnet.com which received 101 citing of its URL in Reuters news reports published between March 24, 200 to December 15, 2006.

The statistical analysis of the Reuter's use of direct links are as follows:

ltteps.org	15	Feb 4, 2005 – Jan 19, 2007
lttepeacesecretariat.com	0	
www.eelamweb.com	2	Mar 30, 1998 – May 05, 1998
www.eelam.com	0	
www.tamilnet.com	101	Mar 24, 2000 – Dec 15, 2006
www.peaceinsrilanka.org	0	
www.nationalsecurity.lk	1	Jan 19, 2007
www. priu.gov.lk	15	Sep 04, 2006 – May 15, 2000
www. army.lk	15	Sep 04, 2006 – May 15, 2000
www.slarmy.org	2	Sep 26, 2001 – Nov 08, 2001

⁹ This figure indicates the actual reference to the tamilnet.com URL as opposed to Tamilnet in 503 reports

In conclusion, considering Tamilnet has produced an estimated 21,000 reports since 1997, it can be argued the wireservice citation of Tamilnet in 2415 to be statistically significant, and represent a 11.5% uptake of Tamilnet reports by key wire services. Similarly it can be argued that the 634 references to Tamilnet in AP wirecopy represent a 3.02% penetration of Tamilnet copy in AP reports.

Statistical analysis of wire service uptake of Tamilnet reports are as follows:

Associated Press newswire	634	3.02%
Agence France Presse	503	2.39%
Reuters News	258	1.23%
Xinhua News Agency	147	0.70%
The Press Trust of India	139	0.66%

While the uptake of Tamilnet reports by the wire services is not monumental it can be argued that it is statistically significant, considering the percentage use of Tamilnet reports as a percentage of all wire service reports on the conflict, where 5.5% of all wire service reports on the conflict and 11.45% of Associated Press reports are generated at least in part through Tamilnet coverage. It can also be argued the uptake of Tamilnet reports ranging from 3.02% - 0.66% represent a significant penetration of a pro-economist and more significantly a pro-LTTE view point which would have otherwise failed to reach the international media theatre.

Tamilnet in the Indian press:

A study of Tamilnet's penetration of mainstream press seems hardly valid without an analysis of its citations in the mainstream Indian Press – particularly those published in English thus transcending the language barrier in the multi-lingual Indian state.

In this context it should be noted that there are four major publishing groups in India, each of which controls national and regional English-language and vernacular publications – the Times of India Group (Bennett, Coleman & Co. Ltd), the Indian Express Group, the Hindustan Times Group, and the Anandabazar Patrika Group. Times of India Group publish its flagship newspaper, the Times of India a news paper with the circulation 2.2 - 3 million copies daily (Times Syndication Service, 2006; and Forbes, 2006), and an additional readership of 8.4 individuals – the largest circulation for any English newspaper in the world (Forbes, 2006). Based on promotional information provided on the newspapers internet homepage the Times of India is also the most widely read Indian newspaper in the international market. The newspaper originally launched under '*The Bombay Times and Journal of Commerce*' on November 3, 1838, was later named the Times of Indian in 1861, now remain in the hands of the north Indian billionaire Indu Jain.¹⁰

The Indian Express first published by the Tamil Nadu press owned by Ayyurvedic doctor and congressman, Varadarajulu Naidu in 1932 is rooted in south India and more importantly its birth place in Madras. While the paper is now owned by the successors of Bihari born freedom fighter and press baron Ramnath Goenka, a close associate of the Hindu grass-roots organisation Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh¹¹, and its mainstream political manifestation the Bharathiya Janatha Party. The Indian Express's South Indian roots, coupled with its political allegiance to the BJP, the main opposition of the Indian National Congress popularly known as Congress (I), led by the North Indian born Gandhi family, is viewed by many

¹⁰ Indu Jain matriarch of the privately-owned Bennett, Coleman & Co, India's biggest media house was born on September 8, 1936 at Ramjanmbhoomi (Faizabad) in Uttar Pradesh, India. She married Shri Ashok Kumar Jain of famous Sahu Jain family of Calcutta (India). The Bennett, Coleman & Co, popularly known as the Times of Indian Group is now run by her two sons Samir and Vineet (Forbes, 2006).

¹¹ RSS was implicated in Mahatma Gandhi's assassination and was banned for some time until it was lifted by the Supreme Court.

Sinhalese as a Tamil nationalist publication. The BJP in turn has established some political links and electoral alliances with the Dravidra Munnetra Kazhgam lead by the pro-LTTE Maruthur Gopala Ramachandran and Muthuvel Karunanidhi, further strengthening Sinhala paranoia. The news paper publishes more than two million copies in seventeen cities across India (Indian Classifieds.com., 2007).

The Hindustan Times Group's flagship English newspaper, the 'Hindustan Times' claims a circulation of 920,000 copies (Monster India, 2007). The Telegraph which boasts the largest circulation for an English daily in East India, is published by the Calcutta based Anandabazar Patrika Group¹² (The Telegraph, 2007).

In addition it should be noted the Madras based 'The Hindu' published by Kasturi & Sons Ltd. ranks the second largest English newspaper with a readership of more than four million. A report on newspaper readership in India published by the Hindu (August 30, 2006) argues "The only English daily with a readership of over five million is *The Times of India* (7.4 million). Its readership has declined from last year as has its position in the rankings from number 9 to number 11 out of 18. *The Hindu* has emerged second among English dailies with 4.05 million readers followed by *Hindustan Times*, which held second place last year. Despite its new edition in Mumbai with a readership of 360,000, *Hindustan Times* has slipped to number three (3.85 million).

