

CAN YOU SPOT A SUSPICIOUS AEROPLANE IN THE SKY?



Can you spot a suspicious airplane flying in the sky? Even a technically smart guy cannot because for 'suspicion' to arise factors other than those of a technical nature must be known. How, then, can ordinary people living in troubled Lanka be given this onerous responsibility? Assuming for argument's sake that it is possible for them to perform such a feat is it practicable for Lankans to run out of their homes every time they hear the sound of a plane as we did at the early stages of childhood?

Well, this is what the Sri Lankan Defence Ministry has reportedly asked the people to do. Soon after the air attack by our Tiger 'sahodarayas' an announcement was made that anybody spotting a suspicious aeroplane should call a given hotline and report the matter to the Sri Lanka Air force (SLAF). I cannot remember the hotline number. If I did, I would have told them a thing or two. Is this a resumption of the old JR theory that people should defend themselves, I thought to myself?

Jokes apart, haven't things come to a very serious pass in Lanka? The government will like to underplay the whole daring incident. One newspaper, obviously obedient to the government for fear of reprisal under The Prevention of Terrorism Act, described this as a "failed air attack". Since I have nothing to fear about this law I can afford to speak my

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mind. However, India's Hindu newspaper defined the event as constituting "a new perilous dimension" to the twenty-two-year conflict. The bold and daring raid may have not have hit its assigned target namely the MIGs. The fact that the LTTE was able to make an air attack without any external help and that they were the first terrorist group in the world to have done such a thing speaks a great deal for their innate strength and creativity. It was a home-modified light aircraft locally adapted to carry electronic bombs. The Hindu added: "The fact that an aircraft or two could take off from the jungles of Vanni in the North, travel 400 kilometres, drop bombs on the SLAF main base and, after being in the air for at least two hours, return unchallenged to the so-called Tiger Air Force base is disturbing to say the least.

What security can anybody have with such an air-striking ability? The President has given an undertaking that this would not happen again. On what objective basis can he give that promise to the people? He has not yet ascertained the facts through expert reports as to what really did happen and why the SLAF



could not, firstly, detect the plane in advance and, secondly, could not counter-attack it for so long. Clearly, our defence line against the LTTE is dangerously porous. How many a time have we had occasion to be taken by surprise. A Raw expert stated that the LTTE commenced building its air power as far back as the year 1998. For the SLAF not to have known that!

Throughout the years, the LTTE has been developing an efficient killer machine while the various governments in Sri Lanka has been merely trying to be in power with the war itself being used as the beggar does his wound.

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Such an historical experience leaves one with a cynical mode of mind to question even the current claims of victory in the East. Are these 'victories' true or myth? Had there been no censorship in this area and had the non-government scribes been allowed to enter the combat areas, we could have got a more balanced picture. That is not to be. How would it be if at the end of

it all it is revealed that the so-called 'captures' have been for the most part those of empty camps abandoned by the Tigers who have withdrawn to the jungles? This is all depressing thought. Hence, let us leave it. Nevertheless, there are a three things that President Rajapakse may consider: Firstly, government must make a realistic



lead the nation above petty political strife. The key target group here is the major opposition party-the United National Party- that commands an electoral strength of over 45 per cent. Unfortunately, President Rajapakse is still bogged down in the role of a petty political leader trying to survive by manipulating other party supporters, sacking his dissidents, and instituting court action against the latter while keeping the corrupt safe in his fold. Thirdly, government must sustain the goodwill of India and global powers if it is to enlist the active support of the latter and if it is to prevent the latter from supporting the LTTE as they once did or being neutral and disinterested about the matter. A devolution proposal must be prepared and submitted. The procrastination and failure in doing so even after 15 months, is making our neighbour and the global powers lukewarm about what is taking place in Sri Lanka. Note how India did not condemn the air attack into our territory. Finally, the government must build a strong internal administration that is efficient and free of corruption. A weak government cannot beat the enemy. Good governance will of course give good economic management. When it is reported that the CEB is loosing 50 million rupees daily one could get a glimpse of what is now going on. "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold"- a great poet said.

assessment of the enemy and of our defence capability to meet it. Based on such a study changes must be made. Secondly, the President must transform himself from politician to statesman and thereby give confidence to other parties that he can

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