

Chetties and Bharathas
are ethnic groups in
census questionnaire

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NORTHEASTERN HERALD

Child soldiers and
human rights violations
in the Northeast

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A makeshift bridge over a canal near the Paranthan - Pooneryn road

Pic by Buddhika Weerasinghe

Census Dept.'s contribution to Lanka's political arithmetic

The Department of Census and Statistics has introduced two new categories in the 2001 census, which demographers believe will dilute the numbers of those who appear under the statistical head of the 'Sri Lankan Tamils,' and 'Indian Tamils' thereby reducing the numerical strength of those communities on paper.

The questionnaire for the census circulated in the 2001 included the categories of 'Chetties' and 'Bharathas' that were not included in the questionnaire in former censuses. What is more, they have been

categorised as 'ethnic groups' whereas in Sri Lanka, the Chetties are known as a homogenous caste group. There is Chetties are an influential caste group in Jaffna and among the Mukkuvas of Batticaloa too there is a matri-clan known as Chetty Kudi.

The Bharathas have also been introduced as an ethnic group in the questionnaire in the 2001 census. There are two important Bharatha groups in Sri Lanka. One is the group of sea-faring families residing from around Chilaw down to Colombo. Besides these indigenised littoral connected Bharathas, there were also a

handful of Bharathas in the Colombo Municipality who settled during the British rule, especially to work in the Colombo harbour.

In the questionnaire given to the enumerators for taking the count of the people, gives the following breakdown for the ethnic groupings in the country: Sinhalese, Sri Lanka Tamil, Indian Tamil, Sri Lanka Moor, Burgher, Malay, Sri Lankan Chetty, Bharatha and other.

"This appears to be a subtle way whereby the various benefits that accrues to the Tamil community by virtue of its numerical strength will be

gradually reduced," said a retired demographer, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Tamil sources meanwhile said the matter would have to be raised in parliament as a matter of urgency because

such underhand methods of brining about permanent political disabilities to the Tamil people could result in tensions appearing even in the peace process. (See full story on page five)

LTTE frees six SLA soldiers

Tamil Tiger rebels freed six Sri Lankan soldiers on Wednesday after holding them for two weeks in an incident that sparked protests and raised concerns about the sincerity of the guerrillas' commitment to end 19 years of war.

The soldiers were grabbed by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil

Eelam (LTTE), who demanded the release of two of their cadres arrested for allegedly carrying weapons in government territory.

"They are free and in the hands of the Red Cross and will be handed over to the military," said Teitur Torkelsson, spokesman for the Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission that

oversees a truce in place since February.

The two cadres were released on bail earlier on Wednesday and handed over to the LTTE in the eastern port town of Trincomalee.

"This has not been good for the confidence of the people. It sends

Cont. on page 2

Tamils demand STF camp be removed

Tamil community leaders in the main villages on the Ampara district's southeastern coast said that incidents of violence cannot be fully controlled here if immediate steps are not taken to remove fears, suspicions and old hatreds between the people and the STF in the region.

Their appeal came amidst accusations that the protestors at Kanjirankudah had entered the STF camp there and had tried to set fire and had attempted to destroy the place.

The STF triggered the incident by severely assaulting and injuring two Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) activists in front of the Kanjirankudah camp on Wednesday morning.

Tensions ran high in Tamil areas of Ampara's southeastern coast after word spread that two members of the LTTE were severely assaulted by the STF and had been admitted to hospital.

Kanjirankudah is 84 kilometres south of Batticaloa. The STF camp

Cont. on page 2

Army violation of agreement led to LTTE arrest of soldiers

By Taurus

As per Clause 1.6 of the Ceasefire Agreement entered into by the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the parties shall provide information to the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) regarding defence localities in all areas of contention. The SLMM shall assist the parties in drawing up demarcation lines at the latest by D-day + 30 that was 23rd March 2002.

It is claimed that this has not been done. It is interesting to note that even Sampoor, in Trincomalee District, which is known to be under LTTE control, is claimed by the Sri Lanka Army (SLA) in Trincomalee to be under its authority.

Under the circumstances, an understanding was reached between the two parties. According to the agreement, LTTE cadres straying into areas supposed to be controlled by the security forces should be escorted back into territory presumed to be under LTTE control and vice versa. This would be so even if the parties were armed.

It is said that LTTE adheres to this agreement. Earlier, when two SLA personnel entered a place called Vattam in an LTTE-controlled area near Muttur, they were not arrested but allowed to leave the place and the SLMM informed of the incident. The SLA and police were however not following this (violations by the navy of the Ceasefire Agreement is not addressed in this article).

Two fairly senior LTTE cadres were arrested by the SLA close to their camp near Vilvery area and

Two fairly senior LTTE cadres were arrested by the SLA close to their camp near Vilvery area and handed over to Uppuveli police. In spite of the assurances given by police officers in Trincomalee, realising their mistake in not following the agreement, there was vehement objection to bail by the state

handed over to Uppuveli police. In spite of the assurances given by police officers in Trincomalee, realising their mistake in not following the agreement, there was vehement objection to bail by the state. It is naive to think that the counsel appearing for the police would have done so without instructions from his superiors.

It is reported that an understanding was reached with the police due to the incidents cited above that whenever they arrested an LTTE cadre with arms in a grey area near their camps, the SLMM would be informed about it without rushing the arrested persons immediately to the Magistrates Court and having them remanded in fiscal custody along with common criminals.

The 2nd September incident was another example of overzealous senior officers at Kanthalai police station who are notorious for their human rights violations with incidents like Potkerny and Kanthalai cell death, which are still being investigated, going all out to scuttle the peace process.

On this day it is said that a posse of policemen from Kanthalai police

went into the jungle near Eechankulam off Mullipothanai almost six kilometres from the main Trincomalee-Kandy road and arrested two LTTE cadres, Kandasamy Ramasamy and Mathavan Wasanthan who were at a forward sentry position near their camp. According to their interview to the media, after being enlarged on bail they were duped by the police into stating that a senior officer would like to speak to them and were then bundled into the jeep. They have also stated that the police assaulted them.

The LTTE claims it always treats army personnel trespassing into its

territory well before releasing them, which has been endorsed by the other side.

The arrest of seven SLA personnel on 25th September in Vilgam Vihare area who strayed into LTTE territory with arms was forced on them due to the SLA and the State not following the agreement reached at between the two parties. Even the LTTE's goodwill exercise in releasing one of them on humanitarian ground was not reciprocated.

The hartal organised on 3rd and 4th October by the Sinhalese in Trincomalee with the blessings of the JVP, the Buddhist clergy and the public brought from Kanthalai was different from other hartals organized in the past according to the Consortium of NGOs Trincomalee District. They state that the police had made all possible endeavours to minimize inconvenience to the public on the earlier occasions. The police requested shops to be kept open and saw to it that no obstruction was placed on the public roads.

However it was reported that this time's hartal was something special. Roadblocks were erected and tyres burnt thereby polluting the environment, while the police stood idly by. Freedom of movement of law-abid-

ing citizens were violated and sometimes such freedom was denied even to judges and members of the legal profession.

It is amazing that, as reported in the press, the majority community finally got the much-awaited opportunity to voice its grievances when Minister Milinda Moragoda visited Trincomalee and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe decided to look into the needs of the Sinhalese of Trincomalee.

It was at the behest of the Sinhalese that the New Market was built at a colossal expense to taxpayers of Trincomalee town, but has been prevented from operating. The beach between the clock tower and Fort Frederick has become the unauthorised town of Samudragama enjoying electricity and water supply. (This was whilst the former PA Minister Mangala Samaraweera was busy demolishing unauthorised buildings in Colombo and the rest of the country).

It is a sad reflection of times that the demonstration by the Sinhalese for the release of SLA personnel had to take place next to the clock tower where many Tamils were burnt during the 1990 ethnic cleansing of Trincomalee.

LTTE frees...

Cont. from page 1

the wrong signal to take prisoners in the middle of a ceasefire," Torkelson said.

The grabbing of the soldiers sparked protests in Trincomalee, where 1,000 residents blocked traffic last week.

"The timing of the incident was especially confusing, with the prisoner-of-war exchange," he said, referring to a prisoner swap that took place several weeks ago as a confidence-building gesture ahead of a second round of peace talks.

The Tigers, fighting for a separate

state in the island's north and east, initially demanded the unconditional release of their cadres in return for the soldiers, saying they were in disputed territory.

Under the ceasefire, soldiers and rebels are allowed to travel in but are not allowed to carry weapons in the other side's area.

The head of the monitoring mission, Trond Furuhoide, met LTTE political wing leader S.P. Thamilselvan last week to discuss ways to avoid similar incidents.

The second round of the Norwe-

gian-brokered peace talks will begin in neutral Thailand later this month to try to end a conflict that has cost more than 64,000 lives.

A death fast by prisoners held as suspected terrorists also ended on Wednesday when officials assured the prisoners that their demand to be released or quickly tried would be met.

More than 100 ethnic Tamils were fasting to protest against their detention under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, a government device used to combat the Tigers. (Reuters)

Tamils demand...

Cont. from page 1

here overlooks the key junction where the interior road from Akkaraipattu town through the farmlands of the area meets the main coastal road to Pottuvil.

The head of the LTTE's political division for the Pottuvil area, M. Visuvanathan and a Tiger activist, Christy Rajah were travelling in a tractor when some commandos of the STF stopped them at the Kanjirankudah camp, which is by the main road on the island's south-eastern coast around 10.30 a.m. Wednesday morning. The commandos had started assaulting the driver and Rajah when they had got down from the tractor to find out why they had been stopped.

Visuvanathan had then intervened and informed the STF personnel who were assaulting them that he was an LTTE official and that they were transporting some material for constructing a memorial.

The STF commandos told him that they knew he was from the LTTE and that is why they were assaulting the driver and Rajah. Thereafter they had severely beaten up Visuvanathan too with the handle of a mamoty.

The two LTTE members were seriously injured in the STF assault and had to be admitted to the Thirukkivil hospital for treatment.

Tensions ran high in the Tamil villages of the Ampara district as

word spread that the STF had assaulted LTTE activists.

Later in the day about five hundred people from the village of Vinayagapuram went in a procession to demonstrate in front of the Kanjirankudah STF camp against the assault.

Tensions were further exacerbated in the Vinayagapuram area because the STF at Kanjirankudah was perceived as the main perpetrators of the total ban on cultivation here last year. Thousands of farmers faced ruin when the STF barred them from entering the rice-producing region south of Kanjirankudah after they had ploughed and sown their fields.

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Anybody for rehabilitating the Minister of Rehabilitation?

By Rajpal Abeynayake

A foreign correspondent told me that Ranil Wickremesinghe may be looking for a Nobel Prize – but whatever the merits or demerits of that suggestion maybe, one of the most intriguing figures in the 2002 peace effort is of course Jayalath Jayawardene or Dr JJ as he is widely known.

Jayawardene is a man who enjoys alternately – and it appears on separate days, the status of demi God and buffoon. Some say the truth about the man of course as is usual about these things lies somewhere in-between. Jayalath Jayawardene however is a political phenomenon that needs to be considered a little apart from any of the other political operators who are seen these days in the national political arena.

