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NORTHEASTERN HERALD

PA-JVP alliance could
defeat UNF in polls

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Woman working at the Mannar salterns

Pic. by D. Sivaram

Northeast

Delay in SLAS appointments

By a Staff Correspondent

The appointment of Sri Lanka Administrative Service (SLAS) officers for posting in the northeast has been delayed due to a stay order issued by courts after legal action was initiated by an earlier batch of SLAS officers whose appointments in turn are yet to come through because the finance ministry is reviewing recruitment to the public service, sources told the Northeastern Herald.

Sources said there are two recently recruited batches involved in the problem of delayed appointments. The first batch comprising approximately 170 persons was interviewed in May 2002 to be posted soon after. However, due to the circular issued by the min-

istry of finance in 2002 freezing recruitment, they are yet to be posted though all other formalities have been completed.

Meanwhile, the government set about recruiting another batch of 115 officers to the SLAS early this year who were to be exclusively deployed in the northeast. The appointments were expedited due to the alarming dearth of qualified administrative officers in most areas in the northeast.

However, fearing the second batch of officers might be appointed over them, the earlier group petitioned court to issue a stay order on the appointments. The matter is settled, sources said.

Speaking on the condition of anonymity an officer of the ministry of public administration told the newspaper that the freezing of ap-

pointments had affected the northeast adversely due to the limited number of qualified SLAS officers who had to face a sudden burgeoning of development and other work they were unfamiliar with due to the peace process.

"It looks a ridiculous. In certain parts of the northeast, promoted clerks supervise qualified cadres such as accounting officers, junior administrative staff and even assistant directors. This is a recipe for a lot of friction," he said.

The main reason for the freezing recruitment was a circular issued by the management services division of the ministry of finance, which had had the concurrence of cabinet to suspend the recruitment of new cadre into the public service so as to assess the volume and deployment of cadre.

Other sources pointed out that this was a move to review whether the public service needed to be downsized due to the numbers being inflated because of political and other pressures. However, the urgent need for new administrative officers in the northeast had led to a special batch to be recruited for exclusive deployment in those areas, but was now facing difficulties due to the earlier batch getting unfairly victimised.

Meanwhile, unconfirmed reports said the actual reason for appointments not being made was due to the allocation of cadre for the north-

east also being filled by officers recruited from the south, leaving no room for the absorption of the new recruits taken in for the northeast.

There are two types of examinations for the recruitment of officers to the SLAS. One is the open competitive exam that is for graduates below the age of 30, and the limited competitive exam that is for those officers already in the public service with the appropriate number of years of experience and seniority in their respective services, interested in joining the SLAS.

The Northeastern Herald will not be published on Friday 18 April in view of the New Year and Easter holidays. Next issue will be on Friday 25 April

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SLN mines infest Talaimannar Mosque

More than 300 hundred Muslim families are unable to resettle in Talaimannar because their homes are in minefields laid by the Sri Lanka Navy which are yet to be cleared despite 13 months of ceasefire, rehabilitation officials in Mannar said. Many Muslim and Tamil homes in the once bustling bazaar of Talaimannar Pier are still occupied by the Navy or lie within its security boundary. The area surrounding the local Mosque is infested with land mines and booby traps.

About 50 Muslim and 200 Tamil families have resettled in a section of Talaimannar Pier vacated by the Navy following the ceasefire. More than 300 Muslim families who are living as refugees in Kalpitty, on the island's northwest coast, are quite keen to return to their homes and lands here, their friends and relatives say.

Only the narrow bazaar leading up to the beach by the Pier is now safe from land mines. Areas are marked off on either side with yellow tape and signs in red warning one of dangerous mines.

Only the entrance to the Talaimannar Pier's Mohideen Jumma Masjeed Mosque is free of mines. A Swiss organisation called FSD is making an effort to de-mine the area, residents said. But progress is very slow, according to them.

Fishing has resumed. The area leading up to and surrounding the light house and pier is still out of bounds for the public. One has to take a detour from the main road to the Talaimannar Pier bazaar and village.

The coast now receives a regular flow of Tamil refugees re-

turning clandestinely from their camps in India. Most returnees from India are people who fled the fighting in Jaffna 13 years ago. Talaimannar is a regular destination because it is closest to the southern tip of Tamil Nadu.

Many Muslim and Tamil families in Talaimannar Pier have kith and kin in villages on the south Indian coast. In 1990 several of them went by boat to seek refuge in Tamil Nadu.

The Navy occupies 100 houses in Talaimannar Pier East and 15 shops and 50 houses in Talaimannar Pier North. The Talaimannar village itself lies about two kilometres south of the Pier.

Before the war started trains went over the long pier right up to the jetty where the ferry to India berthed. Hundreds of travellers thronged the busy Bazaar by the wharf as long as the ferry plied between the coasts of south India and Mannar.

Today the once active railway station is in ruins, overtaken by the ubiquitous Palmyra groves and thorn bushes. A few carriages lie abandoned by the dilapidated platform.

For more than a decade, Talaimannar was virtually cut off from the outside world and was firmly in the draconian grip of the Sri Lanka Navy.

But communication with the outside world is resuming gradually. A bus service from Talaimannar to Colombo was begun recently. But bitter memories of a time when fear ruled the region are a still a heavy burden on the psyche of most residents. That the navy is continues to keep their homes has done little to ease that burden. So the people of Talaimannar are keeping their fingers crossed for now.

SLA refuses to move from civilian areas

The Sri Lanka army (SLA) has refused to relocate its Jaffna brigade headquarters at Kalundai veli and Kaakaitheevu in outskirts of Jaffna town as suggested by the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) members of parliament because senior army officers said it was imperative for the SLA to remain in civilian areas, TNA sources told the *Northeastern Herald*.

Military officers, including chief of staff Major General Lohan Gunawardene and Jaffna security forces commander Major General Sarath Fonseka, who visited Jaffna on Wednesday told the TNA that it was important for them to be relocated at a point where they had strategic advantage over the LTTE and occupying areas in Kalundai veli or Kakkaitheevu would not permit this, adding that if war broke out they would have to fight their way into population centres, which would cause greater loss of civilian life than if they remained within Jaffna town.

The controversy arose when the army proposed to relocate from the Subash and Gnanam hotels and private buildings where it is now encamped, to densely populated areas near the fort, the Jaffna mu-

nicipal council, rest house and the town hall.

Sources pointed out the contradiction between the position of the army and that of the Ceasefire Agreement, which states, "The Parties shall review the security measures and the set-up of checkpoints, particularly in densely populated cities and towns, in order to introduce systems that will prevent harassment of the civilian population. Such systems shall be in place from D-day + 60."

The meeting, which took place in Jaffna, however, did not fulfil the most important reason for being summoned in that town. The reason for the Tamil MPs to suggest Jaffna was because military officials could meet a cross-section of the members of Jaffna's civil society to ascertain their views on the matter. However, no such meeting was possible because the military that was to co-ordinate with the government agent about its visit failed to do so till the last moment.

Meanwhile, the TNA, which was earlier instrumental in suggesting Kalundai veli and Kaakaitheevu has decided that they will not suggest any other places for the relocation of the camp because this

would look inappropriate when the Tamils wanted the army out of Jaffna as quickly and with as little trouble as possible, said sources.

Further, the TNA also fears that army could relocate to a new area and begin to strengthen itself the way it did the Jaffna fort, whereas ideally it should phase out into a bigger camp like Palaly.

Meanwhile, sources said Austin Fernando, secretary, ministry of defence has told the TNA MPs that the LTTE had agreed to relocate the camp in the environs of the Jaffna Fort but was objecting now. The MPs however questioned the veracity of the statement saying if this was true it would undermine the LTTE's stance right along that the army should withdraw from the northeast entirely.

TNA MPs are expected to suggest to Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe when they meet him on Thursday that since the problem had become intractable to be resolved through negotiations between the army and the TNA, the matter be taken up at the next round of talks between the government and LTTE.

Fasting SLA soldiers demand fair treatment

Sri Lankan armed force soldiers who are on a hunger strike in front of the Fort Railway Station in downtown Colombo in protest against their dismissal from service said Wednesday they would fast unto death in batches of four until their grievance is addressed by the Ministry of Defence. This is the first time that soldiers of the Sri Lankan armed forces have aired grievance in a public protest.

Sixty nine soldiers dismissed in 2001 from the National Armed Reserve of the Sri Lankan armed forces say the MoD under President Kumaratunga's People's Alliance regime had treated them unfairly. The group began their protest on Monday.

Strapped for cash, Colombo is under pressure from many donor countries to downsize the island's armed forces in tune with the fiscal discipline recommended by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

The fasting soldiers belong to the National Armed Reserve (NAR), a semi-territorial unit raised by the Sri Lanka army in 1986-1989 to supplement the dwindling number of regu-

lar forces outside the northeast. The Sri Lanka army raised several units like this to meet its growing manpower needs between 90 and 96.

The NAR was raised by an act of parliament in 1985 called the National Armed Manpower Unit Act (no.40)

Recruits of the NAR were trained by the Pakistan army.

The protesting soldiers - all Singha- lese - say that their dismissal was unfair and that the compensation given them by the Ministry of Defence is no commensurate with their service and experience. They say the MoD gave them a few hours notice before their dismissal on 28 February 2002 and that later, each was granted a compensation of 125,000 rupees (approx:1304 USD). "All of us have 13-16 years of experience as soldiers. We have worked in all parts of the country, including the northeast. We received military training here and abroad. Since our dismissal we have been going from pillar to post in search of justice. We wrote to the President, Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, opposition leader and party leaders. But nobody took note of our plight", said leader of the protesting soldiers, Mr. I.A.J Pushpakumara.

The Sri Lanka National Guard (SLNG) was the only territorial unit that was integrated into the regular forces in the northeast. (The SLNG comprises ex-home guards and delinquents and drop outs from other regular formation of the Sri Lanka army)

As part of its drive to bolster the army's manpower with non-regular units, the Sri Lankan government started the National Manpower Unit (SLMU) aimed at recruiting unemployed Tamil youth mainly in the Batticaloa district.

The Sri Lanka army believed that the LTTE was able to sustain its troop levels in the Vanni despite heavy losses during the massive Jaya Sikurui Operation during 1997-99 because of heavy recruitment in this east coast district.

Hence SLMU was set up as a means to draw away potential recruits from the LTTE and to retain them in units on monthly pay. However, the SLMU became defunct in many places and in some was transformed into a civil service organisation after the Liberation Tigers began political work in the SLA held areas of the east.

