

Uncertainties in the Minds of the International Community and Sri Lankans in the Aftermath of LTTE Leader's Heroes' Day Speech

By Satheesan Kumaaran

I am conscious that an equal division of property is impracticable, but, the consequences of this enormous inequality producing so much misery to the bulk of mankind, legislators cannot invent too many devices for subdividing property –Thomas Jefferson

The leader of the LTTE, in his Great Heroes' Day (Maaveerar) speech, broadcast from an unknown location in northern Sri Lanka on November 27, 2007, put much more weight than on previous occasions on the need for Tamils around the world to sensitise the international community to the plight of the Sri Lankan Tamils and to rally round in solidarity with the Sri Lankan Tamils. Such solidarity may very well determine the eventual destiny of the Tamils in Sri Lanka, if negotiations with the Sri Lankan government break down and war breaks out. Furthermore, the LTTE leader, unlike on previous occasions when his statements were directed mainly toward the Sinhala nation, made it his priority this time to chide the International Community (IC) for its failure to recognise the just and fair claim of the Tamils of Sri Lanka for self-determination and the persistence of the LTTE to find a permanent solution through peaceful negotiation. The Tamils in Sri Lanka have been driven to fight for equality and justice ever since the island gained its independence from Britain in 1948, initially using parliamentary means but after these were exhausted by Sinhala intransigence, by taking up armed resistance to Sinhala military oppression.

The LTTE Leader's Earlier Heroes' Day Speeches

Although LTTE leader Velupillai Pirapaharan has been addressing the general Tamil public since 1987, these annual policy speeches did not gain much international significance because the LTTE focussed on military tactics rather than on ending the ethnic conflict through peace talks. The speeches of the LTTE supremo and the concerns of the Tamils of Sri Lanka began to get international attention only after November 27, 2002, when the IC and Tamils elsewhere around the world began to observe the Eelam problem closely because they wanted to know whether the parties in conflict would find a peaceful settlement. The LTTE leader in 2002, 2003, and 2004 urged the Sri Lankan government to enter into genuine peace talks with the LTTE, despite the fact that the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government had already entered into several rounds of peace talks in foreign countries under the Sinhala leaderships of Ranil Wickremesinghe of the UNP and Chandrika of the People's Alliance. LTTE leaders did not

approve of the way the UNP leader, Ranil Wickremesinghe, handled the issues of the Tamils. Wickremesinghe, they felt, failed to address the grievances of Tamils, even though the government negotiating team promised to create normalcy in northern and eastern Sri Lanka. Ranil's UNP was the mastermind in breaking the LTTE in Batticaloa. The government at the time gave shelter to and accommodated an LTTE faction, under former-LTTE commander Karuna, in Batticaloa. Ranil did so during a time of peace. The LTTE was not in a situation to blame the Sri Lankan government alone because the issue involved an internal matter within the LTTE movement. So, the LTTE leadership took quick action to expel the breakaway group and name its members traitors. But the LTTE leadership did not forget the activities of the UNPers. This was not the first time the LTTE leadership had discerned a move to create internal fighting within the LTTE and, thereby, to weaken it. The Indian government, for instance, did this, but without success. India managed to infiltrate the LTTE, to use its second-in-command, Mahthaya, and to name a few other leaders; these attempts were foiled by members of the LTTE intelligence, led by Pottu Amman. When Chandrika Kumaratunga came to power, she tried not to antagonize the LTTE. Hence, she continued the peace process, but she did not enter into genuine peace talks. She even managed to hoodwink the IC. Chandrika's government played a crucial role in 2004, when a tsunami hit countries adjoining the Indian Ocean, including Sri Lanka. She did not permit former American presidents George Bush, Sr. and Bill Clinton or other dignitaries, such as United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, to visit LTTE-controlled areas, even though many people in the Tamil areas in the north and east suffered from the effects of the tsunami, because she claimed their visits to these areas would sanction LTTE claims for a separate state.

