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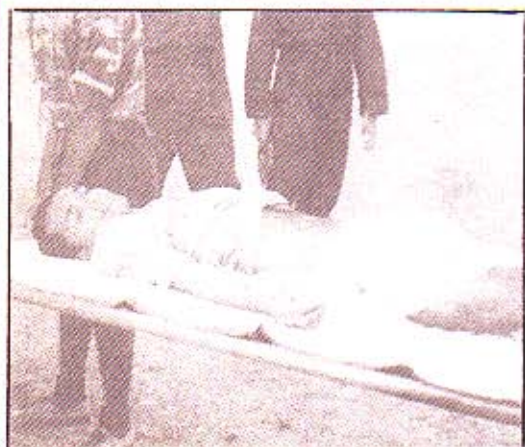
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Army Suffers Major Disaster at Pooneryn

Over 700 Soldiers
and 400 Tigers
Killed in Battle



Burnt-out hulk of the Army's T-55 battle tank without its 105mm calibre gun turret (above) and injured soldiers being evacuated (left)



What Went Wrong at Pooneryn

THONDAMAN'S BRINKMANSHIP

Civilians Killed in Bombing

HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE MEDIA

Failure of the Select Committee

CONSOCIATIONAL DEMOCRACY

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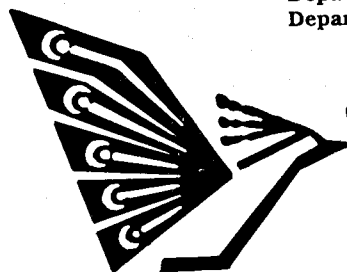
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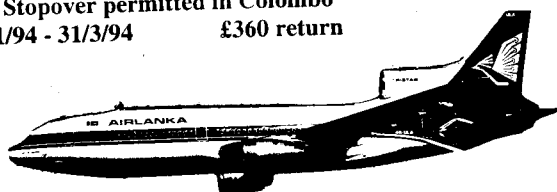
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*I do not agree with a word
of what you say, but I'll
defend to the death your
right to say it.*
— Voltaire.

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GLORYING IN DEATH

In the continuing armed conflict in Sri Lanka, two major military operations were undertaken within the last two months 'Operation Yal Devi' was launched by the government forces on 28 September lasting six days. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) mounted their 'Operation Frog Jump' on 11 November which lasted four days.

In the course of 'Operation Yal Devi', over 120 soldiers, including officers were killed. Seventy-five to one hundred Tiger cadres were reported killed. Many civilians caught up in the battle were also killed. Many more civilians lost their lives falling victims to indiscriminate bombing raids carried out further away from the battle zone.

At the end of LTTE's 'Operation Frog Jump', although no officially acknowledged figures are available, it is estimated 700 service personnel, including many officers, were killed, and approximately 200 remain unaccounted presumably captured but yet remain in unacknowledged detention in the hands of the Tigers. Government forces also lost an enormous amount of military hardware worth millions of rupees. Although the Army high command put a higher figure, the Tigers have officially announced that 411 of their cadres, including many at senior level, were killed in the course of this operation. Again, as in the case following 'Operation Yal Devi', government's Air Force engaged in indiscriminate aerial bombardment in the Jaffna peninsula in which an estimated one hundred civilians fell victims. The Government's own most senior official representative in Jaffna, the Government Agent of Jaffna was injured in one of these bombing raids, and in another some seventeen people who had taken refuge in a church were killed when a bomb hit and destroyed the church.

Irrespective of the claims and counter claims regarding what was gained or lost in military terms by either side, what is certain is that over one thousand four hundred human beings lost their lives and many hundreds more were maimed in these two military encounters. By any calculation, this is an enormously horrific number. Sri Lanka is not the only place in the world where an armed conflict is taking place. There are many places where there are ongoing armed conflicts in various parts of the world. But nowhere else does the level of loss of life even remotely approximate to this number of people. When even few are killed elsewhere in the world, the incidents attract considerable and sustained attention and concern worldwide. However, when over one thousand five hundred people, whether they be combatants or defenceless civilians, are killed in Sri Lanka, it attracts very little attention or concern anywhere except as a passing news report of an everyday occurrence.

What is more tragic is that, even within the country, there is total lack of feeling and concern for those killed in such large numbers in the prime of their life and for the sense of loss, anguish and deprivation that must have been inevitably generated among the kith and kin – the parents, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives and children and other relatives. This lack is reflected in the welter of arguments, analyses, articles, assessments and commentaries by politicians, prelates, military analysts and defence experts and journalists on the conduct, implications and consequences of these operations. Not that the Sri Lankans of all communities are without such feelings. But it would seem that the majority of the people have become brutalised and desensitised by the sheer frequency, scale and extent of the killings that have characterized the violence ridden history of the last several years.

The loss of valuable human lives in such unprecedented numbers is only one aspect of the ongoing human tragedy that is being enacted in the island. Life itself has been so devalued and become so cheap that human beings are being treated as material objects disposable at will. What is worse is the development of a cult that glorifies death, and to put it more accurately in the Sri Lankan context, a culture that seems to indulge in the glorification of killing and being killed. It was the poet Donne who said: 'Every man's death diminishes me'. After the infliction of death upon literally thousands and thousands of people, the Sri Lankan society and those who claim to be its leaders would appear to have been so collectively diminished to a point where they have become totally immune from any responsibility to seek solutions to the very problems that give rise to such tragic loss of life.

Thondaman Back in the Headlines

from Rita Sebastian in Colombo

Savumiamoorthy Thondaman, the powerful leader of the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC), the island's largest plantation trade union, and a Minister in the Wijetunge government is back in the headlines. But then he is hardly ever out of it.

Whether he is fighting the cause of his plantation trade union, or offering to mediate with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, Thondaman has become one of the most controversial politicians of recent times.

He has not been dubbed 'plantation Kingmaker' for nothing. He has often been accused of virtually holding the government to ransom everytime he wanted a demand met. Whether it was citizenship for the descendants of migrant Indian labour, a wage increase or better housing for them, Thondaman, the shrewd, often wily politician has always got what he wanted for those he refers to as 'my people'.

Thondaman bashing has almost become a national political pastime. 'He can make or break governments' says a southern politician not without rancour that 'a man whose father came as a labourer to work for 13 cents a day in a British owned coffee plantation in the 1870s, should today be in a position to dictate terms to the government.'

The CWC has been the ruling United National Party's election ally these many years. An alliance that has been at the centre of bitter criticism in the south. The opposition has on several occasions charged the government of bending backwards to accommodate Thondaman's demands simply to secure the plantation vote.

Former Presidents Jayewardene and Premadasa handled him with kid gloves. Somehow right from the beginning of Dingiri Banda Wijetunge's tenure as President it was apparent the two men were not able to strike the right cord.

Political analysts see a good reason for that. Wijetunge's roots lie in the Kandyan peasantry, whose lives have been entwined with the upcountry plantation sector. And it is these villagers who have now begun to feel increasingly threatened by Thondaman fighting

for the cause of 'his people.'

In the last few weeks, after Thondaman made his strained relations with the government public, there has been a wooing of Thondaman by both the main opposition Sri Lankan Freedom Party and the Democratic United National Front (DUNF).

Unfortunately for them, though the leadership of the two parties would gladly welcome Thondaman into their camp there are sections in the two parties totally against any alliance with Thondaman who they feel is playing politics for selfish ends.

While DUNF President, A.C. Gooneratne has lashed out at party members for making statements welcoming Thondaman without a mandate from the party's decision making body, it is the SLFP's chauvinist Hela Urumaya (National Heritage) twins Tilak Karunaratne and S.L. Gunasekera who have come out strongly against any alliance with the CWC boss.

'While smuggler Prabhakaran wages an unrelenting campaign of military terrorism to destroy our country from the jungles of the Wanni, Minister Thondaman wages a similar campaign of political and economic terror towards the same and from within the portals of the government', they charged in a recent statement to the press.

And while the controversy raged Thondaman shuttled between India and Sri Lanka, missing cabinet

meetings and fuelling speculation that the rift could lead to several re-alignments of political formations in the south.

But the government moved swiftly, met some of Thondaman's demands and diffused the situation somewhat.

They included the suspending of the UNP's Mayoress for upcountry, Nuwara Eliya, Thilaka Herath while she was still on an official visit to Japan, and a probe instituted into allegations of corruption and misappropriation of funds by her, and in her place a CWC member has been appointed as Acting Mayor. Thilaka Herath is facing some 15 charges and has been ordered to appear before a special commission appointed to probe her conduct. The one-man commission headed by retired Judge J.W.P. Udulagama will begin the probe on December 13. The committee has received 15 petitions alleging illegal land deals and other abuses of power.

Two other demands regarding administration and allocation of funds have been granted through central government orders.

Thondaman's main demands however centre on the reconsideration of plans to give a 30-year extension to the private companies managing the estates and a guarantee of 300 working days for the estate workers. Management companies struggling to make the estates viable have run into trouble with the workers on work norms as well.

And as the one-month timeframe given by Thondaman to the government nears its end all the signs indicate that at the end of it, Thondaman will still be with the ruling party.

'I'll Back any Party That Support My People' — Thondaman

The political fallout from the recent moves by Cabinet Minister and leader of the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC), Mr. S. Thondaman, has almost overshadowed the military disaster at Pooneryn in the northern warfront suffered by the Sri Lankan army. He submitted several demands, mostly concerning the working conditions of plantation workers and the government's proposal to

extend the management scheme by private companies of tea estates to thirty years, to President Wijetunga giving him one month time to settle them. At the same time he announced that his party, CWC, would support the opposition parties in the Central Provincial Council thereby bringing down the UNP administration. Simultaneously he commenced negotiations with the

SLFP leader, Mrs. S. Bandaranaike and DUNF leader Mr. Gamini Dissanayake giving rise to strong speculation that he was ready to quit the government and forge an alliance with these opposition parties.

These moves by Mr. Thondaman and his political brinkmanship have produced predictable hostile reactions particularly from advocates of extreme Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinism who have traditionally indulged in Thondaman-bashing. The twin leaders of the extremist 'Hela Urumaya' faction within the SLFP has accused Thondaman of seeking to achieve 'hegemony of the CWC', and denounced those within the ruling UNP and opposition SLFP and DUNF who seek alliance with Thondaman as 'despicable'.

The Hela Urumaya twins in a press statement said, 'The strategy of Minister Thondaman is clear. It is to establish the total hegemony of the CWC in all parts of the country in which large tea and rubber estates are situated, i.e. the Central and Uva Provinces and substantial parts of the Sabaragamuwa, Western and Ruhuna Provinces, and compel the Government to transfer ownership of such estates to the workers, the vast majority of whom are Indian Tamils.

'Presidents J.R. Jayawardene and R. Premadasa kept giving into Minister Thondaman and the CWC for a mess of political pottage. The SLFP then rightly attacked them for doing so and attacked them virulently. Today, President Wijetunga has, unlike his predecessors, had the guts to stand to Minister Thondaman and the CWC and refuse his demands, and some unprincipled and power hungry but powerful sections of the UNP, SLFP and the DUNF are seeking to undermine President Wijetunga's praiseworthy and patriotic stand on this question and to strengthen the hand of Minister Thondaman:

'Those sections of the SLFP and the DUNF do so by negotiating with Minister Thondaman with a view to forging an alliance with him to topple the Government and gain power, while those sections of the UNP seek to do so by preventing such alliance by prevailing on President Wijetunga to give into his demands. The conduct of these sections is despicable.'

The leader of the Sinhala Defence League, Mr. Gamini Jayasuriya, has accused Mr. Thondaman of attempt-

ing to hold both the government and the opposition to ransom.

The politically well seasoned and battle-hardened Mr. Thondaman is not one to be easily rattled by the rantings and ravings of these extreme elements. In an interview with Roshan Peiris of *The Sunday Times*, Mr. Thondaman waxed eloquent with undiluted openness on his latest moves on the political chess board. The following excerpts from that interview are reproduced with kind courtesy of *The Sunday Times*:

Q: You have met the President, the Prime Minister, the UNP General Secretary and top ministers to discuss the problems that confront the CWC. Have you worked out a compromise?

A: I am sorry to say there have been a few provocative incidents. These actions by the Government have irked my people and me. There has been some bungling, possibly by bureaucrats in the Presidential Secretariat. I told government leaders that I want evidence of a policy that recognises the aspirations of a people who have manifested their support for the Government in the past sixteen years through the CWC and me as their leader.

In my talks, I made the point that I expected the government to act with circumspection that would foster an environment of goodwill towards my people who have placed their trust in me.

Q: What provoked you to initiate a no-confidence motion on the UNP administration of the Central Provincial Council? Were you trying to make DUNF leader Gamini Dissanayake the Chief Minister?

A: To explain my provocation as you state I have to go back to the past. Five years ago the Government approved the building of a vocational school for estate Tamils who could not attend other vocational schools on account of the language barrier. Norway was funding the 70 million rupee project. Work was going on to build the school.

You can imagine my chagrin when I received a letter from the Presidential Secretariat stating that all building activities have to be suspended. To add insult to injury, the letter stated that a committee would review the project.

The committee was to consist of three ministry secretaries.

It was indeed disconcerting for me that the Presidential Secretariat

should deem it fit to appoint a committee to review a project approved and begun five years ago without first taking up the subject with me as a matter of courtesy if nothing else.

The letter from the Secretariat sounded like a Parliamentary question from the opposition. It was provocative indeed. I received the letter on November 12 and hence I decided to act on my own. It was I who set the wheels moving for a no-confidence motion in the Central Provincial Council and I told Gambini Dissanayake that I would support him to become chief minister.

Q: You have made a statement that you would co-operate with the Opposition at Provincial Council level and co-operate with the Government as well. Isn't that political tight rope walking?

A: I have not been accurately quoted. I only mentioned my role in the Central Provincial Council. I will continue to support the Government as long as it is sympathetic to the aspirations of my people. I have contributed together with my people in winning elections for the UNP. I have a right therefore to be in the UNP Government unless I am pushed out.

Q: You have met SLFP leader Sirima Bandaranaike twice in recent days. Why did you meet her and what was the outcome?

A: I will associate with and speak to any political party that is willing to help my people. I did not meet Ms. Bandaranaike to ask any favours from her. The talks were exploratory. But I will co-operate as I said with any political party that will treat my people as human beings.

I met Ms. Bandaranaike first with Gamini Dissanayake and then alone. I have to act without prejudice to Gamini Dissanayake whom I invited for talks after I received the letter on November 12.

Q: Gamini Dissanayake has been making overtures to the UNP. Would you say he is dependable as a political ally?

A: A man who is drowning will clutch at even a straw. Mr. Dissanayake is a realistic politician. Anyone in his position will act as he has done. There is nothing wrong with the way he has acted. He is young, he is talented, and has determination. So he is naturally trying to build up his future politically, and get back into the right political

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'Operation Frog-Jump'

The Battle of Pooneryn, an Unmitigated Disaster for the Sri Lankan Military

The 'Operation Frog-Jump' launched by the Tigers on 11 November against the Sri Lankan forces at the Pooneryn army camp and the Nagathevanthurai naval base has been claimed by the Tigers as a great success. It was admitted by even the army high command as a major defeat for the Sri Lankan military.

To the government and its forces it was an unmitigated disaster and a tragedy of unprecedented proportions both in terms of loss of men and material. *The Sunday Times* Defence Correspondent wrote: 'There are no flames or embers of a funeral pyre nor the martial ceremonies of a military funeral to honour the dead, but only the remains of the valiant servicemen returned to their homes in an urn to console the grief of the many parents, wives and children who suffered the human tragedy at Pooneryn.'

Never before in the bloody history of the protracted armed conflict in the island have so many soldiers been killed in one single battle. Of the estimated 2350 service personnel located at the Pooneryn and Nagathevanthurai bases, over 700 were killed, several hundred injured and approximately 250 have gone 'missing'. It is reliably learnt that the 'missing' represent the 'prisoners of war' captured and held by the Tigers, although they have maintained a studied silence on this account. What is worse is that even after a month, neither the Sri Lankan government nor the military high command has been able to give out any official figures in respect of casualties suffered in the Pooneryn battle.

The Army Commander, Lt. Gen. Cecil Waidyaratne has already paid the price with an enforced early retirement, and Major General Gerry de Silva has taken his place. Following 'Operation Yal Devi', the army claimed a 'great victory'. Commander Gen. Cecil Waidyaratne sought to refute charges that it was a bungled operation in an interview

with *The Sunday Times* (17.10.93). Describing the operation as a 'major success', the Army Commander claimed that all its objectives had been achieved. And they were to destroy all LTTE boats and allied facilities such as the Kilali pier thereby preventing the Tigers from making use of this crossing point, to destroy all LTTE camps while advancing, to draw out and destroy as many LTTE cadres as possible, and to deny a major source of income to the LTTE which was making use of the crossing to earn millions of rupees every month.

Despite this grandiose claim by the Army Commander, within two days of the army retreating from Kilali to Elephant Pass, the Tigers resumed their boat service. Now that the naval facilities at Nagathevanthurai have been totally destroyed, the Tiger boat service from Kilali to the mainland is fully operational with little harassment from the Sri Lankan navy, with the improved protective cover provided by the Sea Tigers with the aid of the water jet boats captured at Nagathevanthurai on November 11.

As for the Sri Lankan President, Mr. D.B. Wijetunga, who had decreed the army to bring an end to what he describes as the 'terrorist problem' by military means, the debacle at Pooneryn must serve as an eye-opener. He must quickly learn that war is too important a matter to be left in the hands of generals, and political and ethnic problems, intractable as they are, cannot be solved by military means alone.

