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## Why battered Tigers are suing for peace

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In 2006, a haughty LTTE turned its back on a delegation the government sent to Geneva to have talks with the outfit. A few months later, Prabhakaran resumed war by launching terror attacks on the armed forces personnel and the police and capturing the Mavil Aru anicut. In his heroes' day speech in November 2005, a few days after the installation of President Mahinda Rajapaksa, Prabhakaran had promised to plunge the country back into a bloodbath. He kept on claiming until a few months ago that he would turn the tables on the military and achieve his goal of separation in spite of a string of crushing defeats.

But, Prabhakaran is now begging for a ceasefire and offering to talk without pre-conditions! If only he had done so in 2006, many lives could have been saved on both sides and he and his partners in crime wouldn't have had to hide behind ladies' clotheslines in Puthukudiyiruppu! What the LTTE's offer signifies is the efficaciousness of Sri Lanka's war on terror. The 'most ruthless terrorist outfit in the world', which even dared fly in the face of a call from the donor Co-chairs (the US, the EU, Japan and Norway) for it to return to the negotiating table after its exit from talks in 2003 and to refrain from scuttling the peace process, is now on its knees suing for peace! Whoever thought before the launch of the Vanni offensive that Prabhakaran would have to grovel before the government so piteously! Prabhakaran's peace intentions are far from genuine. But, he is surely dying for a truce and aiming at two birds with one stone. He cannot go on holding out till kingdom come with the best of his cadres perishing in battle and supplies going down. He knows more than anyone else that people under his jackboot are turning aggressive and rebellious by the day&ndash;&ndash;they set an LTTE 'police station' on fire the other day&ndash;&ndash;and a popular uprising against his terrorism is only a matter of time. Even if people take it all lying down, he cannot prevent his organisation caving in under unbearable military pressure that the government is ratcheting up on several fronts. Therefore, he needs a halt to the military onslaught urgently. Secondly, he wants to bring international pressure to bear on the government to agree to a long-drawn-out peace process like the ill-fated one the UNF fell for in 2002 so that he could rearm and regroup. The timing of the latest LTTE truce offer is of crucial import. It came two days before a British parliamentary debate on Sri Lanka. Labour MP Joan Ryan lost no time in urging British PM Gordon Brown to call for suspending Sri Lanka from the Commonwealth, if it did not respond to the LTTE's call positively. Ryan is obviously doing a Keith Vaz MP in the soup over allegedly abusing his position to aid a crook. Shortly we will see the hired guns of the Tigers in the garb of British lawmakers rise in the LTTE's defence pressuring the Brown government to step in, on the pretext of saving civilians, to rescue the LTTE leaders shivering in their boots and wetting their pants. The knee-jerk reaction of the government to the LTTE's ceasefire call has been to ask Prabhakaran to release civilians he is forcibly holding. That is not the way to counter the LTTE's smart move. The Tiger sympathisers in the international community can say that the government has laid that condition to remove civilians and then decimate the LTTE. In fact, that exactly is the government's plan. So, the Tiger backers can reject the government's condition out of hand. What the government should do instead is to request those who are calling for a ceasefire and negotiations, to extract a pledge from Prabhakaran himself that he is willing to give up Eelam as well as arms. No country has officially endorsed the LTTE's Eelam project. All the leading nations including China, Russia, US, the EU, Japan and India have rejected Eelam lock, stock and barrel. In 2000, US envoy Thomas Pickering famously said at a press conference in Colombo that Eelam was possible only on 'a planet of the dead'. Therefore, so long as the LTTE does not bid farewell to arms and Eelam, no negotiated solution will be possible. It was Prabhakaran's intransigence that put paid to efforts by successive governments to solve the conflict through devolution packages such as Provincial Councils, Regional Councils and even federalism. If the international community fails to wean the LTTE from terrorism and Eelam, then Sri Lanka will have no alternative but to follow the US example in tackling terrorism. In 2006, when Osama bin Laden offered a truce, White House spokesman Scott McClellan responded thus: "Clearly the al Qaeda leaders and other terrorists are on the run. They are under a lot of pressure. We do not negotiate with terrorists. We put them out of business." President Bush's Deputy National Security Advisor J. D. Crouch told CNN, "Our job is to try to put terrorists out of business, try to keep them from hurting Americans and hurting our friends and allies around the world. (Strangely, neither MP Ryan nor anyone else in the British Parliament asked the then PM Tony Blair to call for action against America for contemptuously rejecting a truce offer!) It is not only big countries that have a right to defend themselves against terrorists. Small countries, too, have the same right. Sri Lanka is only exercising that sacred right. Courtesy: Island.lk