

## If India agrees, Tamil party ready to ask LTTE to go for talks

Sri Lanka's leading Tamil party in parliament says it is willing to persuade the Tamil Tigers to go for talks with Colombo if [New Delhi](#) agrees to act as the peace maker.

M.K. Shivaji Lingam of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) said in a telephonic interview from [Chennai](#) that his party was ready to act as a bridge between India and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

'If the Indian government wants an assurance from the LTTE that it will talk peace, then we don't mind going to Wannai (to meet LTTE leaders),' Shivaji Lingam told IANS, referring to Sri Lanka's northern region where the Tigers are now concentrated.

'We are ready to act as a bridge between the LTTE and India. We are confident (of persuading the LTTE). It does look that India is willing to be the mediator in Sri Lanka but it is not sure of the LTTE's attitude.'

Shivaji Lingam is one of 22 MPs of the pro-LTTE TNA, the biggest Tamil bloc in the 225-seat parliament. He has been frequently visiting Tamil Nadu, separated from Sri Lanka by a strip of sea, to canvas support for the Tamil cause.

He said while New Delhi may have its differences with the LTTE (the Tigers have been outlawed in India since 1992), there was a lot of sympathy in this country for Tamil civilians caught in the island nation's war.

India deployed troops in Sri Lanka's northeast under a 1987 pact with Sri Lanka to end Tamil separatism. It led to a dragging war between the Indian military and the LTTE, leading to thousands of deaths.

Shivaji Lingam said he and his colleagues realised that another Indian military intervention was out of question. But India, he added, needed to put diplomatic and political pressure on Sri Lanka to go for talks.

Sri Lankan leaders have repeatedly declared they have no intention of talking to the LTTE and they would continue their military offensive against the Tigers until the rebels are militarily overwhelmed.

The TNA MP, who hails from the same region in Jaffna to which LTTE chief Velupillai Prabhakaran belongs, said the need of the hour in Sri Lanka was fresh peace talks between the government and the Tigers.

'India should make that request (to the Sri Lankan government),' he said. 'It should not worry too much about LTTE. We are sure the LTTE will react positively.'

Shivaji Lingam claimed that the current military offensive in the island's north had led to widespread civilian suffering and caused shortages in food and medicines in particular.

'Since the Sri Lankan government has ordered UN agencies to quit the north, the only way India can help immediately is by providing food as well as medicines directly or through the UN.'

'It is this message that we are giving to leaders in Tamil Nadu,' he said, referring to the state where Tamil politicians have denounced what they say is Sri Lanka's callousness in the conduct of war.

'There are people in Tamil Nadu who are opposed to the LTTE, there are those who don't mind the LTTE. But on one point everyone is clear. If there is a humanitarian crisis, then India should act.

'We also know that the safety and security of the Tamils (in Sri Lanka) is linked to the safety and security of India. Our interests meet. We keep saying this.'

*M.R. Narayan Swamy (© IANS / India eNews)*