



# ORF Discourse

Vol.1 • No.2 • November 2006

Published by Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi

## The Way Ahead in Sri Lanka

Summary of an interaction organised by ORF (Chennai) on September 2, 2006

If the stalemated war produced a truce, the stalemated peace ever since the Sri Lankan Government and the Liberation Tigers Tamil Elam signed a cease-fire agreement (CFA) in February 2002 has contributed to the revival of violence in the island-nation. The deteriorating ground situation has been accompanied by repeated calls from the Sri Lankan parties for greater Indian involvement in the peace-making efforts.

To evaluate the developments, the Chennai Chapter of the Observer Research Foundation (ORF-C), which is specialising in 'Sri Lanka Studies, among other issues, organised a seminar on September 2, 2006 in which participants and discussants focussed on the military situation on the ground, the promises from the past that remained only on paper, the lessons to be learnt from the past involvement of India, and also the 'Tamil Nadu factor', which has been at play in New Delhi's policy towards Sri Lanka all along.

### The Ground Situation

**N. Sathya Moorthy**

The recent incidents of violence in the Eastern Province are ridden with social, political and military implications. After a long time, the Sri Lankan armed forces (SLAF) have registered battle-gains, disproving critics of their physical and psychological preparedness to take on a battle-hardened outfit like the LTTE with its series of

victories in conventional warfare. SLAF is no longer a 'ceremonial army' and its soldiers are 'children of war', and trained in that environment. The LTTE, on the other hand, may already be facing cadre-shortage, mainly due to the 'Karuna rebellion' in the East and, possibly, because of large-scale migration of 'Jaffna Tamils' ever since the 'ethnic war' began in the early Eighties.

On the political side, President Mahinda Rajapakse has shown signs of working for a 'Southern consensus', which is a pre-requisite for any peace plan to succeed. The Opposition United National Party (UNP), although it rejected his offer for a national government, has offered to cooperate with the 'Southern consensus' initiative. Given the past experience, the success of such efforts remains to be seen. The political compulsions for President Rajapakse's Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) to ensure an absolute majority in Parliament is a distraction; but, significantly, the party still falls short of the two-thirds majority required for passing constitutional amendments on power devolution. The Sri Lankan Government and the Sinhala polity, which often seek international involvement, including that of India, in the peace process need to understand that a 'Southern consensus' has to precede everything else. While the best option would be for the Government and the Sinhala polity on the one hand and the LTTE and the Tamil society, on the other, to work on the possibilities of power devolution on their own, given the ground realities, the international community could

get involved only in persuading the latter to accept a reasonable package that addresses the ‘Tamil aspirations’.

### International involvement

The international community, including countries like India and Norway (facilitator to the peace process), cannot be expected to intercede between SLFP and the UNP, or between the SLFP and the Left-leaning ‘Sinhala nationalist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), or with the Jatika Hela Urumaya (JHU), the party led by Sinhala-Buddhist monks, without inviting the opprobrium of ‘interfering with the internal affairs of Sri Lanka’. Over time, in any case, that kind of involvement would not be in the larger interest of Sri Lanka’s sovereignty.

The Norwegian facilitator’s failure to appreciate the absence of a ‘Southern consensus’ — like New Delhi did earlier while negotiating the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord — was among the causes for the current tensions and violence. Secondly, Norway, the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE, for reasons of their own, ended up seeing the CFA, signed in February 2002 as an end in itself. The continuance of status quo served different purposes for the different parties involved, so much so the Government did not even come out with a clause-by-clause reply to, or rejection of the LTTE’s proposals for an Interim Self-Governing Authority (ISGA). On funding projects for those affected by the Tsunami, the Government, in fact, went back on the commitment to the LTTE, after intervention of the Sri Lankan Supreme Court. Thus, if in the past, stalemated war had contributed to the truce accord, stalemated peace without any serious effort at power-devolution or power-sharing within the Tamil community (‘Karuna factor’) has led to the current war.

Today, the question of the merger of the Eastern Province with the North, which had already been administratively accepted through the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord and constitutionally guaranteed by the 13th Amendment, has been challenged in the Supreme Court. At the same time, the ‘Karuna rebellion’, the ‘Three M’s’ of Maaviluru incident, the Muttur violence and the consequent Muslim discomfort, may have kick-started a new situation in the East. The LTTE continues to blame and target the ‘Karuna faction’ while for the first time since the Norwegian facilitation began, the ground situation demands that the concerns of the Eastern Muslims are addressed in a holistic manner.

There is also the question of Indian involvement. Does India have a role? Should India play a role? The question begs an answer but in the overall perspective, India cannot be blind to what is happening in Sri Lanka. India’s long-term strategic interests in the region cannot be held hostage

to the fate of individuals, given that the LTTE is banned and LTTE supremo Prabhakaran is a ‘proclaimed offender’ under the Indian law in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case. Sri Lanka, and not just the Government, needs India — and every section of the Sri Lankan society has publicly sought Indian involvement. President Rajapakse’s visit, the constant visits of Government Ministers and UNP leaders to New Delhi, and LTTE ideologue Anton Balasingham’s NDTV interview, calling for a greater Indian role, all have to be viewed in this context .

There seems to be a view in Colombo that India’s strategic interests for the country alone match those of Sri Lanka — of no nation being allowed to have a military toehold on the island. The prompt withdrawal of the IPKF erased earlier apprehensions in the Sri Lankan mind. In their eyes, the fast-tracked Indian aid for the tsunami-struck nation is proof that New Delhi would not require a military base to be of similar help in times of security crises.

If India does not fill the emerging vacuum, other nations and interests would happily do so, and that is what Pakistan has been doing in the past few months. Other nations also have a presence in the island— not just the US and China, Japan and Russia, even Venezuela and Bolivia, have crept in. Maybe, down the years when India is ready, Sri Lanka may not be so inclined. By then, the tendency would have been for a grateful nation and people to provide strategic, political and economic space to whichever country that helps Sri Lanka to achieve permanent peace and prosperity.

### Unkept Promises

**K. Venkataraman**

The Sri Lanka story has been one of broken promises. It was the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord of 1987 that stressed on some principles, including a long-term solution to the ‘ethnic conflict’—recognising it as a political conflict, with the Northern and Eastern Provinces as the ‘traditional habitation of the Tamil-speaking people’—as a compromise to the demand for recognition of a ‘Tamil homeland’.

The relevance of the Accord should be gauged from the fact that the Oslo Agreement of 2002, in effect, followed the same principle and used similar phrases. Under the Oslo Agreement, the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE promised to explore the possibility of a peaceful solution based on the principles of internal self-determination in the areas of ‘traditional habitation of the Tamil-speaking people’—the word ‘speaking’ was deleted subsequently, and it remains the ‘Tamil people’.

Later, there was the agreement on the Post-Tsunami

Operational Management Structure (P-TOMS), among others, for the Government and the LTTE to jointly address the issues of relief and rehabilitation for those affected by the 2004 Tsunami, but the Supreme Court struck down some clauses. The Judges were opposed to replacing the Auditor-General with “outsiders”, and setting up a regional office for P-TOMS at Kilinochchi, the operational base of LTTE leader Prabhakaran. However, this only strengthened the Tamil belief that the Sinhala polity and institutions would not meet their legitimate aspirations.

The Geneva Pact of February 2006 made even less sense as it was an inopportune time to broker an agreement. Ever since Mahinda Rajapakse became President in November 2005, violence had only escalated; neither party was ready for an agreement. The LTTE went to Geneva only to press the single demand for the State disarming the ‘Karuna faction’. No Government could have given such an assurance, but the Sri Lankan Government did so – obviously with no intention of honouring the same. We are witness to the consequences today.

