

Parliamentary debate on campus eruptions

LANKA

# GUARDIAN

Vol. 7 No. 5 July 1, 1984 Price Rs. 3/50

Registered at the GPO, Sri Lanka QJ/75/N/83



LANKAN CRISIS

## The parameters of foreign policy

— Mervyn de Silva



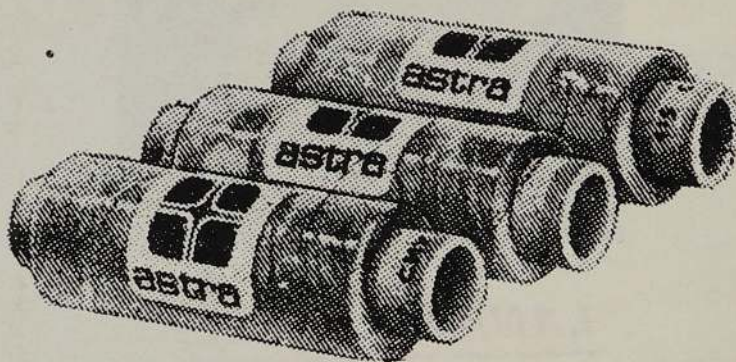
- \* Why India must help us — Lalith  
— An exclusive interview
- \* Politics and thuggery — Gananath Obeyesekera
- \* Century of ethnic conflict — Kumari Jayawardena
- \* Reagan's Vietnam — Michael Klare

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● BOOKS — Quadri Ismail, Arjuna Parakrama : JEHAN PERERA — Sinhala perceptions



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## NO TEA AND LITTLE SYMPATHY

It was no coincidence that President Jayewardene who toured China, Japan and South Korea accompanied only by his presidential staff took Finance Minister Ronnie de Mel to Washington. When he was addressing the powerful Foreign Affairs Committee of the US Congress, President JR turned to his Finance Minister when the discussion moved to economic issues. After all, the World Bank and the IMF have their headquarters in Washington. For Ronnie at least, the journey from Washington to Paris (21 June) was the most logical route.

And it is Mr. de Mel, an owner of a tea estate himself who has been reminding us that the tea boom kept our foreign exchange position fairly satisfactory. But the rise in price was largely an artificial one. It is this column which underlined that 'the Indian connection' was in fact double-edged, political and economic.

With the Indian teas, including some pretty cheap ones, returning to the tea auctions, the result was inevitable. The SUN headlined a Reuter report from London "TEA PRICES PLUNGE".

The British Tea Brokers Association announced that "tea prices which hit all-time heights at the beginning of the year plunged to a seven-month low".

And so economics takes command. What with the Allens, the Moslem agitation, the great Batticoloa escape and the closure of all our universities and similar diversions of a headline making kind, simple facts of our economic life moved out of sight.

### I.M.F. PRESSURE

No tea boom and now little sympathy from the IMF. After protracted negotiations with the IMF, Mr. de Mel refused to sign a new standby agreement for 50 million SDR, a second

tranche. The sum is not all that vital. It is the IMF's "testimonial" we need to raise money from other sources, including commercial banks. The recent Central Bank report observed how Sri Lanka has steadily increased its reliance on short-term high-interest loans from foreign banks — to make the debt-servicing burden quite worrying. And so we come face to face with what the whole world is talking about, the Third world's debt crisis.

Whatever Mr. Reagan may say, that crisis is "inseparably linked" as the FEER noted, with US budget deficits, high interest rates, the overvalued dollar etc. (President JR too mentioned this in one of his speeches in Washington).

But the IMF demands its pound of flesh: devaluation, tougher austerity. It is a prescription which has led to a new phenomenon that has prompted even the studiedly un-theatrical *Financial Times* to style "IMF riots".

### TROUBLE IN THE THOTTAM

Yet another SUN frontpage story completes the gloomy picture. "Another estate strike?" is its headline. The news item said:

"Authoritative trade sources yesterday expressed concern over unrest among workers on many private-owned estates and small holdings which they said could result in trade union action..."

Evidently, the reason is the discrepancy between the daily wages paid in the state sector and in privately-owned plantations. It is also reported that several private estate owners have not complied with the government's decision to pay equal wages to men and women in the plantation sector.

After the major April strike, the Labour Commissioner ordered all estate owners to act in accordance with the government's order.

TRENDS  
+  
LETTERS

### Outrageous interference

Congratulations on your absolutely first rate comment 'The Absurd and the Desperate'. The alleged proposed legislation is said to be the prevention of "irresponsible statements" being published under cover of a pseudonym. What the jack-in-office who dreamt up this absurdity should realise is that it is a free citizen's right to make irresponsible statements if he so wishes so long as he stays within the law. What is an "irresponsible" statement varies with each individual's point of view. If the legislation is passed no paper would carry a single letter to the editor for there is no way the editor would be able to tell if the signature were a pseudonym or not. This is the most outrageous interference we have still met with in the field of free expression.

Sidath Yatigammana  
Kiribathgoda.

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Vol. 7 No. 5, July 1, 1984

Price 3/50

Published fortnightly by  
Lanka Guardian Publishing Co. Ltd.

No. 246, Union Place,  
COLOMBO-2

Editor: Mervyn de Silva

Telephone: 5 4 7 5 8 4

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Printed by Ananda Press  
82/5, Wolfendhal Street, Colombo-13.  
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# President JR: Essays in personal diplomacy

Mervyn de Silva

Following his first state visit to the U.S. seven years after he assumed office, President J.R. makes his second trip to Delhi in seven months. The presidential itinerary was not planned that way but political developments, including an invitation from Mrs. Gandhi have contrived to produce a program that has its own significance and symmetry, its own varied emphasis and balance.

In Washington lay confident expectation and hope of material, political and moral support from the most powerful nation in the world. In Delhi lie the chance and hopeful expectations of that "political solution" which President Reagan in his speech at the arrival ceremony remarked was what Sri Lanka should seek because "the fundamental issue in the communal strife was a political one requiring a political solution"

And the Delhi negotiations late last year showed, the road to a political solution goes through the Indian capital, even if that path, as some Sri Lankans argue, also runs via Madras.

So President J.R. who described Mrs. Gandhi as a "friend" is in Delhi today and all Sri Lankans must hope that these vital discussions will inject a new momentum to the Roundtable "amity" talks.

## CENSORSHIP

All news reports, pictures and comments published here are subject to Censorship by the Competent Authority appointed under Emergency Regulations.

Sri Lanka, the US Congressional committee was told by Mr. Jayewardene was a "5 star democracy" in the Third World community that stretches across the oceans. J.R. himself received a glittering 5 star-treatment from the Reagan administration. The planning of the visit turned out to be a first-rate job by Ambassador Corea and his staff. The only unpleasant diversions were provided not so much by the Pro-Eelam lobbyists with their half-page advertisement and a 100 strong demo at Lafayette park but by an article by Russell Warren Howe in the *Washington Times* (See Correspondent Samath's ISLAND report)

In going to China, Japan and South Korea, JR undertook an essay in "personal diplomacy". He continues that exercise now on his current tour to demonstrate once more how foreign policy (a portfolio he had divested himself of in 1977) had assumed such a tremendous importance after July, and the 'internationalisation' of the Sri Lankan crisis.

President J.R.'s visit would not have been better timed in terms of Mr. Reagan's own responsiveness to Sri Lankan problems. Mr. Reagan has launched a crucial pre-election campaign against what he has termed "international terrorism". So on that question there was a perfect meeting of minds between the two leaders. Mr. Reagan also came out strongly against the idea of separatism. What action will follow on the fund-raising and other activities of the Eelam lobbyists in the US, time will show.

Right through the visit, key US officials made it clear that there was no question whatsoever of military pacts or military assistance.

And President JR closed that controversial discussion with the statement that we will not seek military help from "the US, the Soviet Union or India".

Agreements were certainly signed—double tax, investment, science and technology. And as the World Bank announced that Sri Lanka's aid needs in 1985 total 540 million dollars, the US pledged 74 million, in time for the Aid Group meeting in Paris. (See TRENDS)

Sri Lanka is in the middle of the Indian ocean. US interests in a region where India is the "pivotal power" (Vice President George Bush in Delhi in May) are centred on the Gulf, regional stability in South Asia and strengthening and extending US economic influence in these countries, particularly through the private sector. The penetrative power of US capital and stronger economic linkages, especially in India and its neighbours, is the main instrument of policy. For the rest, the Indian ocean is important in America's strategic rivalry with the Soviet Union at a time when the Soviet navy has begun to effectively challenge the US naval dominance which replaced British power after the withdrawal of the British 'east of Suez'.

Thus, the US visit not only helped define more clearly the US-Sri Lanka relationship but demarcated the parameters of Sri Lanka's foreign policy, and the choices opened to this country as it strives to wrestle with what everybody from President JR to his most fiercest political opponent or critic agrees is the island's greatest challenge—the ethnic problem which is the core-issue in the current crisis.



## “India can help in scaling down violence” — Lalith Athulathmudali

President J. R. Jayewardene arrives in Delhi this weekend for talks with the Indian premier, Mrs. Gandhi. Cabinet Secretary, G. V. P. Samarasinghe has been in Delhi for a week preparing the ground for the summit talks on the ethnic issue. Joining the President at the talks will be National Security Minister, Mr. Lalith Athulathmudali. In an exclusive interview with the BBC, Mr. Athulathmudali took up some basic issues. We publish an excerpt from this interview:

**Q. Indo-Sri Lankan relations right now seems to be marked by much misunderstanding, if not serious friction. Do you agree? How do you yourself see the Indo-Sri Lankan relations at the moment?**

A. I think you have to see that question in an historical perspective; that is in the general background of long-standing friendship. In that relationship there have been on occasion, points of friction. To mention two matters — the major issue of citizenship. Through negotiations and agreements we have resolved what was thought to be intractable and we are still trying to resolve the residual problems. Then there was the issue of Kachchativu. Again we were able to settle that amicably. The present problem is of a different kind. I am speaking of the terrorist groups in India.

**Q. You are speaking of their presence and their activities there...?**

A. Yes. They are on Indian soil, planning and plotting to deny Sri Lanka sovereignty over its entire territory, and nothing could be a more serious threat. But they are also engaged in committing criminal acts.

**Q. How do you think Sri Lanka should approach that question?**

A. By insisting on respect for and adherence to fundamental prin-

ciples governing relations between sovereign states, principles universally recognised by the civilised world.

**Q. How does that relate to the government's declared view that the basic problem requires a political, rather than a military, solution?**

A. There's an integral connection between the two. The point that is not often understood is that the more you succeed in curbing terrorist activities, the better the chances of a political settlement. Just because one has a formula for political settlement, you cannot curb the activities of terrorist groups. Unless one grasps that point, an analysis can misunderstand the manner in which various groups of people feel and act, people who feel threatened.

First, the vast majority of Tamil people who are not for terrorism but who fear the terrorist threats, reprisals etc.

Second, and perhaps more important or at least equally important, is the attitude of the Sinhala majority. The Sinhalese would be in a far more responsive, far more liberal, frame of mind, if terrorist activities are curbed. Thus we could advance on the path to political settlement.

**Q. How does India fit into that analysis...? the talks in Delhi is the focus of this interview...**

A. India can help the process greatly. India has the power to place curbs on the activities of the terrorist groups...they are on India's soil.

**Q. How about extradition and other steps...?**

A. Those legal and executive measures can be discussed...

**Q. But your first priority is the scaling down of violence through enlisting Indian support?**

A. Yes.

(Continued on page 10)

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# CAMPUS ERUPTION

MR. ANURA Bandaranaike Leader of the Opposition said that he was not in the least surprised at the manner the Government had reacted when the shootings were mentioned in the House.

If the request of the students not to set up a police post in the campus was heeded by the Government this shooting would not have taken place, he said.

**Mr. Dinesh Gunewardena (MEP — Maharagama)** said that the Government had decided to bring more laws to bury the freedom of the press and the freedom of expression.

When the leader of the UNP was in the opposition he had taken an entirely different stance on Press freedom but today he had framed laws to gag the Press.

## CENSORSHIP OF PARLIAMENT REPORTS

CENSORSHIP snarled up the flow of newspaper copy from Parliament when the House debated the extension of the emergency on Thursday and delayed the appearance of Parliamentary reports in all newspapers by 24 hours.