In 2005, just nine days after President Mahinda Rajapaksa won the presidential race, the LTTE leader said he was willing to give Rajapaksa time. The LTTE leader believed that, unlike other presidents of the country, Rajapaksa would be sincere and honest in pursuing a peaceful settlement to the ethnic issue. The goodwill of the LTTE, however, was of no avail because the Sri Lankan armed forces began killing Tamils in the north and east. The LTTE, in return, began defensive attacks against Sri Lankan troops. One took place on December 4, 2005, when they killed 10 troops in an attack in Jaffna. On December 5, 2005, they killed another four troops. Sporadic clashes between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan armed forces continued, but the attacks were viewed by the LTTE as defensive one.

Things got worse in 2006, when the Sri Lankan armed forces captured areas controlled by the LTTE, thereby violating the Cease-Fire Agreement (CFA) signed between the LTTE leader and Sri Lanka's premier, Ranil Wickremesinghe, in 2002. In return, the LTTE launched defensive attacks, but refrained from launching major military attacks, except the one in Trincomalee. The LTTE fighters returned to their camps, due to the pressure of the IC over violations of the CFA. LTTE members once again proved they respected the CFA, but the government violated it many times. The LTTE leadership took the issue to the IC, asking its members to exert pressure on the Sri Lankan government to refrain from capturing LTTE-held areas, as stated in the CFA. The Sri Lankan government, however, did not follow the demands of the IC.

On November 27, 2006, the LTTE leader, Pirapaharan, in his Martyrs' Day speech, clarified the prevailing LTTE position. He made a strongly-worded statement: "Both our liberation movement and our people never preferred war to a peaceful resolution. We have always preferred a peaceful approach to win the political rights of our people. We have never hesitated to follow the peaceful path to win our political rights. That is why we held peace talks, beginning in Thimpu right through to Geneva, on

several occasions, at various times, and in many countries”. He also stated that Rajapaksa had rejected his final call, pronounced in his Heroes’ Day statement of 2005, to give more time to finding a resolution to the urgent Tamil National Question. He added that Rajapaksa, instead, had intensified the war, even as he had claimed to want to find a peaceful resolution. Pirapaharan noted this dual war and peace approach is fundamentally flawed: “It is not possible to find a resolution by marginalizing and destroying the freedom movement with which talks must be held to find the resolution. This is political absurdity on the part of the Sinhala leaders. Due to this strategy of the Rajapaksa regime, the CFA has become defunct”. The LTTE leader added that Rajapaksa’s regime, which denied the people food and medicine, thereby starving them, could not be expected to show compassion and give the Tamil people their political rights. He said that the Sinhala nation, eternally trapped in the mythical ideology of the Mahavamsa, has failed to think afresh and has left the Tamils with only one option, political independence and statehood for the people of Tamil Eelam.