JMPGA to meet justice minister

The Jaffna Missing Persons' Guardian Association (JMPGA) Sunday decided to meet Sri Lanka's Minister of Justice, Law Reform and National Integration Mr.W.J.M. Lokkubandara regarding several hundreds disappeared Tamil youths after the arrest by the Sri Lanka Army (SLA) following 1995 military operation, sources said.

A decision to this was taken at a special meeting of the JMPGA held Sunday at the Jaffna Vembadi High School. The JMPGA further decided to request the Justice Minister to give an early appointment for a seven-member delegation to meet and brief him about its agitation for the last several years to trace the disappeared Tamil youths numbering more than six hun-

dred following Riviressa military operation, sources said. Meanwhile the Association of Relations of Missing Soldiers in Action (ARMSA) in the south has come forward to help the JMPGA to file action against the authorities concerned responsible for the alleged disappearance of Tamil youths in Jaffna, sources said.

British handling of power and escalation of communalism

By Bertram Bastiampillai

By 1796, Sri Lanka had lost her maritime region to the British. By 1815, with the aid of local traitorous chiefs, Britain subdued the central region of the island and the chiefs too. There was no independent Sinhalese kingdom left in any part of the country and by 1833 the British divided Sri Lanka into administrative provinces under government agents and subdivisions or districts under assistant government agents. Most local chiefs and sub-chiefs were pliant tools of their British overlords, with little concern for independence. A single valiant attempt at rebellion in 1817-1818 by a few chiefs in Uva-Vellassa ended abortively.

Justice was administered through a British system of legal administration though account was taken of custom and local laws to an extent. All beings, be they Sinhalese (low country or Kandyan) Tamils, Muslims, Burghers and other communities such as Indian labourers who got to work in the plantations, roads, railways or the harbour, were treated as equals. Recruitment to the administrative and other public services was on attainment and merit, except of village headmen, who were chosen owing to their position and influence in the community.

By 1833 the Legislative Council was established with local notables included as unofficial members in it. The unofficial representatives were nominated. The Chamber of Commerce and the Planters Association were consulted in the appointment of unofficial representatives. Sinhalese and Tamil representatives were appointed from elite families. Two additional representatives were nominated from the Kandyans and Muslims around 1889. By

The Sinhalese perceived that majoritarianism, gained through their presence in a large numbers in territorial and population based constituencies, bequeathed to them the legitimacy to rule while the Tamils and other numerically smaller groups had to live on Sinhalese sufferance and concession

1910-1911 a series of reforms of slight importance was made in the Legislative Council. Introduction of the elective principle in 1910 for the educated Sri Lankan in the Legislative Council was a limited concession given for elected local representation. A little group - the educated elite - exercised the franchise. There was no strong nationalist demand for constitutional reform; nationalism was one of prayer and petition in strongly modest manner.

A remarkable event was the Sinhala-Muslim riots in 1915 directed at recent immigrants - the Coast Moors. Trade rivalry inflamed jealousies leading to the disturbances. The British overreacted to the riots misunderstanding them to be an uprising against colonial rule. The riots of 1915 proved a further restraint on a nationalist activity or constitutional progress. The Temperance Movement between 1911 and 1914, which contained a political element also became helplessly lukewarm. The Buddhist revivalism set in motion by Anagarika Dharmapala and advocacy of Sinhalese-Buddhist domination of the island too was eclipsed.

By the early 1920's a degree of constitutional advance in the Legislative Council occurred. But the same time there arose divisions between the Kandyan and low country Sinhalese in politics, and ethnicity assumed a notable position in elite competition. Rivalry and conflict between Sinhalese and Tamils cropped up. Clearly there was no integration of communities in society. Governor Manning was inclined to extend the principle of communal electorates in his government and in Manning's later years the Tamils had begun to think of themselves as a minority community. The number of their representatives in the Council too was disproportionate to that of the Sinhalese. Coming events had cast their shadows already.

The parting of the ways between the leaders of the Sinhalese and Tamils and the minority communities was signalled with the transfer of power from the British in stages to the Sri Lankan elite. The Sinhalese leadership was splintered according to cast hierarchies, while the Tamil elite comprised the presumed superior class. Leadership in both communities mostly tended to be

hereditary.

During the years 1927-1931, the Donoughmore constitutional reforms came to fruition. Universal adult franchise, transference of power in certain subjects like agriculture and lands, education, local government, industry and commerce were left in the State Council, comprising a group of seven committees, each with seven elected members headed by an elected minister/chairman endowed with ministership by the Governor. Ultimate power however rested with the Governor and the British, who controlled finance, justice, the public service and external affairs.

However, the system of one vote for one person ensured that power was actually transferred to the numerically larger Sinhalese while the numerically smaller Tamils, Muslims and Burghers had to remain minorities.

The Sinhalese majority dominated in number the seven ministerships and the leadership of the State Council and on one occasion governed with a pan-Sinhalese ministry or board of ministers. The Tamils and other minorities were excluded and remained impotent in executive action.

In the nationalist agitation before the Donoughmore constitution was introduced, it was already commonly acknowledged that Ponnambalam Arunachalam, the Tamil leader of repute, learning and general acceptability, had left the Ceylon National Congress, the organisation of elite Sri Lankans agitating for constitutional and political reform, because he recognized that Tamils and the minorities had no place owing to the growth of extreme Sinhalese-only nationalism.

With the Donoughmore reforms the Tamils and other minorities came to be relegated to a permanent state of inferiority and the Sinhalese assumed a per-

manent superiority.

With the second rate political placement of Tamils in Sri Lanka, their reaction to the tangible communal discrimination that followed also grew widespread and strident. The hopes of the Donoughmore commissioners that with a grant of equality and democracy in voting communal thinking and treatment would disappear proved to be wrong. The Sinhalese perceived that majoritarianism, gained through their presence in a large numbers in territorial and population based constituencies, bequeathed to them the legitimacy to rule while the Tamils and other numerically smaller groups had to live on Sinhalese sufferance and concession.

Nevertheless, Sinhalese-Buddhist ultra-nationalism did not gather adequate force to become a populist agitation. It was advantageous during the years of the Donoughmore constitution for the Sinhalese to turn away from the religion they were brought up in and become Buddhist. These new converts were called 'Donoughmore Buddhists' and they hoped to reap dividends by their conversion or re-conversion to Buddhism.

Under Pax Britannica, elitist discussion and debate, which reflected a claim to majoritarian nationalism, remained manageable and controlled. The emergence of the Sinhala Maha Sabha and the All Ceylon Tamil Congress however struck an ominous warning note to the islanders of the dangers of communalism becoming a dominant factor in the public life of both Sinhalese and Tamils. They contained the seeds of dissension and division that were to germinate and grow in the future.

Sri Lanka ... your nightmare will end too

By Rebecca Jones

Nobel laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu preached a message of peace and reconciliation to a sold-out Moby Arena Tuesday night, saying, "If it could happen in South Africa, it could happen anywhere, and nowhere can people say they have intractable problems."

Tutu, the retired archbishop of the Anglican Church in South Africa, spoke as part of the Bridges to the Future program, a series of classes and lectures jointly sponsored

by Colorado State University and the University of Denver.

"God, who has an incredible sense of humor, wants to set up South Africa as an example," said Tutu, who chaired that country's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, created to document and heal the wounds of apartheid. "Everyone thought that a racial bloodbath would drown us. It didn't happen."

What happened, he said, was that, even when locked in a conflict that looked as if it could not be resolved, South Africans tried something new.

"They tried talking to each other," he said.

"Talking is better than fighting," he said. "And Middle East, Sri Lanka, Burma, wherever, your nightmare will end, too. . . . It is possible to walk the path of forgiveness and reconciliation."

Tutu urged governments to stop spending so much on military might and instead invest in caring for human needs.

"There is no security for all until the conditions don't exist that make people desperate and resentful," he said. "It is not

merely being altruistic to spend compassionately. . . . It is the best form of self-interest. Desperation, deprivation, squalor, poverty produce resentful persons who metamorphose into terrorists and suicide bombers."

"Each one of us is not just to be respected, but to be revered," said Tutu, warming up in fiery preacher style. "Not because we are rich or successful or beautiful or tall, but

because each of us is created in the image of God. Not because they're Christians. Not because they're white. Not because of

any of these things we have exalted. But because every single person stands in for God. To treat one such as less than this is not just evil, which it is, or painful, which it is, it is blasphemous. It is like spitting in the face of God!"

Tutu said that the chief lesson of Sept. 11 is that all are vulnerable. "Sometimes we are given an illusion of invincibility. But only God is invincible," he said.

"And it's a precious thing to know that I am fragile and exist only because God gives me breath." (Rocky Mountain News)

Is there some element in the US military that wants to take out journalists?

By Robert Fisk

First the Americans killed the correspondent of al-Jazeera yesterday and wounded his cameraman. Then, within four hours, they attacked the Reuters television bureau in Baghdad, killing one of its cameramen and a cameraman for Spain's Tele 5 channel and wounding four other members of the Reuters staff.

Was it possible to believe this was an accident? Or was it possible that the right word for these killings – the first with a jet aircraft, the second with an M1A1 Abrams tank – was murder? These were not, of course, the first journalists to die in the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq. Terry Lloyd of ITV was shot dead by American troops in southern Iraq, who apparently mistook his car for an Iraqi vehicle. His crew are still missing. Michael Kelly of *The Washington Post* tragically drowned in a canal. Two journalists have died in Kurdistan. Two journalists – a German and a Spaniard – were killed on Monday night at a US base in Baghdad, with two Americans, when an Iraqi missile exploded amid them.

And we should not forget the Iraqi civilians who are being killed and maimed by the hundred and who – unlike their journalist guests – cannot leave the war and fly home. So the facts of yesterday should speak for themselves. Unfortunately for the Americans, they make it look very like murder.

The US jet turned to rocket al-Jazeera's office on the banks of the Tigris at 7.45am local time yesterday. The television station's chief correspondent in Baghdad, Tariq Ayoub, a Jordanian-Palestinian, was on the roof with his second cameraman, an Iraqi called Zuheir, reporting a pitched battle near the bureau between American and Iraqi troops. Ayoub's colleague Maher Abdullah recalled afterwards that both men saw the plane fire the rocket as it swooped toward their building, which is close to the Jumhuriya Bridge upon which two American tanks had just appeared.

"On the screen, there was this battle and we could see bullets flying and then we heard the aircraft," Abdullah said.

"The plane was flying so low that those of us downstairs thought it would land on the roof – that's how close it was. We actually heard the rocket being launched. It was a direct hit – the missile actually exploded against our electrical generator. Tariq died almost at once. Zuheir was injured."

