

The East: LTTE's
Achilles heel or main
military asset

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Spectre of NE environ-
mental destruction haunts
entire island

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Prabhakaran has to think big - Stirrat

"Donors like to be seen spending money. But agencies such as GTZ or DIFID should not tell the Tigers what to do. The LTTE should have an agenda that incorporates the work of the agencies," said development anthropologist R. L. (Jock) Stirrat.

He was speaking to the 'Northeastern Herald' about what development strategies the northeast could adopt if the peace process brings about a durable settlement in Sri Lanka.

Stirrat, who is a reader in the School of African and Asian Studies, University of Sussex, UK and did extensive anthropological fieldwork in Sri Lanka in the late 1970s said the LTTE had to take a radical departure from the development strategies that had failed previously if it was to come up with a plan that could be sustained over the long-term.

He said Jaffna had a strong tradition of producing highly skilled persons who had emigrated overseas. The people of the northeast had to use globalisation to their advantage by capitalising on the movement of people, ideas and capital.

Stirrat, who was here to deliver the keynote address at the 'Third Symposium on Poverty Research in Sri Lanka' and other assignments, said, "The question is, if the war is over and there is no independence but autonomy in the northeast; what is Prabhakaran going to tell the ADB and the World Bank. Does he say, 'I want my people to remain poor fishermen and farmers,' or does he give them better opportunities?"

Due to the linkages forged by globalisation, which could not be wished away, even if the northeast succeeded in achieving autonomy short of independence, it would continue to be integrally linked to the south as well as the rest world, Stirrat said.

"The question has to be asked how far can an autocratic state function in a global environment created by such linkages. Therefore, should not a state be created that gives Tamils freedom to make choices?" he asked.

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Discrimination in distribution of Samurdhi benefits at Batticaloa

By Shan Thavarajah

The 25 percent slash in the poverty alleviation payments has hit the poor in the northeast below the belt, officials said. Thousands of families living below the poverty line in the northeastern province have been indiscriminately deprived of poor relief assistance by the government in accordance with World Bank, IMF recommendations although most of the were not beneficiaries of Samurdhi schemes designed to improve incomes of the poor.

Nine hundred Samurdhi banks were opened in the South by the year 2000.

These banks gave self-employment loans ranging from 5000 to 50000 rupees to beneficiaries there, whereas the 24 Samurdhi banks that were opened in the Batticaloa district started giving loans only in last May.

So far, these banks have granted loans to the value of 5 Million rupees to only 1000 families.

The Small Industries Division of the Samurdhi Authority gives loans to start new small enterprises. But this loan scheme is implemented only in the South.

The agriculture section too gives

loans up to 20,000 rupees for growing sub crops. But in the Batticaloa, only 0.6 million rupees have been given to 10 projects so far.

Under the Samurdhi Rural Marketing Programme, a number of mobile sales units were given in the south, but none in Batticaloa. The Samurdhi scheme for developing small enterprises was never made available to the people of the northeast.

Loans up to 20,000 rupees are given to breed cows goats, pigs, chicken and ducks under the Samurdhi Animal Husbandry Programme. But in the Batticaloa district, only 0.19 million rupees were granted for 10 projects last year.

No money for the loan scheme has been allocated for Batticaloa this year.

There are many more to add to the list.

There are 10 schemes to improve the incomes of the poor under Samurdhi. They are small loans, community development, minor irrigation, social security fund, rural marketing, agriculture, animal husbandry, empow-

erment, social development and small enterprises.

The 25 percent cut was made on the basis that there is no need to continue food stamps for those who have benefited from Samurdhi schemes aimed at improving incomes and the general economic environment in which the poor have to ply their new trades. In Batticaloa 23993 persons have been peremptorily struck off the list despite only 1145 persons benefited from some of the partially implemented income enhancement Samurdhi schemes from 1998 to 2002.

Dixon Nilawera, the Secretary of the Ministry for Samurdhi, summoned all the government agents for a meeting in this regard on 9th May 2002. At this meeting the secretary explained the government's proposal to make the 25 percent cut and asked for opinions from the GAs.

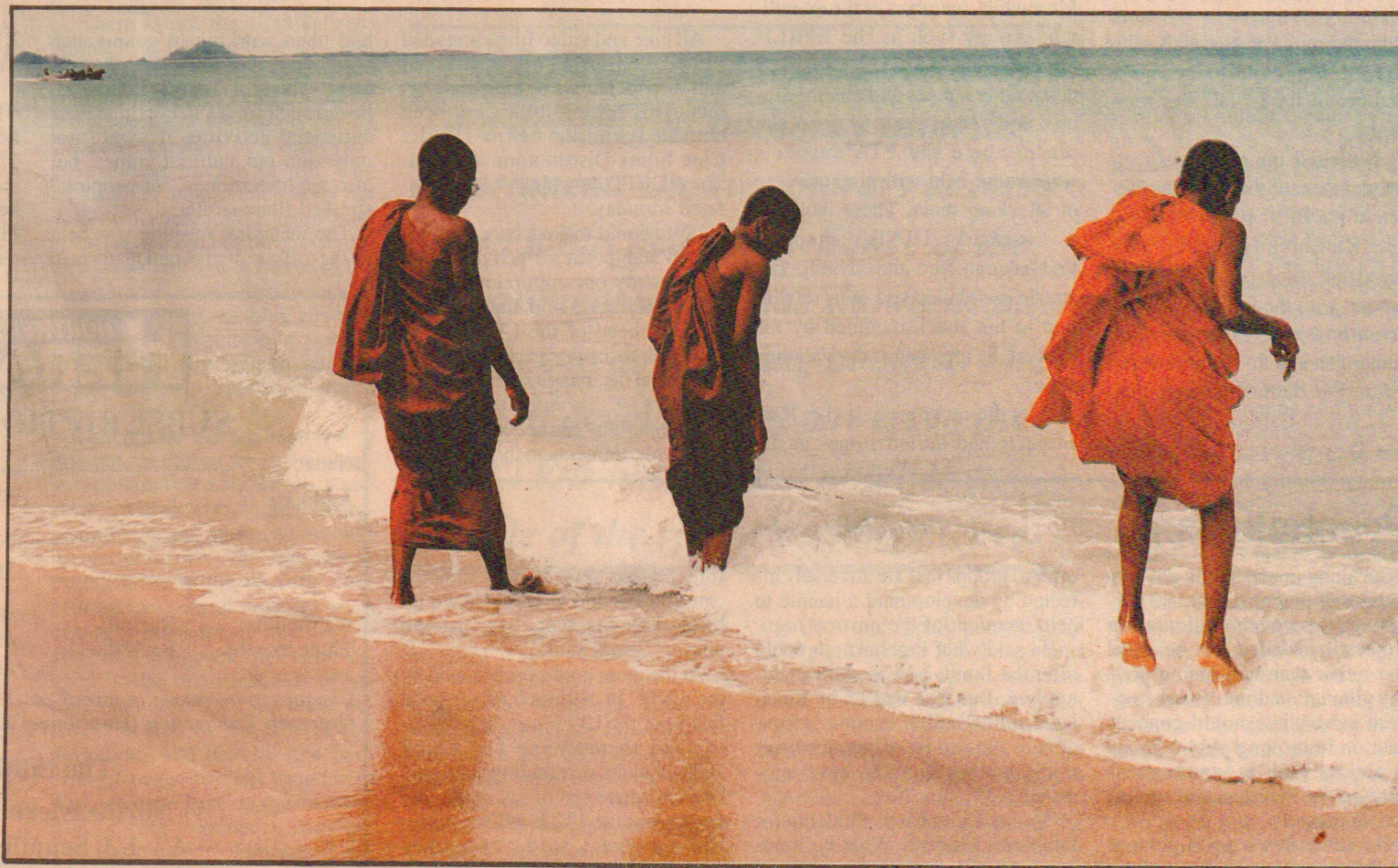
"I explained the predicament of the poor in the Batticaloa district. I pointed out that though normalcy is returning gradually to the NE now, a conducive economic environment necessary to

improve incomes here is absent yet. So I asked the secretary to adopt a different criterion for reducing the food stamp payments, considering the realities of the district. The other GAs from the northeast supported my view. Mr. Dixon Nilawera understood the problem and promised to cut only a 10 % from poor relief payments in the districts of the northeast," said Sinnaiah Shanmugam, the GA, Batticaloa.

A circular was also sent in this regard on 13th May. (Circular No. Poor relief / 01) stating that only a 10 % cut will be implemented in Batticaloa, Ampara, Trincomalee and Vavuniya districts according to Batticaloa GA.

However, when officials from the Batticaloa kachcheri went to fetch the food stamps, they were informed that the food stamps would be given with the 25 percent cut.

Several civil society group are planning protest action against the cut, which according to them is totally unjustified in the northeast.



A young Buddhist monk leaps up in joy at Nilaweli beach with Pigeon Island in the background Pic. by Buddhika Weerasinnghe

Moves to form coordinating body in NE arouses suspicion among NGOs

There is a move to remove the overlapping of functions among NGOs working in the northeast in the Three-R programme that provides relief, reconstruction and resettlement to affected persons. This is through the establishment of NGO District Coordination Committees in all the districts of the northeast supervised by

the Provincial NGO Coordinating Committee based in Trincomalee. The provincial body met on Wednesday in Trincomalee to plan out its work and functions. The governor of the northeast is the chairman of the provincial NGO coordinating body, while the government agents will chair the committees in their respective districts. The move comes in the wake of

three problems faced by NGOs working in the three-R programme in the northeast. These are: more than one NGO delivering the same service to a particular target group, certain programmes are undertaken by both the government and the NGOs, while some sectors are neglected by all.

Sources said that this follows the pattern of members of parliament using the decentralised budget (DCB) in a coordinated manner where all monies are channelled into a central pool after which allocations are made to the different areas that come under the purview of the DCB.

There has been persistent criticism from recipients in the northeast who have complained that NGOs refusing to work together has produced unevenness in the disbursements of donor money and other benefits due to them.

There have also been numerous complaints that the lack of coordination has led to corruption among NGOs with a number of organisations pretending to implement the same project.

The government initiated the moves to bring this coordinating body into being. There has been pervasive criticism of government

bodies acting as plants to probe and interfere into the activities of NGOs in the guise of coordinating NGO activity.

These criticism have surfaced from the south as well, where moves by the UNP government of President R. Premadasa to impose controls on the Sarvodaya movement drew stringent criticism from the NGO community. The PA followed this by trying to compel NGOs to register, but the lukewarm reception of proposal forced it

government to shelve it.

"We really do not know the reason behind the government's moves to set up a body to which will coordinate the work of the NGOs in the northeast. Coordination can mean many things," said an NGO activist sceptically. The LTTE too has voiced criticism about the functioning of NGOs in the 'uncleared' areas as being uncoordinated, thereby leading to corruption.

Clash in Batticaloa prison between PTA suspects and others

A clash occurred between prisoners at the Batticaloa jail on Wednesday evening when suspects remanded under provisions of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) clashed with others who were described by prison sources as members of ex-militant groups. The clash left one person injured and hospitalised.

Sources in Batticaloa said that following this incident some of the prisoners from the ex-militant groups could be relocated in other prisons.

Wednesday's clash occurred after the Kattankudy police arrested three persons in connection with an alleged murder that took place at Ariyampathy on 14th August where Sinnathamby Paratharajah alias Thamiladigal, described as a member of the LTTE, was murdered.

It is alleged the three suspects are members of the Varathan faction of the EPRLF.