The LTTE Leader’s 2007 Heroes’ Day Speech

The LTTE leader’s speech of November 27, 2007 was seen as important, even crucial, by all Tamils around the world and the IC for various obvious reasons. First, Tamils the world over wanted to know what their leaders had to say because Tamils from other parts of the world could not pay a visit to their brethren in the north and east due to security reasons, the closure of roads, and unsafe air, land, and sea passages to the Tamil homeland. Secondly, many Tamils from other parts of the world had gone to the Tamil homeland in Sri Lanka and their youngsters had married there; however, spouses had been left behind, waiting for foreign embassies to approve their sponsorship applications. At the same time, many of the Tamils from abroad who had married in northern and eastern Sri Lanka and were forced to leave their spouses there were unable to make safe passage to Colombo, where their sponsorship procedures had to be completed. Thirdly, some Tamils who visited Sri Lanka were abducted for ransom, and, on many occasions, the Sri Lankan armed forces or their sponsored militant groups kidnapped foreign Tamil nationals. The Tamils around the world, therefore, yearned for a peaceful atmosphere. The IC also wanted to ensure peace prevailed on the island for various reasons. The war against extremists was taking place in the Middle East and in Afghanistan. The Americans and their allies wanted safe sea passage through Sri Lanka from American and British bases in the Indian Ocean, especially from Diego Garcia, near Madagascar. Neighbouring India wanted peace in Sri Lanka, even though India does not want greater autonomy for Tamils in Sri Lanka, fearing that greater autonomy for the Tamils in Sri Lanka will create internal problems for India; India especially fears that the Tamils in Sri Lanka will give moral and material support to the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, which could demand separation from India. This latter myth has existed for quite some time in New Delhi. The idea was first sown by the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), during the early 1980s, when Sri Lankan militant groups became leading players in the fight against the Sri Lankan armed forces and Tamil militants got training, money, and support from India. China, Pakistan, Japan, Israel, and Russia are only a few of the countries that supported the Sri Lankan government for various reasons, including geo-political and security reasons, and that now also see the problem in Sri Lanka as critical. The IC has economic interests in the region, especially with India; that makes Sri Lanka important. The IC also wants to play a critical role in ending the conflict through peaceful means, in order to save the people from gross violations of human rights.

Whatever the consequences to the IC, it is important to highlight the speech the LTTE leader made on November 27 of this year because he said he had lost faith in the IC and urged Tamils throughout the

world to stand behind him in the days, months, and years to come, days that will be the darkest for the freedom struggle because LTTE fighters are determined to liberate the Tamil Nation from the wrath of the Sinhala occupation. The LTTE leader, this time, signalled clearly that the country was heading for a bloody, no-holds-barred war because the government has unilaterally broken the CFA, which, today, is only a paper document. He sent two politically-laden messages to the south. He stated that, since the CFA is no longer in force, everything and everyone is fair game and that he was going add to Rajapaksa's woes by giving the JVP more teeth with which to call on the government formally to abrogate the agreement. The day after the LTTE leader delivered his speech, the JVP did call on the government formally to abrogate the CFA. That evening, a bomb explosion in the heart of Nugegoda killed 20 civilians and injured 36 more. In addition, there was a suicide bomb attack, during the early hours of the same day, at the office of former Tamil militant leader Douglas Devananda, who is today a cabinet minister in the Rajapaksa government, even though his EPDP party members are wandering around the country with weapons. For hours after the bomb attacks, the government, fearing a retaliatory attack based on the LTTE claim of 11 students being killed in a blast in the north, rushed to close all schools in the Western Province. Vehicles were banned from entering the World Trade Centre and the Liberty Plaza shopping complex was searched following a bomb scare. Over 18,000 police and army soldiers are guarding Colombo and its suburbs. These security personnel are conducting door-to-door searches in the Sinhala south. Over 3,000 Tamils have been arrested and put in prison, regardless of their age and gender. All these people were taken to prison because they were born to Tamils. The IC has not responded to the arrests made by the Sri Lankan government. The IC, however, responded immediately, condemning the perpetrators of the November 28 attack on Nugegoda, an attack that killed 20 people.

On the eve of Heroes' Day, while the LTTE leader was preparing his speech, the Sri Lankan government flattened the building of the 'Voice of Tigers' radio in Kilinochchi. Nevertheless, the 'Voice of Tigers' and other media outlets of the LTTE, as well as other broadcasting and television media around the world, aired the speech in full. Although the building of the 'Voice of Tigers' radio was flattened in the raid, the 'Voice of Tigers' radio broadcast continued through a backup station. Ten people at the radio station, including three employees, were killed. Reporters Without Borders and some international media organizations described the attack as a war crime. On the same day, 13 civilians in the north, including 11 children, were killed, allegedly by a deep penetration unit of the Sri Lankan army. Defence secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa, brother of the Sri Lankan president, vowed his army forces would kill the LTTE leader soon. Vowing to kill or arrest senior LTTE leaders is something Sri Lankan and Indian leaders have always done; in fact, this is difficult to do.

