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Marching in search of an electorate?

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“Once for every man and nation comes the moment to decide...”

Unlike April 1942, April 2004 might not be ‘the most dangerous moment’ for Sri Lanka. But it is certainly a most decisive one. The general election will decide a very important question for the country that no other election in the past could do, the reason being that the march of history had not brought matters to a head as it has now.

The polls, fixed very appropriately for the day following All Fools’ Day, has given rise to the question as to how it would affect Tamils in this country. Many Tamils feel that an election could be an opportunity to increase the strength of pro-LTTE representation in parliament, thereby demonstrating to the world Tamil support to the rebel cause. There are others who believe that even a few seats returned by anti-Tiger forces such as the EPDP or the EPRLF’s Varatharajaperumal wing would show that the Tamils spurn the LTTE and its role in northeastern society. But this is to think of elections in conventional terms.

Others reason it could be an election that decides on the resumption of state repression against the Tamils if the United People’s Freedom Alliance (UPFA) returns to power. Systematic harassment by the military coupled with the new government’s immaturity in handling political negotiations with the LTTE would lead to armed hostilities. But this is to view polls in parochial, law and order perspectives.

There is a deeper concern at stake at this election, the grappling of which will determine more important matters than whether there is a resumption of war or an increase in pro-LTTE Tamil representation in parliament. It is whether the people of this country and the international puppeteers who control our political leaderships, are willing to recognise that there are two systems of governance prevailing in Sri Lanka, and that the northeast is a distinct society, with its composition, aspirations and past defining it differently from the rest of the country.

Though historically, socially and culturally the northeast has always been distinct from rest of the Island, even the so-called liberal intelligentsia of the south has been tardy in recognising this diversity and allowing appropriate political and social structures to develop that reflect it. Notwithstanding this indifference, political and military circumstances have led to a semi-state evolving in the Wanni with its tentacles reaching out to rest of the northeast. The interim self-governing authority (ISGA) proposals only try to give a legal colouration and name to this reality.

The Tamil people have already decided what they want. Even those opposed to the LTTE are quite firm on the concept of a distinct society; their clamour for at least extensive devolution of power is testimony to this. One dares the EPDP or the EPRLF (V), both which are to support the UPFA at the forthcoming election, to campaign in the northeast on the basis of the policies of their electoral ally, the JVP, which is only willing to concede decentralisation as an answer to Tamil aspirations to self-determination.

The JVP’s mulish intransigence, and President Chandrika Kumaratunga’s fanciful musings that the PA’s constitutional proposals of August 2000 could serve as a realistic basis to open negotiations with the LTTE on an appropriate constitutional structure for a political solution, only go to show that a substantial number of people in the south, mostly Sinhalese and Muslims, refuse to recognise the distinct society status of the northeast. They continue to believe the northeast is no different from the rest of Sri Lanka.

It is this fundamental question that will have to be decided on 2 April. The ISGA proposals, the disbursement of aid pledged at the Tokyo meeting, and even the extension of the ceasefire and support of the international community for the peace process are all predicated on whether the northeast is recognised as a distinct society or not. And the burden of deciding it will be on the Sinhala and Muslim people.

“Piteous, squalid, vulgar, tawdry and uncouth would be understatements...”

The debasement or rather, I should say the self-abasement of Tamil culture by its own, self-styled votaries, has always been a cause of some concern to me. The trauma of it all was brought back to me in a most excruciating way when I witnessed a televised documentary of the Bellanwila Esala festival, where amongst the other processions of the tutelary gods, there was also the procession of the God of Kataragama led out.

For a moment I was left in some bewilderment, bordering on stupefaction, by the wild, uncouth movements of the dancers who looked very much like young transvestites than women. One lot kept twirling like tops in a most purposeless and comical way with a pyramid of pots on their heads. Another lot were going to and fro sticking their backs out in the most ungainly and provocative manner, replete with sexual undertones, with what seemed to be peacock feathers stuck on their posteriors and similar counterfeit raiment on their heads and arms.

The music party that brought up the rear took the cake. It consisted of five to six youth dressed in shabby, dust-soiled longs and shirts with sleeves folded up and slippers, playing trumpets and beating drums in a meaningless manner. Their music? My mind went back to my school days. It was the self-same music of the merry-go-round players. The same repetition of a few raucous sounds, the same infantile beat.

Is this, I ask you, Tamil culture? Is this how the Tamil nation resident in Colombo conducts its religious processions? What a sad contrast to the beauty and the grandeur of the Tamil festivals in the Tamil homeland, seasonally commencing with the Nagapooshamy Amman, intermediated by the Sellasannithy and ending with the Nallur Kandasamy kovil!

I am not surprised that many of our Sinhala brethren refer to our cultural manifestations as ‘sakkili.’ Especially in Colombo we have for quite some time been providing them with significant cause to regard us, as deliberately propagated by Lake House (or Fake House as Theja Goonawaredene dubbed it) in the bad old days, as “shit-bucket lifters.” We have nobody but ourselves to blame for this self-inflicted cultural perjorization.

The Nattukottai Chettiars, who have been conducting the Vel festivals for the past many years, and the Brahmin poosaris who sit comfortably in the chariots, must take a fair share of the responsibility for the derogation of the average Sinhala man’s perception of Tamil culture, where its main, collective spectacle, equivalent to the Kandy perahera exhibits neither sanctity nor dignity. Piteous,

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squalid, vulgar, tawdry and uncouth would be understatements. The ministry of Tamil Cultural Affairs must intervene. It has a bounden duty to do so; otherwise it is not serving its purpose.

Whilst on this subject may I comment on the sad lack of innovation, modernity or contemporaneity on the part of Tamil dance schools? Are we having till kingdom come to watch endlessly the supremely boring episodes of Radha and Krishna frolicking with the gopies and stealing their curd pots on the plains of Braj? How atavistic can you get?

Have the traumatic experiences of the past five decades in the socio-political history of the Tamil nation in this country had any impact on the consciences of the makers of these ballets? Are the skins of the choreographers of these schools so thick that they have not softened to the extent of absorbing the reality around them? Are they living in a make believe world of their own selves, or are they, as many Tamils then and now, playing safe?

Let them for a change take time off and go and watch the next Ushagarten concert. There they will learn how beautifully and effectively the strictly classical idiom could be combined and blended with the modern and contemporaneous, where much of the choreography, innovated by Usha Saravanamuttu herself, serves to represent and re-enact reality of the topical present in which we are actually placed.

They would greatly benefit, too, by a visit to the next Chitrasena School concert, which presents us, annually, with dazzling displays of innovativeness of great relevance to the present times, in perfect harmony with all the graceful beauty and masculine dynamism of the classical genres of Sinhala dance – up-country, mid-country and low-country. If Vajira was the Diva of her day, then her daughter Upekka, is rightly asserting her claim to the role of Prima Ballerina today.

The Tamil dance world must wake up from its somnolence, take up the challenge and enter into the spirit of the new age that has dawned for the Tamils of this country.

E. A. V. Naganathan,
Colombo 3

This letter was received in September 2003 to the Northeastern Herald, but not published

Boycott elections to Sri Lanka's irrelevant parliament

It is a great pity that Tamils who have had very little benefit from parliament have also been dragged into the forthcoming elections. The parliamentarians from the North and East were not involved in the power struggle of the south between President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga and Premier Ranil Wickremesinghe. But when parliament was dissolved Tamils too were forced to get involved in elections.

But for how long can this go on? Despite two years of ceasefire, the army is continuing to occupy the High Security Zones; it is still there in the temples and continues to rule over the Tamil people. At the same time, no rehabilitation work is going on and no money from the Tokyo meeting or elsewhere is coming into the North and East. But in the South, even during the short span of two years while parliament was functioning it passed legislation, attracted investments and gave a better life to the people.

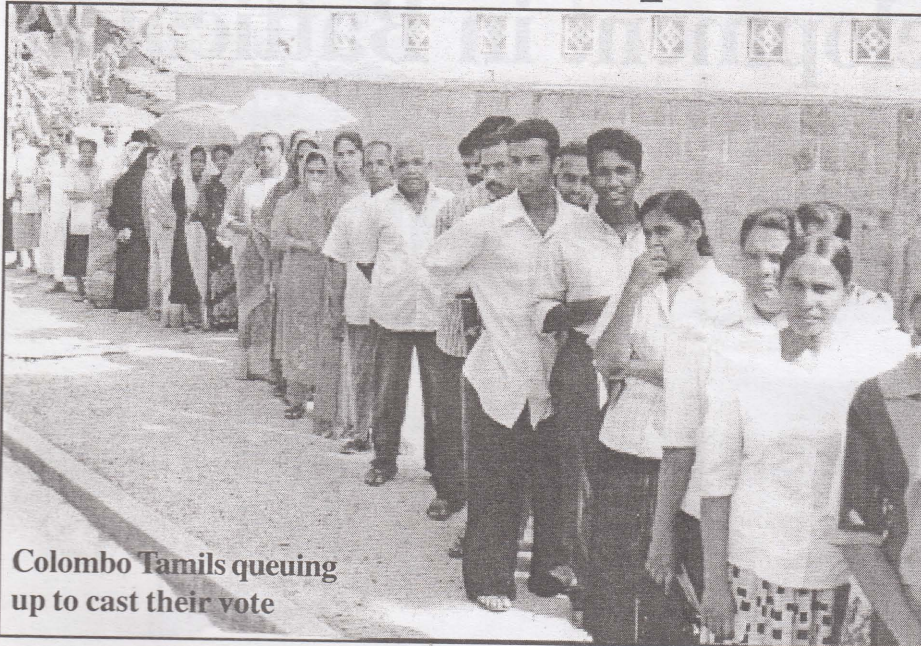
This shows that parliament is an institution that means different things to different sections of Sri Lanka's citizens. It gives greater benefits to some but not to others. I do not agree with the idea that this is because the North and East are not in a position to benefit from parliament as the south is because of 20 years of devastation. I also do not think it has to do with the low calibre of Tamil MPs.

This is because the system of government is such that parliament has become completely irrelevant to the people of the North and East. It gives them no benefit and it does help them in times of trouble. But people of the North and East continue to be taxpayers and contribute to the functioning of parliament in Colombo.

I feel that it is no use sending MPs to a parliament that has no relevance to the people. Till this happens through meaningful constitutional change, if at all, it will not be a bad idea even if the Tamils boycott these elections, because it has no meaning for them.

T. Anandan
Colombo

Only united stand against chauvinism will help Tamils



Colombo Tamils queuing up to cast their vote

— By C. C. David —

A general election has been thrust upon the people. The Sri Lankan public is aware, in fact the whole democracy-preaching world is aware, that forcing the election was a blatantly and indisputably undemocratic act by a power-hungry political party. President J. R. Jayewardene gifted to Sri Lanka a unique constitution presumably deluded into thinking he would be president for life. The incumbent, now basking in the glory of that office and protected by the safety net it provides against the legislature, carries on with scant regard to accountability, while threatening to abolish the presidency if her party is returned at the forthcoming polls.

The Tamils of this country who have suffered repeated tyranny under successive Sinhala governments and their Machiavellian machinations, coupled with the state's security forces who have a record of ethnic-cleansing, mass killing and destruction, are again faced with an election that is designed to negate the peace process.

This is a crucial period for the Tamils, and all Tamils should forget their innate selfishness and go without fear and cast their vote en bloc to that one party, which is sponsored by the men and women who have sacrificed and shed their blood for the community. This includes Tamils of the Western Province who have a voting potential of 250,000. The up-country Tamils also are part of this number. We must all unite and go as ONE body to safeguard our future.

The UNF, which enjoyed support of the Tamils, has deceived them wholesale. In the last two years the government was engaged in peace talks while playing for time. Milinda Moragoda travelled tirelessly to the USA and India to organize safety nets and defence treaties, while allaying Tamil fears that the military was rearming. Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe is no saint; his promises are like writings on water, but he has not looked at the writing on the wall!

The duty of all self-respecting Tamils is to ensure that they check the polls register for their names and go early on election day and cast their vote. There need be no fear; gone are the days of being bullied and intimidated. The Sinhalese are well aware that they cannot risk another communal onslaught against the Tamils because it will be they who will be at the receiving end and it will only hasten the process of secession. If they want a united nation they have to realise this change of fortunes. The international community is aware that the Tamils have achieved their present status through military and diplomatic skill in the name of liberty. It is also fully aware that that community is a power to be reckoned with.

Tamils need not worry about UNF or PA/JVP as long as they are united as one solid body. They have a strong military to defend themselves but need an equally strong representation in parliament to show the world that they are united in their struggle for freedom. The cry for freedom is now — an urgent cry to unite: to unite in the name of liberty and freedom.

Earthiness of TNA too much for urbane Colombo Tamils

The reason for the TNA not contesting the forthcoming polls in Colombo is due to negotiations with P. Chandrasekaran of the Upcountry Peoples' Front (UPF) to field a common list in the district failing to materialise.

