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Rajiv Gandhi on campaign trail before being killed on 21 May 1991

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26 TO DIE FOR RAJIV MURDER

ATTACK ON DALADA MALIGAWA

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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

Attack on Dalada Maligawa

"KANDY will shine like the central jewel in the crown of Sri Lanka ten days from today when it hosts the Golden Jubilee Independence celebrations on February 4th. Distinguished foreign invitees and thousands of proud Sri Lankans will converge on the capital that was ceded to the British in 1815, adding Ceylon to the glittering jewels in the Crown of England. ... Government and private buildings in the city of Kandy have been painted white, reflecting the sunlight thereby creating the effect of greater space and heightening the greenery that relieves Kandy on particularly congested days.

"The palladium of Kandy, the Sri Dalada Maligawa, pinnacled and roofed in gold and bronze, and Devendra Mulachari's historic paththirippuwa with its famous octagonal roof, will look over the city onto Kandy's other jewel, the lake, also Mulachari's creation, with its freshly white-painted, protective, ornamental wall."

This is what Karel Roberts Ratna-weera wrote in the Sunday Times on 25 January 1998. On that very day a truck manned by three suicide bombers who rammed their way through the security roadblock shooting at the sentries and detonated their explosive-laden vehicle right in front of the Temple of the Tooth, Sri Lanka's holiest and most venerated Buddhist place of worship said to be housing sacred tooth relic the Buddha. The attack put paid to the Sri Lankan government's plans for the independence celebrations in Kandy.

The blast that occurred at about 6.30 am left the historic city no longer shining, and the people devastated. The temple's newly painted white walls were coated by black soot from the explosion that also brought down the roof of the 16th century temple known as the Dalada Maligawa. Windows were shattered in almost every building in this historic town that had been spruced up at great cost to host the 50th anniversary of Sri Lanka's independence from Britain on February 4.

Streets near the temple were strewn with glass and leaves and tree branches.

Several houses, including the official residence of the chief lay custodian of the temple Niranjan Wijeratne, had their roofs blown in. According to a temple spokesman, the inner sanctum had miraculously escaped damage and the shrine where Buddha's left canine tooth is supposedly enshrined was unharmed.

Only the rear axle of the truck bomb was left. The rest of the vehicle had been turned into tangle web of metal by the massive and deafening explosion that was heard and felt two kilometres (miles) away.

Sixteen civilians were killed in the blast while more than 25 were wounded. The police also reportedly found at the scene of the blast remains of four men believed to be the suicide bombers allegedly belonging to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) together with a disposable Rocket Propelled Grenade launcher (RPG), two assault rifles, ten rounds of 40mm ammunition, two Icom radio sets and remnants of three suicide jackets. These are usually denim waistcoats filled with explosives, known to be used by LTTE suicide squads known as Black Tigers.

It was generally anticipated that the LTTE, which is engaged in a bitter war with government forces, would attempt to launch attacks with a view to disrupting the independence celebrations, and therefore Colombo, Kandy and other major centres in the south of the island were placed under tight security. But no one thought that that the LTTE would target such an intensely venerated place of worship as the Dalada Maligawa.

It is part the island's recorded history that, in the 16th century, the tooth relic of the Buddha was taken to Kandy, where in 1590 AD a two-storey temple was built by King Wimaladharmasuriya I and later enlarged by King Narendra Sinha. The Pattirippuwa, the distinctive gold and copper-roofed octagonal structure from which the kings addressed their subjects, was added in the 19th century by Sri Wickrema Rajasinghe.

Some 30,000 visitors were expected

for an independence day cultural show at the main public park. Prince Charles was to attend a religious service at the Temple of The Tooth on February 3 and the main celebrations a day later.

The Deputy Minister of Defence, Anuruddha Ratwatte, who was in charge of security arrangements for the independence celebrations in Kandy visited the scene of devastation soon after the attack declared, "We will begin repairs immediately. The terrorists cannot force us to change our plans. We will have the independence day celebrations in Kandy as scheduled."

Despite Ratwatte's assertion, three days later the government decided to shift the centre of its independence celebrations to the island's capital, Colombo. A press release from the President's office said, "In view of the national and international significance of the anniversary, the government decided to hold the celebrations in the same manner in Colombo."

Following the attack on Dalada Maligawa, the privately-owned print media and the main opposition party, the United National Party (UNP), called for the resignation of the Deputy Defence Minister who was accused of having failed in his duty to prevent the attack on the temple. Amidst mounting criticism, Ratwatte tendered his resignation, but was not accepted by the President.

Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs Minister, Prof. G L Peiris, who was in London a day after the blast told pressmen that the attack by the LTTE on the Dalada Maligawa temple which is regarded as "place of intense veneration by Buddhists was a deliberately calculated and cynical ploy intended to provoke a communal backlash against the Tamil people living in the south. They wanted to provoke a repeat performance of the July 1983 communal disturbances in which the Tamil people became victims of death and destruction. That the LTTE should intentionally invite death and destruction upon the Tamil people merely for propaganda purposes shows the callous disregard it has for the lives and property of the people it pretends to serve. But the majority of the Sinhalese people are more mature and will not fall into the trap set by the LTTE."

President Kumaratunga in a statement said, "The Sri Dalada Maligawa is the most sacred site of all Sri Lankan Buddhists. It is also a treasure that is held in the highest esteem by all the people of Sri Lanka and the world community. We condemn this shameful attack. I know that this is a moment of great sorrow for all Sri Lankans. However, we must resolve

not to let sorrow and contempt turn into hatred. I earnestly request that all citizens respond to this tragedy in a calm and peaceful manner. Impulsive action at this moment can only fulfil the plans of the LTTE to create another Black July. They are making every attempt to incite violence in order to weaken the Government which is waging a successful battle against the LTTE terror. I have confidence that our people possess the maturity to defeat the provocations of terrorists with calm and intelligence. This is a savage act. We must respond to it as a civilised people."

Hindu Centre Attacked

In act of instant retaliation, a mob of about a thousand people attacked the Sri Selva Vinayagar Hindu Temple and cultural centre at Katukelle, Kandy, following the bomb attack on the Dalada Maligawa. The police who rushed to the scene fired tear gas and dispersed the apparently unruly crowd. The chief trustee of the temple estimated the damage caused to the temple at about Rs. 20 million.

"All Hindus condemn the attack on the Maligawa. It's sad that a mob retaliated by attacking a place of Hindu worship that has had relations with the Maligawa for the last 300 years from the time of King Kirthi Sri Rajasinghe. To this day, the day perehera commences at this temple," Chief Trustee G. Krishnamoorthy said.

Statues of 22 deities that are over 300 years old had been damaged. Some weighing over a ton had been toppled. The tills and the priests' quarters had been looted and light fittings smashed.

The kovil re-opened for worship three days later with a pooja of forgiveness (priya chittam abishekham) using the undamaged deities. The next day poojas and rituals re-commenced. The trustee said that this was only a temporary measure. Statues of the deities and craftsmen for the restoration will have to be brought from India. It will take a long time to restore the temple to its previous condition.

"We as Hindus repeat our condemnation of the attack on the Maligawa. We also deplore and condemn the vandalism that followed. Even today the day perehera begins here and on the day of the randoli perehera, Hindu devotees go in procession to the Dalada Maligawa to perform Hindu religious poojas there," he said. "This sad event caused by a few hooligans should not disturb Hindu - Buddhist relations."

A delegation comprising of reputed Tamil citizens in Kandy representing the Tamil Community living in Kandy called on the Most Ven. Mahanayaka Theras of

the Malwatte and Asgiriya Chapters and the Diyawadana Nilame of the Dalada Maligawa and expressed their deep sorrow and grief over the recent bomb blast opposite the main entrance to the Dalada Maligawa Kandy and lodged their vehement protests against that inhuman attack.

The delegation which called on the prelates comprised of Messrs. T. R. R. Rajan, S. Velayudar, S. P. Nandakumar, A. C. Vadewel and V. Surendran. They told the Most Ven. Mahanayaka Theras that not only Buddhists but also the people of the Hindu faith venerated and revered the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic and the recent inhuman, cruel and uncivilised attack on the Dalada Maligawa would never be condoned by the ordinary Tamil people. On the contrary, they condemn and protest against that dastardly act.

They said that the Tamil people living in Kandy had enjoyed the most harmonious brotherhood with all people irrespective of religion and ethnic differences in general and with the Buddhists in particular, with whom Tamil people had peacefully co-existed for many years, sharing a religious and cultural heritage as proud citizens of a united Sri Lanka.

They told Diyawadana Nilame Nera-njan Wijeyeratne that they had already credited to the Dalada Maligawa Restoration Fund a sum of Rs. 500,000 as an initial donation from the Tamil people in Kandy.

The Most Ven. Palipane Sri Chandananda Mahanayake Thera of the Asgiriya Maha Vihara Chapter told the delegation that he highly appreciated the sentiments expressed by them on that sorrowful occasion. The people of Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim communities had been living in this country in unity and harmony from time immemorial and Tamil people had never been subjected to discrimination against by the Sinhala people. The unfortunate incidents of July 1983 were due to inciting by some interesting politicians and similar situations should not be repeated under any circumstances.

Most Ven. Rambukwelle Sri Vipassi Mahanayaka Thera of the Malwatte Chapter said that the delegation and their words gave him a new life and strength at a time when he had not recovered from the shock and grief over the inhuman and uncivilised attack on the Dalada Maligawa.

Both the prelates highly appreciated the generous donation made by them to the Maligawa restoration fund and also for their pledge to carry on their struggle for everlasting peace and harmony between the peoples of all communities living in Kandy.

Attack Condemned

There have been widespread condemnation of the attack on the Dalada Maligawa. A statement issued on behalf of the Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the United Nations, said, "The Secretary General has learnt with outrage of the news of a bomb attack on a major Buddhist shrine in Kandy on January 25 and the resulting loss of life and destruction. As he has done on many occasions, the Secretary General strongly condemns the use of terrorist tactics in all circumstances. He deplores attempts to divide human beings on religious and ethnic grounds. He extends his sympathies to the families of the victims and appeals for calm and restraint amidst reports of reprisals by the bombing of the shrine."

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) strongly condemned "this deliberate attack on civilians and a place of worship. This constitutes a serious violation of the rules of international humanitarian law, which forbid indiscriminate attacks against the civilian population. Humanitarian law also specifically prohibits the targeting of cultural monuments and places of worship. The ICRC urges respect for these rules so that civilians will no longer be targeted by such acts."

The Amnesty International in a statement dated 26 January stated condemned the killing of 10 civilians in the attack on the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy. "The deliberate killings of civilians by armed opposition groups are human rights abuses which cannot be tolerated under any circumstances," the statement said.

"Three members of the LTTE drove a truck loaded with explosives through roadblocks and detonated it in front of the temple just after 6am on Sunday. The victims are reportedly all pilgrims who were on their way to worship at the temple, containing a relic of a tooth of Buddha. Among them are five members of one family from Embilipitiya, Ratnapura district, including a two-year-old and a seven-year-old child.

"Amnesty International is concerned that the attack flouts the principle of distinction set out in international humanitarian standards which govern the conduct of hostilities. According to this principle, armed forces of all sides to a conflict must at all times distinguish between civilian and military targets and must not target civilians."

Amnesty International reiterated its call to the LTTE to ensure that its forces abide by basic principles of international humanitarian law, in particular, common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocol II.

Mr James P Rubin, spokesman for the United States Department of State, said that the United States strongly condemned the attack and called upon the LTTE to cease acts of terrorism. "The United States continues to support a negotiated political settlement to the conflict in Sri Lanka. We believe the Sri Lankan Government's wide-ranging proposals for constitutional reform constitute a solid basis for a peaceful solution to this tragic conflict," Mr Rubin said.

The London-based International Alert stated that it was profoundly saddened bomb attack on the Dalada Maligawa which had also resulted in the death of many innocent civilians, and unequivocally condemned any act of violence which targeted religious shrines, cultural symbols or innocent civilians in this way.

On behalf of the Catholic Bishops' Conference, the Archbishop of Colombo expressed dismay and shock and condemned the attack on Dalada Maligawa. In a statement the Archbishop said:

"It is with great dismay and shock that we heard over the news media yesterday of the bomb blast close to the Dalada Maligawa in Kandy. No one in his senses would have thought of perpetrating such a crime which is not only against the Buddhists but against every citizen of this country whatever his religion or race may be. The Dalada Maligawa is not only a religious treasure of our Buddhist brethren, but a religious and cultural heritage of which every Sri Lankan feels proud about. We categorically condemn those responsible for this dastardly act. It is the duty of all peace-loving citizens of this country to join hands in stamping out this senseless violence without any further delay."

A statement issued on behalf of the Hindu Council of Sri Lanka by its President Yogendra Duraiswamy and Secretary General P Paramanathan said, "The Hindu Council of Sri Lanka has always condemned attacks on places of religious worship. It is thus deeply concerned at the cowardly attack perpetrated on the Sri Dalada Maligawa, the holiest temple of the Buddhists in Sri Lanka. We condemn this act unreservedly. Our heartfelt sympathies go out to the victims of this heinous act. The Hindus and Buddhists of Sri Lanka have so much in common. The Hindus venerate the Buddha and the Buddhists worship at Hindu temples. We should continue to maintain this good relationship for the general welfare of the people of Sri Lanka."

The All Ceylon Hindu Congress (the Federation of Hindu Religious Associations of Sri Lanka) strongly condemned the attack on religious institutions. "We

the Hindus always respect the places of worship of all the other religions as well. No doubt all those who truly practise their religions, whether Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims or Christians, venerate each and every place of worship.

"The incidents which occurred in Kandy on Sunday 25 - we strongly condemn those. There had been a number of Kovils and other religious places of worship also destroyed or damaged during military actions in the northeast which we had condemned. We appeal to all not to resort to any act of harm or insult to religious institutions and to uphold the noble teachings of the four great religions practised by the people of this country."

A statement issued on behalf of the Church of Ceylon by Bishop of Colombo Rt Rev Kenneth Fernando and Bishop of Kurunegala Rt Rev Andrew Kumaraage said, "We in the Church of Ceylon are deeply distressed by the dastardly act committed on January 25 causing severe damage to the Dalada Maligawa which is a National Shrine. This temple is held in high regard by all the people in our country and by Buddhists throughout the world.

"The Tigers can have only one objective in perpetrating this cruel deed, namely to anger the peace loving people of Sri Lanka of all communities. Our best response will be to act patiently and allow those foul deed to condemn those who perpetrated it. Our St. Paul's Church, which is in close proximity to the Dalada Maligawa, has also been severely damaged. "Let us at this time of great national sorrow be united with one another and seek to work with renewed vigour for an end to violence and the dawn of peace in our country."

"On behalf of the Sri Lanka Muslim community, the SLMC expresses its deep concern over the bomb blast. We strongly condemn this blasphemous and dastardly act. Such actions will only worsen the ethnic relations that have already deteriorated. We Muslims believe in peace among all ethnic groups. We should develop the culture of respecting the religious sentiments of all groups," the leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, M H M Ashraff said in a statement.

The United National Party (UNP) leader, Ranil Wickremesinghe, said, "The UNP and I personally join the Mahanayake Theras of the Malwatte and Asgiriya Chapters, the Diyawadana Nilame and the Buddhist public of Sri Lanka in expressing our profound grief on the terrorist attack on the Sri Dalada Maligawa, the repository of the Sacred tooth relic which is a source of blessing to the peo-

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Proscription of the LTTE

In a political act of instant retaliation against the attack on the Dalada Maligawa on 25 January, the Government of Sri Lanka outlawed the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) on 27 January.

Some considered that the government's action in banning the LTTE would have little practical impact on the protracted ethnic conflict because the security forces are already engaged in fighting the LTTE and there are no signs at present for any talks between the government and the LTTE. According to military sources, proscribing the LTTE would make little or no difference to the government's ongoing war against the LTTE in the north and east of the country. "It may have a psychological effect on the people. But in the battle field, there is not going to be any immediate change," a military spokesman is quoted as saying.

Some others see it as a symbolic move taken on impulse perhaps to calm the angered feelings generated following the attack on the temple venerated universally by the island's majority population.

However, those engaged in campaigns of reconciliation and peace between the Sinhalese and Tamil communities feel that the proscription of the LTTE would in the medium term close the door for any prospect of negotiations between the government and the LTTE which they regard as essential to bring an end to the long drawn out war which had plagued the

country and its people for more than fifteen years.

Until its recent move, the government had resisted calls for the banning of the LTTE in the expectation that it might one day had to talk to the LTTE. A government spokesman said, "We did not want to proscribe the LTTE because we sincerely hoped, in spite of the fact that the LTTE withdrew from peace negotiations and resumed hostilities, to discuss a solution to the problem with the LTTE too," adding that the patience of the government ended with the attack on the Kandy temple.

Some influential sections representing the extremist Sinhala-Buddhist opinion in the south of the island and the majority of the privately-owned print media have for a long time been very critical of the government for not banning the LTTE before. The recent action of the government has been welcomed by these sections.

As far as the LTTE is concerned, it seems unconcerned by the action of the government. The Voice of Tigers radio said that the LTTE had seen many a proscription in the past, but none had adversely affected its ability to carry on with its struggle.

Non-LTTE Tamil politicians expressed views. EPRLF general secretary Suresh Premachandran said that the ban on the LTTE would not change anything because already there has been an unof-

this place of religious worship, which is not only a religious treasure but also a historic and heritage of all people of Sri Lanka. In this protracted conflict that has already caused the deaths of thousands we have urged that innocent non-combatants should not be targeted by all those who are engaged in this conflict. We are deeply concerned that a place of worship which is so sacred to millions of people should be a target.

"Acts of this nature remind us of the immediate need for a political solution to this problem and we appeal to all sections of our community to work for it. We should urge those who are responsible for such terrorism to stop this kind of destruction to precious human lives and property. We strongly request the LTTE and the Government of Sri Lanka together with the Opposition parties to respond positively to the call for a negotiated political settlement without any further delay." □

ficial ban for a long time. TULF MP for Batticaloa Joseph Pararajasingham considered the LTTE ban inadvisable adding, "At this juncture, when several foreign countries as well as government and opposition leaders are trying to bring the LTTE to the negotiating table, ban could be counter-productive."

Tamil Congress leader Kumar Ponnambalam said that he condemned the bombing of the Maligawa, but religion and politics should be kept separate. The attack, according to him, was a retaliation to the destruction caused by the security forces to Kovils and Churches in the Tamil areas. However, attacks on places of worship had to be condemned. "By banning the LTTE, the government has closed the door on a political solution. It has shown its true face and is not interested in talks," Ponnambalam said.

Scope of Ban

The Extraordinary Gazette notification No 1012/16 of 27 January 1998 that proscribed the LTTE under regulations promulgated under the Public Security Ordinance states that its provisions "also apply to every other organisation and to everybody or group of persons engaged in activities substantially similar to those carried on by the organisation styled as the LTTE."

The regulations apply to any person who :

- (a) wears any uniform, dress, symbol, or other emblem which signifies or indicates any association with or membership of or adherence to the proscribed organisation; or
- (b) summons or attends a meeting of such proscribed organisation or participates or engages in any activity of or connected with or related to such proscribed organisation; or
- (c) supports such proscribed organisation by inviting or exhorting persons to be enrolled as members, contributing or collecting funds, or furnishing information or securing other assistance to such proscribed organisation; or
- (d) harbours, conceals or in any other manner assists any members of such proscribed organisation with intent thereby to prevent, hinder or interfere with the apprehension on trial or punishment of such member; or
- (e) makes, prints, distributes or publishes or is in any way concerned in the making, printing, distribution or publication of any writing or printed matter which is or purports to be published by or on behalf of such proscribed organisation or by any member thereof; or
- (f) communicates or attempts to com-

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ple of Sri Lanka in their times of adversity and moments of joy and happiness. The UNP vehemently condemns this terrorist attack launched on Sri Lanka's Independence 50th anniversary. It is the most tragic and barbaric act committed in Sri Lanka's history."