Now for America's problems in explaining this little saga. Back in 2001, the United States fired a cruise missile at al-Jazeera's office in Kabul – from

I was driving on a road between the tanks and the hotel at the moment the shell was fired – and heard no shooting. The French videotape of the attack runs for more than four minutes and records absolute silence before the tank's armament is fired. And there were no snipers in the building. Indeed, the dozens of journalists and crews living there – myself included – have watched like hawks to make sure that no armed men should ever use the hotel as an assault point.

which tapes of Osama bin Laden had been broadcast around the world. No explanation was ever given for this extraordinary attack on the night before the city's "liberation"; the Kabul correspondent, Taiseer Alouni, was unhurt. By the strange coincidence of journalism, Alouni was in the Baghdad office yesterday to endure the USAF's second attack on al-Jazeera.

Far more disturbing, however, is the fact that the al-Jazeera network – the freest Arab television station, which has incurred the fury of both the Americans and the Iraqi authorities for its live coverage of the war – gave the Pentagon the co-ordinates of its Baghdad office two months ago and received assurances that the bureau would not be attacked.

Then on Monday, the US State Department's spokesman in Doha, an Arab-American called Nabil Khouri, visited al-Jazeera's offices in the city and, according to a source within the Qatari satellite channel, repeated the Pentagon's assurances. Within 24 hours, the Americans had fired their missile into the Baghdad office.

The next assault, on Reuters, came just before midday when an Abrams tank on the Jamhuriya Bridge suddenly pointed its gun barrel towards the Palestine Hotel where more than 200 foreign journalists are staying to cover the war from the Iraqi side. Sky Television's David Chater noticed the barrel moving. The French television channel France 3 had a crew in a neighbouring room and videotaped the tank on the bridge. The tape shows a bubble of fire emerging from the barrel, the sound of a detonation and then pieces of paintwork falling past the camera as it vibrates with the impact.

In the Reuters bureau on the 15th floor, the shell exploded amid the staff. It mortally wounded a Ukrainian cameraman, Taras Protsyuk, who was also filming the tanks, and seriously wounded another member of the

staff, Paul Pasquale from Britain, and two other journalists, including Reuters' Lebanese-Palestinian reporter Samia Nakhoul. On the next floor, Tele 5's cameraman Jose Couso was badly hurt. Protsyuk died shortly afterwards. His camera and its tripod were left in the office, which was swamped with the crew's blood. Couso had a leg amputated but he died half an hour after the operation.

The Americans responded with what all the evidence proves to be a straightforward lie. General Buford Blount of the US 3rd Infantry Division – whose tanks were on the bridge – announced that his vehicles had come under rocket and rifle fire from snip-

ers in the Palestine Hotel, that his tank had fired a single round at the hotel and that the gunfire had then ceased. The general's statement, however, was untrue.

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This is, one should add, the same General Blount who boasted just over a month ago that his crews would be using depleted uranium munitions – the kind many believe to be responsible for an explosion of cancers after the 1991 Gulf War – in their tanks. For General Blount to suggest, as he clearly does, that the Reuters camera crew was in some way involved in shooting at Americans merely turns a meretricious statement into a libellous one.

Again, we should remember that three dead and five wounded journalists do not constitute a massacre – let alone the equivalence of the hundreds of civilians being maimed by the invasion force. And it is a truth that needs to be remembered that the Iraqi regime has killed a few journalists of its own over the years, with tens of thousands of its own people. But something very dangerous appeared to be getting loose yesterday. General Blount's explanation was the kind employed by the Israelis after they have killed the innocent.

Is there therefore some message that we reporters are supposed to learn from all this? Is there some element in the American military that has come to hate

I knew Ayoub. I have broadcast during the war from the rooftop on which he died. I told him then how easy a target his Baghdad office would make if the Americans wanted to destroy its coverage – seen across the Arab world – of civilian victims of the bombing. Protsyuk of Reuters often shared the Palestine Hotel's elevator with me. Samia Nakhoul, who is 42, has been a friend and colleague since the 1975-90 Lebanese civil war. She is married to the Financial Times correspondent David Gardner.

Yesterday afternoon, she lay covered in blood in a Baghdad hospital. And General Blount dared to imply that this innocent woman and her brave colleagues were snipers. What, I wonder, does this tell us about the war in Iraq?

The Sky News correspondent David Chater was in the Palestine Hotel when the hotel was hit by American tank fire. This is his account of what happened.

"I was about to go out on to the balcony when there was a huge explosion, then shouts and screams from people along our corridor. They were shouting, 'Somebody's been hit. Can somebody find a doctor?' They were saying they could see blood and bone."

"There were a lot of French journalists screaming, 'Get a doctor, get a doctor'. There was a great sense of panic because these walls are very thin. 'We saw the tanks up on the bridge. They started firing across the bank. The shells were landing either side of us at what we thought were military targets. Then we were hit. We are in the middle of a tank battle.'"

"I don't understand why they were doing that. There was no fire coming out of this hotel – everyone knows it's full of journalists."

"Everybody is putting on flak jackets. Everybody is running for cover. We now feel extremely vulnerable and we are now going to say goodbye to you." The line was cut but minutes later Chater resumed his report, saying journalists had been watching American forces from their balconies and the troops had surely been aware of their presence.

"They knew exactly what this hotel is. They know the press corps is here. I don't know why they are trying to target journalists. There are awful scenes around me. There's a Reuters tent just a few yards away from me where people are in tears. It makes you realise how vulnerable you are. What are we supposed to do? How are we supposed to carry on if American shells are targeting Western journalists?"

(The Independent)

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the press and wants to take out journalists based in Baghdad, to hurt those whom our Home Secretary, David Blunkett, has maliciously claimed to be working "behind enemy lines". Could it be that this claim – that international correspondents are in effect collaborating with Mr Blunkett's enemy (most Britons having never supported this war in the first place) – is turning into some kind of a death sentence?

Balasingham asks US, India to rethink Sri Lanka policy

The Liberation Tigers this week urged the United States and India to assist efforts to find a just solution to the Tamil question and end Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict by backing their movement's participation in the Norwegian peace process.

Addressing thousands of expatriates at a rally outside the United Nations in Geneva on Monday, the LTTE's Chief Negotiator and political advisor, Anton Balasingham, called on the US and India to rethink their policies towards the Tamil Tigers. The LTTE is banned in both countries.

"Whilst the United States supported the [Norwegian] peace process through other countries, it has not invited us to the April 14 conference [in Washington] on rehabilitation efforts linked to the peace process because we banned in the US," Balasingham said.

The meeting next which is expected to be attended by 60 countries and financial institutions, is a preparatory gathering ahead of an major donor conference on reconstruction and economic assistance for Sri Lanka to be held in Tokyo in June.

"Whilst the United States supported the [Norwegian] peace process through other countries, it has not invited us to the April 14 conference [in Washington] on rehabilitation efforts linked to the peace process because we banned in the US," Balasingham said.

"America is saying we must give up violence if the ban is to be lifted," Balasingham said. "[But] we are saying that we have given up violence; we are observing peace; and there is no war. We have stopped the war and embraced peace in order to negotiate on behalf of our people for their rights."

"The peace process cannot be taken forward by not inviting us to this conference. There cannot be peace in Sri Lanka without the support of the Tigers," he said.

Balasingham urged the United

States "to lift the ban on [the LTTE] and accept us as the representatives of the Tamil people." Balasingham also urged the India to review its policy towards the LTTE. Delhi this week agreed to attend the Washington meeting, which is meant to address "the need for development and reconstruction assistance and how that can help consolidate the ceasefire and reinforce the peace process in Sri Lanka."

"If India truly wishes the Tamil people to achieve a just and lasting settlement and wants to help end

this conflict, it should have positive relations with the Tiger [movement] and our leadership," he said.

"Our wish is that India should forget the bitterness that existed between us in the past and work together with us to bring a just solution for our people's suffering," Mr Balasingham said, adding that the LTTE considers India as a friend and harboured no hostility towards her.

He pointed that at the outset of the Norwegian peace initiative with the present Sri Lankan government, the Tamil Tigers had extended their hand in friendship to India and urged the regional power to host the negotiations between LTTE and Colombo, but that Delhi had not responded positively.

Acknowledging that India had legitimate concerns in promoting the Sri Lankan peace process, Balasingham said this could not be achieved by alienating the LTTE and establishing relations with Tamil paramilitaries and politicians opposed to the LTTE and the peace effort.

"The Tamil people are behind the LTTE as one and are giving us their total support," he said. "They firmly believe that this problem should be

solved through peaceful means."

Balasingham said the LTTE remained committed to the peace process and the ceasefire with the Sri Lankan government, despite provocative attacks by elements of the Sri Lankan armed forces.

"We are participating in these talks with sincere commitment because our people are firmly behind us. We have not lost patience despite Monday, its numerous provocative incidents," he told the rally.

Citing the Sri Lankan navy's attack in international waters on an LTTE merchant vessel, Balasingham said the Tigers had "remained patient and refrained from retaliating" and continued to negotiate our people can be free of war and live in peace."

"We have fought for a long time. Only because we achieved remarkable militance, tary success and brought threequarters of our homeEurope. land under our control the Sinhala government come down and agreed to consider selfrule for the Tamils in homeland under the principle of internal self determination. (Tamil Guardian)

Blood splashed across Arab media

By Cam McGrath

To Western eyes, the Arab media's focus on gruesome close-up images of dead and wounded Iraqi civilians is a macabre obsession. To Arab audiences it is a firm statement about the tragic reality of war.

Arab newspapers splash their front pages with colour images of crushed babies, bloodied wounds and mangled corpses. Television channels broadcast footage of armless children in hospital beds, mothers weeping over their dead babies and on one occasion a grisly close-up of a child's head imploded by a bullet.

The horrific images cascade relentlessly into Arab living rooms, fuelling anger with the U.S and Britain. While Western media focuses on military hardware, Arab media highlights the victims. Body bags are opened for the camera and stumps of amputated limbs held aloft.

"When I see those babies killed by American bombs I tell myself that I should go to Iraq and fight these aggressors...these murderers," says Egyptian taxi driver Mamdouh Hussein.

Western journalists accuse the Arab media of sensationalising the war in Iraq and saturating newspapers and television screens with "blood-

and-guts". Many question this focus on violence.

"But Arabs don't have violence embedded in them at all," says sociologist Madiha El-Safty. "This is the American stereotype."

