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**Mayor's Murder - An Act  
of Ultimate Cowardice**

**Jayasikuru, One Year After**

**Indo-Lanka Relations**

**Securing  
Children Rights**

**UN Envoy's Visit**

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-Voltaire



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*When there are so many we shall have to mourn,  
When grief has been made so public, and exposed  
To the critique of a whole epoch  
The frailty of our conscience and anguish  
Of whom shall we speak?  
For every day they die among us,  
Those who were doing us some good,  
Who knew it was never enough, but  
Hope to improve a little by living.*  
- English poet W H Auden

## An Act of Ultimate Cowardice

**L**ike so many others before her who have fallen victims to pre-meditated and cold-blooded killings that have characterised Tamil politics in Sri Lanka, Sarojini Yogeswaran was assassinated on 17 May 1998.

On 13 July 1989, Sarojini was a witness to the assassination of her husband, Vettivel Yogeswaran along with Appapillai Amirthalingam, the then leader of the Tamil United Liberation Front in their Colombo home. On that tragic day in July 1989, persons who had befriended the ever-trusting Yogeswaran and had visited his home several times previously, ate the food and drank the drinks served by his equally unsuspecting wife, Sarojini, before they fired volleys of shots and bullets from their automatic pistols which pierced into the bodies and heads of Yogeswaran and Amirthalingam. The current leader of the TULF M Sivasithamparam narrowly survived death with serious injuries on that day. Sarojini Yogeswaran was a witness to the brutality that was perpetrated on that day.

Sarojini was compelled to become a widow and was 63 years of age when she was brutally murdered. She became the first woman Mayor of the Jaffna Municipal Council having won in the local government election held in January 1998. She wanted to do something to improve the living conditions of the people of the war-ravaged city. She had no security. She had no bodyguards. She was defenceless. On 17 May, two men went to her home in Jaffna and wanted to speak to her and she called them in. One of the men drew his automatic and fired at her at point blank range as bullets pierced her frail body killing her instantly. Sarojini was the witness to her own death at the hands of assassins

who were not only witnesses to her death but also the perpetrators of what can only be described as an inhuman act of ultimate cowardice.

TULF Vice President Veerasingham Anandasangari told the press that two persons had come on bicycles to Sarojini's house and said they wanted to talk to her. She had invited them in when one fired at her with a pistol. She was hit in about 10 to 12 places.

"I severely condemn this cowardly attack on an unarmed woman. She was really a people's Mayor; she did not have any bodyguards and went around the city meeting people without consideration for her security and lived in an unprotected house. This was no heroic act," he said blaming the Tamil Tigers for the assassination of Mrs Yogeswaran.

Mrs Yogeswaran was elected Mayor of Jaffna, the former LTTE stronghold, after TULF won the Municipal council elections in January. The elections, seen as a first step towards the return of civilian administration to Jaffna, were the first for the area in 15 years. The LTTE was opposed to holding the elections and called upon all to boycott it. During the election campaign, in an interview, Mrs Yogeswaran said, "Sri Lankan politics is tarnished with blood. The gun culture has taken hold of society. I want to work towards removing this gun culture." Yogeswaran was the first Mayor to assume office in Jaffna since 1984.

Before he was killed, Sarojini's husband, Vettivel Yogeswaran, represented Jaffna in the country's parliament from 1977 to 1983.

Another TULF leader said, "This ass-assination is an attempt to drive us away from the political field so that those who carried it out can claim to

(Continued on next page)

# Jayasikuru, One Year After

Even before the battle began, the drums of victory were being beaten. The longest and most expensive - both in terms of men and material - single military operation, Jayasikuru (Sure Victory), was launched on 13 May 1997. The declared intention of the operation mounted with much enthusiasm, in the background of the euphoria generated by the recapture by the armed forces of the LTTE stronghold of the Jaffna peninsula, was to secure the opening up of the land route of approximately 75 kilometers from Vavuniya through Tamil Tiger controlled territory in the Wannai to northern Jaffna.

But to date, despite the superiority of strength, equipment and air and naval resources, Jayasikuru passed its anniversary date uneventfully, though many a date had been previously predicted for its successful conclusion, with government forces numbering over 30,000 still bogged down half-way in the jungles of Mankulam facing stiff resistance from the Tamil Tigers.

The government troops have been able to advance only 45 kilometers,

(Continued from page 3)

be the sole representatives of the Tamil people."

Despite it being widely accused of being responsible for the assassination of Mrs Yogeswaran, the LTTE has not made any statement either accepting or denying responsibility. In the meantime, a hitherto unknown organisation, Sangilian Force, claimed responsibility for the killing in letters handed over to newspapers in Jaffna on 17 May. Some weeks earlier, the same organisation in leaflets circulated in Jaffna demanded the resignation of all members of local government bodies elected following the January election. Sri Lankan security sources allege that the so-called Sangilian force is nothing but a cover for the LTTE.

Some political analysts regard the assassination of Mrs Yogeswaran as an attempt on the part of the LTTE to sabotage any effort on the part of the government to restore civilian administration in the Tamil areas. □

leaving a further 30 kilometers to be cleared.

During the year-long operation, both sides suffered heavy casualties. Accurate reports of the number of killed and injured are hard to come by as each party to the conflict, in its announcements following each and every military encounter, for propaganda purposes, overestimates its enemy's casualties and underestimates its own. According to some independent reports at least 2,500 Tigers have been killed in action and over 3,500 injured while over 2000 government troops were killed in action with over 3,500 wounded and nearly 500 declared "missing in action".

Additionally military hardware including artillery guns, mortars, armoured vehicles and tanks worth millions of U.S. dollars have been lost or damaged on the government side. In terms of expenditure, an estimated 9 million U.S. dollars, excluding the cost of military hardware, has been spent on the operation by the government.

On the other hand, in addition to the military hardware and ammunition that the LTTE had been able to capture from government forces, there have been many reports that the Tamil Tigers have been able to obtain re-equip themselves with of many shiploads of weapons during this period. It was during this period that the LTTE was reported to have successfully hijacked a shipload of over 30,000 tons of mortars ordered and paid for by the Sri Lankan government.

The slow progress of the operation and the heavy resistance encountered by the government forces have raised the question whether the strength, capability and strategies of the enemy - the LTTE - had been underestimated by the Sri Lankan authorities when Operation Jayasikuru was launched in May 1997.

Defence commentators in Colombo say that the operation has neither been a success nor a failure so far in the theater of war. But given the inputs that have gone into the operation at the expense of security in other vulnerable areas, the validity of se-

curely ensuring a main supply route strategy is arguable. They say that Operation Jaya Sikuru should be objectively assessed in the light of its original aim, its successes and failures. They consider that the planners of the operation planners had either underestimated the enemy and overestimated their own capability or subordinated it to a political agenda disregarding a rational appreciation of the military and manpower implications. Whatever the contributory factors, it is clear that there has been a mismatch between the military and political plans and the assessment of capabilities, logistics and aims.

What is clear is that these shortcomings have at the end of one year of fighting every inch of the way been able only to develop a stalemated situation. It may be assessed that the Tamil Tigers may have been weakened and a certain amount of territory under their control has been retaken since the operation began. But what is also clear is that they have not been so weakened to the point of conceding the original aim of the operation - the securing of the intended land route to Jaffna. On the contrary, the operation also has failed to make an appreciable dent in the Tigers' faith in their ability to resist and prevent the aim of the military.

At the end of a whole year of this expensive operation, besides the thousands of casualties, the military authorities would appear to have now come to realise that the army is short of manpower. The manpower shortage has been aggravated by the desertion of an estimated 15,000 soldiers. The amnesties offered to deserters on a number of occasions and a high-gear recruiting drive indicate the real predicament of the army with regard to manpower.

The suggestion of resorting to conscription should manpower levels not be filled through normal recruitment underscores the problem the government is facing.

It is in this context that the military high command has launched a two-pronged recruitment drive to bolster of the ranks of the armed forces. The first is to obtain fresh recruits from among the people who have so far failed to display any degree of enthusiasm to join the armed forces. Secondly is the campaign to bring back the deserters from the armed forces

who are estimated at over 15,000. The military high command declared on 5 May a five-day amnesty in an effort bring back these 15,000 army deserters.

Deserters were asked to report back to duty on the promise that they could keep their ranks and would not be penalised for their desertion. Similar amnesties granted previously only succeeded in obtaining the return of a few thousands but there are still at large many thousands of deserters.

This time round, the military authorities appear to take a much more harder line in seeking out the deserters. They decided to put up lists of deserters at police stations, government offices and other public places in an effort to prompt people to report them. There were reports in Colombo newspapers of arrests of some deserters.

According to Defense Ministry sources many of the deserters have been employed by private security firms. The better pay offered by these firms with relatively less risk involved has become a attraction for the deserters. In addition to private security firms, police believe, night clubs and casinos also hire army deserters as strongarm men. These private institutions have been warned not to recruit the deserters but to hand them over to the nearest police station.

Under the country's law, which the government hopes to strictly enforce after the amnesty deadline, harbouring a deserter, abetting such desertion and employing deserters are punishable offenses.

"We have started the second phase of the operation, that is to arrest the deserters who did not respond to the amnesty," Brigadier K.B. Egodawela, head of the army personnel administration unit, told the press.

Egodawela said over 5,000 soldiers had responded to the army's final amnesty. "It is well over 5,000, the documentation is still going on," he said. "We are happy with the number that has returned, but would be happier if more came," Egodawela added.

Officials said the army had also introduced a scheme to take back retired soldiers and officers to handle security operations in the capital Colombo. Regular soldiers could thus be freed for the northern battlefields.

The Army Commander, Rohan Daluwatte at a news conference on 8 May said, "We need co-operation of everybody to get back the deserters. Our biggest problem is manpower. The main reason for this discussion is to get your support for the deserters to come back. We want them to come back as soon as possible because our main problem is manpower. We have taken large areas and we have to maintain the operation capability and also protect those areas. For that purpose, we require large numbers. We are little short to meet that requirement, the best way is to get the deserters back, because they are trained soldiers. So, I request your assistance and co-operation in this endeavour," the Army Commander told journalists.

### School Leavers

In the meantime, it has been reported that the military had drawn up a country-wide plan to attract school-leavers and others to join the army to boost up its numbers.

The plan involves a new system of recruitment to the ranks of the army by going to schools directly in an effort to attract school leavers. Under this program, a special recruitment officer of the Army would visit schools where he would conduct lectures to 18 year olds who have just finished their secondary school education using video clippings and special leaflets prepared for this purpose. They would compile a lists of those students who expressed their willingness to join the forces, and would be taken in to the army, the moment they complete their education in school.

A Colombo newspaper (The Sunday Times, 10 May) report, quoting Commander Lt. Gen. Rohan de S. Daluwatte, stated that Army Recruiting Officers would visit schools countrywide to recruit students over 18 years. "We will not only go to schools, but also to population zones and to Samurdhi beneficiaries. We will seek the help of clergy too," he told a news conference on 8 May.

He said going to schools for recruitment was nothing new. "Even in the United States the Army goes to schools to tell them that the military is an attractive profession," he added.

The appearance of the news report at the time it did about the plan to recruit school-leavers backed up by a

high profile campaign in schools had clearly embarrassed the government. Addressing the Government's weekly media briefing at the Parliamentary Complex last 14 May, Minister of Information and Media Mr Mangala Samaraweera charged that "this news item has been deliberately inserted to create mischief" at a time when Mr. Olara Otunnu, UN special envoy on children and armed conflict, was visiting Sri Lanka.

In an angry response to the news report, the Minister said, "I would like to read the news item, the LTTE released which I am sure, has been picked up from The Sunday Times." He went on to read "as the Sri Lankan Government found that the number of soldiers has been insufficient for the war to conduct genocide, it had been planned to recruit school students, male and female, to the forces." He added: "Two days after this news item was printed in The Sunday Times, our embassy in Bonn reported the LTTE broadcast. We are sorry that a responsible newspaper like The Sunday Times is behaving in such an irresponsible manner. This in turn enables the LTTE to justify its diabolical practice of using young children in its terrorist activities. The Government of Sri Lanka, I would like to categorically state, has extended its final amnesty to all Army deserters and it has absolutely no plans to recruit school children to the armed forces."

### Conscription

Government sources have let it been known that conscription is on the agenda if the campaign to bolster up the ranks of the armed forces by bringing back the deserters fails to materialise. Sri Lanka's deputy Defence Minister, Anuruddha Ratwatte, has been quoted as saying that compulsory military service will be declared if the amnesty fails to rope in some 15,000 army deserters. "The government has decided on compulsory military service if ongoing attempts to bring back deserters fail," Ratwatte told local journalists on 5 May.

Without giving further details, the Minister said that the compulsory military service will be for those between 18 and 30 years.

The move to introduce compulsory military service in the form of conscription has come in for severe criticism in opposition circles. □

## “Jayasikuru - A Monumental Military Debacle” Says LTTE Leader

The leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Mr V. Pirapaharan, in a statement issued from the LTTE's London headquarters on 13 May 1998 to mark the anniversary of the Sri Lankan military offensive operation called “Jayasikuru” (Victory Assured) described the Government's military campaign as a monumental disaster. Sri Lanka suffered unprecedented casualty rate in the year long battle with over 3000 Sinhala soldiers killed and 7000 injured, Mr. Pirapaharan said.

The Government of Chandrika Kumaratunga is driving the country towards the path of destruction impelled by a singular passion to dominate and subjugate the Tamil homeland by military means, he further said.

The following are extracts

from Mr. Pirapaharan's statement:

Today is a significant day in the history of our national liberation struggle, it marks the end of a year during which we have resisted and fought against the biggest ever offensive operation launched by the Sri Lankan armed forces code named “Jayasikuru”. This operation has not yet come to an end but dragging on for a year though it was programmed for three months and began with much publicity and propaganda. The battle has assumed historical significance as the longest military operation not only in the history of Eelam war but also in the global history of armed conflicts. Our liberation movement has made this remarkable military achievement by putting up fierce resistance crippling the forward mobility of the enemy forces in the Wannu jungles.

“Jayasikuru” operation is not an ordinary battle, it has been the mother of all battles that flared up on our soil. In this confrontation, the enemy mobilised all his strength and resources at his command. We fought against a formidable force of thirty thousand troops belonging to three army divi-

sions with its special forces and commando units, supported in the rear by thousands of navy and police personnel. The enemy forces used maximum fire power by utilising heavy artillery, tanks, super-sonic bombers and fighter helicopters. In the manner of an aggression on a hostile land, the Sinhala army invaded Wannu, the heart of the Tamil nation.

What is the strategic objective behind this military offensive? What are the underlying political motives of this military campaign? The Government claims that this military operation is aimed at opening the Kandy highway that will facilitate travelling of the Tamil people. But it is not the real objective. The Government has different motives which are sinister and dangerous.