There was a once thinking in the TNA that if such an alliance could be forged and a common list drawn up, both elements in the alliance would benefit, especially by being able to nominate additional MPs on the national list since the TNA commands support in the northeast and Colombo, while the UPF does in all areas where Tamils of recent Indian origin vote.

The Western Province Peoples' Front of which Mano Ganeshan is the leader, is playing very safe politics. It is contesting as part of the UNF list knowing full well that Ganeshan himself is the most probable candidate to win a seat from that group and that it would only be to his advantage to capitalise on his popularity among non-Tamil voters too.

The TNA contested the polls in the Colombo District in 2001 general elections and was able to garner 12,696 votes in the district. However, it did not win a single seat. This time the Tamil candidates have grown wiser than allow these votes to go waste and are exploiting what appears to be a growing congruity of views between the TNA and UNF by accommodating the Tamil voice within the UNF.

Another consideration appears to have been the feeling that 'Colombo Tamils' — an indefinable yet accepted entity in Colombo's politics — are not too happy with TNA candidates, since they have too much of a northeastern flavour, which has adverse repercussions on the delicate sensibilities of 'Colombo Tamils.'

Lack of proper planning leads to ad hoc development in Batticaloa



The LTTE, NGO Consortium and government officials deplore the lack of a plan for Batticaloa's development

By S. Somitharan

“Though we try to see the overall ecological balance is not upset, there is scant regard to the environment when plans are drawn up and implemented. For instance most of these plans leave no provision for cyclones that have devastated the east in the past,” said Rajan.

Two years into the ceasefire and weeks before a general election that certain political parties are using as a referendum to measure their performance on managing the peace process, senior NGO officials in Batticaloa expressed deep disturbance about the quality of rehabilitation and development of the past two years, the infrastructure laid to carry out such tasks and the politicisation of the delivery of these services.

Officials of the NGO Consortium in Batticaloa claim that the major portion of the rehabilitation and development work that has been going on in the district has been undertaken by NGOs. The government's initiatives in both these crucial areas have been minimal if not nonexistent in the Tamil areas of the district.

“There has been very little assistance coming from the ministry of eastern development. The government says it does not have the money, which has left most of the initiatives in the hands of the NGOs,” said S. Rajan, president of the NGO Consortium, Batticaloa.

The Ceasefire Agreement, of which the government of Sri Lanka is one of the two signatories, speaks about the restoration of normalcy as a vital task for the peace process to be enduring and be meaningful for the people of the northeast who have suffered

immeasurably in the past 20 years. Though it refrains from mentioning rehabilitation and development explicitly, the removal of checkpoints, vacation by the military of public buildings, permission for the movement of non-military goods and services to the LTTE-controlled areas and the opening of roads closed due to the conflict were ways whereby rehabilitation and development of the war-affected areas would be facilitated.

The Consortium coordinates work between the 14 international NGOs (INGOs) and the 43 local NGOs working in Batticaloa that are registered with the body. It is the INGOs that bring the funding and usually work through local NGO partners. The Consortium plays a role in the selection and allocation of projects to the NGOs and INGOs. Another area that comes within the purview of the Consortium is that of restricting wastage of funds and facilitating their optimum utilisation, which is controlled by ensuring there is no duplication of work. Finally, the monitoring of progress is also the task of this body.

In a situation where there is step-motherly treatment meted out to the Tamil areas by the ministry of eastern development, senior members of the Consortium, officials working in the Batticaloa kachcheri and the LTTE were unanimous that very little rehabilitation and

development work was possible in Batticaloa.

"There has to be an overall plan that identifies and prioritises certain tasks over others and there has to be coordination between different projects for sustainable overall development. But there is no acceptable overall plan for Batticaloa," said Rajan.

He went on to say that the Consortium tried its best to approve plans that were not ad hoc despite the absence of this overall framework. But the Consortium could not enforce norms and standards when INGOs and NGOs came up with work plans or when projects did not meet the required criteria because it did not have the legal authority of enforcement. The body only had a social legitimacy derived from the fact it was working with the people and for the people.

"Though we try to see the overall ecological balance is not upset, there is scant regard to the environment when plans are drawn up and implemented. For instance most of these plans leave no provision for cyclones that have devastated the east in the past," said Rajan.

He contrasted this with what was taking place in Jaffna, where the Jaffna Development Programme or the Jaffna Plan was of prime importance in providing a framework for the development and rehabilitation tasks in the district. He said there was also a degree of legitimacy enjoyed by the Jaffna Plan because of the input of resource persons, scholars, intellectuals and the government administration. This had been done with foreign collaboration and paid by non-governmental sources as well.

In 1993 the presidential mobile service had undertaken a survey and a needs assessment of Batticaloa highlighting the requirements of the agriculture, fisheries, industrial and other sectors. Civil society, the LTTE and government officials say another study of a similar sort has to take place to update and refine the findings of the survey, but that it has not been done.

The business takes on a questionable hue however with allegations levelled by government officials at the Batticaloa kachcheri who refused to be named, claiming that a private company was entrusted with the task of drawing up the Eastern Development plan last year but that it had been openly favouring the areas of Muslim habitation and neglecting the Tamil ones.

"Both the Batticaloa District Development Committee and SIHRN, rejected this report," said the official. SIHRN is the Sub-committee for Immediate Humanitarian and Rehabilitation Needs, set up under the Ceasefire Agreement with both government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE playing equal roles to identify and implement rehabilitation projects. SIHRN has since become defunct.

These sources also claimed that the document merely reflected and formalised what was in practical existence in the east, where the government initiatives under Minister of Eastern Development Rauff Hakeem openly discriminated against the Tamils who were affected in favour of the Muslims. These sources also said while there are NGOs that work in both the Tamil and Muslim areas, some NGOs worked exclusively in the Muslim areas, funded by countries that had a special interest in seeing the development of the Muslim areas of the district.

A Muslim resident of Batticaloa, while admitting that the Tamil areas in the district had suffered greater devastation than the Muslim ones said the bias towards the Muslim areas in rehabilitation work was inevitable. They said the SLMC and UNP Muslims had formed the government and ministers giving preferences to their constituencies were a fact of life. "Look at Douglas Devananda, when he was minister in the PA he supported areas, which he believed he could use for political advantage," a Muslim resident said.

The feeling that government machinery could not be harnessed for rehabilitation or development work in the Batticaloa District had led to NGOs to assume a disproportionate share of the burden in the district's rehabilitation. Since the INGOs were the principal donors they could either work through the kachcheri or the NGO Consortium to implement their projects.

"Certain Colombo-based NGOs however liaise directly with the kachcheri and are given permission to do projects in the district. This adds to the ad hoc nature of the projects and the fact that they are not implemented according to principles of sustainability," said Rajan.

He said if the Consortium protested that development was not taking place in keeping with the greater good of the area, certain INGOs took the criticism in bad part as interference in their work and threatened to withdraw. Caught between the option of implementing projects that were not strictly in conformity with overall goals of sustainable development and having at least minimal rehabilitation and development however inadequate, he said the Consortium preferred the latter and only advised NGOs and INGOs, but refrained from enforcing minimum standards on their work.

At a time when the UNF would be sticking its neck out claiming it has undertaken so much for the Tamils to make the peace process a reality, it will be useful to ponder on the shortcomings of the government's systems of delivering rehabilitation, and chaos springing from the lack of planned development in the Batticaloa District.

They said the SLMC and UNP Muslims had formed the government and ministers giving preferences to their constituencies were a fact of life. "Look at Douglas Devananda, when he was minister in the PA he supported areas, which he believed he could use for political advantage," a Muslim resident said.

Jaffna's displaced residents challenge HSZ in Supreme Court

— By J. S. Tissainayagam —

In what portends to be a landmark case in the annals of Sri Lankan judicial history, three petitions were filed in the Supreme Court challenging the government's right to forbid residents from reoccupying their lands and homes in the high security zone (HSZ) in North Valikamam, Jaffna.

When the fundamental rights petitions came up in court on 19 January, Chief Justice Sarath N. Sila said, "The army should at least allow cultivation even if no permanent structures come up." He ordered the attorney general, to furnish court with all relevant documentation on the HSZ.

The petitioners are residents of villages encompassed by the HSZ. One is an ex-member of parliament of the dissolved parliament, Mavai Senathirajah, who represents the TNA, while the other two are farmers, Sinnappu Sivagnanasambanthar and Vallipuram Rajadurai.

The petitioners have cited head of state and commander-in-chief, President Chandrika Kumaratunga, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, and army commander Major General Lionel Balagalle among the respondents. The petitioners accuse the army of preventing them from occupying their homes and of "arbitrarily, illegally, unlawfully and unreasonably," debarring them from earning a living.

They have also submitted the army has violated of their right to "to equality, freedom to engage in a lawful occupation, freedom of movement and right to choose a residence in Sri Lanka."

The HSZ is purportedly to defend the military's biggest base in the Northeast - Palaly.

According to a submission made by the NGO Home for Human Rights in October 2002 to the UN Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, the Sri Lankan state created the HSZ by evicting through coercive means, 20,917 families.

The submission states the evictions were "without grounds permitted under international law," and those evicted "have been subjected to gross human rights violations and continue to suffer from severe deprivation, hardship and discrimination as a consequence."

In his affidavit he states that except a gazette notification of 8 July 2003 declaring President's House in Colombo and its environs a HSZ, there is nothing else answering that description. "None of the said notifications relate to the Valikamam area..." he insists.

The submission states the illegal evictions engineered by successive governments between 1983 and 1993 were "by constant shelling and air raids on the villages on all four sides of the camp, mostly during the night."

In 1996, the government "declared the area comprising 30 villages within the (Valikamam North) Division to be part of a High Security Zone and thereby denied the inhabitants of these areas the right to return or to resettle in those villages." The move was consolidated in June 1999 by the government acquiring under the Land Acquisition Act 397 allotments of land in the HSZ "for a public purpose."

"After the eviction was complete, the army moved in to occupy the deserted villages. They occupied the lands and premises, ransacked the houses, schools and places of worship and took over whatever they wanted and either destroyed or burned what remained," the submission continues.

Petitioner Senathirajah's first communication with the government requesting permission to resettle in his village was in September 1999 when he wrote to the chairman, Resettlement and Rehabilitation Authority of the North (RRAN). Though his letter was forwarded to the army commander, the officer did not even care to reply, says Senathirajah in his submissions.

The next episode was delayed till the ceasefire between the government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was signed in February 2002. Since the ceasefire, which was to restore normalcy in the erstwhile war-torn northeast of the country, Senathirajah wrote to the ministry of defence (MoD) in September that year requesting that he not be denied the right to live in his own village.

Army headquarters replied Senathirajah's queries in a terse, "...the request made ... cannot be accommodated since the house concerned is located within the Palaly High Security Zone."

Senathirajah contests the existence of any legally defined HSZ in the Valikamam area. In his affidavit he states that except a gazette notification of 8 July 2003 declaring President's House in Colombo and its environs a HSZ, there is nothing else answering that description. "None of the said notifications relate to the Valikamam area..." he insists.

Senathirajah's petition also states, "...the Army is preventing thousands of residents from resettling from the Valikamam area, which is easily the most fertile land for agriculture in the whole..... Jaffna Peninsula"

"People of Valigamam are deprived of their right to food for years. This is on top of their displacement," complains Francis Xavier, director, Home for Human Rights.

Among the "people of Valigamam" are the other two petitioners. Sivagnanasambanthar's petition states he was forcibly evicted from his land in 1992 due to air force and army operations. With the ceasefire he had visited his village within the HSZ after obtaining permission from the army. He found only the walls of his house remained and his farm had turned into a shrub jungle.

In his affidavit Sivagnanasambanthar says, "...while I was in the compound ... about 4 or 5 army personnel came ... and informed I could not clear the compound and ordered me to leave stating that nobody in the area will be permitted to resettle."

Despite Sivagnanasambanthar writing a letter to the MoD requesting the army allows him to clean his land and live in his house, which was forwarded to the army commander, no reply has been received to date.

Sivagnanasambanthar is a good example of the displaced due to the HSZ. He and his family have lived in five different places as an internally displaced person after eviction in 1992. Since he had lost his livelihood he and his family live on government handouts worth Rs.1260 per month. He has no other house except that which lies in ruins in Valikamam.

When the petitions came up end January, the attorney general's department was unable to provide documents stating the Valikamam area could be legally defined as a HSZ. The AG's department however said the state would consent to the petitioners cultivating land that fell within the zone. Court on the other hand held the view that permitting cultivation was insufficient since the petitioners had asked they be allowed to live in their homes

within the zone, which would also be practically necessary if they had to resume farming.

The verdict of the Supreme Court bench will determine if the future of the vast swathe of land will remain uninhabitable because the military believes it is required for the security of the Palaly base, or whether systematic resettlement could resume.

"The people of Valigamam expect justice even if it is late in coming," says Xavier.

The determination could either lead to dismantling of the HSZ, or provide an avenue to seek the jurisdiction of an international organisation such as the UN, since all domestic remedies would have been exhausted.

