DEFENCE SECRETARY GOTABAYA RAJAPAKSA SALUTES THE WAR HEROES



The Humanitarian Operations have been completed and the LTTE, the most ruthless terrorist or ganisation in the world has been destroyed. The strength behind the Army, Navy, Air Force, Police and the Civil Defence Force has been none other than Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa. His planning has been immaculate and precise. President Mahinda Rajapaksa had the will and confidence to see an end to the conflict that had gripped this country for three long decades. Undoubtedly, knowing that his brother was overseeing the military operations, gave President Mahinda Rajapaksa the strength to resist any interferences at home and abroad. Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa will certainly go down in history, not only as the person who destroyed the LTTE but also as the liberator of the Tamil community and thus the entire country.

Amidst praise and accolades, Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa has remained humble…He has not forgotten the sacrifices made by the heroic and courageous Armed Forces, Police and Civil Defence Force, the true heroes of this victory. Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa salutes those who have fought and led this war on the ground, sea and air. This is his tribute to them.

By Udeshi Amarasinghe & Thilini Kahandawaarachchi | Photography by Menaka Aravinda

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The Air Force Commander has the commitment, experience and knowledge to counter the enemy. His strength and direction has been vital…considering his experience, he had the strength and commitment to fight the war.

The Humanitarian Operations are now over and the LTTE has been defeated. What were the sacrifices made to achieve this victory?

Yes, we ultimately defeated the LTTE but that was through the sacrifices made by the Armed Forces with life and limb. Contrary to what some may say, it was not an easy task. It was very difficult. If we look at the military campaign from Marvil Aru till today we have lost the precious lives of 6,261 from the Army, Navy, Air Force, Police and the Civil Defence Force. 29,551 have been injured though most of them have returned to the battlefront. When we look at the number of permanently

disabled, it is 2,556. This is only in the past four years. 6,261 killed in action is a very large number. Therefore, you can see that we have achieved this victory through immense sacrifices.

It Is Their Heroism And Courage That Has Been The Reason For Our Victories. That Is Why We Have To Always Give Fullest Credit To The Lowest Level Soldier Who Achieved This Victory.

Would you like to elaborate on the conditions under which the Military conducted the Humanitarian Operations?

Looking at the duties of the soldiers, sailors and airmen, their lives have been very hard. When a soldier reports to duty in Jaffna or Vavuniya, they go on leave only once in three months. On duty they will be working throughout; day and night in the battlefront, it can be under a tree or in a bunker. In most instances it is in the jungle regardless of the weather; be it rain, shine or drought. The Forces had to undergo immense difficulties in terms of weather. Some areas were completely under water, especially when they were getting closer to Paranthan.

A major delay tactic that was used by the LTTE throughout the campaign was the large ditch and bund concept. We cannot discuss the operations without mentioning this aspect. This concept was used everywhere and the Army had to overcome this obstacle. Furthermore there were mines and booby traps placed at regular intervals. Our troops had to clear all anti personnel mines, Improvised Explosive Devises and booby traps while moving forward. If this was not done, there would have been a massive number of deaths and injuries to our troops. However our troops stepped up to the challenge and mastered the skills to remove and clear these obstacles. Their work was highly commendable.

Earlier, many people including the LTTE were under the impression that difficult weather and terrain conditions would help them. However because of the excellent skills of our soldiers, we took advantage of the difficult terrain and weather conditions. Our soldiers performed excellently in the jungle than the LTTE because they were well trained and were prepared for any eventuality.

I have to specifically mention that many people including certain Defence Analysts both local and foreign said that the military would never be able to capture Kilinochchi. Some compared Kilinochchi to Stalingrad and said that the Army will face its end in Kilinochchi. Even the LTTE were bragging about sending 20,000 dead bodies to Colombo. But we silenced all of them.

By adopting well-planned strategies and tactics, the Army was able to recapture

Kilinochchi. Furthermore as you can remember, within a short period of two weeks Elephant Pass, Paranthan, Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu, Maankulam and all other important areas were brought under the control of the Army. It was a great victory and a big achievement. This is purely because of the good tactical planning as well as the excellent execution of these plans. We should give full credit to the Army Commander and also to all the Divisional Commanders for their immaculate planning and for the excellent leadership given by them.
We have to appreciate these people, because it is not like working in an office. Once they join they know that after training they have to go to the front and fight. They know the danger involved. However they voluntarily joined the Forces, knowing the dangers involved, the ferocity and the threat that they had to face. They went to the battlefield with a sense of responsibility to the country. I wish to extend my gratitude to the excellent mid level and lower level leadership as well as all the soldiers for the their courageous acts on the battle field.

My Sincere Appreciation Goes To The Army Commander, As I Described Before It Was The Army Who Bore The Brunt Of The Battle. General Fonseka Was Responsible For The Tactical Planning For All Areas In The Army. He Personally Supervised, Day And Night On How The Battle Was Moving Forward. Having Him As The Commander Of The Army Was The Decisive Factor For Us. His Commitment, Experience, Knowledge And Also The Way He Performed Was Very Important In This Whole Campaign, Therefore Selecting General Fonseka Was An Extremely Important Decision.

Many were surprised by the arms, ammunition and technology (submarines, aircrafts) that the LTTE possessed.The arsenal was akin to that of a country.Considering this, how did the military tackle this challenge and what would have happened otherwise?

The importance of the task performed by the Military and the Police can be seen when you consider the challenges that they had. When you look at the arms and ammunition that the LTTE had collected, their strength whether it be artillery, mortars, machine guns, mines, boats, suicide boats, submarines and aircrafts and also when you consider the LTTE numbers and the way they were fighting till the end, you can see the force of the enemy that the Military had to fight.
Considering this, if the Government had not taken the action when it did and if we had not defeated the LTTE, the results would have been disastrous. I spoke to the

ground Commanders and looking at the amount of ammunition that we captured and the way the LTTE was fighting if we had not commenced the Humanitarian Operations at the time that we did, there would have been a catastrophe. The LTTE would have definitely divided the country through military means. Considering all of that you realise the importance of the achievements of the Military, Police, CDF and all the war heroes.

The LTTE was one of the most ruthless and well equipped terrorist organisations in the world, by defeating this group, the Sri Lankan Military has proven that it is one of the best in the world. It is undoubtedly one of the greatest achievements of our times. What are your thoughts on that?

The LTTE had grown significantly over the last 30 years. They have networks all over the world and within Sri Lanka. FBI has rated it as the number one terrorist organisation in the world. Many people including Defence Analysts in the entire world said that the LTTE could not be militarily defeated. Even within Sri Lanka, even the public opinion was that the LTTE was an organisation that could not be defeated. Most of the time, even the leadership of this country tried to tackle it differently than defeating them militarily. Our Armed Forces defeated the LTTE and we have proven to the world that if you have the commitment and the will, you can defeat terrorism as well as terrorist organisations. By defeating the LTTE, we have become an example to the whole world and most of the International Community commended us on that.

During the Humanitarian Operations, all Armed Forces had a particular role to play. Would you like to elaborate on the contribution of the Army to the Humanitarian Operations?