As a result of what has been officially termed a ‘military defensive act’, Sri Lanka is facing a large humanitarian crisis. Nearly 2,20,000 people have been declared internally-displaced persons (IDPs). The East is in turmoil, there is no accountability and there is an atmosphere of relative uncertainty. People are being killed; aid workers and doctors are murdered or abducted, ambulances are being ambushed and, international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are slowly withdrawing from the scene. Although the Government has made a beginning by providing relief supplies, little is expected to change in the next few months.

### Positive Points

There are, however, some positive signals. Never before has there been a consciousness in Sri Lanka about the need for a long-term solution. The idea of a federal solution or a quasi-federal solution based on the ‘Indian model’ is being seriously debated. It has, of course, resulted in a lot of hostility towards India. Yet, the two warring parties, more or less, agree that India can play a significant role. The parameters of the same, however, have to be very strictly defined, as the Sinhalese insist that India should not impose a structured solution; it should, they feel, be home-grown.

The other positive factor relates to the tacit pressure from New Delhi to depart from an LTTE-centric approach. For the first time, India has conveyed a message that the Sinhala polity and the Sri Lankan Government can come out with a package, and consider integration of the LTTE’s perceptions through negotiations. India recently forwarded

a copy of the Sarkaria Commission report on Centre-State relations, but even this was seen as an attempt to enforce a solution.

Critics, who presume that India is behind the current efforts of the ruling SLFP and the Opposition UNP to work out a ‘Southern consensus’, also say that New Delhi is out of sync with the ground realities. The UNP is going through a leadership crisis, and the SLFP has been wooing UNP MPs and allies like the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) and the Upcountry People’s Party, the latter two representing ‘Plantation Tamils’ of Indian origin.

Increasingly it is being viewed that Sri Lanka is administered by a small section of the SLFP, and not by the party as a whole. The President, who campaigned for the continuance of the ‘unitary State’, polled a little over 50-per cent of the popular vote in last year’s elections. He does not seem to have accepted that at least 49 per cent favoured UNP’s Ranil Wickremesinghe, with his ‘federal model’ as the electoral plank. Even within the SLFP, a large section headed by former President Chandrika Kumaratunga is in favour of a federal solution.

There is one section of the government, which aligned itself with the extremist nationalist parties like the JVP and the JHU, that is calling the shots, as reflected in the ground situation. The military and the civilian administration is now packed with people with extremist views. The President has his two brothers as aides – one is an Advisor and the other is the Defence Secretary. A whole lot of former military and police personnel are advising the government, and they are obviously pushing for a hard, militarist line. They are the ones who are providing all the justification, some valid, some invented, for the various military operations that are taking place.

Before the international community comes in with the humanitarian mission, this crisis may have pushed the prospect of a solution behind, because the atmosphere of distrust between the parties has reached a new low. Neither side has honoured the CFA in full, to the extent, ambushes, intimidations and assassinations have become as much a tool of the Sri Lankan State as that of the LTTE, both blaming each other also for arming the ‘Karuna faction’ and training ‘civilian auxiliary groups’, respectively. It should not surprise anyone if both the Government and the LTTE went to war for some time, if only to cleanse themselves of the accumulated problems of the past few years, before re-entering negotiations.

### Eastern Evolution

**Ashik Bonofer**

The ethnic divide in Sri Lanka’s Eastern province is largely due to the ethnic profile of the respective communities.

Recent conflicts and internal displacement have affected the profile—overall, each of the communities, the Sinhalese, Tamils and Tamil-speaking Muslims, constitute a third each of the population in the East. According to the 2001 Census figures for three districts, Muslims constitute 37.9 per cent in Trincomalee, followed by Tamils (31.9 per cent) and Sinhalese (29.9 per cent). In Batticaloa, 74.4 per cent of the population is Tamil, 25.4 Muslims and 0.1 per cent, Sinhalese. For Ampara, the figures are Muslims 41.6 per cent, Sinhalese 39.3 per cent and Tamils 18.8 per cent. On the economic front, the Tamils of the East are engaged in fishing while the Muslims are either traders or land-owners. The Sinhalese are the predominant agricultural community. The Tamils often work under the Muslims.

Historically, the region was part of the Kandyan Kingdom from about the 14th century. The port-towns of Trincomalee and Batticaloa were the only habitations with the locals trading with India and other countries. The Muslims, who were originally Arab traders, were advisors on overseas trade policy to the Kings of Kandy, they were given prime farmlands in what were then Trincomalee and Batticaloa districts.

The prominence of Muslims was short-lived, as their trading activity was restricted when the Dutch captured Batticaloa and the Trincomalee in 1766. If anything, the proximity to the Kings of Kandy became a burden, and the Muslims became vulnerable under the Dutch and successor British regimes for whom the Trincomalee Harbour alone held attraction in the East. It was only in the British period that the region got the nomenclature of 'Eastern Province'. The British also retained their military base in Trincomalee even after Sri Lanka attained Independence in 1948. It was as a result of pressure from India that the Sri Lankan Government asked the British to vacate the base— which they did in 1957.

On the socio-political front, the Eastern Province came into focus after post-Independence Governments launched the process of 'Sinhalese colonisation'. The Tamils felt that irrigation projects in the East were initiated with this purpose — and to help the Sinhalese to the exclusion of the other two communities in agriculture and also overwhelm them in numbers. The Governments of the time contended that the farming background of the Sinhalese, against the fishing background of the Tamils and the trading activities of the Muslims, needed to be encouraged in "the larger national interest". It was during this time, in 1960, that Batticaloa district was bifurcated to create the new district of Amapara.

### Separate Identity

Politically, however, the East was neither with the Tamils

nor with the Sinhalese — even though the former did have socio-economic links with the northern 'Jaffna Tamils'. Even though the Eastern Tamils had joined the 'Jaffna Tamils' in protesting against the Sri Lankan Government on issues such as the 'Sinhala Only' order in the Fifties and 'Standardisation in Education' later, they continued to maintain their separate identity. In a way, this continued until the two provinces were merged under the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord of 1987.

The Accord states in Para 2.2, "The Northern and Eastern Provinces as now constituted, will form one administrative unit, having one elected Provincial Council. Such a unit will have one Governor, one Chief Minister and one Board of Ministers." The next clause of the Accord, Para 2.3, clearly states that there will be a referendum on or before December 31, 1988 to enable the people of the Eastern Province to decide whether their province should merge with the Northern Province or continue to remain separate.

The official process for the merger of the two Provinces started with an executive order passed by then President J. R. Jayewardene on September 7, 1988, declaring that the two Provinces form one administrative unit and be administered as one unit until a three-member committee headed by the Chief Justice conducted a referendum, as per the Constitution under Section 37(2) of the Provincial Councils Act of 1987, before December 31, 1988. Successive Presidents have postponed the referendum over the past 18 years, under the powers vested in them. Shortly before remitting office, President Chandrika Kumaratunga did likewise, postponing the referendum process by another year, until November 16, 2006.

The East was once the main source of cadres for the conventional armed wing of the LTTE. The 'Karuna rebellion' of 2004, however, affected this recruitment pattern. This has led to the LTTE and the 'Karuna faction' targeting each other, with the LTTE charging the Government and the armed forces with aiding and arming the 'Karuna faction'. Overall, this has only weakened the Tamil cause.

