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Mullaitivu coastline, Sri Lanka

- ★ **KILINOCHCHI OFFENSIVE – 200,000 DISPLACED**
- ★ **Colombo Train Blast**
- ★ **Mullaitivu – A Shattering Blow for War Strategy**
- ★ **DILLY-DALLYING ON DEVOLUTION**
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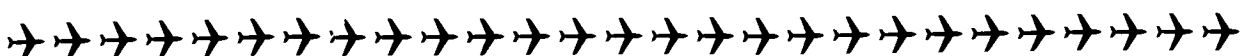
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*I do not agree with a word
of what you say, but I'll
defend to the death your
right to say it.*
— Voltaire.

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NEWS REVIEW

Kilinochchi Offensive Displaces 200,000 People

The military offensive code-named operation "Sath Jaya" launched by government forces to capture the LTTE-controlled northern town of Kilinochchi and adjoining areas has resulted in the displacement of an estimated 200,000 thousand people.

All the inhabitants of the town and nearby areas have fled and all aid agencies including the the International Committee of the Red Cross have moved out of the area. The fighting between the government forces and the LTTE have prevented any supplies of food and other essential supplies to the people and they are reported to be undergoing severe hardships.

Asserting that more than 30 civilians, including several women and children, had lost their lives due to indiscriminate aerial bombing and shelling by government forces, the LTTE on 8 August appealed to the international community to prevail upon the government of Sri Lanka to stop its aggression which it said brought about short term and long term disaster to the Tamil people and allow international organisations to do humanitarian work independently.

The LTTE statement issued from its London headquarters added that the present situation would appear to warrant international intervention.

The military offensive began on 26 July after a curfew was imposed in the Killinochchi district where the LTTE is said to have its headquarters. A military announcement advised Tamil civilians to take shelter in schools and places of worship. Aid workers in the area confirmed hundreds of thousands of people are on the move to escape heavy government artillery fire, and that many aid workers had also abandoned the town.

Kilinochchi, in normal circumstances a rural town with only a resident population of about 50 thousand became a virtual refugee centre for 200 to 300 thousand Tamil civilians from Jaffna when they were evacuated towards the end of last year when government forces captured the peninsula.

Accurate reports of the situation in the war zone are hard to come by in view of the tight censorship and the prohibition of journalists visiting there. However, mili-

tary sources said that nearly three-thousand troops advanced towards Killinochchi from the northern major army base at Elephant Pass located at the neck of the Jaffna peninsula to the north and the mainland to the south and that a second column of troops advanced from around the Mullaitivu army base which they had been sent to relieve after the Tigers overran it killing more than 12-hundred soldiers. The military has now abandoned the Mullaitivu camp which had been totally destroyed.

Following the first day's offensive, it was reported that the troops had advanced ten kilometres facing stiff resistance from the Tigers and had captured the town of Paranthan.

The LTTE said in a statement issued in London on 26 July that more than 2,000 government troops had massed near a northeastern army base at Mullaitivu as they prepared for the offensive. "Troop reinforcements are now consolidating their position in preparation for a major counter-offensive," and that Israeli-built Kfir jets continued bombing operations in civilian areas, but a military spokesman claimed they were targeting Tiger positions.

The hospital at Kilinochchi was hit during an air force bombing run on the town, a representative of a Western aid organization confirmed. However, the number of casualties was not immediately known. A statement from the LTTE's London office said "scores of people were killed and tens of thousands fled from the area" when the offensive began with heavy artillery fire and about 100,000 people have been displaced and "Kilinochchi is reduced to a ghost town now."

The army claimed at least 42 rebels were killed and more than 100 wounded following the first day's offensive. A military statement said 17 soldiers were killed and 36 wounded in their advance towards Kilinochchi. But the Voice of Tigers radio said that only five Tigers had been killed in what it described as fierce fighting.

A military communique said Mi-24 helicopter gunships blasted rebel bunkers ahead of the advance along the road to Paranthan and that Tamil Tigers had thrown up a major earth barrier south of the town on the road to Kilinochchi. It said the earthworks extended 400 metres either

side of the road. The rebels were peppering troops with mortar fire and the helicopter gunships and air force bombers were trying to strike the mortar positions, the communique said.

On 1 August the International Committee of the Red Cross said it had pulled out of Kilinochchi which has become a deserted town. ICRC officials said that Killinochchi was virtually deserted after more than 100-thousand tamil civilians fled to escape a heavy government artillery barrage.

A spokesman for the ICRC said moving that it was moving its office to the village of Mallavi to the southwest, where a small hospital was being used to treat injured civilians from Killinochchi.

Aid workers at the scene have been expressing concern that no government food convoys have been allowed into the area for more than two weeks - because of the upsurge in fighting. They say long lines of people are waiting at fresh water pumps and civilians are sharing provisions to survive.

A Reuter report datelined 4 August stated that troops backed by tanks and air support renewed a thrust against Tamil Tigers rebels as authorities braced for a flood of refugees fleeing the fighting, quoting military and aid.

Air force bombers and helicopter gunships pounded rebel positions as troops resumed their advance at dawn from northern Paranthan towards Kilinochchi after a week-long lull, a military spokesman said. "Troops having advanced about one-and-a-half kilometres (one mile) have now come under terrorist resistance," he said.

In the meantime, the LTTE accused the troops of indiscriminate shelling of Kilinochchi, saying nearly 200,000 civilians had fled the town. "For the last nine days the Sri Lankan troops stationed at Elephant Pass and Paranthan have unleashed day and night indiscriminate artillery shelling on heavily populated Kilinochchi town," the LTTE said in a statement issued from London on 4 August. "The disregard of human life was such that the armed forces relentlessly shelled people's homes, the town's hospital and every other place," it said.

Aid officials said they were preparing 35 schools in and around the frontline town of Vavuniya, 70 km (44 miles) south of Kilinochchi, to accommodate the anticipated influx of refugees.

"We estimate almost 200,000 people have been displaced by the latest fighting," said an aid official. "We expect some of them to come to army-held areas and we're planning to send food to the others (in rebel-held areas) today."

The LTTE on Saturday (31 July) allowed 200 shaken and hungry refugees to move south to army-held areas in Vavuniya for the first time in two weeks. The move paved the way for truckloads of food and medicine to reach tens of thousands of refu-

gees in the northern Wanni mainland, most of which is under LTTE control.

The LTTE allowed the civilians to cross no-man's land on Saturday 4 August, a day after the Sri Lankan Red Cross brokered a deal between the army and the LTTE to let food convoys reach the refugees.

Some 200 lorries laden with food have been stranded in Vavuniya for more than two weeks since the border was closed. "The difficulty is that truck owners in the LTTE areas have been scattered because of the battle around Kilinochchi," one Tamil government official who arrived from the north told reporters. "Some truckers are using the lorries as their homes. We have to find them and get them together," he said.

The army claimed that on 5 August Sri Lankan troops killed at least 203 Tamil Tiger Tigers. However the LTTE in its account of the battle on Sunday 4 August stated that its cadres had killed at least 100 troops and destroyed five army tanks. A Defence Ministry statement said 14 troops were killed, including an officer, near Paranthan. "Due to the confrontation on 4 August, one officer and 13 soldiers were killed and 32 soldiers were wounded," the ministry said. "Ground troops have confirmed 203 terrorists were killed and estimate over one hundred were injured."

In a statement on 5 August, the LTTE said: "More than 100 Sri Lankan troops were killed and five Sri Lankan army tanks completely destroyed when the LTTE forces opened fire on Sri Lankan troops who broke out of Paranthan and advanced towards Kilinochchi town in an attempt to capture it."

The statement added that heavy fighting had raged throughout the previous Sunday near Kilinochchi and accused the army of killing "scores of civilians by intense shelling and heavy aerial bombardment." It said earlier that air force planes had bombed civilian targets, killing five people.

"More than 100 Sri Lankan troops were killed and five Sri Lankan army tanks completely destroyed when the LTTE forces opened fire on Sri Lankan troops who broke out of Paranthan and advanced towards Kilinochchi town in an attempt to capture it," an LTTE statement said.

The military objective of the offensive take control of Kilinochchi is said to open a land route between Jaffna and Colombo via government controlled Vavuniya. The LTTE holds most of the area between Elephant Pass and Vavuniya under its control. "Clearing the road between the Elephant Pass through Kilinochchi to Vavuniya is a tall order, but that is a major objective of the new campaign," an air force official in Jaffna is reported to have said.

But having captured the small town of Paranthan within the first two days of the offensive, it is very clear that the forces have met stiff resistance from the Tigers

and even after ten days of the commencement of the offensive, they have not succeeded in capturing Kilinochchi.

57 Killed in Colombo Bomb Blast

Two powerful bombs which exploded in a crowded commuter train on 24 July killing at least fifty-seven people and injuring about 450 more. The train packed with thousands of passengers going home after work left the Colombo Fort railway station and had just stopped at the suburban Dehiwela station, about ten miles from Fort, when the blasts occurred which reduced two compartments into matchwood.

Before the explosions, a third bomb had been removed from a compartment in front of the train after passengers called attention to an unaccompanied bag in the compartment. Passengers briefly evacuated the train while a soldier riding on the train removed the bag containing the bomb, but they reboarded on the mistaken assumption that the threat had been eliminated.

While the police and the government promptly attributed the blame for the blasts, which occurred on the very anniversary day of the outbreak of anti-Tamil violence in July 1983, upon the Tamil Tigers, the LTTE in a statement issued from its London headquarters denied any responsibility stating that it was not their policy to attack civilian targets. They accused the government of trying to create national hysteria to justify the continuing war it was conducting in the north and east. "Even though the accusing finger is pointed by the government at the LTTE, there are interested parties within the Sinhala ruling establishment who feel the need to raise chauvinistic hysteria in order to facilitate the military option," the LTTE statement added.

As panic set in among Tamil residents in Colombo and its suburbs fearing a backlash, President Chandrika Kumaratunga, went on national TV appealed to the people to remain calm and help the government maintain law and order at this nation's hour of grief without playing into the hands of the LTTE which has a hidden agenda of inflaming another Black July and alienating Sri Lanka in the international community.

Following the bomb blasts, the police carried out a series of raids in and around Colombo rounding up as many as 27 Tamils whom they described "suspected Tigers".

Security forces detained many hundreds of Tamils arriving from the south in the northern town of Vavuniya for questioning over bombs blasts in Colombo. "This is a preventive action to locate any suspects in the Colombo incident," a police official said in Vavuniya.

United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali condemned the train bombing. "The Secretary-General learned with horror of the loss of a large

number of lives and of many, many injuries that were caused by an explosion on a crowded train on the outskirts of Colombo in Sri Lanka," U.N. spokeswoman Sylvana Foà said.

Several countries, including Britain, USA, Germany, and European Union, have condemned the bomb attack as an act of wanton terrorism.

In Moscow the Russian Foreign Ministry expressed serious concern about the bomb attack on the passenger train. "A large-scale act of terrorism committed on July 24 - an explosion in a passenger train, as a result of which about 100 innocent Lankan citizens were killed, deserves a strong condemnation," Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Vladimir Andreyev stated. "We proceed from the fact that organisers of such terrorist acts must be punished in accordance with all laws of justice," he emphasised adding that the settlement of the inter-ethnic conflict lies on the way of political talks, first of all on the basis of the programme proposed by the present Lankan government.

Amnesty International stated that it was extremely disturbed by the recent bombings in Sri Lanka which have resulted in the deliberate killing of at least 70 civilians and injury to hundreds of others.

Amnesty International noted the LTTE's denial that it was not involved and its assurance that it does not target civilians. However, Amnesty International has repeatedly condemned LTTE attacks on civilians in the past and has urged that all steps be taken to prevent such abuses.

AI stated that, whoever is responsible for the blast, such deliberate killings of civilians are reprehensible. While recognizing the government's responsibility to protect people from such attacks, in the light of the wave of human rights abuses that followed the Central Bank bombing in January, Amnesty International appeals to the Government of Sri Lanka to refrain from wholesale arbitrary arrests of Tamil people in the aftermath of the bombing.

Amnesty International appeals, as it has done in the past, to both the LTTE and the Government of Sri Lanka to avoid deliberate and arbitrary targeting of civilians.

Mullaitivu - A Story of Survival

The fall of the garrison is described as the worst debacle suffered by the Sri Lankan military of the civil war, which began with a nationwide outburst of anti-Tamil riots 13 years ago in July 1983.

Though no official figures of casualties have been released, reliable reports indicate just 30 soldiers were known to have escaped to safety.

When mortar fire from the Tigers shattered the nighttime stillness, a teen-age army sentry emptied both magazines of his assault rifle into the darkness. Then, he shinned up a coconut tree and watched the Tigers overrun the sprawling army

base.

For more than 24 hours, Pvt. W.G. Dhammika hid in the leafy branches. From his perch 50 feet above the ground, he watched the battle rage around him and became one of just 30 known survivors from the base's 1,200 soldiers.

The Tigers have claimed that they had killed 1208 soldiers including many officers. However, there are those who believe that the Tigers might be holding scores of soldiers as captives. The ICRC has called for details from the LTTE of any soldiers they are holding, but the Tigers have not so far admitted to captives being held.

In the first eyewitness account of the rebel assault on the base, the 19-year-old private told a Sri Lankan reporter that the Tamil Tiger quickly breached the camp's perimeters before dawn on 18 July.

"The attack came from the sea, the north and south of the camp, and within minutes the Tigers had penetrated our defenses," Dhammika said from his hospital bed in the town of Anuradhapura. "Shells were exploding all over the camp," he said. "...I saw a large group of Tigers attacking the brigade headquarters in the centre of the camp."

At dawn, he heard rebel leaders shouting orders to guerrillas who were ransacking the camp, driving away trailers full of weapons and ammunition. "The camp was littered with about 200 to 300 bodies of soldiers and rebels," Dhammika said. Some of the buildings were still ablaze and columns of smoke rose into the sky.

Dhammika saw men in fatigues and civilian clothing move into the camp and strip the bodies of their weapons and belongings, before loading them onto trailers and driving them away.

As the day passed, the soldier said he grew thirsty, but feared he would be discovered if he opened a coconut. Mortars were still crashing into the base when he descended in darkness and crawled along the shore of the Manthi Kadal lagoon. He discovered two other soldiers who had escaped, but their flight stalled as military warplanes, helicopters and warships pounded the rebels. The three hid in the lagoon for another day, until they spotted military helicopters landing reinforcements on the beach, south of the base.

Crawling along the lagoon and through scrub jungles, they approached. When close enough, they threw away their weapons, raised their hands and shouted in Sinhalese, before running toward their colleagues.

Military sources said the army abandoned the base on 26 July after recapturing it but finding it flattened with nothing to salvage, pulling out under continued attack from Tiger rebels. They said troops who landed by sea and air to retake the base found nobody alive, but neither the government nor the military have released official casualty figures.

The LTTE, in a statement issued from

London on 27 July said over 100 soldiers were killed on the previous day as they army "made a clumsy and disorganised withdrawal."

National Park Closed for Tourists

One of the country's biggest tourist attractions has closed its gates to visitors for security reasons. Police say they can no longer guarantee safety in the Yala National Park, a wildlife sanctuary, in south-eastern Sri Lanka. There have been a series of encounters between tourists and suspected Tamil Tigers is believed to be behind the closure.

The virtual absence of police and army patrols in the area means large groups of heavily-armed Tiger cadres can move around freely, resting before returning to fight in the east.

Their presence has brought them into contact with the many tourists who visit Yala to photograph the park's spectacular wildlife. No tourists have been harmed, but in one the latest incidents, 13 people on safari were stopped by a group dressed in battle fatigues and brandishing automatic weapons. The tourists and their guide are reported to have been briefly detained and questioned at gun point.

A big security operation is now under way in Yala to clear the area of Tiger units, according to military sources. But although police say the park may re-open to tourists within a short time, its closure comes as another major set-back to Sri Lanka's beleaguered tourism industry.

Government statistics suggest the number of visitors to the country has dropped by nearly 40-percent in the past year.

Earlier this month, an emergency rescue package for the island's deserted hotels and tourist resorts was announced, along with an ambitious international advertising campaign to reserve the island's negative image abroad.

With little sign of a respite in the escalating war between government forces and the LTTE, many are sceptical about the future of Sri Lanka's tourism industry.

Serious Food Shortages Feared

Drought and security problems may lead to serious food shortages in Sri Lanka, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) said on 26 July.

A report by the Rome-based agency estimated total rice production in Sri Lanka in 1995/96 would be 26 percent below normal and 11 percent below the last seriously drought-affected crop in 1986/87. It estimated that Sri Lanka would need to import some 600,000 tonnes of rice to make up the shortfall.

Abdur Rachid, the author of the report, said food shortages might be exacerbated in some areas by fighting between government troops and Tamil Tigers. "There may

be critical food shortages in localised areas because of the security situation," Rachid told the press.

The report said the food situation in the north, where a large number of refugees are receiving food assistance, was expected to become particularly tight. "Movement of food into affected areas is likely to be severely constrained by the recent deterioration in the security situation," it said.

The FAO report said the main 1995/96 Maha rice crop would be 22 percent less than the average for the preceding five years because of a significant decline in rainfall since last October. It said continuing drought since April had also resulted in highly unfavourable prospects for the Yala rice crop, which it estimated would be 33.

Wither Human Rights ?

There is increasing concern among international and local human rights organisations concerning the human rights situation in the context of the intensification of the armed conflict between government forces and the LTTE.

A Reuter report datelined 16 July from Colombo by Nick Macfie states:

A pretty Tamil girl is stopped at a Sri Lankan army checkpoint on the edge of rebel territory. Her boyfriend's name is written in ink on her thigh, possibly in a token of affection between lovers. A female soldier does a body check, in private, and sees the boy's name when she lifts the girl's skirt. The girl is detained on suspicion that the boy is a Tamil Tiger rebel.

That was two months ago and she has been detained ever since, according to a veteran American human rights campaigner living and working here.

When a tractor driver makes the reverse trip, from army-controlled Batticaloa to rebel territory, soldiers find 12 pairs of rubber slippers in his possession and believe he is taking them to the rebels. He is detained. That was three months ago. He is still being detained, according to the vice president of the Batticaloa Peace Committee, Father Harry Miller. The owner of the tractor wants it back but it is being held as evidence.

"Why are (the army) afraid of the slippers?" asked Jesuit priest Miller. "What do they think the Tigers will do with them, throw them at them?"

Batticaloa is right in the middle of the war zone and the homeland sought by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the north and east since 1983. The LTTE held the town briefly in 1990. The town is now under government control, as are the main roads out of it. But 100 metres off the roads into the jungle or across a lagoon can be LTTE territory. "The LTTE are increasing in the vicinity," a senior non-governmental organisation relief worker said. "They are coming close."

Miller, 70, who came to Sri Lanka, then

Ceylon, at the time of independence in 1948, is one of the country's most respected human rights campaigners. He describes the peace committee as the voice of the Batticaloa people with the security forces.

He lists the two cases above as exceptions to the rule in the Sri Lankan armed forces which have become human rights conscious since the coming to power of the People's Alliance government of President Chandrika Kumaratunga in August 1994.

"It wasn't rare for people working with the security forces to chop off heads and hang them by the roadside," Miller said in his garret office above St Michael's boys' school. "So there has been an improvement."

His objection to the treatment of the Tamil girl was that her skirt was lifted at all, whereas the men are checked through their clothes. "The women dislike getting different treatment," he said. "...But the human rights situation is much better. The soldiers know that people of their rank are being called before commissions. Two years back that consciousness was not there."

Recently parliament unanimously approved the setting up of a permanent commission to handle public complaints of human rights abuses. A separate state-run Human Rights Task Force monitors reported abuses by security forces involved in fighting the Tamil separatist rebellion.

Government commissions of inquiry are also probing disappearances during a brutal crackdown by the former United National Party (UNP) regime on a violent left wing youth revolt in the south in the late 1980s. International human rights groups have said up to 60,000 people died or disappeared during the period. Ganasha Kumar, Batticaloa regional district secretary for the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front, a once-militant Tamil group which now backs the government, also had praise for the armed forces. "Three or four years ago, security forces came and massacred," he said. "Now that is not happening."

