

EUROPEAN TRAVEL BAN: A WAKE UP CALL FOR LTTE By D.B.S.JEYARAJ

The European Union on September 26th issued a statement outlining its revised position on the on going peace process in Sri Lanka of which it is a co - chair. The statement released in London by the current EU head - Britain - read as follows

" The European Union hereby declares its condemnation of the continuing use of violence and terrorism by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The pursuit of political goals by such totally unacceptable methods only serves to damage the LTTE's standing and credibility as a negotiating partner and gravely endangers the Peace Process so much desired by the people of Sri Lanka. The European Union repeats its condemnation of the shocking murder of Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar and of so many others in Sri Lanka in recent weeks.

The European Union is actively considering the formal Listing of the LTTE as a terrorist organisation. In the meantime, the European Union has agreed that with immediate effect, delegations from the LTTE will no longer be received in any of the EU Member States until further notice. The European Union has also agreed that each Member State will, where necessary, take additional national measures to check and curb illegal or undesirable activities (including issues of funding and propaganda) of the LTTE, its related organisations and known individual supporters.

The European Union furthermore repeats its serious concern at the continuing recruitment and retention of child soldier cadres by the LTTE and reminds them that there can be no excuse whatsoever for this abhorrent practice to continue. The European Union takes this opportunity to underline the Statement of 19 September by the Co-Chairs of the Tokyo Donor Conference calling on the LTTE not least to take immediate public steps to demonstrate their commitment to the peace process and their willingness to change. The European Union calls upon all parties in Sri Lanka to show commitment and responsibility towards the peace process during the coming period of elections and to refrain from actions that could endanger a peaceful resolution and political settlement of the conflict. "

Ancient Indian statecraft comprises of four broad principles when it comes to one entity influencing another to adhere to a particular mode of conduct. They are "Saamam" "Bhetham" "Thaanam" and "Thandam".

Saamam is soft talk where one party is cajoled into agreeing or adhering through a pleasing gentle verbal approach. Bhetham is hard talk where the party is coerced into consenting through harsh intimidatory oral pressure. Thaanam is the method of coaxing a party into agreement through gifts and concessions. The fourth Thandam is compelling a party into agreement through punitive measures and force. It is the last resort to be used only when the other three options fail.

As far as the Sri Lankan peace process was concerned three countries adopted three of the abovesaid principles in dealing with the LTTE. Norway by virtue of being facilitator had to adopt the Saamam or soft approach. ever ready to please and appease. The sole superpower USA that had already banned the LTTE was the Bhetham or hardtalk proponent issuing tough statements and forbidding entry to Washington. Japan with its moneybags of yen followed the Thaanam method of influencing through gifts of aid and assistance. The Tokyo summit pledged 4.5 billion dollars of which around one - third was earmarked specifically for the North - East.

There was however one hitch. None of the three principles seemed to be working with the LTTE. Norway caught between conflicting interests of peace mediation and truce monitoring relied more and more on methods of appeasement without seeming to make any headway. The USA huffed and puffed like the big bad wolf but none of the little piggies in the Wannu were terrified. Yasushi Akashi of Kampuchea and Bosnia fame visited Kilinochchi with his money bags again and again and again. But the tiger supremo would not even grant him an audience.

When the international community tried to get the LTTE adhere to benchmarks in human rights, democracy and pluralism the tigers simply quit the talks and described the previous six rounds as a colossal waste of time. The LTTE boycotted the Tokyo summit and held that the Tokyo declaration was not binding on them. Even the Oslo declaration of exploring federalism was put in cold storage and its co - signatory Anton Stanislaus Balasingham "transferred" from the negotiating process.

On the other hand the tigers kept flouting the ceasefire in letter and spirit from the earliest days of the agreement coming into force from February 23rd 2002. Children were abducted and conscripted. Members of political parties opposed to the LTTE were prevented from engaging in political activity in the North - East. Former and present members of those organizations were killed. Tamil members of the military and para - military forces were murdered. After the Karuna split many civilians suspected of being linked to Karuna were killed. The ceasefire agreement and its attendant obligations was only a worthless piece of paper to the LTTE.