With this context in mind, it is important to highlight another statement the LTTE leader made in his November 27 speech: "The immeasurable dedication and sacrifice of our heroes is delivering a message to the Sinhala nation. Those who plan to destroy the Tamil nation will in the end be forced to face their own destruction". He noted the LTTE's aims: "We are struggling only to regain our sovereignty in our own historical land where we have lived for centuries, the sovereignty which we lost to colonial occupiers. We are struggling only to re-establish that sovereignty and rebuild our nation. The Sinhala nation is continuing to reject our just and civilised demands for freedom. Instead, it has declared a genocidal war on our land and our people. Behind the smokescreen of fighting terrorism, it is creating immense human misery". Furthermore, he added: "Despite our people enduring injustice, oppression, facing death, destruction and massive displacement, no country, no nation, no international organisation has raised its voice on our behalf. We face this situation alone because, although 80 million Tamils live

all around the globe, the Tamils do not have a country of their own”. Finally, the LTTE supremo announced his intention of renewed battle in the following terms: “Thousands of our fighters are standing ready to fight with determination for our just goal of freedom and we will overcome the hurdles before us and liberate our motherland. On this day, when we remember our heroes, who sacrificed themselves for this sacred goal, let each one of us carry their dreams in our hearts and struggle until it is achieved”.

More importantly, the LTTE supremo castigated the IC for not taking active steps to prevent an outbreak of war that would then lead to a breakdown in the peace process; there is also an implication that the LTTE will no longer be mindful of international opinion when carrying out its operations. It is premature, at this stage, to judge whether the LTTE is being hypocritical in placing the entire blame on the government and the IC for the breakdown of the peace process; what is significant is the message that the country will witness a brutal war in the days ahead, a war wherein international norms will find no place. Having dealt with the failure of the international community to enforce the peace process, the LTTE leader clearly stated that there is no way the peace talks can continue and indirectly pointed out that the only permanent solution is one founded on military means. This is not due to the fact that he and his people are lovers of war, but that there is no alternative to military means in finding a permanent solution. The people of all communities in Sri Lanka are sick and tired of the ongoing, sporadic clashes, and many civilians are suffering from economic and military burdens imposed on them under the guise of peace talks. Extortions, killings, tortures, and rapes take place on a daily basis in the Tamil-dominated north and east and in Colombo.

Rajapaksa, too, declared his intention to go to war with the LTTE. However, both parties in the conflict refrain from declaring war because of the exertion of pressure from the IC. Things have been changing, however, since the LTTE leader claimed the LTTE had lost faith in the IC.

This time, the LTTE leader spoke at length and publicly about India’s desire to be a regional superpower. That is why, for geo-political and security reasons, India sent Indian armed forces, in the guise of a peacekeeping force, to the Tamil homeland in Sri Lanka. He noted that India did not even get the consent of the Tamil nation before sending the armed forces. India sent them to suppress the Eelam cause. The LTTE leader is correct in stating that he was forcefully taken to New Delhi, with other Tamil leaders, before signing the Indo-Lanka Accord, in 1987, and that the Indian government then forced the LTTE leader to agree to receive the Indian armed forces without resistance. The LTTE leader only agreed because he knew the mentality of New Delhi at that time and wanted to escape from the custody of Indian government. He and others were then safely transported to Sri Lanka, but only after he gave his word not to launch attacks against the arriving Indian armed forces. The LTTE fighters on the ground in Jaffna stopped preventing the Indian armed forces from landing. By the time the LTTE leader and others arrived in Jaffna, the Indian armed forces were deployed throughout northern and eastern Sri Lanka. Politicians in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, including chief minister M. G. Ramachandran, told LTTE members not to heed the advice of New Delhi. The Tamil Nadu premier told Pirapaharan and others to be careful when dealing with New Delhi and that, only if they were satisfied with the promises made by New Delhi, should the LTTE leadership approve the accord. It is unfortunate Ramachandran died soon thereafter, whereupon many political changes took place in India.