Army spokesman Brigadier Sarath Munasinghe said strict procedures of informing the police, families and issuing of detention orders ensured people were not detained unfairly. "We have not had a single complaint in the recent past," he told Reuters. "We are not perfect, but (if any suspected breach of human rights) is brought to our notice, prompt action will be taken."

But even if the human rights scene has improved, Father Miller still has his gripes with the army in Batticaloa - he objects to their laying anti-personnel mines on their camp perimeters which so far have killed at least one goat but one day he fears may kill children.

Offer of Talks With Conditions

Colombo watchers detected a softening

of the government's position in regard to the prospects of talks with the Tamil Tigers when it recently offered to hold peace talks with the LTTE even after a devastating military defeat at Mullaitivu at the hands of Tigers and a bomb attack on a passenger train for which the government blamed the Tigers.

Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister, Lakshman Kadirgamar said at the press conference on 28 July said the government was prepared to hold peace talks with the LTTE if it would relinquish their goal of an independent state.

They also must renounce the use of violence, lay down arms and set a timetable for talks before the government would consider a political solution to the conflict, Mr. Kadirgamar said.

"But it is clear as far as they (Tigers) are concerned they have only one agenda: a separate state. That is not negotiable," Kadirgamar added.

Kadirgamar insisted that recent military debacles, including the loss of a key military base, did not influence the government's decision to make the overture.

"The Tigers will never agree to the laying down arms as a precondition for talks, and therefore the government's overture for talks will be a non-starter," a political commentator said.

Disaster for Economy if War Continues

The expenditure on the north-eastern war this year would be around Rs.47 to 48 billion, Rs.10 billion more than the budgetary allocation of Rs.38 billion, Constitutional Affairs and Justice Minister and Deputy Finance Minister, Prof. G.L. Peiris, said recently.

The defence expenditure represents 6.3 percent of the country's gross Domestic Product (GDP). "It's a huge amount of money for a small country like Sri Lanka," Mr. Peiris said addressing the Industrialists Association of Sri Lanka.

He said the government had only two options when the LTTE unilaterally pulled out of the peace talks on 19 April last year: to continue the low intensity war like in previous years, or to intensify it with the hope of restoring peace quickly. The government chose the latter option and that meant committing additional resources for the purchase of sophisticated armaments and mobilising more men.

The government's decision to intensify the war had yielded results but to convert the gains of war into durable peace, a political solution had to be worked out. The government was now engaged in that task, and that had to succeed if the escalated expenditure on the war was to be slashed. If without a political solution, the war was kept alive, the expenditure on the war would continue to remain high with disastrous consequences to the economy and industrial growth.

UN EXPERT DISCOUNTS INTERNATIONAL MEDIATION

By Aziz Haniffa

WASHINGTON - A top official with the United High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said here last week that international mediation to resolve the raging ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka is a nonviable option and doomed to fail.

Kaiser Zaman, who has been with UNHCR for the past 17 years and worked in Bosnia, Somalia and Sri Lanka, said "Conflict resolution lies mainly with the people, and in the end it will have to be the people themselves trying to come to a certain compromise" that could be the catalyst to the resolution of the war in Sri Lanka. Zaman, who was speaking at a Conference on Development, Social Justice and Peace in South Asia held at Catholic University here, with special emphasis on the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, said no amount of international mediation would work if the people of Sri Lanka refuse to compromise and warned that such outside interference could be counterproductive.

"Is the international community going to go and tell the Sri Lankan government that, if you don't come to the table, we are going to blow you apart?" he asked more than the 100 participants, mostly Tamil expatriates, who were unanimous in their contention that international mediation was the only panacea to the conflict in the island nation. He said the only way international mediation can work in Sri Lanka is if the warring sides "accept that they want to end the war. Then you bring in the negotiator and then the negotiator can set certain terms."

"But both parties must accept the negotiator" he said. "Whether it's an international organisation or an individual of some repute. The mediator would have to be given some authority and his decision in the end must be accepted." Zaman emphasised that it was imperative that "you prepare the grounds for it," but said that even in such a case, "there is only one in a million chance perhaps that it will work."

Zaman's pessimism was shared by Professor Jayadeva Uyangoda, a political scientist with the University of Sri Lanka, currently a visiting scholar on sabbatical at American University here. Uyangoda, who was also a discussant on the panel on "Peace and Reconciliation," said, "The mere fact that media-

tion has worked in other countries, does not necessarily mean that it would work in every one."

"The very question of mediation presently evokes wide apprehension in the Sinhalese community (and) whether it is right or wrong, it is a reality," he said. He noted that "the débâcle of the Indian mediation and involvement in 1987-1988 is still fresh in people's minds."

Similar sentiments were expressed by the Reverend Paul Morley Jahn, pastor of the United Church of Christ in Southern Indiana, whose church has had a long association with churches in Sri Lanka, particularly in Jaffna, and who has visited Sri Lanka, several times. Jahn, who has convened the US NGO (non-governmental organisation) Forum on Sri Lanka and been active on Capitol Hill on behalf of Tamils in Sri Lanka, said, "I believe the situation is not conducive right now for bringing in third-party mediation."

He said, "One of the things I've sensed in visiting Jaffna," is that "there is political immaturity that does not enable the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) to build a political solution to the military situation." Jahn said that in conversations with Clinton Administration officials and members of Congress, "time and time again, I hear them say, 'We can bring pressure on the Sri Lankan government but who can bring pressure on the LTTE?'"

In contrast, Dr Karunyan Arulantham, a pro-Eelam activist who was one of the organisers of the conference, stressed repeatedly that international mediation is the only option available to resolve the conflict in Sri Lanka. Arulantham, medical director and Pediatrician at Sierra Medical Group in Lancaster, California, said he regularly visits South India to work with Tamil refugees who have fled Sri Lanka and asserted, "I have to point out, in recent times the LTTE has repeatedly called for international mediation."

He claimed that the LTTE, besides making such public pleas, had "declared its willingness to consider a constitutional arrangement in which the Tamils can meaningfully share power." But, according to Arulantham, the LTTE's declarations "have been brusquely dismissed by the government and the inter-

national community. This is unfortunate because this dismissal serves to foreclose a real opportunity for peace." "Whether one likes it or not, and however unpalatable it may be," he observed, "we cannot ignore the reality that many Tamils see the LTTE as the only effective protector of their interests, despite its human rights record and other actions which may have contributed to its negative perceptions."

"I remain convinced," Arulantham added, "that peace will not be possible without international mediation because the dynamics within the country will only promote war." "Currently the Sri Lankan government enjoys international legitimacy," he said. "This is not available to the Tamils, it is not available to the LTTE. The Constitution of Sri Lanka has concentrated all the powers in the hands of the majority. Sinhala community, which has used these powers to marginalise and brutalise and decimate the Tamil minority community."

He said a key element of the Sri Lankan government's strategy of "peace through war" is to "eliminate the LTTE, the only viable Tamil opposition. Arulantham also alleged that Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga, "whatever her intentions and hopes might have been, is now trapped by old politics bent on control of Tamils." "Mrs Kumara tunga, whose statements have been very noble and very moderate," he added, "has yet been the person who's done the most amount of destruction to the Tamils."

Donna Hicks, deputy director of the Program on International Conflict Analysis and Resolution at Harvard University, said, "There needs to be a third party process specifically tailored to the problem in Sri Lanka, not one that might have worked in Northern Ireland or even the one in the Middle East."

"Each conflict is unique," she said, "and each conflict requires a special analysis and a special type of intervention and it has to be non-exclusive. It cannot exclude any party or exclude any legitimate voices in the community."

Meanwhile, Arulantham acknowledged that India cannot be ignored in any international mediation to the conflict in Sri Lanka. "Obviously," he said, "India is a regional superpower and India has an interest in what happens in Sri Lanka." "Consequently," he said, India's "concurrence" is imperative to any mediation process and no solution could be reached without New Delhi's blessing, even though the "last time India came in, it was a mess for the Tamils, it was a mess for the country." ●

(India Abroad, 2.8.96)

Peace : The Need for Reconciliation of Two Divergent Concepts

By Nirmalan Dhas

That Sri Lanka in many ways meets what would be expected of a potential location for an offshore capital base and service centre for South Asia has never been in doubt - unlike the ability of this island's peoples to contain the contradictions that divide them in the interests of its realisation. This was confirmed by the World Bank's Director for its Asia Department when she presented a pleasant projection of the prospects for Sri Lanka - prospects whose realisation, she emphasised, would be possible only within a context where the ongoing war is brought to an end and the task of conflict resolution entrusted to acceptable and non-violent methods. The growing perception of this conflict as one that will stretch out over a few more decades, make a mockery of the projection of such prospects, turning them into dreams that are cruel in their apparently impossible promised.

The urgent need for such an offshore capital base and service centre for the development of South Asia generates its own tensions, and has led to hasty and insufficiently considered initiatives towards ending the fighting. The relationship between interests involved in the actual fighting, those involved in attempts to steer the fighting towards an acceptable end and those who view with some suspicion the possible global implications of the development of the island as a capital and service base to South Asia, are beginning to interact with greater and greater frequency, raising tensions at all levels.

At ground level, the mono personal leadership of the LTTE along with its precarious guidance system has been displaced from the extreme north with its easy maritime access. These functions are now located in a more land bound and central area where it is greatly dependent on peripheral second rung leaders for both security and supplies. This southward movement has been secured through the movement of military men and material to

the northern extremities of the island. The peculiar character of this move is that these men and material are now linked to their supply lines very tenuously. The inherent instability of concentrating the major portion of available troops and hardware to the north of the LTTE - thus leaving access to the south open to that entity - has been compounded by the urgent but as yet unmet need for the rapid recruitment, training, equipping and deployment of tens of thousands of troops south of the LTTE to prevent its advance in that direction.

Delicate situation

In addition, there is nothing to indicate that the question of depriving the LTTE of access to the coast has been addressed, thus leaving the naval wing of that organisation free to move in and cut off supply lines to the north, if deemed necessary. As can thus be seen, a delicate situation prevails with a loud promise of possible catastrophe at any moment, but also with a thin whisper of hope whose realisation depends on many uncontrollable factors, whose happy conjunction may yet bring about the apparently impossible.

The fighting has cost the LTTE dearly, in terms of men, material and credibility both amongst the population once under its control as well as amidst the Tamils abroad. It is difficult to understand - and probably will never be known - why the LTTE decided to abandon peace talks and return to fighting. It is harder still to comprehend its reluctance to accept a political solution when it can be gaining control of the state apparatus decisively influence of the decision making process regardless of who comes to power. A likely explanation would be that the LTTE seeks a solution that would be based on the recognition of its own understanding of the conflict and on the concepts underlying its actions and outlook.

But the fighting has taken its toll

on the government's morale as well. Clearly, international approval and encouragement has not translated into economic support for the military offensive. It is of course true that international financial institutions are not mandated to finance wars. They would of course consider rehabilitation and reconstruction - after the fighting has been brought to an end. But the failure of donor countries to offer to foot part of the bill for fighting the LTTE - a fight they all claim to see as being eminently justified and indeed one that is essential to peace in Sri Lanka - has been perhaps the unkindest cut of all. Not surprisingly the government has in its frustration lashed out at potential donors, insisting that all funds now being channelled through NGOs be sent directly to the government itself. Donors who feel they will not be able to, or do not want to, meet the expenses of monitoring aid utilisation, may now be forced to curtail aid flows until the conflict is ended and the focus of expenditure shifted to rehabilitation, reconstruction and development.

Measure of desperation

This may also indicate a measure of desperation in the government's frantic efforts to find the resources required to pursue the war. Some of these countries have come forward to provide military training alone thus making it abundantly clear that while they consider the pursuit of this war to be in their interests they intend the Sri Lankan people to do the fighting and dying and the Sri Lankan government to foot the bill for the war. Such cynicism does indeed do little to inspire confidence, but the government should be well aware that in politics there are no friends - only interests to be advanced.

Undoubtedly the passionate national pride that has long characterised the Sri Lanka Freedom Party - so absolutely incompatible with the begging bowl - has been sorely wounded. No wonder then the frenzied hurry and strange contortions in a desperate effort to make ends meet - and thus preserve a measure of sovereignty, political autonomy and dignity through the sale of assets through what is being called privatisation. That the use of the proceeds to meet expenditure means in effect that we are consuming our capital seems to be of no concern to the government our capital seems to be of no concern to the gov-

ernment or of anyone else either. Given this situation it is difficult to see any greater credibility accrue to the government than to the LTTE.

Patterns of property development in Colombo and indications of recreational facilities soon to come indicate that such facilities are soon to be required by the residents of this city. Those currently residing there have got by very well without these luxuries and their construction indicates quite clearly that we are soon to be cast in the role of hosts to many persons accustomed to such facilities. These people will probably constitute the advanced human resources necessary for the servicing of capital and the conducting of sophisticated commercial activities. And it is also likely that these persons will not take kindly to a government unable to end the war and maintain peace whatever the contradictions are that it may be faced with. This factor undoubtedly contributes to the pressures acting on the government towards an end to the fighting.

Second rung leadership

The mono personal leadership of the LTTE is faced with pressures of a different sort. Isolated and surrounded in the central areas south of Jaffna with no direct maritime access, it is totally dependent on its second rung leadership for security and supplies. It is becoming apparent that these supplies and security are forthcoming only in keeping with the agenda of these second rung leaders. The result is that there appears to be emerging a collective leadership body just below Mr Pirabhakaran, with the ability to impose a veto on his decisions in favour of their own. Just as Dr Balasingham has played advisor to Mr Prabhakaran, the emerging second rung leadership has its own supportive nexus.

For their part the developed countries of the west appear to have achieved policy consensus on the nature of their response to the LTTE. They are prepared to talk to and recognise those of its elements operating within the recognised legal framework - even to the extent of turning a blind eye to the ultimate destination of monies such elements may collect. At the same time they reserve the right to support the government of Sri Lanka in its responses - military or otherwise - to the military campaign of the LTTE. They have thus set the stage

for the emergence of a political debate that will enable the LTTE to present its own perspectives and proposals to the world, depriving the government of the effectiveness of the control on information that it has successfully built up over the course of the recent fighting.

Censure of UN envoy

But such LTTE related mechanisms operating within the legal and democratic framework will also be open to censure and be held morally accountable for actions that the LTTE may engage in that are deemed unacceptable by the international community. The recent censure of the UN envoy may be an indication of the government's displeasure at this global response so contrary to its own policy. What is quite clear is that while the government has gone on record to the effect that it is not prepared to consider any proposals put forward by the LTTE - the recent massacres may well be a knee jerk reaction of the LTTE to the government cavalierly rejection of its proposed confederation of two states - many in the developed world may well consider this proposal put forward by the LTTE to be of sufficient weightage and credibility as to warrant serious consideration.

The government's recent decision to curtail, and perhaps totally prohibit, the activities of an international NGO with an impeccable record of over three hundred years of experience in the field of non violent conflict resolution may be another expression of its displeasure and dissatisfaction with the response of the international community. The NGO concerned has successfully contributed to the resolution of several complex conflicts arising from current international relations and is in fact the only organisation known to have been active in the field of conflict resolution for such a long period of time. Obviously it has gained a wealth of experience which any government seeking to resolve conflict through methods of non violent conflict resolution would welcome. It is therefore most unfortunate in that this action of the government can easily read as a possible indicator of a commitment to violent military measures, with all their attendant death and destruction, as a means of ending the conflict. It could also read as a rejection on the part of the government of any foreign mediation towards a non-violent resolution of the ongoing

war - and, in time, even cast it in the now widely detested role of an aggressor against a whole people and oppressor of their legitimate aspirations.

The incident involving this NGO has begun to take on an unnecessarily ugly character, with the Department of Inland Revenue having taken action to freeze their bank accounts. Heavy handed administrative actions of this nature, so common in our neighbourhood, are bound to raise questions in the minds of potential investors. The fear that Sri Lanka will exhibit the same type of administrative interventions in all spheres of life - as for instance is widely expected to be seen in post 1997 Hong Kong - will definitely detract from its ability to realise its pleasing prospects for the future. The words and deeds of foreign ministry once merely seen as exemplary in their impeccable articulation and constructive content, have now acquired an undertone of intolerance with a strong hint of national pride and arrogance - understandable perhaps considering that Sri Lanka alone offers to the world that capital base and service platform essential for the effective deployment of capital in South Asia, but quite obviously inappropriate to out well demonstrated and widely recognised inability to resolve the ongoing conflict ourselves - as well.

Considerable divergence

The two perspectives of the government and the LTTE display a considerable degree of divergence. The government considers its offer to restructure the Sri Lankan State in order to accommodate ethnic plurality and the devolution of power to be radical. It sees its offer as a magnanimous concession made in the interest of preserving the unity of country. The concept developed by the LTTE is based on the perception of two nations uniting with mutual recognition, respect and dignity in order to better further mutual interests, and is thought by that organisation to be pragmatic and solidly based in reality.

We then have on the one hand the government approaching what it sees as a need to preserve the unity of Sri Lanka through the restructuring of its state along the lines of a multi-ethnic entity and through the devolution of power to demarcated regions. On the other hand we have the LTTE that sees two nations in conflict the one - under its leadership -

seeking to free itself from domination by the other and to redefine relations between these two nations in a manner that permits them to function within the structures of a confederation of states. The very notion of parties to these divergent perceptions handling the task of resolving the conflict arising therefrom - a task that demands a reconciliation of these two concepts - without the mediation of a third party skilled in such work, borders on the incredible. The government's apparently firm commitment to repeated attempts along this line runs the risk of being seen as postures adopted in response to internal political considerations and as an indication of a need for the development of much more sophisticated political skills, that permit the adoption of more realistic and credible policies.

Reconciliation of concepts

Undoubtedly the reconciliation of these two different concepts will entail considerable effort and a great deal of skill. It will also necessitate the creation of a space for dialogue between parties to the conflict and neu-

tral parties skilled in the task of conflict and neutral parties skilled in the task of conflict resolution. The policy position adopted by the developed nations of the west appears to hold out the potential for the emergence of just such a space not only on their own soil but hopefully also within Sri Lanka and the actual theatre of conflict as well. Based on the government's repeated assertions of its ability to resolve the conflict without foreign intervention, one would expect to see some interest on its part in creating such a space for Sri Lankans themselves to mediate between their government and the LTTE in order to find a way to resolve the conflict. However, nothing of the sort has been visible despite engagement in this task surely being a right and responsibility of every citizen on this island. Its failure to create such a space for dialogue only serves to compound the complexity of a task that promises to take a great deal of time and patience, and demands an ability to tolerate high levels of frustration and disappointment.

The growing need for a capital and service base for the development of

South Asia, however, has an urgency that cannot be ignored. This undeniable urgency seems to have led to the current predominance of attempts to resolve the conflict through conventional coercive military means - or at any rate to a consensus in this direction at regional level. The far more sophisticated response of the developed nations, however, shows a deeper understanding of the dynamics involved. They even provide for a synergistic relationship with the militarist policies of violent conflict resolution that apparently enjoy much support at regional level. These militaristic policies will play the stick to their carrot of recognition and support in exchange for the LTTE's demilitarisation and democratisation. Put simply, their policy makes it possible for them to do the talking to the LTTE while we do the fighting and dying - which the implementation of our policies call for. One realises of course that there is no reason why we should continue to bring such calamities upon ourselves. The 'War For Peace' has long since passed all understanding. Now it appears that the battle for our sanity is on.

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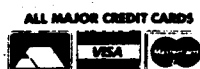
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The LTTE's attack on the Mullaitivu base has made it quite clear that the PA's massive investment in Riviresa I, II, III has come to nought. It took Chandrika more than three days after the base was overrun by the Tigers to return from her holiday abroad. The government-owned Daily News said that the base was being held and that the Deputy Minister of Defence was directing operations to send in reinforcements from Mullaitivu! The army brass according to some sources, were not happy that General Ratwatte, who had flown to Trincomalee was giving instructions to the troops which were trying to fight their way towards the base from Alampil.

When the magnitude of the Mullaitivu débâcle gradually dawned on the Sinhalese people, the General was not in the scene.