The Kattankudy police produced the three persons in connection with the killing -- T.R.L. Priyatharshan, Thambirajah Sinnarajah and S. Thilakeswaran before the Batticaloa magistrate A. L. Abdul Gaffoor on Wednesday. They were remanded till 3rd

September.

They were then remanded in the Batticaloa prison. They were held in the section of the prison where persons arrested under normal law are incarcerated. Those who had been arrested under the PTA are held separately.

At around 3.30 p.m., Thilakeswaran was returning to the ward he was occupying after speaking to his wife, when persons from the group of suspects held under PTA, set upon and assaulted him.

Observing the commotion, the prison guards and other authorities extracted Thilakeswaran and transferred him to the office of the superintendent of the prison to ensure his personal security.

Meanwhile, members of the ex-militant groups such as the EPRLF, PLOTE, EPDP and Razik Group had taken rafters, poles and other weapons and made their way to the place where the PTA suspects were being held with the intention of attacking them. These included a former LTTE member Prabhakaran who and Jayaraj. The attack was conceived as a retaliation to the attack mounted by the PTA on the member of the Varathan group.

Seeing them approach the PTA suspects had hurled stones at the

Prabhakaran...

Contd. from page 1

Speaking in general on poverty and development, he said 80 percent of the poverty alleviation projects had failed. He believed that rather than addressing poverty alleviation directly, development strategists should concentrate on improving public goods in sectors such as communications, roads, the education system and so on.

He advocates a good general education to be part of sound development strategy since it would

offer to groups that are adversely affected by development a handle to help them out of the poverty trap.

He said what Prabhakaran could offer the Tamils now is political autonomy. But that had to be translated into tangible economic benefits to the people of the northeast if the victory were to have substance.

"Prabhakaran has to think big for long-term benefits. What he holds out to the Tamils now is political autonomy, but that, without a care-

fully crafted development strategy, can be a Pyrrhic victory. He would have won the war, but lost the peace," Stirrat said.

At the press conference hosted by the LTTE in Kilinochchi in April this year, the LTTE's chief negotiator and theoretician Dr. Anton Balasingham, responding to a question on what type of economic development the LTTE advocated for the northeast said, "An open economy."

(See full story on page 8)

Change of brigade commanders in Batticaloa

A new commander to the 23-3 brigade has been appointed and is expected to take up duties in the east shortly.

Colonel G.P.Rajitha de Silva, succeeds Lt. Col. V.R.L. Anthoniesz in the east as the Batticaloa brigade commander.

Colonel de Silva was enlisted in 1980 and by 1988. By 1988 he was in the Vijebahu In-

fantry Regiment. Later he was the Regimental Centre Commandant of the Vijebahu Infantry Regiment.

In 1999 he was brigade commander of the 51-3 CKG brigade in the north. He was Brigade Commander 52-2 brigade in 2000. He was also principal staff officer at the headquarters of the Joint Operations Command

Film censorship in Jaffna

All cine and video films screened in the Jaffna district will be censored and distributed with immediate effect. This responsibility has been entrusted with the Jaffna District Cine Films Distributors' Association (JDCFDA) which was inaugurated Monday.

"We should make a concerted effort to stamp out all activities that will destroy our cultural and other pristine values," said Illamparuthi, political head of the LTTE in the Jaffna district delivering keynote address at the inaugural event of the JDCFDA.

Illamparuthi further said that in past some elements in the peninsula

had been working in connivance with evil forces to destroy the cultural values of Tamils. "If we allowed such forces to continue their antisocial activities it would not only ruin our cultural values, but also the liberation of our peoples," stressed Illamparuthi.

The inaugural meeting was held at the office of the newly formed

JDCFDA at Palaly Road in Jaffna. Rev.Jeyakumar, chairman, Human Development Center (HUDEC) lit the flame of sacrifice and declared open the office. T. Jeevaraja, president of the association presided. T. Cheliyan, head of the Thamillelam Cine Film Distribution Section also attended the event.

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Humanitarian law in a flux - the riddle and the consequences

By Rajpal Abeynayake

India is always thought of as a nation, which is streets ahead of Sri Lanka in its application of human rights law. One Indian tradition that has been of particular significance has been that any lacuna in the area of humanitarian law has been supplanted by reference to international law.

This has certainly not been a trend in Sri Lanka, and many contemporary writers have brought this to the attention of members of the legal profession and others interested in developments in this area.

But latterly, reference to international law to supplant inadequacies in the domestic law has come up with certain unexpected impediments and fetters, due to certain anomalies in the developing jurisprudence of international law.

The recent instance of course is the International Criminal Court (ICC) which seemed to have all the sheen taken off its recently acquired reputation, because the US government refused to have any of its military men stationed abroad fall within the jurisdiction of the ICC.

Now, what ICC has to do with regard to the implementation of humanitarian law in certain countries, may be a tortuous issue, which needs to be

discussed at length. But, there are certain basic problems in domestic jurisdictions attempting to develop its humanitarian law, when it is seen that the international law is not in any sense applied uniformly.

If in times of war, human rights have essentially been seen to be in suspension, and what humanitarian law attempts to do is erase this concept and bring certain issues, which relate to human rights in an atmosphere of conflict also within the purview of some sort of human rights regime.

Almost ironically, today, one of the biggest impediments to creating such a human rights regime is what prevails in the international sphere of activity. Since September 11th, the United States for instance, has made cogent well-formulated arguments on the need to bypass any regime of humanitarian law in order to further the 'good cause of fighting international terrorism.' There was Guantanamo Bay, where the US advocated, keeping incarcerated, those suspected of Al Quaida activity without any recourse to due process. It is during this time that the US stance on the ICC also seemed to harden.

The powerful media conglomerates based in the United States have been advocates for this view — and TIME for instance, contained articles in many of its issues which stated for instance that "might is right in this instance"

There is one lobby internationally which still seems to go by the old law on humanitarian issues — but there is yet another which feels that old régime has to be modified in certain specific contexts in which the cause is larger than the preservation of the international humanitarian law regime itself — such as the post September 11th cause of fighting international terrorism for instance

(with reference to the US seeking exception from prosecution for its forces abroad from ICC action.)

In all of these, those who seek references from international law for application of humanitarian law in domestic situations seemed to be faced with an additional fetter. If it was felt that war is an arena in which humanitarian law could be held in suspension — now it seems that the developing jurisprudence is that even when there was strictly no war being fought (i.e. "war" on terrorism),

human rights have to be necessarily held in suspension as long as the cause is correct and there was enough international support for the cause.

This is not to say that all the advances made in the area of human rights law have been defeated. But it is to say that it makes it easier for those who apply humanitarian law within a domestic context to ignore or to marginalise developments in international humanitarian law. Those advocates of international humanitarian law juris-

prudence seem to have been awakened to the dangers that are inherent in this situation. For instance the Canadian lobby was very vociferous in its expression of disappointment about how treaties made in the UN are nullified elsewhere (.. the Canadian reference was to the ICC treaty and the fact that the US has successfully negotiated exemptions).

This schism magnifies the humanitarian law situation and the difference that has obtained therein after September 11th. There is one lobby internationally which still seems to go by the old law on humanitarian issues — but there is yet another which feels that old régime has to be modified in certain specific contexts in which the cause is larger than the preservation of the international humanitarian law regime itself — such as the post September 11th cause of fighting international terrorism for instance.

In this context, those who are engaged in the study of humanitarian law and its development within the international and domestic situations, need to consider these new developments in evolving a humanitarian law jurisprudence that takes into consideration the particular conditions anomalies and aberrations of the times.

(The writer is an Attorney at Law.)

Peace for the Sinhalese is not peace for the Tamils

By Professor K. Sivathamby

There is a misunderstanding about the nature of the Sri Lankan crisis. The main problem is defining the place of the Sri Lankan Tamils in the constitution — in other words what role does the Sri Lankan Tamil community play in the Sri Lankan polity.

The position of the Sinhalese however, in terms of language, religion, access to national resources etc. is well defined. Even the safeguards the Sri Lankan Tamils have had were taken away. From the time such deprivation took place there have been demands for a constitutional guarantee of the Sri Lanka Tamils' position in the country's polity.

The role and function of the Sri Lankan Tamils as a political group should be clearly spelt out in the constitution. This has not been done.

When we are speaking about peace, we have to accept a very painful truth. That peace for the Sinhala people is not ex-

But in the case of the Tamils, the situation is completely different. Most of us have lost our homes. We have to repair or build them anew. Our deeds and relevant documents are missing. Many of our public buildings, schools, temples and market squares are gone. Even if one wants to go back to resettle in his village, there is very little to look forward to.

actly what it means to the Tamils. Largely speaking, peace for the Sinhala people is within the horizon when bodies of soldiers do not come back from the battle fields of the northeast; when there are no sentry points which impinge on their right to free movement; when the cost of living comes down; when they can rest assured there won't be bomb blasts in Colombo. For the first time since the war began most of these have been achieved. It was

clearly seen during the Wesak season this year.

But in the case of the Tamils, the situation is completely different. Most of us have lost our homes. We have to repair or build them anew. Our deeds and relevant documents are missing. Many of our public buildings, schools, temples and market squares are gone. Even if one wants to go back to resettle in his village, there is very little to look forward to. In Keerimalai, any

Tamil who wants to take a bath has to be escorted by soldiers.

What we understand by peace is first and foremost, an environment in which this should not be repeated. Our people were affected by a complete shut off of resources ranging from agriculture to education. Who will guarantee unimpeded access to such resources? How credible will that guarantee be? Peace without such guarantees would be meaningless.

What are the plans for rehabilitation and reconstruction? Who will do it and how? How will the affected people themselves participate? It is only after there are guarantees for such preliminaries, that we can go to the question of political institutions. It is a well-known fact that every extended family in the northeast has suffered loss of life and limb. Women have become the chief occupants of homes where men have traditionally been breadwinners. It is not the widows but their age and their dependents that matter. What is the guarantee that in the future too men will not be taken away in groups and killed?

These are crucially important for the Tamil people to feel that there is real peace. It is after such assurances that we can think about political participation. It is in matters like this one should detect the discourse on traditional homelands. Because all this has happened where the affected people have been living for ages as a community. When that life is disturbed, it is natural that people start speaking about their traditional homelands.

Really speaking peace has not yet come to the northeast in the sense it is understood by the Sinhalese.

The more urgent and crucial question is what really is the constitutional status of the Sri Lankan Tamils in the governance of this country. What are they entitled to? And what is expected of them? Irrespective of who ruled when and where, the Sri Lankan Tamils have been part and parcel of this country for centuries before any foreign rule was established here.

Smardhi discrimination hits NE poor below the belt

By Shan Thavarajah

Over the years, Tamils living below the poverty line in the northeast have been denied even the basic relief the Sri Lankan government provides to the poor in other parts of the island.

It is an incontestable fact that the harsh economic embargo imposed by the military on many Tamil areas, the ban on fishing and cultivation, indiscriminate bombing and wholesale massacres of breadwinners drove thousands to dire destitution and swelling immensely the ranks of the poor in the northeast since 1983.

Yet, for many years the Sri Lankan government completely refused to grant the poor of the northeast the benefits of poverty alleviation schemes that were made available to deprived families in other parts of the island. Even today the Samurdhi poverty alleviation scheme is being grudgingly implemented only in a few Tamil districts.

But in this too, one finds gross discrimination.

The Samurdhi programme was initiated by the PA regime in 1995 replacing the

Janasaviya poverty alleviation programme implemented by the previous UNP government.