This is a slightly rewritten version of an article on the same subject written by the author appearing on IPS

Exasperated IDPs use direct action to highlight demands

With two years of agitation to remove the high security zone (HSZ) in the Vadmaradtchi and Themaradtchi areas of Jaffna falling on deaf ears and a golden opportunity emerging to embarrass the government while it was busy celebrating the country's independence, residents who had been displaced through the policies of successive governments decided to resort to direct action to press for their demands.

Direct action also appeared to be a suitable modus operandi for winning rights due to a series of successful agitations launched by sections of the public sector in southern Sri Lanka demanding wage increases, protesting privatisation and for redressing other grievances. The protest also appeared appropriate in the context of leaders and parliamentarians of the TNA stating publicly that the Tamils had not won 'independence' in 1948 but had got rid of British colonialism only to be confronted by Sinhala hegemony.

Two groups of agitators began a fast to death in Jaffna on 4 February, even as a military parade was marching in Colombo before the country's president, prime minister and other dignitaries as part of independence day celebrations. One group, numbering 12 persons from Vadamaradtchi began fasting in front of the office of the divisional secretariat for Valigamam North in Tellippalai. They were all residents who had been displaced by the war.

The action of the IDPs from Vadamaradtchi coincided with those of a group of farmers from Thenmaradtchi who commenced a similar agitation in Chavakachcheri town. They were drawing attention to the military occupation depriving them of their livelihood since a vast swathe of fertile agricultural land is part of the HSZ.

The protestors from Valigamam who were fasting at Tellippalai refused to allow the divisional secretary and members of the armed forces who had come to the divisional secretariat to celebrate independence day by hoisting the national flag. But what was more interesting was the protestors' hostility to Mavai Senathirajah, then a sitting member of parliament for the Jaffna District and now designated to lead the TNA's campaign in the district for the forthcoming elections.

They refused to let Senathirajah join them stating that he could do so only if he was willing



Relatives and friends gathered around fasting Anandarajah

to fast to death alongside them. Nor did the agitators allow him to address them. TamilNet quoted one of them saying, "We don't want him to use us for his cheap publicity stunts by sitting with us for a few hours to dupe the world that he is behind our protests. We are tired of the false promises of these politicians."

By 5 February there was no response from the authorities while the condition of one of the farmers agitating in Chavakachcheri, Sellakili Anandarajah, was deteriorating rapidly. He even refused to take water. His condition was widely reported by the media.

On 6 February, by which time rumours of an impending election were gathering momentum, political initiatives were taken by the government and the TNA to diffuse the situation. On the one hand Dr. K. Gunasingham, advisor to the prime minister, visited the fasting Anandarajah and promised him a house outside the HSZ. It was however reported that Anandarajah had objected saying that all the families displaced by the zone should be resettled.

This was followed by three TNA members of parliament for the Jaffna District - N. Raviraj, Senathirajah and M. K. Sivajilingam - visiting Anandarajah and promising to take up the

grievances of the IDPs expeditiously and persuading the protestor to give up his fast. However, some agitators had been upset at the intervention of the TNA parliamentarians claiming that it was nothing more than an election stunt.

Anandarajah however gave up his fast that day.

No sooner elections were announced on 8 February, two very significant moves were made with regard to the HSZ in Thenmaradtchi. The army vacated a part of the zone, thereby freeing around 80 houses for occupation. This was followed by the EPDP, protected by an armed military guard, visiting the area vacated by the army and claiming that the party was instrumental in securing the release of the houses.

It is yet uncertain whether the government would give up other areas of the HSZ in view of the election, especially since President Chandrika Kumaratunga is in charge of the ministry of defence, and the EPDP, her staunch ally, is using every possible method to upgrade its public profile. It however remains to be seen whether the army will reclaim the areas it has vacated once the elections are over.

Temporal benefits win over converts only temporarily

— Professor Bertram Bastiampillai —

Over the years Sri Lanka has emerged as a multi-religious society. Though there is evidence of nature worship as well as of Brahmanism or Hinduism in the early period of Sri Lanka's history, the country witnessed a rapid expansion of Buddhism after its arrival from India, its popularity stimulated by the conversion of King Devanampiya Tissa. As a rule subjects followed the royal example.

Hinduism grew in the land when Indian Hindu rulers, mercenaries and traders visited Sri Lanka. Islam, after its birth in Arabia, came to the island along with traders and settlers and grew as yet another religion. Thus long before the arrival of the Portuguese in 1505, the island had practically turned into a multi-religious community.

As a survey reveals Sri Lanka became multi-religious owing to historical events such as initial conversions following conquests, and proximity to India. According to ancient chronicles, Buddhism, today the religion of the majority community, continued to flourish as a consequence of initial conversions.

From 1505 till mid-17th century the Portuguese managed the coastal belt of Sri Lanka and introduced Roman Catholicism amongst the maritime populations of Sinhalese and Tamils. Generally the Portuguese have been blamed for religious persecution and the use of force, as well as for luring converts by giving them material benefits. They are alleged to have been harsh, and compulsorily converted people and vandalised other religious centres in order to establish their own religion.

Nevertheless it is paradoxical that the converts to Catholicism have been steadfastly faithful and strongly active in the social and educational history of Sri Lanka. They resisted attempts to be converted to Protestantism either forcefully or through material gains, especially by the Dutch, the colonial successors to the Portuguese. It is naïve to believe that material inducements can make one easily and readily abandon his or her religious beliefs. Many Catholics remained steadfast to their religion.

Our British imperial masters evicted the Dutch in 1796. The British now turned to spreading Anglicanism across the island, which they ruled after gaining mastery over the independent Kandyan kingdom in 1815.

Strangely, every white imperialist seemed to have believed that the heathen or pagan native's soul had to be saved by inculcating in him the Truth, which his religion alone monopolised. This was so in spite of the perhaps esoteric, arcane and erudite nature of the teachings of Buddhism, Hinduism or Islam.

It is more likely our imperial overlords believed that converts to the newly introduced system of belief would assure docile, subservient and reliable subjects, who could be easily ruled. This probably is the reason that some, especially upper class folk who were earlier Catholics, became Dutch Reformed and Anglican Christians. Similarly, descendants of certain Sinhala leaders who had become Anglicans under British rule reverted to their ancestral faiths such as Buddhism with no qualms of conscience.

This phenomenon reinforces the enduring verity that temporal benefits may capture converts only temporarily. Ambition and avarice may for a while build up followers of those who wield power, but their conscience or expediency may drive them to return to their earlier faith. Conversion hence can be fickle and not to be feared as a danger to a religion.

In the 1880s there was a Buddhist-Catholic riot, but in Panadura a debate between Buddhism and Christianity took place peacefully, where Buddhism came out creditably. In 1915, a Buddhist-Muslim riot occurred. These illustrate that it were only on a few and rare occasions that violent antagonisms had arisen between the followers of different faiths during colonial times.

Although at the birth of independent Sri Lanka in 1948 there were Buddhists, Hindus, Christians and Muslims, there were also a few like the Parsees who followed their own religious beliefs. Their right to profess and practice their individual faith was never in



question. Religions coexisted peacefully with rare exceptions.

Of late however, as the incurable ethnic conflict continues to devastate the nation, one also fears an outbreak of religious hostilities. Alleging unethical conversions, Christian religious edifices have been damaged, vandalised and desecrated. It is naïve to believe that conversions can rob followers from religions. After so many years religions have lost hardly any worthwhile numbers of adherents. Any conversion was due more to expediency, mostly for political or for marital purposes. These too occurred rarely.

The diverse religions of Sri Lanka have for the last several decades been tolerant of one another. It is a misreading to think that there has been aggressive conversion in the past. People have converted from one religion to another only if they wanted to benefit from the solicitude and loving care that one faith offers while another does not.

Some religions have, apart from conducting rituals and ceremonies, left their human followers ignored if not neglected. Some dignitaries have become materially luxurious and distanced from the humble, ordinary follower. Even then only a negligible few have forsaken the faith into which they were born and opted to adopt a new one.

In India, several have abandoned a religion where caste is an important factor for Buddhism, because it preached against caste hierarchies and emphasised egalitarianism. A religion should rely on its intrinsic resources to win over converts and not seek monopolistic status in society to conquer converts by holding them captive, almost in thralldom. Religion should

grow not out of conversion but conviction and it's stupid to believe that a faith could flourish by destroying and vandalising places of worship of other religions.

Buddhism stands foremost in espousing tolerance and compassion; therefore militant Buddhism is incongruous. And one cannot achieve anything by harking back to the violence and intolerance practiced centuries ago by Catholic Portuguese or Spaniards. In the land of the dhamma or dhammadipa such intolerance and violence are anachronistic and anathema.

The political elevation of one language and depression of another in a multilingual country from 1956 has accounted to almost a total

disintegration of the island. Religious intolerance could worsen this already weak state.

Above all, to politicise religion and depend on state patronage to prop it up can make religion a plaything of political expediency and convenience. Its sublime values will evaporate, as will its profound moral values.

Professor Bertram Bastiampillai, former dean of the Faculty of Arts, and professor of history at the University of Colombo was also the parliamentary commissioner for administration (Ombudsman) after retiring from the university.

Centenary Battle of the North to be celebrated in grand style

While preparations are underway in the South to celebrate the 125 year of the Battle of the Blues, the Northeast is preparing itself in a grander scale to have the centenary match between St. John's and Jaffna Central, popularly known as the Battle of the North from the 18 March to the 20 March 2004 at the Central College grounds. This is the first time that this 'big match' is going to be played as a three-day game. Elaborate arrangements are being made by the principal of St. John's College, Jaffna and the OBAs of Jaffna and South Sri Lanka to make this event a success.

In addition to this centenary match St John's is also celebrating the following events:

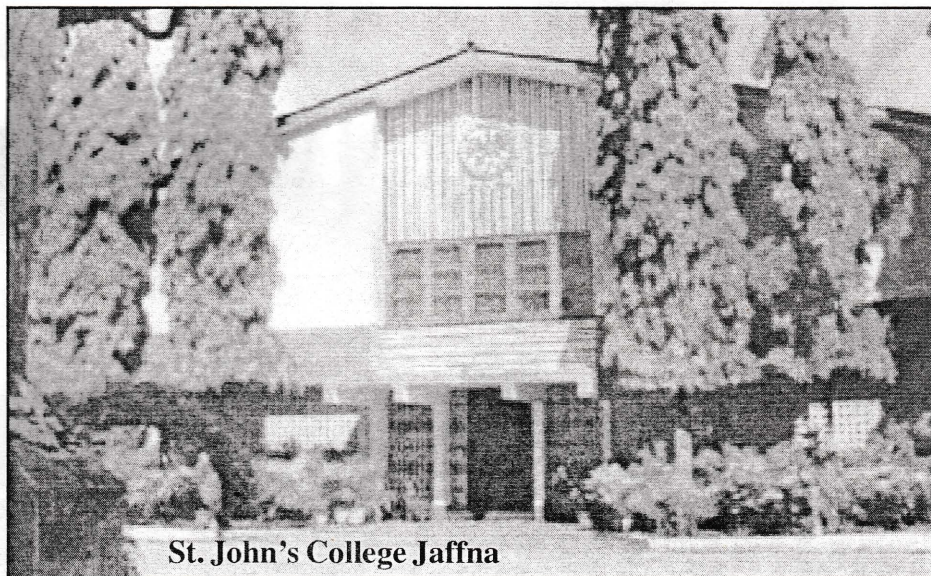
- 1) Centenary year of the OBA Jaffna and South Sri Lanka
- 2) Centenary of the College magazine
- 3) Centenary of the Big Match
- 4) Centenary Dinner -27 March

So it is a triple Centenary celebration.

The St John's College Jaffna OBA (South Sri Lanka) is very busy with a tight schedule in organizing these events. This Centenary match has attracted world-renowned sponsors like Singer Sri Lanka, LG Abans and Janashakthi Insurance Ltd.

The 50 over one day match is fixed for the 25 March 2004. St John's College Jaffna OBA is expecting its faithful old boys from USA, UK, Newzealand, Australia and Canada to attend all these functions.

Although St John's College was founded in 1823, the cricketing ties between both schools started in 1904, and up to now St John's has won 32, Jaffna Central has won 22 with 34 draws. However, due to situations beyond control a few matches were not played during the years 1948, 1961, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1991, 1996, 1997 and one match in 1967 was abandoned.



St. John's College Jaffna

The first win for St John's was in 1908 and the last win was in 1990. The first win registered by Jaffna Central was in the inaugural match in 1904 and the last time they won was in 2002. As St John's has not registered a win since 1990, this crucial centenary match is very vital for them.

In contrast since Jaffna Central won the inaugural match in 1904, they will be all out to win the centenary match too. However, in cricket nobody can predict results until the last ball is bowled.

Although St John's started playing cricket in 1901 under the captaincy of R. R Nalliah, P.S. Hallock captained the first Big Match in 1904 for SJC, while L. R. Alexander led the JCC team. S. K. Mahalingam captained the 50th year match for SJC while S. R. Kanagaligam led the JCC team. It is with pride that one mentions the name of Dr. C. Balakrishnan who captained St John's in 1960 and 1961, who later

represented Sri Lanka in the unofficial test matches played prior to gaining test status.