The LTTE has always taken an anti-Muslim and anti-Sinhalese stand. The Tigers distrust Muslims because the latter did not support the call for a separate State of 'Tamil Eelam'. The Muslims, who are essentially traders, are bilingual and interact with both the Tamils and Sinhalese, but have now become vulnerable to LTTE attacks. Most of the LTTE-sympathetic websites describe the Muslims as land-grabbers, who "joined hands with the Sinhalese Government" to deprive the Tamils of their benefits. The Sinhalese, too, hold similar views about the Muslims, — "land-grabbers" and "supporters of the Tamils". The animosity, in fact, dates back to the 1915 'Muslim

massacre', scars of which still remain.

Now, after the 'Muttur incident' in which innocent Muslims were caught in the cross-fire of the armed forces and the LTTE, there are reports indicating the emergence of new Muslim groups in the East. This will make things difficult for the LTTE. Following the recent attempt on the life of outgoing Pakistani High Commissioner, Col Wali Mohammed, in Colombo, the LTTE claimed that Islamabad was supporting Islamic groups in the East. There are, thus, groups with international support in the East, and the LTTE would go to any length to stop them.

### Leadership Crisis

For the Muslims of the East, both LTTE and the Sinhalese pose a threat. The Muslims have always lived on their own, and this isolation has left them without friends, and antagonised both the Tamils and the Sinhalese. The LTTE is on an all-out propaganda against the community beginning with the forceful eviction of Muslims from Jaffna in 1990, the 'Kattankudi mosque massacre' on August 31, 1990, and the more recent incident when nearly 200 Muslims were killed in the Muttur battle between the Government troops and the LTTE. The community cannot forget the Jaffna evictions, when 100,000 Muslims were forced to leave their homes and businesses overnight with only SL Rs 500 in hand.

There is also no credible leadership for the Muslims of the East. The Sri Lankan Muslim Congress (SLMC), the mainline political party of the community in the island as a whole, has done very little work in the East. It is often said that leaders of the SLMC or, for that matter, other political parties of the Muslims, visit the East only for weddings, funerals or election campaigns. Mostly they are from other regions of the country and are based in Colombo. The absence of a credible Muslim political leadership in the East, while making the community physically vulnerable, has also opened up opportunities for external factors and forces to exploit sentiments, especially among the Muslim youth in the East.

The abduction and killing of the fishermen in the East have become a common affair. Given the presence and influence of the 'Karuna faction', it is not clear if it is the LTTE or the Sri Lankan Navy that is behind these incidents. The incidents have discouraged the fishermen from going out to sea, and thus affected their daily earnings. The farming community has not been left unaffected as both the armed forces and the LTTE have mined agricultural land indiscriminately, rendering it unsafe and unusable. The trading community is at the risk of being whisked at the check-points, separately maintained by the armed forces and the LTTE.

The Muslims of the East are not concentrated in any single town or village. They live in non-contiguous pockets far away from other communities. This has made the demand for a 'Muslim package' in power-devolution for the North and the East that much more difficult to address, as this would involve either immediate acceptance by the other two communities, or large-scale migration of the Muslims, which is not a practical proposition. For now, the SLMC has suggested the 'Pondicherry model' adopted by India, of enclaves-centric power-devolution, as a solution.

The LTTE's ISGA proposals provide for inclusion of Muslim and Sinhalese members in the interim set-up without upsetting the majority. De-merger of the North and the East through a referendum, as and when held, could be another option. In such a case, the Eastern Muslims in particular would feel that they would be over-dependent on the 'Sinhala South', and by extension, be at the mercy of the local Sinhalese.

### 'Eelam War IV'?

#### Colonel (ret'd) R. Hariharan:

On the military front, the Sri Lankan armed forces have tasted success after a long gap. The LTTE revived hostility after Mahinda Rajapakse became President last year, basing their logic on his 'anti-federal' poll campaign. Despite denials, the failed suicide-bomber attack on Army Chief, General Sarath Fonseka, was a 'strategic blunder'. It gave the armed forces, smarting under humiliation after humiliation — including the absence of consultation on the ceasefire agreement (CFA) — an occasion to target the LTTE in a big way. The LTTE does not like peace. It is a war-machine, and it cannot come to terms with peace. Its over-confidence and the poor opinion about the armed forces are among the contributory factors to the current military reverses.

President Rajapakse is qualitatively different from his predecessors and has changed the agenda, from the Government's political initiative to a military equation, where the LTTE used to excel. The LTTE had set a July 24 deadline internally for starting military operations, and the European Union (EU) ban forced its hands to do something before the international opinion turned more hostile. The 'Maavilaru incident', involving a vital area linking Trincomalee and Batticaloa in the East, was thus a foregone initiative, particularly for testing the Government's response. The Sri Lankan Security Forces (SLSF) was cautious, and resorted to heavy bombardment using multi-barrel rocket-launchers (MBRL) purchased from Pakistan when halted by minefields. Despite denials, the LTTE suffered heavy casualties, but the fact that they

withstood the MBRL was proof their defence, despite the Maavilaru sluice-gate falling to the SLSF on the fourth day.

### Three-Pronged Offensive

The SLSF's was a three-pronged offensive, and the LTTE's possible attempt to distract them by occupying Muttur did not help. The LTTE's decision to drive out the inhabitants of the Muslim-dominated area in the town, and opening fire on the SLSF only meant that the innocent population was caught in the cross-fire, in which the SLSF resorted to aerial bombing and heavy artillery fire. The armed forces could not be blamed in an insurgency operation of this kind.

In the Muttur-Sampur operations, also in the East, unlike in the past, the initiative rested with the SLSF. China Bay is a naval base; the airfield and the Fort Frederick army base are also nearby. Along with Fort Osternburg further on the west, these are important areas for controlling the traffic in the Trincomalee Harbour. In the China Bay, on the north of the inner harbour, the IOC tank-farm was not affected as it did not fall in the line of fire. The military operation in this area is difficult because of large water bodies affecting free movement and deployment of tanks. The SLSF resorted to aerial bombing and naval bombardment. Initially, they said it was only to silence the LTTE guns and that they would not occupy Muttur – but they have done so since. It is a clear violation of the CFA, which however has a cushion that if threatened, appropriate action could be taken.

The next operation was in Jaffna in the North, which is unlike other parts of Sri Lanka. It is mostly a dry-belt, involving urban warfare. Pooneryn, on the west bank of the Jaffna lagoon, is under LTTE control, and it is from here that the LTTE launched a three-pronged retaliatory military operation this time. It was a complex operation, requiring good communication facilities. Significantly, they used only 130-mm heavy guns with a range of 30-35 km, captured from the SLSF earlier. It is surprising that they have got the ammunition, but it is not known how long it would last for them to use frequently. Otherwise, they used only 85-mm mortars, indicating that they may lack heavy mortars.

In the end, the 'Sea Tigers' infiltrators hoping to capture the Mandaitivu naval base were eliminated, and 30-40 of their boats destroyed. On the Elephant Pass-Nagarkovil axis, the LTTE was stalled from capturing the Nagarkovil army defences, which would have linked to Vadamarachchi, bypassing Jaffna. While the LTTE established a foothold in Muhamalai initially after suffering heavy casualties, the subsidiary attack on Kilali

was repelled twice and the LTTE suffered heavy casualties. The key element in all this was the support that the army got from the Sri Lankan Air Force. The air support was very significant also for counter-bombardment of enemy artillery after pinpointing their location.

### Short Spurts

Now comes the technical question: Is this, 'Eelam War IV'? It does not matter to which side they belonged, but 1000-1500 persons, including 300 soldiers and 600 LTTE cadres, have been killed since April 2006, and 2,20,000 civilians displaced, with the UN humanitarian agencies fixing a \$37-million budget for three months of relief. If this is not 'Eelam War IV', what is war? From now on, this war would be fought only this way, in short spurts, as both sides have realised that they do not have massive forces. The LTTE's losses are large compared to those of the SLSF, particularly considering their respective strengths.