Tamil political parties, including the EPRLF, TULF, EPDP, TELO and PLOTE condemned the bomb attack on the Dalada Maligawa and urged the government to step up security measures to prevent any further similar atrocities including any possible retaliatory action against innocent Tamils and their places of worship.

The National Christian Council in a statement said, "It is with great shock and dismay that we heard over the news on Sunday 25th January 1998 the bomb blast in the precincts of Dalada Maligawa in Kandy.

"The National Christian Council unreservedly condemns the bomb attack on

The First Woman Jaffna Mayor

Political observers see the outcome of the Jaffna elections as a turning point in the politics of Jaffna. They also see much political significance in the fact that the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), captured two local bodies, the Jaffna Municipal Council and the Valigamam North Pradeshiya Sabha, the only two Councils to which the TULF fielded candidates. Among the Tamil political parties which participated in these elections, the TULF was the only unarmed political party. The TULF's nomination papers were rejected on a technicality by the officials of the Election Commission. The party had to go to the Courts to get its nominations reinstated which happened only a few days before the election took place by which time the other parties were well ahead with their campaigning. The victory of the TULF, in spite of these odds, is seen as a reflection of the desire on the part of the people of Jaffna to bring about an "unarmed democracy" back into their day to life. Some observed that the outcome of the elections marked the return of the TULF back to its base in Jaffna after 14 long years.

(continued from page 5)

municate to any other person in any manner, any order, decision, declaration or exhortation made or purported to have been made by such proscribed organisation or by any member thereof or any information relating thereto for the purpose of advancing the objectives of such proscribed organisation.

Any person found guilty of an offence under the regulations on conviction is liable to imprisonment for a period of not less than seven years and not exceeding fifteen years.

The regulations also empowers the Minister of Defence to forfeit to the State any moneys, securities or credits intended to or are being used by the LTTE. The regulations however exclude international organisations rendering humanitarian assistance from the strict application of the provisions.

The LTTE was banned by the Indian government following its involvement in the assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, and it was only on 28 January 1998 that a special court which

Following the announcement of the election result, the TULF President Mr M Sivasithamparam said that a large section of the Tamil people were in favour of a return to peace and normalcy. By and large they had demonstrated that the Tamil community wanted a democratic framework in the north.

The gun-culture should be brought to an end and the city and its surrounding areas desperately need a civilian administration, Mrs. Sarojini Yogeswaran, the first elected woman Mayor of the Jaffna Municipal Council told the press following the local authority elections held on 29 January in the northern Jaffna peninsula.

"If we want to restore this city back to the glory it once enjoyed, the principle of non-violence must be the foundation," Mrs Yogeswaran said.

Mrs Yogeswaran, widow of the former TULF Member of Parliament, Vettivel Yogeswaran who was assassinated along with the TULF's Secretary General Mr A Amirthalingam in Colombo by the Tamil Tigers in 1989, held out the possibility of a dialogue with the LTTE,

was presiding over the trial convicted and sentenced to death 26 persons who were indicted on various charges connected with the assassination.

The United States government, in October last year, included the LTTE in a list of 32 "foreign terrorist organisations". Canadian courts also have held the LTTE as a "terrorist organisation".

Following its action in banning the LTTE, the government of Sri Lanka would appear to have engaged a campaign to persuade western governments to take action against LTTE branches and its front organisations operating in their countries.

Meanwhile, on an indictment filed by the Attorney General, the Colombo High Court Judge, N Ramachandran issued on 27 January a warrant for the arrest of the LTTE leader V Pirabakaran, its Intelligence Chief Pottu Amman and eight others in connection with the bomb attack on the Central Bank on 31 January 1996. They have been charged with fifteen counts including the murder of 72 civilians and damage caused to the Central Bank and other adjoining buildings. □



as a step toward achieving real peace in Jaffna. She felt that effective peace could be achieved only when an agreement was reached between the government and the LTTE. She would remain in Jaffna and would do everything possible to initiate talks with the LTTE with a view to consolidating the peace in the northern capital, Mrs. Yogeswaran said.

Stating that the armed forces had conducted themselves in an exemplary manner during the elections, Mrs Yogeswaran said that it was important that the Tamil people should no longer be intimidated or threatened. The people of Jaffna do not want to be harassed by armed groups. During the elections, many of the TULF candidates withdrew because they felt threatened by the gun-culture the armed groups had introduced, she added.

Speaking to a Colombo journalist who saw her at her home in Jaffna following the election, Mrs Yogeswaran said she too received many a threat to refrain from contesting the election adding that the fear among the people was so great that she had difficulty in getting people onto the nominations list.

Sarojini had to spend hours convincing her supporters to go out on the streets and campaign for her. She had to appeal to others to come forth as polling agents to monitor the election booths. The generalised reluctance even among those who wanted her to win was fear primarily from the LTTE and then from other armed groups which had entered the election fray.

"I have no wish to be surrounded by armed guards. I want to be close to the people and not be shielded by a armed human wall," Sarojini said.

"This war-torn city and its suburbs desperately need a civilian administration. "The military checkpoints virtually

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Protest and Probe Over Attack on Journalist

Scores of journalists demonstrated on the streets of Colombo on 19 January in protest against intimidatory attack on the home of a senior journalist. The protesters shouted slogans and waved placards reading "Hands off the Press" during the demonstration organised by the Free Media Movement (FMM).

The protests followed the intimidatory and threatening invasion by men armed with firearms of the home of one of Sri Lanka's senior journalist, Iqbal Athas who writes a weekly column on defence and military related matters for

the privately-owned "The Sunday Times".

At about 9 pm on 12 January, as Athas later recalled, a gunman burst into his home, while he and his wife were relaxing in front of a television in their bedroom. The gunman, who was civilian attire - light yellow trousers and a T-shirt - went up to Athas and aimed an automatic pistol point-blank at his right temple and then his chest. Facing instant death, Athas screamed. The gunman, who Athas suspects to be a military man, was not alone. Four other armed men constituted the team that broke into the

journalist's home, while 10 to 15 others also armed with automatics were waiting outside Athas's home in Nugegoda, just a few miles from the centre of the capital, Colombo. After 25 minutes of intimidation and menacing threats, the gang left and disappeared into the dark when the journalist's daughter continued screaming and sobbing uncontrollably.

The gang of five mysterious men broke in at about 8.45 pm, after they assaulted the journalist's domestic aide, Subramaniam, and forced opened the main gate. Subramaniam had spotted three men standing by the side entrance who said they wanted to see Athas immediately because they wanted some news item published in his newspaper. When Subramaniam asked for their identity, the men flashed what appeared to be security services ID cards. And when Subramaniam replied that Athas was not in, one of men assaulted him with an automatic and forced him to lead them inside the home. One inside they burst into the bedroom.

The seasoned journalist said that the men carried themselves like soldiers each brandishing SLAF standard-issue Browning 9mms. "These were people from a service. Their build and demeanour leave me firmly convinced that they were servicemen.

Mr Athas expressed his thanks to the Defence Secretary Chandrananda De Silva and Director of Information Ariya Rupesinghe for promptly organising a round-the-clock security watch at his residence after the he had complained to them about the failure of the police to respond to his request for protection.

The US-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) called for an immediate investigation into the attack by armed men on the home of Iqbal Athas. "The CPJ is gravely concerned over an attack on Thursday by armed men on the home of Iqbal Athas, an internationally respected Sri Lankan journalist... The CPC urges your excellency to undertake an immediate and thorough investigation into this latest incident," CPJ said in a letter to President Chandrika Kumaratunga.

For its part, the Sri Lankan government on 13 January condemned the attack by armed men on the home of Iqbal Athas and said it had ordered an investigation into the incident. "President (Chandrika Kumaratunga) has already issued strict instructions to the relevant authorities to ensure that the offenders are dealt with in terms of the law irrespective of the position they hold or influence they wield," Media Minister Mangala Samaraweera said in a statement. □

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at every hundred metres do not provide a climate for freedom and peace," Mrs Yogeswaran said.

Mrs Yogeswaran said that she wanted see that facilities such as roads, sewage, drainage and other municipal facilities were restored and improved. Maternity and child clinics have to be setup. Lots of funds were needed, and already some foreign governments had promised help. She wanted to meet the President whom she had never met and discuss some of her priority projects she had in mind for the people of Jaffna.

"The people of Jaffna are disillusioned and desperate for peace. They have had enough of suffering and loss of life. They are really pining for peace. The army at present is good and is keeping the peace, but as I said earlier, we don't want the gun culture any more. We daily pray for peace and hope the major parties will come up with proposals which the Tamil people can accept," Mrs Yogeswaran told the press.

Frederica Jansz, who visited Jaffna during the election, in her column in the Sunday Times wrote, "While many in Jaffna have no idea (of) what the government proposed devolution package entails, they did however perceive that the local polls were an initial step towards establishing normalcy in the area. Further that this would in the long term relieve civilians from a constant military presence. Strangely many said they preferred the presence of the military to any other political party....

"It is interesting to note that what dominates conversation in Jaffna is not the elections, but the exodus in 1995 during "Operation Riviresa". The ethnic war has clearly not only created divisions between the Sinhalese and the Tamils but has caused fragmentation to occur within even among the Tamil community in Jaffna. Many of those who have returned to government held territory do not share concern for those left behind in the Wann. Instead it is the damage to personal property and the loss of material goods that dominates conversation. The fact that they were driven out of their homes by the LTTE and underwent immense suffering, returning to find many of their homes occupied by the armed forces, are (with) bitter memories that the people of Jaffna will seemingly not forget.

"The humiliation suffered at checkpoints is yet another thorn endured by the people of Jaffna. While the military do seem to make a genuine effort to be humane, it does not compensate for the humiliation the civilians undergo. For a civilian to travel from Pallai to Jaffna city, it takes 6 hours. They would need to be checked 19 times in and out of Jaffna. The distance is 25 miles.

"Many expressed hope that the government will provide a long term solution to restoring peace in Jaffna. The fact that 43% of an estimated 250,000 eligible voters have called for a democratic framework is a clear message to the LTTE that the people in Jaffna are tired of violence and seek only a peaceful resolution to a conflict that has gone on for too long."

Jaffna Library Re-opened

After 17 years of its destruction, the Jaffna Public Library was re-opened on Thai Pongal day, 14 January, in a refurbished building in the presence of a large gathering attended by three cabinet ministers and Members of Parliament.

The original Jaffna Public Library, a storehouse of rare Tamil literature and old manuscripts, was set on fire and destroyed by a rampaging group of policemen in May 1981. Many had described the destruction of the Library as an act of cultural incineration aimed at destroying the heritage of the Tamil people. Many attributed the development of Tamil politics into armed militancy, particularly among the then youth to the callous and senseless destruction of the Library.

The new library is housed in a temporary building, and will eventually move to a new building on its original site, which is being rebuilt at a cost of 11 million US dollars. Britain, India and private collectors have donated money and books to the resurrection of the Library.

Government spokesmen say that the Library's re-opening is an important step towards correcting historic injustices committed against Tamil people.

The following is the text of the recorded speech delivered by Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister, Lakshman Kadirgamar: "For many decades before 1981, Jaffna had a library of rare excellence - a library that was one of the finest in the whole of Asia. That library contained not only a comprehensive collection of English and Tamil books on all intellectual disciplines; it also contained a priceless collection of manuscripts and old literature in the Tamil language.

It was a library from which generations of students, scholars, teachers, researchers and townfolk of Jaffna derived much pleasure and profit. It was one of the centre of cultural life in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka. The library was housed in a handsome building.

In 1981, in one fell swoop, the library was destroyed. Every book and manuscript in it was burnt. That handsome building was gutted. It stands today as a ghostly relic of what it once was. The

crime that was committed in Jaffna that day 17 years ago was not an act of mischief. It was a calculated blow to the pride of the Tamil people. It was an act that was intended to demoralise and humiliate the Tamil people. The perpetrators of that act have gone unpunished. No effort has been made over all those many years to restore or re-build that library even as an act of atonement. The destruction of that library has left a deep scar on the psyche of the Tamil people. It is an act that is well remembered throughout the world wherever books and libraries are found and scholars congregate.

When President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga was elected to office in 1994, she decided that as soon as it became practically possible to do so the Government of Sri Lanka would restore and re-build the Public Library of Jaffna. That opportunity has arisen. It arose when the Jaffna Peninsula was re-taken by the Government of Sri Lanka.

During the last year it came to the notice of the Government in many ways, through visiting journalists, diplomats, social and humanitarian workers, the citizens of Jaffna, and through the Sri Lanka Army, that the people of Jaffna wished very much to have a library. The president decided that this wish should be honoured immediately.

While plans have already been made for re-building and restoring the old library, she felt it was necessary, as a matter of urgency to provide for the people of Jaffna a temporary library. That decision was made, I remember very well, on the 2nd of September last year.

A Presidential Committee was appointed to oversee the Establishment of the Jaffna Public Library and the Strengthening of the Library System in Sri Lanka. This Committee of eminent persons included the late Venerable Pottewala Sri Pagnasara, Mahanayake of the Ramanna Nikaya. On his death two other Venerable members of the Sangha were appointed to the Committee - the Ven Madit-hiyawela Vijithasena Thera, Acting Mahanayake of the Ramanna Nikaya, and the Venerable Dr Medagoda Sumanatissa Nayaka Thera, Principal, Sunethradevi

Maha Pirivena. The other members of the Committee are: The Rt. Rev Bishop Oswald Gomis of the Catholic Church, The Rt Rev Bishop Kenneth Fernando of the Anglican Church, Mr. K. Balapatabendi, PC, Secretary to the President, Dr K D Arulpragasam, Prof Savithri Goonasekera, Mr Yogendra Duraiswamy, Mr K Kanag-Isvaran, PC, Mr Mano Chamugam and Mr Sinha Basnayake.

The Hon Mangala Samaraweera, Minister of Posts, Telecommunications and Media and I are the Co-Chairmen of the Committee.

In four months our goal of establishing a new Public Library in Jaffna has been accomplished. At last a Government of Sri Lanka seeks to repair a terrible wrong that was inflicted on the Tamil people.

On the shelves of the library, as it opens today, there are some 8,000 books. Many thousands more will come. I wish to take this opportunity of conveying our sincere appreciation and gratitude, on behalf of Her Excellency the President, the Government of Sri Lanka, and the Presidential Committee, to the governments, institutions, organisations and individuals who have donated the books which will form the initial nucleus of the new Jaffna Library and provided other services for the establishment of the library.

The Government of India headed by Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral has made a generous initial donation of almost two thousand English books; The Government of the State of Tamil Nadu headed by Chief Minister Karunanidhi has made a generous initial donation of almost 1500 Tamil books. Both Governments have pledged continuing support for the Jaffna Library.

The British Council headed by Sir John Hanson and by Mr. Peter Ellwood in Sri Lanka, the British Library headed by Dr. Gordon Lang, and Book Aid International, a charitable organisation which sends books to libraries in developing countries, headed by Ms. Sarah Harry, have already extended enthusiastic and dedicated support, and have pledged continuing support for the Jaffna Library project.

Our thanks also go to the Asia Foundation, the Ford Foundation and the Asia Society, three prestigious institutions with headquarters in the United States of America, for the pledges of support which they have given for the development of the Jaffna Library.

I thank the Chairman and management of Air Lanka for the assistance rendered in transporting consignments of books from the United Kingdom and India.

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DEATH FOR ALL 26 IN RAJIV MURDER CASE

All 26 accused who stood trial in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case have been sentenced to death. The Designated Judge, TADA Court-1 who pronounced the judgement in the high security Poonamallee special prison-cum-court complex in Chennai in Tamil Nadu, held that all the accused were guilty of conspiring to assassinate the former Prime Minister, with the help of the LTTE. The

legraphy Act and also for offences committed under various other sections of the IPC.

Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated at Sriperumbudur, about 50 km from here, on 21 May 1991 by a woman suicide-bomber. Dhanu, who set off a belt bomb just as he was approaching the dais at the venue of a campaign meeting for the 1991 general elections.

self took almost the entire day. The trial started on 19 January 1994 and concluded on 5 November 1997. The Judge held that the charge of conspiracy had been proved against all the accused. In respect of Nalini (Accused 1) and Perarivalan (A 18), the Judge held that the charges against them under IPC section 302 had also been proved. The Judge held that Nalini shared the common intention to assassinate Rajiv Gandhi and convicted her under 16 counts.

He also found her guilty under Section 3(2) of the TADA Act as the assassination was a terrorist act committed on Indian soil. She was also found guilty under Section 326 of the IPC (causing griev-



death sentence was subject to confirmation by the Supreme Court.

"In this case Rajiv Gandhi, former Prime Minister was assassinated in pursuance of a diabolical plot, carefully conceived and executed by a highly organised foreign terrorist organisation, the LTTE. Sixteen innocent lives were lost and many sustained grievous/simple injuries. Considering the above circumstances, I hold this the rarest of rare cases and I award the death sentence for the accused." The judge, Mr V Navaneetham, said. The judge also said that from the evidence, oral and documentary, it was established by the prosecution that the conspiracy to assassinate Rajiv Gandhi and others was hatched by the LTTE supremo V Prabhakaran.

Besides the charge of conspiracy, the Judge also held that the accused were guilty of offences under the provisions of the TADA Act, the Explosive Substances Act, the Arms Act, the Passport Act, the Foreigners Act and the Wireless and Te-

The chargesheet filed by the Special Investigation Team of the CBI on 20 May 1992, exactly a year after the assassination, sought to piece together the sequence of events from July 1987 leading to the assassination. It listed 41 persons as accused. Twelve of them were dead, of whom 10 were Sri Lankans and three were declared proclaimed absconders. None of the 26 accused in custody got bail and they were lodged in the high security Poonamallee prison.

The LTTE supremo V Prabhakaran, its intelligence wing chief, Pottu Amman and the deputy chief of its women's intelligence wing, Akhila, were declared proclaimed absconders. Sivarasan alias Bhackiachandran, Dhanu, Subha, Haribabu, Nehru alias Gokhul, Shanmugam, Gundu Santhan, Suresh Master, Dixon alias Kishore, Amman alias Gaigaikumar, Anna alias Kirthi and Kamuna alias Jamila are all dead. The judgement ran into nearly 2,000 pages and the Judge read out only the operative portions which it-

ous injuries to 13 persons) and under Section 324 (causing simple injuries to 6 persons). Nalini, who married another accused, Murugan, while they were in custody was found guilty of harbouring, conspiring, abetment and preparatory to the commissioning of a terrorist act and also that she had indulged in a disruptive act under Section 4(3) of TADA Act.

Perarivalan, who prepared the belt bomb was found guilty under Section 3(3) of TADA Act, Section 302 of the IPC read with Section 109 of the IPC (abatement), Sections 326 and 324 of the IPC. Section 6(1)A of the Wireless and Telegraphy Act. Section 12 of the Passport Act and Section 4(3) read with Section 4(1) of the TADA Act. The charge against Perarivalan was that he purchased two 9 volt cells to detonate the bomb.

While Santhan (A 2) was found guilty under Section 3(3) of the TADA Act and Section 14 of the Foreigners Act. Murugan (A3) was found guilty under Section

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The signing of the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord on 29 July 1987, which put an end to the LTTE's sole aim and objective to form a separate Tamil Eelam, was the main motive behind the conspiracy to assassinate Rajiv Gandhi, former Prime Minister, according to the finding given by the Designated Court-I which on 28 January sentenced to death all the 26 accused in the case.

The Judge culled out the evidence to show how the hatred, sown in the mind of the LTTE supremo V Prabhakaran, developed into a motive to kill Rajiv Gandhi. Prabhakaran was disappointed because the LTTE was not recognised by Rajiv Gandhi as the sole representative

RAJIV KILLED TO PREVENT HIS RETURN TO POWER

of the Sri Lankan Tamils as he could find during his visit to Delhi (before the signing of the accord) that the leaders of other Tamil groups, viz., EPRLF, ENDLE, TELO, PLOTE, EROS, TULF also took part in the discussion (at the meeting held at the behest of Rajiv Gandhi).

