

Factoring the LTTE into the Indian Ocean equation

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NORTHEASTERN HERALD

Grinding poverty stalks Jaffna's children

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An army battle tank destroyed at Olumadu, east of Mankulam during fierce fighting in 1998 holds no terrors for this family, which has resettled in the vicinity Pic. by D. Sivaram

UNICEF agrees to help in teacher training in Wannai

By a Staff Correspondent

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) requested UNICEF to assist the education of Tamil children of the northeast by training teachers, rather than concentrating on providing furniture and buildings as it had done in the past.

At a meeting with Carol Bellamy, visiting executive director of UNICEF, V. Ilankumaran (Baby Subramaniam), who heads the Education Division of the LTTE said in Kilinochchi that the most vital problem besetting the children of the northeast was a lack of trained teachers in science, maths and English, which had contributed to standards of education plummeting in the region.

"Our children do not need buildings to study, they can do so in the open, but we need

qualified teachers," stressed Ilankumaran.

During her tour of the Wannai last Friday, Bellamy saw classes in progress at Bharathipuram Maha Vidyalayam in Kilinochchi where children were studying in the open air.

Trained mathematics teachers in the Wannai are almost non-existent, which has given rise to volunteers having to take their place. The need for trained teachers is all the more acute because children miss a number of years of schooling because of the fluid conditions in the Wannai brought about by the war, and require special attention if they were to be reintegrated into formal learning imparted in school.

Ilankumaran said there was so little money to be paid to the volunteer teachers that the few teachers in regular employment pooled their money to provide for

the volunteers.

Bellamy replied UNICEF would assist in the uplift of teaching in the area by incorporating teacher training within its overall programme. She said the teaching programme should be geared to benefit the poorest sectors of society. Therefore an emphasis should be placed on improving vocational education in the area.

UNICEF however places much emphasis on bringing children to school, as it will allow for teacher-student relations to grow, which the organisation believes is vital for children living in the midst of armed conflict.

The Garca Machel in her report on the impact of armed conflict on children stresses the importance of the formal school environment. She says, "Education is particularly important at times of armed conflict. While all around may be in chaos, schooling can

represent a state of normalcy. School children have a chance to be with friends and enjoy their support and encouragement. They benefit from regular contacts with teachers who can monitor their physical and psychological health."

With the view of encouraging children in the conflict-ridden areas of Sri Lanka to return to school, UNICEF is providing 'school kits' that contain the basic writing and learning instruments children need to enrol in school. There has however been criticism against the programme that it is not targeted properly since it is indiscriminate in help-

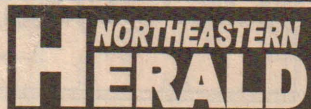
ing both rich and poor children.

Meanwhile, the programme to recruit 3000 teachers to schools in the northeast was going on at slow pace sources told the Northeastern Herald. The 3000 will comprise equal numbers of volunteer, A/L qualified and graduate teachers. Around 750 have been recruited up to now.

In her meeting with the political head of the LTTE, S. P. Thamichelvam, Bellamy promised financial aid for education, health and vocational training for children who have been affected by war and currently being taken care in several childcare centres in Vanni, sources said.

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HSZ issues demand gradualist approach - Nambiar

Speaking at a conference held at the Jaffna district secretariat Wednesday evening, Lieutenant General Satish Nambiar, retired Deputy Chief of Staff of the Indian Army, said that the humanitarian issue of the high security zone (HSZ) is very important, but the security aspect should not be ignored, and a gradual approach to the issue is warranted, said sources in Jaffna.

The Government Agent, Mr.S.Pathmanathan, presided at the conference, which was attended by two Tamil National Alliance parliamentarians, Mr. Mavai Senathirajah and Mr.N.Raviraj. The Jaffna area Commander of the Sri Lanka Army, Major General Sarath Fonseka, Deputy Commander, Major General D.Ratnasabapathy, Navy and Police officials, and representatives of NGOs and welfare organizations, representatives of Jaffna University Students' Union and Tamil Eelam Students' Forum also participated at the conference, sources said.

The parliamentarians and repre-

sentatives of people's welfare organizations and NGOs spoke at the conference first and General Nambiar gave his views later. He said that representations made at the conference would be taken into consideration before finding a solution to the HSZ issue. "I cannot give any answer to your demands right away. If I were to give one, I would be bluffing all of you," he said.

"All of you have come here with very high expectations. We have to study three aspects of the HSZ issue in finding a solution. The first is the political aspect. I am not competent to speak on that. The second is the humanitarian aspect, and there is no question that it is very important. Every one recognizes it. The third aspect is security. I have been asked by the GOSL to examine the security aspect in the HSZ issue. If you do not address the security issue, the peace process itself will be affected," said General Nambiar.

At the outset, he clarified two aspects regarding his participation in the HSZ matter. "I retired from

the Indian army in 1985 and am a private citizen. I do not represent the Government of India. So please do not expect me to do some thing on behalf of India," he said. The other aspect is that "I have been invited by the GOSL in my personal capacity to advise on the HSZ issue. With my experience and whatever I have, I can make some suggestions. You cannot expect a miracle from me. You live with a conflict of twenty fivers old. I cannot produce a solution within three days, seven days or so. I know my limitations."

Concluding his speech, General Nambiar said, "I will come up with my suggestions after a careful study within my limited ability. Some may like my suggestions and some may not like. I cannot please everyone. I will contribute in a small way to find solution to the problem."

The NGOs and people's welfare organizations handed over memoranda to General Nambiar requesting him to take steps to enable the resettlement of displaced people in their lands in the HSZ, the sources said.

TRO collects detainee details

The Tamil Rehabilitation Organization (TRO) is planning to collect names and other details of Tamil youths and others arrested under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) and released after languishing several years in prisons in the south of the country without trial, for want of evidence and for other reasons, sources said.

The Trincomalee district co-ordinating secretary of the TRO Mr.K.Mathavarajah Saturday appealed to all who were charged under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) released from prisons in the Trincomalee district to register themselves with necessary details at the Trincomalee office of the TRO lo-

cated at 41, Thakkiya Lane, Trincomalee before 1 st of March this year.

Mr.Mathavarajah issued a press statement Saturday in this regard, sources said

Hundreds of Tamil youths continue to languish in Kalutara and other prisons in the south even after the ceasefire agreement between the United National Front (UNF) government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) came into force in February last year, human rights activists said. Several youths are detained solely on their confessions taken by security forces under torture or threat of violence, human rights sources said.

Remove SLA camps from schools' -CTTU

The continued presence of Sri Lankan armed forces' camps in many schools in the North-East, despite the passing of one year since the signing of the ceasefire agreement, has disrupted the education of students, and the camps should be removed immediately, said T. Mahasivam, the General Secretary of the Ceylon Tamil Teachers' Union (CTTU), speak-

ing at a gathering of teachers from the CTTU's Manmunai North (Batticaloa) branch at the Mahajana college in Batticaloa today.

"The Sri Lankan government has not acted in accordance with the ceasefire agreement. Though the agreement stipulates that the armed forces should be removed from schools, the forces continue to stay

in and/or in the vicinity of many schools in the North-East. The teachers are unable to teach and the students are deprived of a peaceful environment for learning," said Mahasivam, who was the invited guest speaker at the meeting.

Mahasivam said nearly 70 schools in the North-East are under the control of armed forces.

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Rights issue needs higher place in talks

By Feizal Samath

Sri Lanka's peace talks, now entering its sixth month, could lose credibility unless human rights issues are pushed even higher up at the top of the agenda, rights activists here warn

"Unless human rights issues are discussed the credibility of peace talks would be at stake," says Dr Rohan Edirisinha, director of the Centre for Policy Alternatives, a private think tank.

As the fifth round of talks are held this week in Berlin, rights groups are pushing for a separate memorandum of understanding on human rights between the government and Tamil rebels, to be monitored by a committee of foreign and local experts.

The current memorandum between the two sides, in force since early last year, covers the ceasefire and is monitored by a Norway-led committee.

The Feb.7-8 talks will take up the issue of human rights and allegations of large-scale conscription of children by the Tigers - who at the last round of talks said they were "not recruiting" youngsters and would not do so in the future.

This week's talks will have Martin, a former secretary general of Amnesty International, in attendance to provide advice on the human rights perspective and help shape a human rights agenda as part of the peace process.

His role was agreed upon by the government and rebel sides at the January talks in Thailand, and came after pressure to address the issue of rights in the nearly two-decade conflict, under which the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has been fighting for a homeland for minority Tamils.

During a three-day visit to Sri Lanka last week, U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF) executive director Carol Bellamy won the latest assurances from the rebels that they would not recruit children to their ranks.

But she conceded that similar assurances have been given in the past - and that the Tigers have not always followed up their words with deeds.

"I have been involved in these things long enough not to be naive about assurances, whether from the government or from non-state parties," she said. She said the LTTE could prove it is serious about stopping recruitment - and

about returning child combatants to their families - by developing a concrete action plan.

"We are however hopeful the LTTE will keep to its word," she added.

Some 350 children have been returned by the rebels to their families since November 2001, while 730 reported cases of child recruitment yet to be resolved, says UNICEF.

Human rights groups claim that hundreds have been recruited by the rebels during the ceasefire.

The University Teachers for Human Rights, a Colombo-based group comprising Tamil academics opposed to the LTTE, says the rebels have been demanding one child per family in the eastern town of Batticaloa. "The demand of one child per family was aired openly at a public meeting on Human Rights Day (Dec. 10, 2002) by top LTTE leaders," it said in a statement.

Analysts say the LTTE's change into a non-militant force - which it committed in earlier peace talks - will not happen overnight. In this context, they said, civil society and other groups must put the pressure on the rebels on human rights issues.

The 'Island' newspaper, in a Feb. 1 editorial, accused peace groups

of neglecting children's issues in order to be able to keep claiming success for the peace talks.

"The UNICEF director cannot take the easy path of some of the peace-seeking ambassadors in Colombo have done; Save the Peace and Damn the Children. That is exactly what has been happening for the past year," said the paper, which has been critical of Colombo's handling of the peace process.

The Ceasefire Monitoring Mission has said there is evidence of the Tigers conscripting more than 300 children up to November. Save the Children Norway, a child rights group, estimates that the LTTE could have anywhere between 2,000 to 4,000 child combatants.

Jehan Perera, director at the National Peace Council, believes the answer to the human rights issue lies in civil society pressure building up in the north itself - the area most affected by the conflict - against rights violations.

"There is no other way. Can the local or international community punish the Tigers? What sanctions can they impose?" he asked.

The Non Violent Peace Force, a Canadian-based NGO working on the lines of the Peace Brigade, is

sending three volunteers in the next few months to work on building civil society structures in the rebel-dominated north.

"Whether the LTTE will allow them to work there, remains to be seen. But the group wants to help set up peace-building structures in the north," Perera said. The group has worked before in Israel, Palestine and South America.

CPA's Edrisinha, who will be in Berlin as a resource person in a government-rebel subcommittee on political structures, said the proposed human rights agreement would be a kind of charter covering issues like freedom of speech, expression, women and children's rights, and right to dissent.