He was not in Parliament to make a statement to the house on the matter. This irked many, including government MP's and ministers. The high handed manner in which the censorship has been used to black out all politically unfavourable fallout of the Mullaitivu débâcle antagonised the press. The statement made by UNP leader on the fall of the base in Parliament was praised in some editorials.

It soon became clear to the PA leadership that its popularity in the south was sliding fast following the débâcle. The UNP was making most of it. The PA leadership that its popularity in the south was sliding fast following the débâcle. The UNP was making most of it. The PA's popularity has suffered greatly in recent times due to the spiralling cost of living which was further and tremendously exacerbated by the unprecedented power crisis. The Mullaitivu débâcle could not have come at a worse time for the government. The TULF and the PLOTE have stopped supporting the PA in Parliament. The EPDP is grumbling.

The Sath Jaya Operation which was launched from the Elephant Pass base towards Kilinochchi was seen by many as a foolish face saving move by the government to offset the calamity of the Mullaitivu disaster. But it is not going to help the PA in the long term.

On 4 August it was quite apparent as to how the PA leadership was going to react to the crisis.

Addressing a public meeting at Nittambuwa the President said, "We

cannot let a few journalists and press barons denigrate the war effort. We cannot let them hinder the military's successful forward march (!) with their malicious, false and damaging statements". The President lashed out at the Island and the Divaina and warned that some newspapers have to be closed down. "What these newspapers enjoy is not the freedom of the press but the freedom of the wild ass" she said.

She made a statement earlier that in view of the war effort some of the politically sensitive subsidies on essentials have to be removed. She cannot go on for long blaming the massive war expenditure for the belt tightening economic measures.

The justification for the unprecedented rise in defence spending was not merely the retaking of the peninsula but the destruction of the LTTE's capacity to engage in large scale attacks. Today the government has neither the complete and effective control of Jaffna nor, in the aftermath of the Mullaitivu disaster, Pirabhakaran on his last legs.

Any sound military historian would agree that the total annihilation of the Mullaitivu base, which, according to military sources had 1500 troops at the time is unique. Attacks on large military bases since World War Two which saw such death and destruction have either been extended in time or been backed by heavy artillery support. Nowhere in modern times has an organisation, considered a guerrilla force primarily, launched an attack without the aid of artillery fire on a base of this size held by a well equipped conventional army - the officer corps and special forces of which have been trained by the best military academics of India, England, and now, the US - wiping out almost everyone there in the course of three days, while resisting attempts by elite special forces and the Navy to send in reinforcements backed by MI 17 heli-

copters, heavy artillery fire, naval bombardment and concentrated air cover.

The well defended base standing on almost four square kilometres on the northeastern coast which before 1990 used to be the Mullaitivu town, was overrun by the LTTE in less than eight hours. In the first phase of the attack which began around 1.30 on 17 July the Tigers destroyed the brigade headquarters and its communications tower, overwhelmed the naval unit removing its radar equipment intact and ransacked the large armoury of the base. Some well informed defence sources said that the value of the booty which was removed from the base was more than 20 million US dollars.

The LTTE took two 122 MM howitzers with a range of 14 kilometres. It also took over a thousand shells for the howitzers.

The Tigers have been looking for such long range artillery pieces since 1991. The LTTE realised, following the losses it sustained in the Elephant Pass battle that it could not effectively engage the army in battalion sized or larger confrontations without the aid of artillery. Throwing in large numbers into a battle without first softening enemy positions with artillery bombardment can be dangerous - making one's troops cannon fodder to the enemy's artillery. This made them look for long range cannons in the camps which they attacked since then. Now, the two howitzers in the LTTE's hands can introduce a new dimension to conventional type operations which it might undertake against the army in the future.

The collapse of the Mullaitivu base appears to have been due to the following reasons:

(a) By the time the troops in the base realised that their positions were under attack, the Tigers were swarming inside, knocking out the command structure and communications' nerve centre of the base. This left little room

MULLAITIVU: A SHATTERING BLOW WAR STRATEGY

By S D Sivaram, Colombo

for the troops to fight back effectively. Next day only a few groups were left. With most defences of the camp swiftly overrun in the first phase of the attack, the troops were exposed to the special assault units of the LTTE, each of which seems to have had a clear idea of the nature of the army's positions in the very interior of the base. The utter confusion in the command structure which had arisen in the first phase of the attack appears to have largely contributed to the massacre of several hundred soldiers before the first light of dawn.

(b) the physical location of the camp is such that it leaves little room for the troops to regroup and improvise defence by exploiting the advantages of the terrain. In Pooneryn a natural network of sand dunes helped the soldiers who survived the Tiger assault on that base regroup and then effectively repulse several concerted efforts by the LTTE to overwhelm them. The geography of the area in which the Mullaitivu base was located is different. It is flat country interspersed with shrub jungle. Almost seventy percent of the area covered by the base used to be the Mullaitivu town and its immediate environs. Despite the lessons of Pooneryn, it appears that the army had no well defined fall back positions within the base or in the terrain outside.

The acting commanding officer of the base, Major Aliba, managed to maintain contact with the outside world for a while before he was also killed or captured by the Tigers. Others were massacred en masse. Only about forty soldiers escaped the carnage, trekking more than twenty miles to the nearest army camp to the south. Defence sources have confirmed that more than 1400 in the base were killed or are 'missing in action'. 120 reinforcement troops were also killed.

The LTTE razed the whole base to the ground before reinforcements could fight their way towards it. The day after reaching the area where the base had stood the army decided to pull out all reinforcements completely. But this was well hidden from the people with the aid of censorship.

The LTTE's attack on Mullaitivu defies conventional western military wisdom. Only those who are uninitiated in military history and science will try to explain themselves out of this by attributing LTTE's success to human waves. The presuppositions which underpinned the claims and beliefs of the government and some

western military analysts who were claiming that Pirabhakaran was on his last legs after Riviresa I, II and III, grossly overlooked the fact that the LTTE had systematically withdrawn all its military assets from the peninsula and that while losses sustained by the Tigers during Riviresa were quite exaggerated, recruitment among the refugees displaced from Jaffna and the impoverished hinterlands of the eastern province which had come under the Tigers following the transfer of troops from east to north, had gone up.

In addition to this, a large number of cadre which the LTTE, while it controlled Jaffna, had committed to the defence of the peninsula against operations from Palali, Elephant Pass, Pooneryn, Kayts and Karainagar were freed for offensive operations. The number thus freed when the LTTE pulled its main forces out of Jaffna was substantial.

This considerably boosted the manpower available to Prabhakaran for throwing into offensive operations. This was in fact stated by the Tigers in an article on the strategy behind their withdrawal from Jaffna in their official publication. It should have been quite evident from these that the LTTE was in a position indeed to take on a target such as Mullaitivu. The current crisis in the Eelam war above all should be attributed to Prabhakaran's ability to lull all his opponents into a gun-ho, and hence complacent mood, by allowing some of his expatriate followers to 'beg' India, as though in sheer desperation, for succour, by waiting until Colonel Ratwatte, who apparently believing that he had achieved the ultimate in the Eelam war, got himself promoted as a full General and then, striking with deadly precision to shatter the very basis of the government's Eelam war strategy.

Dilly-Dallying On Devolution

by Dr.S.Narapalasingam

The current positions of the parties in the democratic mainstream which support and oppose the devolution "peace package" can be broadly categorised as follows:

Supporters' Position

1. Devolve legislative, judicial and executive powers to the regions, retaining only minimal powers at the centre which are accepted as inevitable for safeguarding the security and the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka; ensuring a consistent and unified diplomatic, economic and trade relations with the rest of the world; and facilitating a cooperative and amicable relationship between the regional authorities.

2. Given (1) above, the devolution of powers can only be meaningful from a practical standpoint under a non-unitary system of government, as proposed in the legal draft viz. union of regions.

3. The contiguous areas in the North-East presently inhabited by Tamils to be constituted as one region. In fairness, it must be stated here that even among the Sinhalese supporters

of devolution there is disagreement on this insistence of the Tamils. The Muslims in the contiguous areas in the Eastern Province favour a separate (sub-regional) devolved unit.

Opponents' Position

1. In principle, devolution of powers to the regions to be restricted, as under the system of Provincial Councils (Thirteenth Amendment to the 1978 Constitution), with the centre retaining the legislative, executive, judicial, policing, resource mobilising and allocating (including state land) powers. In particular, the centre should continue to retain controlling powers over all regional bodies and the power to dissolve them, even if some additional powers are devolved to the regions beyond the 13th Amendment. The crucial point is that the regional authorities should be subservient to the national legislature (central government).

2. The unitary character of the constitution as stipulated in Article 2 of the 1978 constitution should be retained. Given the position indicated in (1) Above, this stipulation is impera-

tive.

3. The temporarily merged Northern and Eastern Provinces (under the 1987 Indo-Lanka accord) should be demerged and their boundaries should not be re-delineated, especially for the purpose of changing the existing demographic pattern in the Provinces.

Bases for devolution

The case for extensive devolution of powers and which was acknowledged by the Government via the package of proposals presented on August 3, 1995 rests on the following factors:

(i) To address the long-standing demand of the Tamils for self-government in the North-East that would allow them to have control over their own affairs. Its main aims are to safeguard their distinct ethnic identity and heritage, provide safety and security to the people, develop the North-East region according to the needs of the people there, and in general for the Tamil community to prosper without being subject to any form of discrimination by the highly centralised rule that has by its very nature strong propensity to serve the majority community at the expense of the minorities.

(ii) The case for a non-unitary constitution is based on two fundamental factors. First, the kind of self-rule required to achieve the above aims and which is implicitly recognized in the devolution "peace package" can only be possible if Article 2 of the present constitution, which declares that "The Republic of Sri Lanka is a Unitary State" is revoked and replaced by another, as proposed in the legal draft for Sri Lanka to be a "Union of Regions". Second, from the standpoint of Tamils they have lost all faith in a unitary form of constitution, which bestows absolute power to the majority Sinhalese and which allowed the minority Tamils to be victimised by successive governments since independence, mainly for electoral advantage. This needs some elaboration and is provided below.

The victimisation of Tamils solely on ethnic grounds not only in policy formulation but also in the implementation of approved policies has been the normal practice in the past. Earlier, there were no fair policies and later where there were fair policies there was no fair implementation. Tamils have been "bitten" not once or twice but repeatedly several times under the unitary rule. There is a strong feeling that as long as the Sinhalese-

dominated central governments retain overriding powers, they will continue to obstruct the freedom and the fulfilment of the aspirations of the Tamils. It is the very unitary system, that is being used even now by the main opposition party to obstruct the devolution of powers. This had been the familiar pattern, regardless of which one of the two main parties was in the opposition, ever since the initial attempt was made to devolve powers under the district council and later the provincial council system. The Thirteenth Amendment to the 1978 constitution was made possible only by the intervention of the Government of India, facilitated by the expedient circumstances of the time that prevented the obstructive tactics to kill the move.

(iii) The policy of settling Sinhalese in the North-East through State sponsored colonization schemes was perceived as a major long-term strategy to eliminate the stronghold of the Tamils in Sri Lanka and the power that accompanies it. The North-East region had been considered safe for the Tamils whenever anti-Tamil riots broke out in the rest of the country and many sought refuge there during such tragic times. However, this confidence was later shattered when the army dominated by the Sinhalese moved into the region to assert the authority of the Colombo-based Government. It was perceived by many residents as an alien force, which was reinforced by the inability of the soldiers to establish any rapport with the people due to the language barrier and more importantly by the callous way the civilians and suspects were treated. The case for a merged North-East region stems from the necessity to unite under the common language and culture so as to remain strong and viable politically and economically. The importance of territorial status for the Tamils gained strength over the years consequent upon their virtual exclusion from ruling power and the insensitivity of governments to their grievances and fears arising from "Sinhalese hegemony".

(iv) The Tamil struggle for complete self-rule that turned into a bloody war afflicting millions of people on both sides of the ethnic divide to be ended agreeably **without dividing Sri Lanka into two separate states**, requires a political system in which the Tamils have unequivocal confidence that their aspirations could be fulfilled without the inhibitions of the Centre.

Arguments of the opponents

(i) Those opposed to the devolution "peace package" fall broadly into two groups. The first are those archetypal chauvinists who do not even recognise that Tamils have any grievances, and who even go further and state that Sri Lanka is the land of only the Sinhala-Buddhists. In fact, this group seeks to argue that the Tamils are a favoured community and in fact it is the Sinhala-Buddhists who are discriminated! They think that any devolution of powers even under a unitary constitution threatens the future of the Sinhalese, who unlike the Tamils do not have any common linguistic and cultural links with any ethnic group outside Sri Lanka. The others, who are more realistic accept the diverse character of the population of Sri Lanka and the basic rights of the minorities in the pluralistic society, favour some limited devolution but under a unitary constitution. Their conviction is apparently based on the fact that as long as the central government functioning under a unitary constitution has a firm control over the Tamils, there is nothing to fear for the future of the Sinhalese.

(ii) Those opposed to the "peace package" even after it had been diluted in the legal draft, view it as a move to introduce a federal system of government. Even though the inexplicably much maligned and hated word "federal" is not used anywhere in the draft, the contents of the package gives them the same nauseous feeling that they have for any form of federalism. To them, the unitary system is sacrosanct and should not be desecrated regardless of any real need. To them federalism is associated with separatism, as if it constitutes a stepping-stone to separation. They seek to firmly entrench this belief among the Sinhalese population.

(iii) Sri Lanka is too small a country to be divided into several administrative and legislative units. These are too costly and wasteful utilization of the limited financial resources available to a poor country.

There are a host of similar arguments, which imply that there is no ethnic problem but only a straightforward "terrorist" problem. The fact that the Tamil problem has grown over the years into a major crisis dividing the population of Sri Lanka along ethnic lines is overlooked. Hence, in their view the required solution is to be

sought not through political accommodation but by the use of military force. This seems to be the view of even the Buddhist Mahanayake Theras of Malwatte and Asgiriya Chapters.

The fear of division of the land or the perceived likelihood of it into separate Sinhalese and Tamil states is much more frightening than the division of the people with the attendant discontent, unrest and economic loss.

The relatively large size of the Sinhalese in the total population of Sri Lanka is often cited as their prerogative to govern the country, implying that the minorities have to accept their rule. Hence, it is for the majority community to decide what kind of contributions the minorities should make to the prosperity of the nation and what they deserve to get in return. This attitude is well depicted in the statement of the previous President, that the minority communities are "like creepers embracing the trunk of a tree", the latter symbolising the majority Sinhalese.

Despite the unprecedented calamity resulting in enormous human and material losses and untold human suffering, which still continues contrary to claims of various sorts of victories, the thinking of some politicians in the South has not changed. For instance, the recent published statement of Ekeeya Sanvidhanaya contains the reported warning of the veteran politician Ronnie de Mel - "if the UNP supported the Devolution package it will not even poll 2000 votes from the South."

Constitutional obstacles

The Parliamentary Select Committee on Constitutional Reforms has been discussing the legal draft of the devolution package since last September. Over 40 meetings have been held so far with no sign at all of reaching a consensus among the Sinhalese and Tamil political parties in the Government and the Opposition. The main opposition party, the UNP has officially announced after a long silence that it stood for an indivisible Sri Lanka and any proposal (e.g. union of regions as proposed in the devolution package) that threatened the unitary character of the country is unacceptable. The very first hurdle in getting the so-called "peace plan" work-

able remains to be cleared.

The next one to be cleared is its passage in Parliament by the required two-thirds majority. Given that the coalition Government has only a one-vote majority and that one of its partner, the DUNLF has taken the same stand on the "peace plan" as the UNP, the clearance does not seem easy. Finally, assuming that these hurdles have been somehow cleared it has to be approved by the people at a national referendum.

The UNP Parliamentarian K.N. Choksy, a constitutional lawyer has suggested a legalistic way to retain the unitary structure (Article 2) and introduce regional authorities having "co-ordinate powers", a phrase used by the late UNP leader Gamini Dissanayake in the appendix to his election manifesto setting out the method of devolution which he intended to adopt, if elected as President of Sri Lanka. Choksy's proposal is to amend Article 76(1) of the present constitution, which stipulates that "Parliament shall not abdicate or in any manner alienate its legislative power, and shall not set up any authority with any legislative power", by excluding from its binding the proposals to set up regional councils with legislative powers and qualifying Article 2 with reference to this amendment. The UNP has not endorsed this proposal. However, the Government is considering it earnestly. This device is unacceptable to all the Tamil political parties. It has been scorned by Sinhala extremists as they think that the concept of a unitary state will be negated by subjecting the Unitary State in Article 2 to the proviso of the amended Article 76.

Gamini Iriyagolle has gone further and questioned the right of Parliament to amend Article 76 (placing it on par with Articles 75 and 82) in the present Constitution, even with the votes of all the 225 members of Parliament and the assistance of a Referendum.

Dilly-dallying

Since the hostilities between the LTTE and Government forces escalated after that fateful day 19 April 1995, the Government has maintained that it has been forced to take a two-track approach to settle the conflict. The war track is to weaken the "Tigers" and compel them to return to

the negotiating table. The peace track has been kept open, as the Government believes firmly that only a political solution can settle the conflict permanently and bring lasting peace. In order to achieve this ultimate goal, it presented the devolution "peace plan" to the people in August 1995. The draft plan (watered down to allay the fears of Sinhalese critics) in the legal form has not even moved a step forward towards the first signboard in the peace track. This lack of progress is not entirely due to the difficulties in clearing the constitutional hurdles. Actually, it seems that these have become convenient means to dilly-dally in the peace track.

The UNP at first declined to give its reaction to the plan, stating that it was not in the legal form for serious consideration. After the legal draft was presented it kept silent for a long time waiting to see the reaction of the pressure groups in the South and the Buddhist clergy or perhaps even expecting that it would be thrown out in due course, in which case it would not be censured by the Sinhalese and Tamil electorates. President Chandrika Kumaratunga seized this stand of the UNP to point out to the Tamil political parties that the latter was the stumbling block in reaching a political solution based on the devolution "peace package".

In the mean time, other unrelated actions put the President and the leader of the UNP on a confrontational course. This resulted in the latter taking up the adamant stand that he would not discuss the devolution package with the President. However, the UNP has not decided yet to boycott the Select Committee meetings contrary to the demand of some of its party members to withdraw. The members may attend meetings perhaps more as observers than as enthusiastic participants. The reported remark of the UNP leader made at the meeting of the 5 Tamil political parties that "the President's confrontational policies had even silenced those in the UNP who would otherwise have supported the package" is a clear indication that national interests (and the aspirations of the silent majority in the South and North) continue to be overshadowed as before by petty party considerations as between the government and the opposition UNP.

The Tamil politicians find them-

selves now in a bizarre position, where the President tells them to persuade the opposition leader to get the UNP to support the devolution package, while the latter points out to them that there is no unanimity even among all the constituent parties in the Government. He had also questioned the sincerity of the Government, stating that it was trying to put the blame on the UNP and the Tamil parties.

It appears as if the both the Government and the Opposition are keen on distancing the Tamil parties from their political opponent, without realising the consequences of this move to the country as a whole. The lack of seriousness and cooperation to solve the most acute problem that has afflicted in various ways the entire population of the country and polarised them along ethnic lines is clearly evident from their negative attitudes. The bipartisan approach has so far been seen only in two instances, since the present PA Government assumed office. These were when the bills relating to Bribery and Corruption, and Human Rights were approved by Parliament. Unlike the Tamil problem, the politicians were conscious of the inherent danger in playing politics with these two measures as it would have led to political suicide!

How a negotiated settlement?

Given all the above complexities and squabbles, a very queer situation has emerged with the Government wanting to educate the people in Jaffna on the contents of the devolution package, as if this alone would help to circumvent the present impasse and the UNP assuring the Tamil parties that the grievances of the Tamils are understood by the party and it "supports a negotiated settlement to the ethnic question". It is not only the UNP all the main political parties have proclaimed their commitment to settle the conflict through negotiations.

Following a two-day (June 27-28) international conference in Australia on the theme "Peace with Justice", the LTTE spokesman is reported to have said that the militants are "committed to a peaceful resolution of the conflict and respect the views expressed that an early cease-fire and de-escalation of the war is necessary". The LTTE's demand that all Government forces must first withdraw from the areas described as occupied in order to re-start the peace talks is another matter. Notwithstanding all these pro-

nouncements, the war continues destroying many more lives.