There was a hasty meeting between the Deputy Speaker and the Deputy Secretary General and the Additional Secretary General and the Deputy Speaker repeated his earlier ruling that some of Mr. Muttettuwegama's remarks should be expunged.

The Prime Minister intervened to suggest setting up a committee and proposed Education Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe as his representative. Opposition Leader Anura Bandaranaike suggested Mr. Muttettuwegama as his nominee and the two MPs with Secretary General Nihal Seneviratne were asked to constitute the committee.

—ISLAND

He said that in respect of the shootings at Peradeniya and Colombo Universities the Government had learnt a bitter lesson about setting up a Police Post inside the Campus. Students had carried flags and banners when they had been shot at.

**Mr. Haren Corea:**— He is referring to matters which are subjudice.

**The Deputy Speaker:**— The member should refrain from speaking on matters which are subjudice.

Mr. Gunewardena asked whether it was wrong to carry a banner or a flag.

— He said that when Royalists and Thomians damaged property and hooted at the members of the public during the Royal — Thomian match, the Police looked on without even raising a batton.

He said that the Government had to take full responsibility for these killings. It should prevent the students being taken into custody.

The Government was trying to write into the statute book the emergency laws and it had exceeded all limits of democracy and was preparing itself to be a dictatorship.

**MR. RANIL WICKREMASINGHE** Minister of Education said that what started as an arrest of two drunken students, had ended up with the death of a student.

He said that they anticipated certain elements to exploit this situation. Today the trouble was only around universities but tomorrow that could spread to other parts of the city. School students would be brought into this situation tomorrow.

He said that politicians should not drag the innocent school children into these political strategies. The situation was tense but it should not be exploited by political parties.

He said that they were trying their best to prevent this being transformed into a police-students struggle. In such an event they would be compelled to bring in the armed forces which were now in the North.

Mr. Wickremasinghe said that the education system should not be sabotaged because of these incidents.

**Mr. Lalith Athulathmudali, Minister of National Security** said that there were new trends taking place among the terrorists. The terrorists were now finding it extremely difficult to get new recruits to their movement. This was what he had learnt from the terrorists radio announcement.

Several people who were involved in the Jaffna CTB robbery, five persons who were directly involved in the Batticaloa jail break and the terrorists who had killed Dr. Ambalavanar and the 70 year old woman had been arrested.

He said that they were getting better information owing to good public relations.

Mr. Athulathmudali said that one student had died at Peradeniya and one in Colombo.

**Mr. Gamini Dissanayake — Minister of Lands and Land Development and Mahaweli Development** said that he would like to remind the Member for Matugama that the scribbings on the walls did not reflect serious public opinion and the Member should change his mind about the writing on the wall, he had spoken of.

— ISLAND



# Lakshman, Dinesh, Sarath on shootings

**Mr. Lakshman Jayakody (SLFP-Attanagalle)** recalled that seven years ago when he was the Acting Minister of Defence, Mr. J. R. Jayewardene who was then Leader of the Opposition gave notice of a similar question,

Mr. Jayewardene had wanted to know about the shooting of Peradeniya University students by the police.

"We did not waste any time. I got a report from the IGP and read it out in the House", Mr. Jayakody said.

He felt that Minister Athulathmudali should have brought an official report of the happenings to be read in the House. However, he added, this did not mean he did not believe what Mr. Athulathmudali had said.

He was glad about what the Minister had said about the students leaving Aquinas hostel with police escorts. It would prevent any escalation of tension.

He referred to the Iraqi contradiction. The government media had said that Iraq understood the Lankan position.

Mr. Tyrone Fernando, Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs pointed out that what had been actually said was not that Iraq understands, but that Iraq accepted this as a domestic matter.

Mr. Jayakody then said that the PLO statement in the issue had been blacked out by all but one local paper. Foreign criticisms of this was carried in the foreign media.

Mr. Fernando pointed out that the member for Attanagalla could not expect there to be no protest. Other countries were quite free to do so, but they had accepted this issue as an internal matter.

He said the President had mentioned that he would get assistance even from the devil to fight terrorism. Those were the foreign devils.

Mr. Jayakody said that even the surveillance zone was a suggestion made by "Mossad".

— DAILY NEWS



**Mr. Dinesh Gunawardena M E P** — Maharagama continuing his speech said the government should weep over the fact that a police post was started in the campus. Students have continuously protested about the presence of police officers in the campus premises. Under such circumstances the government without considering such protests set up a police post in the Peradeniya Campus. This, resulted in the killing of a student and injuring several others.

This morning students at the Havelock Road Aquinas hostel were trying to put up a banner.

At that stage Mr. Harindra Corea Deputy Minister of Public Administration rising to a point of order said the member for Maharagama has accused the police of killing the student. The member should not say such things as there was a judicial inquiry on.

**Mr. Gunawardena:** What I said was that some students were attempting to put up a banner. At this stage the member was interrupted by several members.

Mr. Gunawardena said he visited the Sri Jayawardhanapura University which was in his electorate and found many students stranded without water, food and even money to get back to their homes.

Undergraduates were being taken into custody one by one by the police.

The police had asked the students to leave the campus by Thursday evening, but the authorities had not provided them bus fare. The police should be well disciplined. They should use force only as a last resort.

— DAILY NEWS



**Mr. Sarath Muttetuwegama (CP-Kalawana)** recalled how the UNP made use of the death of Weerasuriya, the University student prior to 1977.

When he heard the Minister of National Security making a statement on Wednesday he felt the Minister was recalling what the UNP did in the past. The Minister of National Security said there were people trying to come to power with the tears that flowed out of incidents.

The student who died Padmasiri Abeysekera was a 2nd year MBBS student. Those students who had been successful at the exam were celebrating the occasion.

**Mr. E. P. Paul Perera (UNP-Kaduwela)** There is a judicial inquiry on this, and it is not proper for us to refer to this incident.

**Deputy Speaker:** Member for Kalawana is much more experienced on these matters. He knows what to avoid.

**Mr. Muttetuwegama:** I am sorry I am going to refer to this incident.

**Deputy speaker:** The Minister for National Security told the House that there is an inquiry, and we must accept that.

**Mr. Muttetuwegama:** On an earlier occasion when a matter like this came up in Parliament, and I referred to the fact that there was a judicial inquiry on, the Prime Minister wanted me to give the case number and produce a certified copy of the case.

**Deputy Speaker:** I do not want certified copies. I accept the Minister's statement.

**Mr. Muttetuwegama:** I am sorry I going to speak on this incident.

**Deputy Speaker:** If you speak in a manner as not to be prejudicial to the inquiry, I shall allow you to speak. We have to respect the law.

Mr. Muttetuwegama continuing said the police post of the Peradeniya University was set up on the insistence of somebody. Even the police did not like it.

— Daily News



# ALL CAMPUSES CLOSED

The Ministry of Higher Education announced (June 21) that the Universities of Colombo, Kelaniya, Sri Jayewardenepura, Moratuwa and Ruhuna would be closed until further notice. The previous day, the Peradeniya and Dumbara campuses were closed.

In a televised broadcast, Mr. Lalith Athulathmudali, Minister of National Security appealed to all people, especially students and parents, to help end the unrest that has arisen in the Universities. He said:

"I have to tell the nation of an unfortunate incident that took place in the Peradeniya University.

"As a result of this incident, one student died, another received injuries and a policeman was also injured.

"A judicial inquiry is being held into the incident I would not elaborate on the incident itself as it could be sub-judice.

"All I wish to say is that once the inquiry is concluded, the government will in an impartial and a fair way, take all necessary steps required by law, to inquire into this matter.

"We shall also spare no pains to look into the background of this incident and find out who or what organisation is behind it.

"But the first thing the government did was to render all assistance to the bereaved family. Every one of us is filled with sorrow. A young man thirsting, searching for higher Education has died. The sorrow on all of us is only natural."

## Eelam lobby embarrasses govt.

Feisal Samat

A one-hour demonstration by over 100 Tamils residing in the United States was staged at Lafayette Park while President, J. R. Jayewardene and Mrs. Jayewardene were guests at a White House ceremony.

The demonstration, organised by a movement calling itself the Eelam Tamils, carried placards criticising the Sri Lanka government and accusing President Jayewardene of inciting violence in the north.

Meanwhile, a half-page advertisement in the "Washington Post" on Monday also sponsored by the "Eelam Tamils" comprised material critical of the Jayewardene government. Titled "Holocaust of Tamils in Sri Lanka" and sub-titled "Island of Tears" it gave a historic background of the Tamils up to the July 1983 disturbances.

Meanwhile, an article by **Russell Warren Howe** in the "Washington Times" of Monday had made several uncomplimentary remarks about

Sri Lanka and the Jayewardene government.

Here are a few extracts.

"Sri Lanka President is expected to plead with the US to intervene if India used force to protect the Tamils.

"Although the US Ambassador in Sri Lanka John Reed had told Mr. Jayewardene that there was no prospect of America sending in the Marines to help the Sri Lanka Government, the 78-year-old president seems convinced that he can change Washington minds, Western diplomats in Colombo say.

"Repression of the Tamils by the Sinhalese majority has been heavy handed. Amnesty International, comparing local legislation and the systematic torture of political prisoners with S. African practices, given the country one of the worst human rights records in the world."

(Continued on page 17)

## VASA OPTICIANS

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# Democracy cannot survive on diet of words — J. R.

"Our history and civilization have survived in an unbroken sequence from the 5th century BC for 2500 years. There were glimpses of modern democracy even then as in the appointment of Mayors to our ancient cities. The ruins of state buildings still contain carvings in stone where the Cabinets of the Kings and their Ministers sat. We were the first in Asia in 1865 to elect members to the Municipalities that governed our major cities; and in 1931 under the universal franchise to exercise our right to elect the Government of our choice.

"We also have in our country an unbroken historical record extending over the same long period of a line of Heads of State; monarchies of different dynasties, from Sri Lanka and abroad, including India and the United Kingdom; of two Presidents, one selected and one myself elected by the whole country. I happen to be the 193rd in the line of Heads of State from 483 BC to date.

"Democracy cannot however survive on a diet of words. The people require food for their stomachs, clothing for their bodies and roofs over their heads. In the Non-Aligned world of developing nations which covers the whole of Central and South America, the whole of Africa, the whole of Asia from the Mediterranean Sea to the Seas of China and Japan, there are very few countries which could be called a democracy such as is your country. Ours is one. That is why the assistance that developing nations of the world receive from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund is appreciated though there are many matters on which we feel there should be change to help them to exist as free countries.

"We in the developing world have problems similar to those who live in the developed world have deficit budgets, high interest rates, over-valued currencies and unstable exchange rates. These are the classical examples of the symptoms that affect both the developed and developing nations. Those who speak so eloquently on behalf of the developing nations have been pressing for the opening of commodity markets of the developed world for their manufactures without protective laws; stable prices for raw products, and rescheduling of debts borrowed for development. Consider these requests, Mr. President, with sympathy and generosity.

"In our own case with aid received we have been able to commence and have almost completed the largest development programme possibly unequalled in magnitude

by any development programme in any country in the contemporary world or earlier.

"Another and a modern problem and one of universal occurrence today is terrorism. This happens in the extreme North of our country where a group of misguided people of Tamil birth who were favoured by the American people in the latter half of the 19th century by the erection of schools and hospitals, seek separation from a united Sri Lanka. There are more Tamils living in the East and among the Sinhalese than in the regions that seek separation, who do not support them. My Party holds 10 out of 12 seats in the Eastern Province which separatists seek to join to the North. The terrorists are a small group who seek by force including murder, robberies and other misdeeds to support the cause of separation, including the creation of a Marxist State in the whole of Sri Lanka and in India, beginning with Tamil Nadu in the South."

— SUN

## Gamini on poverty

Kendall Hopman

**Lands, Land Development and Mahaveli Development Minister Gamini Dissanayake warned of certain undesirable elements who were bent on provoking people in order to create an atmosphere which would lead to another disruption of the peace as in July last year.**

Assuring that the government has already taken all steps to prevent such a recurrence, the Minister appealed to the people not to fall prey to such tactics warning that one more communal riot could cut short all foreign aid to the country.

