

Saturday Review

SRI LANKA

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ALL PARTY CONFERENCE

TULF ATTENDS PARLEY:

APC MEETS AGAIN NEXT WEEK

When the All Party Conference met in Plenary Session on Friday, 14th December, President Jayewardene presented a package of proposals comprising draft legislation, which involve Constitutional Amendments, for the creation

of Gramodaya Mandalayas Praja Sabhas, District Councils and a Council of State (Second Chamber).

The TULF attended the sessions yesterday after an eleventh hour decision by its Politbureau not to keep

away from the Conference at this juncture. Among the others who attended the meeting were the representatives of the government, the UNP, the LSSP, the CWC, the DWC, All Ceylon Muslim League, the Council of Muslim Associ-

ations, Sinhala Organisations, Hindu Organisations, Christian Organisations and the Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi (FP). The SLFP and the CPSL had earlier withdrawn from the Conference. The Conference is scheduled to meet again on Friday 1st Dec. 1984.

There had been specul-

ations earlier whether the TULF would attend the Conference at all in view of the new Emergency Regulations now being enforced in the North. The TULF leaders had several rounds of discussions with President Jayewardene prior to the Conference Sessions on Friday, in order to seek

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Sri Lanka's Dangerous Drift

Even the Prime Minister of India made a peremptory reference to the siege of Jaffna whilst appealing to the Government "to give the lead at the All Party Conference to achieve a viable political settlement which would meet the legitimate aspirations of the Tamils and be acceptable to all concerned".

The formal refutations by the sovereign Government of Sri Lanka, of matters raised in the statement of Mr. Rajiv Gandhi on events in Sri Lanka, cannot draw a red herring across the issue of what is going on to-day in Jaffna.

Not only Jaffna, but the districts of Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu, Mannar and even sections of Vavuniya would all appear to have ceased to be parts of this country, but for the SLBC, the Rupavahini, the national power grid and of course the presence of the armed forces.

Mr. Amirthalingam was not exaggerating when he spoke to pressmen of the

ill-effects of converting the greater part of the Northern province into prohibited zones and security zones. As much as two lakhs of persons who depend on fishing have been cruelly deprived of their means of livelihood by virtue of the coastal areas being declared a prohibited zone. Fish and most other items of food and other essential commodities are not obtainable for love or for money. For what are available the increases in prices have been staggering.

The breakdown in banking, co-operatives, transportation, health services, educational system, postal and telecommunication facilities is being achieved with such deliberate sordidness as would alienate the Tamil speaking people permanently from the rest of the country.

In other respects, these areas are virtual human hunting-grounds where poachers go unpunished and scot-free, a freedom denied in the wild life sanctuaries of this paradise isle dedicated to the Enlightened.

Elsewhere, the Tamils, be they professionals or plantation workers, priests or peasants, are apprehended without discrimination. They are being shown up as security hazards to be kept under constant vigilance in the neighbourhood, in the temples of gods and in the workplaces of men. Even a Tamil married to a Sinhalese may become a suspect to his or her spouse, let alone the law-enforcing agencies. Enmity is breaking into the realm of private life. The School-mates and booze-pals are being turned into implacable enemies. The word 'kottiya' is now part of the social vocabulary with ominous implications for many more years.

The Sinhalese who speak up for the Tamils are subjected to Sri Lankan Macarthysm with all its ugly improvisations. The innocent and the gullible, the uninformed and the uncritical among the Sinhalese are being driven to panic in the name of 'total security' in the style of Singapore. Even unsullied school children are falling victims to

the infectious 'security' fever. They rely on the media without realizing that "not what is said but what is left unsaid is the besetting difficulty" of our times. The very manner in which the national defence fund has been set up will force the people of this country into opposite camps.

This is the setting in which the Conference of political parties is being resumed in Colombo after an interval of almost three months. It is well over one year since the first tentative steps, towards a political settlement, were taken following discussions in New Delhi between Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the then Indian Prime Minister, and President Jayewardene's special envoy, Mr. H. W. Jayewardene. These discussions had taken place in a mood of urgency in the aftermath of the brutal pogrom of July/August, 1983.

The process of finding a solution has taken devious turns during the intervening period bringing many people to the brink of despair. A

situation has been created in which even the terms of approach to a solution may be considered as too little by the Tamils and too much by the Sinhalese.

It would appear that the sole reason for offering a political solution is to retrieve the image of the country abroad. It would also appear that the reluctance to meet Tamil aspirations is being justified on the grounds that the package should be acceptable to the Sinhalese.