The crucial question that emanates from the above analysis is:- "With whom are the Tamil representatives expected to negotiate and on what common basis?" Should they have to negotiate with the Government or the UNP or the Buddhist prelates? Presently, there is obviously no agreed position among the main parties representing mainly the Sinhalese, on a method to devolve powers to the minorities and share powers at the centre. Without a consensus on the parameters within which meaningful devolution should be examined and agreed by the negotiating parties, the present approach to reach a political solution will only be a wild-goose chase. The accomplishment of the Parliamentary Select Committee is, therefore, paramount to the future of the peace process. Its role in resolving politically the most crucial national issue confronting all the people of Sri Lanka has not been taken seriously by some leaders. Even with some international mediation (the current suggestion of the conference in Australia is for negotiations under "international facilitation and observation"), without reconciling first the basic positions of the pro- and anti-devolutionists highlighted at the beginning of this paper, any negotiations will be a meaningless exercise. This is also clear from the various constitutional and other obstacles indicated above to a political solution based on the promised "extensive devolution of powers", as an alternative to separation.

The irony of the present intransigent stand of the UNP and other parties obstructing the adoption of the devolution "peace package" is that they are strengthening the very forces that want to divide the country by inciting ethnic hatred, convincing the Tamil people that they can never get a fair deal from the Sinhalese leadership and creating conditions that make the North-East ungovernable from Colombo. If they persist in this attitude, it will alienate even the most moderate elements within the Tamil community from the Sri Lankan mainstream. The consequences of playing politics with the national issue should be a serious matter of concern to all parties claiming to be committed to keep the country and the people united through the political system that recognizes "equal legitimacy" and assures peaceful co-existence of all the communities and their economic and social advancement.

ence of all the communities and their economic and social advancement.

The choice for all Sri Lankans is straightforward, namely, whether they want to remain in a permanent state of conflict, the economic consequences of which many leaders seem to have not fully grasped, or prosper in a state of peace and tranquillity which requires some sacrifices and compromises with regard to the entrenched positions of the two sides. Peace does not fall from heaven, a price has to be paid to have it. The price when weighed conscientiously against all the losses that would inevitably result from continued unrest, chaos (fertile ground for corruption to flourish), instability and lack of economic progress is relatively small. Low investment, excessive debt service burden arising from financing unproductive security-related expenditures through public borrowings, rising unemployment and cost of living and falling standard of living will reinforce this vicious circle that will be extremely difficult to break in the future. Under such economic conditions, social upheaval in the South too will become inevitable. In fact, the process of tearing apart the entire social fabric and the catastrophe facing the country does not seem even to worry some Lankan leaders who are content to play party political games for momentary benefit for themselves. ●

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ON THE EDGE IN VAVUNIYA

By Lakshman Gunasekara

"We want peace," insists a local Tamil political party activist. "We want arms," declares an ordinary Tamil citizen in a moment of drunkenness (early in the morning, at that). These conflicting views don't seem out of place in a provincial town on the edge of a vicious war zone, in a community scarred by decades of tensions, violence and suffering. Vavuniya today seems much like many other provincial towns: people go about their normal lives on busy streets and bazaars flourish. Except for the occasional military vehicle, there is little indication of the war - in the town, that is.

But with their homes just a few kilometres from the frontline, and memories of past terrors, the people live on edge..

The rhythmic, staccato clang of the cook's choppers sounds the same whether in Batticaloa, the original home of kotthu roti, in urbane Colombo, or, in border town Vavuniya, I reflect as I sip my hot plain tea in the Kadey on a side street in Rambaikulam. Even at 10pm there is some street life in this residential part of Vavuniya just ten kilometres from the frontline.

The blare of Tamil pop competes with the kotthu choppers and the buzz of conversation inside the late night cafe - conversation which halted only briefly for the customers to stare at my sudden appearance and order for tea in simplified English.

The three-part cacophony seems symbolic of the delicate balance of tensions in this oft-battered township on the edge of the northern war zone: there is the socio-culturally predominant Tamil community on the one hand, uneasy about the current calm but putting on a brave face of normalcy; there is the Army in all its might, the arbiter of everything in this military-controlled border sector; and there are the numerically small Muslim and Sinhala communities - the latter, politically powerful because of the presence of the Army.

The range of needs and interests, many of them urgent and desperate, imposes a complex gridlock on life here. On the single night I spend here I am already able to reflect on the many voices I have heard in my day's interviews and on the issues raised by different people.

District Secretary (Government Agent) Kandiah Ganesh is a senior SLAS officer whose self-confidence and authority is essential for the delicate balancing act he must play as chief administrator of a district divided and ruled by two political authorities: the Government and, north of the military frontline, the LTTE. Some 79,000 people live in the 'cleared' part of

Vavuniya district while 44,000 live in the more remote, thinly populated countryside of the 'uncleared' areas controlled by the LTTE.

The soft-spoken Mr Ganesh, 53, who hails from Jaffna and completed his high school in Pt Pedro before joining the Sri Lanka Administrative Service, determinedly fulfils his duty by his district population with regular monthly visits to the uncleared areas in the company of the international relief agencies operating in the war zone.

"I don't directly relate to the LTTE - that is, to their political wing which is responsible for civilian control in those areas. I deal with my local officials, the AGA's and Grama Niladhari. But I am aware that the various social groups and organisations these officers relate with are controlled by the LTTE", he says and observes that "we have to cater to the social and economic needs of the population in the uncleared areas if the Government is to fulfil its responsibilities to these people".

Needs

Various social services and infrastructural support provided under government programmes, while several local and foreign non-governmental organisations such as the Tiger-controlled Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation (TRO) and Save the Children Fund, UNHCR and Medicin Sans Frontiers also provide services or channel funding and materials to communities in the uncleared areas.

In addition to the needs of the people of uncleared areas in the Vavuniya district, all materials for and communications with the people in the other two districts of the Vanni region, Kilinochchi and Mullaithivu, pass through Vavuniya, giving this township an importance it never had before the war. Because of the war conditions, the main activities are the provision of basic needs - food, medical care, housing materials, agricultural inputs. Emergency supplies for some 100,000 people from the Jaffna peninsula and others internally displaced in the Vanni region, now residing mainly in Killinochchi, Mullaithivu and Mankulam, are the priority.

Mr Ganesh acknowledges that, due to the war, little infrastructure development can take place in uncleared areas of the Vanni, but urges that "at least the main Kandy-Jaffna trunk road should be maintained, and also the Puliyanakulam-Mullaithivu road - for the food convoys".

The war is taking its toll on the basic economy of the Vanni region. The failure to maintain irrigation systems has seen the

gradual decline of agriculture in the uncleared areas. Minor tanks and tube wells have not been repaired since 1990. The drought in the last Maha cultivation season means that the livelihood of the Vanni peasantry is under severe threat. "Earlier, these areas produced food for the rest of the country. Now, we have to supply them with food rations", Mr Ganesh points out.

The position of Vavuniya as a key border town on the edge of the war zone means that the District Secretary must liaise with the military and, his responsibilities also include the maintenance of the delicate balance in ethnic community relations and the problems of people arising from the fighting.

One problem is the slow movement of people coming south through the checkpoint at Thandikulam on the Jaffna road about four kilometres north of Vavuniya town. People wishing to travel from the uncleared areas into the cleared must undergo a security procedure. For security reasons all young people in the age range of 15 to 30 years are separated and are kept in a special transit camp nearby for more intensive screening.

Bottleneck

"Thandikulam has become a bottleneck", Mr Ganesh says, because the number of young people allowed in for screening and entry to the South is restricted to just 25 persons per day. He suggests that if the Army's screening staff at Thandikulam transit camp is increased, they would be able to process more people per day.

At present several hundred people come from LTTE controlled Omanthai town each day to Nochchimodai, the final point of military control along the Jaffna road some four kilometres north of Thandikulam, in the hope of gaining entry to the South but only 25 are allowed in. Because of the slow process of screening, many youth have to stay two to three days in the transit camp where they are provided with food and accommodation by the Government.

The youth wanting to travel South are mainly students intending to sit examinations, teachers taking up postings, youth going to take up employment in the South or overseas, people seeking medical treatment, or young women travelling South to be married.

Mr Ganesh is full of praise for the military. "Today there is absolute discipline in the forces in their relations with the civilians. The Co-ordinating Officer is very helpful".

But the horrors of the past are remembered by Vavuniya's citizenry. As attorney Xavier Somabala (retired R A F) reminds me, many Vavuniya families have lost members in atrocities committed either by fascist mobs or by security forces personnel during the silent years under the UNP regime. People's property too has been damaged.

Squadron Leader Somabala (as he still describes himself) is President of the Citi-

zens' Committee, an ad hoc body of concerned citizens formed in 1983 to respond to attacks on civilians. He agrees that the security forces today are well behaved but is unhappy about the arbitrary way the authorities attempt to implement certain security measures such as the clearing of, or take-over of, land for security purposes. Meanwhile, the continuing war means that people live with the worry that this good discipline could crack at any time under the provocation of a Tiger onslaught.

Ironically, for Mr Somabala and other civilian leaders (and even Government officials), the current pressure on civilian life appears to be coming from the former Tamil militant groups now hostile to the LTTE. "They are extorting money. They can kill anybody and get away with it", he declares, while admitting that his own life is on the line when he protests against this type of behaviour.

Mr Somabala, a native of Vavuniya, blames all the former Tamil separatist militant groups currently operating in the town: the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) and the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO). He is especially critical of the PLOTE, who, he says, has several Members of Parliament elected from the area but are also responsible for the pressures on the people.

He claims that living costs are higher than they should be in Vavuniya because of a 'tax' imposed on all traders by these ex-militant groups. "Coconuts, which should cost Rs 10 per nut are sold at Rs 15 because of a Rs 5 levy per nut", he says.

People resisting the dictact of the ex-militant groups faced possible beatings, or even assassination, he says. "There is even a secret camp to which people are abducted and tortured", he alleges. "These ex-militants are worse than the LTTE. The people are frightened of them because the authorities do not act on any complaints against them. They seem to be protected because of their political support for the Government".

So what does the most powerful man in Vavuniya have to say about this?

"There are some complaints and we are looking into them. But it is difficult to find strong evidence of any illegal activity", says Brigadier Nanda Mallawaarachchi, Brigade Commander, Vavuniya and Coordinating Officer.

The ex-militant groups do perform a very vital service in helping prevent LTTE undercover infiltration across the frontlines, points out this urbane and amiable officer sitting in his air-conditioned office in the heart of the massive, well defended base which is the military headquarters for the region. "Since these groups are the ones which directly relate with the people in their political activity, we do hope that the people don't have to complain about them", he observes.

The Brigadier needs to be amiable. Not just the military commander, he is the 'Co-

ordinating Officer' appointed directly by the Government in Colombo to oversee both civilian and military activity. His job is complicated and immense in scope. In addition to running his own military command, he has to relate with the civilian authorities, community organisations and political parties of all hues and oversee the entire gamut of civilian life.

Bunkerline

"In addition to maintaining our line of control along the forward defended localities (FDL) I also have to control the movement of population and resources inside this sensitive frontline area and also through Vavuniya to and from the uncleared area", points out the 44-year old veteran of many a military campaign. His eyes gleam with enthusiasm as he describes the overall military situation and the counter-insurgency and security measures being implemented under his command.

The entire Vavuniya sector and the region south of it is now protected by a 64-kilometre continuous frontline permanently manned by his troops. The 'bunker line' as it is popularly called, comprises a continuous line of trenches, breastworks, bunkers, observation points, and command posts stretching through jungle and abandoned fields from Kudakachchikudiya to the east of Vavuniya, to Kurukkalpudukulam, across the Jaffna road at Nochchimodai, to Cheddikulam and currently ending at ancient Tantrimalai to the south and west of Vavuniya.

The Brigadier claims that Vavuniya town and its surroundings are now 'absolutely clear' of the LTTE, although undercover informants may be in place.

Hundreds of civilians move through Vavuniya daily travelling north or south of the frontline while up to 50 lorries must be checked daily as they pass through Thandikulam. "Every item has to be authorised by the Ministry of Defence and our job is to check on their authorisation and to check the contents of every package and every vehicle", he explains. "Of course, we allow individual civilians to take certain items for personal use. Otherwise, there is a strict control of the entry of the militarily sensitive, 'banned' items to the uncleared area".

The bunkerline is at present quiet. But 'quiet' in a war zone is a relative thing. "Every day there are small incidents and confrontations. Just yesterday, the LTTE tried to infiltrate the bunkerline and two cadres were shot dead".

Brigadier Mallawaarachchi, a native of Anuradhapura, keeps abreast of civilian life in the areas of the Vanni north of his area of command. "There are 110 NGO's working in Vavuniya and in the uncleared areas. They work with the GA's (District Secretaries) of the various districts. The civilian administrators work under tremendous pressure".

What about the 'bottleneck' at Thandikulam mentioned by the GA?

The Brigadier is firm: "We have ad-

equate staff for the screening procedure. At present this procedure requires the limiting of the intake through Thandikulam to 25 youth per a day. In addition we handle up to 1,000 other civilian travellers daily. We have to do a very serious, rigorous screening. That is how we can ensure that the South is relatively free of terrorist attacks", he points out.

And we must do all this with the staff we have. Ideally we should have computers, faxlines, more direct telephone lines, and other modern facilities to do this careful processing. But all we have are a few manual typewriters! But the Army knows to manage with what it has and we are doing our job!"

Strategy

Is he overwhelmed by the wide scope of his powers, the extent of his responsibilities which has some political dimensions as well?

"I count 26 years in the Army and that is enough training to handle anything!" declares this father of two who wishes he can spend more time in Colombo with his family.

"Nowhere else in the country do you get such an intensive management of the movement of people and resources", he observes.

Using a detailed map of the sector, the Brigadier explains that the security system involving the static bunkerline is based on a counter-insurgency strategy of 'security and development' first tried out in Malaysia during the post-World War 2 communist insurgency there. Originally implemented by a previous sector commander, Brigadier Kalupahana, this strategy aims at providing economic and social development incentives to attract people living in the uncleared areas across the frontline and into the cleared area.

But have people actually made the move from LTTE-controlled areas?

The Brigadier is unable to say how many have actually come across, but claims that up to 5,000 refugees now in the Madhu and Pellampiddy refugee camps want to. It is the LTTE which is blocking their movement, he says.

Brigadier Mallawaarachchi wants more political parties to establish themselves in Vavuniya so that the people there would have a better choice of political leaders. Civilian political leaders relating directly with the people will help improve the stability of the entire community, he argues.

The checkpoint at Thandikulam is deserted when I visit it in the afternoon. All north-south movement has been temporarily stopped in the aftermath of the battle in Mullaithivu. (Note: My visit to Vavuniya was just before the Sath Jaya offensive. Following the offensive, some 2,000 people who had fled Kilinochchi have come across so far. District Secretary Ganesh told me on the telephone last week.)

The special transit camp for youth is full, however, from previous intakes of travellers from the north. Young men are playing cricket in the afternoon sun when I

visit. Others are lounging on the mats provided for sleeping in the open halls of accommodation. I talk to some of the camp inmates.

They say they are adequately fed and are not unhappy with the facilities. It is heard to expect them to say much when their army supervisors are listening and they obviously don't want to jeopardise their chances of access to the South. Some of them said they had been there for a whole week. One of the camp supervisors explains that young people end up staying a long time in the transit camp when whoever is sponsoring them in the South is late in coming to Vavuniya to collect them.

Another transit camp, in Veppankulam, where other travellers, including whole families, are being held for processing, is more crowded. The accommodation there is a complex of large, empty warehouses. Again people say they are adequately fed, but also claim that there are diseases spreading among the inmates due to the poor hygiene.

The military officer accompanying us in the visit asks to be shown any sick persons but no-one is forthcoming.

While the travellers from the north may undergo some difficulties, residents of the district are at present relatively comfortable considering that they are living on the edge of a war zone, says attorney D Sittampalam, a one time local politician of the Tamil United Liberation Front. "Nowhere else in the North-East are living conditions as good as they are in Vavuniya, he says.

Mr Sittampalam, a brother of TULF President M Sivasithamparam, is a long time resident of the town and agrees that the security conditions of the people are good. While there are occasional unreasonable detentions, there are no excesses committed by security forces personnel as in the past.

While the people of Vavuniya were originally quite impressed with the Government's devolution package, the subsequent delays in the consultation process and the seeming dilution of its provisions has disillusioned them, he says. He warns that any dilution of the devolution provisions would drive the Tamil people back into the arms of the LTTE.

"Today the people do not want war. But they have no desire to support any solution that does not provide for what they have been fighting and suffering for all these years".

The Vavuniya rest house does not have many travellers staying over, but its bar is busy from morning until night. Even as I breakfast the next day, tipplers are downing their first shot of the day.

Mr S M G Nathan, one of the vice presidents of the TULF, who comes for a chat on the rest house verandah immediately after breakfast, is adamant that the Tamil people no longer want war. He feels the LTTE attack on Mullaithivu is a desperate move to regain some statute after the movement lost face with its abandonment of

Jaffna. But even the assault on Mullaithivu is not likely to convince the bulk of the Tamils that war is yet an option.

"We want peace." Mr Nathan stresses as I note down his observations.

"We want arms! You write that!" A haggard, drunken man, interrupts our conversation. He nudges my companion, British journalist, Tara Vallente and, barely standing erect, yells again "We want arms!" and staggers away mumbling angrily.

Mr Nathan is embarrassed about this obvious direct contradiction about what he says is the opinion of the Tamil. He angrily dismisses the drunkard, but agrees with me that many Tamils probably do harbour an appreciation (even if unexpressed) of the role armed struggle has played in compelling moves toward a devolution of power.

A Sinhala farmer in a remote "border village" we visit a little later is as emphatic about the need for armed protection - in his case, against violent incursions by the LTTE. Farmer U B Kulasuriya is native of Vavuniya but today finds his village of Kudakachchikodiya is on the edge of a war zone with marauding ethnic rebels prone to slaughtering innocent villagers. He and his family (wife, daughter and son) narrowly escaped a massacre four years ago.

We heard that the Tigers were advancing out of the jungle so we all ran back into the forest behind the village. They burnt down our house," he recalls.

Today the bunkerline has been extended and they live just inside it. But military protection had meant the loss of livelihood. The minor tank which supplied water to their farmland is outside the bunkerline and now their fields are fallow. Mr Kulasuriya makes his living as a home guard while his daughter of 4 years attends a school just 75 metres inside the FDL.

Senior Superintendent of Police, Vavuniya, Gamini de Silva, is a realist: "Providing security for all the villages is a tough job and, in a war, there will be casualties. But the job must be done and will be done to the best of our ability."

SSP de Silva is proud of his police contingent which shares in the manning of the FDL along with the Army. "My men are trained and committed. They have long hours of dangerous duty. Sometimes I wonder how we survive the strain. But rarely does anyone grumble. I have some exceptional junior officers who supervise the police units in the FDL's"

How do the Tamil ex-militants view the war from this side of the frontline?

Military Chief

My last interview, before I depart for Colombo, is with the military chief of the PLOTE, who is based in Vavuniya. I go to their office in town and wait until the staff there radio their commander that I have arrived. Obviously Military Commander Nagalingam Manikkadasan does not hang around in the poorly defended PLOTE office.

He arrives in a cloud of dust in his jeep with an escort of 'boys' toting T56 assault

rifles.

The PLOTE officers I am chatting with all speak in Sinhala so I politely ask Commander Manikkadasan, should we do the interview in Sinhala or English? He immediately puts me to shame by asking: why not in Tamil? I sheepishly confess that I did begin learning Tamil once but never completed the course.

He lets me squirm a little more and then proceeds to conduct the interview in a combination of relatively good Sinhala and English.

Mr Manikkadasan, 38, who is also Deputy Leader of PLOTE, is a native of Jaffna, but his mother is a Sinhalese from Moratuwa. His father dies in Jaffna during an aerial bombing raid.

Today he is proud of the security role played by his fighters in ensuring that Vavuniya is free of LTTE infiltration. He is also conscious of the need for inter-ethnic amity in the Vavuniya district which has a patchwork of Tamil, Sinhala and Muslim settlements.