Mr. Dissanayake was speaking at the prize distribution at the Kana-dulla Sri Dharmaraja Pirivena in Kuliypitiya. Concentrating on the

theme of the current problems faced by the country and of living according to the Dhamma, Minister Dissanayake identified poverty and the lack of knowledge of technology as the two main problems.

"What we need in the country today is to find solutions to the various problems our country is facing. This is what we are trying to achieve. Otherwise the statement of the former World Bank head Robert McNamara that third world countries would continue to get poorer might come true" he said.

"Our principal problem is that we are poor. More than half the population depends on food stamps. Next to Bangladesh, we are the second poorest nation in South East Asia. Our per capita income is only 200 rupees. What can a person do with this?"

— SUN



# Political violence and the future of democracy

Gananath Obeyesekera

I was in Colombo on 26 July when the usual announcement by Air Lanka, the country's only airline, put out its blurb, "Visit Sri Lanka: A Taste of Paradise." This advertisement, with pictures of the brand new hotels with expanses of beach and ocean and tables overflowing with lobsters and tropical fruits, routinely appears on national television, except that on this occasion the advertisement was not quite in good taste: the paradise isle was in flames, the houses and business establishments of the minority Tamil community were being systematically burnt and looted by well-organized mobs belonging largely to the lumpen proletariats of the cities and small towns of Sri Lanka. The brutality was unbelievable: homes and shops were burnt, cars were doused with gasoline and lit, sometimes with the occupant inside: some people were hacked to death, others burnt alive. Thirty-five political prisoners were killed by irate regulars in the country's maximum security prison. The next day seventeen more were slaughtered in the same manner. There was a total breakdown of law and order in the nation that had been touted by foreign governments as the model of stability, the apogee of free enterprise. A few days and the illusion was shattered: the house of cards had crumbled.

The antagonism between Tamils and Sinhalese is rooted in the country's history but has been exacerbated into inter-ethnic violence only since 1956. Sporadic riots, characterized by extreme brutality occurred periodically, but what was striking about the present events was their scale which was beyond anything that had ever occurred before, and the fact that the marauders

were well-drilled mobs on the rampage (this occurred later) but, at least on the first day (25 July), they were well-organized groups who had electoral lists of Tamil houses and enterprises and systematically went about destroying them. It is this aspect of the problem — the political organization of violence — that I shall deal with in this article. Violence has been practised by both sides but, prior to this, the systematic organization of violence is characteristic only of the Tamil extremists (terrorists of the North and they for the most part targeted their attacks on police and military personnel and occasionally on Tamil politicians who supported government of President J. R. Jayewardene. When violent acts were committed the brutality on both sides was extreme. Tamil terrorists who killed service personnel were not content with killing *per se* but indulged also in disfiguring the bodies and desecrating corpses. This time however the Sinhalese outdid all others in the scale and brutality of their violence. Like the Tamil terrorists of the North, their violence too was organised; it had a planned, systematic character. This political organization of violence. I believe goes beyond the problem of Tamil-Sinhalese ethnic conflicts and has larger political implications for the future of democracy in the island.

What then is the background to this violence, unprecedented in the recent history of a country designated by the people themselves as **dhamma dipa**, "the land of the Buddha's **dharma**" a doctrine of nonviolence and compassion? I am a Sinhalese and a Buddhist and this is the troubling question that I ask myself. To even attempt an answer one must focus first on the issue of the erosion of the law and the institutions of justice and with it the political institutionalization of violence in Sri Lanka.

## The Historical Background of the Communal Conflict

The Sinhalese speakers constitute 70 percent of the population of Sri Lanka while the Tamils are about 20 percent. The Muslims who speak Tamil but consider themselves a group apart are 7 percent. The overwhelming majority of the Sinhalese are Buddhists and the Tamils are Hindu. The Sinhalese population speak an Indo-European language (Sinhala) while the Tamils speak a Dravidian one. Underlying language and religious differences — Buddhist versus Hindu — are strong cultural and racial similarities. Physically the two groups cannot be differentiated. Though the initial Sinhala migrants were probably Indo-European language speakers who arrived over 2,500 years ago, practically all later arrivals were South Indians (mostly Tamil speakers) who were assimilated into the Sinhalese Buddhist community. The South Indian influence is omnipresent among Buddhists. On a level of popular religiosity Buddhists propitiate Hindu gods like Vishnu, and Skanda, the son of Shiva. However the Buddhists view these gods as totally subservient to the Buddha while the Tamils view the Buddha as an avatar of Vishnu. Kinship and marriage patterns among the Sinhalese are also part of a larger Dravidian pattern. It is these cultural and subdoctrinal similarities that permitted the assimilation of South Indians through long periods of historical time, into the Sinhalese Buddhist social structure.

The core of the Sinhala identity was Buddhist: the destiny of the ethnic group and that of the religion were inseparable. Myths and historical events confirmed the twin facets of this identity. Historically, almost all the invasions of Sri Lanka came from South Indian kingdoms. Thus opposing the Sinhala Buddhist

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identity was that of the Tamil Hindu identity. In times of historical stress these identities were reaffirmed to mobilize popular support.

When the Portuguese arrived in Sri Lanka in 1505 there were several contending kingdoms in the country among whom was a Tamil Hindu kingdom in Jaffna, the northern peninsula of the island. Each of these kingdoms claimed sovereignty over the whole island. No king was content to see himself as ruler of a part since the island was always considered a totality. The call for a separate state of Tamil-speaking peoples is thus a contemporary historical phenomenon. Insofar as it is the current reality, we must inquire how it came about.

The Tamil kingdom of Jaffna had ceased to be an independent unit in the sixteenth century when it was captured by the Portuguese and then by the Dutch. The Sinhala-Buddhist kingdom in the interior of the island remained independent till 1815 when it was taken by the British. The Tamils of the East Coast and parts of the north central province traditionally owed suzerainty to the Sinhalese kings of Kandy and trade routes connected the east coast with the kingdom of Kandy. Sinhalese Tamil intermarriage, exceptional in the North, was accepted and practiced in the East Coast until recent times. When the British took over Sri Lanka they introduced yet another complexity. They brought in large numbers of South Indian tribal and often low status groups as coolie labour on the tea plantations of the central highlands. Thus there were three Tamil-Hindu zones well established by the end of the nineteenth century: in the north, in the east and in the central highlands. Though out-

siders (as well as some Sinhalese) see the Tamil problem as one, the internal reality is very different. The northern Tamils were much more orthodox Hindu than Tamils elsewhere and were strongly patrilineal; the East Coast Tamils came from Kerala and were divided into matrilineal clans; while the Tamils of the central provinces were recently introduced groups from South India, alienated from both the other groups. Besides they were thrust into the midst of a surrounding Sinhalese population from whom too they were alienated.

During the early twentieth century when constitutional agitation against British rule gathered momentum, Sinhalese and Tamils however presented a united position. In 1919 the Ceylon National Congress was founded by both Tamils and Sinhalese. But political parties soon began to gravitate along communal lines. The Sinhalese increasingly felt threatened by Tamil control of business and the professions while the Tamils became increasingly self-conscious of their minority identity. The political democratization of the state exacerbated these tendencies. Universal adult suffrage was introduced in the 1931 elections and this mobilized communal issues into public voting patterns. When Independence was declared in 1948 there were several Tamil political parties with an exclusively ethnic base, while Sinhalese parties though formally nonethnic, were in reality committed to Sinhalese nationalism. A further escalation of the problems of Sinhalese and Tamils occurred in the post-1956 period which saw the massive electoral success of S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) over the United National Party (UNP). Much of Bandaranaike's success depended on the slogan "Sinhala Only": there was to be one language for the nation

— the language of the majority — Sinhala. This polarized the Sinhala and Tamil forces and led to Tamil demands; some for equality of status for both languages and other for a federal type of constitution.

The Tamil Federal Party, founded in 1951 accelerated the Tamil demand for autonomy. The Sinhalese on their part feared that a Tamil separatist movement would involve South Indian support and undermine the integrity of the state. In the seventies, economic hardship and unemployment and the rise of discontented youth groups added fuel to the movement. A Sinhala youth-based insurrection in 1971 was drastically quelled by the government of Mrs. Bandaranaike (SLFP). In the Tamil North, similar bands of youth militants demanded an independent Tamil state. As a result of their pressure, the constitutional Federal Party changed its name and manifesto. They became the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) committed to an independent Tamil state comprising large areas of the north, east and central parts of the island. This in turn fanned Sinhala fears which increased farther when Tamil youth groups, in the late seventies, supported by expatriate financial backing, adopted terrorism to achieve their goal. Terrorism in turn forced the government to send an ill-disciplined and poorly trained army into Jaffna, further exacerbating the patterns of violence and reprisals on both sides.

(To be continued)

India can . . .

(Continued from page 4)

**Q. President Reagan has also urged Sri Lanka to make every effort at a political settlement. Do you see President JR's visit to India in that context?**

A. It is correct that President Reagan has spoken of a political solution. But whether this was done or not, all ideas promoting a political settlement were initiatives of the Sri Lankan president... if you look at the record, this is clear. Sri Lanka was glad to accept India's offer of good offices... so these views are shared by all parties involved in this process of dialogue...

— M. de S.



# The bourgeoisie versus the plantation workers

Kumari Jayawardena

The main thrust of the Left argument in the parliamentary debate was that the largest single sector of the working-class was being deprived of basic democratic rights. The Sinhala bourgeoisie was accused of cynically arousing racist fears in order to attack a key section of the workers, who were a potential political threat to the Government.

The Communist Party stressed the class bias of the legislation. Its main speaker in parliament, **Pieter Keuneman**, while claiming that the legislation 'operated in favour of the rich and educated and militated against the poor people, the working people of this country', emphasised that class, more than race, was the main determinant.

We are opposed to this Bill because of certain class considerations involved... the real bias is against the working-class Indians. It is far more a class question that arises... The very fundamental theory of this Bill is false..

The way it is to discriminate against a class... and to see that the political structure of the UNP government is maintained under the plea of giving citizenship to the people of this country (Hansard, 19 Aug. 1948).

**Harry Abeygoonewardena**, the Communist party secretary, condemned the view that the Indian workers were a 'fifth column' of the Fascist government of India and said:

'We look upon them as an ally and a section of the working-class of Ceylon who will fight for the establishment of a socialist state in Ceylon.'

Taking a broader view of the question he added that the citizenship legislation was one of a series of repressive laws passed by the government, including the Public Security Ordinance, the Police Ordinance and the Trade Union Ordinance.

This bill is not only against one section of the working classes who are called

Indians, but....against the working people of Ceylon, including the Ceylonese labourers... This is another step taken by the government to entrench itself in power and to deprive the working people of this country of their rights and to divide the working people (Hansard, 10 Dec. 1948).

In this debate Colvin R. de Silva of the BLP also stressed the class angle and said:

There is the cloven hoof of the class approach peeping from under the mantle of an impartial citizenship principle... in defining the principle of citizenship. What this government has kept in the forefront of its mind is neither human justice nor social justice, but precisely restriction in the interests of a particular class. (Hansard, 19 Aug. 1948.)

Similarly, **Robert Gunewardena** of the LSSP, also denounced the 'shameless legislation designed to deny citizenship to a section of the working-class which produces the wealth of this country', and **Dr.N.M. Perera** also accused the government of being afraid that 'a possible unity of the Sinhalese proletariat with the Indian proletariat would be the death knell of the local bourgeoisie'. (Hansard, 19 Aug. 1948) He alleged that the government were doing 'a grave injustice to a large section of... the working-class' and said that the laws were 'openly anti-working-class deliberately designed against the Indian working-class and that class alone' (Hansard 10 Dec. 1948).

## Other Viewpoints

Apart from the race and class aspects enunciated during the debate by the Sinhala bourgeoisie and the Left, there were other shades of opinion voiced on this occasion. While The Ceylon Indian Congress M.P.'s expressed strong views on the injustices done to those of Indian origin in Sri Lanka, the other minority members of parliament did not show the same concern. The voting on the first citizenship bill was 53/35 for

and against and the second, 52/32; the pattern of voting was very much on class lines which cut across ethnicity.