He said similar agreements have been implemented in other war-torn countries like Guatemala and El Salvador.

Meantime, many are also are watching the health of Tiger chief negotiator Anton Balasingham, who is suffering from a kidney ailment that makes traveling long distances difficult. The venue for this week's talks was shifted by Norwegian mediators from Thailand to Berlin, much closer for the London-based Balasingham to travel to. (IPS)

Living symbols and lost totems – a community

By Rajpal Abeynayake

Like some unwritten code of ethics, there can be such a thing called an unwritten code of 'community'. The sense of community that is felt among a collective of human beings, can go by many names, which are in themselves, quite rascally sometimes. For instance, a 'broad national identity' can be called 'patriotism' and it is well known the negative connotations that the word patriotism usually engenders.

But what is patriotism other than a well-developed sense of community? When the Columbia shuttle crashed, the Americans seemed to leave aside all their differences and the political polarisation that was emerging from the issue of the war on Iraq.

There wasn't any discordant voice when it came to the time for mourning, and this, whether it is called 'patriotism' or 'symbolism' or any other word, is nothing but a sense of community that is felt among millions of people who call themselves 'Americans.'

One wonders when this sort of sense of community was felt last in the Sri Lankan community. When did Sri Lanka, North South

Somehow our sense of community is shorn of the symbolism that is imbued in the American sense of community when it comes to matters such as commemorating events of significance, such as the Columbia disaster. This symbolism may be very basic, and it may be of an almost primeval nature, but the fact remains that this symbolism is very powerful in connoting a sense of community within a nation. So when god is evoked in Hebrew at a Memorial Service, nobody says that the American state is partial to the Jewish identity, and nobody strikes any discordant note on such extraneous grounds.

East and West, come together last in unison, to at least symbolically commemorate or observe a given event?

Perhaps the closest most people remember is Sri Lanka's victory at the World Cup cricket? Simplistic and absurd as this sounds this is said (with emphasis on said) to have been the only time when there was a real sense of community that was seen among all the people that inhabit the length and breath of this land. But, no matter what kind of respect they have for off spinner Muralitharan in the North, it is quite difficult to imagine that the people in the Wannu felt a sense

of community with the people in the South over the cricket World Cup when they were barely managing to fend off the fallout from a continuous armed conflict.

Somehow our sense of community is shorn of the symbolism that is imbued in the American sense of community when it comes to matters such as commemorating events of significance, such as the Columbia disaster. This symbolism may be very basic, and it may be of an almost primeval nature, but the fact remains that this symbolism is very powerful in connoting a sense of community within a nation. So when god is evoked in Hebrew at a Memorial

Service, nobody says that the American state is partial to the Jewish identity, and nobody strikes any discordant note on such extraneous grounds.

In India I was witness to this sense of community when I spoke to a three-wheeler driver in Delhi and the three-wheeler driver in Bangalore (who spoke Kannada as opposed to Hindi) both claiming separately: 'I am an Indian.' Now this is not to launch into a homily about the Sri Lankan identity and how all of us should be saying wherever we go that 'we are Sri Lankan.'

Symbols of community have died, which is why there seems to be an

attempt to resurrect them. When Tamil children from the North are asked to participate in Independence Day celebrations in Colombo there is a definite attempt to revive the symbols that go in to forming a sense of community that signifies a larger national identity. Resistance by the LTTE to such symbolism signifies the fact that there is a reason that forging such a sense of community is being avoided by them. It could be precisely the fear that such a sense of community will indeed be formed through the symbolism. Or it could be that it is a protest that a sense of community is being artificially created where there is room for none, because there is still no space for the North to feel one with the South after years of conflict.

Whatever it may be there will be no child-like (American) sense of community in Sri Lanka at the moment, because the symbolic elements that go into forming such a sense of identity are absent. In the South there is an effort to rebuild and restructure these lost symbolic totems. In the North we do not know. Does everybody in the North want to eschew these symbols forever, or is it just a matter of temporary uneasiness?

Formation of International Criminal Court, closer

By Jim Wurst

The International Criminal Court (ICC) came closer to reality this month (December 2002) with UN members agreeing on the details of crimes to be tried by the court.

Canadian ambassador Philippe Kirsch, chairman of a lengthy ICC preparatory meeting from Nov 29-Dec 17, said the session had been "very satisfactory" and he was confident all work on formation of the new court would be completed next year.

The ICC statutes, established in Rome in 2001, gave the Court authority to try individuals (not states) for three categories of crimes: genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.

Genocide already was defined in an international convention and the latest session of the committee dealt with refining the definitions of the other two categories, Kirsch said.

"Provisions on war crimes probably will not be altered significantly, but provisions on crimes against humanity - because they are more novel and most sensitive - might," he said.

"My sense is that many provisions...probably will be left as they are."

The definition of war crimes was, "well advanced...in many respects, probably in their final form," Kirsch said.

One breakthrough came with agreement on the issue of the transfer of populations by an occupying power. "It was a sensitive issue, but it was resolved," Kirsch said.

Crimes against humanity, however, remained "more difficult to resolve because you don't have as much of a basis to define them as you do for war crimes" and because such crimes can be committed in wartime or in peace, Kirsch said.

Crimes against humanity were classified as: murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation or forceable transfer of populations, imprisonment, torture, rape and other acts of sexual violence, persecutions, enforced disappearance of persons and apartheid - the separation of persons and communities based on their race.

The meeting also considered the question of aggression. "While everyone understands

aggression - the unprovoked attack by one state against another - there is no universal, legal definition," Kirsch said.

"Some states would like to have a very expansive definition with a lot of acts that would be aggression while other states would like to limit the act of aggression to being vague, classical acts."

No final decision is expected before June 2000, but the working group did come up with three alternative definitions, which will be debated in 2003. In general, the proposals draw from the Nuremberg and Tokyo tribunals after World War II and a 1974 UN General Assembly resolution on aggression.

This issue also involves the Security Council, since it is the only international body that legally can define an act of aggression and mobilize against it.

Kirsch framed the problem as a question: "Can the Court try a person as having committed an act of aggression if the Security Council has not determined that there has been aggression in the first place?"

The United States, which had opposed the statutes drawn up in Rome because the language failed

to exempt such US nationals as military personnel from the court's jurisdiction, had played a "constructive role" in the latest committee meeting, Kirsch said.

He acknowledged, however, that some difficulties remained. "The general issue for the United States is to ensure that their nationals will not be tried before the [Court]...The question is whether that position can be reconciled with the text and objectives of the statute."

Kirsch said the natural position of the United States would be on the side of the Court, "because if you look at history...there is trend of wanting to punish criminals who have committed serious international crimes. It is very unfortunate that this particular problem is preventing the US from joining all of us without reservation."

Bruce Broomhall of the non-governmental Lawyers Committee on Human Rights said the United States had not pushed its "Big Fix," which he defined as wording that would exempt US nationals and creating a Court "that only the Security Council can use" - in other words, a Court where Washington could exer-

cise its veto.

Instead, the United States had proposed a 'little fix' - rules that "would so entangle the prosecutor in the earliest stages of investigation in legal, procedural hurdles...that the Court would be good for nobody but the Security Council."

He said he found it "disturbing" that the four other veto-holding members of the Council "appeared to be going along with the United States" but the majority of other states rejected the proposal, Broomhall said.

Although 91 states have signed the ICC Statutes, they have been ratified by only six nations whereas 60 ratifications are needed for the court to become a reality.

Kirsch said he expected the rate of ratification to increase since states often have to pass new laws recognizing the Court before ratification can take place. He believed that within two years, many states would be ratifying the statutes at the same time.

"There is no question in my mind that, not only that the Court will exist, but it will exist reasonably soon." (IPS)

Cry, my beloved country!

By Bertram Bastiampillai

About 55 years have passed since we received Independence. Expectations were high in Sri Lanka as she was given Dominion Status in 1948 with no struggle, smoothly and calmly. But such sublime expectations were belied too soon. Stocktaking may provide an answer why and what went wrong, and give us a clue to understand the necessity for emergency rule for almost half of the 55 years.

A contentious issue with our neighbour, India, commenced in 1948-49, when numerous people of Indian descent, immigrants in British years of rule, were relegated to statelessness. Eight years after Independence, linguistic and religious pressure led to elevating Sinhala to be the sole official language. Those who spoke Tamil like the substantial numbers of Muslims and Tamils, and those who used English like the Burghers were now reduced almost to illiteracy and second class status. Riots against passively protesting Tamils became an endemic problem to the country. Submissiveness to marauding mobs engendered repeated large-scale violence in 1958, 1961 (mostly upcountry), 1977 and a savage "holocaust" in 1983.

The worm had turned meanwhile and the resulting Sinhala-Tamil conflict plagued the island, till a year ago when there was improvement with the truce and prospects for peace. In the interval India had intervened in an unstable and proximate country and a part of Sri Lanka was for a time under *de facto* Indian military management. Reminiscences of the island's pre-Portuguese

Additionally, an over-mighty militia or armed force and the maintenance of it with sophisticated and expensive armaments swell expenditure. The militia or security service has grown into a leviathan in a poor country short of resources. The German Empire in medieval times broke beneath the weight of the Holy Roman Empire it is said. Sri Lanka might be crushed by the intolerable burdensome costs of her oversized armed forces

past, cluttered with South Indian incursions, invasions, and the Chola administration of Polonnaruwa and the North were aroused in the minds of discerning citizens.

The island, which was a model colony and witnessed no violence unlike the Indian subcontinent or Burma around Independence, was now experiencing ample trouble and trauma. A coup in 1962 was abortive. It provoked developing a militia, which grew stronger and stronger after the Sinhalese youth uprising in 1971, and the Sinhalese-Tamil strife and forays from about the mid-seventies. Anyway another abortive coup occurred and yet another and more sinister youth uprising.

War was waged in the north between the Tamil Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam rebels and the Indian Peacekeeping Force while the south suffered under the Sinhalese Peoples' Liberation Front, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna. No one was safe with so much fear even in prisons,

because of two massacres of incarcerated Tamil rebels. After all a government spokesman and minister, Ranjan Wijeratne had fulminated against human rights in Sri Lanka while talking to famed journalist, Anita Pratap in 1989. He was candid and made it clear that the state should rule with a strong arm.

Sri Lanka had a constitution in 1948. It was secular and provided for the smaller communities in a plural country certain safeguards against acts of discrimination by the majority, the Sinhalese. Ultra-nationalism had grown strong and an autochthonous constitution was steered through a constituent assembly by a "Trotskyite" minister and an extremely nationalist Sinhalese-dominant legislature in 1972. There was nothing in it to inspire confidence or allegiance among smaller communal groups in a multi-communal island.

Not surprisingly, six years later in 1978, another constitution was created and the trend

was to enshrine power at the centre solidly in an executive president, immune from suit, unquestionable and unaccountable. Three constitutions in fifty years of independence, and with so many amendments! The 13th Amendment inspired by India was meant to assuage the oppressed and suffering Tamils but it came too late and gave too little. The enigma now is how to amend it. There is little hope because of political rivalry.

