
Sri Lanka's Entebbe

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(Colombo, Sri Lanka Guardian): Uganda was represented at the Non- Aligned Summit in 1976 held in Colombo by its Foreign Minister, Colonel Juma Oris. When asked about the Entebbe Rescue Mission he remarked, "The Israelis were magnificent. We did not know what hit us until it dawned on us long after."

Pirapaharan and his Tiger leaders would be expressing the same sentiments over the coup-de-main operation launched by the 58 Division and a combination of Commandos and Special Forces personnel shortly before midnight on April 20, to relieve the siege on the civilians taken hostage by the LTTE, by breaching the DCB defences at Puthumathalan and Ampalavanpokkanai in the No Fire Zone (NFZ).

Provisional estimates quote a figure of around 100,000 civilian hostages were rescued in 48 hours from the clutches of the ruthless LTTE in probably the biggest ever humanitarian rescue operation undertaken anywhere in the world. A host of diplomats and foreign media personnel were invited to Air Force Headquarters to witness the events being unfolded through visuals being transmitted from UAVs flying over the NFZ.

The downright defiance and determination of the suffering masses to escape into government-controlled areas were overwhelming. The attempts of three suicide cadres who killed 17 would-be escapees including women and children and the small arms fire directed at them did not deter the will of hordes of Tamil civilians in their march to freedom.

The human exodus was unbelievable and must have gladdened the hearts of the civilised world viewing the spectacle, except of course the Tigers. These hapless people braved the waters of the shallow sea and even the mud and sludge of lagoon waters, perhaps also with the intention of circumventing minefields planted, no doubt with the design to kill and maim opposing forces on their axes of advance.

Unprecedented demonstration

This unprecedented demonstration was ample evidence of the hate, disgust and fear harboured by a people for nigh on three decades imposed by the ruthless Tigers in their reign of terror. The international community, at least now, must surely be convinced of the bona fides the GoSL and the military were attempting to establish for so long over Tiger lobby claims of genocide against the Tamil community.

The roles are reversed. The so called saviours of the Tamil race and champions of Tamil nationalism have wilfully caused more deaths of their own people than any other entity in this long drawn out ethnic imbroglio. As Minister Douglas Devananda once stated, "The Tigers are no longer interested in Tamil nationalism. They only hanker after absolute power in the north and east exercised through the barrel of the gun."

The Tigers have successfully destroyed their image as freedom fighters and their movement with it, by creating this latest human catastrophe. They have been exposed for the cowards that they are and have always been. In the circumstances, can they face their own people again?

Supporters who must have wished for a resurgence of the LTTE and its fighting machine for reasons including their own selfish designs and even survival -- which encompasses certain countries in the international community -- proposed engineering the release of the hostages in the NFZ as a bargaining factor for Pirapaharan and his leaders to escape abroad.

What the Sri Lanka Army achieved apparently without firing a shot (as reported in the media) exposed the inability and ineffectiveness of the USA and other mighty powers in the international community to pressurise the LTTE to accede to their terms and conditions.

The GoSL issued a 24-hour ultimatum for the Tigers to surrender before resuming the military offensive. The deadline has ended. The million-dollar question is what action will the Tiger Supremo resort to when the end of armed Tamil militancy seems inevitable? Surrender? Unlikely!

India clamours for his extradition to stand trial for the Rajiv Gandhi assassination. We are in the era of war crime trials. Will Pirapaharan want to face the ignominy of exposure? Will he escape and live to design the resurgence of Tamil militancy when the time is opportune as many in the Tamil diaspora are wont to believe? Avoid capture by taking cyanide?

There is a parallel of the most infamous megalomaniac Hitler, who committed suicide when the end was inevitable. The answer may not be long before manifesting itself.

The euphoria generated from the magnificent military action witnessed in Puthumathalan and Ampalavanpokkanai must not detract from ground realities.

Soft targets

Tiger escapees from the Wannu have taken on soft targets even in the east and will resort to urban and jungle guerilla tactics if only to keep the movement alive and detract from the obvious disgrace they face from being a failed terrorist entity. Most importantly they would still want the sympathy and financial support of the Tamil diaspora. Destabilisation of remote village life seems to be the modus operandi with the intention no doubt of bringing about another ethnic backlash - a remote possibility -- in order to garner international sympathy and stop the war.

However, the south may not be inveigled into such machinations of the Tigers. The carnage will continue. Operating seemingly from their traditional jungle hideouts especially in the Eastern Province.

Military occupation of these known LTTE bases could pre-empt such strategy. This course of action was resorted to in order to control Tamil militancy in the Eastern Province which prompted Pirapaharan to state in an interview with Asia Week in August 1992, that he had "lost the east."

To take, hold and dominate areas of control will require a considerably larger standing army than we have at present. Can the national exchequer sustain the financial commitment? Meanwhile, the COL will snowball with likely imposition of increased taxation and increased cost of essential commodities. Demands for higher wages and labour unrest are bound to escalate once the current election fever has subsided.

Urgent development of war torn areas and rehabilitation, reconstruction and resettlement of IDPs would take priority. The sooner this phase commences the better it would be to appease the international and donor communities who would be involved in the 3R process.

Discrimination must end

De-mining will take considerable time and effort. Appeals to foreign sources with the know-how will no doubt figure in the equation to quicken the process.

We have been informed that several Tiger cadres have surrendered. Numbers are bound to increase when the military action is over and confidence is built up amongst others who would want to, for purposes of rehabilitation, employment, security and education. The South African model must be studied and implemented with modifications to suit local conditions.

Winning battles and terminating the war will not solve the factors that motivated Tamil youth to opt for armed militancy in the first place. Discrimination must end. Minorities must enjoy equal rights and privileges.

Unless and until all Sri Lankans are able to live side-by-side in trust and confidence, in peace and harmony, with justice and dignity, there lurks the danger of a resurgence of armed insurrection.

Progress back to square one must be avoided. This God given opportunity for re-structuring sustainable national unity must figure as a national priority. Courtesy: srilankaguardian.lk