The Government cannot be unaware of the inherent dangers in dragging on with a restive minority and a reluctant majority of its own creation. Hence, it would appear, the carrot and stick policy, a combination of political and military solutions. The government leaders have given confirmation of this approach in their recent pronouncements in Colombo and Yatiyantota. It is significant that these revelations are being made in the wake of reports that the American trouble-shooter, General Vernon Walters, had expressed

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Referendum Catches on

The Pakistan Military ruler Gen. Zia Ul Haq is the latest in South Asia to use the device of referendum to entrench his rule over the people. He has decided to hold a referendum on 19th December to obtain the people's verdict on his policy of 'Islamisation'. The democratic opposition parties have described this move as an insult to the intelligence of the people, for it was precisely on this issue that the State of Pakistan was created in 1947. The opposition parties and professional associations have called for a boycott of the referendum.

JANA HANDA

A group of persons dedicated to the preservation of fundamental rights in Sri Lanka, including press freedom, has begun publishing a Sinhala Weekly, JANA HANDA (People's Voice). The first issue was out on 4th November. The Editorial office is at No. 71—B, Dutugemunu Street, Kohuwala, Dehiwala.

All Sinhalese are not Yankee Dicks

(Anniversary Editorial,
Lanka Review,
Canada).

Sri Lanka and the Sinhalese are being fashioned and tied to the nuclear-tipped battering ram of American foreign policy in South Asia—just as the Jews of Israel, who were thrown out of Europe, were thrust against the people of the Middle East.

Europe and America have had no more love for the Jews than they have for the Sinhalese. We are told not to criticise a Government that collaborates with America in belligerent postures and politics against our neighbours which could lead us to suicide—and when we criticise it, are we told we are Anti-Sinhalese and Anti-Buddhist just as critics of Zionist Israel are anti-semitic.

To promote antagonisms by the Sinhalese against people who inherited and sweated in the same country as have the Tamils—to foster divisions against India and the peoples of the sub-continent—who we share a larger history with—is not in our interests.

Asia is half the world. In whose interest is it that Iraq fights Iran? Pakistan against Afghanistan? China against the Soviet Union?

There is no question we were united only in the interests of Europe and bound in a rubix of antagonisms to keep us weak and exploited.

Sikhs against Hindus. Hindus and Muslims. Buddhist against Hindus. To adopt philosophies, Aryan or otherwise; to select religious interpretations, enlarge antagonistic historical incidents only racially subdivides us further.

We among the people's of that region have to struggle and permanently develop a system of co-existence our own image, that respects our common humanity in equal social and economic relations.

When the British had to retreat because they couldn't stand the heat or contain it—we inherited neo-colonial puppets, clowns and dictators, bureaucrats and

administrators; petty businessmen ravenous at the refuse of transnationals; regional policemen, racial time bombs, unrepayable debts which facilitated our remote control until we will be recolonized by the current top dog of imperialism—the United States.

Dr. Iqbal Ahmad of Pakistan, now at the Transnational Institute in Washington D.C., says the U.S. is ultimately interested in an Axis of Washington, Peking and Delhi against the Soviet Union. (One would also think, against the self-determination of the peoples of Asia). So they would not want to destroy all their bridges to India. That would leave them in a foreign policy wilderness—as what happened for a quarter of a century with China.

If they participate too directly in the genocide of Tamils in Sri Lanka (of which there are two million) they just might have to move their consulate in Madras (where there are fifty million) to the Seventh Fleet when next it sails by from Subic Bay in the Philippines to that nuclear warehouse in Diego Garcia.

That is why we have the direct involvement of lesser powers like Israel and South Africa in our country. Terrorist Israel and Terrorist South Africa, well educated in torture and other techniques, live by America and Europe alone—without whose support and sustenance they would not last.

Dr. Iqbal Ahmed says the U.S. is willing to fight the Soviet Union to the last Afghan in Afghanistan through Pakistan.

What does that bode for the Sinhalese against a "recalcitrant" India, who has a friendship treaty with the Soviet Union, and might not slip comfortably under the proposed axis?

What do we, who live in North America, tell the North American people of such policies? We are told not to help hang dirty linen out in public. Our Government hires the old Shah of Iran's western public

relations company to promote a clean image!

Now Sinhalese don't, won't or are not supposed to talk to Tamils and vice-versa. Sikhs won't talk to Hindus. Those who stand up and cry against these dismemberments are threatened and physically abused.

To find a Sinhalese in Toronto, who unequivocally opposes the present state of affairs is rare. Any Sinhalese who speaks out will be chastised. But we must speak out because the cost for those in Sri Lanka is much much greater. And we must always remember that the Sinhalese in Sri Lanka are not as monolithic or as acquiescent to US dictates and Sri Lankan government policy, as is made out to be here.

I submit poems tentatively to the South Asian Review, a local publication, to its Sri Lankan Issue editor, Suwanda Sugunasiri who is also a Provincial 'Multicultural' advisor, and he censors one poem out—a poem that defends the right of the Tamils to a nation (whether it separates depends on the continuing actions of the government). I am told the poem will inflame the community. I am also told there are no Tamils in that issue because they are only interested in business!

