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Solve the ethnic problem . Delay will be calamitous.

The Lanka Samasamaja Party is of the view that the country has reached a point when any further delay in solving the ethnic problem will spell disaster to all communities alike. The recent horrible killings, which are condemned outright, point most urgently to the need to find a way out of the ethnic conflict. The mistakes and the continuing dilatory policies of the Government on the matter in issue cannot any longer be excused.

It will be recalled that when the LTTE was hammered by the IPKF and was reduced to desperation they rushed to President Premadasa who extended to them a most hearty welcome. They were sumptuously lodged. They were allowed to drag out negotiations for months and months. The Sri Lankan Army and the Police who had moved into the positions and stations handed over by the IPKF were subjected to the humiliation of withdrawing from those positions to please the LTTE. They used the time to construct their bunkers and fortify themselves. They even got back some of their weapons. Then, having lulled the Government into the belief that an agreement was about to be reached they launched a military offensive against the Sri Lankan forces. The country suffers on account of the Government's blunders.

The war has resulted in a tragic slaughter and maiming on all sides. What is worst of all is that innocent people ~~whom~~ not involved in any way in waging war are suffering. Those in the affected areas cannot cultivate their fields. There is inadequate supply of food which in any event is impossibly expensive. There are practically no medical facilities and no medicines. Many die in the course of the aerial bombings. Now the recent horrible killings show that the situation has been transformed into the political and military impasse of escalating terror and counter terror.

Negotiations with the LTTE have been rendered impossible. Nevertheless a way out has to be found.

Preceding all this is a sad tale of frustration. The Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact, the Dudley Senanayake-Chelvanayakam "Understanding", the creation of District Development Councils - all add up to one ghastly failure after another on the part of governments. Fearful of a loss of support in the South they have failed to implement what they themselves had promised. The most recent effort is the creation of the Provincial Councils on the Thirteenth amendment to the Constitution. Some ministers are unwilling to give the Councils the powers expected to be devolved under the amendment. Government's ~~policy~~ policy foredooms them into becoming mere cogs in the UNP's electoral machine.

The effort made by the EPRLF to get out of the ethnic crisis through the North-East Provincial Council was also Squashed by the Government. The EPRLF was left to be slaughtered by the LTTE and then they were pushed into causing a deadlock leading to the dissolution of the Council.

One bright thread emerges from this tale of repeated disappointment and resulting bitterness. This is the fact that all political parties at least accept the principle of the devolution of power from the Centre and that it is increasingly realised that a solution is to be found only on the basis of the sharing of power.

In the recent years of this ongoing tragedy the Government of President Premadasa is seen to have consistently avoided stating its own position and its own proposals to solve the problem. Parties hesitate to state their positions openly for fear of being pilloried by opponents who opportunistically use the weapons of majority or minority chauvinism. But a Government has no right to take up such a position. The Government is obliged in every way to formulate its proposals to try to solve the problem. A democratic government is obliged to tell the people what it intends to do. Nevertheless following on the meandering discussions of the All-Parties' Conference the Government keeps its silence on these issues and continues on its dilatory course.

However, recognising that the problem has to be solved on the basis of true democracy, the preservation of the territorial integrity and unity of the Island and the equality of all communities we can see that there are two sets of proposals that can form the basis of a solution.

The first is the set of propositions contained in Part II of the Programme of the Democratic Peoples' Alliance put forward on behalf of Mrs. Sirima R.D. Bandaranaike in the last Presidential Election. Now there is the formulation of proposals advanced by the Tamil representatives in the All-Parties' Conference. Both formulations recognise the need to have an area in which the Tamil-speaking people can have the satisfaction of shaping their own destiny and the need to have a similar solution for the Muslims, while adequately safeguarding the rights of the Sinhala people in these areas and the rights of the minorities in the rest of the country. This is different from the hegemonic ambitions ruthlessly pursued by the leadership of the LTTE. It provides the basis for the governing party to make known the solution it proposes.

We call upon the Government to seek without delay through the disc

discussion of these proposals a formulation that can win the main support of all communities. We call upon the Government to offer such a formulation to the peoples of the North and the East to commence the ending of their present misery. A Government that hedges on this matter forfeits its right to rule.



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