The Kandy highway runs through the Wannu region. By capturing this strategic road, the Sinhala regime calculated that it could bifurcate the geographical unity of the Tamil homeland. Secondly, the Sinhala Government was well aware that Wannu was an LTTE controlled area where the headquarters as well as the military and administrative structures of our liberation movement operated.

Therefore, the Government assumed that the LTTE would be compelled to confront the Sinhala army if an all-out offensive was undertaken in the Wannu heartland. In such a military confrontation the objective of the Sinhala chauvinists was to utilise maximum man power and fire power to destroy the military capability of the LTTE and to bring an end to the Tamil freedom movement.

The grand strategy of Chandrika's Government is to eliminate the Tamil Tigers and to effect a forced linkage between the North and South, thereby finding a permanent solution to the Tamil national question by military means. This is the hidden plan encapsulated in the Government's well known concept ‘war for peace’. With this sinister strategy, the “Jayasikuru” offensive operation launched on the

Wannu soil.

From the very beginning we realised that the offensive operation of the enemy has dangerous designs. We realised that this military campaign posed a serious challenge not only to the territorial unity of the Tamil homeland but also to the very existence of our liberation movement. Therefore, we were firmly determined to fiercely resist the offensive with all our power and potential.

Accordingly we worked out our strategy and tactics to thwart the forward movement of the advancing columns and to inflict heavy losses on the enemy.

Before the launching of the operation “Jayasikuru” the Sri Lankan political and military high command miscalculated the military strength and determination of the LTTE. Based on our strategic withdrawal from Jaffna Peninsula and on our non-engagement in the ‘Edibala’ operation, Sri Lanka Government entertained a theory that the LTTE was militarily weakened. This misconception led the army high command to believe in an assured victory and made them to issue time-frames for the campaign. Ultimately the military establishment has had to face humiliation.

We were prepared to confront ‘Jayasikuru’ troops. We re-organised and re-structured our military machine to engage in a conventional mode of offensive. Our successful campaign at Mullaivu strengthened our fire power. On the basis of our newly acquired weaponry we built up artillery and mortar units, anti-tank and anti-aircraft units to form a well integrated military structure capable of confronting a conventional military thrust. We had a long experience about the offensive maneuvers of the enemy forces. On the basis of such practical experiences we devised new offensive and defensive strategies and constructed impenetrable defense lines. By such method we prepared ourselves to face the biggest ever offensive undertaken by the enemy.

In the ‘Jayasikuru’ military operation the Sri Lankan army has adopted various strategies and tactics. It experimented with new offensive maneuvers found in contemporary military sciences. Furthermore, it implemented war plans charted by for-

eign military experts. Yet, the armed forces could not break or weaken LTTE's determined resistance. Rather, such offensive thrusts resulted in serious setbacks and heavy losses to the army.

In this year long single military operation the Sri Lankan army suffered heavy casualties with over 3000 soldiers killed and about 7000 injured. Several specially trained commando units were annihilated and armoured units destroyed. Military stores and arsenals were wiped out. In this lengthy battle, the LTTE fighters secured huge amounts of arms and ammunition. The losses suffered by the enemy were massive. Having suffered such monumental damage, the army has not yet achieved its strategic objective.

In every confrontation during this prolonged battle we gained new experience and learned a lot in the art of war and that has helped to develop our fighting ability. It has further strengthened the commitment and dedication of our fighters. This battle was a baptism of fire through which we emerged strong with new vigor.

In terms of manpower, fire-power and resources, the enemy was strong and the balance of military power was in his favor. Yet we had an extraordinary weapon which was not in the arsenal of the enemy. The courage and commitment of our fighters was our most powerful weapon in the Wannai battle.

From tomorrow the 'Jayasikuru' military operation begins its second year and it will prolong further. The Government is determined to pursue this military adventure since it has political implications. Sri Lankan regime is making desperate efforts to regenerate the demoralised army by constantly changing the officers of the command structure and regularly announcing amnesty for its deserters. Sri Lanka's war machine will roll again and thousands of innocent Sinhala youth will be victims to the arrogance and short sighted policy of the Kandyan aristocratic ruling elite.

Chandrika's Government has imposed media censorship to cover-up the ground realities of the war. It has deliberately concealed facts about military losses and engaged in a misinformation campaign to cheat the Sinhala people and the world. But the

## Brigadier Killed in Suicide Attack

The Sri Lankan armed forces suffered a major blow when Brigadier Larry Wijeyaratne was killed when a suicide bomber with explosives wrapped around her person threw herself on his vehicle just as it left his brigade headquarters at Point Pedro in northern Jaffna peninsula on 14 May.

The Brigadier was rushed to hospital where he died.

Wijeyaratne was said to be popular amongst the civilian population of Jaffna but had been recently posted to the military defence academy in Colombo and he was to have left for Colombo on 15 May but was killed on his last day in Jaffna assigned to the fortified camp at Vadamarachchi.

The body of the unidentified suicide bomber disintegrated from the force of the blast, but military officials said she was a woman, apparently a member of the elite suicide squad

known as the Black Tigers of the LTTE

The incident occurred when the 48-year-old Wijeyaratne was returning to his camp after bidding farewell to local residents and following a farewell lunch hosted by the Traders Association of Point Pedro. Wijeyaratne was said to have been very popular among the civilian population of Jaffna.

The assassination of the top military official in army-controlled northern Jaffna has yet again showed their ability to strike at will, analysts in Colombo said. "They (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) want to maintain

the hold on the people and remind them that they are very much alive," Harry Goonatileke, a retired air force chief, is reported to have told the press.

"It is certainly a loss of a good officer, but not a major setback for the military," said Brigadier Sarath Munasinghe, the defence ministry's spokesman.

"They (the Tigers) have shown their true intentions by killing a popular officer," he said, adding that they did not want the army to get too close to the people of Jaffna.

This is their (the Tigers) strategy. It helps boost their morale and also shows that they could strike at any time they want," said Joseph Pararajasingham, the Batticaloa Tamil Member of Parliament is reported to have said, adding "This war cannot continue, pressure has to be brought on the government and the Tigers to find a political settlement."

As commander of his Brigade, Larry Wijeyaratne had built up a remarkable rapport with the people of the area under his command in Vadamarachchi. "That was probably the very reason why the LTTE wanted to get him," an army official in Jaffna said. Wijeyaratne had been particularly successful in the "winning the hearts and minds of the people" campaign, and it was officers like him who managed to change for the better the army's reputation among the Tamil people. He sometimes travelled unarmed and without armed escorts, he said.

Government could not cover-up the historical truth that this military operation has been prolonged for a year and has been recorded as the longest battle in the history of armed conflict. This battle will be assessed as a monumental military debacle of the Sri Lankan armed forces. In this major military confrontation the LTTE has demonstrated its remarkable fighting spirit and proved itself to be the liberation army of the Tamil people.

'Jayasikuru' military operation has plunged the Government of Chandrika Kumaratunga in to a serious crisis. The Government is driving the country towards the path of destruction impelled by a singular passion to dominate and subjugate the Tamil homeland by military means.

In conclusion, Mr. Pirapaharan pledges that the operation 'Jayasikuru' will not end until and unless the occupation army is driven out from the Wannai soil. The LTTE leader finally pays homage to 1300 martyrs who sacrificed their lives for the defense of their motherland. □

Human rights groups had also praised Brig. Wijeyaratna's leadership and the way he maintained discipline among his troops, saying there had been no disappearances in his areas during his tenure. The same groups have also said that some 700 people disappeared after arrest elsewhere in the peninsula after the military re-captured Jaffna from the Tigers in

1996.

Residents panicked after the killing of Wijeyaratne, probably fearing retaliation by the army, and some shops closed early. But there was no retaliatory action by the army.

Soon after the attack residents put up flags of mourning and schools closed early.

## Indo-Sri Lanka Relations

It would have been surprising if the "friendly interest" shown during his recent visit by Nagendra Nath Jha, the former Indian High Commissioner in Colombo and presently a relatively an influential figure in New Delhi as convenor of the BJP's foreign policy cell, did not evoke some "unfriendly" reaction in Sri Lanka.

In Sri Lanka, "friendly concern" can be construed as interference in its internal affairs when it comes to the country's long-drawn ethnic crisis. And if it is neighbouring India showing undue concern, alarm bells ring much faster among the government and intelligentsia in Colombo, mostly due to a history of turbulent relations between the two countries.

A huge debate was provoked in Colombo when Mr Jha reportedly told a few Indian journalists that the new government in Delhi entertained a "friendly concern" in respect of the continuing ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. He was reported to have said, "We are working on certain proposals now to break the barriers with

the neighbouring countries and show our friendly concerns." He was also reported as having said that he believed Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict could be resolved by Sri Lanka conceding agreeing to the merger of the he island's Tamil-majority northern region with the multi-ethnic eastern province.

"Every Tamil, from the most moderate to the worst extremist is of one opinion on this demand, and this is one of the issues where the Government of India can talk to the government here," Mr Jha had said.

Mr Jha's statements were promptly characterised as a shift in India's policy of "non-interference" as practised by the defeated Gujral government.

There followed an orchestration of fears of a repetition of the late 1980s scenario when India, under the Indo-Sri Lanka peace accord, sent in troops to enforce the implementation of the accord with a view to resolving the ethnic conflict. Although eventually, the Indian troops invited by one Sri Lankan President fought a bitter war with the Tamil Tigers and sought to subdue them before they were asked to depart by the President who succeeded the previous one, many in Sri Lanka have not forgotten that the Tamil militant groups, including the Tigers, were harboured, funded and trained in India with the full knowledge of New Delhi in the mid-1980s. So much so, The Sunday Times of Colombo commented, "Sri Lanka and her people continue to suffer from the movement that was fed, financed and nurtured by the government of India and the state government of the (southern Indian) state of Tamil Nadu," and in an obvious reference to George Fernandes said, "We very well know that a pro-LTTE man sits as India's Defence Minister and that the LTTE believes it can worm its way back into the confidence of the Indian establishment."

Mr Jha later denied his remarks in a public speech where he said New Delhi might take a middle path in contrast to the previous extremes of full involvement or total disinterest. But that did not satisfy the doubters. But the Foreign Ministry in Colombo did not appear to be unduly agitated over the reported remark by Mr Jha.

The island's Foreign Minister, Lakshman Kadirgamar was the first foreign dignitary to meet Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee after he took power and seek clarification that the new Indian government would in no way

change the earlier policy towards Sri Lanka. The government of the former prime minister Inder Kumar Gujral had adopted a hands-off policy towards India's neighbours under the so-called "Gujral Doctrine," saying it was time for New Delhi to take a lead in improving relations with them.

The National Joint Committee of Sinhala-Buddhist organisations went a step further and said, "The people of Sri Lanka expect India to reciprocate their consistent and strict neutrality in India's internal affairs," and "Mr Jha's statement will be construed as an unfriendly act calculated to undermine the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka."

In an apparent bid to reassure any misunderstanding of New Delhi's stance, India's foreign ministry 27 April said, "Basically there is no change in the policy. As far as we are concerned the policy is still the same." The external affairs ministry spokesman said Jha's comments were his own, and stressed that New Delhi was firmly in favour of an internal, peaceful solution to the problem in Sri Lanka. "The government of India remains firm in its support for a peaceful, negotiated settlement of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka," he said.

## Cyber Warfare and Computer Crime

Sri Lankan authorities have moved to counter what they describe as cyber-terrorism after alleging that supporters of the Tamil Tigers had tried to sabotage the computer systems of its embassies, according to foreign ministry officials in Colombo.

"We found that the LTTE activists were flooding Sri Lankan em-

bassies with junk e-mails. We installed a filter system to counter that," a senior ministry official said.

U.S. intelligence officials reported on 5 May that the cyber-strike last year appeared to have been little more than a bid by the LTTE to swamp Sri Lankan embassies with electronic mail. It was the first known attack by a "terrorist group" on a country's computers, the



officials told reporters at a briefing on worldwide guerrilla-violence trends.

But the incident last year "did cause us to sit up and take notice" because it was the first of its kind involving a group branded as a terrorist organization by Washington and a possible "portent of worse things to come," one official said.

Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry officials said that they were aware of the cyber-attack. A senior ministry official said the government did not know of any other such incidents.

The U.S. officials attributed the reported attack to a self-styled offshoot of the LTTE. In August last year a group calling itself Internet Black

Tigers claimed responsibility for "suicide e-mail bombings" aimed at countering government propaganda sent electronically, the U.S. State Department said recently in its annual survey of guerrilla incidents.

Sri Lanka last year launched a web window through which several government and privately run websites can be accessed in a first-ever move to counter the LTTE's electronic propaganda. There are several LTTE-oriented websites available on the Internet, but the LTTE deny they directly fund or run them.

One of the main websites that reflects the LTTE views is Eelam web (<http://www.eelamweb.com>), which features a colour picture of the LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran and details reported atrocities against Tamils in Sri Lanka.

In the meantime, Sri Lanka has drawn up draft legislation against computer crimes which is likely to be placed before island's parliament shortly. "We have drawn up draft legislation on computer crime. It is being polished up and will soon be put before parliament," V.K. Samaranyake, chairman of the Council for Information Technology (CINTEC), told the press recently.

Sri Lanka's penal code, which is the general law governing crime bequeathed by the British and subsequently amended, was enacted in 1885 long before computers came into use.

The legislation which will be called Computer Crimes Act will be an additional ordinance to the penal code, said Samaranyake, whose office is assisting the government in information technology.

"At present if you steal millions

## Securing Children Rights in South Asia

Amnesty International has accused South Asian governments of ignoring "a litany of abuse" against children ranging from bonded labour to selling them into prostitution. "All over the region, children can be seen working in factories, mines, brick kilns and brothels. They often work in dangerous and unhealthy environments and are deprived of rights...even childhood itself," Amnesty said.

The South Asian governments "have failed to raise concerns about abuses. They have sided with the perpetrators," Amnesty spokeswoman Angelika Pathak said at a news conference held on 22 April when the internationally renowned human rights organisation, Amnesty International, launched a campaign on 22 April on children's rights in South Asia. The campaign is spearheaded by a 52-page report entitled "Children in South Asia: Securing Their Rights" (AI INDEX: ASA 04/12/97) which also features six case studies drawn from six of the countries in the region, namely India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka.

Ms Pathak urged the governments of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka to match their signatures on the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) with action. One-quarter of the world's children live in South Asia, but all of these governments "have failed to fully implement the obligations they have assumed," she said.

All the governments in South Asia have made a commitment to uphold the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and have strengthened this commitment through the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Yet

of rupees worth of software from my computers, I will have to charge you for stealing a diskette," said Samaranyake.

The legislation deals with various types of information crime, including unauthorised access to computers, theft of information, alteration, modification.

children continue to be ill-treated in the custody of the state as it administers juvenile justice, are left unprotected in the family and community and suffer the consequences of living in the midst of armed conflict.