Some of our contributors are threatened. The Lanka Review is called Marxist, (Is this an accusation? Poor Marx!), pro-Tamil (they don't need our help!), agents of Eelam and the Government, and one-sided. But which side are we on when people are killed, threatened and imprisoned? Is the only occupation for Sinhalese youth as soldiers against people in the North? Is this what "open economy" means? What is the economic miracle? For whom?

We are also told not to ask too many questions. Last year, a Sri Lanka Relief Fund was organised in Canada to help the "victims" of the riots. We couldn't say "Tamils" because there were Sinhalese victims as well, presumably. We asked friends and

donated clothes. It wasn't presented to Tamil organisations here.

Also, the Canada-Sri Lanka Association refused to take a minimal position of even offering condolences to the grieved; though its members, individually, organised it. We were promised a method of feed back to ensure proper delivery. One year later, we haven't been told anything. One organiser tells me, it doesn't matter if the people in Sri Lanka didn't receive it, because she's happy, and feels good, that we at least got together to organise it! So much for charity, but where's the justice!

The Lanka Review is now one year old. As the foregoing shows and in other incalculable ways, we have made a measured impact. We thank our anonymous and open donors and contributors, as well as those who fight with us. We are not a community organ, nor are we an outlet for the Government or a mirror of the mass-media's mashed view of the third-world! We will not publish classist, racist or sexist material. We hope to document views that are not popular or promoted otherwise.

We who have been thrown out, run away from, came here on what we think was our own free will from the countries of our birth are constantly reminded that we are strangers in a land stolen by strangers, and told our humanity and needs are of a minority nature. Ultimately, multiculturalism will divide us small as we are into Tamils, Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims again—when all we are to them, are "Pakis." It is in that we will find our unity and strength—but that should be another article!

—Krisantha Sri Bhaggiyadatta.

(Lanka Review is available from P.O. Box 613 Station P, Toronto, Ontario M5S 2Y4, Canada).

REBUILDING THE SRI LANKAN NATION:

Sri Lanka is a country richly endowed by nature and rich in its heritage of culture and spiritual values. Peace and development are within our grasp. But we have also the frightening potentiality to destroy ourselves.

We must give a priority to the dignity of the human person, of each person and all persons. Human beings are all equal in dignity and in fundamental human rights. The fundamental human rights of persons are not given by public authority, but public authority has to recognise them as inherent and inalienable in persons. These include the right to life, to the means of subsistence, and to liberty. Human beings must be able to live with a sense of security and without constant fear and anxiety concerning their life. Public authority exists for the ensurance of these rights.

People's Rights

Peoples have rights to their religion, culture, language and a measure of self-determination. Where peoples of different races, religions, cultures, languages live together, public authority must provide for the rights of all with due regard to their numbers, geographical and historical context. In a country like Sri Lanka, it is out of the recognition and respect for such community identities that the larger national identity of all the people of the country can be elaborated. This requires a conscious and united effort of our generation.

In the relationship among different groups within a society, the respect for human freedom, without endangering the larger common bond, can be ensured by the principle of subsidiarity, i.e. a higher authority should not take unto itself what a smaller or lower authority can do. Authority is in the service of human dignity and human freedom (Pope Pius XI). Hence participation by as many as possible in government at different levels, is desirable for safeguarding human rights. There must therefore be provision for devolution of as much power to the base as is compatible with good government and the general interests of that society.

Since freedom is a human right, public authority should be responsible to the people ruled. Representative democracy is one of the best means of ensuring human freedom—despite its drawbacks as a human institution. Different forms of authoritarianism generally end up subordinating the good of the ruled to the interests of the rulers.

Fair Elections

The principle of choosing rulers through periodic and fair elections and conferring power on those who obtain the majority of votes at a given time is, in general, a desirable form of representative democracy. Majority rule must however recognize

group or another will tend to make a society forfeit the loyalty of such a group. This can be worsened if they perceive themselves as being given an inferior status in the country and humiliated in such fundamental values as language, culture, religion or civil status.

In the Sri Lanka situation we are for a united Sri Lanka based on the rights and dignity of all persons and communities living here. The unity of our country, society, nation and State must be based on consent, which is the fruit of justice and concern for all. Unity cannot and should not depend on mere legal imposition or military power.

"We, the Catholic Bishops of Sri Lanka write to you at a time of grave crisis in our country concerning some issues that are uppermost in the minds of most of our people today. We realise the difficulty of understanding the different factors that have gone into the making of our present problems. We as a community of Christians must recognise that we too in some ways have contributed to bringing about this situation. Conscious of the inadequacies of any analysis and orientations that we can present and of the human limitations in our implementation of them, we humbly invite you to study and reflect on our pastoral. We intend it to be a message of understanding, reconciliation and hope in our troubled times. We believe that where sin may abound grace can superabound and take us towards a better and happier Sri Lanka."