One thing about Jayawardene is that he does not seem to be an ideologue. He has little or nothing to say about what he does, about the various underpinnings and ramifications of his work as the Minister of Rehabilitation and Reconstruction. It is interesting also about how he traverses from being seen in the South as a 'fraud' and as a 'national redeemer' of sorts.

It is also very rarely that a man with very little charisma can be a political force in his party in his



Dr. Jayalath Jayawardena

own right. This is not to say that Jayawardene has immense clout within the UNF. But what he has been able to do is to win a following among mostly the English speaking liberal intellectuals, which is going to stand him in very good stead in his future political undertakings.

More than any other politicians in the South, Jayawardene is seen by those who are poised against the current peace initiatives of the UNF as an 'agent' of some sorts for various interests that are subversive of the Sri Lankan state. He was being branded as a traitor by the various news channels of the previous regime, almost on a daily basis. Jayawardene is not exactly impervious to this criticism. The curious thing is that he seems to live so much in a world of his own – a

Jayawardene is not exactly impervious to this criticism. The curious thing is that he seems to live so much in a world of his own – a political world of his own – that he barely hears this criticism. This is not by design. It shows that the man is not politically sensitive to the developments around him, and that he does not have his antennae tuned to the vital political developments of the day

political world of his own – that he barely hears this criticism. This is not by design. It shows that the man is not politically sensitive to the developments around him, and that he does not have his antennae tuned to the vital political developments of the day.

But, as far as his specific endeavor of continuing and surviving in his mission as the Minister of Reconstruction and Rehabilitation goes – this sort of rarified ignorance that he shows of the realpolitik of these times, stands him in good stead.

On many occasions Jayawardene has also been portrayed as a buffoon by the local media – particularly by The Sunday Leader which has of course exposed some of his shadier doings also in the process. This makes him a sort of person that needs always to be polishing

up his image to live up to the expectations of the liberal intellectuals who are for the most part, his backers. But so far he has not been able to shore up his image as any sort of man of substance, something that Milinda Moragoda has been able to do for instance, without breaking a sweat.

Moragoda seems to be held in high esteem for example among the LTTE hierarchy and there have been some who have voiced the opinion that he has forged the closest link so far for any politician of the South with the LTTE, for as long as anybody could remember. But yet, Moragoda has remarkably been able to deflect any criticism of being an 'agent' or being a 'traitor.'

This therefore is a good study of the politics of the day. Jayawardene remains the outsider, and the po-

litical yokel because he is precisely that for the local political elite. Jayawardene is a 'hick' compared to the smooth Mr. Moragoda who has actually done nothing very tangible however, except to build up his image very carefully.

The liberal intellectuals who are the chief and most reliable constituency of the ruling political elite will never tolerate a political hick even though they will praise one. This is why Jayawardene is today in the position of being seen as a do-gooder, a do-gooder almost of the saintly kind, but nothing much more.

But the liberal intelligentsia also does not want to give out the wrong message. They do not want to show that just because Jayawardene is a bit of a 'hick' and a 'buffoon', that they are about to ignore him or leave him to his own devices. That will be suicidal to their general project – which is why Jayawardene even though he is never quite 'mainstreamed' by the liberal elite, is always being looked after or showered with accolades in some other way. They will see that he gets his honorary Doctorate, and they will see that his image as a do-gooder is appreciated to the point where he is almost a candidate for canonization. But if you are mother Theresa, you will always stay Theresa.

Tamil leader defends work in children's homes

By Feizal Samath

A controversial welfare organisation in Sri Lanka's northern Vanni region, widely believed to be controlled by the Tamil Tigers, is fending off allegations that the children's homes it runs are feeding recruits to the rebel army.

"That's absolutely untrue. Come and take a look at our facilities and you would understand the work that's being done," said Dr Jay Maheswaran from the Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation (TRO) based in Kilinochchi, nearly 300 km north of the capital.

Speaking on the sidelines of a children's summit in Colombo last week, Maheswaran – better known to the Sri Lankan public as a member of the Tigers' delegation at the peace talks with the Sri Lankan government in Thailand in September – said unfair allegations had been made about children's homes and pre-schools run by the TRO.

"Some children have lived and been cared in our homes during the extent of the 19-year old war," he said. "Many children have returned home during times when conditions have improved while

we also helped a girl - who had been in one of our homes for a long period - to get married." The Australia-based Maheswaran, an agricultural scientist and the development specialist on the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) delegation for peace talks, spoke at the Oct. 1-3 International Conference on Children in Armed Conflict organised by Save the Children in Britain and Norway in Colombo.

Dealing at length with the work of the organisation, he said the TRO runs eight rehabilitation homes and more than 300 pre-schools in the Vanni district.

He spoke about the needs of children in the Vanni, the worst war-affected region in Sri Lanka, saying the intensity of the war and the economic embargo has set back the region by 20 years.

Acknowledging improvements to the region after the peace process since December and the lifting of the economic embargo, the development specialist said there was still a lot more to be done and a great need for infrastructure for schools and hospitals.

"Doctors are in short supply and the lack of proper refrigeration means we can't store vaccines," he pointed out.

The war situation has traumatised

many children in the region. Many have lost their parents, or have been separated from their families and are living in refugee camps. Children whose legs have been blasted by landmines have to replace their prosthesis every six months.

"The problems are numerous with few solutions," he said, adding that TRO welfare homes have a total of 1,600 children who are either orphaned, from single parents or sent to them due to poverty. "Most of the children come from poor families who cannot afford to look after them." Some 50 percent of children in the region suffer from malnutrition while 1,714 children were admitted to TRO's six nutritional centres in addition to over 14,000 children receiving nutritional supplements through at pre-schools.

This appear to imply the powerful role TRO would be playing in the region as Sri Lanka's peace process continues.

Maheswaran - who is expected to bring up many of these issues during ongoing peace talks - said that of the 100,000 children enrolled in Vanni schools in 1998, 21,900 students dropped out while close to 4,000 never attended schools.

"A 25 percent drop out rate is very high and worrying," he pointed out.

The number of teachers per students in the Vanni is an alarming one for every 77 students compared to the northern ratio of 1-for-44 and the island-wide ratio of 1-for-27.

Asked about child soldiers, the TRO representative said the LTTE's position is that armed cadres are all over 18 years and that children mostly join the group seeking refuge.

The United Nations' Children's Fund (UNICEF) and several other non-governmental organisations, as well as the government, have accused the rebels of continuing to recruit youngsters despite the peace process.

The rebels have denied the allegation, saying those below 18 years join the organisation on their own accord, and were helping out in community work and non-war activities.

UNICEF officials said there were no estimates of child soldiers who are generally regarded to be in the age group of around 14 years and above. "They could number several thousands. There has been no proper head count," one official said.

Unofficial figures by some NGOs estimate that in a rebel army of close to 10,000 cadres, about 35 percent would be around 14 years of age.

When the Colombo meeting opened on Tuesday, UNICEF representative in Sri Lanka Ted Chaiban

urged that the voices of the children and youth be heard in Sri Lanka's peace process. "We should not exclude or marginalise these groups during the peace process." More than 150 delegates from 11 war-affected countries, including Liberia, Afghanistan, Northern Ireland and Sri Lanka, took part in the three-day meeting aimed at discussing the impact of armed conflict on children.

Professor Harendra de Silva, chairman of the state-run National Child Protection Authority of Sri Lanka, spoke of a survey on child soldiers that they had conducted, in which 19 former child soldiers of the LTTE, who had escaped, were interviewed.

"Eighteen said they had volunteered to join the group for many reasons, including a member of the family being killed by the armed forces," he said.

One 19-year old said he was forced to shoot his friend who was suspected of being a spy. "I was also asked to bury him," De Silva said, reading from the research study.

Another 16-year old girl shot a man and "when the victim's son protested, she shot the son too without any remorse," De Silva recalled.

(IPS)

Driven to opt for death

By T. Sittampalam

The decision of the political prisoners to fast to death has produced the sharpest Tamil reaction in the Northeast Province to any act of outrage committed by the state against the Tamil people from the time the Ceasefire Agreement was signed in February this year.

Though the fishermen's agitation in Jaffna, Muslim meddling in Valaichenai and Muttur, the military's lethargy in vacating Hartley College did draw sharp Tamil public criticism, they failed to provoke such widespread anger.

The responses have all focused on the deteriorating condition of the hapless detainees and the reluctance of the state to expedite their release. The arguments and counter-arguments on their detention have been debated to the point where they fail to move the laymen because the press and the electronic media have been full of it in the past few weeks.

But behind the statistics and legal jargon there lie personal narratives of human beings. Men and women who prefer to die rather than undergo the horror of confinement in a Sri Lankan jail and to be subject to cruelty and other inhuman and degrading treatment from prison officials and fellow prisoners.

These political prisoners are poor, not educated and buffeted between a predatory state and on occasions designing and crafty lawyers who fatten their pockets on the pretext of defending their clients. These detainees are not the Nelson Mandelas or the Zulfikar Ali Bhuttos whose incarceration drew the attention and concern of the world. They are ordinary people who have one simple wish: they want to home.

The 'Northeastern Herald' recounts here the suffering and disappointments of a woman and man with the police, the judiciary and the Sri Lankan state

in general, which would have induced them to undertake this hunger strike.

Sharmila (real name withheld) who was 44 years old at the time arrest came from Batticaloa to Colombo on her way for overseas employment. She was arrested in the Pettah by the Bambalapitiya police on 3rd September 1999 and handed over to the Terrorist Investigation Division of the Colombo police. She was indicted only after 15 months on 5th December in the High Court of Colombo on a number of charges including withholding information on a woman whom she had accompanied from Batticaloa. The woman had been later arrested with explosives. Sharmila produced her passport and other documents to prove she was going abroad and had come to Colombo to obtain a visa and denied she was a co-conspirator with the woman who was allegedly arrested with explosives.

Her pleas were of no avail and the trial was fixed 5th March 2001. A postponement was effected to 9th May 2001 on the very first date of her trial because the prosecution did not have certain documents. On 9th May the case was postponed once more to 25th June because the assistant superintendent of police (ASP) who was an important witness was absent.

On 25th June, the case was postponed once more to 3rd October because no judge was appointed to that particular court. On 3rd October the counsel for the defence made an application to the state counsel to consider amending the indictment for a lesser offence for the expeditious conclusion of the trial, which was yet to begin two years and one month after Sharmila's arrest and 10 months after the indictment was served. The lesser offence was withholding information.

But on 6th November the state counsel disclosed that amending the indictment was not possible was the trial was re-fixed 1st February 2002, three years and five months after her arrest. But believe this or not the ASP was ab-

But on 6th November the state counsel disclosed that amending the indictment was not possible was the trial was re-fixed 1st February 2002, three years and five months after her arrest. But believe this or not the ASP was absent again and the trial had to be postponed for 19th February. The ASP repeated his behaviour on 19th February leading to the trial being fixed 22nd May.

sent again and the trial had to be postponed for 19th February. The ASP repeated his behaviour on 19th February leading to the trial being fixed 22nd May.