However, the question that is being asked by many is as to how the Pooneryn-Nagathevanthurai complex, a well fortified and equipped and heavily manned with experienced and specialised troops (over 2000 soldiers including officers at Pooneryn and more than 350 sailors at Nagathevanthurai) could have been allowed to be overrun so quickly, and with so much loss of men and material. What is worse is

the revelation that the army had prior warning of the impending LTTE attack.

'The army had adequate warning that the LTTE was about to attack Pooneryn', Defence Secretary, Gen. Hamilton Wanasinghe, himself a former Army Commander, told a press conference on 14 November even as the battle was in progress. At a press briefing at Palaly airbase on 14 November, Brig. C.S. Weerasooriya, Director of Army Intelligence, and Brig. Lionel Balagalle, Director of Military Intelligence, said that they had received intelligence three months before 11 November about the LTTE plans to attack Pooneryn.

Out of over 350 soldiers and sailors at Nagathevanthurai, only about 100 managed to escape death or being captured by the LTTE. 14 Navy officers comprising 8 lieutenants and 6 sub-lieutenants were killed. Major U. Hemapala, Capt. K.C.P. Wickremaratne and Capt. Panduka Wanasinghe, Lt. K.T.P. De Silva, Lt. K.W.T. Nissanka and Lt. E.M.N.B. Ekanayake were among the army officers killed in action.

Among the military hardware the Tigers got away with are two Czechoslovak built Main Battle Tanks, 13 Five Zero Calibre weapons capable of ground to air firepower with a range of 4000 feet, 5 inshore water jet boats and 400 automatic weapons and ammunition.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe announced in Parliament that an inquiry into the Pooneryn debacle would be held by the Army Commander. Many have expressed concerns and questioned the propriety of the Army Commander holding this inquiry. *The Sunday Times* Defence Correspondent reflected these concerns as follows in context of the matters that are to be the subjects of the inquiry:

(a) The effectiveness of overall military planning and omission if any; whether the delay in sending reinforcements was the result of the non-existence of contingency planning; whether the long defence lines lacked depth; or whether intelligence was not heeded. These questions imply that the top executive of the Army, the Army Commander and his command mechanism may be open to be faulted. In such circumstances, the question that has to be raised is whether a court of

inquiry appointed by the Army Commander, in other words a military court with serving officers, would in fact find fault with their own system, superiors and colleagues.

(b) The Pooneryn debacle is a national disaster both in terms of tragic human losses and the heavy loss of resources. Hence an internal inquiry is not something that should necessarily be led by the Army, Navy or Air Force. But in the total context of the magnitude of the disaster, and the possible answerability for it, any inquiry should not be departmental but appointed by the Government, say by military experts and analysts.

(c) It is the security forces which have to be assured that the Government is concerned with the conduct of the war, not merely to provide a budgetary allocation and political patronage to the war effort. The man with the rifle in his hands who sticks his neck out must be assured of the correctness of the political and military decisions for which, he as a cog in the whole machine, is staking his life.

(d) The kith and kin of many who have sacrificed their lives, lost their limbs, or are still serving must be assured that their loved ones have served or are serving a cause under responsible leadership. Any loss of faith in the leadership will affect the belief in the cause itself.

The Tigers, even after having inflicted one of the worst defeats upon the armed forces and captured military hardware worth nearly two hun-

dred million rupees, could not hold onto either Pooneryn or Nagathevanthurai. They retreated and it is in the process of this retreat that they lost most of their cadres. Then the question arises as to why the Tigers launched their 'Operation Frog-Jump' at this time? Analysts of the LTTE's battle tactics offer various reasons.

After Elephant Pass came under the control of the Sri Lankan forces, the Pooneryn-Sangupiddy causeway was the route that both the Tigers and the Tamil civilians were able to use to travel to and from Jaffna and the mainland. It was after Eelam War II commenced that this causeway came under the army's control and made out of bounds to the Tigers. In order to maintain the stranglehold on the movement of the Jaffna civilians between the peninsula and the mainland, the Tigers prohibited the use by the civilians of either the Elephant Pass or the Pooneryn-Sangupiddy causeway. It was then that the Tigers opened up and operated the Kilali-Punchiparathan route and the boat service. Having declared this area of the Jaffna Lagoon a prohibited zone, the Air Force and the Navy subjected the Tiger boats ferrying civilians to constant attacks in the course of which many died. These attacks were mainly organised and mounted from the Pooneryn camp and the Nagathevanthurai naval base.

In the absence of a safe passage for the civilians, there was mounting pressure from the people upon the LTTE to go along with the plan

drawn by the UNHCR for the use of the Sangupiddy-Pooneryn causeway by the civilians. However, although LTTE spokesman Anton Balasingham was a participant in discussions with the UNHCR in drawing up this plan, Prabhakaran ruled it out because of the army's control of the causeway at its mainland end. Putting into practice the UNHCR plan would have meant LTTE's armed cadres could not have mingled with the civilians to cross into the mainland. Gradually, the stranglehold the Tigers had on the movement of the people would also have been weakened. In this context, an attack to remove the control of Pooneryn by the army was considered a military imperative.

Another reason offered is that Prabhakaran had realised that the Sri Lankan forces having virtually encircled Jaffna peninsula by occupying the Elephant Pass, Pooneryn-Nagathevanthurai, and the offshore islands together with their control of Palaly, Mathagal and Kankesanthurai, they would sooner than later mount an assault on the Jaffna peninsula itself.

Informed sources confirm that Prabhakaran had told his commanders that the Sri Lankan army planned to launch its Jaffna offensive some time during February-March next year when the climatic conditions would be more suitable to such an operation. 'Operation Frog-Jump' by the Tigers was Prabhakaran's pre-emptive strike to prevent such an offensive.

Of the estimated one thousand cadres of the LTTE which poured into the Pooneryn military complex and the Nagathevanthurai naval base to mount 'Operation Frog-Jump', one of LTTE's major military assaults against the Sri Lankan government forces, it was officially admitted by the Tigers themselves that 411 of their cadres were killed. Presumably several hundreds were injured. This number of killed constituted the second largest number of casualties suffered in one battle by the Tigers in their ten-year war with government forces. In their battle at Elephant Pass which they sought to capture but failed in September 1991, the Tigers lost an estimated 800 to 900 of their cadres.

Among the senior LTTE cadres who were killed in battle are Deputy Commander of the Jaffna Command, Lt. Col. Anbu, Maj. Ilangoan, Maj. Michael, and Maj. Kumar-

Continued on page 30

Tigers List Casualties

Several senior Tiger field commanders are among the 167 cadres listed as killed during 'Operation Frog Jump' launched by the LTTE against the government forces at Pooneryn. The Tamil daily published in Jaffna, *Eelanatham*, has published the names of 167 cadres killed including Lt. Col. Anbu and Black Tiger Majors Gopi and Ganesh.

One Lt. Colonel, 11 Majors, 25 Captains, 44 Lieutenants, 42 Second Lieutenants and 37 privates had died during the attack from 11 to 14 November. On the first night of the attack, the LTTE lost Major Shivaji, one Captain, one Lieutenant, four Second Lieutenants and 3 junior cadres. On 12 November, Lt. Col. Anbu, Black Tiger Major Gopi, and

Majors Eelavan, Prakash, Bhama, Kumaravel, Elanchelian Ruban, Puviraj and Maheswaran were killed. Twelve other Captains, 28 Lieutenants, 29 Second Lieutenants and 27 junior cadres also were killed on this day.

LTTE lost 11 Captains, 14 Lieutenants, 16 Second Lieutenants and 13 junior cadres on 13 November. Major Kamilo, one Captain and a Lieutenant were killed on 14 November.

Of the total number of 167 whose names were listed, 68 were from Jaffna, 47 from Batticaloa, 17 from Vavuniya, 13 from Mannar, 12 from Mullaitivu, 3 from Mannampitya, 3 from Amparai, one each from Trincomalee, Kalmunai, Chillaw and Hatton.

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The Pooneryn Disaster

What Went Wrong?

by Niresh Eliatamby

'The army had adequate warning that the LTTE was about to attack Pooneryn'.

Defence Secretary, General Hamilton Wanasinghe's startling revelation at a press conference eight days ago, while the battle was still in progress, still echoes in our minds.

The keyword here is 'adequate'. Since the Defence Secretary, who is also a former commander of the army, says that there was enough warning, why couldn't this horrible and humiliating defeat be prevented? After all, forewarned is forearmed, isn't it? So, what happened?

The government and the army have still not given an explanation to the public. In fact, even the number of personnel killed, wounded, and missing, has not been disclosed. So it has been left to the media to investigate, analyse, and speculate on the disaster at Pooneryn, for disaster it surely was, by any stretch of the word.

The army knew that Pooneryn was going to be attacked, so how did the LTTE still overrun it?

This is the question which has been haunting the entire nation this week, along with the question of how many soldiers and sailors had been massacred in the Sri Lanka Army's darkest hour.

Three months before the Pooneryn disaster, army intelligence got wind of LTTE plans to attack Pooneryn, according to Brigadier C.S. Weerasooriya, director of army operations, and Brigadier Lionel Balagalle, director of military intelligence, who were briefing media-men at Palaly last Sunday.

LTTE cadres were spotted doing reconnaissance of Pooneryn and Nagatevanthurai from both North and South. Some such LTTEs were even shot at by the forces.

The army did take some cursory precautions. Two additional companies, totalling about 300 experienced troops, were sent in to join the two battalions already there, the first Sri Lanka Light Infantry (1CLI), and the third Gajaba Regiment (3GR). In addition, a unit of artillery was present, manning 120 millimetre mortars, and 106mm anti-tank guns. At least six T65 main battle tanks of Czechoslovak origin were also part of the defences.

On the naval side, the Nagatevanthurai Naval Radar Station could give warning of any attack across the lagoon, and five locally built Inshore Patrol Craft, mounting five zero machine guns, were waiting at the jetty. More than 350 sailors were also present, some guarding the radar station, while others were scattered in small detachments.

According to General Wanasinghe, sentries were given nightvision equipment and bright spotlight, but still, no visible buildup of LTTE was evident.

The total number of security forces personnel at Pooneryn was well over 2000.

In two days, the LTTE killed between 400 and 600 soldiers, including at least 15 officers, over 100 sailors, including 3 officers, and walked off with all five Inshore Patrol Craft, one T85 tank, one T65 tank, one 106mm recoilless, anti-tank gun, two 120mm mortars, a dozen five zero machine guns, three grenade launchers, 50 light machine guns, and about 400 rifles, as well as a huge stock of ammunition for all these weapons. Nearly 600 other soldiers and sailors were wounded, and a Pucara ground attack aircraft was damaged.

On Wednesday, November 10, at 11.45pm a large number of LTTE radio sets in the North came on the air, a sure sign that something big was about to happen. The brigade commander at Palaly immediately sent out a warning to commanders at Palaly, Elephant Pass, Pooneryn, Karainagar, and other detachments in and around the Peninsula. All troops were told to be on full alert.

At 1.45am on Thursday, the 11th, the first attacks came. Hundreds of

Tigers wading up the coast from the South, sometimes waistdeep in the mud and water of the Jaffna Lagoon, attacked the five navy boats at Nagatevanthurai.

Within second, all the sailors in the boats, numbering about 35, were dead, and the boats themselves, P114, P117, P120, P122 and P123 were spirited away by the Tigers.

Almost immediately, Nagatevanthurai came under heavy attack from the lagoon, and from the South. Its radio was quickly put out of action.

Simultaneously, the artillery units at the Pooneryn army camp came under attack from Tigers who had infiltrated from all sides. The meticulous preparation of the LTTE was quite evident, since they knew exactly where each artillery piece was located.

At the mortar tubes, most of the crews of the five mortars were killed immediately, with the Tigers carrying away two of the five 120mm mortars, the other three being damaged.

The CLI regiment, under Colonel Ranjith Silva, defending the main Pooneryn camp, held their ground, despite wave after wave of determined LTTE attacks. The Tigers actually succeeded in getting through the camp's defences, but the CLI managed to dig in, and after some bitter hand to hand fighting, held on until daylight. As dawn broke, the CLI found that more than 200 of their number were wounded, thus making it impossible for the regiment to break out towards the coast, from where reinforcements would have to come. Because of the wounded, the CLI would have to stand and fight.

Further North, however, the 3GR was not fairing well at all. As the attack began, all their radios were destroyed, and bitter hand to hand fighting took place in the darkness. For about five hours, there was no communication from the 3GR and senior army officers began to fear that the entire regiment had been wiped out.

It was only at dawn, that the 1CLI was able to mount an operation to advance Northwards, to determine what had happened to the 3GR, and they were able to re-establish contact with the 3GR and the entire army heaved a sigh of relief.

With daylight, the first reinforce-

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ments arrived, in the form of one Pucara, and several Sia Marcetti ground attack aircraft from Palaly air force base. These immediately set about attacking what enemy activity they could find, but were of limited use, since the two sides on the ground were locked in battle at such close quarters that the pilots were afraid of hitting their own soldiers.

However, LTTE reinforcements, which were now streaming across the Kilali in hundreds of boats, were attacked much more vigorously from the air, although most of them got through to Pooneryn.

The air force also claims to have successfully bombed one of the captured navy boats, but this cannot be confirmed yet.

The three service commanders, Lieutenant General Cecil Waidyaratne, Vice Admiral Mohan Samarasekere, and Air Marshall Terrence Goonewardene, rushed to Palaly that morning.

The immediate concern was Nagatevanthurai. While over a thousand soldiers were still defending Pooneryn army camp, the navy officer commanding Nagatevanthurai, Lieutenant D.N.S. Ulugethenne, told his superiors that of the 160 sailors guarding Nagatevanthurai when the battle began, only 60 were left. Lt. Ulugethenne, himself wounded, had managed to make contact through a telephone, which was amazingly, still working. It was obvious to all that when night fell, the base would be overrun.

Fortunately, the largest landing craft in the navy, SLNS 'Rana Gaja', was in Kankesanthurai harbour at the time, and the navy prepared to sail. But despite all the warnings, the army, astoundingly, had no troops ready to send.

Only about 300 commandos were available, and these left KKS aboard Rana Gaja at 8 a.m. bound for Kalmunai, North-West of Pooneryn. They were escorted by several Dvora Fast Attack Craft from Karainagar Naval Base.

After seven hours sailing, the reinforcements arrived off Kalmunai at about 3 p.m. But the Dvoras were unable to get close to shore to give effective covering fire because of the shallow water, and the landing was beaten back by heavy LTTE fire.

The navy commander, after con-

sulting senior navy and army officers, reluctantly ordered that Nagatevanthurai be abandoned. After destroying everything they could in the base, 48 sailors and 12 soldiers managed to make it to the lagoon at 6.40 p.m.

Ten minutes later, a huge explosion rocked Nagatevanthurai, as the LTTE entered and blew it up.

The 60 sailors and soldiers waded through the lagoon for several miles until they were picked up by dinghies from Elephant Pass.

That night, the LTTE, flushed with their victory at Nagatevanthurai, made several attacks on Pooneryn, but were beaten back by the CLI and GR. Meanwhile, LTTE reinforcements continued to pour across the lagoon from Jaffna.

By this time, heavy artillery batteries at Elephant Pass had also gone into action, with 85 pounder guns, and 120mm mortars firing across the lagoon at Pooneryn, 10 kilometres away.

On Friday the 12th, the navy once again tried to land the commandos and other troops at Kalmunai, but were once again beaten back. The LTTE was determined not to allow reinforcements to gain a foothold on the beach.

The biggest problem was that the army did not want to send troops from Palaly, Elephant Pass, or any of the other bases close to Pooneryn, since it would weaken their own defences. So troops had to be airlifted in from the East, which took time. Meanwhile, on Friday, a Pucara aircraft was also damaged, and its pilot wounded, although he managed to get it back to Palaly.

By this time, another group of soldiers, about 400 strong, had managed to make contact by radio. They were on the coast, South West of Pooneryn, and therefore much easier to reach than the main army camp.

So two of the air force's M18 troop carrying helicopters from Palaly attempted to induct the elite commandos by air, but they too were forced to withdraw under heavy LTTE fire.

On Friday night, the LTTE, knowing that army reinforcements would soon get through, made their most determined effort to overrun Pooneryn. Wave after wave of Tigers attacked the camp with unimaginable ferocity, but the men of the CLI and GR once again stood firm.

The LTTE, which had suffered

less than 250 men killed on Thursday, lost at least 300 men on Friday night's attacks. Most of them were of the elite 'Charles Anthony' brigade, and the Sea Tigers.

When Saturday dawned, the LTTE, unable to sustain such losses, and unwilling to take on the reinforcements which were certain to arrive in force, began a general withdrawal across the lagoon hampered by frequent strafing from the Sia Mercettis.

At 11.05 a.m. on Saturday, 300 commandos from Rana Gaja stormed ashore at Kalmunai, this time backed by heavy gunfire from gunboats which had arrived from Trincomalee, as well as the Dvoras. They met little resistance.

By 3 p.m. a full battalion, the 6th Gemunu Watch, went in behind them, bringing the landing force strength to more than 900. Commanded by Brigadier Shantha Kottegoda, this force began to make its way South, hampered by occasional LTTE fire, and the deadly little battas, or Jonny mines, which the Tigers had sown in plenty.

That afternoon, a second landing was made, this time by the M18 helicopters, to link up with the 400 soldiers on the coast. This landing was made by the 3rd CLI, commanded by Colonel Nimal Jayasuriya.