Yes, the Army had to take the major brunt of the whole campaign. It was the duty of the Army to go forward, defeat the terrorists and capture the land and get control of the land. Even if you look at the number of casualties, the Army had a higher number of casualties and that was the nature of their task. I have already spoken about the amount of hardships that they had to go through.
Some soldiers had gone through the complete campaign from the beginning to the end. Some had started their duty in Sampur and gone all the way to the Eastern region and to Wanni up to the end. There are others who had joined from Wanni and engaged in the campaign to the end. It was very difficult for them to go through the

campaign continuously and engage in high intensive operations over a period of three and a half years. That shows the commitment of these Armed personnel because they were not doing this for personal gains. It is for the satisfaction that they get by achieving something for the country. It is also very important to realise that in the end, it is the man at the grassroots level who matters to win the war for us. It is the lowest level soldier who carries the weapon and goes and faces the bullet. It is he who goes in front and destroys the enemy and takes over a bunker or overcomes an obstacle. They go in the front. They are the people who have suffered the most in this whole campaign. It is not like just walking through the jungle; it is difficult terrain, a dangerous enemy and at the same time facing all the bullets as well as the artillery, mortars and other weapons. It is their heroism and courage that has been the reason for our victories. That is why we have to always give fullest credit to the lowest level soldier who achieved this victory.

ARMY COMMANDER GENERAL SARATH FONSEKA,"In all this, the support and wisdom of the Secretary Defence, Gotabaya Rajapaksa was crucial. Together, we looked into the all-important areas of arms and ammunition, weapons systems procurement, strategy and recruitment and training. The Defence Secretary also knew that we would have to fight. At that time 40,000 soldiers didn't have helmets. Many had just one uniform and one pair of boots. There was a shortage of 40,000 numbers of flak jackets. We needed to replenish stocks and get ready for a prolonged engagement with the enemy and this is exactly what we did."

Business Today – December 2008

Similarly, the leadership of the various Divisions on the ground level contributed immensely to the victory. What are your thoughts on this?

Of course, when you recruit a person, you train him and give him the necessary equipment. It is the various levels of leaders who have to lead. Therefore, leadership is very important at all levels. In the Army, we have seen that the Army Commander downwards to the Platoon Commanders have shown real leadership. They are true leaders.
General Jagath Dias led the 57 Division; he did a tremendous task because it was his responsibility to regain Kilinochchi. He was there from the very beginning of the Humanitarian Operations till the very last minute.
Brigadier Shavindra Silva of the 58 Division did a marvellous job. His Division joined the campaign of regaining the North from Mannar. They were responsible for

captured Pooneryn, all the way upto Paranthan. Then from Paranthan to Vishwamadu, Pudukudiyiruppu and ultimately to Pudumathalan, which was the end of the No Fire Zone. His Division too, was involved from the very beginning of the Wanni campaign until the end and they covered and captured very important ground. Brigadier Shavindra Silva led his Division very efficiently and successfully.
The 59 Division joined the surge from Welioya up to Mullaitivu and are responsible for capturing the important areas North of Welioya region up to Mullaitivu. Major General Nandana Udawatta led this Division and they performed a very important role in this operation.
The 53 Division was based in Muhamalai, but later joined the battle under the command of Major General Kamal Gunarathna. His Division was responsible for recapturing half of Pudukudiyiruppu and was also responsible for ultimately destroying many of the LTTE leaders on the last day of the Humanitarian Operations. Their work was highly commendable. His contribution to the entire operation has been significant.

I Felt It Was My Duty And Responsibility To Visit The Families Of These Men Of The Armed Forces, Police And CDF; Their Immediate Families Such As Their Father, Mother, Wife And Children And Pay My Respects To Them And Look After, Find Out And Solve Their Problems. I Think It Is More Or Less Our Duty And Responsibility Towards Them. It Is My Way Of Paying My Respects To Them.

General Jagath Jayasooriya who is the Security Forces Commander, Wanni coordinated operations from the beginning until the end. He is the overall commander of the Divisions mentioned above. His contribution to this campaign has been immense.
Looking at the entire operations, Jaffna peninsula was a very important factor. Major General G A Chandrasiri who is the present Chief of Staff and the second in Command of the Army, was commanding the Jaffna peninsula. From the very beginning he played a very important role because defending Jaffna peninsula was of utmost importance. The LTTE was not able to cause any damage in Jaffna because Major General Chandrasiri maintained complete control over the entire peninsula. Though the LTTE attempted to infiltrate Jaffna peninsula and destabilise it, they were unsuccessful as the troops under Major General Chandrasiri’s command did a very important task in protecting Jaffna. It was very important not to allow the LTTE to conduct a major attack, infiltrate or attack gun positions of our troops and camps. Additionally, we did a very good job in defending the Muhamalai

Forward Defence Line.
The aim of the LTTE from the very beginning was either to land in the Jaffna peninsula and induct a large force to engage all troops stationed there or break through from Muhamalai Forward Defence Lines into Jaffna peninsula. If the LTTE had caused a problem in Jaffna peninsula we would have had to face a difficult situation. Therefore while conducting the operations in the Wanni, keeping Jaffna peninsula intact was very important and the Armed Forces stationed there did a tremendous job in doing that. There was not a single major incident in the Jaffna peninsula during the entire Humanitarian campaign. This is a very important factor. Though I have not mentioned names, there are so many other Task Force Commanders, Divisional Commanders, Brigade Commanders, Battalion Commanders, Company Commanders and Platoon Commanders, who were involved in the fighting in the forward lines. My appreciation goes out to them as they faced the major impact of the fighting.

During the Humanitarian Operations we heard a lot about the Special Forces and the Commando Regiment. Can you tell us how these two units contributed to the elimination of terrorism in Sri Lanka?

Yes, the Special Forces (SF) Unit and the Commando Regiment did a tremendous task. In many instances SF and Commandos complemented the advancing Infantry troops by assisting them in neutralising major threats. Additionally, throughout the campaign the SF and Commandos have also taken the lead to overcome major threats prior to the Infantry regiments moving forward.
During the entire campaign, the SF conducted operations deep in LTTE controlled areas. By taking targets inside this area, they restricted the movement of LTTE leaders. Previously these kinds of operations were not done and the LTTE had the freedom to move within those areas. However, because of the task performed by the SF and their Deep Penetration Units, going deep into the enemy area and taking their targets they instilled fear in the LTTE leadership.
Once the Deep Penetration Units started their operations the LTTE was never able to move freely, they had to take precautions. At the same time the SF was successful in taking important targets including important LTTE leaders. The significance of the task they performed was tremendous. It has not been an easy task. As a small unit going very deep into enemy territory, they are completely alone, according to the time period they are inside the amount of food they have is restricted. They have to completely depend on themselves.

Considering all these aspects the Army has made great sacrifices and performed a great duty in this entire operation.

PERSEVERANCE – The force of the LTTE was massive; their arms, ammunition and 35,000 strong terrorist cadres posed a real challenge requiring the President to increase the strength of the military. The continuous support given by the people of this country made it possible to increase the strength of the military by 50%. Unlike earlier times, this time the President had the confidence and the will to defeat the LTTE menace. For three years the military campaign that required massive spending on arms and ammunition could be sustained whilst managing the economy and holding public support for the cause. The ability to sustain such a logistical background itself was an achievement on its own. Business Today

The success of the Army during the last three years is largely because of the unwavering strength of the Army Commander General Sarath Fonseka. Can you give your views on that?