When Samurdhi was introduced in May 1995, the entire northeastern province, except the Sinhala majority divisions of the Ampara district, was left out of the poverty alleviation scheme.

Earlier, Janasaviya handouts were given only to the Koralapattu division in Batticaloa north.

Terrorism, as usual, was the excuse for denying the people of the northeast the benefits of the poverty alleviation programme.

At this juncture, people living below the poverty line in the northeastern province received food stamps from the department of social services.

In 1997 January, the government stopped without any explanation the food stamps issued to the poor in the northeast. People opposed this action, staged demonstrations and resorted to other nonviolent activities to draw the government's attention to their predicament. But all their efforts were futile.

Then in August 1997, the PA government with much hesitation introduced the Samurdhi programme in the Batticaloa district.

The poor relief stamps were thereafter renamed as Samurdhi food stamps. Though the Samurdhi programme was introduced in Batticaloa, it was not introduced in full.

A family is entitled to Samurdhi benefits if its monthly income is less than 1000 rupees.

Under the Samurdhi scheme, a

single person gets a stamp to the value of 250 rupees each month. A family of two gets a 350-rupee stamp, a three-member family 500-rupee stamp, a family of four gets stamps to the value of 700 rupees and families with five or more members are eligible for relief stamps worth 1000 rupees every month.

But when the Samurdhi scheme was introduced quite belatedly in Batticaloa everyone living below the poverty line, irrespective of the size of their families, were granted only the 250-rupee stamp monthly.

The government at the time decided issue only the 250-rupee stamp to recipients of Janasaviya as they had already benefited and found means of improving their incomes under that poverty alleviation scheme. This was a grossly discriminatory act because the Janasaviya scheme was introduced only in the Koaralaipattu division of the Batticaloa district – that too in a very partial manner.

Local politicians did not raise a finger in protest against the injustice. In August 2000, the value of the 250-rupee stamp was increased to 400. But, it didn't last for long.

In August 2001, the value of the stamps was slashed. A single person eligible for Samurdhi was paid Rs.250. A family of two was given 350 rupees and families with three or more members was given Rs.400 following the cut.

But the reason behind the action was none other than discrimination.

If one compares the Samurdhi poor relief payments for Batticaloa and the Sinhala majority district of Hambantota under the August 2001 revision, one can grasp the gross discrimination beyond any reasonable doubt.

78,574 eligible for Samurdhi benefits in the district of Hambantota in August 2001. Three hundred ninety eight among these were qualified for the 1000 rupee stamp, 38,388 for the 700 rupee stamp, 10,868 for the 350 rupee stamp, 7448 for the 250 rupee stamp, 20,709 for the 400 rupee stamp, 140 stamp 91 (feeding mothers) and 672 for the 500 rupee stamp. The funds that were required monthly for the Samurdhi payments in Hambantota was 41,567,740 rupees (498,812,880 rupees annually).

In 2001 August, 84,833 persons were eligible in the Batticaloa district for receiving the benefits of the Samurdhi scheme. None of them, regardless of the size of their families were given the 1000-rupee stamp or the 700-rupee stamp.

Among those who qualified for Samurdhi benefits in Batticaloa, 10647 were given the 350-rupee stamp, 10,191 got the 250 rupee stamp and 63,885 got the 400-rupee stamp.

The monthly requirement was 31,857,200 rupees (182,286,400 rupees annually). The above figures speak for themselves.

In the beginning of the year 2002, the World Bank advised the Sri



Lankan government to slash expenditure on poor relief assistance. As a consequence, the UNF regime had to cut 25 % from the Samurdhi food stamp programme funds.

Dixon Nilawera, secretary, Ministry for Samurdhi, summoned all the government agents (GA) for a meeting in this regard on 9th May 2002. At this meeting the secretary elaborated his plan and asked for opinions from the GAs.

"I explained the predicament of the poor in the Batticaloa district. I pointed out that though normalcy is returning gradually to the NE now, a conducive economic environment necessary to improve incomes here is absent yet. So I asked the secretary to adopt a different criterion for reducing the food stamp payments, considering the realities of the district. The other GAs from the northeast supported my view. Mr. Dixon Nilawera understood the problem and promised to cut only a 10 % from poor relief payments in the districts of the northeast," said Sinniah Shanmugam, the GA for Batticaloa.

A circular was also sent in this regard on 13th May. (Circular No. Poor relief / 01) stating that only a 10 % cut will be implemented in Batticaloa, Ampara, Trincomalee and Vavuniya districts according to Batticaloa GA.

But when the officials from the Batticaloa Kachcheri went to fetch the food stamps, they were astonished to see that the food stamps were ready, but with the 25 % reduction. When inquiries were made at the department, concrete answers were given.

So the GA Batticaloa decided to distribute the available stamps according to the needs of specific poverty afflicted areas of the district. He consulted his superiors and aides and drafted a plan, for the disbursement of the stamps.

Now to the question whether the government's decision to cut 25 % from poverty alleviation in the war ravaged, economically neglected district is justifiable by any yardstick.

The population of the Batticaloa is 518,226. Out of the 130,330 families

in the district, 87,618 live below the poverty line. This means 67 % of Batticaloa's total population survives on incomes of less than 1000 rupees a month.

In the past, the people of the district had few venues to increase their incomes due to restrictions on agriculture and fishing, displacement, fear, cordon and search operations, arrests and detention etc.

"Even though, now, our people have begun to feel relieved a little after the MoU it will take a very long time for them to recover economically. So, it is premature to make a reduction in the Samurdhi food stamps," said P. Prasanthan, president of the Rajadurai village youth club in Arayampathy.

The club staged a demonstration recently condemning cuts in poor relief.

"The Samurdhi scheme was implemented fully in the South for more than 7 years. The people there enjoyed all the benefits of the scheme. Whereas in our district not only was the programme started belatedly, but was never fully implemented. When the government first introduced the scheme it dragged its feet quite a lot, but when it decided to slash it did it without any hesitation", he said.

"Samurdhi is originally not a relief assistance programme but a real poverty alleviation scheme," said R. Neduncheliyan, assistant commissioner for Samurdhi in the Batticaloa District.

"There are many components in the programme that help the people increase their income. But such schemes were not fully implemented in our district. The purpose of the Samurdhi Bank is to give loans to the poor to enable them start self-employment projects. The objective is to increase the incomes of poor families," he added.

Nine hundred Samurdhi banks were opened in the south by the year 2000. These banks gave self-employment loans ranging from 5000 to 50000 rupees to beneficiaries there. Whereas the 24 Samurdhi banks that were opened in the Batticaloa district

started giving loans only in last May.

So far, these banks have granted loans to the value of 5 million rupees to only 1000 families.

The Small Industries Division of the Samurdhi Authority gives loans to start new small enterprises. But this loan scheme is implemented only in the south. The agriculture section too gives loans up to 20,000 rupees for growing sub crops. But in Batticaloa, only 0.6 million rupees have been given to 10 projects so far.

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No money for the loan scheme has been allocated for Batticaloa this year. There are many more to add to the list.

There are 10 schemes to improve the incomes of the poor under Samurdhi. They are small loans, community development, minor irrigation, social security fund, rural marketing, agriculture, animal husbandry, empowerment, social development and small enterprises.

The 25 percent cut was made on the basis there is no need to continue food stamps for those who have benefited from Samurdhi schemes aimed at improving incomes and the general economic environment in which the poor have to ply their new trades. In Batticaloa 23,993 persons have been peremptorily struck off the list despite only 1145 persons benefited from some of the partially implemented income enhancement Samurdhi schemes from 1998 to 2002.

Prasanthan, who is contemplating another series of protests against Samurdhi wrongs, says: "We are not begging for alms from the government in pointing out the gross injustices that have been perpetrated on our poor. We are not beseeching the government to stop the 25 percent cut. We are only saying that the Samurdhi scheme should be fully implemented first to get help us get back on our feet from scratch and to create an environment conducive to improving our economy, destroyed by the war for more than two decades. Then our people will send back the food stamps to the government

Hippocrates would blush

Text and Pic. By Our Trincomalee Correspondent

Early on Wednesday morning, police admitted several persons to the Trincomalee general hospital, battered and bleeding profusely. They were victims of a brawl.

Some of the injured had been assaulted with clubs, some with iron rods while others were victims of their assailants' fists. Few were in a critical condition.

The medical officer (MO) of the hospital wanted an urgent x-ray taken of one of the badly injured. He was told the only radiographer working in the hospital, employed post-retirement, had gone on leave. That put an end of the MO's decision to x-ray the patient in Trincomalee.

Subsequently, the medical superintendent of the hospital gave permission for the immediate transfer of the patient to Kandy general hospital for the X-ray. This would be amusing if it was not tragic — one of the many persons requiring urgent medical attention was transferred from Trincomalee general hospital to Kandy in the only ambulance available at the hospital!

Hospital sources said there are vacancies at present for five radiographers in the permanent cadre at the hospital. But only a single retired and re-employed radiographer is on the staff.

After 50 years as a base hospital, Trincomalee was upgraded to a general hospital recently. Despite its newly acquired status, the hospital is severely understaffed at many levels.

In fact, there is only one radiographer available in the whole Trincomalee district though X-ray facilities are not only installed at Trincomalee hospital, but also at Kantalai base hospital and Muttur district hospital.

The hospital also experiences a dearth of nurses. According to existing cadre requirements, 108 nurses have to be on the staff. But only 88 nurses are working with 20 vacancies remaining unfilled.

"With such a severe shortage, the burden on us as individuals has increased. What the senior staff does not realise is that when we are over-worked, the likelihood of making mistakes is much greater," complained a nurse.

She said that unlike doctors and the paramedics who worked hard, but had set duties, nurses were expected to do different tasks and almost always on call.

An old man who is a cataract patient comes to the hospital with the aid of his grandson. He goes to the eye clinic for an examination. But the staff there tells him is no ophthalmologist is available. He is told to try Kandy general hospital.

The old man who hails from a remote village in the northern part of the district says he has no means to go to Kandy as he is too poor.

"Then you contact NGO people — they will help you," comes the reply from the hospital authorities. The old man turns to go home.

Cataract is one of the most common complaints in the Trincomalee district. With no ophthalmologist, not only victims of cataract, but also patients with other eye ailments requiring surgery at this hospital are referred to Kandy, Kurunagala or Colombo hospitals.