Apart from turbulence, disturbed law and order and continuing conflict, the economy of Sri Lanka after over 50 years of independence has plummeted to an all time low. Unemployment is rampant, human resources wasted, and money for development has to be sought from donors and aid agencies. A country once endowed with a sound educational system and establishments, has to now rebuild her ill affected schooling and disturbed university systems. It is often perceived that a "take-over" of schools was in order to

depress educational efforts of Christian missionaries so that it would boost indigenous Buddhist educational enterprise. Sadly the wish is far from being realized even after 40 years since 1961, and the effort has yielded no good at all.

Infrastructure and the public sector too have suffered in the over 50 years of Independence. About nearly half the population is below poverty level while a minuscule number of the people are enjoying ostentatious affluence. Corruption admittedly among those in the higher rungs of authority and power is scandalous and rampant. While those in political power and in the superior positions in administration may fly around the world, the lower-middle and poorer classes languish in distress struggling to make ends meet as prices soar higher and higher from time to time. Strikes affect essential services - even medical care - while private practice in the medical fraternity greater yield and more returns. These are but a few ills of a society in a sad state.

Additionally, an over-mighty militia or armed force and the maintenance of it with sophisticated and expensive armaments swell expenditure. The militia or security service has grown into a leviathan in a poor country short of resources. The German Empire in medieval times broke beneath the weight of the Holy Roman Empire it is said. Sri Lanka might be crushed by the intolerable burdensome costs of her oversized armed forces. It is however yet not too late to work to achieve the dream of Singapore status in South Asia.

Cry, my beloved country!

What is the real contingency plan for our children?

By Ganendran Shanmugaratnam

I would like to openly challenge the following people, including the Sri Lankan government, Carol Bellamy of UNICEF, the Sri Lankan opposition, or even the University Teachers for Human Rights, whether or not they have a contingency plan for our children who are fighting for their future. Certainly, these people do have no answer. Should words match with actions? Without knowing the cause-effect relationship of the war, some people are raising the issue of the rights of our children. Our children lost their rights 54 years ago. They still need their fundamental rights. Is anyone listening yet? There is no

contingency plan for our children. I do not think that anyone is willing to provide this support for our children.

The main aim of this "chorus" is to create a negative image and damage to the on going peace process. Tamils do not have a recognised government and thus their voice in the peace table is not heard very well. Everyone is pretending to be hearing the voices of the Tamil people and Tamil children.

It is certainly not happening. Some people think they can yet again deceive the Tamil people. Tamil people need more brain than brawn to be successful in the peace talks. Should the vital few important to trivial many? Tamils should demand that the government pay compensation for the internally displaced people. Tamils

should demand that the government pay compensation for the lost farming, including rice cultivation and other food and filed crops cultivation. The annual loss is in multi billions. Does anyone care about this loss to our people? Houses along the every major high way and roads leading to Jaffna are occupied by the Sri Lankan armed forces. The armed forces are involved in cultivation, fishing, occupation of houses, and certainly they are enjoying the Jaffna paradise at the expense of the internally displaced people. Our children need education and employment opportunities. Create a situation where these children can live, learn and work without any fear! and tear and then talk about "child soldiers".

It is sad that the some

people are talking about the rights of the children while denying their rights to living, education and employment in their own land. Is the right to live important than anything else? Many children do not have house, education and training facility, and peaceful settings so that they can solely focus on their career and future in Tamil homeland.

The current peace talk is not a peace talk. It is not yielding any dividends to the Tamil people yet. Will the LTTE be trapped by the peace talk? The peace talk is a pseudo "drama".

Peace will not succeed as long as a solution to the burning issues of children, youths and the Tamil people as whole is found. Children have been displaced during the 30 years of war. Should people

first talk about the impact of the war on the children? It is not enough to showing interest in keeping the children out of battlefield. They need their human rights to come out of the battlefield.

They need the right to live, learn, employ, and make a career and independent living. Play a proactive role in bringing these fundamental changes and then cry for our children. Would the people know that Tamils do not want to lose their younger generation too? Do not wait for the Berlin talk. Berlin talk will do nothing. Develop an action plan to provide the basic human rights for our children, including education, training, support, and employment for these children.

Am I wrong yet?

(Tamil Circle)

Why Feb. 4th has no meaning for minorities

By Professor Karthigesu Sivathamby

We were told that as in the case of the last Vesak, Christmas and Thai Pongal celebrations, independence day too was going to commemorated be on a grand scale because not only was there no war, but also talks towards peace were progressing well.

February 4th 1947 was no doubt a landmark in the history of this country. On that day there was transfer of power by the British to the political elite of this country, most of who, hastily combined to create a United National Party. Some of the Marxists and some of the able lawyers of the day like the late S. Nadesan argued that Whitehall continued to have a political hold over Ceylon.

This was quite unlike what happened in India and Pakistan. In India, it was dream coming true after years of selfless fighting by patriots who stunned the might of the British Empire by their outstanding valor and devotion to their country. During the years of struggle for independence, India produced one of the most memorable human beings Mohanadas Karamchand Gandhi who was hailed as Mahatma, the great soul. Such was the breadth, depth, genuineness and conviction that lay behind the claim for a *swaraj* for India.

For Pakistan too, August 14, 1947 was equally memorable because that was a day of achievement for the dreams of Jinnah and the later day poet Iqbal. Of course creation of Pakistan meant wounds created by political surgery were yet to heal.

In the case of Sri Lanka (then Ceylon), there were no popular uprisings, public outcries or patriotic wars. It was simply the Attlee government had decided upon the dismemberment of the pre-war colonial legacy and Whitehall began to think more in terms of a neo-colonialist strategies. Except perhaps for the highly idealistic members of the Jaffna-based Students later Youth Congress, there was no clamor for *poorana swaraj*. In fact the granting of independence was more an act of administrative strategy to overcome some of the problems that arose in the Soulbury Constitution.

Perhaps it would be useful at this 55th year of our independence to compare what happened in Sri Lanka with what happened in India. Of course we did not have a person of the stature of Jawaharlal Nehru whose literary competence matched his political vision.

India immediately appointed a

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

What happened to the Indian Tamils who constituted the backbone of economy, instilled such a fear in the minds of some Tamils that they for the first time brought in a geographic dimension to the minority problem or communal problem as it was then called. The FP demanded a federal unit for the north and east

Constituent Assembly with the Law Minister Ambedkar at the helm to draft a new Constitution, drawing on India's right to rule itself from within and to make historically disparate and culturally integrated India into a single Indian Union. We did not have any such thing. The problem of the minority representation, which was a burning issue for the Soulbury Commission, was considered duly settled with the induction of G.G. Ponnambalam as a Minister in the government, unlike in the case of India, which tried to bring so many language groups with distinct cultures of their own into one union.

Ceylon started its period of independence with disenfranchising the Indian Tamils. They had seven Members of Parliament from the plantations at that time. Nationalist minded and left oriented Sinhalese themselves opposed this vehemently. Historically more important is the fact that this led to the birth of the Tamil Arasu Kadchchi, the Federal Party in 1949. What happened to the Indian Tamils who constituted the backbone of economy, instilled such a fear in the minds of some Tamils that they for the first time brought in a geographic dimension to the minority problem or communal problem as it was then called. The FP demanded a federal unit for the north and east.

Eight years later in 1956 there came the Sinhala Only with no reference to the non-Sinhala-speaking citizens of this country. I think it was in 1956 when India appointed the State Re-organisation Committee under the chairmanship of the great historian K.M. Panikar who recommended the formation of linguistic states. Looking back, it was acceptance of the linguistic diver-

sity that effectively brought together the unity of India. Subramania Bharathi, the Tamil poet, spoke of India as having 18 languages all with a single thought.

With Sinhala made the sole official language, Sri Lankan oneness about which every citizen was proud, shattered. Burghers began to migrate in large numbers to Down Under and the Tamils began to feel more Tamil than Sri Lankan. The concept of post-colonialism has not had much application to delineate Sri Lankan politics, but we can now say that the bane of British colonialism in the post-colonial era had been the import of the concept of numerical majority as a political guiding principle in a country with a permanent minority. The caution that

Equating Sri Lanka with one community alone is not gong to help Sri Lanka as a whole. The Sri Lankan Tamils and the Sri Lankan Muslims should be enabled to consider this country as much their motherland as the Sinhalese do

India exercised in the case of it official language policy namely that of Hindi was not heeded in Sri Lanka.

If I may not misunderstood by my non Tamil friends, what happened in post-1956 Sri Lankan politics was not so much the implementation of Sinhala as the sole official language, but Sinhalese of the entire administrative and political machinery.

The Tamils were prepared to

learn Sinhala and there were in Jaffna leading Buddhist monks teaching that language in the better-known schools. The Muslims also learned Sinhala. It was however not the use of the Sinhala language but insistence on Sinhalese the staff and geographical areas, which made the Tamils and Muslims to hold on steadfastly to their Northeastern areas and identities. When they were threatened in the areas where they were working and had established themselves as its people, the slogan of the Traditional Homeland began to gradually emerge.

Sri Lanka began following a policy that was threatening its solidarity. In these columns, I have quite often referred to the total absence of any program of real national integration. The system of education was democratically planned to give pride of place to the mother tongue but was undemocratically implemented, creating a permanent division between the Tamil and Sinhala youths. As one Tamil militant told me in late 80s, there was no chance given to the Tamil youth to feel that they were Sri Lankans.

Here again we should go back to India and see how they had, from the start pursued a policy of national integration bringing the languages into language groups that were close to each other. They created two great academies for this purpose of integration. One: the Sahithiya Academy and the other: Sangeetha Natak Academy. The theme of integration was an overriding principle that governed state electronic media. There was alternation of dramas, musical programs, etc. and to this day that system remains. The achievements

Tamil folk theatre is taken as having been inspired by the theatrical activities of Ediriweera Sarathchandra. Thanks to great artists like the late Dhamma Jagoda there has been an interaction between the Sinhala and the Tamil theatre personalities. All these friendly interactions were not because the state created opportunities for them. It was purely because concerned people went in search of each other, as creative artistes would do.

The post Dhamma Jagoda, A.J. Gunawardena (the critic) period is so barren that the Sinhala theatre-goers have not had a chance to see Shanmugalingam's masterpieces that gave a new life and direction to the Sri Lankan Tamil theatre. It is a pity that the average Tamil reader of South India knows more about Shanmugalingam than devoted Sinhala theatre artistes. In the field of literature and music, we have not been even so fortunate. (I should hasten to add that artistes like Vasanthakumar and W.D. Amaradeva have never failed to interact with Tamil intellectuals and artistes.) In literature the list become much thinner. Except for devoted writers like Madulgiriya Wijeratne there was hardly any active interaction. Of course we have had many literary 'front people' speaking about Tamil and Sinhala literary interactions, but nothing happened. This is basically because we have not developed sincerely a sense of creativity artistic unity among the genuine artistes.

One should not deny that there had been literature panels and drama panels for Tamil too, but in the field of literature there is now total alienation between the Sinhala and the Tamil writers.

Sri Lanka's independence should instill a sense of belonging to all its children. It is the duty of all concerned to create that sense of belonging. Equating Sri Lanka with one community alone is not gong to help Sri Lanka as a whole. The Sri Lankan Tamils and the Sri Lankan Muslims should be enabled to consider this country as much their motherland as the Sinhalese do.