"The gap between rhetoric and reality must be closed for each and every child in South Asia. A massive 40 percent of the region's population are children - they are the adults of tomorrow and their childhood must be protected," Amnesty International said.

"As the most vulnerable members of society, children need special protection and regional governments have a duty to provide it. If the forthcoming SAARC 'Decade of the Rights of the Child' is to bring about real change in South Asia, governments must take decisive measures to ensure that state officials, businesses, schools and parents do not deny children their rights."

The report called for action on child rights to mark the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

"All over the South Asia region, children can be seen working in factories, mines, brick kilns and brothels. They find themselves trapped in a cycle of poverty, growing up illiterate, unskilled and prone to involvement in crime," the report said.

"Yet children continue to be ill-treated in the custody of the state as it administers juvenile justice, are left unprotected in the family and community and suffer the consequences of living in the midst of armed conflict.

"The gap between rhetoric and reality must be closed for each and every child in South Asia. A massive 40 percent of the region's population are children - they are the adults of tomorrow and their childhood must be protected," it said.

The report cited, among others, the following cases:

- In India a High Court committee found children detained by police were subject to "shockingly savage and barbarous treatment" including electric shocks and piercing of pri-

vate parts with sticks covered with chilli-powder and petrol.

● In Sri Lanka a boy of 12 was stripped by police and beaten repeatedly with a broken wooden bat after being picked up on suspicion of links with Tamil Tigers.

● In Bangladesh, a boy spent 12 years in prison, held in leg irons for almost the entire time. His detention was later found to be illegal.

● In Pakistan, some bonded labourers are held in private jails controlled by landlords. Children as young as a few months old were held in a rural jail in Sindh, where girls were repeatedly raped by the landlord and his sons.

● More than 9,000 girls are sold each year from Nepal and Bangladesh - destined for a life of sexual slavery in India and Pakistan, often with the acquiescence or sometimes connivance of state officials.

● Armed groups in the region have deliberately killed, tortured, raped and intimidated children, and recruited them to fight as soldiers, despite safeguards in international humanitarian law which forbid these activities.

● Many children from Madarsas (religious schools) in Pakistan have been sent to Afghanistan to fight for the Taleban Islamic militia.

● In Sri Lanka, six children were among 42 unarmed civilians deliberately killed by Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) which is fighting for a separate state.

● In Afghanistan, in a massacre of 70 civilians, the Taleban killed and decapitated an eight-year-old boy and reportedly held down two 12-year-old boys and broke their arms and hands with stones.

All over the South Asia region, children can be seen working in factories, mines, brick kilns and brothels. They often work in dangerous and unhealthy environments and are deprived of rights promised them in the CRC such as health, education and recreation. They find themselves trapped in a cycle of poverty, growing up illiterate, unskilled and prone to involvement in crime.

Economic disadvantage, social exclusion and political marginalization add to the vulnerability of youth to perpetuate these cycles of abuse. Girls face particular disadvantage, which compounds the discrimination faced by women.

Amnesty International's campaign report recognizes that delivering on the commitments contained in the CRC is an enormous challenge for any government, requiring a combination of legal, economic and social measures, and that the task is especially daunting for many of the countries of South Asia, with large and diverse populations, limited resources and weak institutions.

According to Amnesty International, some governments have taken positive initiatives to improve children's rights, ranging from legislation to protect children to human rights education programs, with varying degrees of implementation and success.

"But these have not stopped some state officials from denying children their rights, allowing abuses against children in the community and family - either through active collusion and complicity or through tacit toleration and acquiescence," the report argues.

The report states that there are several practical measures which governments could take as a first step towards improving the human rights situation of children. These include: amending domestic legislation to bring it in line with international standards; giving clear signals to law enforcement officials that those who violate the rights of children will be punished; and ensuring that funds are available to secure the smooth operation of the judicial process for children.

AI's report also contains recommendations to armed opposition

groups. Specifically, that they should make clear to all those they command that torture and deliberate or indiscriminate killings will not be tolerated and that all civilians should be treated humanely, that they should prohibit the compulsory or voluntary recruitment into their armed forces of anyone under the age of 18, and that they should ban the use of anti-personnel mines.

Amnesty also says that the international community - governments, international agencies, businesses and ordinary people can play an important role in protecting children's rights in South Asia by raising human rights concerns with regional governments and supporting defenders of children's rights within the region. Businesses in particular should ensure that their partner companies or subsidiaries do not employ children in dangerous conditions, or contribute to ill-treatment of children.

"South Asia's children represent one quarter of the world's children - what happens to them is important for children globally," Amnesty International said. "This year is the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR). Children are fully entitled to the rights it contains."

"The best possible commemoration of this milestone in human rights will be to ensure that people in South Asia celebrating the 100th anniversary will be able to look back on a life of full enjoyment of the rights contained in the UDHR."

## ARMED CONFLICT AND CHILDREN UN ENVOY'S VISIT TO SRI LANKA

At the conclusion of a week-long mission to Sri Lanka (3-9 May 1998), Mr. Olara A Otunnu, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, announced that significant humanitarian commitments had been made by the Government of Sri Lanka and by the leadership of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a statement issued in New York on 13 May said.

He said, "I welcome these commitments, which represent a significant development towards ensuring the protection, rights and welfare of children affected by the ongoing armed conflict in Sri Lanka. I now call upon

the parties to take concrete steps to fulfil their respective commitments."

Mr. Otunnu visited Sri Lanka to promote the protection, rights and welfare of children and to witness and assess for himself the multiple ways in which children are affected by the ongoing armed conflict in that country. Throughout his visit, he stressed the humanitarian character of his mission and emphasised that he was concerned with all children and all the dimensions of the impact of war on their lives. He met with the President, H.E. Ms. Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar, Minister of

Justice, Constitutional Affairs, National Integration and Ethnic Affairs, Professor G.L. Peiris, parliamentarians and other Government officials. He travelled to affected areas in the Jaffna peninsula and the Vanni region, where he visited schools, resettlement villages and centres for internally displaced persons. While in these areas, he also met with local government officials, military commanders, religious and civic leaders, as well as with representatives of local and international humanitarian agencies. He had the opportunity to meet with two senior representatives appointed by the leader of the LTTE, V. Prabhakaran - Mr. Thamilselvan, Head of the Political Section, and Mr. Balasingham, Political Advisor.

In his discussions with the Government and the LTTE leadership, Mr. Otunnu raised several issues pertaining to the rights, protection and welfare of children. Among the issues on which the parties made specific commitments were the following:

- **Provision and Distribution of Humanitarian Supplies:** Impressive efforts are being made to respond to the humanitarian situation in affected areas; but more needs to be done to meet the critical and growing needs of the affected populations. The Government agreed to review the list of restricted items and also to examine procedures to expedite the approval and distribution of necessary supplies. The LTTE leadership made a commitment not to interfere with the flow of humanitarian supplies destined for affected population and accepted the need for a framework to monitor this commitment.

- **Free Movement of Displaced Populations:** The Government agreed to expedite procedures for the issue of permits for movement in affected areas. The LTTE leadership made the commitment that the movement of displaced populations who want to return to areas now under Government control would not be impeded. They also pledged not to impede the return to their homes of Muslim populations displaced by previous outbreaks of hostilities and they accepted that a framework to monitor these processes should be put in place.

- **Recruitment and Participation of Children in Hostilities:** The LTTE leadership undertook not to use children below 18 years of age in combat and

not to recruit children less than 17 years old. The LTTE leadership accepted that a framework to monitor these commitments should be put in place. The Government of Sri Lanka reiterated its commitment to the policy of not recruiting children under the age of 18 years. Mr. Otunnu welcomed Government assurances that there were no plans to embark on a recruitment drive in schools.

- **Observing the Convention on the Rights of the Child:** The Government of Sri Lanka has signed and ratified the Convention. It has also prepared a National Children's Charter. Mr. Otunnu stressed the importance for all parties, including non-state actors, to respect the principles and provisions of the Convention. In this connection, he urged the LTTE leadership to make a public commitment to re-

## FOCUS ON HUMAN RIGHTS

spect the Convention. He was encouraged by the LTTE's readiness to have its cadres receive information and instruction on the Convention.

- **Targeting of Civilian Populations and Sites:** Mr. Otunnu expressed the gravest concern about the targeting of civilian populations and sites throughout the country. The LTTE leadership acknowledged this to be an important and legitimate concern and undertook to review its strategies and tactics in this regard.

Another important issue that Mr. Otunnu raised with the Government and with the LTTE leadership was the continuing use of landmines by both sides. He very much regretted that it had not been possible on this occasion to obtain a commitment from either party to refrain from using landmines; he indicated his intention to pursue this issue.

During his travel to the conflict-affected areas, Mr. Otunnu witnessed the trauma and distress on the part of

affected populations there. He saw how the protracted conflict has undermined the social and ethical fabric of society. He was struck by the deep and widespread yearning for peace on the part of all communities. At a final address in Colombo, Mr. Otunnu strongly endorsed the launching of a local initiative, proclaiming "children as zones of peace", as a systematic effort to apply global recommendations on the protection, rights and welfare of children to the specific context of Sri Lanka.

Mr. Otunnu concluded his visit by launching a strong appeal to the international community to provide more assistance to conflict-affected populations in Sri Lanka, especially for resettlement and the meeting of their urgent health and education needs.

Otunnu told a news conference in New York that the next step was to set up procedures to monitor the pledges made by the parties. He also said too many civilians were being targeted in areas where there was no fighting. But he regretted he made no immediate headway in getting both sides to agree to stop the use of landmines, which were not as widely strewn in Sri Lanka as in other countries but were still there. "But I will continue to press them on it," he said adding, "If even a few people are killed, even a fraction of the fertile land of Sri Lanka is taken up because of landmines, that is bad enough."

Otunnu noted that in the 30 major civil conflicts around the world today, all of them were marked by targeting women and children as one of their main goals. At the end of World War I, he said, about 5 percent of the casualties were civilians. This jumped to 48 percent after World War II and now represents 90 percent of the casualties. "This is a world turned upside down when the very objective of the war effort is to target civilian populations, to humiliate, to destroy, to annihilate, to displace them," Otunnu said. "They are no longer incidental victims. They are the purpose of the war effort."

He said that in Sri Lanka as well as other places local values of life and death had been shattered as a result of protracted exposure to war. "It is an ethical free-for-all. Everyone has become fair game. This is relatively new in the modern era," he said.

# Media Freedom and Social Responsibility

Three of Sri Lanka's most influential media organisations recently placed their signatures to a Colombo Declaration on Media Freedom and Social Responsibility reiterating their commitment to further co-operation and unity in efforts to promote the freedom of expression and media freedom. A fourth organisation participated in the deliberations and said they could ratify the Declaration after their Executive Committee agrees to it.

The Free Media Movement, the Editors' Guild of Sri Lanka and the Newspaper (Publishers') Society of Sri Lanka announced the Declaration at a joint press conference at the BMICH on April 29 following a three-day Symposium attended by local and foreign media personalities, Government and Opposition leaders and public servants.

The Sri Lanka Working Journalists' Association also participated in the Symposium as co-organisers along with the Centre for Policy Alternatives, and the Paris-based World Association of Newspapers was a co-sponsor.

The Colombo declaration begins as follows:

- Convinced that freedom of expression and freedom of information are vital to a democratic society and are essential for its progress and welfare and for the enjoyment of other human rights and fundamental freedoms;

- Bearing in mind that it is imperative if people are to be able to monitor the conduct of their government, be politically informed and to participate fully in a democratic society, that they have access to information;

- Recognising that the journalist performs a critical role in society in facilitating the above;

- Considering that public officials by nature of their office should tolerate more intense levels of criticism than private individuals;

- Convinced that debate on public issues should be uninhibited and robust and that some erroneous statements are inevitable in a free debate, recognise the necessity for legal protection of critics of official conduct,

who given the current law of criminal defamation would be deterred from voicing their criticism even if it is believed to be true and even though it is in fact untrue, thus dampening the vigour and limiting the scope of public debate;

- Recognizing that the application of censorship has often been arbitrary and erratic, and in violation of the public's right to know, and also in violation of international standards of freedom of expression;

- Noting with concern the acts of intimidation and threat to media personnel which have adversely affected the conduct of their duty;

- Desiring to promote a clear recognition of the limited scope of restrictions on freedom of expression and freedom of information that may be imposed in the interest of national security, so as to discourage the government from using the pretext of national security to place unjustified restrictions on the exercise of these freedoms;

Agree upon the following proposals and recommend that the appropriate bodies undertake steps to promote their widespread dissemination, acceptance and implementation.

Among the proposals and recommendations made in the Colombo Declaration are;

- 1) A better formulation of the words defining freedom of expression, opinion and information in the Constitution and a suggestion to adopt either the South African Constitutional wording or the wording of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) on the subject.

- 2) Proposals to avoid the derogation of fundamental rights in times of Emergency.

- 3) The need for a Freedom of Information Act to ensure transparency and open Government with special types of information such as medical records, trade secrets, law enforcement information etc. to be exempted.

- 4) A new Press Committee Act that would articulate the freedom and responsibilities of the print media in terms of the requirements of the ICCPR.

- 5) Broad-basing the ownership of the Associated Newspapers of Ceylon (ANCL).

- 6) The repeal of the provisions of criminal defamation both in the Press Council Act and the Penal Code, with provisions to provide citizens with redress in the case of defamation.

- 7) The repeal of Sections 118 and 120 of the Penal Code which relate to the offence of bringing the President of the Republic to ridicule, and sedition respectively.

- 8) To introduce a Contempt of Court Act in order to clarify the substantive and procedural law concerned, including that of the sub-judice rule.

- 9) To repeal the provisions in the 6th Amendment relating only to those which impinge on freedom of expression for the peaceful advocacy of secession.

- 10) Censorship under Emergency Rule to be within the framework provided in the ICCPR.

- 11) The exorbitant duties presently imposed on newsprint which make the price of education and information through newspapers costly to the economically deprived to be reduced to a zero rate of duty on imports.

- 12) The introduction of a genuinely independent Broadcasting Authority that is not dominated by one political party to be responsible for the licensing of community radio, public and private broadcasting and to maintain a fair balance of alternative points of view, and to convert state-funded broadcasting services in Sri Lanka to public bodies.

- 13) Legislation to be introduced to protect the confidentiality of sources of information.

- 14) The introduction of a voluntary Code of Conduct which will, inter-alia, include the obligation by the media for fair, balanced and accurate reporting of news; divulging conflict of interest faced by media personnel; the exercise of due care in the presentation of programmes where children are likely to be part of the audience; the granting of a Right of Reply to persons aggrieved by the publication or broadcast of a news item or commentary.

The Colombo Declaration also calls upon media organisations to overcome differences of opinion and divergences in style in order to work together to actualize the common vi-

sion set out in the Declaration.

