

Gunaratna says only 1400 people died in final war, warns Canada is emerging as a LTTE hub [Print](#)

Professor Rohan Gunaratna claims that the LTTE cells operating out of Canada and other western countries are reaching out to Tiger sympathizers in Sri Lanka and India to conduct reconnaissance on Sri Lankan leaders and important targets. Gunaratna, who heads International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR) in Singapore also rebuffed high civilian casualty tolls of the final phase of Sri Lanka's war as cited by the international humanitarian groups and said, according to his research only a "total of 1400 civilians were killed in the last five months of the war" He spoke to Ranga Jayasuriya about who's who in the post Prabhakaran LTTE.

Reports quoting Canadian federal authorities say that the LTTE is in the process of setting up a base in Canada. In your opinion, how accurate are these reports?

The LTTE has built their most significant propaganda, lobbying and fund raising infrastructure in Canada, the UK, Norway and in Australia. The LTTE has three factions.

One led by Nediyanan who is operating out of Norway. Second led by Rudrakumaran who is operating out of New York. And the third led by J Emmanuel, who is operating out of the UK. All these three factions have an active presence in Canada. Most of funding to carry out terrorist attacks in Sri Lanka was raised in Canada and the UK. And even after the defeat of the LTTE, these two venues remain very significant for the LTTE. The LTTE is operating in Canada under the name of the Canadian Tamil Congress, which is the main LTTE front organization in Canada.



The World Tamil Movement, what was supposed to be LTTE's main front organization in the past was shut down recently...

The world Tamil Movement was closed down and now the LTTE is operating under the name of Canadian Tamil Congress. And Canadian government is aware of this and is currently investigating.

n And these reports say some leading members of the LTTE have already moved to Canada and some are planning to relocate. Are you aware of the identities of any of those members?

Captain Kamalraj Kandasamy who transported several thousands of tons of arms, ammunition and explosives from North Korea to Sri Lanka from 1997 to until the early 2009, is now in Canada. He is the captain of merchant vessel MV Ocean Lady that reached Canada in 2009. Also, Captain Tamilinniyawan who also transported arms and ammunition and was the captain of Merchant Vessel MV Sun Sea which reached Canada 2010 is also in Canada. Many LTTE leaders are also planning to relocate to Canada from Europe, India and South East Asia.

What makes Canada the favoured venue for the LTTE than any other part of the Western Europe?

It is because Canadian laws are very lax. Canada's legal framework for fighting terrorism is very lax. Not only the LTTE, but also leading members of other terrorist groups are living in Canada and they also claim social benefits. Also two most favoured destinations worldwide for people who are in need of social benefits are Denmark and Canada.

There are also reports that the LTTE is planning to launch two more boat loads of Tamil asylum seekers from a South East Asian destination to Canada...

The LTTE's human smuggling network is currently led by Shanmugasundaram Kanthaskaran, a former sea Tiger leader who was living in the UK. He has now moved to France. Shanmugasundaram Kanthaskaran together with the post-May 2009 LTTE leadership organized both merchant vessels Ocean Lady 2009 and Sun Sea in 2010. He is now organizing other human smuggling ventures. Until he is arrested and LTTE leaders in North America and Europe are arrested, the human smuggling ventures would continue.

You said Shanmugasundaram Kanthaskaran is in France. Haven't the authorities in France been informed by the Sri Lankan government?

I can say that various governments are working together to collect evidence against the LTTE leadership in North America and Europe.

In the coming years, they are likely to be arrested. The wheels of justice turn very slowly, but they eventually catch up. For instance, evidence for prosecution of the LTTE in North America and Europe took more than 10 years of surveillance and intelligence collection.

What kind of threat would LTTE activities in Canada pose to Sri Lanka?

LTTE intelligence cells in Canada, Europe, South East Asia and Australia have been contacting LTTE supporters and sympathizers, both in India and Sri Lanka to survey Sri Lankan government leaders and important targets. It is crucial that the western governments hosting LTTE intelligence cells should detect and disrupt them at this stage.

What measures have Sri Lankan government taken to counter this supposed threat?

Sri Lankan government has been working with some other governments to counter threat in this area.

How effective have the government's measures been so far?

Sri Lankan government has been quite effective. I can say, Sri Lankan government has one of the most effective intelligence services in the world.

What are your other observations about post war challenges of the country?

First, Sri Lanka has built an amazing terrorist rehabilitation program that is a model for the other countries holding terrorist detainees and inmates. It is important for the Sri Lankan government to invite Tamil elite to come and witness this program and help in the further development of this

program, instead of participating in the LTTE's disinformation and misinformation campaign. Sri Lankan Tamil leaders should also be invited to participate in development of the north and the east.

Second, Sri Lankan political leadership headed by President Mahinda Rajapaksa should work with other political parties and former militant groups to build a mainstream Tamil political leadership in the north east.

There is nothing more important, for the Sri Lanka at this stage, than building a mainstream Tamil political leadership in the north east. The Tamil leadership tree was chopped by the LTTE which killed Tamil political leaders which deterred the emergence of a new mainstream Tamil political leadership. The President must encourage and nurture mainstream Tamil leadership that coexists with Sinhala and Muslim leaders.

The third point is that although there is an unprecedented level of development in the north east, there has been very little publicity for the government's efforts to reach out to Tamil community and to develop war affected areas. The challenge of restoring Sri Lanka's image rests on a very capable division for public diplomacy. Therefore, a portfolio of an additional secretary for public diplomacy in the foreign ministry and a portfolio for additional secretary for international engagement in the ministry of defence are crucial to reach out to the international community. Otherwise, some segments of international community will be driven by the LTTE and anti government propaganda and not by the ground reality of unprecedented development in the north and the east.

You are referring to means to win the international community. But in the absence of a genuine reconciliation program, as alleged by many groups and without widespread calls for war crime investigations being addressed, how can the government restore its image?

In parallel to the economic development in the north east, there must be an effort to build reconciliation among different communities. Prabhakaran's strategy was to divide communities by ethnicity, by religion and by region. The effort of the government should be to bridge this divide. The mechanism for reconciliation is to build reconciliation centres in every district in the north and the east. These centres should be led by a nominee of the presidential secretariat and staffed by representatives from ministries of defence, education, information, social welfare as well as the bureau of the commissioner general of rehabilitation and the BOI.

Driven by the LTTE propaganda, UN, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and few other NGOs have given unsubstantiated numbers for civilian deaths. If those statements are to stand the test of time and to remain credible, they must come up with names. Otherwise, those statements will be mere terrorist propaganda. Certainly, civilians perish in the government's fight against the LTTE. But, there was no government policy to kill civilians. Civilians have died in every counter insurgency campaigns. As a proportion, more civilians died as a result of US invasion and occupation in Iraq and the US led NATO intervention in Afghanistan than in Sri Lanka.

But the point is that we don't even know how many civilians died in Sri Lanka. How can you talk about proportions...

Based on interviews with doctors who were in the No Fire Zone, civilians, displaced civilians and coroners, it is estimated that total of 1400 civilians were killed in the last five months (from January to May 2009). This figure is yet to be challenged by those organizations accusing the government. They should come out with names dates and locations where civilians perished.