

# **CHAPTER III**

## **PEACE EFFORTS BY SRI LANKAN GOVERNMENT**

This chapter will focus on the peace efforts that has been done by the government of Sri Lanka to resolve the conflict between Sinhala and Tamil. Additionally, this chapter will also explain about the failure of peace efforts that has been done by the government. Thus, there will be a brief explanation of the background of the emergence and intervention of the third party in order to help the Sri Lankan government in resolving the conflict.

Sri Lanka experienced the tragic ethnic war that begun in 1983 between the Tamils/LTTE (Liberation Tiger of Tamil Eelam) and the Sinhalese. The war passed out for about 25 years. Although the basic difficulties to calm down the confrontation, in the longer history of political catastrophe in the Sri Lanka after its independence, there were some opportunities in which some stakeholders believe in realistic

possibility of gaining and developing peace. During the long period of the war, the possibility of gaining peace has been carried out by some stakeholders (candidates for president and vice president) through their political campaign.

Since 1983 when the war started, each candidates of president and vice president are bringing out their campaign agenda to settle and developing peace within Sri Lanka. However, the peace campaign that has been carried out by almost all of candidates in every election turns out to be promises that are not actually applied in the future. During the civil war, what citizens expected from the elected candidates was to represent the entire nation which means to give an equal rights for all of tribes that exist in Sri Lanka. The peace efforts that have been done by the Sri Lankan government can be categorized as:

#### **A. Military Efforts**

In the 1970s, when the TULF became a pioneer in the national parliament for the north and east, separatist groups

emerged in the predominantly north and east region of Tamil, from the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO) Eelam Revolutionary Organization of Students (EROS) and the Eelam People Liberation Front (EPRLF) to the Liberation of the Tamil Eelam Tigers (LTTE) were renamed from the Tamil Student Federation (TSF) even though the New Tamil Tigers (TNT) under Velupillai Prabhakaran and the People's Liberation Organization Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) as a group of split-LTTE members (Wilson, 2000). Since the emergence of the Tamil separatist groups, the situation is getting worse and there are several attacks of Tamil separatist groups that shocked the Sri Lankan government and also the citizens.

The escalating ethnic tensions ridged in the wake of various violent incidents against Tamils in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Thus, president Junius Richard Jayewardene seeks to destroy the Tamil youth movement and asks parliament to enforce Prevention against Terrorism Act on July 29, 1979 (Wilson, 2000, p. 48). The Prevention of

Terrorism Act<sup>7</sup> of 1979 is a context in Sri Lanka, which provides a policy of full strength to search, capture, and survive terrorist suspects. This law was first ratified as a provisional law in 1979 under the presidency of J. R. Jayewardene, then made permanent in 1982. Prevention This Terrorism Act affects the whole of Sri Lanka, but in practice, this law is reserved for Tamil and Tamil youth only. Since the enactment of the law in 1979, a number of civilians from school to the most brutal have been systematically tortured from the law, and many of them are killed (Department, 2000).

As time goes by, in 1994, under the new regime of charismatic president Chandrika Kumaratunga, there is new hope for conflict resolution in Sri Lanka. The rise of a mass peace movement campaigned to end the conflict. For a short

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<sup>7</sup> An act to make temporary provision for the prevention of acts of terrorism Sri Lanka, the prevention of unlawful activities of any individual, group of individuals, association, organization or body of persons within Sri Lanka or outside Sri Lanka and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto (Prevention of Terrorism, 1979).

time there was a feeling that President Kumaratunga might be able to reach a lasting solution.

The first thing done by the president of Kumaratunga is to carry out peace talks with LTTE. However, the hope to hold peace talks with the LTTE is soon gone. President Chandrika was unable to comply with the LTTE's request. This condition undermined the LTTE's trust in the earnestness of the Sri Lankan government to make peace efforts with the LTTE so that negotiations failed. The LTTE opposed the government by attacking a government naval base on the east coast to drown two naval warships in April 1995. The failure was followed by a policy of re-enmity with the LTTE, a ban on fishing, and imposing an economic embargo on Tamil territory (Saifuddin, 2004).

The rebels of the Tamils separatist group did not want to discuss the settlement of the war through this political path until a series of unsustainable conditions were met. The Sri Lankan government's diplomacy actually collapsed when the LTTE sank two naval warships in April 1995.

The failure of diplomacy to hold peace talks with the LTTE caused Kumaratunga's policy shift from a pro-peace agenda to a "war for peace" policy. This "war for peace" policy is not considered appropriate because of the use of military action intended to expel the Tigers, while political solutions are offered to Tamil people.

Later, most civilians in the northeast only experience the military aspect of the policy. Although government militia groups staged several quick wins, most notably the success of retaking Jaffna territory, which had been fully taken over by the LTTE, in December 1995. However, this victory did not last long as the LTTE resumed its guerrilla tactics against the Sri Lankan government.

When during the reign of Kumaratunga, many of the military atrocities committed by the Sri Lankan government against Tamil people and also human rights violations committed during the reign of Kumaratunga. However, this was successfully covered by the Sri Lankan government at the time from media exposure.

Due to the government's failure to hold peace talks with the LTTE, as well as the atrocities of the Sri Lankan military groups in handling the LTTE and other Tamils, has led to widespread violence perpetrated by the LTTE. The increase in the frequency and intensity of the terrorist campaign was also enhanced by the LTTE in Colombo. Hundreds of people were killed by a bomb blast at the Central Bank in the capital in January 1996. In February 1998, rebels bombed the center of Sri Lankan Buddhism, Temple of Gigi in Kandy and followed up in July 1999 by killing Neelan Tiruchelvam, Tamil MPs who supported the devolution proposal medium. In the end, the LTTE also attacked President Kumaratunga himself, but he escaped with serious injuries, while 23 others died. The attack succeeded in increasing public support for him, just before the December 1999 presidential election took place, and he scored a narrow victory that was ravaged by fraud charges.

