

Island editorial, Oct 4, 2009

Of those captured weapons on display

Stockpiles of LTTE's weapons currently on display at the BMICH are proof that Prabhakaran was never for a political solution and successive governments only played into his hands by trying to talk peace with him. The question that those who advocated a negotiated solution should answer is whether the LTTE would ever have agreed to hand over those weapons upon which depended its survival.

Prabhakaran, it may be recalled, even defied India's order that he surrender arms in return for a devolution package and took on the IPKF in the late 1980s.

Prabhakaran turned each peace effort into a stepping stone to the next phase of his terrorist war and inched towards his goal. By the time he plunged the country into Eelam War IV, he had procured arms and ammunition sufficient for several times the number of his combatants. If he had managed to recruit enough fighters to handle them, perhaps the war would have had a different ending.

That Prabhakaran was faced with a severe dearth of cadres and therefore had to resort to the forcible conscription of even children and the aged is a pointer to the chronic disillusionment and disenchantment of civilians under his control with his macabre cause and tyrannical leadership. A shortage of volunteers is symptomatic of the beginning of a guerrilla movement's end. A terrorist leader begins to dig his grave with his own bayonet the moment he embarks on forced recruitment, because cadres so conscripted are resentful and not motivated enough to give their best for the cause. It may have been his dwindling fortunes that prompted Prabhakaran to revert to war at an inopportune time in a bid to telescope his Eelam project into a few years, though the present government was willingly carrying forward the Norwegian-crafted CFA, which granted all his wishes.

Not even the military top brass may have been aware that the LTTE had so many weapons in its possession. How did it obtain them? It

smuggled in ship-loads of arms and ammunition during the failed peace processes under successive governments. It also captured arms and ammunition from army camps in the past. The Premadasa government gifted money, huge quantities of arms and ammunition, cement and other building materials to Prabhakaran, who was fighting against the Indians. It is believed that a lot of weapons found their way into the Vanni masquerading as tsunami aid. In the aftermath of the killer wavers of 2004, container-loads of undeclared goods were rushed to those parts of the country by various INGOs and some foreign governments.

The US-led forces invaded Iraq claiming there were WMDs. And they found none! Iran has come under threats because of its alleged experiments with nuclear weapons, though that country has vehemently dismissed the allegation as baseless. But, Sri Lanka's war was a classic preemptive strike in that huge stocks of arms have been recovered from the terrorists who would definitely have turned them on the security forces and civilians. Thousands of kilos of high explosives and tens of thousands of mines of all sorts seized from the terrorists would also have been used to blast civilian targets, destroy public property and carry out political assassinations.

Now that the LTTE's chief arms procurer, KP, is in custody and damning evidence is emerging that some countries helped the outfit with the acquisition of arms and ammunition, the UN should be requested to initiate a probe and find how the LTTE acquired all those lethal weapons. Such an investigation will benefit not only this country but also the entire world, as it will expose the sources of arms for terrorists around the globe and the criminal complicity of some western countries accused of having intervened to obtain end-user certificates for the LTTE to buy weapons from arms manufacturing nations via rogue States.

The Sri Lanka army, which is celebrating its 60th anniversary, has done the country proud with its biggest ever victory and the government deserves some mileage from the defeat of terrorism as

well gimmicks like expositions of weapons seized from the terrorists. But, much more remains to be done.

If the government is wise, the weapons captured from terrorists could be used to shame and unmask the western powers that pontificate on human rights but make a living out of selling arms to terrorists and perpetuating conflicts in the developing world.