This force began to make its way East, to link up with the defenders of the Pooneryn camp. Contact was made on Sunday evening.

On Monday, Col. Kottegoda's force linked up with Pooneryn as well. The Battle was finally over.

So what went wrong at Pooneryn? The fact is that the army was relying on the navy to control the lagoon, with its five boats at Nagatevanthurai. This would not only have blocked LTTE reinforcements from the Jaffna Peninsula, but would have allowed troops to cross to Pooneryn easily from Elephant Pass.

But the lagoon is so shallow that the LTTE was able to easily attack Nagatevanthurai. When they took the five boats, they established total dominance over the lagoon, since it is much too shallow for the Dvoras, and other navy vessels. This doomed any hope of reinforcements from Elephant Pass.

The Pooneryn area has thus proved itself to be undefendable, against a determined and well plan-

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Civilians in Church Killed in Revenge Bombing Raid

Jaffna Government Agent, Karthigesu Manicavasagar, was among those civilians injured when Sri Lankan Air Force jet planes bombed sections of Jaffna town in November. Mr. Manicavasagar, whose chest injury required four stitches, considers himself lucky to have escaped death. He spoke about that experience and related incidents concerning the Tamils in the North to A.M. Macan-Markar of *The Sunday Times*, Colombo.

Q: Do you think the recent aerial bombing of Jaffna was a retaliatory attack for the over-running of the Pooneryn military base?

A: It happened on 12th of November, after that battle. Around 8.25am actually.

Q: Where were you when the bombs fell?

A: They dropped two bombs that morning; those were jet planes that did it. At that time I was in my office, and both bombs fell very close: one near the kachcheri gate and one opposite my office. Yes: I had a miraculous escape. Sustained an injury on my right chest.

Q: How many others were injured? How many died?

A: A total of 25 civilians were hurt, all of them employees at the Secretariat. They were hit while working. Six LTTE policemen were injured also, and one of them died, a policeman who was standing on the road opposite the kachcheri.

Q: Where were the injured treated?

A: At the General Hospital.

Q: You mean even the injured LTTE men were taken to the Jaffna hospital?

A: The hospital treats all injured people. I don't know specifically whether they took the LTTE men.

Q: When did the aerial attacks stop?

A: It was repeated the next day. There were two more attacks, one bomb hitting a large church down Main Street, the St. James Church. Nine people who were praying died instantly. There were 53 people badly injured. And subsequently seven of them died.

Q: Have similar attacks occurred before?

A: Yes: the last time during the Operation Yal Devi period (October).

Q: Is the Government aware of

the extent of damage particularly the kachcheri building?

A: I have informed them (the Government) about the estimated cost. According to amounts worked out at Colombo rates, the entire physical damage is about eight million rupees, and that is excluding equipment cost.

Q: What are people saying after these raids?

A: Most civilians feel they are being terrorised by these jet planes and the bombings.

Q: But doesn't the military inform the people? Air-dropping leaflets?

A: Whatever information dropped from the sky, leaflets, never get to the people. Practically 95 percent of them end up in the sea. And since batteries are not permitted there, when the military makes curfew announcements over the Palaly radio station only a very few hear it.

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track. What is wrong in that?

Mr. Dissanayake, in my opinion, is a resourceful politician. I have pledged to help him.

Q: Gamani Jayasuriya, the President of the Sinhala Araksha Sanvidanaya, has said that you are trying to hold both the Government and the Opposition to ransom. What is your response?

A: Mr. Jayasuriya resigned over the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord and he thought he would hold the Government to ransom. But he was not successful. I think first and then act, I have been successful and he has not been. He was ineffective after he resigned, but I have remained effective which perhaps he does not like. I am only exercising the democratic rights of my people.

Q: Mr. Jayasuriya has made the criticism that you do not care for the Sinhala majority. You are asking for the merger of the North and East and also you want to

Q: What is usually announced?

A: They want the people to move away from LTTE camps and go into houses that are safe. But this is not possible since there are LTTE camps everywhere.

Q: What do you mean by 'everywhere'?

A: You see, there are camps in the town and the outskirts. So it is difficult to comply. Also there is hardly any shelter left for people to escape. There is no accommodation.

Q: Do you think these bombings move civilians more close to the LTTE?

A: To the best of my knowledge people approach the LTTE for more security because they have no choice.

Q: Then what do you say to opinions by some Tamils coming from Jaffna who accuse the LTTE of harassing civilians?

A: I have not heard such opinion. But I can only say the LTTE maintains certain codes of conduct, behaviour, and people have to comply. Maybe it is a problem with this.

Q: Do you inform the government leaders about your observations?

A: Yes. In fact I met Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe this time and told him about the serious consequences of the war.

(Courtesy: *The Sunday Times*, 5/12/93).

alienate the Sinhala people's ancestral property by asking for land for the estate Tamils. What have you to say on these criticisms?

A: My people have only the CWC and me to look after them. The Sinhala people have been looked after by the two major Sinhala political parties of the country, the UNP and the SLFP. What am I to do if these two major political parties cannot assess the aspirations of the Sinhala people. So people like Gamani Jayasuriya are angry. Why did he not do more for the Sinhala people when he was a member of the Cabinet? I am most certainly looking after a disadvantaged group and I make no apologies for it.

As for the alienation of land, President Wijetunga himself sent me a letter where he with a measure of statesmanship says he recognises the legitimate aspirations and desire for land ownership of those of Indian origin who are now citizens of this country.

TULF LEADERS' MURDER CASE

Accused Gets 7-Year Jail Term

Vincent William Mariadasa who was found guilty of conspiracy to murder former TULF Secretary-General, A. Amirthalingam was sentenced to seven years imprisonment by the Panadura High Court Judge, Mr. T.B. Weerasuriya on 19 November.

Mariadasa was indicted with the conspiracy to murder TULF Secretary General, A. Amirthalingam, M. Sivasithamparam and V. Yogeswaran in Colombo between June and July 1989 along with Rajalingam Aravindran alias Rasiah Aravindan alias Paul Fernando alias Visu, Aloysius Leon, alias K. Sivakumaran alias Aribu and other persons unknown to the prosecution.

Justice Weerasuriya in his verdict stated that though the accused had not been a card holding member of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) whose members are believed to have carried out the assassination, he had been actively involved in the conspiracy and had supplied valuable information to the assassins. The gravity of the conspiracy was greater as the motive was to eliminate a leader elected to Parliament by the people, Justice Weerasuriya said.

The Judge said that the accused had opted to remain silent in Court thus refraining from giving evidence. Under these circumstances it is possible to consider the voluntary confession given by the accused to ASP Ananda Galgamuwa after the incident as evidence acceptable to Court. He said it is necessary to closely scrutinize this confession and establish its verity. It is also needed to establish the involvement of Mariadasa in the assassination.

Justice Weerasuriya said that the confession could be determined to be true as there are four incidents referred to in the confession that are consistent to the evidence given by others at Court. In a two hour long presentation Justice Weerasuriya explained these incidents and cited their consistency with the evidence of ASP Ananda Galgamuwa and Mr. Amirthalingam's personal Security Officer G. Nissanka and the post mortem reports of the bodies of the assassins Visu Aloysius and Sivakumaran.

The Judge said that the accused in

his confession had stated that Visu had told him in the jungles of Pandikulam that the LTTE was planning to eliminate Tamil leaders. The confession further states that though Mariadasa had not been a member of the above organisation he had been actively involved in raising funds by collecting gold sovereigns and taxes. The accused had confessed that he had been thus sent to Colombo to supply the LTTE leadership with information on the movements of Tamil leaders resident in Colombo. The Judge said that a letter had been found in the residence of Mariadasa at Anderson Flats, Narahenpita a letter written in Tamil revealing information of such leaders. The accused has also said that he had sent information to a LTTE intelligence leader named

Ahilan in Jaffna. Justice Weerasuriya said that the accused had further revealed that Visu Aloysius and Sivakumaran (the assassins who were later killed by the security officers of Mr. Amirthalingam) had met at his house and had discussed and planned the assassination.

Justice Weerasuriya said that hence it could be determined that Mariadasa was actively involved in the conspiracy to assassinate the leader of the TULF A. Amirthalingam.

Counsel for the accused K.V. Thevarasa asked the Judge to consider the fact that the accused had been in the custody of the Police for 4 years, 4 months and 4 days when passing the sentence of imprisonment. The Judge said it was not possible to deduct the period the accused was in remand from the minimum sentence for conspiracy of murder which is 5 years.

State Counsel Priyantha Nawana represented the prosecution.

Amnesty International Protests Against Arbitrary Detention of Tamils

Despite promises by the Sri Lankan Government to safeguard Tamils from arbitrary detention, well over a thousand members of the Tamil community have been arbitrarily arrested in the capital, Colombo, and its suburbs since 15 October and at least six have been held in unacknowledged detention.

'The latest arrests show a complete failure by the Sri Lankan Government to implement the measures which it agreed with Tamil political leaders in June - which were intended to safeguard Tamils from just this kind of abuse,' said Amnesty International.

Some of those recently arrested have been taken away by men in police or military uniform, others by officers wearing civilian dress, often in the middle of the night. In some cases the arrests had still not been acknowledged by the police three or four days after the arrest and despite the explicit promise made in June that relatives of detainees would be informed of where prisoners were being taken, relatives often do not know where they are held.

'Since June, there have been several waves of such arrests forming part of a pattern of human rights

violations directed at the Tamil community, in which thousands of people appear to have been arrested solely on the basis of their ethnic origin,' said Amnesty International.

The first wave of arrests followed soon after elections to provincial councils had been held in June. Since then thousands have been arrested, apparently in connection with investigations into the assassinations of opposition leader Lalith Athulathmudali and President Ranasinghe Premadasa on 23 April and 1 May respectively, and with reports that the armed opposition Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have infiltrated the city. Police attributed both assassinations to the LTTE, which is engaged in armed conflict with government forces to establish a separate state in the northeast of the island.

The most recent mass arrests began on the night of 15 October following a statement by the Defence Ministry that a body-bomb (to be worn by a suicide bomber) had been found in a box on a beach at Modera, north of Colombo, on 14 October. The bomb was said to be of the type used to kill both former President Premadasa earlier in the

year and the former Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, in 1991, raising fears that LTTE suicide squads may have entered the city.

Many of those arrested were released within hours or days. Hundreds, however, have reportedly been kept in custody – from 15 to 17 October, for example, some 1,500 Tamil people were reportedly arrested in the Colombo area, of whom 500 were kept in detention.

Reports received in the past three months suggest that in many cases there are no valid grounds for arrest and that people are simply held in custody while police check their identities and whether there is any existing intelligence information about them. Amnesty International called on the government in June to ensure that people are only arrested when there are grounds to do so.

Some people have been repeatedly arrested in recent months despite government assurances in June 1993 that certificates would be issued on an individual's release to ensure that they would not be rearrested for routine questioning. For example, a young man arrested by police at Modera on 20 October was eventually traced by his relatives to Kotahena police station, and was expected to be released. He had been detained and released three times previously.

Amnesty International is concerned that the way in which people are being taken into custody is reminiscent of the manner in which thousands of people were detained in the south between 1988 and 1990, when the government was seeking to suppress an insurgency by the **Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna** (People's Liberation Front). The lack of proper procedural safeguards on arrest and detention enabled tens of thousands of people to 'disappear' in custody in that period.

Amnesty International has appealed to the authorities to investigate the whereabouts, and ensure the safety of the six individuals whose arrests have not yet been acknowledged and whose whereabouts remain unknown. The organization is also urging the government of Sri Lanka to ensure that the safeguards against arbitrary arrest and detention agreed to in June are fully implemented, to take effective action against officers who fail to enforce them, and to ensure that arrests by officers in civilian clothes cease.

UNHCR Suspends Relief Work Among Refugees

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said yesterday that it had suspended its operations in Sri Lanka's war-torn northern district for security reasons.

'It is with deep sorrow that UNHCR has had to suspend temporarily all its operations in northern Sri Lanka', it said in a statement issued on 10 November.

All four UNHCR staff members working in Madhu had been evacuated by Tuesday leaving only one UNHCR radio operator in Jaffna, the statement said.

The statement also made the following points:

'This decision was taken on security grounds, following the serious incident which occurred on October 30 in Madhu. From an in-depth investigation of this incident, it transpired that four UNHCR staff members had faced a serious security risk during the demonstration staged in Madhu which appeared to have involved some one thousand persons.

'The incident of October 30 is the sixth in a series of demonstrations which started in mid-August 1993. These have, since then, become increasingly violent and future demonstrations of this kind cannot be discounted. In the circumstances, UNHCR feels that it is no longer able to carry out its humanitarian mandate without putting the security of its staff at risk.

'In the same vein, conditions under which UNHCR has been operating in Madhu and Palampiddi Open Relief Centres (ORC) have gradually changed in a way that has reduced the humanitarian space available to the organisation. The ORC operation is predicated upon two key and inter-related principles: Freedom of movement to and from the ORC and, within this framework, the provision of adequate food and basic amenities to ORC residents. Recently, UNHCR increasingly felt that the operation was swaying from these two key principles.

'The temporary suspension will affect the following programme components in northern Sri Lanka:

'The Madhu and Palampiddi ORCs, an operation that UNHCR

was carrying out since November 1990 at Madhu and since September 1992 at Palampiddi. These operations benefited an estimated 32,000 persons. Food provided by the government of Sri Lanka was transported by UNHCR which also assumed responsibility, for basic social services in the two ORCs, including water supply, sanitation and health.

'Assistance provided to returnees from India who wish to proceed to uncleared areas and are allowed to do so. In this context, transportation of these persons to their districts of origin was arranged by UNHCR.

'UNHCR wishes to stress the importance it attaches to these operations and therefore hopes that conditions permitting their resumption could be re-created in the near future.'

Tension has been mounting between the aid agency and the refugees since the Colombo government stopped food rations to some 8,000 refugees. Aid workers have privately said that Tigers were preventing the refugees from returning to their homes.

The Madhu camp is located within territory controlled by the separatist LTTE.

Colombo insists that 8,000 of the Madhu refugees should return to their homes or enter camps within government held towns in the North.

'Most of the refugees are virtually held hostage by the LTTE. It is the LTTE which is behind the agitation. There have been many problems at Madhu in the past month,' a military spokesman at the nearby Vavuniya army facility said.



**Tamil Times wishes all its
readers, contributors and
wellwishers a very
Merry Christmas and a
prosperous New Year.**



Right to Life and Liberty, Freedom of Expression and Assembly and the Media in Sri Lanka

by Lucien Rajakarunanayake,
President, Free Media Movement

All of us here who are concerned about the condition in Sri Lanka have heard of the recent debacle suffered by the Security Forces at Nagathivanthurai and Pooneryn. It was the biggest loss to the military in terms of men and material. At the lowest count, at least 600 troops were killed in an attack by the Tamil Tigers, which in its main thrust had but lasted only a few hours. This excludes the Tamil Tiger admission of over four hundred of their own cadres being killed.

In all the toll at Pooneryn would be at least 1000 Sri Lankans killed. However, it is the reality of our times that this figure would not be reported by the Sri Lankan media in this manner. All it would be concerned with is the number of troops killed – as stated by the Government. The Tiger cadres killed would not be included in the total number of Sri Lankans killed.

Attempts are already under way to make heroes of the troops who were killed at Pooneryn, as a measure of hiding the extent of the debacle suffered and offset the negative impact on future recruitment to the forces. But there is little heard of a proper accounting of what took place and why. Not the least by the Media in Sri Lanka.

It is significant that the military debacle and national tragedy at Pooneryn took place within less than three weeks after the Free Media Movement had to issue a statement condemning a death threat made on the Defence Correspondent of a Sunday English newspaper for commenting on Operation Yal Devi, in a manner which did not paint the military high command in shades of pink.

It was by coincidence that the latest seminar to be held by the Free Media Movement on – The War and the Media – took place on the same day as that of the Pooneryn tragedy. The purpose of the seminar was to discuss the ethics of our profession in reporting the current war in Sri Lanka and by implication and extension, the entire ethnic crisis itself.

Attitude of suppliance

The Media in Sri Lanka is today in the clutches of a major crisis. It is a crisis to which it has been led by the continuing erosion of democratic values for which the Sri Lankan Press is itself responsible in large measure. I attach this responsibility to the Press for its continuing attitude of suppliance before governments, as well as, the identification of its role as that of the spokesperson for the Sinhalese majority and not the Sri Lankan nation, or whatever we have left of that concept.

It is relevant here to give a brief description of the situation in which the media exists in Sri Lanka. We have come through the worst period of repression by government. The magnitude of the problem we faced is best understood when it is realized that in the 52 weeks ending in March 1993, journalists had been assaulted and roughed-up on 52 occasions by the police and pro-government thugs. We also had to face many threats from politicians of the government, as well as, from a few of the opposition too.

The latter part of this gloomy period saw the president of the country make public statements accusing journalists who were critical of the government, and its largely corrupt policies, of being 'terrorists' and the 'acid throwers' or hired assassins of newspaper proprietors. The association that some of these critical journalists had with the JVP of 1979 was frequently mentioned by the President, ignoring the fact that their freedom came after a pardon given by a government in which he was the Prime Minister.

Sympathetic echo

The motive was clear. The green light was being given to the police and security personnel to move in against these reborn terrorists. The threats of the President found sympathetic echo in the government owned Press. There were scribes who even called for the elimination of the so-called fascist forces who were responsible for 'tabloid terror'.

