

## **Voice of Shakthi Thursday 03 May 2001**

The agony and suffering of the ordinary people of [Sri Lanka](#) seems to be of least concern to the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE as they try to outmanoeuvre each other in a deadly game of one-upmanship.

Rising defence costs, a deteriorating economy and international pressure has compelled the Government to seek negotiations with the LTTE for an end to the conflict. The growing nonacceptance of their standing as the liberators of the Tamil people, the rejection of a state of Eelam by the international community and the dismantling of their international [networks](#) has forced the LTTE too to seek a compromise.

The tragedy is, both parties seem to want to achieve this from positions of military strength. The latest indication of this was witnessed last week as government forces, misled into thinking that the military power of the LTTE had waned, launched yet another disastrous military [exercise](#), "Agni Keela".

According to reports, almost 400 personnel from both sides died in this latest battle with over 1,000 injured and maimed. There is no doubt that the government's military intelligence - an oxymoronic term if ever there was one - had miscalculated yet again as it sacrificed more soldiers, mostly poor village youths, to this on-going conflict.

There is no doubt that Government leaders were misled by these so-called military experts into launching this attack in the belief that the continuing cease-fire by the LTTE was a sign of weakness by the latter. In the event, they were proved horribly wrong, yet again.

What exactly is the government trying to achieve by these tactics?

While there was some justification for the government's caution in accepting the offer of a cease-fire by the LTTE, no one should excuse its reluctance to progress talks towards a real negotiated settlement.

While warning that the LTTE was using the cease-fire to build up its strength, it was the government which increased its defence budget, imported the latest weaponry from Czechoslovakia and invited military advisers from the United States. While stalling any moves towards peace, it kept preparing itself for war.

People in the South meanwhile, gained some respite from the constant bomb threats and the fear of LTTE suicide cadres. Clashes on the battlefields became less and less, with only five soldiers being killed during the entire period of the cease-fire declared by the LTTE. As it pointed out quite validly we think, it was the people of the North and East who did not gain any respite from this period.

By failing to make use of this opportunity to advance the peace process and embarking on yet another disastrous military exercise, the Government has

deprived the ordinary people of Sri Lanka a chance to regain some normalcy in their lives.

Sadly, a normal life for Sri Lankans will remain a distant dream as long as these two forces continue their campaign for military supremacy regardless of the cost in human misery and [economic](#) disaster? Normalcy can be restored, in our view, only when there is genuine commitment from both parties to de-escalate the war, meet the political aspirations of the Tamil people and lift the economic embargo under which they have suffered for so long.