Many Arabs say they despise Saddam Hussein, but are angered by Washington's decision to wage war on Baghdad. El-Safty argues that the idea behind the graphic images is to put the human cost of war ahead of its political agenda.

"The idea is a reflection of this anger underlined a thousand times," says El-Safty. "It's to show how awful this war really is and to emphasise its horrors."

Images of this kind are nothing new. Video footage of Palestinians "martyred" resisting Israeli occupation have appeared on Arab television screens for years.

The latest pictures of Iraqi civilian casualties carry political overtones, equating the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq with a broader attempt by Washington to dominate the Arab world. In depicting U.S. troops as callous killers who target civilians and have no concern for the suffering of the Iraqi people, the Arab press carries the general sentiment of the Arab street.

This impression seemed to persist despite television pictures showing celebrations in Baghdad and some other cities.

"The Americans are not liberat-

The horrific images cascade relentlessly into Arab living rooms, fuelling anger with the U.S and Britain. While Western media focuses on military hardware, Arab media highlights the victims. Body bags are opened for the camera and stumps of amputated limbs held aloft.

ing Iraq, they are occupying it," says Syrian merchant Ali Bashir. "All those women, children and elderly people are paying for this war, this stupid war, with their blood."

Many believe that U.S. and British troops are either targeting civilians, or not taking enough measures to protect them. This week's shelling of a hotel where media personnel were staying, and the bombing of the Al-Jazeera satellite network and Abu Dhabi TV offices has cemented this view. Three journalists were killed and at least five were injured in the incidents, which U.S. officials denied were deliberate acts.

The media reflects also Arab anger that their governments are doing little to stop the suffering. The U.S.-led invasion would not have been possible if Arab countries had refused permission to U.S. and British troops to use their territory and airspace for the

military strikes, they say.

"Arab rulers silent while Iraqi children slaughtered!" screams the independent Egyptian weekly El-Khamis.

The tabloid's front page presents a montage of Iraqi civilian casualties said to be victims of U.S. shelling. An open wooden casket is shown holding a dead mother and child, the baby's pacifier still in its mouth. Pictures of the corpses of five other children are superimposed, one with brain matter spilling out of a gaping head wound.

"El-Khamis is a sensational newspaper and deals with the issue emotionally," says Mahmoud Alam El-Din, vice-chairman of the Information Research Centre at Cairo University. "Other newspapers handle the issue differently."

Many Arabic publications are state-owned and almost all are subject to government censor-

ship, but Alam El-Din says editors exercise a great deal of freedom in managing their content.

"Arabs reject this war and the media shows this," he says. "This is not propaganda. All media coverage is directed by the editorial policies of the newspaper or station."

The government-run Al-Akhbar in Egypt carries a daily page of pictures of civilian casualties, and plasters the most shocking ones on the cover. The independent Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, a Saudi-owned pan-Arab daily, takes a more balanced approach. It publishes pictures from Western and Arab sources side by side, and generally avoids gory pictures unless related to a major story, such as the shelling of a Baghdad market.

Washington has criticised Arab newspapers for carrying what it calls inflammatory pictures, and accused Al-Jazeera of fanning the flames with its heart-wrenching video footage of wounded and dead civilians.

Arabs in turn criticise Western media for failing to address the human face of war. They argue that Western media is sanitised, shielding audiences from the stark realities. "Americans want to sleep with a clean conscience," says Mohammed, a fruit seller in Cairo. (IPS)

NORTHEASTERN HERALD

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Preparing different school history texts for northeast schools

The move by the government to revive or revitalise the teaching of history in universities, a subject about which Minister of Education Dr. Karunasena Kodituwakku made public reference recently, is indeed laudable.

We hope it might be the first step in reviving the study of this discipline not only at an undergraduate level where it has witnessed a decline in the last three decades but in providing stimulus for vigorous postgraduate work as well.

History has remained integral to research in the social sciences and humanities in western universities and much more importantly universities in the Indian subcontinent, though they too complain of losing students to other disciplines.

Further, in universities in the west and India, despite IT and business making inroads into the popularity of history as a subject, high quality historical research keeps coming out of these institutions. This however is not the case in Sri Lanka - at least not any more.

It has to be understood that the dearth of high quality historical research has had an enormous impact on the teaching of history in schools as well. This newspaper has raised in numerous articles, flaws in the popular perception of what happened in history - such as Sri Lanka was always a united country under the Sinhala kings, that there was no kingdom in the North, or that Sinhala-Buddhism was the sole ethno-religious ideology in Sri Lanka before the arrival of the colonial powers.

Our articles have pointed out that Sri Lanka has been an ethnic, religious and cultural mosaic, without a centralised power structure and where power has shifted to different locations from time to time.

The question is whether such ideas that have long come to be accepted among scholars inform texts that students use in schools today. The fact they have not to any significant extent is obvious by the repetition of popular myths such as the misrepresentation of the Tamils as invaders from South India, or misinterpreting the colonial project of the European powers as unduly favouring the Tamils.

It is important that revival of the study of history should exclude such moribund perspectives that distort facts. It has been the inability of institutions like the National Institute of Education (NIE) to do so that has led this country to civil war. The NIE has long since ceased to have a national perspective in the writing of historical texts or has believed that it caters only to the Sinhala nation, which is unacceptable to the other communities in Sri Lanka.

There is one school of thought that believes the NIE should be reconstituted where all communities can have an equal voice in preparing textbooks for all-island consumption. But the question is whether after decades of trying, it is still worth persuading the NIE to be fair by all communities, religions and other sub-groups in this country when preparing syllabi.

In other countries education is not a monolith where children answer identical question papers using identical texts. Now that the government and the LTTE are exploring federal options, it is time that schools in the northeast are allowed to teach history and cultural studies that vary at least partially in content from what is taught elsewhere in the island. This is a must in any multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multicultural environment - more so in Sri Lanka, where the NIE publications persist in disseminating pro-Sinhala-Buddhist propaganda in blind defiance of the truth.

PA-JVP alliance could defeat UNF in polls

By D. Sivaram (Taraki)

If someone feels that the peace process in Sri Lanka is being manoeuvred cleverly and inexorably to give the US-UK-Japan alliance a firm strategic foothold in Sri Lanka, then what does one do to reverse or neutralise it without derailing the peace process?

The simple solution is to bring about a change in government - one that would be opposed to allowing the fruits of the process falling on the lap of the US led coalition while continuing to talk with the Tigers.

There are several conspiracy theorists in Colombo who seem to believe that Delhi is backing the JVP and President Chandrika to bring about a change in government here.

Some are even saying so publicly.

Their conspiracy theories are not without some merits.

For one, India wants the LTTE happily locked for good in the peace process cage. But at the same time Delhi has been making it increasingly obvious that it does not want the US-UK-Japan alliance to avail itself of the negotiations to gain undue and irreversible strategic gains in Sri Lanka.

Also the comments of the Indian High Commissioner on the LTTE political study team's peregrinations in the west indicate that Delhi is not quite happy about the extent to which the solution is getting 'westernised'.

The Indians, in other words, seem to be indicating that they want to internalise the search for a political settlement - to take the peace process off its current moorings in the US-UK-Japan alliance.

In this context let us assume the JVP-PA alliance comes to power. The President has now reiterated that she would stand by the peace talks; that she is committed to the process.

But she also would have us believe that she is against US imperialist aggression in Iraq. The JVP's anti-western policies are only too well known.

In his lengthy address to the JVP's central committee in 1986 Rohana Wijeweera argues that the armed struggle for Tamil Eelam is integral to a greater imperialist plot to splinter India into ethnic fragments.

If the JVP emerges as the PA's main coalition partner, we know how it will react to any tangible US influence here; to the gains America has made here so far in military, economic and strategic terms.

In this sense the PA-JVP combination would be the ideal instrument for Delhi to keep Sri Lanka selectively impervious to extra-regional strategic powers.

All this, of course, is predicated on the alliance becoming

Whatever the delays, the signing of the PA-JVP MOU will certainly lead to the dissolution of the Parliament and the defeat of the UNF in the fresh polls to Parliament that would follow

an indubitable fact.

The People's Alliance continues to give us the impression that it is closer to striking a deal with the JVP on forming an alliance to bring down Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's government. We are told that the PA-JVP MOU getting late due to the latter's staunch opposition to granting regional autonomy to Tamils in the northeast. The JVP which was stubbornly opposed to continuing peace talks with the Liberation Tigers changed its mind after persuasion by a 'friendly external power'.

Whatever the delays, the signing of the PA-JVP MOU will certainly lead to the dissolution of the Parliament and the defeat of the UNF in the fresh polls to Parliament that would follow.

The UNF and its followers are now talking about holding a referendum to re-affirm the 2001 December mandate for peace. This is a hoax - a knee jerk reaction to the gloomy prospect of going back to opposition benches again.

During the PA years we have heard enough about the so-called non-binding referendum. It was also a hoax.

The UNF has no way out of the problem except hope that the international community would prevail on Chandrika not to rock the peace boat by dissolving Parliament and also that the PA, JVP may never see the light of the day. As we said in both instances, the UNF can only hope that luck would be on its side.

President Kumaratunga and her advisors appear to believe,

quite rightly though, that an alliance with the JVP would be a sure recipe for winning the general election that will follow when she dissolves Parliament.

First let's see how this is possible.

The JVP has 16 seats in Sri Lanka's 225 member legislature. The PA has 77. The UNF has 114 (UNP -109; SLMC -5). The EPDP - 2; PLOTE-1 and TNA 15.

The party came third in terms of the votes it polled in all the districts outside the northeast. The UNP polled 45.62 percent of the total valid votes polled at the 2001 December general elections (4086026 votes).

The PA got 37.19 percent (3330815 votes) while the JVP garnered 9.10 percent (815353) of the total votes polled at the 2001 elections to Sri Lanka's Parliament.

Even if we assume that the UNP's popularity remains what it was on the eve of the last general elections, the combined votes of the JVP and PA would be quite adequate to rout Ranil's government.

There are 22 electoral districts in Sri Lanka. The UNP polled the majority of the votes in 17 districts at the 2001 December general elections. (The TNA got the bonus seat in Jaffna, Vanni and Batticaloa) The PA was able to get the bonus seat only in Monaragala.

The UNP got the majority of the votes in each district where it won by a slender margin over the PA (except Nuwara Eliya).

For example in the southern district of Matara the UNP got 171661 votes in the 2001 polls. The PA got 171141 and the JVP 55476.

If the JVP and PA join forces then the combine will get the bonus seats in at least 18 electoral districts and the majority of the seats allocated according to the percentage of votes polled at the district and national levels.

