
The military situation is comparatively satisfactory

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Professor Rajiva Wijesinghe interviewed by Sri Lanka Guardian's Udara Soysa (Colombo, Sri Lanka Guardian) Greetings Professor Wijesinghe. Please tell us briefly how you view the current political- military situation in Sri Lanka? The military situation is comparatively satisfactory, in that the LTTE is on the verge of military defeat. However, since they managed to prepare a defence line of human shields, with no one bothering about preventing this when it might have been easy, our forces now have to move very carefully, which means very slowly. Meanwhile, in addition to using these civilians as physical shields, the LTTE is also trying to use them to get the world to try to stop the forces from advancing.

With regard to the political situation, the withdrawal from negotiations of the LTTE allowed for greater involvement with other Tamil parties, and the TMVP is now in power in the Eastern Province. I hope very much that we will be able to have at least Municipal elections in the North, to make it clear that there are brave politicians whom people will vote for, who are willing to work for their people within a united Sri Lanka. It is also important to ensure full implementation of the 13th amendment, including in particular areas that impact closely on the lives of the people such as education and infrastructural development, to allow for development through diversity. What are the key factors behind the government's success against Tamil Tiger rebels? Firstly, a dedicated military confident that the rug would not be pulled out from under their feet and sure that procurement etc. are entirely for professional benefit. The confidence of the armed forces in the current leadership, both political and military, is an important development. Secondly is the fact that the LTTE was indulged almost beyond belief, so that the government, when it finally responded to provocation, had the complete support of the people. Finally the support offered to the government by the TMVP cannot be underestimated, both because of its support in the East and also in terms of understanding the LTTE, and also because of the clear understanding that the government was willing to share power with democratic Tamil forces. What is the current progress of 'All Party Representatives' Committee? It is moving slowly because trying to reach consensus between many parties is very difficult. It also had a problem because initially it was supposed to reach consensus to be put to the LTTE, so now trying to find a solution in itself is difficult. Also, though some parties have withdrawn, there are efforts made in their absence to take their interests into account, which is also difficult. My own view is that, instead of waiting to achieve total consensus, the government should now move on areas in which there is consensus, for instance, with regard to a second chamber based on provinces - though again that should be democratic, i.e. by direct election by the people, rather than based on nominations as in the old Senate. What are the current key responsibilities of the Secretariat for Co-ordinating the Peace Process (SCOPP)?

Firstly we host the APRC and facilitate its operations, but we also maintain links with minority parties and institutions not represented there, including the various Muslim peace secretariats and the Tamil parties who were shut out by the manipulated election of 2004. Secondly we work on confidence building, which includes both rebutting partisan accusations against the Sri Lankan government but also working on practical improvements - for instance, the Presidential Secretariat has entrusted us with the initiative to declare Jaffna a City of Excellence for English and IT. We work also on rehabilitation issues and participate in the Coordinating Committee for IDPs, and are particularly involved in psycho-social initiatives since that is a vital part of the reconciliation process. Then we liaise closely with the chambers and help with economic initiatives, such as the Technological Exhibition in Jaffna last year, since investment and the expansion of opportunity are essential for peace.

The LTTE media claims that genocide is taking place in Sri Lanka. What are your views on this?

I think the LTTE does not understand the meaning of the word, or else they have realized it is a convenient buzzword to use. Far from there being genocide, the government is doing its best for the Tamil people, and it is the LTTE that seems bent on torturing and abusing and killing them. The compulsions imposed on those in the Vanni were horrifying, and are made worse by the current treatment of those the LTTE has kept as hostages over the last few months. How do you see the CFA that was signed in 2002 by Prime Minister Wickremesinghe's government?

I think it was worth trying at the time because you must always give people a chance, but not enough care was exercised in going through the particular clauses. However, proper interpretation would have helped, as with trying to stop violations, which I believe was possible, but that government simply did not try. It took the line of least resistance, and failed absolutely to stop the rot when it was clear to everyone, including members of that government. Do you believe that LTTE military defeat is imminent? Yes, but we have to be careful since it will use every trick in the book to stop us, and make use of some foreign elements that either do not understand the LTTE or else want continuous instability for their own purposes. What can Sri Lankans expect once LTTE is militarily defeated this year? The LTTE will do its best to regroup in a variety of ways, and it still has enormous financial resources, so we have to also win the battle for hearts and minds. This can be accompanied by political empowerment within a united Sri Lanka, which also means giving minorities influence at the Centre, since obviously security considerations and some other matters of government have to be handled at the Centre. We must also concentrate on economic and human resources development, in all the regions, but especially in the North and East, because they have been deprived for so long. We must also harness the energies of the Diaspora by showing the Tamils who are now abroad that they can best help their fellows in Sri Lanka through contributing to their social and economic development, not by buying them weapons. And we must allow for a range of initiatives in development activities, especially in human resources development because that is the key to contentment through prosperity. Courtesy: Srilankaguardian.org