Unless and until such time as that sense is created, February 4th may not have much relevance to the numerically smaller communities. If India could have 18 languages speaking with one thought and voice, why cannot it be done in a country where there are only two languages and a group of people who are related to each other in their day to day lives and dreams?

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Double standards on notice boards

The government has intervened to prevent the erection of a billboard at the entrance of Batticaloa town near the Pillayar kovil and ordered it be removed. The billboard had stated, 'Welcome to the land where courage grows,' and was illustrated by the picture of a combatant carrying the body of another.

This billboard was like any other one finds at the entrance to all our major cities that try to bring out the character, or what the city is famous for. The towns in the hill country advertise their tea, as cities renowned for their tourist attraction boast of what is beautiful or of interest to the visitor.

Similarly, in keeping with the passages of arms that have taken place on Batticaloa soil over the past 20 years, the people want to remind the visitor of their glorious past in battle. As much as there are public references to the Wellessa uprising in those areas where it took place, here is a city making a public statement on its own recent history.

But what has made the highhanded action of the government into an act of puerility is the involvement of a minister in the fiasco. It is learnt that unable to resolve the controversy between themselves and the Batticaloa public on whether the billboard should be erected or not, the security forces had appealed to Minister Milinda Moragoda to have it removed, a request the minister had complied with.

Though it might appear the matter is one of making a mountain out of molehill, the incident is a symbol of the deep-seated inequalities that govern relations between the Sinhala-run Sri Lankan state and the Tamils.

Even if we assume the minister enforced the order to have the billboard uprooted in keeping with the MOU, which states the parties should refrain from propagating ideas that could offend cultural or religious sensitivities, his action smacks of double standards.

If the billboard that makes but a passing a reference to the military prowess of the eastern people so offends the security forces that they want it removed, how come blatantly provocative boards in Jaffna that not only offend the cultural sentiments of the Tamils, but also falsify history are allowed to remain?

We refer to a board erected before the ruined treasures of Kantharaodai in Jaffna. The military has not only built a cement statue of the Buddha at this place of archaeological value, but has violated the regulations of the Department of Archaeology by putting up a board with spurious information that states in Sinhala and English 'purana raja mahavihare.' Pictorial evidence of this act of deception could be obtained from page one of the *Northeastern Herald* of 31 January this year.

Leave aside the double standards of intervening in Batticaloa to appease the military, while turning a blind eye to the military's antics in Jaffna, the government's actions go to show the very basics of federalism - allowing the periphery to manage its affairs on such mundane matters without creating a fuss - have not sunk into the heads of the ministers.

If for a mere billboard Moragoda - widely depicted as a dove and integrally involved in the peace process - could indulge in such buffoonery what can expect from the others in the government?

Factoring the LTTE into the Indian Ocean equation

By D. Sivaram (Taraki)

The dismantling of the Soviet Union created a security vacuum in the Indian Ocean almost a decade ago. India, US-Japan and China are discretely and sometimes openly, vying to position themselves advantageously in the ocean to fill the vacuum.

To do so, each party will need not only powerful blue water navies roaming the high seas as mobile platforms for deploying sufficient force to intimidate opponents on the ocean's littoral and hinterlands but will have to patrol and monitor strategic sea lanes and maritime choke points or straits. It is also necessary for each party to cultivate as many security partnerships as possible with countries on the littoral, particularly the ones bordering the strategic straits, sea lane confluences and gulfs in the Indian Ocean.

The conflict in Sri Lanka should also be viewed in this context.

The Indian Ocean is home to important Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) and maritime choke points. A large volume of international long haul maritime cargo from the Persian Gulf, Africa and Europe transits through this ocean. This sea-borne trade, primarily oil, virtually affects every aspect of the daily lives of most people of the world.

Similarly, the Southeast Asian choke points of the Malacca, Sunda and Lombok Straits affect the economic vitality of the Asia-Pacific region. Measured by the sheer volume of merchant traffic transiting these straits, in 1993, almost half of the world's merchant fleet capacity and one-third of the world's ships sailed through these choke points. Shipping traffic through the Malacca Strait is several times greater than the traffic either through the Suez Canal or the Panama Canal.

The shipping lane transiting the Indian Ocean and entering the strategic choke point of Southeast Asia has great geo-strategic importance to the United States, China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan and the Southeast Asian countries. Given these conditions, the northern Indian Ocean is booming with maritime activity, and both economic and security interests impact in a concentrated form.

By its very location, India lies approximately half way between the Strait of Hormuz and the Strait of Malacca. Both these choke points have the potential to become major flash points. There are alternatives to the Strait of Malacca but there are no other routes to transport the Arabian Gulf oil except through pipelines over land, which is next to impossible, given the rivalries that strain the region.

Therefore, any contingency in the Strait of Hormuz will impact directly on all the vital Sea Lines

Indian analysts stress a proactive role for the Indian Navy in this area. One of them says, "The mercantile traffic transiting the Malacca Strait passes close to the Indian area of maritime interest and, therefore, any unforeseen contingency or development in the Malacca Strait places greater responsibility on India to preserve order at sea".

of Communication (SLOC) between the northwestern and eastern sectors of the Indian Ocean, on which the economies of China and Japan depend.

India and the US/Japan alliance are concerned about the growing influence of China on the most strategic SLOC of the Indian Ocean - the one between the Persian Gulf and the Malacca Strait.

The Chinese have quietly built very strong military and economic ties with Iran, which dominates the northern part of the Persian Gulf, with a vital grip on the Strait of Hormuz. China is building a large naval facility for the Iranians in Bandar Abbas, the port that sits astride the strategic strait through which half the world's traded oil passes.

As long as Iran and Iraq remain the major military powers on the Persian Gulf's littoral, US and its allies, Japan and Britain, cannot fully secure their vital SLOCs and prevent China from emerging a major force to reckon with. The British carved out Mesopotamia (Iraq) from the Ottoman Empire for themselves in World War I to strengthen their position militarily in the Persian Gulf.

Today the US and its allies want to do the same thing to protect, among other things, their SLOCs with greater ease and ensure the unimpeded flow of oil through the Strait of Hormuz.

China has made inroads into the littoral of the Red Sea from which another strategic sea lane flows into the eastern sector of the Indian Ocean. It is working on oil drilling and refining projects for the embattled government of Sudan, now engaged in peace talks with Christian rebels mediated by the west. It is perhaps no accident that Eritrea, which occupies a strategic position on the choke point between the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, was able to easily bargain with the world for its secession from Ethiopia.

The Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal have also become more vital, considering the fact that Japan, US and China intend to ship vast quantities of oil and natural gas out of the Central Asian republics.

Here too China has moved smoothly to strengthen its position by helping Pakistan build a large port and related facilities in

Gwadar would eventually provide facilities for sea borne trade and transshipment of cargo, including gas from/to the Central Asian states and, Xinjiang in China.

China is assisting Pakistan to develop Gwadar with the strategic aim of watching its sea-lane from the Persian Gulf. In pure geographical terms, Gwadar is of strategic importance for China and helps it to sit astride the sea-lane originating from the strategic choke point of Hormuz.

By its geographic location, the Indian peninsula dominates the SLOCs from the Persian Gulf before they round off south of Dondra Head in Sri Lanka.

In 2000 China signed a deal with the PA regime to develop an alternative to the Trinco oil tank farm and to build a large facility to pump oil from ships at sea off the coast of Muthurajawela. China's close military and economic ties with Sri Lanka are well known.

But what is of greater interest is that China has "engineered a manner of a coup by coaxing Maldives' Abdul Gayoom government to let it establish a base in Marao". According to media reports, the deal was finalised during the Chinese Prime Minister Zhu Rongji visit to Male in May 2001. In geo-strategic terms, this development is indeed noteworthy and would enable China to monitor its sea-lanes that run along the Indian coast.

Besides, it would be able to monitor US naval activity at Diego Garcia and also engage in electronic surveillance in the area, a development similar to its electronic surveillance initiatives in Kiribati in the Pacific Ocean.

Further, before it enters the Malacca Strait, the SLOC from the Persian Gulf passes close to the Indian islands of Andaman and Nicobar where the Indian Navy is developing substantial monitoring and patrolling capabilities.

India realises the unique strategic advantage it enjoys in dominating the 'mouth of the vital Malacca Strait into the Bay of Bengal.

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Celebrating February 4th: independence or betrayal?

By V. T. Thamilmaran

"A house half divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure permanently half-slave and half-free." (Comment made by Abraham Lincoln when he contested US Senate election from Illinois in 1858).

Independence days are not for mere territories but for nations. It is an occasion on which people feel proud about their nationhood and national spirit, remembering the past and pledging for the future. That is why it's called *National Independence Day*.

Just two days back Sri Lanka celebrated its 55th year of independence. As a person who was born nearly a decade after independence, 4th of February has been a non-event for me, for all intents and purposes. Every time the occasion comes around, I never failed to pose this question to myself: Don't you think it is an occasion for celebration? Unfortunately, I am still on the lookout for a positive answer.

I look around and wonder who are those people I see, celebrating this day? Only those who gather at the Torrington square once a year? Only those school children and members of the armed forces who take part in by way of performing their official roles? Only those who carry out instructions they received, starting from the District Secretary level to a local politician?

Are all of those who celebrate the *day* real patriots? Do they really love the country and respect it as their motherland? How much have they contributed in making Sri Lanka a nation? I don't deny that there are other reasons as well to get oneself engaged in the discussion on the socio-political analysis of the flag hoisting and other functions specially designed for the consumption of the rural-poor masses. There is no end to these kinds of questions coming to my mind and disturbing me from thinking of the real meaning of independence and the mood of celebration.

It might have become difficult for me to think about celebrating since my firm belief in human rights and democracy refuses to recognize certain false values and condone some actions that are proudly being performed in the name of the state of which I happen to be a citizen.

As I am repeatedly reminded that 'it is not enough to be a member of the human race only but I need something more,'

A nation must be owned by its people. The pertinent question remains; it is not what prevents you from owning it but why are you prevented from doing so

the celebration mood pathetically fails to move me on this day.

Am I alone in this category of those in the twilight zone? If you put together all of those people like me, then you would find what went wrong and when this started to infect us. Why does only one section of the community think that it's a day for celebration and the other doesn't? If it is something for celebration, human nature demands that it should be certainly for all to do so. Why is it not so in Sri Lanka?

Does independence mean the same thing to all of us in this country? What does it mean to me? Have I become a Sri Lankan in the true sense of the term? If not, why? Do I feel proud to say that I am a Sri Lankan? If not, are all of us traitors to the *nation*? Then, how could there be a *national independence day*?

Here comes the identity crisis. It is not just the national anthem, national flag or even the national language that make us ponder over our identity. Fifty-five years are, of course, a very long time in finding ways and means to solve the issue of this identity crisis. Has anything been done towards building a common identity during this period? A *nation* must be owned by its people. The pertinent question remains; it is not what prevents you from owning it but why are you prevented from doing so.

