INTRODUCTION

1. The comprehensive and definitive defeat of LTTE militarily in May 2009 marked a watershed in the contemporary history of Sri Lanka. The sheer brutality of LTTE terrorists indisputably had scarred the entire social fabric of the society across the island to an unbelievable extent and widespread atrocities had been committed against civilians in their own community. Simply said the society in the North had been fractured as a result of terrorism. The social, cultural, political and the traditional life style of a people had been decimated callously and with no sensibility. There was another distinct feature in the activities of terrorists; whilst there was this broad disintegration of the broad and cohesive nature of the traditional Tamil community there had been yet another militant and violence ridden society which was being formed: the terrorists’ family. This type of radicalisation of the members of the terror group and their communities needed something more meaningful by the end of the defeat of terrorists. Such levels of radicalisation and violence pronged individuals had to be dealt within a system that was available. Thus, arose a requirement for a comprehensive reintegration program aimed at full social integration in order to rebuild the deeply fractured community with psychological trauma and physical displacement issues. Concerns were many, including special programs to dissolve the phenomenon of ‘terrorist family’ (mahaveer family) and re-integrate ex-combatants into the society.

2. This mammoth task was undertaken at National level and a comprehensive plan was formulated for a complete social reintegration of all those who had suffered due to terrorism. Some of my colleagues who spoke earlier explained in detail the formulation of this National Reintegration plan and expanded on the successful rehabilitation process and the on-going reintegration processes. Dr. Malkanthi, Dr. Shafras and Prof Arie Kruglanski have scientifically presented their data on the effect of de-radicalization and moving ex-combatants away from violent extremism. As the last speaker for the day I like to place before this august audience the successful role played by the Sri Lanka Army towards
implementing the National Reintegration Plan. Sri Lanka Army played a leading role in implementing the National reintegration plan since it was one of the main state organizations which had the capacity and capability to effectively engage in reintegration work. The compassion ingrained within the Sri Lankan culture, the military’s ethos of protecting and defending her citizens enabled the Sri Lanka’s military to deliver this service towards a segment of her citizens who were misguided and engaged in terrorism.

3. In explaining the tremendous contributions made by the Sri Lanka Army towards successful implementation of the national reintegration programme I like to share some of my personal experiences with you’II which I believe will assist in understanding the yeoman service rendered by the Sri Lanka Army towards the National reintegration programme. It was January 2009 and I was the Forward Maintenance Area Commander in Killinochchi, a significantly important town for the defeated terrorist outfit. What I saw for the next few months towards May 2009 was a teeming hundreds of people battered by the terrorist atrocities approaching the Sri Lanka Army which was on perhaps the largest ever hostage rescue mission in the contemporary military history. The humanitarian operation we conducted gave them hopes against all circumstances impeding any sign of life. They were assured of another chance to live as citizens of this country. That was what I witnessed in 2009.

4. I was subsequently moved to a different official appointment in late 2009 but returned after 3 years to Killinochchi as its Security Forces commander. With immense joy I encountered three things that I was astonished to see what effectively has changed the life of the public in Killinochchi which had been subjected to terrorist brutality prior to completion of humanitarian operations. The rapid development taking place in the once terrorist infested town has brought hope for a future in the lives of the people. I saw a new born town throbbing with activity and movements. Also my ‘second arrival’ to Killinochchi was a defining moment as a senior officer; I felt that my role has certainly changed as the life of the town too has changed. I saw life returning to normalcy, children going to school, farmers returning to chenna cultivation and other livelihoods. The fight against terrorists was fought in more than one single front but we always knew that we never fought to defeat our fellow citizens, but terrorism, therefore it was convincing to them that our campaign was for a reintegration of all victims of terrorism. This reintegration process takes with it the entire society and it is not only filled with stories of justice but also to other forms of social, economic and cultural needs which were absent or remarkably deficient when terrorists were terrorising people. The change was real and evident for the people.
CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED TO REINTEGRATION

5. Before dwelling on the details of Sri Lanka Army’s contribution towards national reintegration I like to share with you’ll details of few challenges which confronted all who were involved in reintegration work. Subsequent to the complete surrender of terrorists and their disarmament came to an end in 2009 the biggest task Sri Lanka faced was the repairing of the social immobility as a result of the brutality of terrorism in the Northern part of the country and the reintegration of all surrendered terrorists into the society. This obviously became a challenging task. Social integration in this context became paramount to the rebuilding of the community in the North whilst providing them sufficient economic assistance to recommence life. The key challenges identified during this process were:

a. Dissolution of the concept of a privileged treatment and elitism designated to the so called Mahaveer Families to be able to integrate with the rest of the community with little or no resentment. This was a difficult task as the Mahaveer families were connected and linked to the blue eyed sector of the top leadership of the terrorist outfit.

b. To sustain the organization terrorists created a separate social network on which those joining the terrorist cadres’ population had to rely on the resources of the mother unit as long as they were alive. The families of those deceased cadres who had died whilst committing terrorist acts were heavily dependent on this social network. Hence the loss of this social network in fact generated severe lacuna anxiety and fear amongst ex-cadres and all those others who were dependent on it.

c. Reintegration of special groups such as ex-combatant women and children (child soldier) had to be prioritised for obvious reasons. The outfit coerced a large number of young women in the North to join their rank and file. As a result, there were a large number of women who had carried arms and committed serious crime to be reintegrated to the society. Forcible conscription of children into outfit also posed a new and a major challenge re-integrating child soldier population especially whose entire childhood had been in and amidst violence and have not known any other story except to hate and be revengeful.

