

# MAKA GUARDIAN

Vol.20 No.11 Feb/March 01st,1998.

*K.M. de Silva*

*Mervyn de Silva*

*Kumar Rupesinghe*

*Bradman Weerakoon*

*S W R de A Samarasinghe*

*Manik Sandrasagra*

*Dayan Jayatiloka*

## SRI LANKA:

# 50 YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE

# Anniversaries and Exit Lines

*"... In the end, all he wanted was to know what we all want to know: Who am I? Where do I come from? How much time do I have?"*

Harrison Ford in *Blade Runner*

That anniversaries are a moment for stock taking, is a truism. Truly significant anniversaries, as the Golden Jubilee of Sri Lanka's Independence indubitably is, are richer in possibilities and responsibilities. They provide moments for a Janus faced retrospect and prospect, conditional upon a sense of where we currently are. In its turn, an understanding of the past and a view of the future, helps frame and constitute our comprehension of the pivotal present.

This special double number of the Lanka Guardian attempts to discharge this intellectual-existential responsibility, the discussion moving along two principal trajectories: firstly, politics-ethnicity-war-peace and secondly the economic-developmental; corresponding broadly to and encompassing 'super structure' and 'base', or that which dominates the present and that which determines, in the last instance, the future.

The spirit of the discussion is suffused with a certain 'pessimism of the intellect', a phrase originating with Romain Rolland and immortalised by Antonio Gramsci. The bottom line of our contributors seems to be: we have seen the future - and it doesn't work.

This special edition of the L.G. is important in a much more minute, personal sense too. It is the final issue under the present editorship. The 'new look' L.G. and its editorial team from Sept'96, was part of a rescue operation to salvage the magazine. That task has been accomplished. The magazine has something of its old impact and high profile. It causes controversy once more. Its circulation has more than doubled and sale points have proliferated. However, we were never able to transcend the narrow limitations imposed by our market - the serious minded English language readership - and breakthrough to profitability. We have no corporate backing and we are unwilling to 'get with the programme' on the set of interrelated issues of neo-liberal privatisation/ negotiation/Western mediation/federalism. Thus, we have been unable to continue to bring in funding on a sufficiently large scale.

The continuity of the journal is a value we all share. This means the search for alternate sources of financing. This entails - or has been thought to necessitate - the recomposition of the editorial team. At least initially this means a restoration of the editorial status-quo ante.

In the past 1 ½ years, the L.G. has been bold, brashly assertive, sharp edged and provocative. To use Tom Wolfe's phrase, we have sought to 'push the outer envelope'. Or as Tina Turner proudly proclaimed: "we never ever do nothin' nice and easy. We do it nice and rough!".

For this non-conformism and absence of neutrality, no apologies.

It has been a privilege to edit this magazine and I wish to sincerely thank all our contributors, readers, funders and our staff. Goodbye.

**Dayan Jayatilleka**  
Editor.

## *Announcement*

The next edition of the Lanka Guardian will appear on the 01st May 1998 which marks the 20th Anniversary of the publication of this magazine. That issue will be a double number for April/May.

**Mervyn de Silva**  
Editor-in-Chief.

# HOW GOLDEN A JUBILEE?

Mervyn de Silva

Well over a century ago Ernest Renan raised this provocative question: "Qu'est-ce qu'une Nation?"

Independent Sri Lanka is 50 this month. Is it one nation? How independent is it? How "golden" is this Golden Jubilee which we celebrate on February 4?

True, this colony ruled by three European nations - the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British for nearly 500 years - has been independent since 1948, and a member of the United Nations for well over 40 years. But is "Britain's best bet", a model colony, truly independent? What has happened to the "welfare state", and its free education, free health services and subsidised food? The welfare system has been dismantled by the new, faceless masters - the IMF and the IBRD.

The governing coalition chose to call itself the "Peoples Alliance (PA) an implicit pledge of populist policies, a promise NOT to slash the traditional social welfare programs - not the capitalism, in short, of the conservative UNP. The PA did not honour its pledges, and could not, once it agreed to operate within the IMF - World Bank framework. The inevitable consequence of this broken pledge can be seen in the streets, trade union pickets.

The first signs of disenchantment could be seen in the reactions of the LSSP, a party particularly receptive to union unrest and agitation. Taking to LSSP leader, and Cabinet Minister Mr. Bernard Soysa some weeks before his death, I could sense a disillusionment that would occasionally erupt in anger. "They" (yes, he used the word 'they' when talking about his fellow ministers) "cannot stand up to the World Bank, or do not know how to stand up to their advisers".

Why isn't the UNP exploiting this situation? A member of the party's think-tank had a simple explanation. "It is not Ranil's style... I mean to rush in, with all guns firing. He is a cool cat. Let them go deeper into the pit ... that's his thinking".

## THE WAR

"Soldiers do not actively and consciously give their lives for the country. They may do so in battle for a comrade but most of the time they die battling the enemy" observed Wing Commander Mark Seneviratne. "The reasons for too many soldiers to have died since April 1995 and in spite of overwhelming supremacy in strength and weaponry by the army, may possibly be poor leadership both military and political; narrow political objectives overriding military ones in operations, an erroneous concept of the nature of this war; deployment of ill-trained troops, inadequate or incorrect training, an absence of proper orientation, unnecessary reliance of heavy weaponry, faulty military planning, strategy and tactics, the absence of a national war plan, low morale, poor and unrealistic organisation, particularly in respect of logistics, casualty evacuation etc."

"Defeat or cripple the LTTE and offer the Tamils and other Tamil groups a "devolution package" remains the PA "grand strategy". If 50% of this studied critique of the State's strategy is valid, then the PA has a moral responsibility to invite a team of competent Sri Lankans representing the relevant disciplines, military and civilian, to take a close look at each of the problems identified by Wing Commander Seneviratne.

## BIPARTISAN SUPPORT

Of course the PA think-tanks claim to know what the regime is doing - its army in the field and the grand strategists in 'Temple Trees' or some more secret place. "ANYONE AGAINST DEVOLUTION IS A TRAITOR" - PRESIDENT. This banner headline has not been "contradicted" or "corrected" by the Ministry of Information. Nor has any minister or senior party official cared to 'explain' it. "Desperation?" The political affairs officer of an important embassy inquired. "Are we going to march forward as a highly respected country with a glorious past of 2,500 years or are we going to

lag behind for another several years like a backward country?" the President asked the other day. Good question. President Kumaratunga is still the most popular politician in the country but it that enough to justify the present state of affairs? "Drift" is a one word description of the prevailing situation after more than three years in office, beyond the halfway mark in its term.

## LANKA GUARDIAN

Vol.20 No.11 Feb/March 01st,1998

Price Rs. 15.00

Published monthly by

Lanka Guardian Publishing Co.Ltd.

No.246, Union Place,Colombo 02.

Tel/Fax 447584

E-mail-guardian@sri.lanka.net

Editor in Chief: Mervyn de Silva

Editor: Dayan Jayatileka

Printed by:

Mahinda Printers

## CONTENTS

Mervyn de Silva	01
Kumar Rupesinghe	02
Bradman Weerakoon	05
S.W.R.de A.Samarasinghe	06
Manik Sandrasagra	09
Dayan Jayatileka	11
K M de Silva	16

# NEGOTIATING PEACE IN SRI LANKA

## LESSONS FROM PEACE PROCESSES

**Kumar Rupesinghe**

*(Dr. Rupesinghe is Secretary general of International Alert)*

In the year Sri Lanka celebrates fifty years of independence, it does so with the long shadow of war still hanging over it. With the approach of a new millennium, and in the spirit of expectation and optimism engendered by the advent of a new age, it is perhaps appropriate to reflect a little on Sri Lanka's troubled road since independence in the hope that some lessons can be learned from past mistakes. This indeed is the purpose of this book. Sri Lanka today faces a major challenge in resolving the armed conflict which has plagued it for many long years. If, ultimately, a solution to the country's national question is to be found, it will be achieved through careful and often painful negotiations conducted by two sides who have learned from their mistakes and pledged never to repeat them. It is my sincere hope and belief that this book will help facilitate that learning process by bringing together the considered views and experiences of many of those most closely involved in seeking a resolution to Sri Lanka's troubles.

Many other countries which emerged from centuries of colonial rule into independent states in Asia and Africa became victims of single-party or military dominated undemocratic regimes. Sri Lanka and its people have managed to avoid this fate and can justly be proud that by and large they have succeeded in maintaining a system of constitutional and democratic governance despite two abortive attempts at coup d'etats in the early 1960's, two armed insurgencies in the south of the country in 1971 and the late 1980s, and the continuing secessionist war from the north-east primarily led by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

This is not to say that the democratic experiment in the island has been without blemish. The violent insurgencies and the armed secessionist conflict have led to the country being subjected to prolonged periods of emergency rule during which the normal safeguards provided by constitutionally guaranteed fundamental rights have been infringed.

*We are pleased to publish in an exclusive preview, by special arrangement with International Alert, this introduction to the volume entitled 'Negotiating Peace in Sri Lanka - Efforts, Failures and Lessons', an anthology of presentations made at the landmark conference in Luzerne, Switzerland, on the occasion of the 10th Anniversary of the Indo-Lanka Accord. The conference was organised by International Alert with the assistance of the Swiss Government. The book will be launched in Colombo February 12th.*

While the phenomenon of violent insurgency in the south which claimed tens of thousands of lives has receded for the present, the unresolved national question has made Sri Lanka a deeply divided society. The central problem that successive Governments have faced is the issue of resolving this national question, and their inability to find a solution has prevented the country and its people from realising their full potential.

How an emergent democratic State can face up to the threats and challenges posed by anti-establishment forces without compromising the normal democratic rights of the people at large has been a key question that has bedevilled successive Governments in Sri Lanka throughout its democratic experiment. How does a democracy respond to a challenge to the State, the avowed aim of which is the overthrow of that State by armed violence or the division of the country through the creation of a separate state? These are the twin dangers which threaten Sri Lanka today. On the one hand it faces the prospect of the renewal of armed insurgency from the south, and on the other the continuing challenge to the State from a secessionist armed rebellion in the north and east of the island.

The continuing armed conflict between Government forces and the LTTE has taken an enormous toll on the lives and livelihoods of people. This conflict is one of the most violent, intractable and complex that the world has experienced during the post cold war period. It is a high intensity conflict with battle field losses and casualties amongst the highest recorded in any part of the world. According to the current evidence, the LTTE has lost over 10,000 combatants and a similar number of combatants have died on

the Government side. In addition, the loss of civilian lives has been considerable and the number of refugees and internally displaced is also among the highest in the world. Economically, too, Sri Lanka has suffered tremendously. Quite apart from the 50 billion rupees spent annually on the war effort, the costs of the damage to the country's infrastructure, development potential, tourist trade and environment are incalculable.

The waging of war has meant that over a considerable period of time, gross and persistent human rights violations have been regularly committed by both sides. Incidents of extra judicial killings, disappearances, torture and arbitrary detention have been so significant that the relevant United Nations bodies have placed the island's human rights record under constant scrutiny. The human rights abuses and the excesses committed by the security service personnel have been matters of continuing concern and the object of condemnation by local and international human rights organisations.

The LTTE has also come under severe criticism for its own violations of human rights and humanitarian law in many areas. These violations have been numerous and included arbitrary killings, individual assassinations of its political opponents, the keeping of unacknowledged prisoners, attacking civilian targets and engaging in acts of wanton terrorism against public property and civilians.

With every failed negotiations process the conflict has escalated becoming increasingly intractable and claiming ever more lives. It was with this in mind that a Conference was convened at Lucerne in Switzerland from 27 to 30 July, 1997 just as the island

approached its 50th anniversary of independence in an attempt to reflect on past efforts and explore fresh approaches to resolving the conflict.

The Conference brought together many people from all sides who are deeply concerned with the problems Sri Lanka faces, including those who, as thinkers or decision makers, had a role to play, directly and indirectly, in the various previous attempts to negotiate a peace settlement in Sri Lanka. They were there to record their experiences, exchange insights and explore the strengths and weaknesses of each of the previous peace processes. It was felt that a study of these past negotiations could contribute to a better understanding of what has gone wrong in the past and how best to proceed in the future.

The participants at the Conference included many of the key Indian and Sri Lankan officials who had taken part in the various peace processes that led to the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement of July 1987 as well as those who were involved in implementing the provisions of the Agreement. They included, from the Sri Lankan side; the former Sri Lankan Foreign Secretary and High Commissioner to India, Mr. Bernard Tilakaratne; the former Joint Operations Commander and former National Security Advisor to the President, Gen Cyril Ranatunge; the former High Commissioner to India, Professor Stanley Kalpage; and the former International Advisor to President Premadasa, Mr. Bradman Weerakoon. The Secretary General of the Tamil United Liberation Front, Mr. R. Sampanthan, was one of the senior Tamil representatives who participated, together with prominent Tamils, Sinhalese and Muslims who have been deeply involved in the conflict in Sri Lanka.

The Indian side, some of whom had been engaged in policy making, included Mr. J.N. Dixit, former Indian High Commissioner in Colombo and Foreign Secretary of India, Lt. Gen. A.S. Kalkat, Commander of the Indian Peace Keeping Force, Mr. N. Ram, editor of the Hindu and Frontline, and Mr. M.K. Narayanan, former head of the Indian Intelligence Bureau. All the experts selected had a deep knowledge of and history of involvement in the issues relating to war and peace in Sri Lanka.

This was the first time that several of the major players, at both official and unofficial levels, who had been involved in the Thimpu Talks of 1985, the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement of July 1987, and the Premadasa-LTTE Talks, had been brought together to reflect on their

experiences, and they did so with explicit candour and frankness motivated by the desire to share their knowledge so that future negotiations might benefit from it.

The most recent attempt at peace making, the Kumaratunga-LTTE negotiations, was also analysed by expert panellists, who though not participants in the talks between the parties, had close knowledge of what transpired. Concerned members of the Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim communities also provided their perceptions of what had gone wrong with previous peace attempts and what was needed to be done in the future.

This book is a result of the contributions made by the participants at the Conference, which have been subsequently revised for publication. The Conference was not an academic exercise. There have been many of that kind. What was unique about this Conference was that many of those who were closely involved, some from opposite sides, in the negotiations process agreed to sit together and discuss their experiences. During the Conference, participants were able to express their views freely and without restraint. What this book seeks to achieve is to obtain a close approximation of the reality that surrounded the negotiations process, and the views, perceptions and reflections of the participants. They need to be judged as such and nothing more. There has been no editing or censorship of their views.

### REFLECTIONS ON AND LESSONS FROM PAST PEACE PROCESSES

The main deliberations of the conference were structured around five sessions. One of these dealt with the Indian experience in trying to resolve the ethnic conflict, another surveyed the Premadasa-LTTE negotiations, while a third looked at the Kumaratunga-LTTE negotiations. The problems faced in arriving at a devolution package acceptable to all the country's communities, and prospects for peace in the future were discussed in the final sessions. The contents list is organised along these same thematic issues.

A wide variety of views were expressed on all these issues. What follows is a listing of some of the points put forward which are relevant to the goal of drawing lessons from the past for the future.

### VIEWS ON THE INDO SRI-LANKA ACCORD

A. The experience drawn from India's involvement in the Sri Lankan conflict. The Indian participants in their papers recount in

detail the policy imperatives that led to the Indian Government's involvement in the Sri Lankan conflict. Among these were:

- \* Worries about the impact the violence against Tamils in Sri Lanka and a continued flow of refugees would have on opinion in the Tamil Nadu State;

- \* The possibility of secession among the Sri Lankan Tamils sparking off a similar development in Tamil Nadu;

- \* The concern that the Sri Lankan Government might turn to countries from outside the region for aid to battle Tamil separatism, and the impact this would have on India's own security.

- \* It was emphasised by the Indian contributors that at no time did India desire the break up of Sri Lanka. The aim of Indian policy was to maintain the unity of Sri Lanka and make it possible for Tamil aspirations to be met within the framework of a united Sri Lanka.

- \* It was acknowledged that there was mistrust of India's intentions in Sri Lanka arising from the association between Indian intelligence agencies and Tamil militant groups. But India's intention was not to fight a "dirty war", but rather to be able to influence the militant groups and persuade them to reach a settlement with the Sri Lankan government.

B. Reasons for the failure of the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord:

In the papers there are diverse opinions on why the Indo-Sri Lanka agreement failed.

- \* It was felt by most Indian participants that the accord failed primarily because neither the Sri Lankan government nor the LTTE was sincerely committed to it, and both colluded in undermining it.

- \* Many of the Sri Lankan contributions clearly indicate that India's involvement was not neutral, and it was seen as acting on behalf of its self interest and Tamil interests. The presence of the Tamil militant groups on Indian soil, and the support extended to them increased suspicion of Indian motives.

- \* Another explanation that is put forward by some representatives of the Tamil Diaspora for the LTTE's rejection of the Indo-Sri Lankan agreement, was that LTTE representatives had not been consulted sufficiently during its drafting, and that the agreement had been imposed on the Tamils.

Despite the differing interpretations as to the thinking behind India's intervention as a third party, with the passing of time there seems to have been a remarkable reassessment by the Indians of their own involvement in the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord. The negative experience of the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord has led many to question the very principle of third party intervention in Sri Lanka.

## THE SEARCH FOR A SRI LANKAN SOLUTION

### Experience from the Premadasa-LTTE negotiations

After the disappointment of the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord, the Premadasa-LTTE negotiations were an effort to create a national solution to the Sri Lankan conflict. The initiative was based on the belief that the conflict in Sri Lanka could be solved by Sri Lankans alone.

Talks with the LTTE were accompanied by confidence building measures on the part of the Sri Lankan President. These included permission for the LTTE delegates who came to Colombo to have their own armed security, allocation of an entire floor of a five-star hotel in Colombo, a secret supply of money and weapons to the LTTE to fight the IPKF, arrangements for the wife and children of the LTTE leader V. Prabhakaran to be brought from abroad and flown to the Vanni and Premadasa consenting to the LTTE's demand to publicly call for the IPKF to be withdrawn. The newly formed political party of the LTTE, the Peoples Front of Liberation Tigers (PFLT) was also welcomed into the All Party Conference as an indication of the then President Premadasa's desire to bring the LTTE into the political mainstream.

The friendly atmosphere between the Premadasa Government and the LTTE was sustained until the IPKF departed on 30 March 1990. Once the IPKF had left, the LTTE took physical control of the northern and eastern provinces while the Sri Lankan security forces were confined to barracks.

While much emphasis was placed on many confidence building measures, there is no record of any serious political talks having taken place between the parties during the 14-month long negotiations between Premadasa and the LTTE. However, after the IPKF's departure, when the time came to discuss political issues, the LTTE issued two demands; the dissolution of the North East Provincial Council and the repeal of the Sixth amendment to the Sri Lankan constitution.

The rejection of both these demands by the Government led to the unilateral resumption of war by the LTTE on 10 June 1990.

Although the papers in this section provide differing perspectives and interpretations, the paper by Bradman Weerakoon, summarises in some detail the lessons to be drawn from this experience:

- \* The importance of fulfilling 'undertakings', especially those given by the Government, on which initial hopes are raised and trust built. While some of the undertakings on the Government side were honoured, two important issues were left unresolved until too late.

- \* The need for an agreed plan for future security and law enforcement after the fighting stops.

- \* The need to embody time-frames for the fulfilment of 'promises' and suitable mechanisms to ensure the process proceeds according to the timetable agreed by both parties.

- \* The importance of having a mediator who can guarantee to either party the fulfilment of undertakings and facilitate contact between the two sides. As the split widened, there was no third party to help bridge the gap or repair the damage.

- \* The need to create mass support, including the media, for the strategies being employed to achieve a durable peace.

- \* That favourable opportunities for negotiations must be seized and all attempts made to preserve the momentum. Changes of regimes or leaders provide potential opportunities.

- \* Given the hierarchical nature of decision-making in Sri Lanka the driving force for initiating, continuing and terminating negotiations comes from the top political leadership.

## HOPE OF PEACE LEADING TO RENEWED WAR

### Kumaratunge - LTTE Negotiations

The Kumaratunge initiative opened up a new phase and great expectations that finally a negotiated solution would be reached during her tenure in office. Expectations were high since the President had vowed that she would initiate direct talks with the LTTE, and had sought a mandate from the people to do so.

