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"The fault dear Brutus is...in ourselves"-Shakespeare
Everybody knows that a scapegoat is a person or body bearing blame that should fall on others. Aren't some of our vociferous Sri Lankan politicians trying to make scapegoats of the Norwegians for our failed peace process?

The JHU organizes protest marches of Buddhist monks. The JVP, too, is up in arms. "Norway is the devil. Get rid of the peacemakers!" they all say. Commenting on the new appointment of Norway's man in charge of operations Jon Hanssen -Bauer, veteran journalist HLD Mahindapala (HLD) states in a piece written for the online journal Asian Tribune: "Jon Hanssen-Bauer is a close friend of Erik Solheim who has been handpicked to continue the LTTE-friendly policies which has dragged on the peace process with no end in sight". Thus according to these people it is Norway that has been the blight of the peace process. Conversely, if the Norwegians are out, hey presto the peace process will start to tick.

The much- publicised allegation that the Norwegian government is deliberately pursuing "LTTE-friendly" policies has yet to be established by these critics. It is a serious charge because it is made against another government. If proved, Norway would be denounced as pariahs by the entire world community- a situation that the Norwegian government would not pride itself to be in. As it stands, our big brother India, the US, EU, and Japan and all global powers of concern to us want Norway to remain in Sri Lanka as facilitators. If we are to believe our protestors, all these countries are following LTTE-friendly policies. A worldwide conspiracy against Sri Lanka! Can you believe that? In fact, past Lankan governments, too, and the present government of President Rajapakse, have also conspired against Sri Lanka because they have backed the Norwegians! In response to current demands for their expulsion, our new President has given a firm decision that the Norwegians must stay on. In fact, the latter withdrew from



AREN'T WE MAKING NORWAY A SCAPEGOAT?

the scene when the new government assumed office and came back on request only on their terms. Hence, it has been a 'take it or leave it' attitude by the Norwegians- not the kind of posture that a conspirator is likely to manifest.

Against all this formidable evidence in favour of Norway, those sharing HLD'S views face a monumental task in proving their allegations. They seem to be currently having a "feeling" that the Norwegians are pro-LTTE. Evidence must replace feelings if they are to persuade the vast majority of people and the global community. It was HLD who once alleged that poor Murali was a LTTE supporter on the basis of some third party hearsay at a Rest House. It all turned out to be a baseless story. Again, it was HLD who once upon a time kept on alleging that Ranil Wickremasinghe had a secret deal with Prabhakaran. What Prabhakaran did at the presidential elections undermines that story.

Anyone can call you or me a dog; the problem is to furnish evidence. I dare say, critics of Norway may yet be right although they may be a small minority but the testing condition is evidence.

In the absence of that litmus test, we are only taking our focus away from the real issues we face, namely our own deficiencies and inadequacies in facing the Tigers at the negotiating table. These problems internal to us, not Norway, have dragged on the peace process without direction. We are unable to arrive at a basic consensus in dealing with the LTTE at negotiations. Take the case of devolution, which is a cen-

tral issue. Global powers have come to understand that behind the cruel terrorism of the LTTE lays a fair demand for power devolution to the Tamil community that will have to be met realistically in drawing up peace plans. Remember how when our President went over to meet Indian government leaders his delegation was presented with a power-point demonstration of the Indian federal model at work and how the delegation was asked to go back and think about that? However, the JVP/JHU coalition parties are opposed to any such devolution. They stick on to the ideology of the unitary state that would yield nothing more than Provincial Council status to the North. We know at least through historical experience that these Provincial Councils are mere glorified local government entities subject to easy bending and breaking by the centre. Sticking to an ideology means that one's mind is closed and not open to experiment. If one is serious about peaceful negotiations, one has to be open to changes.

Part of the reason for the shifting of focus on Norway is the misuse of language by the media. Norwegians are referred to as "peacemakers" when they definitely aren't. They are facilitators. They communicate between the conflicting parties and arrange for meetings. Norway not only funds the three Peace Secretariats but also the Monitoring Mission and has met the expenses involved when talks were held in various capitals. They are not expected to contribute to decision-making during or before the talks. In a role such as this, they got to win and keep confidence of both the GOSL and the LTTE.

This all means that the responsibility for success at peace talks lie really with the parties to the conflict. If the parties are not mentally ready or if internal processes have not matured, then peace talks will fail no matter who facilitates them. In such unprepared circumstances, even if God were to come down he cannot help. Imagine the plight of facilitators who try to help out in Palestine? Sri Lanka may be only a little better than that. There is enough within us to take the blame and let's concentrate on that.



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