In the event of such a victory, the PA-JVP coalition can form a government without having to depend on the support of Tamil or Muslim parties.

The absence of a tangible peace dividend, the rising cost of living and moves by the UNF to privatise state enterprises have undoubtedly made heavy dents on the popularity of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's government.

The JVP and the PA are not so politically blind that they cannot see this sure window of opportunity wide open.

The JVP obviously is keen to craft the MOU with the PA carefully, with an eye on long term plans to overwhelm its partner and capture power on its own.

Bottom line- the road ahead is not smooth for peace.

Pitfalls as Ranil tries to do a de Klerk

By J.S. Tissainayagam

The government this week made public its intention of holding a referendum in the wake of the Tokyo donor conference scheduled for mid-June 2003. From media reports it appears the UNF government is keen on harnessing the support of Sri Lankan voters to continue with the peace process.

The idea of the non-binding referendum comes in the face of opposition to the government-LTTE talks that has been surfacing for a year or so, but the seriousness of which no one seems to be sure. The government is keen on obtaining a mandate from the people to gauge the actual strength of this opposition, while luring voters with the peace dividend accruing from the donors in Tokyo.

There appears to be great emphasis on the mechanics of how parliament is going to call for a referendum, which according to the constitution is the president's prerogative. In the details of the debate, the referendum itself and what it signifies have been pushed to the backburner.

The referendum is going to be nationwide, which means that Tamils too are expected to either endorse or reject the peace process. The Tamils up to today have never rejected an offer of peace even if it were through a caricature — like the district development councils. The UNF by making this an island-wide exercise believes the unswerving support of the Tamils will ensure its victory.

But one thing that has been veiled by the rhetoric on the referendum is that voters, including Tamils, by voting "yes" for the peace process will endorse their general faith in the government as well. It is difficult to see how the UNF will be able to continue governing if the referendum were lost because it would make a huge dent on its legitimacy as the party forming the government.

Therefore Tamils should have absolutely no illusions that when they affirm support for the peace process by voting "yes" in the referendum, they will also be doing a great service to the UNF by allowing it to continue governing.

In this context the Tamils, who have never declined an opportunity to urge for a negotiated political settlement of the ethnic problem and have been asked yet again to endorse one, will be foolish if they fail to demand public guarantees from the UNF on specific areas of concern for them (Tamils) in return for an "yes" vote.

The media has drawn a parallel

The difference between the achievements of the NP government in South Africa and the threadbare record of the UNF is that the black population had confidence in de Klerk's sincerity in the face of sustained white opposition in achieving what he did before the referendum, whereas in Sri Lanka the Tamils are increasingly frustrated as the UNF continues to procrastinate citing the Kumaratunga and the JVP.

between the referendum called by the UNF and that called by the National Party (NP) of South African President F. W. de Klerk in 1992. He called for an endorsement of the South African peace process in the teeth of the Conservative Party and the white right-wing paramilitaries' opposition. At one time de Klerk was not even sure of the African National Congress' (ANC) support though it was secured fairly easily.

It is important however to note that though there are definite parallels between the circumstances under which the referendum was called and conducted in South Africa and what is scheduled to be held in Sri Lanka, they are also different because the peace process had gone much further in South Africa before the referendum was held, though it might have been under greater threat of being unravelled due to the waves of armed violence sweeping that country.

The plebiscite unlike what is proposed in Sri Lanka was open only to white South Africans. De Klerk's campaign was on the basis that if he won he would treat "yes" as a mandate to pursue negotiations for a new, non-racist constitution based on universal adult franchise that would give blacks the right to vote. The referendum asked, "Do you support the continuation of the reform process, which the state president began in February 2, 1990 and which is aimed at a new constitution through negotiation?"

The terminology used in the referendum was very specific and showed there was a clear commitment on the part of de Klerk to a new constitution, while the general trend in the campaign that an "yes" vote was for a united, democratic and non-segregated country, demonstrated the sort of constitution it would be. This was why the ANC

was in support of the plebiscite though blacks did not vote.

We are yet to know what question the voters will be asked in the Sri Lankan referendum and unless the question guarantees the delivery of specific benefits to the Tamils, it will be of no use to them.

Second, de Klerk was seeking a binding mandate to introduce the new constitution, whereas the UNF is seeking a non-binding referendum, which it can either acknowledge or not as it pleases.

Third, dividends from the referendum is limited because regardless of whether President Chandrika Kumaratunga supports the referendum or not, her office as president will continue to give her power to influence the peace process unlike the de Klerk's victory that set a much steadier course for him to achieve his goal.

Fourth, the ANC warned whites the consequences of a "no" vote would be violence to overturn the establishment, a threat that worked very well. It is yet to be seen whether the Ceasefire Agreement will permit the LTTE to do that, even if it wishes to.

The second set of issues concern return to normalcy. The government undertook various commitments stipulated in the Ceasefire Agreement to ensure roads were kept open, the economic embargo lifted, checkpoints closed and the army vacating places of worship and public buildings, but there is very little else to give Tamils the confidence of a process of returning to normalcy. The confidence is further eroded by violations of the Agreement.

If the two core issues of the PTA and high security zones (HSZ) remain un-addressed, talking about normalcy will be futile. The PTA that legalised political repression, torture and seizure of property

based on confessions under duress etc., is still in force. Second, though refugees and the internally displaced are trickling in, with HSZs still uninhabitable, resettlement and rehabilitation that form an integral part of the transition from war to even a temporary peace is far from begun. There are ambitious plans for resettlement, rehabilitation and reconciliation and promises for funding them, but they remain unimplemented.

Besides these, there are perennial problems such as language rights guaranteed under the Indo-Lanka Accord as far back as 1987 that are yet to be implemented. Legislation like the Equal Opportunities Bill lies disregarded and various other irritants that could have been attended to by the UNF over the past 15 months it has been in office are blithely ignored.

On the contrary, confidence-building measures in the South African peace process were well in place before the referendum was held. There were tangible benefits enjoyed by black South Africans that gave them confidence the process would be helped along by the referendum if de Klerk and the NP won it.

Soon after he became state president in 1989 de Klerk announced the withdrawal of a clutch of laws that underpinned apartheid in South Africa and demonstrated his sincerity by doing so. In November 1989 he announced the repeal of the Special Amenities Act enacted in 1953 to ensure that blacks and whites had different public facilities, which was done soon after. This was followed by lifting restrictions on opposition groups, which were banned for opposing apartheid, leading to the freeing of Nelson Mandela in February 1990 after 27 years in jail.

In the wake of this came a spate of reform: in 1991 black children were allowed to enter all-white schools, though white schools and parents challenged the move. This was followed by the repeal of land acts and the Group Areas Act of 1950 that segregated communities and relegated the black population to a minor percentage of the land. Other discriminatory legislation like the pass laws where blacks were required to carry passbooks so that the government could regulate their movement had been repealed in 1986.

Repression had forced black South Africans to flee as refugees to Lesotho, Botswana, and Swaziland. These countries were subject to economic sanctions as 'frontline states' by Pretoria because the ANC recruited guerrillas from there. But in 1991 the South African government granted an

amnesty to all exiles and refugees leading to their return.

Therefore, most of what was known as the 'pillars of apartheid' was progressively dismantled from 1989 to 1992. However, it was seen that economic, political and social power remained with the whites. Changes in these structures could only come about with a new constitution that guaranteed universal adult franchise and democracy. What de Klerk wanted through the referendum was a binding mandate for a new constitution, which he was to receive comfortably in the end.

The difference between the achievements of the NP government in South Africa and the threadbare record of the UNF is that the black population had confidence in de Klerk's sincerity in the face of sustained white opposition in achieving what he did before the referendum, whereas in Sri Lanka the Tamils are increasingly frustrated as the UNF continues to procrastinate citing the Kumaratunga and the JVP.

History of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka never fails to provide charming little parallels from the past. If readers cast their minds back to 1994, Kumaratunga won the general election in August that year with the slimmest of majorities. She had a formidable rival in Gamini Disanayake for the presidency, who she could beat only with support of the Tamils. Kumaratunga presented herself in a way that voting for her was interpreted as voting for the peace process. In November 1994 Kumaratunga won a 62% majority, overwhelmingly supported by the Tamils, using peace and a negotiated settlement as her platform; by April 1995 she had unleashed a bloody war on the Tamil people.

Peace processes have always had the LTTE on the back-foot — it merely reacts to politics of the south. The proposed referendum could very well be another such exercise. If the UNF were to win it, it might very well be used as a mechanism to procrastinate by telling the world there is public support for the peace process, while keeping the LTTE talking without tangible progress for its pains.

It is therefore imperative that if the Tamils are going to vote "yes" in the referendum that definite steps are taken by Tamil leadership to see the UNF and Wickremesinghe are forced to make public guarantees of what they will deliver and better still made to demonstrate the preliminary steps they are to take towards those goals. Otherwise it might be a repetition on 1994.

Negotiating for democratic rights

By Fern Lane

On Sunday, Sinn Féin Chief Negotiator Martin McGuinness reported to the Ard Fheis on the current negotiations with the British government over the impasse on the Good Friday Agreement. He told delegates that he wanted to take the opportunity to outline the party's approach to these negotiations in order to give members a sense of where things stood at present. "I think it is important to say something of the context within which this particular phase of negotiations has arisen," he said.

"When the British government suspended the political institutions on 14 October, he said, they were 'acting at the behest of the leadership of the Ulster Unionist Party and were in clear breach of the terms of the Good Friday Agreement. The UUP, if you remember, signalled as far back as March of last year their intention to bring about the collapse of the institutions."

"Later in October the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, came to Belfast and admitted that his government had not fulfilled their obligations with respect to the Agreement. He went on to call on all parties to the Agreement to engage in what he described as 'acts of completion'."

In contrast, he continued, Sinn Féin's approach "has been the same approach we have brought to previous phases of negotiations - consistent and persistent. While others were attempting to reduce the focus on resolving the current difficulties to a single item agenda, we have been pressing both governments to produce a comprehensive implementation plan to address all the broad range of issues required to bring about the full implementation of the Agreement."

Some weeks after the suspension of the institutions, the governments finally convened all-party talks. In advance, Sinn Féin set out for all the parties its view on all the issues that needed to be addressed. These included: the political institutions and the democratic rights of all sections of the electorate, equality and human rights, victims of the conflict, Irish language issues, the use of flags and emblems for public purposes, the issue of arms, demilitarisation, policing and justice and the transfer of powers on policing and justice, and prisoners.