Media Minister Mangala Samaraweera, Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar and the Leader of the Opposition Ranil Wickramasingha hosted receptions for the foreign participants from the Commonwealth Press Union, Article 19, the World Press Freedom Committee, the Committee for the Protection of Journalists, Prasarbharati and the Media Institute of Southern Africa.

The foreign delegates also briefed the Parliamentary Select Committee on Media Law Reforms at a meeting specially convened for the occasion.

Copies of the Colombo Declaration on Media Freedom and Social Responsibility can be obtained from the Centre for Policy Alternatives. Please free to contact us for further details at: Centre for Policy Alternatives, 32/3, Flower Road, Colombo 7, Sri Lanka.

## Air Force men Arrested for Attack on Journalist

Police in Colombo arrested two Sri Lankan airforce officers over an attack on a senior local journalist, the government sources said on 6 May.

It is learnt that those who have been taken into custody had been responsible for the security of the former commander of the Sri Lanka Air Force, Oliver Ranasinghe, who the journalist had all along alleged was behind the attack.

"The CID (Criminal Investigation Department) took into custody two air force officers who were detailed for security of the former commander," the Media Ministry said in a statement.

The journalist, Iqbal Athas, writes a weekly defence column in the privately owned *The Sunday Times* newspaper. His column sometimes have been very critical of the misdemeanours and negligence in the military establishment particularly in the context the armed forces being engaged in a bitter war with the island's Tamil Tigers.

He was attacked by a group of armed men at his Colombo home in February last (see Tamil Times, February 1998) after writing critical reports on the military, often blaming the former Airforce Commander for vari-

ous setbacks suffered by the Air Force, such as the loss of many aircraft.

The government condemned the attack on Athas and ordered a full scale investigation after several local and foreign media organisations expressed concern.

The officers were produced at a Magistrate Court in a Colombo suburb and at an identification parade where they were identified by journalist Athas and his wife, the Media Ministry said.

The two accused men were remanded by the Magistrate pending further investigations. They have yet to be formally charged.

In the meantime, it is being speculated in knowledgeable circles in Colombo that the former Air Vice Marshall Oliver Ranasinghe could be arrested in the near future for questioning over his alleged master minding of the thug assault on Sunday Times Reporter Iqbal Athas. The lawyers of Athas pointed out to the Gangodawila Magistrate at the last hearing that, the Air Force has a special unit called "Killer Group" who were utilized to attack Iqbal Athas, because the former revealed all details of massive swindles that had taken place in purchasing Air crafts.

## PEACE BRIGADE WITHDRAWS

The London-based Non-Governmental Organisation, Peace Brigades International (PBI) has brought its work in Sri Lanka to an abrupt end recently when the government demanded the right to censor the organisation's reports.

The PBI said on 6 May that it had officially pulled out of the country after being told it must submit reports to authorities before publication if it wished to remain working in Sri Lanka.

It said it was given the order during a meeting on March 4 with officials from the ministries of defence, foreign affairs and other departments.

"PBI believes that placing such restrictions on local and international human rights observers is unacceptable," said a PBI statement released by its London office.

"When such measures are applied

to non-partisan NGO (non-governmental organisation) witnesses whose presence can increase respect for human rights, the result is counter-productive: these measures undermine trust in the government, and weaken the possibilities for achieving true democracy and respect for human rights," the statement said.

PBI, which has had a presence in Sri Lanka since 1989, said as a result its representatives had been unable to receive the residence visas necessary to work in the country.

It said its work in the east of the country, scene of much of the fighting in Sri Lanka's long-running ethnic separatist war, was also "noticeably hindered by the limitations on access to the region" imposed by the government.

"Under these circumstances we were forced to withdraw much more abruptly than we had planned," Anne Harrison, chair of PBI's International Council, said in a letter to President Chandrika Kumaratunga.

It said since PBI's arrival it had published regular reports on the human rights situation and distributed them internationally.

A spokesman for another international NGO operating in Sri Lanka expressed surprise at the reason given for the PBI pulling out of Sri Lanka as there have been no previous known instances of censorship of human rights reports filed by other international NGOs functioning in the island.

## India Extends Ban on LTTE

India extended the ban on Sri Lanka's Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) for a further period of two years on 12 May.

The LTTE, which has been fighting for a separate homeland in the north and east of the island for Sri Lanka's Tamils since 1983, was outlawed by the Indian central Govern-

(Continued on page 29)

# Chandrika and Her Govt Face Crisis of Credibility

D B S Jeyaraj

Chandrika Kumaratunga was elected as Sri Lankan President with an overwhelming mandate on Nov 9th 1994. The premier plank of her political platform was ending the war with the LTTE and resolving the ethnic crisis through a negotiated settlement. Her initiative in entering into talks with the LTTE failed in April 1995. Thereafter war resumed again. This changed situation saw the Kumaratunga government adopting a twin-pronged strategy to tackle the problem.

The new strategy was a mutually reinforcing politico-military approach. One component of it was the search for greater or maximum devolution. The mechanism for this was the Parliamentary Select Committee on Constitutional Reform chaired by former Colombo University vice-chancellor and current minister of Justice and Constitutional affairs Prof Gamini Lakshman Peiris. It was the considered view of Kumaratunga that the 13th amendment to the Constitution brought about by the Indo-Lanka accord of 1987 and consequent Provincial councils Act did not provide for genuine devolution. As such the government released a set of proposals incorporating the substance of proposed devolution in Aug 1995. This was hailed as the most progressive step in the search for meaningful devolution. Yet when it was submitted again as the government proposal for select committee deliberations it had lost some of its lustre. Nevertheless it still provided for a devolution scheme that was quasi-federal in nature. Kumaratunga aimed at achieving a wide consensus on the concept of devolution. Attaining such a consensus would politically isolate

the LTTE.

If that was the political component of the new strategy the other was a military approach. The collapse of the talks with the tigers saw the LTTE conducting several operations that affected the armed forces. The Kumaratunga government came in for criticism that it had by talking to the tigers and suspending military preparations paved the way for the weakening and defeat of

the armed forces. This resulted in the government preparing hastily for all out war. An arms shopping spree of massive proportions was undertaken. Kumaratunga's uncle and ex-military officer Anuruddha Ratwatte in his capacity of Deputy Defence minister was in overall charge of military activity. The government deviated from the UNP in focusing militarily on the North instead of the East. A series of military operations were unleashed. The LTTE were dislodged from the Jaffna peninsula. Now military manoeuvres are on in the Northern mainland known as the Wannu.

The resumption of war under the Kumaratunga regime was described not merely as "War" but as a "War for Peace". Where Chandrika Kumaratunga differed from her UNP predecessors was in her ability to convince significant sections of National and International opinion that this was a war that she never desired. It had been thrust upon her because of the uncompromising intransigence displayed by the tigers she pointed out. Still the war was not being prosecuted as an end in itself but only as ignoble means towards a noble end. The final solution was not a military one but a political settlement enabling the Tamils to live with Justice, dignity and peace in this land. According to Kumaratunga's projections the necessary evil of war had only a limited purpose of weakening the tigers militarily to an extent where the LTTE may either opt to join the negotiating process again or be marginalised to a level where it could not undermine the process of devolution. A negotiated settlement ensuring maximum devolution was necessary on the one hand and military successes weakening the

LTTE on the other.

This twin pronged politico-military strategy has been applied for nearly three years now. The euphoria that surrounded the advent of Chandrika on the political horizon has now evaporated. The Tamils in particular have been saddened by the spectacle of a person perceived as an angel of peace being transformed into a war goddess apparition. The brutal escalation and intensity of the war has caused tremendous hardship to the people of the North-east. Tamils living in Colombo and other Sinhala areas too have not been spared of harassment and indignities. All these ravages of war were tolerated for some time because of the belief that there was a "pot of gold at the end of the rainbow". The sacrifice and suffering would end once the political objectives of the government were realised was the fond hope. Even when things went from bad to worse Chandrika's ability to deliver was doubted but not her sincerity. Her action was faulted but not her intention. So life despite its danger, drudgery and despondency went on with the hope that springs eternally, but now even that sustaining hope of an ultimate settlement has faded.

The current political scenario spells doom for the proposed devolution package. In spite of all Kumaratunga's genuine intentions and aspirations it does not seem possible that she can usher in her proposed devolution package via the proper Constitutional requirements. Even hypothetically it were possible her ability to implement it meaningfully is virtually impossible. Militarily the war seems to have stalemated. The Kumaratunga regime seems notoriously lax in consolidating itself on the few areas it has achieved a modicum of success. If the ethnic problem remains intensified and intractable as ever the performance of the government in areas of governance is woefully abysmal. The rising cost of living, hasty privatisation, allegations of corruption, industrial disputes etc. are all becoming problematic areas. In this situation Chandrika's ability to deliver on a political settlement is most unlikely. In the absence of such a political settlement the justification for the war is eroded. Chandrika Kumaratunga and her government are facing a crisis of credibility on the question.

It is cruelly ironic that the very same Chandrika who raised hopes with her dream of peace is now becoming increasingly perceived as incapable of realising it meaningfully. Instead she is perceived more as a goddess of war in the current climate of endless conflict. The current impasse on both the political and military fronts continues to erode her credibility as an efficient leader. In spite of her massive mandate she is seen as powerless to achieve anything tangible in the politico-military sphere. Although some acts of omission and commission by her government have contributed to this state of affairs the blame cannot be apportioned solely on her.

The chief opposition United National Party and the premier Tamil organisation the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) must also share the blame. In fact their culpability is even greater. Nevertheless it is in the nature of things that the government in power should be indicted particularly when the helmswoman of which is a person who became president on a mandate for peace. In the final analysis the causes and reasons for non-performance are likely to be ignored and only the failure taken into account. Apart from the UNP and LTTE two additional constraints have been the strident opposition to peace initiatives by the hawkish elements within the Sinhala polity namely the Maha Sangha, sections of the media and pressure groups etc. These forces also continue to clamour for greater military activity to finish off the problem of terrorism militarily. The second constraint is the perceptible lack of positive support from within government ranks itself. Apart from a few frontliners the bulk of the part seem totally apathetic towards the devolution exercise. The blessing being the non-emergence of an antipathic group so far.

The UNP and the LTTE have no identity of interests but there certainly is a convergence of interests in stymieing the politico-military efforts of Kumaratunga. The UNP cannot allow the PA government to resolve the problem satisfactorily and gain political capital out of it. This is likely to thwart its ambitions of capturing power at the next hustings. The UNP behavioural pattern is a recurrence of the political syndrome where politi-

cians focus on winning the next election as opposed to statesmanlike sacrifices in the interests of the coming generations. In the case of the LTTE the stakes are greater. A peaceful settlement within a united Sri Lanka means the negation of the long cherished tiger goal of an Independent Tamil Eelam. Moreover there is an all out war against the LTTE going on. So from the tiger point of view, allowing Chandrika to achieve her objectives means the beginning of the end. So these efforts have to be resisted and possibly defeated.

When analysing the causes for the current impasse it is always possible to be wiser after the event. So with the wisdom of hindsight certain flaws in the entire approach towards peace are now more visible. The fundamental error on the part of the peace constituency in general and peace activism in particular was the predominant reliance on political leaders to resolve the problem. The genuine yearning in the country for lasting peace was allowed to be harnessed and channelled as a political project of Chandrika Kumaratunga. She was seen as the personification of the quest for peace by the silent majority. Also the peace lobby allowed itself at a crucial juncture to be subsumed by the politics of the PA. Instead what should have been done was to avoid the hijacking of the peace initiative by the political entrepreneurship of Kumaratunga. The peace lobby instead of identifying itself with the peace efforts of the PA should have continued independently with its own attempts of building up a momentum for peace. The vital prerequisite for peace namely the strengthening of civil society and generating public opinion should have continued independently. New institutions and alternative structures for peace should have been set up instead of relying on the state apparatus alone although it certainly is the most powerful vehicle for change. Avenues of cooperating with Kumaratunga could have been explored without abdicating responsibility for the peace enterprise to her alone.

As a result the momentum for peace became utilised as an election wave to elect Kumaratunga as the President. She then approached this peace project in narrow political terms. Instead of mobilising national

opinion cutting across part affiliations Kumaratunga like any other politician sought to promote peace as her own project. Instead of evolving a genuine, truly broad-based consensus over the issue it was projected more as a PA initiative that at best should be passively supported by others. When the LTTE was talking and a cessation of hostilities agreement was in force everything was hunky dory. But when the tigers opted out of talks and the cookie began crumbling this pleasant scenario changed. After the Kumaratunga government began prosecuting the so called war for peace with a vigour that was making peace itself as a casualty some peace activists became alarmed. They realised too late that the government was now transforming the pro-peace wave into a pro-war wave. The original agenda for peace was now irrelevant. Some peace groups are now trying hard to retrieve lost ground and build up a momentum for peace again. They find that unlike in the case of the UNP it is not that simple to pressurise Chandrika. After all was she not the original apostle of peace? On the other hand the war unleashed despite its professed altruistic objective of ushering in peace finally has its own brutal logic and effect. The prospects for peace become dimmer and dimmer as attitudes continue to harden on both sides of the ethnic divide as a result of the ongoing war.

It is also clear now that the electorate in general and the peace constituency in particular should have known at the end of the 1994 general election itself that given the number of seats won by the PA and the Tamil and Muslim parties effective Constitutional change through existing procedures as not possible. Changing entrenched clauses meant a two-thirds majority in Parliament and subsequent ratification through a referendum. Unless and until the UNP co-operated theatre was no hope of a two thirds majority. As such promising Constitutional change itself was not a realistic pledge. Still Kumaratunga went to the Presidential polls on a peace platform and an enthusiastic electorate returned her with an unprecedented majority. But despite a two thirds majority from the people at the Presidential elections she is unable to summon a two thirds majority of Parliamentarians in the legislature. So

any reform of the Constitution particularly those envisaging changes to entrenched clauses like altering the Unitary structure of the State for example is impossible without UNP support that is not forthcoming.

Another aspect easily discerned now is that the Kumaratunga government in 1994 had naively assumed that the LTTE was amenable towards a negotiated settlement within a united but not necessarily unitary Sri Lanka. A public pronouncement by the LTTE during UNP rule that it was willing to consider a fully federal scheme in a merged North - Eastern province was construed by the PA as an indicator of LTTE intentions. It viewed the UNP then as the villain of the peace for not responding positively to LTTE overtures and projected itself as the political alternative that would pursue peace with the tigers. This struck a responsive chord among the voters as the electoral results of 1994 demonstrate. So when the PA came to power in 1994 it thought that commencing negotiations with the LTTE itself would start the peace process effectively. While taking into account all the possible turns and twists in a tortuous process of negotiations the government expected the LTTE also to stay the full course and compromise here and there on a policy of give and take so vital for negotiations. It assumed that the tigers too were committed to a settlement that would uphold the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka. But in this the government grossly miscalculated.

