

CALL TO SRI LANKAN EXPATRITES: STOP THE HYPOCRISY! CALL FOR NEGOTIATIONS!

ISSUED ON 17 MAY 2000

Hundreds, if not thousands, have died or suffered severe injuries in the fighting in Sri Lanka in the past few days. Thousands of government soldiers are trapped in the Jaffna Peninsular along with hundreds of thousands of civilians dreading their grim prospects in the face of a battle for the control of the territory.

Sections of expatriate Sri Lankan communities have responded with sharply contrasting reactions to the deteriorating situation in the island. Sections of the Sinhala community have reacted with horror and dismay at the prospect of Jaffna falling to the LTTE while many Tamil expatriates have reacted with jubilation, and are eagerly awaiting the "liberation" of Jaffna. Both sides have begun fund-raising activities, in aid of their respective causes, charging their appeals with bombastic rhetoric.

We, at Shakthi believe that The military debacle suffered by the government forces in [Elephant](#) Pass has demonstrated once again - if more proof were needed - the urgency of a negotiated political solution to the conflict in Sri Lanka.

The vast majority of Sri Lankans who live in the country, who daily experience the disastrous impact of this war, desire an end to this bloody conflict. In the south, mass opposition to this war is now at a peak. The youth - primarily drawn from the poorest layers of the community-refuse to be cannon fodder any more to help the political ambitions of opportunistic politicians who promise yet again a 'military solution' to the ethnic conflict. How many more thousands must die or be maimed for life, how much more of Sri Lanka's national assets have to be destroyed or sold to foreigners, how many more billions of national [wealth](#) must be channelled into the coffers of international arms merchants and their local agents before the politicians bow to the will of the people to stop the war and negotiate peace?

The millions of ordinary people who live in Sri Lanka know and accept that there can be no end to this conflict except at the negotiating table. Today no major political party in the south is able to publicly oppose a negotiated settlement. This is testimony to the anger and disillusionment of the community with the opportunism of politicians that ensured that no government since 1956 was permitted by the so-called patriots to offer an acceptable political solution to meet the concerns of the Tamil population. From Sinhala Only in 1956, through the subsequent bloody anti-Tamil programs and the assassination of Mr S.W.R.D Bandaranayaka, to the continuing blood [bath](#) that has made the country the killing fields of Asia since 1983, Sri Lanka has paid a heavy price for giving in to the extremist Sinhala chauvinists.

Today a new danger threatens the country. Just at this moment when an end to this slaughter that drives the country ever deeper into the abyss has become absolutely urgent, the same forces that have propelled the country down this path of senseless blood and tears since the 1950s are attempting to ensure nothing will change. Indeed they want more: they seek to exploit the mass disillusionment with the politicians who have failed to deliver peace to establish a fascist dictatorship under the guise of rallying Sinhala patriots. Rejected by the vast majority of the community in election after election, groups such as the National Movement Against Terrorism (NMAT) now attempt to fish in the troubled waters of today's Sri Lanka, to offer themselves as the saviours of the nation. That is not all. They also have the shamelessness to ask for Indian intervention, something which these forces - and in many cases the same individuals - opposed so vehemently in 1987. Some of them are even calling on the government to hand over Trincomalee on long-term lease to a foreign - preferably western - power in return for military help. Obviously, it does not matter to these "patriots" if the country is sold to foreigners as long as the Tamils, who had inhabited the island for centuries, are subdued! So much for patriotism!

With the escalation of the conflict, they are now joined by their international collaborators. Until now, many groups that rejected the existence of an ethnic problem in Sri Lanka, and peddled the 'military solution', have presented themselves as belonging to the mainstream of Sri Lankan, or at any rate, Sinhalese, community opinion. Anyone who opposed their demented chauvinistic ravings and militaristic bombast was denounced as a supporter of terrorists and paid agents of the LTTE. Now some of these groups have appeared in their true colours.

In appeals made by these elements to Sinhala expatriates, they have exposed their real political affiliations and their real political agenda.