The prominence of the five newspaper; '*Times of India*', '*The Hindu*', '*The Hindustan Times*', '*The Indian Express*', and '*The Telegraph*' validate their inclusion in a study of Tamilnet penetration of the Indian English mainstream newspaper market.

An analysis of newspaper reports published in the '*Times of India*', '*The Hindu*', and '*The Hindustan Times*', '*The Indian Express*', suggests Tamilnet has been cited as a source in 291 reports. It should be noted the Factiva newspaper archive provide full coverage of Times of Indian reports form May 9, 1986; the Hindu from May 1, 1998; Hindustan Timers from October 15, 1997 and the Indian Express from May 2, 2002¹³.

The statistical analysis of tamilnet citation in the four papers are as follows:

The Times of India	17	31 January 2000 - 03 August 2002
The Hindu	201	31 January 1999 - 24 January 2007
Hindustan Times	71	29 April 1999 - 10 November 2006
Indian Express	02	4 April 2004 - 15 December 2006

A statistical analysis of conflict reports in the four paper, selected on Factiva for the keywords 'LTTE' or 'Tamil Tiger':

The Times of India	1537	8 April 1997- 31 December 2006
The Hindu	4149	2 May 1998 - 24 January 2007
Hindustan Times	2108	16 October 1997- 21 January 2007
Indian Express	234	14 May 2002 – 8 January 2007

Tamilnet citations as a percentage of conflict reports in the Indian press:

The Times of India	1.11%
The Hindu	4.85%

¹² The company is named after its flagship news paper the Bengali language Ananda Bazar Patrika

¹³ The following descriptions of the four news papers are provided by the factiva database: Times of India "Leading English-language daily newspaper of India, covering business, economic, political and general news"; Hindu "Independent general daily newspaper focusing on news from the Southern states of India"; Hindustan Times "Daily newspaper based in New Delhi, providing general, economic and business news"; Indian Express "Leading national daily newspaper from New Delhi offering comprehensive local and national coverage of developments relating to Indian society and business."

Hindustan Times	3.37%
Indian Express	0.85%

When compared with the significant number of wire service report that link or source tamilnet, it can be argued mainstream Indian newspapers have been less enthusiastic in sourcing the web-based pro-tiger news service. However once more it should be argued the 2.55% average of tamilnet citation in the mainstream Indian press to be significant, when compared with other cyber news sources hosted by both the government and the LTTE.

The statistical analysis of mainstream newspaper citation of ltteps.org; lttepeacesecretariat.com; www.eelamweb.com; and www.eelam.com

The Times of India	1	31 January 2000- 4 October 2000	eelamweb.com and eelam .com
The Hindu	1	6 January 2002	eelam.com
Hindustan Times	1	14 August 2006	ltteps.org
Indian Express	0		

The statistical analysis of mainstream newspaper citation of www.peaceinsrilanka.org; www.nationalsecurity.lk; www.priu.gov.lk; www.army.lk; and www.slarmy.org.

The Times of India	1	4 October 2000	www.piru.gov.lk
The Hindu	1	2 January 2001	www.slarmy.org
Hindustan Times	0		
Indian Express	0		

Therefore it can be argued that is 5820% more likely for Tamilnet to be cited as a news source in the four major English language Indian newspapers, when compared with any other LTTE, pro-LTTE or government website. The monumental statistic is therefore a testament to Tamilnet's success as a cyber-news source in the conflict theatre.

A 2006 National Readership Study suggest internet use in India has risen over the past few years with 12.6 million Indian's accessing the web. Therefore it can be argued that the increased citation of web based reports on the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict, manifested in the form of Tamilnet citations are more likely to direct newspaper readers to the original web source, which is most likely to be Tamilnet.

Coverage and citation of Tamilnet in the Australian press:

The Factiva news media archive's 'Australian publication' section suggest tamilnet has been cited by name in 46 reports published by the Australian press. A breakdown of the entries are as follows:

The Age	3	24 April 2000 - 8 November 2003.
Daily Telegraph	2	5 August 2000 - 16 April 2005
Adelaide Advertiser	3	4 January 2002 - 8 August 2006
Courier-Mail	4	4 May 2002 - 27 April 2006
Sunday Mail	1	13 August 2006
Herald-Sun	2	6 November 2003 - 18 October 2006
The Australian	6	8 November 2003 - 20 October 2006
SBS World News (Headline Stories)	13	28 November 2005 -18 October 2006
Hobart Mercury	2	15 August 2006 - 18 October 2006
Geelong Advertiser	4	21 June 2006 - 18 October 2006
MX (Australia)	3	12 May 2004 - 6 February 2006

PNG Post Courier	1	7 January 2005
Asian Defence Journal	1	1 February 2005
Northern Territory News and Sunday Territorian,	1	5 March 2006

A search on the same segment of the data base for the key words ‘Tamil Tiger’ or ‘LTTE’ reveal 1965 reports. A break down of the statistics are as follows;

The Age	3	126	2.38%
Daily Telegraph	2	91	2.19%
Adelaide Advertiser	3	124	2.42%
Courier-Mail	4	151	2.65%
Sunday Mail	1	4	25%
Herald-Sun	2	75	2.67%
The Australian	4	317	1.26%
SBS World News (Headline Stories)	13	116	11.21%
Hobart Mercury	2	53	3.77%
Geelong Advertiser	4	45	8.89%

With the exception of 11.21% registered by SBS World News and 25% registered by Sunday Mail, the average citation rate of Tamilnet in LTTE related reports in the Australian media average at 3.28%. While the figure itself could be considered statistically inconclusive, it could be argued a 3.28% citation rate denotes great success for a web based, Sri Lankan news service, considering websites hosted by either the government, the LTTE or the alleged LTTE front organisations – with the exception of one citation of slarmy.org in the Australian, which announced its launching – fail to enter mainstream news reports published in Australia.