The people responded by voting her in with an overwhelming majority. The Tamil people also welcomed the talks as an opportunity to finally resolve the protracted conflict. The popular climate had never been more conducive to peace making.

When the talks began the people of Jaffna turned out in large numbers to greet the negotiating team from Colombo. But as the talks proceeded, it became apparent that little progress was being made. There was no discussion on substantive political issues, and the talks centred instead around logistical and military issues, such as the removal of army camps, the lifting of the embargo on goods into Jaffna, and the free movement of armed LTTE cadres in the east of the island. Once again, the talks got bogged down and the LTTE announced it was withdrawing from them. Hostilities resumed swiftly afterwards.

Unfortunately, this book does not benefit, unlike in the case of previous peace exercises, from the direct experiences of those who were closely involved in the negotiations at that time. However, the paper presented by P.Rajanayagam does deal with several of the key issues that dominated the talks during this period through an examination of the exchanges that took place between the parties. These issues can be summarised as follows:

1. It became clear from the very early stages of negotiations that the parties were on different wavelengths and each had divergent approaches to and expectations from the talks.

2. In spite of the fact that there were four rounds of talks lasting a total of six days spread over nearly six months, the main medium that the parties adopted for their negotiations was through the exchange of letters. The contents of these exchanges repeatedly asserted and reasserted the differing and entrenched positions of the parties rather than seeking to narrow the gap.

3. The gap between the strategies of the two parties served to heighten the tensions. The government was proposing a multi-track approach to the talks. It suggested that while talks took place on the steps to be taken to alleviate the daily problems of the people and for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the war-ravaged areas, the LTTE should simultaneously engage in talks with the government on reaching a political solution. The LTTE, on the other hand, insisted that the talks should take a stage by stage approach. The earlier stages of talks should only deal with the normalisation of civilian

# 50 YEARS OF FREEDOM LOOKING BACK

Bradman Weerakoon

*[Secretary to seven of the country's topmost leaders, he was Advisor on International Relations to Presidents Premadasa and Wijetunga.]*

Has it been a case of 'downhill all the way' as some cynics would say or somewhat like the proverbial curates egg - good and bad in parts?.

I was 17 and a half and one of those among the outer crowd at Independence Square, exactly 50 years ago, who stood mesmerized by SWRD Bandaranaike's oratory on what **freedom** really meant. In words which seemed magical at the time he thought it had to quicken, to have meaning, into a state which gave to the mass of the people, freedom from **want**, from **ignorance**, from **disease**, and from **fear**. A very logical frame of reference, I would presume, from which to assess how far we have come towards those formidable objectives over the past 50 years.

Freeing the people from ignorance and disease, through Education and Health we have perhaps gone some way forward. We often claim, since we like comparisons, that we are the finest, at least in South Asia. This, in spite of the fact that the majority of our 9000 schools are ill equipped and understaffed and that the education which 4.2 million of our children receive is, given the extent of private tuition,

only nominally free. Our health services have managed to reduce mortality—infant, maternal and general- to developed- country levels with a quality of care that is quite commendable. Yet given the pervasiveness of private practice our health services too are only nominally free. They have become overloaded and inefficient and even in the best of them, the General Hospital in Colombo you could still be **free** to lie on the floor after surgery, if you had no means or influence.

But it is in obtaining freedom from **want** and **fear** that the people have got the shortest change. Although we have a **free** market economy and **free** Trade Zones the latest World Bank assessment of our poverty (1993) puts it at 22 per cent of the population. That is, more than 1 in every 5 of us is below the poverty line—their family income levels are below Rs 800 per month and their children go to bed hungry.

And freedom from **fear** - that is, from arbitrary arrest, from unmarked jeeps taking you away in the night, from indiscriminate bombing and shelling, from torture and rape even at the hands of the

guardians of the law- from all of these are we not a long way away from freedom? For almost a third of the 50 years we have been at war among ourselves. For about half the period we have been under Emergency rule, of one kind or the other. And until we resolve our national problem, our defence budgets will remain over 20 per cent of State expenditure, over half a million of our citizens will be refugees abroad and over a million locally, will remain internally displaced.

So the celebrations at Kandy on February 4th would need to be tempered by some sober reflection on what's gone wrong. It's been a lot, downhill. Not altogether, *always breakdown*. In many ways, too little, too late. Perhaps the challenges Mr SWRD Bandaranaike threw out on this day, in 1948, may yet, refurbished and renewed, provide the guiding beacon lights for the next 50 years. They have a validity and relevance which is timeless.

# THE SUCCESSES AND FAILURES OF FIVE DECADES OF DEVELOPMENT

S. W. R. de A. Samarasinghe

[The writer is on the faculty of the Tulane University Institute for International Development, Arlington, Virginia, USA. He serves on the Board of Directors of the ICES. He is also the founder-editor of The Kandy News.]

Sri Lanka's five decades of economic development was the outcome of the interplay of a complex of factors. Some of these were primarily internal factors, and others external. For example, the natural and human resource base, demographic trends, and political leadership fall into the internal category. Some of the more commonly recognized external factors are the terms of trade (ratio of export prices to import prices), world trading conditions, exchange rates, private capital flows, and foreign assistance. However, there is another important foreign influence that has had an important bearing on our economic development. That is the ideology of economic development strategy. The purpose of this article is to briefly review some of the salient features of Sri Lanka's five decades of development experience within a framework that takes into account the principal internal and external factors including the development ideology that influenced our development.

The rest of this article is organized as follows. In the next section we shall define the term development. That will be followed by an assessment of the different components of Sri Lanka's development performance, paying special attention to the economic policies and the results obtained by the individual regimes in the post-independence period.

## WHAT IS DEVELOPMENT?

First we should make clear what we mean by development. Here we use the concept "Broad-based Sustainable Development" (BBSD) to assess development. BBSD is something broader than economic growth but the latter is an essential component of BBSD.

Economic growth is estimated by measuring the increase in national output per capita. In other words, if the annual *real* growth of the Gross National Product (GNP) exceeds the population growth rate on a sustained basis over a period of time, we can say that there

has been successful economic growth. There is no strict rule as to by how much the growth of output should exceed the growth of population. All that can be said is that the living standards would improve rapidly if the margin between the two is substantial.

In the case of developing countries such as ours, growth has to be accompanied by structural change of the economy to make development more complete. In simple terms this means the share of manufacturing in GDP must rise sustainedly, and the share of the workforce engaged in agriculture must decline substantially.

Economic growth to be meaningful must be sustainable over a long period of time. Sustainability of growth has several elements. One is internal economic stability. Economic growth becomes unsustainable if there is excessive inflation. External economic stability is also important for sustainability of growth. That is the country should be able to generate a sufficient quantum of foreign exchange to finance the imports that we need for consumption and investment. Exports are the major source of foreign exchange. In addition there is no harm in depending on foreign loans, grants, and foreign direct investment to finance imports. The only rule is that the country must earn enough foreign exchange in the future to service loans that we take now. In short our external payments arrangements also must be sustainable in the long run.

Sound economic development must also be environmentally sustainable. The Bruntland Commission on Environment and Development defined environment sustainability as "meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the needs of future generations".

Economic development to be meaningful to the community at large must be broad based. In other words the fruits of economic development must be shared reasonably equitably

between social classes, ethnic groups, the rural-urban divide, and males and females.

Finally, in recent years the concept of development has been broadened to include democratic freedoms that enhances choice. The argument is that material prosperity alone is not enough to make development fully meaningful. The people must also have the right to participate in the process of governance as individuals and collectively as members of the civil society.

## GROWTH

In 1948 the per capita GNP of Sri Lanka was about 100 US dollars or about Rs 6000 at the dollar-rupee exchange rate that prevails today. This was not a bad income by the standards of those days. Around that time India's per capita income was about \$50. The Thai income was about the same. In the early 1950s the Koreans were embroiled in a war that devastated the country. In 1955 when we had a per capita income of \$ 133 the Koreans had only \$107. For a newly independent underdeveloped Asian country we were somewhat better-off than almost all of our Asian neighbours.

Fifty years later the situation is vastly different. In 1995 our GNP per person was about 700 dollars - a seven-fold increase. India is still behind us with 340 dollars maintaining the same gap as at Independence. But the Thais who had only half as much as us are comfortably ahead of us with \$ 2740. The Koreans who were also behind us as recently as the late 1950s now have the world's 11th largest economy. Their current per capita income is \$9,700, almost 14 times ours. In short we have not done too well in economic growth in comparative terms.

Overall our economy grew at an annual average growth rate of about 3.8% to 4.0% over the last 50 years. This, in itself, is a modest growth rate compared to, say, the growth rates



of East Asian countries that usually exceeded 6% in the past three decades. Sri Lanka's population growth rate that stood at 2.5% in the early 1950s, gradually declined to 1.6% by the late 1980s, and further to 1.3% by the mid 1990s. Given these numbers it should be clear now why we did not do as well as, say, Korea or Thailand in improving our per capita income.

A basic question that must be answered is why we had such a modest growth rate. There are a number of factors that can be cited. A basic division can be made between external factors over which our governments had little or no control, especially in the short run, and internal factors over which governments had very considerable control. Given the importance of agriculture, the weather is an important factor that determines our annual national output. For example, the severe recession in 1956 was mainly due to drought affecting agricultural production.

World market prices for our commodity exports, and the prices we pay for our imports are important external factors that influence our growth. Sharp increases in the price of tea (e.g. 1983-84) and rubber (e.g. 1951-52) have helped to boost growth, and sharp falls (e.g. tea 1958-59 and rubber 1953-54) have had the opposite effect. In the case of import prices the impact is the exact opposite to that of export prices. For example, the sharp increases in world oil prices in 1973-74 and 1979-80 had a severe debilitating impact on our growth.

External trading conditions undoubtedly were partly responsible for some of the setbacks to growth seen under different administrations. In general, under almost every administration one could cite instances of unfavourable movements in export and import prices. However, arguably, instances such as the fall in rubber prices after 1952, and the two oil shocks in the 1970s were of above average severity. These events undoubtedly constitute a part of the explanation for, say, the below par growth under the UNP administration of 1950-55, and especially the record low growth rate of 1970-77 under Mrs. Bandaranaike. However, that is not the complete story. For example, the 1977-82 Jayewardene administration produced the highest growth rate in the last five decades, the second world oil price hike of 1979-80 notwithstanding. Neither the Dudley Senanayake administration of 1965-70 (growth rate 5.4%) nor the Premadasa/Wijetunge administration of 1990-94 (growth rate 5.3%) had unusual luck with world prices for exports and imports but both had above average growth. The explanation lies in economic policy.

## INVESTMENT

The level of investment is generally considered the most fundamental determinant of growth. Table 1 shows the amount that we invested under each post-independence government as a percentage of GDP. It is clear that there are three very distinct phases. The first is the comparatively low investment phase of the UNP administration of the early 1950s when we invested only about eleven rupees out of every one hundred rupees worth of output that we produced. The second phase began with the 1956 Bandaranaike administration and ended with the termination of the second Sirimavo Bandaranaike administration in 1977 when the investment to GDP ratio was maintained at about 15%. In the third phase starting with the 1978 Jayewardene administration, the ratio rose to about 25%. (See Table 1)

In general, the higher investment levels have been associated with higher growth rates. But that alone does not tell the full story. For example, with similar levels of investment the first administration (1960-65) of Mrs. Bandaranaike turned in a much better performance than the second (1970-77). Similarly, J.R. Jayewardene's first administration produced the highest growth rate in the post independence period. But his second administration produced one of the lowest. Both had similar levels of investment. Indeed, given the fact that the investment ratio was almost 24% in the period 1982-90, it was arguably

the worst growth performance we have had. To gain a better insight we need to probe in more detail the specific policies of the individual regimes.

## UNP REGIME 1950-55

There were several reasons why the first UNP administration was particularly tardy on investing more. The economy was still very much in the tea rubber, coconut mode. The country had substantial foreign reserves that were accumulated during the Second World War. The Korean War (1950-51) boosted our foreign earnings from rubber. Thus we freely imported whatever we wanted. There was no serious pressure in the job market as in later years. But when the rubber market crashed in 1952-53, the government had an economic crisis on its hands.

The government's development strategy was largely focused on maintaining the traditional export sector, and developing rice cultivation and land settlement in the dry zone. Thus, the rubber re-planting program was commenced. The Gal Oya scheme was the star project. In the year we got independence we produced 23.1 million bushes of paddy. In 1955 we produced 35.7 million, an increase of 55%. Focusing on rice production was a sound but limited import substitution strategy of development. The government lacked vision to pay much attention to manufacturing and other new activity with growth po-

Table 1

Sri Lanka: GDP Growth, Investment, and Manufacturing Growth - 1950-96

Period	Annual average growth rate of GDP (%)	Investment to GDP ratio(%)	Manufacturing to GDP ratio* (%)	
1950-56	3.4	11.4	11.7	DS & Dudley
1956-59	3.4	14.2	11.5	Senanayake;Kotalawala
1960-65	3.8	14.6	11.1	SWRD Bandaranaike;
1965-70	5.4	15.5	12.1	WDahanayake
1970-77	2.3	14.3	15.1	Sirimavo Bandaranaike
1977-82	6.0	27.8	14.1	Dudley Senanayake
1982-90	2.7	23.7	16.7	Sirimavo Bandaranaike
1990-94	5.3	24.3	15.2	J. R. Jayewardene
1994-96	4.5	27.4	16.2	J. R. Jayewardene
				R.Premadasa;D.B Wijetunge
				Chandrika Kumaratunge

Source: Central Bank of Sri Lanka: Annual Reports & World Bank, World Tables.

Note: In 1950 manufacturing to GDP ratio was 15.5%.

\*Figure for the last year of each period.

Economic growth rates are quadratic rates.

tential. In fact, the ratio of manufacturing output to GDP declined by one-third from 15.5% in 1950 to 11.7% in 1956 (Table 1).

## THE S W R D ERA

Bandaranaike believed in the Nehruvian model of development. That is the state playing a more active role and stressing industry. Thus he nationalized the bus transport services, and the ports. He also created the Textiles, Sugar, Salt, Mineral Sands, Small Industries, Hard Board, and Industrial Estates Corporation. In Sri Lanka this was the real beginning of the import substitution industrial development strategy that was rapidly becoming popular in many newly independent developing countries. These activities boosted the investment ratio to 14.2%. But growth did not follow.

In 1956 the paddy crop failed badly due to adverse weather. The total paddy output in 1959 was hardly more than what it was in 1955 the last year of the Kotelawela administration. (In fact this became a pattern of the subsequent UNP and SLFP administrations, as we shall note below). State investment in industry did not yield much by way of returns. There was no visible change in the structure of national output, the share of manufacturing in GDP remained virtually the same as before. The contribution of manufacturing to GDP was no different in 1959 (11.5%) to what it was in 1955. On top of that the Bandaranaike administration was constantly paralyzed by strikes in the harbour and elsewhere instigated by the LSSP and CP controlled unions. His nationalization program and socialist rhetoric also discouraged private investment. The net result was modest economic growth.

## DUDLEY: 1965-70

The Senanayake administration was lucky in that good weather helped agriculture. But its economic policies were also sensible. The economy was partially liberalized and the private sector encouraged. A dual exchange rate (Foreign Exchange Entitlement Certificate (FEEC) Scheme) was established to benefit non-traditional exports. Sri Lanka got substantial foreign aid from Western sources, the Paris Aid Club for Sri Lanka having been formed during this period. Senanayake settled the dispute that Sri Lanka had with US over compensation for the US oil companies nationalized by Sirimavo Bandaranaike regime in the early 1960s. Foreign aid allowed the government to keep taxes low and at the same time increase investment.

The Food Drive, which Senanayake personally supervised, was a huge success, especially in paddy. Paddy output rose from 45.3 million bushels in 1965 to 77.4 million bush-

els by 1970, an increase of 71%. The UNP administration was also well positioned to reap the benefits of the industrial investments made by the two earlier Bandaranaike regimes. In short, both in agriculture as well as in industry the Senanayake administration utilized the existing productive resources more efficiently and made them yield a higher output. That explains one of highest post-independence growth rates being associated with a modest investment effort.

But the government failed on two vital counts. Inflation increased, and youth unemployment worsened. Despite the apparent success in rice production and economic growth, inflation and unemployment proved to be the electoral Achilles' Heel of the Senanayake administration that suffered an ignominious defeat in the 1970 parliamentary elections.

## SIRIMAVO: 1960-65; 1970-77

Economic growth under the first Sirimavo Bandaranaike administration was average, and under the second the lowest in Sri Lanka's post-independence history. There were many reasons for this, some beyond the control of the Sri Lankan regime. One was bad weather, which in 1974-75 adversely affected crop yields in rice, rubber, and coconut. Another was adverse global market conditions. But much of the economic problems that prevented the two Sirimavo Bandaranaike administrations from turning in a better performance in economic growth were of its own making, principally bad policies.

The 1960 regime alienated the Western countries and thereby lost an important source of capital. The regime followed what were described as "Bandaranaike Policies" which in economics meant more of Nehruvian socialism. It pushed for more state industry with investments in petroleum, steel, tire, hardware, and fertilizer. In and of themselves these investments could have been useful. But few of these state corporations yielded a good return. Moreover, the 1960 regime turned the country inwards, introducing drastic import controls, and other regulations, albeit in response to foreign exchange shortages. The import substitution industrialization strategy that lasted until 1977 got firmly entrenched during this period. But we lost the benefits of the global market and the capital and technology that come with it, resources that the more successful East Asian countries began to exploit to their advantage.

In 1970 Mrs. Bandaranaike more or less continued from where she left off in 1965. She was strongly anti-Western, but the much hoped for assistance from socialist countries did not materialize. The Dudley Senanayake Food Drive was virtually terminated. An at-

tempt to revive it later with a "Cultivation War" was not successful. The highest paddy production achieved during the regime was 80.4 million bushels in 1977, which was only about 3.0 million bushels higher than the 1970 figure. In fact in every other year during the Bandaranaike administration the paddy output was lower than that of 1970.

The nationalization of tea and rubber estates had significant adverse repercussions on production and productivity. More generally the anti-market and anti-private sector policies of the regime crippled the private sector. But the state sector was simply not capable of filling the void thus created. The result was a low rate of economic growth and about 25% unemployment by 1977.

However, there were two bright spots in an otherwise lackluster performance. The manufacturing sector gathered some momentum towards the latter part of the administration, reflected in the rise in the share of manufacturing in GDP from 12.1% in 1969 to 15.1% in 1977. The other was considerable growth in manufactured exports. Indeed measured by the change in the share of manufacturing in GDP, the most significant transformation in the structure of output took place during this period. However, this accolade has to be qualified by noting that the change in the share was partly due to the poor growth in agriculture and services that depressed their respective shares.

## THE JAYEWARDENE/ PREMADASA OPEN ECONOMY

The Jayewardene administration literally overhauled the economy by replacing the inward-oriented import substitution strategy with a more open export-oriented strategy. This, it should be noted was the new development paradigm that was gaining international currency with the support of the multilateral lending agencies such as the World Bank, and the IMF, and backed by the major donor countries.

The development strategy of the new government had three key elements. First, the private sector was given a major role. Second, it selected a few major projects such as the Mahaweli, housing development, and Investment Promotion Zones to give the economy a big push. Third, contrary to popular belief, the state played a major role in the development effort. In fact the central government expenditure as a percentage of Gross National Expenditure rose from 17.7% in 1976 to 24.7% in 1982.

The post 1977 UNP regimes (and the first two years of the PA regime) have investment

# THE OPTIONS FOR THE NEXT MILLENNIUM: *PRINCE CHARLES OR THE PUNCH & JUDY SHOW*

Manik Sandrasagra

'Feels rush in where angels fear to tread' is exactly what the so-called National Joint Committee (NJC) spokesperson Piyasena Dissanayake has done in his interview with Imran Vittachi in the Sunday Times of January 4, 1998.

The NJC and its leader, ex-Supreme Court Judge Raja Wanasundera are said to be anxious to obtain the apology of The Queen of England and/or The Prince of Wales for what their ancestors did to Sri Lanka during their stewardship, prior to the arrival of Prince Charles in Lanka to celebrate 50 years of Independence on February 4, 1998.