The Judge noted that Prabhakaran was not satisfied with the accord as the LTTE was not made a party to it.

In this context, the Judge said the visit

prosecution, PW 250, while addressing the International Tamil Conference in London in 1988, had stated that Prabhakaran told him on the phone that "he was betrayed by the Government of India by Rajiv Gandhi and he was stabbed in the back."

But during cross-examination, PW 250 denied having said that. The Judge said from the evidence the only conclusion that could be arrived at was that he



V. Selvaluxmi

S. Baskaran

Shanmugavadivelu

P. Ravichandran

Suseendran

G. Perarivalan

Irumborai

S. Bhagyanathan

S. Padma

Subha Sundaram

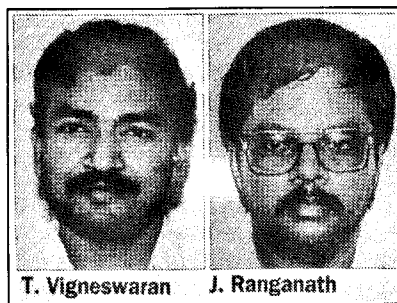
K. Dhanasekaran

N. Rajasuriya

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3(3) of the TADA Act, Section 14 of the Foreigners Act and Section 6(1)A of the Wireless and Telegraphy Act. Sankar alias Koneswaran (A4), T Vijayanandan (A5) and Ruban alias Sureshkumar (A6) were found guilty under Section 3(3) of the TADA Act and Section 14 of the Foreigners Act. Kanagasabapathy (A7) was found guilty under Sections 3(3) and 3(4) of the DADA Act, IPC Section 212 and Section 14 of the Foreigners Act, Athiral alias Chandralekha (A8) under Section 3(4) of the TADA Act IPC Section 212 and Section 14 of the Foreigners Act.

The others convicted are: Robert Pyas. Jayakumar, J Shanthi, P Vijayan, Selvalakshmi, Bhaskaran, Shanmugavadivelu alias Thambi Anna, Ravichandran alias Ravi alias Prakasam, Mahesh alias Surendran, Irumborai, S Bhagyanathan, S Padma, Sundaram alias Subha Sundaram, K Dhanasekharan, Rangan, Vickey alias Vigneswaran and J Rynaganath. □



T. Vigneswaran

J. Ranganath

of prosecution witness 250, (Mr V Gopalasamy, former Rajya Sabha MP, who was then in the DMK), General Secretary, MDMK, to Jaffna and Vavunia forest, clandestinely by a boat on 6 February 1989 and his meeting with Prabhakaran was relevant and significant.

The Judge said the visit of PW 250 to Jaffna and his meeting with Prabhakaran and others were videographed and during his deposition, he identified the video cassette (marked as an exhibit) containing his trip to Jaffna. According to the

did speak at the conference (as above) and his denial in this regard had been proved to be false in his cross examination.

The Judge was of the view that though PW 250 turned hostile his evidence in the light of a Supreme Court decision had to be accepted. He deposed to the court that the movements of the undisputed leader of the LTTE were curtailed in Delhi. No one was allowed to meet him. On 29 July 1987, when the accord was signed in Colombo by Rajiv Gandhi and J R Jayawardene. Prabhakaran was in Delhi. It was at that point of time the seed of hatred against Rajiv Gandhi was sown in the mind of Prabhakaran."

The Judge noted that this hatred which developed in the mind of Prabhakaran in Delhi developed into animosity against Rajiv Gandhi in view of the events that took place after the IPKF was inducted in Sri Lanka.

The Judge also referred to the depo-

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THE JAFFNA ELECTIONS

D B S Jeyaraj

Elections to 17 local authorities in the Jaffna peninsula were held on 29 January. When polls were announced first a great outcry arose against it from Tamil political and newspaper circles based in Colombo. This opposition was based on the premise that "normalcy" was not prevailing in Jaffna. With the army in sole authority all local bodies would only play an insignificant subservient role it was pointed out. The priority of the people was not polls but rehabilitation and reconstruction it was said. In view of LTTE opposition the elections were going to be a recipe for disaster was another opinion. Some accused the government of trying to hoodwink International opinion through the staging of "cosmetic" elections it was stated.

Tamil political parties like the Tamil United Liberation Front, Eelam People's Democratic Party, People's Liberation Organisation of Thamil Eelam, Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation and Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front appealed to the government against the scheduled polls. They asked for an indefinite postponement of the elections. Elections had been announced twice before and postponed in deference to Tamil party requests. Their opposition was that the ground situation was not conducive and that they did not have enough time for political work. This time their appeals did not work.

President Kumaratunga seemed determined this time that elections to the Jaffna local authorities should definitely

be held. Other government ministers too seemed to be of the same view. The newly appointed Jaffna District Army Commander General Lionel Balagalle was confident that despite a perceived threat by the Liberation Tigers of Thamil Eelam it would be possible to conduct a relatively successful election.

With the government remaining firm in its resolve to go ahead with the polls the only alternative left to the Tamil political parties was to remain steadfast in their opposition to the polls and boycott it. If they possessed the political will they could have also issued an ultimatum to the government threatening to withdraw their support if Jaffna local polls were held. But that did not happen. The government seemed to know that for all the rhetoric the Tamil parties were not in a position to even threaten withdrawing support at the present moment. Moreover these parties beset with their own rivalries were unable to adopt any common course of action.

The lack of unity among Tamil parties was demonstrated clearly as events unfolded. When Tamil parties began to pay lip service to the boycott possibility the government simply stated that the People's Alliance would field candidates who would then be elected uncontested. The Tamil parties were unable to call their bluff. So very sheepishly they decided to contest. The next step was to see whether these parties could formulate a common approach and present a joint list of candidates. Again meetings held to discuss

and this was the immediate motive for designing the conspiracy.

Referring to the arguments of the defence counsel, that many other militant groups like ULFA, J&K militants and Punjab militants were against Rajiv Gandhi, the Judge said it was true that Rajiv Gandhi had threats from some militant groups in India.

There was not even an iota of evidence available in this case to support the contention of the counsel in this regard. On the other hand the facts and circumstances proved in this case through witnesses and documents clearly established beyond any doubt that Prabhakaran and the LTTE alone had a very strong motive to kill Rajiv Gandhi. □

unity proved fruitless.

The failure among the Tamil parties to adopt a common approach towards the elections as well as the government could be attributed to three things. It is no secret that all non-LTTE Tamil political parties have, obtained political space to operate only because of the protection given by the security forces. They are able to be physically present only in those areas cleared and controlled by the army. They face total destruction at the hands of the LTTE if they even dare venture into Tiger territory. Even local polls in Jaffna had been made possible only because the army was in control of Jaffna.

In that context no Tamil Political Party can afford to effectively challenge any government in power and withdraw support because they would then lose their only form of protection against the LTTE, compounding this situation further is the fact that all these parties are involved with the government effort to seek greater devolution, a task that is yet to conclude satisfactorily. To break off support to the government would be premature at this point.

Secondly the mistrust and oneness among the Tamil parties was great. If one party withdrew support, it feared that the other party would then ingratiate itself with the government by continuing support and obtain benefits. Likewise each party suspected that if one boycotted the polls the other would rush ahead with a nomination list and try to get elected unopposed. This stood in the way of meaningful unity.

Thirdly notwithstanding their professed antipathy to the polls these parties also had sneaky desires of proving their electoral prowess at some kind of polls. It was very necessary therefore to contest and demonstrate their strength in Jaffna still considered the premier enclave of the Sri Lankan Tamils. Apart from trying to gauge their support those parties enjoying a working relationship with the armed forces may have also entertained fond hopes of engineering an enhanced victory through military machinations as was the case during the IPKF period. The local authority representatives were also entitled to remuneration. Besides there was a strong possibility that future rehabilitation projects would be implemented through these councils.

All these reasons contributed to the Tamil parties entering the electoral fray. That the government had shrewdly played its cards was visible from the last day of the nominations. It appeared that apart from the TULF all other parties namely the EPDP, PLOTE, EPRLF and TELO had entered candidates for all seventeen

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sition made by Vazhapadi, Mr K Ramamurthy (PW 258, former TNCC-1 President) that the Congress Party was committed to the accord of July 1987. The Judge said the Congress-I election manifesto showed Rajiv Gandhi's commitment to the accord and to protect the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka.

If Rajiv Gandhi were to return to power, the avowed objective of achieving an independent "Tamil Eelam" would remain a dream for the LTTE and Prabhakaran.

Therefore, the one and only way such an event could be prevented was by preempting the possibility of Rajiv Gandhi coming back to power by eliminating him

local authorities. Obviously these parties while calling for a postponement publicly had been preparing for polls privately.

On the last day of nominations two upsets took place. An overzealous Elections Department official sent from Colombo misdirected himself when interpreting electoral provisions. Without taking the differences in group nominations and individual nominations into account, he disqualified entire lists for technical errors concerning individual candidates. As a result the TULF which fielded only two lists found itself rejected and ejected out of elections because two candidates had fallen foul of the age qualifications. The EPRLF found five of their nomination papers rejected because formalities concerning attestations by Commissioners of Oaths had not been followed.

Both the TULF and EPRLF went to courts challenging the Elections Commissioner's decision. The Election Commissioner and Attorney-General's departments decided not to contest these challenges. So the EPRLF found itself eligible to contest in the rejected five councils again. In the case of the TULF an unexpected problem arose. The PLOTE went to courts independently contesting the TULF right to have its nominations accepted. The PLOTE refused to compromise on this. It was surmised that PLOTE intransigence was because it feared the TULF would eat into votes that may have been cast for the PLOTE in the absence of the former at the hustings. The TULF went to the appeal courts and got clearance to contest in the teeth of legal opposition by the PLOTE. The TULF entered the arena just a week ahead of elections.

Elections were held to the Jaffna Municipal Council; Chavakachcheri, Point-Pedro and Valvettithurai Urban Councils; and the thirteen Pradeshiya Sabhas (AGA divisions) of Velanai, Delft, Kayta, Chavakachcheri, Nallur, Pachilaippalli, Point Pedro, Valigamam North, Valigamam West, Valigamam East, Valigamam South, Valigamam South West and Vadamaratchi South West. The EPDP, PLOTE, TELO and EPRLF contested all 17 local authorities. The TULF contested the Jaffna Municipal and Valigamam North Pradeshiya Councils. A breakaway group from the EPDP contested the Velanai and Kayts Councils as Independent groups.

The results in a nutshell were as follows. The TULF came first in the Jaffna Municipality with Mrs Sarojini Yogeswaran, widow of former Jaffna MP V Yogeswaran being elected as Mayor. This is the first time that a woman has been elected first citizen of Jaffna. The TULF also won Valigamam North Pradeshiya Sabha. The TELO won the Valvettithurai

Urban Council. The PLOTE through its registered Political party, the Democratic People's Liberation Front won the Urban councils of Point Pedro, Chavakachcheri and the Pradeshiya Sabhas of Pachhilaippalli and Chavakachcheri. The EPDP won the remainder, all of them Pradeshiya Sabhas. The final tally was EPDP - Ten Pradeshiya Sabhas; PLOTE - two Urban Councils and two Pradeshiya Sabhas. TULF - One Municipal Council and one Pradeshiya Sabha; TELO - One Urban Council.

The total number of voters on the registers for all 17 local Authorities was 571,486; The total number of votes polled was 106,464; The spoilt or rejected votes were 14,868. The total number of valid votes counted were 91,596. The total number of candidates elected to the seventeen councils were 234.

Of these the EPDP won 105 seats in all by getting 38,719. The PLOTE Polled 25,576 and got 62 seats. The EPRLF with 13,141 was entitled to 26 seats. The TELO got 7,036 votes and 18 seats. This tally is for the four parties that contested all 17 councils.

In the case of the TULF which contested only two councils it polled 6,361 votes and got 20 seats. The two independent groups that contested two Councils got 919 votes and three seats.

At face value the results indicate that all Political parties have support bases that are fairly well spread out. Even if one group came first it was not a total whitewash thanks to the proportionate representation system. Other parties were also able to wrest control of some seats. Given the EPDP total of about 43% of the total valid votes polled With its lion share of 10 councils out of 17 and 105 of the 234 council seats that party seems to have done best.

The EPDP got nine out of ten Parliamentary seats allocated to Jaffna in the 1994 elections. The flawed electoral process prevalent then enabled the EPDP to do so by polling just about 10,000 votes. The local polls seems to have helped that party to assert that it is the single largest mass based party in the Peninsula. It is a moot point however whether the results would have been different if the TULF had contested everywhere and was not obstructed while campaigning.

Apart from these overt roles there is of course the covert or invisible role played by the LTTE. The Tigers apparently were not in favour of the elections. They had warned elections officials not to cooperate in the process. They had also put up posters and issued leaflets asking people not to support or vote for candidates. Expecting an LTTE backlash security was

tightened for some of the known candidates. A unique feature of this poll was the non-revelation of the names of candidates other than the first two on lists due to security reasons. There were no pre-arranged mass meetings or processions. Only limited house to house canvassing and unannounced pocket meetings were held. All because of fear that the LTTE would target the candidates. As the day of election drew near it looked as if the LTTE was not going to gun down candidates after all. Whether this was a deliberate decision or a virtue made of necessity is not clear. But some analysts predicted that the LTTE would like to test its psychological grip on the Tamil people by encouraging voter abstinence.

In order to perhaps instil insecurity and trepidation among the people it executed two major attacks during election week. The LTTE in a swift move overran and demolished an EPDP camp at Punkudutheevu killing eleven. On election eve the LTTE launched an attack on Army positions on the Gurunagar coast by sea. This resulted in heavy exchanges of gunfire unnerving Jaffna citizenry. This also resulted in voting itself beginning two hours late as the armed forces had to perform extra duties and maintain greater vigilance in the interests of elections security because of the LTTE attack.

Thus it was clear that the LTTE wanted the people to refrain from voting in the polls. Viewed against that backdrop, the phenomenon of only 106,464 persons out of an electoral roll of 571,486 casting their votes seems to be an indirect victory for the "unseen contestants" the LTTE. From that perspective only about 18% have voted and if you take the total valid votes after discarding the spoilt votes then only 16% have voted. This perspective however would not be entirely correct in view of another dimension namely the actual extent of voters present in the peninsula.

Although the voting registers state the figure as 571,000 that is not correct in actual terms. The registers have not been updated or revised for several years and therefore do not reflect the current situation. Thanks to continuous migration from the peninsula exacerbated in 1995 by the great "exodus" to the Vanni, the population of Jaffna is quite depleted. The actual number is said to be only 440,000 at present. Of this about 235,000 to 250,000 only are eligible voters.

In that context, the voter turnout in Jaffna is certainly much higher in percentage terms. It suggests a 40% plus voter turnout in Jaffna. The turnout in the Municipality is much higher reaching nearly to 50%. Again it could be argued that even

a 40% to 45% voter turnout is nothing great when compared to pre-1983 elections in Jaffna where it has been usually about 50%. Also comparative elections in the South have seen about a 65% to 70% turnout. But then the situation in Jaffna today cannot be compared to the Jaffna of yesteryear. Nor can it be equated to the Southern Sri Lankan situation.

The cards were really stacked against a high voter turnout in the elections due to a number of reasons. In the first place there had been right from the start a feeling of resentment against the holding of elections described by the Colombo Tamil media as an imposed one from above. Even after the Tamil political parties had decided to enter the hustings, the Colombo based Tamil media with the exception of State Controlled newspapers kept up a sustained campaign against it. It was a virtual tirade admonishing all and sundry for imposing an election that amounted to a "betrayal of the Tamil people".

Apart from this even some responsible sections of Jaffna society including the Catholic Bishop Rt Rev Thomas Soundranayagam and some prominent educationists expressed misgivings about the timing of the elections. There was also expressed a viewpoint that the priority of the people was relief and rehabilitation. It was also felt that no kind of active and free democracy was possible in a war situation, a climate in which it was the army that laid down the law. Even the times for garbage collection or lighting of street lamps had to be determined by the soldiers it was felt.

In such a context all elected local authority councillors would become powerless puppets of the military, it was pointed out. Moreover increased hostile activity by the LTTE against these bodies and their members would result in them becoming virtually defunct. The example of the Eastern Province councils were cited. The only sensible solution was for elections to take place in a climate of peace. For that to happen a dialogue had to commence between the government and the LTTE was the feeling.

It is interesting to note that when criticism against the holding of elections was expressed by Tamil opinion makers and distinguished citizens, the behavioural pattern of the LTTE was taken for granted as being against the elections. The proponents of elections were faulted but not the LTTE in any way for impeding the process. Again that is the current Tamil reality where only one Side is constantly criticised and those daring to question the other are eliminated physically or branded as traitors and stooges of the enemy un-

fairly. It has still not been realised by responsible sections of the Society that in recent times Tamil political discourse has been overwhelmed by a dominant entity that is neither accountable or even democratically visible. No dissent is tolerated and all intra-Tamil political dialogue has turned into an authoritarian monologue.

Adding further to the Jaffna voters' misgivings about elections was the media campaign that if a high voter turnout was registered, all Tamils living in the West as refugees would be sent back. Since Jaffna, described as a money order economy by Pieter Keuneman, is now a foreign exchange remittance economy this naturally upset a lot of people. Furthermore there was also the media inspired projection that the entire election was a cosmetic exercise by the government to gloss over the recent negative publicity arising out of the Amnesty International Report about disappearances in Jaffna and show the World that all was right with the people of Jaffna.

Another depressant from a voter perspective was the quality of the candidates on display. In fairness to the Jaffna voter many of them genuinely despise all armed groups that have turned "half-democrats" now. Also when these groups proposed some of their cadres as candidates it was further resented. Then there was the "unusual necessity" of not disclosing the names of the candidates for security reasons. Normally voters are enthused in elections by the personality factor where she or he goes to vote for his or her particular candidate. This was absent here.

This left the voters with virtually a restricted "hobsons" choice of selecting the lesser of the four evils. It may not be an accident that the councils contested by the TULF recorded a higher voter turnout than others. It could be argued that if the TULF had contested in all the 17 councils, the voter turnout would have been higher and the results quite different. The bitter infighting between the groups and their internecine propaganda also put off most people.

Finally there was the LTTE factor. Although the LTTE did not unleash a furious annihilation campaign against the elections candidates they did make their hostility known. If the LTTE had been savagely against the elections then the voter turnout would have been really low. But again it was not viciously intensive either. So there was a reasonable flow of voters. Incidentally the 422 polling booths in the peninsula had to be clustered into 114 only because of fears about LTTE disruption.

In the backdrop of this scenario where an "abnormal normalcy" prevails in Jaffna

the 40% turnout is quite creditable. The various Independent Election monitoring teams have recorded some incidents of violence but nothing serious like deaths. Also these were pre-election day incidents. Polling day itself was comparatively peaceful. Unlike the Indian Army period where the IPKF took an active role in electioneering and compelling people to vote, the Sri Lankan army seems to have played a non-partisan role. Although largescale voter rigging was feared because of the unrevised voters lists actual malpractices were minimal mainly because of the vigil maintained by each party against the other. Some impersonation and transporting voters to polling booths has been done. There are also charges of bribery in the form of gifts, money, clothes and liquor. But then these charges have been stated even in other "healthy" elections too.

Thus when one takes into account all the odds heaped against the Jaffna polls the final performance can be deemed satisfactory though not requiring complacency. It remains to be seen as to what beneficial results this poll is going to bring about in the future. The primary objective of this government in staging these elections were to relieve at least a part of the civil administration burden from the armed forces in Jaffna.

Secondly it wanted some form of elected representatives to identify priorities in rehabilitation and formulate development schemes. Foreign governments and donor agencies had indicated very clearly that money for developing Jaffna would be forthcoming only if these requirements were met.

Thirdly the government also wanted to creak into life the long dormant election machinery in Jaffna. The local polls were a rehearsal for other scheduled polls like Parliament, Presidency, Provincial Councils or even a referendum.