On the first Citizenship Act in August 1948, the two Tamil Ministers in the UNP government, **C. Sunderalingam** and **C.Sittampalam** voted for but refrained from speaking in the debate while the Tamil Congress, led by **G.G.Ponnambalam**, voted against; but Sunderalingam who had serious reservations about the question, resigned from the government and G.G.Ponnambalam was made a Minister soon after. When it came to voting on the Indian Residents Act in December 1948, Ponnambalam voted for the bill, while **S.J.V. Chelvanayakam** of the Tamil Congress continued to vote against. Other minority members voting for the bill included the Minister, **T.B. Jayah** (who had supported Indian franchise rights in 1928); independents such as **S.U.Ethirimanasingham V.Nalliah** and **A.L.Thambiyah**, (who had been an ally, of Goonesinha in the labour Party in the late 1920's), and Tamil Congress members **K.Kanagaratnam** and **T.Ramalingam**. Several UNP Muslim members — **H.S. Ismail**, **M.S.Karlapper** and **A.L. Sinnalebbe** — as well as **M.M.Ibrahim** (an independent, who latter joined the UNP) voted with the government, as did the European appointed members (**F.H.Griffith**, **Major J.W.Olfield**, **S.A. Pakeman** and **E.E.Spencer**) and the Burgher appointed member, (**J.A.Martensz**).

However, even on the government benches, there were some who had reservations about the bill, the best example being the Minister for Home Affairs, **S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike** who two years latter, left the UNP to form the SLFP. In winding up the debate on the citizenshipa bill, he distanced himself from the UNP government:



From my point of view — I say from my personal point of view — these provisions go further than I would have liked personally. Though I support them in the interests of statesmanship and wisdom and in the interests of peace, I would have preferred the problem to be approached from another angle.

Bandaranaike's 'angle' was that once it was decided that a 'safe absorbable maximum of Indian workers were needed, they should be given full rights and the 'fullest amenities of labour in this country'; those who wanted to return to India were to be given 'fair and just and if necessary, generous terms'. Expressing the hope that Sri Lankans would in the future work on plantations, he added 'I am sure that the people of this country are capable of working and managing the estates under suitable conditions of labour . . . this is that we would have liked, this is what Pandit Nehru . . . mentioned to me'. (Hansard 20 Aug. 1984).

The other interesting point to note is that many independent members of parliament who were (or were to become) well-known political figures, also voted against the bill, along with the LSSP, BLP CP and CIC. They were **Lakshman Rajapakse, Wilmot Perera, R. S. Pelpola, I. M. R. A. Iriyagolla,** and **H. Sri Nissanka**; the latter, a leading Buddhist, stated 'I am not in a position to vote upon a measure which ignores the first principle of law . . . The method of approach to the solution of this difficult problem might have been different' (Hansard 20 Aug 1948).

### Elections and Satyagraha

When parliament was dissolved and new elections were scheduled in 1952, based on the 1950 register, from which the preponderant majority of Indians were excluded the Ceylon Indian Congress launched a campaign to obtain voting rights for those Indians who had opted, under the law, to become citizens of Sri Lanka. The agitation included sathyagraha by the Congress leaders outside the Prime Minister's office, to highlight the plight of the plantation workers and draw support for their cause. A meeting at the Town Hall on August 5th, 1952, to mark the 100th day

campaign, united the opposition parties. Dr. Colvin R. de Silva said that the disenfranchising of an important section of the people should be the concern, not only of the CIC, but of every community and emphasised the need for working-class solidarity. Philip Gunawardena condemned the treatment meted out to Indian plantation labour as 'most unjust, unfair and inhuman. Representatives of the Communist Party. (Pieter Keuneman) Federal Party (S. J. V. Chelvanayagam) and plantation labour leaders, S. Thondaman and A. Aziz also spoke on this occasion.

One should also read that a section of the Buddhist clergy supported the rights of plantation labour and the satyagraha campaign. K. Indasara Thero on behalf of 29 bhikkus of the Prabuddha Bhikshu Mandalaya of Gampola appealed to the Prime Minister :

It is our earnest wish that as an enlightened statesman, and a Buddhist called upon to guide the destinies of Lanka at such a critical time, you will view the whole matter not in a formal or legal manner, but from the human angle...The Indians who are here are a vital part of the Agriculture and Industry of our land. Moreover they were brought here by the British rulers of old and have directly or indirectly helped the development of our land. It seems a gross injustice to treat them now as unwanted foreigners. Our country is utilising their services to maintain our economy. Let us then give them the fundamental rights they are appealing for. (Congress News 26 May, 1952).

In 1952 the new Prime Minister (Dudley Senanayake) openly displayed the class and race bias of the bourgeoisie when he frankly boasted that the UNP had succeeded in 'liquidating the Indian menace in Ceylon by the simple device of denying the vote to Ramasamy and Meenachchi' (Congress News, 12 May 1952). However, during these years of blatant anti-working class and anti-minority legislation the Left leadership stressed class rather than ethnic consciousness. Progressive ideology was still able, to resist the temptation to adopt racist policies and it is to the credit of the working-class and its leaders that they determinedly supported the rights of minorities up to the 1960's when they were

pressurised into changing their policies.

This article has attempted to show that some of the elements of the Sinhala-Buddhist consciousness which formed the ideological basis for discrimination and violence against minority ethnic groups, were also marshalled in the campaigns against plantation labour. The assumption behind the movement for depriving the plantation workers of citizenship and voting rights was that the Sinhalese were the original and rightful inhabitants of Sri Lanka, in whom alone, lay the right to give or to take away minority rights. Plantation Tamils were seen as the latest manifestation of incursions from India, which had been resisted for so long by the Sinhalese; this concept was advanced at an ideological level in appeals to the Sinhala masses arousing fears of India threatening the country externally and internally but was significantly not allowed to interfere with the supply of necessary labour to the plantations. Racism could be used to mobilise the Sinhalese against the democratic rights of the workers of Indian origin, but in the last analysis, as long as the plantation economy needed cheap labour, the class interests of the bourgeoisie prevailed.

(To be continued)

### **SLFP expresses sympathy**

The Sri Lanka Freedom Party's Central Committee has condemned what it has described as a situation arising out of the unfortunate incidents at the universities and expressed its sympathies for the students who have died.

A press release issued by SLFP General Secretary Ratnasiri Wickremanayake states that the party's Central Committee met on June 20 under the chairmanship of Mrs. Sirima Bandaranaike and strongly condemned the killing and harassment of university students and removal of their rights. It expressed regret at the death of the two university students.

— DAILY NEWS



# Glimpses of Sinhala perception - (2)

Jehan Perera

**Colombo, Working Class —  
April 4-7**

**Bycycle Vendor (age 40)**

TAMILS are not discriminated against. One has only to look around to see the falseness of that assertion. In fact most Tamils are not for separation. It is the work of a minority.

Political negotiations will not work because of the interests of foreign countries. The army must deal with the minority who are terrorists. No regional autonomy because there will be no limit thereafter to Tamil demands.

The Sangha has moral influence over the people because, like for instance the Christian priests, they are the repository of religion. But they do not have state power which is the preserve of the government. It is the govt. that must solve the problem.

Half the people are for JR and half are against him. It is difficult to say whether any other leader would do a better job.

**Boutique Keeper (age 30)**

No truth in Tamil claim of discrimination. The IGP is Tamil and 8 out of 16 DIGs are Tamil. But of course they cannot ask for rights equal to the Sinhalese in numbers.

Negotiations will not work. So the army must solve the problem. The Tamils are too small a minority to be given regional autonomy. However those who are citizens have a right to be in this country.

Much of the problem is being caused by India. About 60% of the terrorists are Indians. That is why it is dangerous to give the Indian Tamils citizenship. But on the other hand we need them for our economy.

The Sangha is more powerful than the politicians. JR cannot

solve this problem. The govt. is mainly interested in prolonging their stay in power and to say that their rule was a peaceful era.

**Domestic servant (age 50)**

Tamils are not treated equally because the Sinhalese realize that they have better brains and work harder, and therefore will do much better. Sinhalese cut one another down whereas Tamils help one another.

Tamils fight for separation because they don't like the domination by Buddhism.

No military solution. If there is, half the country will be killed. Mrs. B. killed thousands in quelling the 1971 insurgency. Regional autonomy is acceptable if it will lead to harmony, but doubt whether the Tamils will be satisfied with that. They have been treated badly.

The Sangha is not powerful. They cannot have influence when they commit so many sins. People know what they are like.

Although people scold JR he is the best. Mrs. B made this a prison.

**Kurumba Seller (age 30)**

Tamils should have equal rights as human beings but they should not have equal rights as communities. They are a proud people. What they want is their own rule, and a link up with India as a federal state.

Cannot give regional autonomy because this country is too small, and Tamils will become too powerful. Even now, without giving them regional autonomy, one has to only look at the prevailing situation to see the govt's lack of control. This situation has gone too far to be resolved. "If I go home my wife dies, if I stay here I die".

There is neither a political nor a military solution. The only thing left to do is to try JR. He is to blame. He is concerned about his international reputation.

The Sangha has little power if at all.

India is behind the trouble. Gives full support to the S. Indians. Thinks of the gain to itself.

Neither JR nor Mrs. B can solve the problem.

**Peon (age 30)**

Tamils are not treated any differently, we eat and live with them and during the July riots gave them shelter from the pillaging mobs. The Tamils are for Eelam because of nationalist feeling and opportunism that seeks to get more. But not all Tamils, or even the majority of Tamils, are for Eelam because they are suffering — caught between the scissors.

In a general sense the army cannot solve this problem. Negotiations with the terrorists are probably the best, but they will not come forward. Therefore it is necessary to send in the army.

No regional autonomy. Sri Lanka is a small country. With the Tamils concentrated in the north and with the two communities speaking 2 different languages this will only serve to divide the country even more.

In times of crisis the Sangha has temporary power, when they are called upon by the people. But otherwise the politicians have more influence.

India might want to come in if there is no solution and the crisis gets worse. America will help us, but then the Soviet Union will help India. Pakistan might seize this opportunity and with China's help attack India in Kashmir, so India will think twice before invading.



This problem should have been solved in 1977. The fault lies with both JR & Mrs. B. for not having solved the economic problem that frustrates the youth. Because JR knows the inside story, the whole story he must be the one who sees it to an end.

#### **Taxi Driver (age 40)**

Since all are the same, Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims, all have equal rights. But the Tamils are not 1st class citizens and neither should they be for this is the land of the Sinhalese who have no other country for themselves. The Tamils have no loyalty, they may live in Wellawatta but they go to Jaffna, they may live in Sri Lanka but they go to India. They want to separate in order to join up with India.

The military solution is the only solution. No regional autonomy because the country is too small. Frontiers will get pushed back. The Sinhalese cannot go up to the north but the Tamils can come down.

The Sangha is more powerful than politicians because they deal with religion and for the genuine good of the country. Politicians give the Sangha their due recognition.

This is a special country watched over and blessed by the gods. So India will not invade but if it does we will get help from foreign countries.

If JR leaves now things will become worse.

#### **Vegetable Seller (age 20)**

No discrimination. Lots of Tamils have education, wealth, cleverness in Trade, whereas the Sinhalese are lazy. Tamils ask for 1/2 the country because it will be profitable for them.

Negotiations will not work. So the problem must be solved by giving full powers to the army. No regional autonomy.

Sangha has more power than politicians because this a Buddhist country. The Sangha's sanction is important.

#### **Odd-job man (age 60)**

Tamils don't have an equal place. But unlike the Sinhalese who pull for both sides, the Tamils pull only for themselves. They are very determined whereas Sinhalese are vacillating.

No military solution because they too are arming and getting support from S. India.

Personally does not mind regional autonomy provided terrorism stops but most people will object to it and besides the Tamils are not to be trusted.

The Sangha is not influential. It is the govt. which artificially elevates them. Buddhist priests now do things for worldly gain.

There is a good chance of India invading but Sri Lanka will get aid from US & UK.

JR cannot solve this problem. He is too weak, besides he is partial towards, the Tamils and the people are all scolding him. Mrs. B would do a better job getting rid of the terrorists.

#### **Clerk (age 60)**

Tamils don't enjoy equal rights. For instance their language is not recognized. But even without having equal rights they discriminate against Sinhalese when they can. Giving the Tamils equal rights will only make it easier for them to overcome us. As we are the majority this is not permissible.

There is no military solution. The APC can come to a solution if all get together. Regional autonomy must not be given because this will give the Tamils more power which they will use against us.

The Sangha is as influential as the politicians.