The International Community and Sri Lanka

The IC does not seem to have an interest in intervening directly, despite the fact the IC wants the conflicting parties to compromise. IC members promised over \$4 billion for the rebuilding of the war-ravaged North and East, but they said they would only release the aid after a solution was found. Sri Lanka is in debt. The IMF has branded Sri Lanka a failed state because it does not meet international standards. Global governments understand that Sri Lanka will go bankrupt if the government continues to war with the Tamils because the country is already in dire economic and social straits. Some countries are granting funds at higher interest rates; subsequently, these countries will take over the shares of most Sri Lanka's assets. The Sri Lankan government is getting weapons from foreign countries, on loans. All these make the IC and Sri Lanka bitter. The IC, however, does not want to interfere in the sovereignty of Sri Lanka.

LTTE leader Pirapaharan flatly stated his frustrations with the IC because the IC is not with the Tamils, but is only using the Tamils for its own benefits, and is unable to make the Sri Lankan state compromise. Sri Lanka is, today, busy making friends within the IC, including Iran. Although the United States told the Sri Lankan government diplomatically not to hold talks with Iranian leaders, the Sri Lankan president made a visit to Iran last month and held talks with Iranian leaders for the purpose of seeking support for his government in Sri Lanka. Pakistan is a natural ally of Sri Lanka, but Sri Lanka turned Pakistan down diplomatically when Pakistan was refrained from taking part in the commonwealth foreign ministers' meeting, held last month. The reason cited for suspending Pakistan is that Pakistan declared a state of emergency, a move that does not respect democracy. Tamil politicians, however, raised questions with the IC because Sri Lanka has also declared a state of emergency, has been conducting a war of genocide against the minority community in Sri Lanka through violent means for the last 35 years, and the government has failed to address the political grievances of the Tamils since the country gained independence from Britain. Tamil politicians posed the question of whether Pakistan would change its ally in the aftermath of the Sri Lankan government's action of speaking against the interest of Pakistan. They argue that Tamils are not a homogenous group. They are comprised of many religions, including Islam. The Sinhalese are purely Buddhists; some of them converted to Christianity, but not to Islam, historically. Pakistan should understand the reality of the Sri Lankan Tamil community. Tamil-speaking Hindus and Christians lived side by side with Tamil-speaking Muslims until groups with sinister motives created tensions among them in order to weaken the struggle led by the Tamil militants.

Policy-makers around the world are beginning to understand the conflict in Sri Lanka because it is a burning issue in the global arena. Policy makers in Britain, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Netherlands, France, Denmark, Norway, Finland, Sweden, Canada, India, and the United States are beginning to speak in favour of the Tamil struggle. Twelve Canadian Liberal Members of Parliament spoke against Sri Lankan state atrocities when the local Tamils organized a commemoration event held in memory of the former LTTE political wing leader, S P Thamilselvan. Tamils around the world organized Heroes' Day events to commemorate the dead heroes of the LTTE, numbering approximately 20,000. This year, Tamil Diasporas took part in the events in greater numbers than ever before. Guest speakers included Indian and Sri Lankan Tamil leaders who urged the Tamil Diaspora to continue to stand in solidarity with the LTTE in the fight for freedom for the Eelam Tamils in Sri Lanka.

One other important event in the international arena is the visit of the Sri Lankan parliamentarian and MP of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) M.K. Eelaventhan to Canada to hold talks with the Canadian government and Opposition leaders. He blamed the Sri Lankan security forces for abductions, killings,

and disappearances. Eelaventhan told Canadian officials: "Disappearance is now becoming a normal feature. I will call it a normality. When a person disappears and doesn't appear for three days, you can safely say that he is among the dead". The Canadian Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, assured him of Canada's support in bringing an end to the misery of the people of Sri Lanka through diplomatic channels.

