



With the two decade- old national conflict reverting to war, the question on the lips of every patriotic Sri Lankan living here in Australia is : "What can we possibly do for the country of our birth and upbringing"? The thinkers among us will follow up with a cautious reservation: "What are the limits of our action?". It is important for us to logically and realistically examine the limits of possible and desirable action if we are to avoid two types of fatal error; one, the fault of not doing enough and, two, the fault of overdoing in a way that can harm the well-being of our community.

The task that the pro-LTTE Tamil expatriates took upon themselves had been clearly defined from the start. It was to engage directly in the campaign for Eelam. These persons are active participant fighters for a separate state. The Tiger Diaspora funds the war, provides arms, and orchestrates a huge campaign of disinformation in order to beguile global leaders. Until the aftermath of nine-eleven, leaders of the Tamil pro-LTTE diaspora enjoyed untrammelled freedom in going about and even harassing their brethren to extract money from the latter. It is reported that even with the international ban these leaders continue to fundraise in many covert ways. They also undertake the buying and shipping of arms.

Obviously, such a primary and participant role is not relevant to Sinhalese expatriates here in Australia. The burden of funding the war and providing arms etc is not ours as the government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) is doing that. Being the legitimate government, the latter is in a position to enlist global support in order to carry out this task. There is no room for us to meddle with that. Even the major task of handling disinformation is best carried out by our diplomatic channels at Colombo and overseas. They are trained to handle that and they are in a direct line of communication with government leaders and media in these countries. Contrary to what some expatriate community leaders assert, our diplomatic channels engage in a lot of work in this connection. They are expected to work in silence and confidence and this gives some of us the impression that our diplomatic outposts are doing nothing. They are not expected to communicate in this regard with members of the public -not even with the Sri Lankan Diaspora. In fact, I was quite surprised when our current High Commissioner came on the local community radio in Melbourne to explain to our community what he was doing. That was a speech out of protocol.

Thus, unlike the pro-Tiger Tamil expatriates, overseas patriotic Sri Lankans are freed from the primary tasks associated with the national conflict. This diminishes their possible role into very humble proportions and makes nonsense of the thunder and noise of some persons in Melbourne and other cities who have

WHAT WE CAN AND CANNOT DO FOR SRI LANKA

Attempts to invest in ourselves a sense of over-importance about what we could do may be regarded as an ego trip to the realm of the ridiculous. This kind of mind set has caused division and friction among the small community that we are as those who come to feel that they are special and heroic have been known to verbally bash others who are reluctant to respond to their adventurous overtures. A recent illustration of this self-delusion is the suggestion made by the convener of the Melbourne Sinhalese community radio program during a Sunday callback that he be allowed to continue control of that media on the grounds of national urgency!

taken upon themselves the goal of 'saving the country'. They work on the assumption that it is their task to meet the



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Tiger threat and that GOSL does not exist or are incapable of performance. If the GOSL is incapable, there is no way in which we expatriates can take over that responsibility. That is the hard reality.

The subsidiary role that is left for grateful Sri Lankans would include a host of measures such as

- (1) monitoring Tiger terrorist activities that are forbidden by the Australian law, which has listed the LTTE as a terrorist organization and reporting such activities to the authorities
- (2) countering disinformation
- (3) liaising with state and federal legislators in order to alert them about such disinformation and to get them to avoid any direct or indirect support to such terrorist activities
- (4) promoting goodwill and understanding among non-Tiger Tamil civilians living in Australia in order to build a broad base of Tamils who are friendly to the Sinhalese people and
- (5) assisting in fundraising for micro-projects in Lanka (example for a border village project).

Some believe in interfering directly in Lankan politics and they support a particular policy or a political group of their choice. Such moves are fraught with inherent dangers stemming from the reality that living here limits our knowledge in making such choices. Many mistakes in judgement have already been made as for instance the sponsoring of the anti-Norway campaign. It is easy for us to get trapped into the spin of complex Lankan politics.