India might invade but we must fight back. We can get international support. JR must consider the opinion of the people. He is too "Dharmishta".

#### **Assembly line worker (CTB) (age 50)**

Tamils have equal rights. Who has money, who are the doctors,

who predominate in the universities? Look at the amount of property Tamils have bought in Colombo. Tamils ask for separation because all minorities want to be majorities. They can ask, but we should not give.

The problem cannot be solved politically. Most Jaffna Tamils are against separation because they don't want to be stuck in Jaffna with its dry climate. Army must wipe out terrorism.

No regional autonomy. It is like dividing the country. We are the majority and we are the bosses. This is the only country for the Sinhalese. They are like the Jews while we have fallen down by being too kind to them.

We must not pay pooja to India. Because we follow the middle path, other countries, including the USSR, will help us if India invades. We also have our own armed forces to defend us.

The politicians are more influential than the Sangha. People don't listen to religion anymore. Otherwise July 1983 would not have taken place.

JR aggravated this problem. The temple and govt. don't go together. JR is too pious. He can't solve this. He wants to show he is a good Buddhist, so he lets the problem fester. He scolded Mrs. B about 1971 so he can't do the same now. This govt. is alone and alienated. The people have only "the sky for their head, and blows to their stomachs".

#### **Conclusions**

1. Opinion is divided whether Tamils as individuals have rights equal to the Sinhalese (there is confusion in differentiating between communal rights and individual rights). As regards communal rights the unanimous opinion is that since the Tamils are a minority group they cannot expect an equal place besides the Sinhalese group. Even those who concede that Tamils as individuals are not treated equally justify this by arguing that since the Tamils are hardworking and

(Continued on page 15)



# Reagan says ethnic conflict is political

Iqbal Athas

United States President Ronald Reagan pledged his country's support to eradicate terrorism from Sri Lanka and assured his attention to a proposal made by President J. R. Jayewardene to set up a United Nation Anti-Terrorism Organisation.

In a 20-minute discussion without aides at the historical Oval Office of the White House, the two Presidents discussed matters pertaining to Sri Lanka's ethnic problems, bi-lateral relation and foreign policy of both countries.

While newsmen were allowed in for a few minutes to the Oval Office a State Department spokesman later briefed the White House press corps and foreign correspondents covering President Jayewardene's visit on the matters that

were discussed between the two leaders.

The spokesman said President Jayewardene had expressed his interest in a double taxation agreement that is to be signed by the two countries. He had also inquired about another "investment protection agreement" for which drafts have already been prepared.

Discussing economic affairs both Presidents agreed that Sri Lanka should re-vitalise its private sector. President Reagan stressed that the government should move to institutionalise private sector investment and develop a rational programme for the development of this sector.

## Economic issues

The State Department spokesmen said the two Presidents had discussed deeply the problems afflicting the two major communities in Sri Lanka, the Sinhalese and the Tamils.

President Jayewardene explained to the US President the historical background to the present ethnic conflict and described how terrorism was hampering the development process of the country.

He explained his government's efforts to achieve a political solution to the problem. President Reagan told President Jayewardene that it was also the view of the United States Government that the problem was political in nature and that it required a political solution through dialogue.

President Jayewardene, the State Department spokesman said, told President Reagan that the Indian Premier Indira Gandhi had invited him to New Delhi on his return from Washington.

He told President Reagan that Ms. Gandhi was a friend of the Sri Lankan Government but the problems with India were being created by the South of Tamil Nadu.

A major issue discussed by two Presidents was human rights. The spokesman said more attention to this was focused probably after the report by Amnesty International on human rights in Sri Lanka.

President Jayewardene accepted that some personnel of the security forces had been responsible for killings of civilians, but he said his government had dismissed these personnel and that his government had not and would not resort to acts of terrorism in seeking a solution to the country's ethnic problems.

Explaining to President Jayewardene an advertisement which appeared in the prestigious 'Washington Post' Secretary Shultz said the government and the people of the United States were aware that most of the allegations made in the advertisement were inaccurate. The advertisement had been sponsored by the Eelam lobby in the United States and attempts to counter a four page Sri Lanka Embassy supplement also in the 'Washington Post' and two other prestigious American publications, the 'New York Times' and the 'Wall Street Journal' on the President's visit.

## Glimpses of . . .

(Continued from page 14)

pull for each other they will surpass the Sinhalese unless kept in check. This corresponds to Anagarika Dharmapala's depiction over 75 years ago of the "helpless Sinhala people in the grip of alien traders, money lenders and land grabbers".

2. The majority favour a military solution for two main reasons: (a) the terrorists will not be willing to negotiate, and since they dominate the TULF, negotiations with the TULF will not lead to any resolution of terrorism (b) the terrorists are a minority in the north and can be surgically wiped out.

3. There is a strong almost unanimous opinion against the granting of regional autonomy on the grounds that the country is too small for such a division and that thereafter there would be no end to Tamil demands from a position of greater strength.

4. The majority see the Buddhist Sangha as having little, or

temporary, influence over the people in view of their weakness, politically and morally. The minority who attached importance to the Sangha spoke in terms of Sri Lanka being a Buddhist country in the Sinhala-Buddhist idiom. It appears that the Sangha, like the moon, can make themselves noticed only when the political sun is not shining, and the leadership thus far being provided by the politicians has not been impressive to the people.

5. Opinion is divided about JR's performance. JR's main strength is that there is no one to replace him. Thus, those who supported him did so on the basis that if he went matters would get worse. Those against him said he is too pious and weak. Although his govt., and cabinet, is well known to be corrupt, no one levelled that charge against him. He is a father-figure. Under his umbrella there seems to be scope for a dynamic person to take risks and work towards a solution.

(To be continued)

— SUN



# The roots of capitalist crisis

Tara Coomaraswamy

## Disproportionality

This results from the "anarchy of capitalist production" (i. e. its lack of conscious planning and regulation) and produces its own equilibrating tendencies as capital moves from one branch of production into another to rectify particular imbalances between supply and demand. Inasmuch as this is a periodic (but haphazard) part of the friction of adjustment within the capitalist system, it cannot be described in terms of general laws. It cannot be said to produce a systematic tendency towards crisis, though the possibility of crisis is always there. According to Marx, in the case of disproportional production.

...that is to say... a faulty distribution of social labour among the individual spheres of production... the rise and fall of market values as a consequence of this faulty relation has a result the withdrawal of capital from one sphere of production and its carrying over into another the migration of capital from one branch to another. Nevertheless it is already implied in this process of equilibration that it assumes the opposite of equilibration and hence can contain within itself the seeds of the crisis, that the crisis itself can be a form of equilibration.

Since disproportionality can be corrected by the operation of the law of value without causing major upheavals, it lacks the force of necessity as a single explanation of crisis.

## Underconsumption

This might be described as a form of disproportionality, (viz. a generalised and systematic tendency for output of consumption goods to exceed demand.) The smaller the proportion of output paid out as wages, the greater the surplus which has to be realised by capitalists themselves. However, it would be tautological to claim that wages cannot realise all out put, since the basis for capitalists' profit would be undermined.

Rosa Luxemburg stated the problem as follows: under simple reproduction the disposal of surplus is no problem, since it is brought by capitalists for their own consumption. Under expanded reproduction there is a problem regarding that part of the surplus which capitalists wish to accumulate rather than consume, since: the part of total output representing variable capital is realised by workers's wages, the part representing constant capital is realised by capitalists' replacement purchases, but surplus value is only partly purchased by capitalists for consumption. 'Who, then could be the buyer and consumer of that portions of commodities whose sale is only the beginning of capital accumulation?' Capitalists cannot sell it among themselves for that would be a return to simple reproduction.

However if (it might be argued that) the surplus existed in the form of extra capital goods which the capitalists bought from each, making accumulation possible, there would be an augmentation of the problem at a later stage in the form of a larger quantity of goods to dispose of. To argue that this (i. e. capitalists selling to each other) could continue indefinitely would be to posit.

...a roundabout that revolves around itself in empty space. That is not capital accumulation, i. e. the amassing of money capital, but its contrary; producing commodities for the sake of it; from the standpoint of capital an utter absurdity.

In other words there is a built in underconsumptionism in the capitalist system which requires an external market for realisation of the surplus value.

Criticism's of Luxemburg's theory have been made earlier; only the most important of these is repeated here: i. e. that it is theoretically possible for capitalists' expenditure to realise all surplus value by increasing the organic composition of capital and introducing technological innovation. Historically it has been the case that the rate of growth of means of consumption has been greatly exceeded by the rate of growth of means of production — or, as Bukharin put it, of 'preparatory operations for the production of means of production.'

Thus capitalism would be precisely as she describes it — an irrational system, a merry-go-round in which capital accumulation grows out of hand, and production is as far as possible, for production's sake. To a large extent this is true. There exists a fundamental contradiction in capitalism between the end of a technical process which satisfies human needs, and the ends of a social system which aims at maximising surplus value. Capitalist production is tied to production of goods for consumption — but only in the last resort. As Marx said:

It is never to be forgotten that in the case of capitalists production it is not directly a question of use value but of exchange-value, and more particularly of the expansion of surplus value.

Capitalist social relations which restrict consumption at the same drive capitalists to accumulate and constantly expand production.

However, even if it is only in the last resort, capitalist production is still tied to consumption. i. e. notwithstanding the proliferation of intermediate stages and branches of production before the final product stands forth.

...A continuous circulation takes place between constant capital and constant capital (even without considering any accelerated accumulation) which is in so far independent of individual consumption as it never enters into such consumption, but



which is nevertheless definitely limited by it, because the production of constant capital never takes place for its own sake, but solely because more of this capital is needed in those spheres of production whose product pass into individual consumption.

Marx stresses the tendency for the productive powers of society to overreach themselves:

The periods in which capitalist production exerts all its forces regularly turn out to be periods of over production, because production potentials can never be utilised to such an extent that more value can not only be produced but also realised; but the sale of commodities, the realisation of commodity capital and thus of surplus value, is limited not by the consumer requirements of a society in general, but by the consumer requirements of a society in which the vast majority are poor and must always remain poor.

Excess capacity is thus according to Marx a chronic condition of capitalist society which would be expected to worsen as capitalism progressed.

Sweezy attempts a re-formulation of the underconsumptionist argument in order to demonstrate an inherent tendency towards the faster expansion of productive capacity than the (expansion of) effective demand for consumption goods. This is based upon two conflicting ratios:

- (1) Logically, profit maximisation leads to a rising degree of capital investment in relation to consumption by workers and capitalists, so that (despite assumed rising consumption by both) the rate of growth of consumption declines relative to the rate of growth of means of production.
- (2) There exists a technically determined proportional relationship between the mass of means of production and total output of consumption goods, such that the ratio of the rate of growth in the output of consumption goods to the rate of growth of means of production remains constant; i. e., *ceteris paribus*, a 5% increase in constant capital would produce a 5% increase in output.

Thus since capitalists' behaviour tends to produce a decline in the ratio.

$\frac{\text{rate of growth of consumption}}{\text{rate of growth of means of production}}$

and the production process enforces a degree of stability in the ratio

$\frac{\text{rate of growth in the output of consumption goods}}{\text{rate of growth of means of production}}$

there exists an inherent tendency for output of consumption goods to exceed effective demand.

Further, it follows that since the numerator and denominator in the above ratios are functionally related, it is equally possible to speak of "underconsumption" (or overproduction) of the means of production.

(It is intended for purpose of the argument, to treat criticisms of underconsumptionism as identifying temporary and counteracting tendencies; to assert the logical validity of underconsumptionism as a theory of crisis (see the rest of this section) and to test this empirically by analysis of historical developments in broad outline (see next Chapter).

**Over-accumulation crises**  
**FTRP/OCC**

This is generally taken to be Marx's primary explanation of crisis and is the most influential of Marxist theories of crisis. The argument here is that competition forces capitalists to invest in increasingly advanced production techniques which involve greater proportions of constant to variable capital. The rate of profit  $\frac{s}{c+v}$  must fall unless of exploitation rises faster than the rise in constant capital. The increase in the rate of exploitation is limited by physical constraints to reducing 'v' beyond a certain point, so that as 'v' becomes an insignificant part of 'v+s', 's' cannot rise faster than 'v+s' and cannot offset the faster rise of 'c' (This is premised upon labour as the only source of additional value; constant capital merely transfers its value — hence its name).