If an apology is sought from the British royal family, being the fair and just people we are, we must also insist that all those Sri Lankans whose grandfathers or great-grandfathers performed deeds against the best interests of this country in the way the NJC accuses the British, also apologise prior to any celebrations.

First and foremost it is most important that we identify all those people who betrayed the last King of Lanka. After all this was the beginning of the end.

In respect of the Waste Lands Ordinance of 1897 could we also have a list of all Sri Lankan families who became plantation owners as a result of this law?

As for those who abandoned the Mahasammata laws that the indigenous people of Lanka lived by in order to serve under Roman-Dutch and English Law, surely it is they who should apologise first.

For instance, who built the road to Kandy for the British to travel on and plunder our inland resources?

Who betrayed Buddhist principles and village values by the slaughter of cattle and the capture of elephants once considered Boddhisatvas?

It is time we as a nation stop being self-righteous hypocrites and turn to the future

and study our options. It is a well known fact that if you point a finger at your neighbour there will always be three more pointing back at you.

To lead a nation anywhere one requires trained leadership. This is why traditional kingship was such an important institution. With the transition of cultures from nomadic to that of settled agriculture, first there came theocracy and then monarchy and with these institutions - a concentration of power. This power was dispensed in a time tested, ethical and just system. Whatever examples we may have of the abuses of these institutions, there were traditional rules, regulations and customs. The King could not do as he pleased. He was ruled by what we in Lanka call the Dasa Raja Dharma - which contained the ideals of Kingship. Ananda Coomaraswamy's 'Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power in the Indian theory of Government' will enlighten anybody interested in the concept of a traditional king.

In today's world, kingship has lost the concentration of power it once had, and, instead it has been passed on to what is called democracy. In Sri Lanka for example we have produced a political station that carries more power than any king. Consider the words of the first executive president of Sri Lanka, the late J.R. Jayewardene, "I have the power to do anything, except change a man into a woman and a woman into a man".

Thus in Sri Lanka today, we have a position of power which is equivalent to kingship and we have both an occupier and an aspirant to that office.

Given such a scenario it is indeed timely that on the 50th independence celebrations of this country that we should have as the chief guest of this nation, another aspirant to kingship - Charles, the Prince of Wales.

We, the public have been given a golden opportunity. As we countdown to the coming millenium, intelligence demands that we send out an invitation to think. We seek the assistance of the communications indus-

try to join us in an exercise to ascertain the intelligence of our mass-mediated public, based on enlightened self-interest, and the potential for the public to participate in identifying national goals.

We wish to create a rapid response capable polling process to gain greater public participation on issues that effect all our lives. I hope our mass-mediated public responds with their pens and gives us their opinions. Each response will be treated as a vote. Let us make this debate a part of our Independence celebrations.

With the signing of the Kandyan Convention in 1815 the people of Lanka entrusted their heritage, religion and wealth to the King of England who became the King of Lanka.

We have been told that the institution of kingship was introduced to Lanka by the Maurayan Emperor Asoka, prior to which every one of our 24,000 villages was ruled by a Gamini (the village leader). The people of Sri Lanka are therefore quite familiar with what constitutes kingship, and, what's more the candidate for the role was ideally a Kshatriya of the warrior caste. Since this caste was not represented in the local caste system, the king was often from the Indian sub-continent. Foreign Kings ruling Lanka was quite common.

Traditional societies saw the whole world as a stage and people as mere players, and the role of the king was very well defined. There never was a problem about its function.

In theocracy the king was never seen. When the king had to be represented a mortal was dressed up for the role. Originally it was the village idiot who was dressed up in over 80 yards of cloth and paraded. This is evident if we study the structure of medieval carnivals in Europe. If however the actor became too engrossed with the role the result was hubris.

When the King of England became the King of Lanka, the people only saw his standard.

There was no photography at that time. The standard represented the king.

The union jack is a traditional symbol of kingship and the colours represent traditional concepts, and therefore no villager would have objected to such a king. What happened however, was that in England, the King had lost his power to a set of 'commoners' constituting every shade of opinion in an exercise called democracy.

What belonged to the King had become the property of the 'commons'. These commoners in England were a club – a new class seeking respectability; made up of social aspirants. What they had inherited was the Empire. They had in turn spread their ideology, which was really their new religion, throughout the realm. Lanka's wealth was in their hands. What once belonged to Lanka, now belonged to them. A noisy belligerent rabble had replaced the king.

Since imitation is the best form of flattery, in Lanka, all those who supported the new class were rewarded.

Lanka now saw the rise of the new political elite who became the peoples' representatives by creating conditions locally to take over power from the commoners in England. All over the world this 'union of commoners' was replacing kings. Kings had strayed away from their traditional roles, and ever since the medieval period, the number of despots had multiplied, resulting in anti-hierarchy.

Locals well trained in imitating English manners and practices replaced the English with independence in 1948. All of them represented 'Galle Road' culture, practising 'Galle Road' Buddhism.

The Galle Road had begun to rule Lanka.

Lanka's history got re-told by Galle Road evangelists. The stories about our last king Sri Wickrama Rajasingha and Maduma Bandara was also part of a plot, which was beneficial to the British, as well as their local agents. Our King became a villain and the white colonial a god.

With this came the era of the coastal thug: arrack renters, land grabbers, contractors, spies and missionaries.

All this resulted in culture shock; from which we are still recovering. With the breakdown of the lifestyles and the slaughter of its youth, village Lanka became desperate and it was to cash in on this desperation that urban politicians invaded the interiors.

W.Dahanayake of Galle, who was a teacher in Bibile, became the peoples' representative from Bibile in the State Council. N.M.Perera of Thotalanga in Colombo became the member for Ruwanwella. The Englishman Freeman represented Anuradhapura. Ivon Dassanayake from Hendala became the member for Wariyapola. H.Sri Nissanka, a lawyer from Matara represented Kurunegala. Bennet Soysa of Panadura became the first citizen of Kandy.

This is what democratic independence did to the Kandyan Kingdom.

Galle Road politics had come into every village in Lanka. In the beginning, only taxpayers were given the right to vote. They first voted for a colour, and, then a symbol, and when everyone had been taught the game the personality of the politician was sold. Soon the whole country got divided along party lines. In fact party politics was used to destroy our social fabric which was based on 'common consensus' or Mahasammata.

Today we have an armed conflict between political parties for a share of the loot. The LTTE is a political party, so is the SLFP, the UNP and the PA. What is termed a war today is their squabble over how power is shared.

Who then do we believe? Since independence this country has been fed falsehoods. It is time the last King of Kandy was exhumed and tried. Was he a villain or was he a King?

Let us now see what independent Lanka did.

The lion flag that united us was re-designed to illustrate that which divided us. The mighty ideals of Devo vassatu kalena, where the virtue of the leader was a mandatory condition for peace, prosperity and fertility, was replaced by a modern national anthem. All the symbols were redesigned and a parody was born out of a rich tradition of regal ritual. The fool indeed was King in such a democracy, often dressed up for the role, but the pomp and pageantry did not work..

Ever since the Galle Road won its independence, village Lanka has continued to lose the freedom it once had.

A Galle Road Government sells Eppawala to a foreign consortium. Have the people in the area any say? A nouveau riche elite riding on politics has systematically disenfranchised the rest of us.

We think we have a right to ask the Prince of Wales to undo the damage done to us as a result of his ancestors being robbed of their custodianship.

Our mountains are dying. Our forests are becoming thinner and patchier every day. Most of our top soil has already left this land. Now we witness the bloody rush of the sub-soils as they choke our rivers at every rain. The countryside is bathed in poisons in the name of agriculture and food production. The quality of our surface water once pure enough to drink from any well is becoming an increasingly hazardous endeavour. The creatures that once shared this land with us are barricaded into the remnant receding patches of forests. Our social fabric is torn apart; irrigation systems destroyed; loss of agro bio-diversity both in a genetic sense and a cultural sense; puranagamas or traditional villages undervalued...what can we say other than that from white sahib to brown sahib, what a decline!

The challenge then for the next century is where do we go from here? The shape of things to come is quite apparent. Anarchy together with a new category - environmental refugees, will add to the burden of government.

Government becomes impossible when the countryside is armed. The competition for resources will further divide the people. Competition and a gangster mentality go hand in hand. Local politics today is like the Punch and Judy show. Slapstick with no rules, all innovation, and the public has nothing to measure performance. It is naturally 'Always Breakdown.'

On the other hand let us consider the Prince of Wales. He comes with pomp, pageant and ritual worthy of a king. A king has a code of behaviour to measure performance. While a king is ruled by fixed rules the Punch and Judy show only wants more power.

Let us continue with our dream for a moment and consider the following.

What If Charles were King of Lanka? Charles has created a niche for himself as an environment conscious person with a deep respect and awe of nature. He likes traditional architecture and traditional medicine. He talks to trees. He likes solitude. King Charles of Lanka and a return to kingship in Lanka will attract tourists from all over the world. The best of British investment capital will follow. This will be ethical investment since the Prince of Wales' views are well known. He will naturally seek the guidance of local experts to provide a healthy, productive, and sustainable environment through to the next century.

In contrast, current trends of investment under the Punch and Judy system is one where there is a rapacious grab of the resources by the local managers, and, the en-

# THE TAMIL NATIONAL QUESTION REVISITED: THE PACKAGE AND GLOBALISATION

Dayan Jayatilaka

We are on the eve of a Great Retrogression.

There are two packages, not one. The political package and the economic. The devolution - actually, federalisation - package is sought to be implemented in tandem with the neo-liberal/globalisation package. The two must be taken together and understood in their mutual interconnection and cumulative consequence.

The neo-liberalisation package entails, in Prof. G.L. Pieris's most recent budgetary proposals, the entry of foreigners into wholesale and retail trade, which lifts a ban imposed on non-Lankans in the latter sphere by D.S. Senanayake in 1942 (when he was Vice Chairman of the Council of Ministers). The Pieris rollback would drive the Lankan and especially the Sinhala trading petty bourgeoisie to the wall. (Anyone familiar with the history of Germany and Italy in the interwar years will understand that such a process is fraught with the gravest dangers for the democratic system). Thus, from the commanding heights of the economy - the ownership of the tea estates - to the phosphate deposits at Eppawala, from Colombo Port and the (erstwhile?) national carrier Air Lanka to the store at the streetcorner, the PA's neo-liberalisation package means the neo-colonisation of the economy. Or its re-colonisation: the ultimate 'irony', as Sri Lanka commemorates its Golden Jubilee of Independence. The process of de-facto economic re-colonisation takes place at the hands of the Peoples' Alliance, which consists of the 'pro-Sinhala Buddhist' 'patriotic', 'non-aligned' SLFP, and the LSSP and CPSL, the parties which pride themselves on their role in the independence struggle. Irony is heaped upon irony.

The costs and consequences for the majority of people of all classes, of neo-liberalism (the latest policy of capitalism), and globalisation (the latest stage of imperialism), have been amply

documented. Add to those costs, the colossal economic costs of the proposed devolution package as enumerated by Prof. Buddhadasa Hewavitharana, the seniormost economist in Lankan academia and one whose political and ideological lineage have nothing to do with the UNP and much to do with the PA.

Add on finally, a third layer of burdens - or, if you will, the third package; the military package, the war package. The costs of war. Columnist Taraki, writing in the Sunday Times a few months ago, pointed out that the PA's military budget for this year exceeds that of the UNP's cumulative military budget over the last seven years of its rule! Forty five billion rupees and counting. Both the PA and the UNP leadership err in attributing this to Gen. Ratwatte's departure from the UNP's "East first, North later - or maybe never" approach of 'containment'.

The exponential escalation in military costs result not from Gen. Ratwatte's welcome departure from this attitude, but from another departure made by him - this time an unwise and unwelcome one, albeit unpublicised and unremarked upon. This is the sharp reversal of the military line of Gen. Denzil Kobbekaduwa who summed it up best when he said: "I'm not interested in taking real estate". Gen. Kobbekaduwa's line was of taking on and taking out the Tigers, in breaking the back of the LTTE military machine. The Chandrika-Anuruddha line has been a natural reflection of their class consciousness, a feudal line which privileges the taking of real estate, of miles of roadway, of headcounts of Tamil citizens under one's suzerainty.

It is this strategic shift, a grievously erroneous one, and not the full-blooded prosecution of the war, that has led to the quantum jump in the military budget.

Let us now re-pack the three packages, one upon the other - the costs of neo-liberalisation, the costs of the Regional

Councils and the costs of war. What will the cumulative burden do, to the living standards and the life chances of our people?

It is within this triadic matrix that the draft constitution must be examined and responded to.

## CENTRIFUGAL CONSTITUTION

While it may be wise that the constitution remain agnostically silent on the character of the State, (as does the South African constitution) its redefinition as a union of regions must be strenuously opposed. Devolution, even enhanced devolution, to regions, is unobjectionable. But standing for regional autonomy in no way necessitates a radical deconstruction of the unitary state and its restructuring as a 'union of regions'. In 1980/81 the UNP implemented a system of district councils, involving district level devolution. This did not mean that Sri Lanka became a union of districts! Under the 13th amendment, we had a system of provincial autonomy, but this did not mean that Sri Lanka became a union of provinces. The Bandaranaike - Chelvanayakam pact was for Regional Councils, but did not entail the conversion of the country into a 'union of regions'! There is no justification for such a drastic qualitative change.

The complete abolition of the concurrent list is yet another danger since there are certain subjects and functions which cannot be wholly devolved to the regions. Neither quasi federal India nor Federal Germany have abolished concurrent lists. Certainly, the concurrent list under the 13th amendment is too long and cumbersome. It should be rendered much more compact and slender; but it must remain.

If the State is redefined as a union of regions, any chance of building an overarching Sri Lankan identity and consciousness in the 21st Century will be doomed. Even the Sinhalese, the majority

***"Locations such as the Straits of Malacca and of Ceylon had significant logistical roles for very long periods of world system development".***

Barry K. Gills & Andre Gunder Frank  
The Cumulation of Accumulation

"The World System : Five Hundred Years or Five Thousand?"

Edited by Andre Gunder Frank and Barry K. Gills.

(Routledge: 1996).

***"In this manner the sovereignty of the state begins to be 'feudalised' or parcellised. At the most acute stage the state may collapse altogether, leading to a period of anarchic local rivalries".***

Barry K. Gills  
Hegemonic Transition in the World System (Ibid).

community, will split up along regional lines. A sense of regional identity, of regional consciousness, will grow, eroding larger identities such as nationhood. There will be no loyalty to the Sri Lankan state; instead, loyalty will be to 'our region'. The Sinhalese are notoriously prone to division and disunity - and regionalism, given constitutional encouragement and sanctity, will only add to such natural fissiparousness. The Sinhala nation shall never be the same again; Sinhalese shall never be *one* again.

What will the 'union of regions' do for Sinhala - Tamil relations? The American Civil War, the bloodiest war in American history - causing 650,000 casualties - took place because the American South sought to secede from the union; their argument was that they were exercising their rights as a constituent state of that union. Until the 1960's, segregation was maintained in the U.S. South under the guise of 'states' rights'. Such are the experiences of 'unions' of 'states' or 'regions'.

More recently, the world witnessed the collapse of two well-known federal

systems: the U.S.S.R and Yugoslavia. The collapse of Yugoslavia's federal system culminated in the horrendous bloodshed of the war in Bosnia, with its concentration camps.

The government's draft constitution aims to set up a system that is federal in all but name. In the post Cold War era of unipolarity, globalisation and neo-liberalism, such a system could be a constitutional catalyst for separation, encouraging and enabling breakaways and wars.

### **GAMINI DISSANAIKE? MANGALA MOONESINGHE?**

The Mangala Moonesinghe Recommendations did go beyond the 13th Amendment but it involved a very clear trade-off between powers and size of unit. The devolved powers were enhanced, right upto those enjoyed by an Indian state, but a surgically swift unilateral de-merger, not subject to a referendum and unqualified by redemarcation, was the symbiotic second part of the recommendation. The argument that the Opposition must now accept the package and cannot justifiably base itself on the 13th Amendment because it has already signed off on a report that goes beyond it, is thus a specious one.

It is much the same concerning the Gamini Dissanaike election manifesto. Even the most cursory glance at the entirety of the document reveals two outstanding features: a heavy emphasis on unemployment-soaking and growth-guaranteeing imaginative development projects which were to be initiated by the State. Secondly, a neo-Dudleyist welfarism. The generous devolution component is a part of this developmentalist-welfarist totality and cannot be abstracted from it. In the contemporary context of the PA's rollback of the State's role in the economy, and the current UNP leadership's refusal to build it back and to make any people-friendly policy pledges, the Dissanaike devolution policy alone becomes meaningless; even exceedingly damaging. Whosoever argues the case for a commitment to the Dissanaike devolution thinking, without an equally explicit commitment to his state-initiated/catalysed/propelled developmental and welfarist thinking, is being diabolically dishonest.

In a curious working out of the dialectic, the PA's package is perfectly consonant  
Dijiz PA's Package is Perfectly consonant  
noolaham.org | aavanaham.org

with the SLFP's own trajectory and track record. Every single time a SLFP led coalition was in office, a qualitative step towards separation was taken! 'Sinhala only' under SWRD Bandaranaike in 1956; the Army being sent North to crack-down on peaceful satyagrahis under Sirima Bandaranaike in 1961; the standardisation of '70-'72 and the Constitution of 1972 which created the Tigers, led to the formation of the TULF, the Vadukkodai Resolution of '76 and the 'mandate for Eelam' in 1977. What the PA - the direct successor of the MEP of '56, the coalition of '60-64 and the United Front of '70 - is doing, is to complete the catastrophic process and constitutionalise the penultimate step towards Eelam. The North-East Regional Council envisaged in the Draft Constitution results in a Quebec scenario; it is a complete material preparation for and likely stepping stone to separation.

### **ABSURDIST ASYMMETRY**

Is the solution then, one of asymmetrical devolution? There are three problems with this: in the first place, it is a policy of 'special privileges and preferential options for the North-East, deviating sharply from the principle of complete equality and a level playing field for all ethnic communities.

In the second place, the problem is that there already is asymmetry. The demographics of South Asia are massively asymmetrical! Asymmetrical devolution will only enhance this problem.

In the third place, asymmetrical devolution will mean 'one country - two systems', which is fine if there is a population that shares one language and culture; that belongs pretty much to one ethnic community. The China - Hong Kong solution is an example. However, if the asymmetrical devolution is superimposed upon and reflects ethnic differences, then such differences will only be reinforced and become an unbridgeable chasm. In Sri Lanka, asymmetrical devolution will mean one structure for the Sinhala majority provinces and another structure - a special arrangement - for the North or the North and East. This will reinforce polarisation along ethnoregional lines. It will be a constitutional Berlin Wall. Antonio Gramsci's enormous theoretical discernment in critiquing 'common sense' becomes clear when one regards the commonsensical argumentation in favour of asymmetrical devolution, namely that

the specificity of Tamil grievances necessitates special institutional arrangements. Sounds reasonable enough: "the specific i.e. ethno-national character of the Tamil question warrants distinctive structural arrangements for its accommodation and management". The Sinhala Chauvinists meet this argument with the assertion that there is no Tamil ethnic problem - hence no special arrangements are necessary! This kind of 'flat earthism' only helps the 'Tamil Zionist' lobby. But the ridiculousness of this counter assertion should not obscure the sleight-of-hand in the asymmetrical devolution argument.

The reality of the matter is this: specificity lies in representation, in 'demand articulation', not in institutional structures. Let us illustrate more concretely: no politician in Sri Lanka has represented his people's specific needs more successfully and consistently as has Mr. Thondaman. Indeed he is a model for politicians anywhere in the democratic world. Were there any special structures created for him? On the contrary he fought for most of his political life on a basis of under representation i.e. with one hand tied behind his back! Mr. Thondaman has, more recently, had exactly the same kind of parliamentary chances and arrangements that other parties have had. His people have benefited because he has used those chances to vigorously represent their grievances, needs and aspirations. Given the common factor of discrimination, the Tamils of the hill country have come a longer way than those of the North and East. Thondaman is far more of a success story, in tangible, ascertainable terms, than any other Tamil leader, apart from Mr. Prabhakaran who operates according to different criteria and in a different dimension. And, I repeat, Mr. Thondaman occupies a political space that is no differently structured from that enjoyed by any other politician. Systemically there have been no special arrangements made for him. He competes on a level playing field.

