

PA, UNP must join hands to defeat LTTE - Srimani. (1995, September 24). *The Island*.

PA, UNP MUST JOIN HANDS TO DEFEAT LTTE - SRIMANI

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Leaders of the newly registered Democratic United National Lalith Front (DUNLF) and Minister of Transport, Environment and Women's Affairs Srimani Athulathmudali says her call for a National Government is based on her conviction that it is only such a government that will be strong enough to defeat the LTTE.

In an interview with "The Island" Mrs. Athulathmudali said that the time has come to stop the "political fighting" and get together to overcome the LTTE.

Discussions on the devolution proposals she says can continue since it is important to obtain the views of the people. But whilst doing that we must look at ways and means of tackling the situation in Sri Lanka.

Following are excerpts of the interview with Mrs. Athulathmudali.

Q - What made you call for a National Government at this particular juncture?

A - Because I feel that we are today in the middle of what is perhaps the greatest crisis in the

history of our beloved country. We have to get together to do something for our country. We have to put the country above everything else.

We have come to a point where the Tigers have got very modern equipment. They are capable of a stronger war now. We need to take stock of what is happening and act together to save this country.

Sri Lanka is a small island and I think if everybody acts together this country could be developed.

Because of this war that has gone on for almost 13 years development is almost coming to a standstill and we can't afford to let that happen.

We have a lot of young people without jobs. The unemployment figure is in the region of 1.3 million.

Because of the expenses involved in fighting this war we are unable to go forward. There has to be development to create jobs for the young people.

There is going to be absolute frustration for the youth if they have no jobs. We have to think broadly and in the long term and do something now if we want to take this country forward.

Q - In your statement calling for the formation of a National Government you state that there should be no question of aligning with dubious friends just to be in the seats of power. Do you think the government has in fact aligned itself with such dubious friends?

A - No, I haven't said anybody had but what I am saying is that it shouldn't happen. We need to think as one, think as one country and act as one.

Q - Is it your view that a National Government will be able to defeat the LTTE?

A - If we stop the political fighting and all get together we will have a stronger hand to do something for the country.

Q - Do you think the UNP will agree to the formation of a National Government?

A - I hope so. I am calling all the parties including the UNP.

If everybody thinks that this situation is grave



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enough for us to get together then it would be beneficial for the country.

Q - The talk in political circles is that the DUNLF is developing a link with the UNP. Is this position correct?

A - That has been the talk I think since I joined the PA. If I wanted to link with the UNP I would have done it at that time. I will not join with one group

and then say I am going to some other group.

We decided to support the PA because its policies were somewhat similar to that which Lalith had. We are with the PA and work with the PA. I don't jump parties.

Q - Are there any discussions going on between the DUNLF and the UNP?

A - I have no problem with having talks with any party. I am not angry with any party and I don't believe that just because you are in one party you shouldn't talk to other parties.

When Lalith was in the UNP he had a constant dialogue with the other parties.

He used to talk to several opposition politicians, some of whom were Mr. Bernard Soysa, Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike and Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga. Why should we be angry with another party just because they are in the Opposition.

Outside of Parliament I do not see the necessity to be angry with the Opposition. As a child I have seen Dudley Senanayake, J. R. Jayewardene and S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike talking to each other and I didn't get the impression that they were gunning for each other outside of Parliament.

I think this idea of not being able to talk to anybody outside your own party is something I cannot go with. One should be free to be able to talk to anybody but once you have decided which party you should belong to you should stick to the policies of that party and not to do underhand things to topple somebody. But an open dialogue is certainly healthy.

Q - The President has reportedly referred to the DUNLF as only an organisation. Is this not an indication that all is not well between the SLFP and the DUNLF?

A - I don't know. Perhaps at that time she felt that the Lalith Faction was not registered as separate political party.

The DUNLF itself was a registered political party but it had broken into two factions and

perhaps she felt at that time since we had broken away from the DUNLF that we were a 'group of people'. But we have now been recognised as a political party.

Q - Constant reminders given by the DUNLF for the need to abolish the Executive Presidency has been a source of irritation to the government. Do you think your call for a national government would increase the friction between the DUNLF and the SLFP?

A - The newspapers are trying to make out that there is friction. I don't see any friction. I have no problem. I have a dialogue with the President and the other Cabinet Ministers. We are giving an opinion and I don't think it would be a cause for any friction.

Q - During your discussions with the UNP did they give any indication of supporting your call for a National Government?

A - I have not had discussions with the UNP on this matter. I have flouted the idea and expect a feed back from the people on the possibility of forming a National Government.

Q - Have you given thought to what the composition of a National Government should be?

A - The leaders of all parties, provided they are agreeable to the formation of a National Government, should get together to discuss the composition of such a government.

Q - Are you thinking of a National Government under Presidential rule or under a Parliamentary system of government?

A - Since we have a Presidential System of government at the moment it would have to be under that system.

Q - Do you advocate the devolution proposals being withheld until such time the LTTE is defeated.

A - Discussions on devolution can go on. We have to get the views and opinions of many people. So that can continue. But whilst we are doing that we must look at ways and means of tackling the situation in Sri Lanka.