Marx provides five main counteracting factors to the FTRP/OCC: (1) increased intensity of exploitation; (2) depression of wages below

the value of labour-power; (3) cheapening of elements of constant capital; (4) relative overpopulation; (5) foreign trade.

This argument hinges around the question of whether or not increased productivity can offset the increase in 'c'. Marx did not foresee the tremendous leaps in productivity that technological progress has enabled.

Further, it does not necessarily follow that the value of constant capital should rise commensurate with its physical increase. Improved productivity in branches of production producing elements of constant capital reduce their value. Marx himself points this out, as seen above.

It was all so been said in criticism of the FTRP/OCC that a new production method would not be introduced unless it assured capitalists of reduced costs, and could not therefore cause the rate of profit to fall, **in itself**. (This may hold true of individual capitalists, but the outcome might be very different from that expected, if all capitalists acted similarly.

However, on the basis of the rising productivity of labour, and the counteracting factors mentioned above, it is possible to question whether there exist (or has existed over a long period) a fundamental tendency for the rising organic composition of capital to cause a fall in the rate of profit, i. e., whether there is a "necessary" tendency as opposed to merely a "concomitant" one. It is not possible to make a definite judgement regarding the importance Marx accorded to the FTRP/OCC since sections on the internal contradictions of the law' and the counteracting tendencies were merely sketched in outline form and did not represent a carefully thought out formulation.

(To be continued)

**Eelam...** (Cont. from page 7)

The rest of the article deals with ethnic violence and the background of the Tamil issue. The article was head lined "SRI LANKA PRESIDENT TO PRESS BID FOR US TROOPS IN CRISIS" — "ISLAND"



# A Vietnam at Reagan's door

FOREIGN  
NEWS

**W**e have not considered nor have we developed plans to use US military forces to invade Nicaragua or any other Central American country... "So say US Secretary of State George Shultz, Defence Secretary Casper Weinberger, CIA Director William Casey and National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane in their joint statement of 10 April.

Bold words in the wake of the latest CIA escapade — the mining of Nicaragua's coastal waters — but oddly at variance with the long-term military planning and preparedness for US intervention in Central America.

In their statement, the US top brass also denied plans for "a post-election military enterprise in Central America," but for a growing majority of US citizens, the November presidential election appears to be the only restraint on a repetition of the Vietnam syndrome — this time much nearer home.

This shift in strategic perception reflects several major developments: the 1979 Sandinista victory in Nicaragua, which provided Cuba with its first ally on the Latin American mainland; the 1979 coup by Maurice Bishop in Grenada, giving Havana another ally in the Caribbean basin; and the growing boldness of Marxist guerrillas in El Salvador, portending yet another left-wing takeover in the region. All these events — while arising from the unique condition in each country — created a sense of revolutionary momentum that could not fail to produce anxiety in Washington.

The new US outlook also reflects an altered view of relationships between events in this region and its interests elsewhere in the world.

Defence officials have expressed particular concern over the security of the vital "sea lines of communication" (or SLOCs, in Pentagon jargon) passing through the Caribbean Basin.

"Caribbean is a very important passageway for our international commerce and military lines of communication," President Reagan declared in his so-called Star Wars speech.

Although many experts have questioned the existence of a genuine threat to US trade in the Caribbean area — no evidence of such a plan was actually unearthed in Grenada after the US invasion, and the Soviets have never deployed a significant military force in the area — this concern continues to underlie US security policy.

Moreover, since Vietnam represented the first test of US determination to combat "wars of national liberation", any hesitancy would have an "unfavourable effect upon our image in Africa and Latin America."

In July 1983, Reagan approved planfog a far more extensive US military effort in Central America. Although details have never been made public, a senior white House official told *The New York Times* that "we have developed a programme for a significant and long-lasting increase in the US military presence in Central America." Other administration statements suggest the plan calls for a coordinated programme consisting of:

- \* Increased military assistance and arms transfers, with the bulk of such aid going to government forces in El Salvador and Honduras;

- \* On-site training of Honduran and Salvadoran forces by US combat instructors many of them counter-insurgency specialists with extensive Vietnam experience;

- \* Expanded US support for the *contras* entailing direct involvement in the day-to-day operations of these forces;

- \* A continuing series of major US military manoeuvres, intended both to familiarise US troops with combat conditions in Central America, and to compel Nicaraguan passivity in the face of other US moves in the region;

- \* The establishment of a permanent military infrastructure in Honduras, designed to facilitate US military action anywhere in the region;

The new US posture was first revealed in a dramatic series of

military manoeuvres US warships patrolled the waters offshore. Big Pine-II also featured an appearance by the battleship *New Jersey* off the Pacific coast of Nicaragua, and an amphibious landing by US Marines on the Caribbean coast of Honduras. Most significant, it involved the construction of several airstrips and dozens of smaller military installations in Honduras — many of which are believed to be used in support of *contra* operations inside Nicaragua.

When Big Pine-II was officially terminated in February 1984, the Department of Defence announced it was planning another set of exercises later in the year, and that at least 1,000 US soldiers would remain in Honduras to prepare for the next set.

These activities have turned Honduras into a major US military bastion, much as South Vietnam was converted into a giant US military base in the early 1960s. At least six Honduran airfields — at Palmerola, San Lorenzo, Aguacate, Trujillo, La Ceiba and Puerto Lempira — have been constructed or expanded by US combat engineers, and more are to be built during the forthcoming Grenadier! and Big Pine-III exercises. While these facilities are supposedly for temporary use only, US politicians who have visited the sites claim they appear to be designed for permanent occupation. "There is real evidence", said Democrat Senator Jim Sasser after an inspection, "that our military is building airfields and other infrastructure to support a very large and possibly permanent US military contingency there."

Such a "contingency" could involve direct US military involvement in the war in El Salvador, or US intervention against Nicaragua. Although neither step is likely to be taken precipitously — especially not with the US elections coming up in November — it is no secret that the Reagan administra-



tion has developed fullscale plans for such action. Both types of action were simulated during Big Pine-I and Big Pine-II. US maritime forces have practised for a naval quarantine of Nicaragua. Similar tests are expected during the forthcoming Grenadier-I and Big Pine-III.

Even if US forces are not committed to fullscale military operations in Central America, a gradual expansion of the combat-support function looks likely. US spy planes are already providing "real-time" (near-instantaneous) battlefield data on guerrilla positions to government forces in El Salvador, and US helicopters are reportedly flying supplies to *contra* forces inside Nicaragua. These, and other C3I (command, control, communications, and intelligence) activities of this sort, are likely to endow US forces with evergreater responsibility for the conduct of military operations in both countries, thus erasing whatever distinction remains between "combat support" and combat itself. This is something very similar to the onset of the Vietnam conflict, when US advisers were assigned more and more combat responsibilities until they were, in effect, fighting the war.

Although Pentagon officials have repeatedly sworn that US military forces are not engaged in actual combat operations, the use of US spy planes to collect battlefield data on Sandinista and guerrilla positions comes close to anyone's definition of direct combat involvement. Already, a US helicopter has been shot down while flying over Nicaraguan territory — supposedly due to navigational error rather than by intention — and US advisers have been exposed to hostile fire while accompanying Salvadoran forces in active combat zones. "We are currently engaged in a region of open hostilities," Senator Sasser charged in March. "American troops are and have become involved in imminent danger."

While some aspects of Reagan's blueprint for Central America cannot as yet be fully discerned, there is no longer any question about its basic thrust — increased US mili-

tary involvement in both El Salvador and Nicaragua.

Such a "victory" following as it would the US debacle in Lebanon would undoubtedly prove gratifying to Reagan and his hard-line cohorts in the national security establishment. It is highly unlikely, however that this outcome could be achieved without extensive loss

of life and the outbreak of a regional war.

The price of "victory" could well include a permanent US military presence in Central America, along with substantial dissent at home and intensified anti-Americanism in Europe and the Third World.

— 'SOUTH'

## LESS DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

# Dismal outlook for some

Anatole Kaletsky

"**H**AVE THE Less Developed countries bottomed out?" is the title of the latest analysis of the world economy published by Data Resources (DRI), the world's largest econometric forecasting service.

The International Monetary Fund, in its recent World Economic Outlook answers this life and death question for millions of people as follows:

"Developing countries can reasonably expect... relatively satisfactory rates of growth of imports, exports and gross domestic product..."

The trouble with this kind of reassuring answer is that it addresses a question which no longer makes much sense: for one of the lasting consequences of the past few years of international economic turbulences is that terms like "Third World" or "developing countries" have lost much of their economic meaning.

The Third World today is a collection of disparate nations which may have some similarities in their relative poverty and in their political aspirations; but their economics are careering in different directions at a bewildering rate. To take comfort from the "satisfactory" outlook for the developing countries in the aggregate, is like standing beside a hornets' nest and expecting not to be stung because a mild breeze is blowing in the opposite direction.

Thus, while the IMF's "base" projection of a 4.6 percent growth rate for the non oil developing countries by 1986-90 may seem satisfactory enough—indeed many private forecasters expect an even better performance — the situation looks very diffe-

rent from the shanty towns of Manila or Sao Palo.

Not only do such relatively rosy predications for the latter part of this decade divert attention from the economic wrenching still in store in many developing countries during the next year or two; they also ignore the fact that Brazilians and Filipinos, whose incomes per head will still be far below pre-debt crisis levels by the end of the decade, are more likely to be chagrined than consoled if the second half of the 1980s turns out to be a boom era for South Korea, Thailand or even Argentina.

Yet this is precisely the confusing and uncomfortable prospect which lies ahead for the rest of this decade, as forecasts produced by companies like Data Resources and Wharton Econometrics clearly show. The stark contrasts, both between nations and between each country's future prospects and long-established historical trends emerge particularly when the raw rate of economic expansion is converted in to another indicator which is much more meaningful for countries still in the midst of population explosions, namely the growth of gross domestic product *per head*.

International financial officials concede that their computers, too, are churning out alarming numbers about several of the key developing countries — especially Brazil the Philippines and much of Africa — even on the optimistic assumptions about the general world economic environment which allow the IMF to state officially that prospects are "satisfactory" for the Third World as a whole.

— Financial Times, London.



# SURELY NOT THE BEST ?

BOOK  
REVIEW

Arjuna Parakrama

*Navasilu 5: Journal of the English Association of Sri Lanka & the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies, Sri Lanka.* Editor: Prof D C R A Goonetilleke. Published in 1983 by Sampath Publishing Co., Sri Lanka.

*Navasilu* has been for many years the only local literary magazine in English, and therefore carries the responsibility for presenting a representative selection of serious writing in the country. My criticisms of the latest issue of *Navasilu* are based on this view of its role, in keeping with its privileged position. If I sound as if I am destructive or carping in my criticism it is because the journal has not to my mind fulfilled its obligation to Sri Lankan creative writing in English, which even at the best of times is suspect.

Anne Ranasinghe's 'It was Planted' which had appeared earlier this year somewhat smothered in Dr. Rajiva Wijesinghe's bad taste in the *New Lankan Review*, is perhaps the best poem in the volume. She has achieved a refreshing economy of language and complete sincerity — the lines are almost prose and they succeed, in their smooth conversationality, in masking the tensions of the relationship she detachedly describes,

As our silence grew

His plant in my pot remained  
our last

And only frontier.

Her control of the emotion, albeit strongly felt, distinguishes it from *Poem 1981* and *Poem 1982* in which the feelings are obviously too strong to be expressed in the muted indirectness so typical of her style. As a result the void created by death (my cliché) can only be measured in terms of phrases such as 'eternal darkness', 'lonely vault', 'final absence', 'the echo of your voice and footsteps' (her clichés).

*Polonnaruwa* and *Dambulla* belong to a different genre altogether. I suspect that they could best be classified as 'exotica' written for a foreign literary market. Many of the criticisms Prof Kandiah made some years ago of Jean Arasanayagam's *Ruined Gopuram* are valid here. *Polonnaruwa* evokes a vague lyricism which serves merely to mystify, as if some sublime truth too deep for words were being alluded to. All the diverse and contradictory descriptions of time have been posited here: in the first part time moves unceasingly, flowing through the centuries'. "Poetic" words and phrases abound — the forest is ancient, sleep is endless, there is a final mystery, and of course the three old pals — past, present and eternity — are there. The poet has let herself get so carried away by these vaguely elegiac notions that by the second part of the poem she is willing to contradict her earlier meditations on the nature of time. The unceasing movement of time is seen as 'this one and only time' (again very poetic, I'm sure), no doubt in order to fit in with the quasi-philosophical Buddhist section that precedes it.