The specificity of a peoples' existential situation is manifested in the demands, political alliances, choices, manoeuvres, strategies etc. of their leadership(s). In other words, the ethno-national needs and aspirations of the Tamils of the North & East do not necessitate a devolutionary arrangement different from (greater than/superior to) that which prevails elsewhere in the island; it requires no conferment of a constitutional special status on the North

& East. All it really requires is the re-incorporation of those areas into the democratic system; the restoration and extension of democracy. The special sense of Tamil identity will be manifested by the political behaviour of the elected representatives of the Tamil people. If these representatives do not adequately articulate these identity-based needs in the devolved units (provincial /regional

*'... The idea of progressive centralisation as the economy develops from a lower to a higher stage is at the heart of Marx and Engels' analysis of the national question. This premise, as Ian Cummings asserts [Marx, Engels and National Movements - London: Croom & Helm 1980] "runs like a red thread through Marx's writings".'*

Ephraim Nimni  
Marxism and Nationalism  
Theoretical Origins of a Political  
Crisis.

councils) and in Parliament, they will be replaced by the Tamil voters, by those who do so better - and that is pretty much all there is to it. This is not to argue that there is no need for a second or third tier of governance. There is such a need, but for an autonomy that is available in equal measure to all provinces.

### NEGOTIATIONS: BEEN THERE, DONE THAT

Should there then, be negotiations with the LTTE? Is that the solution, or part of the solution? The answer is NO. And why not? Because the Lankan conflict is not the result of a failure to negotiate. It is not the result of an absence of negotiations. Rather it is the story of the failure of negotiation. Its the story of failed negotiations. Furthermore, it is not the failure of any one type of negotiations to the exclusion of others, because we have had all possible types of negotiations with the Tigers. We have negotiated with the LTTE from 1983 to 1993 for 10 years, for an entire decade! The Sri Lankan State had

multilateral negotiations involving the LTTE at Thimpu in 1985. The LTTE used this to landmine the approaches to Sri Lankan Army camps. It had proximity talks with the LTTE at the November '86 SAARC Summit in Bangalore. It had bilateral negotiations with the LTTE under the widely divergent Premadasa and Chandrika Administrations. In other words we had bilateral talks twice, under UNP and PA governments.

What about the (current UNP leadership's) line of talks with a third party mediator? What on earth was India but a mediator? It was first a facilitator, then a mediator, finally a guarantor. We've already been there, done that. Should we then try Western mediation? Some Western countries are former colonial masters who created the problem. How can they solve it? Furthermore, almost all Western powers have sizeable Tamil refugee populations and even considerable numbers of Tamil citizens, from India, not just Sri Lanka, some very well placed. So Western mediation will always be relatively pro-Tamil and anti-Sinhala, never even handed. We cannot and should not expect them to be.

Finally, what have been the results of negotiations? Two dead leaders - President Premadasa and Shri Rajiv Gandhi. Possibly also the end of the secular state in India and a nuclear arms race in the Subcontinent, if the BJP wins. Another result has been renewed war in Sri Lanka. In science, we draw certain conclusions if an experiment repeatedly fails. Negotiations have repeatedly failed, with disastrous results. Negotiations were not the answer to Adolf Hitler. Then why should it be the answer to South Asia's Hitler, Velupillai Prabhakaran? It is argued that Hitler was from another country while Prabhakaran is a citizen of Sri Lanka. What then of the JVP and Wijeweera? They were not foreigners, but negotiations were obviously not the answer!

### DEVOLUTION'S STRATEGIC DIMENSION

When peace packages fail and the shells start to explode, the military pays the price for the illusions of the politicians and the peaceniks. This has happened repeatedly been the lot of the Sri Lankan military, and even of the Indian Armed Forces - the IPKF. This is why any peace/devolution package must be gone through with a fine comb, for its defence and security implications.

The constitutional and economic aspects of the proposed devolution package have been discussed and debated, but **what of its military - strategic significance?** Has the proposed re-demarcation, for instance, been reviewed from a **geostrategic** perspectives? Is Trinco more or less defensible if the package or asymmetrical devolution goes through? And what of the Welioya military district? What of the location and relocation of Sri Lankan military camps, the deployment of forces, the logistics of supply, the potential for the build up of subversive capacity - how will all of these be affected by the package or asymmetrical devolution?

This is not to say that the military must hold a veto over a political process, but to argue that as in any developed democracy, a negotiating process which has strategic implications must have the officer corps and certainly the military high command making specialist inputs into the policy consensus.

### THE ALTERNATIVE

What then is the solution? Any solution must have as its base and foundation, the 13th Amendment. It can be an improvement upon it, an enhancement of it; but it must be on a continuum with the 13th Amendment. The 13th amendment was only partially successful **not because of the insufficiency of devolution** but because of (a) the JVP insurrection (b) SLFP obduracy and extremism (c) the LTTE's military campaign (d) the EPRLF's irresponsibility and adventurism. Currently, factors (a), (b), and (d) are neutralised or not in operation. (c) must be militarily defeated. **Then, the full potentialities of the 13th amendment can be realised.** The Tamil parties assert that many improvements to the 13th amendment were pledged, but unimplemented. Let us immediately implement all of them! If the Tamil parties were prepared to accept from the Indian State, the 13th Amendment, which did not entail - and fell far short of - a union of regions, how can they not accept an improved version from the Sri Lankan polity?

The solution then, must be the '13th Amendment Plus'. No less; no more.

What of the unit? Either there must be a referendum in the whole of the Eastern province, or a redemarcation must be effected in which the ethnic Tamil majority (not Tamil speaking) AGA divisions which are contiguous with each other and with

the Northern Province, are made part of the Northern Province. There should be no permanent merger of the Northern and Eastern Provinces as they are currently constituted. Nor can a referendum justifiably be held in the Trincomalee and Batticaloa districts together, with the Ampara district being polled separately.

As for the proposed or rather, threatened, 'non-binding Referendum', the Opposition can and should clearly advocate a line of 'No to the Union of Regions - Yes to the 13th Amendment Plus'. While totally and genuinely eschewing any form and manifestation of Sinhala chauvinism, and avoiding any capitulation to or appeasement of Tamil chauvinism, it can chart out a moderate, Middle Path policy on this subject. The Opposition can bring to the forefront the issues of State interest, National Interest and the impact on peoples' living standards. The appeal must be centrist one of State patriotism, modern pluralistic nationalism and the public interest. This will enable the democratic Opposition to cut across party loyalties, occupy the middle ground and win over a majority of the people, thus imposing a strategic defeat on the package.

### SUSTAINABLE DEVOLUTION

The same principles apply as in the case of sustainable development: what is crucial and should be aimed at is not overrapid growth with hyperinflation and inherent instability, but a 'steady-state' economy, with balanced and harmonious development and minimum ecological destruction. So also with devolution. The main obstacle to the fulfilment of Tamil rights has been the phenomenon of the Sinhala backlash which has obstructed or overturned reforms. The Tamil leaders have learned the wrong lessons from this. They want a Sinhala government that will stick to a radical devolutionary package worked out with them, in the same manner that the IMF-IBRD insists that governments stick to structural adjustment, come what may!

Sinhala backlashes are either **preventive/abortionist** (anti B-C Pact), **real time** (anti Accord riots) or, deadliest of all, **delayed-action** ('55-'56: Sinhala Only). They are fuelled by fears of damage to majority interest and/or special privileges for the minority. Whether the fears are justifiable, understandable, or not - and in what part - is functionally irrelevant. The package and its variant of asymmetrical devolution whose 'special status' arrangement

smacks of 'special privilege', is a classic catalyst for a slow burn backlash, with massive deposits of fissile material in the form of socio-economic deprivation. The combination of accelerated, visible, regional unevenness and the social downside of the privatisation programme can generate the most powerful backlash ever: perhaps even bringing a Sinhala fundamentalist or fascist movement (JVP, JVP type and/or military putschism) to power. Less apocalyptically, a Sinhala BJP/RSS may be elected to office. Tamil hardliners - and not just the Tigers - will not mind this, because it can be used as justification for UDI or at least

*"The state is historically the creator of nationality. Race and linguistic community have provided the [basic] material, but this would never have been formed into a nation without the state".*

E. Bernstein - 'Der Staat und die Staatbitwendigkeit' in Die Neue Zeit Vol 35.

**Cyprusization.** But what of the horrors of partition for the Tamils outside the North? And what of the horrors of Sinhala fundamentalism for those millions of Sinhalese (specially the women) who will have to live beneath its jackboot?

How is this to be prevented? The Tamil leaders must learn the same lessons in 'applied Gramscianism' that the Italian Communist Party did from the 1973 Chilean coup and the ouster of Allendé. Or, if you prefer, they must adopt the strategy of the Social Democrats - protracted, evolutionary, gradualist reforms; so 'capillary' or 'molecular' that no backlash is created. It is far better to achieve durable change by advancing more slowly over a broad front, with the genuine legitimacy and organic character that can derive only from authentically received majority consent, than to continue to engage in manipulationism, intrigue and political putschism. Broad consent must be authentically achieved through genuine moderation, modulation and fine tuning of demands to the point that they represent



(and are felt to represent) a balance of interests between the ethnic communities. Consent cannot be artificially manufactured, conjured up or hijacked.

That is the path of durable, viable, sustainable devolution; of devolution that will strike deep roots. What recommends this strategy most strongly is the fundamental fact of demography: we Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims have to live together on a land that is small and is an island. Demography determines destiny. The case for moderation rests upon demographic determinism. **The war is not unwinnable but the ethnic conflict is**, because the Sinhalese are a majority on the island but a minority outside of it, while it is the reverse in the case of the Tamils.

*The ethnic contradiction has to be handled and the managed. The war has to be fought and won.*

### BIG PICTURE, SMALL ISLAND

Received wisdom is almost always contrafactual, even its most intellectual form. Daniel Moynihan is wrong when he traces the paternity of the Right of Nations to Self-Determination, to Woodrow Wilson. Several years before Wilson, it was the subject - and title - of well known essays by Lenin. Indeed as far back as 1898, the international Marxist movement, then known as the Second International (or international Social Democracy) had featured it in its congress resolutions.

For Lenin, who elevated self determination to the status of a doctrine, the recommended exercise of that right was hedged in by two important qualifiers: how it dovetails with the interests of the general democratic struggle and the interests of the working masses in the class struggle. In doing so, he was applying the methodology of Marx and Engels, whose stands for or against any particular national struggle was based on its relationship to the overall balance of the forces in Europe in the context of the democratic Revolution, and to Tzarist Russia in particular (which was identified as 'the bulwark of reaction' in Europe). What would the application of the Marxist method yield in the present situation? Today, we live in a new era in human history - the post Soviet era - in which the USSR and a socialist bloc no longer exist as a counterweight, however flawed, to imperialism. And the Empire is striking back, trying to make up for the decades in which it was thwarted. (See: Post Socialist

Capitalism - Dayan Jayatilleka and Tisarane Gunasekara Lanka Guardian Jan 01st 1998). Today the Empire pushes for the dismantling of precisely those Third World state machines which it built up during the Cold War. **That is what distinguishes globalisation from earlier stage of imperialism's global expansion: the policy towards the state.** Unlike the old colonialism, the metropolitan power neither wields state power nor occupies the economic assets. The territory doesn't come with it! While the welfare state is withered away, the state's repressive apparatus remains, albeit downsized to handle internal resistance and rebellion, not national sovereignty. As for the rest, it is the state as virtual reality. In the new stage of imperialism, the Third World nation-state exists only on T.V.

To reiterate: today state capitalism is abandoned and the State dismantled so as to remove the fetters to untrammelled global accumulation, the unilateral re-drawing of the global economic map and the effective economic re-colonisation of the world. This is precisely what Fidel warned of at the 1973 Algiers NAM Summit, when he debated with Colonel Gaddafi in the OPEC oil price hike context. If the Soviet Union did not exist, he warned in disputation of the 'equidistance between the two superpowers' thesis, the empire would have military intervened in the Middle east during the OPEC oil crisis, and redivided the world. In 1991, it did pretty much that, in the Gulf. **The globalisation project is as much political as it is economic: with the downsizing of the state in the rest of the world, the relative strength of the Imperial State and the asymmetry of global power are qualitatively enhanced. Ein Reich?**

*"The multitude of workers and peasants ... cannot allow the dismemberment of the nation because the unity of the state is the form of the apparatus of production and exchange built by ... labour"*

Antonio Gramsci  
L'Unita Nazionale in L'Ordine  
Nuovo  
4th Oct 1919.

That is why ideologies, formations and personalities who resist this project are objectively more progressive than those who subjectively may be more 'politically correct'. That is why, according to Stalin in 1925, the Emir of Afghanistan was more progressive than the British Labour Party. And that is why today, Pope John Paul II and Mahathir Mohamed are objectively more progressive than Tony Blair and Bill and Hillary Clinton.

### SELF CRITICISM

My own formulations on the Tamil National Question in the pages of this journal 1 ½ to 2 decades ago, (while in my early '20's) which achieved a long lasting notoriety, were an ideological intervention in a particular global and local conjuncture - and were part of a specific project. I believe them essentially correct in their place and time. Those theses were Leninist in their letter and spirit, but suffered also from the blindspots of Leninism, the same blindspots that led Stalin to support the setting up of the state of Israel in 1948!

The sole dimension of my theses was **political** and the stress was on discontinuous change ("new tasks, new forces" - in this case the emergence of a Tamil guerrilla struggle with a left tendency within it). The factors that guarantee **continuity** were all ignored: history, geography, culture. It is not that the reactionary side of Tamil nationalism was unknown but its combating was to be the exclusive preserve of the **Tamil Left**, who could be aided in the task only by having their position strengthened. The best way of strengthening the Tamil Left was thought to be the existence of an internationalist Sinhala Left, whose commitment to Tamil self determination and national liberation was unambiguous and visible enough to be pointed to by the Tamil Left. The latter had to be given a strategic option in the contestation with their non-Left/non-Marxist Tamil rivals. That option was to be one of alliance with an 'actually existing' Sinhala internationalist left who could be all the more valuable because they were willing to take the armed road. That combination would tilt the strategic balance. In its (dialectical) turn, such an alliance which harnessed the Tamil guerrilla struggle would have a strategic edge vis-à-vis the State, a State which was seen as allying with the Reagan Doctrine in the post-Vietnam high tide of the 'world revolutionary process'.

*Contd on page 30*

# JOURNEY TO THE HIGH CONFLICT ZONE

K M de Silva

Executive Director, International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Kandy/Colombo, Sri Lanka, and formerly Professor of Sri Lankan History, University of Peradeniya.

## I AROUND AT THE CREATION

Those of us who were schoolboys in 1948, and could remember the celebrations in Colombo and other parts of the country, of the lowering of the Union Jack and the raising in its place of the lion flag, are bound to have mixed feelings about the 50 years through which we lived. True, fifty years is a very brief time span in a country with a recorded history as long as ours, but the 50 years from 1948 to 1998 acquire such importance as it deserves from the simple fact that it marked the formal end of colonial rule in the island, three centuries in the coastal areas, and one hundred and thirty two years over the whole island. Considering all that has happened during this period of fifty years, the triumphs and tragedies, the achievements and failures one is struck by the wisdom of Burckhardt's comment that: "Great historical transformations are always bought dearly, often after one has already thought that one got them at a bargain price".

This is a discursive essay rather than a conventional political or historical analysis in which I deal with some key events, some crucial trends, some achievements, some failures, and above all with some key individuals, in these fifty years. It does not pretend to be comprehensive. I have also deliberately chosen to fit them into a regional context, principally South Asian.

I was a school boy at Kingswood College, Kandy when Sri Lanka (or Ceylon as it was then called) gained her independence. On the day of the formal national celebrations a special assembly of the boys in the school was held, at which the Principal assigned the task of

making the main speech to a respected senior teacher. The part of his speech that remained stuck in my mind was his use of an extract from Francis Bacon on that occasion. "Upon the breaking and shivering of a great State and Empire," Bacon had written, "you may be sure to have wars; when they fail, all goes to ruin, and they become a prey." The speaker, a great admirer of D S Senanayake, was not thinking of Sri Lanka's independence in those terms but he was making a point that warranted close attention: that in looking at the island's immediate past and its immediate future it was essential to think of the external environment. The enormous pleasure at India's successful transition to independence had been mixed with a sense of foreboding, of things falling apart. The same newspapers that reported Nehru's now famous "...tryst with destiny..." speech on the eve of India's independence also carried gruesome details of the appalling carnage that marked the transition to the independence of India and Pakistan. Looking back at this school teacher's speech I think the reference to Bacon's pessimistic words on "...the breaking and shivering of a great State and Empire ..." stemmed as much from the mass killings that preceded and followed the partition of the raj, as it did from a more immediate event - the assassination of Gandhi on 30 January 1948. On that occasion Nehru made a touching tribute to his mentor, broadcast on All India Radio. "The light has gone out of our lives," he said, "Our beloved leader, Babu (father), as we called him, the father of the nation, is no more." Thus Sri Lanka celebrated her independence against the background of this great tragedy.

A little over six months earlier Burma's Prime Minister-to-be, Aung San and most of the senior members of his ministry,

had been gunned down by assassins acting along with or on the instructions of a political rival. At the time of his death Aung San had been a mere 31 years old. In January 1947 the Attlee-Aung San agreement on Burma's independence had been signed. A provisional government for an independent Burma had been established, and preparation for the establishment of a republic of Burma had begun. The preparations had barely got underway when this multiple assassination destroyed what little chance there was for the secure establishment of an independent Burmese state.

There was, despite all this, an unmistakable air of optimism as well, the feeling that things would get better once the imperial power left the scene. The assassination of Gandhi did come as a jolt, even a shock, but it did not entirely shatter the optimistic mood in India and Sri Lanka. There was little ground for optimism or confidence in Pakistan, which had to cope with the death of its founder so soon after independence; and shortly thereafter - in 1951 - with the assassination of its Prime Minister, Liaquat Ali Khan. Thus Pakistan virtually sleep-walked its way to independence, through the agonies of the partition and the first phase of its emotion-laden conflict with India over Jammu-Kashmir.

## II NEGOTIATING SRI LANKA'S INDEPENDENCE

Amazingly Sri Lanka seemed to be free from all these tensions, this all pervading political violence. She was unique in South Asia - and not merely in South Asia - at that time, in having secured independence through a process of negotiation. No wonder then, that in

the early years of independence British political commentators referred to Sri Lanka as the "model" colony in which an eminently sensible leadership had preferred a negotiated transfer of power to the agitation, sometimes peaceful, sometimes violent, but always very vocal that had been a feature of India's transition to independence. Needless to say, not everybody in Sri Lanka, certainly not the articulate critics on the left of the political spectrum saw it that way.

An examination of the voluminous Colonial Office records\* - dispatches, telegrams, and secret and confidential Cabinet papers - leads us to the conclusion that there was an unique feature of the transfer of power in Sri Lanka, the dominance of a single individual in the negotiating process, D S Senanayake, who took charge of it in December 1942 when he became the Leader of the State Council and Vice-Chairman of the Board of Ministers. The records also show how he deliberately eschewed the Indian style of political agitation and preferred instead to follow the more conventional if unglamorous methods adapted in Canada, Australia and New Zealand in their passage from colonial to independent status. In his negotiations with the Colonial Office, and the colonial administration in the island, he was fortunate in having the advice and assistance of Dr (later Sir) Ivor Jennings, the first Vice-Chancellor of the newly-established University of Ceylon, a constitutional lawyer of the first rank. Seldom has a colonial political leader been served so well by an expatriate advisor as Senanayake was by Jennings in the negotiations for independence.