Fourthly it was also an opportunity for other Tamil parties to demonstrate to the world that they too enjoyed some political support. It was also a measure to gauge their respective weaknesses. For the armed forces it was an acid test to display their control of Jaffna. Arguably a case can be made out now that the LTTE is in no position at present to totally disrupt the polls and that it could no longer lay claim to being the sole authentic voice of the Sri Lankan Tamils.

Tamil critics in Colombo have been confounded by their Jaffna counterparts' electoral performance. To adapt Neil Armstrong, the Jaffna polls verdict was only a "small step for a local poll exercise but a giant leap for the future of de-

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FAILURE OF NATION-BUILDING AND THE COSTS OF WAR

By Dr. S. Narapalasingam*

Sri Lanka has failed in the task of nation-building since independence. Assets worth billions of rupees which could have been deployed to improve the lives of the people have been diverted into a war effort in which the flower of the country's youth has been decimated. That in substance was the sad confession made by President Chandrika Kumaratunga on the occasion of celebrating 50 years of the island's independence from colonial rule.

Direct Cost of the War

According to the preliminary findings of a study commissioned by the National Peace Council of Sri Lanka and undertaken by the "Marga Institute", the direct expenditure incurred both by the government and the LTTE during the period 1983-1996 amounted to Rs. 228 billion. Government's expenditure is estimated to be Rs.190 billion and the balance Rs.38 billion is the amount incurred by the LTTE. Of course, the total direct expenditure incurred would be much higher now, as the process of destruction has continued unabatedly since 1996.

Attention should be drawn to the way the LTTE's direct expenditure has been

estimated in the study as this differs significantly from that used to estimate governments' expenditure. The relevant portion in the published study is quoted to avoid any argument over this estimate.

"Substantial resources are spent by the LTTE on their fighting forces and on purchases of arms, ammunition and other goods and services directly used for the war. Part of this would be obtained from the gross domestic product (GDP) of the North and East and part would consist of the resources mobilised outside the country. There is evidence of resources having been raised through levies, taxes and other means in areas controlled by the LTTE. The compelling logic of war inexorably drives both the combating parties to an "arms race" and the Sri Lankan case has been no exception.

The LTTE has displayed the capability to engage the government forces in large scale military operations indicating that on their side they have mobilised and used substantial resources to fight the war. Even if it is estimated that these resources are in the region of 20% of those deployed by the government, which is a relatively conservative estimate, the expenditure incurred by the LTTE on the war would be regarded as considerable. In 1996 prices this would amount to Rs. 38 billion.

Other Economic Costs

The other economic costs of the war during the period 1983-1996 indicated in the aforementioned study are as follows:

1. The expenditure incurred on displaced persons and refugees: Rs 35 billion. (The number of displaced persons in December 1996 increased to 1,017,000).

2. Loss of human capital through migration (which includes large number of doctors, engineers, academics and professionals of various categories): Rs 56 billion.

3. The cost of damage to and destruction of physical capital: Rs 23 billion. (This estimate represents the total expenditure incurred on reconstruction, rehabilitation and relief during the period

1987-1994. Considering the subsequent destructive actions of both sides, this total would also be much higher).

4. Cost of the reconstruction programme required in 1995: Rs 49 billion. This estimate includes the cost of repairs and reconstruction in the border villages but not the cost of reconstructing the houses and resettling the displaced persons. By May 1996, 17,000 housing units in the Jaffna district were fully damaged and another 64,000 were heavily damaged out of a total housing stock of 176,000. If the costs of replacement and repairs resulting from acts of violence elsewhere are also considered the total would be in the region of Rs.75 billion as at 1995. It must be pointed out that the military operations that recommenced after the 1995 estimate was prepared had caused further damage and destruction.

5. The value of output lost in the North and East during the period 1983-1996 at 1996 prices, assuming that the North and East would have grown at the same average rate as the rest of the economy, implying that the GDP of the region would have increased by 85% at the end of 1996: Rs 240 billion

6. Loss of potential earnings from tourism in 1996 prices attributed to the unfavourable conditions arising out of the war: Rs 174 billion. Had normal conditions prevailed and the government policy to promote tourism continued, it is estimated that the number of tourist arrivals could have reached more than a million by 1996. Instead the actual figure in 1997 was only 305,000.

7. Reduction in foreign investment: Rs 60 billion.

It has been estimated that the loss of gross domestic product over the 14-year period is about Rs.2340 billion in 1996 prices. This amount would have been available for consumption and investment if not for the war. The study notes that 50% of the 740,000 households below the poverty line would have moved above it and additional jobs created would have been close to the number of unemployed in 1996, which was 800,000 had there been peace in the country.

Human Cost of the War

The study quite rightly has emphasised that the human loss cannot be priced. The total number of deaths in the war has been estimated at approximately 35,000 until 1996. The total number of civilian deaths in the North and East attributed to the war according to official sources is 17,529 until 1992; the number injured was 7786. Of the 35,000 deaths, about 20,000 is estimated to be that of civilians. There are no independent esti-

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mocracy in Jaffna". Representative democracy which went comatose in 1983 is yet to revive though many optical illusions have been performed. It is important to ensure that the gains of the local polls are consolidated and used to lay the groundwork for a far more strong and enduring democratic structure.

There are negative countervailing factors too. They are the extent to which the LTTE will escalate the conflict in the Peninsula and the State response, the extent to which the armed forces will really hand over power to the councils in practice, the calibre of the elected representatives in maximising their posts for the benefit of the people and the speed and efficiency of the government in providing finance and facilities for development. In spite of these probable difficulties, the collective will of the people can ultimately triumph. If the prudent and pragmatic Jaffna people utilise this first ray of democratic sunlight well they may in the future usher in sunbeams of happiness for their future. □

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mates of the casualties in the war and certainly war-related fatalities and illnesses would put the actual figures much higher. Many missing persons too are yet to be accounted for. It should be noted the government's figure of more than 50,000 deaths in the 14-year ethnic war has often been quoted by various international news agencies. They have also been mentioning in their reports that the LTTE have put the toll much higher.

Homelessness

According to the study, the total number of families who had to be resettled in 1995 was approximately 130,000, of whom 40,000 were in welfare centres and 90,000 living with friends and relatives. About 650,000 people were deprived of the essential security, comfort and privacy of their homes. Those who are still in welfare centres have the minimum provision for survival and endure intolerable conditions. Significantly, many had to repeat their experience of seeking refuge in welfare centres and with friends and relations more than once. They have been driven to a state of hopelessness as the war continues. The number of people displaced as a result of the war in December 1996 is over one million.

Fear and Insecurity

A pervasive sense of insecurity has become a part of life for the vast majority of the population in the country. For about 130,000 households, who have their members as combatants in the war on either side, the fear of death is ever present. The greatest fear and insecurity has been suffered by the civilian population in the North and East due to bombing, shelling etc. Both sides seem to have shown little consideration to the safety of civilians.

The study has failed to differentiate between the fear and insecurity that prevail among the Sinhalese and the Tamils living in areas with mixed populations like Colombo. Because of the ever present fear of LTTE attacks in the south of the country, particularly in the capital, Colombo, the vast majority of the Tamil people in Colombo and its suburbs have the constant fear that they could be taken into custody on suspicion of being "LTTE terrorists" or as "informants" of the LTTE or as harbouring "LTTE terrorists". Those having National Identity Cards which indicate their permanent addresses at the time of registration as some places in the North or East are likely to come under greater suspicion. Young persons living in lodges and hostels also come under suspicion.

There have also been cases where in-

nocent Tamils have been taken in forcibly for questioning by the security forces under the Prevention of Terrorism Act on some alleged tip-offs by those having personal grudges against them. A senior police officer told this writer that many are arrested for not having registered at the police stations or not possessing valid identification papers. He assured that after interrogation many would be released. But the tiny cells meant for a few in which too many suspects were locked up like animals have been described by many as unbearable to watch. Not knowing the Sinhalese language, which happens to be the only language any communication is possible with junior police officers is also a disadvantage. It must be said that the fault lies in the system that has come into being as a result of past policies and individual senior police officers cannot be held responsible for these deplorable conditions. The dilemma here is that such actions do not help to win the hearts and minds of Tamil people. The innocent people who have experienced the ordeals of hardship and unjustified incarceration, albeit generally for only a day or two, are bound to hold lasting bitterness and hostility towards the system.

Since the present government assumed office in August 1994, a substantial space has been created for the free expression of views even by those who are opposed to those in power. The fear psychosis that prevailed before has vanished. Many of the newspapers, including the Tamil language papers, carry articles and views highly critical of the government and its policies and practices. These newspapers even provide considerable space for many Tamil political personalities, some of whom seem to openly and freely defend the positions and actions of the LTTE.

Despite this positive development in regard to free expression in the south of the island, the Tamil civilians in the North and East have yet to obtain this freedom. Even many ordinary Tamils in Colombo too are afraid to express publicly their views on the prevailing situation caused by the war. However some positive signs are emerging now, especially in the North.

From conversations with some Tamil civilians who have recently travelled from Jaffna to Colombo, it would seem that the people in the North under the control of the security forces appear to be less fearful of security service personnel now than before. Some said with a sense of relief that people no longer experience the harassment from the militants demanding gold and money. The overall cost of living in Jaffna is reported to be not significantly higher than in places like Colombo.

There are shortages of selected items but the essential goods are available though at slightly higher prices because of the continuing transport difficulties. Paradoxically, vegetables grown in Jaffna are now cheaper because of the difficulties in transporting and marketing them outside, for instance in Colombo. They seem to be content with the several check points that people have to go through within the areas under the control of the army as they view this as inevitable inconveniences they have to put up with as a result of the war. The general mood appears to be that the majority of the people do not want to see any armed groups back in the areas under the control of the security forces. Some go even further and would seem to justify the presence of the security forces as a precaution against the return of armed groups of whatever name or description. They seem to want to be left to lead their own life without intimidation or harassment from whatever quarter it may come. Ideally, they would prefer to see all armed personnel including the security forces out of their way with only the local (independent) police around for law enforcement.

Lack of Accountability

The study is very weak in denouncing the violations of human rights of citizens by both the government security forces and the Tamil militants, and the lack of transparency and accountability. In fact it considers them as something inevitable in a war. It says: "The war also weakens transparency and accountability in society. This clearly applies in the field of human rights. But by the very nature of its operations and the exigencies that govern them, it becomes difficult to apply the normal regimes of transparency and accountability to many other areas which affect the war. In such a situation there is an in-built tendency for laxity in financial accountability and the possibility of irregularity and corruption becomes greater. As might be expected, some transactions for procurement of arms and other goods and services for the military have been the subject of criticism."

What should have been highlighted here is that it is the general public that has been paying directly and indirectly for the misappropriation of the resources by unscrupulous persons. The scope of the study did not cover the method used to mobilise the resources by the Tamil militants of whatever description and importantly that portion of the resources that were exacted from the people to finance rehabilitation and relief work, but was not used for this purpose. The truth is that the people of all communities have been paying not only for continuing the proc-

ess of destruction but also for enhancing the finances of the few, who have been in suitable positions to exploit the situation related to the war. Investigative journalists have from time to time revealed that the misappropriation of resources has occurred on both sides. Significantly, the beneficiaries are not among those in the front line and indeed some have no direct involvement in the military operations. In the case of the LTTE, its name has been used by some deceptive expatriates even to intimidate fellow Tamils for personal gains. There is no doubt that some Tamils are continuing to benefit financially and economically (especially some in the expatriate community) as a result of the war.

Gold and money have been extracted even from the very poor Tamil people. They had to part with their meagre savings or borrow to pay the fund "collectors". At least on the government side there was some degree of control as the "war tax" was linked to income of the tax payer. Details of cases of poor Tamil persons being "punished" for not able to raise the money to pay the "collectors" working for the militants have now emerged. In the absence of proper accounting and financial control bogus "collectors" seem to have been functioning at various levels.

Political and Civic Rights

The people of Jaffna were denied their political and civic rights after the Eelam war started in earnest in the 1980s. In the areas in the North captured by the government forces, local government elections were held for the first time in more than a decade on January 29, 1998. These were for 16 local bodies in Jaffna district and Pachilaipali Pradeshiya Sabha in the Kilinochchi district. The voter turn-out of 105,413 represents 18.4% of the registered voters of 571,486 based on the last revised voters list prepared in 1986. Since then, particularly after June 1990 and specially after October 1995, tens of thousands had left the Jaffna peninsula to go abroad or live in the south of the country. Given the actual resident voters at present which may be more closer to 250,000, and taking account of the security situation, the voter turn-out of 105,413 must be regarded as significant.

The fact that the Tamil rebels who are opposed to any democratic elections attempted to infiltrate 15 to 25 of their cadres around mid-night of the previous day in the vicinity of the Gurunagar Jetty leading to a sustained firing between them and the security forces until the area was cordoned and

search operations began around 6.30

am should also be considered, among other attempts to disrupt the poll. It was on January 23, only 6 days before the election day the EPDP (the political party that secured the largest number of seats in the elections) camp in Punguduthivu was attacked by the LTTE. Furthermore, it was reported by independent journalists that groups of LTTE cadres were seen distributing pamphlets and in some instances threatening civilians to prevent them exercising their voting rights. At Mirusivil, Chavakachcheri, which is just outside the forward defence lines, people who had come to cast their votes had their polling cards torn and asked to go back to their homes. Despite these obstacles, many had shown determination to exercise their democratic rights and they include the 14,838 who chose to spoil their votes. The message that is clear from all these is that many Tamils in the North want civilian institutions created through which they themselves can manage their affairs and live in peace without any threats from the military or from armed groups from their own community.

Collapse of Moral Values

As the study points out the war has a high moral cost. The terrifying era of ethnic, political and social violence has witnessed a breakdown in moral values. It is said that "society as a whole has had to cultivate a moral callousness of its own to survive amidst this brutality". Those who have been to Jaffna recently have noted the striking change in the attitude of the people brought about by the circumstances they have been thrust into. Those days when the neighbour returns a coconut that has fallen into his grounds from the tree in the adjoining compound have vanished. In those days, even taking a coconut that has fallen on the public road from someone's tree would be considered as an anti-social and degrading act. Today people are buying stolen tiles and other essentials knowing well where these have come from.

It is now public knowledge among the people in Jaffna as to who removed the asbestos roofing sheets, doors, door frames, including consumer durables, especially television sets and portable and non-portable household electrical items of various kinds from the houses whose occupants were forced at the end of 1995 to leave their homes and join the mass exodus from Jaffna. Some of these items were sold later and the owners had to purchase their own belongings at a price. Others were taken to Vanni to be given to a selected few among the many thousands who walked several days without food and drink in the pouring North-East

monsoon rain to reach Vanni. Having gone through this tragic and traumatic experience, the average thinking among the people seems to be that taking away belongings of others without permission or simply stealing is no longer considered immoral. It is considered a necessity for survival.

The observation made in the study that "it is the generation born in the 1970s and thereafter that is most exposed to the moral breakdown and the culture of violence", is therefore not totally correct. It is true that Tamil boys and girls have been mobilised for combat by appealing to their emotion and lack of options. On the other hand, tens of thousands of Tamil young men and women have over the years found their way, by hook or by crook, to foreign lands to avoid becoming victims. On the other side, it is mostly the young Sinhalese men and women from the rural areas who through the lack of opportunities to earn similar incomes have joined the fighting forces. The high number of desertions suggests that they do not want to be the "sacrificial lambs." They too cannot be blamed for the breakdown in the moral values of the society. Those responsible for all the immoral practices that have dehumanised the society are among the many who have seized the opportunities to capitalise on the war as well as those who provide all the encouragement to continue the war. In the latter category are the political and religious leaders, who have nothing to lose but expect to thrive in the ensuing chaos.

There is no such thing as clean war. It may be recalled there were some who made enormous profits immorally at the expense of the poor people during the time of the second world war, when rationing system was introduced. But there is a difference in that the present war is not between two foreign powers but an internal war where the warring sides are citizens of one country. It is not unusual for the antagonists to propagate all sorts of lies to hoodwink and demoralise the enemy and boost the morale of their own forces and the people. But when these are done in internal wars such as the one in Sri Lanka, the long-term consequences to morality of different ethnic groups in a multi-ethnic society are very damaging and the hatred and suspicions cannot be easily removed. This is precisely why reconciliation between the peoples of different countries that fought wars, as in the case of the second world war is much easier than between the peoples of different groups living in the same country, whose leaders have been fighting for long periods. A Tamil businessman in Colombo told the writer in very simple lan-

guage - "we cannot flourish without coming to Sinhalese areas and they cannot prosper without us". Although he is not an expert in political science or economics, he has the wisdom to know this reality. The rich and the power seekers as well as those who have vested interests in prolonging the war indefinitely want to ignore this fact.

Conclusion

President Chandrika Kumaratunga in her message to mark the 50th year of independence (4 February 1998) has urged the people of Sri Lanka to accept the reality of a diverse society and make serious efforts to end the war by accepting the past failures and making compromises. She is the only leader as head of State, who has shown courage to say openly; "We have faltered (along the path of nation building) for 50 years, permitting the differences to emerge and dominate our social fabric, rather than nurture the commonalities." With regard to what the war has cost the country, she said: "The flower of our youth is being decimated in a fratricidal war. National assets worth billions of rupees are being destroyed. We are compelled to divert to the war effort vast sums of money which would otherwise gone to improve our children's lives." If those political leaders who were entrusted with the task of nation-building in the post colonial period had acted with wisdom and foresight, the incumbent would not have had to endure the humiliation of confessing in public to the abject failure of nation-building at the time of the Golden Jubilee celebration of its independence.

She also stressed that it was time to attain political maturity and implement systems to unite all the people. The big question is whether the other political leaders, whether they be in power or in opposition, who have for far too long ignored the imperative to reach an early political solution, hoping that by non-cooperation they can swing the political fortunes in their favour, will see the need for statesmanship and courage in the quest for lasting peace? The uncompromising stand-off between the major political parties on devolving powers to the regions and power sharing at the centre cannot go on for too long. Sooner than later, there has to be in place a common set of proposals for a political settlement of power sharing, both at the centre and regional level that recognises the legitimate rights of all the people. □

Could Sonia Spoil BJP Bid for Power ?

T N Gopalan

By March, first week a BJP-led coalition could be in power. The prospect is disturbing, but looks probable.

The party which gives top priority to building a temple at Ayodhya, on the very site where a mosque dating back to Babar's times had stood and was demolished during a communal frenzy on 1 December 1992, building up a nuclear arsenal and doing away with the constitutionally guaranteed autonomy to the troubled Kashmir, does seem set to assume office.

Only Mrs Sonia Gandhi's mystique, if anything of it is actually there, could shore up the other major political formation around, the Cong-I, and hopefully stop the communal BJP right at the threshold of power.

If the BJP is able to secure upwards of 250 seats along with its present allies it would not be difficult to mop up another 25-odd seats to command a majority in the 545-member Lok Sabha. But if the Cong-I could muster up 180-odd seats, to that extent the BJP's performance would be affected.

In the recently dissolved 11th Lok Sabha, the BJP had 162 seats, the Shiv Sena 15 and other minor allies 11 in all, thus giving it 193 seats, leaving the loose alliance 80 seats short of an absolute majority.

On the other hand the Congress with 138 seats for itself and 6 from its allies fell short of a whopping 129 seats to form the government. And so when the desperate regional forces, the left and the Janata Dal came together to form the united front, the Cong-I thought it prudent to extend support to the UF from the outside and forestall the BJP.

The latter could not, try as best as it could, attract 80 more members to its side and so the 13-day-old Vajpayee government had to bow out. It has since been able to successfully get rid of the stigma of untouchability, by forging alliances with a variety of regional forces, from Jayalalitha's AIADMK to Lakshmi Sivaparvathi's Telugu Desam in Andhra Pradesh to Ramakrishna Hegde's Lok Shakti to Mamata Banerjee's Trinamul Congress in West Bengal - Akali Dal in Punjab and the Samata Party of George Fernandez in Bihar were with it even in 1996. It is this broad coalition which has

given it enormous hopes and a winning image.