The next line 'An intermingling/Of images refers to nothing in particular, and the confusion is further confounded with the harking back to the inevitable theme of transience. All this is of course profoundly oriental and neo Wordsworthian. It was one of the poems selected at the All Nations Poetry Contest conducted by Triton College, USA!

Richard de Zoysa is represented by two poems *Apocalypse Now* despite some unsubtle end rhymes, reads like prose cut up any old how! The impression is not of irreplaceable rightness of language, but of experimentation with words — a looseness or imprecision supplemented by a propensity for 'clever' word-play (such as the use of 'bottleneck'), neither of which

are the stuff of serious poetry. De Zoysa's immaturity can be seen clearly from this contrived use of language. The extended metaphor (punning on the Indian name *Jambudipa*) which likens India to a ripe fruit waiting to drop into 'our mouths' is too much an artifice to pad the poem. The word 'pendulous' with all its pomposity and artificiality captures the tone of that stanza. The imagery is surreal (a nice word that just about covers everything here), and I can go along with pustulating stars burning like sores, but hovering Brahmins flickering in the haze of a heat filled sky is altogether too hot for me!

In *Past Mending*, which I shouldn't waste time on but for the fact that it has been vaunted as one of the finest examples of Sri Lankan creative writing, the poet has literally gone to town! 'Oh boy that Honda'. 'Oh boy' is I feel a singularly unfortunate expression to use in the context of the conscious facetiousness of the rest of the poem.

'Flesh blood bone/leather metal/rubber burning/thunder and lightning' which comprise lines 3, 4, 5 & 6 in that order, could just as well have been shuffled out of a riding helmet in some other sequence!

Suvmalee Karunaratne's short story *Festival Stall* which is the first thing in the book, is unevenly narrated, sometimes even gauche, but she is sympathetic towards her characters without sentimentalising them as does James Goonewardene in an extract from *Dream Time River* contained in *Navasilu 5*. Nandasiri the municipal labourer turned businessman for the duration of the *Esala Perahera* (it is no accident that most Sri Lankan fiction seems to be centred on 'exotic' touristic happenings such as carnivals, exorcisms, marriage ceremonies etc), is a peculiar mix of kindness and



avarice that is hard to reconcile. Too much has been attempted with the character of Nandasiri at the expense of the other figures who are mere pasteboard. Nandasiri is presented as at once typical of his class, and different from it. His 'normality' is explained in long and extraneous passages such as the one about his getting drunk which hardly rings true.

Mrs. Karunaratne has at least made some attempt to preserve the Sinhala idiom in the conversations between Nandasiri and his family, although with mixed results. "You all just look up and wait", a literal translation from the Sinhala, and "Nowadays there are such pretty materials on the pavement..." have the ring of authenticity, but "that they will give anything to get a bite of something", and "I'm going now to do my thing" sound like American slang, and probably are. "A fine how-do-you-do that will be!" has perhaps been used in the wrong sense and malapropisms aren't too scarce, but despite these obvious short-comings there is merit in the attempt.

Goonewardene, however, hopes to overcome his inability to cope with the local idiom through a liberal sprinkling of exotic terms and phrases such as *aduru*, *distiya tovil* and the various personae of the *yakkas*. His dialogue makes no allowance for the cadences of the language and his lapses from Standard English Grammar reflect carelessness rather than a conscious use of indigenous forms. Dhanu the boy so paralysed by fear of the *Maha sona* is at the same time sophisticated enough to discern/diagnose Piyatissa's father's illness immediately on hearing the symptoms. Dhanu is a mass of such contradictions and yet no attempt has been made to show his conflict credibly — instead, at different moments he articulates different sentiments incongruous with those that have preceded them.

Careless writing is evident here too. To quote a glaring though superficial example, the writer has taken great pains to show that the younger boy Piyatissa admires Dhanu greatly. So much so that Dhanu has grown tired of the youngster's

'craze for imitating him', and is perhaps even embarrassed by the fact that he is looked upon as an incredible person not the least by virtue of his English education. All this is made very obvious, but Goonewardene writing at one point without due deliberation, brings in elements of adult psychology and subterfuge when he refers to Piyatissa's secret regard for Dhanu as a hero.

Sita Kulatunge's *Of Cockroaches and Forgiveness* attempts 'potted' social criticism but the moralising is trite and heavy-handed, and the symbolism even more so.

Manel Ratnatunge in her risqué short story, *The Visitor*, has shown clearly that Rosemary Rogers is not the only Sri Lankan who can write a certain type of fantasy, alas!

The critical articles which form the largest portion of the journal are certainly of a better quality than the creative writing, and this is a fair prognosis of the present Sri Lankan literary predicament.

Professor Goonetilleke's article on Language Planning in Sri Lanka may be the exception. In the course of making the profound assertion that a central language planning agency, free from the present political and bureaucratic hierarchy, is necessary in Sri Lanka today, he has made several serious statements of questionable accuracy on behalf of which I must now take up cudgels with him.

Prof Goonetilleke writes that English has to be promoted nationally for at least three cogent reasons: as link language in a multi-cultural society, as a means of bridging the generation gap and in order to provide equality of opportunity. The first and third reasons are patent, but it is in the second that a surprising lack of sensitivity is betrayed. In explaining himself on this point, the author says that it is possible to simplify Sri Lankan society as consisting of Sinhala speakers, Tamil speakers and an older generation of English speakers including both Sinhalese and Tamils. Such a simplification, I say, would necessitate that more than 95% of the older generation be deemed negligible, for only around 5% of Sri Lanka's population has some degree of fluency in English!

Regarding the teaching of English in schools, Prof Goonetilleke advocates a selective policy basing his judgement on the flimsy but all pervading excuse of the lack of funds and adequate personnel, though elsewhere he points out that teachers are not so scarce as inequitably distributed. He suggests that a fair solution could be reached when sufficient numbers of good English teachers are available for all schools, and this involves the teaching of English in primary grades, allowing only those who perform well to progress to the secondary level in the language. Yet even this process, he reiterates, is expensive, as if to indicate that some of it is wasted money. On the one hand you have Prof Goonetilleke asserting that English must be broadbased to provide an equality of opportunity in a country where it is still the preserve of a privileged minority, and on the other he postulates an ideal situation in which English is to be insulated from too many of the *hoi polloi*, as if a kind of special aptitude or charisma were required in order not to desecrate the language! In effect what he advocates is an enlarging of the privileged minority, but not too much!

Professor Yasmin Gooneratne's analysis of Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* is sensitive and witty, easily the most literate piece of writing in the entire journal. She has discussed Ondaatje's work with a lively imagination that matches the author's own, but never loses her sense of proportion which enables her to see his weaknesses of stereotype, and to place it in the total context of the book. I must register a protest, however at the superficial case with which she dismisses all of Ondaatje's poetry, saying that *Running in the Family* is a 'far finer work than anything he has yet written in verse'. Many of his poems are fine too (*Rat Jelly*, for instance), and isn't there also a difference in the level of intensity which makes such a comparison simplistic?

M I Kuruvilla's essay on the poetry of Patrick Fernando is sympathetic and perspicuous, but one would have preferred more of the

(Continued on page 24)



# Wanted : An offensive poetry

Quadri Ismail

"If the poet does not make himself the spokesman of the human condition what else is there for him to do?" — Pablo Neruda

Looking over last year's literary activity for the radio I praised, if somewhat gently, Kamala Wijeratne's poetry — for conveying, with a certain freshness, a sense of life. This was after reading two poems in *Navasilu 5* and a somewhat hasty glance through the volume *The Smell of Araliya* published in November. I also said however, her efforts suffered seriously from a lack of effort and of thought; from a conception of the poet's function, of his relationship to the language and of what poetry should do in a country like Sri Lanka. This lapse is common to nearly everyone whose efforts are passed as poetry, either by the Sunday papers or our critics — most of whom display the same ignorance in their writing. The Lankan attitude to poetry is somewhat similar to Jean Cocteau's: "Poetry is indispensable — if I only knew what for." Little wonder that, given the lethargy of our academicians, our publishing houses don't take poetry seriously, though they maybe justified. So any Lankan who considers himself (or herself) a poet has to publish privately; in the West, these are called "vanity publications". Indeed, examining that "thin fitful ooze", the produce of our poets, it is difficult not to believe that they are doing very much more than exercising their vanity with such produce.

Most of Wijeratne's efforts could, when examined critically be described as such; they would not look out of place in the *Sunday Observer* or the *Weekend*. It is because they have a more serious purpose than that they need greater attention. Lankan English poetry could play a very definite and purposeful role in the cultural life (in the broad ideological sense) of this country. In the hands of an able practitioner it can have most potent effect. It can, by opposing prevailing values, help to change — to cleanse as it were —

the consciousness of the English speaking middle-class. A poet must be an influence. If not, he would be a dabbler in verse, for his own amusement. A serious consideration of *The Smell of Araliya* would manifest the faults common to most English poetry written by Lankans today, even that of the more technically proficient. This would, I hope, then make clear what a positive Lankan English poetry would be like; what it must be like; and what it must do.

A note at the back of the book is meant to help the reader: "Beautiful as the Araliya is it could be deadly too. Superstition has it that the Araliya is grown round a home would bring ill-luck to that home. This belief was used to illustrate the changes that have overcome a peaceful, agricultural community." (And made it no longer peaceful, I presume.) This is the theme of the poem that gives the volume its title. In it, however, the tenor of village life is not conveyed with much force, the writer devoting many stanzas to inactive, descriptive statements. Then comes a description of the changes:

A lake filled up the wide valley  
Where the young cricketers played  
the squalid babies were gone  
and the new flowered girls with  
expectant faces.

I wonder how rural is a cricket playing community. More importantly — and this is an irritating feature of most poetry published here — it is badly proof-read; one does not know whom to blame for the mistakes. The poem concludes:

a hawk soared high above  
its raucous cry broke the silence  
of the watery waste  
Somewhere deep down a turbine  
hummed generating electricity  
for the big towns far away

Araliyas rotted in the lake  
They gave a stench that nauseated  
me

I took the first back back to town.

The single hawk, in stark contrast to the many lives the village enjoyed before, is the only poetic image in the whole poem. (Being a believer in Lankan usage, "gave a stench", coming in there as part of the natural flow, meets with my approval.) The rest of the stanza shows most lazy thought (and what I can only call perverse ideology). A hum, I have always believed, is something that could be heard, especially when from a turbine; but it is only the cry of the hawk that breaks the silence. And no rational mind would call a reservoir of water a waste, certainly not when it is used to generate electricity. This brings me to the ideological aspect of the poem, which I have called perverse.

Many Lankan writers, not just poets, are prone, indeed feel it necessary, to lament the loss of village ways even though they have no real empathy with such a way of life. They have either no experience of it or have long deserted it. What is dishonest about such an attitude is that it demands the rural peace preserved merely for urbanites to be able to retreat to it occasionally. It is not a village voice raised in protest. A villager has every right to so do if his life and livelihood are threatened (without adequate recompenses — which is usually the case); but Wijeratne, nauseated by the stench of rotting araliya, registers her protest by "taking the first bus back to town". The same town, probably, whose life is maintained by electricity generated from the very water she calls a waste.

Her reactions to the town do not bear close examination either manifesting, again, no clear perception of her standpoint. 'Women's Lib (the title is ironical) opens thus:



The bus was choc-a-bloc  
 With hot and perspiring mortals  
 Their bag and baggage  
 And their young,  
 The stench of hot close bodies  
 Packed together like fish  
 In a battered aluminium can.

Wijeratne uses "choc-a-bloc", a colloquialism, again without embarrassment; such usage gives her poems a convincingly, I might say authentically, Lankan tone.