In his unpublished study of the Transfer of Power in Sri Lanka, Jennings explained that his

*"association [with D S Senanayake] continued throughout the four and a half years between the declaration of May 1943 and the end of December 1947. It was modified when one of us was out of the country, and after the general election of August 1947 and the establishment of the Senanayake government with Sir Oliver Goonetilleke as Minister of Home Affairs I became a mere consultant, called in when questions of some difficulty arose. Until then the three of us could have been described as the nucleus of a Reforms Ministry,*

*with Mr Senanayake as Minister, Sir Oliver as Permanent Secretary, and myself as Constitutional Advisor on tap."*

Senanayake's tactics and strategies reflected his own political convictions, with their emphasis on moderation and pragmatism, as well as the political traditions of the mainstream of nationalist politics in Sri Lanka with its well-known proclivity for peaceful constitutional agitation. Moreover he was a realist who saw nothing dishonourable in an acceptance of constitutional reform in instalments. Jennings explained that Senanayake

*"had the good politician's unconcern with detail. In consultation with Sir Oliver - and the relationship was so close that it was rarely possible to say whether an idea came from the one or the other - he had worked out the grand strategy. The aim was Dominion Status. Any proposal which seemed to be a step in that direction would be accepted, though an effort was made to make it go a little further. In working out the details, the proposal should be pressed to its limits and just a little beyond. Having gone some way towards Dominion Status, a suitable opportunity should be sought for presenting a demand for the next step, and if it proved impossible then to secure Dominion Status, any offer which nevertheless went further should be accepted and pressed to its utmost limits."*

The draft constitution prepared under the terms of Whitehall's declaration of May/July 1943 was entirely the work of Jennings serving as constitutional advisor to Senanayake. The Ministers' Draft Constitution of 1944, as this came to be called, acquired a wider significance when the Soulbury Commission adopted all its main features in its own report. There were some modifications and addition no doubt, but none of any great significance, except with regard to the creation of a second chamber, the Senate.

Even before the Soulbury report was published Senanayake was invited to Whitehall for discussions on constitutional reform in Sri Lanka. At the Colonial Office in July/August 1945 Senanayake handled his negotiations

with an aplomb that belied his lack of anything more than a secondary education. Thanks to the regular briefings he had from Jennings (who had travelled to the UK to be with Senanayake) his mastery of the intricacies of constitutional reform impressed the hard-headed phalanx of officials and experts the faced. "It was perhaps an advantage", Jennings stated in his study of the Transfer of Power in Sri Lanka, that Senanayake:

*"had not the facility of language of the English-trained [Sri Lankan] graduate or slick self-assurance of the professional advocate. A [Sri Lankan] prototype of the English official would not have made such an impression because the Colonial Office was familiar with it. It had never met Mr Senanayake's type before... Mr Senanayake completely captured the Colonial Office and the Secretary of State [G H Hall]... The result of all this was that an entirely different relationship was established between Mr Senanayake and the Colonial Office..."*

Throughout his negotiations with the British, Senanayake faced the opposition of G G Ponnambalam whose battle cry of '50-50', i.e., the equal division of seats in the national legislature between the Sinhalese majority and the minority, begun in the late 1930s, reached its peak in 1944 when the Tamil Congress was formed. Nor did Senanayake have much support from the Muslim community in the early stages of his career as the principal political leader of the day. Yet within three years he had won the support of the Muslims and had undermined Ponnambalam's support among the Tamil members of the State Council.

In November 1945 Senanayake's triumph was complete when he secured a vote of 51 to 3 in favour of the White Paper issued in London incorporating the principal recommendations of the Soulbury Report. The only votes against the White Paper were cast by W Dahanayake (who wanted something more than Dominion Status) and two Indians. All the Tamil members present voted in favour as did all the Muslims and representatives of smaller minorities. Ponnambalam was out of the island at the time the vote was taken, but he had been overtaken by events. His close

association with some right-wing Tory MPs proved to be a disadvantage once a Labour Party government came to power.

Senanayake's principal objective from this time onwards was to secure Dominion Status for Sri Lanka, but the Labour government was not so enthusiastic about this, and Prime Minister Attlee himself proposed a waiting period of six years from the introduction in 1947 of a constitution based on the White Paper, before Sri Lanka could gain admission to the Dominions club. But the impending partition of the raj, and the fearful violence that broke out prior to and after the partition helped his cause. But more than the Indian situation, it was the decision taken to grant independence to Myanmar that spurred senior officials to press ahead with Sri Lanka's passage to independence. By the time the Attlee-Aung San agreement on Burma's independence was signed on 27 January 1947, Sri Lanka's case for Dominion Status was being sponsored by the new Secretary of State, Arthur Creech Jones, with the support of the senior staff at the Colonial Office, and the governor of Sri Lanka, Sir Henry Monck-Mason-Moore. The argument the Colonial Office used was the simple one that if the Myanmar leadership led by Aung San were to be granted their request for independence, despite their record of opposition to the British, and in many cases, collaboration with the Japanese, Whitehall could hardly refuse the same status to Sri Lanka. Lord Soulbury himself pressed the government to concede Dominion Status to Sri Lanka, without the period of transition which his own report had recommended. Thus by early 1947 the decision was taken to grant Dominion Status to Sri Lanka. The agreements on Defence and External Affairs which the two governments signed prior to the grant of Dominion Status to Sri Lanka, were part of the procedure for Sri Lanka's advance to that status suggested by Senanayake himself on Jennings's advice as early as August 1945. Focussing their attention on these agreements the Marxist left in Sri Lanka claimed that Senanayake secured a fake independence for Sri Lanka. A reading of the British records including secret and confidential cabinet papers now available shows that this was clearly not the case.

As Sri Lanka's first Prime Minister, D S Senanayake, based his strategy for his country's security in the post-

independence situation on the assumption that the most likely threat to her independence would come from a newly-independent India. For Senanayake no less than for Whitehall the defence agreements signed in 1947 were intended to help the newly independent state adjust to the uncertainties of a new pattern of international politics in South Asia with India as an independent state. For Whitehall the defence agreements with Sri Lanka were important because of British strategic interests in the Indian Ocean, especially for securing her links with Australia and New Zealand. Senanayake believed that the agreements offered Sri Lanka security against any possible threat to her independence from India. This arrangement gave the country a free ride in defence and external security in the crucially important early years of independence. Sri Lanka had no credible defence capacity at the time of independence: no army, no navy and no air force. All these were built from scratch and under British supervision over the next decade.

### III SENANAYAKE AND THE INDIAN PROBLEM

The reference to the two Indian representatives who had voted against the White Paper is an appropriate point of departure for an examination of one of the more controversial features of Senanayake's policies, his attitude to the complex issue of citizenship rights of the immigrant Indians in the island. The two Indian representatives had been inclined to vote in favour of the White Paper in November 1945 but M S Aney, the Agent for the Government of India, seated in the gallery of the State Council sent down a note asking them to vote against. It was, as Governor Sir Henry Monck-Mason-Moore observed, "a stupid and improper piece of interference" on the part of the representative of the Indian government. If nothing else it confirmed fears of undue influence in the affairs of Sri Lanka in the future. Relations between Senanayake and his associates on the one hand and the leadership of the Indian community in the island on the other remained strained ever since 1939, but more particularly after September 1941. On that occasion a second round of talks had been held between a Government of India delegation led by Sir Girja S Bajpai and a

delegation of Sri Lankan Ministers and officials of which Senanayake was a member. (Previous discussions held in Delhi in 1940 had failed virtually *ab initio*.) The Sri Lankan delegation offered the status of permanent settlers - with the right to vote - to those Indians resident in the island who had a minimum of seven years residence, while all those admitted to the island thereafter would be treated as temporary residents. This was part of a six-point formula offered by the Sri Lankan delegation. An agreement was reached and initialled on this occasion, accepting this formula as a reasonable settlement of an issue that had been so controversial from as early as 1928, but the Indian government, under pressure from the leadership of the Indians resident in the island failed to ratify it even though the terms of the agreement were published as was the fact that it had been initialled. Had this agreement been signed in Delhi the question of the status of the Indian community in the island would have been settled long before Sri Lanka received independence.

The leaders of the Indian community raised the issue of citizenship rights in their evidence before the Soulbury Commission. Devoting two chapters of its report to the issues of the franchise and immigration the Soulbury Commission came down on the side of the Board of Ministers in declaring that the policies pursued by the latter on the franchise "did not seem to His Majesty's Government to involve any racial discrimination against Indians whereas some of the Indian protests amounted in effect to a claim for a position of privilege rather than of equality".

In December 1947, on the eve of Sri Lanka's independence, another round of talks was held with the Indian government on the question of citizenship rights of Indians resident in the island, the Senanayake-Nehru talks as they were called. The substance of the offer Senanayake made to Nehru on this occasion was the grant of citizenship to all Indians who had lived in the island for a "prescribed number of years", and the prescribed period being defined as seven years continuous residence for married persons, and ten for single persons, with 31 December 1945 as the operative date. This, in fact, was an even more generous offer than the one made in 1941, but it did not satisfy Nehru who held out for a qualification of eight years

for all persons, married or single, with January 1948 as the qualifying date. Senanayake, with memories of what had happened at the negotiations in 1941 very much in mind, refused to give in to Nehru's demands. The talks collapsed. Professor Hugh Tinker, the historian of the Indian communities settled in British colonies blames Nehru for the failure of these talks. He pointed out that as a result of Nehru's rigidity and his refusal to bargain or compromise on what he thought were matters of principle, a unilateral settlement was imposed by Senanayake's independent government in 1948-1949. Indeed one of the first initiatives of Senanayake's government after independence was the definition of Sri Lankan citizenship. *The Ceylon Citizenship Act No. 18 of 1948* restricted the status of a national of Sri Lanka to those who could claim it by descent or registration. Thus the failure of the negotiations conducted in 1940, 1941 and 1947 form the essential background to this piece of legislation and the two others that followed: the *Indian and Pakistani Residents (Citizenship) Act No. 3 of 1949*, and the *Ceylon (Parliamentary Elections) Amendment Act No. 48 of 1949*. This legislation has drawn considerable criticism from the time of their enactment to the present day. Critics generally ignore the background sketched in these paragraphs, and no reference is made to the generous offers made in 1941 and 1947 by Senanayake and his colleagues for a settlement of the issue, offers that were spurned by Nehru in 1947, and rejected under pressure from the leaders of the Indian community in Sri Lanka, in 1944.

#### IV

### A SHIFT OF FOCUS, 1956 AND AFTER

D S Senanayake's vision of a harmonious multi-ethnic society and his policies on nation-building placed a premium on reconciling the interests of the island's ethnic and religious minorities. Himself a Buddhist, he stood firmly against attempts to mix state power and religion. As Prime Minister he regarded it as his first task to stabilise the position of his government within parliament, and to strengthen the foundations of Sri Lanka's multi-ethnic polity. Within a year of independence he succeeded in doing both, in part at least, by winning the support of the principal Tamil party, the Tamil Congress whose leader G G

Ponnambalam joined the cabinet. In the longer perspective of history it would be true to say that at a time of violence and conflict in the rest of South Asia and in Myanmar, his principal achievement was to have protected the national interest by inspiring the confidence of all moderate elements in the country, and by his vigorous discouragement of policies that would upset the delicate balance of political forces he had established to sustain the country's democratic framework in the early years of the nation's existence.

Nehru and Gandhi failed in their efforts to keep the political legacy of a single state in the sub-continent intact, and Myanmar erupted in civil war from the moment of its independence. Senanayake, on the other hand, succeeded in ensuring that the transfer of power in Sri Lanka was peaceful and in winning the support of the minorities - with the exception of the Indian community - to bolster his successful negotiations with the British.

In 1956 Sri Lanka became the first country in South and South East Asia in which the original legatee of the colonial power was removed peacefully and through the ballot. (In this too Sri Lanka was 20 years ahead of India). From 1956 to 1977 each successive general election saw the incumbent government go down to defeat at the polls. One result is that Sri Lanka developed into a genuine multi-party democracy. Alone among Asian democracies Sri Lanka has had two main parties, the United National Party, founded by D S Senanayake and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party established by his one-time rival in the Board of Ministers and the first post-independence cabinet, S W R D Bandaranaike, which have governed the country on their own or as the core of coalitions throughout the entire period after independence.

Even while Senanayake was alive (he died on March 1952) the legatees of British rule were under systematic attack by the Marxist left and populist nationalists, in that order. In the mid-1950s this order of opposition to the status quo was reversed and it was the populist nationalists under Bandaranaike's SLFP (established in 1951) who set the pace. They raised claims of ethnic identity based on language and religion to challenge the post-colonial political order's emphasis

on pluralism and a version of secularism. Their campaigns, which reached a peak with the 1956 electoral victory of the SLFP, marked the beginning of the first phase of Sri Lanka's violent post-independence ethnic turmoil. The SLFP owed some of its success to the electoral alliance with the Marxists but it was evident soon enough that the latter were as much losers on this change of political fortunes as the UNP.

Language was the key that opened Sri Lanka's version of Pandora's box. In the first decade after independence all the nations of South Asia, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, were to learn how difficult it would be to replace English by an indigenous language (as in India and Pakistan) or by indigenous languages (as in Sri Lanka). While both India and Pakistan sought to replace English with what were, in effect, minority languages, Hindu and Urdu, respectively, in Sri Lanka one of the two official languages of the transfer of power "settlement", Sinhala, was spoken by a clear majority of the population, indeed by over two-thirds of the population. Even a cursory glance at the debates on language policy in the states of South Asia in the immediate aftermath of independence would appear to suggest that language planners there did not look at Europe's experience in handling language issues in the 19th century. Had they done so they would not have been so complacent as they set about implementing changes in language policy (as in India and Pakistan) or unilaterally repudiating the language settlement reached prior to independence (as in Sri Lanka). Nineteenth century Europe provided several examples of the utterly destructive impact of linguistic nationalism on multi-ethnic states. In all three countries the potential for violent resistance of changes in language policy was fairly evident, and in two of them, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, the evidence was ignored.

In South Asia the earliest signs of the potentially destabilising effects of the clash of linguistic nationalism's came in Pakistan. The Bengali speaking people of East Pakistan began an agitation as early as 1948 against the move to impose Urdu on them. Indeed when Jinnah during a visit to East Pakistan re-asserted his commitment to Urdu as Pakistan's sole national language, he was heckled and shouted down by students of Dhaka (then Dacca) University. Angry

students tore down his portraits in schools and colleges in protest against the prospect of having Urdu imposed on East Pakistan as the national language. There was agitation in 1950 and 1952, and in the latter year occurred the first deaths in the cause of language agitation and 21 February is still commemorated in Bangladesh - as Shaheed Day - in memory of the martyrs of that campaign. More important, this language agitation was one of the principal factors in the rout of the Muslim League government of East Pakistan at the general election held in 1955 - the Chief Minister and his cabinet colleagues were overwhelmed by a wave of public opinion directed against the official language policy adumbrated by the West Pakistani leadership.

In India itself the potential for violence over language policy became evident in 1952 in the riots sparked off by the death of Shiraramulu Potti on hunger strike for a Telegu-speaking Andhra state. Nehru himself, a sceptic in these matters, was compelled to respond with the appointment of a States Reorganisation Commission under the chairmanship of Sardar K M Panikkar, whose report recommended the establishment of a system of linguistic states in India, through a re-drawing of the boundaries of the existing states.

There is no evidence that the principal advocates of language policy reform in Sri Lanka in the mid-1950s were aware of these warning signs from the experience of Sri Lanka's South Asian neighbours: certainly even if the leadership (which included S W R D Bandaranaike) had known of them, they are likely to have brushed these warnings aside. Instead they chose to ride the wave of public support in 1955 for a repudiation of the language settlement made prior to independence, in 1943-1944, confident that the wave would take them triumphantly to the shores of power. It is not my intention here to deal with the events that surrounded the passage of the *Official Language Act No. 33 of 1956*, and the violence that followed. The immediate consequences for Sri Lanka were fearful. It helped destroy the civil peace for a decade or more. "Sinhala Only" proved to be an elusive objective, and it was never implemented in the form in which it was presented to the electorate in 1955-56, and in which its more committed and enthusiastic advocates insisted it should

be implemented.

For one thing the *Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act No. 28 of 1958* substantially modified the original policy change of 1956. Even though the regulations required for the effective implementation of the 1958 Act were approved by Parliament only in 1966, the use of the Tamil language in administrative matters, in the national legislature, and local government institutions, in the law courts, and above all in education - in the school system and in university education - proceeded on an uninterrupted continuity from the pre-1956 situation, from 1939-40 in fact. The rhetoric of "Sinhala Only" was not reflected in the humdrum reality of public life. The fact is that a *modus vivendi* emerged on language rights, between 1958 and 1978.

The essence of that accommodation was worked out in considerable detail and embodied in the constitution of 1978. This realistic adjustment to life in a plural society all but conceded parity of status to the Tamil language. That status was eventually conceded in 197-88, three decades after the introduction of the *Official Language Act No. 33 of 1956*.

At the election of 1956 and under Bandaranaike's government the country witnessed a second phase in the transfer of power this time from the largely English-educated elite to the vernacular-speaking elites. So far as the electoral process was concerned the transition was a peaceful one; but the process of change in the country at large was anything but peaceful, largely on account of the language issue. From 1956 to 1977 with a short break from 1964 to 1970 the dominant political strand was the populism of the SLFP, which ruled for all but five years during this period generally with the support of Marxist parties. Populism received another burst of energy under Bandaranaike's political heiress his widow.

Under Mrs Bandaranaike's two governments this populism placed enormous pressure on the country's democratic traditions: its legislative, administrative and judicial institutions; and its economy. Political elites used or abused existing institutions to impose their own priorities, oblivious of the need to protect institutional independence and

autonomy often shielded vested interests and obstructed efforts to help the poor. The needs of "the people" became the justification for eroding if not destroying the independence of institutions ranging from the judiciary, the bureaucracy and the press - Mrs Bandaranaike's government "nationalised" the press in 1973 - to schools and universities.

The special feature of the period 1960-64, and 1970-77 was that the electoral triumphs of the SLFP and its Marxist allies, which could have helped to confirm the consolidation of democracy actually served to weaken if not undermine it. These parties viewed democratic procedures primarily as a means to the capture of state power. Once the state was in their hands, they treated it as an engine of redistributive justice governed more by ideological considerations than any concern for the efficient management of the economy.

The origins of Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict go back to the governments of S W R D and Sirimavo Bandaranaike. They go back to the unilateral repudiation in 1956 of the pre-independence agreement on language rights, the adoption in the 1970s of a new university admissions policy that was seen to favour the Sinhalese unfairly, and the replacement in 1972 of the original constitution by one that was less solicitous of minority rights.

## V

### POLITICAL ASSASSINATIONS

S W R D Bandaranaike was assassinated in September 1956 by a strong ally turned bitter enemy. It was not the first of the political assassinations which had marred the transition to independence of the South Asian states; certainly it was not the last. South Asia, over the last 50 years, has had a record of violence in its public life, unusual even for states and societies breaking free of colonial rule in any part of the world. Indeed in no other part of the world have so many heads of state and heads of government, so many prominent personalities, political and national, been victims of the assassins' bullets and bombs as South Asia over the last 50 years. In India, as we have seen, it began with the assassination of Mohandas K Gandhi. Then thirty-seven years after independence came the assassination of Indira Gandhi (1984) and of her son Rajiv, seven years later.

In Pakistan, the country's first Prime Minister was assassinated within four years of independence; followed as in the case of India by the violent elimination of two others three decades or more later, the hanging of Bhutto in what is widely seen as a judicial murder, and the mysterious and violent death of Zia ul Haq who put Bhutto in jail, and set in motion the train of events that led to his execution. In Bangladesh its founder and several members of his family were assassinated in 1975, to be followed thereafter by the assassination of his successor. Like some sinister natural force the shadow of these assassinations still lies across the political landscapes of Bangladesh.

Sri Lanka's record has been equally grim; beginning with the assassination of its third Prime Minister in 1959. Nearly thirty-five years later came the next assassination, of R Premadasa, Sri Lanka's second Executive President (in 1993) and three of its most prominent politicians between March 1991 and October 1994, each of them a potential head of government. This is apart from several Tamil politicians including the head of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) and leaders of Tamil separatist groups. There is no parallel for this in the post-colonial states of South East Asia with the exception of Myanmar in the earliest phase of its independence when its Prime Minister designate and several ministers of his provisional government were assassinated; and in Vietnam during the years of its long civil war. Political assassinations of leaders has been elevated to an art form in South Asia.

Similarly the exploitation for political advantage, by the closest relatives of the victims, of the grief and sense of loss that flows from the killings - or more particularly, the public expressions of such grief and sense of loss at a popular level - have been developed into an elaborate ritual and high political theatre, the ultimate objective of which is personal aggrandisement through the political process. In the intensely competitive electorates of South Asia, sorrow has become an eminently marketable commodity. In this too, Sri Lanka was the pacesetter beginning in 1960, through Mrs-Bandaranaike. The beneficiaries of assassinations in other parts of South Asia have been the wives or daughters, principally, of the murdered leader and occasionally, a son (Rajiv Gandhi, for instance) but not, so far, a

husband.