IMPLEMENTATION OF A SUCCESSFUL REINTEGRATION PLAN

6. Consequent to the identification of challenges to the reintegration, a comprehensive plan was formulated encompassing all aspects of social and
economic reintegration. Since successful social integration is a lengthy process a Presidential Task Force (PTF) was established to implement the plan and monitor the progress as it moves forward. The entire process was viewed as a national requirement and all state institutions were made partners to the implementation process. Armed Forces also willingly contributed towards the successful implementation of this reintegration plan. Sri Lanka Army being the largest amongst the three Armed Forces played a pivotal role in assisting the Presidential Task Force in the implementation of reintegration plan.

**SRI LANKA ARMY’S CONTRIBUTION IN IMPLEMENTING THE NATIONAL REINTEGRATION PLAN**

7. Sri Lanka Army provided considerable assistance towards the implementation of the reintegration plan. This was consequent to a comprehensive National Plan drawn up at the grand strategic level and implemented rapidly under the direct supervision of a Presidential Task Force. One of the main points to be noted here is that the Sri Lanka Army provided assistance solely on the request of civil administrative authority; that is the Presidential Task Force. The Army’s attempts to bring normalcy were multi-pronged but was in association with other civil authorities. We carefully and skilfully shared with this double mandate for reintegration processes. The assistance provided by the Sri Lanka Army covered almost all aspects of reintegration. Following are areas where Sri Lanka Army provided direct assistance towards the successful implementation of the reintegration plan:

8. **Assistance to ex-combatants.** The assistance to ex-combatants was provided mainly on their needs to overcome livelihood difficulties. The special categories of ex-combatants such as women and children had to be provided with considerable assistance in this regard to remove the fears they had and to increase their confidence in the reintegration program. Especially the women’s tragic change of role as fighters and recruiters were unimaginable to the ordinary people. Their resettlement or reintegration will not be easy as there is an issue of social stigma vested on the women cadre population. Sri Lanka Army along with several other organisations are working with these women cadre population to help and support to find their lost role within the community. An empathetic approach to their situation would build confidence and avenues for re-skilling them is indeed a task to bring their potential in the reintegration process. They can be familiarised into the productive labour market and make them feel that they are no more in isolation but are active contributors to the social and economic growth of the region and the nation as a whole. Sri Lanka Army was very successful in providing the required assistance since it was in a vantage
position to coordinate and facilitate provision of required assistance on ground. Some of the specific areas where the Army was successful in this regard are:

a. Rapid distribution of material to needy on a priority basis.

b. Conduct of vocational training programmes.

c. Facilitation and coordination of awareness programmes for sustenance of livelihood activities.

9. **Community Assistance.** Expediting the process of settling people in their original places of habitation was another big challenge and a priority for all who were involved in implementing the reintegration plan. Here again Sri Lanka Army spearheaded in organising and providing the required assistance. Requirements such as housing, infrastructure facilities, education facilities, health and sanitary facilities and livelihood opportunities for the people who were settling down were the major issues that needed attention. The mega reintegration plan implemented by the Presidential Task Force to cater to these requirements was augmented with the efforts of the Sri Lanka Army. One of the most poignant achievements that the Army made was to win confidence of the ordinary people despite constant and severe criticisms from elements both home and abroad. Army’s newest skill gained through its engagement with the civilian population is that it becomes the largest organisation now able to mobilise its skills combined with community based development strategies. The assistance that has been provided to the entire community in the north in this regard is as follows:

a. **Livelihood Assistance.** Sri Lanka Army was aware that reintegration was more than mere return of civilians, resettlement and employment. Army undertook the initial responsibility of facilitating the livelihood programmes for people including ex-combatants to resettle. These included coordination of inflow of material required for livelihood programmes and distribution of the same to needy on a priority basis. This enabled the people in the community to confidently settle down as their needs were being met without an interruption. As the activities expanded in the reintegration programme the Army continued as a facilitator mandated by the civilian administration for the smooth running of the programmes, supervised both by the civic officers as well as the officer responsible within the Army. Both the civil administration and the Army have worked in close collaboration to reduce duplication and competition which is usual among those responsible for delivery.
b. Construction of Houses. It is a feeling of settlement when someone has a roof above one’s head and the Army’s pioneering work was to involve its labour force to help people commence construction/renovation of houses as they began to settle down. Army commenced the construction of semi-permanent and permanent houses initially for returnees including the ex-combatants. This paved the way for all who were returning to confidently seek appropriate livelihood opportunities which essentially are one of the key factors for the smooth reintegration. United effort with the returnees to build their own house paved the way for the Army and the reintegrating population to build rapport and cordiality and to being to think of a shared future. We believe that such efforts are fundamental to the success of the reintegration process.

