

# How to Tame Tigers

The Tamils in Sri Lanka are facing the greatest humanitarian crisis. A massive military assault by the Sri Lankan Army has turned tens of thousands of Tamils into refugees. There are plans to build barbed wire enclaves, which can only be called concentration camps. At the time of writing Tamil refugees are said to be waiting in the town of Visvamadu to be sent to government camps where the Sri Lankan authorities are planning to hold 200,000 ethnic Tamil refugees from its north-eastern conflict zone for upto three years while seeking funding for the project from Britain. If they are not yet full-fledged concentration camps they are already detention camps and military grilling stations. It does not matter whether they call it concentration camp or detention centre, they in effect violate UN guidelines on internally displaced people. As the Sri Lankan government has not demonstrated that exceptional circumstances exist in conflict zone, they have no right to set up concentration camps.

The Nazi concentration camp for Jews is history. So is holocaust. After the second world war 'concentration camp' was extensively used by America to destroy Vietnamese people and their historic resistance. In truth President Rajapaksa will go down in Sri Lanka's history as the most able follower of Nazi legacy. True, Liberation Tigers are no angels. But the entire Tamil community cannot be persecuted for their actions including ruthless violence against the innocents.

The course of history cannot be reversed so easily. The demand for a separate sovereign state—Eelam—got crystallised only after the rebels lost all hopes in an administrative system that officially encouraged Sinhala majority-led successive pogroms against the Tamil minority community. No doubt Tamils are minority in Sri Lanka but they are citizens of Sri Lanka. 'Why should they be in camps' is the moot question. If they are citizens the displaced people should be rehabilitated straight away. But the Rajapaksa government thinks otherwise. Maybe, they are citizens but they are second class citizens. The way ordinary people who generally die in cross-fire are being ghettoised in concentration camps speaks volumes about the intention of the persons in authority in Colombo.

In recent years ethnic cleansing got wide currency when the Serbs in former Yugoslavia began to exterminate Bosnian muslims, ignoring international outcry. The international community lost no time to punish the Serbian leaders and military generals and eventually Yugoslavia was dismembered beyond recognition leading to three separate entities. Germany along with America made a case out of ethnic cleansing and played the most crucial role in destroying Yugoslavia—one of the founder members of nonaligned movement—with a view to consolidating its sphere of influence, particularly after the demise of Soviet Union.

As for the Sri Lankan crisis, what is unfolding with every passing day is nothing but ethnic cleansing—it is genocide. For all practical purposes the Vietnam syndrome now visits the war-torn north and north-east of Sri Lanka with brutal ferocity and yet the so-called international community does not find any reason to constitute international war crimes tribunal and punish those who are responsible in the first place for the hell the people are being forced to live in.

But Sri Lanka's barbaric campaign against the ethnic Tamil minority is dangerously polarising Tamil society and stoking Tamil passions in India's southern state of Tamil Nadu and elsewhere in the world. Self-immolation by die-hard sympathisers of Tamil Tigers, beginning with Muthukumar is producing emotional outbursts and protest marches by the vocal Tamil diaspora throughout the world. And yet the international community, not to speak of UN which after all, is a rubber stamp for USA remains silent

without bothering about one of the greatest human tragedies of the century. And in India all political parties are in a bind as they simply do not know how to tackle the growing Tamil anger and New Delhi's passivity, if not the complicity in the crime; albeit they will soon be forced to take position because the 15th parliamentary election is just knocking at the doors.

For the people the most pressing issue is to end the conflict and stop the ethnic cleansing. Unless voices on the left, both here and abroad, rise to the occasion, the conflict would last longer, notwithstanding the LTTE defeat, and it's awful for both people—Sinhalese and Tamil.□