Tamilnet coverage in the North American press:

A factive data base search of the North American press suggest 252 reports citing Tamilnet, in contrast LTTE and government websites at ltteps.org; lttepeacesecretariat.com; elamweb.com; eelam.com; peaceinsrilanka.org; nationalsecurity.lk; priu.gov; army.lk and slarmy.org make a mere 23 citations – 9.13% of the Tamilnet citations. It should also be noted that the factiva data base contained 5425 North American news reports containing the ‘tamil tiger’ or ‘LTTE’, thus suggesting 4.65% of all reports on the Northern conflict make mention of the Tamilnet as a news source.

America’s largest newspapers, the Washington Post and the New York Times – widely considered the nations newspaper of record, recorded 428 reports on the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict, which included 210 reports in the New York Times and 218 reports in the Washington Post, containing the key words ‘tamil tiger’ or ‘LTTE’.

The New York Times’ web site citations;

Tamilnet	20	12 April 2001 - 25 December 2006
Government and LTTE	2	19 January 2001- 12 April 2001

The references include priu.gov; and eelam.com; however the citation of eelam.com also contained a citation for Tamilnet¹⁴

¹⁴ Both reports are written by Indian based Celia W Dugger, the journalist who first cited Tamilnet in the New York Times on 12 April 2001 (Separatist battles ebb in Sri Lanka and hope for peace talks in the Air, April 12, 2001; 620 words). However it should be

The Washington Post's web site citations;

Tamilnet	7	30 April 2005 - 18 December 2006
Government and LTTE eelam.com is cited in a report on 'the computer is a revolutionary tool'.	1	9 January 1997

Once again while the number of references are not statistically unprecedented, it can be argued that Tamil net was cited 1000% more than any other government or LTTE website, in the New York Times; and 700% more in the Washington Post. It should also be noted that, while it was only 0.95% likely that a government or LTTE website, with the exception of Tamilnet, would be cited in New York Times; the statistical analysis shows a 9.52% probability of Tamilnet being cited in a New York Times report on the Northern conflict. Similarly while there was 3.21% probability of Tamilnet being cited in the Washington Post, there was only a 0.46% likelihood of any other key website of either the LTTE or the Government being cited in the Washington Post.

While the percentages themselves are not overtly significant from a statistical point of view it can be argued that Tamilnet undisputedly has the greatest probability of reaching the mainstream press through the New York Times and Washington post's acuminated readership of an estimated two million readers daily (Shin, May 31, 2005).

An analysis of the Canadian press suggest 543 reports containing the key words LTTE or Tamil Tiger* in the Globe and Mail and 580 reports matching the key words in the National Post. However when compared to the American press, the Canadian national press has show less preference to Tamilnet, with both the Globe and Mail and the National Post citing Tamilnet in four report each. The break down is as follows;

Citation of Tamilnet;

National Post	4	6 April 2002 - 17 October 2006
Globe and Mail	4	26 January 2002 - 12 April 2004

Citation of: ltteps.org or lttepeacesecretariat.com or elamweb.com or eelam.com or peaceinsrilanka.org or nationalsecurity.lk or priu.gov.lk .or army.lk or slarmy.org;

National Post	1	3 March 2001	priu.gov.lk
Globe and Mail	1	25 July 2001	eelam.com

The statistical analysis therefore suggest only a 25% probability of any other website being cited in the Candain National press when compared with Tamilnet. However it should be noted that even the citation of Tamilnet to be significantly poor in Canada, amounting to 0.73% in the Globe and Mail and 0.69% in the National Post.

While the statistically the percentages are of little significance, it should be noted that even in this poor example of web citation, the Tamilnet shows a much greater probability of being cited when compared with any other website produced by either the government or the LTTE lobby – thus suggesting a universality in the Tamilnet's status as the preferred news source.

noted that Dugger had earlier cited the government's priu.gov cite in a situation report of the Northern battle front (Sri Lanka restarts drive on rebels at crucial pass, 19 January 2001; 516)

Coverage of Tamilnet in the British Press:

A factiva search of the British press show 4821 reports containing the key words LTTE or tamil tiger,* and the same segment of the data base contained 96 citation of Tamilnet. Thus suggesting 1.99% of all reports on the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict had been directly sourced through Tamilnet. In contrast the key government and LTTE websites including the ltteps.org or lttepeacesecretariat.com or elamweb.com or eelam.com or peaceinsrilanka.org or nationalsecurity.lk or priu.gov.lk or army.lk or slarmy.org were cited in only 17 reports.

However it should be noted that British papers, arguably show less preference in citing web addresses in their news copy. A statistical breakdown of newspaper reports for conflict content and web citation are as follows;

Reports citing key words 'LTTE or Tamil Tiger*'

The Times (London)	526	27 July 1983 - 20 December 2006
The Guardian	559	24 March 1990 - 25 January 2007
The Observer	87	3 March 1991 - 22 October 2006
The Sun	43	1 February 1996 - 9 November 2006
The Scotsman	67	7 August 1997 - 4 May 2005
Irish Independent	16	27 June 2003 - 23 December 2006

Reports citing Tamilnet

The Times (London)	4	5 November 2003 - 19 October 2006
The Guardian	19	26 June 1997 - 15 December 2006
The Observer	0	
The Sun	0	
The Scotsman	2	4 December 2001-22 March 2003
Irish Independent	0	