On 22nd May the judge (name withheld) was on leave and the case was postponed to 2nd July. On that date all the witnesses were absent and the trial had to be re-fixed for 6th September. The judge (name withheld) was absent once again on 6th September leading to the trial being postponed to 22nd October that is 11 days hence. Any guesses who will be absent on 22nd October?

Sharmila approached the attorney general requesting the case be transferred to the Vavunia, Trincomalee or Batticaloa high courts in a desperate attempt to expedite the trial.

She had also petitioned the Supreme Court against her arrest and detention but counsel withdrew the petition when the matter came up for trial in the High Court.

Twenty-two year old Ravi (real name withheld) of Thalankudah, Batticaloa was employed at a Hindu temple in Ramboda at the time of arrest. He was handed over to the Ramakrishna Mission orphanage when he was nine years old at the death of his fa-

ther. After studying in Batticaloa and working as a labourer to keep the home fires burning he came to Ramboda around 12th August 1999 and was employed in a temple there.

On 12th December 1999 police from the Counter Subversive Unit (CSU) of the Nuwara Eliya police division arrested him without giving any reasons and he was detained at the Nuwara Eliya police station under emergency regulations on a detention order issued the area DIG.

While in detention he was taken to the Special Branch Unit and assaulted several times and accused of having provided information to an LTTE operative. Udaya Jeevadas, on the movements prominent political figures such as S. Sellasamy, P. Radhakrishnan and S. Rajaratnam and having with him details of access to Arumugam Thondaman's residence. Ravi was assaulted despite pleading he was innocent and poor and had come to Ramboda to work at the temple on the recommendation of the Ramakrishna Mission, Batticaloa.

While in detention he was met by counsel to whom he complained he had been tortured for a confession. The counsel told the Senior Superintendent of Po-

lice that if the authorities wished to record his confession to do so in the presence of a magistrate. The response of the SSP, Nuwara Eliya was that he knew the law and that the police was authorised to get the confession.

Ravi produced before the magistrate on two dates and continued to be in the custody of the police for four months without charges being framed. Indictment was served on 24th October 2001 nearly two years after his arrest. The matter was fixed for trial in the Kandy High Court on 5th May 2002. There the counsel representing Ravi appealed to the attorney general (AG) for the transfer of the case to the Colombo High Court, which was done.

It was called in the Colombo High Court on 26th August 2002 where the defence requested time to make representations to the AG to withdraw the indictment. The trial was re-fixed for 9th September, but the state counsel appearing for the AG had been transferred and the new state counsel said he did not possess proper instruction and the case was postponed to 18th September. On this date the state counsel claimed he did not have the brief upon which the judge gave a long calling date for 7th November.

Ravi petitioned the Supreme Court against her arrest and detention but counsel withdrew the petition after the matter came up for trial in the High Court.

All the 139 fasting prisoners must have 'case histories' as deplorable as Sharmila's and Ravi's that have driven them to the end of their tether. The earlier the government realises the human tragedy prolonged and illegal detention has caused among the Tamil political prisoners the better will it come to understand excuses such as the peace process now moving ahead or the Ceasefire Agreement currently in operation are not the panacea for all ills.

Biggest object since Pluto found in solar system

By Richard Stenger

A newly discovered body in the outer reaches of the solar system is larger than all the objects in the asteroid belt combined, astronomers announced Monday.

The spherical planetoid, half the size of Pluto, is the biggest found in the solar system since astronomers detected the ninth planet in 1930.

It orbits the sun from a distance of about 4 billion miles (6.4 billion kilometers) in a nether region known as the Kuiper Belt, a ring of thousands of primordial icy, rocky chunks beyond the

planets that date back to the origins of the solar system.

The object, dubbed Quaoar, further strengthens the theory that Pluto is not a conventional planet but rather a Kuiper Belt object.

"Quaoar definitely hurts the case for Pluto being a planet," said planetary scientist Mike Brown, co-discoverer of the new object. "If Pluto were discovered today, no one would even consider calling it a planet because it's clearly a Kuiper Belt object."

The Kuiper Belt is home to many of the comets that periodically swing into the inner solar system. They and larger objects in the belt are pristine

vestiges of the infant solar system, which could help explain how our space neighborhood formed.

The new object is about 800 miles (1,300 kilometers) in diameter and circles the sun once every 288 years. Its orbit is stable and circular in comparison to Pluto.

Pluto, usually the most distant planet, takes 248 years to complete a trip around the sun and orbits at an average distance of about 3.7 billion miles (5.8 billion kilometers).

But the eccentric ice planet follows an extremely elliptical orbit and goes inside the circular path of Neptune from time to time.

While traditionally classified as a planet, Pluto more likely is a Kuiper Belt object that was pushed into an erratic, Neptune-crossing orbit billions of years ago, according to astronomers.

Like other Kuiper Belt objects, Quaoar is thought to contain rock, water ice and frozen organic compounds such as methane, carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide.

The surface, slowly cooked over the eons by ultraviolet radiation from the sun, could be dark and similar in consistency to tar, Brown and co-discoverer Chad Trujillo said.

The California Institute of Technology researchers pre-

sented their findings Monday at an American Astronomical Society meeting in Birmingham, Alabama.

The scientific duo named the object Quaoar, pronounced KWAH-o-ar, after the creation god of the Tongva people, a Native American tribe in Southern California.

As telescopes and high-tech search techniques improve in the coming years, astronomers said they expect to find many more Kuiper Belt objects, including increasingly larger specimens.

"Right now, I'd say they get as big as Pluto," Brown said.

(CNN)

Chetties and Bharathas are ethnic groups in census questionnaire

By Professor Karthigesu Sivathamby

To the best of my knowledge and belief, except for a reference made in one of the Sunday editions of the Tamil paper Thinakkural during the enumeration weeks of Census 2001, the director, Census and Statistics has run away with a major national exercise with very questionable categorisations.

In the questionnaire given to the enumerators for taking the count of the people, he has given the following breakdown for the ethnic groupings in the country - Sinhalese, Sri Lanka Tamil, Indian Tamil, Sri Lanka Moor, Burgher, Malay, Sri Lankan Chetty, Bharatha and other.

I am not referring here to the taking away of the colonialist categorization, which divided the Sinhalese into Kandyan and Low Country (had it been removed half a century ago it would have saved a lot of embarrassment for the Low Country elite in Colombo at the time) nor am I referring to the omission of the category of 'Indian Muslim' which constituted a substantial number earlier.

There has been a continuous history of inner tensions between the Sri Lankan Moors and the Indian Muslims. I do not know what the director, census and statistics thinks about how the Indian Muslims were absorbed into the general Sri Lankan population. Here, I am also not quarrelling with the nomenclature (though I should really be doing so) 'Indian Tamil', the legally accepted term is 'Tamil of Indian Origin'. It is morally and politically wrong to continue to call this group Indian Tamil after granting them full citizenship in this country.

What I want to really raise here is the two new categories called 'Sri Lanka Chetty' and 'Bharatha'.

Let us take the category 'Sri Lanka Chetty' first.

Chetty in Tamil is a caste name derived from the Sanskrit word 'Sresthin'. Chetty is not a Sinhala caste. It is one of the most influential castes in Tamil Nadu. In fact there are a number of Chetty subcastes there.

In Sri Lanka, the Chetties are a homogenous, caste group. There has been Chetty group in Jaffna, which over the years intermixed with the Vellalas so much so that there is sub-caste among them known as Chetty Vellalas. (One of Arumuga Navalar's sisters was married to a Chetty Vellala. Among the Mukkuvas of Batticaloa too there is a matri-clan called Chetty Kudi. (In Tamil the word Kudi means clan).

Generally speaking the Chettiyars seem to have come from Tamil Nadu and were en-

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

Now the question is whom does the director, Census and Statistics, refer to as the Sri Lankan Chetties? Is this a polite way of giving an all-island status to the Colombo Chetties? Does the director, Census and Statistics, expect the few extant Chetty families in Jaffna also to fill in his questionnaire as Sri Lankan Chetties? I am sure the Chetties would be aghast!

gaged in commercial and financing activities in Sri Lanka. Evidently at the time of the arrival of the Portuguese, the coastal trade was largely in their hands. Most of them converted to Catholicism unlike the castemen in Tamil Nadu or Jaffna. Most of them continued to be Catholics even under Dutch and British rule: a few Chetty families like the Ondaatje's became part of the Dutch Reformed Church. (The presence of a branch of the Ondaatje family in Batticaloa is to this day testified to by the place name Ondaatje Madam)

The Tamilness of this coastal Chetties was not in doubt till the middle of the 19th century when Simon Casie Chitty was nominated a member of the Legislative Council. More important is the fact that Casie Chetty was the first literary historian of Tamil in English (The Tamil Plutarch, 1857). He was also the author of the 'Castes among Tamils of Ceylon.'

Perhaps the word Chetty in its westernised form became Chitty thus becoming the family name for many illustrious citizens of this country. Over the years their exclusiveness led them to be called the Colombo Chetties and their influence within the Colombo Municipality is retained by the road name 'New Chetty Street.' It also must be added here that Puttalam was the chief centre of the Colombo Chetties and there was a substantial population of Tamils until recently. Now of course they have dwindled in numbers and have become an insignificant minority.

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lies in Jaffna also to fill in his questionnaire as Sri Lankan Chetties? I am sure the Chetties would be aghast!

Is it right on the part of the director, Census and Statistics, to introduce such caste categories as ethnic groups of Sri Lanka? The worst is yet to come.

The Bharathas too are now classified by him as an 'ethnos' - a group having distinguishable ethnic characteristics.

There are two important Bharatha groups in Sri Lanka. One is the group of sea-faring families residing from around Chilaw down to Colombo. There is evidence that there had been

concentration of Bharathas who had been maintaining close family relations with their caste group in Tuticorin in Tamil Nadu.

The word Parathar and its variant Parathavar have been in usage in Tamil from the earliest period. The most ancient of Tamil literature, the Sangam anthology refers to them as a people from the maritime regions (Neithal). They are depicted as traders and fishermen in the Sangam classics.

It is possible that as fishermen they were also interested in pearl diving which should explain their presence upto the northwestern shores of Sri Lanka, some place names of which like Silavathurai and Silapham are reminiscent of Muthusalapham which in Tamil means pearl oyster beds.

In the late medieval, pre-western period, the pearl fishery was controlled by Muslim traders. The Muslims employed the Parathavar mainly as their Pearl divers. Scholars like A. Sivasubramanian have shown how the Parathavar who were exploited by their Muslim masters converted en masse to Catholicism in the 16th century. It is quite possible that the large number of them who came to settle on the northwestern coast were already Catholic.

The fact that these Bharathas continued to practice their religion and speak their mother tongue is testified to by the number Tamil schools in the predominantly Catholic places of the Bharathas.

From the late 20's there has been a slow process of Sinhalisation among them led by

From the late 20's there has been a slow process of Sinhalisation among them led by the Catholic Church itself. By the sixties and seventies the place of Tamil among the Catholics of the western and northwestern coast was severely dented. Only the Hindu coastal peoples in places such as Muneeswaram and Udappu retained their Tamilness amid this process of Sinhalisation.