"Once it became clear that discussions would in fact deal with the broader range of issues rather than the single item agenda," explained Martin McGuinness, "the UUP withdrew from these discussions."

The current phase of negotiations began in early December last year. By 22 December, Sinn Féin had submitted a 57-page

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While others were attempting to reduce the focus on resolving the current difficulties to a single item agenda, we have been pressing both governments to produce a comprehensive implementation plan to address all the broad range of issues required to bring about the full implementation of the Agreement."

document to the two governments setting out the party's view on how these outstanding issues could be addressed.

Since January, when the current negotiations began to pick up pace, Sinn Féin had sought to achieve a plan for the full implementation of the Agreement and to counter any attempt to filter this implementation through a unionist prism.

"A particular irony in all of this," said Martin McGuinness, "is that while our approach is premised on inclusivity, equality and the democratic imperative, there are those

tions - for the fourth occasion - by the British government has been central to the current crisis. But the party's negotiating team has "been resolute in our opposition to suspension since the British government arbitrarily took this power onto itself. However - and this is the politically important thing - it is untenable. It has to go and we are confident that, as a result of our endeavours, that it will go."

He also spoke on the issue of sanctions; like suspension, this has been introduced in breach of terms of the Agreement. He

"And Sinn Féin, in the context of the peace process, has entrenched our strategy of negotiations to achieve these ends. We will continue to negotiate, we will continue to fulfil our political mandate to deliver radical and progressive change.

whose sole focus has remained the exclusion of Sinn Féin from ministerial office, from government and from the political institutions.

But whilst this may be frustrating, he said, it should not be viewed as "indicative of a lack of progress". In fact, it should be seen as quite the opposite, as "the more progress we make the more intense will become the efforts of the opponents of change".

The suspension of the institu-

wanted to make it clear, he said, that "Sinn Féin will not be held responsible for any words or deeds other than our own."

"We demand for our electorate the same democratic rights as all other sections of the electorate. We reject all sanctions outside the terms of the Agreement."

Of the party's meetings with the UUP, he told the conference that "our objectives in these discussions are clear; republicans and

nationalists need reassurance that the political institutions will not be faced with the same serial suspensions and crisis they have in the past.

"I cannot say that they have yet borne fruit other than the benefit of discussion and engagement in which there is an inherent political value. But we will persevere with that. We are a patient lot." Nevertheless, he said, progress has been made on policing on justice, on human rights, on equality, on the Irish language and on other issues.

He told the conference that, on the issue on policing, the party was building on the advances made in Weston Park 18 months ago. In respect of democratic accountability, additional commitments to new legislation and additional amendments had been secured, including:

- a requirement by the British Secretary of State to consult with the Ombudsman, the Human Rights Commission and the Equality Commission on the key areas of policing objectives;

- a requirement for the same consultation process in respect of Codes of Practice over which the British Secretary of State formally had a blank cheque; and
- a commitment that the Belfast sub-groups are placed on a par with the District Policing Partnerships.

Other equally important issues are also being addressed, he explained, including the demilitarisation of PSNI and the establishment of a human rights ethos within the force.

The negotiating team has also pressed the British on issues such as the Special Branch and plastic bullets. "We have made it clear that the Special Branch abuses which took place under the cover of the Walker procedures and the force within a force created and perpetuated by lengthy or indefinite tenure of Special Branch positions can be no part of a new beginning to policing" he said.

"The British government has also agreed in principle to the transfer of power on policing and justice from the British government to the Assembly and the all-Ireland Ministerial Council. What we are seeking now is that this is firmed up in terms of specific proposals and a defined time frame."

He also outlined in some detail the expectations of the party and the progress which has been made on the issue of criminal justice - including such matters as judicial appointments, the plight of the OTRs, additional powers for the Ombudsman - on demilitarisation and on human rights.

In regard to the latter, he said: "We expect an affirmation of the principle that there is no hierarchy of victims and, most importantly, action to support that; for instance, an end to the discrimination in the funding of victims support groups."

He called on the Oireachtas to

implement the recommendations to provide representation in the Oireachtas for Irish citizens in the North through their elected representatives. "It is important that all Irish citizens are encouraged and enabled to play an active role in the democratic life of the nation. The Irish government, obviously, has the primary responsibility for achieving this democratic development and we call on the government to expedite the process to do this," he said.

But, for all of this, he said, he wanted to make it clear that "despite the claims by some that the negotiations are closed, there is no deal done. And let me be equally clear, our best endeavours and energies are directed at achieving a deal."

"We do not yet have an acceptable policing service or a representative criminal justice system. We certainly do not have equality. And no one is going to give it to us. This party will have to fight for this issue every day. It cannot be left to the negotiating team no matter what commitments are made."

"This issue of equality has to be the political and campaigning thrust of this party. In other words it is work for you. We do not have functioning political institutions or the demilitarisation that the GFA promised. But we intend to continue to be an engine for change in all these areas. It was particularly disappointing to hear the Irish government assert that there should be no more negotiations on these issues. Surely their role should be to defend Irish national rights and the rights of Irish citizens North and South rather than try to set limits or boundaries on forward progress."

"And Sinn Féin, in the context of the peace process, has entrenched our strategy of negotiations to achieve these ends. We will continue to negotiate, we will continue to fulfil our political mandate to deliver radical and progressive change."

"But negotiations and negotiating strategy cannot be seen in isolation. Everyone here has key role to play. Every Sinn Féin voter has a role to play. The political landscape of the North has changed forever. The degree of change that we can achieve is linked directly to our political strength. We have an obligation to reach out to unionists and others; we have a responsibility to use our mandate wisely in the interests of a lasting peace."

"Increased political strength will allow Sinn Féin to deliver further change in the interests of all of the people of this island. In the Assembly elections, as in previous elections across this island, we collectively, as a party, have the opportunity to increase our political and negotiating strength. That is the challenge we must address as we leave this Ard Fheis." (An Phoblacht)

General Nambiar and the 1breakup of the state

Gen. Nambiar's report concerning the possibility of resettling civilians within certain areas of the northeast of Sri Lanka now designated High Security Zones may be available to the public soon. Gen. Nambiar has had a good deal of experience in areas of the world engaged in internal conflict. This experience is relevant in previewing the possibility that his report will recommend changes to the status quo. Gen. Nambiar's writings on his Bosnian experience, his feelings toward Pakistan and his concern for the unity of India, particularly, lead one to predict unfortunately that he will choose to emphasize the security concerns of the central government over the needs of civilians in his report on Sri Lanka.

This essay will look first at the issue of the High Security Zones and will then turn to Gen. Nambiar's previous military postings and how these may relate to his report on Sri Lanka that is expected out soon.

When the Sri Lankan armed forces first started being stationed on a permanent basis in the Northeast during the 1960s, camps were established to accommodate them. These camps grew in number and size throughout the ensuing years. In the early 1990s there were over 200 camps in the Northeast, while today it is estimated that there are 400 or more. The buffer zones considered required for these camps to protect them against attack kept growing. In the early 1990s the camp and airfield at Palaly, north of Jaffna City, expanded its protective buffer by thousands of hectares taking over a heavily populated agricultural zone and expelling the inhabitants. Between 15,000 and 30,000 families were displaced with no compensation. Rather than calling these areas 'camps,' they were designated 'high security zones.'

In the February 22, 2002 ceasefire agreement between the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL)

and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) "high security zones" are mentioned only once, in paragraph 2.2, which says "Places of worship which are situated in 'high security zones' shall be vacated by all armed personnel and maintained in good order by civilian workers, even when they are not made accessible to the public."

With the ceasefire agreement came a period of military consolidation, most noticed on the Jaffna Peninsula, in which these high security zones were formalized and expanded. These zones and camps now comprise between 25 and 30% of the land area of the peninsula. (www.tamilguardian.com/tg193/jaffna_hsz.jpg) Of the 45 Grama Sevaka Niladhari Divisions (GSN, an administrative unit in which a village services officer is stationed) in Jaffna, 28 divisions are completely designated as high security zones and 5 are partly so designated. New zones continue to be created, particularly in the east.

A view of a high security zone in the northern Jaffna peninsula. (Frontline, 3/16/03)

Because these zones frequently involved displacement of the civilian population in their creation, always without compensation or resettlement, the former inhabitants are, naturally, anxious to return to their homes and occupations.

The Tamil Guardian has editorialized, "Sri Lanka's obsessive focus on undermining the LTTE's military capabilities whilst 40% of our people are prevented by the Sinhala military from returning to their homes justifiably raises suspicion of the government's longer-term intent." (Jan. 28, 2003)

The issue of these high security zones has thus become a source of dispute in the peace negotiations between the GOSL and the LTTE.

At the fourth meeting of the peace negotiators in Bangkok in January, 2003, the Norwegian facilitators announced that "The second phase of the Action Plan will focus on resettlement of IDPs and refugees in

areas within the High Security Zones, as and when they are released by the Security Forces for resettlement. For this purpose, the GOSL will carry out a review with the assistance of an internationally recognized military expert, taking into account relevant humanitarian and security needs." The LTTE acquiesced to postponing the resolution of this issue, probably because it threatened to derail the whole negotiation process unless contained. Lt. General Satish Nambiar (ret'd) was chosen to carry out the review of the High Security Zones for the GOSL. His report, however, is not binding on either party.

There is some hint in recent news items that Gen. Nambiar's report may be completed or near completion. It is therefore an appropriate time to ask, "Who is Gen. Nambiar?"

General Nambiar retired as Deputy Chief of Staff of the Indian Army and is now Director of the United Services Institution of India, a New Delhi thinktank which has several programs, one of which is to train UN peacekeepers. In between Gen. Nambiar was the First Force Commander and Head of Mission of the United Nations Forces deployed in the former Yugoslavia from 1992 to 1993.

According to The Sunday Times (2/3/03), "Lt. Gen. Nambiar made two previous visits to Sri Lanka, one in September and the other in December, last year, both at the invitation of Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe."

"UNF Government sources" who spoke on grounds of anonymity told The Sunday Times following these visits that Lt. Gen. Nambiar, handed over a ten-page report encompassing three different aspects. They related to the role of officer level cadres in the Army (under the proposed defence reforms), the working of High Security Zones and how their existing structure could be reviewed to facilitate the peace process and a possible long term incorporation of Tiger guerrilla cadres in the military/police when a fuller peace settlement is arrived at."

There has also been discussion

of incorporating some of Sri Lanka's enormous now-idle military into the UN's peacekeeping operations.

