



**INTERVENTION BY H.E. RAVINATHA ARYASINHA, AMBASSADOR OF
SRI LANKA TO BELGIUM, LUXEMBOURG AND THE EU AT THE EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT - SOUTH ASIA DELEGATION SESSION, BRUSSELS**

**Embassy of Sri Lanka
Brussels**

11 February 2009

INTERVENTION BY H.E. RAVINATHA ARYASINHA, AMBASSADOR OF SRI LANKA TO BELGIUM, LUXEMBOURG AND THE EU AT THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT - SOUTH ASIA DELEGATION SESSION, BRUSSELS

Chairman Robert Evans, Members of the South Asia Delegation of the European Parliament, representatives of the European Council, European Commission and my fellow South Asians.

It is clear that the LTTE in Sri Lanka and its front organizations abroad, desperate in the face of impending military defeat, have over the past two weeks resorted to means unparalleled in recent times. This is not surprising.

What is surprising from some of the speeches we heard last Thursday at the discussion on “the situation in Sri Lanka” at the European Parliament’s Strasbourg session, and also others here today, is how much many of you have been influenced by the dis-information spread by the LTTE and its cohorts, and keep repeating them.

Hence, while I have no illusion that I can alter the thinking of those who might have for the past 25 years or so fed off Sri Lanka’s troubles, let me use this opportunity to appeal to the good sense of those of you who might be interested in reason, to underline the fallacy behind some of the main strands of the the dis-information spread by the LTTE, and to provide an update on the current situation in the cleared/uncleared area in Northern Sri Lanka.

DIS-INFORMATION SPREAD BY THE LTTE

1. Associated Press (AP) report - “300 civilians killed, 1,000 wounded in fighting”

If one is to pin-point the triggering off of this dis-information campaign, it is the report issued by the AP, which on 29 January 2009 in a story headlined “Sri Lankan health official says more than 300 civilians killed, 1,000 wounded in fighting”, claimed that “Dr. Thurairajah Varatharajah, the top health official in the region, revealed the figures in a desperate appeal to the government and aid groups for medicine and blood transfusions for those injured in the fighting”. It said “the letter was dated Monday and obtained by the Associated Press on Wednesday”. (see report at [Annex 1](#))

I am in possession of an advisory note to editors issued by the same AP the following day, advising editors to “kill” the story, noting:

“ The Colombo, Sri Lanka, story BC-AS--Sri Lanka-Civil War, 3rd Ld, has been killed. The source denies he wrote the letter that said more than 300 civilians had been killed and 1,000 wounded in fighting in northern Sri Lanka”.

The advise went on to add;

- ¶ A kill is mandatory
- ¶ Make certain the story is not published,
- ¶ A substitute story will be filed shortly. (see report at [Annex 2](#))

As news cycles work, I am sure many of you would have read the original story, but hardly any heard of the AP’s “killing” of the story, as for the Western media, that was not news. So in your minds “300 civilians killed, 1,000 wounded in fighting” remained.

2. UN charge that “Puthukkudiyiruppu Hospital was hit by cluster munitions”

Subsequently, on 4 February 2009, there was a charge by the United Nation’s Colombo based spokesman Gordon Weiss that Puthukkudiyiruppu Hospital was hit by cluster munitions, which could cover large areas of land and some of the bomblets could remain unexploded for a long time and later harm civilians.

Sri Lanka categorically denied that it had neither fired cluster munitions nor it had ever bought cluster bombs into the country. Military spokesman Brigadier Udaya Nanayakkara said, "We don't have the facility to fire cluster munitions. We don't have these weapons."

The United Nations the same day apologized to the Government for their comments about the use of cluster bombs on the Pudukkudiyiruppu Government Hospital. A statement issued by UN's Colombo based spokesman Gordon Weiss has said they “accepted the Sri Lankan statement that it did not have any facility to fire cluster munitions”. He has said the UN did not point a finger at the military, but “was going by what his staff on the ground said”. The UN Resident Coordinator in Sri Lanka Neil Buhne extended a verbal apology for the comment made by its spokesman.

However the once again the damage was done.

3. ICRC allegations against the Government of Sri Lanka “for the plight faced by the patients and civilians in the uncleared areas of Mullaithivu”

In the ‘Daily Mirror’ of 7 February 2009, ICRC spokespersons have made allegations against GOSL for the plight faced by the patients and civilians in the uncleared areas of Mullaithivu, due to the risk involved as a result of the fighting between the LTTE and the security forces of the GOSL and the lack of medical and other supplies.

