
BBC, Aid Agencies and Sri Lanka

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Dr. P.A.Samaraweera Today more than half the world is fighting terrorism in one form or another. Some of the countries directly involved are the US, the UK, Sri Lanka, India and Pakistan. Sri Lanka has been fighting terrorism for nearly three decades at a high cost-human and financial.

With the recent developments in the conflict the international media have been keeping a close tab on the events in Sri Lanka. Of all, the most popular of them which is the BBC has been supplying inaccurate reports relayed by the LTTE and their sympathisers. For example, on March 8th, BBC South Asia reported that, “...A senior Health Official working inside Tiger held areas has told by telephone that shells by artillery from security forces fell inside Government designated safe zones causing civilian casualties and 15 deaths...” When the Health Ministry verified this with the Health Official he had categorically denied making a phone call. It is obvious that anyone can make a fake call and this confirms that the BBC does not check the authenticity of statements made to them. In their report of the conflict, there was no mention of the civilians forcibly held by the Tigers as human shields and preventing them from leaving the combat zone. The BBC did not refer to the fact that the Security Forces had toned down the pressure on the Tigers by not using heavy weapons. In contrast, the Tigers have accelerated attacks by taking cover behind civilians. This was clearly indicated by the Disaster Management and Human Rights Minister during the interview for “HardTalk” on March, 2. The BBC reporter at the interview pointed the finger at the Government Security Forces treating the Tigers as ‘freedom fighters’ despite the fact that they are ruthless terrorists banned in so many countries. Further on March 5, the BBC World News reported that the ICRC had warned of an impending humanitarian crisis in Sri Lanka. But when the Secretariat for Coordinating Peace Process in Sri Lanka checked this with the ICRC, there had been no such assertion. Thus it appears that the BBC reports are based on hearsay evidence, distortions and propaganda by the LTTE. If the ‘Al Qaeda’ were cornered by the US and the British forces in Afghanistan and there is an end in sight, will the BBC try to bail them out as they try do to the Tigers now in Sri Lanka? During recent times the role of Aid Agencies as well had come under greater scrutiny. For instance, the question has come up as to how the LTTE possessed heavy machinery for the construction of earth bunds and bunkers. On March 10, an English Daily reported that the 55 Division of the Army made a startling revelation of a possible flow of ‘Combat Rations’ to the LTTE. A high protein “BP-100” packet of biscuits had been in the possession of an LTTE cadre killed in combat. What is astonishing is that last year a police check point had apprehended a lorry destined to Vavuniya with a stock of 39,000 Kg’s of “BP-100” compact therapeutical, high protein biscuits sent by the World Food Program. The activities of the Aid Agencies have been closely investigated by other countries as well. An extreme case is Sudan, where last week the Aid workers from the International Rescue Committee, Oxfam and Amnesty International were taken to task and asked to cease functioning. Thus the credibility of these organisations has been eroded due to their dual role in developing countries.Courtesy: dailynews.lk