The cardinal error was not understanding LTTE motivation sufficiently and underestimating the very real dedication on the part of tiger supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran to his vision of Thamil Eelam. The LTTE has both died and killed for Eelam. It has sacrificed and destroyed for this goal. The dream of Eelam had fired the imagination of a 16 year old boy Prabhakaran as far back in 1970. This dream had sustained him and enabled him to nurture and nourish a movement whose hallmark itself is the cyanide capsule embodying a commitment to martyrdom for the supreme cause. Such a movement and leader were not going to negotiate for a settlement that would retain at the end of the day the sword-bearing lion as the national flag. Again the mistake was

not so much in misjudging the LTTE but more in not preparing for such a contingency. PA spokespersons have now gone on record that the government was totally unprepared for such an eventuality. So when war resumed again a beleaguered government rushed headlong into war. It was more an ad-hoc reaction rather than a calculated move. There are also traces of an underlying desire to teach the rejectionists of peace a costly lesson. The war then continued with the government once committed to peace pursuing an opposite course of a military option vigorously.

Once the war resumed the PA government again became guilty of another mistake in assessment. The strength of the enemy the LTTE was greatly underestimated while the ability of the Sri Lankan forces were vastly overrated. Also the nature of the war undertaken by the LTTE was not understood properly. More importantly the level of motivation by the LTTE and their enhanced battle skills were not appreciated. The UNP had earlier concentrated 42% of the army in the East and more or less retained control over the Province sufficient to conduct different types of elections without too many defects. On the north it was more a policy of containment and the LTTE maintained the vestiges of a parallel civil administration there.

But the PA reversed this. It withdrew large numbers of troops from the East and deployed them in the north. This created a vacuum in the east that has been quickly filled by the LTTE. The LTTE now virtually controls the hinterland known as "Paduvankarai" comprising about 75% of the land mass there. In the north the government succeeded after a long military operation in dislodging the LTTE from overt control of the Jaffna peninsula. After fighting hard in Jaffna town and areas of Valigamam the LTTE withdrew to the Wannai mainland with all its military assets intact from Thenmaratchy and Vadamarchy in the peninsula. Now the army is engaged in a long drawn operation to open the A-9 highway or Jaffna-Kandy road between Vavuniya and Kilinochchi. After a year of fighting the troops are still near Mankulam only with another 32 kilometres more to go. The costs in terms of men and materials have been enormous. The

problem again is not in capturing the road as that does seem inevitable at some point merely because of the vastly superior resources at the disposal of a conventional army, but in consolidating and retaining it. The LTTE that has displayed great fighting resilience so far is very likely to continue its attacks on positions and convoys along that road in the future. Also the LTTE has also re-established a covert presence in the peninsula and is now waging a limited war of attrition. This means the war will continue to bleed. One more reason for the PA discomfiture is in not understanding the relationship of the Tamil people towards the LTTE in the context of peace. The government at one stage thought that the pressure for peace by the Tamil people at large who yearn for peace should be enough to compel the LTTE too into opting for a negotiated settlement. This assumption did not account for the structural weakness of Tamil civil society and the absence of mechanisms within the Tamil polity to promote peace. A sad aspect of contemporary Tamil society is the very real difficulties of promoting peace within. Peace activists among Tamils are depicted as traitors by the LTTE and are under constant threat because of this. The LTTE too is neither visibly open or responsibly accountable to the Tamil people on a concrete level although it continues its armed struggle for the avowed objective of the well being of the Tamil people in abstract. The end result is that there is no intra-Tamil force capable of pressuring the LTTE. The only possibility in this direction is the Tamil Diaspora but the more vociferous members among Tamil expatriates are more militaristic in attitude and opinion than even the actual tigers fighting on ground. When war began the government began treating the ordinary Tamil civilian with unsurpassed harshness. The mass arrests in Colombo being one example. These along with the blatant human rights violations like disappearances in the Tamil areas are progressively alienating the Tamil people from Chandrika who was at one time their ray of hope.

The cumulative impact of all these developments is a situation where the PA government seems well and truly bogged down. Militarily it seems to have overreached and overextended



itself. As a result the armed forces seem quite vulnerable to continued tiger attacks. Even if the LTTE is dislodged from all areas of overt control in the Wann, a prospect that seems quite unlikely, the tigers will certainly continue their covert activity. Thus the normalcy that is very necessary for working out devolution in the north-east seems a remote possibility. The war on the other hand will continue to escalate with Ratwatte contemplating conscription and the Army generals talking of conducting recruitment drives in schools. Also various charges of corruption in purchasing war equipment have been levelled in newspapers. All this means a further erosion of army morale and credibility which in turn means that the task of weakening or marginalising the LTTE would become increasingly difficult.

The problem gets further complicated by the time frame required by the government in achieving a semblance of a military victory. One strategy adopted in the past and likely to be adopted in the future is the imposition of military deadlines to suit political imperatives. In that context the government would require a clear cut military victory to boost its own fortunes among the Sinhala people. This again is for the stated purposes of either staging a referendum on the devolution package or holding another general election aimed at securing a two thirds majority for the devolution proponents. But the government feels that demonstrating a military victory would provide the swing necessary for electoral success. But thanks to the military resilience of the LTTE the deadlines for military success get continuously postponed. Also the government is not likely to get a respite for a long time even after achieving a limited objective. Moreover incidents like the Dalada Maligawa bombing etc are only going to harden Sinhala opinion. So the prospects for the government to gain big victories in free and fair elections because of the military situation is unrealistic.

Politically the UNP too has scented blood and is not likely to help out in any way. Kumaratunga's own manner of handling UNP leaders in this exercise has further aggravated the crisis. So now the UNP is playing naked politics by shifting its position

on the devolution process. The UNP that once spoke of asymmetrical devolution to the Tamil areas alone has now shifted to the other extreme by saying that extensive devolution is not possible. It has nothing more to offer than what is available through the current Provincial Council structure. As a further measure it talks glibly of power sharing at the centre through devices like reserved quotas for the minorities in Cabinet and joint vice-presidents etc. The UNP also embarrasses the government by talking of the necessity to talk with the tigers. In essence it is clear that the UNP is not going to co-operate meaningfully with the PA to resolve the problem through measures envisaged by the PA. The UNP knows that by remaining intransigent it will push the PA into a no-win situation that would gradually weaken the PA. What with issues like governance, cost of living and the anti-incumbency factor there is arising tide of resentment against Kumaratunga. If the PA is unable to deliver on the ethnic problem front then its credibility would be greatly eroded because that promise was the mainstay of its mandate. If and when elections are held there would be a strong possibility of Tamil votes swinging the UNP way then.

Chandrika on the other hand knows that there are only three options of countering the UNP that is smacking its lips in anticipation of electoral victory. One is for the government to make the package a reality. It is in this context that Kumaratunga talks of a Constitutional revolution whereby she hopes to appeal to the people directly. The danger inherent in this approach is that when the Sinhala people are asked to vote on a one point issue like this the vote is likely to be negative. Feelings of resentment against the government along with hatred of the tigers may cause this. If that happens then the whole concept of devolution would be defeated. A collapse of the government would be imminent. The time for Kumaratunga to have gone to the people directly by way of referendum or even a snap Parliamentary election was in mid 1996 fresh after the Riviresa victory and the introduction of a much hailed devolution package. She procrastinated on this because she thought that international pressure and the efforts of the Tamil and Mus-

lim parties would influence the UNP into supporting the proposals. Now the moment is past. To attempt a "constitutional revolution" now is fraught with dire consequences.

The second is to register an overwhelming military victory over the tigers and using it for political advantage. The problem in this is that if and when the tigers are defeated militarily the Sinhala hardliners and chauvinists will rise to the fore and prevent meaningful concessions to the Tamils. In the absence of a genuine political settlement the current war for peace would be exposed as an imposition of a military solution. In any event the progress of the current war indicates clearly that this type of a military victory is virtually impossible and that the LTTE would continue to be a hard nut to crack for some time at least.

Then there is the third dramatic option of negotiating with the Tigers again. That would help the government greatly. But again it is very difficult for the government to even attempt this because of its unfinished politico-military agenda. The government thinks it needs a position of strength on ground. The abandoning of the much touted Fox brokered bilateral approach accord between PA and UNP floundered because of this. The devolution lobby was wary about entering into talks with the Tigers before finalising concrete devolution. There was also worry that all what had been achieved in the select committee proceedings would be negated. The military lobby was unhappy because its mission was yet to conclude successfully. All these reasons are valid in the current scenario too. More importantly the LTTE itself is under no compulsion to negotiate with the government now. To the LTTE Chandrika Kumaratunga poses a political threat that is far more lethal than Ranil Wickremasinghe. So it would prefer to even enter into a tactical dialogue with the UNP to undermine the PA. The tigers know that by keeping away from negotiations they would hasten the political downfall of Kumaratunga. This prospect would be more desirable from an LTTE perspective than strengthening her now.

Thus it does seem that all options available for Kumaratunga are quite limited. The LTTE by its military per-

(continued on next page)

# Celebrating the Sinhala-Tamil New Year in a Fool's Paradise?

**Oswald B. Firth OMI**

Director, Centre for Society and Religion and Editor Social Justice

## Time Stops at New Year

There have always been fleeting moments in the annual cycle of events in this country when the nation's problems are shelved and life takes on an aura of happiness that is shared by both young and old, whatever be the ethnic community to which one feels a particular allegiance. It is a time when the usual whirligig of events comes to a standstill, where feuds are forgotten and faults are forgiven. The Sinhala - Tamil New Year, ushered in the month of April, both during times of war as well as when peace reigned supreme from the point of Dondra to Point Pedro, is undoubtedly one of those sacred moments, a welcome watershed, an oasis of hope that cuts right across the life span of every genuine Sri Lankan.

But the Sinhala - Tamil New Year,

as it has come to be known for ages in our rural villages, portends the sorrowful signs of fast becoming a Sinhala OR Tamil New Year where the demise of a father, friend, brother or husband will be tearfully remembered in both Sinhala and Tamil villages that span the length and breath of this land. They had to be sacrificed at the altar of a treacherous war that continues to be waged to appease the insatiable hunger for power of some mundane political gods. To that extent has human life been devalued and dehumanised, to be disposed of as scum and cannon fodder readily available as grist to the war mill.

The Sinhala - Tamil New Year is a feigned replica of a paradise fit for fools who imagine that the regular life of political and economic skulduggery takes leave for one full week.

Even while we light the hearth at the auspicious time and set the fires of life ablaze, the blast of rifle-fire, mortars and deadly bombs are never really distant from our daily existence. Even while we prepare milk-rice from the fresh produce of our harvested fields and fill our tables with delicious and assorted sweetmeats, the lamentations of the hungry bowels of our displaced and homeless sons and daughters, of our farmers and fisher folk, barely filter through our auricular orifices. Even while we sit around our rabans, striking them with rhythmic beats, target the eye of the elephant, scale the greasy pole and batter one's opponent with cotton filled pillows, war drums continue to beat and the amphibious tankers keep rolling to disturb and drown the melodious voices that announce the choice of the neighbourhood's Avurudu Kumari. Here, in the village, it is skills that win, while in the Wann, the winners are the killers. There is hardly a semblance of Sinhala-Tamil New Year where this raging war is being waged.

## Where the Blame Lies

It is time for Nemesis, the goddess of retributive justice, to deal with those who are responsible for the protracted paroxysm of pain experienced by those whose loved ones will not be at home to celebrate this Sinhala-Tamil New Year because the violence of war has snuffed them out of existence and right out of their families. A large part of the blame for this state of affairs has to be borne by none other than the leaders of our two main political parties in the South. It is in them that the people of this country had invested considerable hope to resolve the crisis in which we all find ourselves today. Instead, what we find today is an acrimonious tug-o-war between these two political parties where hair-splitting arguments are being churned out and offered to the public in a desultory attempt to justify one party's Constitutional proposals over those of the other. It is indeed a crying shame that the government and the opposition are unable to see eye-to-eye on their two draft Constitutions, thereby frustrating any hopes of having the national crisis resolved through a process of political negotiations with all parties concerned. What the country

(Continued from page 13)

formance and the UNP by its political non-performance have combined to create a politico-military impasse for Kumaratunga and her government. The major casualty in this seems to be the prospect of a negotiated settlement. The derailing of the peace process will ultimately affect the political fortunes of President and her Peoples Alliance government. The lack of forward movement on the political search for peace and devolu-

tion along with the ravages of a horribly terrible war continue to erode the political credibility of the President. The angel of peace is now perceived as a fallen arch angel of war. What is saddening is that the causes for the current impasse are forgotten and only the consequences remembered. And so it is Chandrika Kumaratunga who is called upon to bear responsibility for the current crisis and will have to pay the political price if necessary. □

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is presently experiencing is none other than the dialogue of the deaf.

### Constitution vs Constitution

A cursory glance at the PA Government's Constitutional proposals indicates that elements of a sort of a federal government in the regions are in predominance, while the UNP's proposals are intent on guaranteeing the unity of the nation while assuring the minorities of equal rights within a democratic frame of central governance. The UNP's proposals may appeal more to the Sinhalese, while the PA's proposals may find greater favour among the

Tamils. But whatever be the strengths and weaknesses of the two draft Constitutions, their ultimate objective should be the resolution of the North and East crisis that is making our village economies depend more on the war for their survival than on industry, farming or fishing. Recent statistics clearly indicate that nearly 25 percent of today's rural economy is derived from the war than on any real or illusory "Waga Sangramaya".

Both draft Constitutions appear to be magnanimous in granting equal rights to the minorities. The UNP proposals speak of a common citizenship; equal protection of the law; the right to his or her own religion, language and culture without discrimination by law or executive action; fundamental rights; equal opportunities to participate in the government of the Republic at all levels; to enjoy equal opportunities in education and employment without discrimination; the security of his or her person and property without distinction on grounds of race, religion or political opinion, and the freedom to reside and work in any part of the country. Conspicuous by its absence is any meaningful set of proposals to devolve power to the periphery which is where true people's power should find expression. This renders all these high-faluting sentiments of sharing power at the centre nugatory.

Through its vociferous spokesperson, Mr. Ronnie de Mel, the UNP proposes the establishment of a new political culture free from political violence, vote rigging, fraudulent election practices, attacks on journalists and the mass media, and all such actions that have made a mockery of parliamentary democracy. Such sycopha-

ntic conundrums sound rather hollow and naive after seventeen years of deadly trauma where the miscreants who caused such physical and mental agony to so many are still at large. Why the UNP required twenty long years to propose a new political culture is a matter that begs the question.

### Theory vs Practice

The PA Government's proposals are equally adulatory. The chapter on Human Rights is supposed to be one of the best and strongest in Asia. The Right to Life, a significant omission in the 1978 Constitution, is considered to be a non-derogable fundamental right. Rights related to arrest and detention are to be strengthened in the proposed PA Constitution. Every person arrested would have the right to communicate with a relative or friend and the State shall provide the necessary means of communication for this purpose. Also, every person arrested would have the right to consult a lawyer from the moment of arrest and the State shall afford facilities for this purpose.