My sincere appreciation goes to the Army Commander, as I described before it was the Army who bore the brunt of the battle. General Fonseka was responsible for the tactical planning for all areas in the Army. He personally supervised, day and night on how the battle was moving forward. Having him as the Commander of the Army was a decisive factor for us. He is an experienced officer and throughout his career he has been involved in anti terrorist activities and all the major battles during the span of the war. Therefore, he has a very good knowledge of the enemy. This was a very important factor because he knew how the LTTE would react, what their plans were and how they would fight. Thus the Commander was always a step ahead. General Fonseka knew the capabilities of his men. Therefore he selected his officers to command the division according to merit and not purely on seniority. He knew the capabilities of the men who could perform well. This was a very important factor that produced results. During instances where officers were not performing well, he immediately took action and appointed new officers. There were a few instances like that, which show how closely he was monitoring and identifying people who could bring in results. This was very important.
His commitment, experience, knowledge and also the way he performed was very important in this whole campaign. Therefore selecting General Fonseka was an extremely important decision.
President Mahinda Rajapaksa recognised the capability and ability of General Sarath Fonseka and that is why he appointed General Fonseka as the Army Commander.

Usually an Army Commander serves for four years however, when President Rajapaksa took over office, the Commander was Lt General Shantha Kottegoda. He had not completed even two years of service but President Mahinda Rajapaksa called him and explained to Lt General Shantha Kottegoda that he had nothing against him as he knew him very well but he wanted a person like Sarath Fonseka to command the Army because he knew the capabilities of the General Sarath Fonseka. Actually in the end, it proved to be the right decision as it produced results.

NAVY COMMANDER WASANTHA KARANNAGODA – “The unwavering leadership of His Excellency the President and the Defence Secretary is the key factor. The determination to fight this to the finish, remaining focused and the decision to provide necessary equipment to the security forces went a long way in helping us score the successes we did. Another major factor is the public support for the Armed Forces and Police. Never in the history of this war, during the last 25 years have we received such public support. His Excellency the President and Secretary of Defence motivated and galvanised the public and ensured their overwhelming support for us.Business Today – February 2009

The role of the Navy in destroying the might of the LTTE was crucial during the Humanitarian Operations. Can you elaborate on this?

The Navy played a very important and decisive role in this whole campaign. Looking at the victories of the Navy, the high point was the destruction of nearly twelve LTTE boats, which were carrying arms and ammunitions during 2006- 2007. From the twelve they destroyed, seven ships were destroyed by venturing out to the deep sea away from Sri Lankan waters. This was the first time that the Sri Lankan Navy has conducted such an operation. The supply of ammunition to the LTTE was one of the major problems that we faced. The LTTE purchased weapons from the world market and were storing these in large ships, which had been converted into floating warehouses and armouries. Whenever they had the opportunity or the need, they transferred these arms and ammunition into the island. The Navy with some international help located these ships. They went very far out to sea and destroyed these warehouses. We did not have ships, which could go that far but the Navy was not discouraged, they improvised and took charge of the situation and destroyed the armouries of the enemy. This was a very important turn of events that ensured the forward march of our Forces.

The Navy was also very successful in destroying many trawlers and ships, which were carrying arms and ammunition from the floating warehouses to Sri Lanka. The strength of the Navy is very important because Sri Lanka is an island. The LTTE was trying to dominate the sea by increasing the number of LTTE boats at sea. The Navy earlier used Dvoras, which are fast attack crafts. These are very expensive and if the LTTE destroys a Dvora, we would not only lose valuable equipment but also a large number of officers and men because to operate a Dvora you need twenty-four men. The LTTE used to ram these Dvoras with fast moving suicide boats. This was happening quite often during the conflict. However the Navy was able to counter the LTTE suicide boats by introducing the small boats concept. The Navy introduced Sri Lankan made small boats with a smaller number of crew of about four but with good firepower and speed. As these boats were less expensive, the Navy could introduce a larger number of boats and thus were able to completely counter the LTTE threat at sea. The Sri Lanka Navy was able to completely dominate the sea and this was extremely important as the LTTE was trying to move from one sector to another sector. Once the Eastern Province was brought under Government control, the LTTE repeatedly tried to infiltrate into those areas. Furthermore as the LTTE was constantly moving between Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu, bringing arms and ammunition into the country, it was of utmost importance that Navy dominated the sea and they have done so satisfactorily.

The Navy Commander Admiral Wasantha Karannagoda performed a tremendous task. He took upon himself to counter the LTTE suicide boats and also to destroy the floating warehouses of the LTTE. Admiral Wasantha Karannagoda has been fully committed to securing the seas surrounding our country.

The Navy was instrumental in supplying provisions to the Army stationed in the North of Sri Lanka. Can you tell us a little bit about this?

We have about 50,000 troops stationed in the Jaffna peninsula. For a long period of time the only method of providing provisions to these troops were by sea as there was no land route between the south and the peninsula because the LTTE controlled the Wanni. Therefore, the Navy performed the very important task of maintaining the troops through the daily supply of food and ammunition. Furthermore, the Navy provided the only means of transporting troops out of the peninsula and back.

This was a major task that the Navy performed until we cleared Elephant Pass and opened the A9 road. The sea route was from Trincomalee to KKS. We would

transport about 3000 troops at once in a ship called the Jetliner and the LTTE had been targeting this ship for a very long time. If the LTTE had been successful it would have been a disaster and that would have been the end of the campaign. Everyone would have blamed the Government and the Military and asked us to stop these operations as losing 3,000 soldiers at once would have been a complete debacle and a disaster. Therefore this was a tremendous task performed successfully by the Navy. Through their hard work we were able to maintain the troops in the Jaffna peninsula.

Beyond performing its classic role, the Navy also supported the Army on the ground. Would you like to elaborate?

The classic role of the Navy is to dominate the sea and to maintain the troops by supplying food etc. However when the Army was involved in operational duties there were certain areas that we wanted to dominate and we had to use the Navy to perform this task. Now this is not the classic role of the Navy but they took up the challenge by taking over certain land areas especially in the Mannar district and all the islands such as Kytes and Mandativu. The Navy controls and occupies these areas. Similarly, in the Eastern Province, a large area has been taken over by the Navy, so that the Army could concentrate on liberating the Wanni region.

EXTERNAL PRESSURE The President clearly identified the importance of numerous external forces. Though in the 80’s we were unable to realise the importance of the impact of India, it is a fact that India did intervene. However, President Mahinda Rajapaksa diplomatically addressed these interventions. He was able to contain all types of pressure from various free media groups, some international organisations particularly from Human Rights groups, NGOs and certain sections of the International Community. A few countries stopped providing arms and ammunitions causing us to look elsewhere for the necessary arms while others imposed sanctions on arms. On the other hand there was pressure on the economy as well by way of schemes such as GSP +. Especially in Colombo and other areas in the south, people were scared of the instability that could have taken place in Colombo. Controlling terrorist activities in the south was a factor that helped to continue military operations in other areas. Despite all these pressures, the President was able to counter them and continue the campaign. **Business Today**

There was a major concern that the LTTE leadership would try to escape by sea, however the Navy prevented that. How did the Navy achieve this?

Finally, when the LTTE leadership was confined to a small area there was a sea frontage till the last minute. Though the area of this sea front reduced with the advance of the troops there was a sea front throughout the campaign. Many said that Prabhakaran and the leadership would escape through this sea front. Some people said that the LTTE will use a submarine to go and then will escape in a boat to Malaysia. Therefore, the Navy had a tremendous task to prevent the escape. They had to prevent anyone from leaving and arrest any LTTE cadres. There were many IDPs who tried to escape to India. Even the family of a LTTE leader – Soosai, tried to escape and they were arrested. Therefore, the Navy had to do a thorough survey to prevent the LTTE leadership from escaping.

