

Need for real Tamil leadership

(By: Shenali Waduge)



"The war has reached a significant phase" so says most international media channels. We cannot be naïve to the fact that regaining lost territory & winning the battle will finally put to rest 30 years of calamity. While the army surges ahead it is time for the people of Sri Lanka to start working upon a change in mindset away from extremes & not allow the past to haunt the decisions that should create a fresh start for the entire country. Only then can we expect changes for the better. It is in this scenario that we need to look at the present leadership of the Tamil people & wonder what ails its present existence & why they are not suited to continue to function as the representatives of the Tamil people.

It has been unfortunate that the present Tamil "leaders" belong to the old brigade & carry with them thoughts harbored by those who propagated the 1976 Vaddukodai Resolution in an attempt to elevate their stature amongst the Tamil public through the secessionist theme. This thought was soon hijacked by the LTTE who vanquished all other rebel groups along with their leaders & became the defacto "sole representative" of the Tamil people. This invariably left the Tamil leaders with little choice but to side with the LTTE & become their proxy in Parliament or side with the Government.

Most of these Tamil leaders have taken great pains to maintain their existence by creating a scenario that Sri Lanka cannot solve any problem without India's interference & are seen flying off across the Palk Straits to seek India's advice. Can a sovereign country continue to have minority leaders whose decisions are made following discussions with a neighboring country & leaders who have to be watchful of their shadow fearing LTTE's reprimand - the case of Varatharaja Perumal comes to mind? Thus, the present Tamil political leadership were not only able to openly depict or debate their thoughts, but failed to put

forward the wishes of the Tamil people or project themselves as genuine representatives of the Tamil grievances - right is what the LTTE does & wrong is what the enemies do, so the Tamil parliamentarians ended up justifying to all what the LTTE did.

Can we hold any confidence in their leadership ability? The people had little or no choice as they had to either keep silent or openly praise the LTTE. Those who join the Government face a higher risk of assassination attempts of the LTTE. We cannot accept any longer the problems that have been articulated through the present Tamil members in Parliament (the proxy LTTE) for they lack sincerity to say the least. No longer can solutions be tabled to satisfy their desires or the continuance of their leadership which has now to be seriously evaluated based on their performance.

So if we presume that these leaders are following two extreme directions we can but wonder if there are any moderate thinking Tamil leaders at all? If there were any, the

LTTE has ensured their voice has been permanently silenced - possibly over 55 such Tamil leaders through their campaign of terror are no more.

SLFP Mayor for Jaffna (Alfred Duraiyappah) became the LTTE's first successful assassination attempt. They have killed two other Mayors including Mrs. Sarojini Yogeshwaran (TULF) & Pon Sivapalan(TULF). The MPs killed account for respected men & women from the ACTC, TULF, EPRLF & Sri Lanka Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadiragamar & Chief Government Whip Jeyraj Fernandopulle also to this list includes Amirthalingam, V Yogeshwaran, Mr & Mrs. Sam Thambimuttu. The LTTE has also eliminated men & women of other political partys including UNP (A J Rajasooriar, Mala Ramachandran), Ceylon Communist Party (S. Wijayanandan), TULF, PLOTE, ACTC, EPDP, TELO, EPRLF & even TNA parliamentary candidate Rajan Sathiyamoorthy. To the list of public officers killed by the LTTE includes Tamil Government Agents of Mullaitivu, Samanthurai, Batticaloa, Trincomalee, Kopay & Jaffna as well as a District Judge & Primary Court Judge. Principals have also not been exempted & the principals of St. Johns College Jaffna, Palugamam Maha Vidyalaya, Vigneswara Vidyalala Trincomalee also faced death at the hands of the LTTE. Members of civil society groups, citizens committees & the Chairman of the Point Pedro Urban Council also were assassinated as were Tamil religious heads.