Paper submitted at the Seminar 'On Democratic Rights and Civil Liberties in Sri Lanka' organised by the Committee for Democracy and Justice in Sri Lanka on 20-21 November 1993.

That was the background in which the Free Media Movement was born. We carried on a campaign against the severest of odds to fight this threat on the Media and the individual journalist. We did what appeared to be the impossible. While the opposition parties were in a stupor, trapped in the family squabbles of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party and mired in the general inability to offer solutions to the larger threat to democracy, a group of journalists took the issue of the Right to Free Expression to the country. The people did respond favourably. We realized the need to place the issue of a Free Media, the Right to Free Expression and the Right to Information, high on the political agenda of Sri Lanka.

The immediate threat to the journalists and the critical Press appears to have been pushed into the background after the assassination of Ranasinghe Premadasa. The Wijetunge administration is now shedding some of the embarrassments of the Premadasa era. Yet there is little room to be happy about the trend of events with regard to the Media. It is significant that in the first interview given to the Press after his swearing in, President Wijetunge said that the freedom of the Press would be assured but not the freedom to topple governments. The President has not explained as to what he has meant by toppling governments. However, the current trend of thinking appears to be that even the democratic change of government could amount to that of toppling a government. A phrase which has deeper meaning when stated in Sinhala – 'Aanduva Peraleema' – which has more than a light shade of overthrowing a government.

The situation of the Media today is certainly made worse by the fact that it functions in the immediate aftermath of the second JVP uprising. It was a time when the Government used the most ruthless means to suppress a revolt by discontented youth, who had been led to embrace the policies of terror in the pursuit of their campaign to overthrow the system. It was a terror which fright-

ened the ordinary people. A terror which was directed not just against media owners and organizations which the JVP opposed, but against newspapers dealers, vendors and even newspaper readers. It was a terror targeted against journalists as well.

Subverting democratic means

The government's reaction to this terror is too well known today to need recounting. It was the calculated response of State terror against that of the JVP and all democratic opposition to the Government. The affidavits of Udugampola, which he later denied although not very convincingly, give some indication of how the fight against the JVP was used by the government to eliminate its other opponents as well.

It is in this situation of post-JVP, coupled with the continuing war being waged by the LTTE, with its own undisguised use of terror, that both democracy and the media are being subverted to serve the ends of the government and the manipulators of power in Sri Lanka.

For many years Sri Lankans have lived in the acquired belief that we have had a very strong and independent Press; that the Freedom of the Press is quite safe in our community and that we have a journalistic profession and media owners who pay great allegiance to the ethics of the profession. We are now in the latter stage of the discovery that this is furthest from the truth. The ethics of communication as we have known it in Sri Lanka is what has been built during a period of a near monopoly of Press ownership, by sections that were in the main, happy to use the Press to support the governing establishment and the social forces that lay ranged behind it.

This situation became even worse with the early entry of the State into the electronic media, and the subsequent acquisition by government of the largest newspaper organization in the country. The complete ownership that governments have had over the decades of radio broadcasting and in the initial decade of television, has virtually shorn these sections of the media of any ethical standards and a sense of national direction, apart from the blind following of government's political directives.

It was no accident, therefore, that in the televising of the funeral of the

late President Premadasa, the state owned TV station thought it fit to replay a recording of the assassinated president's last political speech, as the background accompaniment to the lighting of the funeral pyre. The speech was wholly accusatory of the late president's political rivals. It was more the ghoulish than the ethical at play in a society which still largely believes that funerals are places where enmities are forgotten or should be.

Propaganda tools

The electronic media is today functioning under a set of guidelines which makes no secret that it is the primary function of radio and TV to tell the people of the government's development policies and activities. There is in this more than a ring of the Third World Media proposals of the recent past. Proposals which saw the emergence of government-owned News Agencies which deteriorated very fast, and not unexpectedly, to the propaganda tools of government and not the sources of information they were touted to be.

The guidelines for the electronic media make no mention whatever of the ethical need to give the other side of such development strategies. The ethic, stated quite brazenly, is that only one side need be known. There is also a more dangerous ethic which is being propagated, that even an attempt to give the other side could amount to subversion or, in simpler terms, be anti-government.

The reason I deal with the electronic media at the outset, instead of the older medium of the Press, is because of the much wider reach this media has today. The magnitude of this reach alone underlines the urgent need for the formulation of some ethical guidelines for a section of the media, in which there is increasing capital investment and the rapid acquisition of great technical skill, in the absence of wholesome ethical values which can be translated to national interest in place of the prevailing interests.

The need for such ethical values is, however, more easily said than done. How are they to be formulated? Who is to formulate them? How much trust can we have in the professionals themselves to undertake this task? Even with such trust, will they be free to do so? The influence of government from the inception of radio in the country – initially it was a section of the departments of posts and telecom-

munication – has in no way helped the rooting of ethical or national values in broadcasting. This is not to absolve others of their own share of responsibility in this matter. It is also due to the general acceptance by the intelligentsia, that the Government has some right to conduct its own political propaganda at public expense.

Until the overall dominance of government in the media was seen in the post-1977 period – extending to this day – there has been little concerned discussion about the ethics that should govern the electronic media in Sri Lanka. Even today, the discussion is more in the nature of giving some space to the political Opposition, as opposed to the broader ethical need to give some space to a wider array of opinion. This is of special importance because the opposition parties are, in the main, pressure groups and not necessarily representative of independent opinion.

There is also the confusion of what is ethical with what is traditional. A confusion which leads to the trap that what is traditional must necessarily be ethical. This is best seen in the dilemma that the electronic media faces with regard to the response to the threat of AIDS. Medical opinion is convinced that the threat is very serious. Social workers also share this view. Yet the State-owned electronic media which has the widest reach, does not know how it is to give this message to the public, without treading on the corns of tradition. The confusion over helping the prevention of AIDs through the encouragement of SEX of the safe variety, prevents the electronic media from carrying out the necessary educational role it is best equipped to fulfil.

Information Ethic

The basic shortcoming appears to be in the lack of appreciation that the electronic media, specially that which is owned by the State, has the over-arching function of keeping the people informed. This does not absolve the private stations of this responsibility. But the peculiar structure of the electronic media in Sri Lanka, its overall reach and the language of transmission places this responsibility more heavily on the State. A State which has demonstrated that it does not trust the Information Ethic. This is an attitude which has been common to all

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parties that have held power in Sri Lanka, be it of the right, left or middle.

The ethic that is dominant is one of secrecy. A secrecy that seems to be justified either on the basis of the need for official secrecy in administrative terms, national security with its broadest possible misinterpretation and worst, in the view that the public need not know. Or, in the idea which is often encouraged that there are others who know best what the public should know.

If this is the situation in the electronic media, what do we see in the Press? The Sri Lankan Press has a good history in terms of chronology. We boast of some of the oldest newspapers in Asia. Our levels of education did produce journalists of great capability. We often take pride in the fact that many newspapers, particularly in East Asia, were dependent on journalistic talent from Sri Lanka for their launch and continued success. With such a background it would be not unusual to expect a strong commitment to Communication Ethics in the world of Sri Lankan newspapers. Yet, the more we search, the more we discover the absence of such ethical standards. Especially in the context of the current national crisis over the future of democracy, the rights of the Tamil minority and the response to the Tamil Tigers.

Worst predicament

In fact it is in the context of the ethnic crisis and the LTTE's demand for a separate Tamil-speaking State that we find the media, and particularly the Press, placed in the worst predicament of its own making. A predicament not in terms of the newspaper proprietors and their search for profit. The predicament is in the role of the newspaper to inform the public and as far as is possible place contending points of view before the public.

The wider circulation newspapers in Sri Lanka, those which attach to themselves the adjective of being 'national', have by and large been consumed by a majoritarian viewpoint to the near total exclusion of reasonable access to minority viewpoints. The presentation of minority news and viewpoints, when permitted, is often with the assurance of a heavy load of biased rebuttal and the certainty of the closure of the debate being imposed by the Editor

when it is most advantageous to the majority view.

Very often one sees a confusion in the approach of these newspapers to the current war. Those that preach the need for a negotiated settlement do not hesitate to carry on campaigns which would undermine any moves aimed at such negotiation. They demand military solutions but are unable to face up to the reality of repeated military setbacks and the apparent unwillingness of the larger numbers of unemployed Sinhala youth to enlist for the fighting.

One leading newspaper has now called for national service, to draw in youth with proper motivation into the fighting forces. It avoids the obvious question as to how this is to be done. How can one conscript to fight in the Sri Lankan Army, when in the streets of Colombo routine searches by the military begin with the question: 'Are you Sinhalese or a Tamil?' One of the biggest arguments presented against the demand for greater autonomy for the North and East is that more Tamils today live in harmony with the Sinhalese outside the North. This is a favourite of the newspapers too. But, the same newspapers never question why time and again Tamils from all walks of life are rounded up in large numbers for suspicion of being Tiger agents or informers. Although most of the venom against the Tamils emanates from the larger Sinhala newspapers, their English counterparts are in no way free of blame in this regard.

Absence of journalistic ethics

The divisions in the country caused by the continuing war in the North and East have contributed to the distorting of whatever little values we may have had in terms of journalistic ethics, if not on the building up of a national consensus on unity. I would make a point here of how newspapers, whether English or Sinhala, describe those who have been arrested for smuggling of contraband, generally gold or narcotics. If the person apprehended or arrested is a Sinhalese, then he is just a person, a businessman, a passenger from Singapore or some such place. The community is never mentioned. However, if the person arrested or apprehended is a Tamil, you can be sure the community will have prominence, even in the headline. There will most probably be a comment by an unknown Customs or Police officer about connections

with narco-terrorism or the financing of the Tiger war effort.

It was recently that we saw a report in one newspaper about suspicious stores of urea based fertilizer in the premises of the Tamil Union Sports Club. Quite a big raiser of suspicious eyebrows. Urea is much in demand by the Tamil Tigers. Some Tamil businessmen have been implicated in its transport to the North. Now, you have the Tamil Union Sports Club, storing it. Ever so suspicious. It finally ends up as very legitimate cargo, stored by a government-owned business. The correction is published, but the newspaper makes no apology for not checking the veracity of its source in the first instance, or not obtaining the views of the Tamil Union at the outset.

The reporting of the war in the North has exposed in great measure the absence of a proper ethic of communication among the Press in Sri Lanka. There is general satisfaction to go by the regular situation reports issued by the Defence Ministry. What often passes off as on the spot reporting of the war is a report which has been obtained on an official conducted tour of a light battlezone. Very little or no effort is made to give the all important viewpoint of the people of the affected areas, particularly in the North. The agonies of the citizens of the North are hardly ever mentioned. Newspapers that make genuine complaints and strong criticism of waste in government expenditure, for some reason have decided it is more ethical to remain silent over what may be much bigger waste in the matter of arms procurement and the disbursement of funds for the war.

Accidents by the Security Services, defeats in battle at considerable loss of life – both of the official troops and the Tamil Tigers, questionable promotions, continued extensions granted to senior personnel are all glossed over with little regard for the accountability to the public who fund the fighting with steadily increasing contributions from the national budget.

Veneer of freedom

The situation in Sri Lanka, although overtly one which could give one a great deal of satisfaction with our apparent commitment to the values of freedom and democracy, is in the main one of great crisis

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The Failure of Politics and Select Committee Process

by Dr. Radhika Coomaraswamy

The Parliamentary Select Committee convened to study the ethnic relations was greeted with great expectations but concluded its deliberations in relative obscurity. For those who continue to believe that a political solution is necessary with regard to the ethnic conflict regardless of what happens on the military side of the equation the failure of the select committee is a major setback to what had begun as a constructive, all-party effort.

The final report of the select committee accepts the need for devolution of powers along the lines of the Indian Constitution which scholars have called a quasi-federal model. It goes further to say that the North

and East should retain separate provinces and that local government elections should be held in the eastern province so that a new generation of leadership can emerge.

In some sense, if one were to look at the proposals from the perspective of Sinhala politics, the report has come a long way. Both major political parties, the SLFP and the UNP appear to have accepted the need for a quasi-federal arrangement as a solution to the ethnic conflict. They still shy away from federal terminology but the concepts point to an arrangement which is federal in form. This is, of course, a major advance in southern political thinking and should be heralded as

such though it has been downplayed for political reasons.

The failure of the select committee has been its inability to come up with an acceptable compromise formula with regard to the North-East merger. The report categorically resists any such merger while the Tamil parties appear to have boycotted the sittings demanding that merger be one of the first principles.

Analysts of the process may argue that the committee should have addressed issues on which there was a consensus first and then moved onto the problem of the North East merger. In that sense outstanding issues on the question of land, finance and law and order may have been analysed in depth and some compromise may have emerged from the deliberations. But because attention was drawn to the North-East merger as the first issue of contention under this quasi-federal

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TAMIL TIMES – INCREASE IN SUBSCRIPTION RATES

In spite of the rise in printing costs and postal charges during the past years, the present annual subscription rates of £10.00 for UK/India/Sri Lanka and £15.00 for all other countries have remained static since December 1986 when the journal came out with 24 pages. For several years now, the journal regularly appears with 32 pages.

We have been able to absorb the additional costs only by effecting cuts in administrative costs, input of more voluntary work and prudent financial management. The income received from subscriptions has proved insufficient to meet the costs of printing and postage, and to that extent it can be said that the subscribers have been subsidised. In fact if not for the modest income from advertisements, the journal would not have been financially sustained.

In addition to the recent increase in printing costs, we are faced with a sudden and steep rise in postal charges with effect from November 1993. The postage for a copy of the journal to European countries has increased from 40 pence to 58 pence (a 45% increase). In the case of the Pacific countries like Australia, Japan etc., the rise is from 76 pence to £1.13 (a 49% increase). In respect of the rest of the countries, the increase is from 59 pence to £1.01 (a rise of 70%).

Subscribers will appreciate that the journal cannot be sustained with the latest increase in postal charges without an increase in the annual subscription rates. Therefore, we have been compelled to announce an increase which will come into effect from January 1994. At the same time, subscribers will be happy to note that the number of pages of the journal is being increased from 32 to 36 beginning with this issue.

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model, the deliberations stalled and eventually failed. The only compromise offered was the notion of two councils of the North and the East respectively and an apex council for management and policy making with regard to the north and the East. The proposal failed because there was no agreement on the powers that should be given to the apex council.

On the one hand the North-East issue appears to be an intractable problem. Part of the difficulty emerges from the fact that both sides seem to accept the boundaries of the two provinces as sacrosanct – boundaries which were drawn for us by the British. If the principle of redemarcation is accepted there emerge countless possibilities for compromise and give and take. NGO think tanks have put forward various solutions. One that seems most plausible is the redemarcation of the north and the east into ethnic council areas:-

a. The Tamil ethnic council in the North and a corridor through Trincomalee to Batticaloa.

b. A Sinhala ethnic council made up of Amparai town, west Amparai and South Trincomalee, and;

c. A Muslim Ethnic Council made up of Amparai without the town area. These councils would enjoy full devolution of powers with perhaps an apex council to co-ordinate policies. In this suggestion everybody wins, in that the Tamil areas are merged and the Sinhala and Muslim areas are de-merged and there is ethnic experimentation in communal give and take at the level of the apex council. This suggestion for the North-East is only one of the many proposals which could be entertained by the committee if it was ready to accept the concept of redemarcation, a principle that it did not adopt or entertain.

The issues of law and order, land and finance were also unaddressed by the committee in its months of deliberations since the negotiations were stalled on the issue of the North-East merger. There was no discussion on what should be the organising principles to guide policy in these areas. There would have to be a separation of powers in which there is a rational connection to the respective requirements of the centre and the province. Such schemes were not entertained by the committee. Therefore though there is a

general agreement of federalism or devolution along Indian lines, the actual details of that devolution or federalism are not clearly worked out. So we are left with the questions:-

What should the provincial police be in charge of as opposed to the national police and how would this operate at the community level? What is the role of the Provincial Commissioner of Police? Is he responsible to the Chief Minister or to the centre or to both? What would be the role for the national police commission and what are the issues which should be under its jurisdiction? The same type of questions exist with regard to the issue of land. Land is a central resource for all the provinces. In this regard should land title vest in the province or in the centre or should land be shared according to given formulas? Should the Mahaweli formula be used for all other irrigation schemes? With regard to future state-aided schemes should preference be given to people of the district and what type of formula should be worked out? What is the role of the national land commission and what are the issues that come under its jurisdiction? All these questions remain unaddressed.

The same unanswered questions remain in the area of finance. What is the role of the finance commission, the tax base of the province, the sources of its revenue, the budget requirements and the accounting procedures? There has also been no discussion of the various lists and the need to review the provincial list, the concurrent list and the national list when it comes to a separation of functions. There are also no recommendations with regard to the power of the governor and the need to find a formula which will maximise legislative power of the provincial council while safeguarding the interests of the centre.

The select committee was interested in trying to work out broad areas of agreement and disagreement. As a result the details that are necessary for any solution were cast aside for another deliberation. By doing this they did not capitalise on their strength – the notion that there would be a quasi-federal form of government and what that would mean in terms of details. In that regard the committee may have been able to work out a full scheme of devolution with only the unit of devolution for the North and the

East being the outstanding factor.

This would have allowed the select committee document to be a blueprint for devolution in future negotiations. At the moment, since it is only asserting broad principles everyone is uncertain as to what this would mean in practice if the principles were to be adopted.

The failure of the select committee is not only a reflection of the complexity of the issues that are facing us but also a pointer to the fact that parliament has not developed the processes of the select committee to make it an effective element in public decision-making. A forty member committee which accepts representations and then attempts to deliberate among itself cannot be an effective channel of decision-making.