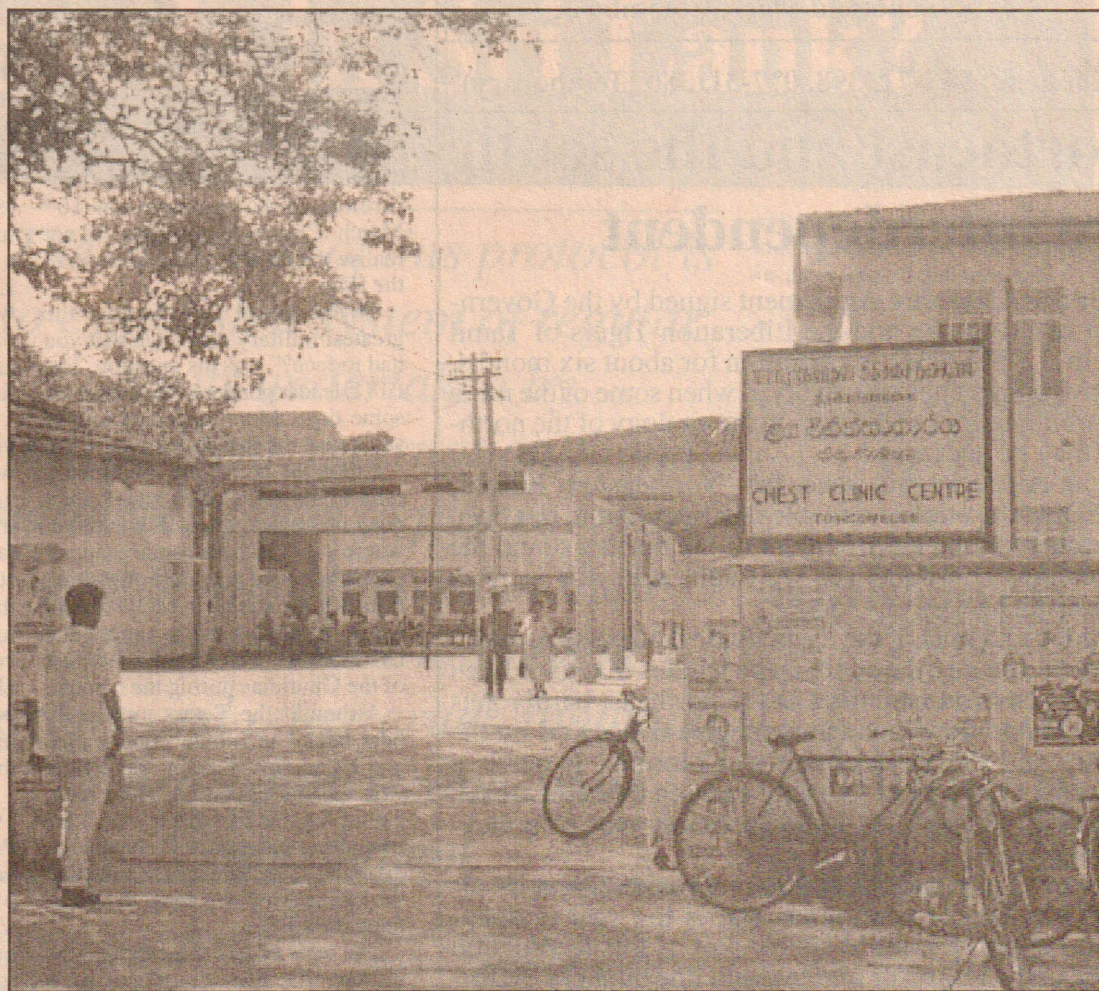
A doctor who spoke on the condition of anonymity said, "The majority of patients with cataract lose their eyesight permanently because prompt attention of an eye specialist is not available. If an eye specialist is available in this hospital, they could be easily treated."

The hospital has run sans an eye surgeon since 1986. Though facilities and equipment required for eye clinic are available in the hospital, the line ministry of health (ministry of the central government) has not taken an initiative to post an eye surgeon at the hospital.

Things are hardly different in the ENT section. Though the cadre structure allows an ENT surgeon and a special ward and equipment are available, the vacancy has remained unfilled for the past 25 years.

Morbid and irreverent as it may sound, the hospital's mortuary stinks. There is no cooling plant available to keep corpses from decomposing. In certain instances, corpses have to be retained in the hospital for official purposes for up to three days.

An accident or sudden death is one such. By the time a magistrate orders a postmortem it is several hours late. Thereafter, the medical officer has to conduct an autopsy and the inquirer into sudden deaths



Among the woes of the hospital is that it also lacks the services of a psychiatrist. Medical sources say a significant portion of the people in the district are psychologically disturbed by the war and require care, including counseling. "We can have a psychiatric clinic at the hospital. A psychiatrist visits Batticaloa district once in two months. Surely such a facility could be provided

"Trincomalee is part of the northeast. Drugs are supplied from the residue after dispatching stocks to all other provinces. In the ministry's list of priorities, supplying the northeast comes last," said the hospital source.

Discrimination in the supply of essential drugs to hospitals in northeast has seriously eroded health services in the province — especially in the Trincomalee district.

Under these circumstances, patients are frequently told by the hospital authorities to purchase essential drugs from outside. This again is costly and unaffordable to the patients seeking government healthcare.

A request has been made to the line ministry for a well-equipped ambulance with trained paramedical personnel to be stationed at the hospital for emergencies — especially for cardiac patients. However the request is yet to be met.

The story of the ambulance at Trincomalee hospital is a curious one. The single vehicle at the hospital was suddenly transferred to Kalmunai without a replacement. For some time, Trincomalee hospital was without the services of an ambulance.

Last week however, officials connected with the industrial exhibition approached the hospital authorities for the services of an ambulance for an emergency. Becoming aware of the hospital's plight, immediate word was sent to Kalmunai to have the ambulance returned to Trincomalee.

Interestingly, the people of Trincomalee believe that the hospital is the victim of discrimination that is not essentially based on ethnicity or religion. They say Trincomalee is a hospital that does not serve only one community or religious group. Being in a cosmopolitan town people from all ethnic groups as well as classes come there for treatment.

At a time the politicians of every hue in the area as well as those at the national level entertain ideas of transforming Trincomalee into a Singapore, it is indeed ironic the century-old hospital that should be preserved for its historical value if not for the yeoman service it renders the people of the area, is allowed to deteriorate through the crass indifference of the authorities who should know better.

A doctor who spoke on the condition of anonymity said, "The majority of patients with cataract lose their eyesight permanently because prompt attention of an eye specialist is not available. If an eye specialist is available in this hospital, they could be easily treated."

has to conduct inquest into the death. It is only then the body is released to relatives of the deceased.

This procedure usually takes more than two days. Meanwhile, the corpse decomposes and emanates a foul smell — all because the basic body cooler is unavailable in the hospital, which was elevated to the status of a general hospital.

What makes it more gruesome is the matter has already come to the notice of the provincial ministry of health, whose offices are situated very close to the hospital premises. Predictably, no action has yet been taken.

here too?" asked an NGO representative.

A shortage of drugs — including life-saving drugs — prevails in the hospital. A proposal has been forwarded to the provincial ministry of health to take steps to open a branch of Osusala — the state-run pharmaceuticals outlet — in Trincomalee. This will not only remedy the shortage of drugs, but also enable the public to purchase pharmaceuticals at reasonable prices.

Hospital sources complain the supply of drugs and pharmaceuticals by the ministry of health are not regular.

Trincomalee hospital...

The Trincomalee general hospital has a history of over 100 years having been founded at the turn of the last century by the British colonial government.

It serves about 400,000 people in the district comprising three electorates Trincomalee, Muttur

and Seruvila. It is the core for more than twenty base and district hospitals in the area.

According to the annual figures compiled for 2001 by the provincial ministry of health, 232,370 patients were given OPD treatment, while 34,694 were warded.

NORTHEASTERN HERALD

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Northeast and the south are interdependent

With the Ceasefire Agreement signed by the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) being in operation for about six months, an environment has now evolved when some of the more disturbing fallout of the war on the ecology of the northeast may be addressed.

In an article in this issue, the 'Northeastern Herald' spotlights the unconscionable destruction that has been unleashed on the environment of the northeast and the horrendous consequences we might reap if it were to remain unchecked any longer.

A good example of the deep divide that exists between the northeast and the south is the studies that have been done by environmentalists in the northeast hardly gets factored into development strategies conceived by the donors and the government in Colombo. It needs a Ceasefire Agreement for such research to merely reach the public domain, let alone becoming part of policy-making.

The environmental degradation brought about by almost 20 years of continuous war is too vast to document. Perhaps the more visible part of this destruction has been the felling of trees to both line bunkers for fortification, as well as to line the pockets of corrupt police and military officials.

What was left behind was annihilated when successive governments executed a scorched earth policy to compel the movement of the public out of population centres in the northeast.

Water surfaces have not been spared either with mangroves being destroyed and the beaches and the shallows webbed by mines that have had a detrimental effect on marine life and hastened sea erosion.

There is an urgent need for the restoration of the ecological soundness in the northeast. The question is: how can this be done? With the Ceasefire Agreement now in place, which is basically a series of do's and don'ts for the conflicting parties, it might be possible to graft on to this document a list of good practices on protecting the environment that both sides could observe.

Both sides should guarantee an environment that is peaceful, during which a programme to first halt the destruction of the ecology is put together, followed by steps to restore what has been destroyed by the conflict.

Meanwhile, the reforestation programme that is currently under implementation in Kilinchchi should be commended. It is a programme that has been initiated by those living in the area that realise the short and long-term consequences of the large-scale felling of trees.

What we have to acknowledge is that nature does not have boundaries. As much as gasses and effluents discharged by the industrialised west has an impact on us in South Asia, the destruction of the environment caused by systematic denuding of forests and mangroves in the northeast will not have adverse affects on people inhabiting that part of the country alone.

The south should wake up to the enormity of the problem and realise that they too are stakeholders in this matter. The importance of the ecology of the northeast for the survival of the south as a sustainable civilisation has to be stressed to the Sri Lankan public. And the ecological inter-dependency between the northeast and south has to be made the basis for a long-term programme on curbing wanton destruction and promoting a mutually acceptable policy on restoring what has been lost.

The East: LTTE's Achilles heel or main military asset

By D. Sivaram (Taraki)

The 'Hindu' newspaper's Sambandan asked what was in my view the most useful question at Prabhakaran's press conference in Kilinochchi on 10th March. Clearly Sambandan did not realise the import of his question at the time.

"What would you consider the greatest military challenge that you had to face?" was his question. The LTTE leader pondered the matter for some time. Many expected him to say it was the Indian army.

I thought he might specifically refer to the battle of Nithihaikulam, deep in the jungles of Mullaitivu, where a special commando group of Ghurkhas were sent in for finishing him off. It was a fiercely fought battle - hand to hand at times. The LTTE leader was within a few feet of the Ghurkhas during the combat.

Although the Tigers eventually beat back the Indian commandos and killed Col. Bakshi, the officer who led the operation, there is no gainsaying the fact that it was a narrow shave indeed for Prabhakaran. To many, it appeared at the time that the Indian army was about to checkmate the LTTE.

The tales of Indian generals who lament that they could not do a proper job in Sri Lanka because their hands were tied by orders from New Delhi not to kill Prabhakaran are plain untruths. The Ghurkhas went into the thick forests of Nithihaikulam with very clear orders to kill the Tiger leader and wipe out the organisation's main base camp.

So anyone familiar with the military history of the Liberation Tigers would have naturally expected Prabhakaran to tell Sambandan that the greatest military challenge that he ever had to face was the Indian army, or more specifically, the Nithihaikulam battle.

But the Tiger leader after the long pause said that it was Operation Jeya Sikurui. He was certainly not complimenting General Anuruddha Ratwatte, who mercilessly drove the army to destruction in the unrelenting jungles of the Vanni.

It was his way of acknowledging to the world the importance of Karuna, the eastern commander who was seated by his side at the press conference.

Karuna was the overall commander of the LTTE's defensive operations and counter-offensives against Jaya Sikurui. It was Karuna who commanded the LTTE forces that drove the army out of the Vanni.

It was the greatest honour Prabhakaran could have bestowed on any of his commanders.

Almost all who were present at the conference missed the message in his reply - and its implications.

The ramifications of the answer, among other things, would help us understand why the LTTE leader is able to inspire such ferocious loyalty among his troops and followers.

Prabhakaran readily acknowledges and perseveres in honouring those who stood by him and the Eelam cause in times of great danger and adversity, against great odds.

