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# Negotiating with LTTE

The Sri Lankan government represents all of its citizens including the Tamils in the North. But unfortunately, the Sri Lankan government seems to have voluntarily abandoned the Tamils in the north and let the LTTE be their spokesperson. The Tamils in Jaffna are in fact Sri Lankan citizens and it is the moral and constitutional duty of the Sri Lankan government to protect all of its citizens. Tamils in Jaffna have the same rights and privileges as any other Sri Lankan citizen. Sri Lankan government too should have the moral and political courage to speak for the Tamil citizens in Jaffna. Sri Lankan government should realize that Eelam is not yet a reality and the negotiations between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government is not an international one.

The Tamil ethnonationalist crisis has been with us in various forms since the formation of the Federal Party in 1949. Since the early 1980s it took a violent turn and it has deteriorated into a mini war fought between the LTTE and the government forces for well over a decade. We have tried to find solutions to this crisis from the early days but we have failed in every attempt. Today we have come to a stage where Sri Lanka as a country and the Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims as citizens of Sri Lanka cannot any longer afford to continue to live with this crisis. We see that some attempts have been made by the government and the LTTE to negotiate with each other. This is praiseworthy. But unfortunately there are two serious problems in this process. First relates to the goal of these negotiations and second is the basis on which the two parties, i.e. the government and the LTTE are trying to negotiate. Before elaborating on these problems it is essential that we understand the wider political context within which these negotiations have to be carried out. The events during the last decade has created an entirely new context that is different to that which existed when the TULF first proposed the separatist demand. The new context includes several salient features. 1. Sri Lankan government has little control of the Northern Province in

country is fast developing the North and East have stagnated thus increasing the disparity between these two areas. 5. Both ordinary citizens and the political institutions of this country are losing interest in this crisis and it appears that they are actually forgetting that Northern and Eastern Provinces are also a part of Sri Lanka. 6. The ordinary people of Jaffna live theoretically in Sri Lanka but practically in an Eelam. 7. While Sri Lankan government continue to sustain the life in Jaffna to the best of its ability, LTTE continues its war against Sri Lanka at the expense of the welfare of the people of Jaffna.

**Goal of Negotiations**  
To return to the main thesis of the article, there are serious problems of the goals of the negotiations between the LTTE and Sri Lankan government. No deep analysis is needed to come to the conclusion that the primary goal of these negotiations must be the welfare of the Tamil people. If as LTTE says, Sri Lankan governments have failed in this task, it is a very legitimate question to ask whether or not the LTTE has been able to succeed in that regard. As LTTE too has failed, I think there is an urgent need for the two parties to act together. If either the LTTE or the Sri Lankan government enters into negotiations with motives

other than the above then they are bound to fail both in the short run and long run. The present political reality in Jaffna is such that the current senior generation of Tamils in Jaffna is for democracy whereas the younger generation has never felt a sense of democracy. If the present authoritative hold of Jaffna people by LTTE is released then the Jaffna voters may very well democratically elect their own political leaders and the LTTE is well aware of this possibility. Given this and the actual observations of LTTE behaviour at the negotiating table, leads us to argue that the basic premise on which LTTE enters into negotiations is not the welfare of Tamil people but their own survival. On the other hand, if the Sri Lankan government can take the credit for ending the war, it will be a political victory and it will undoubtedly help the governing party

to sustain its power. At the same time, if normalcy returns to Jaffna, no one can predict how the Jaffna voters might behave. The strength of Jaffna vote is quite adequate to decide who governs this country under the present proportional representation system. Thus, re-establishing democracy in the North and East is ironically a risky venture for both

Sri Lankan citizens suffer the worst possible while the rest live as if it doesn't matter at all. **Basis for Negotiations**  
The second problem is the basis on which the LTTE and government attempt to negotiate. The LTTE continues to claim that it is the sole spokesperson for Tamils in Jaffna. It is true that LTTE is the strongest guerrilla group and the