The size of the committee has to be smaller and the political parties concerned should prepare working papers which would be the subject of deliberations. Or, as in international negotiations, a large secretariat is created to back up the chairman with technical expertise to ensure that the best possible conditions exist for negotiations and that different option papers are circulated for consumption and analysis. Neither of these developments took place. The political parties did not put forward ideas, nor was there the kind of secretariat which allows committees to function as policy-making bodies. This experiment then should point to the need to revise the process of the parliamentary select committee when it is sitting on issues of policy.

The failure of the parliamentary select committee on the ethnic question is the failure of politics and the style of politics that does not allow for the resolution of conflict. The Tamil parties also exhibited a certain juvenile tendency to boycott sittings at will if what they ask for does not emerge.

The notion of a dissenting report will allow them their say at the end of the proceedings. But the need to take the deliberations as a serious process and not search for excuses for withdrawal is the only way that politics will finally triumph over the military side of this conflict. For the Tamil parties who participated in the deliberations, politics is their only option. In that context, their cavalier approach to the select committee must have been a serious

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LANKA'S ETHNIC CONFLICT: A REJOINDER TO DR. UYANGODA

Consociational Democracy and Grand Ethnic Coalition

by Chris McDowell, University of Zurich

Dr. Uyangoda's 1993 S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike lecture, reproduced in the *Tamil Times* (No.11, pp.13-15), was both erudite and timely. The author, a senior lecturer in political science at Colombo University, discovered a precedent in Sri Lankan political discourse for the development of a new Sri Lanka rooted in the ideas of consociation. In the pre-independence period the birth of consociational democracy was extremely troubled and finally still-born. In the 1990s, however, Uyangoda is hopeful that a new 'political space' has emerged within which can evolve a 'Grand Ethnic Coalition' to overcome maximalist thinking and lead instead towards conflict resolution and a fair and equitable society.

The terms used are those of the political scientist. Academics have a driven desire to introduce yet more 'isms' into situations which are necessarily complex in their explanation. But Uyangoda's arguments and proposals can be put simply and can be questioned. What the author desires is a restructured Sri Lanka in which all people come together in a 'Grand Ethnic Coalition' which is elaborated through a 'Social Contract' and organised around the principles of consociation. Consociationalism is a theory about constitutional arrangements, it is a theory which is used to understand the workings of democracies which seem to be unusually divided but in which stability is somehow maintained. In practice consociation is the practical arrangements whereby interests are balanced to achieve stability.

The relevance for Sri Lanka is clear. Theoreticians are in a continuous search for a model of democracy which could be grafted on to Sri Lanka. For many the search has led them to those European countries which have a democracy that contains certain features of consociation: Switzerland and the Netherlands. Uyangoda is no exception, but he fully realises that a political system that works in one

country cannot simply be transposed onto another country that is fundamentally different in a number of key aspects. The conditions have to be right. And in preparing the ground the author proposes a controversial cultural pre-condition. In pursuit of a 'Grand Ethnic Coalition' he proposes that all groups in Sri Lanka must suspend or put on hold their ethnic identity until the political process has been seen through. Only then, once 'ethnic justice' is defined, can groups go back to their ethnic identities.

The argument is neat and the desire laudable but is it credible? I have two disagreements. The first has to do with the nature of ethnic identity and the second concerns the desirability of consociational democracy for Sri Lanka.

Academic contributions to the anti-Apartheid campaigns of the 1980s included a principled stand that later became known as the 'similarities discourse'. Today little is heard of it. But in the 1980s a basic canon of progressive academic thought in South Africa advanced the view that ethnic groups as bounded entities were merely either the invention of self-interested politicians or were imagined communities constructed in the pursuit of gain or opposition. Subsequently black students entering white universities were taught how to demystify and downplay ethnicity. There are signs that the 'similarities discourse' has now entered Sri Lankan universities under the guise of Uyangoda's 'de-ethnicisation'.

The conflict in the former-Yugoslavia led South African scholars to re-evaluate the message from the 1980s. The harsh lesson of the 1990s has been that you cannot simply wish away ethnicity and ethnic identity as only a convenient construct. In earlier theories the way in which ethnicity (and culture) was defined made it manipulable and Uyangoda's hope, that members of ethnic groups could somehow suspend their identities for the common good, almost credible. In the 90s and

particularly in Sri Lanka, cultural and ethnic identity cannot and must not be voluntarily suppressed but must be taken as central to any future constitutional arrangements.

My second point of departure from Uyangoda leads out of the first. Assuming that a 'Grand Ethnic Coalition' has been attained the democratic principle for new constitutional arrangements will be based on consociational models. The argument of political scientists has been that consociational democracies have succeeded in holding together fragmented communities in a stable system. Air Lanka has transported numerous delegations of Swiss constitutional experts to Colombo to explain the intricacies of their system. Presentations are greeted with initial enthusiasm but not before long a deep sense of unease sets in. It cannot be denied that the Swiss system works: the question is, how?

At its root the Swiss polity is one which has compromised with mainstream democratic forms in the sense of 'one man one vote' with majorities prevailing at all levels of government, in the sense that it has accepted a 'blocking minority'. Most recently this has meant that in a national referendum to decide whether or not Switzerland should proceed with plans to join the European Community, German-speaking voters who did not want to proceed denied the wish of French-speakers who did want to proceed. The referendum result and the nature of the campaign to persuade voters divided Switzerland along its language lines.

Balance, stability and fairness are by no means always assured in the Swiss system. Consociation depends upon there being separate, discrete and bounded groups playing a role in the polity. Uyangoda's plan for 'de-ethnicization' is anathema to consociation. Consociation in the wrong hands leads to chaos and oligarchy. It demands that decision-making is in the hands of elites or cartels of elites which have the right of veto over decisions of which they disapprove. And finally, in a bid to safeguard the interests of subordinate minorities, consociational democracy demands proportionality, which means that the various segments of the population must have

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proportionate representation among the major institutions of the state. Which in practice means that subordinate groups can, under certain circumstances, hold the majority to ransom and stifle progress.

It can be argued that Switzerland has not held together because of her consociational democracy but in spite of it. The Swiss complain that important decisions are made in smoky backrooms without public de-

bate and that referenda – a pillar of the system – are a sham. Switzerland holds together because throughout its history and today in particular it sees itself as under threat. The system is there to repel the French, the German and the Italian state. And the system is there to protect the wealth, the comfort and the reputation that is Switzerland.

Sri Lanka is not an Asian Switzerland. What is 'wrong' in Swiss poli-

tics, elitism, backroom deals and deliberate polarisation is precisely what has been wrong in Sri Lankan politics. What is 'right' with Switzerland, vast wealth, highly sophisticated population, historical desire for unity, compromise and neutrality are not, unfortunately, features common to Sri Lanka. Sri Lankan political scientists, unless they enjoy skiing, should strike Switzerland off their itinerary and instead remain at home from where any workable solution will be found.

Buddhism Betrayed?

by Bruce Kapferer, Professor of Anthropology at University College, London.

BUDDHISM BETRAYED? RELIGION, POLITICS, AND VIOLENCE IN SRI LANKA by Stanley J. Tambiah with a foreword by Lal Jayawardena, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London. pp. 203, 1992.

Buddhism Betrayed? is a masterly follow-up to Tambiah's earlier work on ethnic violence in his homeland – *Sri Lanka: Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy*. The new book expands previous arguments but concentrates on the issue of Buddhist ideology in the conflict. He eschews a common Western view of Buddhism, a purist one founded on the nineteenth century researches of Western Pali scholars, which presented a rarefied Buddhism somehow separate from the political and social pragmatics of everyday life. He correctly dismisses a largely Western surprise that a religion which stresses non-violence should be involved in political violence. This is an idealism which refuses its own history, divorces the formation of ideas from within historical practices, and fails to realize that ideas only have force through the relations and structures of social existence and practice.

Tambiah addresses three main concerns. The first relates to shifts in Buddhist ideology and interpretation from the early nationalist period (from the later British colonial period to 1960) to later transformations of nationalism (the post 1977 period which has seen the greatest escalation of inter and intra ethnic violence). His second, closely related, interest is with the changes in the organization of the Buddhist clergy in connection with nationalist issues and with the growing complexity of their involvement within and resistance to local and state politics. Tambiah's thesis is upon the question of the historical continuity

of Sinhala ethnic identity and antagonism to the Tamil minority which also involves a discussion of conceptions of power and modes of political integration among the Sinhalese that might be traceable to the past. Tambiah's careful investigation of these issues extends an understanding of the violent crisis that is consuming Sri Lanka.

Tambiah examines aspects of the Buddhist revival and the development of so-called Protestant Buddhism in the last century focusing on the years up to and immediately after independence. He presents the largely legitimate claims of major Sinhalese interpreters that Buddhism had been disadvantaged, relative to other religious interest groups and especially Christian, during British rule. The key texts which Tambiah explores were influential in changes which gave Buddhism and Sinhalese culture and language a greater role in the institutional apparatuses, particularly educational, controlled by the State. They were vital in a re-examination of the role of Buddhism in pre-colonial Sri Lanka and supported the active role of monks in politics, a role which the authors of the texts said that the British rulers had undermined.

There is little doubt that monks have been active in politics, sometimes violently so, in the course of Sri Lanka's history. What Tambiah demonstrates is that the current activity of the monks is not a mere extension or re-enlivening of their past role but produced and shaped in

BOOK REVIEW

Tendentious and mischievous misrepresentations and distortions of Prof S.J. Tambiah's book have produced a raging controversy in Sri Lanka where extremists have called for its proscription. At the same time, many academics and professionals have defended Tambiah's book as a scholarly work and denounced attempts at censorship. A review of the debate on this controversy will appear in the next issue of Tamil Times.

the political dynamics of the modern state. Tambiah describes how the Buddhist clergy were an important source of popular support for the political parties, particularly those in the left coalition following Independence. They shed much of their marxist clothing and quickly revealed powerful chauvinist and populist tendencies providing a major pressure on all governments. The political activity of the monks declined momentarily after the assassination of Prime Minister S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike in 1958, perhaps because of the disrepute that befell the clergy following their implication in the murder.

Tambiah suggests a distinction between the nationalism and ethnic tension of the immediate post independence period and the nationalism and violence which has consumed the country since 1977. Indeed, after the anti-Tamil riots of 1958 ethnic tensions subsided for some seventeen years. Tambiah speculates that this may have been because many of the Sinhalese nationalist feelings of injustice hitherto expressed had been redressed. However, the bloody Sinhalese youth uprising of the JVP in 1971

(precursor of the far more violent revolt of the late eighties early nineties) indicates that populist nationalist feeling was still running high. This movement was also one in which monks took an active part. Observations like this do not undermine Tambiah's thesis that the turmoil of post-1977 corresponds with shifts in nationalist ideological emphasis and vital organizational and structural changes in the political and economic order of the state.

As far as Buddhist ideology and the participation of the monks is concerned Tambiah asserts that the current period, *vis-a-vis* earlier nationalist developments stemming from the Buddhist Revival, manifests a reduction in concern for the doctrinal and ethical aspects of Buddhism and an intensification of monk participation in the political process, the organizational structure of the monkhood following the complexities of the infrastructures of political parties. To put it another way, religious institutions became dominated and subsumed in the political; they become an energy in the multiple directions of power and much-reduced as a constraint on its excesses. This is evidenced in the increasingly violent practice of monks whereby the often murderous factionalism of the political party process is a feature of life in the temple.

Recent nationalist ideological developments among Sinhalese are becoming much stronger than before in rejecting foreign and especially Western values. Tambiah looks at some of the Buddhist models for the reshaping of political society in Sri Lanka. He discusses the notions of Buddhist democracy that are being advanced. He is critical of them arguing that there is little place in their vision for ethnic minorities. Such ideological developments are consistent, Tambiah considers, with a deepening of a romantic imagery (often of the noble peasant kind) which supports nationalist notions of the Sinhalese as a homogenous collectivity. These developments exacerbate the present conflict and make resolution all the more difficult.

Tambiah's discussion of debates on democracy in the Sri Lankan context have implications for debates going on elsewhere, not least in Europe. Many of the ideological directions that Tambiah describes for Sri Lanka especially redefinitions and interpretations of what

constitutes appropriate democratic process refract, in my view, similar compromising and potentially dangerous processes going on in other parts of the world.

The volume concludes on issues relating to the historical depth of Sinhalese ethnic consciousness and the force of the past in the present. These are not just intellectual concerns but matters of import in the ethnic conflict and internal to its discourse. Intellectuals, usually members of the powerful elites and struggling fractions of urban and rural bourgeoisie, have great influence in the political course of Sri Lanka and they are divided, often bitterly, over such issues. Given this context Tambiah makes a courageous move in giving a scholarly weight to the view, increasingly unpopular in many Sinhalese circles, that a Sinhala ethnic consciousness is a comparatively recent phenomenon (possibly taking form round about the 12th century C.E.). It is not primordial, present at the very start of a Sinhalese presence on the island. Tambiah goes further to argue that there was no necessary enduring or firm Sinhala/Tamil opposition before the final British takeover with the conquest of Kandy in 1815. The last kings of Kandy and of independent Sinhalese were Tamil of the Nayakkar line. Tambiah's deconstruction of the relevant texts indicates (contra the nationalistic interpretations of some Sinhalese scholars) that such opposition to these kings as did develop was not born of ethnic hostility but of more complex and grounded lineage and intra-lineage fractious antagonism. This is so even where the metaphors of the conflict were ethnic which disguise roots to the conflict other than ethnic. The scandal of the betrayal of the last king of Kandy to the British was, in part, the outcome of a power struggle among competing lineages.

Tambiah's point is powerful and is reinforced by anthropological evidence collected elsewhere in the world. The import of ethnic identity and of its assertions of historically and culturally constructed difference for the constitution and shaping of the character of social and political relations emerges in situations of social distance (see e.g. the path-breaking work of Gluckman, Mitchell and Epstein on Central Africa in the 1950s). Ethnicity or the significance of ethnic identity is stimulated under the conditions of

colonial and post-colonial industrialization and urbanization and, too, in the development of the bureaucratic order of the modern state. The modern state and its political and economic structural circumstances is entirely different from pre-colonial polities. It follows that the place of ethnic consciousness in the processes of the formations of pre-colonial systems were distinct and that the present is not reducible to them.

Tambiah shows that the pre-colonial state in Sri Lanka functioned along the lines of an incorporative ideology whereby waves of immigrants to the island over the centuries from South India (many of whom now staunchly declare themselves to be anti-Tamil Sinhalese nationalists) were brought within the cultural order of the state. In this process difference was changed from being potentially conflictual and oppositional to being consistent and integral within a unifying state order.

At the very least Tambiah's argument is likely to be resisted by some within Sri Lanka who are ideologically committed to a reverse interpretation. In my own opinion continuing disagreement is exacerbated by a global discourse on ethnicity which attaches explanation and understanding to the concept and consciousness of identity *per se*; which give analytical weight to oppositional principles of identity over and against notions of interrelation and structure. This concentration on identity, even the fetishizing of it, often in combination with the implication that it is the source of social and political relations, rather than the other way around (identity is constituted and emergent in particular political and economic processes), is an outgrowth, I suggest, of comparatively recent historical global changes or transformations. Continual argument which focuses on such abstractions as identity and identity consciousness without a thorough attention to the ground, structures and relations wherein they derive their import maintains discourse at a level at which it cannot be resolved. The insistence on such discourse may be potentially dangerous, as in Sri Lanka, for it yields to identity and authenticity and a legitimating power which it does not have. Tambiah's deconstruction and exploration of

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TAMIL NADU – MAJOR SPLIT IN THE DMK

Dissident DMK Leader Gopalasamy Expelled

MADRAS, Nov. 11.

Mr. V. Gopalasamy, MP, was today expelled from the DMK on the charge of continued anti-party activities.

The expulsion came as a finale to the month-long trading of charges and counter-charges following the release by Mr. M. Karunanidhi, president of the party, of a communication from the Centre cautioning him of an alleged LTTE plot to eliminate him to promote the interests of Mr. Gopalasamy.

The decision to expel Mr. Gopalasamy was conveyed to him through a letter written by the party general secretary, Mr. K. Anbazhagan, after considering the reply sent by Mr. Gopalasamy to the show-cause notice served on him earlier.

In his letter, Mr. Anbazhagan termed as unsatisfactory the reply sent by Mr. Gopalasamy to the show-cause notice issued to him and said that under the rules and regulations, he was empowered to expel a member from the party found guilty of anti-party activities.

The Rajya Sabha member, in his reply to the notice, sent on November 7 refuted the charge that he had indulged in any anti-party activity warranting disciplinary action.

Acts of indiscipline

Mr. Anbazhagan's letter released to the press at the party headquarters by Mr. Durai Murugan, headquarters secretary, charged that Mr. Gopalasamy had been saying that Mr. Karunanidhi had implicated him in the LTTE plot in spite of repeated denials by the party president. This amounted to an act of indiscipline and was designed to mar the image of the party.

Mr. Gopalasamy himself had accepted that he made a clandestine visit to Jaffna without the knowledge of the party leadership. His claim that he went to Jaffna to explore the possibility of a peaceful settlement of the ethnic problem was an act of indiscipline, the letter said.

The party president had never expressed the view that the LTTE

could negotiate without effecting a ceasefire. Mr. Karunanidhi's appeal to the Tigers to suspend the war before coming to the negotiating table was published in all the newspapers. Mr. Gopalasamy should own responsibility for writing a letter on the subject to the LTTE leadership which landed at the hands of the Central Intelligence Agency, Mr. Anbazhagan's letter said.