The first century in this series was scored in 1920 by Johnian C. A. Dissanayake, (104 runs) while A. Ramalingam was the first Centralite in 1945 to score a century (103 runs). The highest individual score in this series is 145 by S. Sureshkumar of St John's in 1990. The highest team total by St John's is 326 for 6 wickets in 1999.

The best bowling figures in a single inning for both teams were in 1960, where A. J. Somanadar of St. John's captured 8 for 18, while A. B. Segarajasingam captured 8/22 for JCC. Jaffna Central won this low scoring match.

These details were derived from the souvenir published in 2003 by both schools. Score sheets of the inaugural match in 1904 cannot be produced due to records being destroyed during military operations of 1987 and 1995/96.

Functioning in an era when politics, not war is at the fore

By T. Sittampalam

Though there have been concerted efforts by the detractors of the TNA, both Sinhala and Tamil, to discredit that party as composed of a bunch of spineless individuals who would rather lose their self-respect than their seats in parliament, the LTTE's open acknowledgement that the TNA commands its approval, and the TNA, in turn, stating that it would campaign on a platform of the Tiger-authored ISGA proposals, assists greatly in clarifying issues of vital concern for the Tamils.

The political and strategic closeness between the TNA and the LTTE has been the single-most important factor in denying noney outsiders the chance of exploiting a situation where the parliamentary party remains 'moderate,' while the armed party is represented as 'extremist,' a phenomenon clearly seen in the case of the Palestinian peace process, where Israel and the United States use the Hisbollah and Hamas threat of violence to wrest concessions from the PLO and its chairman Yesser Arafat.

In the Sri Lankan peace process, it is the potentially most violent group, the LTTE

that is today spearheading moves for dialogue, without having to fear a parliamentary entity undermining or outflanking it by doing deals with friend and foe, a character in some parliamentarians we have seen before.

On the contrary, it is in the south that extremism in politics has emerged. In that part of the country, which boasts of adherence to democratic principles (at least after the emasculating the JVP between 1987-1990), which is slowly but surely creeping into democratic institutions and,



The resettlement of displaced persons has been neglected by the UNF government

PM Ranil Wickremesinghe - guilty of delay



today, hopes to find representation in parliament through the forthcoming polls.

The TNA's platform it appears would be seeking to get an endorsement for the Tigers' ISGA proposals from the Tamils, which will be vitally important for the next stage of the peace talks, if indeed the south is still interested in continuing them. The TNA is also expected to seek a mandate from the Tamil people for continuing with the ceasefire, resumption of negotiations early, as well as for discussions on what sort of structure the final solution to the ethnic problem might take.

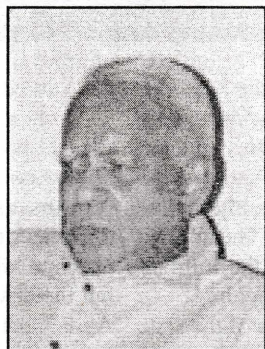


V. Anandasangaree

The official position of the LTTE is that it is willing to negotiate with any party voted to power at the 2 April general election. However, the Tigers are also on record that they would want any government in Colombo negotiating with them to acknowledge their status as the sole representatives of the Tamils. They have also expressed reservations of renegotiating the Ceasefire Agreement stating that what they have signed with the UNF continues to stand.

Though the UNF believes that the UPFA's reluctance to acknowledge the Tigers as the sole representatives of the Tamils would render it impossible for LTTE-UPFA dialogue, one does not know whether the prospect of forming the government in the event the UPFA wins more seats than the UNF, will soften its stance and make the party more conducive to take less extreme positions than it is now occupying as it plunges into the hurly-burly of an election campaign.

Though the LTTE occupies a neutral position as far as its support to the party emerging victorious from elections goes, the TNA is expected to give unannounced support to the UNF. This is due to the perception that unlike the UPFA and the parties that constitute it, which have rejected out of hand the ISGA proposals, the UNF was not even given a chance to respond to them before President Chandrika Kumaratunga wrested control



R. Sampanthan

of the three ministries and prorogued parliament, thereby plunging the country into chaos.

The thinking appears to be that given a chance the UNF might have come out as willing to negotiate on the proposals rather than reject them totally. This position of

the LTTE and TNA is also understandable because neither the SLFP nor the JVP have given any cause for building confidence, which is a vital ingredient before talks take off. Finally, it is also a subtle message that the TNA by supporting the UNF is in agreement about the way sections of the international community is backing the peace process which is apparently not to the liking of other sections of the community.

While acknowledging this, there is one important point that such support of the UNF by the TNA obscures. That is the essential procrastination of the UNF on a number of matters during the last two years it has been in government. It has displayed the most pathetic reaction to allowing rehabilitation in the high security zones of Jaffna, delayed vacating places of worship, public buildings etc. in a number of places in the northeast, done absolutely nothing to get either industry or services going in the former battle-torn regions except permit every consumer good available in the south to be sold freely and facilitate the outflow of funds from the northeast.

The UNF has also sought to negotiate various defence deals and pacts with its international backers apparently to create a safety net, but which Tamils feel could one day be turned on them if the ceasefire falls apart and the country slides back to war. In other words, whenever it was expected to act to alleviate the suffering of the Tamils, the UNF procrastinated, but behind this façade of indecision, underhand moves were going on to strengthen defence of the state.

A facet that will emerge after the election, assuming the UNF forms the government and the peace talks can resume where they left off, is that the new regime would be expected to respond to the ISGA proposals. They will have

to, at least, begin negotiations on it. One thing going for such dialogue is that it is likely only support from the TNA will keep the UNF in office. Despite this, the question is will the UNF be in a position to pursue meaningful negotiations or revert to its favourite delaying tactics?

With extreme Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism emerging as a factor to contend with at the forthcoming election, could the UNF, even if it wins more seats than the UPFA and goes to form a government with the TNA, discuss these proposals or negotiate on them? Even if it is returned to power it will be unlikely it can break down the ethnic hatred and racist exclusivity the campaign of the ultra-right Sinhala parties is going to throw up.

Knowing the characteristic indecision of the UNF and the readymade excuse – it has to contend with Sinhala extremism in the south – once again there will be no delivery on promises. Once again, the displaced and the refugees will be kept hanging on to a thread of hope that might be severed at any moment, while containing the military harassment will be even harder if the president's party gets more seats than it has now and ends up neck to neck with the UNF.

What has to be also bourn in mind is that the LTTE says it will not go back to war unless provoked by forces of the south. If that is he case, whatever forward movement we can expect has to be on the political front. And if indeed it is to be on this front, it has to be more purposeful than having round after round of peace talks. There has to be an infrastructure put in place whereby development, rehabilitation and other services to the northeast begin to flow systematically and uninterruptedly.



Mavai Senathirajah

It is this issue of how such goods and services are going to reach the people of the northeast, possibly in an atmosphere of non-cooperation from the south that should form a cornerstone of the TNA's election campaign with that of the ISGA proposals. It will have to tell the people of the northeast how it is going to set about the business of governance depending on the various scenarios that might unfold.

An election campaign has to be fashioned depending on the need of the hour. For the Tamils of the northeast the need is how it is to look at the future where not only the more Sinhala nationalist party, the UPFA could be dismissive of their demands, but the UNF too, despite all the goodwill in the world, remains hamstrung in the face of racist politics emerging from the south.

The task of the TNA is not to subtly acknowledge its support of the UNF, but to tell the Tamils how they could face a future where politics emerges to the fore in the north, but where politics in southern Sri Lanka put obstacles in the way of the northeast's progress.

Is the ethnic war going to be re-fought?

By Professor Karthigesu Sivathamby

So, finally, the inevitable took place; a general election is upon us where we have been asked to exercise our right to franchise as good citizens. It has however been argued convincingly by political scientists of repute that this election is essentially a constitutional act designed to outdo the UNF, which if given another year in office, would have been able to reap the rich harvest of the Ceasefire Agreement.

The Sri Lankan Tamil community also wants to join the rest of the country to clarify the issues involved through the electoral process. But at the same time it is worried about the outcome of the polls.

One is forced to face up to the reality that right from the time the Ceasefire Agreement was signed, extreme Sinhala opinion, especially that which was articulated by the JVP and sections of the SLFP, has been against it. It has been interpreted as a sell-out. What is more, right from the time the Agreement was initialled it was also severely criticised by a section of the state that too much was being conceded to the LTTE, resulting in a security problem for the country as well as one of maintaining territorial integrity.

The Sinhala print media, especially of the mainstream, carried on an incessant and virulent propaganda campaign that the government was giving away too much to the Tamils and that the Norwegians were aiding abetting such moves. Charges of duplicity against senior officials involved in the monitoring of the Ceasefire Agreement were openly made, culminating with the official in charge of the SLMM being recalled on a request of President Chandrika Kumaratunga.

However, while the media and extremist Sinhala forces harped upon the inadequacy of the ceasefire there was virtually no attempt made to create a substitute agreement to which the Tamils could have assented. In fact that point was never even brought up. The JVP was in the forefront in the campaign against the ceasefire, which was also advocated by the Sinhala Urumeya (SU), but their options and alternatives were not made clear.



Maithripala Sirisena and Tilvin Silva, general secretaries of the SLFP and JVP respectively at the signing of the MOU inaugurating the UPFA

This column wishes to highlight those omissions and inadequacies, which have led to the neglect and alienation of the Tamils of Sri Lanka. The writer is not for creating further divisions, but earnestly hopes to heal those already there

The manner in which the JVP and SU criticised the efforts to monitor the ceasefire made the average Tamil wonder whether they wanted a resumption of war. Such suspicion on the part of the Tamils should be viewed in the perspective of there being no alternative suggestion made by these critics. The implicit argument, it seemed, was that the military solution should be prosecuted again.

The more respectable sections of the state however did not go to the extent of advocating that a rescinding of the Ceasefire Agreement would automatically result in war. This might have been due to various international pressures. Among these sections, the need for a ceasefire, even if the present one were to be cancelled, and indeed a peace plan were discussed. But there was absolutely no indication of the nature or

character of the new memorandum of understanding they wanted.

All these groups could do was to cite the PA's proposals presented in August 2000 for a new constitution based on a union of regions as an alternate to the present document (something the UNP opposed at that time, which the Tamils have not forgotten) but there was no substitute to the Ceasefire Agreement forthcoming.

On the part of the UNF government, initiatives taken following the signing of the agreement were more on talks on political questions than on rehabilitation. It is noteworthy that the Sri Lankan parliament did not allocate a single cent for rehabilitation and resettlement. If any monies were indeed allocated, they were part of the grants to members of parliament from the decentralised budget. And it should be said many MPs did

utilise the monies given to them for rehabilitation work.

A feature of developments that followed the Ceasefire Agreement was the branding of all proposals made by the Tamils at the negotiating table and outside as "LTTE demands." They were not thought to be demands made by affected Tamils. This attitude came across as extremely illogical to the Tamil mind because the talks were between the government on one side, and the LTTE, representing the Tamils, on the other. The LTTE was party to the Ceasefire Agreement and the TNA, representing the Tamil voter, insisted the talks should be held with the LTTE.

Finally there was even speculation about the automatic expiry of the peace process because of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's unwavering stand that unless the ministry of defence taken over by the president was returned, he would refrain from carrying forward the peace process.

It was against this background that an initiative was taken for an alliance to be forged between the SLFP and the JVP – the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA). The MOU between the two parties was signed on 20 January this year.

This document too was not clear on how the ethnic question was to be resolved. The SLFP and the JVP had contrasting views about it. The overall tone of the MOU and the manner in which it was formulated seemed to advocate one core idea: the *pancha maha pilivela* indicated unambiguously that it was articulating a Sinhala-centrist position rather than a truly national one. The document's stance on resolving the ethnic conflict was that it supported negotiating with all Tamil groups to resolve the ethnic conflict but did not lay down clearly how it is going to be done.

Soon after parliament was dissolved 8 February and the date announced for the next general elections, the JVP element of the UPFA or *nidahas santhanaya* was vehemently critical of the ceasefire initialled by Wickremesinghe and the LTTE. To anyone reading the Sinhala press or listening and watching the Sinhala electronic media it was clear that the dissolution had been done so that a group of representatives would be elected to 'safeguard' the security Island and its territorial integrity.