The Navy was instrumental in providing provisions to civilians as well. Could you tell us how exactly this was done?

Once the A9 road was closed, the Government was pressurised by the International Community including the UN and other organisations to open it. If we had opened the A9 road it would have been a major problem for us to maintain the security of the Jaffna peninsula and that was why the LTTE was keen on opening this road from Muhamalai. That would have given the LTTE the opportunity to infiltrate and take explosives, arms and ammunition to the peninsula. Therefore we did not want to open the A9. Then the pressure came to us as to how we were going to supply food and essential materials to the Jaffna peninsula. The Navy yet again stepped up and facilitated the passage of civilian ships to Kankasanthurai (KKS) and also the movement of civilians to and from KKS.

If We Had Not Commenced The Humanitarian Operations At The Time That We Did, It Would Have Been A Catastrophe. The LTTE Would Have Definitely Divided The Country Through Military Means. Considering All Of That You Realise The Importance Of The Achievements Of The Military, Police, CDF And All The War Heroes.

The Navy was vital in protecting the harbours of the country. How did they perform this function?

All the harbours including Colombo, Trincomalee and Galle were major targets of the LTTE. Throughout the campaign, Colombo harbour was a target of the LTTE. Though the LTTE attempted to attack the Colombo harbour the Navy was able to

successfully prevent that and provide ample security. The Navy was vital in protecting the Colombo harbour.

The Navy Commander has been pivotal to the success of the Humanitarian Operations. His ingenuity and skill has entailed in the destruction of the sea capabilities of the LTTE. What are your thoughts on this?

The Navy Commander Admiral Wasantha Karannagoda performed a tremendous task. He took upon himself to counter the LTTE suicide boats and also to destroy the floating warehouses of the LTTE. The small boat concept of the Navy was the brainchild of Admiral Wasantha Karannagoda. Furthermore he personally planned the attack and successfully destroyed all the LTTE ships. Such commitment and dedication has been instrumental to our success. He has immense experience and knowledge, as he has been part of this war since its inception. Admiral Wasantha Karannagoda has been fully committed to securing the seas surrounding our country. I show my appreciation to him.

During the Humanitarian Operations, having a strong and a capable Air Force proved to be a great advantage to us. How did the Air Force contribute to the success of this campaign?

Yes, the Air Force played an important role in this campaign. As you know, air support was a very important factor to the ground troops. Especially when you have to neutralise fire from the LTTE. Ground troops received close support from helicopter gunships and fighter jets. Tactical bombings by the Air Force succeeded in neutralising the LTTE and to minimise our casualties.
During the past three decades, we lost so many courageous pilots. However, fortunately during the past three years we have not lost a single airman due to enemy fire or enemy missile. This was because of the efficiency of the pilots. We caused immense damage to the LTTE through Air Force bombing, which was done with good intelligence and after accurately identifying the targets. As you know the Air Force killed Thamilchelvam. Our focus was to target the LTTE leadership; therefore we were not only able to get him but also other LTTE leaders by accurate Air Force bombings. The Air Force was successful in destroying LTTE weapon systems, artillery guns and tanks. Air Force was able to destroy many LTTE cadres upon receiving information or when the LTTE concentrations were identified.

The Air Force has provided close support to the ground forces, which has been an advantage to us. The Air Force has performed a very immense task in this. The pilots take a lot of risks because LTTE fires at them from the ground. As you know the jet is an aircraft that moves very fast therefore, you have to react very fast. They go into enemy territory and they have to dive down and take these targets. By doing that the pilots take a big risk. Therefore in such ways the Air Force has provided tremendous support on the battlefield. I would also like to mention helicopter fighter pilots, Fighter Jet pilots who fly under extremely dangerous conditions. The Air Force has shown great courage by taking targets over enemy territory.

The Air Force Commander has the commitment, experience and knowledge to counter the enemy. His strength and direction has been vital…considering his experience, he had the strength and commitment to fight the war.

The Air Force has also proven to be invaluable in evacuating casualties. Can you tell us about this?

There is another important role of the Air Force, which is to maintain ground troops by troop transportation and food transportation by air to Jaffna peninsula and other areas. Then the other most im-portant function is evacuating casualties. In the instance when a member of the Deep Penetration Units got injured, the Air Force would evacuate them from enemy areas. Then also on the battlefield, casualty evacuation is a very important role played by the Air Force. This is very important. It is a very big morale boost because when a soldier gets injured, you have to remove them immediately from that area and provide them with medical treatment. This could be done only by air. The Air Force was a great asset to us.

The Air Force extensively used technology to carry out their operations in an accurate manner. How was new technology used to our advantage?

An important aspect of the operations by the Air Force was the use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV). We used it to the maximum this time and it was very useful. Many ground Commanders have personally informed me that it has largely helped them. We gave all Commanders a direct connection to the UAV. Therefore, all Divisional Commanders could see what was going on in front, in the LTTE controlled areas. Throughout the Humanitarian Operations we gave this facility to the ground

Commanders. Therefore, when they were planning and executing the operations it was very helpful for the ground Commanders to see in front; to see where the enemy concentrations were, to see and locate where the fire was coming from, to neutralise and act accordingly. It was a big help to the ground Forces. This introduction of the UAV was another major achievement by the Air Force. Earlier too, we had the UAVs but we did not use them effectively. This time we gave the direct connection, so that the Commanders could see real time what is going on in the battlefield and that helped them in identifying and changing their plan to locate the obstacles.

It helped the Air Force pilots as well. Once we get the locations of the LTTE targets from the ground human intelligence, we were able to do better surveillance of the area and better understand the area using the UAV. By doing that the pilots got a better knowledge and view of the target beforehand. That was why we had a very good success rate on ground attacks during the last three years. Most impor-tantly, it prevented civilian casualties. This is another way that we prevented civilian casualties.

All over the world it is air attacks that make the most damage. But here, before we take any target, we use the UAV to monitor the area and the target, to do the surveillance of the target, to pinpoint the target and also to see whether there are any civilians around. Thus, by doing this the pilot had a better understanding of the target and were able to take the target accurately and precisely. This gave us results both by taking the target and preventing civilian casualties. That was very important and this is the classic role of the Air Force.

GIVING CONFIDENCE The Defence Secretary was instrumental in giving strength and confidence to the President to carry on the Humanitarian Operations. He personally oversaw these operations. The President needs a good analysis of the ground situation to make decisions as these decisions involved the lives of people and the Defence Secretary was able to provide the President with that analysis. That gave the President the confidence that the campaign was going in the correct direction. Unlike previous leaders who did not have that confidence in the briefings that he or she received, President Rajapaksa was confident that the Defence Secretary was giving him the correct picture of the situation. That gave the President the necessary confidence and the strength to go on and whatever the pressure or views that were coming from outside, he was able to stand strong. The President was sure that the campaign was going on the right path, which made it easy for him to take a stand and make decisions. **Business Today**

Apart from what was said above , the Air Force was also actively involved on the ground. Can you tell us about this aspect of the Air Force?

We also use a large number of Air Force personnel on the ground as well, to occupy certain areas and relieve the Army to do the fighting. In the Eastern Province, lot of areas in the Trincomalee district are manned by and the ground security is done by the Air Force. Similarly in Vavuniya, a large area is occupied by the Air Force and the ground duties are done by them. Beyond their classic role, they are helping the Army by holding the land. In the Eastern province maintaining the main supply routes from Habarana to Trincomalee is also done by the Air Force. Their role in relieving the Army from ground duties was a very important task.