Only one of these violent deaths, these assassinations in South Asia did not have a political motive. That was the assassination of S W R D Bandaranaike. There, as we have seen, the motive was a personal one. The man who planned the assassination - *bhikkhu* Mapiitigama Buddharakkita - had been closely associated with him in his successful bid for electoral success in the mid-1950s, as one of the principal figures in an unusual movement of *bhikkhus* who converted what might have been a normal electoral campaign in 1956, into a moral crusade on Bandaranaike's behalf. The man who did the shooting, also a *bhikkhu*, had been a minor figure in that campaign; he was a human instrument directed and driven by the personal enmity of the principal conspirator to the man he helped so much to bring to power. To that extent a murder with a personal motive was not without links to the swings in the country's political moods of the mid-1950s and late 1950s. And in any event it had profoundly important political consequences in the emergence of Mrs Bandaranaike to power, the first of South Asia's many political widows; to be followed by political orphans, if we may use that term to describe the Benazir Bhuttos and Sheik Hasina Wajeds of this world. Sri Lanka's current Executive President has the advantage of being at once a political orphan and a political widow.

With one exception, that of Bandaranaike, every other assassination in South Asia had a political motive. Some, especially those in India and Sri Lanka, sprang from separatist agitation and ethnic conflict. Rajiv Gandhi's violent death was a unique example of an assassination directed from a neighbouring state, a consequence, nevertheless, of an ethnic conflict consuming a presumed mediator as a victim.

## VI

### ETHNIC CONFLICT

An inevitable feature in any political analysis of the current Sri Lanka situation is the stark contrast drawn between the great promise held out by the successful stabilisation of the political system in the early years after the transfer of power in Sri Lanka and the current reality of the country's identification as an area of

High Conflict. The complimentary terms used by analysts in their assessment of the political management skills demonstrated by Sri Lanka's leadership in the first decade after independence, the "model colony" which negotiated its independence in contrast to its neighbours, seem all so unreal today. Not surprisingly political analysts feel compelled to ask how and where it went wrong.

One of the answers to the question of how it all went wrong, lies in the adoption of majoritarian policies to quicken the pace of changes that had already begun, in a short-sighted attempt to secure immediate gains - e.g. the language policy of 1956, and the university admission policies of 1970-71. Once opposition to these policies emerged, and it came soon enough in the first case (language reforms) in the form of ethnic tensions and riots, the attempts at modifications of these policies, or even a reversal of them, have proved to be much less effective in repairing the damage. The attempts at removing grievances on a piecemeal basis, resorted to in the case of language policy from 1958 and thereafter in the 1970s, and 1980s and in the case of university admission policies in the late 1970s and 1980s, have had less of a positive impact than was anticipated. An interesting theme in conflict resolution emerges - even carefully considered and well publicised reversals of policy have less of an ameliorative effect in a situation of continuing conflict because the original sense of grievance remains only slightly diminished, or is sustained at previous levels by those with a vested interest in prolonging it for their own political ends. Part of the problem in the Sri Lankan situation is that the "moderate centre" of Tamil opinion has been generally reluctant to publicly acknowledge the advantages and benefits of this line of action for fear of being marginalised even further by intransigent Tamil separatist activists. The moral of the story is that once damage has been done by hastily devised policies, it is extremely difficult to restore the *status quo ante*.

What we see then is the inappropriateness of purely "majoritarian" decision-making in sharply divided societies. On the basis of the empirical evidence from Sri Lanka it would be true to say that ethnic tensions have generally occurred whenever

governments have either totally disregarded, or paid less attention than they should have, to the legitimate interests and concerns of minorities. After 1977 tensions have persisted or have erupted in violence despite the efforts of governments to take into consideration the legitimate interests of minorities in devising new policies, or seeking a reversal of policies which have contributed to the current conflict. What this demonstrates is that in periods of prolonged ethnic conflict, it is extremely difficult to reverse a trend.

Second, where sharp cleavages exist in societies, political stability is ensured, if not guaranteed, by devising institutional arrangements giving minorities easy access to the highest decision-making processes. By doing so minorities would have a sense that their opinions have been considered in devising policies, and in their implementation. Sri Lanka's record in this regard has been more constructive and imaginative than its recent history of the persistence of ethnic tensions and frequent eruptions of violence would lead us to believe.

Thirdly, where religious or linguistic divisions have deep historical roots, political stability could be ensured by a deliberate lowering of expectations on both sides of the divide. Just as a majority group who believe that they have been the principal victims of the imposition of colonial rule should resist the temptation to adopt policies that would hasten the redress of historical grievances, so too a minority group should desist from making exaggerated claims and demands. Examples from Sri Lanka would be the "50-50" campaign of the Sri Lanka Tamils in the late 1930s and 1940s, and in more recent times the claim to exclusive possession or rights to parts of the country identified as "the traditional homelands of the Tamils". This process of a mutual lowering of expectations has kept the Malaysian political system viable and stable since independence and helped it to withstand the political tremors set off by the ethnic riots of 1969 in that country. Although the processes of government are then often reduced to a prosaic and humdrum search for areas of agreement between contending groups or factions within those groups, it has had the great benefit of keeping the peace in a sharply divided society. Thus while Malaysia is referred to as a Low Conflict area, Sri Lanka has been converted from a Low Conflict area

to a High Conflict area.

The Sri Lankan experience illustrates the ramifications of the influence of the island's geographical location on its conflict situations. The geographical setting has two interconnected aspects of which the first is the existence of a large concentration of Tamils in the north of the island, and separated from their co-ethnics in Tamil Nadu by a narrow and shallow stretch of sea - the Palk Straits. The other aspect, of course, is the proximity to a regional power - India - intent on expanding its influence on the states on its periphery in much the same way that the British had done in their own day. India itself has a variety of ethnic conflicts within its own territories, some of which (i.e. conflicts) were in strategically important border territories on its north-west and north-east. In its own way the southern state of Tamil Nadu is a border region with the difference that the border between it and Sri Lanka's northernmost territories is the sea and not the land.

The Indian intervention aggravated rather than resolved the conflict. India prevented the Sri Lanka Army from re-establishing its control over the Jaffna peninsula in 1986 only to embark on a surprising campaign of its own between 1987 to 1990, in which the early success of the Indian Army against Tamil separatists in the north and east of the island gave way to a prolonged stalemate. As a result of this botched intervention by the Indian Army the northernmost parts of the island, and parts of the east were controlled by separatist guerrillas till October-December 1995 and early 1996 when the Sri Lanka Army re-captured many of these territories, in particular the Jaffna peninsula, the core area of Tamil settlement in the island and which the separatists had converted into their principal base of operation.

Thus the island's geo-political environment helped in exacerbating Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict. Had Sri Lanka not been located so close to India, the management of its ethnic conflict may have taken a different form, and had greater success. In Thailand and Malaysia, for example, with no strong regional power seeking to influence the ethnic conflicts in those countries, much less to intervene in them, it was left to the contending parties to reach a pragmatic settlement with each other.

## VII

### A "MINI"-WELFARE STATE

One of the principal positive effects of the introduction of universal suffrage in 1931 was that it stimulated a broad impulse towards social welfare. The origins of the social welfare policies currently in vogue, go back to the days of the second State Council, 1936-47, and more particularly to the period of the second world war during which there was a substantial increase in government revenues, and a greater readiness to spend it on social welfare measures. During this period we see the origins of the free education scheme and the education reforms of the 1940s, a major investment in hospitals, clinics and preventive health care for the masses, a policy of cheap subsidised food (which began in the days of the second world war) and above all a massive investment in irrigation.

Sri Lanka, had a higher (indeed, very often, a substantially higher) average per capita income than British India. Even so, Senanayake and his principal associates in the first post-independence government had no cause for complacency. The central issue as they saw it was the poverty of the country's peasantry. At independence Sri Lanka produced only a third of the rice needed to feed a growing population - growing at this time at the astonishing rate of 3.3 percent per annum - and the bulk of the country's requirements in rice and subsidiary food-stuffs was imported, and accounted for more than half its imports.

The first post-independence government placed its hopes on the achievement of self-sufficiency in rice and subsidiary food-stuffs - "[increased] production particularly in the matter of home grown food", it declared "will be given a place of supreme importance in the policy of the Government". In his first budget speech in 1947, D S Senanayake's Minister of Finance J R Jayawardene spoke of the "supreme importance of a [massive programme] of productive investment..." and warned that unless the country,

*"Is in a position to undertake [such] a programme of development there is no prospect of any improvement in the economic condition of her people.*

*It had been repeatedly demonstrated that*



*her economy dominated by three export commodities is highly sensitive to the vagaries of the world's markets. Every past depression has served to underline this great weakness. The importance of diversifying her production to introduce a greater degree of economic stability cannot be over-emphasised and it is precisely this diversification which the projected programme of national development will bring about..."*

The principal means of achieving this objective was seen to be the rapid development of the country's dry zone.

In regard to this latter too Senanayake provided the inspiration, the leadership and the continuity. Indeed, had Senanayake's political career ended in the 1930s, he would still have been remembered in Sri Lankan history for his contribution to land policy and peasant agriculture. It was largely through his initiative that faith in the peasant as an agent of economic change established itself as part of the conventional wisdom of the day, and with a greater appreciation of the potential value of the underdeveloped dry zone. Senanayake saw peasant colonisation of the dry zone as a great national venture, a return to the heart-land of the ancient irrigation civilisation of the Sinhalese. Through his son Dudley as Minister of Agriculture this interest in peasant colonisation and return to the dry zone continued as a central theme of government policy. The massive Gal Oya irrigation project in the Uva and Eastern Provinces which began in the early years after independence was the first major irrigation project constructed in the country since the eleventh century. The Senanayake Samudra tank in Inginiyagala which was part of this project, was four times larger than the largest of the ancient tanks, the Parakrama Samudra.

The continuity in policy in its most striking form came in 1977, when under J R Jayewardene the UNP government embarked on an accelerated development of the irrigation and power resources of the Mahaveli basin. Jayewardene had remained faithful to Senanayake's vision of a resuscitated hydraulic civilisation. Thus thirty years after independence, as the country's Prime Minister, and its first Executive President, he embarked on the Mahaveli Scheme, the most complex and the most gigantic irrigation project in Sri Lanka's history since the halcyon days of the

Polonnaruwa kings in the twelfth century.

The most notable success of the agricultural policy initiated by D S Senanayake has been in rice production. The performance in rice production in post-independence Sri Lanka has been described as perhaps "the most spectacular record of any rice-growing country". Since 1946 the population of Sri Lanka has nearly trebled, but while just over two-thirds of her requirements of rice were imported in all at that time, by the early 1990s imports are marginal. The periods of rapid growth have been the early 1950s, the period 1965-70, and period after 1977. In the early 1970s rice alone accounted for nearly 20% of the country's import bill; by 1983 rice imports were less than 2% of total import costs, and by 1985 it had dropped to less than 0.2%.

Significantly, near self-sufficiency in rice was reached before the full benefits of the multi-purpose Mahaveli scheme made their impact on the market. In terms of historical continuity the most outstanding development has been the rapid progress made in completing the major reservoirs of the Mahaveli Multi-purpose Project. For the 20th century it marks the culmination of an irrigation policy begun under D S Senanayake. That project is the most complex and largest irrigation scheme devised in the country since the eleventh century and marks the culmination of a fifty year process of resuscitating the island's dry zone, and converting it once more to the island's granary. The shift of population to this region was already very significant before its acceleration under the stimulus of the Mahaveli scheme would make it one of the largest peaceful movements of population in the island's history. It marks also the revival of the island's hydraulic civilisation- an irrigation-based agriculture base - after the collapse of that civilisation over 600 years ago.

The welfare policy to which all Sri Lankan governments since independence have been committed has been one of the great success stories in the post-colonial world, and not merely in Sri Lanka. In terms of the per capita Gross National Product (GNP) Sri Lanka has been left far behind by many South East Asian states - the per capita income in Malaysia is six times that of Sri Lanka - yet it ranks well above almost all these countries in terms of the Physical Quality of Life Index (PQLI) measured by the

literacy rate, life expectancy, the infant mortality rate, and the distribution of wealth.

The statistics are really astounding. With a per capita GNP of around \$ 700 per annum, Sri Lanka has achieved a PQLI in the low eighties out of 100, a rating entirely unprecedented among low income countries and one that compares favourably with many countries enjoying a GNP ten to twenty times higher than does Sri Lanka. If one co-relates Sri Lanka's PQLI with its per capita GNP one may conclude that Sri Lanka has done more for its citizens, considering its poverty, than most other countries in the world, and any other country in the third world.

Sri Lanka's current literacy rate of 90% compares well with literacy rates among high income countries (i.e. above \$ 2,000 per capita GNP a year) of about 84.1%, and has no parallel among low income countries. Similarly Sri Lanka's present infant mortality rate of 18 per thousand births is compatible, in fact, with that of high income countries. Among low income countries the rate generally averages around 149.8. Similarly Sri Lanka's life expectancy rate of 71 years is consonant with high income countries which have an average of 72. No other low income country has so high a life expectancy rate; indeed few of them has achieved a rate of 60 years.

Equally significant, the spread of education, medical care and other amenities of modern life, like electricity to the rural areas, together with cheap transport through a network of roads and railways, have helped to retain people in their rural and suburban locations instead of crowding into the city of Colombo and other towns. Thus Sri Lanka is relatively free of the urban sprawl of third world societies, and the huge slums of the cities of Asia, Africa and Latin America. Colombo the capital of the country remains a relatively small and manageable city, with a rate of population growth that is well below the national average.

Also, as far as education is concerned, there has been a greater emphasis on primary and secondary education than on tertiary education. This has ensured the spread of education among the masses, and this in turn has ensured easier access to higher education to the children of poor than in most third world

societies where higher education in particular is often restricted to the children of the affluent if not the elite. The education system in Sri Lanka has the strength of a pyramid with higher education forming its apex; in contrast in other third world societies higher education is in the form of a column perched on a relatively thin base of general education.

Over the last 60 years a third or more of the annual budget has been spent on these welfare services. While the commitment to social welfare has been a consistent feature of social policy since independence, the emphasis on aspects of welfare has kept changing. Thus in 1978 the subsidies on food which had been introduced in the early 1940s and sustained thereafter, were abandoned. In their place a system of food stamps meant as a social security safety-net for the poorer sections of the community was introduced. About half the population were entitled to food stamps before the system was superseded by the Janasaviya programme. Then again there was the extension of the "free" education concept to include free school books as well, a change introduced in 1980. Finally there was the housing programme which began in 1978 under the leadership of Prime Minister R Premadasa, and was expanded in the 1980s. At a time when the welfare state was under attack in many parts of the world, the benefits of the Sri Lankan version of the welfare state were widened through the most ambitious and most socially beneficial – in the sense of benefiting the poor in both the urban and rural areas – housing programmes in the third world.

The critics of this housing programme included the World Bank and the IMF both of which believed – in conformity with the conventional wisdom – that it would absorb scarce resources which could have been put to much better productive use in other areas of the economy, and that its impact would be inevitably inflationary. Nor did they believe that the targets set were realistic ones. In the event the targets were reached and exceeded by anything between 15% and 30%, an unparalleled success in a government housing programme in a third world country. Moreover, unlike such schemes in other third world countries, the benefits were distributed in all parts of the country, and in the rural areas in particular which benefited through the Village Re-awakening Scheme. Indeed a significant feature of the implementation of the programme was that it was not concentrated in towns and the city of Colombo. The inflationary impact was much less severe than anticipated, and most significant of all the beneficiaries were largely the poor, both urban and rural.

The well-known Pakistani economist, Mahbul ul Haq points out in his recently published study of *Human Development in South Asia, 1997*, that:

*"Sri Lanka poses a baffling dilemma. Its human development indicators are among the highest in the world, often surpassing those achieved in more prosperous regions of the developing world, and sometimes even the human progress made in industrial nations. Human development is supposed to smooth the way for accelerated economic growth, democratic*

*institutions, and a more tolerant civil society. What has really gone wrong in Sri Lanka?"*

Some of the answers to this "baffling dilemma" have been referred to earlier in this essay, but one of them is slow economic growth, an answer that Mahbul ul Haq himself emphasises:

*"... GDP growth was not fast enough to sustain this successful social experiment ... Sri Lanka experienced a decline in its economic growth from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s. ... Both output and economic generation suffered due to declining economic growth in the country. Despite such adverse economic conditions, Sri Lanka did not waver in its strong commitment to welfare policies, [in the late 1970s the government began to]... restructure its expenditure in favour of economic growth policies, pursuing economic liberalisation and export-led growth".*

What is paradoxical is that the simmering tension between Tamils and Sinhalese which began in the 1950s, exploded into open violence in the 1980s, at a time when the forces of economic growth had begun to gather renewed momentum."

Growth in the island's economy has barely kept pace with population increase. The weakness of the system is that up to the mid-1980s the island's economy was still dominated by the production and sale of three plantation commodities, tea, rubber and coconut, as it was over the previous eight to ten decades. Industrialisation – largely import substitution industries – had made some, but not much, headway. By the late 1970s there was a new policy orientation in industry, and its benefits are so obvious that the present government has continued it. By the early 1980s exports of industrial products, in the main, garments displaced rubber as the second largest foreign exchange earner after tea. Today the position of tea as the main foreign exchange earner is under serious challenge by industrial exports. Thus the late 1970s heralded the beginning of a new era in Sri Lanka's economic history, a single comforting thought as we look around us in this troubled country, and as we look ahead to the 21st century.

A comprehensive selection of these documents has been published recently, edited by the author.

Sri Lanka.	Part I	<i>The Second World War and the Soulbury Commission, 1939-1945</i>
	Part II	<i>Towards Independence 1945-1948</i>

British Documents on the End of Empire Series, B Vol. 2, The Stationary Office, for the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, The University of London (1997)

\*\* The author's book on Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka, titled *Sri Lanka: Ethnic Conflict, Ethnic Politics. Reaping the Whirlwind* will be published in February by Penguin India.

**Contd from page 4**

life and the rehabilitation and reconstruction programme for the north-east, the relaxation of controls on essential supplies and fishing in north-eastern waters, the removal of one of the Sri Lankan army camps, and the right of armed LTTE cadres to move about freely in the army controlled areas of the east of the island. This would then lead to a full formal cessation of hostilities and the political issues could be left until the next stage of the talks.

During the Lucerne conference, there was no agreement on the reasons for the failure of the latter two sets of talks. There was a school of thought that believed the talks failed because the LTTE was irretrievably committed to Tamil Eelam, and its intention was only to use the peace talks to strengthen its own position. Some others felt that the fault was with the Sri Lankan government for not taking the negotiations seriously, and not providing the LTTE with an acceptable alternative to a separate state. However, in spite of these opposing views, there were a few general lessons that emerged from the papers and the discussions that ensued:

1. The need for careful preparation of negotiating teams and agendas. Well prepared negotiating teams and a clarity of aims is a prerequisite for success. The lack of an institutional memory on the government side was also a handicap and it was felt important to enter into negotiations with a clear knowledge of what had happened in the past.

2. Given the deep distrust that exists between the protagonists in the conflict, an outside mediator, or facilitator would have an important role to play in any further negotiations. However, in the light of the Indian experience, it was thought important that any mediator or facilitator could only function if it was on the basis of a genuine request from all parties to the conflict. There should also be a commitment on the part of all to abide by any agreement reached. The mediator or facilitator should not be seen to be imposing a settlement.

3. The lack of a mutually agreed framework within which an agreement could be reached was thought to be a handicap. At present, there is no half-way point between the LTTE's declared aim of a separate state, and the government's offers of a package involving devolution of powers to the regions.

4. Many participants spoke of the need to evolve a new, common vision of a Sri Lankan identity which could encompass all the different communities on the island without

compromising each group's sense of individuality.

5. Almost all the participants felt that a military solution to the conflict was not possible, and that negotiations were the only way to bring about a settlement.

## FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The opinion of many participants on the Sri Lankan Tamil side was that it is possible to arrive at a solution to the ethnic conflict within an undivided Sri Lanka. Although the LTTE's formal position on an independent Tamil Eelam remains unchanged, some Sri Lankan Tamil participants felt that the LTTE would settle for something less.