Of course, rulers of Ceylon (as it was then) decided to grant independence to the country in accordance with the agreement they had reached with the Ceylonese leaders of that time. In finding such an agreement, the minority community of the country got very much disappointed as almost all of its alternative proposals were disregarded by the British rulers. The arrangement went substantially according to what was proposed by the (pan-Sinhala) Board of Ministers of the State Council.

The British Government issued a Declaration in May 1943 and thereby it requested the Board of Ministers to undertake the preparation of a 'constitutional scheme' to be considered immediately after the war was over. This scheme would have to be considered for the purpose of effecting major reform of

Ceylon's constitution. The intended reform was in the form of "full responsible government under the Crown in all matters of self-government." The Declaration further stated that "such proposals of the Ministers will be examined by a suitable commission or conference."

The Declaration had laid down certain conditions subject to which the proposals were to be made by the Board of Ministers. The acceptance of any such proposal by the British Government would depend, firstly, upon full compliance with those conditions set out in the Declaration. Secondly, these were to be approved by three quarters of all members of the State Council.

The multi-ethnic Council elected in 1936 consisted of 39 Sinhalese representatives; and in order to get the necessary two-thirds majority 'the scheme' required at least 44 votes in its favour in the Council. As far as the board was concerned it was a 'difficult condition.' The main

As Dr. Nihal Jayawickrama pointed out, it had no ideological basis, and professed no economic or social objectives. It had failed to take into consideration any of the particularities of Ceylonese society. However, the Commission in its Report emphasized the need for certain constitutional safeguards against the exercise of power by the 'permanent and unassailable majority'

reason for the difficulty was due to the fact that the Board consisted only of Sinhalese ministers. The minorities were prepared to support any such proposals if these were to ensure adequate and effective checks on the exercise of legislative power of any new self-government thus proposed.

It was an open secret that the 'constitutional scheme' was prepared for the Board of Ministers by Sir Ivor Jennings, then

Principal of the Ceylon University College. There was no public participation in its preparation, nor was it submitted for approval by the people. When the British Government announced in July 1944 its decision to appoint a commission to examine the Ministers' proposals and for 'providing full opportunity for consultation to take place with various interests including minority communities.'

When the Commission visited Ceylon under the Chairmanship of Viscount Soulbury, the Board of Ministers decided to boycott the Commission on the ground that the intended consultation went beyond the terms of reference by the Declaration of 1943. However, since the commission ignored this objection, D.S. Senanayake made it a point to meet the commissioners at private meetings and informal gatherings. No one was sure about what transpired at these private meetings. But, the final outcome was adoption of the ministers' proposals by the commission with minimum changes.

The 1946 Constitution was the first in a series of Westminster-Whitehall Model Constitutions, which Britain provided for its colonies on the eve of their independence. As Dr. Nihal Jayawickrama pointed out, it had no ideological basis, and pro-

that failed attract the attention of our national leaders was that at the very first general elections held in 1947 under the new Constitution all the Tamil members of the old State Council were routed. Were the Tamil people happy with the Soulbury Constitution? Why it did fail to help in building a nation?

At the next stage, one of the fundamental mistakes many of us make is that we always refer to Section 29 in isolation; and not in relation to other institutional safeguards contained in the Soulbury constitution. It is true that this matter couldn't have been helpful for any court of law in interpreting that section. But, when it comes to safeguards against 'permanent and unassailable' majority, we should give equal importance to provisions for multi-member constituencies, six nominated members in the House of representatives, a second chamber (15 elected and 15 nominated), an independent Public Service Commission and continuation with the appeal procedure to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council.

When Dr. Colvin R de Silva wanted to make Ceylon the Republic of Sri Lanka he had to try hard to do away not with Section 29 but the other provisions, which in his opinion prevented him from adopting an autochthonous constitution.

Makers of the First Republican Constitution, instead of entrenching the existing institutional safeguards, were hell bent on doing away with them in the name of patriotism and commitments to so-called progressive ideologies. When defending the removal Section 29 from the status of constitutional safeguard, Dr. Silva took much pain to explain its uselessness. But, being constitutional expert, he tactfully dodged the issue of his failure to introduce the other institutional safeguards that existed under the Soulbury Constitution.

In simple terms, what Dr. Silva had introduced was a simple mechanism of resolving any possible dispute between a group of three persons and a group of two by way of putting the matter to vote. One could not make a complaint anywhere except to the body that decides according to a group's voting strength. What a brilliant idea it was! The Second Republican Constitution came into existence just to perpetuate the previous wrongs in a rightful way.

That is why even today there is a long way to march towards *national independence!*

Another interesting scenario

IMF/World Bank policies pave way for continuing famine in Africa

By Brian Smith

The World Food Programme (WFP) estimates that more than 38 million people in over 25 countries across the African continent are in need of food assistance.

Following two, three or four consecutive years of drought and erratic weather, the situation for 2003 looks bleak. Most agencies expect this year to be as bad as the famines of the 1980s and 1990s, or worse. The situation is compounded by the huge growth in HIV/AIDS, but also, as the United Nations/Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) reports, it is due to the policies of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank.

The famine is largely ravaging the east coast of Africa from the Horn of Africa down through the Great Lakes to Southern Africa. Famine is also to be found in the less high-profile Western Sahel, of which the worst affected country is Mauritania where 420,000 people are facing famine—about one-sixth of the population. A further one million farmers and herders are described as “food insecure,” with around two-thirds of all communes described as “extremely” or “highly” food insecure.

In normal circumstances Mauritania, a very poor rural economy, can meet only 25 percent of its food need through its own production. Commercial imports cover up to an additional five months of need, with the remaining seven months described as the “lean period” when farmers eat their reserves and wild foods where available, and resort to selling fuel wood and charcoal to earn income. But freak storms a year ago killed 20 people and 120,000 cattle, sheep and goats, and destroyed one quarter of all harvested crops and six metric tonnes (MT) of rice. It also rotted the already dry pastures, and destroyed around 6,000 homes, schools and other buildings.

In addition, 2002 saw the worst drought in over two decades, in a country which has had 30 years of climatic degradation, drought and desertification, causing the major agricultural zone to shrink to a 200km-wide strip running east/west. The crucial June rains came late and erratically, which delayed or even postponed the planting of *dieri* (or rain-fed) crops. The high-water period, on which the *walo* (or flood recession) crops rely, lasted only 12 days rather than the usual three to four months.

The storms and following drought severely affected the traditional “survival strategies” for the lean period, as herders rely on killing some of their live-

Under IMF structural adjustment programmes, the state is no longer “food security guarantor”. Commodity boards that fixed producer prices and collected farmers’ produce are abolished, and the task handed over to the private sector. In addition, the social services on which the poor depend and as well subsidies to small farmers are being curtailed

stock at this time of year, and also there was less wild food than usual due to the drought.

Consequently, the government estimates that it is short at least 160,000 MT of grain, and international donor response has been poor, in part because of more high-profile famine crises in the east and south of Africa.

Signs of malnutrition are on the increase, especially among children and adolescents. These include exhaustion, weight loss, night blindness, dehydration, diarrhoea and hunger-related deaths. Epidemics such as measles are also expected, and only the improved water situation is currently holding off major famine. Desperate farmers have resorted to cutting down immature crops, and eating next year’s seed reserves to survive. There has been a sharp rise in deaths from eating toxic wild berries. Donkeys, which are used for carrying water, have been dying in droves.

Many communities are reliant on unreliable weekly car services from urban areas with remittances from relatives. The situation in urban areas is increasingly desperate as large numbers of migrants, including whole families, arrive from the countryside. There is also severe degradation of pastures and huge herd migrations from the north to the Senegal River area take their toll.

Comparisons are being made with the severe famines in Ethiopia of the early 1980s. However, this current famine is expected to be worse, with 11 million people already affected compared to 8 million in 1984/85. In addition, per capita income was \$190 per year in 1981 but only \$108 in 2001, whilst the HIV/AIDS epidemic has increased the numbers of dependents per household, and in many cases left child-led households. The epidemic has also left many farmers too weak to plant or harvest, and also has forced the healthy to spend precious time looking after the ill.

Eritrea has had three years of drought and the rainfall in 2002 was the worst in 15 years. It has appealed for 477,000 MT of grain with 2.3 million (68 percent) of its population affected by the drought.

Border closures with Sudan and Ethiopia and the ongoing war have exacerbated the situation.

Sudan has itself requested 78,000 MT of food aid for the south of the country until September 2003 and 117,000 households also need 1,800 MT of seeds. Sudan has seen a steady increase in food aid required since 1999. Refugees and migrant herds from Ethiopia are arriving in Somalia, worsening the situation there.

In the Great Lakes region the situation is not as desperate, though 77,000 will have food shortage in Tanzania, and up to 86,000 in Rwanda. In Burundi, 7,500 people are in receipt of World Food Programme food aid, in a situation exacerbated by guerrilla war, and Uganda has lost 40-50 percent of its maize production and faces shortages.

In southern Africa, the main countries affected by famine are Zambia, Zimbabwe and Malawi, though Mozambique, Madagascar, Lesotho and Swaziland have all suffered some degree of food crisis.

In Zambia, over three million people need food aid at least up to March or April. Only 13 percent of the total relief-aid requested has

ping towards a “barter economy”, notes *Stratfor.com*. Inflation currently stands at 198 percent and the IMF believes it will reach 500 percent in 2003. Food prices account for 60 percent of this rise, though President Mugabe has announced a salary freeze to curb inflation, partially in an attempt to please the IMF. Zimbabwe needs 300,000 MT of food aid by April, of which two thirds has been met.

Malawi, even in “normal” conditions, can meet only 10 percent of its food requirement, but following heavy rains, floods and the recent Cyclone Delfina it is in a dire situation. Delfina damaged 23,500 hectares of crops and affected 57,000 households. There is also a cholera epidemic brought on by the floods. President Muluzi has declared a state of disaster, and has appealed for food and non-food aid.

Elsewhere in Southern Africa, Mozambique is also suffering the effects of Cyclone Delfina, which has put the growing season at risk. Cases of malnutrition are rising, and there is an increasing need for food assistance with the number at risk recently rising dramatically from 600,000 to 1.4 million.

What is more, all the countries suffering from famine are heavily indebted. This is in large part due to previous IMF and World Bank policies that encouraged poor countries to take out loans. As a result of their debt repayments many of them are incapable of buying food on the world market and are reliant on donor assistance

been met. This is the third consecutive year of food crisis and erratic weather and “survival strategies” are all but used up.

In Zimbabwe, however, where 8 million people (66 percent) require food aid, the “formal economy” has been allowed to collapse, and the country is slip-

ping towards a “barter economy”, notes *Stratfor.com*. Inflation currently stands at 198 percent and the IMF believes it will reach 500 percent in 2003. Food prices account for 60 percent of this rise, though President Mugabe has announced a salary freeze to curb inflation, partially in an attempt to please the IMF. Zimbabwe needs 300,000 MT of food aid by April, of which two thirds has been met.

This widespread and growing

famine is becoming a continent-wide famine in which millions across Africa face death either directly from malnutrition or from illness brought on by hunger. Extreme weather conditions are nothing new in Africa and are not in themselves the cause of the famine. As IRIN observes, “The failure of rains over two consecutive seasons should not have precipitated a crisis as deep as the region has now experienced.”

