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Sri Lanka: Explosions in Colombo- Who could be the Perperators?

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By Prof. Suryanarayan

The explosions that took place in few churches across Sri Lanka as well as two popular hotels in Colombo on Easter Sunday were completely unexpected. The sudden developments came as a shock to Sri Lanka watchers. The Government has not officially reacted so far nor has any organization claimed responsibility. Therefore, I have no clue about government thinking or of the culprits. Given below are my tentative views.

The minorities in Sri Lanka have been treated very badly by majority Sinhalese as well as successive Sinhalese - dominated governments. Sections of Buddhist monks are in the forefront preaching violence against the minorities, especially Christians and the Muslims. It must be added that the Muslims fared no better under LTTE dispensation. They were driven out of Jaffna peninsula by the Tigers when they were in *de facto* control of the Jaffna peninsula. Majority of them still live in refugee camps in Puttalam.

Compounding the situation had been the increase in the activities of Christian evangelical groups like the Pentecostal Mission and Seventh Day Adventist Church. Many Tamils and Sinhalese have been lured into Christianity. It is estimated that nearly 15 per cent of the hill country Indian Tamil population has been converted into Christianity. The on-going evangelisation should be a matter of concern for the Buddhist monks though they have not done anything meaningful to counter this evil except indulging in selective attacks on churches.

Who could have been behind the dastardly attacks? I rule out the Sinhalese extremists. While they are capable of mob violence as in July 1983, attacks on selective targets by suicide bombers is not their way of functioning. Is it the work of the Tigers who still have considerable support among Tamil Diaspora? I rule out that possibility also because there is no evidence of any linkages between Tiger remnants and disgruntled Tamil civilian population in Sri Lanka.

My tentative assumption is that it is the handiwork of Muslim extremists with support either from the ISI or Muslim terrorist organisations like Lashkar-e-Taiba or Jaish-e-Mohammad or both. What happened today fits in with their long term objective of destabilizing India. The only part of India which is relatively tranquil is South India. The objective of destabilizing South India can be achieved through Muslim extremists from Sri Lanka, encourage them to develop contacts and linkages with Muslim extremists in Tamil Nadu and Kerala. It may be recalled that a former ISI chief was Pakistani High Commissioner in Sri Lanka few years ago. He used to visit the Eastern Province regularly and encouraged the younger elements to have education in the Madrasas in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

The Muslims constitute 7 per cent of the total population of Sri Lanka. Though majority of them live in Sinhalese areas there is a concentration of Muslims in the Eastern Province where they constitute roughly one third of the population. In the Eastern Province they speak Tamil whereas in the Sinhalese areas they speak both Tamil and Sinhalese. The Muslims seek their identity in terms of religion and not on the basis of language. Over the years they are getting more and more Islamised, they have started learning Arabic language. Muslim women have taken to Islamic dress and what is more the younger elements who have gone to Madrasas abroad are getting more and more radicalized. My tentative assumption is that the incidents which took place today are the handiwork of these radicalized suicide bombers.

India should be concerned with these developments, because what happens in Sri Lanka will have a profound impact in Tamil Nadu. We are like Siamese twins what afflicts one will affect the other. The need of the hour is for the two governments to work closely and tackle the common problem.

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