
So, the Tamil Tigers were mortals after all

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IANIS COLOMBO: The dramatic collapse of the Tamil Tigers, accompanied by white flags and surrenders even as some suicide bombers kept exploding themselves, is a sad commentary on the politics of uncompromising mayhem the rebels pursued for so long in Sri Lanka.

Here was a group called the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) that set out to form an independent Tamil state by breaking up the north and east of Sri Lanka. They never fought any elections but prided themselves as the sole and authentic representatives of the Tamils. It appears now that this was not the only contradiction in their personality.

steady revelations about the final moments of the LTTE leadership speak poorly of the Tigers who declared a sudden love for peace when their own lives were at risk, after contemptuously dismissing all past efforts at peace making. When they were repeatedly called to go for negotiations, they decided to settle for nothing less than independence. Those who wanted to shake hands with the Sri Lankan state were dubbed traitors and killed. By the time a quarter century of

unceasing bloodletting passed, more than 90,000 people lay dead, many thousands were injured and maimed, the Tamils were in ruins, and there was no trace of Tamil Eelam. But the LTTE would not call a halt to the fighting, telling

incredulous Westerners even in the last few weeks that another generation would pursue the Eelam campaign even if all the Tigers died fighting. As if to fulfil that vow, thousands of children mainly from poor Tamil families were forced to enlist and wage war, the like of which was unseen anywhere in the world. Young men and women became suicide bombers -

killing themselves and others till the very end. Others sailed with explosives-laden boats to ram navy ships. The LTTE even acquired planes; given the chance, it could have come up with submarines. Yet, it was a war over which the

ordinary Tamils, both in and outside the LTTE, had no control. As it kept winning one battle after another, as it kept killing one "traitor" after another, as Colombo started to bend its knees, the LTTE came to be seen, rightly, as a never-say-die

group. At his April 2002 press conference in Kilinochchi, LTTE chief Velupillai Prabhakaran even declared that he too could be dubbed a traitor and killed if he turned his back to Tamil Eelam. In ordinary words, this meant the LTTE would never surrender or show the white flag, come what may. Yet this is precisely what it did - at the first opportunity. As the

military closed in, the LTTE stunningly announced that its struggle had reached a "bitter end" and it was silencing its guns. In no time, S. Pulidevan and B. Nadesan, heads of the Peace Secretariat and the political wing in the LTTE

respectively, began urging people in distant lands to intercede so that they could give themselves up. Of course, there was nothing wrong if Pulidevan and Nadesan wanted to live. The tragedy was that the LTTE killed several Tamils like

Nadesan and Pulidevan, simply because they too desired peace. If only this had not been the case, tens of thousands - Tamils, Sinhalese and Muslims - would be alive today. But those were the times when Prabhakaran decreed, year after

year, that there could be no compromise on Tamil Eelam. In hindsight, one can say that this misplaced arrogance came because the LTTE's top leaders never faced any serious danger - until recently. No wonder, even as late as November

2008, in his annual speech, Prabhakaran mocked at President Mahinda Rajapaksa, daring him to capture LTTE-held territory in the north. It took only six months of merciless military assault to force the LTTE to beg Western powers to

save it from destruction. Tragically, even as the leaders were preparing to give up, the foot soldiers continued to fight and die, carrying out suicide attacks as late as May 17. The next day, Prabhakaran lay dead and the LTTE was in ruins.

Even after his death, the LTTE's love for fantasy did not abate. It kept claiming that Prabhakaran was alive and well - before sheepishly admitting the truth a week later. Their awesome reputation notwithstanding, the Tamil Tigers finally

proved that they too were mortals. Courtesy: expressbuzz.com