At whose cost the BJP is going to increase its tally now is the question. Many believe that the UF which commanded 175 seats in the last Lok Sabha, the Janata Dal especially, could be the worst sufferer. The UF tally could be down to less than 100, it is feared.

In the circumstances if the Cong-I is able to notch up more than 180 seats thanks to Sonia, a coalition between it and the UF could become conceivable, and the BJP might have to cool its heels once again outside the corridors of power.

At the moment as this article is being written, however, the predominant feeling is that the BJP and its allies would be able to bag 250 seats plus. A hung parliament with no-one commanding a clear majority could result at which time some of those who are with the UF right now could switch sides and help the BJP form a government.

And when one learns that the DMK itself is toying with such an idea, it is not difficult to imagine what is in store for the nation after March.

Sonia kicked off her campaign from Sriperumbudur where her husband had been assassinated seven years earlier, not far from the site where he fell to the human bomb. She never joined issue with any critic, any party but only stressed time and again that she was very much the citizen of "this great country" and as an inheritor of the Nehru legacy, as the daughter-in-law of Mrs Gandhi and widow of Rajiv she was genuinely concerned with the state of the nation. And it was her bounden duty to pull it back from the brink, launch it on the path of progress once again and realise Rajiv's dreams.

Though the Cong-I in the state is virtually defunct she was able to attract a moderate crowd and she and her daughter Priyanka stole the hearts of their audience. And the Press too gave her unprecedented coverage. From then on she has been criss-crossing the country in the company of her daughter, and son too sometimes, apologising for the storming of the Sikh Golden Temple during her mother-in-law's days and for the demolition of the Babri Masjid, denouncing the BJP for its divisive policies and demanding that the Jain Commission probe be

expedited. She has been attracting huge crowds wherever she goes and has most certainly infused new life into a dying party. Thus far the martyrdom of her mother-in-law and of her husband and the mystique of the Nehru clan has stood her in good stead. She is getting the benefit of a feudal and patriarchal society in that she is seen as the daughter-in-law of the Nehru family and her Italian origins are ignored completely. The leader-starved people seem to adore her. How much this will all translate into votes of course remains to be seen. But already the BJP is getting unnerved. Its manifesto says that the election offered the people a choice "between nationalism and a foreign hand". Though in the beginning the BJP had sought to make light of Sonia's impact and would not even care to comment on her foreign origins, it has since been forced to revise its strategy. It has realised that Sonia will be the person who could frustrate all their grand dreams.

Its allies are going all out to attack Sonia in no uncertain terms. The Samata Party is threatening to resurrect the Bofors issue and charges that one of her own relatives could have been a beneficiary of the multi-crore gun deal. Come clean on that first before talking of cleansing the nation, Fernandez thunders.

Jayalalitha, realising perhaps that she could not talk of corruption with any credibility, has chosen to attack Sonia on her foreignness. "We'll oppose her tooth and nail she promised the other day, "Why

should a foreigner become a PM as if there is no-one else more competent to take up the job. In no other country could such an aberration be even thought of.

Surely the prospect of power slipping back into the hands of the Nehru Dynasty is nothing pleasant to contemplate. And she herself operating as she does only through her minions, communicating through statements, reading out speeches avoiding the Press like the plague and trying to promote her daughter and son, does not inspire much hope.

If and when she assumes the leadership of her party and comes out in the open to face an aggressive media and a hostile opposition, her true mettle will be seen for whatever it is worth, as a commentator puts it.

But the non-Congress secular formations which despair of the resurrection of the one-family rule even while wringing their hands in sheer helplessness over the remorseless forward march of the BJP have to blame only themselves for their current plight.

Through sheer in-fighting the Janata Dal has become terribly fragmented and is close to extinction. It used to have some following in states like Bihar, Orissa and Karnataka. Last time its tally of 45 MP's was drawn from these states essentially. In Bihar Lalbo Prasad Yadav has broken away. In Orissa a major chunk has crossed over to the BJP. And finally in Karnataka too it could be swept aside either by the BJP or the Congress, notwithstanding

played by the officers and men of the Sri Lanka Army, led by Major General Balagalla, Commander, Security Forces, Jaffna, in repairing and refurbishing the impressive three-storeyed building which will accommodate the new Jaffna Library. They completed the work assigned to them in barely six weeks.

Their enthusiasm for this project is one of the most heart-warming manifestations of what I believe is the new spirit that moves the Sri Lanka Armed Forces in their task of building trust and friendship with the people of Jaffna.

Today we make a new beginning. This library will become, I hope, a bridge between the people of the North and the people of the South in our island home. The books in this library will become, I hope, the building blocks of peace.

Finally, I say to the LTTE is it not time to bring the war to a close to seek a just and durable peace within a united Sri Lanka? Give the Tamil people peace. They have suffered most from the ravages of war. All our people are weary of war. Peace can be found. Let us try to find it."

Deve Gowda's arrogant postures.

A crafty Mulayam Singh Yadav (of the Samajvadi Party) would not enter into any arrangement with anyone in the UP whether it is the Congress or the Janata Dal or the Bahujan Samaj Party. He knows quite well that only the BJP would stand to gain in a multi-cornered contest, but is still unyielding. His major concern seems to be to emerge as the largest single constituent of the UF and thus stake a claim for prime ministership never mind the BJP could gain more seats in the process. By the same token the BSP, the party of the Dalits, would like to frustrate Mulayam's designs and position itself as a crucial deciding factor in a hung parliament whatever might be the BJP's gains.

A short-sighted CPM, stubbornly unwilling to learn lessons from the past, is still equating the Cong-I with the BJP and could be said to be behind all the confusion in UP which sends 85 MP's to the Lok Sabha, first preventing any understanding between Mulayam and Kanshi Ram (of the BSP) on the ground that the latter is undependable and could defect to the BJP any time and then forestalling an agreement between the Samajvadi Party and the Congress in the name of UF solidarity. Ironically it failed to persuade Yadav to enter into a pact with the Janata Dal. And it is still trying to crucify Lalbo Prasad Yadav on the fodder scam though his secular credentials cannot be questioned and he does enjoy immense following among the backward castes.

Whether it is its strident calls for an or all out fight against the "sponsored terrorism in Kashmir" or a uniform civil code - though this last has some positive features the BJP's ill-thought-out offensive is certain to arouse the suspicions of the Muslims - or its reactionary views on the position of the women in the society, the BJP certainly bodes ill for a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural mosaic like India. Some tend to argue that in its bid to become widely acceptable it is diluting its positions across the board and could emerge as nothing more than an innocuous right-of-centre conservative party after the elections, putting behind it its trident-wielding, fanatical past for ever. It is fast becoming Congressised, claim some of its apologists.

Even while releasing his party's manifesto, BJP president and seen an aggressive Hindutva proponent, L K Advani vowed that it would seek to realise its goals through consensus and that some of its priorities could even be put on the back-burner by way of respecting its allies in the case of a coalition government. Firmer indications should be available in March.

(Continued from page 9)

Already many individual donors have sent books in English, Tamil and Sinhala for the new library. I thank them all. There are a very large number of Sinhala citizens who have expressed a wish to give books for the new Jaffna Library, as a gesture of goodwill for, and a desire for reconciliation with, the Tamil people.

The vast majority of the Sinhala people were aghast at the destruction of the Jaffna Library in 1981. Those who await a signal that their donations of books will find a welcome home may now rest assured that their donations will be accommodated in the new library building.

I must make special mention of the bequest of his entire library made to the people of Jaffna by the late Pieter Keuneman. The Pieter Keuneman collection of some 4000 books will form an important part of the new Jaffna Library.

I convey my thanks to the officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Library Services for all their willing help in getting the library project launched as quickly as possible.

I wish to commend highly the role

Thambapillai Maheswaran: The Hyper-realism of History

Ramesh Gopalakrishnan

Well, there it was, happening on the night of February 4. Thambapillai Maheswaran alias Kathiresan alias Rajkumar, the one time leader of the shadowy Tamil Eelam Army (TEA), was arrested on the railway track at suburban Pazhavanthangal in Chennai after a hot chase. A .9 mm pistol was seized from him and he was promptly handcuffed.

Thirteen-and-a-half years ago, the same man's hands were busy making frantic phone calls to the nearby Meenamakkam international airport to alert the authorities about a suitcase which was to explode minutes later killing 30 persons and injuring 24 others.

Maheswaran's history is surreal or even hyper-real. The 42-year-old leader was once a student of civil engineering at the University of London. Imprisoned by the Sri Lankan government for his militant activities, he managed the escape of seven persons including himself from the dreaded Panagoda prison, and soon came to be known as "Panagoda Maheswaran" in Tamil militant circles. He started operating from India in early 1984. A hi-tech wizard, he was an expert in several fields including setting off time bombs. His TEA group once went to the extent of threatening to poison all tea exports of Lanka.

Not many know that Maheswaran's life forms part of a Tamil novel written by the sensitive writer, Asokamitran, in the aftermath of the Meenamakkam blast.

Asokamitran took a few years to reflect on the gory event and write the novel, named Paavam Dalpathado, which was first published in the well-known One Rupee-junk-paperback-format devoured by bus-travelling-crazy Tamils before the full-scale advent of television. The novel was since re-published as part of the writer's now-immense repertoire.

The novel is set in an imaginary island, not unlike Salman Rushdie's dystopian lands, near India. A legendary filmmaker, not unlike Peiris, travels to India, the land of his mentor Satyajit Ray, to show, in a film festival, his sensitive realist film about a river, Paranimaaru, which only bores the masses. As the director arrives for the festival in what was then Madras, and not Chennai as of now, he is accompanied by Dalpathado, his

deputy, and Sylvia, the sultry actress. The novel has a first-person narrator who receives the three on behalf of the festival. The film bags the top award, given the charms of the actress. Dalpathado nurtures a secret liking for Sylvia, who, shares her secret feelings for Dalpathado with the narrator. Asokamitran's earlier stint in the film industry has come in handy in narrating these sequences.

Years roll on and the narrator's only daughter is killed in an air crash mishap at Bombay. Even as the narrator is recovering from the ghastly event, he has a chance meeting with Dalpathado in the airport and he calls out his name. During the years in between, Dalpathado has drifted to a militant movement founded for the rights of the minorities in his island who do not speak his language. Such is the nature of Dalpathado's sense of justice, having been rejected by Sylvia. Dalpathado holds the narrator captive for two days in a shady house at suburban Pazhavanthangal which consists of militants like Maheswaran. Dalpathado and the militants use the narrator to off-load the bomb-cum-suitcase onto a plane bound for the neighbouring island. The flight is delayed. Realising that the bomb is set to go off immediately, the narrator tries to make a few phone calls to alert the airport police, but the explosion brings down the airport.

Dalpathado and his comrades flee the scene, and among the dead passengers is an unidentifiable woman.

Even as the narrator feels guilt and remorse over his deed, he receives a letter from Sylvia informing him that she'd be arriving soon in Madras. The narrator waits for her, checks for her in a house of her distant relatives in Royapuram, what was once a Portuguese-Indian suburb in north Madras.

Finally, he realises that the unidentified woman killed by the bomb was indeed Sylvia! Yes, she had arrived when the bomb went off. Dalpathado has ended up killing his lover and the narrator facilitated the murder. He cannot get over the loss of a dear one this time.

Asokamitran's novel is not a realist work like the film, Paranimaaru. It is hyper-realist. The novel re-frames the Meenamakkam blast in a new way; it indicates the link between Dalpathado's

failed art of realism and the very stuff of revolutionary rhetoric which is raring to go for a massacre. The novel implies that every mass murder is played out in the theatre of history as though willed by destiny. This way, the novel foresees similar disasters for which everyone is to be held ethically responsible. It anticipates history, and hence, renders contemporary history in a new hyper-real tragic mode which governs everyday life.

Also, the novel is not only about one's responsibility for any murder which takes place around oneself; it points to the directionlessness of the lives of Maheswaran, Dalpathado and the narrator. They end up killing, or facilitating the murder of, their beloved, be it a woman or a homeland. They are condemned men, having lost, in the sea of justice, the possibility of love.

The condemnation is an inner spiritual disease which can perhaps hit all human beings, men and women, militants and liberals, revolutionaries and cowards.

Like Dalpathado, Maheswaran and his associates prepared the bomb in a shady, rented house at suburban Neelankarai. (The policemen who searched the house after Maheswaran's arrest found another bomb in a suitcase). On the fateful evening of August 2, 1984, Maheswaran entered the airport with the baggage and booked it in the name of Kathiresan in the Air Lanka flight bound for Colombo. The bomb was timed to explode in Colombo after an hour's journey from Madras. As two unclaimed baggages were found in the departure lounge, they were taken near the aeroplane for identification by passengers. As no one claimed them, they were taken back to the departure lounge, the customs check-point and the arrival hall where the bomb went off.

In the meantime, came two voices of destiny: one over the public address system calling for Kathiresan who had not emplaned; another, over the phone, obviously from Maheswaran who had slipped to Guindy by then, alerting the airport authorities. The impact of the explosion drowned the voices, making the entire concrete roof of the hall crumble. The explosion devastated the airport and temporary arrangements had to be made for a year for maintaining normal domestic and international flight operations.

A number of theories made the rounds during those heady days: the Israel's Mossad and the US' intelligence were blamed for the dreadful act for a while, before the city police arrested eleven persons including Maheswaran. Maheswaran and two others, Thambiraja and Vignes-

(continued on next page)

RAJIV EXACTS TERRIBLE REVENGE AS ALL ACCUSED FACE DEATH

T N Gopalan

It was a judgement like never before. All the 26 persons accused and tried in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case have been sentenced to death by hanging by a special court in Chennai, subject of course to confirmation by the Supreme Court. Three other accused, LTTE supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran, his intelligence chief Pottu Amman and deputy chief of the women's wing Akila, declared proclaimed offenders since they could not be apprehended, are not covered by the judgement as under the Indian law a sentence can be pronounced only in the case of a person subjected to the "due processes of law."

Sathyameva Jayathe (Truth alone triumphs), Mr D R Karthikeyan, Joint Director of the Central Bureau of Investigation (OBI), had crowded on the morning of 28 January, beaming, when he met the presspersons anxiously waiting under a pandal set up for the occasion, half a kilometre from the Poonamallee maximum security prison. He disclosed, around 11 am, barely half an hour after the court had commenced its sitting inside the prison complex, "All the accused have been found guilty. The OBI feels vindicated. All its sweat and toil of years have borne fruit." Though it was a bit of a shock that all the accused, including those who

(Continued from page 20)

wara Rajah, were released on bail and the three promptly jumped bail, escaping possibly to London. In the meantime, the charge sheet was filed on March 8, 1985, and the judgement in the case was delivered at Chengalpattu on July 31, 1989, well after the novel was published. Five of the accused - Saravanabhavan, a medical college student, Chandrakumar, Loganathan, Vijayakumar and Balasubramanian - were awarded life sentences. Their bails were revoked. Two others - Ramu and Dhandayuthapani - who turned approvers (prosecution witnesses) were acquitted.

The future was to turn more hyperreal. A Tamil film starring Saravanabhavan was made. And politician T S Killivalavan, who had signed Vigneswara Rajah's bail bond, had to appear in courts. He switched sides from P Nedumaran, a diehard supporter of the Sri Lankan militant groups, to Vazhapadi K Ramamurthy, who was at the other end of the political



seem to have figured only in the periphery, should have been held guilty, nothing prepared the press corps or the relatives of some of the accused waiting out-

spectrum being an acerbic critic of the groups, especially the LTTE.

More shockingly, Maheswaran managed to reach Madras once again and lead a cool life. Now known as Rajkumar, he got trapped as a suspect in a double murder which took place in 1996 at suburban Pallikaranai, not far from the Meenambakkam airport. He and one Simon, who had fled Nallur in Jaffna, had reportedly lent Rs 1.60 lakh to Anton and Kannan, both Sri Lankans. As the amount was not repaid, Anton and Kannan were murdered and their faces burnt and disfigured. The city police have now nabbed Simon. And now Maheswaran and Simon are awaiting their trial on charges of murder. Maheswaran is likely to be charged for his involvement in the Meenam-pakkam blast of 1984 and for jumping bail.

Stranger is the case of one Sri alias Uma who has been absconding ever since the Meenambakkam blast. It certainly awaits a new novel, perhaps more hyperreal.

side the barricades, for the blow that was to come.

The entire trial spread over 700 working days since 1993 had been conducted in camera under the provisions of the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act and when the judgement was

delivered by Mr V Navaneetham, the press was shut out completely and it had to content itself with periodical briefings by the prosecution and the Special Investigation Team (SIT) chief Karthikeyan. Even around 3 pm when the public prosecutor told the presspersons that all the 26 had been found guilty of having had a hand in the conspiracy - which ultimately led to the assassination - no one could sense the gravity of the situation. For the correspondents were told only Nalini, the Chennai-based girl and Perarivalan, an electronics engineer, were linked to the 21 May 1991 explosion though they and the others had been held guilty of conspiracy and abetment besides destroying evidence and helping the killer squad escape the law after the event.

It was a bolt from the blue when at around 6 pm Special Public Prosecutor, Jacob Daniel, told the presspersons, "the judge has awarded the death sentence to all the 26 accused."

Though for most of them, from national and international media organisations, it was yet another bit of sensational news, a few felt genuinely sorry that such a cruel fate should visit upon the pawns while the actual culprits should get away

scot free.

A lady correspondent, who knows the mother of Perarivalan, almost broke down. Her plight became even more acute when, on her way out, she was accosted by Perarivalan's family who wanted to know the fate of their boy.

Mr S Duraisamy, one of the defence counsels, utterly devastated, later told this correspondent, "I just don't know how to react. Not even during the Nuremberg trials have so many been sent to the slaughter-house at one go. We'll surely appeal to the Supreme Court."

The very next day the convicts were taken out of the Poonamallee prison, split into groups and shifted to different central jails. And there they will languish, dying a thousand deaths, before the Supreme Court decides on their appeal.

The Designated Judge TADA Court - I, Mr V Navaneetham held that the brutal killing of Rajiv Gandhi "is a gruesome, inhuman, uncivilised and merciless bomb blast by an LTTE woman bomb, which was successfully executed with active help, assistance and participation of the accused who were LTTE militants or its staunch supporters."

Mercifully he was not as effusive as Justice Milap Chand Jain about the great leader who was felled at the prime of his life. who had won the hearts of millions

of his countrymen, ad nauseum. But Navaneetham waxes eloquent on the aftermath of the assassination "...Such was the impact and after effect of the killing that it brought the Indian democratic process to a grinding halt inasmuch as the general elections had to be postponed."

And how does he justify the award of such a drastic sentence? "...Giving deterrent punishment alone could deter other potential offenders and in future dissuade our people from associating with any terrorist organisation to do such diabolical and heinous crimes." A rarest of rare cases as 16 persons having lost their lives and 43 persons having sustained injuries.

Nine police officers including a superintendent of police, who were public servants, lost their lives while on duty and 43 persons sustained grievous or simple injuries in this "most heinous and gruesome crime perpetrated by a pre-planned and premeditated conspiracy."

The court has no doubt whatsoever that the conspiracy was hatched in Jaffna. "From the evidence, oral and documentary it has been adequately established." But what is the proof available to link all the 26 accused to it? The Judge harks back to a dictum of the Supreme Court to the effect that conspiracy from its very nature is generally hatched in secret.

"It is therefore extremely rare that

direct evidence in proof of conspiracy could be forthcoming from wholly disinterested quarters or from utter strangers." All the same the court has been only too willing to accept all that was proffered by the CBI as enough of an evidence to nail the accused.