In a letter addressed to Mr Paul Castella , Head of Mission, ICRC- Sri Lanka the same day, Dr H A P Kahandaliyanage, Secretary - Ministry of Healthcare & Nutrition, draws attention to his communication with the ICRC with regard to evacuation of civilians, patients and medical staff of Puddukudiriappu , Udayarkattu , Vallipunam and Sudandirapuram hospitals. He notes “in my communication with you I have clearly mentioned that the patients and medical staff are willing to come over to the Government declared No Fire Zone or Vavuniya hospital and that the LTTE is preventing it and thus the Ministry of Healthcare and Nutrition requests the assistance of the ICRC in enabling these trapped patients and medical staff to reach the Government declared No Fire Zone or Killinochchi or Vavuniya. But the ICRC on their own decided that they should go to Puthumattalam, which is away from the desired safe area in Vavuniya.” The letter further states, “Had you heeded to the request made by me to move these civilians, patients and medical staff west, towards the Security Forces who were waiting , ready to receive and take them to Vavuniya, the plight that these civilians, patients and medical staff are currently in, might have never occurred. Therefore the responsibility for this plight lies solely with the ICRC for having deviated from the best possible route arranged by the government for evacuating the patients and medical staff from Puddukudiriappu”.

These three instances I have documented underlines the extent of the dis-information network the LTTE has built and continues to use. It is unfortunate that knowingly or callously without verification, by spreading blatant falsehoods about the situation in the operational area conscious of the damage it could cause, some journalists, as well as Spokespersons of UN Agencies and INGOs, appear intent to hide the true situation when commenting on the plight of civilians in the Wannu.

I have seen little written by the same persons/agencies drawing attention to;

- the well known practice of the LTTE's continued holding of the civilian population as "human shields"

- the LTTE terrorists deployment of artillery batteries, heavy mortars and satellite bases within the 'safety zones' demarcated by the Government

- that failing in its efforts at drawing retaliation upon these 'safety zones', in recent days the LTTE's despicable tactic of using its suicide cadres/firing to cause death and disruption within the 'safety zones' and on those Tamil civilians trying to flee the LTTE dominated areas. Several such instances have now been well established;

- a) On 4 February, the LTTE sent a 14-year-old girl with explosives strapped to her body and blasted her near the advancing 55 Division troops in Chalai.
- b) In another incident on 4th February one lorry was filled with explosives, accompanied by two other lorry loads of civilians, and the explosives detonated.
- c) On Monday 9 February, a female suicide bomber who had come with around 1,000 displaced civilians from the uncleared areas of Mullaitivu to the 'safety zone', had blown herself up when a woman soldier had tried to body check her at a checkpoint prior to being taken to a transit welfare centre where persons were being registered at an IDP rescue centre, North of Visuamadu in Mullaitivu, killing 30 people and injuring more than 75 others including 11 children and 31 females.
- d) The shooting by the LTTE on Tuesday 10 February 2009 upon a group of civilians trying to flee LTTE captivity in Puthukkuduiruppu in Mullaitivu, killing 19 civilians and injuring 69. 11 children and 31 females were among the injured.

It is un-mistakable that these acts are reprisals against Tamil civilians for defying the LTTE orders, as well as possibly a desperate attempt to trigger a ethnic backlash.

While the US Government promptly condemned the suicide attack, acknowledging that it as an "apparent effort by the LTTE to discourage Tamils from leaving the conflict area killed and wounded many Tamil civilians", and the UN too "expressed its strong condemnation on Monday's suicide attack", I note a silence from the European Union, which in some quarters, as I heard in Strasbourg last week, wants GOSL to talk to the LTTE.

CURRENT SITUATION IN THE CLEARED/UNCLEARED AREA

1. Status of affected civilians within and outside the un-cleared area

It must be noted that 98% of the area dominated by the LTTE in the Northern and Eastern Provinces as at November 2005, has now been cleared and as at 11 February only about 100 square kilometers North of Mullaitivu remains to be cleared. 40% of this area has been demarcated as a 'safety zone' throughout the period of conflict.

Contrary to allegations that over a quarter of a million (250,000) people are trapped in the uncleared areas, according to the Government Agent of Mullaitivu the number is considered to be around 110,000.

This is not new. In early 2007 as the Sri Lanka security forces were nearing completion of military operations to clear the entire Eastern province of the LTTE presence, some UN agencies, and many INGOs parroted LTTE propaganda lines that half a million persons (500,000) were displaced by the operation. However, when the final count was taken, the government and the UN agencies agreed that the number displaced during the period was that 187,000, of which 80% were re-settled in their original homes within 6 months.

