

Only alarm bells rang on Freedom Day. (1999, February 07).  
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OPPOSITE EDITORIAL

# Only alarm bells rang on Freedom Day

The defence establishment in Colombo including the country's intelligence community heaved a sigh of relief late this week.

The Independence Day celebrations last Thursday went off without a hitch. Hardly anything untoward happened. This was despite intelligence warnings of possible attempts by Tiger guerrillas to trigger off violent incidents, not only in the City, but also in the Wann.

In Colombo, security precautions had to be doubled just 24 hours before Independence Day. This was after reported fears of a possible light mortar attack on the celebrations venue - Independence Square. Barring a soldier and an airman who fainted during the joint services static parade, there was hardly any incident during the ceremonies.

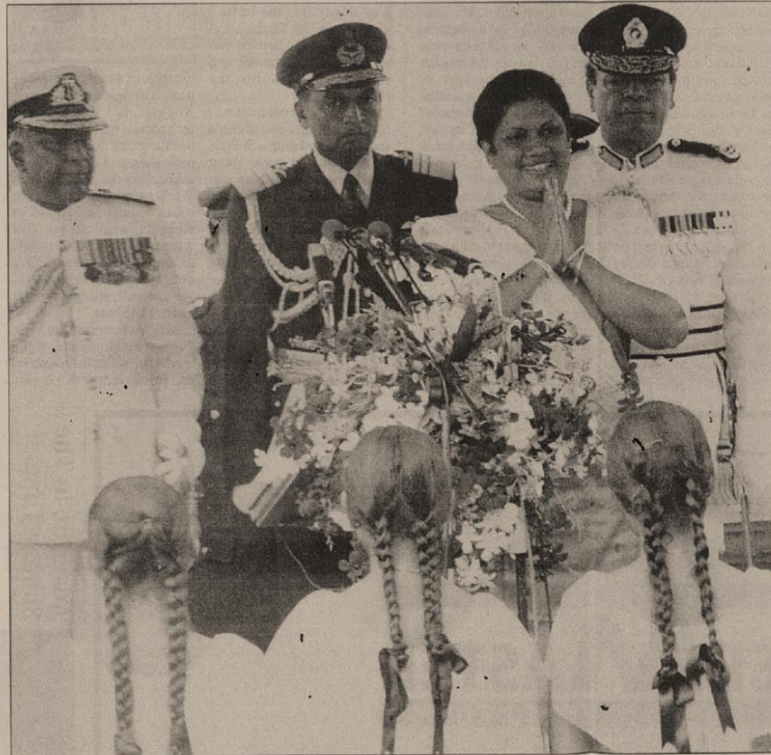
However, there was panic at the highest levels in the intelligence community. That was after the emergency alarm went off at the City headquarters of a leading State intelligence arm. Senior officials were either watching on a big screen the live broadcast of Independence Day ceremonies or monitoring how the security arrangements were working. Just when President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga was addressing the nation, the alarm bell went off causing panic and concern. Worried officials and subordinate staff rushed

was senior military officials who had planned to take part in Police sponsored Independence Day celebrations.

A similar incident also occurred in the City last Thursday. The arrest of an LTTE cadre led to another guerrilla at Dam Street. When Police pounced on the man, he bit a cyanide capsule and was later admitted to hospital.

The man died on Thursday. Although the suspect is now in custody, it is not immediately clear whether they planned any attacks on Independence Day. His death, however, came barely 24 hours after an electricity transformer at Norris Canal Road was blasted on Wednesday night. Police say it is the work of the LTTE. On Friday Police averted a bomb explosion at an electricity transformer at Grandpass. A timer mechanism had been set for the bomb to explode at 9.30 am on Friday.

The fact that attacks on power transformers are taking place despite heavy security precautions, particularly on the eve of Independence Day celebrations, has begun to worry senior officials at the Operations Command, Colombo - the military apparatus tasked with overlooking security in the City and suburbs. This was the seventh attack on a power transformer, in a month. At first, three were destroyed in Pettah and another three in Grandpass. In the past years, attacks on power transformers in the east were rampant.



At the Independence Day Ceremony - President Kumaratunga flanked by Navy Commander Vice Admiral Cecil Tissera, Air Force Commander Air Marshal Jayalath Weerakkoddy and Inspector General of Police, Lucky Kodituwakku

fly to Tokyo and return to Colombo.

During Gen. Daluwatte's absence, the Ministry of Defence has appointed Chairman of the Joint Operations Bureau, Lieutenant General Weerasooriya to act as Chairman of the Joint Operations Bureau. In terms of seniority, Lieutenant General Weerasooriya is the most junior among the three service commanders and assumed office only in December, last year.