Should we then be surprised when academics & professionals are also included into the LTTE death list & figuring here is Dr. Mrs Rajini Thiranagama of the Jaffna University, K. Loganathan Deputy Secretary General of the Sri Lanka Peace Secretariat, Dr. Maheshwary Weluatham attorney at law & advisor to Minister Douglas Devananda & Dr. Neelan Thiruchelvan. This is the list of known Tamil leaders who are now no more - & if the Tamil people lack any honorable leadership today it is because the LTTE has eliminated any opportunity for the two sides to engage in democratic interchange since their objective was to take up arms.

It is thus not too late for us to accept the LTTE as the common enemy. The LTTE is nothing but a terrorist movement for what kind of "sole representative" would do away with their own men & women especially the Tamil intelligentsia? We can empathize with the fear psychosis that has prevented the ordinary Tamil people from putting forth their honest opinions but now that the LTTE has been significantly weakened it is a good time for the Tamil people to come forward & let the world know directly what really ails them. It certainly is not an "ethnic problem".

The world may opine that the Sinhalese have been particularly discriminative of the Tamils but let us also remember that the Tamil leaders at post-independence voted with the Government to disenfranchise Indian Tamils through the Citizenship Act of 1948 (this affected 700,000 Indian Tamils) It is evident that both Tamil & Sinhala leaders of the past stand accountable for a series of mistakes for which we are today the beneficiaries. For the two protagonists to move forward there is an urgent requirement to remove the root cause. To do that we need to first identify what the root cause is. The LTTE hijacked the idea of separation from the TULF - this was their sole agenda in taking up arms they were not interested in highlighting or striving to address the needs & wants of the Tamil people, through 25 years the peace talks &

ceasefires were only a façade to appease Western elements who take delight in "political negotiations" how many of these have actually seen their results. US Secretary General has made 17 visits in 2 years to the Middle East to solve the Israel-Palestine crisis - nothing has even remotely been achieved.

In Sri Lanka's case let us not forget that we are dealing with 3 communities & requires sensitive attention - 25 years we have heard only what the Tamils have been denied but this is not the correct scenario.

If the Tamils declare that the Sinhalese leaderships have failed them can they acknowledge what the LTTE has done for them in the 25 years that they have held the entire country to ransom - are the Tamil people willing to allow this façade to continue for their leader is not immortal?

With all the funds that the LTTE makes (Jane's Intelligence says the LTTE has an annual income of USD200-300million) has any of this money trickled to feed the poor Tamils even in the areas that they control, have they put up any schools, improved any roads or hospitals...or even taken care of the families whose children are part of their child brigade?

The UNICEF declares that 30% of LTTE conscripts are children which invariable means that this 30% are children from poor Tamil homes who have had to sacrifice a child since they do not have money to add to the LTTE kitty, something which the richer Tamils can do & save their children from joining the child brigade. With the weakening of the LTTE we can see positive changes taking place - a few Tamils abroad have been forthcoming to say that the Sinhalese have not discriminated them. So finally we are seeing a brave few coming out to acknowledge what we have said all along - the Sinhalese people have not discriminated the Tamils. No one wants to see either of the communities in strife especially when we look around us we cannot see any of the animosities that certain media outlets, NGO representatives, self-interested political analysts, political parties & even the international community project. We must understand that each of their views correspond to the need to sustain their existence & their program within Sri Lanka.

Therefore, now that the country is reaching a significant milestone we need to come to terms with the fact that the LTTE is & was always a terrorist outfit, that the "ethnic" problem scenario was purely a camouflage & an excuse to nourish its existence & more importantly the Tamil people must accept that not only has the LTTE failed the Tamil people that the present Tamil parliamentarians have too.

The present dearth in proper Tamil leadership immediately gives calls for young Tamil leaders to take over & until such time it requires the Southern leaderships to be more pragmatic in their approach to the grievances of all communities & not to satisfy the needs of only political leaders. It is the combined will of the people with benevolent leadership that will see any distinctive & decisive changes taking place to resuscitate Sri Lanka & beat the forces that are trying to diminish its development.