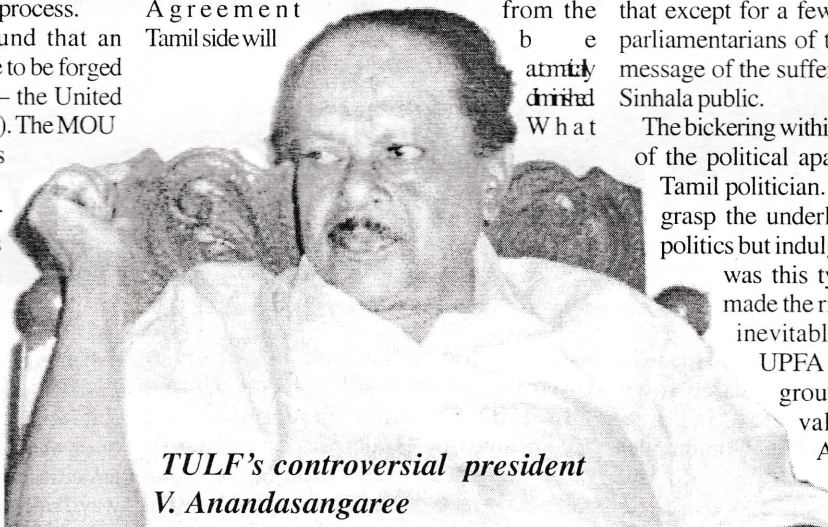
The JVP, it should be admitted, has a clean administrative record. In the districts of the Deep South, which it dominates, the party was very keen to see there were no allegations of corruption or nepotism. Therefore the message the JVP sought to convey, especially over the state electronic media, was that the polls on 2 April would throw up an incorrupt political grouping that is adequate to counter the challenges of the LTTE.

Once again however, Tamil demands have been completely downplayed and painted as those made by the Tigers. And what is of overwhelming interest in that the ISGA proposals of the LTTE were not even taken up for discussion, but summarily dismissed.

The need for infrastructure changes within the administration of the northeastern provincial council to effectively handle the rehabilitation process has also been completely ignored and no attempt has been made to demonstrate how the rehabilitation process is going to be administered.

There is a pervasive Tamil fear because the aspersions cast on the ceasefire that the provisions that constitute it will not be taken into consideration if the *nidahas santhanaya* returns to power. And given the *santhanaya's* avowed stance that it would also speak to Tamil groups other than the LTTE on the resolution of the ethnic conflict, the position of the Tigers as the sole signatory to the Ceasefire Agreement

Tamil side will from the b e atmitly dritial W h a t



TULF's controversial president V. Anandasangaree

is more, rehabilitation needs of the Tamils will be painted as "LTTE demands" and the ISGA proposals disregarded.

There is also a vitally important but not openly discussed factor in the politics of the south. The unexpected demise of the Bikkhu Gangodawila Soma who was very harsh on the un-Buddhistic assumptions and values that were slowly eating into the Buddhist fundamentals of Sinhala-Buddhism, showed the Buddhist leadership how popular his ideas were among the laity. There is now an attempt to appropriate this into the rhetoric of the new Alliance, which could be a silent but guiding light to the pattern of voting.

All these prompt a question that has become almost inescapable: is the war going to be re-fought with clean hands?

This fear is genuine. It becomes the responsibility of that generation of intellectuals who have been brought up within a tradition a shared and sharing culture to express and articulate this fear that is gripping the minds of the Tamils.

People who matter should clarify the position relating to the ceasefire and the

rebuilding of the north and east. But while making this appeal to Sinhala brethren it becomes also one's duty to pinpoint to the counterproductive electioneering tactics of certain major Tamil political parties.

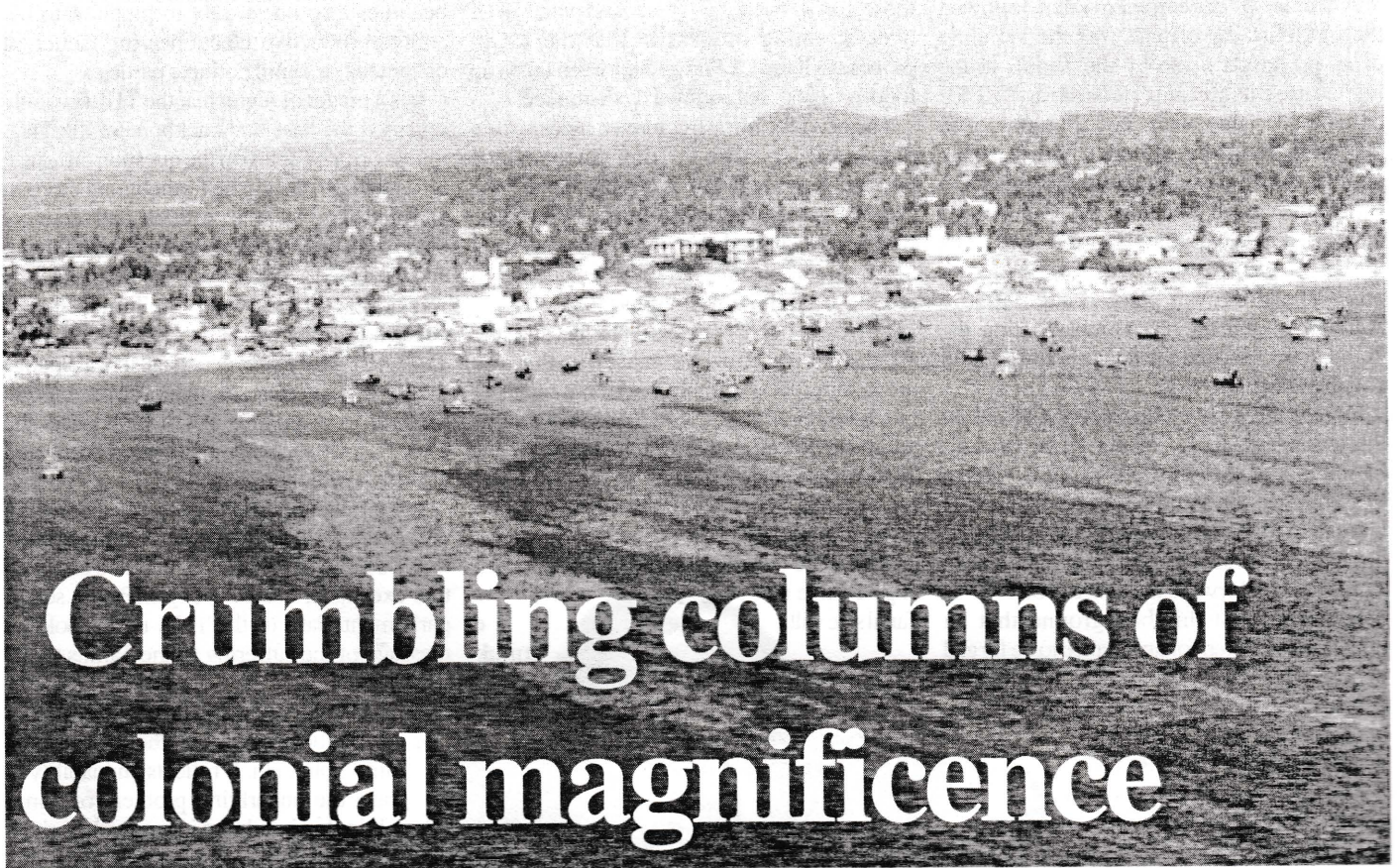
It is a matter of regret that the TULF, widely regarded the base and backbone of the TNA is being ripped apart on the question on how it is to function during the forthcoming election and after. The way the president and secretary of the TULF accuse each other over the foreign and local media makes it appear that the bloody war of 25 years involving the Tamils did not occur nor militant groups such as the LTTE, TELO, EPRLF etc. ever engage in war against the Sri Lankan state, or, indeed, ever existed. Regardless of this history of bloodshed, the TULF is worried about its candidates and election symbols!

They have not shown any understanding of the role function of the TNA in the context today's politics. In fact, it should be admitted that except for a few young MPs the senior parliamentarians of the TNA never took the message of the suffering of the Tamils to the Sinhala public.

The bickering within the TULF is a symptom of the political apathy of the professional Tamil politician. It reflects an inability to grasp the underlying problem of Tamil politics but indulging in empty rhetoric. It was this type of insensitivity that made the rise of the militant groups inevitable. At a time when the UPFA and extremist Sinhala groups are questioning the validity of the Ceasefire Agreement and indeed the very basis of Tamil existence, it is regrettable that senior politicians of a well-established party are indulging in such pettiness.

In a way this also reveals the way whereby the Tamil public has been politicised in the past. Making the community alive to the needs and demands of the times has to be studied more seriously. The conventional and guerrilla modes of warfare waged by the two sides did not render much space for an open, popular dialogue on the concept of achieving on what the Tamils wanted. But the general feeling is that politicians who should be at the forefront of the struggle and play the role of opinion makers are now themselves split. It should be said however it is becoming increasingly hard to believe that internal and domestic compulsions alone have led to this disarray.

This type of confrontation would only strengthen hands of the opponents of the ceasefire and argue for its cancellation. One does not want to sound pessimistic, but the fact remains that neither the *nidahas santhanaya's* rhetoric or the parliamentary politics of senior Tamil politicians give any cause for satisfaction or confidence.



Crumbling columns of colonial magnificence

By K. Sivapalan

The Naval Commissioner's House in the centre of Trincomalee town opposite Dutch Bay is in a dilapidated condition. In 1817 Commander Upton was so taken up with the architectural designing and majestic appearance of the building that he considered it as one worthy of use by the governor of then Ceylon.

Alas, the present condition of this building is appalling. Situated at the centre of the town and facing the sea, this magnificent building should be preserved as it is and serve as a museum, art gallery and auditorium with the British Council and library housed in it – as a monument to the excellence and munificence of the British. It is a shame if it is left in the present dilapidated state as it may crumble any moment.

It is only proper that that the British as those who built it should restore the building to its original splendour, especially so because of the expertise Britain has in the restoration of such old buildings. As we know, Britain continues to maintain the British Admiralty cemetery at Alles Garden, Trincomalee.

Flashpoints in the history of British rule in Trincomalee (1795-1947)

In 1796 British forces took command of Fort Frederick. First the take over of the coastal areas, followed by the Fort Osterberg and strengthening of its fortifications. Between 1796 and 1801 the Duke of Wellington resided

within the fort and directed the system of governance similar to the East India Company.

In 1802 Governor Frederick North accompanied by Health Inspector Thomas made an official visit to the district, and submitted a report after inspecting the Kantalai tank.

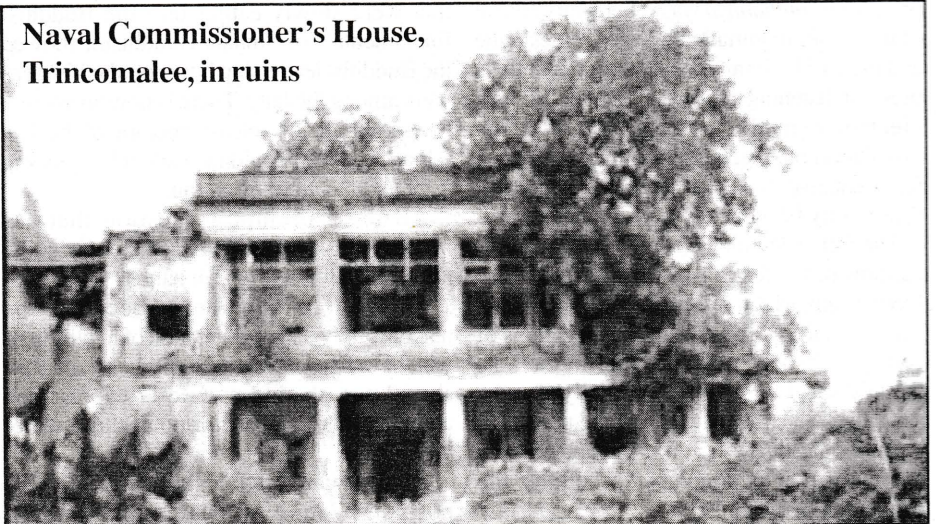
In 1803 there was confirmation of the use of the name 'Fort Frederick' without change. It was considered for use on the basis that the brother of the then King of England (King George III) namely the Duke of York who also had the same name.

War against Kandyan rule erupted in 1803 and forces from Trincomalee and Colombo

suffered greatly and retreated to Trincomalee. Around 1814 King of Kandy Sri Wickrama Rajasinghe was considered a spy with the result that his subjects were treated to immense atrocities and the affected victims found their way Trincomalee.

In 1815 Colonel Packet paved the way for the opening of a naval station on a small scale at Trincomalee. Later that year the Naval Commissioner's House was constructed in the centre of the Trincomalee town opposite the Dutch Bay. The first occupant of the house was Commander C. Upton who in 1817 was so taken up with the architectural designing and the majestic appearance of the building that he

Naval Commissioner's House, Trincomalee, in ruins



considered it as one worthy of use by the Governor of Ceylon and be made appropriate recommendations to the authorities.

In 1831 a notification regarding Trincomalee appeared in the Ceylon Government Gazette for the first time.

On the recommendation of the Colebrook Commission in 1832, Trincomalee was made the capital of Eastern Province.

'Ceylon' by Emerson Tennet was published in 1858. In this book the author referring to Trincomalee harbour states: "On comparing this magnificent bay with the open and unsheltered roadstead of Colombo, and the dangerous incommensurable harbour of Galle, it excited an emotion of surprise and regret that any other than Trincomalee should have been selected as the seat of Government and the Commercial Capital of Ceylon. But the adoption of Colombo by the Portuguese and its retention by the Dutch were not matters of deliberation or choice."