As reported in these columns last week, senior officials of the three services and Police were disappointed that none of their representatives were included in Gen. Daluwatte's team. Since the JOB is required to work through the respective service commanders and the JGP, inclusion of their representatives would have been of great benefit, they point out.

The entire question of the JOB and its function in the defence system is becoming increasingly intriguing. In the first instance, as to why a top-level link in the command system was first established before its star-studded functionaries were programmed on a tour of foreign countries to study the workings of similar organisations in those nations defies common sense.

The initial advisory adventure of JOB to take on what was later found out to be civilian areas illustrates the confusion that can result from undefined command and control responsibilities. To the military command and

and subordinate staff taken out from their positions. Some reached out to telephones to find out whether anything had gone wrong. Others were checking radio transmissions of various state security agencies. Yet others walked out of the building. They soon realised it was a false alarm.

A top level investigation is now under way to ascertain how the alarm was triggered off. Was it an accident or was it an act of sabotage? All aspects are being gone into.

These developments did not mean, the Tiger guerrillas, contrary to intelligence warnings, had no plans for strikes during Independence Day. One hard core cadre was arrested last Wednesday in the outskirts of Vavuniya. He bared details of how a group, that had infiltrated the area from the Wanni, were planning attacks. He gave the identities of the men and the location of at least one. Military officials led him to a house. A colleague who was there bit a cyanide capsule. Death was instant.

Military officials learnt from the guerrilla in custody that the man who killed himself had planned to carry out a suicide attack. He was to have positioned himself on the main road, near the turn off to Security Forces Headquarters in Vavuniya and trigger off explosions. His target

was the power transformers. The fact the attacks are continuing in the city despite tighter security measures prompted the Operations Combine to raise the issue with the Ceylon Electricity Board. The CEB was examining the possibility of employing watchers to guard the transformers. Guards have been placed near some transformers. This is said to be a costly exercise since in the City alone, there were 1,400 power transformers. Surprise security forces and Police patrols are now being launched. Operations Combine also wants to seek the assistance of the Ministry of Defence to establish Vigilance Committees. This is to be made up of residents living close to areas where power transformers are located. Arrangements are to be worked out for them to work closely with the security forces and the Police. Police have also said they would continue to pay cash rewards to the public who provide information about attacks on power transformers. Why are the Tiger guerrillas carrying on a campaign of attacking power transformers? Senior military officials explain that it is a stepped up phase to take on economic targets with minimum effort. They say the LTTE had eyed telephone distribution points and cabins located in the streets also

as targets. Heightening concern in this regard is the requirement of explosives to bomb the power transformers. Military officials fear a large quantity of explosives are available for LTTE cadres operating in the City. This has raised questions on other targets they may be planning.

The attacks on power transformers in the City came at a time when the stalemate continued in the battle areas of Wanni. Security forces placed troops in the Wanni on a 48 hour red alert during independence celebrations. Troops have also been warned to be vigilant of attempts by guerrillas to smuggle weapons into the controlled areas of Wanni.

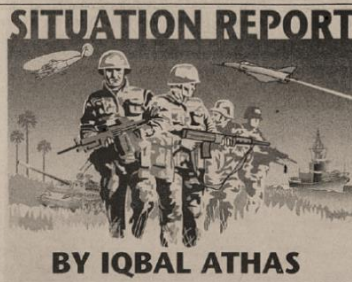
The battlefield lull comes at a time when the Joint Operations Bureau (JOB), the agency tasked with preparing strategic plans for approval by the National Security Council, is yet to become operational. The JOB has also been tasked to co-ordinate the execution of such plans through the service commanders and the Inspector General of Police.

Any concerted action by the JOB will now have to await the return to Colombo of its Chairman, retired General Rohan de S. Daluwatte, who is now on a tour of United Kingdom, France and the United States. He is being accompanied by Brigadier S.R. Balasuriya, now Director Operations at JOB

(earlier at Army Headquarters) and Colonel Vikum Siriwardena, Principal Co-ordinating Officer (PCO) to the JOB Chairman.

Last Wednesday, Gen. Daluwatte and his entourage arrived in London for an elaborate programme that covered even visits to British Army's Nuclear Bunkers.

Their programme began with a visit to the Ministry of Defence at Whitehall where he called on Sir General Charles Guthrie, Chief of Defence Staff. Later they visited the Permanent Joint Headquarters (PJHQ) of British Forces in Northwood, outside London but a meeting with its head, Sir Gen. Christopher Wallace, was not possible. He was reported to be away in Cyprus.



He also visited the Royal College of Defence Studies and the Tri Services Staff College. The visit of General Daluwatte and his entourage is costing the government a million rupees. Perhaps with that in mind, Gen. Daluwatte wanted to make maximum use of the opportunities being afforded by the three Governments. He made a request to British authorities to visit Northern Ireland. But the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London politely turned down the request. They are learnt to have explained that no such visits are allowed to Northern Ireland.

