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In mid- April, Sri Lanka physically put the clock back. By going for war, the country can metaphorically put the clock back to the point of real physical self-destruction.

The LTTE has a decisive edge over Sri Lankans (by definition the LTTE is anti-Sri Lankan) and their government in that they run an implacable dictatorial machine where command simply flows down to all rank and file rapidly, inexorably, and surely leaving no option but to comply. On the other hand, the Government of Sri Lanka is a democratic regime that requires consultation and compromise in decision- making. It has an opposition with a right to oppose. Laws require time to pass and to implement and transparency is desired. As a sovereign government, Sri Lanka has to abide by international conventions and codes of conduct. Finally, Sri Lanka can run its economy only with the help of international agencies like IMF and World Bank. The Sri Lankan modus is, therefore, slow whereas that of the LTTE is swift and far more effective.

In times like this, therefore, it is plainly mandatory that Sri Lankan political parties do not exploit the democratic environment for selfish ends. All parties must close ranks on a collectively accepted consensus in dealing with the huge threat of extinction to the Sri Lankan state. Individually, we may have different views and, more importantly, different interests. There are those amongst us who see war as the only solution. However, the vast majority does not favour that. Both Presidential candidates in the recent elections fought on a platform that acknowledged the rejection of war and the electorate endorsed that. In fact, even Mr Ranil

Wickremasinghe who went a step further and boldly proposed a federal solution earned his defeat only by a two per cent margin, and that, again, with large numbers of his supporters in the North and East being disallowed to cast their votes.

It is heartening to find that the All-Party Conference (APC) summoned soon after the highly provocative Tiger blast on our military high command, reaffirmed a previous consensus to eschew war and to continue with negotiations. A toughness and periodical show of force is good tactic but it should end as tactic. Kfir jet crafts and aerial bombardments cannot put the Tigers out of business because like house rats they have the instinct to slip into hiding. There are bunkers and underground tunnels waiting to give them instant safe cover. Any visitor to Vietnam today can see how intricately and ingeniously the Vietcong built such devices, which helped them to beat the powerful US-led artillery. Going to war means a resort to an old method that has little relevance in a context of contemporary guerrilla moves, undiscernible enemies, and suicide bombers. If you have any doubts, consider the war failures in Vietnam, Palestine, and Iraq. In Sri Lanka, the Tigers cannot win



this war unless we behave stupid; nor can we win this in going for conventional war.

The government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) has to go in for more subtle ways of enemy

attack by the manipulation of multipronged strategies. Simultaneously, GOSL must move to win the hearts and minds of the Tamil people with a genuine approach to ethnic harmony. Douglas Devananda said a few days ago that there is a terrorist

problem and a Tamil problem. In fact, it is the existence of a component of perceived



Tamil grievances that baulks more positive global action against the LTTE. Tamil militancy is a symptom and the lasting treatment would include a conciliatory approach to the Tamil question The movement for majoritarian supremacy that the JHU advocates runs counter to such an approach and will only exacerbate the national crisis creating other similar fissures in its wake. President Rajapakse has promised a new Sri Lanka and that Sri Lanka will have to be founded on an universally accepted ethic of equality among ethno-religious groups. The dogma of supremacy necessarily entails war and the island's isolation from the world. It is no surprise, therefore, that those who demand war are also supremacists.

The menu for peace is something totally different. It will require both short term and long term strategies. Short term strategies include the following: (1) The maintenance of the Peace Accord must continue. Despite its limitations, that Accord is the first major step for peace that has been taken in

the twenty year- old history of our conflict. That Accord must be handled with tact and intelligence

(2) Peace negotiations must continue (3) The global support network must be nursed and maintained with fine-tuned diplomacy. Disinformation must be countered

(4) Defence Forces should be strengthened and its power to unleash must be demonstrated

(5) The Sinhalese population must be edu-



PUSHING FOR WAR WON'T HELP

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