The PLOTE deputy leader is also generally satisfied with the treatment of civilians by the security forces, although he says that there is some harassment of villagers in the countryside.

What about the complaints by civilians of harassment by ex-militant groups, including PLOTE? Extortion?

Certainly not, says Mr Manikkadasan. Perhaps some other groups are doing it, he hints. Perhaps some secret Tiger infiltrators are demanding money from civilians. PLOTE has only occasionally asked business people for voluntary contributions for specific functions such as a literary festival held recently, he explains.

Mr Manikkadasan says that Tamil villagers living in the uncleared areas might be willing to come over the frontline if they are convinced about adequate facilities for farming.

For this purpose the Government should make an effort to develop irrigation systems in the district. He complained that irrigation water channelled north from the Mahaveli scheme during the last government had stopped at Anuradhapura, although its supply had originally been promised as far as Vavuniya.

He said the Tamil people were keen to have a political settlement of the ethnic conflict but the Government and the Sinhala political leadership in general were dragging their feet over the devolution proposals. He claimed that the ordinary Sinhala people were just as tired of the war as were the Tamil people.

The PLOTE, he said, was getting tired of the Government's prevarication. "We have now abstained from supporting the Government in Parliament. This is the first step," he declared, broadly hinting of a threat of full withdrawal of support for the fragile PA coalition. With this threat hanging in the air, the Military Commander set off again in a cloud of dust. I hit the road too, getting away from the edge." ●

(Courtesy of "The Sunday Observer")

It's going to be a hot day' Devika pulls the curtains apart to see the weather outside and mumbles to herself while getting ready to go to work. The clear blue sky is decorated with wandering soft white clouds moving in slow motion. The street is nearly empty as it is only about seven in the morning, but would be noisy and crowded in no time. The man next door is playing reggae music, loud as usual. Devika puts the audio tape on and goes to the bathroom. Within a few seconds, devotional songs fill the house with calm rhythmic tones.

She gets ready and goes down to make some tea. Her children are asleep in their rooms, next to hers. They were playing games with their friends until late last night and they are going to wake up late. Their cat, Josie is wandering around the room and licking her feet as is usual in the morning. The black cat is very beautiful and moves as elegantly as a well bred young lady. The cat mews at Devika.

Cat wants her food, but the boys won't be awake until late: "Okay Josie, come down, I'll feed you". Devika strokes the velvety body of the cat. She turns the radio on in the kitchen to listen to the seven o'clock news. Devika always listened to the world service in the morning before she went to work.

Another news bulletin about Sri Lanka; the Mullaithivu attack. The news reader is going on about the number of deaths in the attack. Devika stops opening the tin of cat food to absorb the news of the attack. "Nearly a thousand young men had been killed according to various sources and the Sri Lankan government is looking for terrorists and are fighting back with naval, air and the armed forces."

The news goes from Sri Lanka to Rwanda, Burundi and so on, to give details of the third world mania for killing games. For the radio broadcaster these bulletins are just more incidents. For Devika? Her imaginings of the scenario are too much to contemplate. What a tragedy! Losing her appetite, now she couldn't be bothered with a cup of tea. She turns the Radio off and gets ready to go to work. There is a knock at the door and the post man drops the letters.

Bills, bills and more bills, a never-ending flow of bills; the water, electricity, gas and the telephone. Sometimes they all come at once, like a heavy 'flu with head and body aches. With those bills there are two blue airmails. Suddenly Devika feels numb in her heart. She dreads airmails as they usually bring

A SHORT STORY

bad news. That was all that had happened for the last fifteen years in Sri Lanka.

She puts the letters in her work bag and goes upstairs. The devotional song is still going on, she turns to the statues of Gods and Goddesses and asks: "Why, why this madness of killing in Sri Lanka?"

Could she wait for an answer? Men have taken the place of Gods in Sri Lanka and are playing 'war' games with

'MOTHERS OF SRI LANKA'

by Rajes Balasubramaniam

innocent people.

Devika goes to her little son Ravi's room and says "Bye darling ... see you later" although he is fast asleep. He is eleven years old but for he is her 'baby'. She kisses him gently and watches his angelic face for a while, and mutters, "how many children like this one have died in Sri Lanka today, how many mothers have lost their loved ones, when is it going to stop and who is going to stop it? is in there anyone who would dare to challenge the government? Where has all the spirituality gone?"

She shuts her son's bedroom door and hurries to the street. Josie the cat follows her up to the corner of the road.

There is an uproar in the next street, she can hear. The noise is increasing every second as some children are screaming as loud as possible to protect an old Oak tree which the council is going to cut down as they think the tree is a danger to the shop (which sell cosmetic product which often tested on animals). The infant- army screech and scream in their little voices, their small spokesperson saying that the destruction of that tree will damage the way of life of many birds who use the tree to perch, and there are two varieties of squirrels living in that tree which are most beautiful to look at. There are a few children dressed in 'bunny' outfits to symbolise the rabbits who are some of the occupants of the bushes that surround the tree. Some five- year olds are holding a banner saying 'save our tree and the animals in it'.

There are local reporters as well as one of the TV reporters to cover the issue. This old Oak tree is in national focus for the last few days as the protest is being broadcasted on national TV portraying the campaign to save the tree as a

'people's issue and affecting the local community'. The animal rights campaigners who are against testing on animals are there too with their placards with sentimental slogans to save the animals throughout the world, and protesting against any cruelty to animals. There were the ecologists as well, going on about the destruction of nature's greenfields and rain forests by greedy men in the world. "Look at what we have got now; our cities and towns are polluted with dirty air, look our streets- they are scattered with cars and lorries, this is all based in man's greed, they exploit everything and everybody."

"What a world - cats, birds, squirrels, rabbits and an old Oak tree have the right to exist in the world but there is no right for ordinary

people in Sri Lanka to live in peace because they belong to the wrong ethnic group", Devika mutters to herself sadly.

The girl from the corner house is just coming out to the street. An Indian young beauty in her twenties with a seductive smile, slim figure, a simple blue outfit which complements her golden skin colour and flowing long black hair. She walks in the style of a well trained fashion model who knows how to make other people turn and admire her elegance and charm. Devika had said 'hello' now and then to that young lady; other than that she has nothing much to say as they both always seem to be in a hurry.

Every time Devika looks at the young lady, she thinks of her nieces back home. Her cousin's daughter Savitri was almost like another girl who is just passing by. One of the most beautiful girls in that village. Devika closes her eyes as she refuses to let the thoughts about Savitri to come to her any further as those memories are too painful.

A mother with two small children from the white house near the main road is behind her. Devika says good morning to the mother as usual - they meet every morning at the same spot. There has been nothing except 'good morning' up until now.

"It's going to be a hot day" the woman said, looking up into the blue sky.

"Mmm" Devika.

The mother of two may have been from Ireland as her English accent was not same as Devika's English friends.

"You are Sri Lankan, aren't you?", she is asking, keeping her stare on Devika.

"Yesbut how do you know?" Devika is surprised.

"Well ... my husband was listening to

the early morning news and he mentioned you came from Sri Lanka."

Devika still couldn't work out how he had known.

"Oh, you're wondering how he knew, aren't you. Mrs Patel from the corner shop told him you're from Sri Lanka, when Sri Lanka won the Cricket World Cup."

Devika smiles politely, partly about the world cup, and partly because she was about to be asked about the early morning news. "Oh yes, some of my country men are good at the cricket field, and some are good at the killing field too." She wanted to honestly say to the woman.

"The radio said that thousands of people are dying in your country; do you still have family there?" They have reached the bus stop now.

Davika can't answer. As the bus comes to a halt, she gets on. She waves to the mother, who waits for another bus. The bus is very crowded, people awaiting their turn to get in, some muttering about the lateness of the bus, others patiently followed others.

Her mind is still with the question from the mother of two. 'How many are being killed?'

"It's a bloody murder." A fat man with a huge stomach trying to move into the back of the bus yells at the driver. Devika places herself between a young lady who is plastered with heavy make-up, heavily soaked in a nauseating perfume and a thin lady who is coughing intermittently with a slight wheezing.

Davika's bus journey usually takes about twenty minutes and she will read something to pass the time. She fishes through her handbag and instead of finding the air mail letters she sees a note, which is about a Tamil woman who needs Devika's help.

A Social Worker phoned Devika yesterday and asked her to meet with her today to do a translation for a Tamil woman refugee who is in England and has to see a psychiatrist. The refugee woman came to London four months ago, lives alone and had a baby about two months ago and is having post-natal depression. She cannot communicate well as her English is not good. The Social Service is considering isolating the child from her as the mother is not in an appropriate medical condition to care for the child.

A Tamil refugee! That's the identity for about 500,000 Sri Lankan Tamils abroad; no name, no status, no qualification, no address is needed except the word 'refugee'!

Devika puts the note back into her handbag as the bus stops at the tube station. She runs down to the platform as she doesn't want to miss the train.

Within a few minutes the trains will be packed with people like sardines in the tin.

She takes the airmail letters out as soon as she finds a place to sit down. Both letters are from Colombo, one from her sister another from her friend. Her friend Geeta's letter which Devika has opened first:

"Dear Devika, please help me, I have no one here to turn to, my son was arrested by the police a few days ago, as they thought he was one of the Tamil terrorists. As you know my family never had anything to do with politics, yet, as you know, in Colombo your don't have to do anything; if you are a Tamil that is enough for you to get arrested. They took him a few days ago; with great difficulty I located his whereabouts and now know where is being kept. Now of course they are expecting me to pay lot of money for his release. You know Murugiah the lawyer from our village. He is now practising in Colombo. I contacted him; he wants his fees as well as Rs.20,000 to be paid as a bribe to the Inspector for release of innocent son. Everything in Sri Lanka is big business. The police will ask for money at the police station, the army takes money at the checkpoints, the lawyer will ask money to act as go-between; the politicians will earn money from any means whether that is from an arms deal or from foreign aid to feed the hungry. Renting a house is a nightmare for a Tamil in Colombo, existing is a day to day struggle here, please help me".

Devika's eyes are filled with tears. Geeta's life is being destroyed by the awful political situation in Sri Lanka for the last fifteen years. Geeta was living back in Eastern province very happily before the trouble started in Sri Lanka, with her teacher husband and her three boys and two girls. When the Sri Lankan security forces systematically arrested and tortured the Tamil youths in the Tamil areas, Geeta lost her elder son. A brilliant student from a Christian college, arrested, tortured and his mutilated body found in a field days after his arrest.

Then the army came to look for 'Tamil terrorists'. When they couldn't find men.....?

Devika can still hear the screams of Tamil women who were the victims of this brutal communal violence. 'Oh poor Geeta', Devika says to herself silently.

The other letter is from Devika's sister, which described the most recent 'round up' by the army; how many people have died or disappeared as a result, and how many have either been recruited by or joined the Tamil militants to fight the government in their village.

"Dear sister, the life here at home is like a living hell - there is no future for the poor in Sri Lanka, you can run away

abroad only if you have money or if you have some one abroad to help you, otherwise the young ones have no jobs to be occupy them, the government recruits Sinhala boys to go to the battlefield to be massacred; poor Tamil boys have no future, therefore they are letting them into the war as a way of 'living'! Some of them are the same age as your little son, what else can they do? Stay home and be arrested or killed by the army? The recent sad thing was that our niece Premalatha has gone with the Tamil militant after her father and a brother was taken away by the army; as you know there is very little chance that they are alive. I wonder in our country if there is anyone left to fight for peace, freedom, justice and humanity at all".

"I am going to go early today" Devika tells her colleague Caroline Simpson. Caroline used to work for one of the international organisations and she was in Afghanistan helping women and children. She got injured by a Russian missile and nearly lost her life. Now she is working for this women's organisation and has some knowledge of the Sri Lankan situation. Caroline looks at Devika who is busy organising the names of women who go for advice. Their work involves helping women with varying problems, from domestic violence to pregnancy testing.

"Are you OK?" asks Caroline. Devika is nearly in tears thinking about what is happening in Sri Lanka.

"How can I be OK, Caroline? Will you be happy when you hear that your countrymen are killing each other in their thousands?"

Samantha Johnson - the receptionist - walks in and says, "It's a shame, a damn bloody shame!"

Caroline and Devika look at each other with a question in their eyes.

"It is a shame that your people are killing like this in your country... you see I booked a holiday to go to Sri Lanka, and now I can't go; why can't your people behave themselves properly like other human beings?"

How simple a question for Samantha - but giving an answer doesn't seem to be easy.

The telephone is ringing.

One of Devika's son is on the phone and she can hear her little fellow Ravi wailing away very loudly in the background.

"What is the matter?", Devika is panicking as she hears her son crying. She always worries about them when they are at home alone during the holiday, although son Segar is about fourteen and very sensible.

"Mother the cat has been hit by a car, I think we ought to take him to the Vet....

can I take some money from the kitty?"

"Of course darling, you take some money but make sure Ravi is OK, and calm him down a bit, otherwise he will be crying all the way to the Vet."

"Yes mother."

She puts the phone down. The children love their cat and the little fellow wouldn't even eat if the cat is not at home as he is very fond of that animal.

"Some of the Tamil fighters are the same age as your little son", the words from her sister's letter echo in Devika's head!

The poor children of Sri Lanka have been denied their right to be children, the poor Tamil boys are in the battlefield, some poor Sinhalese boys are at the beaches to sell sex to the foreign paedophile who has no hesitation or moral restraint against exploiting innocent lives for their perverted sexual desires!

The country is bleeding to death and politicians and religious leaders pontificate about the "greatness" of their history, nation, language and religion! What hypocrisy? Don't they have conscience?

These questions often come to Devika's mind but no one will give her an answer.

"Are you OK"? Caroline asks Devika again when they are alone. Devika tells her she has to go and help a Tamil refugee in north London.

Devika would rather not to talk about the news. Caroline often asks Devika about Sri Lanka and the political situation. Some of Caroline questions are too complicated to answer, such as "why are these troops killing the Tamils in a frenzied way", or sometimes she will read of the attack by the Tamil militants on the Sinhala villagers and wail "why the Tamil militants are killing the innocent women and children?"

Caroline may not understand when Devika explains that Sinhala dominated governments regardless of their party political point of view want to continue the war to stay in power and do not allow the Tamils to live with equal rights in Sri Lanka. The governments that have ruled the country are mainly responsible for all this violence, not just the militants.

When Devika reaches the Tamil woman refugee's place, the Social worker is awaiting her at the estate. A massive concrete jungle with over a thousand families from all over the world. Unemployed, refugees, drug users, criminals, people with mental disorders all put in one complex of several blocks! A hell of a life to experience.

The estate looks very untidy and littered with all kind of rubbish, like a slum in Colombo. Children are playing loud

and rough, young men are standing and staring at passers by. A group of young women with provocative outfit are flirting with one and the other.

The weather is hot, the heat practically burning the skin, the humidity makes the atmosphere stuffy. Devika fans her face with a paper.

The social worker gives more notes to Devika, the details of that young mother. Her name is Luxmy Sundaram.

Luxmy left Sri Lanka with her husband and child in the hope that family will reach UK and stopped in some country in Africa on the way. The "agent" sent her and child first to England and the husband had to stay back as directed by the agent who has the final say in these matters. Luxmy has no relatives in London. The social worker has been trying to find someone who could speak Tamil in the block but she couldn't find any one yet. That's why Devika is here.

They walked to the stairs which are scattered with rubbish including dirty needles and used condoms, smelly faeces and urine. Devika feels nauseated.

"What is the matter with the lift?"

"Oh, those things never work properly in a Council estate, do they," the social worker replied.

When they reach the fourth floor Devika feels giddy as well as nauseous as she hasn't had anything to eat all day. They knock on the door a few times and it is opened reluctantly. There is a thin young woman with sunken eyes, dull expression, uncombed hair, with a baby in her arm.

"Hello Luxmy, I have brought someone who can help you."

Luxmy looks at Devika.

Devika asks, 'How are you,' in Tamil, within a second that Tamil refugee mother has burst into tears and is weeping uncontrollably.

Devika puts her arm around the mother.

"Please don't let them take my child away from me..." she sobs.

"No, I won't let them if I can help the situation get better". Devika takes the little baby from the mother. The baby is well covered with a soft blanket.

"Can I remove the blanket...it's very hot...the baby is sweating heavily," says Devika to the mother. The social worker exchanges a glance with Devika that tells: 'you see, this mother has no idea how to cope with a baby.'

"I don't want my baby to catch cold, my husband wouldn't like me if I don't care for the baby properly." Luxmy says nervously.

"Not to worry, the baby won't catch cold in this weather."

Devika says gently while making the baby comfortable.

"I lost everyone in one shell blast in Jaffna, now my husband is in Africa, I'm here, they are going to take my baby away." Luxmy's body is trembling with pain when she cries.

Devika spends two or three hours with Luxmy, as she has to go with her to the psychiatrist and bring her back to the flat.

"We must find some one who can speak Tamil in this block", Devika persists, as she thinks Luxmy needs constant support as well as good observation.

"There is a Muslim family upstairs, I don't know whether they are from Sri Lanka", the social worker says, and they go to the tenth floor to look for the family and by this time Devika has nearly fainted with tiredness and hunger as well as worry about her children at home.

The Muslim family is from Sri Lanka, 'I hope they are not from the north' prays Devika, as a few years ago the minority Muslims from the north were driven out as they were alleged to be a "security risk" for the Tamil struggle! Since then if Devika meets any Muslim in London, they have not been hesitant to express their anger at what was done to them. Who wouldn't be angry? If people lived in an area for generations and was forced to leave because of their ethnic origin any normal person will feel humiliated and discriminated against.

Mrs Karim is a kind lady from Kandy - the midland of Sri Lanka and she lives with her two sons and a daughter in London. The children are students at the nearby college. Mrs Karim lost her husband in a car accident and she couldn't afford to pay the mortgage and so she moved to a Council house recently. She told them, "At least we are safe in this country, whether there is financial hardship or not, I feel really sorry for people, particularly the mothers, who are losing their loved ones."

She gives them home made 'vadai and sambol'. Devika observes Mrs Karim's gentle manners and Devika can tell that she is a woman with a genuine sympathy for others. Mrs Karim sits in front of her visitors to listen to what they have to say.

Devika explains to her about Luxmy on the fourth floor and asks her whether she could help the young mother. "Of course my dear, after all we all are Sri Lankans. We should help each other, I'll definitely go down and do whatever I can, and I'll tell you something else, my seventeen year old daughter is fond of children, she would be more than happy to help Luxmy." Mrs Karim says happily.

"You Sri Lankan people are very kind...you came all the way to north London to help and this Muslim lady is going to help the mother. I think your

people are very kind", smiles the social worker when they are coming to the bus stop. Devika does not say much.

Sri Lanka, shaped like a teardrop, in the Indian ocean, is possessed with the most splendid natural beauty on earth. But today the beautiful landscape is decorated with the decaying bodies of the next generation, demolished modern buildings and ancient temples, the rivers carry headless corpses, swaying from the lamp posts are so called 'traitors', femininity is facing constant abuse from all sections, mothers with no children, women with no husbands, the land in some places bare and ruined, the price of a piece of bread is going up every day to meet the cost of the war which brings nothing but destruction!

"Are we all kind to each other?, What are we doing to each other and why are we letting these mindless politicians and religious fanatics destroy our young ones; the politicians children will never go the battle front, why do we allow our children to die for them to enjoy the luxury of life? Isn't it enough for us to see other parts of the world which have been destroyed in no time like Bosnia, Rwanda, or Russia who, like us, are trying to be superior to each other because of ones race, colour, religion or language? We breath the same air, drink the same water, walk on the same grass, look at the same blue sky but we behave like savages to please the politicians and religious fanatics!" She would like to ask sixteen million Sri Lankan people if she had the chance.

"How can I help Geeta?" She is thinking, while she is in the tube train on the way back home. She will send money to help Geeta. "Giving money won't solve any problems, but to do campaign work with others who have the same problems as her may create some awareness about the increasingly dangerous situation for Tamils in Colombo". She thinks of her Sinhala friend Thilaka Ratwatte who had lost her brother during the terror unleashed in the late 1980s when the previous Government was in power.