But, how meaningful would the strengthening of these fundamental rights be to those who have disappeared, been raped, wrongfully arrested, tortured and even killed in the most diabolical manner under the sinister provision of emergency and in the name of a rather tenuous democracy! Can the Constitution furnish a guarantee to the elimination of such crimes, or should the victims have to wait till these crimes are committed to seek legal remedies and judicial redress against the violation of their Constitutional Rights! Is it not the responsibility of the government to protect the fundamental rights of all the country's citizens irrespective of whether or not they are enshrined in the country's Constitution? Will people have the right to use Constitutional provisions to challenge and bring to justice ministers and even presidents who cause suffering to people as a result of mishandling the war, failing to end the war and even mismanaging the country's economy and selling off the country's natural resources to trans-national corporations of dubious reputation! How possible would all this be in a country where majoritarian rule unduly influences policies of the centre. This

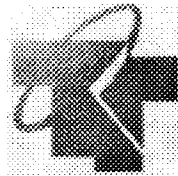
is perhaps where Regional Councils will be most effective when people will be independent and detached from centre politics and be in a position to safeguard their resources, change individual council members and even Regional Councils in their entirety when they cease to function in the interest of the people.

### Unfulfilled Aspirations

The amusing scenario where political leaders of the government and of the main opposition engaging in scurrilous debates and public discussions where each others Constitutions are torn apart and where insults and accusations are hurled at each other outside Parliament is turning out to be utterly farcical and melodramatic. Similarly, meeting in Parliament to rush through certain bills damaging to public interest in a fashion that is most undemocratic and unethical, while the opposition is performing satyagraha seated on the embankment of the Diyawanna Oya across which wafts a soothing cool breeze during these days of oppressive heat is, to say the least, sensational if not amusing.

On almost the eve of another Sinhala - Tamil New Year, what the people of this country would expect of their political leaders is a consolidated and collaborative effort to hammer out a national Constitution that would ensure justice, equity and fair play to all communities so that solid foundations could be laid to build a land for all to live in peace, harmony and prosperity where war and want will be eliminated forever. Why should we be wrangling over Constitutions if they do not provide adequate guarantees of peace and prosperity to all, irrespective of culture, creed, cast and language differences! The sooner we draw up such a Constitution the earlier will we cease to be the laughing stock of the LTTE and of those who have placed at least a modicum of faith in any of the major parties that has ruled this land to this day.

That would indeed be an eventful day heralding the dawn of a new era of our dreams when every Sinhala AND Tamil New Year that follows would be an occasion of rejoicing together across the ethnic divide, with all the races galvanised into one true united nation. □

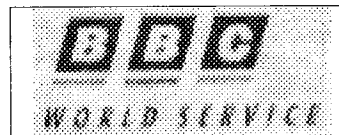
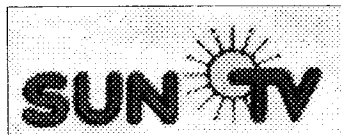
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SRI LANKA today presents three contrasting, but interesting pictures. First, the Sri Lankan security forces have managed to gain the upper hand in Jaffna, the citadel of Tamil separatism. What is more, there is a growing rapport between the people and the Army in the peninsula. Secondly, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has shifted its major areas of operation to the jungles of Vanni, the Eastern province and the capital, Colombo, after having been driven out of Jaffna. Thirdly, the hopes that many Sri Lanka watchers entertained quick implementation of the devolution package are slowly vanishing.

During my earlier visits to Jaffna in June 1996 and March 1997, the Sri Lankan security forces were omnipresent. Their deployment level has now been scaled down; a number of women security personnel have been inducted; people do not have to wait for long at checkpoints; soldiers are being taught to converse in Tamil, and human rights cells have started functioning.

Since Major General Lionel Balagalle assumed overall command of the peninsula, the number of "disappearances" has come down and every complaint filed about alleged misconduct is being inquired into. Rev Fr Alphonsus Iruthanayagam Bernard, Principal of St Patricks School, spoke highly of the attempts being made by Major General Balagalle to promote cordial relations between the Army and the civilians, a view shared by a cross-section of people.

The LTTE's strategy of forcing people to leave their homes so that the advancing Sri Lankan Army would march into a ghost town, has backfired. The trauma the people have experienced has resulted in a perceptible change in their attitude towards the LTTE.

Major General Balagalle and Brigadier Larry Wijeratne (who is in charge of Vadamarachi) have been making efforts to improve the living conditions of the people. These efforts have begun to pay dividends. In July 1997, an LTTE guerilla was killed in an ambush in Valigamam.

Among the documents seized from him was a letter addressed to the LTTE leadership, explaining the reason for his inability to succeed in his mission. If an LTTE cadre stayed in a house for more than 24 hours infor-

vegetables and plantains being sold cheaper in Jaffna than in Colombo. More buses are plying. Kerosene, petrol and medicines are available, although at higher prices. Major General Balagalle said that the Government's top priority was to improve telecommunications; an additional 20,000 telephone lines are likely to be provided by the end of the year.

The elections to local bodies held on 29 January 1998 (Frontline, 6 March 1998) provided an ideal opportunity to

transfer administrative responsibilities from the Army to the elected representatives. Although the Tamil parties wanted the elections to be postponed until normalcy was restored, official Colombo was determined to go ahead with the process. It was not an ideal election: the voters' lists had not been updated, and many of the people whose names figured in the electoral rolls had left the peninsula or had been displaced. As a result, although the total number of voters who figured in the electoral register was 571,486, the number of votes polled was only 106,464. Out of this, only 91,596 were valid votes. The voter turnout was, however, higher than in the 1994 parliamentary elections.

True to their nature, the non-LTTE political parties could not arrive at a common programme and contested against one another in elections to all the 17 local bodies. The Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) was undecided about whether to contest or not. The leadership was finally persuaded to field candidates for the Jaffna Municipality and the Valigamam North Pradeshiya Sabha. Sarojini Yogeshwaran, a TULF candidate, was elected Mayor of Jaffna. The party also won the majority of seats in Valigamam North. Sribhaskaran, a popular TULF leader, told this writer that he had neither campaigned for the party nor addressed any public meeting. He said that the TULF would have won more seats had the central leadership decided to enter democratic politics. The TULF's victory is a testimony to the fact that it has an important role to play in the emerging political sce-

## A MIXED PICTURE

While the situation in Jaffna is improving steadily, the picture in other parts of Sri Lanka continues to be bleak

By V Suryanarayan

mation about this invariably reached the Army. The people no longer like the presence of the LTTE in their midst.

When the people of Valigamam were forced to leave their homes, many of them did not know what to do with their savings. A few of them placed their jewellery and currency notes in polythene bags and buried the bags in their compounds. However, when they returned, they found that the LTTE had placed land-mines near their homes, or that their homes were occupied by the security forces. Major General Balagalle narrated how he had received a letter from an elderly man seeking help to recover his savings. The security forces recovered 100 sovereigns in gold and currency notes worth Sri Lankan Rs 500,000. Since the currency notes were soiled, Major General Balagalle wrote to the central bank asking that they be replaced. Thirty-nine others were provided with similar help.

More and more people are returning to Jaffna. According to the latest District Profile made available by the Government Agent's Office, between May 1996 and February 1998, 65,000 people returned by ship from Trincomalee and Mannar. What is interesting is that the people who were stranded in LTTE-controlled areas are coming back.

Schools and colleges are functioning normally. Electricity is available for a few hours in certain parts of the town. The faculty members of Jaffna University view television programmes from Chennai every day. Agricultural operations have started; in fact, there is a glut in the market, with

nario. Will the central leadership of the party respond to the challenge of the times or will it allow the void to be filled by gun toting militants?

On the second day of my stay in Jaffna, I visited Point Pedro and Velvettiturai. Lieutenant Colonel R B Senanayake, who escorted me, suggested that we take a short-cut to Point Pedro via the seashore. Since the road was in poor shape, we abandoned our plan to take that road. We then motored along the usual road from Palaly. On both sides of the road I could see the ravages of war: hundreds of buildings, including churches and temples, had been destroyed. The market at Velvettiturai was completely destroyed as a result of indiscriminate bombing.

The civilian administration must, when it assumes charge, devote its attention to rebuilding the houses and roads, provide employment, promote agriculture and fishing, extend medical services and resettle displaced people. Unless the basic problems confronting the people are resolved expeditiously, the military victory may well turn out to be a mirage.

The desire expressed by Muslims

to return to Jaffna is another sign of the improvement in the situation. Muslims, numbering about 75,000, lived in the region amicably with Hindus and Christians for centuries. They made valuable contributions to the economic, social, political and cultural life of Jaffna. However, in October 1990, the LTTE ordered them to leave their homes within 24 hours. The LTTE then looted property left behind by the fleeing Muslims. The Muslims took refuge in Puttalam, Anuradhapura and Kurunegala districts. I met a group of 25 Muslims at the mosque in Grand Bazaar. They were on a probing mission to find out whether they could return to Jaffna and start their lives afresh. Will Hindus and Christians extend their hand of friendship to their

Muslim brethren? Will the new Mayor make Muslims feel that they are an integral part of the social fabric?

While Jaffna provides hope, the situation in other parts of the island nation is bleak. Operation Jayasikuru, intended to link Kilinochchi with Vavuniya via Puliyankulam and Mankulam and thus open up the land

route to Jaffna, is yet to be successfully accomplished. Even if the Army attains its objective, it will be a Herculean task to maintain the supply route, given the resilience of the LTTE.

The situation in the East is alarming. According to Air Vice-Marshal Harry Goonetilleke, 75 per cent of the land area is dominated by the LTTE and only the major towns of Batticaloa, Trincomalee and Amparai are under the control of the military. The LTTE's suicide squads regularly attacked the nerve centres of the economy. What is more, the attack on Dalada Maligawa, the sacred place of worship for Sinhala Buddhists, on 25 January (Frontline, 6 March 1998) sent shock waves across the country. In retaliation, a Sinhalese mob desecrated the Selva Vinayagar temple. The LTTE's objective is to foment riots in order to widen further the ethnic divide.

A tragic fallout of the attack on Dalada Maligawa is the relegation of the devolution proposals to the background. In order to exploit the simmering Sinhalese discontent, the Uni-

(continued on next page)



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# The Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland

Dr S Narapalasingam

## History of the Conflict

The sectarian feud in the island of Ireland has a long history going back to the time of Anglo-Norman conquest. An attempt to propagate Protestantism in Ireland had largely failed by the 1590s among both the Gaelic Irish and the so-called Old English (descendants of the Anglo-Normans). The Roman Catholic church claimed the allegiance of almost the entire population, except for the British-born newcomers. Ulster, one of the four historical provinces (others being Connaught, Leinster and Munster) became dominated by Protestant English and Scottish planters. The native Irish became largely a landless, displaced population for whom only menial vocations were available. The most violent reaction to this subjection was the rebellion of 1641 against the English and later the Scottish set-

(Continued from page 22)

ted National Party has come out openly against the devolution proposals. The concepts of "need-based" and "asymmetrical" devolution have their merits, but in the present context, the articulation of these demands spell the death knell for President Chandrika Kumaratunga's devolution proposals. With provincial council elections imminent, Sri Lanka is being pushed into the vortex of competitive Sinhala politics. And the Tamil groups are being relegated to the background.

Every student of contemporary Sri Lankan politics is sensitive to the fact that without a Sinhalese consensus, there cannot be any meaningful solution to the ethnic problem. By playing the Sinhalese card, political leaders are unwittingly strengthening the LTTE's argument that the Tamils can never get justice from Sinhalese-dominated governments.

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(Courtesy of "Frontline")

tlers. However, with the re-conquest of Ireland by Oliver Cromwell in the 1650s, the Ulster plantation was re-established. As a result, Ulster was distinctive among the provinces of Ireland because of the concentration of its immigrant British (and Protestant) population.

The 1916 Easter Rising in Dublin was a watershed in the rise of Irish nationalism. Although the Home Rule Bill of 1912 was passed in the House of Commons for the third time in 1914 (which was defeated twice earlier in the House of Lords), it was too late and too little to satisfy nationalist sentiments in Catholic Ireland. The war of independence from Britain started in 1919. Under the Government of Ireland Act (1920), Ireland was partitioned into two self-governing states, Northern Ireland and Southern Ireland. Both were to enjoy limited powers of self-government within the United Kingdom. The 1921 Anglo-Irish treaty provided for the creation of Irish Free State (Eire). The new state comprised the 23 counties in the South and 3 counties of Ulster Province in the North with a predominantly Catholic population. The remainder of Ulster Province with 26 districts where the overall majority of the people were Protestants, known as Northern Ireland, remained part of the United Kingdom.

With the start of the civil war between the pro and anti-treaty groups in 1922, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) which was leading the fight against the British, was declared illegal in Northern Ireland. In 1937, Eamon De Valera's constitution for Eire (now the Republic of Ireland after it left the Commonwealth in 1949) claimed sovereignty over the entire island of Ireland. The land area of Northern Ireland is 5,463 sq. miles and has a population of 1.6 million, compared with the Republic of Ireland's area of 27,136 sq. miles and a population of 3.5 million. The Nationalists (or Republicans) who are mostly

Catholics have never accepted the partition of Ireland and their aim has been to rejoin the Republic of Ireland. The Unionists, mostly Protestants wished to remain in union with Britain.

In 1966, Nelson's Column in Dublin was wrecked by a bomb. The first civil rights march in Northern Ireland was in 1968. IRA's border campaign during 1956-1962 escalated into violent conflict between the Protestant majority and the Roman Catholic minority in 1968. Prime Minister Terrence O'Neil of Northern Ireland sought to end the enmity between the two groups by fostering closer ties between Ulster and the Republic of Ireland. But the hardliners within the Ulster Unionist Party forced his resignation. His successor, James Chichester-Clark had to call in the British troops to quell the disturbances. The overwhelming majority of the people in Northern Ireland voted in favour of remaining in union with the United Kingdom in a referendum held there in 1969.

Violence intensified after the referendum as its result was a foregone conclusion when the people of Northern Ireland were divided between Protestant majority and Catholic minority. The Protestant-dominated Stormont Parliament that had governed Northern Ireland since 1921 was abolished in 1972 by the British government and "direct rule" was instituted. The Ulster workers' strike (by Protestants) in 1974 brought down the power-sharing executive set up in Northern Ireland under the 1973 Sunningdale agreement, which was reached following the talks Ireland's Prime Minister Cosgrave had with his British counterpart Edward Heath and representatives of Northern Ireland. This accord recognised that the North's relationship with Britain could not be changed without the consent of a majority of the population in Northern Ireland and it also provided for the establishment of a Council of Ireland composed of members from both the Dail (Ireland's Parliament) and the Northern Ireland assembly.