Both sides are playing by different rules, unlike on earlier occasions. The SLSF will not attack the LTTE, but would wait for the latter to launch an attack on a new position that it was holding – then, go in for the kill. Even while maintaining the CFA as a façade, they will keep hitting wherever they want, with no concern about the human cost, or about refugees, or their ethnic identity. Both sides are issuing statements on peace to keep the international community happy, but neither is serious. Rather than wanting to occupy territory, they would go about killing each other's cadres. In the current operations, hardly any prisoner has been taken. In high-intensity wars, prisoners are not taken generally, as there would not be facilities to hold them.

On the military aspects of 'Eelam War IV', the SLSF has demonstrated better planning, improved defensive battle, good air support, and the use of multi-barrel rocket launchers, and creditable naval performance. This is really remarkable considering, in particular, the use of high-altitude Kfir fighters for close support to the ground troops. There were reports that Pakistani pilots were flying the Kfirs, but Pakistan does not have Kfirs, nor would the Israeli manufacturer let PAF pilots fly them. It is possible that unemployed pilots from CIS countries may have been employed, but the SLAF has some very good pilots who can do the job. The naval performance was a slow-offensive operation, either intentional or for battle-readiness of the cadets. This could even be a strategy of Gen. Fonseka, for the ground forces to take the battle forward after a lot of aerial pounding, with total disregard to casualties.

Surprisingly, the LTTE has exhibited weakness in planning conventional operations. At Maavilaru, the LTTE offensive brought the divided Sinhala groups together,

behind the Government and the security forces. Elsewhere, when it launched the main offensive, the LTTE was short of forces. It has about 7000 cadres in the North. The LTTE has also exposed weakness in combining and coordinating conventional and non-conventional operations. The Sri Lankan Air Force (SLAF) has become its main problem, and as the recent arrest of 14 persons in the US and Canada shows, the LTTE is still shopping for 50 SAMs (surface-to-air missiles). The last time they were similarly troubled by the SLAF, an LTTE suicide squad was sent to blast the Kattanayaka air base. One should not be surprised if they repeat something like that now.

### Sea Control off Sri Lanka Commodore (Retd) R.S.Vasan:

For an island like Sri Lanka, 'sea control' is essential and in this 'sea denial' forms a part, as the latter is an easier strategy with only fewer assets needed for deployment. It is a potent strategy for weaker nations, and it is thus that Pakistan, for instance, is investing on submarines to enforce sea-denial. The LTTE is simultaneously looking at both sea denial and sea control; it also has a number of assets. Against this, the Sri Lankan Navy (SLN) has assigned to itself the role of the most vital defence force for an island-nation.

At times, the LTTE's 'Sea Tigers' is dubbed as a de facto navy. The need to provide logistic support to the cadres, for moving them from the North to the East, which has a disjointed land link, demands transport capability either by air or sea. The military capability of the 'Sea Tigers' is amazing in terms of inventory. They have logistic ships registered in Panama, Honduras and Liberia, which are also engaged in legitimate trade/traffic. The LTTE is also in possession of a fishing trawler fleet, which too is being put to dual-use, either for fishing or for picking up arms from Singapore, Thailand, Myanmar, or elsewhere. The 'Black Tiger' suicide-squads have men trained in maritime attacks. Their communication devices, which used to be modern, are becoming increasingly difficult to procure.

Under UNCLOS (UN Conference on the Law of the Seas), however, the LTTE has no claim to a legitimate navy to call its own. But in response to the categorical statement of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Missions (SLMM), 'Col' Soosai of the 'Sea Tigers' had this to say: "Even during intense war, we were able to establish sea-links with distant lands at our will. No party was able to stop us then... Now, the SLMM is advancing new explanations to label our sea movements as illegal." This is a very important indicator considering the large-scale illegal arms import by the LTTE, not only from South-East Asia but also from Africa. However, this has become a little

difficult now with an international squeeze being applied on all such transactions.

The failed LTTE attack on the passenger liner, *Pearl Cruiser II*, carrying 710 passengers, on May 11, 2006, was a serious incident, as its success would have had dramatic consequences. They also attacked '*my Jet Liner*', carrying 854 troops, called in the place of the slow and bulky *Pearl Cruiser*, on August 2, but this was thwarted again. In the past, the LTTE used to be successful in similar operations, but the Sri Lankan Navy and the Air Force have been able to predict a pattern and thwart the attacks. The LTTE is not in a position to catch the SLN off-guard, not any more.

Yet, both sides have lost at sea. Though the LTTE did sink *The dvoras* of the Sri Lankan Navy (SLN) in a suicide-attack, their losses have been heavier in comparison. Recently, on September 2, the navy sunk 12 of the 20 boats of the LTTE fleet, off Point Pedro. The SLAF also destroyed an LTTE boat-building yard, south of Trincomalee, and this would mean that Sea Tigers would not be able to put out more boats for conventional attacks and suicide-missions.

When we correlate the possible airstrips at Sampur with the ground offensive at Sampur, we can see how important the linkages are. From the point of ground offensive, Sampur has always been very important as it overlooks the entrance to the Trincomalee Harbour, allowing monitoring of sea traffic. It was quite easy to neutralise or sink a ship in the harbour, and make things difficult for SLN. The action at Sampur against the LTTE strongholds, therefore, was inescapable. This is what Lt. Gen. Sarath Fonseka, Chief of Army Staff, SLA, had to say: "The combined army, navy and air force operation launched Sunday was intended to safeguard the strategic Trincomalee harbour and navy base."

### IMO Restrictions

A few factors have turned the tables on the LTTE in the present scenario. The first is the ban on the LTTE, imposed by India, the UK, the US, Canada, and now the EU, and also the freezing of funds in the West – making it difficult for the LTTE to continue getting the supplies even if had the money. More importantly, the restrictions on maritime movements, imposed by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), mostly at the behest of the US after 9/11, have had their impact. Greater control in the form of International Ship and Port Security Code (ISPS) has made it much more difficult for bringing in cargo without proper scrutiny. Under the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), involving bilateral agreements between the US and other nations, American forces can

now board and examine any vessel even on the high seas, to exercise contraband- control.

The Container Security Initiative (CSI), likewise prevents transport of contraband. The LTTE has a couple of ships with container facility, but ISPS has guaranteed against misuse. Where the LTTE is known to deploy low-tonnage vessels to escape some of the international codes, they have been targeted by SLN. The noose is only getting tightened. In the Sri Lankan context, whoever controls the seas will have the upper-hand.

Simultaneously, the shelf-life of the SA-7s, the Russian SAMs in the LTTE's possession, is over, and this should explain the Tigers' inability to counter the air-attacks of the Sri Lankan forces. Whatever they have left, reports say, are earmarked for the protection of Prabhakaran. Today, the Kfirs with the Sri Lankan Air Force do not have to fly high, to avoid ground attack. They can come low and fast, drop the bombs and get away. The SLAF is also using helicopters for aerial attacks with impunity, which could not have been imagined in the past. This explains the LTTE's desperation for procuring anti-aircraft missiles at any price. The LTTE is looking for anti-tank weapons, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and modern communication devices so that they could achieve a breakthrough some day in the not too distant future.

Geographically, the security of 'Tamil Eelam' is interlinked to that of the adjoining seas. "It is only when we are strong on the seas, and are able to break the dominance of the enemy, will we be able to retain the land areas we liberated, and drive our enemies from our homeland," Prabhakaran said sometime in 2000. This explains the creation of their maritime force and infrastructure, including the boat-building yard, etc. The LTTE has been well-versed and well aware of the need to have sea-control, and it also has been working towards having the constituents of such sea power in its armoury.