The collapse into famine follows a more protracted economic decline. A recent UNICEF report showed that 59 percent of children under the age of five were already malnourished in Zambia in 2000. In Malawi it was 49 percent; in Lesotho, 44 percent; and Zimbabwe, 27 percent.

IRIN also questions what it calls the “Washington consensus” on market reforms promoted by the IMF and the World Bank, which “frown on government intervention, and look at short-term financial considerations rather than medium-term food security”.

Under IMF structural adjustment programmes, the state is no longer “food security guarantor”. Commodity boards that fixed producer prices and collected farmers’ produce are abolished, and the task handed over to the private sector. In addition, the social services on which the poor depend and as well subsidies to small farmers are being curtailed.

In most of Africa small farmers are the main food producers. If they are given access to credit, subsidised seed and fertilisers they are capable of feeding the population if strategic reserves are maintained for times of drought or flooding. But the IMF’s policy of ending subsidies, breaking up state marketing boards and opening up African agriculture to the “free market” has resulted in the present famine.

World Bank lending for agriculture slumped from 31 percent of total lending in 1979-81, to 10 percent in 1999-2000. The IMF’s own evaluation is that the liberalisation of state marketing in Zambia in the 1991-94 period led to a 30 percent increase in rural poverty.

What is more, all the countries suffering from famine are heavily indebted. This is in large part due to previous IMF and World Bank policies that encouraged poor countries to take out loans. As a result of their debt repayments many of them are incapable of buying food on the world market and are reliant on donor assistance. Malawi alone pays out 39 cents of every dollar that it receives in aid to its international creditors. (WSWS)

Human rights: long-term issues should be discussed at Berlin talks

By J. S. Tissainayagam

The agenda for the fifth round of talks scheduled to begin in Berlin today between the Sri Lanka government and the LTTE includes discussions on human rights. As it was pointed out in the editorial in this newspaper last week, next to beauty, there is very little else that draws such biased and 'beholder-centred' responses, as do human rights. It should be also mentioned however that it stirs up passions and bigotry scarcely imaginable in any discussion on aesthetics.

More than the topic placed on the agenda for the Berlin talks, what will be important is who defines human rights at the talks and what matters will be addressed within this definition. This is of crucial importance because of the subjective nature of any discussion on this topic.

The Sri Lanka government appears to be systematically building up a case against the LTTE. The utterances of the president, the instructions she has issued the military, the media blitzes in newspapers known to be sympathetic to the government, as well as the thrust of the NGOs and other organisations in civil society make it pretty obvious that the issues of conscription, extortion, child soldiers and Muslim grievances will definitely fall within what the government defines as human rights violations by the Tigers.

Though we are not privy to it, there are a host of issues the LTTE perceives as violations on the government side that it would very probably address at the discussions. The impediments to the rehabilitation and resettlement of IDPs within the High Security Zones as well as outside them, continuing occupation of private property by the security forces in the northeast, the killing of protesting but unarmed civilians in Trincomalee, Kanchirankudah and Nellyyadi, the new navy camp at Kopalapuram are but a few of the abuses by the state.

If the parameters of the discussion were to be restricted to these areas of concern alone, the talks would be only looking at human rights violations that have occurred in subjects the Ceasefire Agreement expected both sides to respect and uphold to facilitate the smooth unfolding of the peace process.

The Ceasefire Agreement is a document, which was drawn up to address certain immediate concerns that were crucial if even a temporary cessation of hostilities were to be achieved. The timeframes and the deadlines the government had to adhere to – on removal of checkpoints, vacating places of worship and public buildings, lift-

Therefore it will be undeserving of the Tamils if the LTTE representatives confine themselves to the violations of human rights pertaining strictly to security concerns and to guarantees in the Ceasefire Agreement. If indeed these talks are part of a peace process, the long-term abuse of the human rights of Tamil citizens should be taken up

ing restriction on goods transported to the northeast and to fishing – were for the de-escalation of hostilities and the resumption of a modicum of normal life that would give spirit to the agreement entered into by the two parties. In the same way, the LTTE was to suspend "acts (such as torture, intimidation, abduction, extortion and harassment" carried out against the civilian public.

There might be other subjects added to these lists in the agenda for Berlin such as removal of the PTA etc, but that will not be a significant departure from what are seen as violations of guarantees in the Ceasefire Agreement as they too concern matters of immediate relevance that bedevil good relations between the Tamils and the state.

If human rights are to be defined and addressed within such a narrow sphere the discussions will no doubt end in mutual recrimination and, hopefully, resolution. But human rights concerns have to be elevated from this rather mundane level if they are to be dealt with comprehensively, which is imperative if these talks are to bear fruit in resolving any of the more basic problems that form the core of what has come to be known as the national question.

For human rights to be viewed in their proper perspective in Sri Lanka today, they have to be seen in their long-term application. The questions addressed in the Ceasefire Agreement however, only deal with security. This is entirely understandable for two reasons. One, security in a war is of paramount importance and over the past 20 years our concerns about human rights have gradually come to revolve around physical security to the exclusion of others. Two, the Ceasefire Agreement is essentially a document that spells out the initial steps in the de-escalation of hostilities between two armed formations. It is by no means a comprehensive human rights instrument, nor was it intended to be.

In our preoccupation with security, we have forgotten the core problems that drove the Tamils to first take up cudgels against the Sri Lankan state over 50 years ago. There were a number of grave shortcomings that went to prove

Sri Lanka was not a plural state that could successfully cater to the demands of a multiethnic, multi-religious and multilingual society. These core problems remain, but are pushed to the backburner due to 'security' enjoying a central place.

One of these is the use of Tamil as an official language. The Indo-Lanka Accord stipulates, "The official language of Sri Lanka shall be Sinhala. Tamil and English will also be official languages." The Sixteenth Amendment to the Constitution gave effect to this, though for reasons too long to explain here, Tamil is yet to become a full-fledged official language. In his book *Tamil As Official Language* A. Thevaranjan says, "Despite ostensible legal changes, still nothing tangible resulted and complaints about non-compliance with Tamil language provisions continued."

What are of greater concern to us at the present moment are the problems of implementation of the Sixteenth Amendment. Thevaranjan says, "Tamil-speaking citizens are frustrated that the Sixteenth Amendment to the Constitution granting official status to Tamil is being ignored..."

"...Tamil-speaking citizens agitate for the early implementation of the Sixteenth Amendment to the Constitution. Their grievances remain little discussed because the Sinhala and English mass media have failed to publicise their cause. The bureaucracy is not prepared to even respond to the call of the Director of Establishments to furnish Tamil-speaking staff and other requirements. The administration remains their own."

The denial of equality to the Tamil citizen in the use of his/her language, which began in 1956 remains almost un-addressed 47 years later. And when the government spouts statistics of 64,000 dead in the past 20 years due to the war, one understands the reason why. What is more, failure to implement language provisions also impacts on security, the prime concern at the moment. A simple example will suffice. One of the biggest drawbacks affecting the personal security of the Tamils is the inability of the police to record statements in Tamil apparently due to a dearth of Tamil-speaking po-

licemen, which is a ridiculous situation the government should be forced to remedy.

The next set of human rights violations that tend to be ignored pertains to employment. Problems that surfaced in the wake of the 1956 'revolution,' which succeeded in swelling the ranks of the public service and the military with Sinhala-speakers, remain. What is worse, many of the business houses today, some of them very prestigious, admit unofficially that they discourage Tamils joining, stating various reasons from upsetting staff relations to security concerns as excuses.

Creditably, one of the few decent steps taken by the PA government while in power was to try introducing the Equal Opportunities Bill. It was not only progressive in opening up employment and educational opportunities to the ethnic and religious minorities, but it was expected to go a long way in even guaranteeing gender equality.

But what happened? Students from some of the so-called leading Buddhist schools engaged in visible protests, while nearly every leading Sinhala lawyer in this country (some of whom are now championing the peace process apparently because their loyalty to the UNF is stronger than their racism) was before the Supreme Court supporting petitions to strike down the Bill.

Thirdly, the early grouse Tamils had with education resources being inequitably distributed and weighted in favour of the Sinhala majority remains. Schools of the northeast – especially in Jaffna – have one of the highest cut-off marks for entrance to the university, though the devastation its education system has suffered in the 20-year war is incalculable.

School textbooks contain material that distort Sri Lankan history and mistakes in them remain unattended, while the A/L syllabus teaches subjects like Fisheries and Aqua Culture to Sinhala medium students, which is unavailable to Tamil children. What is more, a massive shortage of Tamil medium teachers exists in the northeast.

Though there might be an excuse however spurious, for giving step-motherly treatment to the northeast because it is a hotbed of anti-state agitation and rebellion, Tamil schools, which form the backbone of education in the estates sector in central Sri Lanka, also remain neglected and uncared for. There is no talk (yet) of rebellion or agitation among the Tamils of recent Indian origin in the estates to bring down upon them the wrath of any government.

Fourthly, there have been systematic inroads made into forcing Tamils to compromise their right to security, franchise and property through colonisation schemes in the east followed by large-scale 'settlement' of Sinhalese in the homes from which Tamils were

forcibly evicted due the war.

In the furore created by the eviction of the Muslims from Jaffna, more three-quarters of a century of colonisation (supported at its launch by the Father of the Nation Prime Minister D. S. Senanayake whose contribution to independence was referred to with great reverence and solemnity on Tuesday last), has been quietly forgotten. Sinhala settlements in Trincomalee remain concentrations of thugs whose evil is witnessed even today. The Sinhala traders Association deny their Tamil counterparts freedom to livelihood, while the Sinhala thugs of Abeyapura and Samudragama were allegedly responsible for the violent incidents late last year against Tamils who were demonstrating on the Trincomalee streets.

What is more, the army, senior officials in the administrative service stationed in Trincomalee and the Buddhist clergy have been instrumental in systematically 'settling' Sinhalese in the homes and lands vacated by the Tamils; what is more these Sinhala 'settlers' are given rehabilitation allowances by the government. In the instances where the rightful owners dispute such illegal acquisitions, the official position is evicting Sinhala settlers is practically impossible. Any study on property rights should look into these matters too rather than confining itself to problems of resettling IDPs in the High Security Zone.

In other instances, government departments such as the Ministry of Fisheries bought land, ostensibly to 'settle' migratory Sinhala fishermen. A corollary of these 'settlements' has been the systematic demographic change that has taken place over the decades in Trincomalee.

Lastly, one of the biggest drawbacks in the human rights regime in Sri Lanka is the failure of the most fundamental of rights – the right to life – to be enshrined in the Constitution. The absence has caused the Tamils dear. On many instances action could not be taken against the security forces and the government, such as when the embargo on food, medicine and fuel was imposed on the northeast, because this right was not included among the fundamental rights guaranteed to a citizen of this country.

Therefore it will be undeserving of the Tamils if the LTTE representatives confine themselves to the violations of human rights pertaining strictly to security concerns and to guarantees in the Ceasefire Agreement. If indeed these talks are part of a peace process, the long-term abuse of the human rights of Tamil citizens should be taken up. Otherwise the talks will be another exercise in papering over the deep fissures that exist between the two negotiating parties and the constituencies they represent.

