

The Island

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223, Bloemendhal Road, Colombo 13.
Tel: 011-2497500, 011-2497571, 011-2497572, 011-2497573
Fax: 011-2497543

Advertising Dept.

Tel: 011-2436892 Fax: 011-2344252, 011-2497543

www.island.lk / E-mail: prabath@unl.upali.lk

Circulation Dept.

Tel: 011-2497568, 011-2497519, 011-2497580 Fax: 011-2334564.

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Bring these thugs to justice!

Thursday's savage attack on a group of Tamil National Alliance (TNA) parliamentarians at a meeting in Jaffna must be condemned unreservedly. Among the injured are TNA members and the police officers providing security to MPs. The TNA has identified the assailants as military personnel.

The government and the army top brass must not try to cover up the brutal attack. They must pluck up courage to face it and take steps to ensure that the assailants, who are a disgrace to the armed forces, are brought to justice forthwith and prevent the repetition of such unfortunate incidents. The people of the North, who went through hell under Prabhakaran's jackboot, must not be made to suffer under anyone else's. Thursday's cowardly act of terrorism perpetrated against a group of parliamentarians and civilians engaged in democratic activity is also a body blow for the on-going reconciliation process.

The TNA parliamentarians who are calling for action against their assailants are no paragons of virtue, period. They backed the LTTE to the hilt and sought to justify its barbaric terrorism. In fact, they benefited from LTTE terrorism immensely as the European Union polls observers have noted in their report on the 2004 parliamentary election. The TNA never condemned heinous crimes the LTTE committed such as forcible conscription of children, civilian massacres, political assassinations, murders, extortion and violent suppression of political dissent. While the LTTE was reigning supreme in the North and the East, no political party other than the TNA was allowed to do political work there. Worse, the TNA politicians campaigning for democracy and human rights today accepted the murderous LTTE as the sole representative of the Tamil people and had no qualms about acting as its mouthpiece in Parliament much to the consternation of the victims of terrorism. But, it must be stressed that the TNA's right to engage in democratic politics and voice dissent must be recognised and safeguarded at any cost in spite of its abominable past.

Having secured popular support convincingly at the last parliamentary and LG polls, the TNA, as the main Tamil political party, has a pivotal role to play in rekindling democracy in the former war zone. It should have the freedom to operate in any part of the country.

The army is doing a thankless job in the North and the East. Having graduated from a ceremonial role to combat operations owing to armed conflicts in the North and the South, today it has had to perform constabulary duties in the post war period. Its contribution to rehabilitation, reconstruction, administration, development work etc in the North and the East is praiseworthy. But, all its good work will be in vain if a handful of rogue elements within its ranks are allowed to unleash violence with impunity.

There have been protests by concerned citizens of the North against the denial of their freedom of assembly. Thursday's incident is also said to have been sparked by an argument between the army and the TNA over the legality of the latter's indoor meeting. It is alleged that not even a library association meeting takes place in that part of the country without the intimidating presence of military personnel. These complaints should be investigated and swift action taken to reassess the security situation there and relax restrictions on people's freedom.

Unless the government and the Army Commander act immediately to have Thursday's dastardly attack probed and the suspects dealt with according to the law, they will only help a different breed of terrorism emerge in the former war zone, where people are struggling to rebuild their lives. They will also prove right their critics who accuse them of sweeping the so-called accountability issues under the carpet.

"The IPCC...must take great care not to squander its credibility on geo-engineering, a topic that is gathering steam precisely when there is no real progress on mitigation and adaptation," said the letter. "International peasant organizations, indigenous peoples, and social movements have all expressed outright opposition to such measures as a false solution to the climate crisis."

BY GWYNNE DYER

"We are getting into very risky territory," said Christiana

Figueres, head of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, last week. But she acknowledged that we may have to go there anyway.

She was talking about geo-engineering, the manipulation of the world's climate to avoid catastrophic warming. Nobody actually wants to do that, because we don't understand the climate system well enough to foresee all the possible side-effects. But a large number of people think that in the end we'll have to do it anyway, because we're not going to get the warming under control in time without it.

Geo-engineering might involve putting sulphur dioxide into the atmosphere (to reflect some incoming sunlight), spraying fine droplets of seawater into low-lying marine clouds to thicken them up (and reflect more sunlight), or painting the world's roads and roofs white. There are also proposed techniques for removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and for slowing the acidification of the oceans. In fact, there are dozens of proposals in all.

The topic is now on the table because sixty scientific experts are meeting in Peru on 20 June to begin an exploration of geo-engineering options that will probably end up in the next report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)

in 2014. This has caused outrage in some sections of the environmental movement, and 125 organisations wrote an open letter to the IPCC head, Dr Rajendra Pachauri, condemning the whole concept.

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Then came a sly suggestion that scientists in this field are a bunch of greedy frauds: "Asking a group of geo-engineering scientists if more research should be done on the topic is like asking a group of hungry bears if they would like honey." This is clearly a subject that inspires passionate opposition on the left, although the geo-engineers themselves spread right across the political spectrum.

The overwhelming majority of the open letter's signatories are organisations you have never heard of – Terra-1530 Moldova, the Dogwood Alliance of North Carolina, and the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, for example – but they include a few well-known organisations like Friends of the Earth International. Their goal is not just to ban large-scale geo-engineering. It is to ban

even small-scale experiments in geo-engineering. Why so angry?

Part of the problem is that there has indeed been "no real progress on mitigation and adaptation" in recent years, and the enemies of geo-engineering are afraid that efforts to cut greenhouse-gas emissions will be abandoned in favour of just trying to hold the temperature down artificially. I have never met a geo-engineer who thought that would work, but there is profound suspicion of them among the Greens.

There has been a remarkable reversal of roles in environmental issues over the past century. The old left loved industry, modernity, man "conquering" nature, whereas the old right believed in tradition, conservation and preserving nature. The new left, or large parts of it, hugs trees and romanticises peasants, while the new right, at least in the United States, denies climate change outright.

They are both wrong, and it is not an ideological issue at all. The problem the scientists see, and many other people too, is that an industrialising world of seven billion people poses a grave threat to the very environment it depends on, notably in terms of changing the climate.

Ending greenhouse-gas emissions, reducing population, and adopting sustainable patterns of consumption are the necessary long-term responses to the threat of runaway warming, but they are not happening fast enough to avoid catastrophic changes and mass death. At the

One of the geo-engineering solutions to climate change is to spray seawater droplets into marine clouds to make them reflect more sunlight. Photograph: NASA

Risky Territory