The failure to give a proper reply to the party for imputing motives to the meeting between the then IPKF chief, Lt. Gen. A.S. Kalkat, and the then Chief Minister, Mr. Karunanidhi, was an act of indiscipline against the party leadership, it said.

It was wrong to say that the DMK dissociated itself with Mr. V. Ravichandran (brother of Gopalasamy) when he was accused of having sheltered the injured LTTE cadre. He (Mr. Anbazhagan) had only said that the failure of Mr. Ravichandran to apprise the police of the shelter he had given to the LTTE cadre was not consistent with the party's policy vis-a-vis the ethnic issue.

The act of Mr. Gopalasamy unleashing vicious attacks on the party leadership from public meetings in the last one month was a violation of party discipline, the letter added.

Mr. Gopalasamy had gone on record saying that someone had given to a Tamil evening paper a letter addressed to him that hereafter 'Mr. Karunanidhi should be met only through an AK-47 rifle'. Neither Mr. Gopalasamy bothered to find out as to who was responsible for releasing the letter to the Tamil evening paper nor chose to condemn the news published in that paper. This deserved to be condemned.

Mr. Gopalasamy had nothing to say in his reply to the show-cause notice drawing attention to his charge that Mr. Karunanidhi was behind the alleged LTTE Plot after levelling similar charges against Mr. Murasoli Maran, Mr. M.K. Stalin and Mr. M.K. Azhagiri.

The DMK which had a 40-lakh membership could not afford to set a precedent by convening the General

Council to discuss the problems of individual members. In spite of knowing the rules and regulations governing the convening of the General Council, Mr. Gopalasamy had been insisting on convening the council and thus had violated party discipline, the letter said.

Instead of giving proper replies to the show-cause notice allegations, Mr. Gopalasamy had been trying to divert the attention by making 'frivolous accusations' against Mr. Karunanidhi and demanding a General Council meeting.

District Officials Face Expulsion

MADRAS, Nov. 14.

The DMK General Secretary, Mr. K. Anbazhagan, today issued show-cause notices to eight district secretaries of the party supporting the expelled Rajya Sabha member of the party, Mr. V. Gopalasamy, asking them to explain why disciplinary action should not be taken against them for anti-party activities.

Similar notices were also sent to Mr. Madurantakam C. Arumugham, Chengai-Anna district secretary (South) and three others – Mr. L. Ganesan, Secretary, Party Constitution Amendment Committee, Mr. Malar Mannan, member, Party's Audit Committee and Mr. K. Chandrasekharan, Central Executive Committee member, accusing them of indulging in acts of indiscipline and marring the dignity of the party's image. All the 12 partymen have been directed to send their explanations within a week.

In identical letters despatched to Messrs L. Ganesan, Malar Mannan and K. Chandrasekharan, the General Secretary said they had been found guilty for having condemned the party high command for expelling Mr. Gopalasamy and announced their decision to convene the general council meeting in violation of party rules. They had also questioned the expulsion of Mr. Gopalasamy saying that the party leadership and the General Secretary had no moral or legal right to do so. All this constituted a flagrant violation of the party discipline and its rules.

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'Illegal and Unjust' Expulsion to be Challenged

TIRUCHI, Nov. 12.

A high-level meeting of the supporters of the dissident DMK leader Mr. V. Gopalasamy, MP held here today (in the presence of Mr. V. Gopalasamy), termed as totally illegal and unjust the action of the party general secretary, Mr. K. Anbazhagan, in removing Mr. Gopalasamy from the primary membership of the party.

It was decided at the meeting to convene at an early date a meeting of the General Council of the party, to prove that the expulsion order was wrong.

The meeting in a resolution adopted said that the DMK party president, and the general secretary had lost their legal and moral right to take any action on behalf of the party since they had grossly violated the basic principles of friendship, fraternity, and democratic values cherished so dearly by the party and enunciated by late Annadurai.

The resolution said that the voice

of protest raised by Mr. Gopalasamy and the widespread support he had received from the DMK party workers, had unnerved the party chief and hence they had been planning for sidelining Mr. Gopalasamy, and his supporters in a very systematic manner during the past few years.

Asked whether the party will get enough support for convening a meeting of the general council, Mr. M. Kannappan, former Minister, and secretary of the Coimbatore district unit of the party said that there will be no difficulty at all.

The total membership of the general council was 862 only, and the party chief was fully aware of the same. But highly exaggerated figures were given with regard to the total membership of the general council, by the DMK president. It was not arithmetical ignorance, but a political strategy, said Mr. Pon Muthuramalingam, former minister and secretary of the Madurai district unit.

Mr. V. Gopalasamy said that he would continue to be a loyal party workers, and carry on his duty of campaigning for democratic values and fair play in the party.

Asked whether Mr. Gopalasamy would resign his membership of Parliament, if asked to do so by the DMK high command, Mr. Kannappan said there was no room for any such demand from the party general secretary, since they had absolutely no right to remove Mr. Gopalasamy from the primary membership of the party at all.

Hundreds of party workers from all over the State had come to Tiruchi for this crucial meeting to chalk out the future course of action.

The members of the Coimbatore DMK Lawyers Association have condemned the expulsion of Mr. V. Gopalasamy from the primary membership of the party. By circumventing the party rules the president, Mr. M. Karunanidhi, as well as the general secretary of the party, Mr. K. Anbazhagan, have forfeited their rights to occupy the positions, said Mr. S. Rajendren, Secretary of the Association.

(Courtesy: *The Hindu*).

● Kashmir — The End of the Mosque Siege

by T.N. Gopalan

The Cassandras have been belied. Much to the surprise of many seasoned observers, the notoriously indecisive Narasimha Rao government has notched up its first major triumph in recent months — the month-long siege of the Hazratbal shrine in Srinagar ended in the wee hours of November 16 without a shot being fired; the militants holed up inside the shrine gave themselves up to the Indian authorities without any incident whatsoever.

Thus the crisis which threatened to develop into a major uprising in the Kashmir valley was successfully defused by the Rao regime without any major loss of face, and at a critical juncture at that — right on the eve of the elections to the legislative assemblies in the two important states in the Hindi belt, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh; the surrender of the militants, apparently without the authorities' giving in to any of their major

demands should take the wind out of the sails of the communal BJP which had been projecting the crisis as yet another instance of the ineptness of the Cong-I government in the face of fundamentalist mischief and nefarious designs of Pakistan.

The Hazratbal shrine is one of the holiest for the Muslims, especially for those in Kashmir. It houses a revered relic, a strand of hair from the beard of Prophet Mohammed and encased in quartz. Supposed to have been installed in the present site in the early part of the twelfth century, the relic and the shrine acquired a considerable amount of political significance even in the thirties of this century when Sheikh Abdullah rallied behind him the Muslim masses through his fiery discourses from the Hazratbal pulpit.

Such was the sentimental attachment of Muslims to the holy relic that riots broke out when it was

stolen on 27 December 1963.

The crisis was not confined to the valley — Muslims were out on the streets far away in Calcutta as also in the Khulna and Jessore districts of the erstwhile East Pakistan. Normalcy was restored only after the mysterious restoration of the relic a week later. It was in the wake of those tumultuous days the conspiracy case against Mr. Sheikh Abdullah was withdrawn.

That very same relic and the very same shrine was in the eye of yet another storm for one full month — a battle of attrition between the Muslim militants and the Indian army on the one hand, a battle of wits between the governments of India and Pakistan, the latter cleverly utilising the occasion to mount a propaganda offensive against the former, the BJP charging the Cong-I government with pussyfooting on the Kashmir imbroglio and the secular opposition blaming it for creating an artificial crisis with an eye on the Hindu vote-bank and so on.

Apparently following a tip-off from a police constable that the two locks leading to the small room on the first floor of Hazratbal (where the relic is kept) had been tampered

with, a contingent of the Border Security Force surrounded the shrine on the night of 15 October and thus began the siege drama. The outside world was told that top militants had taken shelter in the shrine and were threatening to blast the dargah with a view to arousing the Muslim sentiments – the siege was aimed at frustrating their designs, flushing them out and ensuring thereafter that such a religious place was not misused for waging a war against the Indian state.

While there are enough indications to prove that the siege was a well calculated ploy to boost the sagging fortunes of the ruling Congress party, it must also be borne in the mind that when the BSF launched cordon-and-search operations to clean up the Regional Engineering College and the University of Kashmir campus in the last week of September, militants active in the campus fled to take refuge in the nearby Hazratbal. Probably the army authorities sensed a danger *à la* the Golden Temple affair was building up – allowing the militants to use the mosque as a hide-out or arms repository could have dangerous consequences, it was felt.

Any Blue Star operation in Srinagar would prove disastrous for India, it was also realised, and hence the pre-emptive move when there were only 20-odd militants holed up in Hazratbal. To bolster up its case further, the Indian government also claimed that the militants were doing whatever they were doing at the behest of the Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan and that there were quite a few foreign mercenaries in the crowd. Apart from the militants, there were others who had gone to Hazratbal to offer their prayers and got trapped when the BSF moved in – in all there were more than 80 persons inside Hazratbal on 15 October.

Vowing not to storm the shrine, promising to expose the 'dirty' hand of Pakistan, spreading around hair-raising stories of threats from the militants to blow up the shrine, deploying more than 10,000 soldiers equipped with medium artillery and armoured cars, the Indian government was flying high to start with. But not for long. Emboldened by the presence of the international media and by the discovery of a source of food-supply from within the shrine complex itself, the militants started hardening their stance and demanded unconditional lifting of the siege

and safe passage for themselves. The Kul Jamat-e-Hurriyat-e-Kashmir (All Party Kashmir Freedom Front), a coalition of some political parties and some non-political associations, threatened to march on the shrine in thousands if the siege was not lifted. There were demonstrations in several parts of Kashmir, police firings and killings of the innocent.

The Bijbehara massacre was easily the worst – over 50 civilians were killed and 72 others injured in that small town, 40 km from Srinagar in an unprovoked firing by the BSF and the Central Reserve Police Force.

Shaken by the October 22 incidents at Bijbehara, the Kashmir administration allowed food and water into the complex the very next day, touching off a bitter row between it and the army. The Srinagar High Court also ruled in favour of regular supply of food for those trapped inside, an order slightly modified by the Supreme Court later on. But the heat was now turned on the Centre. The BJP was trying to inflame the Hindu passions by fuming at the government's policy of 'bullets for the kar sevaks (those who demolished the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya) and Biriyanis for the terrorists.' On the international front too, India was getting a lot of flak.

The Muslim countries were expressing serious concern over the situation, and there were none to take up India's cause. Worst of all, Ms. Robin Raphel, a US Assistant Secretary of State and supposed to be a close confidante of President Bill Clinton came out with a searing indictment of the Indian position on Kashmir – she questioned the accession of Kashmir, dismissed the Simla agreement as of no consequence, hinted at a possible joint initiative with Russia, talked of the insurgency in positive terms and blasted India for its human rights violations. Inevitably the Indian media used the occasion to belabour the Rao regime mercilessly.

It indeed seemed to be meandering from one vacuous position to another – while the militants were shouting the **azadi** (freedom) slogans, the army authorities could only plant stories of imminent surrender by militants, promptly repudiated by the supporters of the insurgents. Then suddenly came the news of the surrender, this time for real. In all 62 persons, both militants and civilians, gave themselves up to

the Kashmir police (not the army). The rest had trickled out in the interim in ones and twos.

The Kashmiris themselves rejoiced, the secular forces in the country heaved a sigh of relief, the tottering Rao regime was flush with victory and, predictably, the BJP cried foul.

The actual terms of the deal are not known. Though all those who came out have been taken away for questioning and the government says it has agreed to release only those against whom there are no cases registered, it is still possible the militants have been assured of release from custody in stages. Anyway barring a couple of persons from the Pak-Occupied Kashmir, no foreign mercenary has been identified.

Apart from two leaders of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) none of any consequence has been apprehended, it is reported. It is even possible that the Government of India chose this precise juncture to act because it wanted to shore up the flagging zeal of the secular JKLF and bring down the popularity ratings of the pro-Pakistani and more fundamentalist Hizbollah by a notch or two.

Even the arrest of Mr. Amanullah Khan, president of the JKLF, in Brussels (at the instance of India again), is interpreted as another pointer in that direction.

If such were to be the case, for all its stupid manoeuvres, the Rao government could be said to be moving in the right direction, towards a political solution.

As a veteran observer put it: 'Whatever its motives and whatever its blunders and even some horrendous human rights violations, the Indian government is still responsive to public opinion, nationally and internationally. It does not seek to mow down the Kashmiris wholesale... still looking for a political solution, however ham-handed the approach might be... and that's the difference between it and the Sri Lankan government...'

Continued from page 18

disappointment to the chairman as well as to the Tamil constituency.

The select committee on ethnic relations has accepted the broad principle of federalism as a means of resolving this conflict. The future rests in negotiations over the north-east merger and the details and substance of devolution. Who will discuss and negotiate these issues?

● DMK Poised for a Split

by T.N. Gopalan

The inevitable has happened at last. The DMK has at last expelled from the party the fiery orator and number one dissident V. Gopalasamy, known popularly as Vai.Go. The high command has also served notice on nine district unit secretaries and a few other front-ranking leaders for allegedly flouting party discipline.

Vai.Go.'s supporters have hit back by questioning the legitimacy of the high command's action and calling for a meeting of the party general council which has been resisted by the party high command. Indications are that the dissidents will convene a General Council by themselves, they will dismiss the current DMK leader, Mr. Karunanidhi, from the leadership and elect Vai.Go. in his place. With a majority of the General Council members still backing Karunanidhi, the splinter group will be constrained to function under a new banner and hope that in course of time they will be able to win the support of the cadres and the people and thereafter appropriate for itself the DMK label.

After Mr. Karunanidhi went public with the Centre's warning of 'unconfirmed' reports of an LTTE conspiracy to assassinate him in order to make Vai.Go. the new DMK leader, Gopalasamy was able to whip up considerable sympathy for himself among the cadres by questioning the party president's motives in implicating him in a conspiracy and charging that Karunanidhi was only planning to sacrifice him at the altar of an alliance with the Cong-I. There were three or four self-immolations, and public meetings organised by his supporters in various parts of the state proved huge draws.

Many a senior leader feeling outraged at the stranglehold of the family members of Mr. Karunanidhi on the party, cast their lot with Vai.Go. Buoyed up by the show of support, the dissident leader started making ever more strident allegations against the leadership, even suggesting that Karunanidhi had teamed up with Gen. Kalkat of the IPKF to finish him off when he went on a secret mission to meet the Tiger leader Prabhakaran during the time the IPKF was fighting the LTTE in Sri Lanka. The official faction, for its part, started sniping at him as an

irresponsible, ambitious and even corrupt leader, and worse, he was destroying the party at the instigation of Ms. Jayalalitha. Amidst this welter of charges and counter-charges, came an article in a pro-Tiger Tamil periodical from Canada, *Ulaga Thamizhar*, hailing Vai.Go. as a great leader of the world Tamil community, ranking in importance next only to Velupillai Prabhakaran and denouncing Karunanidhi for betraying the interests of the Tamils time and again and accusing him of being an agent of the Indian intelligence agency RAW. This was gladly latched on to by the DMK leadership to paint Vai.Go. in villainous terms, charging him with teaming up with the Tigers to assassinate the DMK leader.

It was in this context the expulsion came, and, surprisingly, the reaction was very muted. Barring a couple of more self-immolations, stone-throwing incidents here and there and some demonstrations, nothing much happened. Surely Tamil Nadu was not in flames, not even the DMK, for that matter.

There could be a number of reasons for such a turn of events. Perhaps Vai.Go. overplayed his cards and went a bit too far or chose an inopportune time to strike at Karunanidhi. To be known as a Tiger-champion when the memories of the Rajiv assassination and the massacre of Padmanabha and company are still fresh in the minds of the general public does not help him much perhaps. Even those workers chagrined by the ways of Mr. Murali Maran and others of the Karunanidhi family are possibly a bit too wary of the Tiger factor. Further the torrential downpour and unprecedented floods in the southern districts - Vai.Go.'s stronghold - came in the way of any serious demonstrations in those parts.

Apart from the eight district secretaries, from Coimbatore, Madurai Rural, Tirunelveli, Periyar, Kaniyakumari, Thanjavur East, Trichy and South Arcot who have been in the forefront of the present revolt, Mr. Madhurantakam Arumugam (Chengalpattu South), a plain-speaking and seasoned leader, too has now cast his lot with Vai.Go. That perhaps is his only gain now.

When Periyar EVR's nephew E.V.K. Sampath revolted in the six-

ties - when Mr. Annadurai was alive - he came to grief, but MGR gave a bloody nose to the DMK led by Karunanidhi in the seventies and kept it in wilderness for more than a decade. In fact MGR's ghost continues to haunt it to this day in the person of Jayalalitha. What will happen now? One has to wait and see.

Jayalalitha sitting pretty

Meantime Chief Minister Jayalalitha is sitting pretty. She is certainly buoyed up by the two by-election victories, the discomfiture of the DMK, some rethinking on the part of the Cong-I over the attitude towards the AIADMK with one faction openly calling for an alliance with it and the High Court ruling that her *bete noire* T.N. Seshan cannot sit in judgement on the petition challenging the validity of her election. And she went forward to consolidate her hold over the Tamil masses by organising a state-sponsored bandh on November 16 to press for a constitutional amendment to facilitate a high percentage of reservation for the backward castes. The bandh was a total success with all political parties jumping on Jayalalitha's bandwagon.