It is also noteworthy that despite the conflict, supplies to the uncleared areas have been sent at regular intervals, most recently on 29 January, when 180 tons of food and other essentials was sent. While the GA/Mullativu has confirmed that there are sufficient stocks of food supplies to feed the remaining population in the uncleared areas for the present, currently, a convoy of 40 lorries of supplies are ready to move into the un-cleared areas, but the WFP has upto now been unable to negotiate with the LTTE for the further delivery of supplies. Meanwhile the Air Force today (11 February 2009) airlifted 20,000 packets of food parcels to be distributed among IDPs in Paranthan, which is north of the uncleared area.

2. Surge in civilians leaving the conflict zone

It is a fact that in launching the current operations, GOSL took swift measures to establish “safe corridors” in order that civilians in the uncleared areas could relocate to welfare villages located in safe ground.

Repeated appeals to the LTTE, “to let the people go”, have been made particularly since December 2008 by President Mahinda Rajapaksa, the Bishop of Jaffna Thomas Savundranayagam, the Government of India, the UN Secretary General, and the Co-Chairs of the Tokyo Donor Conference (The United States, European Union, Japan and Norway), as well as a number of INGOs. In its statement issued 3 February 2009, the Co-Chairs, (see [Annex 3](#)) which includes the EU, urged the LTTE (a listed terrorist entity within the European Union), to consider surrendering to avoid more deaths, including among thousands of civilians trapped in the war zone. "There remains probably only a short period of time before the LTTE loses control of all areas in the north," they said in a joint statement.

By the shooting of civilians fleeing their clutches and detonation of human bombs inside security zones, that the LTTE defied these requests, is now well established. But I am glad to be able to report to you, that braving the threats by the LTTE, in recent days there has been a surge of civilians leaving the conflict zone. It is estimated that 6500 civilians had arrived at Visuamadu, Dharmapuram and Sugandirapuram on 9 February alone, bringing the number of civilians that have moved to the cleared areas to 32,000 as of February 10. They have indeed voted with their feet.

3. Establishment of Welfare Villages

Currently the IDPs are housed in seven schools in Vavuniya. The Government is taking measures to expedite the establishment of fully equipped and functional welfare villages in three separate locations Ramanathan Suthanthirapuram, Arunachalam Viduthalaipuram and Kadirgamar EluchiNagar, in consultation with UN agencies and INGOs, to accommodate the IDPs until they can return to their place of origin with safety and dignity. For this purpose, 900 acres of land has been identified. It is proposed to construct 32,400 houses in these three villages, each of which will be allocated 270 acres. In the interim, as of 9 February 2009, 350 families have already been settled in the Menik Farm Welfare Centre in Vavuniya. The Ministry of Health has sent a medical team comprising 10 specialists and 110 nurses , in addition to emergency medical units sent previously, to meet the needs of displaced civilians.

4. Political Settlement

Let there be no doubt, that the Government was compelled to engage in a military operation to defeat terrorism in Sri Lanka, only due to the intransigence shown by the LTTE during 5 phases of peace negotiations with successive governments of Sri Lanka from 1985 to 2006, including that of President Mahinda Rajapaksa. Whilst the Government believes that the ultimate solution to the present conflict is political, it is confident that defeating the terrorists militarily is essential to creating an environment where a political solution can be found, as it provides the opportunity for a serious and meaningful dialogue with a number of moderate Tamil politicians, devoid of their being under pressure from the LTTE. In this quest, let me assure you that President Rajapaksa is committed to move as quickly as possible to implement the 13th Amendment to the Sri Lankan Constitution, which followed the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement of 1987 and as recently indicated to the visiting Indian Foreign Minister, even to explore the possibility of going further than the existing provisions.

Conclusion

From the above, it would be clear to members, that while completing its military operations to defeat terrorism, GOSL is deeply mindful and are fully addressing the needs of those temporarily displaced, while at the same time intent on using this moment to forge ahead in evolving a political settlement with all democratic forces in Sri Lanka.

It is in such context that GOSL appeals to members of the European Parliament, to support efforts to bring an end to this conflict, prevent the LTTE seeking safe-heaven in Europe through its numerous front organizations and to support the restoration of normalcy in the areas regained.

To do so, it is imperative that members begin viewing developments in Sri Lanka within 'a post-LTTE paradigm', that supports democratic forces of the Tamil community – both in Sri Lanka and within the diaspora, who are keen on re-building the country. Doing otherwise for sheer electoral or any other gain, would not only be a set back to the rare success a country has achieved in militarily defeating a terrorist organization - the LTTE, an organization the FBI has referred to as "among the most dangerous and deadly extremists in the world", but also run the risk of allowing this cancer of terrorism to spread within European society, where Tamil children and youth are being indoctrinated and terrorism and martyrdom glorified, while members of the LTTE through their front organizations could use their expertise in money laundering, human smuggling and gun running possibly to support other terrorist groups as well.

I thank you.