

“Peace — the need of the hour”

The above letter by Brig Narada Wickremaratne RWP (Rtd.) which appeared in the Features Column of the Sunday Island of 9th instant is a very relevant and revealing commentary of the sad state of affairs in the conduct of our Military operations actions in the North East confrontation. In this article a retired senior military Officer, who has seen active service at the front has exposed the mismanagement and lack of conviction at very high levels, resulting in serious Military setbacks and unnecessary loss of lives.

The fact that we continue to go on in this manner is truly amazing. It is no wonder that the people have lost interest in the war. As I have maintained earlier the Tigers will win their objectives (not the battle but the war) purely because they are prepared for the long haul, a war of attrition where the opposition is reduced to because they have neither the will, the moral courage nor commitment to continue to struggle. The only interest of the Sinhala majority seems to be to look at their short term benefits and make the best out of each situation. The blood, sweat and tears of the poor soldiers at the front, the death and destruction, seem so far away. Let us carry on with the cricket matches, the sports festivals, election carnivals and propaganda wars regardless, until the next insurgency when we can use the same Military and Police and the covert feline operations to do the dirty work and bury some more bodies or send them up in smoke on pyres of tyres.

It is clearly apparent that our internal fratricidal war, the LTTE is on the offensive and

has the advantage. We have no political philosophy, will, wisdom or courage to address this issue with the determination necessary to end the war and restore peace in our country. The pitiful Sinhala majority, even after such a long drawn out struggle, paying a heavy price and the loss of many lives, have still not got themselves together. They are debating the issue in polemics and oneupmanship.

The last government was more interested in staying in power than in ending the war. True the new PM and the PA government has declared their determination to end the war through negotiations, but so far the Tigers have

and communication systems, air surveillance and use of fast attack naval craft, with coordinated troop movements ashore, the terrorists would have been severely restricted. Is our military high command using modern sophisticated technology or are they slugging it out on Galle Face Green?

It is not only the immediate loss of lives and military material but the far more devastating effect on morale, that we should worry about. As Brig. Wickremaratne says, who has been called to account for this irresponsible conduct of foolish military operations where hundreds have lost their lives. To name a few I list

poor colonists.

8) Blowing up of the military High Command in the North including late general Denzil Kobbekaduwa

9) Several attacks in our capital city of Colombo with the loss of the Defence Minister and Service Commanders.

10) The abject surrender of the police and other military personnel on the orders of irresponsible politicians and their lackeys in command who resigned or was sent home in disgrace?

I doubt any country in the world, at any time in history, tolerating such crass and irresponsible management of a war without calling the

they have strong local support. One method of accelerating a settlement may be granting territorial power and increasing employment opportunities and development.

Should we not take the risk and attract the support of the people of the Eastern Province, (the area where we are in general command) by a massive development thrust eg.

going ahead with the Coal Power Plant Project and development of the South eastern sea board for tourism and industrial activity. The expense of maintaining continuous military watch, even on a stand-by basis, means at least 5000 military personnel on

Public Opinion

called the shots and are very much in command. At every turn they have made the Sri Lanka government and military look helpless and undecided. The latest attacks on military installations and personnel and the apparent negligence and the incompetence displayed by our armed forces in the loss of SLNS Sagarawardene and the attacks on food ships, military camps, patrol craft and other troop movements show barefaced effrontery which no self-respecting government should allow.

The biggest advantages that the Sri Lanka Armed Forces have are their unchallenged domination of the air — for surveillance, attack and transport! Why is this not used to maximum advantage? With advanced electronic surveillance, monitoring

below some disastrous military adventures which the public may have forgotten and have been conveniently swept under the carpet by the authorities.

- 1) The Commando landing at Muttur in the early days of Trincomalee destabilisation
- 2) Attack in the Palali airfield and loss of one air craft
- 3) The Kilali misadventure; was it at all necessary? What did we achieve?
- 4) Pooneryn disaster. Why were we open to attack and suffer such severe losses?
- 5) Loss of several armed patrol craft at sea and at harbour
- 6) The loss of tanks and armoured vehicles from military camps
- 7) The highly successful Tiger attack at Welioya et al resulting in the slaughter of innocent civilians and

people responsible for this tragic state of affairs to account. There would have been military courts and public hangings in other countries. When will the people wake up? A military War Council with political/civilian representation is an urgent necessity. The people of the country must express their views and the real cost of the on going tragedy should be made public. The loss of lives and countless suffering cannot be compensated with money. Another generation is growing up with bitterness and hatred to what purpose except to continue the war?

Despite claims of clearing the East, it is apparent that there are still strong pockets of resistance where terrorists operate with impunity. We must conclude that

duty at any given time, with all the attendant back up logistics. This is an expense we cannot continue to bear much longer.

The ongoing peace overtures by the PA government are indeed welcome and deserve the support of all peace loving citizens. However, we must not let our guard down. We must win the military advantage now and always see that we negotiate from a position of strength.

There has been an ominous and significant silence on a ceasefire and disarmament. Even then, the government and the military should be prepared for treachery. They must remember the old aphorism “for peace prepare for war!”

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