Bharatha settlements up to Kalutara in the Colonial period.

Besides these indigenised littoral connected Bharathas, there also a handful of Bharathas in the Colombo Municipality who settled during the British rule, especially to work in the Colombo harbour. In fact the area opposite St. Anthony's Church in Kotahena, there was a heavy con-

centration of Bharathas who had been maintaining close family relations with their caste group in Tuticorin in Tamil Nadu. The word Parathar and its variant Parathavar have been in usage in Tamil from the earliest period. The most ancient of Tamil literature, the Sangam anthology refers to them as a people from the maritime regions (Neithal). They are depicted as traders and fishermen in the Sangam classics. It is possible that as fishermen they were also interested in pearl diving which should explain their presence upto the northwestern shores of Sri Lanka, some place names of which like Silavathurai and Silapham are reminiscent of Muthusalapham which in Tamil means pearl oyster beds. In the late medieval, pre-western period, the pearl fishery was controlled by Muslim traders. The Muslims employed the Parathavar mainly as their Pearl divers. Scholars like A. Sivasubramanian have shown how the Parathavar who were exploited by their Muslim masters converted en masse to Catholicism in the 16th century. It is quite possible that the large number of them who came to settle on the northwestern coast were already Catholic. The fact that these Bharathas continued to practice their religion and speak their mother tongue is testified to by the number Tamil schools in the predominantly Catholic places of the Bharathas. From the late 20's there has been a slow process of Sinhalisation among them led by

This has been a touchy, sensi-

tive point - how are the Bharathas to be described in terms of the demography of this country, Tamils or Sinhalese? Those Bharathas who had to choose Sinhala as their medium of education on the western and northwestern coast became increasingly embarrassed to identify themselves as Tamils. Behind this language switch lies the interesting history of how the Roman Catholic Church was chiefly instrumental in promoting the Sinhalisation of the Tamil speaking Bharathas of the western and northwestern coast.

Without going any further into this history of the alienation of the Bharathas from the Tamils, let us return to the question of categorising Bharathas as an ethnic group of Sri Lanka.

Forgetting for a moment their inerasable Tamil origins, let us pose the pertinent question why are the Bharathas fighting shy of calling themselves Sinhalese?

It is unfair by the Sinhala language to call it their mother tongue and yet desist referring to themselves as Sinhalese.

The director of Census and Statistics has evidently stepped in (with all respect to him) where the angels fear to tread. The political point should be made clear here. We should try to find out that in the overall census whose numerical strength is affected by these two newly introduced categories? My problem is not so much with the categorisation itself because there have been many cultural 'switchings' in Sri Lanka in recent Sri Lankan history. For example, the process by which Kataragama lost its Hindu identity.

The question is who ordered this categorisation in the census? And on what historical authority?

Extending this logic, how would the Sinhalese feel if tomorrow the Karawas or the Salagamas persuade the powers that be that they should be categorised as a separate ethnic group? To me, at the age of seventy, this administrative intrusion into the socio-political

..... We have to take this as yet another one in the long list of bureaucratic invasions into minority rights. What is interesting here is that Tamil MPs who should keep themselves informed of developments like this one are blissfully ignorant.

Whether it is a case of making Bharathas a separate ethnic group or adding Haguranketha to the Nuwara Eliya district to increase Sinhala strength there, Tamil Parliamentarians are tight lipped for after all if you want to be in the good books of a minister or a government these are not things to speak of. "Oh Lord Forgive them for they do not know what they do".

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TNA's let down of political prisoners

The hunger strike by political prisoners at Kalutara and other prisons came to a halt when Minister Milinda Moragoda visited the jail and held negotiations that resulted in the inmates agreeing to the government's terms.

The minister was flanked by the members of the Tamil National Alliance, who like a bunch of corpulent Florence Nightingales reportedly administered the fasting prisoners dribbles of milk, thereby officially announcing the fast to death coming to an end.

The minister, it is learnt, assured the prisoners they would be released on bail and the special courts established to try PTA suspects would take up their cases expeditiously. It is also learnt he had promised to visit the prison in a month at which time he said most of the present inmates would be no longer behind bars. The assurances seem to have been good enough for the prisoners to call off their fast.

With this deft move the government was able to diffuse a situation that had the potential to explode due to the inaction of the state and the fundamental justice that underpinned the hunger strike of the incarcerated.

But the astuteness of the government was aided and abetted by the disgraceful conduct of the Tamil National Alliance. The Tamil MPs collectively sold the community they represent in parliament as they were reduced to mere bystanders over an issue on which they had the moral right to take the political lead for the simple reason that that was the mood of the voters on whose ballots they came to parliament.

The TNA Members of Parliament on Monday decided with a group of activists committed to the release of the Tamil political prisoners on three-point agenda. On Tuesday they were to raise the matter in parliament as a matter of national importance and walk out of the chamber. On Wednesday there would be a sit-in in front of all the district secretariats in the northeast and today (Friday) a demonstration in Colombo would be organised with activists from the south who were committed for the release of political prisoners and the repeal of the PTA.

Finally nothing happened. There was only an adjournment debate, no walkout by the TNA but discussions with the government and the customary acquiescing to the wishes of the party in power with a polite smile and a bowed head.

If it were for a settlement through feeding milk to the prisoners, human rights and other activists would not have drawn up elaborate plans of action for sustaining the campaign for the release of political prisoners. This was drawn up because the government's intransigence on the repeal of the PTA and release of prisoners was known, and its ability to come to compromises on the basis of promises it has not the slightest intention of keeping had been worn threadbare.

The release of political prisoners depended on a political decision from the government. A political decision was indeed taken but not to release the prisoners because the PTA is illegal. The decision was for the fasting prisoners to give up their struggle on the assurances they would be enlarged on bail.

There is every possibility these prisoners might be released soon. But that is not the point. The point was a joint struggle to establish certain norms on the arrest and detention of political prisoners. And it is this the TNA through the cynical conduct of its MPs who prevented this from being put in place.

What lies behind the uprising in the East

By D. Sivaram (Taraki)

The incident in Kanjirankudah in which fifteen civilians were wounded and five were killed by STF fire on Wednesday has once again given a boost to those who argue that the LTTE is deliberately and systematically provoking civilians into attacking military camps.

They see a sinister pattern in such incidents where civilians have raised not only their voices but also their fists against the presence of the Sri Lankan armed forces in several key points in the northeast.

They also argue that the LTTE is using civilian unruliness as a cover to push the army out of strategic positions.

Let us, for argument's sake, assume for a moment that all this is true.

If so, the following assumptions also have to be necessarily true -

a) That the people in the areas where the incidents said to have been provoked by the LTTE have had no reason now or in the past to harbour any anger or grudge against the presence of the armed forces in the camps;

b) That they had no reason to feel that military barriers, defence positions or camps of the Sri Lankan armed forces should be removed from those places that have faced civilian protests since the signing of the ceasefire agreement between the Tigers and the United National Front government;

c) That they had remained passive and law abiding until the LTTE deliberately pushed or compelled them to act as a cover for their operatives bent causing havoc against the Sri Lankan armed forces.

To iterate our point, it should be plain by any common sense yardstick that these assumptions should have to be necessarily true if the argument that the LTTE is deliberately and systematically instigating incidents such as the protest in Kanjirankudah on Wednesday with ulterior motives.

Let us first take the Amparai incident itself first to test the above assumptions.

Hospital records show that two members of the LTTE were seriously assaulted by the STF and were admitted to the Thirukkivil District Hospital for treatment.

According to the civilian driver who was also assaulted by the STF who beat up two LTTE members, the head of the political division of the Tigers for the Pottuvil area, M. Visuvanathan and a Tiger activist, Christy Rajah were travelling in a tractor when some commandos of the STF stopped them at the Kanjirankudah camp, which is by the main road on the island's southeastern coast around 10.30 a.m. Wednesday morning.

The commandos had started assaulting the driver and Rajah when they had got down from the tractor to find out why they had been stopped.

Visuvanathan had then intervened and informed the STF personnel

Yet fools have the temerity in this country to argue that everything was rosy and fine between the people and the Sri Lankan armed forces in this part island until the LTTE instigated them to protest

who were assaulting them that he was an LTTE official and that they were transporting some material for constructing a memorial.

The STF commandos had told him that they knew he was from the LTTE and that is why they were assaulting the driver and Rajah. Thereafter they had severely beaten up Visuvanathan too, injuring him grievously.

The chain of events that followed culminated in the protest by villagers of Vinayagapuram against the attack turning unruly and the STF opening fire on the civilians.

The STF cannot have so soon forgotten a similar incident it provoked earlier this year when commandos in its camp at Sakamam, near Kanjirankudah, assaulted an LTTE member for apparently not possessing a driver's license. This sparked a demonstration against the STF main camp for this area, which is in Thirukkivil. The STF opened fire on the demonstrators but fortunately no one was killed. The STF of course had no right to check for driving licenses.

So much so for the argument that the incidents in question are well calculated and premeditated.

Now let's examine the second assumption that the people in these areas had no reason to resent the STF's presence in this part of the country until they were compelled by the LTTE to protest.

The STF has ruled the roost in the Tamil villages on the southeastern coast of the Amparai District since 1985. There were only two hospitals serving this remote region. Both were taken over by the STF and converted into military camps. Part of the Thirukkivil hospital was allowed to function inside the STF camp there.

Any one with an iota of commonsense visiting the villages of Thirukkivil and Thambiluvil will meet a whole generation that has grown up with not so sweet memories of being checked and often being humiliated at the hospital by STF guards who virtually ran the place. And anyone with an iota of commonsense would see that there are so many other strategically advantageous places in that area where the STF could have set up its camp.

How many of those who are howling hoarse about the

Kanjirankudah incident know that the villagers who protested against the STF were subjected to the same kind of harsh economic embargo under which the people of Vanni had to suffer for more than a decade. People entering the area were subjected to the same draconian checking procedures. Everyone passing beyond Kanjirankudah was closely questioned before they were allowed on their way. Outsiders were often turned back. It was virtually an open prison.

The predicament of the people here was far worse than those living in the Vanni. The STF forcibly evicted thousands from their villages in the interior of this region in 1990. Tens of thousands of acres of fertile paddy lands lay fallow in the interior for twelve years while their owners languished in squalor and abject poverty in the crumbling, ill maintained refugee shelters near Thirukkivil.

The STF strictly banned all cultivation and cattle herding in this region under pain of death. Many refugees who were driven by poverty to look for their lost herds in their abandoned farmland have been shot dead or arrested and tortured. Several went missing. There are very few men in the refugee camps of Thirukkivil who have not been assaulted, tortured, or forced to labour by the STF.

Kanjirankudah is 84 kilometres south of Batticaloa. The STF camp here overlooks the key junction where the interior road from Akkaraipattu town through the farmlands of the area meets the main coastal road to Pottuvil.

Hence the STF camp at this junction and nearby Sakamam, have been the chief imposer of the draconian restrictions and the ban on all cultivation and cattle herding in the interior. Pathetic and persisted pleas by the refugees, beseeching the STF to let them clear their overgrown fields and homesteads fell on deaf years.

