

CHOGM is coming to Sri Lanka

CHOGM is coming to Sri Lanka despite many obstacles. My mind goes back to the Non-Aligned conference of 1976 because of certain similarities that can come later.

Her Majesty the Queen of England, who is the ceremonial chief of this ceremonial organisation will not be present as the whole world knows that her age (87) prevents her from long air journeys.

However, interpretations are many, not only Tamil Nadu, but even the opposition circles of Sri Lanka.

Her Majesty will be represented by His Royal Highness Prince Charles and his wife, Pamela Parker Bowles.

Incidentally, Prince Charles will be celebrating his 65th birthday in our "commercial capital" Colombo where the conference will be held (not only the international community but even a few people in Colombo know is not the political capital of the island but it is Sri Jayewardenepura). It is not strange in a country which has forgotten its republic day (May 22nd the day that real independence was dawned).

India is the largest member country in the Commonwealth as well as the Non-Aligned Movement. If India in 1947, opted to remain outside the Commonwealth - as its neighbour Burma did - the Commonwealth would not have been larger than the Dutch Commonwealth.

Now returning to the main subject, the politicians in Tamil Nadu have started playing games as they did three decades ago.

In 1976, when the Non-Aligned conference was held in Colombo the DMK of Karunanidhi and the AIDMK of Ramachandran, launched the campaign against the tiny island of Kachudev to Sri Lanka. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi ignored all those protests attended the conference and took her dignified place in the Non-Aligned Movement.

All members of the Non-Aligned Movement will be attending CHOGM. Only the Prime Minister of Canada has come out strongly about the so called "human rights issues" in the island. UK on the other hand has issued several "insinuations" in luke warm statements.

All right thinking people are aware that Canada (as the United States) which is not a member of the Commonwealth is being influenced by the Tamil diaspora, which is numerically stronger than the erstwhile Jewish diaspora and also is financially sound.

Campaigning for national self respect by any community is noble but if any organisation backs terrorism its nobility will come to an end.

India is one country which has suffered in its struggle against terrorism for the last six decades. Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated by a Hindu extremist terrorist. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated by a Sikh separatist terrorist. Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated

in Tamil Nadu by a Sri Lankan Tamil terrorist.

Sri Lankan Tamil terrorism gained full stretch with the assistance of the diaspora.

Today New Delhi keeps on issuing cautious statements in CHOGM. "We are considering seriously the feelings of the people of Tamil Nadu as well as the historic friendship we have with our neighbour Sri Lanka". Speculation is overtaking consistency.

I feel it is pertinent and relevant for me to quote part of an editorial written by my good friend Abraham Erali, in the prestigious magazine 'Aside' in the September 1984 issue. That was written after the Madras Airport blast. A bomb which was targeted to the Colombo Airport exploded in the Madras Airport killing 40 people including 30 Sri Lankan transit passengers. The situation in Tamil Nadu has not changed (as far as the politicians are concerned for the last 40 years). I conclude with parts of the editorial: "they are killing each other out of tribal, religious, national or any other madness and they are continuing to do so. Not just in Punjab and Hyderabad or Sri Lanka, not just in developing countries - UK has its Belfast; in the US the ghettos have erupted as late as the sixties, Germany and Italy have their own terrorist groups. In a world where mankind can always, and any number of time divide into "we" and "they", our own cause, whatever they are, are always just and noble. Like the moment a man lifts a knife, aims a gun, throws a bomb, he slips from the narrow latch he is climbing, up into a future into which he will transcend himself - and plunges into atavism. However "noble" the cause, there is no hope in violence, no redemption. That is the lesson Gandhi taught.

But, as every hard nosed politician knows, Gandhi is not relevant to human condition. Not yet.

So living as we are on the edge of violence, personal or tribal, only the coercive power of state can restrain us. But when the state itself becomes an advocate or conniver of violence, it is like putting he arsenist in charge of the fire station. That is why it is disturbing that the Tamil Nadu government should support the Sri Lankan rebels. It may be that the cause of the Sri Lankan Tamils is noble, there may be the other and even more pressing of political expediency, which our ruling politicians have to take into account, but a government violates its very nature when it supports terrorism.

But our politicians like playing games. It's therefore not surprising that Karunanidhi should condemn the government for arresting the suspects in the Meenambakkam blast.

And the government, in turn, has to okay coy with the identity of the Mastermind ("the hero") behind the airport blast.

S. Piyasena

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Susantha Katugampala LL B (Monash)
Barrister & Solicitor
Accredited Immigration Law Specialist
MARN: 9601070



Sushendra Fernando LL B (Monash)
Associate

Lindy Noone
Migration Consultant
MARN: 0322507

Frank Sabelberg LL B (Monash)
Consulting Solicitor
MARN: 0004726

Michael Gros LL B (Monash)
Consulting Barrister
MARN: 9803398

Melbourne

FAIRFIELDS

IMMIGRATION LAWYERS - MELBOURNE

10, Morrison Place
East Melbourne Victoria 3002

Telephone: +61 3 9650 4557
Interstate Callers: **1300 888 331**
Fax: +61 3 9650 4559
Mobile: +61 417 851 041

Colombo



Hilton Colombo Towers
200 Union Place Colombo 02

Telephone: +94 11 2300 627
Mobile: +94 777 347 670
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