Japan's new embrace of peace diplomacy

By Suvendrini Kakuchi

Japanese Foreign Minister Yoriko Kawaguchi's visit to conflict areas and minefields in Sri Lanka at the start of the year says volumes about the major changes under way in Japan's traditionally conservative policy on foreign aid.

At the forefront of this new thrust is Japan's emerging peace diplomacy, which is expected to be reflected in the review of guidelines for official development assistance that Tokyo has announced for mid-2003. This is the first review of aid guidelines since 1992, and comes at a time of falling resources for development assistance as well new global concerns. "We certainly welcome the active use of official development assistance for conflict resolution as a means of ensuring that aid goes to the people rather than to large wasteful projects as has been the case," said Professor Hiroyuki Ohashi, who teaches international development at Keisen University. The changing global climate, in addition to pragmatic concerns such as limited resources, has already led to new initiatives that indicate a change in Japan's check-book diplomacy. The most obvious and recent ones are Japan's involvement in efforts to resolve Asian conflicts and help in the reconstruction efforts afterward.

"Japan will actively engage in

Experts welcome the focus on improving the quality of Japanese aid, saying a humanitarian and peace approach has less room for the weaknesses of the aid program - funds used to build expensive infrastructure that often benefit the country's own contractors.

efforts to resolve regional conflicts toward the establishment of peace by permanently resolving conflicts such as Afghanistan, Indonesia's Aceh province, Mindanao in the Philippines and in Sri Lanka," Kawaguchi told the Diet, Japan's parliament, late last week.

Kawaguchi, the first foreign minister of an industrialized country to visit conflict-torn Jaffna in northern Sri Lanka, met leaders and experts on the ongoing peace process, aimed at reaching a political settlement to end a nearly two-decade quest by minority Tamils for a homeland.

"Official development assistance is indispensable to consolidating the peace process here," she said.

Japan also plans to host a donors' conference to rebuild Sri

Lanka, marking the first time Tokyo has promoted aid before an official peace settlement is reached between warring parties.

In December Japan hosted a conference on Aceh, which that month signed a peace agreement that is now under implementation. In January last year, donors gathered here to pledge US\$1.8 billion in aid for the rehabilitation of Afghanistan.

Other signs indicate Tokyo's policy change as well. For the first time, Japan has begun to send its experts to draw up a civil code and civil procedure code in Cambodia, departing from its usual focus on big infrastructure projects. This is aimed at providing support for projects such as election monitoring and the development of human-rights laws.

Also this month, the government said it would fund a program to collect small weapons as a condition for providing reconstruction assistance in peace diplomacy. Japan has also made available the extension of up to \$8.5 billion in debt forgiveness for aid recipients following certain conditions.

Former United Nations diplomat Yasushi Akashi, Japan's representative for peace building and rehabilitation and reconstruction in Sri Lanka, urges the dispatch of Japanese civilian police and specialists to that South Asian island nation. During her visit, Kawaguchi also offered low-interest loans to build power generating facilities, roads and agricultural development in the rebel-held north and east of the country.

In many ways, experts say, a successful shift in foreign-aid policy would help maximize the impact of Japanese aid even with the financial constraints Tokyo is facing.

Japan's aid budget in 2001 stood at \$9.65 billion, down 27.2 percent from the previous year and giving to the United States the position as the world's top donor that Tokyo used to hold. A further 10 percent cut is estimated for fiscal 2002, which ends next month, with the Foreign Ministry reporting that funds will decrease another 5.8 percent for fiscal 2003. The cuts reflect the country's poor economic performance - half a percent gross domestic product growth recorded for 2002.

Experts welcome the focus on im-

proving the quality of Japanese aid, saying a humanitarian and peace approach has less room for the weaknesses of the aid program - funds used to build expensive infrastructure that often benefit the country's own contractors.

Critics complain that the process has facilitated Japanese commercial interests in developing countries, leading to recent corruption scandals and huge trade surpluses benefiting Japan.

"Promoting peace will call for spending in ravaged areas to support the rehabilitation of refugees, rebuilding schools and hospitals and mine-clearing, in contrast to expensive infrastructure projects," Hisashi Nakamura, a well-known expert on development assistance, explained at a recent seminar.

Statistics for Sri Lanka, for instance, show that while Japan provided some \$461 million - 69 percent of overall aid to Sri Lanka in 2000 - grants comprised only 39 percent of that amount. Between 1999 and 2002, just \$25 million of Japanese aid reached areas in devastated north and east of the country, despite their growing humanitarian needs. Total aid from Japan was some \$1.15 billion during the same period.

"The data [do] not indicate Japanese aid is sensitive to domestic political conflict," said Dr W D Lakshman, a political scientist at Colombo University.

(IPS)

Remove SLA...

Cont. from page 2

He cited many schools in Thenmaradchi, Inuvil, Konadavil, and specifically the Thellipalai Union College, where the armed forces are still staying, saying that the school falls under the High Security Zone (HSZ). The teachers and students going to the school in the morning are subjected to checks by the military before they can attend to teaching and learning. In this militarized environment, "how can there be a normal environment for students to learn?" Mahasivam asked.

Mahasivam said that the CTTU rejected allegations by the extremist elements in the South and in the Sri Lankan government that the LTTE is recruiting children under the age of 18. He said that a large number of children became orphans when the Sri Lankan armed forces killed their parents, and these children are being educated at some schools administered by the LTTE.

"Without any thought about the future of these orphaned children, the propagandists are distorting the truth and saying that

these children are recruited for military training," he said. "Such propaganda should be stopped."

Mahasivam said that an SLA soldier who recently surrendered to the LTTE with his gun had said that he is 19, but he joined the SLA 5 years back. That shows that the SLA has recruited children under 18, but no one is pointing this out.

According to Mahasivam, the CTTU is not only raising its voice to solve problems concerning education, but it also works to bring peace and social progress. He said, "The department of education is taking teachers for granted. This is more acute in the East. Officials are engaged in retribution and taking sides. The CTTU strongly condemns such actions."

Veeravarnan of the LTTE's educational development division, the CTTU's President S. Thandayuthapani, Administrative Secretary S. Saravanapavananthan, Finance Secretary Mr. S. Thamarajan and the district secretary for Batticaloa, Murugu Thayanathan also spoke at the meeting.

Factoring the LTTE...

Cont. from page 6

Indian analysts stress a proactive role for the Indian Navy in this area. One of them says, "The mercantile traffic transiting the Malacca Strait passes close to the Indian area of maritime interest and, therefore, any unforeseen contingency or development in the Malacca Strait places greater responsibility on India to preserve order at sea".

During the war on the Taliban, Indian Navy provided escort to US war ships carrying valuable material through the Malacca Strait. This did not develop into a long term corporation.

China, however, has established sophisticated electronic monitoring capabilities on Myanmar's Great Coco Island, just above Andaman and Nicobar.

Japan's energy supplies come primarily from Middle Eastern sources, and its tankers have to pass through the Indian Ocean, the Strait of Malacca, and the South China Sea, making them vulnerable to hostilities in South and Southeast Asia. Vulnerability to interception of oceango-

ing trade remained the country's greatest strategic weakness. Efforts to overcome this weakness, began with Prime Minister Suzuki Zenko's statement in May 1981 that Japan would attempt to defend its sea lines of communication (SLOC) to a distance of 1,000 nautical miles.

Japan has also strengthened its alliance with the US, passing new legislation in 1999 to enable it to provide logistical support in the event of regional military crises involving North Korea or the Taiwan Straits that could threaten Japan's own security. Japan is also cooperating with the US in research for the development of a missile defence system.

On Nov. 9, 2001 with little fanfare, two Japanese destroyers and a supply ship sailed from the Sasebo naval base in Japan for the Indian Ocean. The aim of Japan's first foray into the area since World War II is to support the U.S. war effort in Afghanistan.

The three vessels were joined shortly by destroyer fitted with the sophisticated Aegis missile

defense system, a support ship and eight aircraft.

Nevertheless, as we pointed out at the outset, ensuring the stability and security of one's SLOCs depend on the kind of foothold one gains in states or non states that lie close to them. It also depends on one's ability to stabilize a region, the calamities of which may directly impact on the SLOC.

The independence movement in Aceh in Indonesia is a case in point. The Aceh region commands a vantage point on the Malacca Strait. Japan and its allies are keen to settle the problem for reasons which we have examined here.

Similarly, Sri Lanka's war torn Tamil region lies not far from the confluence of several SLOCs in the Indian Ocean.

But unlike secessionist movements of Aceh or Eritrea, the Liberation Tigers have a naval force with an offensive capability that has to be necessarily factored into any strategic scenario planning for the Indian Ocean today.

Grinding poverty stalks Jaffna's children

By S. Somitharan

The two checkpoints at Thandikulam, on either side of the border present a picture of intense activity. And understandable too: unless the Sri Lanka military and the LTTE are able to run their respective systems at a high degree of efficiency there will be bottlenecks on the A9.

Under the placid morning sun visitors to Jaffna, obviously coming from overseas, alight from their vehicle and stretch their limbs. Their sense of relief in getting off from the cramped interior of the van is tempered by the thought of having to undergo regimented checking that all travellers to Jaffna and the Vanni are subject, both by the army and the civilian officials under the LTTE.

Lounging under the trees that rustle in the breeze of early January, before the sun reaches the pinnacle on its journey to the west, they are assailed by an attack of thirst. Looking around they spy a little corner-shop that sells bottled water, because the supply from the tap might be contaminated with bacteria too robust for their vulnerable little stomachs used to the clinical purity of the water available in the metropolises of London, Paris, Toronto or Melbourne.

On the way to the corner-shop, a boy approaches one of the party. The lad is sunburnt and wears grubby, though not tattered clothes. Though small, his adolescence is visible by the down on his upper lip slowly taking the form of an adult moustache. He proffers a bottle from a number in a cloth bag he carries. It contains a dark liquid.

"What's this?" asks the foreign returnee hesitantly in broken Tamil; he is apprehensive lest it be some heady, clandestine Wannu brew being sold to him.

"Bee's honey..." says the boy, his eyes lighting up at the question in the prospect of putting through sale.

"Where did you get it from?" asks the foreign returnee, the sight of the exotic kindling gastronomic excitement, somewhat jaded from years of eating western junk food.

"My brother gets it. I sell it!" says the boy, his voice now alive with enthusiasm hoping to lock the foreign returnee in conversation as a prelude to selling his wares.

The sight of boys aged between 10-15 years selling bee's honey at the checkpoints in Omanthai and Muhamalai on both sides of the border is a common sight today.

The years of war, displacement and separation have left them drowning in poverty, with only the meagre allowances from the government available to support their bloated families. The ceasefire was a wonderful opportunity because the threat of death through shelling or an air raid receded. But the desperate circumstances in which their families lived did not change.

Then came a rumour that the Jaffna - Kandy Road was reopening. There seemed to be a faint glow of opportunity to earn a few rupees to support the family. But who was to earn it? Not the father, who was dead perhaps or had disappeared; not the mother who had to look after toddlers in the brood. The task of the breadwinner thus becomes the onerous responsibility of a boy or girl between the ages 10 and 15. He or she by rights (and by definition of UNICEF)



A young boy selling vegetables in Tirunelveli

should be going to school.