Last year even the residents of Thirukkivil and Thambiluvil who had been allowed to cultivate the lands by the coastal main road too were hit below the belt when the STF banned them from reaping more than three thousand acres of fertile paddy they had nurtured at great expense and risk.

Hundreds of petitions and pleas urging the STF to let the farmers reap their harvest were callously rejected. Yet fools have the temerity in this country to argue that everything was rosy and fine between the people and the Sri Lankan armed forces in this part island until the LTTE instigated them to protest.

You cannot wake up people who deliberately pretend to indulge in the slumber of convenient ignorance. After 53 years blowing the trumpet futilely into the ears of those who pretend to sleep, it is indeed time for Tamil politicians to take stock and act.

What PTA prisoners could learn from IRA activist Bobby Sands

By J. S. Tissainayagam

The defiance of fasting of Tamil political prisoners in Kalutara and other jails petered into nothing when they agreed to assurances by Minister Milinda Moragoda who, flanked by members of the TNA, said detainees could be released on bail, once the special courts began functioning, and their long-term status would be discussed in Thailand at the next round of talks with the LTTE. Thus efforts taken to pronounce the PTA and detention of political prisoners as illegal disappeared into thin air.

Though the hunger strike is over, a review of what took place might be interesting.

The demands of the three categories of prisoners – those in remand, those on whom indictments have been served and the convicted – were that they be released unconditionally regardless of their status and the seriousness of their crime. The demand was based on the premise that the PTA is an illegal piece of legislation that contravenes international legal instruments safeguarding human rights, thereby rendering even those convicted under its provisions, innocent.

The irony is that many of those on hunger strike were arrested on superficial charges such as not giving information about the LTTE, possession of certain categories of weapons, having obtained weapons training from the LTTE etc. They are sprats when compared to Kennedy and other acknowledged members of the LTTE who were released in the prisoner swap, which prompts the question as to why these persons should remain while the bigger offenders are free.

The 'fast unto death' as it is known in common parlance in Sri Lanka, should also be examined in comparison with examples from other countries because there are many associations that could be studied with profit.

To us today the uneasy truce, occasionally broken, which characterises the relationship between the British government, the Protestants, the Catholics, the IRA and the power sharing agreement these parties are working on as a consequence of the Good Friday Agreement, fails to bring out the bloodshed, violence and terror that must have been the lot of the people of Ireland and England during the cataclysmic 1970s and 1980s.

In that tale of tragedy and heroism the hunger strike undertaken by IRA prisoners in 1980 and 1981 stand out as watershed. They showed how a group of resolute men with a mission to accomplish brought Westminster to agree to their de-

The next point of interest is the statement the IRA prisoners made before embarking on the hunger strike in 1981. They said, "We the Republican prisoners ... demand as of right political recognition and that we be accorded the status of political prisoners. We claim the right as captured combatants in the continuing struggle for national liberation and self-determination. ... We refute the tag of 'criminal' with which the British have tried to label us

mands by sticking to principles and not giving in. What is more, the parallels between what led to the hunger strike in the prison in Belfast in 1980/81 and at Kalutara in 2002 are amazing.

We have to go back to 1971 to place the hunger strike of 1980/81 in its proper context. In August 1971 the Provisional IRA issued a call for a ceasefire, if the British government was willing to agree to a demand (among others) for the release of "all political prisoners tried and untried both in Ireland and Britain." The British authorities however chose to ignore it.

The IRA repeated their offer of ceasefire in May 1972, which while calling for a withdrawal of British forces from Northern Ire-

Category Status though the ceasefire fell through.

Due to reasons too long to explain here, but mostly to do with the violence the IRA unleashed in response to the British government's repression, the Special Category Status was withdrawn in 1975. The next phase of the struggle in the Irish prisons, which came to an end in 1981, was to restore this status for prisoners.

In 1976 the IRA prisoners issued five demands. These were their right: not to wear prison uniform, not to do prison work, to be allowed free association with other prisoners, to organise their own educational and recreational activity and for weekly visits and the delivery of parcels and mail.

hunger strike that began in October 1980. The strike that seemed intractable in the beginning was eventually called off in late December without any deaths. The fasting prisoners said they had received advance copies of a document, which was to be presented in the House of Commons that conceded most of their demands. Though the prisoners believed it answered their demands for recognition as political detainees, once the hunger strike came to an end, the British authorities gradually withdrew the concessions they had granted, assisted no doubt by the no-nonsense attitude of Margaret Thatcher who had become prime minister a year earlier.

Another round of hunger strikes, beginning in March 1981, was held to oppose what the IRA felt was as an act of duplicity by the British government. The male hunger strikers were from Long Kesh prison, joined by females from a prison in Armagh. It ended many months later with 10 prisoners dead, including the legendary Bobby Sands. He was, when he died, a member of parliament. With ten dead the fast drew to an end.

There is however dispute as to whether the political status for which IRA prisoners clamoured was actually granted. They were allowed to wear civilian clothes as long as they were not IRA type uniforms and though they were not allowed free association, their wishes were respected and parcels, visits and mail – all that was agreed upon during earlier negotiations – were formalised. The British authorities on the other hand felt they were successful in denying the IRA detainees the status of political prisoners and the concessions granted were minimal.

The hunger strike of the IRA where Bobby Sands and others lost their lives is instructive not only because PTA detainees too adopted a similar mode of struggle. It is important because of the reason for which they fought – recognition as political prison-

ers. Local detainees too should be most concerned that their rights as political prisoners are respected because there is no signal as yet from the government that the PTA is to be repealed. If it remains in the statute books it could be used any time in the future too.

In Sri Lanka, persons taken in under the PTA are not treated as political prisoners or as a separate category. If at all their special category is marked by systematic torture. For Sri Lankans a Special Category Status would mean that the draconian provisions of the PTA such as indefinite remand and admissibility of confessions extracted through torture are made inapplicable, while access to lawyers etc. are granted as a matter of course. Further, they should be protected from fellow prisoners as well as racist prison officials.

The next point of interest is the statement the IRA prisoners made before embarking on the hunger strike in 1981. They said, "We the Republican prisoners ... demand as of right political recognition and that we be accorded the status of political prisoners. We claim the right as captured combatants in the continuing struggle for national liberation and self-determination. ... We refute the tag of 'criminal' with which the British have tried to label us..."

In my column last week I said that one of the glaring inconsistencies in the treatment between the seven military persons in LTTE custody and 13 LTTE members in the hands of the state, was the way they were treated. Captain Boyagoda and the others never complained of torture, which was routine for those like Kennedy. What the IRA demand shows is that there has been a precedent for political prisoners demanding they be as treated as combatants rather than criminals, which the Tamil and Irish prisoners share in the treatment their respective captors meted out to them.

The only way this can be ensured is to see that a) that the unacceptable PTA is repealed forthwith and b) that those who are taken in under other laws are accorded special status as political prisoners and the same protection afforded to POWs under the Geneva Convention be granted to them too.

It is high time that forces working in the south – parliamentary, political, civil society and at the level of individual citizens – bring pressure to bear on the government to repeal the PTA and to ensure better treatment for political prisoners. If humanitarian standards cannot be achieved in times of peace, we will never achieve them in times of war.

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land also demanded an amnesty for political prisoners. On 15th May 1972, IRA prisoners began a hunger strike in support of a demand that they be given political prisoner status, rather than be treated common criminals. The negotiating British authorities agreed that IRA prisoners would be given Special Category Status.

Special Category Status fell short acknowledging the IRA detainees as political prisoners, but their conditions of imprisonment were improved and they were separately lodged, they could wear their own clothes rather than prison overalls, had a command structure as in the IRA in communicating to prison authorities etc. What is also encouraging is that the British government did not go back on their Special

The British authorities however decided not to give into these demands. The prisoners interpreted the British response as 'criminalizing' them because their political activism was perceived by the British state as a crime. This triggered relentless confrontation.

The defiance by members of the IRA of British authorities were to last almost four years – as long as some of our detainees have had to suffer the horrors of Sri Lankan prisons – during which time they were in solitary confinement swaddled only in blankets and their own excreta to keep them company in maggot-infested cells. What is more, they were beaten and systematically tortured.

This culminated in the first

Models without a human face: maths & economic development

By Jude L. Fernando

There has been in the past mutual suspicion between the Tamils and the Sinhalese that each side is walking into a trap laid by the other, which would, in the long run, undermine the right to self-determination that both communities enjoyed. But this is being overshadowed by an emerging configuration in the LTTE – government relationship, which secretary to the prime minister, Bradman Weerakoon, referred to as a 'partnership.' This partnership however, seems to be leading the country into a far more dangerous trap – the trap of development led by the World Bank, IMF and the transnational corporations.

President Harry Truman gave the term 'development' currency after which vast areas of the world, mostly the former colonies were suddenly labeled as 'underdeveloped.' A new problem i.e. underdevelopment was invented and new solution was offered. Truman, however, was able to distance his imperialist project from the previous ones by making the World Bank its leading actor and development a responsibility of the sovereign nation-state. From then onwards, development was a national, not a colonial or imperialist, project.

Development for Truman was more than helping poor countries. It was a means whereby U.S. hegemony around the world was defined and consolidated in response to the threat of communism. Truman, the Ford Foundation and other development agencies believed that underdevelopment was a breeding ground for communism. However, the new institutions they helped to evolve to counter this threat formed dependencies between the developed and the developing countries that proved far more oppressive than any during the colonial era.

Imperialism in the guise of development, unlike in the older colonial administrations, has a remarkable power to discipline the national economies to function according to the interests of international capital, drain wealth from developed to developing countries and at the same time pass the responsibility of its failure and cost to the victims.

The World Bank is known more for its failures than successes. Now it is under attack by its own leaders and is the main target of anti-globalization protests as worldwide poverty continues to disempower majority of the world's population and subverts democracy. For decades, the Bank's response for its failures was simply to change the focus of development from economic growth to basic needs, to gender, environment, human resources/

For all practical purposes these economists have dropped the concept of class as the fundamental reason for economic inequalities, or distributive justice as an objective from their academic pursuits and political agendas. They have relocated themselves in a new political space called the 'civil society' located far away from the conventional spaces of radical politics and from majority of the population. They even take the brightest students to the civil society as research assistants and keep them busy collecting data for a few dollars a day

social capital and good governance. These efforts, however, did not change but further strengthened its commitment and capacity to imprison the third world within capitalism.

These efforts were aided by academia. Towards the end of the cold war there was a fundamental shift in the profession of economics from an emphasis on distributive justice and social welfare to neo-classicism that basically believed in economic growth driven by international trade as the main engine of development. Its benefits would, in the long run, trickle down to majority of the population.

The conceptual and analytical horizons of the world's neo-classical economists are limited to what can be quantified or mathematically modeled. Ideologically they are committed to the Enlightenment notion of progress and free-market capitalism. Even the most enlightened ones have become prisoners of their own models and unable to see anything beyond.

The knowledge they produce, evident in the so-called consultancy reports, are based on methods that are ridiculed by other social scientists for their narrow and limited explanatory powers. What is more, they are extremely secretive and unavailable to the public whom they pretend to serve. They conspire with the Bank and transnational corporations in pressuring the governments and local agencies to function according to the logic of global capitalism.

