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Twists in Norwegian peace efforts

Panduka SENANAYAKE

Norwegian officials appear to have thrown overboard international obligations which they have undertaken to uphold in their haste to meddle in Sri Lanka's internal affairs.

Though the most recent incident of turning a Nelsonian eye to the attack by suspected Tiger terrorist sympathisers on the Sri Lankan Embassy in Oslo and a deaf ear to its earlier repeated requests for security resulted in 'pie in the face for Norway' in the form of it being kicked out of its 'facilitator' role between the Government and the LTTE, a previous 'indiscretion' against Sri Lankan and Indian interests almost went un-noticed.

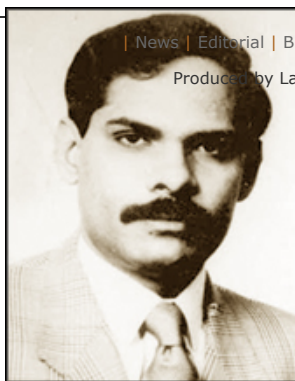
Clandestine visit

It is the disregard of its obligations to the world's largest international police organization, INTERPOL by Tore Hattrem, the Norwegian Ambassador to Sri Lanka when he undertook a recent clandestine visit to Malaysia. The visit was to meet an international criminal, wanted for the murder of a former Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi and a violator of the Indian terrorist Act and the Indian Explosives Act. Perhaps to this descendent of the ancient Vikings, who plundered the countries they invaded with scarce respect for the inhabitants, it may not appear to be an act of insulting and disrespecting the Government or the people of India.

The man, identified as Tharmalingam, Shanmugam Kumaran alias Kumaran Pathmanathan or KP was placed on INTERPOL red notice, which seeks the arrest or provisional arrest of wanted persons with a view to extradition, at India's request following the murder of Rajiv Gandhi by the Tigers.

KP

Operating the Tiger's procurement network clandestinely from Thailand and Malaysia, KP has managed to evade arrest so far and was recently appointed as the LTTE Head of International Relations. Some analysts believe that this move is aimed at providing KP some 'respectability' which may enable him freedom of movement among western countries and would also lead to the INTERPOL red notice being observed in the breach by some well intentioned but ignorant officials sympathetic to the Tigers.



Kumaran Pathmanathan (KP)

Whereas it beggars belief that the Norwegian envoy would have met KP without being briefed of his antecedents by the Norwegian authorities, one wonders (now that he has met a man on INTERPOL's wanted list) whether he is willing to abide by the organization's request to its members and the public to contact National or local police and provide information.

It is said that the meeting between the envoy and KP was to facilitate contact between the conspirator in the murder of a former Indian Prime Minister and UN Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs Sir John Holmes. Did the Norwegian envoy inform the UN top official about the antecedent of KP or was Sir Holmes an innocent party to an international conspiracy against Sri Lanka which paid scant regard to the obligations towards a friendly country like India and an organization such as INTERPOL?

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Distrust

According to a former senior official of INTERPOL, such brash actions by short sighted officials of member countries not only tends to undermine the integrity of the organization but builds distrust between the Police Forces of member countries. Formed in 1923, INTERPOL is the world's largest international police organization and comprises 187 member countries which include Norway, India and Sri Lanka. It facilitates cross border police co-operation and supports and assists all organizations, authorities and services whose mission is to prevent or combat international crime. One of its key functions is to help police in member countries share critical crime-related information using the organizations system of international notices. The notices are in different colours and have different objectives. Topping the list is the Red notice which seeks the arrest or provisional arrest of wanted persons with a view to extradition.

While on the subject of KP and Norway it would not be amiss to recall an incident which occurred in June 2000 in Phuket , Thailand from where KP was directing LTTE procurement operations.

Unmasked

Thai police conducting operations against oil smugglers stumbled upon a shipyard making submersibles for the LTTE and the key man behind the operation was a Norwegian national named Christy Reginald Lawrence. Originally from Sri Lanka, Christy Lawrence, who was married to a Thai woman, was arrested along with several others. Sonar and Radar equipment, satellite telephones as well as other sophisticated equipment were recovered along with military fatigues and other equipment meant for the LTTE.

Credibility questioned

Investigations by the Thais revealed that the a so called tourist operation engaged in by Lawrence was a cover up for smuggling arms and other items from the Thai Cambodian border via the Andaman Islands to the LTTE. The Norwegian was convicted by the Thai authorities but mysteriously disappeared from Thailand. This followed a visit by a woman posing as a representative of Amnesty International who had apparently got the Thai authorities to deport him to Norway.

In light of these events, where its dabbling had perturbed the authorities of several countries one wonders at the credibility of the Norwegian Government and its agents and their ability to mediate in world affairs. As a wag pointed out following the attack on the Sri Lankan Embassy, these people try to mediate peace in Sri Lanka but cannot do so in their own backyard and also fail to meet their international obligations to boot.

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