The story of Charles Anthony (Seelan) of Trincomalee would illustrate the point well. Seelan was a relatively junior member of the LTTE (in the late seventies). He was working under the directions of several seniors who were closely associated with Prabhakaran at the time.

The Tigers were struggling to survive after the split in the movement, which saw Uma Maheswaran and his loyalists going off with most of the organisation's assets. The attack on the Chavakachcheri police station led by Charles Anthony was the turning point in the military fortunes of the LTTE that was on the verge of sliding permanently into oblivion, swamped by the numerous armed groups, which were mushrooming in the northeast in the early eighties.

Charles Anthony was killed in 1983. Three years later Prabhakaran, a scion of a conservative Hindu family that owns the old Shiva temple in Valvettithurai, named his first-born Charles Anthony. When he formed the LTTE's first conventional military formation in 1991, he called it the Charles Anthony Padaippirivu.

It continues to remain the LTTE's foremost conventional fighting formation under the general command of Balraj. The unit commemorates Charles Anthony every year.

Karuna and his troops went from Batticaloa when Operation Jeya Sikurui was threatening to slice Vanni in two and to eventually reduce the LTTE to a guerrilla group confined to pockets in the north.

The tide turned in favour of the LTTE under Karuna's command. More than 2000 from Batticaloa laid down their lives to defend the LTTE's heartland in the Vanni.

So, he chose the best moment possible to express his gratitude for what Karuna and his men had achieved for him.

The sudden removal of Karikalán, Visu and Thurai has given rise to speculation that the LTTE's command structure in the east is unstable. One report went as far as to say that a disgruntled Karikalán was "running amok" there.

The stories arise from the traditional military wisdom in the south is that the east is the LTTE's Achilles heel given its ethnic diversity and contradictions plus the fact that it has got a long and porous border.

Critics have argued that the LTTE is Jaffna-centric and hence cannot fully understand or effectively handle the east which by virtue of its ethnic fault lines is naturally unstable.

This is derived from their understanding of the LTTE's early mili-

tary history. At the time when they first enunciated their military strategy for achieving their goal, the Tigers said they would first build up their strength in the peninsula through urban guerrilla warfare and gradually spread into the Vanni and the east once they were sure of their military power and resources in the peninsula.

They argued that in the first stage of their development as an armed national liberation movement they had to engage in low intensity guerrilla war, which required the sympathy of a general population for its success. The Tigers claimed that the popular support required for carrying out hit and run operations was available only in the peninsula.

This view was largely due to their inability at the time (early eighties) to develop substantial support points in the Vanni and the east. Most of the best fighters from the east and the Vanni who had joined the LTTE during the early period were based in Jaffna. The names of Seelan (Trincomalee), Victor (Mannar) readily come to mind.

The Marxist groups in the Eelam movement squarely condemned the LTTE's strategy as Jaffna-centric. They argued that the middle classes of Jaffna who were in the majority there would turn against the cause if and when they felt their material interests were directly threatened by it. Only the people who had little or nothing to lose would support the Eelam war to the very end, they said. The majority of the Jaffna middle classes who were the vociferous advocates of the armed movement for Eelam would back out and then betray the cause once the war was at their doorstep it was prophesied.

That the LTTE had appointed persons from Jaffna to run its affairs in Batticaloa was also adduced by sections of the Eelam as a manifestation of the organisation's Jaffna centric attitude. The Tiger leadership sent Ramu, Kaaka and Kumarappa to command the eastern district until the east could manage on its own.

Karuna was appointed as the commander for Batticaloa and Ampara in 1987. He is the only one in the LTTE hierarchy and in the organisation's history who has held a regional command uninterruptedly for more than fifteen years.

And he is the only one who enjoys the greatest and unique devolution of power in the LTTE's regional command structure. Myriad complaints of child conscription, extortion from Muslims, have not undermined his position.

What many who theorise about the east, and the difficulties it present to the LTTE's strategic interests fail to see is that Karuna, has over the years, turned the Achilles heel into its most important asset.

Will the Protocol preventing torture deliver the goods in Sri Lanka?

By T. Sittampalam

With the Ceasefire Agreement coming into effect from 23rd February this year, there has been a gradual shift to the backburner of the issues that occupied the forefront of Tamil attention till end 2001.

Among these is the question of torture. Even less than a year back, horrendous cases of Tamils arrested by the security forces and tortured in police stations (including those of the STF), military camps and other unauthorised centres of detention, were receiving publicity.

Right now, the focus of public attention is the PTA. It is true the PTA is a piece of legislation that contravenes basic standards enshrined in international human rights instruments and has to be repealed in toto. However, this does not mean the public, or human rights specialists should ignore the existence of specific evils such as torture, which could be prevented by ratifying other international instruments.

Among these instruments is the draft Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment adopted recently by the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations.

The UN and other international bodies have adopted two methods whereby errant states could be compelled to comply with international human rights standards. One is to subject them to international inspection and the other to allow victims to appeal for relief directly to international institutions over the heads of national judicial bodies.

In other words, states guilty of perpetrating human rights violations are known to hide behind the cloak of sovereignty. International inspection and direct appeal to international bodies are mechanisms to outflank states protecting themselves by claiming 'unwarranted interference in internal affairs.'

In fact even the draft Optional Protocol states "...convicted that protection of persons deprived of their liberty against torture...could be strengthened by non-judicial means of a preventive nature..."

Article I of the draft states, "The objective of this protocol is to establish a system of regular visits undertaken by independent, international and national bodies to places where people are deprived of their

liberty in order to prevent torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."

According to the draft, a Sub-Committee for the Prevention of Torture of the main body – the Committee against Torture (CAT) – is to be established to carry out the functions laid down in the Optional Protocol. The sub-committee will initially consist of 10 members, which will increase to 25 after the 15th ratification.

The main function of the of the sub-committee will be to send monitors to visit places of detention "and make recommendations to state parties concerning persons deprived of their liberty from torture etc. It may also "advise and assist them (state parties) in the evaluation of needs and other means necessary to strengthen the protection of persons deprived of the liberty through torture..." and "make recommendations and observations ... with view to strengthening the capacity ... of the national preventive mechanism for the prevention of torture..."

The draft also states that unrestricted access to all information concerning the number of persons held in custody in places of detention, their locations, as well as unimpeded access to information on the type of treatment and the conditions in the places of detention should be made available to the sub-committee. What is more, the members of the sub-committee should have the opportunity to hold interviews with detained persons in camera.

The draft speaks about independent local bodies. It is sad the HRC has neither been independent or proactive in pursuing the cause of human rights violations in this country

The draft does not mince words on the part to be played by state parties in carrying out their obligations. It says in the preamble that CAT obliges each state party to take effective measures against torture and that

The objective of this protocol is to establish a system of regular visits undertaken by independent, international and national bodies to places where people are deprived of their liberty in order to prevent torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

states have the primary responsibility of implementing these articles that strengthen the protection of people deprived of their liberty and full respect of their human rights.

In Article 16 of the Optional Protocol it is stated, "If the State Party refuses to cooperate with the Sub-Committee on Prevention ... or take steps to improve the situation in the light of the Sub-Committee on Prevention's recommendations, the Committee against Torture at the request of the Sub-Committee on Prevention decides ... after the State Party has had an opportunity to make its views known, to make a public statement on the matter, or publish the Sub-

Committee on Prevention's statement."

It is only when all other means of compelling a state party to fall in line with its international obligations fail that the sub-

committee can enforce the harshest measures it has in its command – that is to publicise its findings. Once again, this might be insufficient by itself, unless other states and international organisations use this report to impose sanctions or other punishment on the errant state party till it rectifies its human rights record.

Sri Lanka signed CAT in 1994. This permits the attorney general (AG) to prosecute police and military officials accused of torture. But interestingly, the AG has, up to date, utilised these provisions only six times to prosecute police and army personnel.

This may be interpreted as Sri Lanka becoming a signatory to international human rights instruments such as CAT, ICCPR and ICESCR, but using government officials like the AG to prevent action being taken against errant police and military personnel. In other words the state ratifying these instruments is nothing more than a formality.

Second, though it is now possible for individuals who are victims of torture to appeal directly to CAT if all means of relief through domestic law is exhausted, Sri Lanka has not ratified this optional protocol thereby not permitting any aggrieved Sri Lankan citizen to appeal to this body against the misdemeanours of the state.

Both these precedents do not augur well. What it means is that either Sri Lanka is a signatory to international human rights instruments in name only and uses government officials to prevent the implementation of these standards in practice, or when there is a possibility for a

victim to go over the heads of state authorities to seek justice in an international tribunal, successive governments see to it that state is not a party to treaties that enable this.

What we should be also vigilant against the provision that under the Optional Protocol, independent international and national bodies may undertake visits to places of detention. Both local and international human rights activists have to see to it that under no circumstances local bodies such as the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka are allowed to visit such places and make reports. The draft speaks about independent local bodies. It is sad the HRC has neither been independent or proactive in pursuing the cause of human rights violations in this country.

The CRM in its statement on the draft Optional Protocol has however stated that all states do not have to sign the protocol, even if they, like Sri Lanka, are signatories of the Convention against Torture.

In its statement dated 22nd July the CRM states, "It is important to explain to countries that are reluctant about or hostile to this initiative, that adoption of the Optional Protocol by the UN does not commit any state, whether party to the main Torture Convention or not, to be bound by the Optional Protocol. That would be entirely independent act of ratification by each individual state party to the Convention, which it may or may not decide upon on a later date."

What we should realise is the iniquity of the PTA was enhanced by the torture and rape in custody by the security forces and the police. What is more, in many such cases, the AG has displayed a remarkable reluctance to prosecute offenders, thereby giving them virtual immunity. And unless there stricter ways of monitoring conditions of detention and torture are evolved, there is very little reason to believe law enforcement arm of the state will mend its ways.

Therefore rather than dropping our guard and being complacent now that 'peace' is here, we should mount concerted pressure on the present government during these times of an absence of war, to see that the apparatuses of terror, which also sanction torture, are removed or rendered ineffective.

Tigers should have a radically different development strategy – Jock Stirrat

Anthropologists and development experts assembled in Colombo last week for the Third Annual Symposium on Poverty Research in Sri Lanka. It came at a time the United National Front (UNF) government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) were preparing for talks, thereby indicating the ceasefire agreement between the two parties would hold – at least for the time being.

As prospects for peace grew over the past nine months, the government was exploring avenues for attracting foreign investment for economic development. Complementing these efforts, an Act to form the Youth Brigade to facilitate the training of youth in computer studies and English, designed to better their prospects for employment, was piloted through parliament last month. The Samudhri ministry meanwhile, is attempting to modify poverty alleviation strategies carried out by the former government by streamlining it so as to target beneficiaries better and thereby bring it in line with the present regime's development policies.

R. L. (Jock) Stirrat, who delivered the keynote address at the poverty alleviation symposium, is a reader at the School of African and Asian Studies, University of Sussex, UK. He is no stranger to Sri Lanka having carried out extensive anthropological fieldwork in this country during the mid-1970s resulting in a number of monographs, the more famous of which are his studies on the fishing and Catholic communities in the country.

Stirrat spoke to the 'Northeastern Herald' on development issues in Sri Lanka's northeast within the context of globalisation, on the discipline of development anthropology and the fallout of contemporary development strategies among different segments of society.