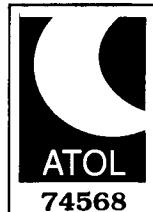
The way it tries to show that the LTTE had enough of a motive to assassinate Rajiv is a case in point. It quotes ironically, Vai Ko (incidentally for reasons not clear the once fire-brand Prabhakaran enthusiast V Gopalsamy has changed his name to Vai Ko) as having observed at a conference in London in 1988 that Prabhakaran had felt stabbed in the back by Rajiv Gandhi over the Indo-Sri Lanka accord. A person who was the uncrowned king of the northern and eastern parts of Lanka had to remain cooped up in a hotel room in New Delhi for a week and from that point onwards the LTTE supremo had started nurturing ill-feeling towards Rajiv which was to turn into animosity and worse thanks to the subsequent developments.

The judge goes on to quote extensively from the LTTE's own literature the Satanic Forces especially, to try and show how it was all inevitably leading to 21 May 1991. Whether it is news photographer Subha Sundaram's alleged involvement or of Nalini's - where all there



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could be some extenuating circumstance or other - the court chooses to accept the prosecution's contention that they were all part of a terrible conspiracy.

The very presence of Nalini at the Sriperumbudur meeting is enough to make her part of the murder mission. The attempt of Subha Sundaram to retrieve the camera left behind at the site or Bangalore-based Industrialist Ranganath's providing shelter to the Sivarasan gang after the event or the Lankan Tamil girl Athirai's seeking to make some travel arrangements for some in the gang or the poor nurse Padma's playing host to the LTTE cadres, everything, everything becomes part of the conspiracy to eliminate Rajiv. No distinction between those who could have masterminded it all and those who could have played no more than a peripheral role.

Of the 26 now facing the gallows, 16 are Lankan Tamils and the rest Indians. Nalini emerges the most devastated. She has been made the most important accused, guilty of murder, conspiracy and a host of other charges. She, her mother Padma, her elder brother Packiyathan and the LTTE cadre Murugan with whom she had developed intimacy are all in death row. And her daughter, born a few months after her arrest, is now being brought up by some relatives in Chennai itself. The tragic story of these and others needs a separate detailed recounting.

At the moment it is suffice to note that the judge has taken upon himself the mission of producing a most effective deterrent "against the anti-national interests" with a most devastating effect.

When pressed whether he thought that the hanging of all the 26 was justified, Mr Karthikeyan evaded the issue saying that what the court in its wisdom had decided on could not be questioned.

But off the records the CBI sources admitted that they themselves had not expected such a stiff sentence and sincerely hoped it would be commuted by the Supreme Court in a few cases at least.

But Karthikeyan gloated, "Perhaps it should be taken as a strong message to those who seek to play with the destiny of the nation. We're not a soft state and none can afford to harm our interests and get away with it..."

A small band of volunteers of the Periyar Dravidar Kazhagam were spotted outside the barricades near the Poonamallee prison on the judgement day, anxiously inquiring with the press what was happening and dispersed shell-shocked after the deadly ruling came to light. They would not dare even raise slogans denouncing the judgement, and they profess to be among the most ardent ad-

ESCHATOLOGY BRINGS HI-TECH TEMPLE TO LANKA

Ramesh Gopalakrishnan

In line with headlong rush towards the end of the millennium, there's time only for despair and eschatology amidst the chaos of war in Sri Lanka: the island government is now building, near Colombo, an exact hi-tech replica of the Sri Ranganatha temple at Srirangam near Tiruchirapalli in Tamil Nadu. Now, who said Xeroxes cannot be made of temples! The reason for erecting the temple is to ward off the ill-effects to the island-nation due to the Tamil Nadu temple's Rajagopuram, or the main tower, which was

mirrors of Prabhakaran. There was an odd equivocal statement from Nedumaran, seeking to find fault with the judgement, but in relatively safe terms. A couple of PDK volunteers were taken into custody when they sought to paste posters criticising the judgement. According to some reports funds are being mobilised to fight the case of the accused before the Supreme Court.

The original Dravidar Kazhagam, also supposedly a Tiger votary and other fringe nationalist groups have maintained a discreet silence, desisting from even expressing solidarity with the families of the accused. Not to speak of Vai Ko or Dr Ramdas, the PMK leader. They are in the company of Jayalalitha who has sought to derive the maximum political advantage from the sentence, in a most callous and selfish way.

She of course welcomed the judgement heartily, saying that though it was stiff, it could serve as an effective deterrent against other sinister forces. But her interests lie elsewhere. She wants those indicted in the Jain Commission's interim report too to be brought to book. Leaving nothing to imagination she went on to mention Karunanidhi and Chidambaram and implied that the former could have been among those who had instigated it all, going by some findings of the commission. Newspaper editorials of course uncritically accepted the verdict as a vindication of the CBI and sought to deride the Jain Commission's efforts as a futile exercise now that the courts have concluded that it was the LTTE and the 26 accomplices who had done it all.

Even eminent lawyers like Ramjethmalani welcomed the judgement and human rights organisations too are silent. ●

consecrated in the late eighties.

As a boy living in Thanjavur in the late sixties, I remember having heard from many elders that the main tower was kept out of construction to ward off the evil consequences which would descend on Sri Lanka. Their words had a finality of tone, which used to amuse and terrorise me as a kid. I learnt from them the legend that Sri Ranganatha icon, or Lord Vishnu in the ever-reclining posture, had been given to Vibeeshana by Lord Ram for installation in Lanka, but the idol got rooted to the ground when Vibeeshana put it down in a beautiful island to bath in the river Cauvery which surrounds the island. Interestingly, there are two such places in south India, the other one being Srirangapatnam near Mysore, which also houses an ancient Sri Ranganatha temple.

Wars in the subcontinent never seemed to have been out of sight of temples and other places of worship, as we learn with trepidation in our modern era, from the horrifying demolition of the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya and the attempted bombing of the Holy Tooth temple at Kandy. History has it that Tippu Sultan was shot dead by the British while fighting near the Srirangapatnam temple. And according to the legend heard by me as a kid, the mediaeval rulers of south India yearned, in vain, to complete the construction of the Rajagopuram, as they wanted the decimation of the Sinhala rulers, whom they considered their traditional rivals. Sri Ranganatha has had a benevolent gaze on Lanka and they wanted to obstruct it by erecting the tower, the legend said.

In the meantime, growing up as a leftist intellectual, I ignored the legend, but would have a fleeting glimpse of it not when I visited the Srirangam temple but when my trains or buses crossed the two bridges across the Cauvery within which Srirangam is located amidst lush green fields.

Srirangam, as I went on to find later, was an ancient place celebrated by Tamils and other cultures since the days of the Tamil epic, Silappadhikaram. With an elaborate architectural history down the eras, Srirangam, I felt, would be a unique entry in Italian novelist Italo Calvino's In-

(continued on next page 25)

Bernard Soysa The Last Champion

By Ajith Samaranayake

BEING a renaissance man, Bernard Soysa would have agreed with T. S. Eliot that there was a curious appropriateness to his death on the last but one day of 'the burnt out year'. This then, is how life ends; not with a whimper but a bang, whimper but a bang.

In other senses, too, Bernard Soysa's death at the end of the old year appears to have been an appropriate curtain fall. For he is the last of the oldguard leaders of the Left, both of the LSSP and the CP, to go. He was the last link with the heroic LSSP of the war days, and what is more, by dying in office as a Minister of the People's Alliance Government he has offered testimony to the LSSP's association in coalition with the SLFP, an association begun in 1963 which was irrevocably to fear asunder the original Lanka Samasamaja Party, and continues to haunt left politics even today.

Bernard Soysa offers a classic example of the young bourgeois intellectual who is attracted to Marxism not merely through intellectual conviction but larger

idealistic impulses. Born to a middle-class family in colonial Ceylon, he was educated at Ananda College, Colombo, the then principal enclave of nationalism among schools. Other distinguished Old Anandian Leftists were to include Philip and Robert Gunawardene and N. M. Perera.

At the University College he came under the influence of Marxism and with his quick wit and agile mind was soon a full convert.

Unlike the Gunawardene brothers and NM, however, Bernard was essentially a Colombo man. True, NM was born in Thotalanga although he entered parliament from Ruwanwella, but Bernard spent his entire life in Colombo both as a municipal councillor and member of parliament for Colombo South. He formed an integral link with the urban bourgeoisie and the urban working class, for he was eminently at home in both milieux. To think of Bernard is to think of Kollupitiya and Thimbirigasyaya and Narahenpita with the sleazy underworld of which he

was as familiar as bourgeois drawing rooms.

It brings a whiff of days irrevocably gone when socialism stirred the young and Sidney Wanasinghe edited the 'Young Socialist' from his fastness at Arethusa Lane in Wellawatte, and Osmund Jayaratne was nominated the General of the 1953 Hartal in Colombo city.

When the LSSP was proscribed by the colonial government during the Second World War, Bernard fled to India with the other leaders and spent some time in jail there. In fact Hector Abhayawardhana (perhaps the last surviving figure from that time) recently attributed Bernard's terminal illness to that period in prison saying that it was the same kind of ailment which had finally stricken NM and Colvin.

In the historic divide between the Samasamajists and the Bolshevik Leninists which characterised the post-war period, Bernard belonged to the latter faction. This was true of most urban intellectuals such as Colvin, Leslie, Edmund Samarakkody and Doric de Souza. In fact, Bernard first contested a seat in parliament on the ticket of the Bolshevik Leninist Party at the first General Election of 1947.

Unsuccessful in his parliamentary bids both in 1947 and 1953, he made a



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memorable name for himself as a Colombo Municipal Councillor. His best remembered contribution to the politics of the Town Hall was the massive filibuster speech he made on the occasion of the vote of No Confidence brought against Dr. N. M. Perera who was the then Mayor of Colombo. This was recalled recently by Prof. Osmund Jayaratne who followed Bernard in an article written on the occasion of the centenary birth anniversary of former President William Gopallawa who was then the municipal commissioner and presided over that historic session.

Bernard entered parliament for the first time in 1956 as MP for Colombo South and held that seat till 1977 sharing it with J. R. Jayewardene later when the latter took refuge there after his defeat at Kelaniya in 1956. At the General Election of 1965 the two MPs were elected uncontested.

Bernard never held ministerial office until 1994 but he was unique in that he acted for a minister without holding the position of deputy minister. This was whenever Finance Minister N. M. Perera went abroad on official duties. Bernard would unobtrusively go to Queen's House by taxi, dressed in his white suit and red tie, take oaths in front of President Gopallawa and equally quietly would slip into the Treasury. For many years the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee,

(Continued from page 23)

visible Cities, since it is at once a temple within a city and a city within a temple. The modern gopuram, with its plastic paint, I would think, has a new story to tell. Never did I imagine that the gopuram would produce its Xerox antidote in Sri Lanka whose violent convulsions were due to the ideologies I was examining!

The news is that Chandrika Kumaratunga has set apart Rs 10 million from the president's fund to construct the Rs 300 million temple and a Rs 100 million Buddhist Vihara to be built side-by-side in a 20 acre plot at Muthura-jawala, 15 km north of Colombo. I am sure the Sri Lankan rulers would have consulted south Indian astrologers before launching the project, as they have done during all these years of war! The foundation stones for the temple-Vihara complex were laid on February 9 by two ministers, Lakshman Jayakody and Anuru-dha Ratwatte, who sought to de-link the legend and the ethnic turmoil in Lanka. Top Lankan businessmen and India's premier business group, the Tatas, are associated with the project, it is learnt.

Soon, this latest religious reconciliation project in Lanka would soon have a church and a mosque as well. So it goes...

he was a pillar in parliament's control and regulation of finance.

In 1970 he headed a Commission to go into the activities of Agency Houses and also played a leading role in the formulation of legislation to establish the Institute of Chartered Accountants and the Post-Graduate Institute of Medicine.

As a speaker Bernard was in a class of his own. Never given to histrionics or pyrotechnics, he had a fine turn of phrase. His speeches were not didactic in the pejorative sense of that word but were packed with information tellingly delivered. Like NM and Pieter Keuneman he was a cool speaker in parliament. I remember as a schoolboy in the 1960's stumbling upon a copy of a Hansard containing Bernard's speech on the first budget of the Dudley Senanayake government delivered by Mr. U. B. Wanninayake. It was a masterly analysis of why Sri Lanka had yet not been able to throw up a robust entrepreneurial capitalist class.

Later when he was out of parliament from 1977, his analysis of Mr. Ronnie de Mel's long spell of budgets delivered in some public place in Colombo were eagerly looked forward to and were certainly far superior to the speeches made in parliament during the budget debate.

Bernard excelled as a speaker both in English and Sinhala. His English skills he honed as sub-editor on the 'Times of Ceylon.'

His background at Ananda College and as a teacher at Rahula College, Matara went to enrich his Sinhala. When some years ago the party organ 'Samasamajaya' was revived I remember Bernard speaking on the origins of that journal and how its first Editor Henry Pieris had to virtually coin new Sinhala words. Bernard maintained his interest in the Press till the last. Sometimes reporters doing the night shift would receive telephone calls from him giving some tit-bit or another. Once I remember the then 'Observer' News Editor Carlton Seneviratne saying that Bernard had called. At that time the

Rio cinema was showing a film 'Percy's Progress.' It dealt with a sensitive organ of the male body. Bernard was drawing attention to the fact that at the end of the show the management was showing a slide saying 'Please ensure that you have not left anything behind.' The News Editor, though no prude, thought that it was too risqué to carry as a 'Talking Point.'

Bernard himself was no prude and enjoyed the good things of life as well as bourgeois culture such as classical music. However, there was also a streak of frugality and self-sacrifice in him. For example, he lived with his brother Winmen in a house at the Thimbrigasyaya junction but he told me that he decided against staying there because the children were growing up and needed the space. Being a bachelor he moved to a hotel close to the LSSP headquarters at Union Place and was quite comfortable there. When he was given an official residence he balked because as a bachelor he did not know how to run such a household.

It was a much enfeebled LSSP to whose leadership Bernard succeeded after the death of Dr. Colvin R. de Silva but yet he piloted his party back into an alliance with the SLFP and a much broader United Front at that. For the LSSP, then, the cycle was complete.

In his last days Bernard was no doubt troubled by the LSSP's relationship with the SLFP as the major party of the People's Alliance, but failing health may not have permitted him to give his mind fully to the problem.

There are times when even clichés ring true and this is one such. The death of Bernard Soysa at the age of 83 on December 30 does decisively close a phase in Sri Lanka's Left politics.

He was the last of the towering leaders of the LSSP and perhaps with the exception of Hector Abhayawardhana the only link with the wartime LSSP underground round which so many legends have gathered. Of those Bernard himself was one of the finest legends. ●

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BOOK REVIEW

ASSIGNMENT COLOMBO

by J N Dixit

Vijitha Yapa Bookshop,
Unity Plaza, 2 Galle Road, Colombo 4, Sri Lanka

Review by Prof. A J Wilson

Having been myself a privileged member of President JRJ's Byzantine Court during 1977-1984, I can well understand Jyotrindanath (A K A... Mani) Dixit's wounded feelings in his *De Profundis* entitled "Assignment Colombo" (Colombo Yapa, 1998).

This is a fascinating book written very carefully and leaving the reader asking for more when the last page (386) is turned, an Insider's account of the men who played like toy soldiers for the delectation of a master factician (JRJ) who won out in the end.

JRJ always said he was governed by the planet Jupiter and could therefore never be defeated. Dixit's book is an important contribution written truthfully and honestly by one of India's ace diplomats. If one wants to know the inside story, the years 1985-89, then read on. It surely is a valuable companion volume to my own modest outpourings in my book. *The Breakup of Sri Lanka, 1977-84*.

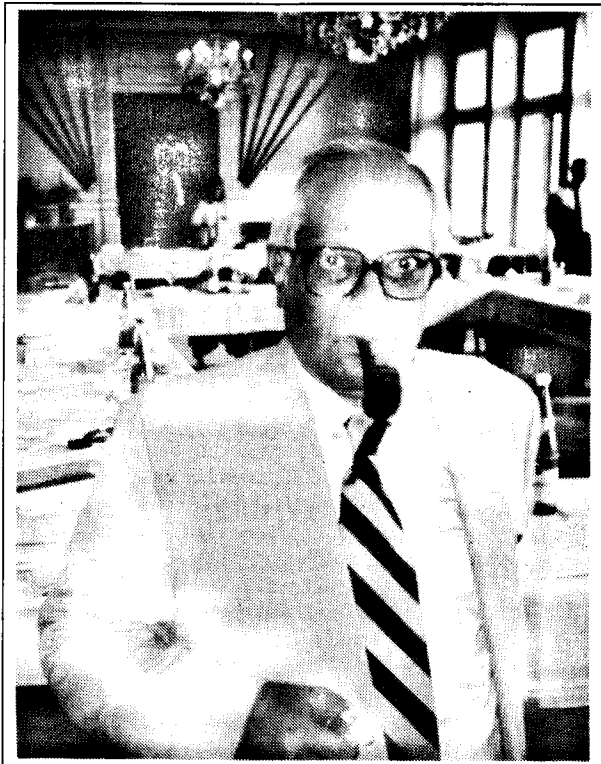
At the centre of all these passing years, a relatively long time span for a septuagenarian head of state, J R Jayewardene stands pre-eminently like a colossus if for no other reason than because of the flatness of the plains (the cabinet of ministers) around him.

Dixit makes no bones about the fact that he is India's man and all he did was to preserve and advance the interests of his principals at Delhi, Mrs Indira and Mr Rajiv Gandhi. The reader should bear this in mind when peering through the pages of this singular eye-witness to history.

Dixit places under the magnifying glass some of the men who shaped history during these fateful years, the dramatic personae as he refers to them. The penultimate chapter eighteen, (pages 304-350) presents candid portraits of the main actors and it is worth a read to understand some of history's men.

Dixit's view of the tragedy-prone Executive President is sympathetic - that he had assumed power late in life, that his very presence summoned a majestic trail and that he had difficult men with whom he had to operate the ship of state.

This was indeed my own impression. The President lacked elan to put the mas-



ter intriguers in his own court in place. He always referred to Premadasa as "the Prime Minister". And only once when he and I discussed caste divisions among the Sinhalese and he stated that Premadasa belonged to "the lowest of the low" and that his schooling was in the school of life, "picking up a great deal along the way".

Some months after JRJ's demise, an Indian academic visiting me mentioned that JRJ often derided "the laundry man". He knew better.

I had I sneaking doubt that Premadasa was in cahoots with the leaders of the JVP

insurrection and that he orchestrated the brutal violence against the state and the assassination of some key figures in the political firmament. On the first day of the insurgency when the Sinhala reaction to the LTTE's killing of 13 Sinhala soldiers in Jaffna enveloped the island, to my question to the President on the phone, "are you sure that there is no attempt at a coup by the Prime Minister", he parried my question, neither admitting nor denying it and advised me "to stay indoors, don't go out".

President Jayewardene was clearly a captive of his ministers, a conclusion that can be arrived at from Dixit's findings. President JRJ in fact told this reviewer just a day before Black Monday (23 July) that he was "surrounded by anti-Tamil ministers" and if he could be assisted "to jump out of this circle, he would go ahead with implementing the DDC scheme.

Dixit's conclusion is that President JRJ lived on the edge and took too many risks with the LTTE to whom he served the TULF on a platter.

Premadasa was obviously a bad guy, for, Rajiv Gandhi and the Indian establishment looked on him as churlish and curmudgeonly. Premadasa believed in himself and thought that his gunboat diplomacy with the Indians would pay off. In the end, he proved to be too clever by half and fell a victim allegedly to an LTTE suicide bomber.

Lalith Athulathmudali and Premadasa were thorns in the side of JRJ. They tried their level best to sabotage the Gandhi-Jayewardene agreement of 27 July, 1987. At first Lalith seemed to have his way.

Together with the Prime Minister, he met with success in forcing JRJ to stand firm on the original order to bring Pulendran and sixteen of the LTTE's com-

manders to Colombo for questioning despite all the efforts of Dixit to delay this fatal step.

Dixit even failed to pressure the commander of the IPKF, General Harkirat Singh, to hold Pulendran and his men in military custody. In the end, LTTE visitors who were permitted to visit their comrades in gaol to provide them with meals provided them with the deadly cyanide pill.

