

No easy task, moving from war time to peace. (1994, October 23).
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No easy task, moving from war-time to peace

By Our Defence Correspondent

The reality of politics, war, is often submerged by the pomp and circumstance of a guard of honour and a civic reception that does not allow the reality of war to be forgotten.

The objective is resolution of the crisis and an end to the insurgency. The LTTE — the Government of Sri Lanka must address the central theme of the euphoria of peace, prevailing both in Jaffna where have clouded the facts that has cost Sri Lanka over 30,000 lives, not to an equal or a greater intervention in 1987.

The LTTE do not want its collapse. Whether or not, the LTTE has established its own publication, economic department and research wing, and legal system

and judiciary, postal system, currency and banking, an army and a navy. What it has built by sacrificing several thousands of lives of Tamil men and women, mostly in their teens, will force it to administer the north if not the desired North-East.

The LTTE will not give up its weapons and the territory it controls irrespective of what the government negotiators offer it. The argument the LTTE continues to present is that the security of the lives of the Tamil people in the north cannot be guaranteed by the Sri Lankan armed forces.

The fact that the government cannot replace the LTTE administration system in the northern province (Jaffna and Kilinochchi districts) as well as to persuade the LTTE to lay down its weapons by peaceful negotiations is a hard fact.

Beyond these two, the LTTE will agree to co-operate with the

government. The LTTE will agree with the government to build and rebuild roads, buildings, co-operatives, hospitals and the economy. However, the Government of Sri Lanka will have to undertake development of the northern province in consultation with the LTTE. The LTTE's political wing headed by Thamilchelvam who is overseeing the negotiating team will have to sanction every step. Karikalan, his deputy, who was formerly the political chief for the East, will work with the government appointees.

The three other members of the team, S. Illamparadi, the political organizer for the Jaffna district, A. Ravi alias Root Ravi, the Head of the Tamil Eelam Economic Development Organization (TEEDOR) and S. Dominic, the newly appointed head of the Tamil Eelam Public Administration (also dubbed the LTTE Government Agent) has been requested by Prabhakaran to ensure that the government development efforts are fully integrated

into the LTTE administrative structure. By engaging the very same government to build what government troops had destroyed over the years (in the perception of the Tamil people) the LTTE has won a political victory before the eyes of the northerners.

Premier Kumaratunga's request to Prabhakaran by letter was "our government has also decided to restore, as far as possible, electricity repair the major highways and part of the irrigation schemes, as further normalization of civil life. We therefore expect you to extend all cooperation to our technical officers who would be handling the repair work in the above stated development projects."

Prabhakaran's response to Premier Kumaratunga was, "Our nominees could also discuss with your representatives the modalities involved in the renovation work of the proposed development projects."

It is clear that the government has up to now not reached the core issues of negotiations. With-

in the next few weeks the government negotiators will have to come to grips with these issues and make headway. Than trying to weaken the LTTE, the motive of the government must be to incorporate the LTTE into the democratic mainstream and provide the LTTE cadres and the leadership an escape route. The government must also build the broken bridges between the people of the northeast and the rest of Sri Lanka. One major way this can be done is by constitutional reform as it will guarantee minority rights.

Ideally, the best for the government, would have been to empower the Tamil people without doing so under LTTE pressure. Today, whatever concessions the government has made to the people of the northeast, the credit will be taken by the LTTE. This means that the LTTE is gaining greater political authority and power over the Tamil people of the northeast. The theory that Colombo is now making life better for the Tamil

people, because they fear and respect the LTTE is gaining currency in some quarters. This agreement has some parallel with an earlier theory of a Colombo-based prominent Tamil politician that the Sinhalese are not thrashing the Tamils living in Colombo because if they do the LTTE will strike Colombo and the military in the north.

Amidst such wild assumptions, how does the government incorporate the LTTE into the democratic mainstream? The government will have to examine the interim administrative council and the Thirteenth Amendment which were the central issues in 1987 and 1988, and the Select Committee recommendations. Whether the PA, likes it or not, these packages will be the starting point of any future serious dialogue.

How does the government provide an escape route to the LTTE rank and file? The government will have to work out a general amnesty. This will be complicated because Prabhaka-

ran and many of his top associates are wanted for the murder of several thousand Sri Lankans and Indians? Even if Sri Lanka pardons the LTTE, Prabhakaran will have to live armed and hiding all his life protecting himself both from Indian crack forces (which empowers their security forces operation in criminal matters beyond the territorial jurisdiction after the passing of an Indian law last year) and the revengeful anti-LTTE Tamils.

These are the pressures and the complexities of negotiating with a militant group as ruthless and devious as the LTTE. Therefore, working out lasting peace is difficult, particularly in the face of India's position vis-a-vis the LTTE after the LTTE-IPKF war.

It is a fact that even after the IPKF left the Sri Lankan shores, Indian operations against the LTTE did not cease. India continues to sink LTTE ships, imprison their supporters and cadres and even create rifts within the

LTTE, the biggest being between Mahattaya and Prabhakaran. India has privately conveyed its displeasure over Premier Kumaratunga's decision to negotiate with the LTTE. As long as the LTTE is in political or military power, India will continue to avenge the death of Rajiv Gandhi and thousands of other Indians consumed by the LTTE.

All these point out to the pressures the LTTE leadership is subjected to and the difficulties it has to face even in the context of peace.

The continuity of the talks itself will depend on the willingness and the ability of the new government to alleviate these inherent and acquired fears and provide some form of security to the LTTE rank and file. Otherwise only perpetual war can secure the personal safety of the leadership and their families, and the pledge to achieve a Tamil state to a people who had sacrificed and supported the LTTE struggle for over a decade.