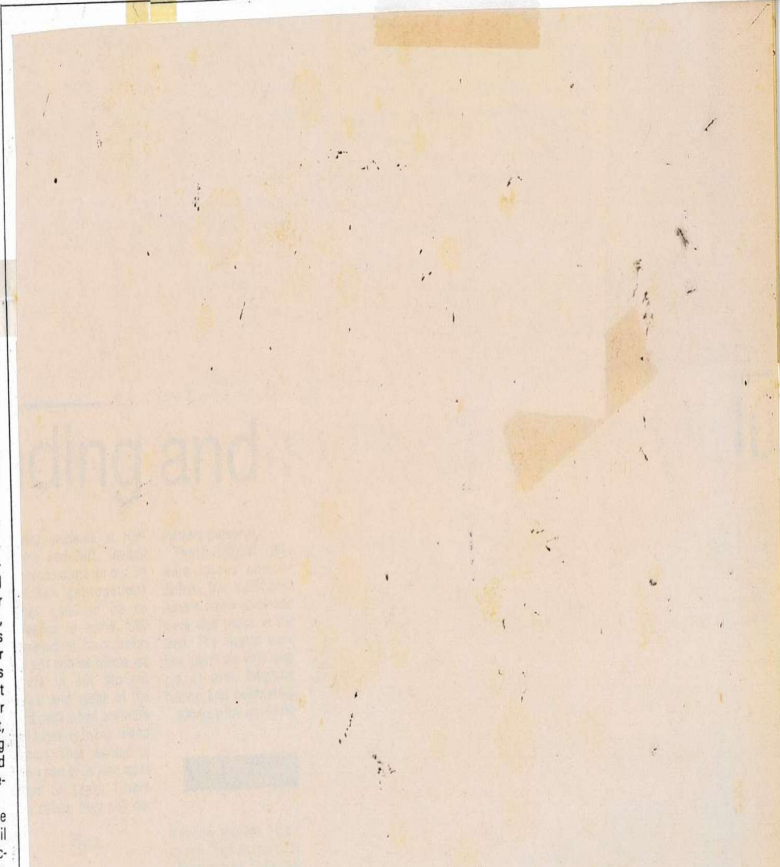
comfortably in Western cities who draw up plans for the Sri Lankan Tamils). The only way to find out whether or not the LTTE is representative of Tamils of Jaffna is to hold free and fair elections in Jaffna. In short, to restore democracy in Jaffna. If LTTE's sole concern is the welfare of Tamils then the LTTE should take up the moral and political leadership in restoring democracy in the North. The Sri Lankan government represents all of its citizens including the Tamils in the North. But unfortunately, the Sri Lankan government seems to have voluntarily abandoned the Tamils in the north and let the LTTE be their spokesperson. The Tamils in Jaffna are in fact Sri Lankan citizens and it is the moral and constitutional duty of the Sri Lankan government to protect all of its citizens. Tamils in Jaffna have the same rights and privileges as any other Sri Lankan citizen.

Sri Lankan government too should have the moral and political courage to speak for the Tamil citizens in Jaffna. Sri Lankan government should realize that Eelam is not yet a reality and the negotiations between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government is not an international one. Negotiations with LTTE is absolutely necessary and essential. However, the two parties at the negotiating table are not the LTTE which claims to represent the Tamils in the North and the Sri Lankan Government speaking on behalf of the interest of the state and/or the Sinhalese. The real parties at the negotiating table should be the Sri Lankan government representing the Tamil people who had been denied their democratic rights and the LTTE. Since there is no elected representative of the Tamil people, the Sri Lankan government by virtue of the fact that

Tamils in the North are Sri Lankan citizens must represent their interests and welfare at the negotiations. If the Sri Lankan government fails to see this reality and work hard to convince the Tamil people of that, we may not succeed in finding a viable solution. The Tamil people in Jaffna and elsewhere too should be bold enough to see the reality that they have gained nothing but lost a great deal in terms of their standard of living, economic development, social stability and culture and finally hope for a better future by supporting separatist politics. LTTE's goal is long term. But here is a situation where long-term politics can actually be detrimental to the society. As it is, LTTE's dream of a separate state, if it ever materializes it will be through the sacrifice of a whole generation or two for the sake of yet unborn generations. By then, the present political institutions which also could include the states

may not even matter so much. In the present context of the ethnonationalist crisis negotiations between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government is an utmost necessity. However, the only acceptable goals of these negotiations must be nothing but unequivocal restoration of democracy in the North and East and fostering the welfare of the Tamil people living in these areas. I cannot think of why the LTTE or the Sri Lankan government should have any thing else but the above as their goals. What does this mean? It means that we need to transcend beyond vested interests and expedient politics, which precisely created the crisis to begin with. As a concerned citizen of Sri Lanka I only wish that both the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE would first put the welfare and basic democratic rights of the Sri Lankan citizens living in the North and East in their negotiations.

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**Whose responsibility?**  
Who is responsible for all this? The Sri Lankan government or the Sinhalese alone cannot be blamed any longer. By and large the responsibility lies with the LTTE. LTTE came to power on the argument that TULF failed to deliver the promised land of Eelam to the Tamil people during its active tenure from 1977 until 1983, a period of over six years. Since 1983, after engaging in its own style of politics for over a decade LTTE has also not fulfilled that objective any better than the TULF. In fact, the life in Jaffna during their tenure has vitiated to its lowest since independence. I am surprised at the behaviour of the Tamil intellectuals at this junct-