

TO BREAK A STALEMATE

1. I thank you for including my article of May '96-STATE AND NATION, THE NATION-STATE AND THE STATE OF OUR NATION- in your issue Vol. 4 No 9. Thank you also for referring to it (if only to dismiss it as a **dismal conclusion** !) in the editorial under the above-mentioned title in the same issue.

2. I write now about the title of the editorial since it highlights in sharp relief **the** most serious conceptual problem that the Sinhala nation faces today. You, and all the Sinhala people, believe sincerely that the war has reached a stalemate. Instead of a continuing military engagement, or series of engagements, in which one side or the other finally triumphs, nothing seems to be happening now. You regard this as a military stalemate. Such thinking shows how complete the failure is to understand what is now in progress.

3. The war in Sri Lanka is a war of attrition waged by the LTTE. The LTTE, like all similar nationalist guerrillas, understands what a war of attrition is. Mr. Prabhakaran does not talk of "winning" the war because *wars of attrition are not won or lost*. Their object is to weaken the state by compelling it to maintain, and deploy among an hostile population, a large and ever-growing standing army. This is why such wars last for decades - the one in Myanmar is now nearing the end of its fifth. In such wars the guerrillas constantly replenish their armory from the state's forces by ambushes and other attacks. The longer such wars last, the stronger the guerrillas get. One does not need to be a specialist in military strategy to know that at the end of 13 years of conflict the LTTE is stronger, much stronger, now than at the beginning in 1983.

4. The idea that there is a military stalemate now is an wholly mistaken idea. Mr. Prabhakaran must regard the war of attrition as proceeding entirely satisfactorily, what you decry as a "stalemate" being a central element of a war of attrition.

5. The real issue before us now is not how to break a supposed military stalemate but how to end a war of attrition - such wars **do** end, of course, as in Mindanao recently after 28 years of conflict. The end comes by way of a peace treaty between two armed parties who continue to retain their arms after the peace treaty. These wars do not end, as conventional wars do, by the unconditional surrender of one party. Even the briefest and most cursory glance at wars of this type that have ended in this century -

- i. The Irish war of Independence in 1922;
- ii. The war of Bangladesh Independence in 1971;
- iii. The war of Turkish Cypriot Independence in 1974;

- iv. The war of Eritrean Independence in 1992;
- v. The war of Bosnian Serb Independence in 1995;
- vi. The war of Chechen Independence in 1996;
- vii. The war of Moro Independence in 1996;

will show that the separation of the armed parties in their respective areas of domicile, sacrificing the classical concept of the integrity of the original state, is the way forward to peace. The concept of outright military victory by the state, exterminating or weakening the guerilla adversary to the point of capitulation, is a delusion of almost medieval ignorance. We ought to be thoroughly embarrassed at even harboring such nonsense-thoughts in our heads in these last years of the 20th century.

6. You refer also to a political stalemate i.e. lack of progress in the Parliamentary Select Committee (PSC) on even the etiolated version of "the package". Nothing better illustrates our near-total (and, perhaps, frighteningly irreversible) divorce from reality as the hope of progress from the PSC. The PSC is a part of Parliament and Parliament is the legislative forum of the single all-island state which is the *fons et origo* of the conflict. The single all-island state, strait-jacketing the two maturing nation within it, is the fundamental cause of the conflict rather than the folly or wickedness of individuals on either side. The attempt to restore the single all-island state is an attempt to revive the uncontainable tensions and conflicts to which it gave rise and to re-instate the root cause of the conflict. The effort itself is bedeviled by almost universal discord as you yourselves, thankfully, have noticed. To expect salvation from it or from "the package" is akin to a fowlyard expecting deliverance by the fox. The very last thing we ought to think of restoring, even in our most benighted moments, is the single all-island state. Fortunately, it cannot be done either militarily or constitutionally and reality will prevail in the end despite our perverse and persistent efforts to compound the disasters we have visited upon ourselves so far.

7. PRAVADA, more than all else, has a clear duty to prepare the Sinhala people for the inevitable and inexorable denouement, namely, a nation-state for each of the two nations upon the island. It should take its courage in both hands, abandon feckless hopes of returning to an imperial aberration and speak loud and clear to our good people on the world's reality and the wisdom of treading the selfsame road to salvation. The time is now ripe to use your well-deserved and growing influence to hasten such a conclusion.

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