By J. S. Tissainayagam

Jock stirrat said that in general, poverty alleviation programmes had failed all over the world. Though donors would like to portray poverty alleviation strategies having succeeded, the fact remains that 80 percent of them had not. He said moreover, "There is very little evidence on what impact NGOs have had on poverty – whether NGO involvement in poverty alleviation has actually increased or decreased poverty."

"We have to look at the problem differently – not as poverty alleviation. Rather than saying 'we are going to alleviate poverty,' it is better to think in terms of sector growth – roads, telecommunications or education – and not try influencing poverty directly. You have to find out what public goods are lacking, such as good quality health services for instance, and try to provide those. Bare-foot doctors in today's context will not help, because nothing comes cheap," Stirrat said.

He said it was important that Sri Lanka takes advantage of the peace process and diversifies its export base by producing commodities that yielded better returns. "Sri Lanka cannot afford to be at the bottom of the feeding chain by producing textiles and chillies. Producing microchips is the same. Software development, on the other hand, is different because it is value-added," Stirrat said.

However, private sector led development of which he is an advocate, results in casualties.

People did lose out – like for example female-headed households. The question was how to deal with such casualties. It was here perhaps that humanitarian assistance might have a role to play. It could provide a safety net to the groups on whom development had a negative impact.

A good example of such negative impact is the fishing industry in eastern India's Orissa that had developed improved methods of fish processing leading thereby to a direct export of the product to overseas markets. This had resulted in a substantial increase in incomes of fishermen of the area. The losers however were the poor women who traditionally worked as fish vendors. The other set of losers were the poor consumers, who were unable to afford expensive fish.

"With peace, private sector driven industry like prawn farming will expand in eastern Sri Lanka. There are two types of prawn farms. One is the large prawn farm done on foreign funding and involving an elite input and ownership, including politicians. But it has little local impact because it employs very few people of the area. Others prawn farms are small ones," Stirrat said.

As in Orissa's fishing industry, large-scale commercial prawn farming impacted negatively on the local lagoon fishermen because of the effluents discharged by the farms into the water and the systematic destruction of mangroves. In the long-term, it had a detrimental effect on community-based fishing.

Challenges in development are deciding what path development

should follow, he said. How do you balance different interests – local, communal, environmental – with the massive income from larger, environmentally non-friendly enterprises?

Stirrat said well-executed development projects helped people make informed choices such as where to put their money to acquire what would be of long-term benefit to them. For instance, it was about making a choice between getting an education, or to continue sticking to an age-old trade though it no longer yielded a high income.

Since development was about escaping poverty, a general education was important. Educating people to drive tractors would not help improve agriculture production, because a specific education was not good enough. A broad, general education was required. Education should develop skills that prevent group from losing out on development.

Stirrat said it is vital that all development strategies are evaluated in the context of globalisation. Globalisation was here and could not be wished away. Local economies were integrally linked with the international movements of people, commodities and money.

If Sri Lanka were to take advantage of global development, general education imparted to the public would have to concentrate on improving English language skills. "Long-term thinking has to concentrate on the acquisition of English language skills – Kaduwa. Universities teach survival skills and teaching English in Sri Lanka is one such," he said.

On the contrary, an over-emphasis was placed on paddy produc-

independent small farmer is romantic. The units are too small for viable harvests and village life is full of conflict. Therefore, we should not sink into development models that do not work."

Stirrat's vision for the northeast is that it departs radically from development models that rely on agriculture and fisheries. "If the northeast has a future, it does not lie in rural development. Jaffna has a strong tradition of producing highly skilled persons involved in urban occupations, who emigrated overseas. Some of them now help Britain to rule the world!" he said.

How far the economy of the northeast takes advantage of globalisation for the general well being of the people living in that area was absolutely essential for future development, Stirrat said.

He said it was important the LTTE adopts a policy that does not bow to the dictates of international donors when evolving development strategies. The agenda of the foreign agencies should not push the LTTE. "Donors like to be seen spending money. But agencies such as GTZ or DIFID should not tell the Tigers what to do. The LTTE should have an agenda that incorporates the work of the agencies."

"The question is, if the war is over and there is no independence but autonomy in the northeast, what is Prabhakaran going to tell the ADB and the World Bank. Does he say, 'I want my people to remain poor fishermen and farmers,' or does he give them better opportunities?" asked Stirrat.

The LTTE had to have a strategy that made sense, not something that was romantic. It had to

and the rest of the world due to globalisation. "The question has to be asked how far can an autocratic state function in an global environment created by such linkages. Therefore, should not a state be created that gives Tamils freedom to make choices?" he asked.

Speaking further on development strategies in the northeast he said, "Prabhakaran has to think big for long-term benefits. What he holds out to the Tamils now is political autonomy, but that, without a carefully crafted development strategy, can be a Pyrrhic victory. He would have won the war, but lost the peace."

On the question of NGO accountability both in the northeast and the south, Stirrat said he believed if there is monitoring, it had to be done in "a constructive and engaging manner." However, it should not be accountability at an individual level. The system should be such that people are not given an opportunity to buckle something individually.

"The term NGOs denotes a wide range of different organisations. You get good and bad NGOs. Some are highly committed others are a rip-off. There is also the unresolvable question of policing them. Governments which are elected believe they have the right to police NGOs, whereas NGOs feel they should be autonomous."

Speaking on development anthropology and its role in the world of ideas and on influencing practical policy-making, Stirrat said, "Development is about political decisions. It is about who has the power to make decisions and how you influence them. Since politicians have a habit of making a mess of things, the strategy of development experts should be to see these politicians are integrated into the system as stakeholders."

He said there were precedents in Sri Lanka's history of persons evolving into guardians of the community and thereby earning its respect. The 19th century had seen arrack renters and mudalalies metamorphosing into Buddhist reformers.

Stirrat was of the opinion that development anthropologists should engage in big issues whereas the discipline had got hung up on studies on village level development. If at all what should be of interest was to see the big picture – why this village is poorer than the other village, or what impact has international trade has on village life. "We cannot look at the village by itself, but the inter-linkages between the village and the world outside," he said.

We have to look at the problem differently – not as poverty alleviation. Rather than saying 'we are going to alleviate poverty,' it is better to think in terms of sector growth – roads, telecommunications or education – and not try influencing poverty directly

tion in Sri Lanka, but it was a high-risk venture in the context of globalisation. Little new knowledge on agriculture was coming in, which was partly due to the notoriously inefficient agriculture extension services.

Commenting on agriculture production he said, "I doubt the market is working. The idea of the

be radically different from earlier development strategies that had failed. It had to recognise risks and insure against them. It had to distinguish between assets and non-assets.

Even if it were able to achieve political autonomy, the northeast would have links through trade and other sources with the south

India's strategic concerns and Sri Lankan Tamils

By V.I.S. Jayapalan

Few weeks before the 11th September, last year, I had a long discussion with an Indian Diplomat posted in a western country. Among the things we discussed, the necessity for the resumption of a relationship between Sri Lanka, Tamil institutions and India, naturally assumed priority.

Our discussion encompassed the increasing anti-Indian activities of the ISI in south Asia that is detrimental to the interests of Sri Lankan Tamils. Right from the beginning, Pakistan and China were the main allies and suppliers of military hardware for the Sri Lankan government in the war against Tamils.

Even though Sri Lankan Tamil militants and India committed blunders against each other-like the killings, maiming and raping of hundreds of Tamil civilians by the IPKF and the murder of the late prime minister of India - their mutual interests are one and the same as they were in the past. I argued that the mutual interests should be given priority above everything.

In reply to my observation the Indian diplomat emphasised the political and economic situation in Pakistan will lead to its bankruptcy very soon. Few other Indian intellectuals, I met with or communicated through the Internet also shared the same opinion. They think that Pakistan will not only go bankrupt but also disintegrate along ethnic lines.

In my reply I emphasised that a stable Pakistan is less dangerous to India than a disintegrated one. If Pakistan disintegrates, every piece of it with its nuclear capability will be in the hands of the extremists.

No country in conflict has easy options. In prolonged military or economic conflicts even strong nations go bankrupt and disintegrate. The prolonged Afghan war and economic problems also contributed to the disintegration of the super power, USSR.

The forces which do not want to see a strong India seem to know this very well. India cannot afford to ignore all these facts. Being a Sri Lanka Tamil, I strongly believe a strong democratic and confederated India can be the major stabilising factor in South Asia and protect the interests of the region.

In addition to war on the Pakistan border and cold war on the Chinese border, India also has serious internal problems, which deserve immediate attention. One of the external situations, which make things worse, is that most of the neighbours are much friendlier with China and Pakistan than with India.

Most of Sri Lanka's waters which are strategically important to India's security in the emerging geopolitical environment described above lie along the Tamil dominated northeast coast. The proposed Sethusamuthram channel is off the northern coast and the greater part sea-lanes linking India's western and eastern naval assets are off the east coast of Sri Lanka. Hence the stability of the northeast has to be factored into India's current strategic considerations about the emerging security environment in the region.

Many of my Indian friends think that the internal problem of India is only the communal conflicts between the Hindus and Muslims, which are destabilising its Northern states.

Of course continuously disturbed minorities and the inability of Delhi to protect them from the Hindu extremists is a serious internal problem.

In such situations all over the world-frustrated youth among the minorities choose extremism. This kind of situation always becomes conducive for the covert activities of a country's enemies. India cannot be an exception. Not only Hinduism, Hindi language too cannot enjoy superiority over other the languages of India without exacerbating regionalism and communal conflicts.

In addition to this some others consider non-India friendly globalization also has serious threat. It is destroying some of the pillars of modern Indian state such as the protected market where national bourgeoisies enjoyed priority.

Many of them fail to see the fact that part of the foundation on which the modern Indian state was built has become irrelevant and demands restructuring. The present developments in linguistic regionalism, which has given rise to coalition governments in Delhi, are a signal for the necessity for further constitutional adjustments. In future, a strong and united India can be built only on a full-fledged federal constitution. Any reversal will become counter productive.

I can site the following examples to support my argument. Modern India was built in a USSR friendly nonaligned space created by the

cold war between the USA and USSR. But with the disappearance of the USSR, that space ceased to exist.

Modern India was built on a closed and state controlled economy and protected market in which, the so-called national bourgeoisies was thriving. This is being shattered by unfettered globalisation. The Indian market has now virtually become the extension of the market of the developed countries. Control of the central government over the economy and allocation of the resources has been weakened as a consequence.

Most of India's economic decisions can be influenced by US and the west today. The Indian state was built by joining other linguistic states with the Hindi belt in northern India. Until the mid-eighties the Hindi belt was able to produce enough MP's necessary to run a stable government. But the Hindi belt is now becoming a destabilised region, split along religious, class and caste lines. With globalisation and the IT revolution, English is eroding the status of Hindi.

Centralised, pan-Indian parties, chiefly the Indian National Congress played a central role in building modern India. These parties, however, were built on the basis of a stable north India. Up to mid 80s the Nehru-Gandhi family contributed much to keep the confidence of the minorities and the loyalty of non-Hindi speaking linguistic regions. Here I can site the acceptance of English as a link language to satisfy Tamilnadu in the 60s.

This situation does not exist now. No one will forget the bloody riots against the Sikhs, which took place immediately after the death of Indira Gandhi. The role of the Congress

youth wing and its leaders in the pogrom is no a secret. This was one of the starting points of state-sponsored pogroms against minorities in India which culminated in the attack on Muslims in Gujarat recently. After mid-80s, the political and communal stability of northern India, specially of the Hindi belt, the corner stone on which the modern India was built, is in shambles.