In the west this new breed of economists hardly get any training in political economy, history of economic thought, ethics or philosophy and their capacity to think critically about economic development from the perspective of the needs of the people is extremely limited. These economists simply model the world mathematically and the NGOs clothe it in the language of local culture and society. So development appears to become national and driven by the interests of the natives rather than by the Bank, which obscures the fact

that these economists are simply functioning as the mathematical technicians for transnational corporations.

Economists from poor third world countries are co-opted by the World Bank and IMF while in graduate schools as interns but subsequently find employment as consultants when they return to their home countries. The knowledge they produce is regulated by the parameters of neo-classical economics and implicit faith in the trickle down theory, although their work is cloaked in such language as 'development with a human face' or 'empowerment of women.'

Their persistent attempts at privatization of the education system and changing curricular and teaching methods are attempts at making academia to function according to a free-market economy. The space for critical thinking gets restricted and the only forms of knowledge that is considered as legitimate are those that can increase the productivity of the economy.

The on-going transition to the semester system is partly a politically motivated one in order to restrict the space available for university students to engage in political activity. This is not to argue that the existing system of education should not be changed. It simply points out how the World Bank and IMF have colonized academia and transformed it according to the interests of global capitalism – unfortunately with the blessings of the sons and daughters of the soil.

For all practical purposes these economists have dropped the concept of class as the fundamental reason for economic inequalities, or distributive justice as an objective from their academic pursuits and political agendas. They have relocated themselves in a new political space called the 'civil society' located far away from the conventional spaces of radical politics and from majority of the population. They even take the brightest students to the civil society as research assistants and keep them busy collecting data for a few dol-

lars a day.

These civil society 'walas' take the free market economy as given, echoing Frances Fukuyama's notion of end of history after the triumph of capitalism. Hence the problem of underdevelopment can be only resolved through a vibrant civil society and good governance. The World Bank and the development industry represents the work of these economists and consultants as the interests of the local population or voices of civil society so that the 'top down development' masquerades as 'bottom-up development' or 'people's development'.

Today the development industry has shown remarkable creativity in exploiting the language and practices of the local culture as a way of hiding racist, anti-people and anti-environment biases of its interventions. Mainstreaming gender in development means using the women as means of incorporating the market economy, good governance means to discipline the state and society to function according to the logic of the transnational capital, sustainable development, sustaining economic growth.

Empowerment, participatory development and self-reliance means asking the poor to look after their own future by making profits from the markets and there by providing legitimacy for the withdrawal of the state from providing basic welfare. Collectively, all these methods have absolved the rich from taking any responsibility for economic misery and environmental degradation. Even more frustrating is the market economy's success in appropriating the language of its opponents, e.g. especially the feminists and environmentalists, as means of undermining radical challenges to colonizing the life-worlds of the poor.

The fundamental problem today is that we do not have economists to reclaim the development for the people of the soil. The entire theoretical basis of neo-classical economics is based on false premises and is more fiction than on facts. Even the most religious and hu-

manistic minded economists do not see the reality of development because they neither have the training nor permitted to do so by the agencies they serve.

The economists' great accomplishments with scarcity and mathematical models are to mystify this truth about scarcity with scientific pretensions such as 'laws of supply and demand,' 'price mechanisms,' etc. Their claims about free trade or free markets never existed in the world, but simply sanitize the western model of development.

After decades of development, between one-half and one-third of humanity goes hungry while food rots in warehouses because the market is the only mode of distribution that the rich will permit. As the Somali saying has it: "Scarcity and abundance are never far apart. The rich and the poor live in the same house." Still a very few realize that it is immoral and catastrophic to make the fear of hunger as a quest for profiteering.

The way out of this impasse is not to romanticize traditional economic systems and blame the west for ills of development as advocated by the nationalists and traditionalists who in fact are the main promoters and beneficiaries of what they refers to as 'western model of development.' Further, we should not condemn all NGOs as some prominent Buddhist leaders have done in the past. The rich temples along with the help of their patrons have accumulated wealth from the development industry when there are increasing number of Buddhists monks and Buddhists who are on the verge of starvation.

Isn't it ironic the millionaire gamblers are the main patrons of the rich temples who condemn the NGOs for using poverty as a means of conversion? Similar to the development industry blaming the lack of governance as the fundamental reason for underdevelopment, the local elites use the NGOs and the west as the excuse for increasing disparities between the rich and the poor.

Development has always been a global process and a trap imposed by the rich against the poor because its underlying logic is exploitative and discriminatory, breeding inequality. However, experiences of development vary between states, communities and individuals depending on how it is made use of.

If we are interested in preventing the LTTE and the government from walking into the trap of development, we need a new carder of economists who can think and plan economic development from more humanistic and environmentally friendly points of view and the social and political institutions, which can implement their ideas effectively.

Child soldiers and human rights violations in NE

By Cicero

Human rights are universally applicable. Mahatma Gandhi said higher values in the form of rights are applicable to the least and the worst. Human rights norms treat people as human beings without categorizing them.

Human rights activists are, therefore, expected to be above all differences, particularly, political ones. Those who speak of human rights have to first demonstrate they are tolerant of opposite views, however stupid those views may be. There cannot be a duality in human rights as between good persons and bad persons.

It is however very unfortunate that such is not the case with human rights activists in this country. Their perceptions and activism seem to be going against all fundamental human rights values referred to above.

No one would deny that human rights can be used for more purposes than one and that it depends on the hidden agenda of vested interests. In this sense, there is no reason why Sri Lanka should be an exception.

International human rights law imposes legal obligations on states as well as on states that are parties to various human rights instruments to respect and promote such rights for those who are within the jurisdiction of such states. But depending on the ground situation it may become impossible for a state or non-state party to guarantee all rights for the people under their control.

However, when an objective analysis is made to assess the ability of a party to undertake its obligations, an international standard is always prescribed for the purpose. This is because experience shows it is difficult to escape from political and other biases that interfere when assessing the local situation in a particular country.

In Sri Lanka, the activities of certain NGOs and certain human rights activists have been constantly troubling the minds of the Tamils. This type of one-sided human rights activism has undermined the plural nature of Sri Lanka's polity. Although a number of instances may be cited, I would like to mention just two such concerns, application of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) and the issue of child soldiers.

The repeated fast unto death campaigns clearly demonstrate the bizarre manner in which the PTA is applied on the Tamils in this country and the extent of legislative discrimination against this

The arrogance with which the author approaches issues pertaining to the actions of the LTTE sometimes identifies the needs of his 'master' and sometimes the identity of the 'master' as well

ethnic group. Under this act, the suspect can be remanded until the conclusion of the trial but nothing is stated on when such a trial should be concluded. As such, it is possible and it has been the case with many, where an individual can be deprived of his liberty by simply indicting him or her under the PTA.

All that needs to be done for filing such an indictment is to merely arrest an individual on suspicion and obtain a confession. I do not want to drag readers into a long discussion on the PTA at this stage, but my reference to the act is in order to expose the duplicity of some of our human rights champions.

Out of more than 100 NGOs in the south, except for a few, how many voiced their protest against the PTA? Was there any mass mobilization mounted against it in the form of demonstrations or pickets? There are even instances where suggestions were made by members of certain NGOs that action protests should be expressed against the PTA, to which the response from NGO hierarchy was that it was better to wind up the institution rather than engage in such action. So much for their human rights commitment and concerns.

Many NGOs prefer 'soft targets' such as family planning, rehabilitation, resettlement, rights of the children and women or poverty alleviation rather than running the risk of upholding the rights of affected people for the simple reason of their ethnic identity. Many of these activists want to play the dual role of defenders of human rights and being friends with the ruling elite of the country.

The second type of human rights activists work according to their political convictions and although not ignorant of human rights violations against the Tamils, will not dare to open their mouth against government. For example, there are many who would be very active in defending human rights when their political opponents are in power. When their own party forms the government, they seek greener pastures by seeking positions in the U.N system and in other international organizations.

The third group of NGOs and ac-

tivists belong to the category of the sinister. For them, it is only the majority community that may enjoy human rights, while parties that do not form majorities cannot do so. When the war was going on this particular group was concentrating only on the rights of the majority community vis-a-vis the members of the security forces and the police. This type of activism borders on racism and is not worth commenting on.

One cannot however simply ignore the damage done by the activities of the first two categories when they attempt from time to time to paint different pictures for public consumption, thereby trying influencing the course of events.

For instance, except for a few who have been consistent in their concerns throughout the war, all other NGOs and activists suddenly woke up to human rights violations in the northeast after the GOSL and the LTTE signed the ceasefire agreement. One can understand the JVP and Sihala Urumaya talking about these matters because they

human rights champions have turned their guns on the immediate beneficiaries of the process. In their perception it was only the LTTE that was going to be the sole beneficiary of the talks, hence the issue of child conscription and rights of the child.

The only source for these 'concerned' activists turned out to be the University Teachers for Human Rights - Jaffna (UTHR-J), which publishes volume after volume of reports in double quick time depending of course on the demand for these documents.

The credibility of the author of these reports (although he is no longer working at any university in Sri Lanka, not a teacher in any sense, and not even present in the northeast) and the purpose behind publishing them are well known to most people in the northeast. The arrogance with which the author approaches issues pertaining to the actions of the LTTE sometimes identifies the needs of his 'master' and sometimes the identity of the 'master' as well. The line he draws is no longer difficult to understand.

But, there is another side to this business as well. For instance he says it is because of the LTTE's pressure through Norway that the U.N Secretary General's Special Representative Olara Otuunnu's intended visit to Sri Lanka has been deferred as he has gone to Africa. He also accuses the GOSL and the Norwegians of always downplaying the violations of human rights by the LTTE including

Here in Sri Lanka the very right to survive was threatened by indiscriminate bombardment, starvation and denial basic health care. Under such conditions how on earth could one think of blocking these children from taking their own decision - even seeking refuge with the militants for the sake of mere survival?

oppose the peace process and even the opposition from PA quarters may be understood in the context of reaping political gain vis-a-vis the government, but what is the objective of the sudden concern of NGOs and human rights defenders for the people of the area?

At the beginning, much concern was expressed over the absence of human rights clauses in the MoU. However, as days passed it was proved that these fanciful doubts entertained by them were wrong were illusory. In utter frustration after the trouble-free take off of the peace process in Thailand, these

that of child conscription. The identity of the author's 'master' becomes clear because the party that does not want to see Norway playing an active role in this process is well known.

It is by depending greatly on the reports of the author of the UTHR-J that the above mentioned human rights champions go to town on the issue of child conscription.

No sane person would condone forced conscription by anyone leave alone the conscription of children. It must be condemned unreservedly. But that is not what the whole issue is about.

The International Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) asserts that the importance of self-identity of the child is based on two grounds: the best interest of the child must be given prominence in deciding all matters that affect the welfare of the child and that children are entitled to the enjoyment of all human rights recognized and guaranteed by international law. If that is so, have these human rights activists expressed any concern about the welfare of children in the northeast during the times of war? When the war machine was in top gear what happened to the survival and development of the child as envisaged in Art. 6 of the Convention?