The Anglo-Irish agreement signed by the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and the Irish Prime Minister Garret FitzGerald in November 1985 reiterated the previously agreed position regarding any change in the status of Northern Ire-

land and also established an inter-governmental conference to deal with political, security, and legal relations between the two parts of the island. This agreement for the first time gave the Irish government a role in the internal affairs of Northern Ireland. In 1993 John Major and Albert Reynolds signed a joint peace initiative (the so-called Downing Street Declaration), in which they pledged to seek mutually agreeable political structures in Northern Ireland and between the two islands. The following year the IRA declared a cease-fire but it collapsed after 18 months in 1996. The first official meeting between the British Government and the Sinn Fein, the political wing of the IRA took place in 1994. It must be noted that Sinn Fein was operating over-ground as a political party though many did not doubt its link with the underground IRA. Although some Sinn Fein members were elected to the Parliament in Westminster, they did not take their seats there, as they did not wish to take the oath of allegiance to the British Crown.

### The 1998 Peace Deal

The historic peace agreement signed on Good Friday 10 April, 1998 in Ulster after 22 months of intense negotiations by the heads of the British and Irish Governments and eight out of the ten political parties representing the Protestant majority and Roman Catholic minority in Northern Ireland has given hope to all peace loving people there that at last after 30 years of bloody civil war and sectarian violence, they can live in peace and raise their children free from the shadow of fear and uncertainty. The peace deal agreed by the 8 parties, some of whom were bitter enemies for years and would not even face each other let alone sit together around a negotiating table was too good to be believed.

There were several moments when all the signs indicated an imminent collapse of the peace talks, even up to the very end of the time (midnight of 9th April) set by George J. Mitchell the leader of the mediating team for a conclusion. The mood of the peace makers and the people at large oscillated between hope and despair during the entire period of the negotiations. The marathon session that took place during the critical 17 hours af-

ter the passage of this deadline was also not free from deadlocks and only the interventions of British and Irish Prime Ministers Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern and the long distance telephone contacts with the leaders of the negotiating parties by the US President Bill Clinton helped to reach the understanding on the key issues paving the way for the final agreement.

The deal is significant for the unanimous acceptance of non-violence and the principle of consent. The essence of the agreement is that both sides have rejected the use of violence and agreed to use peaceful methods to achieve their separate political goals. The new agreement enshrines the principle that the fate of Northern Ireland will be decided by the will of the majority of its people. The Irish Government will amend Articles 2 and 3 of its Constitution which lay claim to the territory of Northern Ireland and the British Government will repeal the 1920 Government of Ireland Act. A new Northern Ireland assembly made up of 108 members, six elected by PR from each of the existing 18 Westminster constituencies would have powers to legislate and take over the running of specified government departments such as agriculture and education. This would end the direct rule from Westminster that prevailed for 25 years.

A 12-member executive committee drawn from the assembly will include Sinn Fein members, provided there is prior IRA decommissioning of weapons. Up to the very last this has been a sticking point and only the reaffirmation of all participants of their commitment to the total disarmament of all paramilitary organisations buttressed by the confirmation that they would use their influence to achieve the decommissioning of all paramilitary arms within two years helped to remove this obstacle. Also the Independent Commission that will be set up under the deal will monitor, review and verify progress on decommissioning and will report to both governments at regular intervals.

The settlement will be put to separate referendums on both sides of the border on May 22.

The following are the key factors that enabled the antagonists and the sceptics to agree to the final terms of the settlement:

- War-weariness has no doubt played its part in the shift in the attitude of the Catholic people. Sinn Fein must have realised that it is prudent to secure equal rights for Catholics in Northern Ireland in the short term than hold out for a distant dream of a united Ireland. In this regard, the perception that demographic trends within Northern Ireland favour the nationalists may have also influenced their thinking. In the late 1960s, the population was roughly one-third Catholic and two-thirds Protestant. According to the 1991 census, the Catholic proportion of the population has risen to 43%.

- The combined SDLP and Sinn Fein vote at the last election in 1997 made up 38% of the total, a figure close to the Catholic share of the vote in Northern Ireland, as against around 30% in 1985. This growing strength at the ballot box is also a reason for taking the political route. The once solid unionist majority has shrunk to a much smaller margin.

- The way the new Northern Ireland assembly will be formed ensures that a tyranny of the majority is virtually ruled out. The share of seats each party wins will determine the number of posts it holds in the proposed executive committee. Legislation in the Assembly cannot be passed unless there is 70% or greater majority and this ensures that it will have to attract the support of a majority of nationalists and unionists. The proposed inter-governmental arrangements also give confidence to the Catholics that their rights would not be subjugated by the Unionists.

- Attitudes of Irish Catholics in America and in the Republic to Northern Ireland have also changed over the years. Many have become disenchanted with the purely military tactic of the IRA, often resorting to terrorist attacks, that has claimed many innocent lives. The Irish Republic has become relatively prosperous, self-confident and more integrated into Europe than Britain. There is no pressing need to reclaim Northern Ireland on economic grounds. The violence in Northern Ireland came to be viewed by mainstream politicians in the Republic as an unnecessary headache.

- The role of the Catholic Church, both in the Republic and Northern Ireland, contributed a great deal for rec-



conciliation. Its leading clerics were uncompromising in their condemnation of violence, and whenever the IRA resorted to terrorist violence, they did not fail to condemn it in unequivocal terms, and helped both by their deeds and utterances to build a peace-movement.

- The fact that Sinn Fein, the political wing of the IRA got 17% of the vote at the last election meant that it could not be dismissed as just a terrorist organisation. Participation in electoral politics also had its dynamics within itself. Sinn Fein had progressively become part and parcel of mainstream politics.

- There was also a demonstrable change in the change in the approach to Northern Ireland politics accompanied by its protracted violence among people in mainland Britain. A MORI poll in 1997 found that 51% of British people thought Northern Ireland should become independent from the United Kingdom.

The clout that the Ulster Unionist MPs had in Westminster during the previous government when the Conservative Party needed their votes diminished after the new Labour Party won the last elections with a majority of 179 seats. This meant that the biggest unionist group, the Ulster Unionist Party could not resist the pressures of the new Labour government. It could not afford to be left completely isolated within British politics.

All the three major political parties in Britain - Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrats - have taken a common stance in dealing with the problem in Northern Ireland. For many years the parties had developed an all-party consensus non-sectarian consensus in regard to the Northern Ireland conflict.

- Although the proportion of Catholics in Northern Ireland has been rising, the majority will remain Protestant for quite some time. Northern Ireland's continued union of the United Kingdom would not come under threat as long as the majority of its residents decide in favour of it. The Republicans have agreed to adhere to the principle of consent by the Protestants as a basic requirement of any change in the status of Northern Ireland in its union with Britain.

- All participants at the talks were conscious of the fact that they were in a no-win situation and that the only

alternative to the agreed deal was more conflict and bloodshed with the continued fearful and uncertain existence, which the people were no longer willing to accept. Businessmen and the public at large (the visible Peace Constituency) were lamenting about the economic effects of the prolonged conflict on investment and general living standards. They were also tired of living in a climate of fear.

### The Main Players

George Mitchell, the former US senator was sent to Northern Ireland in 1994 by US President Bill Clinton as his special envoy. The Unionists initially doubted his neutrality, as his father was the son of Irish catholic immigrants. He was able to win their trust later by the determination, objectivity and impartiality he showed in his dealings with the antagonists in the task of promoting peace despite the many obstacles that he faced; his apparent commitment to defend democracy; disapproval of the use of violence to achieve political goals; and the conviction that honest discussions can resolve most problems.

President Clinton's decision to grant US visa to Gerry Adams, the Sinn Fein leader disregarding the displeasure of both John Major's Government in the UK and the Unionists in Northern Ireland also helped to wean away Adams from violence as a sole means to achieve his political goals.

Mr Mitchell did not turn his back on the Irish problem, when the Tory Prime Minister John Major, under pressure from the Unionist MPs on whose support his government's survival depended, failed to endorse in January 1996 his framework worked out following negotiations with all parties (known widely as the Mitchell principles) for peace negotiations. A month later the IRA bombed Canary Wharf and the cease-fire was over. Senator Mitchell agreed to the subsequent request to come back and chair the peace talks that produced the deal on Good Friday April 10, 1998.

Tony Blair, as Prime Minister representing the whole of Northern Ireland spoke for both communities - the Catholics and the Protestants. He had talks separately with the leaderships of Sinn Fein and Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), who were the ones with ex-

treme positions in the peace talks. He established good relationship with Mr David Tremble and gave him access to his office in Downing Street. When the talks at the eleventh hour reached a deadlock and was in danger of breaking down, he rushed to Stormont and succeeded with his Irish counterpart Bertie Ahern in persuading both sides to show courage and compromise for the sake of peace. Blair was ably supported by his Northern Ireland Secretary Mo Mowlam. She showed courage and firmness in her responses to the pronouncements of various leaders that went contrary to the basic principles on which the deal was finally structured.

The part played by Bertie Ahern, the Irish Prime Minister in the peace talks that resulted in the deal is significant not only for his position as head of the Irish Government but also for the importance he gave to save the talks from collapse at the time when he was mourning over his mother's death. He attended his mother's funeral and returned without delay during the final stage of the talks to join forces with his British counterpart. Although his two predecessors John Bruton and Albert Reynolds had provided the impetus from Dublin to find a solution to the problems in Northern Ireland, the approach of Ahern was seen as more assuring to both Sinn Fein and UUP. The settlement has given Dublin an enhanced role in Northern Ireland and this is seen as the quid pro quo for agreeing to amend the constitution of Ireland as to relinquish the traditional territorial claim to Northern Ireland.

John Hume, the leader of the non-violent nationalist Social Democratic Labour Party (SDLP) has been involved longer than any other leader in the crusade for a peaceful settlement of the sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland. Ever since he started clamouring for peace in 1969, he steadfastly worked towards this goal despite verbal abuses and threats he encountered from ardent nationalists. Successive Irish governments had looked to him for advice to manoeuvre through the thicket of politics in Northern Ireland. It was Mr Hume's decision to open a dialogue with Sinn Fein in 1993 which influenced others to rethink their attitude towards the IRA. The British, Irish and American governments were willing to take the

risk of talking to Sinn Fein (the IRA) largely as a result of his initiative. Mr Hume's discussions with Gerry Adams of Sinn Fein also influenced the IRA to rethink the stalemated strategy of joining Northern Ireland with the Republic through armed struggle. He made several trips to the US lobbying support for his peace goal. Without him there would not have been the alliance between SDLP, Sinn Fein, the Irish Government and the Irish American lobby and indeed the peace process. To him peace has been a greater goal than party advantage.

David Tremble showed himself to be a mature politician at the critical time in the peace talks, contrary to the hard-line rhetoric of Unionism which he espoused publicly. Mr Tremble kept his party in the talks even when Sinn Fein joined in, which at that time was detested by the hard-line Unionists. He was careful to avoid the fate of his predecessors when they showed willingness to devolve powers to the minority Catholics. They were left open to the charge of sell-out. Despite some strong opposition from his parliamentary colleagues within his own party, he was able to carry the party executive with him just before the final draft of the

agreement was signed. His position was vindicated by the massive support for the peace deal given by the ruling council of his party, with 72% of the members voting in favour of it, at the meeting held in Belfast on April 18th. On 24 April two Protestant guerrilla groups, the Ulster Defence Association and Ulster Freedom Fighters in a joint statement said: "While uncomfortable with some aspects of the agreement, we nonetheless feel that we can commend it as an overall package to the people of Northern Ireland for endorsement at referendum on May 22."

Sinn Fein's president Gerry Adams difficulty in persuading the extreme nationalists to accept the peace deal was not less than that faced by David Tremble on the other side. He and his vice-president Martin McGuinness have had a tough time for years persuading the republican movement to listen to them as the balance has tilted from all-out violence to engagement in the democratic process. Mr Adams also has proved to be a clever tactician not only dealing with his counterparts in the Unionist camp but also carrying his own supporters with him in the search for a peaceful settlement of the conflict. The subsequent near-

unanimous support he obtained for the peace deal from Sinn Fein's executive Council of nearly a thousand delegates is not only proof of his maturity as a political leader, but also the commitment of his party and the bulk of the IRA to the peace process.

One hopes that the Northern Ireland referendum on 22 May would result in an endorsement of the Good Friday agreement. The fact that British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, has called upon his political opponents in the Conservative Party, the former Prime Minister John Major and its current leader, to jointly campaign for a yes vote in the forthcoming referendum, and that his request has been reciprocated affirmatively is an example of how politicians should conduct themselves as statesmen on national issues concerning their country and people.

The protracted violent conflict in Northern Ireland and its long search for peace resulting in the Good Friday agreement, and hopefully its endorsement on 22 May referendum by its people should provide beneficial lessons for many countries, like Sri Lanka, which continue to be afflicted with similar violent conflicts without any sign of peace in the near future. □



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# THE BOMB AND THE GENERAL

By Umberto Eco

*This piece by the famous Italian writer Umberto Eco would be the correct one to understand the condemned loneliness that nuclear-hungry generals end up with. This piece is timely stuff for Indians and their baffled neighbours. In the jingoist subcontinent of contemporaneity, the piece should be read substituting the word general with president, prime minister, scientist, strategic analyst, bureaucrat, politician, ideologue, editor, columnist and a whole lot of others...!*

Once upon a time, there was an atom. And once upon a time, there was a bad general who wore a uniform covered with gold braid. The world is full of atoms. Everything is made of atoms. Atoms are very tiny, and when they come together, they form molecules which then form all the things we know. Mum is made of atoms. Milk is made of atoms. Women are made of atoms. Air is made of atoms. Fire is made of atoms. We are made of atoms.

When the atoms are in harmony, everything works fine. Life is based on this harmony. But when an atom is smashed, it parts like other atoms which then strike still more atoms and so on... A terrifying experience takes place! This is atomic death.

Well, our atom was sad because it had been put inside an atomic bomb. Along with other atoms, it was waiting for the day when the bomb would be dropped and they would all be smashed, destroying everything. Now, the fact is that the world is also full of generals who spend their lives piling up bombs. And our General filled his attic with bombs. "When I have lots and lots," he said, "I'll start a beautiful war!" And he laughed.

How can you help become bad when you have all those bombs within reach?

The atoms shut up in the bombs were very unhappy. Thanks to them, there was going to be a huge catastrophe. Many children would die, many Mums, many kittens, many calves, many birds - everybody. Whole towns would be destroyed where before there had been little white houses with red roofs and green trees all around.. and nothing would be left except a black pit.

And so the atoms decided to rebel against the General. One night, without making a sound, they stole silently out of the bombs and hid in the cellar. The next morning, the General came

into the attic with some other gentlemen. These gentlemen said: "We've spent a pile of money to make all these bombs. Are we going to leave them here to collect mould? What's a General like you for, anyway?"

"It's true," the general replied. "We must really start this war. Otherwise, my career will never get anywhere". And he decided war.