More recently several mass graves have been found in the mainly Sinhala southern area. It has been reported that these graves contained the bodies of Sinhalese youth who "disappeared" during the previous regime. Thilaka's brother was a journalist and did not hesitate to write about the human rights violations in Sri Lanka. One night at about 11 pm policemen in plain clothes came and took him for 'questioning' - then he 'disappeared' from the face of the earth without a trace. Thilaka frantically tried to find about her brother's whereabouts with no success; the police denied any knowledge of seeing or taking away

Thilaka's brother. That was the end of a Sinhalese progressive man who campaigned for human rights in Sri Lanka.

When Devika reaches home the house is in a zombie mood as the cat is still with the Vet with internal injuries due to the car accident.

Little Ravi is in tears and crawling onto the settee, moaning. Segar is philosophical, saying that 'every life has a meaning and it ends one day, Josie cat had a happy life and she gave so much pleasure to all of us in this house.'

Cat gave pleasure to people in the house? Devika wonders.

The cat brought half dead mice and birds to show off her love for boys!

Ravi won't stop weeping.

Devika wants to dial Thilaka to find out how to help Geeta. Devika phones Thilaka while stroking her little son who is weeping. Thilaka is angry with Sri Lankan politicians as usual. "I am sorry Devika about your friend, I hear that there over a thousand soldiers have been killed and the military has gone mad with bombing innocent civilians in the Tamil areas. Who is going to stop this carnage, savagery, barbarism?"

Thilaka's questions are like Devika's but none knows the answer. Thilaka gives her some contacts in Colombo for Devika to get in touch with.

A few days go by and the cat is still with the Vet, under observation after having an intravenous infusion as she has lost so much blood due to the accident. Ravi is coming to terms with the tragic situation, just as any human learns to live in hope for the best. Devika is busy trying to meet with people who can help her to secure the release of Geeta's son. "There are over seven hundred Tamil youths who have been arrested in Colombo," one said. The 'war' in Mullaitivu is still in progress; an offensive in Kilinochchi has begun causing enormous damage to the civilian people of the area. No one has any idea of the scale of the death, destruction and displacement as the government won't let any independent reporters to go the 'war' zone.

A friend of Devika asks her to go to an event which is organised to commemorate the 1983 July riots in Colombo against the Tamils by government sponsored Sinhala racist mobs, when millions of rupees worth of Tamil's property was damaged and many Tamils were burned alive in front horrified foreign tourists in Colombo and thousands of Tamils went through untold sufferings. Even Tamil political prisoners were killed inside high security prisons!

This evening's commemorative event

in London is on a grand scale, portraying the past with graphic posters, reports, discussions and debates. Devika is here alone, not many people say hello to each other; although they are all Sri Lankan Tamils there is no obvious brotherhood (or sisterhood) - unless one belongs to a certain Tamil area in Sri Lanka. The children in the hall are wearing their best dresses, and the women are wearing "Peetamparam or Kanchipuram or Bangalore or Kashmere" silk sarees, which poor Tamils back home can only dream about. Children are collecting money for 'refugee children' in Sri Lanka, women are preparing delicious food for men engaged in the action of self promotion, men with expensive suits and nicely trimmed moustaches (some are dyed to cover the greying) who are on the platform chanting the ancient glory of the Tamils and explaining why we must continue the war. Suddenly Devika feels the surrealism of the picture.

She remembers what Geeta has written. Politics is a business for some people.

The attacks and the carnage, the suffering of mothers like Geeta, to fight for the rights of Tamils, girls like Savitri, who has chosen(?) to be a suicide bomb, her young body blasted along with her 'enemies' (?) and her mother couldn't even bury her 'body' - all these issues have no meaning in this absurd setting. None of the rich women at this event would be a match to Geeta, or Savitri, or Premalatha, or the Tamil refugee in the Council house.

Devika walks out of the meeting with a question in her mind: "Is it our situation that has given to some people the opportunity to organise social events, to get to wear expensive outfits, eat delicious meals and gather and meet their kith and kin, and friends to maintain a heritage that can survive here in London? Do they really want peace and justice in Sri Lanka - of course Devika knows none of these people will ever go back home giving up their comfortable lives in the West. So it is easy for them to talk about the 'war, as if they are watching an Indian commercial film, with very little feeling. She goes home disappointed

On the way home she can hear the celebrational activities around the old Oak tree which is 'saved' by the people who fought for their rights. The tree is decorated with yellow ribbons by children from all over the street; parents are having a party to celebrate their children's victory.

There was a call from Colombo, Segar says. She phones a friend to find out the recent news. Geeta is waiting there, expecting Devika's call. Geeta can't speak,

her voice is cracking, "my son... my son..." she won't complete the sentence. Her friend comes on the line.

"Sorry Devika..... they found Geeta's son's body....."; there are pauses at both ends.

Devika's throat is blocked with a lump of some sort and she has no words to comfort her friend.

"By the way...", her friend continues, "your sister said your niece Premalatha was one of the fighters who died in the 'war' with the Sri Lankan army in Mullaitivu".

Devika puts the phone down. Tears falling like a river on her cheek.

Ravi starts to scream suddenly as he sees Segar was coming with his head down and a sad face from the Vet.

"My cat ... my poor cat" Ravi is crying. Devika cuddles her son tenderly, Segar does not have to say anything in words.

They all sit together, crying: "The poor little Josie is dead isn't it?" Ravi asks Segar.

"The Vet had tried very hard" Segar said.

There is a long pause between all of them, then she tells the children, "your cousin Premalatha is dead too in Sri Lanka". She can't tell them the details of the carnage.

The children look at their mother, trying to remember their cousin whom they met when they were little.

"Do you remember a girl who had a red doll from me?" She asks them.

Premalatha like any other Sri Lankan Tamil or Sinhala young woman could have been a good mother, or a teacher, or a writer or a actress, or a dancer but her life has been destroyed by the political violence in Sri Lanka.

All those young who died this week could have been able and wonderful citizens of our future, but what a waste, what a waste!

They are silent. The children may not remember anything about Sri Lanka, just like the children in the hall who were trying to commemorate the deaths back home. She cries for the children and the mothers of Sri Lanka, her children cry with her without any real understanding of what is going on in Sri Lanka. ●

INDIA'S DISTANT WESTERN NEIGHBOUR

G. Ramesh

In many ways, Afghan civil war offers a more confusing scenario to Indian observers than Sri Lanka during the last two decades. India's whatever little involvement in Afghanistan proved futile. The civil conflict in Afghanistan has more visible and invisible backers; the conflict is more protracted; and the consequences far more unpredictable for the subcontinent.

In late 1979, when Soviet troops went into Afghanistan, Mrs Indira Gandhi, about to be elected as Prime Minister, was stunned. She could not let down her trusted Soviet friends, but did not like the possible chaos the Soviet occupation would lead to. The occupation, she came to realise, was not like the 1969 disaster in Czechoslovakia which India managed to support without guilt. Afghanistan was nearer home and events there could mean a lot of chaos in the northern and western borders of the subcontinent.

For once, Mrs Gandhi's doubts were vindicated. The Soviets vacated Afghanistan in the late 80's, but Afghanistan remained deeply in conflict, with Pakistan and Iran pitching in India's attempt to support Dr Najibullah ended poorly and J N Dixit, the then Indian Ambassador in Kabul, was destined to do a more direct-military intervention in Sri Lanka before going on to retire as the country's Foreign Secretary.

In the meantime, Punjab and Kashmir, in India's western and northern

borders, saw unprecedented violence. Immediately thereafter, the Soviet Union collapsed and some of the Central Asian Republics witnessed civil conflicts. The Kashmir conflict in India intensified, and scores of mujahideens from the militant Islamic world were trying to give a hardcore identity to Kashmir where the mainstream culture had been Islamic Sufism. A similar attempt to forge a militant identity in Punjab, had, however, failed beyond a point. However, India itself now witnesses a dangerous rise of Hindu/National chauvinism, rendering resolution of the Kashmir conflict more intractable than ever.

What should India do, rather not do, in Afghanistan? Answers to this question came from the country's new Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar who met visiting Indian journalists at war-battered Kabul last week. While thanking India for its message of greetings on his assumption as Prime Minister, Hekmatyar made it clear that his Hezb-i-Islami party was justified in complaining about India's support for the Soviet-supported regimes ending with Dr Najibullah during the first phase of the Afghan civil war. India should not repeat its past mistakes of supporting puppet regimes, he asserted.

Hekmatyar did not give any direct answer to a specific question from Indian journalists about his party's covert support so far for pro-Pakistani groups in

Kashmir.

Hekmatyar, who graduated from being a powerful warlord to the official post after years of bloody fighting, forms the political triumvirate in Afghanistan, along with theologian-professor Burhanuddin Rabbani, the President, and military wizard Ahmed Shah Masood, the Defence Minister. Masood was once Hekmatyar's competitor on the anti-Communist US-backed front. Hekmatyar had fought the other two bitterly for years. However, Hekmatyar joined the other two a month ago against the powerful Taliban militia which is seeking to capture Kabul. The Taliban militia is rumoured to be backed by the Pakistani military establishment which once armed Hekmatyar to the teeth following the US decision to fight Soviet-backed regimes at Kabul.

Hekmatyar said the Afghan government was willing for a dialogue with the Taliban provided the latter agreed to avoid attacking Kabul. The Taliban must also accept cease-fire and gradual demilitarisation of important Afghan cities and towns. The indications are that he regards Pakistan as a crucial neighbour while India is, only, a major country in the region. Hence, the willingness to go along with Pakistan to a point of dialogue with Taliban. Also, Afghanistan needs food aid from both Pakistan and Iran in the short run.

Hekmatyar is pressing the United Nations' new peace envoy, Dr Norbert Holl to announce a peace formula without seeking to ascertain the already-known positions of the various Afghan tribal factions. It is not clear to Indian observers whether this would work. A direct war between the Afghan regime and Taliban for Kabul would spell further doom. ●

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CORRUPTION IN HIGH PLACES

T N Gopalan

When Pamulapurti Venkata Narasimha Rao decided to hitch an alliance with the AIADMK led by Ms Jayalalitha Jayaram many eyebrows were raised. "It is suicidal. She is so totally discredited that when she sinks, she'll pull down Rao too along with her," felt many commentators.

But some cynics wondered then, "what is all the fuss about? They are but natural allies, both so horribly corrupt and completely unscrupulous..."

As it has turned out, they both are undergoing remarkably similar experiences in the post-election scenario. Scandalous corruption charges hurled against them are coming to a head, they both are being arraigned in the courts, challenge to their leadership is mounting and both are desperately clinging to their offices. Inevitably both the Indian National Congress and the AIADMK are hurtling downhill fast.

But it looks like it will be the Congress President who will go down in disgrace first. The man hailed as a scholar among rogues is being portrayed as a rogue of the first order, fit to adorn the rogues gallery anywhere in the world.

Named as a co-accused in a hundred thousand dollar cheating case (along with his childhood friend Chandraswamy) and summoned before a magistrate in New Delhi, Rao is waging a desperate rearguard battle to save not only his party presidentship but his very political career itself.

There are enough disgruntled elements in the Congress who would like to see Rao step down, including Karunakaran from Kerala, Sharad Pawar from Maharashtra and Rajesh Pilot from Rajasthan.

Shrewdly exploiting the differences among his detractors within the Congress and by distributing such favours that he still could, he has managed to stave off all the challenges to his leadership thus far.

A London-based Non-Resident Indian (NRI), Lakhubhai Pathak, paid the notorious godman Chandraswamy

US dollars 100,000 way back in 1985 to clinch a contract to supply paper pulp and newsprint to the state-owned State Trading Corporation. But the contract never materialised nor of course was the money returned.

Narasimha Rao who was then External Affairs Minister at the time figures in the scam because Pathak alleges the former had held out the hope that his work would be done. The NRI had met the Swami-Rao duo at a Manhattan hotel in New York in December 1983. The two had been closeted together for some time and on their coming out Pathak was introduced to Rao by the godman. And it is claimed by Pathak that Rao during this encounter said, "Pathakji, Swamiji ne mujhko sab kuch bata diya hai. Aapka kaam ho jayega." (Swamiji has told me everything and your work will be done.)

He turned heaven and earth to get back the money he had paid the godman. But Chandraswamy was too wily and powerful for the pickle-king from London. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), after a lot of humming and hawing, started acting hesitantly on Patnak's complaint, even jailing Swamy for a brief period in 1988, but the conman managed to wriggle out. The ascension of his boyhood friend from Andhra Pradesh made things brighter for Chandraswamy.

For nearly five years Chandraswamy was on a roll, peddling his influence with impunity and receiving a royal welcome wherever he went in India. The glitterati actually queued up before his imposing ashram in New Delhi, seeking all kinds of favours.

But the roll came to a grinding halt early this year when the then Minister of State for Home Affairs, Rajesh Pilot, rebelling against his boss, ordered the arrest of the godman. Pilot was promptly stripped of his prestigious Home Affairs portfolio by then PM Rao. But the Swami's (and Rao's) troubles had just begun. It was then the turn of the courts to step in and admonish the CBI for its inept handling of the various charges against

Chandraswamy, and finally he was remanded to jail pending the hearing of the case against him, and the various attempts by the godman to be released on bail have been rejected by the Court.

In a recent interview the former Prime Minister claimed that there was no special relationship between him and Chandraswamy. "I know so many people, you get to know so many of them when you are in public life and since he happens to be from Andhra Pradesh, there could be a bit more familiarity, nothing more to it. In fact I have made it a rule not to have any special relationship with anyone in my life," he said.

But the clout the dubious Swami commanded in the Rao establishment was legendary. He was one of the few who could drive his car right up to the portico of the Prime Minister's residence and he had never had to undergo the usual security drill. Besides what was the provocation for the sudden sidelining of Mr Pilot when the latter initiated action against the Swami?

The linking of Rao's name is not limited to the alleged payment by Pathak to the Swamy. The Rs 133 crore urea scam in which Rao's son Prabhakar Rao is seen as a key-mover and commented on in these columns only last month was perhaps the most outrageous of it all in that not a single grain of the fertiliser has reached the Indian shores months after the payment of the entire amount in advance.

But Rao is certain to have played a key role in what is known as the Jharkhand Mukthi Morcha case. There was a sudden surge in the bank accounts of these four MP's from this regional party from Bihar in June 1993. A total of Rs 3 crore had been paid to the four. Within days thereafter it so happened that the four JMM MPs voted in support of the then minority Rao government against a no-confidence motion in parliament. The MPs are predictably hard put to convincingly explain the accretion of so much money and the matter is before the courts now. Many observers also find a surprising coincidence between the payments to the JMM MP's and the controversial hawala payments to Indian politicians. Though Rao does not figure in the diaries of the conduits, one of the accused did talk about paying Rao directly. The JMM could prove a crucial missing link in the hawala case and thus seal Rao's fate.

Narasimha Rao himself claimed af-

ter the New Delhi High Court turned down his petition seeking the quashing of the summons issued to him, "I am innocent, I am in no way connected with the case. In fact I was not even present in New York on the dates Lakhubhai Pathak was supposed to have met me. I am committed to the rule of law and let the law take its own course."

Interestingly the thieves seem to have fallen out. Chandraswamy's Counsel is nowadays gunning for the then Prime Minister. When Pathak named Rao in his submission before the Magistrate and the CBI objected to the dragging of Rao's name on the ground that it had not figured in the original complaint of Pathak, Swami's counsel flared up and remarked acidly, "The whole truth should come out. Why should Rao's name not come on the record? In fact the objection of the prosecution should be put on record to expose how the country's prime investigating agency is functioning."

If his track-record is anything to go by, the conman, Swamy could spill the beans and get his erstwhile partner too into trouble out of sheer pique.

Apart from the JMM and Pathak cases, there is yet another Damocles' sword hanging above the head of Rao. Again when he was the External Affairs Minister, this time under Rajiv Gandhi, he is alleged to have played a key role in fabricating documents suggesting that Ajeya Singh, son of V P Singh, held secret accounts in St Kitts, a Caribbean island.

The CBI initiated action in 1990 when Mr Singh himself was Prime Minister, but predictably forgot all about it when Rao became the Prime Minister in 1991. Under pressure from the courts, the CBI once again took up the investigations. Even now it is unwilling to implicate Rao too strongly, it is said. However, with Vijaya Rama Rao, an acolyte of the other Rao, retiring as the CBI Director and an officer from Punjab is tak-

ing over, the St Kitts forgery case too could lead to some trouble for Rao.

The United Front too is pleased with Rao's problems. Surviving as it does on the backing of 136 Congress MP's, it would only please the Front partners to find that party in turmoil, thus preventing it from asserting itself on any issue and dictate terms to the Front Government.

In fact there are reports to the effect that the Maharashtra Congress strongman Sharad Pawar is inclined to join the Government which development, in turn, could provide greater stability to the Gowda regime and even enable it to do without the support of the demanding CPM and CPI. A change in the Congress leadership could expedite such a process.

Also the rebels are hoping to woo back those who had quit earlier like Mr G K Moopanar, Madhavrao Scindia and Arjun Singh and revitalise the party. The picture could become clearer in the near future. ●

She might have led her party to its worst ever electoral débâcle, but she is unfazed and still arrogance personified. There is no trace whatsoever of any sense of remorse in her and it looks like she would go to any lengths to retain her supremacy in the party.

And the cumulative impact of former Chief Minister Jayalalitha's queenly ways (a la Lewis Carroll's) is that the AIADMK is heading for a vertical split.

By the time this article appears in print, the dissidents led by former minister S Kannarpan will have convened a rival general Council of the party, deposed Jaya from the general secretaryship of the party and put in place a collective leadership.

As one of her critics wryly put it - "We must hand it to her. She is perhaps all set to achieve what Karunanidhi himself could not all these years - destroy the AIADMK completely..."

When this correspondent, commenting on the expulsion of Mr S Thiru- navukkarasu and his supporters from the party six years ago (when the AIADMK was still in opposition), had compared her with the offing-heads- Queen of Alice in Wonderland, Jaya- lalitha had complained to the editor rather bitterly, "How could he

write like this?" He's calling me mad..."

But then this time round too, those witnessing the expulsion binge of

her, nay pleading with her in the most passionate voice possible, to throw Sasikala out of her Poes Garden household and issue a public apology of sorts for all the commissions and omissions of the AIADMK regime in an attempt to regain the confidence of the public. After all the elections for the panchayats are only a few months away and yet another débâcle could prove disastrous for the

AIADMK Heading for a Split

By T N Gopalan

Jayalalitha inevitably reach out for Carroll yet again. A more appropriate imagery will be difficult to come by.

Jaya's actions since the crushing defeat in May do seem to defy any rational explanation. Only a mentally unstable, thoroughly insecure, person would so willingly plunge his or her party into such a deep crisis - a rational course of action would have been to consolidate and regroup one's base and prepare oneself for the battles ahead.

And to think that the tussle in the AIADMK presently seems to centre around her confidante Sasikala makes it an even more ludicrous tableau.

Since 10 May when the election results were out, her courtiers- turned-rebels have been sedulously advising

party.

But she simply would not listen. She would not accept that Sasikala is the most discredited person in her Court, though ironically she does not hold any position in the party. The media is awash with reports of Chengiz Khan-type loot of the people's wealth and investigations by the Enforcement Directorate and Income Tax Department are ferreting out skeletons by the dozen with every passing day.

Still Jaya does not seem to care one whit or share the concern of her colleagues. She is desperately clinging on to her sister-like confidante. "Love me, love my dog," is her motto, whatever situation she might find herself in. Anyone questioning her association with Sasikala is rudely rebuffed and unceremoniously thrown out.

In all the interviews she has given to the press - condescending to talk to the media itself is some kind of departure from her earlier ways - she has stoutly defended Sasikala and refuted all allegations against her as motivated and malicious.

In fact with every interview, Sasikala is constantly raised to ever higher pedestals. The last one heard from Jaya was this: "She has taken care of me like a mother, she has stood by me through all the hours of crisis. Would those who want me to distance myself from Sasikala throw out their own wives from their respective households if someone from the party makes such a demand!"

Ironically again it was the 73-year old S D Somasundaram, considered closest both to her and the Sasikala clan, who sparked the current round of squabbles.