How many NGOs in the south raised their voice against the total violation and inhuman treatment of children in the northeast at that time? What was the condition of their schooling? Was there a single school building spared from aerial bombardment? When the army arbitrarily refused to allow more than two exercise books per child to be taken into Vanni and to the east, where was the UTHR? Who was worried about problems of malnutrition of the children in those areas? When they were pushed into the refugee camps in thousands and meted out the worst form of inhuman treatment why were these activists conspicuously silent? Is it because they were Tamil children, or was it because speaking of human rights at that time could have upset the plans of the warmongers?

Rights of children and the international standards in this respect would be meaningful if those children were living a condition in which all necessities are provided for by the state. Here in Sri Lanka the very right to survive was threatened by indiscriminate bombardment, starvation and denial basic health care. Under such conditions how on earth could one think of blocking these children from taking their own decision - even seeking refuge with the militants for the sake of mere survival?

Is there any single NGO or activist who speaks of child conscription and the rights of the child who would come forward to guarantee these children all the facilities enjoyed by their counterparts in the south? Can they guarantee the right to life of these children if war breaks out again? Will the NGOs operating from the air-conditioned rooms go to the Vanni and Batticaloa in the midst of battle and rescue these children and protect them from possible violations by the warring factions?

Invasion under another guise

By Bill Vann

George W. Bush and his junior partner, British Prime Minister Tony Blair, have repeatedly insisted that their aim is to "disarm" the regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq. Their justification for preparing an invasion of the Arab nation is Iraq's alleged refusal to comply with UN resolutions on weapons inspections.

The reality is that Washington is straining every muscle to block two United Nations inspection agencies from returning to Iraq, while proposing a new Security Council resolution that is aimed at scuttling the entire process.

After an agreement was reached a week ago between Iraq and UN officials to allow the inspectors to return with "unconditional and unrestricted access" to all sites, the State Department's spokesman announced that Washington was going into "thwart mode"—which means, in practice, using intimidation and bribery to prevent the plan from being implemented.

There are no valid legal or procedural grounds for the US stonewalling of the inspectors. Their proposed return would be carried out under terms set by the UN four years ago that were accepted by the US. Iraq has agreed to an even more intrusive UN presence in its recent negotiation with Hans Blix, chairman of UNMOVIC (United Nations Monitoring Verification and Inspection Commission).

The Bush administration has two basic reasons for opposing resumption of inspections. First, it is universally recognized by those familiar with Iraq's weapons programs and capabilities that Washington's fear-mongering about Iraqi "weapons of mass destruction" is based on outright lies and gross exaggerations. The return of inspectors would soon make that clear.

Second, if weapons inspectors were sent back to Iraq, it could disrupt a timetable that has already been worked out for a US invasion. Military planners have recommended that the ideal period for launching an unprovoked war against the Arab nation is during the coolest months of January and February, which present the best conditions for nighttime attacks as well as for the use of chemical-protective gear by US troops. The bombing to prepare the way for an invasion force could begin even earlier. With hundreds of UN inspectors still completing their work inside Iraq, an invasion could be placed on hold for several more months.

The blunt instrument that the Bush administration has chosen for the purpose of demolishing the agreement reached by the UN is a Security Council resolution crafted to provoke an Iraqi rejection, thereby providing the pretext for a US invasion. In the unlikely event of Baghdad's acquiescence to the US demands, the resolution would provide the framework for a US military occupation of the

country under the guise of weapons inspections.

A draft of this resolution leaked to the press last week makes clear Washington's real intentions. The proposal sets a deadline of seven days for Iraq to submit to the US proposal, and another 23 days to make a "full and complete declaration of all aspects of its programs to develop chemical, biological and nuclear weapons."

If Iraq is found to have given "false statements" to the UN, the resolution allows "member states" to immediately use "all necessary means to restore international peace and security in the area." In other words, if Baghdad denies the US

that inspection teams be provided with "bases" throughout Iraq and that both they and their bases be protected by armed troops. These would be supplied by Washington. The document reserves the right for inspectors and the US military forces accompanying them to declare "no fly/no drive zones," "exclusion zones" and secure "ground and air transit corridors" whenever and wherever they see fit. The result would be the fragmentation of the country into various occupied zones.

Finally, it allows inspectors and the US government, as a member of the Security Council, to take Iraqi scientists and officials together with

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allegations that it has resumed its weapons programs, Washington is free to declare that it is lying and launch an invasion aimed at "regime change" and the US occupation of the country.

The deadline is itself a manifestation not of Washington's desire to "toughen" inspections, but of its cynical tailoring of US diplomatic maneuvers to further the ongoing preparations for military aggression. Undoubtedly the time period given for declaring Iraq out of compliance was determined by counting backwards from the Pentagon's planned date for launching US air strikes.

First, the resolution stipulates that any of the five permanent member states on the Security Council may join the inspections, sending their own personnel and enjoying the same rights of unrestricted entry into Iraq and into any site or building in the country.

In practice, this would mean the hijacking of the inspections regime by Washington, which would be able to flood special operations troops and CIA agents into Iraq posing as inspectors. US officials have admitted many of the Americans involved in the inspections in the 1990s were Green Berets out of uniform or military intelligence officers. It was revealed in 1999 that these covert operatives used the inspections as a cover for gathering intelligence on Iraqi defenses and on the movements of Saddam Hussein in preparation for future US military actions.

Some of these agents supplied the location coordinates of Iraqi facilities to the US Air Force, which used the information for targeting air strikes—the same methodology employed so effectively in Afghanistan against the Taliban regime.

The resolution further demands

their entire families out of the country for interrogation.

Hans Blix, the UNMOVIC chairman, was reported to have balked at the US proposal, questioning the need for military-enforced "exclusion zones" and, according to one UN diplomat, expressing the belief that "the UN shouldn't be in the business of spiriting people out of the country."

There is a clear precedent for this kind of diplomatic ultimatum. In 1999, the US led a devastating NATO bombing campaign against Serbia on the pretext of defending ethnic Albanians in Kosovo. The pseudo-legal justification for that war was Belgrade's refusal to sign the Rambouillet Accord.

The conference in Rambouillet was supposed to forge a negotiated agreement on Kosovo autonomy, which Yugoslavia was prepared to accept. Instead, at Washington's instigation, the final accord demanded that Belgrade accept the right of NATO military forces to "free and unrestricted passage and unimpeded access" throughout all Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo as well as their airspace and territorial waters.

In short, it would have meant a US occupation without a shot being fired. Not surprisingly, the Yugoslav government rejected the agreement, and Washington used its opposition as the pretext for launching an air war that claimed thousands of lives and left much of the country's infrastructure in ruins.

With the current proposal, the State Department has put together another offer that can only be refused in order to pave the way to war.

Three members of the Security Council with veto powers—China, France and Russia—have all expressed opposition to the proposed resolution. France in particular has

insisted that any resolution granting authorization for military action should be passed only after inspections are thwarted. If the US-backed resolution is vetoed, there is substantial support within the administration for moving toward unilateral action, while proclaiming that Washington attempted to make the UN act, but it shirked its duty.

From the end of the Persian Gulf War more than a decade ago, the weapons inspection regime has served as a cat's paw for US military intervention in Iraq and has been carried out under terms that represent a fundamental violation of international law and Iraqi sovereignty.

Many of those involved in the inspections, including former US Marine intelligence officer Scott Ritter, acknowledge that the inspections succeeded in effectively disarming Iraq by 1998, when Washington pressured the UN to pull out of the country on the eve of a US bombing campaign.

In an interview this week with the Portuguese daily *Diario de Noticias*, Ritter charged that the new Security Council resolution backed by the US is "designed so that Saddam Hussein will reject it and refuse to allow the return of weapons inspectors." He added: "It is not a resolution that has as a goal the disarmament of Iraq; its goal is to humiliate Iraq. The only purpose is to provoke Iraqi obstruction, which will then allow the US to start a war."

From the outset, the inspections mandate has provided an open-ended pretext for intervention into Iraqi affairs and the continuation of the punishing sanctions imposed upon the country after its defeat in the unequal confrontation of 1990-91.

Despite the wholesale destruction of Iraq's military hardware during and after the last war, it is virtually impossible to prove the negative—that Iraq does not somewhere possess such weapons. Therefore, the inspections are never deemed completed.

While Iraq's cooperation with the inspections was supposed to have led to the lifting of economic sanctions against the country, Washington has repeatedly blocked the fulfillment of this agreement. According to UN sources, 1.5 million Iraqi civilians, more than a third of them children, have died as a result of the economic sanctions. Many are victims of malnutrition and diseases that are caused in large part by the decimation of Iraq's water-treatment and health care facilities and other basic infrastructure as a result of the war and the sanctions regime.

The weapons inspections are part of an entire framework of continued aggression against Iraq that includes the unilateral imposition of no-fly zones by the US and Britain over northern and southern Iraq and the continuous aerial bombardment of these areas by US and British warplanes.

While undoubtedly Saddam Hussein heads a despotic regime that oppresses its own people, the claim that Iraq's attempts to arm itself with advanced weapons is driven by plans for terror and aggression is spurious. What the war propagandists in Wash-

ington always conceal is the fact that Iraq confronts a nuclear-armed Israel in the region, a country that has invaded neighboring states more times than any other in the world.

While preparing to seize upon Iraq's—or the United Nations Security Council's—expected rejection of the US proposal on weapons inspections as a pretext for invasion, Washington has routinely blocked any attempts to subject its own massive biological, chemical and nuclear programs to international scrutiny.

Last year, US negotiators effectively gutted the 30-year-old Biological Weapons Convention, blocking international efforts to develop an inspection and enforcement mechanism under the aegis of the UN.

Both the Bush and Clinton administrations have similarly attempted to undermine the Chemical Weapons Convention. US government officials have carried out precisely the conduct that Washington has cited in relation to the Iraqi regime as a pretext for military aggression—blocking inspectors from entering selected parts of facilities and vetoing inspectors based on their nationality.

Moreover, the US reserves the right to simply refuse inspections altogether. In 1997, the US Senate passed the Chemical Weapons Convention Implementation Act, which stipulates that "The President may deny a request to inspect any facility in the United States in cases where the President determines that the inspection may pose a threat to the national security interests of the United States."

Meanwhile, there is ample evidence that the Pentagon is continuing the extensive development of germ warfare capabilities under the cover of research for defense against biological attacks. Plans were revealed earlier this year for testing warheads containing live microbes at the US Army's Edgewood Chemical Biological Center in Maryland.

And, as is now well known, US biological warfare laboratories are continuing the development of more lethal strains of anthrax, one of which was used in the fatal attacks carried out, apparently by one of the Pentagon's own scientists, in October 2001.

There is little danger that the United Nations will attempt to impose sanctions on the US for violating international treaties regarding "weapons of mass destruction." The present crisis is demonstrating once again the role of this body as an instrument utilized by the US and the other major powers to provide a multinational fig leaf for policies of aggression and exploitation directed against the oppressed and former colonial countries.

The "international law" repeatedly invoked by Bush as grounds for preemptive war against Iraq applies only to the poor and relatively powerless nations of the world. For itself, US imperialism recognizes only the law of the jungle.