AIR FORCE COMMANDER AIR CHIEF MARSHAL ROSHAN GOONETILEKE
"The important factor is the role that the Secretary, Ministry of Defence plays as a person who has enormous experience in this field. A veteran on military operational issues, he directs and guides us with an absolutely clear vision; set right on the purpose. Therefore, whatever we ask, his approval has come quickly. Such support from the Secretary of Defence has had a positive outcome on the Huma-nitarian Operations that we did. We were given a wide frame to work on; no interferences and we were given the freedom to do what we needed to do…Therefore with the correct leadership of the President, the Secretary of Defence, his understanding of the situation and his perseverance has enabled us to gain the current successes. In fact this environment has helped us in an unprecedented manner to suppress and destroy the LTTE's war making capability."
Business Today – March 2009

An important responsibility of the Air Force is protecting the Bandaranaike International Airport (BIA). Can you tell us how the Air Force fulfilled this function?

Protecting such important installations was vital because as we saw previously, the LTTE attacked the BIA and destroyed many aircrafts. Such incidents bring immense pressure on the Government. Harbours, Airports and other such installations in Colombo such as the oil refinery, Kelanitissa power plant are very important. These have been the targets of the LTTE throughout because that brings a lot of economic and social pressure. Also, when you consider the security of the BIA, it is very important. The protection of the International Airport was completely the responsibility of the Air Force. They performed this task very well. Throughout this

operation we had a severe threat on the BIA and the Air Force successfully protected it.

MAKING DECISIONS Throughout the Humanitarian Operations, the President had someone he could depend on, as brothers, the President was aware that a wrong picture would not be given to him by the Defence Secretary. The confidence in each other that they had built all through their lives played a major role. The decision to destroy the LTTE and see an end to this conflict was a major decision as it involved dealing with people's lives. The President is responsible for the lives of everyone including the lives of soldiers. It was a major decision that the President had to make when he had to decide whether it was worth in making all these sacrifices. Since he knew that the Humanitarian Operation was going on the right path, he was sure of achieving the goals and liberating the country by defeating the LTTE. The President took this decision to continue and he had to review the progress throughout. He was able to do that because he had a person who he could depend on. The President knew that the Defence Secretary would not give him an inaccurate briefing and that he would always give the truth. That was a great asset to the President. **Business Today**

Just a few months ago, in a desperate effort to save face, the LTTE sent two suicide aircrafts to Colombo. However yet again the Air Force proved its might by destroying the LTTE air capabilities. What are your thoughts on this achievement?

The Air Defence System is a very important aspect in this entire military campaign. Till 2006, there was no Air Defence System in the country. During this time the LTTE for the first time in history introduced aircrafts. Countering low flying aircrafts was very difficult. The usual interceptors in Jets and other aircrafts are to identify similar kinds of aircrafts; that is a very fast moving aircraft. However, in this instance the Air Force had a very big challenge because the LTTE came up with a small, slow and low flying aircraft.
I have to emphasise that the air wing of the LTTE did not give any military advantage to the LTTE. It did not change our military successes. They did not succeed in doing any major damage, but it gave a very psychological effect to the people and it was a nuisance. In that way it was a major challenge to the Air Force. Therefore, the Air Force had to improvise to counter this problem, because buying an interceptor would have been useless. Though the LTTE came into Colombo, the Air Force prevented them from entering more important areas. We know that one of

their major targets was the BIA, except on the very first time when they came and dropped explosives, however they couldn't cause any major damage. Once the Air Defence System was adopted by the Air Force the LTTE was never able to at-tack.

The second major target was the harbour and the President's House, the LTTE has never been able to infiltrate. Therefore, with the Air Force Defence System in place, except for the first time on all other occasions we received early warnings. As soon as the LTTE aircraft took off we received the warning. The ground defences were prepared and were able to counter this. The Air Defence System, the radar system worked really well. Though during the first few occasions we were not able to shoot them down, subsequently we were able to shoot down all three aircrafts. The first one was shot down over Mullaitivu but we could not recover the debris. During the last attack we were able to destroy both aircrafts and prevent a major disaster. Actually the last attack, the LTTE came on a suicide attack – one was targeting the Air Force Headquarters and the other was targeting the Katunayake jet squadron. But both failed. The full credit and appreciation needs to go to the Air Force.

Overall When Considering All Three Commanders, Army, Navy And Air Force, They Were Very Com-Mitted And They Performed An Immense Task In Seeing An End To This. I Was Extremely Fortunate To Work With Such A Dedicated Team. My Appreciation Goes Out To Them.

The Air Force Commander, Air Chief Marshal Roshan Goonetileke has been the strength behind the Air Force. Your thoughts?

I have known the Air Force Commander from his younger days as a person who has been involved in counter terrorism. He too has the commitment, experience and knowledge to counter the enemy. His strength and direction has been vital. I knew him as a young helicopter pilot. Considering his experience he had the strength and commitment to fight the war.
Overall when considering all three commanders, Army, Navy and Air Force they were very com-mitted and they performed an immense task in successfully seeing an end to this. I was extremely fortunate to work with such a dedicated team. My appreciation goes out to them.

How did the Military ensure that innocent civilians would be protected during the final stages of the Humanitarian Operations?

There are many places in the world where similar types of conflicts are occurring such as Afgha-nistan, Iraq and Israel. But, when it comes to civilian casualties, the Sri Lankan Military has performed very much better than any other Military in the world. Though from the very beginning the LTTE propaganda and various other organisations which were sympathetic to the LTTE made accusations about the number of civilian causalities, the actual fact is that the amount of civilian casualties are much lower when you consider the whole campaign. Until the final stage, we were successful in maintaining almost zero civilian casualties because from the very beginning of the Humanitarian Operations from Sampur in the East we introduced the concept of zero civilian casualties. We always kept this aspect in mind and planned accordingly to minimise and prevent any civilian casualties.
During the latter stages of the operations when the LTTE used civilians as a shield, then the Military had to adopt different tactics and as a result of this on their own initiative the Military demarcated certain areas as No Fire Zones (NFZ). The Army did this voluntarily. This was not requested from us. The Government considering the plight of the civilians declared the NFZ. We requested the civilians to move into the NFZ so that the Army can proceed in other areas. This was the first NFZ. The LTTE moved into the NFZ with their guns and leaders and started operating within the NFZ. They started firing at the Army from within the NFZ.
Even with such provocation, the Army refrained from firing into the NFZ. Then the LTTE forced the civilians to move from the first NFZ to Pudumathalan. In response to this the Army considering the safety of the civilians re-demarcated the NFZ to Pudumathalan area. Once all other areas were re-captured, the Army ultimately surrounded the NFZ from all directions.
At this stage there was much pressure coming from various organisations. Certain sections of the International Community started to cry out saying that they were suspicious of a large number of civilian casualties and that the Army was going to push forward into the area.
At this stage even though the LTTE was saying that they are the saviours of the Tamil community, instead of protecting the Tamil civilians, the LTTE used Tamil civilians to protect them. Ultimately they used the civilians to protect their leadership.
At this moment too, the Army changed its tactics and commenced the largest ever hostage rescue operation in history. On April 20, 2009, they rescued approximately 25,000 civilians. Within three days a record number of approximately 100,000 civilians were rescued from this area. This was without a single shot being fired. As soon as the LTTE realised that the civilians were moving into Government controlled areas they started attacking the civilians. We saw this clearly from the video

footage that was taken from air. The LTTE not only shot the civilians, there were three suicide explosions within the NFZ, which killed and injured many civilians. The Army proved their courage by rescuing 100,000 innocent people from the LTTE. Additionally, the Army went a step further and declared that they will not use any heavy weapons in the military operations. From that day onwards the Army refrained from using artillery or tanks in their operations purely to prevent any civilian casualties. However even though the Government took all measures to prevent civilian casualties the LTTE continued to fire mortars, machine guns and use civilians as a shield. As a result of such precautions the Army had to suffer more casualties. Thus, I need to emphasise that the Army sacrificed life and limb in order to save the lives of the innocent civilians.