2. The participants recognised that the ethnic conflict is capable of resolution only through a negotiated political settlement.

3. There was broad agreement among the participants on the following five basic elements of a constitutional arrangement to meet the aspirations of the Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim and other communities:

(a) Separation of legislative, executive, and judicial powers between the centre and the regions;

(b) The constitutional provisions relating to sharing of powers between the centre and the regions should be entrenched;

(c) Making amendments to the constitution difficult so that centre-region relations cannot be unilaterally altered;

(d) Provision for a fully-fledged judicial review of legislation; and

(e) Constitution to provide for power sharing at the centre, possibly through a second chamber.

## EXPERIENCES FROM CONFLICT RESOLUTION

The following points were not discussed at the conference nor are they explicitly stated in any of the papers in the book. They are offered as possible insights gained from experiences of conflict resolution in other deeply divided societies. Drawing lessons from other conflicts can, however, be a hazardous task and some might argue that since no conflict is similar to another such an exercise is futile. Nevertheless, it is a fact that all conflicts come to an end eventually and contemporary examples of

war termination can sometimes be useful, if only for comparative purposes.

Historically, lasting negotiated peace settlements are relatively rare. This is especially true of intra-state conflicts which are often more protracted than cross-border wars and correspondingly more difficult to resolve, particularly when the conflict is over ethnic identity. More often than not, identity-based conflicts are brought to an end either by outright military victory or by partition of the country and even when belligerents have committed themselves to a peace accord, they have often produced unstable settlements that only lead to renewed warfare.

It is because there are so many obstacles to settlements in protracted identity conflicts that it is important to analyse the structure of the conflict, and get to grips with the political economy of the war. There are many factors which need to be taken into account. The question of leadership and its willingness to compromise is frequently an important issue. Leaders may face a threat to their position if they are perceived to be conceding too much and are therefore sometimes unnecessarily intransigent in their approach. Also, there are inevitably some who will actually gain from the conflict and will have no wish to see it resolved. The business of war can be very profitable for those willing and able to exploit the fears and suffering of others. These and other issues, therefore, need to be carefully considered when attempting to bring about a negotiated settlement.

In the post world war period, however, there are many examples where war termination has been successfully achieved through negotiation. Some of the most recent examples, such as in Guatemala, El Salvador, Mozambique, and the current efforts in Northern Ireland may be worth analysing to see if lessons learned from those conflicts can be applied to the Sri Lankan situation. For although it is true to say that every war is unique it is equally true that all wars have something in common.

### 1. The importance of reaching an Bi-partisan agreement

One of the prerequisites of a negotiated solution to the conflict in Sri Lanka is the full implementation of a Bi-partisan agreement.

Resolving a deeply-rooted conflict is certainly easier with such an agreement.

Two examples where a Bi-partisan agreement has been reached are South Africa and Northern Ireland. In the case of South Africa, the agreement between the National Party, led by De Clerk, and the ANC, led by Nelson Mandela, was crucial in ensuring a consensus over the transition from an Apartheid regime to a democratic state. Two weeks before the election, an agreement was also reached with Chief Buthelesi thus paving the way for a united approach to the South African elections. In the case of Northern Ireland, all the major political parties in Britain are committed to not making the Irish question a party political issue. This policy has ensured that all the parties adopt a common approach so as to bring coherence and consistency to the negotiations process.

## 2. The importance of maintaining communications

It is important to maintain communications at all times during the war. This communication needs to be discreet and confidential in nature. There are many examples where good communications between the protagonists have helped to reduce differences, develop agendas and time frames and have helped enormously to reduce misconceptions and misunderstandings which are so ingrained in such conflict situations.

In the British-Northern Ireland conflict such a secret channel of communications was maintained by the British Government and the IRA for over two years during the Premiership of John Major. This channel became very useful for settling many issues during the pre-negotiations phase and helped frame the formal negotiations phase. The secret channel of communications maintained by the Norwegians between the Israeli Government and the PLO was also crucial in reaching what is now known as the Oslo Agreement.

## 3. The importance of incremental negotiations

Incremental negotiations may sometimes be better than having all the issues discussed simultaneously around the same table. Incremental negotiations mean that the talks are broken down into specific issues which are addressed and agreed upon separately. In such instances, agreements can be reached on a range of issues without a cease fire or a declaration of a cessation of hostilities. The agreements could be on humanitarian issues such as the delivery of humanitarian assistance, mutual respect for

humanitarian law and human rights law and agreement on common monitoring mechanisms. In El Salvador, war termination was achieved by reaching agreement on seven treaties before the final accord was signed. Incremental negotiations help to build confidence by taking the process one step at a time and leaving the most difficult issues to the end by which time some measure of trust has been established.

## 4. Building a Peace Constituency

It is important to build powerful peace constituencies which can hold the protagonists accountable for their actions. Peace constituencies need to flourish within both communities where they can create space for dialogue and for citizens to exchange ideas and evolve mechanisms for reconciliation.

There are rich and varied experiences in the way peace and has been built and won in difficult circumstances. Ultimately, of course, if a peace agreement is to hold the people on both sides must be committed to it. In the Philippines, the Coalition for Peace expanded its activities nation-wide through workshops, seminars, training programmes in non violence and through the establishment of branches all over the country. Eventually they were able to declare entire regions 'peace zones', where violence was forbidden and where the parties were obliged to abide by international humanitarian law. In Northern Ireland, citizen movements have promoted meetings, workshops and seminars, and have developed community based peace initiatives across the conflict divide. Communities from both sides have met to exchange ideas and foster a spirit of reconciliation. Such movements have acted as a powerful force in generating and accelerating the peace process.

## 5. On the question of mediators and facilitators.

There is often confusion between the distinctive role played by third parties in internal conflicts. Often a third party is interpreted as an influential powerbroker with enforcement capacity or international political leverage. This was the case with the US intervention in Bosnia or India's intervention in Sri Lanka. In both these instances, the big power intervened with significant military and logistic capabilities and with a commitment to help transform or manage a protracted conflict. There are, however, other forms of third party intervention which need to be evaluated.

They can range from activists and convenors, to advocates or facilitators. These forms of intervention are not based on leverage, power or enforcement capacity but rely primarily on building trust and facilitating communication. In modern conflicts, it is likely that a mediation process would involve a multitrack approach where different roles are played by a range of actors and where different functions are performed by each. The argument here is that in protracted conflicts a strategic framework is necessary where a variety of third parties, both internal and external, play specific roles to reduce intractability and persuade the warring parties of the benefits peace will bring. In the case of Bosnia, the Dayton Peace Accord was a result of a concerted effort by the US, NATO, and an umbrella of nations, including Russia and the European Union, all acting within a coherent strategic framework. One of the reasons why some internal conflicts drag on for such a long time is that there is insufficient political will on the part of the international community to bring its influence to bear on the conflict.

This book is intended to provide the reader with a summary of the main findings and lessons learnt from the protracted negotiations in Sri Lanka. It is an assumption in the book that the in-depth study and analysis of the 3 stages of the negotiations process are necessary and that lessons can be learnt from each one of them. Does this assumption hold? Does it mean that if these lessons are applied successfully that the conflict will be resolved? It is certainly our belief that this book can contribute towards a constructive reassessment of past mistakes and some of these findings may be successfully applied in a future negotiating process. However, reaching a negotiated solution requires sustained political will and the consent of the people. As many of the papers have emphasised, the conflict in Sri Lanka is about perceptions, sentiments, fears, claims and counter-claims by both parties. It is a question of mindsets and attitudes. What is necessary is that profound change takes place within both communities, and that adequate institutional frameworks are created which can provide a sense of security and identity to the disparate peoples living in the country.

levels that are almost double that of the 1956-77 period. But the economic growth rates have varied significantly with high rates in 1978-82 and 1990-94 and a low rate in 1983-89. The first Jayewardene regime and the Premadasa regime produced some of the highest economic growth rates that we have had after independence. Both had high investment rates to help produce those results. In the 1978-82 period, an economy that was starved of resources under Mrs. Bandaranaike boomed when Jayewardene liberalized and let the private sector play an active role.

The secret of success of the Premadasa regime lay primarily in better utilization of the productive capacity that was created in the preceding decade, quite similar to the strategy of the Dudley Senanayake regime of 1965-70. It is useful to note here that both men had a "hands-on" style of economic administration that took them to the field.

It is premature to pronounce a verdict on the Kumaratunge administration after three years. But the real disappointment is to be found in the poor growth performance of the second Jayewardene administration (1983-89). Like in Latin America, the 1980s appear to be our "Lost Decade" of development for Sri Lanka. The reasons for this are partly political and partly economic. The growth rate dropped from 7.9% in 1982 to 3.2% in 1983, the year of the ethnic riots. In the last three years of the regime, when the ethnic war intensified, and the JVP destabilized the south, the average growth rate fell to 1.8%. Of course Jayewardene himself has to be largely held responsible for this outcome.

The other question is why we failed to produce much higher growth after 1977 despite higher investment. There are several theories. The World Bank theory is that we have made poor choices in investment projects, and also failed to make sufficient structural reforms in the economy, especially during the 1980s. An excellent example of a poor choice of investment is Air Lanka that has been a drain on the Treasury. The World Bank has also suggested that even the Mahaweli does not yield an adequate economic rate of return, although some sections of the project such as hydro-electricity has had a good pay back. It has also noted that investment in housing has limited short term economic benefits although social benefits may be significant. An example of failure to effect required structural reforms comes from the nationalized plantation sector that was beset with a multiplicity of problems under state management.

The PA theory attributes low growth relative to the high investment rate to "waste and corruption" under the UNP. It is hard to quantify waste and corruption, but probably would not have made a significant difference to the

overall growth rate. Unlike, say, some African counties where money is taken but no project is executed, our projects are actually implemented, bribes, kickbacks and commissions not withstanding. Moreover, when the relatively high rate of investment under the Kumaratunge administration is considered, the question arises whether the same "waste and corruption" theory explains the modest growth in the last two years also.

There is probably some validity to all these different explanations. In the period between 1956-77 we produced one percentage point growth for roughly every 4.0 percentage points in investment. After 1977 we raised investment to around 25% and got a growth rate close to 6.0%. This is about right in terms of our historical experience. However, had we been wiser in the choice of projects, more daring in structural reform, and less prone to corruption, we probably could have squeezed out some more by way of output from our investment.

## GLOBAL FACTORS

External factors originating in foreign markets often retarded our economic growth. When the prices of our products drop we lose income that we could either use to consume more, or save abroad in foreign reserves, or use for investment. When the prices of our imports go up we lose money we could have saved and invested. The best examples are the oil crisis in 1973-74 and 1980-81.

All our post-independence governments have suffered from drops in export prices. The Dudley Senanayake regime of the early 1950s, the Sirimavo Bandaranaike administration of 1970-77, and the UNP administration in the early 1980s probably were the hardest hit by such adverse trade conditions. It is difficult to manage the economy in such situations. However, the solution should have been to have a development strategy to get us out of that situation. Developing countries that have succeeded in development have done just that.

## POLITICAL INSTABILITY

Political instability created by factors such as the two JVP uprisings, the ethnic riots of 1983, and the current civil war have had a major negative impact on economic growth. For example, economic growth slowed down both in 1971-72 as well as in 1987-89 due to the JVP rebellions. The 1983 ethnic riots disrupted the economy and hit the tourist industry very badly. The civil war that has lasted over 15 years has discouraged investment, disrupted production, diverted billions of rupees to the war which otherwise could have been invested for economic progress.

However, unlike, say, world market prices which are largely beyond the control of our governments, these are essentially of our own making. The JVP in 1971 was a political movement that supported Mrs. Bandaranaike in the parliamentary elections of 1970. The ethnic riots of 1983 took place under Jayewardene in his sixth year of rule. He released the JVP leaders from jail, and later proscribed their political party. The LTTE is the child of the political process of the last fifty years. Thus rulers cannot be excused for poor economic results merely because they were also incompetent politicians.

## ENVIRONMENT

There are few reliable measurements on Sri Lanka's environment. One issue that has been the focus of considerable public attention is deforestation. It is generally believed that we had at least 40% of our land area under forest cover in 1948, and that today it has dwindled to about 25% or about 17,000 square km out of a total surface area of 66,000 sq. km. Some of the other important environmental questions that have arisen include, soil erosion in the highland area, the loss of coral reef due to harvesting for industrial purposes, the loss of wetlands to agriculture and construction, and industrial and urban pollution.

Experts point out that we have enacted some of the most advanced regulatory laws to protect the environment. We also have macro level agencies with a fair amount of technical capacity. For example, a Coast Conservation Department is a rarity for any country with a sea coast, and its establishment in Sri Lanka is an expression of our concern for coast conservation.

In practice, however, these macro national level measures have not been matched by sub-national level capacity building. Thus, at the provincial and local government level where implementation of policy would be most effective, environmental protection capability is practically non-existent. They have neither the financial resources nor the technical expertise to do a good job.

There are also two other problems that constrain a more effective environment policy. One is the short-term economic cost. For example, heavily polluting industries in densely populated areas are allowed to continue to protect jobs and output. Tourist hotels that may be harmful to the environment are allowed to be built for the economic benefits that they yield.

Second, the lack of political will to adhere to the law to protect the environment vastly reduces the effectiveness of the regulatory framework in place. Attempts to avoid proper

environment impact assessments of major projects have been a common occurrence.

In the past two decades or so some countervailing pressure has been brought to bear upon the decision making process by the active involvement of non-government environment groups. However, we still do not have a regular and systematic procedure such as mandatory public hearings on the environment implications of major projects.

## WELFARE AND POVERTY

Sri Lanka has secured a place in the international developmental literature not because of its economic growth performance but because of its reputation as a model welfare state with a comparatively low income. Indeed in the 1960s when "Growth with Equity" and "Basic Human Needs" strategies of development became fashionable in international development ideology Sri Lanka together with Costa Rica, China, and the Kerala State in India came to be frequently cited as examples to be emulated.

As of 1995 we were classified as a "low-income" country with a per capita income of \$ 700. This made us the 49th poorest country on a list of 133 countries prepared by the World Bank.

However, in terms of social welfare indicators Sri Lanka has a reputation of having been considerably ahead of most countries with a low per capita income. For example, in 1995 the average life expectancy at birth for low income countries including China and India was 63 and excluding those two countries 56. For Sri Lanka it was 72. Adult illiteracy was 10% when the average for the low-income group was 34% including China and India and 46% excluding them.

The Human Development Index has been designed by the UNDP as a composite measure to assess socio-economic progress. The index combines life expectancy that reflects the health status of the population, adult literacy and school enrollment ratios that reflect the skills of the people to lead a productive life, and income per capita that reflects material prosperity. Sri Lanka's score in this index has consistently reflected the fact that we have generally done better in education and health than what one would expect on the basis of our income level alone.

The reasons for this encouraging picture are fairly well known. Our heavily state-subsidized education, health, and welfare system, and the food subsidies that have ensured some minimum level of food for the poor are important causal factors. Less well recognized is the fact that the pattern of national invest-

ment that heavily favoured small scale farming - Gal Oya, Mahaweli and other colonization schemes in particular - also played a key role to produce these favourable social welfare numbers. It should also be noted that industrial policy that aims to take manufacturing to the rural areas - e.g. Premadasa's two hundred garment factory project - would have a similar impact on equity.

However, the success of Sri Lanka's social welfare system has been questioned by some analysts. Some have pointed out that we inherited a relatively advanced system of social welfare from the British in 1948. Given that base, they assert that we have not done too well for the expenditure we have incurred on the social sector in the past fifty years.

Other critics note that our relatively low economic growth was partly the result of channeling too much resources to social welfare. It was a sort of "putting the cart before the horse" situation. They assert that today we could have enjoyed a higher income, lower unemployment, and indeed even better welfare had we curtailed social spending in the 1950s and 1960s and spent more on directly productive investment. These analysts also point out that in the 1970s and 1980s we were compelled to cut back social spending - e.g. cuts in food subsidies - because the country did not have sufficient economic growth and a strong enough income base to support the elaborate welfare system.

Moreover, some also note that the income distribution and poverty situation in the country have been far from satisfactory. In income distribution the pendulum has swung both ways over the past five decades. Very roughly speaking the available evidence suggests that there was a trend towards greater equity between the early 1960s and the mid-1970s. In the late 1970s following the introduction of the open economy the pendulum swung the other way. For example, the richest 20 percent of households got 52% of the income in 1963, 43% in 1973, and 50% in 1978-9. In contrast the poorest 20% got 4.5%, 7.0%, and 5.7% respectively. In 1980-1 the share of the richest 20% was slightly down at 48%, and that of the poorest 20% slightly up at 6.3%. In 1985-6 the share of the richest 20% was higher than ever at 62% and that of the poorest 1.5%. This last set of figures made Sri Lanka's income distribution one of the most unequal in the world. In 1990-1 the last year for which data is available, the share of the richest 20% is reported to have come down to 52%, and that of the poorest 20% gone up to 5.2%.

It must also be noted that not every section of the community has done equally well in Sri Lanka's welfare state. For example, both the Kandyan Sinhalese peasantry in the less de-

veloped parts of the Kandyan provinces as well as the Tamil plantation community have remained relatively backward in terms of most social welfare indicators, most notably education and health. In the case of the latter (Plantation Tamils) considerable progress has been evident in the last ten to twenty years, especially after they gained citizenship, and began to exert electoral influence. The remote Kandyan villages are yet to benefit from such a program of development.

As for absolute poverty the data is very tentative. The percentage of people living on less than one dollar a day is a widely used international measurement of poverty. On that basis the World Bank estimates that only about 4% of our people live in poverty compared to India's 50.0%. The UNDP estimates that about 22% of Sri Lankan families live below the "national" poverty line. This generally squares with other known information on poverty. However, the malnutrition rate among children under five is reported to be around 35% to 40%.

Overall, the income distribution and poverty questions have raised a lot of controversy. In particular some have held the open economy culpable for a worsening of income distribution. Others have noted, quite correctly, that a distinction must be made between absolute poverty and relative poverty. The point made is that under the open economy absolute incomes of the poor improved mainly because of rapid job creation. Thus, it is suggested even if income distribution had deteriorated the poor also benefited from the economic liberalization program.

It has also been pointed out that special programs such as *Janasaviya*, and now *Samurdhi*, have the potential to address the poverty issue while maintaining a liberal market economy. The information available on these programs are inadequate to arrive at a firm conclusion. Going by some micro level research that has been done recently on both these programs, what seems certain is that merely having such programs do not ensure poverty alleviation and equity. It depends on the success with which the target populations are reached for viable income generating schemes. It should be noted that in the case of both *Janasaviya* and *Samurdhi* there has been a remarkable reticence on the part of the government to undertake serious and independent evaluations to assess their impact, and make necessary adjustments.

*Contd from page 10*

vironment, the culture and the economy have to pay the price.

Indigenous knowledge, natural resources, are today, under-valued, and our potential for sustainability is discounted and sold from under our feet. Freeport McMoran / IMC Agrico / Tomen, and the sale of our national food security in exchange for cash flow into certain individual institutions is just one example. If we were to have peace tomorrow the entire nation will be sold to outsiders for a pittance so much has growth oriented consumerism taken over our lives.

The Prince of Wales values his culture and history. He does not undervalue people and their traditional skills in order to turn them into a cheap labour force. He has had the best training for the job of leadership in the whole world. If he becomes our leader Prabhakaran will have nothing to fight over. We can close down parliament and turn it into a residence for our new king. It will be cheaper by far. In fact Charles will cost the people of Lanka less than what politics costs today. Surely he will not eat for Rs: 400,000 per day!

In fact Charles will generate more than it costs us to maintain him and his court. We should therefore I believe invite him to be our king.

King Charles of Lanka or the Punch and Judy show are the options open to us as we move towards 2000.

King Charles of Lanka can then knight Sir Arthur in Serendib. We will also give him other names of Englishman who have benefited Lanka by their presence. They are not known because they do not have press agents. For example consider the contribution of Sam Popham in Dambulla.

The mass media will love us. We can close down all our publicity offices worldwide. We will be news all the time. Good news for a change of a marvelous experiment.