This is stated in a Pastoral Letter issued by the Catholic Bishops of Sri Lanka. It is signed by

Rt. Rev. Dr. Nicholas Marcus Fernando, Archbishop,
Rt. Rev. Dr. Thomas Savundranayagam,
Rt. Rev. Dr. Henry Goonewardane O.M.I.,
Rt. Rev. Dr. Edmund Fernando O.M.I.,
Rt. Rev. Dr. Kingsley Swampillai,
Rt. Rev. Dr. Oswald Gomis,
Rt. Rev. Dr. Frank Marcus Fernando (President),
Rt. Rev. Dr. B. Deogupillai (Vice-President),
Rt. Rev. Dr. W. Don Sylvester (Secretary General).

the legitimate and basic rights of all—especially in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society. If it fails to do so, there tends to be an authoritarianism of the majority that causes discontent among the minorities and may even lead to the disintegration of a society. The State and government should be for all persons and groups in the country. The rights of the people are the limits of power. People's loyalty should be based on consent which is best evoked by justice, fairplay and recognition of the human dignity of all. A sense of permanent political powerlessness of one

Given our present difficulties we believe that these problems can be resolved peacefully if there is a due recognition of the common good of Sri Lanka and of the rights of all, both majority and minorities. We have to acknowledge whatever blunders or inadequacies there may have been in our past approaches—whether by one group or the other. We envisage such a national consensus to be in the form of a social contract or covenant to be arrived at by dialogue and consensus among political, religious and cultural leaders of our country. This is urgently required. Time is

running out. Delay may lead to further violence and irreversible rupture in relationships. It is desirable that such an agreement be accepted by all political parties so that no one will seek political advantage at the expense of the common good of the country. For such a consensus there must be a spirit of give and take, of good will and confidence among the peoples of the country.

thus endeavoured to meet their problems of ethnic pluralism.

There should be institutional provision for the monitoring of ethnic relations, the right of access to the courts in order to resolve conflicts. The independence of the judiciary should be ensured. Any interference of the judiciary does harm to the whole of society.

A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Sri Lanka being a multi-ethnic society there must be a constitutional provision for safeguarding both the unity of the country as well as the rights of the ethnic minorities. This can be ensured by a devolution of authority that provides for people of different areas to manage those aspects of government which they can conveniently administer. Devolution is a means of ensuring the democratic participation of people in the development of their own geographical and social communities and of the nation as a whole.

It is desirable that the ethnic distribution of population be taken into account in the sharing of power between the Centre and the districts and the provinces. The Central Government should retain those powers which are essential for the unity, integrity and good government of the whole country—such as foreign affairs, finance, defence, international trade, judiciary, nationwide development projects. The exercise of specific and limited powers in other matters, under the overall jurisdiction of the Central Government, should be given to the areas to which authority is devolved; be they districts, provinces or other regional groupings.

In this manner both national unity and the right to a measure of self-management by the people can be ensured. Instead of leading to a greater divisiveness, such a sharing of power, arrived at by a national consensus, can be a means of fostering national unity and the development of the country. Many modern States have

The issues of land settlement, education, employment and language need to be resolved within the framework of national policy and our understanding on the issue of the sharing of political power.

We favour a recognition of Tamil also as an official language of this country. This need not be a disadvantage to Sinhala. We encourage the study of both languages by all students in the schools and universities. English could also be accepted at least as the language for relations with the rest of the world.

Compromise

A compromise solution will have to be worked out whereby we respect both the right of every Sri Lankan to reside and work in any part of the country, and also recognise the validity of the desire of an ethnic group to maintain its identity in a given area.

We welcome the recommendation of the Round Table Conference to give citizenship rights to the stateless persons of Indian origin, who wish to make Sri Lanka their home. This is a long due recognition of a basic right of a people who have contributed much to our national well-being, often without reaping adequate benefits themselves. Attention should be given to grievances and rights of both the plantation workers and of the even longer-suffering peasantry, specially in the hill country.

(Continued overleaf)

We recommend the expansion of opportunities for higher education, specially in the Sciences and in technical education, so that many more young persons may have opportunities of realizing their goal of further education. We recommend that the content and methods of education, including religious education, be so refashioned as to contribute towards the better appreciation of our common humanity, of the common strands of our millennial history and of our varied cultures. The generation of a new consciousness of belonging to a modern Sri Lankan society and nation can depend very much on education in the schools and on the media of social-communication which must be enlisted to this purpose.

