

## EDITORIAL &amp; OPINION



## International Aid

the Sinhala establishment (from politicians to civil servants) to implement that which was agreed in negotiations with the Tamils. A slew of failed pacts and deals over the past sixty years suggest it is not agreement, but implementation which sinks the peace.

After all, in theory, issues such as ending language discrimination were resolved decades ago. However, it is in implementing these solutions, as the language issue - picked up by every Sinhala leader since 1956 - that the Sri Lankan state consistently fails to deliver to the Tamils.

The present round of unclaimed hostility is a direct consequence of the murder by the paramilitaries of a Tamil politician, Vigneswaran, which could have been easily prevented had the paramilitaries been disarmed. Ironically, President Rajapakse, who disregarded Geneva I, recently offered to disarm the paramilitaries, if the LTTE agreed to marginalize the Norwegians and talk directly with him.

## Easy challenge

And it is in the wake of his own contribution to the litany of broken Sinhala promises that the international community has handed President Rajapakse the initiative by asking him to deliver a just political solution to the Tamil people.

The President has enthusiastically picked up the gauntlet. After all, the international community has unwittingly allowed Rajapakse to implicitly fulfil his election manifesto, which was to disregard the existing peace process (and

Ceasefire Agreement) and focus on an acceptable political solution, within a unitary (now termed 'undivided') state.

Unsurprisingly, the early signs do not look promising. Rajapakse's allies and ideological bed-fellows, the ultra-nationalist JVP and JHU have insisted that any solution has to be within a unitary framework, as stipulated by the pre-election pacts he signed with them. This compelled President

**With no timeframe for a solution and no definition of precisely what their grievances are, the Tamils will remain trapped in an abstract political purgatory - whilst Sinhala politicians continue to decide their fate.**

Rajapakse to appeal to Delhi's understanding that though he will endeavour to deliver some form of devolution, he cannot term it federalism without his allies turning on him.

In the meantime, whilst outwardly attempting to form a southern consensus with the main opposition, United National Party, led by Ranil Wickremesinghe, President Rajapakse continued to poach parliamentarians from it, scuttling any hope of UNP cooperation in

working toward a consensus on a political solution.

Assuming it is even possible, the process of devising and reaching agreement will take many years, especially given the starting point in the present political environment where it is merely taboo to mention the word 'federalism.'

And this is before we get to the addressing the inevitable and previously unassailable hurdle of implementation.

Sri Lanka's Supreme Courts, lest we forget, have already thwarted less ambitious projects such as the sharing of international tsunami aid. Any solution involves changing Sri Lanka's constitution, which requires a two-thirds majority in Parliament that has been impossible to achieve.

## Breathing space

For the southern hawks, and specifically for Mahinda Rajapakse, the All Party Conference (APC) provides a breathing space and enormous respite from the difficult international position in which he had been placed by Geneva I. Should he consent to begin to implement Geneva I by disarming the paramilitaries, then he would come under fire from the JVP and JHU. In theory at least, should he have failed to disarm the gunmen, he would come under pressure from the international community.

But in a startling turn of events, the international community has virtually caved in on its demands and is instead allowing Rajapakse the considerable freedom of determining the basis from which a political solution is found.

**Amid the impotence of the international community to curb the Sri Lanka state's aspirations, Tamils can expect a return to the 'twin-track' or 'war for peace' policies of the past.**

Although the international community has effectively conceded to the intransigent Sinhala establishment, it has also made some concessions to the Tamil community. It has alluded to their rights to a homeland and it is now consistently demanding that Tamil grievances be addressed - although they still remain fairly vague on precisely what these grievances are.

## No timetable

But there appears to be no timeframe for the Sinhala establishment to come up with a resolution. This effectively leaves the Tamils in limbo until the southern parties see fit as to offer the Tamils what they think the minority deserves.

Perhaps the Tamils should be reassured by the solemnity of the message the international community is delivering to President Rajapakse and his coalition government. However, the past handling of the peace process by the donor community does not inspire much confidence.

After all, at the first bit of stern resistance from the Sri Lankan state on issues such as the disarming of paramilitaries, the implementation of aid sharing projects or addressing the normalcy in the North-East, the international community has shied away from taking aggressive measures to coerce the state into implementing the deals, and has instead sought to change tack and avoid confrontation Colombo.

And instead it is the Tamils that seem to be receive the brunt of the coercive measures. From the proscription of the Liberation Tigers to the most recent measures to curb aid to humanitarian organisations such as the Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation (TRO), the international community has spent most of the peace process twisting the Tamils' arms into accepting the Sri Lankan state's positions.

## No change

In practical terms little has changed for the Tamils during the peace process, and the signs are that, under the international community's latest approach, they can expect even less to change in the coming years. Over a quarter of the population remains displaced, and with the peace process in tatters there no longer appears to be even a timetable for returning them to their homes - so much for the international monitoring of the

ceasefire.

This year, the Sri Lankan military and associated paramilitary organisations carry on their increasingly horrific atrocities with impunity, with the odd period of pause in the immediate aftermath of some international criticism.

The continued re-arming of the Sri Lankan state throughout the peace process and the expansion of the paramilitaries continues to shift the balance of power away toward the Sri Lankan military, no doubt an intended policy of President Rajapakse.

## 'Impotence'

In light of the impotence of the international community in curbing President Rajapakse's aspirations, the Tamils and the LTTE can no doubt expect a return of the familiar 'twin-track' or 'war for peace' policies of the Sri Lankan state, most aggressively pursued under President Chandrika Kumaratunga from 1995. These have invariably involved the unveiling of a devolution package (implicitly based the unitary state), whilst militarily hammering the Tamils into accepting the 'offer'.

With a deteriorating security environment - and no sign of any respite to the violent suppression of the Tamils in the North-East, it is not clear how the International community expects the LTTE to react to its latest approach. After all, the international community ensured the Tamils that the present perilous state of affairs is going to carry on, indefinitely. In short, Colombo can offer what it likes when it likes. The Tamils must put up with the military repression - the LTTE's attacks on the Army will however be punished.

Is this a sign of things to come? The international community has begun to withdraw humanitarian aid from the Northeast - not least by tacitly allowing Sri Lanka to constrict the activities of international NGOs - and cracking down on humanitarian support from the Diaspora.

## Perfect situation

This is precisely the situation that Sri Lankan governments from Premier Wickremesinghe to President Rajapakse have pushed for from the outset of the peace process. And the only thing the Sri Lankan state had to do to achieve it was to impede the peace process enough to force the international community to concede to Sri Lanka's demands.

With no timeframe for a solution and no distinct definitions of precisely what Tamil grievances are, the Tamils can expect to be trapped in an abstract political purgatory, whilst Sinhala politicians continue to decide their fate.

Should the Tamils accept the latest roadmap planned for them by the international community then they would have forfeited the last forty years of progress by their people - a deplorable affront to those who have sacrificed so much to bring the Tamil nation this far.

## Writing to TAMIL GUARDIAN

Letters for publication should contain the writer's signature, name and full address. They should be brief and are subject to editing. Letters and unsolicited manuscripts are not acknowledged or returned.

Letters should be addressed to the Editor.  
Email letters should be sent to: [editor@tamilguardian.com](mailto:editor@tamilguardian.com)