In 1870, Trincomalee as the capital of the Eastern Province recognised from 1832, gave way to Batticaloa for the sheer reason the Batticaloa District had a higher density of population. Thus, the provincial government agency was created in Batticaloa with the status of the district assistant government agency in Trincomalee.

In 1900 the British government initiated irrigation schemes with its headquarters in Trincomalee inside Fort Frederick. Subsequently, this was shifted to Colombo, York Street.

The famous author, M. W. Cave who visited Trincomalee in 1903 and wrote the book on Ceylon refers on Page 630 to the legendary Konesar temple thus: "There is now left only the bare site of the magnificent temple."

The naval dockyard station was constructed in 1923 with additions and improvements to enable better harbour facilities followed by the Trincomalee- Gal Oya junction railroad that was constructed in 1926 establishing a railway service to and from Trincomalee.

In April 1942 Trincomalee experienced the horrors of the Second World War. The

Japanese attack commenced at 6.45 a.m. and ended at 3.30 p.m. Suicide attack by three Japanese pilots by nose-diving into the oil tanks at China Bay sparked off a conflagration. One particular tank which had the full capacity of 12,000 mt. tons of oil was ablaze for seven days. The remnants of that suicide aircraft are now displayed for sightseers.

When the British handed over the bases in 1958 the Naval Commissioner's House was abandoned and began to fall apart through sheer non-maintenance and neglect.

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Upsurge of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism eats into its own constituency

By J.S. Tissainayagam



President Chandrika Kumaratunga



PM Ranil Wickremesinghe

The general election scheduled for 2 April this year has been attributed to an intra-elite power struggle. Though simmering for a long time it was brought to a head when President Chandrika Kumaratunga realised that the UNF government could only be crippled by a swift, decisive move. This was because the UNF was responding to the LTTE according to the dictates of the government's western backers thereby not only containing the rebels but also laying the foundations for Sri Lanka's economic prosperity.

With this in view the president prorogued parliament, grabbed three ministries she knew were indispensable when elections were going to be called, and once she thought she had consolidated her position to win the general election, dissolved parliament. The consolidation was by formalising an electoral alliance with the JVP, which was the culmination of months of negotiations and a virulent media campaign against the UNF, the LTTE and the ceasefire, which fanned the flames of Sinhala communalism.

When the ceasefire agreement was signed in February 2002, a well-known journalist was telling this writer with a smirk that all the UNF government had to do was to keep the ceasefire going for six months. That would be enough for the LTTE, an inveterate war machine, to either implode or recommence armed hostilities, at which point the south could turn to the international community and point a finger at the bad guys.

The reality appears to be that the LTTE remains coherent a force and the political disintegration we are witnessing, is taking place in the south. It is not that such contradictions

were not there before, but that the two-year absence of war and the prospect of imminent elections have exacerbated these contradictions.

It will be interesting to note that the disintegration has been taking place with the assertion of ascriptive identities – ethnic and religious – rather than, say class or strictly regional ones. There has been a resurgence of Sinhala-Buddhist consciousness, which has resulted in the polarization between that ethno-religious community and the Christians, both Catholic and protestant (including the evangelical), the Tamils, both northeastern and up-country, as well as sections of the Muslims who do not buy the argument that the biggest threat to the Muslims in the east are the Tigers, and have roundly rejected the theory of a Muslim grand alliance.

The resurgence of such vehement ethno-nationalism in the country, it should be reiterated, is due to the PA with its leader Kumaratunga unleashing a no-holds barred campaign against the Tamil people, supported by the JVP and the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) (the latest avatar of the Sinhala Urumeya). Though the campaign itself was disguised as anti-LTTE, it was obvious the target was Tamil aspirations. If indeed it were not an anti-Tamil campaign, those forces spearheading such moves would have asserted their belief that the rights of the Tamils had to be protected and fostered because they superseded the importance of the LTTE. Instead, all that the PA could do in response to the Tamil demand for self-determination was to wave its constitutional proposals as a basis for talks with the Tigers, proposals that had been rejected by the Tamils in 2000 elections.

The communal flames fanned by the PA, JVP and the JHU have been compared to Sinhala-Buddhist revivalism of 1956, based on linguistic nationalism and mobilisation of the 'hath havula,' variously described as the Sinhala petty bourgeoisie, the rural non-westernised elite etc. The year 1956 has come to symbolise "dawn of the era of the common man."

Paradoxically, the most demonstrable achievement of the recent upsurge of Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism has been disintegration of that constituency itself. We all know that the south is fragmented with Sinhala Christians, Muslims and Tamils eyeing resurgent Sinhala-Buddhism with suspicion and disgust, but ironically, the starkest result of this mobilisation is the deep fissures that have emerged within the Sinhala-Buddhist community itself.

The fragmentation is best seen in the way Sinhala-Buddhism deals with the Tamils. What has been the Sinhala-Buddhist response to the LTTE's proposals for an interim self-governing authority or ISGA?

The established parliamentary party, the PA, (includes the SLFP, MEP and the left) realises that devolution of power is essential for the ethnic problem to be resolved or even contained. (Observers will no doubt notice that rabid Sinhala chauvinism, which once

characterised Dinesh Gunewardene's rhetoric has been diluted since of late.) The problem with the PA response to the ISGA proposals is that its August 2000 constitutional package essentially seeks to resolve the ethnic crisis through a unitary constitution, which is ridiculously inadequate for the job.

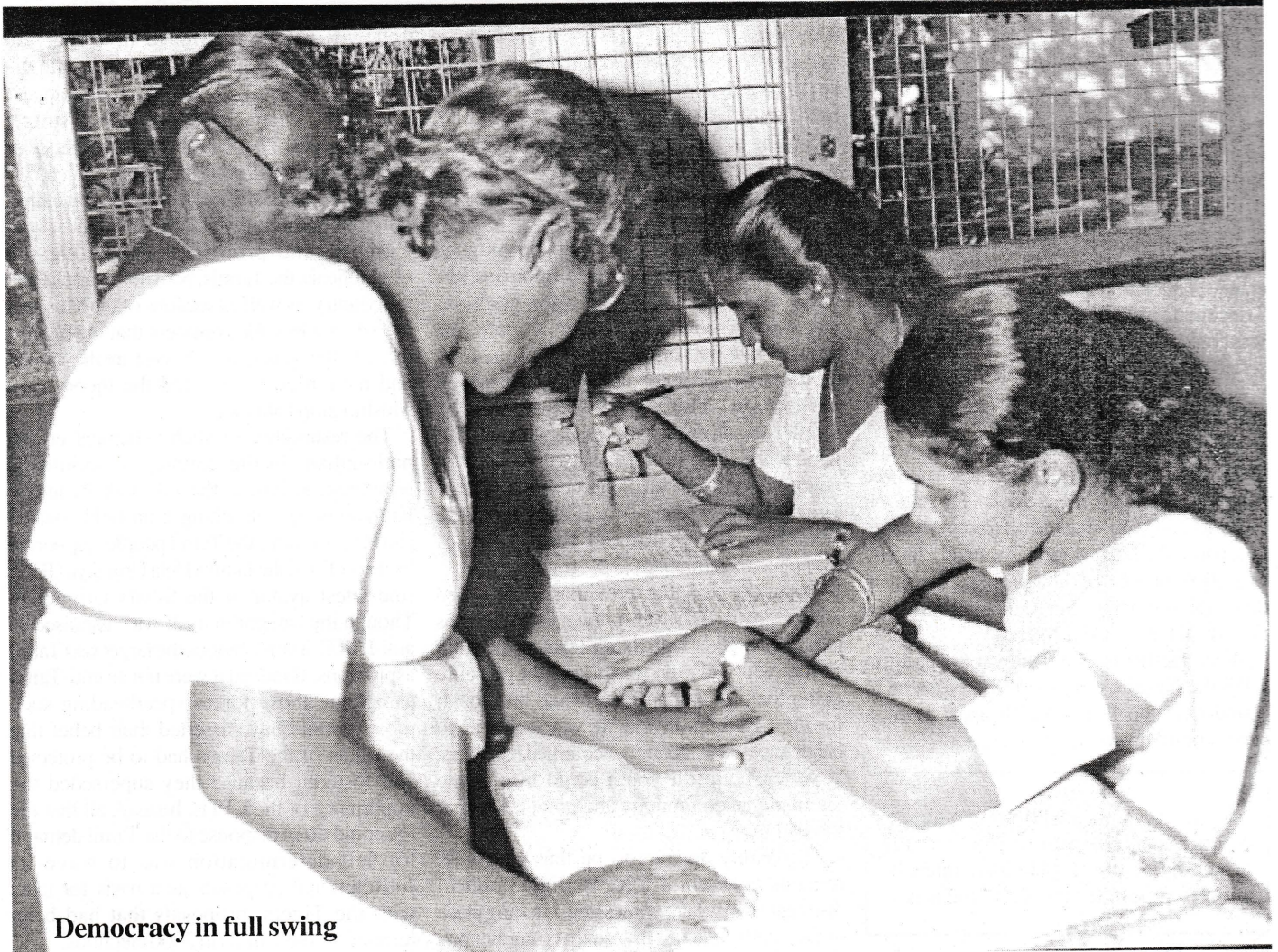
The other grouping is the JVP, which is much more strongly anti-Tamil with its leadership making rash statements, calling to question the ceasefire agreement and its willingness to share power with the Tamils only through decentralisation of administration. The last time even an attempt was made to put such a scheme into operation was through district development councils (DDC) that was seen as an affront by the Tamils, though the TULF was prepared to work it. The JVP however is campaigning on a strong socialist economic platform that it sees as an antidote to the unbridled liberalism of the UNF.

The third element that shares the Sinhala-Buddhist constituency with the PA and JVP is JHU, which believes negotiations with the LTTE will be fruitless and advocates a military solution to destroy the Tigers. However, its ultra-right Sinhala nationalism goes hand in hand with an equally rightwing economic policy that makes it the inveterate

foe of the JVP. The chic feature of the JHU's campaign is drawing Buddhist monks in their numbers to contest the elections. But to many Buddhists this violates the sanctity associated with the saffron robe. Further, the monks' assertion that they will practice the four virtues of metta, karuna, muditha and upeksha while in the same breath refusing to dialogue with the LTTE, reduces their understanding of Buddhism as well as of politics to a farce.

There is no doubt these groups are drawing on the inspiration from the BJP, the Visva Hindu Parishad etc in India that sought to exploit the sentiments of dominant Hinduism, essentially concentrated in the Hindi-speaking heartland, but with significant pockets in the south and in Bengal as well. The BJP sought to cash in on pan-Hindu nationalism, projecting the Muslim as the 'other' that was epitomised by Islamic militancy in Kashmir and of course by its bete noir, Pakistan. The purpose of the BJP's political platform was to unify all groups under the Hindu flag, which it did – the political mobilisation was good enough to form two governments in New Delhi though in coalition with the unlikeliest of political parties.

Instead of unification however, the Sinhala nationalist 'line' of the PA and JVP, now



Democracy in full swing

associated in the UPFA as well as the JHU, has created greater division in its core constituency of Sinhala Buddhists and exposed the fissures in the Sinhala nation. This divisiveness has to be clearly understood. It is not whether the UPFA, the JSU and other such organisations cannot cobble together the numbers required to form a government or not. It is to do the potential divisiveness in electoral politics that has been exploited so mercilessly by these groups.

With these parties displaying a strong Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist line, the UNF has come out as the party that is ready to accommodate and embrace diversity – Tamils, Christians and Muslims. In that sense it harks back to the UNP of the Senanayakes, which was lost under the presidencies of J. R. Jayewardene, R. Premadasa and D. B. Wijetunga.

Second, the UNF is the only incumbent party since the ethnic conflict began, which is going back to the electorate on a platform of continuing negotiations with the LTTE. The UNP before the 1994 general election had taken on an ultra-nationalist position with President Wijetunga saying that the minorities were creepers seeking nourishment from the tree of the majority community. In 2000 and 2001, though the PA tried to portray itself as accommodating Tamil aspirations by holding aloft the proposals for a new constitution, the party was in open antagonism towards the LTTE and the suffering heaped on the Tamils through years of war, violence and human rights abuse hardly made it a favourite of the minorities.

Third, the UNF is presenting itself as a party fully cognisant of the dictates of the international community both for the economic progress of the country, as well as for the politico-diplomatic initiatives to resolve the ethnic problem, especially those by the co-chairs of the Tokyo aid meeting. The UNF comes out as party striving to uphold western liberal-democratic norms in the face of PA/JVP caprice.

The liberalism of the UNF and a better understanding of the nature of electoral politics in Sri Lanka's version of proportional representation (PR), has forced certain smaller political parties to come out as catchall parties, rather than remain parties strictly representing certain ideologies or ethnic groups. This is an election strategy too, designed to break the vote banks of the opposition. And every single vote from any part of the country adds to winning national list seats.