We recommend that independent permanent Commissions be set up concerning ethnic relations and human rights.

Deepest Level

The deepest level of solution to these problems has to be in the minds and hearts of our people as a whole. There is unfortunately a wide gap of ignorance and prejudice separating the ethnic groups in Sri Lanka specially the Sinhalese and Tamil peoples. Different antagonistic perceptions of history and of contemporary realities keep the majority of each of these groups rather suspicious of each other. The educational system and the mass media sometimes foster and pander to such perceptions. The unfortunate spiral of violence further blinds our perceptions and even breeds hatred and desire of retaliation.

The majority community must inspire by its actions a sense of security and acceptance among the minorities. The minorities must assure the majority of their fundamental political loyalty to the Sri Lankan community and that they do not conspire to divide the country. The minority consciousness of the Sinhala majority needs this assurance.

In the face of the growing violence in our society, a mass movement for peace with justice and love needs to be developed. Active methods of non-violent conflict-resolution and community building must be evolved at a national level.

This requires much patient listening, dialogue, reflection and firm option for the nobler values of the best inspirations of our religions and philosophies. The development of active, creative non-violence requires much more attention than has been hitherto given to it by persons of good-will. One of the causes of the spread of violence is the relative inactivity of the peaceful concerning issues of national unity and human rights.

constitute the majority and even in some of their non-violent leaders, who led them to opt for the goal of a separate sovereign state of Eelam. Some of them are motivated by ideologies favouring violence seen throughout the world today.

Pathological State

With regret we have to note that the pathological state of our body politic and society has spawned a militant youth in the North, as it did in the

are likely to participate in a peaceful and humane way of life. This is the best in their tradition and culture.

It is also necessary to understand the frustration and restiveness of the State's security forces who are sent to maintain law and order in a situation of breakdown of relations among the political leaders of the communities. They live in constant fear and tension. They are fighting a struggle (oftentimes due

While we disapprove of the use of violence for the resolution of our political problems, we have to acknowledge that our youth and security forces are being motivated and supplied with arms to fight each other and maintain an atmosphere of terror specially in the North. Our passivity in the face of gradually mounting tensions has led the country to this conflict. We owe it to those combatants on both sides to free them from this unrewarding and deadly situation by bringing about an early political solution to our problems. Only then can our youth harness their energy to building a country in which all will enjoy the fruits of their labour rather than suffer the pain of their violence. We commend and encourage the efforts of all persons of good-will of all communities who strive for a just, peaceful, effective and lasting solution to these issues. We wish to join our endeavours to theirs for the sake of our peoples and our country.

(Excerpted from the Pastoral Letter issued in June, 1984.)

Rebuilding the Sri Lankan Nation

Violence as a means of conflict resolution is an appeal to brute force not to reason, and still less to justice and love. It is contrary to the best inspirations of Christianity and of all our religions. Violence tends to brutalise those who have recourse to it. In the present conflict both sides are bound to suffer if they resort to violence. There can be no satisfactory resolution of the ethnic issue through violence. On the contrary we are likely to have a festering sore, that will plague several generations of Sri Lankans. We do not approve of the violence of the youth militants, of the mobs and of the thug squads. Neither do we condone the harassment and excesses by the State security forces. All these aggravate these issues. Our endeavour should be to win over the violent by persuasion. This requires an understanding of the causes of violence and the motivation of those who have recourse to violence.

The Tamil militant youths have taken to arms partly as a result of an accumulation of frustration due to the futility of peaceful efforts at constitutional change and also to their sense of indignation at the way their people have been treated by the political leaders of the majority community and by the ethnic mobs since 1956, and the security forces in the North. They seem to have lost confidence in the predominantly Sinhala governments since Independence, in the Sinhala people who

South around 1971. While we do what is required to contain their violence, every effort should be made to win them over to a peaceful way of life. For this they must be persuaded by actual deeds that the causes for which they resort to violence can be effectively resolved by non-violent means. Then most of them and the over-whelming mass of the Tamil people

to being sent there)—with a sense of inability to resolve the conflict either by arms or by peaceful means. Hence they tend to react violently and irrationally when attacked by the young militants. This in turn alienates these militants and the Tamil people at large from the security forces, the Government and the Sinhala people as a whole.

SRI LANKA FIGURES IN NORWEGIAN PARLIAMENT

This is an English translation of a statement made by Ms. Marit Wikholm, MP (Labour Party) in the Norwegian Parliament, on the 26th of November 1984 on Sri Lanka.