### Intelligence-Sharing

The India-Sri Lanka defence agreement has not been signed, but at the unofficial level, a lot of exchanges appear to be taking place between the maritime forces of the two countries. Intelligence on the shipment of arms and ammunition, and the movement of ships is perhaps being exchanged. Officers of the Indian Navy have quarterly meetings with their Sri Lankan counterparts on the International Border Line (IBL), to review the security scenario and to arrive at mechanisms for coordinated action. There are informal arrangements, high-level visits, and a lot has happened for SLN to get more information than in the past. Even the 'Sethusamudram Project' could be a facilitator for greater sea control, but there need be no

concern about the possibility of LTTE sinking their targets in the canal.

For India, the investments at Trincomalee are very important from the strategic point of view, and they need to be protected. The SLN, SLAF and the Government of Sri Lanka are quite clear that Trincomalee continues to play a very important role in not just economic development, but also in various other aspects of governance, investment and strategy.

The 'Pakistan card' needs to be considered, though it is not very new. Earlier, it used to be the 'China card', of China building a base at Hambantotta, but the 'Pakistan card' is now taking centre-stage. This is a serious matter. The point is, if India is not willing to arm the Sri Lankan Government, for reasons right or wrong, the latter would naturally go to whoever is willing to give them arms. Pakistan was willing to do so, to score points over India and to gain a foothold in the island.

If Pakistan had refused, Sri Lanka would have gone to any other country that was willing to replenish its arms stocks. In this context, the influence and linkages of the ISI, to ferment trouble in southern India, have also been analysed, and the profile of Pakistani appointees, and their involvement with SLAF, needs to be studied closely.

### The Indian Dilemma Dr V Suryanarayan

Elements of both continuity and change in India's Sri Lanka policy, especially towards the debilitating ethnic crisis, can be discerned from the Annual Report of the Ministry of External Affairs, 2000-2001 : "India consistently reiterated its commitment to the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka and to a peaceful political process as being the only means of achieving a lasting peace, through a negotiated settlement, which would meet the aspirations of all elements in Sri Lankan society". A more forthright assertion of Indian stakes in the unity and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka contained in the Joint Statement was issued at the end of Prime Minister Ranil Wikramasinghe's visit to India in the third week of October 2003. Another statement, issued by the Ministry of External Affairs in August 2005, was a matter-of-fact description of Indian stakes.

As war clouds are gathering over Sri Lanka, pressure is mounting on the Indian Government to play a more active role. This demand cuts across political lines. The Sri Lankan Government's hopes were articulated by President Mahinda Rajapakse in an interview to India Today: "I have been repeatedly requesting the Indian Government to play a much bigger role in helping Sri Lanka solve its crisis... We need India's help in the seas around Jaffna and



Trincomalee to prevent arms for terrorists being smuggled into our country. We make a special appeal to India's Tamil leaders to take the initiative and help the misguided though small section of our Tamil population to unite for a peaceful solution to the problem." The Tigers have been requesting India to forget the past and adopt a pro-LTTE policy in the ethnic crisis. What is more, Tamil Nadu is once again getting drawn into competitive politics with the pro-LTTE forces championing the cause of the Tigers and the DMK State Government walking a tight-rope—of maintaining good equation with the Centre without being seen as pursuing an anti-Sri Lankan Tamil stance.

### Love-Hate Relationship

For India, the past still weighs heavily on the present, and the dilemmas, unless resolved amicably, will continue to cast their long shadows on the Indian foreign policy establishment. What are these dilemmas? Is it the love-hate relationship that has characterized India-Sri Lanka relations in the past? Is it the obvious asymmetry – size, population, economic resources, and military power – between the colossus in the north and the small island in the south? Is it the 'Tamil Nadu factor', which has vitiated the relations between the two countries? Is it the 'IPKF misadventure' in Sri Lanka? Is it the internationalisation of the ethnic conflict, with external powers like United States, Pakistan, China and Japan playing an increasing role in India's immediate neighbourhood?

In the course of a visit to Ceylon in 1927 to popularise khadi, Mahatma Gandhi rightly referred to Ceylon as India's 'daughter State'. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru stated in the Lok Sabha on May 15, 1954, "We want an independent Ceylon and a friendly Ceylon. In every sense, Ceylon is nearer to us than any other country – culturally, historically, linguistically, and even in the matter of religion... Why should we look with greedy eyes on Ceylon? We do not. But the fact remains, there is fear, and because there is this fear, I would beg this House not to say at any time, things which might add to that fear... We should treat and continue to deal with Ceylon in a friendly way, even though Ceylon's response might be unfriendly,"

It is the tragedy of India-Sri Lanka relations that instead of reciprocating the goodwill, several Ceylonese leaders resented the mention of close co-operation. According to Prime Minister Sir John Kotelawala, "The day Ceylon dispensed with Englishmen completely, the island would go under India." He regarded the membership of the Commonwealth "as the first insurance against any possibility of aggression from quarters closer home". In more recent times, the induction of the IPKF, at the

invitation of President Jayewardene under the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord, 1987, enabled the Sri Lankan army to devote itself completely to counter the JVP threat. The military marginalisation of the LTTE, accomplished at heavy cost of men and material, did not earn for India the corresponding gratitude of the Sinhalese. On the contrary, it gave a fillip to Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinism and provided justification for the argument that Sri Lanka would soon become the client State of its hegemonic neighbour. The Premadasa Government even gave money and weapons to fight the IPKF.

### 'Monumental Tragedy'

LTTE ideologue Anton Balasingham's description of the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi as a "great tragedy, a monumental, historical tragedy", in the NDTV interview in June 2006 has to be viewed in the context of the LTTE's desperate attempts to regain sympathy and support in India, especially in Tamil Nadu. As the memory of Rajiv Gandhi's assassination has started fading, the pro-LTTE forces in Tamil Nadu have become more vocal in their criticism of Sri Lankan government and admiration for the prolonged struggle waged by the LTTE. In the NDTV interview, Balasingham requested the Government of India and the people of India "to be magnanimous to put the past behind and to approach the ethnic question in a different perspective".

Balasingham's statement was a reiteration of what he and Prabhakaran said in the news conference held in Kilinochchi in April 2002. In Kilinochchi, Balasingham underlined the role of India in the resolution of ethnic conflict: "Without India, this problem will not find a permanent settlement. India is the regional super-power and we need India's backing and support... We do not want to have any unfriendly relationship with India because we have suffered a lot as a consequence of the contradictions between India and the LTTE. So we want to renew our friendship and engage in a positive relationship with India".

Balasingham added: "As a race of people, we are Tamils and we have our roots in India. India is our fatherland. So whatever happened in the past, we are not going to entertain any unpleasant memories". Recent events in Tamil Nadu should be a matter of serious concern. The unanimous resolution passed by the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly, condemning the killing of innocent children in aerial bombings and the demonstration led by Vaiko before the Sri Lankan High Commission in New Delhi illustrate that the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka is likely to become a major political issue in the politics of Tamil Nadu.

The internationalisation of the ethnic conflict and the self-imposed restraint on the part of New Delhi has created a situation where, in India's immediate southern neighbourhood, external actors have started playing a major role. The US, Japan, China, Pakistan and member-States of European Union are fishing in troubled waters of Sri Lanka. Since New Delhi has expressed its unwillingness to provide arms, naturally Colombo has approached countries that are willing to supply arms. The increasing involvement of US and Pakistan in Sri Lanka should be a matter of serious concern for New Delhi. While at present there is convergence of interests between India and the US in combating 'LTTE terrorism', it must be kept in mind that the US foreign policy, during recent years, has oscillated sharply between excessive military involvement and disengagement.