In Sri Lanka, standardisation - a measure aimed at giving a leg-up to the backward Sinhalese students - proved the beginning of the slide in the fortunes of the Tamil community. But in Tamil Nadu reservations for the backward castes, the dominant section among the Tamil community here, in jobs and educational institutions are a major contributory factor responsible for the advancement of the interests of the community at large. The order of the then Justice Party government of the Madras Presidency in 1921, providing for reservations in government jobs for some non-Brahmin communities, is still hailed as the first milestone in the history of the Dravidian movement, the first step in the liberation of the Tamil community from the yoke of Brahminism - the Tamil-speaking Brahmins are considered to be outside the pale of the Dravidian society.

Though Ms. Jayalalitha is a Brahmin by birth, she is never found wanting when it comes to championing the Dravidian or non-Brahmin cause - after all she is the leader of an off-shoot of the Dravidian movement. Like MGR used to do so time and again though he was a Keralite

by birth. In fact in her very first Assembly session after assuming office as the Chief Minister, Ms. Jayalalitha boasted that she represented the latest stage in the evolution of the Dravidian movement and sought to place herself firmly in the pantheon of the greats of the movement, starting from Sir P.T. Thyagarayar and Periyar EVR. Naturally then she would not let go of yet another opportunity to establish her credentials.

It may be recalled that the Narasimha Rao government has agreed to implement the Mandal Commission recommendations providing for reservations for the OBCs (Other Backward Castes) in government jobs and educational institutions upto 27 per cent of the total number of positions or seats in question. A number of cases filed in connection with the decision on the Mandal report are before the Supreme Court, and it has ruled that in no case the total amount of reservations (for all communities put together) shall not exceed 50 per cent.

Now in Tamil Nadu reservation proportions are as follows – 18 per cent for the Scheduled Castes (Harijans or Adi Dravidars), one per cent for the tribals, 30 per cent for the backward and 20 per cent for the most backward and only 31 per cent for the general pool or open competition.

Now the reservations for the politically powerful backward and most backward castes are almost a holy cow in this State. If the Supreme Court ruling were to be implemented in full, the government cannot touch the reservations for the SCs or STs but will have to cut down on the quota for the OBC, and this could prove explosive. On the other hand if the ruling is flouted, the AIADMK government can be hauled up for contempt of court. Hence the demand for a constitutional amendment.

Incidentally the reservations for the OBCs which stood at 31 per cent were increased to 50 per cent by MGR under some questionable circumstances. He first imposed an income ceiling for the OBCs to become eligible for reservations, but immediately thereafter was humbled in the Lok Sabha elections by the Cong-I-DMK combine in January 1980. A shocked MGR executed a neat U-turn and removed the ceiling and increased the OBC quota!

READERS FORUM

MILITARY CONFLICTS

IT is regrettable that very few recognise that the conflicts in the North and the South of Sri Lanka have had common origins and characteristics. These conflicts have naturally worsened as and when employment opportunities plummeted when the economic climate for local industries and agricultural production became bleak.

Prolongation of the conflicts have also resulted from the failure of successive Governments since independence to understand the message clearly conveyed by the vernacular Sinhalese and Tamil speaking people via their respective mandates at the 1956 general elections. Their undisputed message was that English was being used as the primary vehicle of exploitation and subjugation of the common people.

Unfortunately the movements demanding appropriate redress were hijacked by those coming from the very sections of society who were beneficiaries of the existing system, like the then leaders of the SLFP and the FP. Naturally, instead of undermining their own privileges, the ruling classes moved to fuel communal disharmony amongst the ruled.

A further unforgivable crime that was perpetrated on the common people was to downplay the unquestionable importance of English as a second language. At the same time they permitted or connived with those who succeeded in maintaining English as the *de facto* language of administration and the medium of tertiary professional education.

One of the reasons for the upheavals in the South which began in the seventies and the corresponding upheavals which began in the North in the eighties was the result of these misleading acts perpetrated on the common people. Another factor was the calculated opposition of the more powerful sections of the communities towards the call for a Federal system and/or other means of devolution of Power by dishonestly identifying them as concessions to the Tamils only.

Notwithstanding the fact that the militant movements in the North and the South have been supported

and ruthlessly manipulated by foreign and local vested interests for their own benefit, the fervour of the commitment to the respective causes can never be permanently put down whatever military might is used.

If the country accepts this reality the lives and other resources that are being unnecessarily lost could be used for the development of the country rather than for enriching the arms dealers and other vested interests who are successfully promoting the conflicts.

The solution to the problem does not lie in continuing the costly military offensive. Nor does it lie in reinstating English to the pre-1956 situation as has clearly been the wish of the anglicized elements who have been the actual beneficiaries of the movements.

A sustainable solution is feasible if and only if the legitimate aspirations of the vernacular elements in the Sinhalese and Tamil communities are duly recognized and properly dealt with. A *SINE QUA NON* for granting genuine redress to the grievances of these sections of society is the early establishment of two separate entities that would have Sinhalese and Tamil only as their respective official languages of Administration and the medium of instruction.

Adopting such a policy is now vital to both the ordinary Sinhalese and Tamils of vernacular origin. Unless such a policy is implemented as soon as is practicable, the ordinary Sinhalese people in particular would soon end up being in a position very similar to what the Palestinians are now in. Current and recent Indian policies towards Sri Lanka could very well accelerate such an eventuality.

In this connection boundaries that were marked up merely to facilitate colonial rule have little or no relevance today. Accordingly boundaries must necessarily be based on current realities and in the respective river catchments. However it would be a fruitless exercise to negotiate possible alternative demarcations until and unless the policy of genuine devolution of power to All regions including those in the South are agreed prior to such negotiations.

It could also perhaps be opportune to consider the possibility of carving out an independent administrative

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entity for the Trincomalee area for it to be run as a free port in the model of Hong Kong. It could also use a separate convertible currency and use English as the language of administration, medium of instruction and the language of the courts in the area. This would help to attract a large section of the anglicized communities in the North and the South to Trincomalee.

Trincomalee could then develop into a hub for business activities for the South and West Asian Regions and even as the logical location for Region Loan Syndicating and Commercial Arbitration. The effects of such development including the large employment and training opportunities that would be generated would no doubt contribute considerably to reducing tensions and forging cooperation between all the communities in the country.

The political realities of the South and West Asian regions and the added attraction that Sri Lanka enjoys among individuals and business enterprises in China, Hong Kong, Japan and Korea in particular would make the achievement of such a goal a very real possibility.

Bernard Wijedoru.

TAMIL MILITANCY

- An appraisal

The role of Tamil militancy in the struggle of the Tamils for security, and autonomy in a homeland, is a matter of much concern, and the subject of various differences of opinion. An appraisal should help to dispel illusions or delusions, thus helping united Tamil endeavour. The prolonged suffering and sacrifice of the Tamils must not be in vain, and hence the need to apprise direction and leadership, to attain the goal. There are divisive forces stemming from selfishness, prejudice and opportunism to jockey for opinion, as well as well meaning individuals with genuine concern to assess and decide. Tamil militancy has now to be identified with the LTTE, since the other groups have been displaced or evicted. Their opportunism under the umbrella of the Government and even participation with the Army, leaves little to the imagination as to their motivations.

Criticisms and doubt about Tamil militancy domination and leadership have been founded mostly on the following - that Tamil objectives

could have been achieved through negotiations or cooperation with the Government; the participation and cooperation of the other Tamil groups would have helped the struggle; that democratic opinion amongst the Tamil population within and without, should have been allowed and considered for options; that Muslims should have been placated actively, in place of reprisals and even evictions; that Tamils should have cooperated with India in interventions and direction; that there should have been no rejection of Government's overtures on the grounds that something is better than nothing; that extortions, violence, confiscation should not have been enforced on Tamils within their control; that atrocities, and violence of all sorts should have been avoided; and various other sins of omissions and commissions.

It would take much space to dwell on all of the above, but the generality of such are referred in the form of appraisal and opinion, to be considered. Primarily, it would be necessary to be agreed that the Sinhala Government whatever the pretences and rhetoric, had at no time been willing to concede Tamil demands. On the other hand, the objective had been to perpetuate Sinhala domination and gradual extinction of Tamil identity. 'There are none so blind, as those who will not see' and recent history is all too evident to a discerning observer. Hence the validity of Tamil militancy as the only option for Tamils. The possibility for any other course is compounded by the 'Undependability of the Government'. The record of the State reneging on commitments has been dismal' to quote an informed writer on the subject. The long trail of broken promises and duplicity is well known. Military solution has been the only option.

As for the condemnation of violence in all forms, often termed atrocities and acts of terrorism, it is to be noted that in a state of war, all means to pressurise an opponent to concede are valid, on the grounds that failure could be devastating in consequence. The fate of the J.V.P. with tens of thousands murdered in cold blood is but one example. What would one call the organised pogroms against the helpless Tamils culminating in the holocaust of 1983, except deliberate terrorism to intimidate and thus subjugate with less military effort. 'All is fair in love and war' and to quote an informed writer - T.C. Schelling from his book

Arms and Influence 'It is the power to hurt, not military strength in the traditional sense, that inheres in our (U.S.) most impressive military capabilities at the present time. . . And it is pain and violence, not force in the traditional sense, that inheres also in some of the least impressive military capabilities of the present time - the plastic bomb, the terrorist's bullet, the burnt crops, and the tortured farmer. . . War appears to be, and threatens to be, not so much a contest of military strength as a bargaining process'.

The dominance, extortion, and even coercion of the Tamil population in some instances, has embittered some, within and without. It is no doubt, regrettable, but necessary for a single minded conduct of offense and defense against the power of an overwhelming foe. It is to be noted that the militant cadres, must depend solely on their own people for support and maintenance and in return are prepared to sacrifice their own lives for the cause which is common to both. On the other hand, the Government spends astronomical sums, procured as tax from the population, or loans which too must be paid back by the people. Tamils have been proverbially selfish, and unwilling to extend assistance, except for their personal ends, and hence the compulsion of extortion where necessary, since failure would bring forth greater condemnation. Who can deny the right of the militants to conduct defense in the manner they think proper, for these are willing to give their lives in return, for the common cause? As for courage and sacrifice in the popular mood, it was Lenin, one of the architects of the Russian Revolution, who said: 'A party would be insane to condition the revolutionary character of its movement, upon the revolutionary mood of the peasantry'. This has relevance in the need for total courage and sacrifice against great odds, hence also the limits for democracy in a life and death struggle for an accepted cause.

The frequent hostile attitude against some groups of Muslims by Tamil militancy has been the subject of adverse comment, on the grounds that their cooperation and goodwill should have been sought. It is generally known that most Muslim strategies have been to obtain political and other benefits as a counterweight against Tamils. Hence the need of the Muslims to give their solidarity for minority action

against majority oppression. It was Hitler who banished the Jews from Germany for their betrayal of the German war effort in the 1st World War. In a back to the wall struggle, 'one who is not for me is against me' denoted practical policy.

As for relations with India, it should be known that India has only been concerned with sponsoring the Tamil cause for its own purpose of influencing Sri Lanka. It has ever been Indian policy to curb Tamil nationalism lest it encourage Dravida action against Hindi domination. India can never be depended upon to help the progress of Tamils, and their open hostility when Tamils progress to claim autonomy. Indian support for the blockade to deprive the Tamil population, even in essentials, is a case in point.

Above all, it is courage and fortitude that commands respect, which is essential to exact concessions from a foe. In a way Tamil docility and perhaps even traces of servility, has been responsible for the domineering attitude of the Sinhala majority. The fact that the Tamil Militancy has now commanded that respect is now perhaps its greatest contribution to the cause.

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REFERENDUM?

I FULLY support Dr. P. Varothayasingham's submission that no referendum should be embarked upon in the Northeastern Province of Eelam with a view to its de-merger (Ref: *Tamil Times*, 15 August 1993, p.24), and wish to add the following facts:

Referendums constitute a method of referring specific governmental or political questions or legislation to an electorate for direct decision by general vote. Plebiscites also utilise a similar method of direct vote of all electors of a State on important public questions, such as the changing of a constitution, or for the public expression of a community's opinions, with or without binding force. The term plebiscite is normally employed to those referendums held to decide to which State an area should belong, such as the centuries-old French vote on papal Avignon.

Ballots on referendums and plebiscites, simple though they might appear to be e.g., when only two alternatives are offered, should still be professionally designed with the

help of experts proficient in the sciences of social psychology, verbal communication and statistics. The answers of the voters, for example, would depend on the wording and innuendos of the question asked, and hence the questions should be direct, clear and comprehensible with no possibility of misinterpretations. There must be adequate advance publicity such as through public announcements, notices, and the media, about what exactly is being asked, and what is expected from the voters. Enough time should be given for the different camps to explain the relevant issues to the public who should know the various consequences of their answers. And, all those likely to be affected must be given a chance to vote.

The actions to be followed after the vote is taken should be clearly discussed and decided beforehand, e.g., what will be done if there is only a simple majority, the consequence of a two-thirds, four-fifths or nine-tenths vote of assent, etc. Allowance should be made in such decisions for any statistical errors in the polls despite all the scientific methods used and precautions taken.

Also, the voting should be conducted in a manner which inspires public confidence on the verdict of the polls. It is best that teams of observers with wide powers, including representatives from the opposing camps as well as from international organisations and friendly countries, are invited to watch the entire procedure – ideally from the very initial, conceptual stages.

In Eelam (Sri Lanka), Mrs. Bandaranaike's SLFP-led United Front Government did not hold a referendum when the 1972 Constitution was enacted, nor did President Jayawardene's UNP government on the 1978 Constitution, though there were two controversial referendums on the extension of his term of office and of his Parliament – for an unprecedented and historical 12 years. Election Manifestos being merely statements of intent, were insufficient to decide on an important issue like changing the country's constitution. In fact, had there been Island-wide referendums in 1972 and 1978, there might be no ethnic problem today.

In summary, referendums could be costly, both politically and economically, and could prove futile too, raising more issues than the ones intended to be solved, and should be embarked upon with utmost cau-

tion. In the context of Sri Lankan government's intentions to de-merge the existing NE Province, neither a referendum nor a de-merger is advisable at any time. It must be abandoned forthwith, by Presidential decree, because the Tamils and Muslims of the NE too, are united that their Province should stay merged.

Prof. Kopan Mahadeva,

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'TAMIL REPRESENTATIVES'

I REFER to the article written by Rita Sebastian in your esteemed journal under the heading 'Thondaman Resumes Peace Moves Amidst Govt. Reluctance', (*Tamil Times*, 15, September). When commenting on Mr. Thondaman's statement Rita Sebastian states that 'However irrelevant the rival Tamil groups in Colombo are in the thinking of Thondaman the people will have to accept the Tamil representatives who now sit in parliament'. No people need to accept anybody as their representatives just because at one time they were elected in an election which was boycotted by the majority of people. The so called 'elected' rival Tamil groups who sit in parliament have not achieved anything which they have promised in their election manifesto. Therefore they have no moral right to represent the Tamil people any longer. Mr. Thondaman is correct in saying that the two people who can bring peace to this troubled land are the Government and the Tigers.

N. Jegarajasingham,

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ned attack from a large force. Estimates of the LTTE numbers used range from 1000 to as much as 6000.

Pooneryn was taken by the army in late 1991, in an operation commanded by the late Lt. General Kobbekaduwa. It was supposed to seal off the Jaffna Peninsula, and prepare the way for an assault on Jaffna itself. But in the two years since then, no such attack has been made, and the LTTE has attacked it continuously, with varying degrees of success. Military analysts say that it is only a matter of time before the LTTE return, and the Pooneryn disaster will be repeated.

(Courtesy of *The Sunday Island*).

Minister & MP Found Guilty

The Sri Lankan Supreme Court recently found a Minister of State, a Member of Parliament and a Provincial Council Member belonging to the ruling party, guilty of impropriety or connivance with police officers in wrongful acts or omissions violative of the fundamental rights of a government officer serving the Forest Department. This is the first time that persons, like the three politicians, who were not agents of the executive, were held by the court to have violated a person's fundamental rights by acting in concert with police officers who were admittedly agents of the executive.

The Court ordered Minister of State, Mr. H.G.P. Nelson, Member of Parliament, Mr. C.S. Sooriyarchchi and PC member Keerthiratne to pay Rs.10,000 each as compensation to Forest Officer Mohamed Faiz who had been illegally arrested, detained and treated in a cruel and degrading way. As additional compensation, the Court ordered the State to pay Rs.10,000 and Rs.5,000 as costs to the victim Mr. Faiz.

In this case, on 26 April 1991, the Forest Officer, Mohamed Faiz had gone to the Minneriya-Giritale Nature Reserve on receiving reports of

illegal organised logging and felling operations where he arrested those persons engaged in the illegal activity. As he was taking the arrested men, angered by the arrest of those engaged in illegal logging, Provincial Councillor, Mr. Keerthiratne and MP, Mr. Sooriyarchchi, along with others, had waylaid him and assaulted him with iron rods seriously injuring him. The Forest Officer, with his bleeding injuries, had proceeded to the Polonnaruwa police station to make a complaint about the assault upon him. Minister of State Mr. H.G.P. Nelson, Mr. Keerthiratne and Mr. Sooriyarchchi, along with several others, were already at the police station when the Forest Officer arrived. All three, upon seeing the Forest Officer, assaulted him within the police station in the presence of police officers. At the insistence of the three politicians, police officers without recording the complaint made by the Forest Officer arrested him, kept him in custody till the following day when he was produced before the Magistrate who, without knowing the facts, remanded him into prison custody. Later he was released on bail on an application made by the Assistant Director of Wildlife.