"... Finally a few words on Sri Lanka. I have noted the committee's (Parliamentary committee on Foreign Policy) remarks that one will appraise the situation in Sri Lanka according to White Paper No. 36 on Norway's Cooperation with Developing Nations, I think it is important that the government of Sri Lanka is made to receive strong signals that development aid can be altered if it continues its systematic hunt and near extermination of Tamils. Despite President Jayewardene's strong efforts to explain away the acts of Tyranny and maintain that it is the terrorist groups they are fighting, we know from, among others, BBC reports and from Tamils living in Norway, it is only a propaganda to legitimize (the Government's) own actions. I am also re-

ferring to 3 Amnesty reports of the last year. People are disappearing, and being murdered, and houses and shops are being burnt. That Tamils are resorting to counter-offensive is natural. But it is up to the government of Sri Lanka to restore law and order. There are very good reasons for Norway to follow the developments closely. Our entire Development - Aid

policy will fall into disrepute if we risk our Development aid funds being used by one ethnic group to suppress another. I would like to ask minister Brusletten (minister of development aid) whether we can be sure by any means that a certain proportion of the grant for Sri Lanka will go to projects in the Tamil areas, and what practical problems are encountered in that respect?"

Tamil Doctor to the Rescue

A Tamil doctor at the Chilaw Hospital donated his own blood to save the life of a Sinhalese mother recently.

Mrs. Sita Wijenaike was on her way to hospital when she gave birth to a child.

She was bleeding profusely when she arrived and was in urgent need of a transfusion.

None of the relations who accompanied her had the blood of the required type.

Dr. Y. C. Gunanathan promptly asked the nurses to take his blood and give

it to her, thereby saving her life.

This news is reproduced from the November issue of GURU HANDA (Teachers' Voice), the monthly Sinhalese journal of the Lanka Guru Sangamaya published from No. 72, Malay Street, Colombo 2. Editorially commending Dr. Gunanathan for his magnificent gesture, GURU HANDA asked: You Sinhalese who in a sense of misguided nationalism set fire to houses and kill innocent Tamils, please tap your hearts.

ASHAMED OF OUR POLITICIANS

The Editor,
SATURDAY REVIEW

As you have said in the article suggesting that the "Tigers" be invited to the conference table, Tamil youths have been forced to take up arms because of discrimination and frustration.

It seems to me that the policy of successive Governments had been to treat a section of the citizens as if they were strangers who do not belong to a common motherland.

In the last few days, Sri Lanka has been spotlighted in the Australian media. The T.V. portrayed several pictures showing the terrible destruction of a whole village in North Sri Lanka.

It would appear that journalists from here who sought to interview the President and the Government officials were rebuffed. However, they had got through to the North and seen the wanton destruction and interviewed the local people who related their plight.

Later, the radio broadcast an interview with a Sinhalese doctor in this country, who made a scathing indictment of the Government. The name of a Minister was mentioned and details were given of what you had said in your article.

Incidentally, the doctor was to appear on T.V. as well but I heard that the Sri Lanka High Commis-

sioner was successful in persuading the authorities to abandon this part.

The Sri Lanka High Commissioner here was also interviewed on T.V. when pointed questions were put to him. He cut a very sorry figure, being unable to explain away what the journalists had seen for themselves.



Though "Dharmista" is the avowed policy of the Government, what is now being pursued is the very opposite and a land where peace prevailed once has been converted into one

where communal violence is a daily occurrence.

I have been in this country for nine years, and as a Sinhalese, I am ashamed of our politicians who have brought ruin to our motherland and tarnished its name.

Robert Samersekera
Adelaide.

A LESSON

The Editor,
SATURDAY REVIEW

I refer to the article "The Censor and the Press" (29th September) which was interesting and thought-provoking.

No nation, especially in a democratic country, can function without the freedom of the Press. It is as vital as oxygen is for a human being.

During the "Dark Days" of Emergency in India freedom was curtailed, liberty was considered a luxury, truth was suppressed and opposition leaders were arrested.

The "Dark Days" taught our politicians a lesson — never to censor the Press to hide the Truth.

I hope the Government of Sri Lanka will learn a lesson from India's past experience.

Srinivasa Sarma
Bombay.

ASYLUM SEEKERS FROM SRI LANKA

The Editor,
SATURDAY REVIEW

Herewith I send you the English version of a press statement we have released on 2nd November after being informed about the plan of the West Berlin Senator for Social Affairs to publish an official announcement in two Sri Lanka daily papers in order to prevent Tamil refugees to come to the German Federal Republic.

The contents of this announcement provoked protests among human rights organisations like ours and the co-signatories below, because we found the text full of misinformation and distortions.

Dr. Tessa Hofman
Survival International

Since 1981 the Berlin Senate has consistently declared, that those Tamil refugees lured to Berlin by "touts" cannot be considered politically persecuted persons.

Till this day the Senate has stubbornly refused to admit knowledge of the persecution of Tamil refugees, although various human-rights organisations and other informed sources have made information on this readily available to the public.