Reports citing; ltteps.org or lttepeacesecretariat.com or elamweb.com or eelam.com or peaceinsrilanka.org or nationalsecurity.lk or priu.gov.or army.lk or slarmy.org

The Times (London)	3	29 April 2000 - 12 September 2000 priu.gov.lk (1) and eelam.com (2)
The Guardian	3	15 July 2000 - 5 November 2003 priu.gov.lk (2) and eelam.com (1)
The Observer	0	
The Sun	0	
The Scotsman	0	
Irish Independent	0	

The statistics however suggest a 0.76% probability of Tamilnet being cited in Sri Lankan conflict report published in the London Times, and a 3.40 % in the Guardian. In contrast the probability of any other web based news sources of either the government or the Eelamist lobby remain poorer with ltteps.org or lttepeacesecretariat.com or elamweb.com or eelam.com or peaceinsrilanka.org or nationalsecurity.lk or priu.gov.or army.lk or slarmy.org being cited in only 0.57% of the London Times reports and 0.54% in the Guardian Reports.

Once again, even in taking into account the poor probability of web page citation in British press copy, the tamilnet ranks better than even when compared with the accumulated success of all other government and eelamist web sites.

While British newspapers have been slow to cite web references when reporting the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict, the British Broadcasting Corporations BBC Monitoring has extensively cited Tamilnet as news source. Based on the factiva database it can be argued that BBC Monitoring and its subsidiary BBC monitoring South Asia have published a staggering 4035 reports containing the key words LTTE or Tamil Tiger*, with 1516 of them citing Tamilnet. A statistical analysis conducted on the data base on January 30, 2007 is as follows;

LTTE or Tamil Tiger*	4035	5 September 1985 - 30 January 2007
Tamilnet	1516	10 February 1996 - 30 January 2007

The analysis suggests 37.57% citation of Tamilnet in conflict reports, and more tellingly other key news sites produced by the government and the LTTE including ltteps.org or lttepeacesecretariat.com or elamweb.com or eelam.com or peaceinsrilanka.org or nationalsecurity.lk or priu.gov.lk or army.lk or slarmy.org, fail to make even a single entry in the BBC reports.

Based on the overall statistics of Tamilnet citation in the wire services; Australian, American and British Press; and reports published by BBC monitoring, it can be argued that tamilnet is by far the most preferred web-based news source in reporting the Sri Lankan conflict.

Sri Lankan based wire-services:

Associated Press newswire	11.45%
Agence France Presse	3.77%
Reuters News	2.47%
Xinhua News Agency	3.87%
The Press Trust of India	4.59%

Indian press:

The Times of India	1.11%
The Hindu	4.85%
Hindustan Times	3.37%
Indian Express	0.85%

Australian media:

The Age	2.38%
Daily Telegraph	2.19%
Adelaide Advertiser	2.42%
Courier-Mail	2.65%
Sunday Mail	2.5%
Herald-Sun	2.67%
The Australian	1.26%
SBS World News (Headline Stories)	11.21%
Hobart Mercury	3.77%
Geelong Advertiser	8.89%

American press:

New York Times	9.52%
Washington Post	3.21%

British press

London Times	0.76%
The Guardian	3.40%
BBC monitoring Service	37.57%

The statistics therefore suggest a 5.23% probability of Tamilnet being cited in wire service reports on the Sri Lankan conflict, and a 6.84% probability of citation in the English language international media.

Cyber links – internet exposure by proxy

A web analysis of the American based Cable News Network (CNN); American Broadcasting Company (ABC); the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) suggest all four television giants have made significant references to Tamilnet. In this context it should be noted a web based search on the CNN site revealed 38 reports citing Tamilnet on CNN-online, published between May 22, 2000 - October 9, 2006. Similarly ABC America has published 58 reports citing tamilnet on their website between January 6, 2006 – January 19, 2007. A search on ABC Australia's news web site showed only 5 reports containing the key word tamilnet published between April 26, 2003 and April 26, 2006, while BBC recorded 8.

While a key word search on BBC online registered only eight entries for the keyword tamilnet, it should be noted the search sowed only news reports which carry the word in its text, and not reports that contain tamilnet as an external link off the BBC website. In this context its should be noted the BBC has consistently carried an external link to Tamilnet from most of its news reports on the Sri Lankan conflict, a practice coupled with the providing of 'balanced coverage' and news voice to the Eelamist lobby, for which the British news service has come under fire form the Sinhala lobby .

In what can hardly be termed an eloquent out burst the Sinhala lobby transmitted an email condemning the BBC alleging it of sympathising with the LTTE, in August-September 2006. The text of the email containing photographs of an anti-BBC demonstration in London is as follows:

“The Tamil Tigers have now been banned by the whole world. The BBC news company employs Tamil Tiger supporters, and Tamil Tiger employees in turn change the stories around telling the Sri Lankan government kills innocent people. Sri Lankan Army getting paid for doing their job, but the Tamil Tigers doesn't get paid at all. Some Tamil Tiger groups kill innocent people in Northern Sri Lanka and blame the Sri Lankan army for those killings. BBC news shows the Sri Lankan government as the bad guys, and when they publish their stories, other news companies take that information and release something similar to that story in their own countries. BBC may be an established channel to get accurate information from, but when it comes to the war is Sri Lanka, that's one place where the truth may not be told. To get the right facts, go to CNN, ABC,”

The email was also reproduced in a number of pro-Sinhala discussion forums including '*Ravana brothers*'¹⁵ a purported brotherhood of the mythical king Ravana, who according to Valmiki's Sanskrit epic the Ramayana and Sinhala myth rule over the Isles of Lanka and faced the Indian king Rama in battle; and '*Sihala katha*'¹⁶ – the Sinhala woman.