Now, neither the Congress nor the BJP enjoy a similar all-India status of the Congress before 80s. In addition to all this, the geopolitical environment in which India finds itself after the end of the cold war is not conducive either.

India's western maritime zone is in the Bay of Bengal and its eastern seaboard in the Arabian Sea. The western and eastern maritime zones are indispensable for peninsular India's security. But India's strategic weakness is that the two zones are not linked directly by any navigable waterway. There are no options for India to coordinate its maritime zones and its naval resources other than using the waterways between Sri Lanka and the US base in Diego Garcia.

This is an important weak point as it poses a real threat of interdiction in times of a stand off in the region.

It would have become greater threat if Sri Lanka had signed the defense treaty with the US. Such a treaty will enable US to use the Sri Lankan harbours and air space in the near future.

Then the Indian naval ships moving from the Arabian Sea to the Bay of Bengal will have to reckon with greater and real US presence and potential for quicker interdiction.

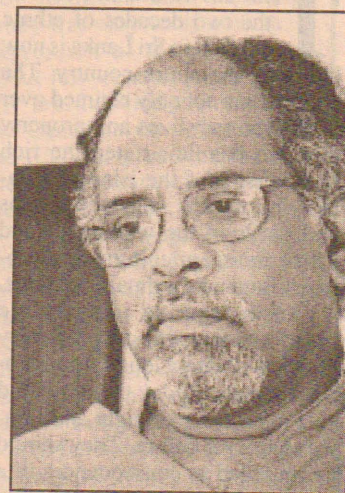
One can even say that whoever (China, US) controls Sri Lanka can debilitate the Indian navy's ability to coordinate its strategic resources between the western and eastern maritime zones.

Only the digging of the Sethusamuthram canal can partly solve the problem in India's favour.

But India has to pay a big environmental price for this. Finding and developing an environmental friendly Sethusamudram project is inevitable to protect the Indian interest in the region.

Even by digging Sethusamuthram, India cannot completely offset this disadvantage.

Whoever controls Sri Lanka, will be able to exert influence over Indian Ocean and in a way threaten Indian interests. This becomes more valid especially in the background of the increasing presence of US in the Arabian Sea and increasing Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean through Burma. If the US is able to install a puppet government in Afghanistan in order to achieve its dream of building pipe lines to bring central Asian oil to the Arabian sea in order to break Arab monopoly on oil. Pakistan will become a second Israel for US in the



V.I.S. Jayapalan

region.

If this is achieved by the US, India will loose its grip on the Arabian Sea. The Northern Alliance forces in Afghanistan are one of the means that India to prevent this. Increasing US and Chinese influence in Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh is a serious problem, which India is unable to ignore. It is alleged that the Maoists insurgency in Nepal has a Chinese connection. More information is now surfacing about the activities of ISI in Nepal and Sri Lanka.

It is in this context that India has to look at the Sri Lankan Tamil question today.

Most of Sri Lanka's waters which are strategically important to India's security in the emerging geopolitical environment described above lie along the Tamil dominated northeast coast. The proposed Sethusamuthram channel is off the northern coast and the greater part sea-lanes linking India's western and eastern naval assets are off the east coast of Sri Lanka. Hence the stability of the northeast has to be factored into India's current strategic considerations about the emerging security environment in the region.

Historically and culturally, Sri Lanka Tamils and Indians are the natural allies, though both sides have committed blunders in the past detrimental to their own interests.

The Sinhalese have their own historical and political reasons to fear their giant neighbor and feel more protected by their friendship with China and the US. Unfortunately India has no friendly neighbours. It is a fact that New Delhi was not able to develop a single military base in the south Asian neighbourhood. India too has to take blame for this.

The potential to project power is not enough to preserve India's strategic interests in this region. India should also look for friends and natural allies and develop mutual interests. It is the best way forward.

(The writer is a Sri Lankan Tamil poet)

Spectre of NE environmental destruction haunts entire island

By Jude L. Fernando

The environmental cost of the two decades of ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka is now haunting the entire country. The conflict has not only claimed over 70,000 human lives and property but also has devastated the rich biodiversity of the island by destroying natural vegetation, trees and parks in the wilderness and urban areas, agricultural land, domestic and wild animals and birds.

These negative impacts are mostly irreversible and recovery efforts will take a long time to produce results. Today the north and east is prone to drought and famine than ever before. They should be regarded as consequences of a political failure in nation building rather due to natural causes.

The competition for the control of the environment is not only a fundamental reason for the conflict, but also its most helpless victim. The environmental disasters affect areas beyond the war zone and yet-unborn generations and economic and social development in the region, irrespective of the outcomes of the political settlement to the crisis.

A sustainable environment and a sustainable political solution to the conflict are interdependent. The 'Northeastern Herald' has embarked on a series of investigations to create broad awareness and to promote a dialogue among the relevant agencies regarding the war-induced and post-cease fire induced environmental issues.

Adopting an environmentalist perspective to the ethnic crisis will certainly benefit the entire Island irrespective of how the future political boundaries between different ethnic groups may be drawn. What follows is an initial overview of some aspects of the environmental crisis in the north and east.

The northeast is fast becoming a dump yard for waste disposal; among them the most hazardous materials are the plastic and polythene. During the war, the security forces dumped waste and other material in places, which often happened to be the areas where civilians live, and in rivers and lagoon that were closer to their settlements.

Refugees in the northeast receive a great deal of their supplies in polythene bags and other hazardous material. Travellers between north and south use extensive amounts of polythene and other easily disposable petroleum based wrapping material that are dumped, especially in towns such as Vauniya that are major points of transition between north and south.

In Trincomalee, the post-ceasefire influx of tourists from the south has created large waste dump yards. Many of these are located closer to refugee camps, poor

neighbourhoods, forests, rivers and the sea. These waste dumps are fast becoming an important source of food for the poor and animals.

In Trincomalee, hotels and guesthouses continue to dump waste wherever they prefer, despite people in the area having made several complaints against this practice. The environment in the famous Pigeon Island is threatened due to it being a popular place for tourists for having lunch.

Ironically, NGOs, many of which are regular patrons of the Nilavali Beach Hotel continue to ignore the waste dump yards on their way to the hotel. Some NGOs are only prepared to create awareness of hazards of waste dumping among the civilians, but not to work against the real culprits.

A clear assessment of the war-related destruction of the forest, mangroves and other environmental resources is lacking. Forests surrounding security camps have been destroyed for the purpose of enhanced visibility, building bunkers and obtaining firewood.

While it was advantages for the LTTE to maintain thick forest cover, we have no information as to how much forest and wild life was destroyed in the areas where they have their camps. The balance of power between the LTTE and the government forces after 20 years of fighting suggests that bombs and ammunition have destroyed more trees and animals than their respective carders.

The security forces destroyed a large part of the mangroves between the main land and island of Mannar. This has reduced the water level in the area, and generally the abundant catch of fish is no longer available.

Many poor fishermen were forced into refugee camps and to abandon their traditional livelihood and the culture surrounding them. Some fishermen are of the view that the fish populations in these areas have dwindled due to dumping of hazardous material into the water and placing of landmines.

Illegal logging continues to be a lucrative business despite the ceasefire. Logging carried on with their illegal activities in collaboration with the government authorities. It is a well-known fact that large quantities of timber were transported to the south from the army held areas of the northeast to be sold to furniture stores and were used in the houses constructed by those employed in the war zone.

With the easing of transportation in the region following the ceasefire logging and other forms of exploiting forest resources in the north and east have become much easier than before - as long as one pays the taxes and bribes to the relevant authorities.

The most visible victim of war is the Palmyra tree. The available estimates suggest that over 2.5 million Palmyra trees were destroyed due to bombing and construction of bunkers. Palmyra trees are not only economically viable tall trees that grow in the



Palmyrah and coconut trees near Muhamalai, Jaffna, decapitated by MBRL projectiles

arid climate of the north and east, but also central to the economy and the culture of the region. Thousands of poor civilians whose livelihood depends on Palmyra tree were thrown into destitution. With the limited supply of firewood, building materials that were hitherto obtained from the Palmyra trees, the civilians too were forced to intensify the use of available trees in unsustainable ways, and it was not possible for them to carry out the tradition of replanting during the war.

Today the Palmyra economy and the social-culture that was associated with it are greatly destroyed. Major victims of this destruction are women who have lost breadwinners in their families. According to M. Packiyathan, chairman, Palmyra Development Board, such destruction is also creating a major ecological imbalance in the region and in the nation as a whole, since these trees act as windbreakers, protecting villages from strong winds, which are common in the north and east.

The northeast is a home for a rich variety of wildlife. The two decades of bombing, crossfire and destruction of forests have had a devastating impact on the wildlife. According to Dr. Sarath Kotagama, the former head of Environmental Science Department, University of Colombo and the former director of Wildlife Department, "Wildlife has disappeared, most elephants have moved towards the south, while other animals were killed in war."

We are yet to know the full impact of war on the wildlife in the sanctuaries such as Willpattu and the area surrounding the Giant's Tank. While some of these natural environments may have been somewhat protected during the war, they face new challenges following the ceasefire due to the easy access to these areas, and the mad rush to take control over the natural resources and the lack of controls by the wild-

life authorities.

Several parts of the northeast are natural habitat for elephants. Many cite the war as a major factor in the reduction of the elephant population and decline in the natural growth of herds in the northeast.

At the turn of the 20th century Sri Lanka's elephant population was 12,000. But today it is about 4000. During this period the country's forest cover dropped from 70 percent to 40 percent, constricting the elephants to an even smaller area.

The war fragmented their natural habitats due to the demarcation of security zones by the military and the LTTE. The fighting disturbed their natural mobility and breeding. During droughts, elephants migrate from the Vanni region to the Willpattu National Park through the Madhu road and Mannar-Madawachi main road. During the past few months alone five elephants were electrocuted as they came into contact with the unprotected wires used by the security camps and check points to draw power from the high powered electricity lines. Moreover, according to the villages poachers continue their business with the assistance of the security personal in the area.

During the past twenty years, large quantities of ammunition have been buried underground and dumped throughout the region. There exist no inventory of the dump yards, particularly of the camps that no longer exist.

Local ecologists have drawn attention to bombing-related damage to the underground water system, which is a network of caverns in porous limestone bedrock. In many areas water is polluted due to chemical residues from bombs and shells and biological pollutants. High intensity naval battles have caused the death of marine life, disrupted the seabed. Seamines and the dumping of chemicals

and fuel oil have damaged and polluted underwater resources.

Human settlements have been main instrument for changing the demographic balance in several parts of the country since independence. The war has also created many new settlements and more are likely to emerge as the reconstruction of the north and east gets underway.

The planners of none of these settlements have paid much attention to their environmental impact. Following the ceasefire, the pressure on the forest resources has intensified due to increasing construction, traveling, and other economic development programs. The contractors involved in rehabilitating the highways are destroying forests without any accountability. In future, industry is likely to rush to the region to exploit the natural environment under the guise of eco-tourism and sustainable development. Right now there exist no control over these activities in the northeast.

More often than not, struggles over the control of the environment have been a main reason for demands for right to self-determination. However, the past experience has shown that the nationalists have viewed the environment as something to be exploited for economic growth without paying much attention to its sustainability. Under the free market economy, sustainable development is nothing but an oxymoron.

What we need to keep in mind is that the environmental issues cannot be made to wait until a political settlement for the crisis is found. We cannot let the free market economy resolve these issues in the meantime.