Batticaloa's fishermen sing their tale of woes

By Shan Thavarajah

Fishermen in this coastal town, which was once a pride of Sri Lanka, are today a cheated lot. After much promises, they are now left homeless, with state apathy adding to their brimful of woes. Little has been done by the Government to improve the lot of the fishermen in the land of the Singing Fish.

Restrictions on fishing and farming - the main sustenance of Batticaloa - have meant a continued state of poverty for those dependent on these occupations. Fishing is permitted only in certain areas, and that too for specified a period. Several families have lost their kith and kin, their fishing vessels and gear, houses and properties during the last decade.

However, the government has thus far done nothing to either compensate or rehabilitate them. Of the 128,689 families in Batticaloa, 16,472 are directly involved in fishing. The facilities available fall short of the requirement.

The only concrete help offered by the Government to these sons of sea - the Deewara Gammana - has also not been implemented wholeheartedly.

There are four housing schemes for fishermen in this district. The first one was started at Palameenmadu, just inside Batticaloa Municipal limits, in 1999. A total of 50 houses were constructed. But the promised common facilities under the housing scheme such as internal roads, a community hall, a nursery playground, drinking water, electricity supply, etc., are not provided yet. Visitors to this area can be shocked by the incomplete community hall and lack of electricity.

The other housing scheme is at Sinnavaththai, Mandoor, where 100 houses were allocated. The construction was started in the year 2000, but not yet finished because of the delay in paying the instalments. The Payments are made in 5 instalments. The initial payment is Rs.5000/=. When the

beneficiary finishes the foundation, the 2nd instalment of Rs.8,000 is paid; when construction up to the window level is finished the third payment of Rs.10,000 will be paid for construction up to the roof level to be finished. Then the fourth payment for the roof is Rs.17,000 and Rs.10,000 is given for finishing works.

For those in the Sinnavaththai housing scheme, only two instalments have been given. The same is the case in the Navalady housing scheme where 50 houses are being constructed. As in the earlier cases, payments of the instalments are irregular. Half-build houses stand as mute testimonies to the situation.

The officials at the district fisheries extension office declined to comment on the progress of the housing scheme. They are quite a helpless lot. Their repeated requests met with answers along the lines: "we don't have money". Though the housing scheme requires only a few millions of rupees - a paltry sum compared to the enormous war expenditure - the Government does not seem to be in a mood to find the resources. The irony is that the present deputy minister of Fisheries Development and Ocean Resources, Mr. M.B.M Abdul Cader is an M.P. from the Batticaloa District.

The lack of funds is just a part of the problem confronting the housing scheme. The politicisation of the scheme has its own set of complications. The conditions at the Palameenmadu fishing village are also a result of political expediency. Reportedly initiated by an MP from the district, the houses were nearing completion when elections were announced.

While the department's authorities were making their best efforts to obtain money for the common facilities, the MP was reportedly in a hurry. As a timely boost to his electoral prospects, he declared open the housing scheme. "The common facilities works could have been finished a long ago, if the housing scheme was not opened by the M.P. at that time" a fisheries department



official told the Northeastern Herald.

There are allegations that even the houses are not given to genuine fishermen. Some have been reportedly sanctioned to political supporters. For instance, in the Palameenmadu fishing village, fishermen occupy just 15 of the 50 houses. Most of the other houses are closed for a large part of the week, with their owners, mostly those who have nothing to do with fishing, dropping by only during the weekends.

"The closed rooms are or real threat to us. Some anti-social elements use these dwelling units for nefarious activities. We who have young girls and boys at home are worried about that", a worried father said.

P. Indrarajah, president of the Janatha Company, a welfare association for the people of the housing scheme, said "we, who are homeless, have no alternatives rather than living here. We have no proper transport, electricity or other facilities. However, we have to put up with all this".

The roads in the housing scheme are sub-standard. An international Non Government Organisation provides drinking water to the area. Toilet facilities are non-existent.

In a district where many deserving families go without a roof over their head, most owners of the houses in this scheme are not fishermen but supporters of a politician. They own the houses just for the sake of having a house.

Hopes of an early solution to their

difficulties were dashed when Mr. Cader, announced plans for a new housing scheme in Palainagar, near his hometown, Oddamavady. While there is no grudging the need for a new housing scheme, residents here feel that their residential scheme will get lower priority now.

Residents here point out that before a new scheme is started, the ongoing ones must be completed. "All it takes is a few millions. It is fair of us to expect rewards for our patience and suffering," a fisherman said.

As attempts are on to usher in peace after two decades of fighting, the land of the singing fish has no tale of joy. The new hurrahs are gradually drowning the old difficulties.

'Safe Third Country' adopted by Canadian cabinet

CTV News has learned the federal cabinet has approved a new "Safe Third Country" policy for refugees. It's designed to stop so-called "country shopping" by claimants.

Under the new rules, potential immigrants cannot claim refugee status in Canada if they're coming from a safe third country, such as the

United States. The policy would be based on the argument that the potential immigrants should have been able to qualify for refugee claim in the first country they landed in.

Under Canada's existing system, virtually everyone who shows up and makes a claim is entitled to a refugee hearing here, unless they are excluded on terrorism or security grounds.

Last year, about 14,000 refugee claimants entered Canada through border crossings with the U.S. It's estimated that for every 10 refugee claims made in Canada, six are made from people who first landed in the U.S.

The new plan was initialled in July - in the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks - by Deputy Prime Minister John Manley and U.S.

Homeland Security Director Tom Ridge as part of their 30-point Smart Border action plan.

Citizenship and Immigration Minister Denis Coderre said in September that he expected Canada would formally approve the landmark refugee accord this fall.

It's unclear when the so-called Safe Third Country agreement would come into force.

Canada took in 250,386 immigrants last year, exceeding the target set by the government for the second year in a row.

More than half of last year's immigrants came from 10 countries: China, India, Pakistan, the Philippines, Korea, the United States, Iran, Romania, Sri Lanka and Great Britain. (CTV)

Unceasing waves of the SL Navy at Pooneryn

The Eelam wars have deliberately and unwittingly wreaked massive environmental destruction in the northeast.

Although there has been no fighting for more than 10 months, few of the experts flying into study and propose numerous panaceas to the ills of the war ravaged Tamil region have bothered to assess the scale of environmental destruction caused by the war.

Instances of mangrove destruction and the wholesale and systematic obliteration of coconut plantations in the east have been recorded by a few journalists and academics.

The most intense and largest battles of the Eelam wars were fought in the north. But yet no visible efforts have been undertaken so far to study the environmental destruction caused particularly by the latter phases of the Eelam war in Jaffna and the Vanni mainland.

We have often heard of whole villages in the Vanni being abandoned in the face of operations by the Sri Lanka army.

But none may have seen or read the fact that many prosperous and ancient villages in its northwestern sector have been abandoned due to salination and the sea spreading under and over its once fertile lands and prosperous settlements.

The ancient village of Pallavarayankattu in Pooneryn stands derelict today, but with few signs of the usual scars left by the war on the villages of the Vanni that took the brunt of Operation Jeya Sikurui.

The village school, its ancient temple and old houses lie exposed to dry, searing wind. There is brine in the abandoned wells of the Pallavarayankattu. Seawater has seeped into the desolate fields that surround the village. People



The bund constructed to prevent sea water from coming into the land Pic. by Buddhika Weerasinghe

here and many villages in Pooneryn have had to abandon their homes and fields as the sea slowly seeps inland.

The horror of the situation strikes one at Kiranchikulam, an ancient irrigation reservoir. There is seawater in this tank!

Government officials say that more than 4000 acres have been directly and highly affected by salination.

The sea began claiming this fertile sector of Pooneryn after the salt exclusion bunds that prevented the sea from seeping inland fell into disrepair during the war. The salt exclusion bunds were constructed in 1956 when engineers saw the danger of the sea overwhelming the low-lying area.

The bunds with their system of sluices extend from Selliyaithivu to Sangupiddy.

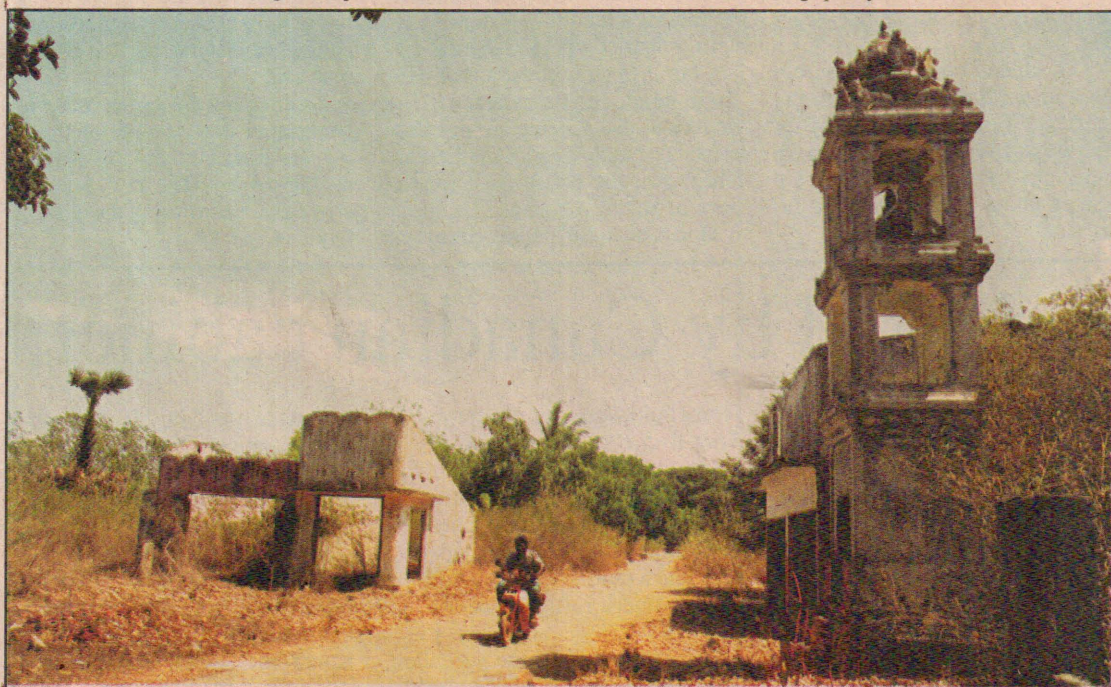
The bunds were not maintained after the army moved into Pooneryn. Many sections of the bund were destroyed by the SLA for easy access to the sea.

The worst came when the Sri Lanka Navy, which had a strategic camp at Nagathevanthurai for many years dug a canal from the Pooneryn coast into the region to bring in their vessels safe anchoring.

The navy left more than six years

ago but the way remains open for the sea to seep into the land at will. The canal has expanded and speeded up the salination of Pooneryn. Drinking water has turned brackish undrinkable in seventeen villages in this sector. Seawater has come into the old agricultural village of Kiranchi.

The disaster would reach tragic proportions if no immediate steps are taken to arrest the march of the sea into Pooneryn.



A ruined temple



Pooneryn's deserted market square