

Voice of Shakthi Thursday 25 October 2001

We are quite sure that many of our listeners would have seen the advertisement appearing in a national paper last weekend which compared Osama Bin Laden with Velupilai Prabhakaran. The advertisement, which is said to have cost around 30,000 dollars, drew attention to the numerous acts of terrorism perpetrated by Prabhakaran's LTTE and claimed that even if Bin Laden is gone, Prabhakaran will be able to fill his shoes. More pointedly, it complained that despite all the LTTE's terrorism, Sri Lanka has been forced to negotiate with Terrorists.

Compared to the the idiotic performance of one of the people behind the ad on television a fortnight ago, this was of a slightly higher standard because it drew attention to a valid issue – that of terrorism. We will definitely join with the advertisers in condemning the LTTE's terrorism, even though we think that the comparison with Bin Laden is greatly overdrawn. However, we cannot endorse what appeared to be the main thrust of the advertisement – that LTTE terrorism cannot be defeated by negotiating.

We strongly believe, as we have pointed out on many previous occasions, that the LTTE's terrorism does not exist in a vacuum and that only by tackling the issues that gave rise to Tamil militancy and terrorism can the problem be satisfactorily solved. Indeed, everybody except the people who placed the very expensive advertisement are of this opinion. Even the US and the UK which have banned the LTTE have repeatedly pointed out that only through negotiations can a lasting solution be found. Australia too is of the same opinion. This view has not altered even after the September 11 horror in New York., or even after some academics had pointed out links between the Al Quaida and the LTTE.

Representatives of major Western countries have emphasised that the LTTE's terrorism should not be confused with the issue of power sharing with Tamils in Sri Lanka. There is very little chance that a large advertisement in a weekend paper is going to change this perception.

We believe that very soon Sri Lankans in Australia will get a chance to rethink their commitment to this pointless warmongering. Elections in Sri Lanka are to be held on December 5 and the opposition alliance, from all reports, seem likely to gain power. The leader of the opposition has already pledged to devolve power to the Tamils and has the backing of the Tamil parties. It is also likely that the LTTE, which is shunned by the international community, will choose to enter into negotiations with the new government, which also has the backing of the business community which recently staged a massive demonstration in support of peace talks. If that happens, we are likely to see all major Western countries lending their weight to the peace effort, as we believe it should be. This war which has killed and maimed thousands of people in Sri Lanka and destroyed the country's economy can only be stopped through discussions. It cannot be stopped by asking for or giving support for a continuation of the war.

In these circumstances, those who pay for large advertisements calling for military solutions will have to seriously re-think their position. We are not sure if some of them will ever grow out of their bloodlust and bigotry, but we are certain many of them will not want to waste their money!