All the additional measures that the Government took to safeguard civilians were self-imposed. The demarcation of NFZ, restrictions on using heavy weapons and hostage rescue operations were all self-imposed. Any form of law, whether it is Humanitarian or International law does not require these measures to be taken. We introduced these methods on our own to minimise civilian casualties and this is a very important fact that everybody should take into consideration when they talk about war crimes etc, because we went over and beyond to prevent any civilian casualties. Therefore, I can confidently say that our Military performance was much better than any other Military in a similar conflict in any other part of the world.

I Have To Emphasise That The Military Fought Against The LTTE Terrorists And Not Against The Tamil Community. But Unfortunately Because Of The LTTE Threats, The Tamil Community Could Not Come Out Or Help To Give Information And Help The Forces. However, Many Tamils Who Lived Outside The North And East Did Not Like The LTTE, But They Could Not Do Anything. Inside The Wanni Area They Had No Choice Because They Could Not See Any Other Government Or Body Except The LTTE.

During the final assault, it was only the Mahaveera families and LTTE members who remained with the LTTE leader. The entire civilian population crossed over to the Government controlled areas. As claimed by the LTTE, if the Tamil people were bent on having a separate state, why did they not remain with the LTTE?

This is a very clear indication that for the past 30 years the Tamil people lived under the LTTE because they had no choice. From the number of people that crossed over

it is apparent that the Tamil civilians did not want to live with the LTTE. Their heart wrenching stories are proof of the state of their lives that they spent under LTTE control.
Even when UN officials who visited the IDPs questioned as to why they did not move to Government controlled areas earlier, what they recurrently said was that from the very beginning they had wanted to come out of these areas but the LTTE had prevented them from moving to the Government controlled areas by force – i.e. shooting and killing. They came out at the very first opportunity that they got. Furthermore the LTTE was creating a false image of the Government and the Military inside the controlled areas. They were saying that if you go to the Government controlled areas the Army will rape women and they will kill men, thus spreading a false image among the people, but later on they realised that all these were not true therefore, they started coming out.

We have built a very strong and capable Military. Since the primary threat to the territorial integrity of the country has been neutralised, what is the future role of the Armed Forces?

The first phase of the Humanitarian Operations are over. We have captured their arms and ammunition, their leadership and a large portion of their cadres. Therefore, the LTTE is virtually finished but there are a lot of other tasks that we have to perform. There are so many arms and ammunition that are hidden in caches. Most of these areas are in thick jungle and difficult terrain, therefore, the Army has to search thoroughly and locate these arms caches. This is a very important task that they have to perform. They have a bigger responsibility in clearing these areas as a large number of mines have been planted in these areas by the LTTE. They have laid a lot of mines to prevent the advancement of the Army. Therefore before resettling or allowing the civilians to come back, we have to clear these areas or else there will be a lot of human casualties. As we have to clear the entire area, it is a large and difficult task. Each and every inch of land will have to be surveyed thoroughly. Furthermore there may be small-scattered LTTE groups operating in this large area, therefore we will have to locate and apprehend these people.

It is with the greatest difficulty and sacrifices that we have crushed the LTTE, but the next step is to maintain a high level of security and not allow violence to resume. As you know, there may be LTTE cadres posing as civilians and IDPs.

We have to rehabilitate the LTTE cadres who have surrendered and after rehabilitation we have to resettle them. However as we know there are certain people outside the country who are trying to run the organisation and they might try to use some of these people to restart the LTTE movement. It is our responsibility to ensure that this does not happen. The Government has to take certain action and deploy troops to prevent such things from happening. Therefore, for a longer period the Armed forces have an important role to perform.
We have to also remember that for the past three and a half years the Army was engaged in a high intensity military operation and thus we have not been able to give them adequate rest and relaxation. This is the time for them to go on vacation and to be with their families. We cannot continue to put the Forces through the same hardships. During the high intensity period, when they joined the Humanitarian Operations, they didn't have the time to rest. Day and night, 24 hours a day they had to work under the same high intensity and harsh environment. This cannot be done over a long period of time. Now we can revert to the usual procedure where while some are on duty the others can rest. We have to adapt to this new requirement and thus we will continue to need more troops. At the same time we can use them for development work because the military is very good at road construction and such other infrastructural developments.

INSPECTOR GENERAL OF POLICE JAYANTHA WICKRAMARATNE "We have dedicated Commanders and we have the fullest support from His Excellency the President and the Secretary of Defence. Having faced terrorism on the ground himself, the Secretary of Defence has produced results…Then the Secretary of Defence made the right decision when he initiated the Media Centre for National Security. This centre concentrates on providing information and is entirely focused on the media aspect of National Security."

Business Today – April 2009

When the Armed Forces were engaged in the Humanitarian Operations in the North, the Police was responsible in countering terrorism in the South. Would you like to elaborate on the role played by the Police?

At this time the Police was used very effectively in countering terrorism. Going beyond their usual task, we used the Police everywhere in the country to counter terrorism. If you take the Western Province, the Police played a major role, especially protecting the Colombo city and breaking the LTTE cells. They were also

involved in investigating LTTE incidents such as the assassinations of VIPs, all the bombs – car and bus bombs. The Police was successful in arresting the terrorists who were in-volved in all these incidents and that was very important. Earlier when such incidents took place, they were never able to capture those who were responsible for the same. Therefore, capturing the people who were responsible and those who were involved in the planning and destroying the network was a very important thing. To neutralise a cell and breaking that meant that the LTTE had to start again. For that reason, investigating and breaking the LTTE cells in Colombo was a major task. As you know, keeping Colombo safe was a very important factor in this whole campaign. Many people said that if we started operations in the North, there would be a lot of damage in Colombo. Many speculated that there would be killings. There were rumours going around that schools would be attacked and that the LTTE will kill so many civilians; that they will create a blood bath in Colombo. Therefore, preventing these incidents and keeping Colombo safe was a major challenge. The Police was responsible, of course, the other services helped. However the Police played a major role by taking various control measures including roadblocks, searches, intelligence work and keeping surveillance. They did a tremendous job in Colombo that went beyond their normal Police work. Getting involved in counter terrorism, the Police performed a major role in this campaign. I have to especially mention Former IGP Victor Perera and IGP Jayantha Wickremaratne who contributed immensely in achieving our goals. Then if you take Colombo, I have to especially mention, Senior DIG Colombo Nimal Mediwake who did a wonderful job by enforcing control measures. When you take criminal investigations, DIG Anura Senanayake did a wonderful job in Colombo and he was responsible for investigating most of these cases; there was also a very good team in Colombo who were performing these functions. There are other DIGs who are responsible for various areas in Colombo. Furthermore SSPs in the area also did a marvellous job in keeping Colombo safe. The full credit should go to all of them.