What has your readership got to say? Let us have a poll. Let there be intelligent discussion, but please let us keep apologies out. If there are to be apologies let us do so collectively. All of us in Colombo are guilty. The present is a result of the past. We can't undo the past but we can learn from it. Or else let us remain condemned as the Mecca of Mediocrity. The Buddha calls it Karma Vipaka. Nobody is to blame.

## Waiting - 45

# Thurstan Road

That red box, now partnered by a green  
Is where I dropped my letters to you then  
Making sure they went right in  
And would catch the mail time listed on the panel  
To Reach you early at Kundasale  
(You demurred they were too passionate  
I said, be easy, the Postmistress won't read them).

These broad and shady sidewalks under giant branches  
Recall spacious afternoons and exodus from lectures  
The anxious recapitulation  
Of knowledge and information at Examinations  
And the optimistic note I always wrote  
In postscript that I had fared well.

But on the side walk, in knots, we stragglers had our doubts  
Which I didn't bother you with,  
But I, now your husband, have to trouble you  
You are no eager partisan, holding this pot of paste  
On Thurstan Road, in the front seat, while the engine purrs  
And I melt into the dusk  
To put up those Vietnam posters.

I know you are no convinced ideologue  
Wars and revolutions to you are far away and unreal  
But you have come, fair and formidable with this pot of paste  
To make sure your husband will not have a scrape.

**U. Karunatilake**

*Contd from page 15*

Today I continue to admit the existence of a Tamil Nation, a Tamil National Question and their right to self determination. I find the Thimpu Principles and the preamble of the Indo-Lanka Accord to be unobjectionable, in the main. However, in a vastly changed historical context, I believe that progressives must oppose the **exercise** of the right to self determination in the form of separation, confederation, or federation and support it only upto the point of regional autonomy within a unitary state. (Which was the position of N. Sanmugathasan in the '70s and '80's). The region itself must be constituted of contiguous ethnic majority areas and in the case of amalgamation subject to referenda in the area concerned. This of course is the Leninist position and methodology. It is also pertinent in the extreme, that Lenin was unambiguously opposed to federalism! (See Box)

**SIZE, NOT SYSTEM**

What of the comparative assessment of India and Sri Lanka, of which the local federalists are so very fond, namely that the quasi-federal system has prevented the break-up of India, while the unitary state has resulted in the powerful separatism of Tamil Eelam? That parallel contains a third sleight of hand which deftly eliminates the factors of size and scale. If India consisted of **only West Bengal plus the Northeastern states of Nagaland, Mizoram and Manipur, it would not be taken as any kind of success story!** Since Independence, guerrilla insurgencies have kept a large number of Indian troops pinned down in the Northeast. **Conversely, if Sri Lanka had been as huge as India, the Tamil insurgency at our Northeastern periphery would have been much less dramatic and strategically significant!** Surely, if any honest attempt at comparison is to be made, the two objects/countries have to be analytically redrawn to the same scale. The key variable then, is **size and scale**, not system i.e. the vast discrepancy in size, not the inherent superiority of the quasi-federal Indian system.

Federalism in Yugoslavia and the USSR operated in the twin contexts of single party rule and a socialist economy. **With the removal of those two factors and the introduction of multiparty competition and capitalist economics, the countries broke up.** It was worse in Yugoslavia because there was never really a planned economy and the introduction of market economics had deepened regional unevenness for

decades. This and Yugoslavia's submission in the '80s to IMF 'reforms' are what made that country's collapse almost incomparably bloodier than that of the USSR. In Sri Lanka, federalisation under the new Constitution would take place in the context of (i) A highly competitive multiparty system (ii) the absence of a strong executive Presidency elected by the whole people (iii) a capitalist economy with its inherent inequities, anarchy of production and unevenness (iv) an adoption of accelerated neo-liberalism (including rampant privatisation) with attendant povertisation (v) a strong separatist challenge (vi) multi ethnic areas such as the Eastern, Western and Central provinces (vii) high levels of youth unemployment (viii) a history of local particularisms (ix) a propensity for political violence and insurgency-prone fanatical movements (x) a large army (xi) a large number of deserters with military training (xii) the relatively plentiful availability of lethal weapons on the black-market (xiii) armed political gangsterism.

In short, twelve reasons that will make the Chandrika-Ranil strategy of the package/asymmetrical devolution the path to a Bosnia-Rwanda outcome.

**INDOPHILIC INTELLIGENTSIA**

Roderick Mac Farquhar, Professor History and Political Science at Harvard, writing in the *New York Review of Books* (Oct 23rd 1997) on the Golden Jubilee of Indian Independence, reveals that: ... "Infant malnutrition is worse than in sub-Saharan Africa ... The neglect of primary health care is attested to by the infant mortality rate of 75 per 1000, as compared with 31 in China, 41 in Egypt and 53 in Indonesia and with a world rate of 63 .... A particularly sad failure is suggested by the fact that no more than 52 of the population is literate - as compared with a world rate of 76 percent - with an Indian female rate of only 36 percent ... The failure to spread primary education is attested by the fact that only 40.8 percent of Indians are literate at age 15, as compared with 90 percent of South Koreans, 72.6 percent of Chinese and 57.3 percent of Ugandans".

This abysmal situation prevails, one might add, notwithstanding the presence of those features that make India so beloved a shrine of Colombo's intelligentsia, namely a quality press, well established Marxist parties and strong trade unions, an independent judiciary given to public

interest litigation, a rich culture, a quasi-federal framework, a dynamic book publishing industry, an articulate feminist movement, excellent universities, multitudinous NGOs and accomplished filmmakers. Despite this sophisticated civic and intellectual culture - or one may say precisely because of these transfixing trappings and delightful diversions - the masses are plunged into abysmal misery. Sri Lanka, by contrast, is way ahead in its social indicators because, in four fundamental areas, the tasks of the 'bourgeois-democratic revolution' have

***"By the early 1980's, Yugoslavia's leaders were forced to adopt an austerity plan that ... left one of five Yugoslavs unemployed ... For a society that since the war had taken its growing prosperity for granted, the political effects were devastating ... It was against this tattered economic background that [Ambassador Zimmermann's "villains"] brought to bear their nationalist schemes, manipulating and exacerbating the people's growing insecurity with slogans of hatred that were expertly disseminated ..."***

Mark Danner  
The US and the Yugoslav  
Catastrophe  
(The New York Review of Books  
Nov 20, 1997).

***"More than a decade of declining living standards corroded the social fabric and the rights and securities that individuals and families had come to rely on ..... Normal political conflicts...became constitutional conflicts and then a crisis of the state itself..."***

Susan L. Woodward  
The Balkan Tragedy: Chaos &  
Dissolution  
after the Cold War [Brookings].



been fulfilled beyond anything in India. There is no rigid caste system, there is little **organised social violence** (as distinct from political violence), the Agrarian question is not as acute thanks to waves of land distribution/re-distribution, and most important of all, the presence of the basic propellant of social welfarist/social democratic policies: a strong, intensely competitive two party system. This last structural factor alone renders Sri Lankan bourgeois democracy more advanced i.e. far closer to the model of the core Western states, than that of India. It is the Sri Lankan **people** who sustain this two party system, clustering into the two great political camps. The existence of these two camps guarantees a modicum of social amelioration, just as the polarisation into two nuclear armed camps globally, ensured European peace for 50 years and a degree of manoeuvrability, some breathing space and significant foreign development assistance for the Third World.

With the onset of the federalisation package, the superior features of the Lankan system in relation to the rest of South Asia may be unsustainable and may disappear, lowering the living standards of our people to the subcontinental average. Given the social (class and ethnic) biases and agenda of those lobbying for the package, (some of who are also intermediaries in the huge privatisation programme) a question could be raised as to whether **economic ethnicide** is in fact an **intended outcome** - or at least a subconscious motivation - of their strategic manoeuvres.

### THE ANTI-MODERN TWINS

What is ironic is that this idealisation of India is not limited to the 'rootless cosmopolitan' wing of Colombo's intelligentsia but extends to those of the Jatika Chinthanaya/Janatha Mithuro wing, who have as their soulmates the 'anti-development' school of India's intelligentsia (e.g. Ashis Nandy, Claude Alvarez et al). Anyone who can live in India and argue against rapid economic development and modernisation - as these pseudo Gandhian deconstructionists do - are indeed the most reactionary pack of intellectual charlatans in that vast country!

Always passing unnoticed, is the underlying commonality between the pro-package ideologists and the anti-packagists of the Jatika Chintanaya school and its offshoots: **anti-Modernity**. The latter attack modernity from the standpoint of a

glorification of the pre-modern. The rootless cosmopolitans of the Social Scientists Association, the post modernist deconstructionists, contradictorily and confusedly invoke 'rationality' while critiquing modernity. They attack the quintessential agency of modernity and modernisation i.e. the nation State, the agency of the bourgeois democratic revolution which is the indispensable condition and corollary of modernity and rationality. The JC/JM school strive mightily to save the (modern) nation state from the globalisers and the Tamil nationalists, but are unable to do so effectively because they stand on anti-modern/pre-modern philosophical ground. The federalisation package pushed by the rootless cosmopolitans makes way for the reassertion of local particularisms and the strengthening of what my friend Newton Gunasinghe termed 'the parochial elites' in his criticisms of federalism. (He never failed to stress that the parochial elites were ineluctably more reactionary than the national elite). Thus **postmodernism** becomes the handmaiden of **premodernism**, firstly in the form of service to a premodern political elite (the feudal dynasty leading the SLFP) and secondly in support of the 'package' with its pre-modern, parochialistic outcomes. Colonialism had - as Marx stressed in connexion with India and China - a positive spin-off: the breakdown of the old local self sufficiency, the creation of a unified state and national market. Today with the combination of the 'Package' and economic neo-liberalism, we shall have the bath water without the baby i.e. no integral centralised state, weakened national economic bonds and economic re-colonisation/neo-colonisation entailing vastly augmented dependency. (In historically concrete terms, we therefore have the total exposure to and facilitation of foreign investment resulting from of the Colebrooke-Cameron reforms of 1833, **without** the centralised administrative structure and abolition of provincial particularisms, which were its fundamental political product).

### IN CASE OF BJP

India's role vis-à-vis the neighbourhood may be loosely interpreted as resembling, albeit much less overtly and persistently, that of early 20th Century USA - 'the Colossus of the North' - vis-à-vis Latin America. It may also approximate Ruy Mauro Marini's classification of Brazil as **sub-imperialist**. Until the advent of the PA administration, Sri Lanka had one

safeguard: unlike the USA in Latin America, India did not have any foothold in terms of ownership of economic assets, in Sri Lanka. However, with the privatisation of plantation ownership this has changed. This change will be accelerated with the devolution package's provisions concerning land ownership and the recent budgetary decision to open up retail trade to non Lankans.

The situation roughly resembles that faced by Sri Lanka 50 years ago at the dawn of Independence. We need a return, not to the wishful thinking of the J.R. Jayewardene foreign policy, but to a combination of the realistic foreign policy of D.S. Senanayake in relation to India (albeit minus the Western bias) and the zealous guarding of national sovereignty of Ranasinghe Premadasa.

Borrowing a leaf from but slightly modifying Samuel Huntington's 'Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of the World Order' our policy of external alliances must be one of counter-balancing any tendency towards Hindu hegemonism by reaching out to the non Hindu civilisations: the Buddhist (Japan, Thailand, Vietnam) the Islamic (Iran, Indonesia, Malaysia, Turkey), the Christian (Europe, Latin America, Philippines), the Orthodox Christian (Russia, Eastern Europe), and the Sinic-Confucian/neo-Confucian (China, Korea).

It took the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin for the world to comprehend that there were always two trends within Zionism, reaching back to 1947 and even beyond. The mainstream tendency represented by the Labour Party and Histadut, had its origins in the Haganah and the Palmach. The rightwing tendency, which manifested itself in Likud and the ultra-zealots to the far right of it, had its roots in the Irgun Zwei Leumi and the Stern gang, to which Menahem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir respectively belonged. Benjamin Netanyahu is its smooth, Americanised, media-friendly 'human face'.

So it is with the Indian political spectrum. The moment of Independence saw contention between three projects; the victorious mainstream of Gandhi and Nehru, the Communist critique and the Hindutva challenge. The last named was sufficiently powerful to be manifested in the holocaust of the Partition. The Hindu hardline was strong enough to punch through the moral and political hegemony of Gandhi and the Congress leadership. It overreached itself with the assassination

of the Mahatma. Then began its long retreat and hibernation, re-entering the mainstream by infiltrating the Jayaprakash Narayan led democracy movement and being represented within the Janatha Party. Once again, it overreached itself in Ayodhya and went on to disguise itself. It is important to recall that even after Ayodhya, Rath Yatras were resumed and a list of over a hundred mosques to be 'deconstructed' were named.

A possible scenario is that a BJP victory may uncork the RSS-VHP-Shiv Sena forces at the grassroots and state level. The resultant contradictions, 'multiple dysfunctions' and tensions will have to be channelised somewhere. The Muslims within India would be too dangerously destabilising a target - and Pakistan under Nawaz Sharif is no push over, particularly with its suspected nuclear capability. The BJP may be tempted to handle the contradictions it faces by broadening its base through some 'ideological engineering'. The North Indian/Aryan profile of Ramrajya will be sought to be dissolved or secreted in the larger Hindutva, which incorporates pan Tamilianism, even pan Dravidianism. Thus, pan Tamilian/Dravidianism could become a subset of Hindu Hegemonism. Such a re-engineering would, as an unconscious, unintended by-product, open up an avenue for the export of contradictions: Sri Lanka, a softer target than Pakistan. This is of course, only a single scenario, the worst-case one; but unfortunately, one that does not have zero-probability!

India may have to be regarded warily as a potential threat to the Lankan State, irrespective of whether or not the BJP is elected to office. The latter is a conjunctural question, while the root of the potential threat is sociohistorical or historico-structural. 'Historical' because of both the civilisational contradiction and the now transparent policy of destabilisation and intervention pursued in the '80 and '90s, by successive Congress governments. The structural dimension on the other hand, consists of two factors - the massive overhang of 'backward' social structures (the outrageous social apartheid that is caste), combined with the 'modern' (the tendency for the export of capital).

The 'roots' must not be confused with the 'fruits' and vice versa. The genesis must not be conflated with the outcome, the product. The Tamil National Question and Sinhala and Tamil nationalism are modern phenomena, specific to the epoch of

capitalism. The Sinhala chauvinists are quite wrong in their assertion that this is a conflict that has gone on for millennia. However, the conflict has its distant roots, its embryonic stage, a stage in which it was not a conflict of nationalisms. If one were to apply the Braudelien *longue durée* or better still, Andre Gunder Frank's recent yardstick of a 5000 year old world system, then one recognises the genesis of the conflict - the very earliest stage of its protracted and complex evolution - in the contradiction between the Hindu and Buddhist civilisational systems, particularly in the aftermath of the former's victorious counter-reformatory offensive and the displacement of the latter to the offshore sanctuary of Lanka. What we speaking of here is not an inter-religious conflict but a contradiction between two civilisational systems, one of which had/has Hinduism as its cultural core and the other, Buddhism. To say that Sri Lanka is broadly classifiable as belonging to a Buddhist civilisation is not to deny (as the Jathika Chintanaites do) that Sri Lankan society is, and should indeed be celebrated as, multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-lingual and multi-cultural! Or, in a word, pluralistic.

Taken as a social formation, India is the 'bulwark of reaction' in South Asia because of its system of social apartheid, casteism. Sri Lanka is far more progressive, given its vastly superior social indicators. Whichever regime rules in Delhi, the Sri Lankan state may stand in danger of being 'intervened' (as the Latin Americans put it). We have experienced interventionism at the hands of Congress I dispensations. A coalition

government would mean an enhanced role for the DMK or AIDMK both of which supported Eelamism from the standpoint of Pan-Tamilian, even Pan-Dravidian, solidarity. A BJP government could turn out to be the most dangerous of all: its hardcore Hinduism could lend itself to a pan-Hindu manipulation by Prabhakaran (Bal Thakeray has already expressed his support for the Tigers) and/or rekindle its historic contradiction with Buddhism. The whole world and the Muslims of Ayodhya in particular found out that these people take the Ramayana with utmost seriousness - just as the LIKUD party's brand of Zionism takes the Old Testament. And Ram's legendary foe is Ravana - 'the Lord of Lanka', as the ideologically enormously influential Dooradarshan serial reminded its gigantic Indian audience!

The problem for Sri Lanka is compounded by the fact that the BJP's main ally in Tamil Nadu is the AIADMK, the party of the late M.G. Ramachandran, the LTTE's godfather. The AIADMK was the primary party of patronage for Mr. Prabhakaran - indeed it was this factor that motivated Rajiv's administration into aborting the Lankan Army's Vadamarachchi operation. Even more importantly it was the MGR factor that caused the Prime Minister's Office in Delhi to sanction RAW's negotiations with the Tigers at a time when the IPKF was locked in combat with the LTTE. Thus AIADMK pressure was responsible for the second track which eventually cut across and tripped up the first, leaving alive a wounded Tiger, with mortal consequences for Rajiv in '91.

***The right to self-determination does not imply only the right to secede. It also implies the right to federal association, the right to autonomy you write. I disagree entirely. It does not imply the right to federation. Federation means the association of equals, an association that demands common agreement. How can one side have a right to demand that the other side should agree with it? That is absurd. We are opposed to federation in principle [emphasis added], it loosens economic ties and is unsuitable for a single state. You want to secede? All right, go to the devil if you can break economic bonds, or rather, if the oppression and friction of 'coexistence' disrupt and ruin economic bonds.***

***You don't want to secede? In that case, excuse me, but don't decide for me; don't think that you have a 'right' to federation.***

V. Lenin, Letter to Shahumyan in Collected Works Vol 19 p.500.

# Anniversaries and Exit Lines

*"... In the end, all he wanted was to know what we all want to know: Who am I? Where do I come from? How much time do I have?"*

Harrison Ford in *Blade Runner*

That anniversaries are a moment for stock taking, is a truism. Truly significant anniversaries, as the Golden Jubilee of Sri Lanka's Independence indubitably is, are richer in possibilities and responsibilities. They provide moments for a Janus faced retrospect and prospect, conditional upon a sense of where we currently are. In its turn, an understanding of the past and a view of the future, helps frame and constitute our comprehension of the pivotal present.

This special double number of the Lanka Guardian attempts to discharge this intellectual-existential responsibility, the discussion moving along two principal trajectories: firstly, politics-ethnicity-war-peace and secondly the economic-developmental; corresponding broadly to and encompassing 'super structure' and 'base', or that which dominates the present and that which determines, in the last instance, the future.

The spirit of the discussion is suffused with a certain 'pessimism of the intellect', a phrase originating with Romain Rolland and immortalised by Antonio Gramsci. The bottom line of our contributors seems to be: we have seen the future - and it doesn't work.

This special edition of the L.G. is important in a much more minute, personal sense too. It is the final issue under the present editorship. The 'new look' L.G. and its editorial team from Sept'96, was part of a rescue operation to salvage the magazine. That task has been accomplished. The magazine has something of its old impact and high profile. It causes controversy once more. Its circulation has more than doubled and sale points have proliferated. However, we were never able to transcend the narrow limitations imposed by our market - the serious minded English language readership - and breakthrough to profitability. We have no corporate backing and we are unwilling to 'get with the programme' on the set of interrelated issues of neo-liberal privatisation/ negotiation/Western mediation/federalism. Thus, we have been unable to continue to bring in funding on a sufficiently large scale.

The continuity of the journal is a value we all share. This means the search for alternate sources of financing. This entails - or has been thought to necessitate - the recomposition of the editorial team. At least initially this means a restoration of the editorial status-quo ante.

In the past 1 ½ years, the L.G. has been bold, brashly assertive, sharp edged and provocative. To use Tom Wolfe's phrase, we have sought to 'push the outer envelope'. Or as Tina Turner proudly proclaimed: "we never ever do nothin' nice and easy. We do it nice and rough!".

For this non-conformism and absence of neutrality, no apologies.

It has been a privilege to edit this magazine and I wish to sincerely thank all our contributors, readers, funders and our staff. Goodbye.

**Dayan Jayatilleka**  
Editor.

## *Announcement*

The next edition of the Lanka Guardian will appear on the 01st May 1998 which marks the 20th Anniversary of the publication of this magazine. That issue will be a double number for April/May.

**Mervyn de Silva**  
Editor-in-Chief.

