

Sri Lankan troops committed war crimes: Probe panel

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Colombo: Allegations that the Sri Lankan army committed war crimes during the bloody conflict with Tamil rebels are "credible", a government probe panel has said and backed UNHRC's recommendation that foreign judges should have a role in domestic inquiry.

"There are credible allegations which, if proved to the required standard, may show that some members of the armed forces committed acts during the final phase of the war that amounted to war crimes giving rise to individual criminal responsibility," the probe panel commissioned by former president Mahinda Rajapaksa said in a 178-page report.

The report by retired judge Maxwell Paranagama also called for an independent judicial investigation into war crimes allegations.

The report, the report dated August 2015 was tabled in parliament yesterday.

The panel proposed to set up a separate war crimes division within the Sri Lankan legal system. Paranagama said that there was evidence to suggest that footage obtained by the Channel 4 documentary No Fire Zone showing Sri Lankan soldiers executing Tamil prisoners was genuine.

"The Commission is of the view that the material shown in Channel 4 - shorn of its theatrical and dramatic presentation and of the occasionally extravagant language used - does show, however, that there was material enough to justify a judge-led investigation," the Paranagama commission said. Sri Lanka's military at the time had dismissed the documentary as a fabrication.

On the allegation that Sri Lanka had executed surrendering top members of the LTTE at the end of war, the panel contended that despite some conflicting evidence, the underlying matrix is such that these alleged illegal killings, together with other such killings of those who surrendered, must be the subject of an independent judge-led investigation.

To that list for investigation, must be added the cases of all those who were hors de combat and allegedly perished while in the custody of the Sri Lanka army, the report said.

Backing the last month's UN Human Rights Council report, the Paranagama panel recommended that international judges should have a role to ensure the credibility of any investigation into war crimes.

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