

SRI LANKAN PEACE PROCESS: THE NEED FOR INTERIM AND PERMANENT POWER SHARING ARRANGEMENTS

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In February 2002, the Sri Lankan government and LTTE signed a ceasefire agreement under Norwegian government auspices that appears to offer the real prospect of a final end to violence as a means of conflict resolution. However, peace talks broke down in April 2003. The ceasefire is currently undermined by continuing acts of violence perpetrated by each of the sides against the other.

At present there is no trust between the government and LTTE and other relevant parties, such as other Tamil parties and Muslim parties. Compounding this lack of trust is the political vacuum that exists in terms of an agreed political framework within which the ethnic conflict will be resolved. The lack of trust and lack of a political framework both explains and leads to the continuing efforts to obtain a position of strength vis a vis the others, even to the extent of utilising violence to undermine the others. Therefore, there will be no full adherence to the Ceasefire and Geneva Agreements until the government and LTTE agree on a broad political framework. The political framework agreement would set out the scope for economic development and political control. In other words, an end to the deadlock in political talks is necessary.

In this paper I will be looking at the situation as it has evolved over the period after the signing of the Ceasefire Agreement in February 2002 and the main issues connected with the ongoing peace process. I will look at

- 1) The root causes of the ethnic conflict that will continue to determine the nature of the overall political solution as being the need to find a power sharing system of governance that would mitigate the adverse impact of ethnic majority rule on the ethnic minorities, and would also empower the ethnic minorities.
- 2) The antecedents to the Ceasefire Agreement that was signed in February 2002, including the escalation of the costs of war, the general election campaign of November 2001, and the election promise of the victorious political alliance to deliver a ceasefire plus an interim administration for the north east.
- 3) The political interests of the government and LTTE. In particular, the government's need to ensure that Sri Lankan sovereignty and territorial integrity is protected, and central authority is reinstated. Also the LTTE's expectations to be legitimized as an equal partner and have their institutions legitimized as a result of the peace process, along with the expectation of development assistance to be channeled through them.
- 4) The political debate that erupted over the issue of the setting up of an interim administration for the north east and the government and LTTE proposals in this regard, particularly the LTTE's proposals for an Interim Self Governing Authority.
- 5) The criticisms leveled against the peace process from a human rights perspective, as focusing too narrowly on the political and military interests of the government and LTTE, and the exclusion of Muslim and non-LTTE Tamil parties from directly contributing at the formal level to the peace process.

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