The bus isn't packed with people but "mortals" — the word is impersonal, serving to distance the reader from the crowd. This is enhanced by bracketing the children (referred to, again, not in a personal manner but as "young") with "bag and baggage", and emphasized by the reference to their "stench". The fish, brought in here, adds to the stink, but the lines do not evince the best use of language. Trying to avoid the cliché, "packed like sardines", Wijeratne (breaking a fundamental rule that poetry strives for economy of expression) elaborates the phrase and loses precision. The criticism of the mortals is continued into the next stanza: they chew betel, smoke beedi (that is, are the very low) despite smoking being banned and flow all over the footboard despite that too being prohibited. Into this mass comes:

A mere child  
 Forced into motherhood  
 Ere she was a woman...  
 Her stomach rounding in  
 Yet another pregnancy

I have never understood why Lankans lapse into archaic forms ("ere") since, not being in current use, they jar. "Yet" is unnecessary in the context, the girl having only one other child — product(s) of a temporary alliance, the man ("a party to build the dam" — dams have been criticized before) using her and then deserting her (appropriately enough, within Wijeratne's scheme of things, to a "big town"). Despite all this the passengers have no sympathy for

the girl and do not give her a seat. The poet, quite revolted,

...raised my voice and cried  
 "O for the love that our  
 Culture claim!"

But to no avail. Only the poet reacts to this inhumanity (that is to say, the lower classes have no claim to culture and/because they are base):

I felt the rush of hot blood  
 To my burning head  
 And my hand clench  
 In a rounded fist

Since the girl-mother had called her "lady" and since she refers to the people in the bus as "a shapeless mass and "the horde", the nature of the anger is evident enough. It does not matter whether such an incident will generally occur or not; the point is that the poet wanted to illustrate something, which is, see how barbarous the lower classes are.

The point of the title I do not get; it being obvious, I think, that Wijeratne took refuge in a cliché. What she intends to say is that in this era of women's lib women are still treated barbarously (that being the intended irony); but a "liberated" woman, considering herself equal to man, would not demand chivalrous treatment. In any case, the concept of a "liberated" woman, — and the "mere child" isn't one (unless one stretches it to mean that she has been liberated by her former lover, which I do not think Wijeratne intended) — would be alien to the lower classes the poet is seeking to condemn.

What makes the entire poem ironical is in the context of her general attitude to life that Wijeratne is angry at man's (that is to say the lower classes') inhumanity to man (or, to be precise, woman). 'Women's Lib' must be compared to two other poems differently interpreting similar occurrences.

'The Youthful Utopia' is subtitled "A word of admonition to a hot-headed son". The sarcasm in

the title is unmistakable: the use of the definite article confirming that only the young can have such stupid dreams. The poet (I cannot understand the practise, here and elsewhere, of beginning lines at varying lengths from the margin — they do not add to the sense in any way) seems to present both points of view; but there is no doubt — especially after the reproof and warning to the irritational boy — who is wrong. The poet may refer to herself a "senile" and "old-fashioned", but her son's dreams (of a society, no doubt, where pregnant mothers will be properly looked after — but something she cannot appreciate) she calls "a hallucination/of/a deranged mind"; strong words. She is quite sure that no one, let alone "fledglings on the wing", can

...change man's nature

Rooted in avarice, envy hate and  
 pride

Especially since she interprets her son's actions as having no moral basis but as being only a violent nihilism — "razing every existing thing to the ground".

A similar attitude infects 'I heard an infant crying':

A hopeless cry of cold, loneliness  
 and fear

From deep down a garbage gutter  
 That skirted the wall behind the  
 public market

Among the rotting roots of leeks  
 Perforating cabbage and grinning  
 lips

Of worm-swarmed tomatoes  
 The putrid slush of the public  
 lavatory

Pitiful conditions indeed, described in language that strays from the creative to the negligent as in her other work. The compressed "garbage gutter" is not only poetic but Lankan; "skirted", however, with its connotation of movement, is not exact enough. Wijeratne rarely uses the sounds of words; "rotting roots of leeks" is effective, the pun in the last word preparing us for the public lavatory from where the leaks probably originate. "Perforating cabbage and



grinning lips. Of...tomatoes" don't make any sense. The first adjective, meaning cracked rather than cracking, is a common Lankan error; intending to convey that the cabbage is rotting itself apart, the poet leaves us with the impossibility that the roots of the leeks (which are not growing, but rotting) maybe the agents of perforation. The "grinning lips" I simply cannot understand; the tomatoes, it would appear, are cracked too, but one would hesitate to call them "lips", besides, "grinning" has a positive connotation, inappropriate when speaking of garbage. Why the market was "public" (it would usually go without saying) is not evident until "public lavatory"; the two phrases reinforce each other and make "public" sound a dirty word, like the "horde" in the other poem. Wijeratne makes quite plain her contempt for the masses. I do not think it an intentional, intellectualized hatred; but within her scheme of things, which does not allow for human progress and improvement, this sentiment — incaring when meant to be humanist — is not inappropriate.

The regarding filthy and diseases-ridden sorrounings do not evoke any sympathy from the woman-poet to the child. It may be argued that the presentation of the situation itsesf would do so, except that the poet has the last word. Calling him, without pity, a "son paying for his father's sins", she ends:

Every half-hour a birth  
 Everyday three thousand births  
 There are enough infants

The child, it would appear, had no right to be born. Wijeratne, here as elsewhere, isn't willing to give the underdog a chance, does not protest at this inhumanity (which, really, is "rooted in avarice") and, let alone insisting on the necessity of change, does not believe in the possibility'

Contrasting with the poet's indifference to the gutter-child is her love for someone of her own. Indeed (one many remark before getting on to 'Lullaby') she is most successful in her personal poetry; not so much when she speaks of

herself as when she gets into the "soul" of other (middle-class) women whose tears and laughter she finds a ready empathy with — as in 'Anna Karenina' (published in *Navasilu*) easily the best of her poems. 'Lullaby' is among the weakest efforts:

Sleep my little milk-white grandson, sleep,

Sleep my grandson in your little rag cot and weep;

Your mother is gone to bring home petrodollars

To line your little milk-white cot  
 O pray that the mirage of the burning sands

Lure her into temptations not.

"Milk-white" does not evoke the same response in English as in Sinhala when describing a human, baby or not; what is unfortunate about its use there is that it spoils, by repetition, "milk-white cot" when we come to it, which is, given the significance of milk to the child, a very poetic description — even if one is led to expect, by the "rag cot" before (not to mention the mother gone away in search of money) that the cot would be dirty and not white. The rhyme, necessitated by the lullaby form, is uneven (again manifesting the lack of attention and thought the poet has given her work) and the lilting, soft rhythm one expects is nonexistent. While "lurking sands" is a good anticipation of the "temptations" to come, "not" at the end of the line is good example of the rule that one does not contort syntax (or anything else, for that matter) merely for the sake of rhyme. I do not know what is called a "mirage", since the mother is surely making the money she wants.

Given Wijeratne's biases, especially towards middle-class women (in this case, her daughter, after all), it is not surprising to find her blaming the temptations, as it were, for existing; does not occur to Wijeratne to blame the weak (middle-class) person for succumbing to these temptations (which she does not think necessary to describe).

(To be continued)

## Surely not . . .

(Continued from page 21)

poems themselves than on the theory of poetry after Coleridge which no doubt has its place elsewhere. Some of the more personal of his poems such as *Father and Son*, *Boat Song* etc would have, if included, provided a surer perspective of the total artist. Here, for instance, are the few beautiful lines he wrote on his young son's memorial which was perhaps his last poem.

"Quickly, in the quiet, sapling day  
 You called me, Lord, and I leaving  
 All I loved have come, believing

Love prospers best in your will, and pray

Let my admission, like your summons  
 Be a matter of love's impatience."

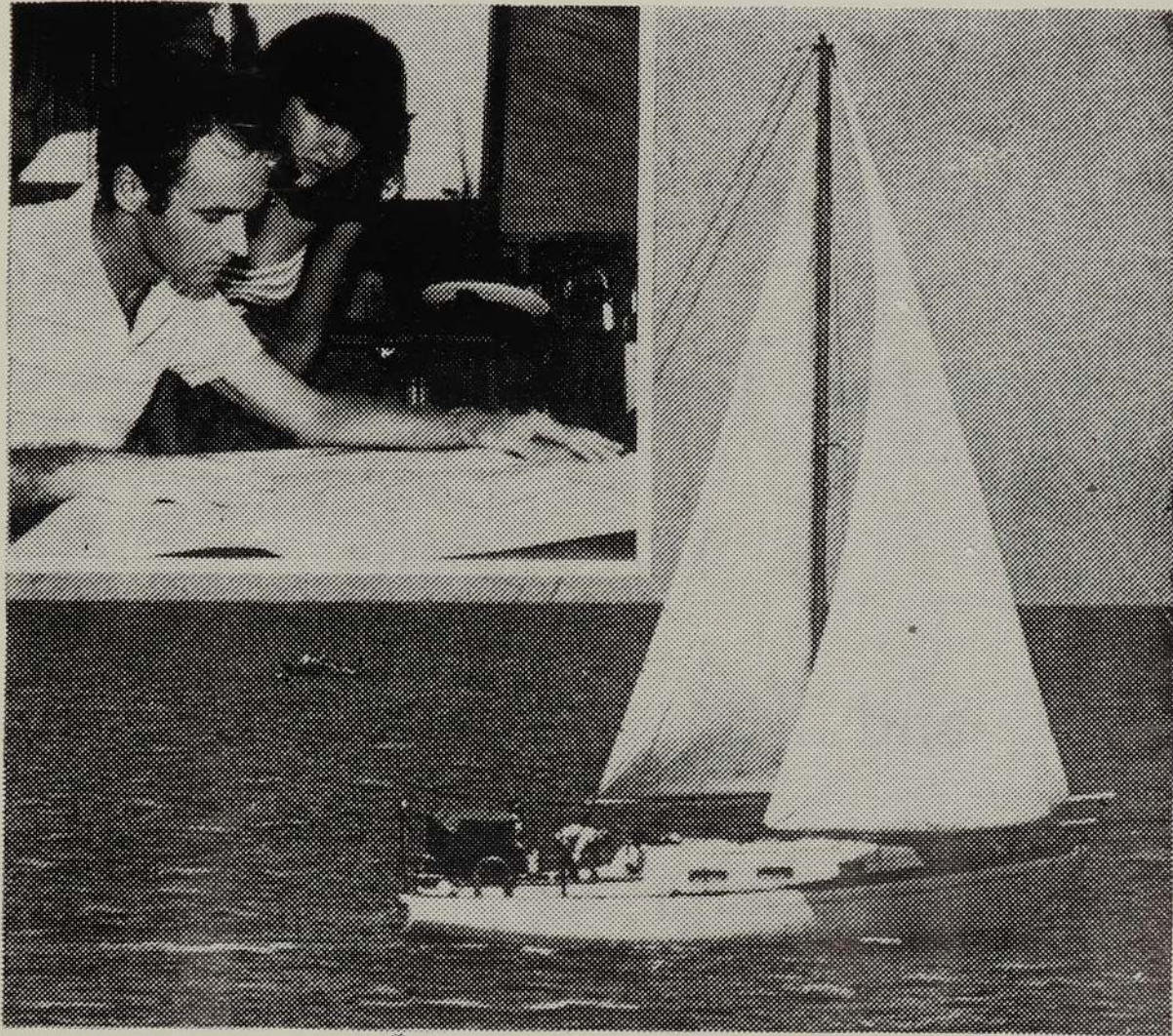
Prof H W Piper's contribution from Australia to *Navasilu* is a discussion of the poetry of Yasmin Gooneratne in so far as it deals with the expatriat writer's problems of adapting creatively to a new and hostile culture. His commentary of the poetry is incidental and fragmentary, allowing the poems to speak for themselves as it were. In singling out *Nambiliya* (Washing the Grain) from her latest collection of poetry, *6000ft Death Dive* for special praise, however, Prof Piper makes an extremely valid judgement. *Nambiliya* is a beautiful piece in which the measured rhythm of the lines derive from the actual movement of the bowl (the *nambiliya*) in cleaning the uncooked rice, and the whole describes the poet's need for washing herself clean into a new (Australian) ethos — emphasising all the while the sadness, of this endeavour.

A couple of kindly, even magnanimous reviews of N Chandrasoma's *Out Out Brief Candle* (what a title?!) and Colin de Silva's *The Winds of Sinhala* show that if nothing else the university is full of nice people!

I cannot believe that *Navasilu* 5 presents the best of Lankan writing. For surely, the situation cannot be so bad, so soon!



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