c. Infrastructure Development. With the rapid progress of resettlement, development and reconstruction of infrastructure facilities too commenced. This single phenomenon has taken many people by surprise that an intense level of social mobility is being experienced right across the region. The region is as if awoken from a long slumber. Sri Lanka Army’s contribution towards infrastructure development cannot be overstated. The initial area-wide repairs and reconstruction of roads and bridges were undertaken by the Army to pave the way for other agencies to move into the area which is integral to the Army’s disaster management imperatives. It is our belief that infrastructure development is a visible symbol of normalcy where it is proven that people, agencies and other institutions now can move freely and safe to get on with their business – a crucial ingredient for peace and stability for socio-economic development and national security as well.

d. Education Assistance. One of the sectors which was wilfully destroyed by the terrorists was the education sector in the North. Army’s involvement in providing assistance and opportunities in the area of education was through rebuilding and renovation of schools and ease the access to education mechanism like in the rest of the country. Providing school accessories both to the institutions and for the scholar population was executed with assistance from various agencies provision set apart by the government. Army also spearheaded in imparting Information Technology skill development which was a key factor to get the settling younger generation in par with the rest of the country and to improve their communication skills and the ability to use the world wide web to be aware of the rest of the world. We were conscious that it was one of the ways where by the population could dispel myths and false propaganda and to understand the world and their place in it.
by themselves and not allow others to impose to prescribe yet another world to them. Reintegration in its full meaning is to be agents of change and not agents of terror and inflicting fear.

e. Health, Sanitary care Provision and Assistance. The reintegration programme implemented by the state included extensive healthcare measures for the entire community in the North. Sri Lanka Army was instrumental in providing initial medical assistance to all who were in need of such assistance in a given area. A careful facilitation and coordination of healthcare awareness programmes carried out by the Army with its staff alongside other civil bodies were most effective among the returnees. We managed to win their confidence in terms of providing these health and sanitary facilities which were held in high esteem by the people. Caring for the sick, the elderly and children in need is one of the most touching moments at the community level. Due to this People began to feel that they are citizens of a country and that its compatriots care for them.

f. Religious Activities Provision. North being home to a multi religious community, Army lead the way in renovating places of worship and enabling easy access to them was important for a community to settle down fast. People look for meaning in times of crisis and the people in these areas were denied access to places of worship by the terrorists. Sri Lanka Army understood that reintegration is also helping and supporting people not only to continue with their livelihood but also to develop spiritual aspects. Army’s role though limited with religious institutions yet it was possible for them to create a conducive environment for people to find comfortable ways to access their individual faith traditions and places of worship. Providing appropriate provision to conduct their religious festivals in public was most important and the Army was leading in this regard. People felt comfortable with the way that the Army was handling amenities necessary for such public devotion and festivity. People who were given something else to believe and obey by the terrorists, have now reverted back to their folk culture and freely worshipping their ancestral religiosity in freedom without any fear of their child been abducted.

g. Sports Opportunities. Due to the terrorist brutality, the regular sports activities were virtually non-existent in the area and they made sure that youth only have a single focus – of armed activities, which they might have described as sports. Here too the army spearheaded in reactivating the dormant training ground of disciplined citizens through sports. It is in sports that one learns to accept both defeat and victory with the same spirit of magnanimity. The efforts in uplifting sports infrastructure and activities in the area by organizing sports meets, distributing sports
accessories, renovating and constructing play grounds and conducting coaching camps etc were overwhelmingly supported by the reintegrating population. They were symbolic of the peace dividends that the people were willing to enjoy now in freedom and without fear. Youth in general were very keen to get involved as we found such activities immensely promoted unprecedented rapport between the Army and the reintegrating population. A new message was being communicated to the wider society; that the Sri Lanka Army is capable of rising to the occasion to help the country’s citizens irrespective of cast or creed.

CONCLUSION

10. The security forces under the brilliant and unwavering leadership of their Commander in Chief, His Excellency the President and with the unparralled dynamic guidance, supervision and coordination of Secretary to the Ministry of Defence liberated the country from the clutches of a terror outfit and thereafter made a tremendous contribution towards implementing the national reintegration programme to rebuild the social and economic conditions of people in the North. The success of the involvement by the Army in the implementation of the national reintegration programme has made the Army today a very professional army that is able to handle such tasks because it is now a skilled group of men and women able to deal with big and small with a disciplined soul, robust operationality and with acute awareness of the need of the hour. It is this consciousness that lead the Army to accept people who were held hostage by the terrorists. It was the tri forces of Sri Lanka they witnessed with food and water, Medicare and transportation, safety and security. What these innocent people experienced was that they crossed into safety – a glimmer of hope after experience years of brutality of terrorists. Reintegration therefore is not an overnight project. National reintegration began when people in desperation were rescued from the clutches of terrorists. Army’s role would be to contribute to that vision as the largest and the trained group of men and women, because the people look up to it as an organization possessed with discipline and clear vision for all.

Globally we have seen the part played by the military in reintegration and its success proven, locally in Sri Lanka we have seen the successes.