



Editorial: Providing security to Tamils now will define northeastern politics of the future

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Killings in the government-controlled areas of the northeast go on unabated. A day does not pass without reports of incidents in parts of the Tamil-majority areas. With perhaps less frequency but to deadlier purpose have been the massacres: Puttur, Chavakachcheri, Allapiddy, Vengalai.

An article carried in this month's The Northeastern Monthly highlights the culture of fear that grips the people of the northeast as they confront selective assassination, targeted precisely and with deadly intent. In Jaffna at least, the public is on record saying when a total war was being waged between the government and the LTTE they were adopting certain modes of security ? even in the case of air raids ? that proved sufficient.

In today's context however, things are different. The target is the individual and the killer an individual too. The hunted live in the open, the assassin ? hooded, sinister and without a name ? hunts till the victim is laid low. The fact that it is the individual that is earmarked for death has caused tremendous psychological and emotional pain to the people of the northeast.

The attendant problem is that the counterinsurgency campaign carried out by the government is so effective that no killer has been caught or charged. The killer remains the ?unidentified gunman.? This problem takes on new meaning in an environment where a multiplicity of forces using violence as a means of achieving their target, operate.

This issue was eloquently put by someone who spoke to The Northeastern Monthly on the condition of anonymity: ?A woman having love affair with EPDP cadre is killed, as much as the man who gives meals to the LTTE.?

The inability to protect its citizens within the areas it controls has caused Sri Lanka international embarrassment. This includes the ultimate opprobrium of being a failed state. These problems are only worsened when the military bombs and shells areas within the de facto control of the LTTE, but over which the Sri Lankan state persists in claiming sovereignty.

The question however is what is going to be the future of the Tamils of the government-controlled areas of the northeast. From around December last year they have become the sacrificial lambs in a war that is almost exclusively targeting civilian individuals.

It is fairly obvious that the government is not going to offer them any protection. In fact it is the state security forces that are the main perpetrator of the killings.

The people realising this are looking elsewhere for security ? to some other organisation or body that will provide protection and play the role the failed state was supposed to play. But to their consternation there does not appear to be a viable substitute.

The LTTE has exhorted the people to rise up against their oppressor. That is because the four years of so-called peace has rendered nothing to the Tamils. But the upsurge among the civilians has brought upon them the wrath of the government.

The solution to this is not give in tamely to the state. It is that the LTTE, which runs a state that is there in everything but in name has to devise a way of protecting Tamils living elsewhere in this benighted land of ours.

How the LTTE and the government come out in playing what is the most rudimentary role of the modern state ? providing security ? will be an important strut in defining Tamil politics of the future.