They have issued a call for expatriate Sinhalese collect money for particular groups and organisation in Sri Lanka to 'help our heroic soldiers'. We warn our readers that this is a cynical attempt to cash in on the sympathy of expatriates for the plight of suffering soldiers. This is money being collected for political organisations - one particular appeal calls for cheques to be drawn in favour of a recently-formed political organisation with a decidedly fascist agenda for the south. It is not being collected for any accredited agency that is providing medical or welfare assistance to injured soldiers or families of dead soldiers. The money will go to help and support the same forces that pushed the country into this situation by the politics of Sinhala chauvinism that in turn gave birth to Tamil separatism. Any contributions to these organisations will ensure that the blood bath will go on, that more lives will be blighted, and that Sri Lanka's agony will be even more prolonged.

It is heartening that these forces - however much publicity they may receive in the media - are opposed by the millions of Sri Lankans who can see through the

hypocrisy and political opportunism of these modern day 'saviours of the nation'. Despite the dissatisfaction of the Sri Lankan community with their political leaders, time after time the majority have totally rejected these new saviours. Nothing has changed. Even the above-mentioned appeal acknowledges this reality: "Talk to any ten people in Sri Lanka, about seven or eight would say, "there is nothing we can do but to negotiate" ". Of course for these "true patriots", this is all because, according to their message, the Sri Lankan masses are 'malindoctrinated'!

We at Shakthi believe, on the contrary, that the long suffering Sri Lankan people have good common-sense.

They do not merit the slanders of self-styled patriots of this type. These 'patriots' who are willing to fight the war from the comforts of Australia, who have ensured that their children can have peace and security in a multicultural community, who know exactly how the war should be waged and won should put their money where their mouths are. We would suggest that these patriots join the Sri Lankan military that is desperately short of manpower in Jaffna, but we do not want to deepen the suffering of the poor Sinhalese youth already forced to fight a war they do not care for, by having to put up with these armchair military strategists and long distance heroes.

At this stage, it is necessary for the Tamil expatriate community especially the Tamil ealam lobby, to consider its options. In many ways, Tamils do have a reason to celebrate - to many Tamils, the Sri Lankan Army is little more than an alien occupying force. But what those elements in the Tamil lobby in the West that celebrate the capture of Elephant Pass as a victory for Tamil ealam should realise is that spurring the LTTE on to even greater victories is not going to bring the war to a close with Thamilalam as the assured prize. In fact, there are signs that the most savage phase of the war is yet to begin. As the LTTE moves into the more populous parts of the Jaffna Peninsular the government can be expected to try everything in its power to save face, if not the lives of their soldiers. New weapons are already arriving. In this endeavour, they will have the unconditional and enthusiastic support of the chauvinist lobby in Sri Lanka and abroad, and the international arms dealers will only be too willing to oblige the government's thirst for more killing power. The main victims of this coming battle will not be the LTTE cadres, who know how to defend themselves, but the defenceless civilians in whose name the LTTE is supposed to be fighting. Already, there are reports that many civilians are suffering from lack of water due to the LTTE cutting off the water supply to the military. What will happen to them once the fighting escalates is anybody's guess. Many of these people are those who have not been able to escape to the safety and comforts of the West. While the Tamil lobby is dying to see the video recording of the victory at Elephant Pass from the comforts of their plush [living rooms](#), the helpless civilians will be simply dying. At this moment of crisisfacing the tamil people in North and the East, the Tamil lobby should seriously ask themselves: have they explored all

avenues to bring about a negotiated settlement such as exerting maximum pressure on all parties to come to the negotiating table or is it Thamilalam at any cost ?

We at Shakthi believe that it is time for both Tamils and Sinhalese expatriates to adopt a more sensible and humane approach to this conflict. Please put the interests of the people who are still living in that island that we have all left before your own egos. Call for unconditional negotiations NOW! Not when there is nothing or nobody left to negotiate about. Nothing is more sacred than human life.