The LTTE that has openly endorsed its support for the TNA at the forthcoming polls, stated the Alliance should be fielding Muslim candidates, which is a way of presenting a more liberal image as well as giving space to persons who are against

the policies of the principal parties representing Muslim interests in the northeast – the UNF, the SLMC, the Ashraff Congress and NUA (the last two contesting with the UPFA). This becomes much more obvious in the case of the CWC, contesting with the UNF in the Kandy District, which is fielding a Muslim candidate who is opposed to the SLMC, not with the hope of capitalising on Muslims who will vote for the policies of the CWC, but hoping to profit by the votes of the Muslims who are unwilling to vote for the SLMC and the UPFA.

Therefore the depraved action of the president, supported by power-hungry politicians – mostly from the JVP – and of course widely rumoured to be backed by a section of the international community unhappy with the power configuration underpinning the present round of peace talks, has managed to fracture the body politic of southern Sri Lanka. It is important to note that such breaking up will have a negative impact upon the social fabric, with various groups and sub-groups that are part of Sri Lanka's social formation pulling in different ways in unanchored chaos. As mentioned earlier, it is not just how many votes and seats the Sinhala-Buddhist electorate wins that is important, it is that the electorate has shown incapability of achieving unity even for the limited purpose of capturing electoral/political power.

These processes demonstrate, unlike what was assumed by this writer's journalist friend whose optimistic views were discussed above, that southern polity and society are beginning to look a little shaky and coming apart at the seams after two years of ceasefire. The northeast on the other hand, buffeted by the winds of adversity during the 20 years of violent conflict, does not seem to have taken the ceasefire too badly.

Very clearly the south unites when there is an external enemy. Up to now the 'other' was provided by the Tamils. But the external threat has diminished steadily in the eyes of the Sinhalese who are beginning to feel very comfortable with a ceasefire agreement that is rendering more bountiful dividends to the south than the northeast. The fractious southern polity could be a result of this. If this indeed is the case, the south will have to find ways and means of preventing the crisis developing further. One way this could be achieved is to resume belligerence with the LTTE.

Therefore, what is frightening about the possible return of the UPFA at the forthcoming general election is not that it might initiate the resumption of belligerence to control a robust and demanding LTTE, but because only by engaging an external enemy – an 'other' – could all-important Sinhala-Buddhist unity be retained.

These processes demonstrate, unlike what was assumed by this writer's journalist friend whose optimistic views were discussed above, that southern polity and society are beginning to look a little shaky and coming apart at the seams after two years of ceasefire.

Northern perspectives on the Tamil homeland



Archaeological site at Kantarodai, Jaffna

— By Professor S. K. Sittrampalam —

The genesis of the concept

As aptly observed by K. M. De Silva, the concept of a traditional Tamil homeland is inextricably linked with the political ideology of the Federal Party since its inauguration on 18 December 1949. This is evident not only from the inaugural speech by its founder S. J. V. Chelvanayakam, but also in its resolution at the first national convention held in Trincomalee in 1951:

“Inasmuch as it is the inalienable right of every nation to enjoy full political freedom without which its spiritual, cultural and moral stature must degenerate and inasmuch as the Tamil speaking people in Ceylon constitute a nation distinct from that of the Sinhalese by every fundamental test of nationhood, firstly that of a historical past in this Island (which is) at least as ancient and as glorious as that of the Sinhalese, secondly by the fact of their being a linguistic entity entirely different from that of the Sinhalese, with an unsurpassed classical heritage and a modern development of language which makes Tamil fully adequate for all present day needs, and

finally, by reason of their territorial habitation of definite areas which constitute over one third of this Island, this first national conference of I.T.A.K (Ilankai Tamil Arasu Katchi) demands for the Tamil speaking nation in Ceylon their inalienable right to political autonomy and calls for a plebiscite to determine the boundaries of the linguistic states in consonance with the fundamental and unchallengeable principles of self-determination”

Chelvanayakam has argued in his presidential address to the party in 1949 that the Tamils had settled on the Island not only during ancient times as the Sinhalese had, but that this country had been ruled at times by Sinhalese kings and at others by Tamil kings. From these alternating fortunes between the two communities there emerged in the 13th century an exclusive Tamil kingdom, which was conquered by the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British in succession.

The above view was later confirmed by the Vaddukoddai Resolution of the first National Convention of the Tamil United Liberation Front, successor to the Federal

Party, on 14 May 1976. At its first convention, presided over by Chelvanayakam, they resolved to restore and reconstitute the state of Tamil Eelam. Their resolution was as follows:

“The First National Convention of the Tamil Liberation Front, meeting at Pannakam (Vaddukodai Constituency) on the 14th day of May 1976, hereby declares that the Tamils of Ceylon, by virtue of their great language, their religions, their separate culture and heritage, their history of independent existence as a separate state over a distinct territory for several centuries till they were conquered by the armed might of the European invaders, and above all by their will to exist as a separate entity ruling themselves in their own territory, are a nation distinct and apart from the Sinhalese and their constitution, announces to the world that the Republican Constitution of 1972 has made the Tamils a slave nation ruled by the new colonial masters, the Sinhalese, who are using the power they have wrongly usurped to deprive the Tamil nation of its territory, language, citizenship, economic life, opportunities of employment and

education and thereby destroying all the attributes of nationhood of the Tamil people.

“And therefore, while taking note of the reservations in relation to its commitment to the setting up of a separate state of Tamil Eelam expressed by the Ceylon Workers’ Congress as a Trade Union of plantation workers, the majority of whom live and work outside the Northern and Eastern areas, This convention resolves that the restoration and reconstitution of the Free, Sovereign, Secular, Socialist State of Tamil Eelam based on the right of self-determination inherent in every nation has become inevitable in order to safeguard the very existence of the Tamil nation in this country.”

From non-violence to armed struggle

So the concept of a Tamil homeland nurtured as a political philosophy by the Federal Party and later by the Tamil United Liberation front has gone through the political models from federalism to a separate Tamil state since independence. Commenting on the nature of the people of the north, especially Jaffna, Portuguese historians described that they are generally, “quiet and mild without any military training and therefore unlikely to rebel unless instigated by the outsiders. However Michael Roberts, a modern historian of Sri Lanka writing in 1978, in his article on ‘Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka and Sinhalese Perspectives: Barriers to Accommodation’ warned that “Indeed there is room in Sri Lanka for the conflict to evolve in the direction of such awesome ‘models’ as Northern Ireland, Cyprus and the Lebanon.” Instead of solving the ethnic problem politically by addressing the problem democratically, successive governments sought to solve it militarily. Consequently the State became militarised. Today the country is divided both militarily and administratively with two armies and two governments.

Perceptions of the Sri Lankan historical sources

Commenting on the vision of Sri Lankan history bequeathed to the Sinhalese, Michael Roberts observed that: “The history of the Island has bequeathed to the Sinhalese a vision: their role as a chosen people destined to preserve Buddhism in its pristine purity within the Island Bastion. This vision is embodied in two sister concepts the Dhammadipa concept (Island of Dhamma) and the Sihadipa concept (Island of the Sihala people or Sinhalese). Dating from the fifth century A.D., at the very least, these concepts were not only embodied in the ancient Pali chronicles (the Dipavamsa and Mahavamsa) but also were maintained and embellished in Sinhala literature, folklore and mythology.”



Army puts up board claiming ancient Buddhist site in Jaffna

According to these myths the credit of introducing civilization was attributed to Vijaya. Although he and his retinue of 700 people married a Pandyan princess and other maidens from the Pandya country, his descendants have been called as Sihala / Simhala / Sinhalese. The form Sihala / Simhala which originally denoted the Island, was identified with the Sinhala ethnic group. Kings of Anuradhapura became the Kinsmen of Buddha and the Island became Dhammadipa where only a true faith of Theravada Buddhism could flourish. Concepts of only Bodhisattvas (future Buddhas) could become the kings of the Island gained currency. Scholars who have analysed these myths have found a kernel of truth in the Aryan colonization from North India, although the term Aryan is not found in them.

Thus, G.C.Mendis, a pioneer historian of Sri Lanka writing in the late forties on the history of Sri Lanka assigned a third place to the Dravidians (Tamils) after the Stone Age and the Aryan settlements. Paranavitana, a doyen of Sri Lankan history and archaeology remarked that “there is also no evidence to establish that a people of Dravidian stock who in historic times occupied the neighbouring mainland and on many occasions fought with the Sinhalese for the sovereignty over the island were present there at the time of the first Aryan settlement. Early Tamil literature contains nothing to indicate that Ceylon was a region in which that language was spoken by a considerable proportion of the people.” K. M. De Silva in his book published in 1980, after discussing the Aryan colonization and the introduction of Buddhism into the Island observed that

the “Dravidian influence was the third major ingredient in the Island’s development in Proto-historic times. There is no firm evidence as to when the Dravidians first came to the Island, but come they did from very early times either as invaders or as peaceful immigrants.”

Tantalizingly enough the perceptions of the Pali chronicles about the Tamils such as ‘aliens’ ‘usurpers’ ‘adventurers’ and ‘people of false faith’ have found acceptance in the writings not only of the eminent historians but also eminent people who adorned the judiciary of this country.

Claiming historical legacy for the concepts of ‘Bhumiputra’ and the unitary model constitution

The Island newspaper, dated 29 October 2003, in an article entitled ‘A case against a federal constitution of Sri Lanka, has published a report of an Independent and Representative Committee, appointed by the National Joint Committee on the request of the Mahanayake of the Malwatte chapter Ven. Rambukwelle Sri Vipassi. The committee comprised learned retired judges of the Supreme Court such as S. W. Walpita (chairman), R. S. Wanasundara, Lucian de Alwis, the former solicitor general Douglas Premaratne, P.C. and attorney-at-law M. Z. Akbar. Dr. Piyasena Dissanayake functioned as the secretary. Following the demise of Walpita, Wanasundara functioned as chairman. As it is useful, the two paragraphs from the article are quoted to show how the concepts of Bhumiputra and the unitary form of government of the past Pali chronicles have found their way into the popular mind of the majority community.

"Prior to European invasions, Sri Lanka was known as Sinhale or "Sinhala-deepa" meaning the land of the Sinhalese. From early times, the persons of Dravidian stock from South India had connections with the inhabitants here as traders, adventurers, invaders, and even as mercenaries. These Dravidians were not exclusively Tamils but included Malabars, Keralites, Pandians and persons from Andhra Pradesh. The Chola conquest of the 11th century paved the way for a large influx of Dravidians mostly Tamils. These Dravidians who spoke one or the other of the Dravidian languages were immigrants, some of who would have settled down in isolated pockets. But until the 12th century there had been no permanent Tamil settlements large enough to influence political events in the island. The British colonial administrators recognized a distinct racial group called 'Tamils' for the first time only after 1880, and in 1907, they became a census category.

"Until 1505 A.D. Sri Lanka was a monolingual and mono-religious state, where the population was exclusively Sinhala Buddhist. The Portuguese, the Dutch and the British invasions noticeably changed its demographic and cultural scene. New linguistic groups and adherents of new religions began to settle down on a permanent basis. The Dutch brought in South Indian labour to do tobacco cultivation and for agricultural work. Notably the British brought in substantially large numbers of South Indian Tamil indentured labour to work on their coffee and tea plantations. The descendants of these latter groups still largely live in the central hill districts and are commonly called the "Tamils of recent Indian origin."

Perceptions of the Tamilian Past

Mudliar Rasanayagam writing in the twenties of the present century identified the Tamils of the north with the Nagas mentioned in the Pali chronicles and Tamil sources, and took back the origin of the Tamil settlements in Sri Lanka to the 15th century B.C. Father Gnanaprakasara, a contemporary of Rasanayagam, published several articles in which he claimed that Sri Lanka was originally the land of the Dravidians. Sinappah Arasaratnam writing in the mid-sixties while discussing the antiquity of the early Tamil settlements and acknowledging the fact the Megalithic culture paved the way for the flowering of the Dravidian civilization in South India, observed that: "Could this Megalithic parent of the later Dravidian Civilization have spread to Ceylon and could this have been the culture that existed in Ceylon when the Aryans landed there? Whether this be so or not, there is no doubt that at the time of Aryan Colonization of Ceylon the inhabitants of the Tamil country played

an important role in the establishment of the civilization."

While referring to constraints encountered in this study, K. Indrapala writing in the mid-sixties had remarked that, "the study of the early Tamil settlements in Ceylon has been rendered difficult due to a variety of reasons. As in the case of all students of ancient history we are confronted in the first place with the problem of inadequate sources. While Pali and Sinhalese chronicles provided very reliable, fairly adequate and surprisingly continuous information regarding the political and to an extent the religious history of the Island, their contribution to our inquiry is very little. The activities of the Tamils in Ceylon find mention in the chronicles only when these affected the political or religious affairs of the Sinhalese Kingdom.

