

## Riding the Tiger

8.9.94

The prospect of talks between the Government and the LTTE is most welcome to all Sri Lankans of whatever community. Yet the Govt. must be wary of not being trapped into concessions that are not required, nor indeed bear any consideration. Talks certainly, legitimate concessions certainly, legitimate dues certainly, but not sell out of the majority community, nor of the Muslims.

Now in this context, it appears to me that the LTTE has already pulled 'a fast one' on the country, and the Government. The LTTE while indicating that it is ready for unconditional negotiations, (which is all to the good), has also as a prelude to such talks, sought proof of the Government's goodwill, in the form of the lifting of the

embargo on certain goods, a ceasefire and the opening of the Elephant Pass or Sangupiddy route. If there is a more brazen attempt to pull the wool over the Government's eyes, I'd certainly like to know. What are these requirements of so called goodwill gestures except the LTTE conditions before they are prepared to negotiate.

In effect so far as the LTTE is concerned, they will talk only after certain conditions are met, while the Govt. is ready to talk even before certain other conditions, essential from a military point of view are met. The Govt. has already met one of the LTTE's conditions for unconditional talks. How many more such goodwill gestures will be made or needs to be

made is what the country should be wary of.

As regards an essential condition the Govt. must insist on is the need for the LTTE to lay down arms, or a suitably equivalent gesture which could be monitored. This is basic international safeguard procedure, as witness for e.g. The IRA vis-a-vis the British govt. Else, the talks will amount to nothing less than allowing the LTTE to build up their armouries again, and prepare for a longer confrontation. The treachery of the Premadasa-LTTE talks is enough of a lesson. Once bitten, we must be not twice, but many times shy, where the LTTE in particular is concerned.

The country wishes Madam Prime Minister well in her efforts to solve

the ethnic or terrorist problem, whatever. But utmost caution is required. She would perhaps remember the following known Verse and the lesson it conveys: "There was a young Lady of Niger,

Who smiled as she rode on a Tiger,

They came back from the ride,

With the Lady inside,

And the smile on the face of the Tiger".

I might also refer her to another caution: "Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes", a lesson learnt by the hapless Trojans, who thought that the Greeks had had a sudden change of heart, offering them gifts instead of war. So beware of THEM even when they bring gifts.

**Everyman.  
Colombo 5.**