Gen. Nambiar's previous military experience will, of course, color his conclusions concerning the tradeoff between military and civilian claims to the land comprising the High Security Zones.

Gen. Nambiar wrote about his experiences as head of the UN Force in the former Yugoslavia. In India he received accolades for "standing up to NATO" in his role as a UN peacekeeper. Gen. Nambiar's piece is entitled "The Fatal Flaws Underlying NATO's Intervention in Yugoslavia" (<http://www.diasporanet.org/food4thought/nambiar.htm>) and provides a window into his thinking concerning an ethnic conflict in which the validity of various claims must be determined. His premise is that neither side, the Bosnians or the Serbs, had right on their side, the Serbs were unnecessarily blamed for their actions, and it was his duty to remain 'neutral' and above the fray. His orientation towards that fragmentation of the former Yugoslavia leaks out in various forms, however.

"In my experience with similar situations in India in such places as Kashmir, Punjab, Assam, Nagaland, and elsewhere, it is the essential strategy of those ethnic groups who wish to secede to provoke the state authorities..."

It is appropriate to touch on the humanitarian dimension for it is the innocent who are being subjected to displacement, pain and misery. Unfortunately, this is the tragic and inevitable outcome of all such situations of civil war, insurgencies, rebel movements, and terrorist activity...

And finally, secessionist movements, which often start with terrorist activity, will get greater encouragement [from NATO's actions to prevent atrocities in Bosnia]."

In none of these statements is Gen. Nambiar sympathetic to the 'secessionist' side - regardless of the history and human cost of the conflict - when its interests diverge

from those of the 'state authorities,' nor does he expect anything less than human misery from efforts to stop one ethnic group dominating another.

Why would Gen. Nambiar choose a stand which, while ostensibly neutral, favored the Serbs whose belligerence was recognized by many observers as the main cause of much of the bloodshed in the former Yugoslavia? David Reiff, a former reporter and New School University researcher, writes in The New Republic (2/12/96) "The first UNPROFOR commander, the Indian general Satish Nambiar, was regularly accused by UNHCR officials in 1993 of holding pro-Serb views. One senior official told me at the time 'When Nambiar looks at Izetbegovic, he sees Jinnah. For him, Izetbegovic [the Bosnian leader] is a man who ruined a perfectly good multiconfessional country, just as Jinnah ruined India in 1947 by insisting on a separate Pakistan.'"

According to Reiff, another, unnamed UNPROFOR official wrote, "I will not conclude by naming the aggressor." Reiff continues, "He implies that he declines to do this because he rejects such simplistic ascriptions of blame. What the UN never wanted to understand was that without such an analysis, all its actions in the former Yugoslavia led it not to impartiality or good works, but to collusion with aggression." (<http://www.amber.ucsf.edu/~ross/bosnia/un.txt>, also posted at <http://www.bosnia.org.uk/bosrep/febmar96/evil.cfm>)

One is ever hopeful that an impartial report balancing the needs of displaced civilians and security considerations will be the end result of Gen. Nambiar's investigations in Sri Lanka. The good general's past history, however, leads one to believe that in this case he will almost inevitably determine that the requirements of the military and the state trump civilian concerns. (*Ilankai Tamil Sangam*)

WAN, WEF ask Bush to investigate journalist's death

The World Association of Newspapers (WAN) and World Editors Forum (WEF) have asked US President George W. Bush to ensure that "a full and frank investigation" is carried out into the death of British journalist Terry Lloyd, who was shot in Iraq, apparently by coalition forces.

Lloyd, a veteran reporter with ITN, was killed in late March when the vehicle in which he was travelling came

under intense fire, reportedly from coalition forces. The vehicle was clearly marked as carrying journalists.

In a letter, to President Bush, (released to the media on 8 April 2002) WAN and the WEF said:

"We are writing on behalf of the World Association of Newspapers and the World Editors Forum, which represent 18,000 publications in 100 countries, to express our grave concern at the death of British

journalist Terry Lloyd.

According to reports, on 22-23 March Mr Lloyd, a veteran reporter with ITN, was killed as coalition forces advanced towards Basra. He died when the vehicle in which he was travelling, which was clearly marked as carrying journalists, came under intense fire, reportedly from coalition forces.

There was no immediate confirmation of the fate of his two colleagues, cameraman

Fred Nerac and translator Hussein Osman, who were also part of the team that came under fire. A fourth member of the team, cameraman Daniel Demoustier, was injured but was able to get back to US and British lines.

We respectfully call on you to ensure that a full and frank investigation into the circumstances surrounding Mr Lloyd's death is immediately carried out and that the findings are made public."

The Paris-based WAN, the global organisation for the newspaper industry, defends and promotes press freedom worldwide. It represents 18,000 newspapers; its membership includes 71 national newspaper associations, individual newspaper executives in 100 countries, 13 news agencies and nine regional and worldwide press groups.

The WEF is the division of WAN that represents senior news executives. (WAN)

Impact of armed conflict on children in Sri Lanka

This is the second part of a two-part article on the impact of armed conflict on children that appeared in *Beyond the Wall*, published by Home for Human Rights, Sri Lanka. This week we publish the final part. The first part appeared last week.

By V. Yogeswaran

It is estimated that over 60,000 persons have died in this senseless war. The war has given Sri Lanka an abundance of orphans and widows. Orphanages have mushroomed in the northeast.

While attention is being paid to sustain the cessation of armed conflict that has come to replace the war after the signing of the MoU, the country is confronted with multiple questions about children affected by war, especially those who are orphaned. They seem to say, "Peace cannot replace my mother or father; peace cannot replace my lost innocence and childhood; peace cannot make me lovable and loved. I am kept in an institution and I am not at home, I am charitably maintained by the adult society in this institution but not lovingly. Peace cannot give me a new future due to this irreplaceable past of mine."

If we adults fail to listen to this voice, we will reap a black harvest.

I have had the opportunity of visiting orphanages in various places and the visits have convinced me these children are already worried about their future. "If I do not behave well or make mistakes or break rules, I will be sent away. Will I be looked after in this place till I find a job? Will I be looked after and be given in marriage in due time?"

I am left wondering whether the institutional approach to take care of the orphaned is appropriate and will bring the desired outcome. Should we adopt other formulae in looking after these children? Will we not have better options in seeking foster-parent home adoption to bring a home environment for the orphaned child instead of an institutionalised environment?

There are numerous requests that have come my way from parents looking for their missing children and children looking for their missing parents. I have shared many anxious moments with children and parents helping them to cope with the emotional problems arising from these tragic circumstances.

This group of children is so special because of their unique experience. It is difficult to convey the truth that their missing

parent is dead and will not come back. This peculiarity is derived from the fact that these missing persons are not counted among the dead. The security forces use the term 'missing in action.' In a similar manner, there are also many civilians accounted for as 'missing' in the northeast whose children are waiting in hope their father/mother will come back. This has become a long wait and reconciliation and acceptance has not really taken place.

It is futile at this juncture to ask hypothetical questions such as whether the LTTE or the security forces are holding missing persons in secret locations. Practical reality tells us that these persons are dead and there is only a remote chance of discovering them alive. But the human spirit refuses to accept this and the search continues. Not only is the anguish of the adults communicated to the children but their frustration, arising from the futile search, is also taken out on them. The refusal of the grownups to accept this reality is detrimental to the welfare of the child. Neither the child nor the parent is afforded an opportunity to cope with this emotional stress. There are thousands of such families and situations to be addressed in the future as the country moves towards peace and reconciliation.

Children of missing soldiers have similar experiences. They too grow up waiting and hoping that one day their father will come back. It is only an illusion and temporary shelter to sooth the emotional and psychological trauma of the child. Unless the reality is confronted and accepted the healing process will not begin.

Children disabled by war and armed conflict, mostly victims of landmines, miss play, which is an important element in the life of the growing child. When a child misses play it means he or she fails to express himself/herself fully. Play is an integral part of a child's world and the play in adulthood is the expression of the child in the adult.

According to a survey conducted by the White Pigeon Movement there are about 11,455 children affected by landmines according to the following breakdown: Mullaitivu 6158, Kilinochchi 4043, Mannar 1254. Other areas were not covered in this survey. All these children are below 16 years.

Loss due to landmines does in-



"Peace cannot replace my mother or father; peace cannot replace my lost innocence and childhood; peace cannot make me lovable and loved. I am kept in an institution and I am not at home, I am charitably maintained by the adult society in this institution but not lovingly. Peace cannot give me a new future due to this irreplaceable past of mine."

calculable damage to a child, physically and psychologically. The maimed child has difficulty in integrating with society. He or she is always bitter because of the lack of opportunities in life such as prospects for marriage, family life and employment.

Armed conflict leaves deep wounds in the physical, psychological and spiritual life of children. Physical impact - especially in the area of education, health and food

Standards of education of children in the northeast have de-

clined due to educational institutions being occupied by the security forces forcing children out of school. Besides, school buildings have been destroyed or damaged, teaching staff displaced due to

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Impact of... *Contd. from page 10*

security and other reasons and in the institutions continuing to provide education, a serious inadequacy in facilities including a lack of study materials and other equipment.

Bamini (14) of Jaffna who was displaced many times with her family says, "When we were displaced, we did not have any food to eat, no water to drink and no place to stay... Every time we were displaced, we studied in different schools... I have studied in seven schools so far."

Amidst fear and uncertainty children from refugee camps and displaced homes in isolated and abandoned areas peddled or walked to schools, which sometimes meant a tree shade or temporary hut. The student population which stood at 290,000 in 1990 dropped drastically in the coming years and was only 130,000 in 2000... Among the other areas, (the) education sector seems to be a major constraint facing the development officers. Even though the army has vacated most of the school buildings, there still remains a lot to be done. Teacher shortage, rehabilitation of war-torn buildings, provision of drinking water, sanitation facilities and physical resources to name a few.

A UNICEF survey indicates over 11,500 students do not go to school regularly in the Jaffna peninsula. Of that, 7809 have dropped out permanently and about 3946 do not attend most of the time.

In the Vanni, over 10,000 children do not attend school and others have polythene covered sheds as schools. Surveys are needed in other areas.

Just think of it. Every single child in our country today was born and has grown up experiencing the uncertainties, the fears and the destructive terror of armed conflict, either directly or indirectly. Today we have more than 270,000 internally displaced children who lost homes or had their families brutally killed or torn away from them. Thousands of them lost either one or both parents. Think of the near impossible task of locating their relatives or re-homing them in foster homes.