Chandran is 12 years old. He is among the 16 kids who hang out at Thandikulam checkpoint selling honey. His friends sell apples or oranges. They play practical jokes on each other and the lively banter between them is infectious. But below that, competition is keen. A few more apples sold could mean an extra bit of food that would go a long way to fill the empty stomachs at home.

Chandran is from a family of five. He has a brother older than him and a sister. He also has a brother and sister younger to him. Chandran is shy, and despite the eagerness to sell bottles of honey, scared.

"I have to work. My elder sister

is maimed. She got caught to an exploding shell and has to get treatment every month. Unless I work every day, we cannot afford to give my sister the treatment she needs," Chandran said, speaking hesitantly.

He studied up to the fourth grade and dropped out. The family lived in Kilinochchi but due to the fighting was displaced. Chandran's father disappeared during the trek in 1998 from the Wannu to Vavuniya, where the family now lives.

"My brother is 17. He goes to work. He gets the honey for me to sell," said the little boy.

Thilakan is his friend, who is from Vavuniya too. He is around 10 years old. The *mudalalai* gives him a bag of 10 apples to sell. If he sells one bag he gets a commission of Rs.10. "During the early days after the road was opened I used to get up to 100 rupees a day from the visitors; now with the numbers dwindling my daily income is not so good," he said.

At Muhamalai another group of children are busy selling patties. They are mostly from a village in Kilinochchi. A girl comes up; she is reluctant to give her name and stares at the visitors curiously as if trying to get into their thoughts. She says she is 10 and her sister, 13. They start from Kilinochchi bus stand at 6.30 every morning spending Rs.25 for the ticket with a stock of patties their mother bakes for them. They sell till around three in the afternoon, but if they finish their stock, go earlier.

When asked whether they go to school they replied in the affirmative, their eyes shifting elsewhere. But the fact is you see them at the checkpoint day in day out.

Chandran, Thilakan and our little patties-seller are not unique. They are among the scores you will see at any market whether it be in Kilinochchi, Puthukudiyuruppu, Mallavi or Kalliyankaadu. They are all between 10-

15 years, which the war has left as providers to their families.

The Sabapathy camp for the internally displaced is teaming with children. They are from among the thousands of IDPs who were displaced from Valigamam due to deliberate and systematic efforts by the Sri Lanka army between 1983-1993 to depopulate the area by shelling and aerial bombardment. The waste that was result of this criminal policy became the High Security Zone (HSZ).

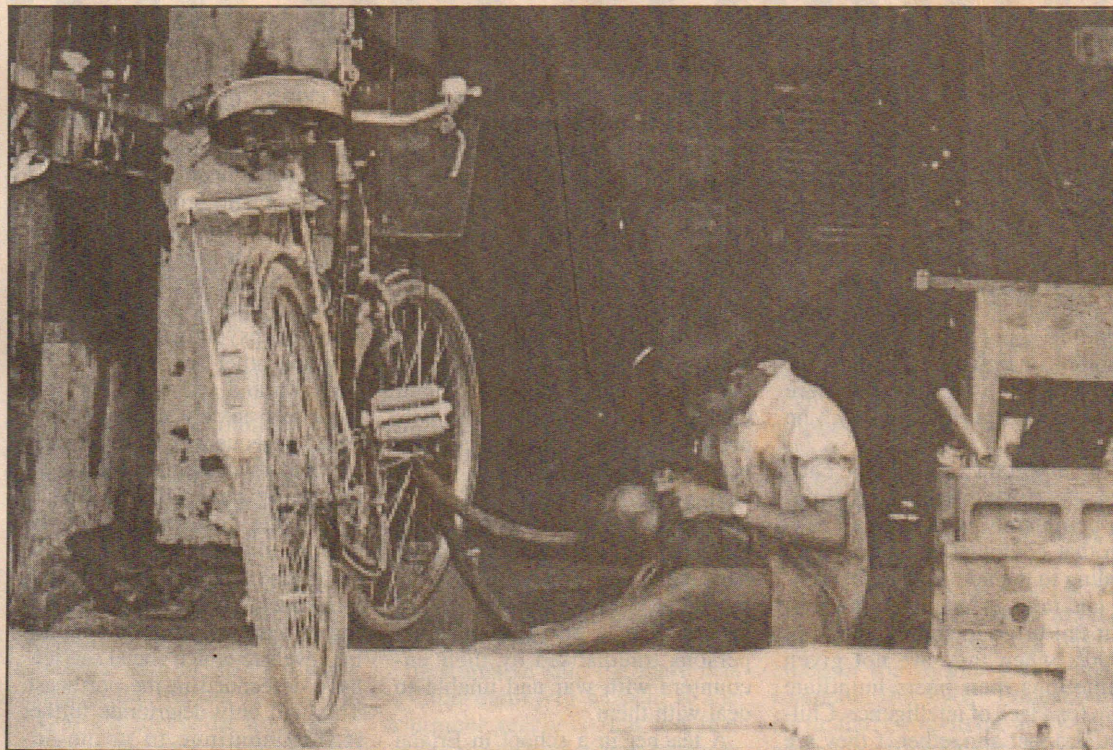
Most of the families in the Sabapathy camp are driven to the end of their tether due to the circumstances they find themselves in. Some were displaced as far back as 1990. There are 99 children in the camp between 9-15 years of which 30 do not go to school. The balance go to school but irregularly and enduring much hardship.

V. Alageswaran (15) left from the ninth year in 2002. While his more fortunate counterparts were planning to sit the GCE Ordinary Level examination, desperation drove Alageswaran from school. His 16-year-old brother Anbarasan left from the eighth grade in 2000. They left because they were already working at night in a bakery, while attending school by day. They worked continuously during the weekend. The nightshift made it possible for them to be present in school only every other day.

"But baking in the oven before an open fire gave us burns all over our bodies and unable to withstand it any longer we decided to return to school," said Alageswaran. But that did not last too long and they discontinued.

Anbarasan is now a casual employee mostly working as a labourer.

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Boy in a cycle repair shop in Kalliyankaadu



Boy on bicycles pedal across a brand new bridge built by the Sri Lanka army at Olumadu, east of Mankulam after fighting in Operation Jayasikurui destroyed the original bridge

Pic. by D. Sivaram

Grinding poverty...

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Their father is sick and cannot be employed. Alageswaran's family has 10 members – eight children and the parents. His elder sister is studying her GCE Advanced Level. The brothers earn basically to support the sister's education. Three of the younger siblings are in school too.

Poverty that dogs the family is partly due to the heartless policies followed by the government in granting relief. According to the government's assistance programme, the maximum a family receives as relief payment is calculated for families of five and above – that is Rs.630 for fortnight or Rs.1260 per month. This is ridiculously low for a family of 10 to subsist on: hence Anbarasan and Alageswaran have to work to keep the home fires burning.

A. Kugathevnathan is an inmate of Sabapathy camp. He is 17 and has studied up to his GCE Ordinary Level. The IPKF killed his father in Oorani after which his mother married again rendering him for all intents and purposes an orphan. He would want to continue studying, but has to find work to live. And his O/Levels notwithstanding he can only command casual employment.

K. Nimalathas is also 17. He left school in 2000 and works as a casual manual employee, to help his 7-member family, which subsist on his income. The other siblings go to school. "If we are to educate the other children we have to send at

least one to work. The relief allowances of 630 rupees a fortnight is not enough for seven people to manage on," says Kunalingam Ranjani (35), Nimalathas' mother.

But her anxieties are nothing compared to Selvarasa Vasantha (45), mother of eight children. A mine that was concealed behind a cinema in Chunnakam maimed her husband in 1997 and he has not been employed since. One of the eight children married, but committed suicide due to a dispute arising from dowry payments. Another child is now 20 and visually handicapped.

"I have two children studying in year three and six. I have to support them. I bake tithis and sell them in schools to make ends meet," she told *Northeastern Herald*.

Domestic pressures have become a great disincentive to formal learning. This has led to UNICEF and other organisations pioneering a drive to upgrade school enrolment. But just the fact children are in school is not a panacea for all ills. Children who are most affected are from among the poorest sections of Jaffna society and attend schools by trying to carry on as well as they might under straitened circumstances.

Some of the children of the

displaced from Valigamam go to Vasvilaan Central School, Tellipalai Union College and Mathuthanamadam Ramanathan College, which are among the few that function in Valigamam.

"There is no discipline in the conventional sense of the word because children are irregular to school. But the problem is that they have to work. They come to school only if the parents insist they should," said A. S. Nadarajah, retired principal of Vasavilaan Central College.

S. Varaharajah, deputy director of education, Jaffna zone, pointed to logistical problems arising from irregular attendance. "The irregularity of the students does not allow for an accurate computation of the number of students actually attending school. This becomes a problem later when applying for assistance etc., because there are no concrete figures to go by," he lamented.

An important reason for children who come irregularly, to drop-out completely is the school system that continues to function according to the archaic way of passing and failing students. If the children fail to go to school, they fail exams; when they are not given promotions their peers humiliate them for a lack of intelligence. Children dropout altogether if they are unable to come to terms with such degrading treatment.

"How can we go to school when we have to sit with smaller children? They laugh at us," said children Bharathipuram Maha Vidyalayam in Kilinochchi.

Schools find it difficult to take the initiative to help children who are unable to come regularly because the institutions themselves are not financially well equipped. Bharathipuram Maha Vidyalayam is so poor that children sit on mats in dilapidated huts. At this school children have dropped off as long as two years and returned. Since they have to catch up with the class and because they go to work in daytime, volunteers have night school, but that too is not sufficient.

The war has also affected the psychosocial well being of children, denting their willingness to study or concentrate. There is child studying in Meesalai Hindu College (name withheld) who witnessed a bomb explosion in close proximity, when she was in the sixth grade. Now in her in Year 10 she displays fear of crowds, is very reclusive, constantly complains of headaches and takes a long time to be cured of even common illnesses. She is one among many persons traumatised by their encounters with war and unable to deal with them.

A teacher in a school in Erlalai who did not wish to be named said, "Children display very ag-

gressive behaviour while in school. We cannot instil any discipline. But when you study their backgrounds you find they not only work to provide for the home, which curbs the freedom of childhood, but also come from broken families and can express their frustration only in school," he said.

Rev. Fr. S. Damien, a psychosocial counsellor said symptoms of disorders arising from trauma are evident in students and children. They displayed unexpected aggression, learning disorders, falling performance in school, and psychosomatic problems such as insomnia, chest pains, poor appetites etc. He said there was very little infrastructure available in Jaffna to cope with the demands made on psychosocial counselling and other services.

Health and social workers express deep anxiety about the long-term consequences of mass poverty and psychological trauma on the rising generation. What is worse, the aid promised at the donor conferences appear to emphasise rebuilding of physical infrastructures and not on providing services to arrest the appalling levels to which social services have descended in the northeast. This will only deteriorate further if they continue to go un-addressed, while refugees and IDPs begin their homeward trek.