

S.L. sees no end to this war, unless. (1993, November 28). *The Sunday times.*

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This speech was delivered by Parliamentarian S.L. Gunasekera during the course of this year's budget debate on the Ministry of Defence's expenditure

Mr Chairman, every year as we debate the Votes on the Ministry of Defence, the war in the North and East grows with increasing ferocity and increasing loss of life, destruction of property and human misery, and the end nowhere in sight. And if I might venture a reason for this, it is the fact that there has not yet been a proper appreciation of the nature of the problem, the gravity of the situation, the dire peril in which this country stands and the solution that must be adopted. I say this, Sir, because, from the Government and the Opposition there are confusing signals. There are for example those who still view this problem as a political problem to which there is a political settlement. I am happy to note that His Excellency the President has gone part of the way in identifying the problem in that he said that this is not an ethnic problem but a terrorist problem.

Once again you find the Hon. Prime Minister saying that the operations we conduct are to disarm the LTTE. That would say, Sir, is the understatement of the year. What is happening in the North and East is a full fledged civil war and nothing else. A full fledged civil war designed to rob this country of one third of its land and one third or 60 per cent of its sea coast, and to set up a fascist, racist regime in that area, where none but Tamils and other Tamils and no other Tamils can live.

Now, Sir, with all the evidence of the LTTE's objectives, I am surprised to see so many people, including Ministers, talking of the possibility of a negotiated settlement or of a political settlement. Far be it from me, Sir, to propose a political settlement if one is possible. If we can solve this problem without bloodshed, without deaths, without humans getting maimed, without destruction, let us do it. If you can do it without bloodshed, why not? But the question is, is there a possible solution?

Now let us examine for a moment, what is a "political solution"? A "political solution" would be a solution in terms of which all citizens of all races, creeds, castes and religions can live in every inch of this country in dignity, in freedom as equals with all others. A solution that will ensure that a Sinhalese from Matara can enjoy in Jaffna every right enjoyed by the Tamils from Jaffna, that a Tamil from Jaffna can enjoy in Matara every right enjoyed by the Sinhalese from Matara, that a Muslim from Kalmunai can enjoy in Colombo every right enjoyed by the Sinhalese from Colombo. Now, I have no doubt that all the Southern based parties, the UNP, SLFP, LSSP and whatever P or F you can think of, when I say F, I mean the Fronts, are agreed on that.

There is no dispute about it. But is the LTTE agreed? Is there any possibility of the LTTE agreeing to a solution of that nature? Is there any possibility of the other communal Tamil parties that some persons call "moderates" would agree to a solution of that nature? Examine, Sir, their demands. For example, they walked out from the Select Committee putting forward five demands, the same demands that were put forward at the Thimpu Talks eight years ago. What are those demands? They want the North and East recognized as the traditional homeland of the Tamil people, they say.

They are speaking sometimes. But certainly they do not include Muslims there because they drove the Muslims out. So they want one third of this country reserved for the Tamil group. Then naturally, they say you must recognize their rights to self-determination. Now, Sir, how in a multi-racial country can any particular racial group have a right of self-determination that is separate and distinct from that of the others. If the Tamils must have a separate right of self-determination in the North and the East, so must the Sinhalese. They must have it

there. Then the Sinhalese must have it in the other parts of the country. So must the Tamils. So must the Muslims. So must the Malays. So must the Burghers. So if each racial group in this country has an independent right of self-determination this country will be cut up into racial enclaves, the Sinhalese traditional homeland, the Tamil traditional homeland, the Muslim traditional homeland. Where then, is the peace? Where is the equality because the very concept of a traditional homeland is that the racial group whose homeland it is, will have superior rights to all others in that area. And that is borne out by the fact that all these Tamil parties are completely opposed to the settlement of any indigent Sinhalese in a Land Settlement Scheme in the North and the East. They do not oppose the Tamils being settled. So what they say is, being a Tamil qualifies you to receive land, while being a Sinhalese disqualifies you. Now, how on earth can there be a political settlement in a situation of this nature?