### Pakistani Involvement

The Pakistani involvement in Sri Lanka should be a matter concern from the point of view of Indian security. According to B. Raman, one of India's leading experts on strategic affairs, there has been "clandestine" co-operation between the Pakistani Air Force and the Sri Lankan Air Force. The Muslim community in Sri Lanka is also slowly getting 'radicalised' under the influence of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). A strong ISI presence is likely to lead to the infiltration of Lashkar-e-Toiba into the island. This would provide Pakistan an opportunity to infiltrate and sponsor jihadi terrorism in south Indian states.

The emergence of the 'Sea Tigers' as a credible fighting force in India's immediate maritime neighbourhood should be a matter of serious concern for India. The Sri Lankan and foreign intelligence agencies estimate the strength of 'Sea Tigers' at around 2,000-3,000 cadres. They have acquired the latest equipment from several countries in Asia and Europe to enhance their fighting capabilities. According to an LTTE publication, the cadres include specialists from disciplines ranging from marine engineering to naval architecture. A few years ago, *Jane's International Defence Review* pointed out that the Sea Tigers have "taken on the Sri Lankan Navy with unprecedented success". A recent publication of the Woodrow Wilson School of Politics and International Studies reckons that the 'Sea Tigers' have destroyed 35 to 50 per cent of the Sri Lankan Navy's coastal craft.

### External Sovereignty

Since March 2003, the LTTE has begun articulating its 'rights' over the seas. Prabhakaran demanded a de facto naval status for the LTTE, and in its proposals for an

interim self-government authority (ISGA), the LTTE has demanded control over maritime resources, and the right of access and exploitation over them. If Colombo were to ever accede to these demands, which is a remote possibility, two-thirds of Sri Lanka's coastline would come under the control of the LTTE. As far as the Palk Bay is concerned, the 'Sea Tigers' dominate the entire coastline, excepting the outer islands in the Jaffna peninsula and the Mannar island, which continue to be under the control of the Sri Lankan Navy. As M. Rasgotra, the former Indian Foreign Secretary, has rightly pointed out, some parts of the ISGA proposals, especially those relating to control of the seas, are not relevant "to internal self-determination, but are an aspect of external sovereignty".

In this connection, two points are worthy of consideration. First, immediate talks should commence between the two countries at the highest level and provision should be made for a joint naval presence in the island of Kachchativu, which would enable the two navies to monitor the movement of the 'Sea Tigers' in the Palk Bay. It would also relegate the controversy regarding the ownership of the island to the background. Equally important, Colombo's willingness to consider proposals for licensed Indian fishermen to fish in Sri Lankan waters, as agreed to in July 2003, should be pursued in right earnest. In return for such facilities, as a quid pro quo, Sri Lankan fishermen could be permitted to fish in Indian Exclusive Economic Zone on the same terms and conditions. The Tamil Nadu Government should be concerned that the Tamil Nadu fishermen who regularly poach into Sri Lankan waters in the Palk Bay area are at the mercy of the Sea Tigers, who, in 2002, took a huge ransom to release the fishermen and their boats, which were caught poaching in Sri Lankan waters.

There is increasing realisation among the Sri Lankan authorities that the Indian political and constitutional model can provide meaningful solutions to the complex problems facing various ethnic groups. It is necessary to highlight the fact that despite the limitations, the 13th Amendment to the Sri Lankan Constitution, following the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord, for the first time in the history of the island, provided for devolution of powers to the Provincial Councils. It is also necessary to find satisfactory democratic solutions to satisfy the aspirations of smaller ethnic groups like the Muslims and people of Indian origin.

Can the 'Indian model', which provides for autonomous districts, be replicated in Sri Lanka, to address the Muslim aspirations? Similarly, if the aspirations of the 'Indian Tamils' who are a non-territorial minority, are to be met, there must be devolution from provincial councils to Pradeshiya Sabhas. Can the Governors be vested with

special powers to protect the interests of the 'Indian Tamils'? Can the community have some sort of veto power when legislations are introduced affecting their religious and social practices? Here again, the 'Indian model' can be relevant. Since the Muslims, and especially the 'Indian Tamils', do not have adequate legal expertise, the non-governmental organisations in India can come to their assistance, study their problems and suggest ways and means for incorporation in the constitutional settlement.

### Siamese Twins

For India, Sri Lanka is not just another country. What happens in the island will have its immediate consequences in India, especially in Tamil Nadu. The LTTE's ISGA proposals, if accepted in toto, would create a virtual State. Given the track-record of the LTTE, especially its role in the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi and it being a banned terrorist organisation, we cannot have any truck with the LTTE, nor have any sympathy for its style of Pol Potist politics. Terrorism expert B. Raman has said that India "should work for an LTTE minus Prabhakaran". This may be difficult, but India must start taking steps for the emergence of democratic alternatives to the LTTE.

Given the track record of the LTTE in Tamil Nadu and its policy of exploiting the political contradictions in the State to its advantage, in the present context of coalition politics in New Delhi, the role of Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi in India's Sri Lanka policy becomes extremely significant. Karunanidhi should naturally be wary of supporting the LTTE. India, especially Tamil Nadu, must distinguish between the LTTE and the genuine grievances of the Tamil people. Only by adopting such a stance can the Sri Lankan Tamil cause be rescued from the clutches of the pro-LTTE forces in Tamil Nadu.

### Tamil Nadu Factor

#### S Murari:

The absence of a consensus has been a constant aspect of the 'Tamil Nadu factor' with regard to the 'Sri Lankan issue'. From the Sinhalese side, the history of 'separatism' in Tamil Nadu is also over-rated. Whenever there is a strong Centre in India, the regional parties always towed the line, and whenever there is a weak Centre, they assert themselves. Inside Sri Lanka, if Prabhakaran were to be neutralised that would not assure any end to 'Tamil nationalism'.

Whatever be the reason/motive for India arming the Tamil youth of Sri Lanka in the Eighties, it introduced the 'gun culture' in Tamil Nadu. It has died down only now, 15 years after the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. Some of

the violent incidents at that time included the 'Madras Airport blast' of 1984, in which 35 persons were killed, the 'Mahalingapuram incident' in which two Sri Lankan Tamil leaders, Douglas Devananda and Sri Sabaratnam fought over a local dispute in their country, the 'Pondy Bazar episode' involving Prabhakaran, and the 'Padmanabha killing', apart from the killing of Sri Sabaratnam; in 1986 a train was derailed, a bomb went off in Madurai airport, a TV tower was blasted, and the Nehru statue at the Kathipara Junction in Chennai damaged. These incidents showed that the militants were being sucked into the local politics.

In 1986, then Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, the late M. G. Ramachandran, under pressure from the Centre, ordered the seizure of all weapons of all militant groups when Prabhakaran was made to come to Bangalore to talk to the Sri Lankan Government representatives on the sidelines of the SAARC conference at Bangalore, Prabhakaran laid the condition that he was willing to go to Bangalore only if his entourage's arms were restored. In the process, not only their weapons but even those of other Tamil militant groups were handed over to the LTTE. Anton Balasingham, the LTTE ideologue, was of the opinion at the time that the confiscation of the communications equipment was a serious attempt at undermining Prabhakaran's leadership. It showed how insecure the LTTE felt.

Prabhakaran went back to Jaffna in 1986, never to come back. When the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord was signed in 1987, he felt that India should have been a guarantor, and not a signatory. But the situation at the time was such that the Government of Sri Lanka could not have been expected to keep its promises unless India directly entered the picture. When IPKF entered the scene, the entire population turned against them at the instigation of Prabhakaran. He convinced them that India was there only to protect its own interests.

