

We spoken — Mr. Deputy Speaker

The controversial and outspoken Deputy Speaker Mr. Gamini Fonseka has done it again. His fiery speech in Parliament in the wake of the recent murderous attacks on Pooneryn Army Camp and the Nagathivanthurai Naval Base by the LTTE, is an eye opener and cannot go unheeded.

Notwithstanding his position as Deputy Speaker to the House, he had the courage, unfortunately lacked by most of the members of the government today, to show his utter disgust of the recent military setbacks and enlighten the people of this country what a farce this war has become.

The Deputy Speaker's home truths would have naturally angered those who have turned this unfortunate war into their advantage and livelihood and even before he could end his speech would have no doubt contemplated disciplinary action and how to get rid of him. What the government should keep in mind is that they have a mandate to the people of this country to end this war and to end it speedily.

Every public spirited citizen of this country irrespective of his political faith would undoubtedly agree with the shocking facts bared by the Dy. Speaker and laud his gallant efforts even at this late hour to expose the shortcomings of his own camp even at cost of an imminent expulsion.

At the time of writing, the actual death toll of our men and the loss of military equipment are not made public. Unconfirmed reports say that more than 400 servicemen feared dead, hundreds injured and missing and the rest trapped inside their besieged camps. The loss of military equipment

including armoured tanks, gun boats, communication equipment etc., would no doubt run into millions of rupees as in the previous LTTE attacks.

Have our people just now realised what this war has done to this country and to us? With this on-going war there has been a case of tightening our belts for years but how long can we afford to carry the burdens of this costly war?

The Dy. Speaker has pinpointed the agony of the soldiers who are expected to win a war against well trained and highly motivated LTTE cadres with an empty stomach shivering in the cold, their improvised bunkers day in and day out. Not long ago there were urgent appeals for 'cadres' to protect them during rainy seasons.

There was also this report of soldiers making use of sticks to detect land mines in the absence of mine detectors when the people of this country unhesitatingly contributed to the Defence Fund. Is it how we expect the armed forces to fight and win this war?

An incident that happened not so long ago comes in to my mind. A friend of ours who went on a business trip to Trincomalee was returning to Colombo in his van. He was waiting his turn at an army check point and a serviceman approached him and asked him whether he could help them to get their mid-day meal packets from an army camp as due to the non-availability of official vehicles they were unable to get their meals. Our friend gladly obliged.

While our soldiers fight under these pathetic conditions, the politicians run round in their luxurious pajeros unconcerned. Most members of the parlia-

ment have more than one official vehicle, for their use.

There was recent report in a news paper that a former Chief Minister had eleven official vehicles for his use while the Governor of that province had been allocated nine official vehicles, when four wheel vehicles are a crying need in the operational areas. It is a shame that those in power have a callous disregard for the sufferings and welfare of our troops.

During the remembrance week we boldly wear a 'poppy', lay a wreath at the foot of a statue and our patriotism ends there. We return to cricket matches, tamashas and beauty contests. What kind of Sinhalese are we? This is not the time for post-mortems or shift the blame to previous governments. Why has the government failed to end this war? If the Indian Navy is reported to be successfully obstructing a major portion of the supply line of the LTTE, how do they afford to continue this war? Each time a camp of ours was overrun millions of rupees worth of sophisticated arms purchased by the government at our cost, were removed by the LTTE and ironically these arms in turn were used to annihilate our own forces, proverbially 'cutting the flesh of the pig on its own back'.

Haven't we become Neros today playing the fiddle while the North and the East are burning enjoying ourselves in dance halls in Five Star Hotels and being deaf and blind to the alarming rise of casualties in the armed forces and the cries of agony and despair of their families. This war has caused more heartburn than the ration can bear.

The need for valiant and dedicated soldiers like the late Gen. De-

nzil Kobbekaduwa who was respected even by the Tamils in the North and who ended by becoming a household name in the country, is mostly felt at this sad hour today.

It is upto the people of this country to effectively agitate the government for a speedy end to this bloody war which the country can ill afford.

The LTTE has no desire for peaceful negotiations. Their declaration of an 'all out war' with government aptly describes their intentions. People of this country are not interested in elections or who comes to power. What they want is peace and not to be deceived by election gimmicks. This is the hour of the Patriots.

The Opposition's repeated calls for placing the country on a war footing was never heeded. The President should at least now, review the call of the opposition and make genuine efforts to save this country from total destruction and pave a way for all the people live in peace.

The absence of a State Minister of Defence who is answerable to the parliament is yet another cry of the opposition which has gone unheeded. The people of this country should be enlightened to the gravity of the situation. The Editorial of the *Island* paper of the 14th November '93 aptly describes the present war situation.

In the face of the recent shocking military defeats the President and his government should review the whole military strategy and make effective changes if we are to contemplate winning this war and saving this country from threats of utter destruction.

Mr. President, you owe it to the people of this country.

Mrs. R. Dahanayake.