Thousand of children are killed every year as a direct result of fighting – from bullets, knife wounds, bombs and landmines. But many more children die from malnutrition and disease heightened by armed conflict. Wars – many of them in the world's most impoverished regions – disrupt food supplies and destroy crops and agricultural infrastructure. They wreck water and sanitation systems along with health services. And wars displace whole populations, tearing families and communities apart. All these take immense physical and emotional toll on children. Beset by malnutrition, common childhood diseases and opportunistic infections,

According to a survey conducted by the White Pigeon Movement there are about 11,455 children affected by landmines according to the following breakdown: Mullaitivu 6158, Kilinochchi 4043, Mannar 1254. Other areas were not covered in this survey. All these children are below 16 years

children by the thousands fall into a fatal spiral of failing health. Some of the highest fatality rates occur among children who have been uprooted from their homes, including those languishing in camps for refugees and internally displaced.

Children in Sri Lanka are no exception to this rule. Due to the economic embargo imposed on the northeast many essential goods were prohibited from being taken across. Prohibiting medical goods have caused serious health problems. According to health authorities the official embargo on pharmaceuticals to the north have caused the mortality rate among infants and pregnant mothers to increase by nearly 18%, mortality rate among children under five to increase by nearly 18% and malnutrition among under-12s which was at 4.3% in 1983 to go up to 40% in 2001. The death rate due to common diseases has increased due to the shortage of drugs.

The war destroyed the economy of the northeast. The mainstay of the northeastern economy is agriculture and fisheries. The war has demolished irrigation systems and planted paddy fields with landmines, making fertilizer a rare commodity and the land barren due to the adverse impact of warfare on the environment. The displacement of fisher families and the damage to fishing gear placed further restrictions on fishing. Children whose parents depend on agriculture and fishing to support the family are impoverished due to this.

The restriction imposed on the movement of people and on the transport system imposed further constraints on the growth of the economy. Whatever little was produced could not be marketed and goods from outside could not be brought in.

Children who survive armed conflict have to deal with the horrors they have witnessed. War undermines the very foundations of children's lives, destroying their homes, splintering their communities and shattering their trust in adults. Children spared the direct experience of violence in armed conflict still suffer deep emotional distress in the face of the death or the separation of the family members and the loss of friends... war affects every aspect of the child's development – physical, emotional, intellectual, social and spiritual. Children who have lived through conflict need psychological support. Article 39 of the Conven-

tion of the Rights of Child guarantees the right of children to psychological recovery and social integration following armed conflict and other abusive experiences.

Exposure to armed conflict also contributes to a child's internalisation of the culture of violence. Children take cues from their adult caregivers, so when they witness situations in which the anxiety and vulnerability of their parents is exposed, they tend to become more fearful and insecure themselves. Children can also have difficulty understanding erratic, overly protective or authoritarian attitudes in adults.

Symptoms arising from prolonged exposure to armed conflict are found among children in Sri Lanka. There is hatred for an unknown enemy – for the child in the northeast it is the Sinhalese soldier; it could be otherwise to children from the south. There is bottled-up anger due to reasons from loss of family members to loss of property, culture etc. Almost all the children in the northeast have been deprived of basic facilities like food, shelter

ing that culture while degrading the culture of the 'other' as oppressive. This creates false pictures and images in children's minds. These constant one-sided exposures without explaining enough the causes of war and their justification (if any), has imparted wrong values in children. Intense fear is another experience which children are forced to cope with – fear of being killed, abducted, arrested, repeatedly displaced – all that have led to a life of pessimism and frustration.

Fieldwork conducted by a team from the Butterfly Garden among children affected by war from four villages in Batticaloa revealed the following: 41% had personally experienced conflict-related violence (e.g. home attacked or shelled, shot at, beaten or arrested). 53% had direct family members killed violently, including disappearances of family members following abduction or detention.

Ninety-five percent of the children recalled events for which the definition of PTSD applied (i.e. personal experience or witnessing events of actual or threat-

Further, it has also raised questions in the minds of the children of the purpose and meaning of religion and God. Can God protect us from suffering? Why can't He prevent disaster? Where is God in the face of death of loved ones? Failing to understand manmade misery and suffering, children tend to blame God for it and have moved him out of their lives

clothing, education and medicine. The impact and effect of being deprived and knowing the consequences of the deprivation has disturbing effect on the child.

Further, the child in the northeast has had a lopsided exposure to one culture – songs, plays and public performances glorify-

ing death, serious injury, threat to integrity of self or others). 92% of these events were directly conflict-related, as distinct from domestic violence or accident. Severe (20%) and moderate (39%) levels of post-traumatic psychological distress were found, as well as similar levels of depression and unresolved

grief reactions. Many children disclosed experiences and shared emotions previously withheld from others. This survey in just four villages among 170 children is a pointer to the psychological and emotional imbalance that exists in the children affected by war.

Impact of this armed conflict in the spiritual life of children

In any culture the place of worship is a sacred one. When everything fails and falls apart, the human spirit longs to find solace and remedy to troubles and suffering before of his/her favourite deity. Therefore, the place of worship is very important in the social, cultural and spiritual life of a society.

The occupation by the armed forces of places of worship has made these centres inaccessible for the adults and children. Further, it has also raised questions in the minds of the children of the purpose and meaning of religion and God. Can God protect us from suffering? Why can't He prevent disaster? Where is God in the face of death of loved ones? Failing to understand manmade misery and suffering, children tend to blame God for it and have moved him out of their lives.

It is an enormous task that faces adults in dealing with children affected by armed conflict in Sri Lanka. The important question that one needs to ask is about oneself. What can I do individually within my capacity and ability? Each one of us has a duty to contribute to this process of peace and reconciliation building. Thereafter, men and women of goodwill can come together to form interested groups for collective action. What can be done collectively at church/organizational level to be then transferred to the national level? What can be done nationally with other partners engaged in similar programmes?

The world is not silent and people of goodwill in our country are not silent either. There are many actively involved in rehabilitation and reconciliation. I came across a programme or plan of action spelt out by the UNICEF: Children: Zones of peace and I find much needed material there for action planning depending on capacity and expertise.

I do not intend elaborating what has already been said in the above-mentioned chart of action of the UNICEF to protect our children from future and further armed conflict. We could be partners in this programme.

Sri Lanka on ratifying the Convention on the rights of children, submitted its initial report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and the committee gave a list of recommendations on 21 June 1995¹⁶. These could be of use in planning future action for children's welfare in Sri Lanka. The UN committee is now considering the next report submitted by the Government of Sri Lanka. (Concluded)

Are our development strategists worth their salt?



Mannar's Manthai Salt Ltd.

By D. Sivaram

Before the Eelam wars began the salterns in the northeast produced enough salt to meet the needs of Sri Lanka. Elephant Pass and Kurinchathivu were the largest of these. The other salt production facilities were in Chemmani, near Jaffna town, in Mannar town, in Nilaveli and Kumburupiddy in Trincomalee. There was a large salt pan west of Batticaloa town during the Dutch and early British periods. Colonial records indicate that this saltern was the main source of salt supply to the Kandyan kingdom then.

The northern salterns produced the best quality salt in the island with a sodium chloride content of 98 percent. Until the Sri Lanka army took over the large area containing the salt pans of Elephant Pass and Kurinchathivu in 1990, more than 85,000 metric tons of salt were produced there annually.

To get the two facilities back on their former footing, 800 to 1000 million rupees would be required, officials say.

The Paranthan chemical factory produced export quality sodium chloride thanks to the inexhaustible

supply of salt from the pans of Elephant Pass and Kurinchathivu which were nearby. (The Paranthan chemical factory was totally destroyed in the war)

The only saltern in the northeast to survive the war was the one in Mannar town now called Manthai Salt Ltd. On paper all the salterns in the northeast today come under the administration of Manthai Salt.

The British brought all salt production in Sri Lanka under their control in 1938 with the establishment of the Salt Department in the wake of the 'salt satyagraha' by Mahatma Gandhi in India.

The Salt Department was made the National Salt Corporation in 1966. All salterns in Sri Lanka were under the corporation before 1990. That year, under World Bank and IMF steered deregulation of the island's economy, the Sri Lankan government formed the Lanka Salt Company under the supervision of the Public Enterprises Reform Commission (PERC).

Under this program, the Mannar saltern was divested and reconstituted as Manthai Salt Ltd. As the PERC could not supervise the privatisation of all the salterns in the northeast, these were brought under Manthai Salt Ltd in 1990.

Despite deprivations caused by

the war, the deregulation under the PERC has increased pressure on the privatised salt companies to become self sustaining and profit making.

But for the Manthai Salt Ltd, located in Mannar town, it is an uphill task. In 1991 and 92 the 'company' had to cease production completely as a consequence of the war. It limped on with minimal output until 1997 when it was able to get its act together with a loan of 400,000 rupees from the government agent (GA), Mannar. In 2000 February, the GA handed over the company's administration to the Federation of Fishermen's Societies in Mannar.

The Ministry for Rehabilitation and Reconstruction in the northeast took over Manthai Salt in October 2001, barely two months before the general elections. The United National Front government brought the company under the ministry of industries. (Technically all the salterns in the northeast are under the purview of Prof. G. L. Pieris)

"We cannot run profitably as in the past unless we increase our production. To expand it's out capacity, 'Manthai Salt' needs capital investment", says K. Arumugaswamy, the regional manager in charge of the Mannar saltern.



K. Arumugaswamy

Manthai Salt now depends for its survival on handouts from the treasury and limited sales in a highly competitive market. Privately owned smaller salterns in Puttalam produce and market salt at a much lower price. Some of these brands which are marketed as iodised salt contain no iodine content at all.

"If you do not add iodine, you save money and can afford to sell at a lower price," observes Arumugaswamy.

A person requires 150 micrograms of iodine per day to remain healthy.

Unit cost of production is high at Manthai Salt

because the company, being a semi government concern, has to maintain the wage structure and work force according to standards inherited from the public enterprise system.

The regional manager says that if production is doubled with adequate capital input then the cost of production would come down.

"To achieve this we need 30-40 million rupees capital investment. Then we can run at profit," Arumugaswamy says.

Currently the Mannar saltern produces 2500-3500 metric tonnes of salt annually depending on the extent of rainfall. (Production ceases during the rains)

The annual consumption of salt in Mannar is around 800 metric tonnes only, most of it used for making dried fish. "We can market the rest competitively even amid the current salt imports from Tuticorin in India if we have the capital to expand," Arumugaswamy argues.

Salt is a valuable resource that is available in plenty in the northeast. A development and rehabilitation plan to get out salt industry going is a must today.

But the big question is: 'are our development strategists worth their salt?'