It can be argued the citation of tamilnet in web based news copy, and more importantly BBC style linking would arguably increase tamilnet's exposure through a wider news audience.

Accessing Tamilnet through web searches: key words “Sri Lanka” and “Tamil”

¹⁵ <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ravanabrothers/messages/1301?viscount=100>

¹⁶ <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/sinhalakatha/messages/1?viscount=100>

Each time a website is accessed, the access information is logged on the Common Gateway Interface (CGI) which provides an interface between the web server computer and the internet. The information stored in the 'cgi/bin' is password protected and can only be accessed by the website owner or by an illegal computer hacker (National centre for Supercomputing Applications, 1998). While some webmasters prefer to keep their 'hit rates' a secret, other incorporate counter programs on their pages show the total number of times the page has been accessed. Counters, however, are rare in pro-Eelam web sites.

The prominent Canadian-based pro-Eelam website *tamilcandian.com* does not incorporate a counter on its homepage, but provides a detailed 'hit' record for itself and its news-based companion *News.tamilcandian.com* through a separate link. According to this record, during four weeks in December 2000, the two sites were accessed 2.4 million times, with 12.8 Gigabytes of information downloaded – although these figures cannot be verified independently.

By comparison, in the two years between 2000 and 2002, the Sri Lankan army media page (*army.lk*) was accessed only 230,033 times. On-line Sri Lankan newspapers and other official Sri Lankan sites such as the Department of Information do not have counters on their sites.

But putting *tamilcanadian.com's* statistics in perspective further, the estimated number of Sri Lankan residents who had internet connections at the time of the 2.4 million-a-month figures was estimated at just 50,000 - an extremely small percentage of the population but a massive increase on the 14,000 people two years earlier (news.com, 1998).

Tamilnet in this context maintains a strict secrecy on its CGI figures, for purported security concerns, thus preventing any meaningful comparison of Tamilnet readership trends. However it should also be noted that despite Tamilnet's refusal to release accurate web access data, the news sites comparative popularity among web surfers can be estimated through an analysis of its ranking on a number of browsers.

Most search engines use a program called a 'spider' which 'crawls' through the web cataloguing and ranking web sites. While the exact algorithm of each search engine spider is kept secret, most use a location-frequency algorithm to rank sites. In this manner sites are graded according to the location and frequency of a specific key word used. Therefore in most cases the sites that are most relevant to a particular key word are listed at the top of a search for that word.

As such the relative positioning of a web site on a search engine can be used as a measure of that page's success, since the listing shows that the pages at the top are considered more relevant by the search engine algorithms and have a higher chance of being read by any one who performs a search for that particular key word.

A Nielsen-netrating report for 2006 suggest the web browser market remains in the hands of three main search engines, Google, Yahoo and MSN accounting to 50.8%,23.6% and 8.4% respectively¹⁷ (Nielsen-NetRatings, January 23, 2007). It should also be noted that the position of the three leading search engines have remained unchanged in the past few years (Nielsen-NetRatings, January 2002) enabling a comparison of key Eelamist and government web rankings between 2002 and 2006 – the commencement of the peace talks and the commencement of Eelam IV.

A key word analysis conducted on google, yahoo and msn for the words 'Sri Lanka', in 2002, suggested pro-Eelam sites ranked extremely poorly, with Sri Lankan newspapers, the official Department of Information homepage and the Sri Lankan Army page (*army.lk*) ranking considerably higher - primarily because the words 'Sri Lanka' are inseparable from those web page's theme and subject matter. The search results included 2,840,000 *google* hits and 2,670,000 *yahoo* hits for the key word 'Sri Lanka'.

¹⁷ The search engine AOL is ranked fourth with 6.1% rating, while the remaining 11.1% is distributed among a number of search engines including *My Way Search* (2.4%), *Ask.com* (2.1%), *EarthLink* (0.5%), *Dogpile.com* (0.5%) and *Comcast* (0.5%).

The top position in both searches was taken by *Sri Lanka Web Server* which provides links to on-line versions of five mainstream national newspapers – *The Sunday Leader*, *The Island*, *Divaina* and the government-owned *Sunday Observer* and *Daily News*. The second listing was the Sri Lankan government site maintained by the Presidential Secretariat’s Policy Research and Information Unit - priu.gov.lk. While the Tiger’s official site failed to enter the top 100 in both *google* and *yahoo*, it ranked 25th in *msn.com*, but again the government-owned *Daily News* came well ahead in fifth.

However the results changed dramatically when the key words were changed to ‘Tamil Tigers’, with *eelam.com* and *eelamweb.com* securing the top two positions – again because of the very nature of their sites. One anti-Tiger site, the Australian-based Society for Peace, Unity & Human Rights in Sri Lanka (SPUR) ranked well coming fifth. A key word search of ‘Tamil Tiger’ also proved overwhelmingly favoured pro-Eelam sites, but a page titled ‘Eliminate Tamil Terrorism from Sri Lanka and the Rest of the World’ - a mirror site of the anti-LTTE *sinhaya.com* – managed to make it to the top of 49,200 entries in *yahoo* and 45,900 in *google*.

Despite Sri Lankan Tamils constituting less than 10% of the world Tamil population, the word ‘Tamil’ also strongly favoured the Eelamists. *Tamilnet* came second and *eelam.com* third, closely followed by *tamilguardian.com* in sixth out of 1,560,00 *google* search results and 1,690,000 *yahoo* results. The results were similar but less favourable for pro-Eelam sites on *msn.com*.

