
Prabhakaran was obstacle for Tamil's future: SL minister

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Colombo: Velupillai Prabhakaran was an "obstacle" for the future of Tamils in Sri Lanka and with his death the road is now clear for the government to address the "genuine political" grievances of the community by devolving powers to northern region, a senior Tamil leader said on Tuesday.

Minister of Social Services and Social Welfare K N Douglas Devananda said the government should now hasten the process of resolving the decades-old ethnic conflict by implementing the 13th amendment under the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord of 1987 in full. "Prabhakaran was an obstacle for the Tamil people. He missed many golden opportunities to join the mainstream. With the obstacle no more, the path is now clear for us to address the problems of the people. We should quicken the process as we have no excuses now," he told visiting Indian journalists. 53-year-old Devananda, who survived 13 assassination attempts by the LTTE, returned to the democratic mainstream two decades ago after giving up arms with the view to finding a negotiated settlement. He also heads the Eelam People's Democratic Party. "The LTTE betrayed the fundamental aspirations of the Tamil people by rejecting the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord and by obstructing its implementation," he said and added that devolution of power for the North and East should be the basis for the lasting peace. The senior Tamil leader also appealed to India to extend all possible help to the Sri Lankan government in implementing the 13th amendment to meet the political aspirations of the Tamil people in northern Sri Lanka. "India has been following the right path in this issue. It is playing a definite role and we expect New Delhi's help in the development and political process. It should help Sri Lanka to quicken the process," he said. Devananda said Prabhakaran was solely responsible for the "destruction and sufferings" of the Tamil people by spurning every opportunity to resolve the ethnic strife through political means. "Prabhakaran's death was an unavoidable incident. I am not ready to forgive the man who fought with an arrow and died by it. He got number of opportunities to settle the issue and the Rajiv Gandhi-Jayawardhane Accord of 1987 was a golden opportunity. But, he missed it too," he said.

Devananda said except the LTTE leaders who were directly responsible for the bloodshed, their family members and cadres should be pardoned. "The former LTTE cadres should be given pardon and they should be rehabilitated to bring about a qualitative change in their minds," he said. Asked about the future of LTTE, he said: "Politically, it can function but the chances are remote. These are the outfits which depend on their leaders. Once the leader is dead, they cannot function." On the de-merger of Northern and Eastern provinces, he said it was done so after the Supreme Court verdict. "Let the people decide whether the provinces should be merged or it can remain like these through a referendum."

Devananda also appealed to other moderate Tamil leaders to rally behind the people to take the country on the right path and to solve all the problems involving Tamils in a peaceful manner. The Minister said he would contest for the Chief Minister's post as and when the provincial elections to the north are held and said his priority would be to get the Tamil people "right to live, freedom of speech, freedom of movement and freedom to work." "I will be a democratically-elected Chief Minister of the province not nominated," he said. Courtesy: indianexpress.com