Pulendran and his men made the right decision when they bit the pill and died before the bestial torturers of the Sri Lanka security forces could get at them.

It is this one single act, a fatal one at that, which sparked off the second Eelam War and egged on Pirabhakaran to launch on a do or die course causing so much death and destruction.

The problem with Lalith was that he was bent on winning a Duttu Gemunu style victory over the Tigers and thereby strengthening his hand to win the presidency.

One thing Dixit fails to fully discern, notwithstanding his cerebral mind, is the intriguing that went on in the Byzantine Court as between the three main actors - Premadasa, Lalith and Gamini Dissanayake. It was pretty certain that JRJ had decided to bequeath the Presidency to Gamini who as Thondaman once said is "the President's pet".

In my conversations with JRJ I concluded that he had a warm heart for Gamini and in fact after his victory at the 1982 presidential election, it was quite clear to me that he was planning to make Gamini Prime Minister getting rid of the incubus that was Premadasa. Had Dixit but known of the intriguing courtiers in the court of a Sinhala Rajuruwa, he would indeed have been Prometheus unbound in his mission to Colombo.

Lalith knew very well or had clearly intuited that he would not be the anointed successor. As he once told me in an interview he was looked on as a newcomer to the ranks of the UNP. So, as he said, he planned to reach his goal, step, by step, just as he had done in Oxford, first the secretaryship of the Union and then its Presidency.

The man was proving his worth as Minister for National Security that his rival Gamini tried to cut him to size. Gamini achieved this by a master stroke, the Rajiv-Jayewardene agreement of 27 July, 1987. With that Agreement, despite Lalith's expression of open opposition to it Lalith realised he had been outmanoeuvred by Gamini only to be dismissed out of court by Premadasa. So Dixit's ipse Dixit on Lalith; a "suave politician, personally ambitious who to further his ambitions took a strong anti-Tamil stance".

Premadasa had a strong anti-Tamil and anti-Indian orientation in his political thinking and was deeply suspicious of Tamil demands because he was convinced that accepting them would be the first step towards Sri Lankan Tamils successfully engineering the break-up of the country" (p.16).

For Mrs Bandaranaike, Dixit's views border on adulation of a lady he thinks is slightly less than majestic. Surprisingly Mrs Bandaranaike was not condemnatory of Tamil demands. Her observations were

that JRJ and Premadasa were not to be trusted.

Her considered view was that India should have avoided getting involved. She said that India and the Tamil leaders have been asked to negotiate a settlement. Dixit's account of Mrs Bandaranaike's attempts to exculpate herself from the Tamil reaction, which Dixit accepts, is evidence of his being misled.

She conveniently put all the blame on JRJ and his ministers when history will hold her responsible for driving the Tamil people to desperation and to their taking to arms. The notorious standardisation of marks and restricting the admission of Tamils to the university, during her 1970-77 government are in the contemporary context, unforgivable, although memories are short.

To get back to Dixit's odyssey, it seems to this reviewer that he did not realise the power he had. Consequently he almost fell a victim to the nefarious machinations of Lalith, Premadasa and JRJ himself. The surprising fact is that Rajiv and his advisors showed mountains of patience in handling the troublesome trio in the Sri Lanka cabinet.

One gets the impression that JRJ was steadfast in his successful manipulation of his colleagues and in orchestrating the maha sangha for and against an agreement with India at every critical step, almost overreaching himself in the process. In any case JRJ's position was at stake but he had Rajiv's assurance that Indian commandos would snuff out any moves to overthrow him.

In his account Gamini, Ronnie de Mel, marginally, and Premadasa and not surprisingly the President's son, Ravi emerge as important figures in the encircling crisis. For a man like JRJ with so much experience and elan, these figures were small potatoes. But he took every precaution and walked on eggs as it were, with the utmost care.

Poor Gamini. As much as I knew him and this was over a long period of some ten years, he was a gentle and decent man. He was undoubtedly ambitious and fell foul of Premadasa. Had he lived, he would have been the peacemaker who brought the two peoples together since the arrival of the Portuguese in 1505.

This review will not be complete without an assessment of President JRJ. He did always give the feeling that he was a much wrecked figure sitting on a volcano of his own creation. This pose invited the sympathy of persons who did business with him.

Demia Judith Hart, stated after talking to his cabinet that she was sorry for "the dear old man"; Jeane Kirkpatrick

mistakenly told him that Lalith was one of his "brainiest ministers" and as for my own views of the President. I counted JRJ as my most brilliant student in 43 odd years of university teaching.

JRJ had risen to the top of the greasy pole after some forty years of waiting. He had escaped from the machinations of the Senanayake's pere and fils. If not for his thoughtful brother Harry who insisted that he should leave his power of attorney with him when he left Ceylon on a tour, he would have been expelled from the UNP by the Kaleel Committee which investigated him especially for disloyalty to his party.

JRJ was very very widely read. He told me that he had read my "The Gaullist System in Asia" twice over. His Sunday reading was devoted to The Times (London). He read biographies of leading statesmen perhaps deriving vicarious pleasure.

Despite all that has been said and written about JRJ, in my mind, he remains a brilliant politician who was sadly captive to his cabinet and who could have performed the miracle of bringing the Sinhalese and Tamils together. But he fell victim to the false stories told him by political sycophants and senior police officers about Amirthalingam and the TULF leaders.

Even the telephone tappers were fabricating conversations between Mrs B and Amirthalingam. I told him once when he showed me the text of a dialogue between Mrs B and Amirthalingam that it was not the way in which the latter addressed the former, the greetings reportedly starting with "Hi Madam"; Amir was much more respectful than that.

Dixit had mellowed in his assessment of Pirabhakaran. The latter becomes a sort of anti-hero in the book. Dixit is guarded in his praise of the latter. Only some years ago he had referred in an address to the Indian Institute of Strategic Studies New Delhi as "Fascist monitor full of his own self importance.

I enjoyed my six years working with JRJ. He was very quick to grasp the essentials but of course gave nothing away in that he compartmentalised his friendships. In demeanour he was as cool as a cucumber. I think he would have liked a few others with whom he could tune in.

I liked our discussions and regret not having given him more of my time. He will I think remain etched in the memory of history in whatever way that discipline evolves. My guess is that he would be reckoned one of the greats. Dixit's book is good for its rich insights. It could best be compared to Sir Neville Henderson's "The Failure of a Mission".

FILM - MARUDHANAYAKAM

Kamal Haasan's Tryst with History?

T.N.Gopalan

Where and when does the Indian freedom struggle start? With the Sepoy Mutiny in 1857? Or sixty years earlier with Veerapandia Kattabomman? Or with Veluthambi Thalavai still earlier? Or with Marudhanayakam alias Mohammed Yousuff Khan in 1760 or so as that cerebral actor Kamal Haasan would have it?

Marudhanayakam, the great hero, the great soldier, the great rebel and what have you as Kamal's historian-consultant Mr.S.Muthiah claims, has suddenly come into limelight and there is a raging controversy in the media and concerned circles what the Marudhanayakam phenomenon means to Tamil identity, to Tamil nationalism. From where did Kamal dredge up Marudhanayakam, the eponymous hero of his next Tamil film and is all the hype generated in the process really justified?

Incidentally with this film, Kamal, generally hailed as the actor's actor, will be making his directorial debut and also it will be the first historical he is going to star in. Possibly for purely commercial reasons he has decided to go back in history, come up with a little known name and make him out to be the pioneer freedom fighter. Still for a change even film journalists are wrestling with such weightier issues as the history of the freedom movement in India, in Tamil Nadu, the role of the local chieftains who collaborated with or fought against the British colonialists, when does a rebellion of a military commander become identified with the aspirations of the community at large and so on.

A refreshing breather that from obsessive concerns with bust-lines or sentimental mush. And of course only Kamal could provide such a break. He is a complex character. Though less popular than the other superstar Rajinikanth - whose entry into politics is the most-awaited event in the state - and suffering from quite a few disabilities including not a very impressive physical stature, some of his movements looking almost feminine, Kamala has still managed to catch the imagination of the audience by his sheer thespian genius and his restless quest for

variety and perfection.

He is complex in that even while having his eyes firmly trained on the box-office, he has also been able to transcend the constraints inevitable in such an orientation with some genuine concern for aesthetics and been able to elevate his audience to a higher plane too. Though he is a Brahmin by birth, Kamal has been able to make himself acceptable to the caste-conscious, anti-Brahmin sections too by professing admiration for Periyaar (E V Ramasamy Periyaar, the original leader of the Dravidian movement before it split into factions) and the Dravidian principles in general. He is particularly close to Chief Minister Karunanidhi. On the launch of his film, Marudhanayakam, on 17 October, he pointedly spurned the traditional poojas, and a big portrait of Periyaar EVR adorned the stage.

The irony did not stop with a Brahmin's spurning of a pooja still religiously performed at the inaugural of any film in this country, whoever be the producer, and wherein the Brahmin priests are a permanent fixture. Queen Elizabeth, the monarch of the erstwhile colonialists against whom Marudhanayakam had so valiantly fought was the star attraction at the film's launch. The first few lines spoken by Kamal on the occasion lampooned the English arrogance, though mildly.

That apart, by latching on to Marudhanayakam, born in the high-caste Saiva Vellalar community but who subsequently converted into Islam, and making him out to be a peerless freedom fighter, Kamal is perhaps extending his constituency too. Whatever his motives in pitching upon Marudhanayakam, he has clearly shown that he dares taking risks and that his is a restless spirit.

Unlike many other run-of-the-mill heroes, he has sought variety in the roles he performs. Whether as a don in Nayakan or a dancer in Salangai Oli, or a dwarf in Aboorva Sakodhararkal or as a middle-aged woman in Avvai Shanmugi, Kamal has brought to bear on such vastly different roles a very rare combination of poignancy and understatement. Though his range is less awe-inspiring than that of

the one and only Sivaji Ganesan, the realism he imparts makes the characters he essays far more credible than Sivaji has ever been able to do.

Sivaji, the famed elder actor was on hand at the launch of Marudhanayakam. And in 1959 he had immortalised Veerapandia Kattabomman, a Telugu-speaking chieftain from down south but who is very much a Tamil folk-hero. Ironically Kattabomman's grandfather was a contemporary of Marudhanayakam and had collaborated with him when he was a British stooge. Even more interesting both the better-known and the rebellious Kattabomman and Marudhanayakam were hanged to death by the British on 16 October, the day Kamal's film was launched.

It was made out by circles close to Kamal that the date was purely coincidental and that the launch date had been fixed to suit the convenience of Queen Elizabeth. And the very first shot of the film, for all the excitement occasioned by the Queen's presence, Tamil Maanila Congress(TMC) leader G.K.Moopanar's clapping and Karunanidhi's conferring of another title on him, Kalai Gnani (one deeply schooled in arts), still raised serious questions about the success of Rs.20 crore mega venture. For when Kamal uttered words to the effect that he had sprouted from the Tamil soil and that it was the British who were the aliens, the audience were not exactly electrified as they would have if, say, a Sivaji Ganesan had delivered the dialogue. The delivery by Kamal was almost dead-pan and his eyes were not flashing even though Yusuf Khan was at the time supposed to be raging against the British. And here exactly is the rub.

Kamal, unlike Sivaji, is not used to stentorian utterances or fierce theatrical gestures. But then the Tamil audience is conditioned to seeing in the historicals, plays or films, larger-than-life characters who roar and tear the air constantly and who use a very stilted language, traits so alien to Kamal. Besides, as mentioned earlier, he lacks the physical stature expected of battle-scarred heroes. How does he then expect to carry conviction is indeed a moot point. But then when he could take such a risk in the choice of the subject himself, he could also dare essay a more realistic, credible historical character too, sans all the conventional sound and fury.

Available records suggest that Marudhanayakam was born in Panaiyur in Ramanathapuram, not far from Kamal's own native village, and sheer poverty forces him to leave for Pondicherry where he serves a French official in some me-

(continued on next page)

Fr. Tissa Balasuriya's Excommunication Revoked

The excommunication order served on the Roman Catholic priest Tissa Balasuriya OMI by the Church has been revoked and he has been re-admitted to the Church officially in what is described as a historic act of reconciliation.

Church sources said that Fr. Balasuriya was re-admitted to the Church after a reconciliation service held at the Chapel at the Colombo Archbishop's House in the presence of Apostolic Nuncio Rt. Rev. Oswald Padilla, Church authorities said.

Fr. Balasuriya 73, attended the reconciliation service conducted by Colombo Archbishop Rt. Rev. Nicholas Marcus Fernando who announced the lifting of the ban imposed on Fr. Balasuriya.

The move to restore the 74-year-old Fr. Balasuriya to the full priesthood came after six days of intense negotiations. Playing a vital role in the corporate dialogue for conflict resolution was Fr.

Marcello Zago, international Superior General of the missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI) who stood by and supported Fr. Balasuriya at the time of grave spiritual crisis.

Fr. Zago told the press that the reconciliation and lifting of the excommunication order on Fr. Balasuriya was a triumph for the new spirit of person to person dialogue and accommodation in the Catholic Church. He said the spirit in which the crisis was resolved through open and sincere dialogue of all parties along with a mediator or facilitator was an example for conflict resolution not only within the Church but in society also. The Church hierarchy was represented at the talks by the Papal Ambassador Bishop Oswald Padilla, Archbishop Nicholas Marcus Fernando and Kandy's Bishop Vianney Fernando in his capacity as the current President of the Bishop's Conference of Sri Lanka. Besides Fr. Zago, Fr. Balasu-

(Continued from page 28)

rial capacity. Then he goes on enlist himself in the East India Company's army, through his exploits in the battle-field, he becomes a commander and is commended to the service of Nawab Muhammad Ali of Arcot. He plays a stellar role in the second war of Carnatic which Muhammad Ali, an ally of the East India Company, wins, crushing the French-supported Sandha Sahib, the war setting the stage for the consolidation of the British hold on India and the ultimate decline of the French power. At this point of time he converts to Islam, becomes known as Mohammed Yusuf Khan and is referred to as such in all historical works. His exploits continue and is made Governor of the Madurai province while the British empire spreads and so does his fame as he dedicates himself to the task of improving the life of the people under his charge through a number of developmental works.

It was at this stage either as a result of sheer hubris or because of a jealous Muhammad Ali's conspiracies, Yusuf Khan finds himself constrained to take on his masters. He fights bravely, defying the odds, though in vain. Though Kamal claims that he stumbled upon the

Khan Sahib as Yusuf Khan came to be known as among the people through some folk song, history as known from the available records, do not mark him out to be a great freedom fighter. He had collaborated with the British till the very end and the conflict occurs only when his masters turn the heat on him and seek to humiliate him. It is not clear what the script is going to make him out to be or how historical it would be.

Still it would be a great challenge to turn such apparently unheroic material and chisel the personality into a valiant rebel. More important by focusing on a Muslim convert and calling him the first freedom fighter could give Muslims a place of pride in an otherwise Hindu-dominated discourse. Precisely why some have even questioned Kamal christening the film Marudhanayakam and not Yusuf Khan, implying that he is being less than just to the Muslim background of his hero. Possibly he is scared, and a Muslim name as the title could prove damaging at the box-office in an essentially Hindu milieu. Still he will have done a signal service when he completes his ambitious project and make the Tamils aware of yet another strand of their multi-faceted history. ●

riya was accompanied by several brother Oblates including the local Superior Fr. Bernard Quintus and social justice crusaders Fr. Dalston Forbes and Fr. Oswald Firth.

After a four-year controversy over alleged heresies in his book 'Mary and Human Liberation,' Fr. Balasuriya was excommunicated more than one year ago on a recommendation of the Vatican's Congregation of the Faith headed by the powerful hardliner Cardinal Ratzinger. Fr. Balasuriya pleaded he had not been given a fair and full hearing before the drastic punishment was imposed on him. The Oblate community in Sri Lanka and thousands of individuals and groups here and all over the world stood by and spoke out for Fr. Balasuriya's case to be reviewed.

Bernadine Silva, Assistant Director at the Centre for Society and Religion summed up the drama as a triumph for the Church of the People. The lifting of the excommunication order is significant in that it shows that the Church responds to the voice of the people. This controversy has been going on since 1993 and people all over the world reacted to it. The Church finally listened to the voice of the people while the Oblate community, to which Fr. Balasuriya belongs took up the role of reconciliation.

"The Church has also shown that it has responded to the pain that Fr. Balasuriya suffered. The removing of the excommunication order also signals the triumph of the people. Catholics now know that the Church listens to them.

"Finally it is a triumph for Fr. Balasuriya, for the suffering and pain he has undergone for the last few years has not been in vain - for through his suffering the humanity of the Church and of the people have triumphed," said Bernardine who has worked closely with Fr. Balasuriya for some 25 years. The formal Church announcement regarding the lifting of the excommunication order along with other details of the dialogue and the agreement will be published in the 'Catholic Messenger' next week. After the reconciliation agreement was signed at the Chapel in the Archbishop's house, Fr. Balasuriya along with Fr. Zago concelebrated Holy Mass at the OMI communities De Mezenod House to mark a new chapter of dialogue and accommodation in the Catholic Church.

Father Balasuriya, a tireless crusader for social justice, told the press that he was glad and thankful that the problem had been settled amicably through a spirit of co-operation and accommodation. He expressed his gratitude to all in Sri Lanka and other parts of the world who had stood by him in his time of crisis. ●

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MATRIMONIAL

Jaffna Hindu parents seek partner for fair daughter, 34, M.Sc., teaching in Colombo, Mars in eighth house. Send horoscope, details. M 1007 c/o Tamil Times.

Tamil Christian doctor seeks medical doctor as partner for attractive management accountant daughter, 31. Write with details. M 1008 c/o Tamil Times.

Hindu professional seeks lady with family values around 48, UK resident, for early marriage. Religion, widows, innocent divorcees no bar. Please write giving details. Treated confidentially. Leslie, 40A High street, Hounslow, Middx. TW3 1NW.

Doctor, 26, specialising further, Jaffna Hindu, British born, 5'11", fair, handsome, pleasant, humble, sober, interested Indian music, seeks suitable qualified caring bride. Horoscope, details early. M 1010 c/o Tamil Times.

WEDDING BELLS

We congratulate the following couples on their recent wedding.

Umasuthan son of late Mr. A. Thiagarajah & Mrs. Rajeswary Thiagarajah of 'Anpaham', Thammalai, Alaveddy, Jaffna and **Geethanjali** daughter of the late Mr. & Mrs M. Sivagnanaratnam of Alvai North on 1.2.98 at the Highgate Hill Murugan Temple, 200A Archway Road, London N6 5BA.

Selvaranjan son of Mr. & Mrs. Selvapaskarathurainayagam of 'Sakthi Vasa', Chunnakam South, Chunnakam, Jaffna and presently of Bahrain and **Kalaivani** daughter of Mr. & Mrs. S. Murugupillai of 39 St. Martins Close, Erith Kent DA18 4DZ on 7.2.98 at Ravensbourne School Hall, Bromley Kent.

Sashimohan (Sashi) son of Mr. & Mrs. V. Parameswaran of 25 Beach Road, Mt. Lavinia, Sri Lanka and **Chrishanthi (Chrisha)** daughter of Mr. & Mrs. M. Rajaratnam of 115-25 Mabelle Ave., Etobicoke, Ontario M9A 4Y1, Canada on 9.2.98 at Saraswathy Hall, St. Lawrence Road, Colombo 4.

OBITUARIES

Gemma Ranee Sittampalam, relict of late V. Sittampalam, Advocate, Jaffna; loving mother of late Nirmala, Vasantha and Leela; mother-in-law of S. Balaratnam - Colombo, Justice Satchi Ponnampalam - Belize and Dan Muthuveloe - UK; grandmother of Sivakumaran, Sivaganeshan, Sumathi Courtney, Jamuna Vasquez, Menaka, Manjula, Sam and David; great grandmother of Patrick, Alex and Priya; sister of late Jai Singam, late Amita Perinbanayagam, late Kulasingham and of Gurusingham - Colombo and Lucky Saravanamuthu - Australia; sister-in-law of late V. Satchithanatham, late V. Nagaratnam, late Dr. V. Kumaraswamy and of V. Suntharalingam - Canada, Muthamma Gurusingham - USA and Logambihai Balasubramaniam - Canada passed away peacefully on 12th January 1998 after a brief illness. Cremation took place according to Hindu rites in Belize, Central America on 13th January 1998. - 24 New Town Barracks, Belize City, Belize, Central America.