Yesterday, Gen. Daluwatte was due to arrive in Paris for a three day visit which will cover meetings with French military leaders and visits to military establishments. According to Government sources in Colombo, the joint military command system in France influenced the setting up of the Joint Operations Bureau though a Joint Operations Command was not set up for other political reasons.

On Wednesday (February 10), Gen. Daluwatte and party fly from Paris to Los Angeles. There he will see US troops in training and later fly to the US Pacific Command in Hawaii. The US visit is the longest and covers a ten day programme. Thereafter the JOB team will

To the military command and control are clearly defined. Any intrusion into those areas of responsibility be it by political interference or by ad-hoc military or quasi military bodies only causes confusion.

The history of the war is replete with such situations, which will only be revealed when history comes to be written. That there also appears to be some ad-hocism in the grand study tour is apparent from the schedule in the UK. That a visit to northern Ireland was not possible also suggests a void in planning, whilst the visit to training establishments is unrelated to the study mission and looks more a time-filler.

Torn pieces apart, what is most baffling is the enormous gap in the defence and strategic outlook between the countries visited and Sri Lanka. To find any commonality is difficult to say the least, except perhaps that they are comrades-in-arms.

Quite apart from the global strategic interests of the US, UK and France, none of these countries have an internal security threat in the nature of ours.

Their experiences are totally different. In the circumstances the million dollar question, whether the over a million rupee expenditure is justifiable does seem relevant.

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# Small arms: big problem world over

NEW YORK-The National Rifle Association (NRA), the most powerful gun lobby in the United States, vigorously justifies the right of every adult American to carry arms. "Guns don't kill people", argues the NRA rather cynically, "only people kill people."

Headed by onetime Hollywood movie star Charlton ("The Ten Commandments") Heston, the NRA received half-hearted approval last year as a UN-blessed non-governmental organisation (NGO) advocating the cause of handgun owners, ironically, in an Organisation dedicated to world peace.


The American small arms industry - which nurtures and funds the NRA as a lobbying

group - is now under fire.

A group of six people, whose friends or family members have been killed by firearms, are suing 25 US handgun manufacturers accusing them of negligent marketing practices that have "put guns into the hands of shooters." The defendants include Smith & Wesson, Colt and Beretta USA.

The landmark case, currently being heard in a Federal District Court in New York, is based on the argument that gun manufacturers, not shooters, are legally and morally liable for all the killings in the US and throughout the world. If gun makers lose this lawsuit, they may be gradually driven out of business. The trial is being care-

**inside the glass house:**



**by thalif deen**  
at the united nations

fully monitored by those who are already waiting in line to sue the industry. The fresh wave of public anger against firearm manufacturers comes at a time when the United Nations has itself launched a global campaign against small arms. Seeking to cut off

the flow of light weapons from the world's battle zones, the UN is also watching the outcome of the case in a country which is one of the world's major arms manufacturers. The UN says that small arms - including assault rifles, grenade launchers,

landmines, machine guns, mortars, and pistols - are primarily responsible for most of the killings in ethnic conflicts and civil wars throughout the world.

Conscious of the need to stem the flow of illicit weapons to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Sri Lanka is backing a proposal for an international conference on the illicit arms trade.

The meeting, which is to be held in Geneva in the year 2000, will attempt to set up a UN mechanism to track the movement of small arms as they make their way into the hands of rebel groups and terrorist organisations worldwide. The present Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, who resurrected the UN's Depart-

ment for Disarmament Affairs, is seeking a subregional moratorium on trafficking in small arms. "A precedent exists," he says, citing a self-imposed arms embargo by Latin American countries in November 1997.

UN Under-Secretary-General Jayantha Dhanapala, who heads the Department for Disarmament Affairs, says there is a sense of great urgency for "prompt and effective global action" to restrict the flow of small arms. According to Dhanapala, about 500 million small arms are floating around the world.

"Small arms have been or are the primary or sole tools of violence in most of the recent armed conflicts dealt with by the United Nations

where fighting involves irregular troops," Dhanapala says. Recent conflicts, in which small arms have caused death and destruction, have taken place in Rwanda, Angola, Bosnia, Cambodia, El Salvador, Chechnya, Georgia, Guatemala, Liberia, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Sierra Leone and Sri Lanka.

In contrast to Heston, another Hollywood super star Michael Douglas, is now a UN ambassador of Peace battling the US arms industry.

At a UN luncheon recently, he said that the dramatic increase in civilian deaths is a direct result of the ease with which so many people in so many countries supporting so many causes can obtain small arms.