M. G. Ramachandran (MGR) as Tamil Nadu Chief Minister supported the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord, and sent State Minister, Mr S. Ramachandran, to witness the signing ceremony in Colombo. At the time the Accord came into existence, the Tamil Nadu population, and even the Sri Lankan Tamil population, was all supportive. They were not bothered about the finer and final contours of the Accord, they just wanted a peaceful settlement and the Accord was a hope in that direction.

When Prabhakaran rallied for peace and was talking to MGR, Rajiv Gandhi and the others—it was seen as a sign of weakness. The IPKF-LTTE engagement continued till 1989-90, and in between, when Tamil Nadu was under President's rule after MGR's death, Prabhakaran's wounded aide, Kittu, was sought to be deported. Yet, the Dravidar Kazhagam and others went to court on his behalf, and

said that the wounds of Kittu and others were fresh and needed medical care and healing. The Sri Lankan Army was not in the picture, indicating that the IPKF was involved, instead. This was the kind of support that the LTTE enjoyed even when they were fighting the Indian Army, the IPKF. Karunanidhi as successor-Chief Minister, when in Delhi in the midst of the 'Padmanabha killing', reportedly pleaded with the Prime Minister that medical treatment be extended to the LTTE cadres, fighting the IPKF. This would have been unthinkable in any other country.

It is now opined that when Karunanidhi paid a courtesy call on Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in February 1991, the latter had reportedly asked him to try talk out the issues with Prabhakaran and find a way out. It is made to appear that Rajiv Gandhi wanted a political settlement. That was not the case, because with Premadasa winning the Sri Lankan presidential elections on the plank of sending back the IPKF – he thought that was the only way to contain the JVP – the Indian Army had started pulling back. So when Karunanidhi met Rajiv Gandhi, in all probability all that the Prime Minister wanted was to use his influence with the LTTE for some sort of a settlement, facilitating an honourable way out for the IPKF.

### IPKF Withdrawal

When the IPKF was in Sri Lanka during Rajiv Gandhi's premiership, Karunanidhi maintained a very low profile. Then in November 1989, when V. P. Singh came to power and DMK's 'Murasoli' Maran became a Union Minister without the party having a single seat, the Prime Minister left the entire matter to Karunanidhi. The Chief Minister then held talks with a whole lot of Sri Lankan Tamil leaders. It was in this period that the IPKF pullout was completed. It also resulted in anti-LTTE cadres and others coming back to Tamil Nadu as refugees. As Chief Minister, Karunanidhi did not want them in Tamil Nadu, he asked them to be sent to Dandakaranya instead, fearing some kind of fallout in the State. Then, when the last contingent of the IPKF came back, Karunanidhi refused to receive them, saying that the Indian Army had killed Tamil youth and raped their women in Sri Lanka. He followed the LTTE propaganda, hook, line and sinker. It was fashionable for him to support the LTTE as it was fashionable for the Jaffna Tamils to support the LTTE.

It was not only Karunanidhi from among Tamil Nadu politicians who said as much. During the provincial council elections under ceasefire conditions in Sri Lanka in 1988, the LTTE was playing Vaiko's speeches, referring to the Indian Army in similar terms. The campaign went to the ridiculous extent of ethnic-profiling the IPKF, to

whip up chauvinism. After the dismissal of the DMK State Government in January 1991, 'Murasoli' Maran said that the Indian Army was not a holy cow, and likened the IPKF induction to the US involvement in Vietnam. He said he was a critic of the IPKF induction, and not of the Indian soldiers dying in battle. This was the pervasive atmosphere in Tamil Nadu at the time, which emboldened the LTTE to come here and assassinate Rajiv Gandhi in cold blood.

### Defining Moment

Yet, this was also the defining moment in the history of Tamil Nadu's involvement in the Sri Lankan struggle. In the elections that followed, the DMK won just one seat, that of Karunanidhi, in the 234-member State Assembly, and none at all from the 39 Lok Sabha seats. This was the mood of the Tamil Nadu people, which has not changed even now. They will not give any quarter to terrorism, regardless of what the political leaders may be talking about.

Given former Chief Minister and Opposition AIADMK leader, Jayalalithaa's consistent opposition to the LTTE, and Chief Minister Karunanidhi's ambivalence, who are the people that are left? PMK founder S. Ramadoss, whose party shares power at the Centre, is again ambivalent. Dravidar Kazhagam General Secretary K. Veeramani is keeping quiet and has not issued any statement this time. You then have pan-Tamil, pro-LTTE leaders like MDMK's Vaiko, Pazha Nedumaran and Thol Thirumavalavan, who do not have any real stakes in power.

The people of Tamil Nadu will never want a return to the past. No political party has made Sri Lanka an issue since the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in 1991 and the situation has not changed now. This is true of the people of Tamil Nadu, as well.

### Discussion

#### **Ramachandra Sundaralingam (ex-SL Police & Interpol) :**

Speaking from interactions with Sri Lankan Tamils, from Jaffna, Mannar and Batticaloa, they would be happy living under the Government than the LTTE. Their reason is that the "LTTE will not tolerate dissent". All in all, the situation in Colombo is explosive, and it could become a prime target. This is a problem that needs to be settled by India, and Tamil Nadu too has a major role to play. People can say that India can be the outsider but I personally feel, having been a Sri Lankan police officer, having been associated with a lot of Sri Lankan politicians, India has a major role to play, as well as Tamil Nadu, in solving the

problem in Sri Lanka.

### **Sreedhar Rajan (Social Activist):**

The possible emergence of a 'soft-LTTE' is anathema to the LTTE, and Prabhakaran is not known to countenance such ideas. If it were so, what has LTTE got to show in terms of proving it has become soft? Is there a way to negotiate with an LTTE that goes beyond Prabhakaran, as had happened to other cult figures like Yasser Arafat? Likewise, how long should Sri Lanka wait for the emergence of a 'S consensus'?

### **V. Ramamurthy (IAS Retd):**

Language, which was meant to be an instrument of communication for making people come together, instead, has divided people. Considering that we are interested in a peaceful Sri Lanka, considering that we are interested in a neighbour whom we'd like to help, who we would like not to be a hindrance to us, how do you consider the use of force, including diplomatic force, as a possible way for arriving at a solution?

### **Oslo Formulation**

#### **K Venkataramanan (The Pioneer):**

The statistics that we are familiar with say that the Sinhalese constitute about 72.5 per cent of the population, and the Tamils about 12.5 per cent. The 18 per cent figure is the total of 'Tamil Hindus' and 'Tamils of Indian Origin', but even then I do not think we should go by this.

At Oslo, the Muslims were very much on board, even though the LTTE had not formally recognised them as a party on the head-table, and Mr Rauf Hakeem, who was there as a member of the Government delegation, represented the community. The 'Oslo formulation' was largely a product of the thinking of the two parties, roughly modelled and probably inspired by the 1987 Accord. It just said that the Tamils would have a right to internal self-determination, and on that basis explore the possibility of a 'federal solution'.

In the rest of Sri Lanka, there is resistance to the very idea of federalism, for it to be considered for the Provinces other than the North and the East. The word 'devolution' was used only as a via media, and Tamils, in turn, dislike the idea of devolution. The idea of federalism or some sort of power-sharing arrangement is very much present in the 1987 Indo-Sri Lanka Accord, and enforced by the Constitution 14th Amendment. The Provincial Council system is meant for the whole country, but ironically because of the 'ethnic war', the North and the East, for which the amendment was meant, do not have a provincial government. Other provinces have provincial councils,

but they too are only glorified civic bodies. As a solution to the current impasse, the provincial councils can be expanded, to arrive at some sort of a federal structure, for all the provinces. Whenever anyone talks about a solution, whether it is devolution or federalism, they largely mean a second tier of government.