IN MEMORIAM**First Death Anniversary**

Mr. Ponniah Pathmanathan
D.I.C., C.Eng., F.I.C.E., Civil Engineer passed away on 10.02.1997.

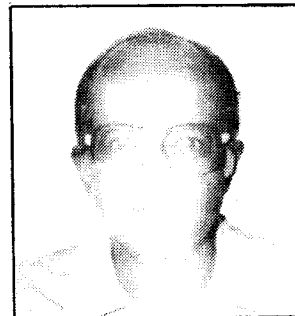
Our kind, spiritual and knowledgeable APPA. Thank you APPA for all you have done. Your Soul Now Rests In Peace.

Fondly remembered by AMMA, CHILDREN and SON-IN-LAW.- 67 Bouverie Road, West Harrow, Middlesex HA1 4HD, U.K.



In loving memory of **Mr. Vallipuram Sellathamby** (formerly Attorney-at-Law, Point Pedro) on the second anniversary of his passing away on 21st February 1996 in Surrey, UK.

Sadly missed and lovingly remembered by his wife Saraswathy, children, grandchildren, son-in-law, daughter-in-law, relatives and friends. - 50 Wiltshire Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey CR7 7QN.

IN MEMORIAM

Mohandas K. Samuel
18.1.35 - 4.2.97

A life well-lived is a precious gift of hope and strength and grace
From someone who has made our world a brighter, better place.
It's filled with moments sweet and sad,
and laughter through the years.
A life well-lived is a legacy, of joy and pride
and pleasure, a loving, lasting memory
Our grateful hearts will treasure.

Lovingly remembered and sadly missed by his loving wife Utaiwan, children Monti, Manee and Mike; mother Rasamanie; sister Chandra; brothers Indran and Peter and their families. Buckingham Drive, Chislehurst, Kent BR7 6TB.

31st Day Remembrance of



Mrs. Kathirasipillai Sangarapillai

'We did not see you close your eyes,
We did not see you die,
All that we knew was that your were gone,
Without a last goodbye even though,
You were our living embodiment of God'

Beloved wife of Mr. K. Sangarapillai (Malayan Pensioner) of Linga Vasa, Karaveddy Center, Karaveddy; loving sister of late: Mr. V.K. Kathiravelu (Retd. V.H.), Mr. V.K. Murugasu (Planter, Kilinochchi), Mr. V.K. Veeravagu (Retd. T.O.), Mr. V.K. Arumugam (Retd S.P.), Mr. V.K. Thamothersampillai (Retd. O.A.), Mrs. Parvathipillai Murugasu and Mr. V.K. Subramaniam (Retd. S.R.D.).

Loving mother of late Dr. Sivalingam (Australia), Mr. Rajalingam (former Regional Manager, Sri Lanka Petroleum Corporation), Mr. Gunalingam (Engineer, Australia), Mrs. Sivapakiavathy Thavathuray (London), Mrs. Sarasvathy Ganeshamoorthy and Mrs. Lingavathy Somasundaram (London).

Kind hearted mother-in-law of late: Mr. G.A. Thavathurai (Legal Draftsman), Mr. S. Ganeshamoorthy (Principal) and Dr. P. Somasundaram (London), Mrs. Santhirothayam (Australia), Mrs. Bammathy and Mrs. Pragaspathy (Australia). She is survived by twenty one grand children and great grand children.

Funeral took place at 2pm on Friday 9th January 1998. the 31st day religious obsequies were performed on Sunday, 8th February 1998 at Linga Vasa, Karaveddy. In London a lunch was given in her memory.

May her soul rest in peace!
Information provided by Mr. R. Raveendralingam - Eldest Grandson.



In loving memory of Mr. Chittampalam Subramaniam (Orator) on the fourth anniversary of his passing away on 18th February 1994.

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by his wife Annaratnam; children Kandasamy, Gnanaranjini, Pathmasany, Chitsabesan and Dr. Vasanthan; son-in-law Dr. Puvanarajan; daughters-in-law Malini, Kumuthini and Dr. Premila; sister Sinnamma Somasegaram; nephews Dr. Sothinathan and Kanagasabai; grandchildren Janani, Vaani, Senthuran, Yamini, Lohita, Praneeta, Thayalan, Anjali, Mahen, Lakshman and Rishi.



In loving memory of Mr. Chelliah Sivasampu on the sixth anniversary of his passing away 9th March 1992.

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by his two sons.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

March 1 First Sunday of Lent; 6.00pm Institute of Tamil Culture, Fine Arts presents Inspiration of Indian Music & Dance, 'Krishna Leela' Dance Drama, Bharatha Natyam and Thiri Veni Music Orchestra at Ashcroft Theatre, The Fairfields, Park Lane, Croydon.

Tel: 0181 241 1684/949 6888/224 2501.

6.00pm Tamil Orphans Trust presents Violin & Vocal duets by Ganesh & Kumaresh of Tamil Nadu at Acton Town Hall, High Street, London W3. Tel: 0181 908 1101/482 7745.

Mar. 2 Sathurthi.

Mar. 3 Sasti.

Mar. 4 Karthigai.

Mar. 7 SLTWG Drop in. Tel: 0181 545 3313.

Mar. 8 Eekathasi; Second Sunday of Lent.

Mar. 9 Feast of St. Francis.

Mar. 10 Pirathosam; 8.00pm Sristi presents Independence - Bharata Natyam & Kathak by Nina Rajarani & Prashant Shah at The Purcell Room on the South Bank. Box Office Tel: 0171 960 4242.

Mar. 11 Masi Maham.

Mar. 12 Full Moon.

Mar. 15 Third Sunday of Lent.

Mar. 16 Sankadahara Chathurthi.

Mar. 17 Feast of St. Francis.

Mar. 18 Feast of St. Cyril.

Mar. 19 Feast of St. Joseph.

Mar. 21 SLTWG Drop in. Tel: 0181 545 3313.

Mar. 22 Fourth Sunday of Lent.

Mar. 24 Eekathasi.

Mar. 25 Pirathosam; Feast of Solemnity of Annunciation of the Lord.

Mar. 27 Amavasai.

Mar. 28 SLTWG meeting of Women's Front. Tel: 0181 545 3313.

Mar. 29 Fifth Sunday of Lent.

Mar. 31 Sathurthi; Karthigai.

April 6 11.00am Colombuthurai Sri Yoga Swamigal Abhishekam and Guru Poojah at Shree Ganapathy Temple, 123 Effra Road, London SW19

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

Mar. 7 5.30pm Talk on 'The Concept of Leadership in Agni Sukta Rigveda' by Prof. Usha Choudhuri. All welcome.

Mar. 15 6.00pm Karnatic Vocal, Violin & Mridangam Benefit Concert for Bhawan by Bhawan's students.

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The King of Hearts - A Golden Jubilee Tribute



Gemini Ganesh, the archetype romantic hero of South Indian cinema is the first Tamil actor to complete fifty years as a celluloid trouper. In a long and distinguished career from *Miss Malini* (1947) to *Kalamellam Kaathal Valkka* (1997) - Gemini, as he is affectionately called has enchanted millions of Tamil cinema fans all over the world for the past five decades.

The strong good looks, the unhurried elegance, the exquisite timing, cultured mannerisms and an inherent flair for humour made him a natural choice for a movie star. During the early fifties when Tamil cinema was dominated by political propaganda, overlong rhetorical oratory, theatrical type histrionics and over-the-top performances he brought some semblance of normality to his acting roles.

Early in his career it was the critics who spotted him as a natural. Author and critic R. Krishnamoorthy (Kalki) in his review of the movie *Missamma* (1955) commented on his natural and effortless playing of the lead role. The famous K.V.S. Vass, editor of *Virakesari* stated in his forthright manner 'R. Ganesh is a rare actor who brings a sense of down-to-earth realism to the madness we call Tamil cinema'. The cinema critic of the popular magazine *Kumudam* observed the 'very naturalness' of Gemini's performance in *Yar Paiyan* (1957). For many years it was the critic, the intelligentsia and the student of the cinema who appreciated the life-like realism Gemini brought to his roles.

The average cinemagoer only appreciated his handsome looks and the elegance of his romantic playing, so much so the popular Tamil press named him 'Kaathal Mannan', which described only one facet of his screen persona failing to do justice to his overall abilities. Over the years he has established himself as a formidable per-

former in so many varied roles to be widely accepted not only in India, but all over the world where Tamils lived and cared to view his films.

In a film career extending five decades, Gemini's output of over 200 films also reflects the history of Tamil cinema since Indian independence. He has played every conceivable role Tamil cinema came up with - college student, brother, father, lover, husband, playboy, lawyer, doctor, clerk, school teacher, professor, farmer, pauper, peasant, vagrant, village bumpkin, rebel, outlaw, thief, bank robber, forger, prisoner, priest, freedom fighter, adventurer, army officer, king, commander, hunchback, crackpot, beggar, mentally handicapped, artiste, art lover, Gandhian disciple and many more. He also played the Hindu Gods - Krishna, Shiva, Skanda and from mythology - Arjuna, Abhimanyu, Lakshmana and others.

A screen actor's life in his films and a professional survey needs some background knowledge into what has gone into the man himself, of his experiences, aspirations and life values that have moulded his personality and character. Gemini Ganesh was born in 1920 into a well-to-do family in Puthukoddai in South India. He lost his father early, but the family was rich enough to provide him with an education at the elite Madras Christian College (MCC), where he was a boarder student. A middle class breeding, English education, rigid discipline and leadership qualities developed his personality. His interest in cricket and sports, easy manner and inherent ability to make friends made him a very popular student. He excelled in studies as well, graduated with distinction with Chemistry as his main subject and became a lecturer at MCC. He settled for an academic career. The lure of cinema was strong and in 1946, he resigned his teaching job and joined S.S. Vasan's Gemini studios with the dream of becoming a Clark Gable or Cary Grant. He had the screen test for the lead role in *Miss Malini* (1947), but did not get the role he wanted; he settled for a small role in the same film. This was followed by secondary roles in several films that followed. Dejected he terminated his contract with Gemini studios and became an independent actor, but the prefix Gemini stuck to him particularly to distinguish him from namesake Sivaji Ganesan who entered films in 1952.

Having left Gemini studios, he played next as a villain in *Thai Ullam*. This became one of the major hits of 1952. Gemini Ganesh got some good reviews and was noticed. From then onwards there was no turning back. Gemini Ganesh hit big-time with a string of blockbuster hits *Manam Pol Mangalyam* (1953), *Penn* (1954), *Missamma* (1955) and *Kanavane Kankanda Deivam* (1955). *Missamma* remade in Hindi as *Miss Mary* and dubbed in Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, and Sinhalese was a tremendously popular film all over India, Ceylon, Singapore, Malaysia and the Middle-East.

Gemini's *Kalyana Parisu* (1959), became

a hit satisfying the masses as well as the intelligentsia. The cinema critic of *Kumudam* who was always cynical of Tamil films called it 'an eternal beacon that will light the heart of every filmgoer for ever'. In *Summal Thangi* (1962), a famous novel in Tamil which had touched the hearts of millions, as the central character Babu, he gave a sincere, deep and heart-rending performance. *Kaviya Thalaivi* (1970) a film adapted from the Hindi film *Mamta* is another in which the most outstanding performance came from Gemini Ganesh. In every scene and frame he appeared, he left an indelible mark giving greater depth, intensity and sincerity to a character role already played to perfection by veteran Ashok Kumar, which many felt could not be bettered. He won a state award as best actor and during the year was also bestowed with a Padma Shri by the Government of India. *Punnagai* (1971) is the greatest triumph of the Balachandar - Gemini Ganesh combination. The aesthetic design and the neo-realistic approach leads the spectator to a thoughtful, inward, insightful participation of this film; which is what a high class cinema is all about. In a measured, restrained, low key performance - enduring all the suffering without anger or indignation - and with great compassion and understanding Gemini Ganesh gives one of the most sublime performances of his career.

A friend who recently saw Gemini in '*Avvai Shanmugi*' (1996) asked me why is this man still acting, after he has slowed down, lost his looks, age has caught up with him, he has even lost his old voice, he is a pale shadow of his past, why can't he have retired with the 'romantic image' of his past still intact. I told him, perhaps, Gemini is a realist; one who gave us flesh and blood characters on the screen with down to earth realism. Ageing is a fact of life; and this is how he is going to be in real life at this time and age. He is lucky at being able to do well what he enjoys most; and have found an audience who also enjoy what he does.

This is a tribute to Gemini on behalf of the millions of Tamil filmgoers all over the world who have enjoyed his movies over the past fifty years. Thank you Ganesh for all those enchanting hours of sheer delight you have given us in the darkened cinema halls all over the world. We laughed with you; we cried with you; we sang with you; we romanced along with you and we shared your experiences on the screen. Our life is well worth the time spent in your company.

May God Bless You!

Dr. S. Thiagarajah.

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Write to E 86 c/o Tamil Times.

Hats off to HATCC

The Hindu American Temple and Cultural Centre (HATCC) arranged a scintillating Bharata Natyam programme by Lakshmi Knight (daughter of the legendary dancer Balasaraswathi) and her son Aniruddha on 24th January 1998 at New Brunswick High School Auditorium. The accompanying musical support was provided by Dr. T. Viswanathan - Balasaraswathi's brother - (Flute & Vocal), Douglas Knight (Mridangam) and S. Vidya (Nattuvangam and vocal).

Lakshmi was in her best in what is her forte - Abhinaya (expressive facial mime and hand gestures) - which was tellingly brought out in the two padams she rendered: the first one in Ragam Kambhoti set to Talam was as effective in portraying the Nayika's desperate desire to unite with Lord Subramanya as the second one in Ragam Punnagavarali set to Tisra-Tripata Talam was the maiden's pining for Lord Krishna. Lakshmi's handling of the following sloka and the Devarnama Jagadodharana both in Ragam Kapi, produced subtle expressive nuances, nostalgically reminiscent of her mother Balasaraswathi's legendary Abhinaya. The piece de resistance of the programme was the Varnam in Ragam Kalyani set to Rupaka Talam, which represented a comprehensive weave of complex Jatis and expression.

Aniruddha's role was confined to the initial pieces of Khanda Alarippu and Vasantha Jatiswaram portraying pure dance sequences and the final Tillana in Ragam Mandari which involved alluringly sculptural poses. This left the audience wondering why no Abinaya item was slated for him.

Dr. Viswanathan's lilting flute rendering, his and Vidya's vocal contribution and Douglas's Mridangam play lent appropriate support to the dance recital.

The occasion for the programme was to raise funds for the proposed Sri Gurusvaayoorappan Sannidhi (Sri Krishnaji Mandir). It was indeed a meeting point of philanthropy and art, for the artistes donated their fees back to the temple. May there be more such programmes and more such voluntary donations.

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Dr. Indrakumar Wins Tamil Nadu Literary Award



Dr. K. Indrakumar of UK has won the prestigious literary award from the Government of Tamil Nadu, India.

'Vinnvelliyl Veera Kaviyangaal' (Epics in Space), a book in Tamil written by him and published in Tamil Nadu was awarded the first prize in the field of Science among the books published in Tamil Nadu in 1996. At a glittering function held at the Kalaivanar Arangam in Chennai, he received the award from the Chief Minister Kalaingar M. Karunanidhi.

Dr. Indrakumar is the author of several books in Tamil and English, one of which - 'Mannil Irunthu Vinnukku' (From Earth to Space), received the Sri Lankan Government's Sahitya Award in 1975. He had been a prolific writer on Space Research and Parapsychology in Sri Lanka in the seventies and early eighties and had regularly contributed to the leading English and Tamil newspapers.

Dr. Indrakumar was also a versatile broadcaster in Tamil over the Sri Lankan National Radio producing popular weekly magazine programmes in Science and Medicine. He participated as the consultant doctor in the popular weekly health programmes produced by the UNESCO. When the American and Russian space-ships docked for the first time in space and the Voice of America gave a live commentary in English, Dr. Indrakumar captured those magic moments with his simultaneous Tamil commentary for the Sri Lankan Radio Tamil listeners. He also covered the details of the joint flights, through front page lead stories in the Tamil daily 'Thinakaran' for three days running for the benefit of Tamil readers. He was Founder President of the 'Gagarin Space Club' in Sri Lanka launched to popularise space research with even Arthur C. Clarke participating in its activities. Messages from the club to orbiting astronauts were relayed to the spacecraft via Mission Control in Russia and replies received in Colombo. He also acted as hero in 'Vaadai Kaatru', a Tamil movie made in Sri Lanka which won the Film Festival award in Sri Lanka as the best Tamil movie produced in 1976. In 1975, he toured the Soviet Union in his capacity as a writer and as an invitee of the Soviet Government.

Dr. Indrakumar was a Lecturer in forensic

Medicine at the Medical Faculty of the University of Ceylon, Colombo and now practises as a Psychiatrist in UK. His wife Vijayambigai is the famous Bharata Natya and Kuchipudi dancer.

Indumathi Delights Chennai Rasikas



Classicism and innovative creative ability came to the fore when Kapali Fine Arts society presented Indumathi Srikumar of UK, a dedicated pupil of the late Guru Veenkatachalapati to provide a spectacular dance performance at Kalapeedam, Chennai 18 on 19.12.97. The chosen items had been choreographed by the artiste herself with a difference from the conventional numbers and capturing the spiritual themes in the various compositions.

Indumathi commenced the programme with the conventional 'Mallari' in Nattai with an impeccable balance in every pose of gestures, she rendered the selected numbers in an imaginative and competent manner. Nattuvangam coupled with melodious singing was in the able hands of C.K. Rajasekharan, a Kalakshetra mould like Sri Venkatachalapati, which enriched the quality of the evening's winsome performance. The Varnam that followed 'Swamy Nee Manamirangi' in a pleasing raga 'Sriranjani' set to Adi was simply expounded with verve, vivacity and elegance by Indumathi and she took the audience to a refined level of perception, awe and wonder.

Similarly, the rendering of Devi's Kirtanam 'Aigirinandhini' had an emotional and informative aspect justified by the complexity of the pure ancient classical forms saturated with a tradition, freshness, efficiency and elegance which marked the quality of the presentation. She performed these numbers with confidence, understanding the meanings of the songs and her face became sensitive and facial expressions glittered with bhakthi bhavas.

The rendering of Lalgudi Sri Jayaraman's Tillana in Tilang set to Adi, the concluding item, exposed Indumathi's artistic capacity, charm, grace and quality, the result of which, there was spontaneous applause as the curtain rolled down.

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கிரமமான, நம்பிக்கையான சேவை.

★ கொழும்புக்கு அர்ப்பணம் மிகுந்த உன்னத சேவை. (16 தினங்கள்) ★ தேயிலைப்
பெட்டிகளிலிருந்து, முழு அளவிலான தனிப்பட்ட பொருள்கள் வரை. ★ கார், மற்றும்
20 அடி, 40 அடி முழு வர்த்தக சரக்குகளுக்கு விசேட கட்டணம். ★ மின்சார உற்பத்தி
யந்திரம், யந்திர வகைகள், உபகரணங்கள். ★ சலவை யந்திரம், குளிர் சாதனப் பெட்டி
போன்ற வீட்டுப்பாவனை மின்சார உபகரணங்களுக்கு வரிவிலக்கு.

உங்கள் பொருள்களுக்கு இலங்கையர் பலரும் விரும்பும் முதல்தர துரித விடுவிப்பு வசதிகள் அளிக்கப்படுகின்றன.

● உலகளாவிய விமான பொதி சேவைக்கு எங்களை நாடுங்கள். ●

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