In a more specific word search, the key word ‘Eelam’, perhaps unsurprisingly delivered overwhelming success for LTTE and pro-Eelam propaganda sites - both ranking well at the top of 88,900 search results on *google* and 87,500 on *yahoo*. In both cases pro-Eelam news sites such as *tamilnet.com* and *tamilguardian.com* ranked significantly lower than propaganda sites such as *eelam.com* the tigers official site and *eelamweb.com*. Mainstream and government media failed to appear in the top 50 sites in both searches. Interestingly in a search using the words ‘Sri Lanka Army’ – *tamilnet.com* ranked third in the results. A repeat of the study carried out in 2007, suggested *tamilnet* had slipped in its ranking for the key words ‘Sri Lanka Army’, coming 12 in a 189,000 page search on *yahoo* and 19 in a 1,850,000 page search in *google*

In this context it should be noted the 2002 search and its 2007 replication provide valuable insight in to *tamilnet* and its position in the internet. The results of the *google* and *yahoo* web searches carried out in 2002 are as follows;

key word ‘Sri Lanka’ – figures indicate position of web pages with in the search.

google search of 2,840,000 pages in 2002 for key word ‘Sri Lanka’;

Sri Lanka webserver - <http://www.lanka.net> (1)

Research and Information Unit (PRIU) of the Presidential Secretariat - <http://www.priu.gov.lk> (2)

Sunday Times newspaper (11)

Government Department of Information (13)

Sri Lankan army - slarmy.org (38)

Tamilnet – (67)

Sinhalaya, an ultranationalist website (77)

yahoo search of 2,670,000 pages in 2002 for key word ‘Sri Lanka’;

Sri Lanka webserver - <http://www.lanka.net> (1)

Research and Information Unit (PRIU) of the Presidential Secretariat - <http://www.priu.gov.lk> (2)

Sunday Times newspaper (8)

Government Department of Information (13)

Sri Lankan army - slarmy.org (31)
Tamilnet – (58)
Sinhalaaya, an ultranationalist website (69)

In addition an MSN search registered;

Daily News (5)
Sri Lankan Embassy in the US (6)
Eelam.com (25)

The search results for the key word Sri Lankan on the internet's most frequently used search engines suggest Eelamist websites in general and more particularly tamilnet have ranked poorly rating 67 in the google search and 58 in the yahoo search. In contrast government media and information sites have ranked considerably higher in both searches. The Sri Lanka webserver which rated as the most relevant site in both searches provide links to the 'Independent' English weekly the Sunday Leader, the state own English news papers the Daily News and Sunday Observer; and the nationalist English daily The Island and its Sinhala counterpart the Divaina. It should also be noted that the government information department which carry military situation reports ranked 13 in both lists, significantly better than tamilnet. The same argument was true for the Sri Lankan army website which ranked 38 in google and 31 in yahoo.

In contrast a repeat of the study conducted in January 2007 suggested government and pro-government websites had gained an even stronger foothold on the internet, when compared with the eelamist websites. The results of the google and yahoo web searches carried out in 2007 are as follows;

key word 'Sri Lanka' – figures indicate position of web pages with in the search.

google search of 117,000,000 pages in 2007 for key word 'Sri Lanka';

the first four positions were taken by en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sri_Lanka (wikipedia entry on Sri Lanka; www.srilankatourism.org/ (the official website of the Sri Lanka Tourist Board; www.lonelyplanet.com/worldguide/destinations/asia/sri-lanka (lonely planet entry on Sri Lanka; and www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ce.html (CIA fact book entry on Sri Lanka).

Sri Lanka webserver - <http://www.lanka.net> (4)

Research and Information Unit (PRIU) of the Presidential Secretariat -
<http://www.priu.gov.lk> (6)

WWW Virtual Library (www.lankalibrary.com/); InfoLanka: Gateway to Sri Lanka (www.infolanka.com/); and Lanka Page (www.lankapage.com/), pro-government websites with significant news and news-links ranked 8-10 respectively.

Government of Sri Lanka Official Web Portal - www.gov.lk/ (13)
LankaWeb - Latest Sri Lanka news -www.lankaweb.com (16)

Sri Lankan Newspapers : Newspapers from Sri Lanka : Sri Lankan News -
www.onlinenewspapers.com/srilanka.htm (33)¹⁸

Sri Lanka news updated 24 hours day: The Lanka Academic - theacademic.org/ (36)
Sri Lanka Army - www.army.lk/ (39)

News Portal of Sri Lanka - Home Department of Government information -
www.news.lk/ (40)
Peace in Sri Lanka -www.peaceinsrilanka.org/ (61)
U.S. Embassy Sri Lanka - srilanka.usembassy.gov/ (68)

¹⁸ the page contains an extensive collection of links to Sri Lankan news sources including tamilnet

News from Sri Lanka on LTTE Tamil Tiger Terrorists -www.spur.asn.au/latest1.htm (69)
Ministry of Foreign Affairs - Sri Lanka - www.slmfa.gov.lk/ (99)
Online edition of Daily News, Lakehouse newspapers -www.dailynews.lk/ (101)
SLBC, Sri Lanka - www.slbc.lk/ (111)
Sri Lanka Police Service - www.police.lk/ (116)
President of Sri Lanka - www.presidentssl.org/ (122)
Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission - www.slmm.lk/ (123)
Rupavahini, State television - www.rupavahini.lk/ (130)
Sri Lanka Newspapers - www.lankanewspapers.com/ (135)
The Parliament of Sri Lanka -www.parliament.lk/ (150)
Daily Mirror -www.dailymirror.lk/ (154)
The Sunday Times Sri Lanka - www.sundaytimes.lk/ (175)

