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The Anandasangari proposal

Veerasingham Anandasangari is an outstanding Sri Lankan politician of this era. He had not been prevented by threats, bombs and guns to stand by his political beliefs although only a few or none are there to support him. Anandasangari, one time school teacher in his ascetic white garb, unarmed, speaks out for nonviolence, democracy and democratic rights of the Tamil people, defying fearful odds.

In a world where those ranging from the mighty superpower to the Third World demagogues shout themselves horse for democracy, we cannot see anyone standing by him. Anandasangari, the Tamil political leader, has not been scared to tell the LTTE what they should do and not do. Nor is he scared to tell the Sinhalese extremists where they are wrong. These are rare qualities one can find in a Sri Lankan politician today.

Last week, in a letter to the JVP General Secretary Tilvin Silva he said the Tamil people would never agree to a settlement to the ethnic conflict within the framework of a unitary constitution. He had said the Tamil people were prepared to give up separation to the alternative of a federal constitution "but if the word 'federal' is allergic to some Sinhalese and 'unitary' is allergic to some Tamils, let us all agree to find a solution based on the Indian model which is neither federal nor unitary in character," he has said.

The LTTE's pretences for federalism were well and truly exposed when at the peace talks in Oslo a federal solution was proposed and the LTTE accepted it but went back on it soon after and came up with the Interim Self Governing Authority (ISGA) proposal.

The UNP and the SLFP Leader Chandrika Kumaratunga too had agreed to a federal proposal but Mahinda Rajapakse together with his coalition allies of the JVP and JHU stood on their heads and opposed federalism at the elections. Now President Rajapakse appears to be having second thoughts — although he has not actually said so — but his comrades in the JVP are virtually saying that the best of friends must part if the pledge to a unitary state is dropped.

The federal proposal which our foreign well-wishers strongly believe in may appear good on paper but when the Eastern Province comes into consideration, it flops completely. The Northern Province now comprising almost entirely of Tamils — Pirapaharan having ethnically cleansed it in 48 hours about which the Western powers have developed amnesia — now appears to be suitable for federalism but not the Eastern Province where all three communities are distributed equally in widely separated pockets. Now comes even a greater problem; the Karuna faction fighting for Eastern Province Tamils as against the Northern Province hegemony of Velupillai Pirapaharan.

In this situation, the Anandasangari proposal for a constitution based on the Indian model is worthy of consideration. It can at least be a starting point. The 13th Amendment to the Constitution enacted by the Jayewardene government in fact was an attempt to devolve power from the centre to the periphery on the lines of the Indian constitution but it failed to materialise in many respects although the two provinces remained united as in accordance with the amendment. The Anandasangari proposal in fact is a very practicable *via media*, if the opposing parties are prepared to accept it. But are they so prepared?

President Mahinda Rajapakse and his cronies can give themselves lusty pats on their backs and congratulate one another about the 'consensus for peace' that they claim to have been reached. This is mere self deception. Certainly there is a consensus for peace among all parties. But if peace is to come about, is there a strategy for peace worked out quite apart from a consensus for such a strategy?

With the Rajapakse government and the LTTE scheduled to meet in Switzerland next month, has the government worked out these political and diplomatic strategies? The LTTE is bound to adopt a strategy accusing the government of going back on their pledges to disarm the 'paramilitaries' and add on the new demand to disband security zones. If not the LTTE spokesman will threaten another walk out. If then what would be the government's reaction? Cave in as they did the last time?

The only persons who will be present at the next pow- wow that will be able to call the LTTE to tune are the four Co-Chairs — US, European Union, Japan and Norway. The intermediary will be Erik Solheim. Thus, the strategy should be to tell the four Co-Chairs to advise the LTTE to be serious about negotiating to bringing about peace and not to make it another theatre to help them along towards their objective of a separate state. But for that to happen the government must be seen to be honouring the agreements reached and speaking with one voice. If not the government will forever be on the back foot.

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98, Ward Place Colombo 7
Tel : +94-75-365891,2 Fax : +94-75-365891
email : editor@themorningleader.lk