

Voice of Shakthi Thursday 16 March 2000

Peace-lovers throughout [Sri Lanka](#) may question the LTTE's commitment to peace after the latest attack in Kotte last week. We at Shakthi, condemn without [reservation](#) this attack on civilians which killed over twenty people and injured more than sixty. There is no doubt that the majority of these victims were those who hoped for a peaceful end to this conflict. They were, like thousands of other Sri Lankans, those who believed in peace.

There is no doubt that [Norway's](#) initiative to mediate in the Sri Lankan conflict strengthened this hope. Even the extremist Sinhala organisations in the South were unable to oppose these moves, judging by their recent pronouncements. These organisations, which burnt shops and Government institutions and called for a boycott of Indian goods over [India's](#) involvement in the peace process in 1987, were reduced to calling for that country's involvement in the face of this latest initiative. Such antics, we believe, have not been forgotten by the Sri Lankan people. This is reflected in the lukewarm response such extremist organisations evoke these days in Sri Lanka.

Another development which raised the hopes of peace among ordinary Sri Lankans were the recent talks between President Kumaranatunge and the United National [Party](#) leader Ranil Wickremasinghe. The people made their voices heard in far-away places such as Vavuniya and Kantalai. In one voice they shouted "Give us the chance to live in peace."

Their voice was one of eternal suffering; their cries reflected not only the need for peace but a plea for the war-mongers from both sides to bring an end to their misery. It was reflected not only in their words but in their pale and weary faces. Their need for some settlement is apparent now, even though the the Government has yet to reveal the details of its devolution package.

But how ready is the LTTE to accede to these wishes? Why is there reluctance to make their demands public? Will they impose impossible conditions to avoid any talks? These are the questions the ordinary Sinhalese and Tamils are asking now.

According to Norway's now deposed Foreign Minister, the LTTE has expressed their willingness to enter peace talks. They had also called for mediation by a third party. The LTTE's recent gesture of releasing some armed forces personnel in their custody could be interpreted as a gesture of support for Norway's initiative.

But the latest LTTE attack has negated all these gestures. At the same time, so has recent operations of the Army in the North where harassment against ordinary Tamil people has been

intensified to the extent that strip searches has become the order of the day at Army check-points.

In this climate, we believe it is difficult to question only the LTTE's motives in this regard. For both [parties](#) must de-escalate this conflict if there is to be a negotiated settlement, to tone down their power-plays if a genuine settlement is sought.

We believe it's the responsibility of the Srilankan Government & the Opposition to put forward a political package to address the grievances of the Tamil people of Sri Lanka, irrespective of LTTE's willingness for peace. If such a solution is forwarded it would be extremely difficult for LTTE to ignore. If they do they will be marginalised and will have to face bitter consequences. But the main problem we have today is whether the Sri Lankan Govt. has the courage and the strength to implement such a solution.