In 1999 the LTTE also attacked back and occupied the military base in the north. In April 2000 the LTTE regained

control of the strategic Gajah Path; as many as 1,000 government troops were killed in the fighting. The last insult to defense formation occurred in July 2001, when, in its most daring attack to date, the LTTE unit took over the Katanayake airport near Colombo, the only international airport in the country, and destroyed half the air fleet. With the defeat of Kumaratunga's devolution proposals in parliament in 2000, in an unholy mixture of political and personal passion, and the catastrophe of the next year, the failure of the whole concept of "war for peace" was over.

## **B. Peace Talks Effort**

The Sri Lankan government often invited the LTTE to have a peace talks between them. In each period of leadership, almost all of them have a chance to do a peace talk. The peace talk has been done by:

### **1. JR Jayewardene**

The first peace talks between LTTE (and other Tamil militant groups) and Sri Lankan



government was held in 1984 under the regime of Junius Richard Jayewardene. However, the first attempt of Sri Lankan government to hold a peace talks with LTTE was failed, because very time peace talks were held, LTTE managed to win an aim which was otherwise difficult to them. For example thanks to Thimpu talks<sup>8</sup>, LTTE could establish their network in Jaffna. While SL and LTTE were doing talks, LTTE built bunkers around Sri Lankan Army (SLA) camps. SLA could not stop that due to peace talks. And then LTTE attacked going away from peace talks.

## 2. Ranasinghe Premadasa

The second peace talk was held under the regime of president Premadasa as the third president of

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<sup>8</sup> Thimpu talks is a talks that was held on July and August 1985 between the leaders of the Tamil armed resistance and the the Sri Lankan government. The talks, sponsored by India, were held in Thimpu, the capital of Bhutan.

Sri Lanka in 1990. The Premadasa peace talk is the most embarrassing peace talk between LTTE and SLG at that time. It was because the president was being fooled because of the LTTE. LTTE and SLG have the same interest at that time, which is to kick out the IPKF (Indian Peacekeeping Force) back to India. So that the LTTE cooperates with the government.

At that time, both of SLG and LTTE were on the ceasefire mode. Thus, president Premadasa accepted the suggestion to cooperate with LTTE. Premadasa gave them a living place at one of the hotel in Colombo. While doing the peace talk with the representative of LTTE in the hotel, several policemen came to the hotel in order to make sure that the peace talk will running well. However, when arrived, the policemen were attacked by the LTTE because they feel insecure.

So that the president asked the policemen to surrender. As the amount of 600 policemen

surrendered. The president thinks that by surrendered, the LTTE will follow what the president wants. Premadasa wants to maintain the ceasefire mode. Government of Premadasa was adamant saying they need to save the peace talks. At the end, the second peace talk between the SLG and LTTE turns out to be a great disaster because the LTTE killed 600 policemen at that time.

### 3. Chandrika Bandranaika

The Sri Lankan government's struggle for peace talks did not stop at the stage of the Premadasa government. Any country will not think to talk to these terrorists after the police massacre during the truce by these terrorists. Under a new government by president Chandrika Bandaranaika, the Sri Lankan government continued its round of peace talks with the LTTE.

If the LTTE succeeds in securing the Jaffna peninsula thanks to Thimpu talks, they secure the Wanni forest thanks to the Premadasa peace talks. The government's peace talks Chandrika also ended in disaster when the LTTE attacked a Sri Lankan navy ship (SLN) during a ceasefire. The next peace talk effort took place in October 1994 after Chandrika Kumaratunga won parliamentary and presidential elections, ending a 17-year rule by UNP. This Peace talk was represented by Presidential Secretary Kusumsiri Balapatabendi as a delegate from the interim government of the LTTE delegation headed by the political wing leader S.P. Thamilselvan.

However, after four rounds of talks that lasted until April 1995, the process ended abruptly with the LTTE launching an attack on the Sri Lankan navy at Trincomalee in October 1994. From 1994 to 2000 there was no peace talk but a continuing war.

#### 4. Ranil Wickremasinghe

In 2001, the government changed after the election. With a new government by Ranil Wickremasinghe, the Sri Lankan government is continuing its efforts to reclaim the LTTE to the negotiating table. At that time, peace talks between the Sri Lankan and LTTE governments resulted in ceasefire aggression. Without any worries, the Sri Lankan government signed a ceasefire agreement (Ish, 2017).

By using these peace negotiations, the LTTE gained international recognition, legitimacy, built their strength, started their air wings, went to the western capital and met with their supporters there. But the LTTE never wanted a solution and the end of the war. Thus, many LTTE offenses have been committed against the CFA (Ceasefire Agreement) already underway (Ish, 2017).

The conflict continues to drag on, and victims of this conflict continue to fall. The peace process in Sri Lanka then attracted more attention from the international community to quickly create ethnic conflict resolution through facilitation. Britain is one of the countries that have initiatives to help resolve the inter-ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. This was taken by the deputy Foreign Minister of the United Kingdom, Liam Fox, to refer to a bipartisan agreement between government leaders and the opposition (Perera, 2005).

In 1997, with England as a facilitator, the government held peace talks between UNP and President Chandrika Kumaratunga (Perera, 2005). The talks are aimed at paving the way for negotiations with the LTTE (Saifuddin, 2004). However, the agreement was not implemented, due to the lack of mutual trust on both sides.

Thus, the first intervention of Britain in 1997 motivated the other nation states or international actors in intervening and help the Sri Lankan government in resolving the prolonged ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. The international

actors started to deliver their aids towards the SLG in many forms of aids.