Court Calls IGP to Explain

The Inspector General of Police was summoned by the Supreme Court recently to explain as to why the police had not taken action against several police officers who were found by the court to have violated the fundamental rights of a person from Anuradhapura.

In this case, the person had petitioned the court alleging that he was unlawfully arrested and tortured by police officers, and thereafter he was transferred to the Boosa detention camp where he was kept in custody for about an year. He claimed that his fundamental rights under the Constitution were violated. The Supreme Court held that his rights were indeed violated as alleged and ordered the payment of Rs.10,000 as compensation to him. The Court further ordered the IGP to investigate the matter and take action against the police officers concerned, and that a report regarding the action taken should be forwarded to the Court.

The Police authorities had failed to file the report as ordered by the Court, and hence the IGP was summoned to appear before the Court and explain. The IGP apologised to the court for the delay.

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an. The Tigers also lost 6 Captains and 14 Lts. and 2nd Lts. Among the senior Black Sea Tigers who were killed in action were Maj. Ganesh, Maj. Gobi, Lt. Katpagan, 2nd Lt. Kaviarasan, 2nd Lt. Elumalai and 2nd Lt. Vivekan. One of the significant losses among women cadres of the LTTE was Major Padhma, the Deputy Commander of the Women Black Sea Tigers.

Great Heroes Week

To the LTTE, Pooneryn was a great victory over the Sri Lankan forces, in spite of the fact that it lost over 400 of its cadres including many at senior level - LTTE cadres do not die, they only achieve martyrdom.

Every year, the week ending November 27 is elaborately observed with ceremony, pomp and pageantry everywhere by the LTTE and its supporters as the 'National Great Heroes Week' to honour the cadres of the LTTE who had achieved 'martyrdom'. And the week, not without significance or

design, coincides with the birth day of the Tigers' supreme political and military leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, 26 November. This year on this day he was 39 years old.

The backdrop to this year's Heroes Week was the LTTE's 'great victory' over the enemy at Pooneryn. The Tigers did not lose the opportunity to display to the public in Jaffna and Kilinochchi the impressive collection of sophisticated military hardware worth hundreds of millions of rupees captured from the Sri Lankan forces during Operation Yal Devi mounted in late September by the Sri Lankan army and at Pooneryn. The Czechoslovak built T-55 Main Battle Tank captured at Pooneryn which was on display at Kilinochchi was one of the main attractions.

In his message marking the Heroes Week, the Tiger leader, V. Prabhakaran was uncompromising in his determination to achieve a separate state. 'I never believed that there could be a change in the extremist attitude of Sinhala chauvinism. The Tamil people will

never receive justice until there is a change. The strong attitude of Sinhala chauvinists has kept open the only path of a separate state for the people of Tamil Eelam; we have no alternative but to traverse on this path. Our liberation movement continues its dedicated journey on this path. This path is most difficult, full of obstacles, stones and thorns, full of beasts and poisonous snakes, but we continue our journey on this very same path. The great heroes who went ahead of us will be guiding us. They cleared the path by removing the stones and thorns; they killed the beasts and poisonous snakes; and they illuminated the path for us. We will continue our illustrious journey on the path of freedom which we can see very clearly by the beacon lights lit by our great heroes,' the Tiger leader said.

It was during the Heroes Week that the Tigers announced that over 6100 cadres had lost their lives since the inception of the LTTE. Of these 600 were women cadres. Over a thousand cadres are reported to have been seriously injured.

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and in fact of major tragedy. What we see today is a thin veneer of freedom and democracy which seeks to hide the harsh realities of communal strife, the denial of liberties, a heavily controlled media, a manipulated system of justice and a largely complacent intelligentsia which watches helplessly the galloping advance of corruption in the State and the private sector.

If the JVP uprising with its commitment to terror bred in our people a new fear of official terror and more determined and militant political opposition, the continuing war in the North and East is making it all the more easier for the government to trample on the freedoms of the people.

This war is not only sapping our people of their economic strength, it is the biggest threat we have to our individual rights. It eats into the core of our traditional values of truth and decency; it helps the government to push the country into the questionable values of the marketplace; it breeds corruption particularly in the developing of vested interests in war and military procurement; at every turn it strikes hard against truth and the Right of Free Expression and the Right to Information.

It is unfortunate that in the midst of this crisis the political opposition seems helpless, largely because it also shares considerable responsibility

for the crisis we have reached. The need in Sri Lanka seems to be a new politics. If one is to ask almost for the impossible it is the politics of honesty. A movement for reform of the entire political establishment.

It is a movement which will of necessity have to address the reality of the war. One that will stop pretending it is a mere problem of terrorism. A movement that will seek to give redress to the genuine grievances of the Tamils, while assuring the Sinhalese and Muslims that their basic rights will also be guaranteed. This is no easy task, after the years of misinformation and bogeyism, as well as, the terror of the LTTE. But it is one which has to be carried out.

The principle of devolution has to be fully implemented, even extended. Where necessary we have to be ready to take a fresh look at the boundaries of our provinces which were carved out by the British for their revenue and administrative purposes. There is little doubt that most political parties are now in agreement that the governance of the North should be by the Tamils, within a devolved entity. The problem really is that of the East, where the situation is far more complex. But complexity is no reason to give up. The more detailed proposals placed before the Select Committee of Parliament should be studied with greater commitment to the search for peace.

The guarantees of life and liberty should not remain mere clauses in the Constitution. We need organizations that will challenge in the Courts every violation of these rights. A campaign is needed to enhance the punishments for violation of fundamental rights. For the termination of services of all State employees found guilty of the violation of fundamental rights.

We need an amendment in our Constitution with a clause which will guarantee the Right to Information, as a justiciable right. We need to remove the blanket restrictions that the Emergency Regulations can place on the Rights of Free Expression, Speech and Assembly. There is the need to rescind the present Parliamentary Privileges Act and bring it back to the situation before 1978, when parliament had no powers of adjudication.

There is no need to dwell at any length on the fact that the Media has a major task to perform in the strengthening of the fundamental rights which form the bedrock of democracy. However, the structure of the Press, as it is in Sri Lanka, does not give much hope that such support would be forthcoming. There is, therefore, the need for new centres of information, with sufficiently strong economic base and the commitment of journalists with good training, to change the direction of the media and make it more relevant to the need for peace.

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the conditions of ethnic identity and consciousness is a move to break out of the vicious circle.

Tambiah concludes this work through a dialogue with some of the arguments on Sinhala nationalist ideology which I presented in my *Legends of People, Myths of State* (1988). There I confined myself to exploring the political ideological use being made of the ancient chronicles by the agents of the modern state and their popular appeal as a function of their doxic or what I called their ontological resonance. I used the term 'ontology' not in the sense of fundamental and immutable being (which was the sense that some of my critics assumed) but as a 'logic' of orientation which could underpin a variety of ideological interpretations. Such a logic, which I suggested was capable of numerous even contradictory meanings being placed upon it, facilitated what could

be termed a process of metaphoric transfer whereby meanings established in one sphere of relations could be moved into another sphere conditioned in completely different circumstances. I developed the notion to understand how people could experience and interpret their current historical situation as continuous with the past when, in fact, it wasn't. In other words how the meanings of ancient texts could appear sensible in the present, and vice versa, giving passion and shape, though not the cause, to some of the violence.

Tambiah (p.178) queries that I seem to be having it both ways conflating past processes of the cosmic state with the present dynamics of mass nation-state politics. My point was not that the ancient meanings of the past continued into the present. Rather that old ideas carried in the ancient chronicles used by nationalists achieved origin-

al meaning in the contemporary context. They had appeal through their hierarchical ontology which enabled them to gain force and sense in other practices of widely different import and meaning but sharing, in their structural process, a similar ontology. The metaphors of the past are tropes, their meaning changed within present contexts and, also, changing the orientation of some Sinhalese to their understanding of their everyday experiences. In my view the ideological processes of nationalism in Sri Lanka are not reducible to a Sinhalese past. It is the imagination of the past, something far different from what the past might in actuality have been, upon which I focused. My concern was to investigate the dimensions of one imagery, a current nationalist selection of particular events described in the ancient chronicles, and the parameters of its potency in the contemporary context.

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MATRIMONIAL

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WEDDING BELLS

We congratulate the following couples on their recent wedding.

Baskeran son of Mr. & Mrs. V. Kumarasamy of 40 Nelson Place, Wellawatte, Colombo 6 and **Dr. Gnanamanogary** daughter of Mr. & Mrs. M. Gnanapragasam of 202/5 Kachcheri Nallur Road, Jaffna on 10th July 1993 at Nowerhill High School Hall Pinner, Middlesex, UK.

Jayakumar son of Mr. & Mrs. A.G. Segaran of 'Krishnagiri', Chunnakam, Sri Lanka and **Luxiya** daughter of Mr. & Mrs. S. Pusanathan of 'Telli Engineering', K K S Road, Tellipallai, Sri Lanka on 10.12.93 at Palam Grove Hotel, Madras 6, South India.

Kajendran son of the late Mr. Sivasubramaniam and Mrs. Sivasubramaniam and **Myura** daughter of Mr. & Mrs. R. Mahadevan of 11A Ediriweera Avenue, Dehiwela, Sri Lanka on 10.12.93 at Hotel Sapphire, Galle Road, Colombo 6.

Mohanathas son of Mr. & Mrs. S. Ponnuthurai of Kokuvil East, Sri Lanka and **Sutha** daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Sinnathurai of Kondavil, Sri Lanka on 28.11.93 at Lanfranc School Hall, Mitcham Road, Croydon, UK.

OBITUARIES

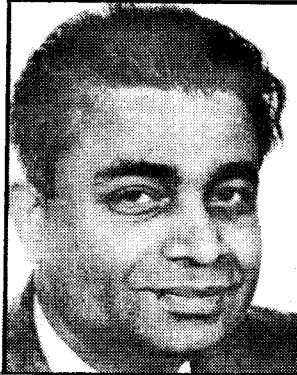


Mr. Nalliah Rasanayagam formerly Proprietor and Director of Rajah Press Pammanakade Colombo 6, husband of late Balambal. Father of Kausalya, father-in-law of Kulaseharan; grandfather of Prashanth and Sangeetha all of Markham, Canada; brother-in-law of Mahadevan New Zealand, Rajadevan Canada, Sahadevan, Vamadevan Colombo, and Mrs. Viyakesparan UK passed away on the 13th October 1993. Funeral took place in Canada on the 19th October 1993. Kula and Kaushi convey their very sincere thanks to all relatives and friends who assisted in the obsequies, attended the funeral, sent floral tributes and messages of sympathy. - 24 Rowe Court, Markham, Ontario L3S 2J9, Canada. Tel: 416 471 6468.



Pushpa Somaskanthan beloved wife of Dr. Kandiah Somaskanthan (Attorney at Law, Jaffna); mother of Priya and Kumaresan (Darwin, Australia); daughter of the late Beauty Coomaraswamy (Irrigation Engineer, Sri Lanka) and the late Rukmini Coomaraswamy of Chundikuli, and sister of the late Dr. Parames Durayappah, Puvanam Pathmanathan (Brunei), Mahen (Brunei), Dr. Vijendra (Eastbourne, UK), Pathma Wimal Sockanathan (Thornton Heath, Surrey) and Dr. Sivendran (Perth, West Australia) passed away in Colombo on 8th December '93 after a brief illness. Funeral took place in Colombo. - 727 London Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey, UK (081-689 7303).

IN MEMORIAM



In everloving memory of **Dr. T. Thambyahpillai** (Research Fellow, Imperial College, London) who passed away on December 4, 1984.

So many years have gone by,
Since you left this earth,
When you died, our lives were empty,
All we knew was sadness.

Time has passed by so quickly,
But how can we forget
The part you played in all our lives,

The happiness we felt?

Now all we have are memories,
And time ebbs away.

But we will always remember the
Happiness of yesterday.

So sadly missed and dearly loved by his wife and children Meenalosani, Sivakamasunthari and Shiyamalanayagi.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

January 1 Feast of St. Mary.

Jan. 6 Feast of Epiphany of Lord Jesus.

Jan. 8 Eekathasi.

Jan. 9 Feast of Baptism of Lord Jesus; Pirathosam.

Jan. 11 Amavasai.

Jan. 14 Thai Pongal.

Jan. 15 Sathurthi.

Jan. 21 Feast of St. Agnes.

Jan. 22 Feast of St. Vincent.

Jan. 23 Eekathasi.

Jan. 25 Feast of Conversion of St. Paul; Pirathosam.

Jan. 27 Full Moon, Thaipoosam.

Jan. 28 Feast of St. Thomas Aquinas.

A Lesson in Nattuvangam



While most of the weekends in October were taken up by Arangetrams for invitees it was a bold venture on the part of the British Association of Young Musicians to stage a Bharata Natya recital by Indhumathi Sri-kumar on 17th October in aid of the Jaffna Hospital Fund - a spiritually satisfying recital netting a profit of £1500 for a worthy cause. The quality of the programme was enhanced by the top quality of the orchestra - brilliant Nattuvangam of Madras based Sangeetha Sironmani Rajasekaran, vocal by Nageswari Brahmananda, and the Bhavan duo Bhavani Sankar (mridangam) and Chandrasekar (violin). Indhumathi who was initiated by the yesteryear Kalakshetrian Kamala Johnpillai and later trained by the Dhananjayans and the late Venkatachalapathi, was seen to reflect Kalakshetra in the jathis and the varnam. Indhumathi is a Communications Engineer by profession and it is noteworthy that she finds the time to promote this art. The Compering was done by her sister Ilamathi Skanthabalan, herself a product of Kalakshetra.

ASIA Aids SCOT

As the autumn sun was setting on London's skyline on the 30th October 1993, Logan Hall of the University of London was reverberating with the melodious sounds of an ancient Tamil instrument, the Nagasuram, accompanied by the thavil – the traditional drum.

The occasion was Lakshmi's ASIA (Academy of South Indian Arts) presenting a programme of Bharata Natyam and the epic Ramayana as a ballet in aid of the Standing Committee of Tamil Speaking People, the foremost registered charitable organisation of expatriate Tamils in the U.K. The occasion also marked the beginning of the seventeenth year of uninterrupted work by SCOT.

Over the years SCOT has supported projects totalling more than £200,000 and funds for these Relief and Rehabilitation Schemes in the homelands and for the Human Rights Campaign were from modest subscriptions, fund raising events organised by SCOT and donations from well-wishers. Last year alone, SCOT managed to send over £15,000 for projects designed to give some relief to the suffering. SCOT is also involved in a campaign to draw the attention of the world community to the plight of Tamils in Sri Lanka and to work for inter-racial justice.

ASIA's efforts produced, among others, two notable results. Firstly, the Academy was able to make a donation of £2,000 (net proceeds of the event – the hall was full, with tickets sold out a month in advance) for further work by SCOT and, secondly, in producing a programme of such quality, ASIA again contributed to the fostering of Indian Fine Arts in a multi-cultural milieu in Britain.

An Engineering graduate from Imperial College, Lakshmi Ganeson could have easily laid to rest her interest in Bharata-natyam. Instead, she founded ASIA and continues, by example and by precept, to inculcate in young minds an art form revered by Tamils over centuries. She hails from a family dedicated to fine arts and is fortunate to have the support of her father, and her mother, an accomplished veena exponent.

The first half of the programme was a selection of dances performed solo by Lakshmi herself. The opening item was Mallari

followed by Alarippu, in the raga Nattai. Sri Thiruvavur Letchappa Pillai on the Nagasuram set the scene. The accompaniment was a combination of thavil by Sri P. Vigneswaran, and Mridangum by Sri Karaikudi Krishnamoorthy.

Sri Krishnamoorthy, a jewel in the crown for over 17 years in Kalakshetra, continues his excellent work in London as Principal of the Music Academy of Dance Rhythms and Songs (MADRAS). Sri Kutralam Nagarajan, a disciple of Prof. Krishnan and the recipient of the title Sangeetha Vidwana from the Tamil Nadu Government, and Sri Manickam Yogeswaran, a leading vocalist from Sri Lanka, blended well, to produce the musical foundation for the evening. Sri Thiruvavur Kothandapani was on the violin, Sri Paskaran Sreekaram on the Gadam and Sri Thayaparan on the flute.

The song by Bharathi entitled 'Payum oli nee enakku' was in a superb combination of seven bhairavi ragas once again a masterpiece by Sri Krishnamoorthy, enabled Lakshmi to bring out the meaning and the bhava in its fullest richness. Lakshmi's footwork in the Thillana was breathtaking.

After the intermission, ASIA presented Ramayana as a ballet lasting one hour. This was directed and produced by Lakshmi Ganeson and Sri Karaikudi Krishnamoorthy. There were 24 participants, almost all of them children born and educated in the U.K. Our children growing up in the comparative comfort of the West, were able to lend a helping hand to the children of the less fortunate. The ballet ran uninterrupted with twelve scenes. The musical accompaniment was primarily an instrumental one, interspersed with short verses in suitable ragas. The selection of ragas was again outstanding.

The quality of the expressive aspects of dance in some of the scenes was exceptional. Ramas enquiry regarding his father when Bharatha meets him in the forest and in conveying the news of the death of their father and the resulting shock and grief (all done in mime), was moving. Even the little ones contributed significantly. A criticism of the show was that there were too many speeches, however, as we left the hall, thoughts were very positive – it had been a performance of unequalled excellence for a very worthy cause.

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