It is urgent that the relevant authorities conduct a comprehensive study of the condition of the environment in the north and east and come up with a set of policies irrespective of the outcome of the political negotiations.

The rhetoric of impotence

By Adrian Wijemanne

The President, members of her political party and leading members of the JVP ask the Prime Minister with increasing frequency whether he is aware that the LTTE is setting up an administration in the areas controlled by it and what the Prime Minister proposes to do about it. They make no suggestion as to what should be done nor do they say what can be done. Clearly they are unhappy with what is going on and would like to see it ended. They do not say what they would do if they were in the Prime Minister's shoes. Indeed, they do not convey the impression that they could, in some rational way, fill the yawning gap that exists between their wish and its fulfilment.

For nearly two decades now the LTTE has engaged in establishing and expanding its armed forces both terrestrial and naval in the area under its control. These forces have fought a long war against the forces of the state and during the last six years they have been conspicuously successful in all the battles that have been fought. These are facts well known to the Prime Minister's interlocutors and to the whole population of the island. For six years, from April 1995 to April 2001 the last government led by the President's party made a desperate attempt to defeat the LTTE militarily and if possible exterminate it. That attempt bankrupted the country and ballooned its public debt. It ended the possibility of any further military activity.

No government of Sri Lanka has ever committed all its resources to such a massive military effort. No holds were barred as the saying goes. Yet the President and the entire population of the country know only too well that that final despairing effort failed and that the LTTE today is incomparably more powerful than it was at the beginning of the conflict. No one ever asks the Prime Minister why he allows the LTTE to maintain and expand its armed forces. This question is not asked because everyone knows that the Prime Minister can do nothing about it. There are large areas of the public domain where unpleasant realities exist which we can do nothing to reverse.

However, political discourse in Sri Lanka at the highest level, and lower down as well, seems to evade engagement with these realities. For instance, both the President and the Prime Minister are united in the determination to preserve the single all-island state. In all their pronouncements there is not the slightest hint that the single all-island state has long ceased to exist and our desperate efforts to resurrect it have failed. Both lead their listeners to cling to the forlorn hope that by some sleight

In all their pronouncements there is not the slightest hint that the single all-island state has long ceased to exist and our desperate efforts to resurrect it have failed. Both lead their listeners to cling to the forlorn hope that by some sleight of hand the status quo ante bellum will reappear. It is impotence that produces such vain hopes

of hand the *status quo ante bellum* will reappear. It is impotence that produces such vain hopes.

The simple fact that the state has had to ask for foreign mediation is a clear indication that reliance on a military solution is no longer available. The foreign mediator will be dealing with two parties whose armed forces have failed to exterminate, or drive to unconditional surrender, one or the other. The state is unable to impose a solution on the LTTE. Peace has to be secured by a peace treaty negotiated between the two sides. Despite this, the ministers of the government, including the two who are likely to be involved in the forthcoming peace talks, talk of 'devolving powers on the LTTE,' to enable the latter to set up an Interim Administration in the area under its control.

There is not the slightest recognition of the manifest fact that the LTTE already has a growing administrative organisation operating openly in the area under its control regardless of whether the government likes it or not. The LTTE is an autonomous body not deriving its authority from the government. On the contrary at every turn it has acted in defiance of the government which has shown its impotence to do anything about it. The talk of devolution of powers to the LTTE is nothing but another example of the rhetoric of impotence.

Conceptual misconceptions of this nature derive from the seminal illusion that a single all-island state still exists. It has disappeared long ago and survives only in vestigial form. The two armed protagonists in the recently concluded war each has its own organisational set up and area of control. The peace that is envisaged is the establishment of arrangements for each of these entities to live in peace with its neighbour and provide the benefits of peace to their respective populations. Talk of the restoration or (the even more illusory) maintenance of the single all-island state is but a striking example of the rhetoric of impo-

tence.

The talks due to commence in Bangkok in mid-September – and possibly go on for a very long time, even years perhaps – will take place in a radically different context to the three previous rounds of talks. The differences may be enumerated as follows:-

First, the period of war since the last meeting is the longest on record, six years and eight months from April 1995 to December 2001. During that period both sides made the maximum military effort of which they were capable and the result was inconclusive. Indeed, in the last five years and eight months from July 1996 (Mullaitivu) to April 2001 (Pallai) the state's forces have suffered an unbroken series of severe military defeats. At sea too the state's naval forces have suffered many re-

verses and lost many expensive warships. There was no such military imbalance before any of the three earlier meetings. Then the state had a military fall-back option which no longer exists. Second, there has been a devastating change in the state's financial situation caused by large purchases of expensive military hardware after the fall of the Elephant Pass complex of military

campes to the LTTE in April 2000. These purchases were financed by foreign borrowings which ballooned the public debt to barely imaginable dimensions. The annual debt servicing charge rose from around LKR 60 billion per year to its current level of LKR 327 billion. (The entire revenue of the government for this year is LKR 278 billion.) This has foreclosed irrevocably any possibility of a return to war by the state. On the other hand, the LTTE not being a state and so having no possibility of public borrowing or printing currency, has financed its war expenditure entirely from grants from the worldwide Tamil Diaspora which has raised funds by sacrificing its savings. Not only is the LTTE unburdened with debt, its financial resources are received in the world's hardest currencies because the Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora lives and works and saves in the world's most prosperous countries. Contrariwise, the Sri Lankan government's spree of borrowing and printing has devalued the country's currency to such an extent that it is virtually a straw currency in comparison with the currencies of the rest of the world. Not only is war-making capability ended even the most basic elements of public expenditure on public utilities and infrastructure maintenance are jeopardised.

Third, this time around the talks are to be mediated by the Royal Norwegian Government which has the backing not only of other Nordic countries but also of the whole European Union which is a large aid giver to Sri Lanka. This arrangement has been welcomed by

six months and been observed by both sides despite minor hiccups. Government embargoes on food and medicines to the LTTE-held areas have been lifted under monitoring supervision and restrictions on fishing by Tamil fishermen have been eased. These confidence-building measures augur well for a rational and productive encounter.

Fifthly, the Sri Lankan government has successfully resisted the public pressures of extreme Sinhala nationalists unlike on the two previous occasions on which agreements with Tamil leaders were resiled from in response to such pressures. The strident protests of the JVP and elements of the PA are widely recognised for what they are – the rhetoric of the impotent.

The stage is set therefore for the most serious peacemaking effort of the last twenty years. International involvement not only of the international community but also of the international Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora has imposed imperatives that need to be heeded in the quest for peace. That quest must not be held hostage to ancient imaginings of a single all-island state at the expense of the national aspirations of one of the two nations inhabiting the island.

The talks due to take place in Bangkok are peace talks, because both the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE are deeply concerned with providing peace for their respective peoples and ending the war that has cost them so dearly. They are not talks about the integrity of the single all-island state. Only one side, the Sri Lankan government, is interested in the integrity of the single all-island state. The LTTE has no interest in it.

The Tamil people regard the single all-island state as the arena in which they were subjected over a long period to adverse legislative discrimination, recurrent bouts of physical violence, with neither redress nor restraint under due process of law and, finally, military repression of their attempts to realise their national rights. The consequence has been the mounting of armed resistance by them since 1983. This unhappy evolution is not due to the shape or size of the state but to the folly and ignorance of the people who ran the institutions of the state. The insistence of the Sri Lankan government on the preservation(!) of the single all-island state shows that it is concerned only with the result and not with the cause of the war. This is why the Tamil people can aspire to peace and justice for themselves only in a separate state of their own in the area of their domicile.

The Bangkok talks need to focus on peace rather than on a return to the past. If peace can be more securely founded on two separate states on the island that should be the way ahead.

The LTTE is an autonomous body not deriving its authority from the government. On the contrary at every turn it has acted in defiance of the government which has shown its impotence to do anything about it. The talk of devolution of powers to the LTTE is nothing but another example of the rhetoric of impotence.

the USA and Japan, another pair of big aid givers. So, the content of the talks including the positions of the two sides will be communicated widely within the international community. There was no such exposure to world opinion in the three earlier meetings.

Fourthly, on this occasion the talks take place after a far-reaching Cessation of Hostilities Agreement has been in place for over

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Different faces of Nilaveli

Nilaveli is booming into a one of the major tourist spots in the island today. Residents have already started complaining about the threat of unchecked pollution in the area. Nine months ago few, save the occasional foreign daredevil, bothered to risk the journey through numerous army and navy checkpoints on the road along Trincomalee's troubled northern coast. Nilaveli means a place lit by the rays of the moon.

But few could pause to take in the beauty of the beaches and the tranquil sea on moon lit nights for more than 18 years. Fear ruled the darkness here until the ceasefire agreement was signed.

The Liberation Tigers and the Sri Lanka Navy that controlled the village of Nilaveli skirmished frequently in the area. People kept indoors after five in the evening. The navy was encamped in the heart of the village, with the garrison straddling the main road. The Nilaveli MPCs was occupied the security forces. Fear ruled the village after dusk.

The village is 16 kilometres north of Trincomalee town. The village of Hindus and Christians has a few Muslim settlements too. The people here were mainly farmers. Red onion and chilli can be cultivated three times a year as fresh water sources are abundant here. Many abandoned fields are now being reclaimed for the cultivation of red onions. The Hatton National Bank helped set up a sprinkler irrigation system last month to boost farming here. A lagoon separates Nilaveli from the interior. The waters abound with prawns and crabs as few dared to fish in the lagoon after dark for more than twelve years. Moves are also afoot to get the Nilaveli salt pans going again.

The saltern, spread on 500 acres was abandoned 15 years; the settlement nearby was destroyed in military operations.

Hundreds of refugees from Thiriyai in northern Trincomalee live in temporary huts in the coconut plantations of Nilaveli. Thiriyai was one of the largest and most prosperous farming villages in

the district until it was completely taken over by the army in 1990. Most of the houses were completely destroyed in the military operations.

The refugees saw a fresh ray of hope after the security forces let officials, development workers and former residents visit Thiriyai recently. The Asian Development Bank funded NECORD has promised to build 200 houses there to enable the refugees resettle there.

The calamities of the village began in 1986 when the army launched a major operation to wrest control of Trincomalee north between Saambaltheevu and Kuchchaveli. Tamil militants groups dominated the area from the latter part of 1984. By mid 1985 they had set up defence positions to consolidate their control of this part of Trincomalee north.

Hundreds fled Nilaveli during the army operation. Some took the boat to India from Salli, a coastal village close by. Others went as refugees to Jaffna and Mullaithivu. Several villagers were killed and maimed in helicopter gunship attacks, which preceded the army operation.

The hotel trade that had barely

started to thrive along the beautiful white sand beaches of Nilaveli had to close shop. Many hotels were used by Tamil militant groups as transit camps for cadres moving between Batticaloa and Mullaithivu before the army moved in.

Miraculously, the Nilaveli Beach Hotel was the only place along this beautiful coast to survive the ravages of war for almost 18 years.

In 1990, the army moved into the village again. This time almost everyone in the village fled north or took refuge in temples and schools. The local Tamil population has dwindled as a consequence of several mass displacements. Until the signing of the MOU, few preferred to live in Nilaveli, fearing the uncertainty that prevailed at the time. Four civilians, including a schoolboy was shot dead by the navy 22nd November, 2000.

But today the Pigeon Island is one of the main tourist attractions of Nilaveli. Ten fishermen in the area have begun to prosper ferrying hundreds of visitors from the south to the scenic coral reef islet.



A refugee child from a camp near Nilaveli pic. by Buddhika Weerasinghe