Then the question is, are they fighting for Tamil rights? I posed the question earlier also in Parliament. What is the right to which I, a Sinhalese, am entitled to which a Tamil is not? Then what are the rights they are fighting for? If they are fighting for Tamil rights, then why do they go and kill Muslims worshipping inside a Mosque in Kattankudy? How does killing Muslims worshipping in a Mosque help to win Tamil rights? How does killing Sinhalese babies in a village help to win Tamil rights? So, Sir, this is not a problem that admits of any Tamil of any other group to engage in any kind of politics there or even to live in Jaffna? Why did they murder Sam Thambimuttu, Yogasangani, Amirthalingam, Uma Maheswaran and so many others? Their desire is to set up a racist, fascist state in which Tamils who obey them and only they will have rights and others will have none. So the solution is military and only military and nothing else and the sooner we appreciate that the better.

What is the next step that must be taken? It is often said — even the Hon. Leader of the Opposition has said so. I am very happy to hear it — that this country must be placed on a "war-footing." Let us examine for a moment what that "war-footing" is. What is meant by a war-footing? I would say that a "war-footing" is not merely a slogan. A "war-footing" means that the military imperatives must take precedence over any and everything else and I say it with responsibility. Because, just consider for a moment the consequences of our losing this war. Suppose we have to surrender to the LTTE, suppose the LTTE is able to defeat us, then what happens? We will have one-third of our country and 60 per cent of our sea coast under the rule of a fascist, racist state. We will have a border with that fascist state stretching from just a little north of Puttalam and going in and out in semi-circles, in curves and angles over a distance of about 600 miles down to the estuary of the Kumbukkan Oya at Kumana — of a border of about 600 miles with a Fascist state. Imagine the defence expenditure in the policing of a border of that nature, imagine the racial turmoil as a result in the seven Provinces if there is a racist, Fascist Tamil State in the North. Then, imagine the communal violence that will take place in this country.

Those being the choices and the way out being a military effort, we have got to sit down and work things out and work out a strategy to win this war. Once that strategy is worked out, every other imperative — be it political, be it social, be it cultural, be it developmental,



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and everything else — must take second place to the military strategy to win this war because there must be an end to this problem. So, having worked out the military strategy, any and everything else, must be worked out to fit into that strategy, because as far as I can see, what we had so far is a kind of AD HOC approach to this matter. We go on, we think, "Let us have some elections in the North and the East so you

Presidential Mobile Secretariat" and you go and have one there. So the Military have got to adjust their Military imperatives to suit the political, imperatives. For instance, you want to have Local Government Elections now the military will have to provide security for all those who go there. They must see that electro-netting can be conducted safely and they must necessarily bring to a halt any offensive operations which they may have planned earlier. You see Sir, the amount of work they have to do. They have to picket the roads. How many roads do they picket? The main road from Habarana to Trincomalee; the main road from Horowapattana to Trincomalee; the road from Kantale to Seruwila; the road from Padaviya to Pulmoddai; and so many other roads. Those roads are not open to traffic until some soldiers with some rakes and some probes have gone through every inch of them seeing if there are mines. And many have paid with their lives for it. After that they must go to the jungles and guard the roads from either side, picketing it.

Are you going to impose on them some further burdens to achieve some political objective? If they are doing that, if they are given defensive duties, how about offensives? They have to cry halt to offensives when you tax them so much for other matters. When you have a some kind of ceremony when a VIP goes they must have all security, then necessarily you impede the offensive operations. So, let us strive to put as few unnecessary