Aside from constant repetition of their unbased assertions, the Senate has up to the present, not been able to provide any evidence of the "tout theory".

It has suppressed knowledge to the Nordrhein-Westphalian Upper Administrative Court's decision on 1st January 1984 and the re-

peated legal action taken by Administrative Courts in Berlin and Koln that recognised the refugee status of persecuted Tamils, and the Federal Bureau of the Recognition of Foreign Refugees has since August, 1984 passed decisions in at least 120 cases in favour of the refugees.

The Senate's planned measures for repatriation are obviously a counter-move to these positive court verdicts. As early as Summer 1984, Senator of the Interior Lummer expressed concern about the consequences of the verdicts the courts had taken.

It is absolutely incomprehensible, that in its newspaper announcement, the Berlin Senate refers to a Federal Administrative Court decision on 30th October before it had been announced! The assumption based on this decision, that

the Tamils would have to return to their home country, is false. The Federal Court has not made a definite decision on this question at all. On the contrary, it has confirmed the mass persecution of the Tamils in the South of that country, and has turned the matter over to the Upper Administrative Court of Nordrhein-Westphalia with the request to review the possibility of a Government-supported mass persecution in the rest of Sri Lanka.

In view of the continuing and in part intensified persecution of the Tamils in Sri Lanka; the assertions made by Berlin's Senator for Social Affairs reveal cynical contempt for human rights and complete ignorance of the suffering of thousands of people.

The undersigned demand that the Berlin Senate nullify its news announcement and that it give up all attempts of "voluntary" return of Tamil refugees to Sri Lanka; we must fear, that he is in effect, planning deportations. We hope, nevertheless, that the people's love for democracy in present-day Germany will not tolerate the deportation of political refugees out of Germany.

—Association for Endangered Peoples;
International League of Human Rights;
Refugee Council, Berlin;
Alternative List, Berlin.

The Embassy of Switzerland in Sri Lanka has sent us the following communication on the subject of "Asylum seekers from Sri Lanka in Switzerland":

As it might be of interest to you and to the readers of your esteemed publication, I have the honour to inform you on the latest development in my country concerning asylum.

There are today more than 1,700 persons from Sri Lanka, the overwhelming majority of them Tamils, who have asked for political asylum in Switzerland. In all but one of the cases scrutinised so far by the competent authorities, asylum had to be refused, as the applicants did not fulfill the conditions set down in the Swiss legislation.

On 1st October 1984, the Swiss Federal Council, that is the Cabinet of Ministers, has taken the following de-

cision: "Asylum seekers from Sri Lanka whose request for asylum has been rejected will as a rule be sent back to their home country unless, when examining each case individually, there are specific indications that they would be personally threatened".

It is, therefore, erroneous to assume that non-genuine asylum seekers will be permitted to stay in Switzerland; it would also be wrong to give any credit to promises—whoever makes them—of employment there without checking first with the Embassy of Switzerland in Colombo.

With the hope you will find some space to publish these lines and thanking you very much in anticipation, I remain.

Yours sincerely,
P. Monod
The Charge d' Affaires of
Switzerland

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Saturday Review

SRI LANKA

TULF Attends...

(Continued from page 1)

clarification about the proposals and to vehemently protest about the hardships now imposed on the people in the Northern Province. It is reported that the decision to attend the Conference was made after consultations with New Delhi.

The new proposals envisage the creation of 4500 Gramodaya Councils, 250 elected Praja Sabhas along the present AGA Divisions and 25 elected District Councils with much wider powers than the present Development Councils. Two or more District Councils could come together within a Province to constitute a Provincial Council with the consent of the majority of the electors in the District. A Second Chamber called the Council of State, with 75 members, will also be established.

Meanwhile the verbal exchanges between New Delhi and Colombo are

continuing. The new Indian Prime Minister, the forty year old Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, made his first major foray into Regional Politics with a strongly worded statement on the Sri Lankan situation. The statement issued in New Delhi on 12th December caused a flutter in political and diplomatic circles in Colombo. The Sri Lankan response was made through a statement by its Foreign Minister, Mr. A. C. S. Hameed, which diplomatic circles described as the toughest ever statement by Sri Lanka against a foreign government. A spokesman for the Indian External Affairs Ministry has described this statement as a perversion of facts and expressed India's unhappiness over the polemical tone of the statement.

Addressing Election Meetings in Tamil Nadu, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi has reiterated that there cannot be a military solution to the Sri Lankan ethnic problem.

DANGEROUS DRIFT

(Continued from page 1)

"great pleasure at the willingness of the government to settle this problem at the conference table".

The government would seem to be satisfied that it has a strong case for the future before the bar of the world. Well, if the minorities are intransigent and if the terrorists among them are uninhibited, in such a situation what could a well meaning government in a small country do? A similar question was posed by THE ECONOMIST when Sri Lanka entered into its agreement with Israel on the advice of General Walters.