SDS, as he is popularly known, hails from Thanjavur district as do Sasikala and her husband, Natarajan, and they all belong to the Kallar community, a powerful intermediate caste of the delta region.

In fact he had revolted against MGR himself, protesting the rising clout of Jayalalitha in the party in 1984, come to grief but was subsequently rehabilitated when he returned in sack cloth and ashes. He went on to become the most ardent champion of Jayalalitha in the post-MGR scenario and was the most unabashed courtier in her durbar. A picture of SDS, perched precariously on a ladder attached to a van of Jayalalitha during an election campaign, is an enduring image and is endlessly commented upon in the local press.

Why such a person took it upon himself to dash off a missive to her suggesting that she distance herself from Sasikala is still a moot point. But it was Jaya who mentioned the letter in one of her interviews even though she would not comment on the contents of the letter.

Subsequently SDS was arrested for his role in the assault on DMK lawyer K M Vijayan two years ago had challenged the Jaya regime's reservation policies.

While she has made as many as six trips to the Madras Central Jail to call on her dear friend, Sasikala and console her, she has studiously ignored SDS except for a brief cursory meeting on one occasion.

It was when he continued to be in jail that SDS was peremptorily expelled from the party. He called it an

inhuman act and added significantly, Jayalalitha knows and everyone else too as to why I'm spending my time here.. "However, to this day, he is yet to come out in public as to why the two have fallen out.

All his statements thus far are oozing with self-pity - "How could all this happen to me, a loyal foot-soldier? If I, a senior leader, am to be treated like this what is going to be the fate of the ordinary cadres and so on."

But the two other leaders S Kannappan and C Aranganayakam expelled along with SDS for alleged anti-party activities have been more vocal. Actually it was Kannappan who had been silently mobilising cadres in an attempt to challenge Jaya's leadership. After the expulsion the two have held press conferences hitting out at Jaya herself and ignoring the Sasikala clan.

"She alone is responsible for the humiliating drubbing. We can't be seen in public wearing dhoties, carrying party colours. So discredited the party founded by MGR has become... She has always been dictatorial and she never listened to us... It is but fair she owns up to her responsibility and bows out gracefully. The party has no future if she continues to remain at the helm of affairs," they have said.

It is not clear how much of a support the rebels enjoy in the AIADMK. All the earlier rebellions, whether against MGR or Jayalalitha, have come to nought. Besides none of the rebels enjoy any clean image either and there is not a single charismatic figure among them. It is doubtful whether these men sans a mass base could rescue them from the morass.

On the other hand there is general resentment against Jaya's authoritarian ways, and the workers would surely prefer a more responsive and a more sensible leadership.

Meantime Sasikala and her husband are still in prison, unable to obtain bail. Jaya's foster-son is also facing arrest for Fera (Foreign Exchange Regulations Act) violations by the JJ TV company.

Mrs Indrakumari and her personal assistant have been arrested in connection with a Rs 16 crore scam in the distribution of free saris, dhotis and school uniform to poorer sections. In many cases the clothes never reached the intended beneficiaries and in yet others they were never procured at all though payments had been effected. She has now said that all her actions

as the social welfare minister had the endorsement and prior approval of her boss, Jaya.

A probe by the Vigilance and Anti-Corruption department into the illegal wealth amassed by Jayalalitha is on. The Income Tax Department is demanding that she pay up Rs 5 crores by way of arrears for the last five years. But the Jaya caravans goes on, unmindful of the barkings from any quarter.

The Cauvery Issue

Even as the Jaya charade is being acted out on the political stage, a tragedy is slowly unfolding in the once prosperous Cauvery delta regions.

The short-term Kuruvai has proved a near total disaster and the future of the longer term samba, the very life-line of the delta region, remains uncertain. All because the neighbouring Karnataka, the upper riparian state, is not letting any water into the Tamil Nadu reservoirs.

There has been a large-scale exodus of landless labourers to urban centres in search of jobs. Times were when hundreds and thousands of them from various parts of the state would flock to Thanjavur and Trichy districts during agricultural operations.

There has not been much of a rain in the catchment areas of Karnataka during the South West monsoon. But the details regarding the storage positions in the various reservoirs are not clear. There is just no transparency and both the governments are known to fudge their respective figures.

To complicate matters further the chairman of the Cauvery Tribunal has resigned for unspecified reasons and its hearings have come to a grinding halt.

Surprisingly no-one, Karunanidhi or Deve Gowda or Karnataka, Chief Minister J H Patel, is striking any hawkish posture. Since they all want the United Front government to survive they would not like to precipitate matters by any fiery rhetoric. They seem to be inclined for a settlement outside the Tribunal.

Karunanidhi has mellowed a lot. The delta farmers, weary and frustrated, also support resumption of dialogue. Only Jaya keeps screaming, but not many care.

But then the point is the canals still run dry. Sowing for samba is delayed. Both farmers and labourers are apprehensive. If the samba too fails, there could be starvation deaths in the traditional rice bowl of Tamil Nadu. ●

STATUS OF TAMIL TODAY - CLASSICAL, POPULAR, MASS OR MARGINAL ?

G.Ramesh

It is more than a century after Father Caldwell saw Tamil as a unique language with classical and popular levels of existence. But it is only now that the Tamil Nadu government is pressing for classical recognition for this language from the current Delhi dispensation. Tamil might be considered a classical language in some universities of the West, but in India, that status is reserved for Sanskrit, mostly because of political reasons. Even Arabic/Persian comes only after Sanskrit. That Tamil and Arabic have popular existence has gone against their claim for classical statues, while the reverse should have been the case!

Today, the situation seems to have changed, or is it? In Delhi, Harvard educated P Chidambaram laces his budget speech with quotes from Tiruvalluvar, and the sound of Tamil enchants north Indian Members of Parliament. The ruling DMK wants Tamil to be made an official language also at the central level. There are now eight Tamil ministers in Delhi, the highest ever since 1947. The seven languages in which Union Information Minister, C M Ibrahim is conversant includes Tamil.

Yet, the reality is that Tamil is getting poorer by the day in Tamil Nadu, where the ability to utter a full sentence in English is a sure way of getting public recognition. English clearly is more than a language in India, especially so in Tamil Nadu. What it signifies is a kind of status, power and manners, the peremptory manner of a manner-born. Thus, Tamil Nadu's insipid and farcical public sphere is a compound/complex one, full of silly English and mass-Tamil. Filmsongs and magazines in mass-Tamil end themselves with English catchphrases. Rural Amma-Appas want their kids to be taught everything in English and certainly not in poor Tamil. Urban mum/dads including some Dravidian politicians (some of them participants in anti-Hindu agitations) are against even Tamil language being taught to their children. For them, mass-level Tamil spoken on the small screen is enough; they prefer France or German for their kids roaring to go abroad. Some want their kids to learn Hindi for professional needs. Very few Tamils in Tamil Nadu actually learn other south Asian languages, unless they are forced to migrate to other Indian states.

Administration of Tamil Nadu is mostly English, including orders issued to use more Tamil in officialdom. Judges

including scholars of Tamil deliver verdicts in English. The medium of science and all higher education is all English. Banking, big business and industry sectors conduct their internal and external affairs in English. Computers and software courses spread English at the grass-roots level. The English media is considerably more objective and academic and the Tamil media decidedly peripheral, emotional and given to silliness and sensationalism. Tamil-speaking news-readers and media persons make it a point to be seen wearing suit and tie and uttering an occasional English phrase to sound sophisticated. It does not matter if they cannot differentiate the three N's and three L's in Tamil, or the three S's derived from Sanskrit.

Suave ministers use English constitutional vocabulary in the Tamil Nadu assembly to baffle unsuspecting rural politicians. Even good Tamil linguists present their interesting papers in places like World Tamil Conferences in English. Convent-educated girls write adjectives in offices and sensitive poems back home - in English. An acquaintance named by his enthusiastic father after Valvil Ori, one of the seven patron-chieftains of the sangam era, went abroad and changed his name to Ore, which is nothing but general mineral!

This battling incongruity came to the fore on 10 July last. That day, Education Minister K Anbazhagam was telling those running matriculation schools to switch their medium of instruction from English to Tamil. A few kilometres away, a tenth standard boy of a city matriculation school was being punished for daring to speak to his classmate in Tamil. The punishment, of standing on one leg in hot sun for an hour, was given with the express sanction of the Tamil Christian boy's parents who want their kid to speak only in English! And Anbazhagan wears a pathetic look, a poor old man caught in a time-war. An Uncle Rip (Van Winkle) who has woken up in a strange land having slept for decades!

This all-pervasive fad for English, or whatever signified by English, has seen Tamil Nadu become the first state in the country to elect a convent dropout as the head of its government. Of the tongues, if Tamil is the milk-giving Mother and Hindi once the poison-giving Demon, then English is certainly the seductive Auntie for those who matter here now.

Throughout history, Tamil has witnessed the dominance of other languages

and linguistic traditions, but managed to emerge victorious by retaining its classical and popular levels of existence. Tamil has contributed decisively to Sanskritic poetry, as is evident from George L Hart's study of Dravidian elements present in Kalidasa's poetry. The five-fold tinai classification since Tamil sangam poetry is unique, observed the late A K Ramanujan. Tamil linguistic and grammatical tradition since Tolkappiyam is not a mere copy of Sanskrit's Paniniyam, but parallels and reworks it. Tamil literature is a field wherein several dialects, local and alien cults, religions and traditions co-exist. Prakritic, Chinese, Arabic and European scholars down the ages found in Tamil a fertile new ground for cross cultural work. All this might well become a thing of the past, if Tamils fail to grasp and work out the rightful place of their language in the modern and post-modern eras. The current indications are that it is just not happening. Unlike Sanskrit or English, the Tamil language exists in field of diglossia - simultaneously in classical and popular modes. Unfortunately, in its classical mode, Tamil is treated like an artefact (while it is not), making it difficult for Tamils to adopt words from other languages for newer concepts and fields for the growth of their language.

The Tamil mass version, however, has "grown" mainly due to the spread of print and film media. Tamils are currently borrowing their daily vocabulary heavily from English, mainly because there are no Tamil equivalents for several new words in currency at the modern private and public spheres. The shift from mass to genuine popular versions can occur only if there is creative flux all around. This flux does not exist now because of lack of creative activity in Tamil on the part of that generation of elites who know both English and Tamil well. This includes the elites, who are more interested in consolidating their contacts abroad. They have simply abdicated their responsibility.

Thus, the purists who wield enormous power within the Tamil officialdom are caught within a time-war. They are interested in evolving a standardised state language, which would be buffeted by an undeveloping mass version. Thus, the standardised state version and the undeveloping mass version are destroying Tamil's dialects and also the possibility of the emergence of a genuine modern Tamil in its classical and popular modes.

There is very little by way of creativity among scholars in using Tamil to grasp how a modern field of knowledge, say computers, can be adopted to Tamil. To speak of an example, all Tamil computer keyboards are mechanical replicas of the Tamil typewriter. It has taken 15 years for this to be corrected by a Tamil teacher working in Singapore. As

Book Review

TRAVAILS OF WAR

**Andhakaraya (Darkness) By Nimal Sedera,
Sara Printers and Publishers, Colombo, Rs.50.**

The Sinhala reader who is necessarily set on his own social and cultural background had hitherto been treated with an overdose of familiar characters lodged in Sinhala fiction. Leading the Sinhala reader to formally unfamiliar ground with his collection of short stories. Nimal Sedera introduces local Tamil characters to him. These fictional compositions woven against the background of current ethnic violence are rare, and *Andhakaraya* is unique. Its ability to penetrate communal, ethnic and religious barriers and to reach the bottom-most layer of humanism in touching emotions of compassion exuding from a Sinhalese deeply disciplined in Buddhist way of life is one's lifetime realisation.

Set against the atrocities and violence in 1983, 1986 and 1987, Sedera has developed fascinating stories savouring forbearance and humanism interlaced with horrendous acts of inhumanity unleashed by the Sinhalese, Tamils and the IPKF. Events in the eighties saw the ethnic conflict in the country deepening into a new dimension nailing itself into the political and social fabric that compelled each community to search for new grounds of reconciliation.

The moving tale of woes twined in "The Darkness" is based on the real life experience under the IPKF that forced people into submission. It portrays the warming of an Indian soldier to tender humble appeal of an innocent young girl to spare her family from death. The au-

thor succeeds in not only bringing out the humanism existent even in a murderous soldier but also how each character reacted to the rare sympathy shown by him. The father thought that they were saved because of the daughter and the mother thanked God while the daughter kept quiet reflecting that it was the humaneness and softness of heart of the soldier who saved them, and the credit and merit should invariably go to him a sentiment which alone could help promote inter-human relations.

Creativity

"The Shock" shows the author's creativity in expressing deep human feelings. In fact, the events of 1983 were a shame on the majority Sinhalese and similarly the shooting spree at the Sri Mahabodhi later, was a shame on the Tamil psyche too, because in each instance the victims were innocent civilians.

Instead of the anger each massacre naturally evoked in the other. Sedera in subtle conviction and clever composition tells how such inhuman acts bring shame finally to rest with the perpetrator himself.

Silva, a baker in Jaffna is joined by his wife who runs away from the wrath of her mother-in-law for being childless. They adopt a Tamil boy. He was later killed by Tamil racists under a mistaken identity! The couple in grief leave Jaffna for good. In tenuous interpretation of the devotional adoption of a child, Sedera mocks at the wife's belief that the child

is God's gift to them. Here the foster-parents' failure to appreciate and acknowledge the human and benevolent gesture of the Tamil doctor who found a baby for them was emphasised. Instead, they thanked God reflectively, unable to realise how could a God's gift be so easily destroyed by marauding atheists who had no respect or love for God. That is the theme of "Blood Relations" which was enthusiastically written into a short story where both love and hatred transcend racism.

The people whether in the North or South do not want war which makes themselves the victims. War always brings misery to them. When his house in Colombo was burnt down by vandals, Gnanaratnam left for Jaffna only to find that his house had been burnt down by the IPKF. The author emphatically and sympathetically cries in "Black Smoke" for the innocent who suffers in common wherever the lives. Eventually what remains at the bottom is the bare human being with pangs of hunger and strained emotions hurting him to the core. That's how it goes to portray the poor Jaffna Tamil forced to live in traumatic conditions who finally ends up in Tamil Nadu still yearning to return to Sri Lanka, his motherland.

Tragedy

"Battle Field" depicts the tragedy as well as the comedy of the poor Sinhala soldier fighting the ethnic war in the north. He leaves the south not out of love for the country but out of love for life the sustenance of which needs money. In him and his family the desire to live and not to sacrifice life was always in command. At the front, he shoots himself in the arm and saves his life from death so that he could live back at home. The writer while showing scorn and throwing sarcasm over the very idea of war brings out the dilemma of the poor living in the south who are caught in between the desire to live and commission to die at the call to serve in the army.

Nimal Sedera, a well-known fiction writer has developed sufficient moral courage and intellectual maturity to use the medium of literary fiction to portray the tale of trepidations and travails of war perpetuated by interested parties on either side of the ethnic divide. *Andhakaraya* (The Darkness) is a collection of short stories that reflects the true sentiments of a person seeking peace passionately. These stories should be translated into Tamil and English to convey the deepest emotions of a Buddhist who is also a Sinhalese, towards his fellow human beings suffering under political and military pressure of a war.

Reviewed by E M G Edirisinghe
(Courtesy of "The Sunday Observer")

(Continued from page 28)

a teacher of the Tamil alphabet, he quickly realised that only consonants and vowels need to be put in the keyboard. There is no need to put combining elements of the 247 letter-forms. Any Tamil word can be punched by combining the necessary vowels and consonants the right way.

In general, Tamil scholars including the majority of the purists are aware of the language's classical heritage. However, they are by and large uncaring of contemporary literary trends across the world. On the other hand, those practising modern Tamil literature are mired deeply within contemporary social and political problems, tending to ignore the eternal cultural value of the cosmic language-forms in the classics, myths, legends and folktales of Tamil land. With the result that what is written by many

talented writers ends up as mere journalistic!

Hence, Tamil has failed to gain much from its modern litterateurs and linguists who should be living at the cutting edge of the language-form. Rare exceptions to this in literature are found in the marginal trends of modernism inaugurated, in poetry, by Subramania Bharati and, in prose, by short story writers Pudumaipithan and Mouni. These trends are being carried forward by a handful of litterateurs who are worried about modern and post-modern forms of language.

However, there are only a few linguists or litterateurs sensitive to Tamil language today. Modern Tamil, alas, does not have a Noam Chomsky or a Shakespeare, a Tolkappiar or an Ilango Adigal whom it surely deserves! Tamil Nadu, thus, has marginalised modern Tamil. ●

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MATRIMONIAL

Jaffna Hindu parents seek professional, ambitious, outgoing bride, 25+, for Master's qualified engineer son, 32, employed in US, horoscope immaterial. Details, photo please. M 855 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna Hindu sister residing in Australia seeks educated partner, 36-45, for doctor sister, 36, New Zealand permanent resident working in Colombo. Send horoscope, details. M 862 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna parent seeks partner below 36 for engineer son, disabled but very independent, self employed in Canada. Religion immaterial. M 863 c/o Tamil Times.

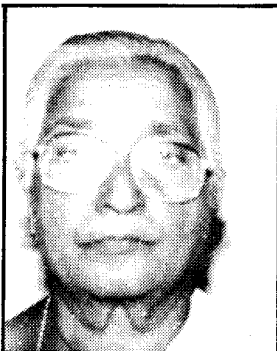
Brother seeks bride for engineer, early 40s, securely employed in London. Widows welcome. Religion immaterial. M 864 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna Hindu parents seek professional groom, 30-35, in UK employment for daughter, London University Ph.D. student. Send horoscope, details. M 865 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna Hindu professional father seeks doctor in UK, for slim, fair daughter, post graduate holding substantive job. State sector UK. Horoscope immaterial. correspondence treated strictly confidentially. M 866 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna Hindu aunt seeks partner for accountant nephew, British citizen, 39. Please telephone 0171 624 5108.

OBITUARIES



Mrs. Parameswary Navaratnam (77), beloved wife of the late Mr. Navaratnam, Malayan

pensioner formerly of Kaddudai; loving mother of the late Mr. Ramachandran, Mrs. Nagapooshani Suntharalingam, Mrs. Mithiladevi Vivekananthan, Mrs. Nirmaladevi Balasingam (Australia), Mrs. Vikneswary (Ruby) Jeyagandhinathan (Australia), Mr. Ramakrishnan (Canada), Mrs. Sivayogi Kugaveri (Kaddudai) and Mr. Ramkumaran (Australia); step mother of the late Mrs. Seethadevi Ponniah; sister of the late Mr. Karthigesapillai (formerly of Ipoh, Malaysia) passed away on 19.07.96 in Perth, Western Australia and was cremated on 22.07.96 - Ramkumaran, 50 Crossland Way, Kardinya, Western Australia 6163. Tel: 332 3978.



Kandaval - retired chief architect P.W.D., Colombo, Sri Lanka - beloved son of late Velauthampillai and late Meenambal Velauthampillai of Karampan, Kayts; beloved husband of Jeyapooshani; loving father of Wignesh (architect); father-in-law of Gowri Narayani; grandfather of Ganesh Ramana, Rathini and Prasanthi; brother of late Dr. Thiagarajah, late Kumaraswamy, Mrs. Thevaky Sabaratnam, Poopal, late Mrs. Kamala Canagaratnam, late Gnaneswaran, Mrs. Rajeswary Arulanandan, Mahadevan (architect); brother-in-law of Mr. C. Canagaratnam, Professor K. Arulanandan, late Mrs. Manonmani Poopal, Mrs. Rane Mahadevan, Mrs. Kularanjitham Ilagunathan, Mrs. Mano Dharmarajah and Balabaskaran, passed away peacefully on

18 July, 1996 in Los Angeles, California.

He is very much missed by his loved ones, relatives and friends who are praying for his soul to rest in peace.

The members of the family thank all friends and relatives for their messages of sympathy and support during the period of grief.