burdens on the military and let them get on with the job of winning this war. Then Sir, there must be proper political leadership for the war. The absence of a full-time Minister of Defence has often been commented on. Indeed we have never throughout this war had a full-time Minister in charge. Even Mr. Athulathudimali was the Minister of National Security and at the same time Minister in charge of Ports and Mahapala also. Mr. Ranjan Wijeratne was Minister of State for Defence and also Minister of Foreign Affairs and later of Plantations as well. His Excellency the President is today the Minister of Defence, in addition Minister of Policy Planning and Implementation, Minister of Buddha Sasana and Minister of Finance. So we have one-fourth of a Defence Minister in a time of war, whereas Sports and Youth Affairs have two Ministers. Surely for political working time to the war and nothing but the war, who will visit the army camps; I do not mean only the Brigade Headquarters — the bunkers, the remotest of camps and see how soldiers are getting on, give them encouragement and come back to the government and be their spokesman in the government. It is not enough to get a file and say the soldiers are provided for. As the Hon. Harindra Corea said, "Oh, they are well provided for, after all they get 20 grams of dal a day, 5 grams of pepper. So what are you complaining of?" One cannot go on these books and say they are getting so much dal and so much pepper and, therefore, they are well provided. I ask you, please go to the camps and see how many are without vehicles, a single motor vehicle.

Sir, there is the question of the nation being galvanized to be behind the armed forces in this war. Today that does not happen. There are still groups of so-called, intellectuals who still talk in these terms. "Oh, we must have a political solution." The LTTE has just grievances. You must redress those grievances." The moment you go on giving signals like that you give legitimacy to the LTTE struggle, to the genocidal war they are waging.

There were large numbers of misguided people like Neville Chamberlain, Baldwin, Halifax and so on who thought they can go and negotiate a settlement with Hitler. Even after the Anschluss with Austria, even after Munich, even after the march into the Rheinland they said "after all the poor Germans, poor Hitler have genuine grievances, the Versailles Treaty was so unfair." They kept on saying that but once the war broke out all those people were lock, stock and barrel behind the Government in their war effort. Here, Sir, I blame not only the Government, I blame the Opposition also because from both sides we have been sniping at each other about who caused the war. You say the SLFP caused it. We say the UNP caused it. What is the net result? The net result is, we tell the world, we tell the LTTE, we tell our armed forces that the LTTE has a genuine cause to fight for that they are fighting some sort of legitimate battle. You detract from the righteousness of the cause for which our soldiers are fighting. In Britain during the Second World War you found all the religious dignitaries supporting the war effort. From pulpits they preached they prayed for the victory of the armed forces. Far be it from me to seek to cause some religious discord but this I must say. I am not a Buddhist. I come from a Christian family though I am an agnostic. How is it that in no church in this country are there prayers for the victory of our army, for our forces over the LTTE? During the Second World War from every pulpit there were prayers for the victory of the allied

happening today in respect of the war with the LTTE. They must be galvanized. You find a Bishop going and saying that Prabhakaran is a humane man. What is the meaning of this? Our own people, our own citizens are under-cutting our own war effort and contributing to the destruction of our country. Then again we find something else. The pre-occupation of the Government and the Opposition with winning elections. No one is prepared or few are prepared, the black sheep are prepared, of course, to call a spade a spade, but those sheep who are not black are not. So you find a Minister of the Government, Hon. Thondaman going and saying the Government to give the LTTE the substance of Eelam without the name. Have our armed forces been fighting over a name or over the substance? The armed forces have been fighting not against a name, but against the substance of Eelam. You find a Cabinet Minister saying that Hon. S. Thondaman talks of negotiating with the LTTE. You find Hon. Sellasamy making a speech recently saying that those days when a member of the armed forces came, the Tamils hid but that today when the Tamils come the armed forces hide and the Tamils must keep that up. Does that not demoralize the forces? Why is it that both your side and our side are frightened to castigate them? You castigated Hon. Ganuni Fonseka but no one will castigate Hon. Thondaman and Hon. Sellasamy. Sir, the answer is simple because there are elements on your side and our side who act on the simplistic belief that the Sinhalese are a pack of fools, that the Sinhalese who are UNP will always vote for UNP, that the Sinhalese who are SLFP will always vote for SLFP and that therefore victory or defeat will depend on who can get the block vote of the Hon. Thondaman, and that is the minority vote. So they put up their favours for auction. They say, give us this and we will support you and our parties like fools bid at that auction. I pose this question, what is the use of winning elections? What is the use of the pomp and power of office if in the process you betray and lose your country.

Sir, I end up my speech by reminding the Government and the leaders of the Opposition on our side when the late Judas Iscariot, very soon got tired of his thirty pieces of silver.