How about attempting to influence the Commonwealth Government in Canberra by measures such as street protests and rallies? Australia is used to street protests and demonstrations from the time of the Eureka Stockade and has not been



Why do people commit suicide?

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People might have asked this question a million times for centuries without a proper answer but even in this DNA age, no one knows exactly why people commit suicide! Let me begin with some explanation made by the father of French sociology, Emile Durkheim in 1897. Durkheim in his classic text 'Suicide' explained how individual decisions to commit suicide could be understood as being affected by the different forms of social solidarity in different social settings. He identified three (3) major types of suicide on the basis of his analysis of the suicide statistics of different societies; Egoistic suicide, Altruistic suicide and Anomic suicide. In his view, egoistic and anomic suicide commonly found in modern societies where traditional form of social regulation had declined. In primitive societies, altruistic suicide was common. Anomic suicide occurred when the individual experienced a state of 'normlessness'. Although there have been major criticisms of his approach, Durkheim's suicide represents the most influential sociological contribution to this issue.

In layman's terms, people who kill themselves see it as the only solution to their problem. Many find it hard to solve personal problems, whether it is personal, social or economic, in a balanced or ordered manner. We differ in our ability to handle the problems that may cause suicidal feelings. The inability to cope with problems may be connected to biological and chemical imbalance in our body.

What are the main 'reasons' for suicide? In modern society, loss of a job, divorce, breaking up a relationship, failing an exam, problems with peers, romantic rejection and

mental illness are main 'triggers' of suicide. Statistically, 90% of people who commit suicide have a mental or substance abuse disorder. More than half of the people who kill themselves are seriously depressed. Although most depressive people are not suicidal, most suicidal persons are highly depressed. Depression is a serious mental illness accompanied by a number of signs and symptoms; sadness, fatigue, feeling of tiredness, lack of appetite and sleep, loss of interest in doing things, lack of concentration, spending more time alone, hopelessness and having suicidal feelings. Suicidal feelings come in slowly, then become intense till you harm yourself. It is a horrible thing to feel and society has taught us

that it is wrong to think that way and that is why most people don't communicate or share their feelings with any body else. They think they are alone and if disclosed, they would be segregated and labeled as 'psycho'. This is the kind of feeling they need to deal with in suicidal crisis.

Statistics show that about 25% of people who commit suicide are intoxicated. Although there is no direct causal relationship between alcohol and suicide, alcohol lowers self-control and increases impulsive behaviour which may lead to suicide. People with psychiatric illness who drink are more likely to commit suicide when they are drunk.

Suicide is one of the leading causes of death in the western society. For instance, it is the eight leading cause of death in the United State. 30,000 Americans commit suicide annually and an additional 500,000 Americans attempt it annually. Research shows that about 30% to 40% of persons who commit suicide have made a previous attempt and risk is more than 100 times greater than average in the first year after an attempt.

What are the initial signs of suicidality or suicidal ideation? Some of the signals might be verbal suicide threats, expression of hopelessness and helplessness, risk taking behaviour, giving away valuable possessions, depression, lack of interest in future plans, changes in personality and previous suicide attempts. Reasons for suicide depend on the kind of society in which it occurs. In a developed country like Australia, poverty is never a reason whereas in a developing

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impressed by even a million on the streets for domestic issues. Remember the protest over IR reforms? Our community is small and not rich and we cannot gather anything over a two thousand persons and that only with free transport. Hence, this is not going to take us anywhere except on a free bus ride to Canberra. One cannot understand anyone seeing this as sensible. Besides, and more importantly, the Commonwealth Government prefers dealing on a government-to-government basis as far as issues that are not domestic are concerned. A telephone call from a head of government or a Foreign minister or a visit from a High Commissioner can stir the latter more than a street demonstration. This is the reality of intergovernmental politics and one cannot show one's ignorance of this. In the light of this, it was quixotic to hear a particular group claiming that they were responsible

for the ban on the LTTE!

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