What about protecting other areas in the country?

If you go beyond the Western Province, there were threats in other parts such as the Central Province. Therefore, they had to do a lot of work in Central Province. In all the Southern areas that are beyond the North and East, there were many recoveries because the LTTE were bringing in claymore mines and such explosives into these areas. Therefore, by maintaining a roadblock system at the periphery in places such as Medawachchiya, Hathareskotuwa, Manampitiya in Polonnaruwa and

Ampara, we were able to prevent the arms and ammunition or explosives laden vehicles as well as suicide cadres from coming into these areas, Police did a good job. They carried out an important task by maintaining this network of roadblocks at the periphery, intermediary and within Colombo. It was crucial in preventing terrorists from coming into Colombo.
In the Eastern province, the STF played a very important role. The STF was responsible for the operations conducted in Kokkadicholai, Karadiyanaru and areas towards the Southern parts such as Panama and also maintaining security in the Batticoloa District. In the Eastern Province, we deployed more Policemen beyond their normal police duties. By establishing more posts and posting more Policemen in the Eastern Province, they helped to relieve the Army so that the Army could go and engage in the Humanitarian Operations. In that way, they took over the security duties in that area. In Vavuniya and Wanni Districts, the STF and Police were doing an important task by manning and controlling certain areas. Therefore, the Police was involved in counter terrorism in a major way, in a bigger way than the previous role that they played. Their contribution has been vital.

What was the contribution of intelligence agencies in this whole operation?

When you take the Police, terrorist investigations is very important. The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and the Terrorist Investigation Department (TID) played a major role in conducting investigations into various incidents. The intelligence agencies did a better job this time; they were better coordinated and worked as a team.
Further, all the military agencies and all the intelligence agencies worked together. By working to-gether they were able to counter and apprehend a lot of terrorists who were trying to carry out terrorist activities in other parts of the country. They were able to break the LTTE networks and they were able to apprehend those who were planning to kill VVIPs, attack VIPs and conduct various terrorist activities. Therefore, this time all the intelligence agencies worked together, sharing information amongst them. It was an important factor and they contributed heavily to this victory.

The Civil Defence Force (CDF) also made a contribution to this victory, particularly in the threatened areas. Would you like to elaborate on the part played by the CDF?

Actually the CDF was initially known as the Grama Arakshakas. We realised their importance and organised them into a Force and created the CDF. Admiral Sarath Weerasekera was appointed as the Director General of the CDF and he did a very good job particular in reorganising, regrouping, recruiting and training; more than anything else, in giving them an identity and giving them pride and motivating them. Overall the major role of the CDF was to protect the villages. They were recruited from the villages, especially to protect their own villages. Initially these villages were called 'border villages' but now since there is no border they are called 'threatened villages'. These were the villages that were close to the conflict areas and where the LTTE cadres used to come and kill the civilians and destroy their lives. In those areas, people were involved in paddy cultivation and chena cultivation. These are jungle areas, difficult terrain. The Army or the Police could not protect each and every village because that would have required a lot of strength. Hence, we reorganised and trained these Grama Arakshakas to purely protect the villages and they did a 100% good job.
Had there been a lot of incidents and killings in those areas, we would not have been able to continue with this campaign. In that way, they have protected the villages. Initially there were only 19,000 personnel but we increased that to 42,000. We put them into an organised Force. Though this was their major task, they also did other work in other parts of the country such as helping the Police and the Army to protect vulnerable points. Sometimes in protecting the Main Supply Routes (MSRs). These are the main tasks performed by the CDF. At a time when the Army Commander needed to protect the ground when the Army was nearing the end of the campaign and trying to prevent any infiltration, there was a need to fill the belly area on the ground. He needed to get nearly 3,000 personnel to fill that gap. We were able to provide those personnel from the Civil Defence Force, because we had trained and motivated these people. Within a week we were able to gather 4,000 people and assign them to the Army Commander to be deployed in the Wanni area. This was a very important factor. Thus, you can see the important role played by the CDF in this campaign.

DIRECTOR GENERAL CIVIL DEFENCE FORCE, REAR ADMIRAL SARATH WEERASEKARA – "Nevertheless, after February 2006, when the terrorist attacks on innocents resumed, the Secretary of Defence, Gotabaya Rajapaksa recommended to the President that the Home Guard Force should be reorganised, restructured with better training and deployed for the protection of the threatened villages as an independent force under the Ministry of Defence. Thus, the Civil Defence Force is the brainchild of the present Secretary of Defence…We have a

very committed Secretary of Defence. He has been a soldier, he understands the battle well, he knows the enemy well and he is aware of his troops, resources etc. He commands respect from all and inspires the troops with his addresses. He is the main pillar behind the success. **Business Today – May 2009**

The Government also established the Media Centre for National Security and the Defence website. What were the reasons behind this step and in what manner did they contribute to this campaign?

As you know, the media played an important role throughout. The media can create and change the public opinion and they decide whether the campaign is going on the correct path, whether things are happening right and all these are decided through the media. Previously we saw defence analysts who had the monopoly and who were controlling the media; their view was taken by the public as the whole truth. We had to challenge this because public support was a very important factor to carry out the campaign, without public support you cannot carryout a military campaign. If the public support goes against, the pressure is on the President and the Government to stop this. If the public think that the campaign is not going on the correct way that will put the pressure on the Government to stop the campaign and look into other directions. So it is very important to keep the support of the public with the military. Therefore, we thought that in order to give the correct information and to give our side of the story we needed to develop a mechanism. For that, we developed this Media Centre for National Security.

Both the Media Centre and especially the Defence Web were crucial in this campaign. We had developed the Defence website to such an extent that on May 18, 2009 there were 34 million hits on the Defence Web and I think it is a record in Sri Lanka. Particularly Sri Lankans living abroad gradually became dependent on that. We gave them the latest and we updated regularly throughout the day on what was happening. We gave our side of the story. We also countered whenever other papers and media gave wrong information.

Now most of the people have forgotten what it was like in 2006 – 2007. Everyone was against us, most of the papers were against us and very few put our side of the story. Now there are so many television channels, newspapers coming to us. But at that time, we had to counter all of this; the De-fence Web and the Media Centre did a tremendous task in countering this. In that way, this time we were able to disprove many of the major critiques and claims made by various Defence Analysts on which people were depending on earlier. Though people claimed that we were

controlling the media, we never did that; what we did was, we countered these views through our means of media by using the Media Centre and the Web. It was a very successful operation.

When the Humanitarian Operations started, the innocent Tamil population in the country were not on the streets protesting. Even when the LTTE leader was killed, they did not have a vigil. Today, the Tamil people are coming out. Predominantly Tamil areas are crowded as if a new life has begun. What are the reasons behind this?

I have to emphasise that the Military fought against the LTTE terrorists and not against the Tamil community. But unfortunately because of the LTTE threats, the Tamil community could not come out or help to give information and help the Forces. However many Tamils who lived outside the North and East did not like the LTTE, but they could not do anything. However, inside the Wanni area, they had no choice because they could not see any other government or body except the LTTE. They did not know any life beyond that. But now, looking at the reaction of the Tamil people within the country, they are happy. They say and they know that the LTTE did so much harm to the Tamil community. They killed so many Tamil people. They killed all their Tamil political leaders. They destroyed their education system. They destroyed their society and lifestyle. In LTTE controlled areas they forcibly recruited children and made them fight. They completely destroyed the Tamil culture, generation after generation. The LTTE dragged innocent Tamil people into this unnecessary war and destroyed them – their whole community. Now the Tamil people have the opportunity to live peacefully with the rest of the country.