The key to the understanding of the government's mind

is to be found in Mr. Wickremasinghe's analysis of the economic situation, the concluding section of which was carried in the last issue of the SATURDAY REVIEW. It is clear that the government's ethnic policy and its military pursuits are primarily intended to divert the attention of the Sinhalese from pressing economic problems. The whole situation is becoming complicated by the succession struggle within the ruling party.

A combination of policies and circumstances is leading Sri Lanka to a situation in which the country will stand discredited and isolated in South Asia. Those who are responsible for this drift may well remember that they are not serving the historic interests of the Sinhalese.

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VVT Citizens Tell JR: Don't Treat Tamils as Aliens And Enemies

The text of a memorandum sent to President Jayewardene by the VVT Citizens Committee:

His Excellency the President the Republic of Sri Lanka, Colombo.

It is with extreme sadness that we note that the regulations promulgated on 29th November 1984 clearly reveal that the government has decided to treat its own citizens as enemies, throwing away its duty to govern.

How else could one read the implications of the declaration of the prohibited zone (of 100 metres from the sea) in a predominantly fishing region? It can surely not be said that the government is not unaware of the fact that fishermen live close to the beach-sometimes dangerously close so that they had to be shifted to drier areas during rain and cyclone. This whole exercise of the declaration of a prohibited zone means the declaration of a total war on a people, who do not have any hand in neither the beginning nor the escalation of the present crisis.

We shall present the facts as we know them.

On the northern coast line from Ponnalai to Point Pedro live almost 40% of the population of the district. All of them would come within the prohibited zone. The fishing industry that provides 25% of the fish production of the island and in particular seasons as much as 40% of the production will come to a standstill and with it would ensure the inescapable starvation and deaths. The fisheries harbours at Myliddy, Nagerkovil and Point Pedro would go waste.

The prohibited zone on the northern coast line would cover almost all the schools of the area, some of them nationally significant like Hartley College and Methodist Girls High School.

An approximate count shows that there are about 35 agamic temples (not just cult-centres) and about 15 churches, some of Jaffna's internationally known historic tourist spots like Keerimalai fall within this area.

Let us give you a more exact picture of Valvettiturai.

50% of the population of the Valvettiturai Urban Council area (13,982 living in 7.8 sq.km) falls within the prohibited zone.

Of the seven schools, five schools, the really major ones, fall within this area. The hospital, post office, U. C. Office all fall within this zone. Even the 3 crematoriums and a burial ground fall within this zone.

An impression has been sought to be given over the government media and government controlled media (and there is no other media available now) that the prohibited zone is only a sandy tract with a few huts. This picture is totally untrue. Besides the huts of the poor fisherman which could be nothing else but huts, there are also more permanent structures of the well-to-do and some of them, architecturally very significant, are as old as 200 years.

The prohibited zone has within it trunk routes to Jaffna and Keerimalai. Buses on route numbers 751, 752, 763, 764 and 766 run on this coast line.

The term "evacuation" has never been more glibly used than in this context. We are sure that the administrative officers of this zone would tell you that even with full state support and aid an evacuation of the zone would take at least one month. How could there be an evacuation within hours and minutes of military announcement? It is humanly impossible. The military warning would be ritualistic and normal but the consequences of total decimation would be real and irreplaceable.

The most important question is "evacuating to which areas?" It needs no close study to know that there is not a place or places within the peninsula to house all these evacuees.

We are truly afraid that this whole exercise is only a fait accompli for an unprovoked air attack and complete decimation of the people.

Given the hitherto unadmonished attacks of the armed forces on civilians, these regulations will serve only to provide legitimacy to intended attacks.

May we conclude, Your Excellency, by emphasising the fact that these regulations are in fact counter-productive in that they no longer help the law-abiding to go about self-assuredly their normal activities as citizens of Sri Lanka; instead these regulations have become totally anti-Tamil creating a feeling that we do not belong to this country, which is equally our mother-country, as it is of other citizens.

It is in that spirit we call for an immediate withdrawal of these regulations.

— Secretary
Citizens Committee
Valvettiturai

Bitter Rice

Here are the current market prices of some vegetables and rice in Jaffna:

Rice Rs. 15/- per kilo;
Coconut Rs. 15/- each;
Brinjals Rs. 25/- per kilo;
Potatoes (not available now)
Rs. 30/- per kilo; Long beans
Rs. 25/- per kilo; Green
chillies Rs. 45/- per kilo;
Tomatoes Rs. 20/- per kilo;
Cabbage Rs. 25/- per kilo.

The chopping and changing of curfew hours and the ban on private transport have a lot to do with these spiralling prices.