Now, there is an emerging area of thinking that this by itself may not really solve the problem. There is a feeling about the 'historical discrimination' against the Tamils for whom even government records and court papers are only in Sinhala, a language that most of them do not read or write. How can this be solved in the Sinhala-majority Provinces, and vice-versa, under a federal or co-federal setup? The majority of the Tamils, it should be remembered, live outside the North and the East – only about 48 per cent of the Tamils live in these two Provinces.

### **Col Hariharan :**

Next to India, Sri Lanka has the largest number of internally-displaced persons. Over 200,000 people, Tamils, Muslims and Sinhalese, who have not returned to their homes. The LTTE threw out even Sinhalese from Jaffna, and according to UNCHR, another 200,000 people have joined the ranks of IDPs since April 2006, taking the total close to half a million.

The situation is different now from the one in 1987, when the LTTE was on the run. It was being threatened even in Jaffna, and luckily for the LTTE, the Indian Air Force rescued it with the air-drop operation – which is also a major grouse of SLA. In fact, the LTTE has never won Jaffna – it just occupied the town when the IPKF left, but pulled back when attacked by SLA. There is no point in putting two dozen LTTE cadres when SLA is advancing with 1000 soldiers, and making them cannon-fodder. This is also why they shot Muslims, and this is their big weakness.

### **K Venkataramanan (The Pioneer):**

The LTTE gathered the Muslim civilians in front of the Al Arabiya School and the local mosque, and fired rockets at SLA. As they had hoped, the SLA's retaliatory fire hit the civilian cover.

### **Col. R Hariharan:**

In 1989, the Muslims did not feel insecure, but today, thanks to the LTTE, the community has rallied together. The next time it will not be so easy for them to be thrown out. There is the Muslim Regiment also being raised in the SLA and that is also a point to be considered. It is not a good suggestion but the SLA is raising it.

### State and Nation

#### Dr V Suryanarayan:

On the concept of State and nation, over the last two decades, one tendency is for existing States to cede their sovereignty to come together, as in the case of European Union. There is also the equally important tendency, which the western scholars do not mention, of some existing States disintegrating. Most of the States were artificial creations of a colonial legacy, and were not nation-States but only States that had resolved to stay together. The disintegration of the Soviet Union, the revolutionary and the counter-revolutionary developments in Eastern and Central Europe, and Yugoslavia are the precedents that the LTTE draws encouragement from.

On the question of demography, populations of any country can be divided on several counts. In Sri Lanka, the Census figures cite only two Tamil groups, the 'Sri Lankan Tamils' and the 'Indian Tamils'. The Muslims, though Tamil-speaking, are identified on the basis of religion, not language. Therefore, the LTTE's attempts to project the Muslims also as Tamils and by implying that they (LTTE) are the sole representatives of the Tamils who can look after the interests of the Muslims, does not carry much weight.

In Sri Lanka, the Tamils' demands have escalated from being a part of the Government to wanting a separate State, while the Sinhalese are happy with a 'unitary State'. In fact, late President Premadasa is their hero because he used to take immediate decisions, which used to get implemented right away, under the 'unitary State' scheme. But there needs to be further devolution from the Provincial Council to other levels in the case of Muslims and 'Indian Tamils'. Innovative forms of power-sharing need to be evolved.

Regarding the defence agreement between the two countries, obviously the Tamil Nadu partners in the successive coalitions ruling the Centre have played a role. This is the dilemma that faces New Delhi: In the absence of a constitutional settlement, any weapons that India provides to Sri Lanka could be used against the Tamils. One suggestion is for India to do business with LTTE minus Prabhakaran, but the other could be for India to encourage a democratic alternative to the LTTE.

#### S Murari (Deccan Herald, Chennai):

How do you reach out to the LTTE? There is no answer. Whether it is Norway, or the US, or the EU that is taking an interest, India is very much in the picture. Pakistan may supply arms to Sri Lanka, but Pakistan cannot displace India. This is because India is seen by both the LTTE and as well as the Government in Colombo as the natural player that could help resolve the conflict. But,

they want India to come to their rescue on their terms. That will never happen.

#### Col R Hariharan (ex-MI-IPKF):

There is no central committee in LTTE for taking decisions, so there is no question of finding a replacement to Prabhakaran. His aides are kings in specific domains, and he also has many external advisors, but it is Prabhakaran who takes the decision.

### Indian Experience

#### N Sathiyamoorthy (ORF-Chennai):

From the older generation of advisors close to Prabhakaran, only Balasingham remains – and he too is not staying in Kilinochchi. The younger generation that grew up worshipping Prabhakaran as a demi-god, cannot be expected to think independently, or go against him. Also, an LTTE-minus-Prabhakaran, or a Tamil community without LTTE would only create faceless leaders of the Osama kind, with the result that Governments would not have anyone to talk to, or even target. Nevertheless, there are still provisions in the Sri Lankan Constitution, under which the President can order devolution without involving Parliament. For obvious reasons, no incumbent wants to do so.

What can India do? Apart from the 'Indian model', Indian can educate all sections of Sri Lanka, including Sinhala hardliners, on the 'Indian experience' in power-devolution, on how many a regional party that had begun with secessionist leanings had become democratised and joined the mainstream. The 'Indian experience' could apply to various Sri Lankan institutions, including in matters of 'judicial activism' of the Indian kind, in the absence of which conservative judges end up getting dubbed as 'Sinhala chauvinists'. Encouraging Sri Lanka to evolve a 'Sri Lankan model', thus, alone would help, as India cannot be expected to run their Government for them – the negative fallout of which would be disastrous.

The Sri Lankan Government now seems sensitive towards the 'Tamil Nadu factor', and President Rajapakse did despatch Arumugan Thondaman, a leader of the 'Tamils of Indian origin' to meet with Karunanidhi, after the latter became Chief Minister. A day before Thondaman met Karunanidhi, TULF leader Anandasangaree wrote to the Chief Minister seeking his involvement to help solve the 'ethnic issue'. It is time the Centre began taking the regional parties across the country into confidence on all major policy issues and policy-shifts, with coalition politics becoming a reality of our national life.

For India to play a pro-active role, New Delhi needs to think and feel like a great power. The two super-powers in

the post-War world evolved by either 'managing' or 'over-running' neighbouring nations, and thereby making their neighbourhood, safe and secure in the case of Moscow, and friendly and sincere for Washington. In the post-Cold War world, neither course is possible, yet the realities of regional equations cannot be wished away by anyone.

India has the potential and need, both in self-interest and larger regional interests, to win over the confidence and friendship of all neighbours, to be able to defend them as much as defend its own sovereignty and territorial integrity

### SPEAKERS

- Ashik Bonofer, Research Assistant, ORF-Chennai
- Col R. Hariharan (Retd), formerly with Military Intelligence in charge of Intelligence Wing of Indian Peace-Keeping Force (IPKF) in Sri Lanka.
- S. Murari, Special Correspondent, The Deccan Herald, Chennai
- N. Sathiya Moorthy, Director, Chennai Chapter of the Observer Research Foundation (ORF-C)
- Dr V Suryanarayan, formerly Director, Centre for South and South-East Asian Studies, University of Madras, Chennai
- Commodore R. S. Vasan (Retd), Additional Director, ORF-Chennai (formerly Commander, East Zone, Coast Guard)
- K.Venkatramanan, Special Correspondent, The Pioneer, Chennai (formerly Special Correspondent, Press Trust of India, Colombo)



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