RALLYING PUBLIC SUPPORT When the Humanitarian Operations commenced in 2006, the public was not convinced that the Military could win. Some wondered whether talks with the LTTE should be continued in order to reach a settlement; certain business leaders, media personnel and politicians were not 100% confident whether terrorism should be tackled militarily. Hence, it was important to rally public support. The public had to be convinced in order to get their support without which a campaign cannot be continued. The public irequired to join and contribute to the campaign. However, the President was able to successfully counter the adverse propaganda and this time around, the whole country was mobilised; the public opinion was changed and there was large-scale support for the cause. **Business Today**

Even though some countries were against Sri Lanka solving its internal

problems through this campaign, it was countries such as China, Russia, India, Pakistan and certain Middle Eastern countries that have stood by us. How significant is that?

The International Community has helped us in many ways to counter terrorism in this campaign. When you say 'International Community' it is not only the countries that make noise but lot of countries in the region, India, Pakistan, China, Russia, Israel, Japan, Iran and Middle Eastern countries helped us by giving us aid/help during this difficult time. Even countries from South East Asia such as Malaysia and Thailand have helped by sharing intelligence and not allowing the LTTE to operate their ships etc. Most of the countries realised that a small country like Sri Lanka was fighting a terrorist menace. They understood our situation and sympathised with us in international fora and gave us moral support. The International Community actually helped us.

Till recently terrorism was seen as something that could not be defeated. We have proven to the world that it is not so. Now even international media organisations are saying that terrorism can be eliminated. Why do you think they have changed their mind?

We have proven that terrorism can be defeated. The main thing that you need is to have a political will to counter this. Without a strong political will you cannot do anything. Then you also need to have a proper plan and implement that. Commitment is also important because by committing the military with a plan and a clear aim we could defeat the terrorists; we have proven that. Therefore it is a good lesson for all the countries.

Actually, even within Sri Lanka because of all the failures in the past and because we have not taken proper action, everyone thought that the LTTE could not be defeated. But by proper action we were able to destroy the entire LTTE within a very short period of time, which was not done during the last three decades. With the same people, same equipment we did this, we conducted the military campaign in a very short period. So it shows that if you have the will, if you have the commitment and a plan and if you give proper leadership, then it can be done. That was the only difference this time.

This time we had the commitment and the will from the President, he wanted to completely defeat the LTTE; he had a plan and he selected the proper people who could do this. He selected the proper leaders and executed this. He didn't change

his stance. He was unwavering throughout the campaign whatever the pressure that came. He didn't change. Previously we saw the leadership changing its stance and halting military campaigns where they went for ceasefires and peace talks. This time the leadership didn't change its stance, we continued facing whatever pressure and we succeeded in the end.

Many young men and women joined the Military because they had confidence in you. For the first time in history in Sri Lanka, a Defence Secretary has spoken to the families and soldiers on the ground; you have gone over and beyond. What is your response to this?

The success of the entire campaign depended on how the lowest level person, that is the soldier, reacts and works in the front. For them to do that, it is very important that these people are motivated. If not, they would not perform their tasks properly because it is life and death. When you go to fight, when you step forward, you never know whether you are going to come back alive. So, for that you need motivation. It is very important for them to realise what we are doing. We tried from the very beginning and we told them exactly what they were doing; we told them that they were fighting to save this country, to rescue this country from this terrorist organisation. For that we needed to destroy the LTTE and Prabhakaran. To do that we needed to assure the soldier that until we destroy the LTTE we would not stop so that their sacrifices would not be in vain. We were adamant that whatever the pressure that comes, we would not stop this military campaign until we finish the LTTE. Therefore, the aim of the military campaign was known to everyone – and it was unwavering. By telling that to the officers and men, they knew the aim, they had a very clear mission and they were motivated and committed to do that. It is also very important to maintain the confidence of everyone who was leading – the leadership from the top to the lower level leaders were able to motive the soldiers. We had their commitment and that was why they fought.
From the very beginning I was concerned about the welfare of the men because I was in the Military and I knew of the difficulties faced by the soldiers and the lower ranks. Therefore, I was able to especially focus on the welfare of the men. That's why I felt it was my duty and responsibility to visit the families of these men of the Armed Forces, Police and CDF; their immediate families such as their father, mother, wife and children and pay my respects to them and look after, find out and solve their problems. It is more or less a duty and our responsibility towards them. It is my way of paying my respects to them.

During The Course Of This Conflict General Denzil Kobbekaduwa, General Angammana, Lt General Parami Kulatunga, Major General Wijaya Wimalaratne, Brigadier Lucky Wijerathne, Former Navy Commander Clancy Fernando, Rear Admiral Mohan Jayamaha, And Many Other Senior Officers As Well As Middle Rank And Junior Officers Sacrificed Their Lives For This Country. Prior To 2006, Thirty-Eight Pilots Sacrificed Their Lives While Flying Helicopters, Jets And Fixed Wings Air Crafts. We Lost Many Courageous People During This War. Their Service To This Country Is Remembered Now.

The conflict in Sri Lanka officially started in 1983, since then a large number of the Armed Forces, Police and CDF have sacrificed their lives and limbs. This victory is also a symbol of their sacrifices. What are your thoughts?

Yes, though the focus has been on the recent victories, we have to pay tribute to the security personnel who made sacrifices prior to Marvil Aru and the beginning of the Humanitarian Operations. Nearly 25,000 Armed Forces, Police and Civil Defence Force personnel lost their lives. Their sacrifices have not been in vain and have contributed to our victories. At this moment it is our duty to remember them.

During the course of this conflict General Denzil Kobbekaduwa, General Angammana, Lt General Parami Kulatunga, Major General Wijaya Wimalaratne, Brigadier Lucky Wijerathne, former Navy Commander Clancy Fernando, Rear Admiral Mohan Jayamaha, and many other senior officers as well as middle rank and junior officers sacrificed their lives for this country. Prior to 2006, thirty eight pilots sacrificed their lives while flying helicopters, jets and fixed wings air crafts. We lost many courageous people during this war. Their service to this country is remembered now.

It has been a long journey; the war is finally over, what do you think the way forward is?

With all these sacrifices and hardships we defeated the LTTE. We defeated the terrorists to bring normalcy to this country because that is the ultimate aim of these operations. We have lost so much because of terrorism and we have to regain what we have lost. We lost our image and pride and now is the time to rebuild our image

and pride. Now we have new opportunities to develop the economy of our country. This is a good opportunity to bring investors into our country, develop tourism, bring back the educated people who had left this country and rebuild the country. The ultimate aim is to bring normalcy to the country and to allow everybody to live in Sri Lanka happily and peacefully. That is the aim. I know most of the people below the age of 35 years do not know a life in Sri Lanka without bombs and killings etc, they were living their entire life in that environment – they were hearing only about death, war, fighting etc. Many people don't know about the beautiful country that we had 30-40 years ago. We have to bring that back. We need to bring back the peaceful and beautiful country where all communities were living together in harmony. We have lost many values because of this war and we have to bring those values back into our society, that is our aim. That is Sri Lanka.