Dr. N.T. Sampanthan (80), formerly of Co-operative Hospital, Moolai, Sri Lanka; beloved husband of Saratha; loving father of Subaschandran and Nagalingam (both of Colombo) passed away at his son's residence at 312 Thimbirigasyaya Road, Colombo 5 on 2nd August 1996. The cremation took place at Kanatte on 4th August in the presence of a very large gathering of friends and relatives.

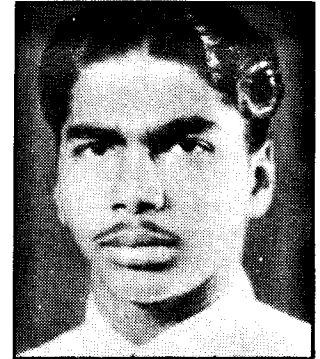
Information given by K. Jegannathan, Kyalami Flats, Butterworth 4960, South Africa. Tel: 474 610115.



Mr. Arulnandhy Thavendran, Consultant Chartered Accountant of 14 Palm Grove, Colombo 3 beloved husband of Rane, loving father of Anjali and Ravi; son of late Mr. & Mrs. K.S. Arulnandhy; son-in-law of late Mr. N.A. Rajaratnam and Mrs. Rajaratnam; brother of late Mahendrarajah, late Kamala, late Mangalam, Manie,

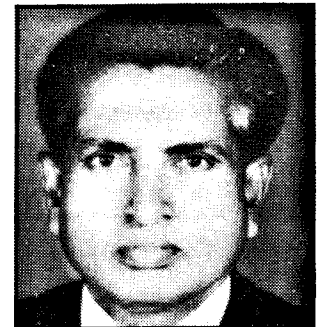
Puveendran, Thevi and Chithra; brother-in-law of late Jeyarane, late Thiruvathavoorar, Mahadeva, Kiruha, Sarojini, Sunthari and Alvapillai passed away in Las Vegas, USA on 14.7.1996. The funeral took place in Lancaster, California on 17.7.96.

IN MEMORIAM



In loving memory of **Mr. Apputhurai Gunaratnam** of Point Pedro, Sri Lanka, formerly Divisional Superintendent of Post Offices, Sri Lanka on the sixth anniversary of his passing away on 28.8.90.

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by his loving wife Rani; children Thirukumaran (Australia), Vasuki (Sri Lanka), Devaki (Australia), Sutharsan (UK) and Saratha Devi (Australia); daughter-in-law, sons-in-law, grand children, sister and in-laws. - 67B St. Ann's Road, London N15 6NJ. Tel: 0181 802 5601.



Mr. Mayilvaganam Velummayilum, J.P., U.M., Attorney-at-law and former Chairman, Urban Council, Point Pedro, Sri Lanka passed away on 31.8.89 and the seventh anniversary of his demise falls on 31.8.96.

Sadly missed by his loving wife, children Thayanandarajah (UK), Nithyanandarajah (New Zealand), Mayilvaganarajah (UK), Chitra, Anandarajah, Krishnarajah and Jayanthi (all of Sri Lanka); grandson Cameron; in-laws, relatives, friends and a host of grateful constituents. 59 Edgwarebury Gardens, Edgware, Middx. HA8 8LL.



In loving memory of **Mrs. Man-kay Sivasampu** on the sixth anniversary of her passing away on 2.8.90.

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by her two sons. - 15 Wolsey Road, Chessington, Surrey KT9 1XG.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

August 30 Swami Nithyananda Giri of Tapovanam, Tamil Nadu visits Sri Raja Rajeswari Amman Temple, Stoneleigh, Surrey. For details Tel: 0181 393 8147.

September 1 Aawani Sunday 3.

Sept. 3 Kaarthikai.

Sept. 4 Krishna Jayanthi.

Sept. 7 Raja Rajeswari Amman Temple presents Cultural Evening 1996 in aid of Building Fund - Live Music, Villu Pattu, Tamil Drama, Bharatha Natyam & Veena Recital. Tel: 0181 393 8147.

Sept. 8 Ekathasi; Aavani Sunday 4.

Sept. 8 6.00pm Tamil Performing Arts Society presents Tamil Drama Festival 1996 with New

Productions Directed by K. Balendra at Secombe Theatre, Cheam Road, Sutton, Surrey. For Tickets Telephone: 0181 459 4335/470 7883/240 0211.

Sept. 10 Prathosam.

Sept. 12 Amavasai.

Sept. 14 Feast of Exaltation of the Holy Cross.

Sept. 15 Aavani Sunday 5.

Sept. 16 Vinayaga Chathurthi.

Sept. 18 Sasti.

Sept. 21 Purattashi Sani 1; Feast of St. Mathew.

Sept. 23 Ekathasi.

Sept. 24 Pirathosam.

Sept. 26 Full Moon.

Sept. 27 Feast of St. Vincent de Paul.

Sept. 28 Purattashi Sani 2.

Sept. 28 Tamil Performing Arts Society presents Tamil Drama

Festival 1996 with New Productions Directed by K. Balendra at Waltham Forest Theatre, Winns Terrace, London E17. For tickets Tel: 0181 459 4335/470 7883/240 0211.

Sept. 30 Feast of St. Jerome.

At Bhawan Centre, 4A Castle-town Road, London W14 9HQ. Tel: 0171 381 3086/4608.

Sept. 1 7.00pm Asian Music Circuit presents Vishwamohan & Salil Bhatt on Veena.

Sept. 5 7.00pm Krishna Janmashtami. Bajan, Puja & Prasad. All Welcome.

Sept. 20 7.30pm Asian Music Circle presents Light Classical Vocal by Sipra Bose.

Sept. 22 6.30pm Manipuri Dance by Darbhana Jhaveri & Latasana Devi.

CANADIAN NEWS LETTER

Weather: A sunny and warm summer with temperatures of 23 to 27 degrees and occasional thunderstorms towards evening or overnight. Canadian Tamils are having a field day picnicking.

Senior Tamils' Centre of Ontario: Twelve of the Seniors along with fellow Canadians participated in a 10 day WELLNESS CAMP at Corburg from 3rd to 12th July.



They enjoyed their stay at this get-away lodge far away from the city's madding crowds.

A hundred of the Seniors had a pleasant experience when they visited the world's highest hydraulic cruise in Peterborough on 10th August. The Seniors' annual visit to the Shakespeare village is scheduled for 10th September when they will see 'The Merchant of Venice'.

Canadian Ceylon Tamils Chamber of Commerce had its annual trade exhibition at the Metro East Trade Centre, Pickering on 10th and 11th August. It would be recalled that the Chamber conducted a workshop on the use of computers in small businesses with particular reference to inventory control, in spring this year.

Sixth World Tamil Cultural Festival is due to be held for three days commencing 24th August at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre. Professors K. Sivathamby, A. Shanmugathas and A. Sivarajah from Sri Lanka and Professor M.P. Balasubramaniam and Dr. R. Janarthanan from Tamil Nadu, South India are some of the distinguished visitors to the festival. Tamil Nadu Bharatha Natyam dancer Ms. Jayaledchumi leswar and playback singer Theepan Chakkarawathy are expected to take part in the festival.

The Tamil Eelam Society of Canada held its annual general meeting in July when Mr. M. Duraiswamy was reelected president. The following are the other office bearers elected.

Vice-President: S. Sittampalam, **Secretary:** R. Gunanathan, **Asst. Secretary:** Ms. Rohini Uthaykumar, **Treasurer:** S. Pathmanathan, **Directors:** S. Rajaratnam, S. Sivanathan, V. Puvanachandran, Ms. Sathamathy Arunthavashanmugan, K.C. Nadarasa K. Kulamohan and J.F. Xavier.

Changes to Rent Control: The Ontario Government has released a discussion paper on changes to Rent Control and Landlord Tenant Law. If the government proposals are accepted, it will take away many of tenants' legal rights. Many Tamils who are now tenants in apartments and rental buildings will be financially threatened. When a tenant moves out, rent control will be lifted and the landlord can charge the new tenant what ever rent he wants - the market force remaining the only restraining factor.

Scholarship Awards: Two young Tamils, Deepa Thayalakumarasingham and Suresh Sriskandarajah of West View Secondary have won the Canada Trust Horizons Programme Awards for 1996. The scholarship entitles them to annual awards of 500 dollars during secondary schooling and 2000 dollars at the University.

Nelson Mandela To Open Saiva Conference

The fifth World Saiva Conference is to be held from 20th to 23rd September 1996 in Durban organised by the South African Branch of the World Saiva Council. It is due to be ceremoniously opened at the Durban University Hall by the South African President, His Excellency Dr. Nelson Mandela.

Over 100 overseas delegates including the heads of South Indian Saiva Mutts and Saiva Siddhanta Professors are attending the conference. Swami Siva Nandhi, Dr. S. Sivathasan, Mr. V.R. Ramanathan and Mr. K. Ranganathan are attending the conference as seminar speakers from the UK.

Lisa's Bharata Natya Arangetram



Lisa Thiruvallam's Bharata Natya Arangetram, at the Ashcroft Theatre in Croydon on Sunday 4th August, was a debut for Guru Priyadharshana Yogarajah as well. Lisa was the first student to be presented in an Arangetram by Guru Dharshana's Pranavalaya school of dancing and the young dancer earned her Guru and herself a much deserved chorus of approval and applause.

The start bode well for the rest to follow. Lisa, starting with Ganesha Vandhanam, wasted no time in displaying her confidence and agility. The movements were deft and executed with suppleness and grace. The padam Mathurashtakam, with music composed by Sri Yogeswaran the vocalist, was enchanting. Lisa danced the padam Adi Kondar majestically with an admirable spring in her movements. The Tamil Varnam, nallaa sakunam nokki selladi, is a rarely performed piece and can be described as a padavarnam due to the scope given for bhava and Lisa took the opportunity to demonstrate her abhinaya skills splendidly.

Sri Yogeswaran is a gifted vocalist whose enchanting singing raised the quality of the evening's performance. Excellent support was provided by a youthful and talented group of musicians with Sri Kirupakaran on the mridangam, Sri Kothandapani on the violin, Sri Gnanavaradan on the flute and Sri Sithamparanathan on the morsing.

Guru Dharshana, a sangeeta vidwan, had received her own tutelage from the doyen of dancers, Smt. Balasundari Prarthalingam and from Smt. Subathra Sivadasan. The entire repertoire was choreographed by Dharshana with freshness and versatility. The purists may have been surprised at times, but so they should and full marks to you Dharshana for presenting Lisa, your first arangetram student, with such panache and style. It was a pleasure to see a young dancer perform not only to a high standard but also with much evident enjoyment.

Ravi Sanguhan.

Karthiga's Vina Arangetram



It was a great pleasure to be present at the Vina Arangetram at Lewisham Theatre, Catford on 3rd August 1996 when Smt Sivasakthi Sivanesan presented her disciple Karthiga daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Gengatharan. To attain the standard to ascend the stage for an arangetram or debut, not only requires talent but also devotion, dedication and very hard work from both sisya and guru and support from the pupil's parents. We had ample evidence of the results of following this demanding discipline.

The programme started with a Varnam, Sarasijanabha followed by Varavallabha Ramana. The beautiful Dikshitar kirtana Panchashatpitarupini was followed by the first of Tyagaraja's Pancharatna kritis, a demanding piece to show the skills of the vina player. By now Karthiga was having problems with her new vina, the heat of the

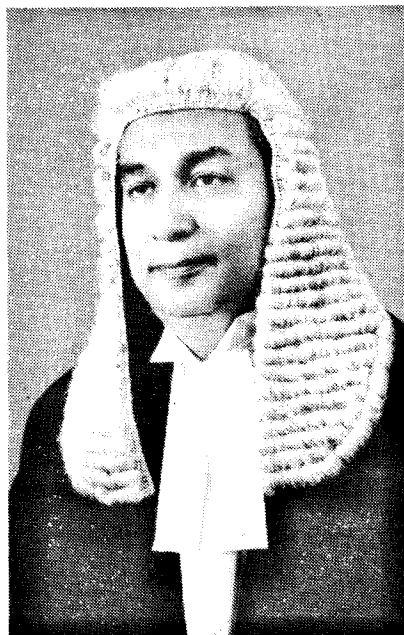
lights constantly altering the tuning of the strings. In circumstances that would have unnerved a seasoned professional, Karthiga remained calm and collected and continued to play Mamava Sadha Janani and the lyrical kirtana Parvati Nayakane. Sri P. Kanagasabapathy, guru to both Karthiga's parents made an inspiring speech before the interval.

The Paridanamichite, Ragam Tanam Pallavi, Kunjaran Sothara Kumara and the Ragamalika Sri Chakra Raja were beautifully executed by Karthiga after the interval. The lively and complicated rhythms of the Thillana with the vina, the mridangam and the ghatam both supporting and rivalling each other brought the wonderful evening to a close. Sri M. Balachandar on the Mridangam, Sri R.N. Prakash on Ghatam and Karthiga's cousin Harri on the Tambura gave her excellent accompaniment.

The distinguished Chief Guest Prof. R. Vedavalli congratulated Karthiga and Smt Sivasakthi on the performance. Ms. Mary Webb of Sydenham High School and Dr. John Marr expressed their pleasure at attending the arangetram. The programme was compered by Karthiga's aunt Smt Jayanthi who made the journey from Malaysia expressly for the performance.

Wendy Marr.

Kamalasabayson – President's Counsel



Mr. K.C. Kamalasabayson, Deputy Solicitor of the Sri Lankan Attorney General's Department was appointed Additional Solicitor General from 1st March 1996 and recently took his oaths as a President's Counsel. Mr. Kamalasabayson was a brilliant student and passed out as an advocate with first class honours from the Ceylon Law College. He obtained his Master of Laws in Public Law at the Colombo University and later the Master of

Laws in International Business Law at Kings College, London. His first appointment was as a State Counsel in the Attorney General's Department on 1st August 1974 and it was through hard work and dedicated service that he has risen to the present high position. He has appeared for the state in several important cases including those connected with the extradition of Manik Sandrasagara and Benwell. He had advised successive governments in Sri Lanka on the most complicated legal issues. He was a visiting lecturer and examiner in the Sri Lanka Law College and a visiting lecturer in the University of Colombo.

He is an inspiration and guide to everyone in the Attorney General's Department. His methodical and meticulous application to his duties and his resourcefulness set the standard for those in the department.

Mr. Kamalasabayson is a great debater and orator who won gold medals in the Law College and hails from a distinguished legal family in Trincomalee. His brother the late Mr. Kamalanathan was a leading criminal lawyer and Mr. Kamalabaskaran, the well known social worker of Surrey, UK is another brother.

Emeritus Principal Feted



அதிபர் ஓடுவரின் கருிய பார்வையில்

Mr. P. Kanagasabapathy, Emeritus Principal, Mahajana College, Tellipallai, Jaffna was feted by members of several Old Students' Associations, friends and well wishers at a well attended dinner held at

Rutlish School Hall, Watery Lane, London SW20 on 20th July 1996. He was 'draped in a golden shawl' and blessed by Bhrama Shri Naganatha Kurrukkal of the London Murugan Temple and by Mr. A. Vairava-moorthy on behalf of Mahajana Old Students.

The others who spoke on this occasion were W. Thayalan and N.Sri Gengatharan, President and Secretary of Mahajana

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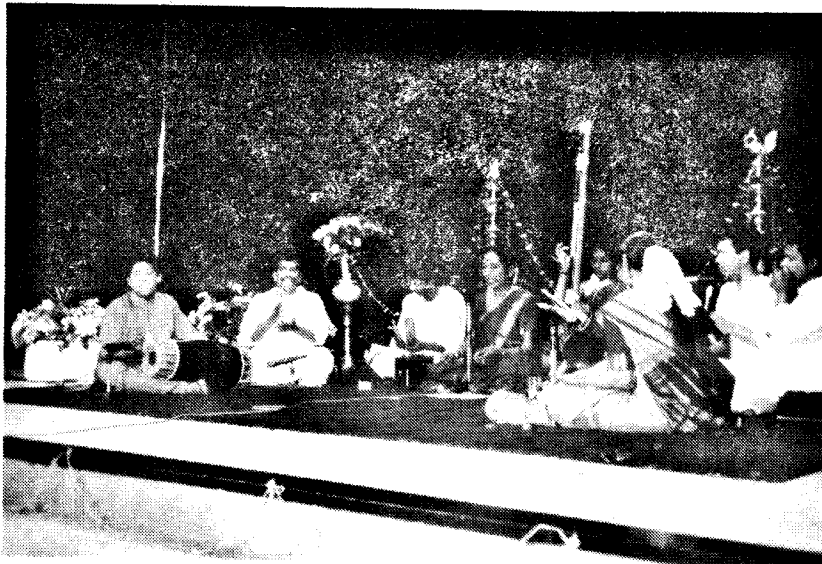


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- 6.00pm



Eason's Miruthanga Arangetram



The Miruthanga Arangetram of twelve year old **Eason** son of Mr. and Mrs. Kumarasingham of Vinters Park, Maidstone on 20th July at Thurrock Civic Hall, Grays, Essex was different from other Miruthanga Arangetrams in the recent past. This time the guests had the privilege of enjoying two very good recitals - a veena and a vocal.

Eason's Arangetram was divided into two parts. During the first half Eason accompanied a veena recital by Smt Malini Thanabalasingam and after the interval he accompanied the well known vocalist Smt Ambika Thamotheram.

The veena recital consisted of Varnam, Kriti and Ragam Thanam Pallavi in Karaharapriya Raga and Kanda Tripata Tala followed by the Thani Avarthanam in which Eason displayed his talents as a full fledged percussion artiste.

In the second half, the songs were in varied Talas. The highlight was the Kriti by Gopalakrishna Bharathiyar in Shanmugapriya Ragam - 'Thanthai Thai'. The programme concluded with the Thillana in Sangeera Desathi Talam followed by a Thiruppugal in Kandachappu Talam. Eason's Guru Sri Muthu Sivaraja was beaming with justified pride when the audience applauded the young artiste.

The Chief Guest Sangeetha Vithushi Smt Katpalam Swaminathan blessed Eason and congratulated the parents Sarada and Kumarasingam for their dedication to the art.

The other accompanying artistes were Sri S. Visakan - Ganjira, Sri Gananathan - Gadam, Sri K. Sithamparanathan - Morsing, Smt Kalaivani Indrakumar - Violin and Selvi Gayathri Nathan - Thambura.

O.S.A. (UK), K. Yogeswaran, T. Puthirasingham, J. Jeyakumar, Sri Vasanthamala Yasokkumar representing Puttur Sri Somaskand College of which he was Principal for a few years, E.K. Rajagopal, A. Tarcisius, Mangayathkarasi Amirthalingam, K. Selvagunachandran, N.Sri Sabe-

san, P. Rajanayagam representing Chunnamak Skanda Varodaya College of which he was a student and G. Natkunam.

A book of ten articles selected from the contributions of Mr. Kanagasabapathy to the Canadian Tamil Journal, 'Tamilar Thaval' was launched on this occasion.

The Search - A Dance Drama

Samudra, a South Indian Performing Arts Organisation in the UK is presenting a Dance Drama - *The Search* - based on a popular Malayalam poem, 'The Poothappattu' by Kerala's best known poet Etasseri Govinda Menon. The story has the simplicity and directness of a fairy tale and has an inner depth of meaning. It is about the redeeming of a young child from the clutches of a wicked Pootham (demon) through the pure and devoted love of his mother. The demon abducts him on his way to school, the mother goes in search of her son and redeems him by overcoming the wicked charms of the demon.



Thanuja Shanker, one of the finest young Bharatha Natyam dancers based in UK, a product of the Dhananjayans School of Dancing, Madras will portray the simple story in a Dance Drama, for the Milap Festival Trust at the Blue Arts Centre, School Lane, Liverpool on 20th October 1996 and at the Old Bull Arts Centre, Barnet, Herts on 26th October 1996. For further information please telephone 0151 427 4920.

Annual Dinner of Tamil Lawyers' Association (U.K.)



The Annual Dinner of the Tamil Lawyers' Association was held recently at the Regents Park Marriott Hotel.

Mr. Martin Mears, the President of the Law Society was the Guest of Honour. A representative gathering of the Tamil Lawyers currently practising in the UK and their spouses took part in this annual event. Picture shows the President, Mr. Martin Mears, with officials of the Tamil Lawyers' Association.

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