It should be noted that Tamilnet failed to rank in the first 200 search results in the google search. Suggesting its reliance pro-tamil and more importantly pro-eelamist stance has excluded it from searches for the key word 'Sri Lanka' – arguably a more popular search word among web surfers when compared to other key words which include 'Tamil' and 'Tamil Tiger*'. However the search result in yahoo significantly varied from google, with Tamilnet ranking 5 in key word search for 'Sri Lanka'.

yahoo search of 69,500,000 pages in 2002 for key word 'Sri Lanka';

Government of Sri Lanka - www.priu.gov.lk (1)
Sri Lanka, Wikipedia - en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sri_Lanka (2)
Sri Lanka's Daily News - www.dailynews.lk (3)
Sri Lanka - Yahoo! News Full Coverage - news.yahoo.com/fc/world/sri_lanka (4)
TamilNet - www.tamilnet.com (5)
Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation - www.slbc.lk (6)
Sri Lanka - BBC Country Profile - news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/country_profiles/1168427.stm (7)
Sri Lanka - Lonely Planet - www.lonelyplanet.com/worldguide/destinations/asia/sri-lanka (8)
Sri Lanka Tourist Board - www.srilankatourism.org (9)
Sri Lanka Web Server - www.lanka.net (10)

Ceylon Sri Lanka Information - www.lankapage.com (12)
Sri Lanka - www.slembassyusa.org (20)
Lanka Academic, The - www.theacademic.org (31)
Peace in Sri Lanka - www.peaceinsrilanka.com (44)
The Island - Online Edition - www.island.lk (68)
Lankanewspapers.com - www.lankanewspapers.com (91)
Most Reliable News in Sri Lanka - lankatruth.com - www.lankatruth.com (93)

The contrasting positioning of Tamilnet in the two most frequently used search engines require more detailed analysis of internet search patterns, that could yield a clue to the possibility of a generic web search presenting Tamilnet as a viable source of information.

In this context a clearer impression of search patterns among web surfers can be obtained through a WordTacker keyword search – a function provided in WebPosition 4, Search Engine Optimization (SEO) software designed to analyse the frequency of search words in major internet search engines. The database analyses key word searches conducted in the past 90 days, as they are recorded in a database of keyword searches carried out in selected search engines. Then based on the actual recorded number of searches for a given word or phrase in the WebPosition data base, and the percentage use of the search engines viewed in the database search, WebPosition mathematically predicts an overall popularity of a given word or phrase across all search engines available to web surfers. Based on the data collected through WebPosition's WordTacker function it can be argued 'Sri Lanka' has been used as a key word in 919 searches between November 8, 2006 and February 6, 2007. The results suggest predicted 1621 searches each day for a given

period of 24 hours in early February 2007. In contrast the key word 'Tamil' recorded a projected daily search frequency of 713, thus suggesting it was 226.09% more likely a web surfer would search for 'Sri Lanka' than they would for 'Tamil'.

Further more it can be argued, based on the projected figure of 1621 searches for the key word 'Sri Lanka'; coupled with the google's market share of 50.8%, that 823.47 searches carried out on any given day for the key words 'Sri Lankan' would positively fail to yield Tamilnet as a search result in the top 100 pages listed. Similarly yahoo's 23.6% market share would suggest 382.56 searches carried out each day would yield tamilnet as viable search result in the fifth position. Therefore an indisputable chance of Tamilnet presenting itself in the first page results in 23.6% of the searches for the key word 'Sri Lankan' on any given day.

However it can be argued that Tamilnet had an even higher probability of being cited in web search for the key word 'Tamil' – in this context its should be noted that the Sri Lankan Tamil population constitute only a very small percentage of the global tamil population, which includes an estimated 62,500,000 in the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Therefore Tamilnet's positioning in the second position in both the google and yahoo searches conducted in 2002 and 2007, is in its self a significant achievement.

A search conducted in 2002 revealed tamilnet had ranked second in both google and yahoo searches. The results are as follows;

key word 'Tamil' – figures indicate position of web pages with in the search.

google search of 1,560,000 pages; yahoo search of 1,690,000 pages in 2002, for key word 'Tamil'; showed the same ranking;

Tamilnet (2)
Eelam.com (3)
Tamil Guardian (6)

While the search field had significantly increased by 2007 with google registering 33,700,000 pages and yahoo 29,400,000, Tamilnet was successful in maintaining its key position with in both searches. The search results for the two search engines are as follows;

google search of 33,700,000 pages in 2007, for key word 'Tamil';

The first position of the search was taken by Wikipedia's Tamil language page
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil_language

Tamilnet – www.tamilnet.com (2)
Tamil Nation and Beyond - www.tamilnation.org/ (8)
Tamil Eelam Homepage – www.eelam.com (11)
Tamil Canadian - www.tamilcanadian.com (30)
Canadian Tamil Broadcasting Corporation - www.ctbc.com (32)
Tamil Guardian - www.tamilguardian.com (50)
Tamil Tigers net - www.tamiltigers.net (56)
Sangam.org - www.sangam.org/ (63)
Eelamweb - www.eelamweb.com (78)
SPUR -
www.spur.asn.au/chronology_of_suicide_bomb_attacks_by_Tamil_Tigers_in_sri_Lanka.htm (89)
Tamils Rehabilitation Organisation - www.troonline.org (94)
Eelam.com - www.eelam.com/tamil_eelam.html (98)

yahoo search of 29,400,000 pages in 2007, for key word 'Tamil';

As with google Wikipedia's Tamil language page ranked first in the yahoo search.

