

Human lives matter

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On Wednesday the Sri Lankan government ended the ceasefire agreement that the previous government had entered into with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. On the morning of the same day, 26 people were killed and 67 seriously injured following the detonation of a claymore mine in Buttala in Monaragala District.

This attack in the southeastern part of the country is naturally being perceived as a violent act of the LTTE. This incident is perhaps an omen of the sad beginning of the killings that are to come in the days ahead.

Simply stating that the ceasefire has ended and the war has begun means that now killings will begin on a large scale. The LTTE will try to legitimize their killings on the basis of their claim for a territory of their own; the government and elements associated with it will claim their right to kill in order to defend their territory and prevent it from being lost. To both parties in this conflict, human lives seem not to matter at all.

The center of a dispute in any civilization needs to be the safeguarding of human lives, a principle that cannot be sacrificed without endangering the very fabric of the society within which the dispute takes place. The people who died in this attack are ordinary citizens who are part of this society.

The LTTE will naturally claim that many Tamil citizens too have been killed by military action. However, by engaging in such equations, they are in fact undermining the fundamental human discourse. Instead of pursuing a path to eliminate and restrain killings on both sides, both are seeking to maximize killings to achieve the goals they claim to be the aims of their struggles.

For decades, the political leadership representing both parties to the conflict has failed to allow this dispute to be resolved through democratic discourse. One blames the other as unworthy of trust and incapable of dealing with the issue through mutual understanding and compromise within a framework of principles.

The result of decades of disregarding discourse based on valid democratic principles has eroded the basic framework of the country itself, where respect for the Constitution has been lost. That loss affects not only the combatants but the society as a whole. Now the principles that hold a human society together and preserve respect for human life, the most precious objective of a social organization, have been seriously eroded.

Those who are to die in this senseless conflict and their family members will not be satisfied by the explanations offered by either party as to why they and their loved ones have to die. The questions of these families need to be answered. No decent way of life can survive without serious answers for these human beings who are members of Sri Lankan society.

There has been no attempt at all to explain to families why their relatives had to die. This society has lost interest in preserving the basic principles that safeguard human life and human dignity.

Naturally, there would be little point in preaching to the ideologues and leaders who have no qualms about the loss of life. The questions must be asked by the people themselves as to what is happening to their society and why they have to take the risk of being victims of this conflict. Only then may responsible reactions arise to resist all killings.

This responsibility is not just the task of the people of Sri Lanka. It is also the responsibility of all human beings who value human life above all things. Louise Arbour, the U.N. high commissioner for human rights, has expressed her own concerns on this issue. It is time for everyone else to take this matter up as an issue of conscience. The prevention of killings and the preservation of human life are obligations that each human being has a responsibility to uphold.

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