The tigers were having their own way and seemingly getting away with impunity. There was no one to deploy the fourth statecraft principle of Thandam or force. The European Union along with Norway, USA and Japan are the four co - chairs of the Sri Lankan peace process. If Norway, USA and Japan were following the other three principles the EU

could have been expected to enforce the fourth. The EU heavily influenced by the facilitator Norway also followed what was regarded as an appeasement policy towards tiger antics. Though sounds of disapproval were heard from time to time they were not taken seriously least of all by the European nations themselves.

In the absence of a "forceful" influence there was speculation that India could fill that role. So there was talk of coopting India as a fifth co - chair. New Delhi however is not interested in playing any direct role at this point of time. India certainly does not want to wield the "Dhanda" openly against the LTTE. It prefers to watch and wait while indicating its wishes to Colombo and Oslo quietly.

Who then is to bell the cat or in this case the tiger? It appears that the EU is going to be entrusted the role of flexing some muscles at least towards the LTTE. The EU statement condemning the LTTE and enforcing a travel ban with the threat of an outright ban is the first credible sign in three and a half years of post - ceasefire developments that the International community is really serious about continuing LTTE violence and intransigence.

The International community through the EU action has given notice that it intends invoking the fourth principle of Thandam in stages against the LTTE. It does not mean that troops are going to be sent or bombing begun. The EU statement in diplomatic parlance is a demarche to the LTTE. In simple language it is a wake up call.

The travel ban is only a preliminary punitive measure. If the LTTE treats the EU statement seriously, desists from violence and tries to adhere to the ceasefire in a comprehensive manner then the travel ban would only be a temporary phase. But if the tigers take no heed and continues as usual then an outright proscription is likely to be on the cards. This then will be followed by a crackdown on LTTE activists and front organizations in Europe. This will curtail tiger propaganda and restrict fund raising even if these things cannot be totally eradicated. It is entirely up to the tigers in deciding how to respond to the EU wake up call.

What was the proverbial straw that broke the camels back? What prompted the EU in issuing this statement by overriding Norway in this respect? Britain taking over EU leadership from Netherlands and the Blair governments attitude towards terrorism is one factor. The subway bombings and consequent British legislation has caused a hardening of approach. This is shared to some extent at least by European nations. Even Oslo would be of the same mind if not for its role and goal of peacemaking.

Norway has gone out of its way in whitewashing the LTTE in international capitals. Oslo says that the tigers are making a difficult transition from war to peace and guerilla outfit to political party and therefore need time. If mishandled the LTTE will resort to war again is the implied threat. Feeding carrots and not brandishing sticks was the modus operandi to be adopted towards the LTTE was what Norway preached to its compatriot nations.

It has been realised belatedly that this appeasement has not worked with the LTTE. It was one simple act of murder that demonstrated LTTE mala fides clearly to the world. The tigers overreached themselves by assassinating Lakshman Kadirgamar. The international community was outraged and had to demonstrate it meant business to the LTTE. This is what this column stated in the "Morning Leader" of Aug 17th.

" But in the case of the Kadirgamar assassination there is a crucial difference. The killing was not the work of a third party or outside force. It was perpetrated by one of the parties involved. It was not done during a time of war but during the course of a peace process. This is an assassination committed by one of the negotiating partners engaged in a peace process after having signed a ceasefire agreement that expressly forbids such acts. In short it is a blatant violation of the ceasefire and a terrible betrayal.

If such an experience had been encountered by any of these countries now proffering advice their response would have been different. Had Condoleezza Rice, Jack Straw, Pierre Pettigrew, Natwar Singh, Jan Peterssen, Nobutaka Machimura, Alexander Downer or Philippe Douste-Blazy been killed in a hypothetical situation under similar circumstances there would have been hell to pay."

Even now what concerns the Western nations is the threat of violence by the LTTE during elections. The LTTE was asked to come for talks on strengthening the ceasefire but has been avoiding it. This has raised suspicion that the LTTE intends taking out a few political figures during the presidential and possible parliamentary poll. The EU statement is an ultimatum demanding that the LTTE desists from such violence. It is in a sense the securing of an insurance policy.

The important question now is whether the LTTE leadership will take full cognizance of the EU statement or not. If it responds positively to this wake up call and amends its conduct the LTTE will find itself in the good books of the EU. Even if it conveys an appearance that it is seriously trying to do would suffice. But if it disregards this unofficial demarche and continues its violence then the fourth principle of "Thandam" will be invoked with greater force in the future. **(ENDS)**