Tamilnet – www.tamilnet.com (2)
Tamil Nation - www.tamilnation.org; Tamil History (6); Nation and Beyond (11)
Tamil Eelam - www.eelam.com, information of the 'freedom struggle' (17);
www.eelam.com/tamil_eelam, arguments for independence from Sri Lanka (83)
Tamil Canadian - www.tamilcanadian.com (24)
Tamil Eelam News - www.tamileelamnews.com (69)
Tamil Editors - www.tamileditors.com (97)

Based on the 2007 search results; coupled with Word Tracker's prediction of 713 searches for the key word 'Tamil' each day; and given that google and yahoo account for 50.8% and 23.6% of the total web searches; it can be argued that 74.4% of all web searches for the key word 'Tamil' would yield Tamilnet as the second most relevant search result, accounting for 530.47 searches each day.

Web search for key words Tamil Tiger* :

A search conducted for the key word 'Tamil tiger' on 49,200 web pages failed to cite Tamilnet in the first 10 search results, a search outcome comparable with a yahoo search of 45,900 pages. The results for both searches are as follows;

google search of 45,900 pages in 2002 for key word 'Tamil tiger';

A mirror site of the anti-LTTE web page Sinhalya.com, eliminate tamil terrorism (1)

Tamil Eelam – eelam.com (3)
SPUR – LTTE tiger atrocities (9)

yahoo search of 49,200 pages in 2002 for key word 'Tamil tiger';

A mirror site of the anti-LTTE web page Sinhalya.com, eliminate tamil terrorism (1)

Tamil Eelam – eelam.com (3)
SPUR – LTTE tiger atrocities (7)

google 1,130,000 pages in 2007, for key word 'Tamil tiger'

Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, Wikipedia - en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil_Tigers (1)

Tamil Eelam - www.eelam.com (2)
Tamil tiger's net, outlines the struggle for Tamil Eelam's independence from Sri Lanka - www.tamiltigers.net (5)
SPUR Chronology of Suicide Bomb attacks by Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka - www.spur.asn.au/chronology_of_suicide_bomb_attacks_by_Tamil_Tigers_in_sri_Lanka.htm (6)
Council for Foreign Relations, LTTE - www.cfr.org/publication/9242/ (7)
Global Security, LTTE - www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/lte (10)
LTTE peace secretariat - www.ltteps.org (11)
Birth of the Tiger movement - www.tamilnation.org/ltte/index (16)
Tamilnet (26)
Asia Tribune - www.asiantribune.com (32)

Voice of America - www.voanews.com/english (36), Herald Sun - www.voanews.com/english (37), UK guardian - www.voanews.com/english (41), Al

Jazeera - english.aljazeera.net/NR (43), ABC news - www.abc.net.au/news (49) and CNN - www.cnn.com/2007/WORLD/asiapcf/ (50)

yahoo search of 1,670,000 pages in 2007, for key word 'Tamil Tiger'

Tamil Eelam - www.eelam.com (1)

Wikipedia (2-3)

Tamil Tigers net, Supports the Tamil Rebel Army and struggle for Tamil Eelam's independence – www.tamiltigers.net (4)

www.spur.asn.au/chronology_of_suicide_bomb_attacks_by_Tamil_Tigers_in_sri_Lanka.htm (7)

Tamil Canadian, Tamil Tiger leader lectures Harper (11); Tamil Tiger rebels honor [sic] their female fighters in Sri Lanka (16) - www.tamilcanadian.com

Tamilnet (14)

Tamil Eelam news, Tamil Tiger delegation heads home - www.tamileelamnews.com/news/publish/tns_5736.shtml (15); Tamil Tigers advances further in the latest fighting in Sri Lanka - www.tamileelamnews.com/news/publish/tns_5541(19)

Eelam web, explanation of the Tamil call for independence and news from the Tamil Tigers - www.eelamweb.com (17)

Birth of the Tiger movement - www.tamilnation.org/ltte/index (18)

The search was also conducted for the key word 'Tamil tigers'

google search of 76,300 pages and yahoo search of 82,100 pages in 2002 for key word 'Tamil tigers';

Eelamweb.com (1)

SPUR – chronology of suicide bombing by the Tigers (5)

google 1,170,000 pages in 2007, for key word 'Tamil tigers'

Tamil Tigers net - www.tamiltigers.net (1)

Wikipedia (2)

Tamil Eelam - www.eelam.com (3); www.eelam.com/analysis/ (26)

SPUR Chronology of Suicide Bomb attacks by Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka - www.spur.asn.au/chronology_of_suicide_bomb_attacks_by_Tamil_Tigers_in_sri_Lanka.htm (5)

Eelam web - www.eelamweb.com (6)

Tamil Nation, the birth of the tiger movement - www.tamilnation.org/ltte/index.htm (10)

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Conclusion:

The over all results of the analysis show Tamilnet has maintained a small but decisive edge in the international media theatre, largely though the positive coverage it has received through wire service citations.

It can also be argued the Tamilnet success as internet based news service has been largely attributed to a unique position it has created as the only 'independent' provider of a reliable alternative view in the Sri Lankan theatre, one designed to counter the states rudimentary propaganda machine. Tamilnet has also adopted a reportage style closely resembling a wire service feed identified by western media practitioners as viable and reliable media. The prompt coverage of news both in the government controlled regions and those under the LTTE control has placed the a Tamilnet in the unique position of the being a news service with the widest coverage – a defining attribute in a media theatre dominated by Colombo and south centric media.

Therefore it can be argued that Tamilnet's strategy of providing pro-Eelamist news without any overt LTTE connections has yielded results and coupled with its reporting style and content, paved the way significantly wider coverage in both the internet and through international mainstream media, when compared with any other web based media Sri Lankan media product.

END

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