Another milestone is that American senators and policy-makers, especially Democrats, publicly criticize the Sri Lankan government for indulging in violence against ethnic Tamils on the island. They now urge the Sri Lankan government to respect human rights. Democratic senator Hillary Clinton, during a recent interview with a British newspaper, *The Guardian*, urged a more nuanced approach to armed non-state actors; she argued that "the bottom line is, you can't lump all terrorists together...what the Tamil Tigers are fighting for in Sri Lanka, or the Basque separatists in Spain, or the insurgents in al-Anbar province may only be connected by tactics". No-one should lump together all the movements that claim to be engaged in freedom struggles. One should recognize the movements that are fighting for genuine causes. No-one should support extremists or fundamentalists. The United Nations, although it does not have a better definition of terrorism, widely covers all the movements that are waging wars against states, with or without motives. The role of the IC in regard to Sri Lanka has been a failure, but Sri Lankans are getting some comfort from the speeches of lawmakers who are inspiring others to bring peace to the island.

The Internal Politics of Sri Lanka Creates Governmental Chaos

The Rajapaksa government has tabled the budget for the year 2008. This government, in order to succeed, must get the support of small parties like the TNA, the JVP, or others. It is optimistic in its hope that the Sinhala extremist party, the JVP, will come to its rescue on December 14. JVP's propaganda secretary, Wimal Weerawansa, stated that his party's support during the December 14 vote will be based on the political situation at the time. The JVP is one of the allies of the ruling government, but it speaks out against the Rajapaksa government and makes many demands on the government in return for its support. One of the senior members of the JVP stated that while the JVP will decide its political agenda based on realities on the ground, there will be no change in how the JVP votes on the December 14 budget; it is the same budget the party opposed on November 19. The JVP leader, Somawansa Amarasinghe, in a local television interview, stated categorically that the decision to vote against the budget will stand.

The Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, which counts six members, has already announced the party will review its decision soon. The CWC is expected to do so next week, thereby putting 12 MPs who voted for the government on November 19 in the undecided category. Panic in the government was blatant in parliament last week, with several ministers, including G. L. Peiris, Jeyaraj Fernandopulle, Champika Ranawaka, and Basil Rajapakae asking SLMC leader Rauf Hakeem how serious he was in reconsidering his decision. Hakeem was asked what the government had to do to secure the SLMC's support for the budget, but Hakeem remained noncommittal, stating the party would have to consider realities on the ground before making a final decision. One problem the SLMC faces is the growing anger of the Muslim community against the government because of the rapidly-deteriorating economy, the perception there is a Sinhalisation of Muslim areas in the east, and the perception the community is being taken for granted by the Rajapaksa brothers.

Although it is widely known in political circles that the government will face critical issues, not only in regard to the LTTE, but also due to political and economic circumstances, the Rajapaksa government will have to bend in order to obtain the support of other parties; this will definitely put the government in a difficult situation. The government cannot run a stable administration, even if it survives December 14. It is against this backdrop that the LTTE leader's speech of November 27 has to be viewed. Intensified conflict is the catchphrase.

Conclusion

The annual speech of the LTTE supreme has been much anticipated since the movement began to observe Heroes' Day, but it has been considered even more important since 2004, for various obvious reasons. The 2005 annual speech gave Rajapaksa time to make peace after he took power. Thereafter, the leader voiced his disappointment with Rajapaksa's approach to ending the ethnic conflict, stating he was never really interested in ending the conflict. The 2006 annual speech noted the Tamil Nation would no longer expect justice from the Sinhala nation. Finally, the 2007 speech addressed the international community, which urged both parties in the Sri Lankan conflict to enter into genuine peace talks, but which has failed to understand the legitimate grievances of the Tamils because the IC is biased in favour of the Sri Lankan government. Therefore, the LTTE leader expects Tamils throughout the world to show solidarity with the LTTE during the difficult times the Tamils in Eelam will face in the days, months, or years to come, while they fight for the liberation of Tamil Eelam.

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