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Price of Laxity!

Sri Lanka has seemingly paid a very heavy price for laxity in national security despite forewarning on what was going to happen. Though it is an internal affair of Sri Lanka to enquire into what, why, how of what has happened; concurrently, it also sounds warning signals for other democratic countries, including India, which have already been victims of terrorist violence to disallow any kind of laxity in national security, defence preparedness and vigilance. Having been named recently Lonely Planet's *numero uno* travel destination for 2019, and this image of Sri Lanka built over the past decade as a stable, relaxed island was shattered in the aftermath of suicide bomb blasts occurring on Easter Sunday on April 21. The end of a bloody, protracted civil war in 2009 had inaugurated an era of peace, prosperity and stability returning to the Sri Lanka and this decade-long spell of peace and stability has been severely jolted by the Sunday Easter suicide bombings sending shock waves throughout the globe. International media has termed this tragic occurrence to be the biggest terror attack in the history of Sri Lanka.

Media reports make it discernible that there were prior intelligence warnings that a radical group was planning to conduct suicide attacks targeting churches and hotels in island's capital, Colombo. Laxity, lack of coordination and negligence on the part of concerned agencies and authorities for not acting on the advanced intelligence inputs culminated in the suicide bombings of prominent hotels and churches in Colombo causing irreparable loss of human lives and property. The question as to how a 'little or unknown' radical group could carry out such a sophisticated bombing operation has left Sri Lankan and foreign intelligence experts stumped. Undoubtedly, Sri Lankan authorities have constituted a committee to conduct an investigation into lapses; nevertheless, the said committee will take its own time to come out with facts. Defence and intelligence experts attribute lack of preparedness as a significant factor enabling a little-known terror group to orchestrate such a deadliest terror attack. One expert has opined that terror attack of such a magnitude could be made possible by a much longer-term decline in functioning of security services and government. Taking cognizance of intelligence failure helps in ascertaining what its component parts mean.

Intelligence inputs ought not to be treated as mere raw information, rather these are cumulative output of the tireless efforts of well-trained personnel. This provides groundwork for the information analysts to collate, compare, evaluate and synthesize some information culled from other sources. Cognizance of the information experts along with their appropriate sense of judgment yields an analysis that provides meaning, relevance and accuracy to event-centric, situation-centric or issue-centric information that is to be made available to decision-makers for potential action. While emphasizing on according priority to both strategic intelligence as well as tactical intelligence, some defence experts insist on the fact that it enjoins upon the competent leaders with authority to be receptive to the intelligence inputs they receive and be bold enough to implement the same in letter and spirit. Failure of intelligence is attributable to laxity in security, absence of inter-departmental coordination, lack of synergy at inter-agency level, improper intelligence assessment and reluctance on the part of 'receptive leadership.'

Intelligence failure enables the perpetrators of terrorism to wreak havoc with the human lives and property thereby causing irreparable losses. What has happened in Sri Lanka, Pulwama and Uri in India recently, 9/11 in the United States, terror attack on Indian Parliament in India in 2001 and 26/11 in Mumbai etc., are such deadly incidents of intelligence failure. Some experts point that almost all top decision-makers in the United States had plenty of information by September 10, 2001 "but none of that got shared and therefore, didn't get synthesized' to create correct picture and the end-result was 9/11.

Undoubtedly, eternal vigilance is the price of freedom and our government is cautious enough about safeguarding the territorial integrity of the nation. We are equally proud of our Armed Forces and other security forces for their sacrificial spirit, valour and patriotism for the national cause. In order to cope with the menace of terrorism, which is not a nation-specific problem but a universal problem, well-coordinated efforts by all countries are needed to rein in terrorism.

— BK