"On the Tamil side, chronicles that are extant are those written nearly three centuries after the foundation of the Tamil Kingdom in the Island in the thirteenth century. The sections of these works dealing with the period prior to the thirteenth century i.e. the period during which the earliest Tamil settlements were established are full of legendary material and are wholly unreliable. The Tamil works of South India have no notable allusions to the activities of the Tamils in Ceylon. The evidence of the archaeological materials is far more encouraging in this respect but by no means adequate. But excavation is still an undeveloped branch of archaeological research in our country. As long as excavation work remains undone, much that is relevant to our study will be wanting"

Archaeological perspective on the genesis of Sri Lankan civilisation

Mendis, a pioneer historian of Sri Lanka who analyzed the Vijaya legend dismissed it as of no value to history at all. According to him, the real provocation for the Vijaya's story is the name Sihala / Simhala which was originally the name of the country. As correctly perceived by S. P. F. Senaratne, in the phase of archaeological neglect, legend has filled the breach and such views as are held about this period derive mainly from these traditions. Surprisingly enough, what has been said about a quarter of a century ago is valid even today. Archaeological researches conducted during the last three decades or so, have given sufficient data to delineate the historical process that leads towards the dawn of civilization in the Island. Firstly, these researches have given new data regarding the prehistoric and proto-historic phases of our history. The collection of stone tools, all over the Island, including the north, has shown evidence of the presence of Stone Age man, the progenitors of the present days Veddas, who are the non-human Yakkhas of the Pali

chronicles. They were closely allied to the prehistoric population of South India.

The Nagas, who are also mentioned as the non-human beings may also now be identified with the section of the proto-historic population. Also, the available archaeological data from the regions mentioned as areas of early Aryan settlement, have shown that South India and Sri Lanka were in the same cultural zone known as Iron Age Megalithic Culture, which had its beginning in South India around 1000 B.C. In Sri Lanka the C14 dating has dated the beginning of this phase, which preceded the historic phase of around 250 B.C. to 900 B.C. This has four component units: they are settlement, burial ground, tank and the rice field. The distribution of this culture is Island-wide. Anuradhapura, Kantarodai and Mantai in northern Sri Lanka, and Tissamaharama (Akurugoda) in southern Sri Lanka are the most important habitational sites of this culture, besides other burial sites all over the Island.

The analysis of the cultural deposits of this people shows that the authors of this culture are Dravidian language speakers as that of their counterparts in South India and the earliest recognizable social, economic, political and religio-cultural institutions were introduced to Sri Lanka by them. They, together with the prehistoric population of the Island laid the foundation for Sri Lankan civilization. What we later have as Elu, or proto-Sinhalese or Tamil, are in fact the offshoots of this culture as in the case of Tamil, Kannada, Telugu and Malayalam emerging from a common Megalithic cultural base in South India. This is confirmed by the evidence from the pre-Christian Brahmi script of Sri Lanka, a precursor of later Sinhalese and Tamil scripts. The script has two layers, namely the earliest layer having Tamil Brahmi, with forms akin to the Brahmi of Tamil Nadu, followed by the north Indian Brahmi associated with Buddhism. The latter form later submerged the earlier form. This is confirmed by the presence of Dravidian titles such as *y_v*1, Parumaka*, Barata*, Naka as well as place names in the Brahmi inscriptions spread over the whole Island. Thus Susantha Goonetilleke observes that, "Sinhalese was fundamentally a cultural process associated with Buddhism and that migration, even if it did take place, was of a minor kind so as not to have left a significant trace in the archaeological data or in demographic terms on the population."

(To be continued)

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—By J. S. Tissainayagam—

I was once travelling from Paranthan to Vavuniya. It is not a pleasant journey at the best of times, but due to circumstances beyond my control the bus had to make a detour to Mullaitivu and then through Nedunkerni to meet the Jaffna-Vavuniya road at Puliyanikulam.

From Puliyanikulam it was a short run to Vavuniya. But this arduous journey had to be undertaken through war-infested area where one never quite knew when he would meet a military patrol or a checkpoint. My predicament however was made unduly severe because of a personal problem, which had become a constant worry. I wracked my brain on how to circumvent it but realised that there was only one way out.

“Annai,” I told the bus conductor as I got in, in a low confidential tone, “I don’t have an I.D card. Would there be a fuss anywhere?”

“Up to Mullaitivu everything will be fine,” he replied pondering, “and even beyond, but at Puliyanikulam, there are army patrols. They might get in to check and bother you.”

“But I have to reach Vavuniya urgently,” I insisted, a hint of desperation giving an edge to my voice.

“I can suggest one thing only,” he said doubtfully, the sunken cheeks and wrinkles on either side of his mouth twitching as he rolled his tongue around his toothless gums, “I will drop you at a point a little beyond Nedunkerni where you have to walk through jungle a couple of miles and reach Vavuniya.”

“There are no patrols or anything no?” I asked anxiously. “No, I will drop you near the place where the footpath starts.”

His words were reassuring. Though my work of late took me often into the jungles they were in areas, which I knew well. Walking some miles alone, through treacherous terrain with the possibility of a stray patrol crossing my path was not exactly a cheerful prospect. So you can imagine how worried I was.

I hardly saw anything when I looked through the bus window during the ride. Scenes of rural life that I usually found so heart-warming left me cold that day. The long stretches of tangled undergrowth and the mysterious jungle, an occasional little hamlet that broke the stark monotony of the vegetation, the villagers, anxious-eyed and uncertain as they boarded the bus, all which I would have usually delighted in, passed meeting my indifference.

After awhile I calmed down. After all, the conductor had said that he would drop me at the place where there was a footpath. The rest was up to me on how well I could weather

This vignette is reproduced from the *Northeastern Herald* when the journal was first published as a limited circulation monthly newsletter in November 1992.

the scrubland and wastes of the Nedunkerni jungle under the blistering sun and reach Vavuniya.

I must tell you here something else. A man who was closely involved in an ambush where they got about six soldiers in Jaffna way back around 1984, was once staying in my house. In the mad rush that followed, the army came home on a tip-off with the intention of arresting him. But he must have I got wind of it, and managed to dodge them. A few days later he was captured and under severe interrogation, spilled the beans.

I was taken in and despite my protestation of innocence severely tortured. But over a period of time the officers became convinced that I actually knew nothing. I was eventually released which was a miracle because whoever was taken in when the army had its cordon-and-search operations was rarely released. But the ordeal to which I was subjected was so nerve shattering that it took me almost six months to recover.

After I recovered, I was able to look back towards the period of my detention. And I looked back in anger. Gradually I became involved in various ‘operations.’ Sometimes it would be sabotage; otherwise a heist or an ambush where they got a couple of policemen. This was the time I got to know certain areas of the Northern jungles. But I was never really involved in executing the deed. My role was providing the backup, logistics and so on. The fact that I was ‘involved’ made the prospect of being even randomly searched at a checkpoint all the more frightening.

Forcing myself to remain calm I looked out of the window and did mechanical things like counting the taller trees on the roadside or making faces at a small child seated across the aisle of the bus on the lap of its mother. The child sat staring insolently at me never batting an eyelid. But these attempts at distraction were of little avail and that terrifying feeling of impending doom swept over me over and over again.

We passed Mullaitivu and then Nedunkerni safely. I resigned myself to the fate of having to trudge through the jungle trail all by myself.

Without warning the conductor signalled to me and rang the bell. I arose, took my bag and literally dragged myself to the door. Because I was closer to the rear exit I thought of getting down from it.

As I did, I looked for the conductor to thank him, but he who had beckoned me hardly seconds before, was nowhere to be seen.

I got down from the bus saying that I had to pull myself together. The scorching afternoon sun poured down in all its ferocity. Trees mantled both sides of the road. The sun and the parched earth had made the vegetation take on an ashen colour over which the dry zone dust had settled like a brown cloud.

All around me was dark, tangled treacherous undergrowth lying naked under the pitiless sun. Beyond was the jungle. The road itself, potholed and badly maintained, petered out into the bushes and elephant grass that lay on either side. The sky was cloudless overhead. Except for an occasional birdcall or noise in the thicket from small game everything was silent, as if nature had given up the fight with the blistering heat of the noonday sun.

I could see a dirt track, which began on the side of the road and wound its way into the dark recesses of the forest. As I got down the old bus drove off chugging and wheezing.

I took stock of the dry desolate place before disappearing into the bush. But I had no time to indulge my fear because the receding sound of the departing bus was cut by the roar of an approaching helicopter. The chattering sound of those rotors herald death in my land. I looked wildly into the air, the sun blinding my eyes. I spotted the machine frighteningly low, hardly above the trees. What was worse, it seemed heading straight for me.

In an insane act of mortal terror I ran across the road for cover. My hope was to somehow get under cover of the overhanging foliage. The roots and the hard thicket tore my hands as I dived, my fingers clawing the burning sand.

Lying flat on the ground I turned to steal a glance at the chopper. I could see through the shimmering glare of the afternoon the machine bearing down on me, its snout like front painted jungle green the sun glinting on the windshield.

It would hardly have been 150 feet away and as it approached, the displaced air from the rotors pinned me to the ground. I wanted to move still further under the trees but storm raised by the hurricane did not allow me raise myself, besides I was hoping against hope they would not see me.

I closed my eyes and winced in anticipation of the steel ripping apart my body.

The deafening noise of the rotors was receding. The displaced air was not pinning with the same merciless power. As I opened one eye cautiously, the leaves began to slacken their trembling dance. The danger had passed.

The close shave had left me drained of energy. I picked myself up feeling that my body was something alien to myself. With my chest heaving to drink more air I turned cautiously to see where the chopper was. By now I was in better control of myself. Even if the machine returned I would have had sufficient time to make myself scarce.



I went on to the road and peeped. Over the foliage I could see the helicopter banking slightly and then return to even keel as it positioned itself. There was a single report as it fired.

The vibration of the explosion hung in the air and wave after wave of its thundering echo seeped into the very soul of the afternoon. About two hundred yards away, I saw the bus rear up convulsively and a streak of intense orange fire shoot out of the vehicle as it swung crazily and crashed into a ditch.

As I watched horror struck, the helicopter circled the burning wreckage and disappeared over the trees, steadily gaining height.

Before I knew what, I found myself running towards the bus. It had come to a halt a couple of hundred years away. Coils of thick black smoke were billowing from near the front of the wreckage.

When I reached the bus I heard voices wailing and shrieking and others groaning in pain. Luckily the bus was still upright and the exits could be used to evacuate the dead and wounded. As I tried to get in they were helping a man out, his eye and entire left cheek covered with blood, very probably caused by flying glass. He was the conductor whom I wanted to thank. I forced myself inside and saw utter carnage. There was shattered glass everywhere and splotches of blood stood in thick pools on the aluminium floorboards.

A woman was trying to help another who had been caught between two seats, which had come loose and collided due to the impact. Her leg was crushed into pulp. In the front a couple of men were trying to douse the flames.

As I ran forward to help I saw a figure of a woman lying crumpled on a seat. A copious pool of blood was dripping from her mouth on to the floor. Her eyes had the vacant look of death.

I bent down to see whether I could be of any help. A movement on the floor between where the dead woman lay and the seat in front of her caught my eye.

Seated on the floor was a little child. It was the one at whom I was making faces to distract myself in the bus. In shocked remembrance I recognised the woman was its mother.

The pool of blood snaked towards it. And as I watched, the child dipped its dainty little hands in it and smeared itself and the floor. It was its mother's blood.

This story was told to this writer some years after it happened in the late 1980s. Its protagonist carried the memories of that gruesome incident for a long time and its images returned to haunt him over and over again. He left the 'movement' and immigrated to Europe. But no doubt the harrowing images of that fateful afternoon on the road to Pulliyankulam still live in him.

The Northeastern Monthly

27 February 2004

Dear Sir / Madam,

The Northeastern Monthly is a new venture, which may interest you. It begins publication at a time when Sri Lanka's politics is poised to take what could possibly be a new turn.

This monthly magazine seeks to reflect a Tamil point of view that is glaring in its absence in what goes today as mainstream media. It will concentrate on politics, society and economic development of Sri Lanka's northeast, as well as on cultural and artistic matters in that region. At the same time, it will devote space for views from other areas of significant Tamil habitation such as the upcountry and Colombo.

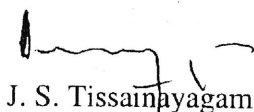
The Northeastern Monthly will reflect a diversity of views and will not necessarily represent views that are dominant in any particular area. The challenge to keep such diversity alive lies partly with the readers, who could contribute immensely towards this effort by sending mail and their opinions to the publication.

You will doubtless notice *The Northeastern Monthly* has not printed an address on this copy. This is due to a delay in finding fixed premises and consequently a land telephone. The publishers decided to come out with the first issue despite these drawbacks due to swiftly moving developments in Sri Lanka's politics, which did not allow the luxury of ensuring the entire infrastructure to be in place before starting publication. All these shortcomings as well as fixing the price will be rectified before we post you the next issue. In the meantime correspondence may be directed to jprakash30@yahoo.com

Your support to this venture will be highly appreciated; it will be the most significant factor in keeping the effort alive.

Thank you,

Yours truly,



J. S. Tissainayagam
Editor