When the news spread that the atomic war was going to break out, people went crazy with fear. "Oh, if only we hadn't allowed Generals to make bombs!", they said. But it was too late. Everybody fled the cities. But where could they find refuge?

Meanwhile, the General had loaded his bombs on an aeroplane

and was dropping them one by one on all the cities. But when the bombs fell (empty as they were), they didn't explode at all! And the people, happy at their narrow escape (they could hardly believe their luck), used them for flowerpots. So, they discovered that life was more beautiful without bombs... and decided not to make any more wars. The Mums were happy. So were the Dads. So were everybody.

And what about the General? Now that there were no more wars, he was fired.

And to make use of his uniform with all the braid, he became a hotel doorman. Since everyone now lived in peace, many tourists came to the hotel. Even former enemies. Even the soldiers whom in the old days the General had ordered about. When they entered and left the hotel, the General opened the big glass door and made an awkward bow, saying, "Good day, Sir." And they (who had recognised him) said to him with a grim look: "The service in this hotel is dreadful! It's an outrage!"

And the General turned deep red and was silent. Because now he was of no importance at all. □

## THE GREAT PRINCE OF MAY BETRAYED WHERE HE WAS BORN

Ramesh Gopalakrishnan

**I**f July has been the month of disaster for Sri Lanka in recent decades, India can well lay claim to the month of May for such events. And, the Prince of May, born Siddharta, 2541 years ago, who rebelled against the sight of misery and wandered throughout the plains of the subcontinent, has been betrayed twice over by the two countries.

The Sakyamuni's enlightenment had also occurred on one of his birthdays, the Pournami of the Tamil month of Vaikasi. And his great life and mission was to sweep the continent of Asia for the next few centuries. Several centuries later, there's the now surreal scene that one of the countries which swears by his middle-path

unleashes violence on itself year after year and the other blasts three nuclear bombs on the Purnima day and comes up with two more lest the

Tathagata would still still be lost in his meditation!

The act of universal shame is now explicitly the act of bravery for India. Sheer Evil is now the pride of India, the historic country which has now sunk into sub-human levels from those of aesthetic and rebellious civilisations. The place where it took place is not a real desert. The desert has its own life and the mind which blows up the nuclear bombs is the real desert. What it distributes across the atmosphere is not wisdom and dialogue, but jingoism and radioactivity.

Peace for India now booms out of

**INDIA'S N-BLASTS**

the horrible hydrogen bombs.

Methodical yet barbaric is its celebrations and self-patting. Poison is full in the minds of the political leaders, scientists and mediapersons who raise their hands aloft in saluting bombs and jingoism. Horrific perversion. What else can the temerity to blast a hydrogen bomb along with two Hiroshima-type bombs on the very day of the birth of the Gautama Buddha be called! Bizarre is the unholy welcome accorded to the blasts during a speech at Madison by none other than the Dalai Lama in his eagerness to retrieve Tibet from China.

The Buddha indeed did smile this year in India, as he did in May 18, 1974, when the first Pokhran blast was conducted. That year too, it was the Purnima day. The Pournami had fallen in the month of Vaikasi as usual, unlike the special occasion this year when it got advanced to Chitrai, the first month of the new year. Chitrai brings summer and heat and so also does the nuclear bomb. Mrs Indira Gandhi gave a code-word for her very, very peaceful nuclear explosion (PNE as it was called in those days) as "The Buddha Has Smiled": the contrasts are the Fat Man, the one dropped on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, and the Little Boy, the one which had devastated Nagasaki three days later.

The Western bombs were named after deformed or ungrown humans, whereas the Indian bomb was given a term to deform the very gesture of Buddha's enlightenment: the Smile, which is now lost forever. The ambiguous and life-giving smile of Buddha, the smile of his pain and endurance, the smile of his quiet pleasure of drinking a handful of water poured by Sujata, is now shorn of ambiguity, having got transformed by the code-word into the bare fangs of Evil. This perversion of philosophy and civilisational ethos is complete in the Indian code-word. Awful, were these code-words, just as awful as the act of exploding serial nuclear bombs, as done by the new government in New Delhi within 40 days of taking power, evoking great feelings of disgust and repulsion from generations of people across the world who have been fighting nuclear arsenals of their own governments or other governments.

Siddhartha, the Prince, had renounced all that he had, in order to make us live, for eternity. And he gave

unto himself and unto us the possibility of enlightenment, the amrit (nectar) of wisdom, the drink of life and non-death, as is evident from the Full Moon of the month of Vaikasi. Contrast this with the draining of wisdom, the darkness of the approaching night, the New Moon, the spewing of the poison of radioactivity and jingoism from India's five bombs exploded at the pitiable site of Pokhran in Rajasthan on May 11 and 13. Aren't the blasts constituting a kind of blood-sucking of the wealth of the subcontinent? Is it not the feeling of defeat of trust and the lack of love among the state machineries of the subcontinent? The prince active here is definitely not Siddhartha, but the Dracula, the Prince Vlad, the blood-sucking nocturnal beast, the anti-Christ, who lives forever in the mountains of Transylvania, after succeeding in the Crusades but failing in love. At least the Dracula loved one woman, as we learn, and she is reborn in London to which he travels. India's blasts have no aim of fostering love anywhere in the world and hence are simply banal.

The blasts at Pokhran betrayed more than one philosopher: the next in line was Jiddu Krishnamurthy whose 103<sup>rd</sup> birthday fell on the fateful day of May 11. JK too had done a renunciation in 1929 just when Annie Besant was about to anoint him as the new prophet. He wandered all over the world and kept up a dialogue with the keenest of minds, on behalf of the subcontinent and its philosophers. JK's discussions with David Bohm, the physicist, reveal the philosopher's grasp of the problems of modern science, especially the subject-object predicament of the field of quantum mechanics, which was to culminate in the nuclear blasts of Los Alamos, Hiroshima, Nagasaki and other places including Pokhran in the last 58 years.

It is now more than clear that India always had a long-term bomb programme since the times of Nehru, another prince among men who had sought to renounce everything during the anti-colonial struggle. (Or renounce, did he?) His dilemma was resolved in favour of making the bomb, as evidenced by his close association with Homi Bhaba, the first chairman of independent India's most secretive organisation - the Atomic En-

ergy Commission. Work on Indian reactors were couched in the deceptive terminology of nuclear power, even as dangerous material needed for the bomb was quietly diverted elsewhere. First, it was the US, then Canada and finally France who had quit helping the Indian nuclear power programme. Now, only the tottering Russians were ready to dump one of their old reactors at Koodankulam in the Tamil Nadu coast - not far from Sri Lanka. It is now doubtful whether the Russians would part with their reactors and give them to India.

The blasts have made India and the subcontinent drift into unknown scientifico-medical, political and economic courses, hitherto uncharted by anyone. The blasts and more so, the hydrogen bomb blast, will create enormous problems due to impact of radioactivity, among the people of Pokhran and nearby villagers, which were evacuated for a few hours on both the days. Villagers recall the ailments and sickness they had gone through in 1974, including polio.

The tests were conducted underground, but it is not clear how the very-active Indian prime Minister A B Vajpayee could state that the enormous radioactivity could be contained within acceptable limits. He made this statement within hours of the blast, but the radioactivity takes a long time to decisively spread. The isotopes which might have gone around spreading have half-lives upto 40,000 years.

Internationally, India has never been criticised so badly in the last five decades. The country is almost friendless, except for Sri Lanka, which is almost supporting India's bomb programme. The Indian government seems to have practised the art of deception while dealing with major nuclear powers like the United States. Several visiting US' officials were coolly misled by the new BJP-led government at the centre in what could be called a cool diplomatic sleight. The Indian government has managed to evade the eyes of the diplomats and the spy-satellites while setting off the blasts. This has angered the US no end. As for other countries, a number of them in the Western world have gone ahead with sanctions and aid cutbacks. India's bid for a permanent place in the UN Security Council might not get the requisite backing from both nuclear

and non-nuclear states. The more tragic loss is that of the ability to lead the Third World. After the blasts, Third World countries would regard India with distrust, as this country has joined the "club of hypocrites" or nuclear powers. Third World countries might now start looking to Brazil, Argentina or South Africa for leadership.

In the subcontinent itself, Pakistan is likely to clamour for getting a nuclear bomb at any rate. Other smaller countries like Bhutan and Bangla Desh are keeping their fingers crossed at the possibility of a huge arms race. And the Chinese government, which is already taken exception to Indian defence minister George Fernandes' outbursts, might quietly help Pakistan quickly develop the bomb.

Politically, all the parties have gone along with the BJP-led ruling coalition in supporting India's nuclear tests. The communists had certain initial reservations about the timing of the blasts, but came around to the government's view after the prime minister had a tete-a-tete with the left leaders. It is true that Vajpayee has been able to divert its attention from the pressing problems faced by his government, especially the demands made by his allies which are part of the ruling coalition. However, it is also clear that Vajpayee has tried to project the nuclear blasts as a vindication of the BJP's stand over the issue. He seems to have overplayed this card somewhat.

Indeed, copies of "Organiser", the mouthpiece of the Rashtriya Swamsevak Sangh, celebrating the blasts, were freely available for Delhi-based newspaper correspondents around

the same time they were flashing the news over the blasts. Whether the RSS mouthpiece had advance information about the blasts is a question Vajpayee alone would be able to answer.

The US' economic sanctions are bound to hit India badly, as the US is India's biggest trade partner. Also, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Norway and several other countries are cutting down inter-governmental assistance to India. Financial organisations like the World Bank might announce a cutback. India has been the biggest beneficiary of World Bank loans to be given in several fields including transport, health, roads, irrigation and urban development.

All this might be scaled down when the World Bank meets on May 26 to decide on this issue. Foreign

direct investment, needed for continuing the liberalisation process, would be hard to come by at this stage. In case the US slaps a ban on various Indian exports, India would find it very tough. India's foreign exchange reserves can last only a few months, and hence, the country has almost no option but to do a bit of sabre-rattling and sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) to get the sanctions lifted. The more dangerous option would be to resist signing the CTBT and cash in on the resultant anger of the people against the Western countries. This seems the more ideologically closer option for the BJP which would find it easy to absorb resentful recruits to implement its agenda of jealousy and hatred. The route to complete fascism would then be on. And the betrayal would then be total. □

(continued from page 13)

ment in May 1992 after it was accused of conspiring and carrying out the assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi during his election campaign in 1991. The two-year ban was subsequently extended.

After a prolonged trial, 27 men and women accused of various charges of involvement in the assassination were found guilty and sentenced to death on 28 January this year. The convicted persons appealed to the Supreme Court of India against the conviction and sentence which is pending. Included among the accused in the list of accused persons in the trial were three of the top leaders of the LTTE including its leader V Pirobakaran and the intelligence wing

chief Pottu Amman against whom the trial could not take place they could not be apprehended and therefore they remain proclaimed offenders at large.

"The government has decided to continue the ban on this organisation for two more years," a government spokesman said after a meeting of the cabinet dashing the hopes those who thought that the new government in New Delhi would bring to bear a different approach to the LTTE particularly in the context of the presence of George Fernandes occupying the high profile important portfolio of Minister of Defence in the cabinet because, while he was in opposition, he had perceived by reason of his outspoken speeches as a supporter of the LTTE.

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### MATRIMONIAL

**Jaffna Hindu mother seeks groom for daughter, 35, 5'3", fair, slim, working in Colombo. Send horoscope, details M 998 c/o Tamil Times.**

**UK Sri Lankan Tamil Hindu/Christian parents seek non-smoking, professionally qualified partner for daughter, 29, UK qualified, employed teacher. Send details M 1024 c/o Tamil Times.**

**Tamil mother seeks pleasant bride for qualified engineer son, 35, 5'11" employed in Colombo. Contact 01462 675273 (UK).**

**Jaffna Hindu parents seek educated partner for son, 29, 5'8", British citizen in good employment in London. Send horoscope, details M 1026 c/o Tamil Times.**

**Jaffna Hindu mother seeks partner for son, 35, 5'6", British citizen in employment in London. Send horoscope, details. M 1027 c/o Tamil Times.**

### WEDDING BELLS

We congratulate the following couple on their recent wedding.

**Sakthiguhan** youngest son of Dr. & Mrs. A. Balasubramaniam of 12 Fitzwilliam Road, Vancluse, N.S.W., Australia and **Savitha** daughter of Dr. & Dr. (Mrs) M.S. Balu of 431 Hawkesbury Road, Winmalee, N.S.W., Australia at the bride's residence on 10.5.98.

### House for Sale

A two unit upstairs house on 22.2 perches at Austin Place, Colombo (off Kynsey Road), each unit with separate entrance, garage, garden, three bedrooms, verandah, hall and dining room. Contact Advertiser, 48 Beechgrove Lawns, Monaghan, Ireland. Tel: 00353 47 83591.

### OBITUARIES



**Mr. Ponnusamy Ganeshan** of Hemel Hempstead, UK; beloved husband of Santham; loving father of Mrs. Kirija Uthayakumar (London), Mrs. Vanaja Dineshkumar (Canada), Das Ganeshan (London); grandfather of Nilani, Mayan, Byravi, Krishanth and Prasanth; dearest brother of Mrs. Loshini Thiyagarajah (Kopai, Sri Lanka) passed away on 3.5.98 in London.

The cremation took place at West Herts Crematorium, Garston on 9.5.98. Das Ganeshan wishes to thank all relatives and friends who attended the funeral, sent messages of sympathy and assisted in several ways during the period of great sorrow. - 19 Gadebridge Road, Hemel Hempstead, HP1 3DT, UK.



**Mrs. Nagammah Kanagasabai** (80) beloved wife of the

late Mr. Subramaniam Kanagasabai; loving mother of Kailainathan (Sri Lanka), Kathirgamanathan, Mrs. Punithawathy Thangarajasingham, and Gopalanathan; mother-in-law of Mrs. Poomani Kailainathan, Mrs. Indra Kathirgamanathan, late Dr. V. Thangarajasingham and Mrs. Malini Gopalanathan; grandmother of fifteen grandchildren and great grandmother of six great grandchildren passed away peacefully on 8th May 1998 in Wimbledon, UK and was cremated on 12th May.

The members of the family wish to thank all friends and relatives who attended the funeral, sent messages of sympathy and assisted them in several ways during the period of great sorrow. - 73 Kingston Road, Wimbledon, London SW19 1JN. Tel: 0181 715 4588.

### IN MEMORIAM



In loving memory of **Mrs. Ranjini Geetanjali Thirunavukarasu** on the second anniversary of her passing away on 24th May 1996. Sadly missed and lovingly remembered by her husband Thirunavukarasu; children Poomima and Pradeep; father Mahalingam; mother-in-law Mrs. P. Ponnuthurai; sisters Mrs. Lalitha Dilkushi Karunakaran and Priyadarshini Damayanthy; brothers Premkumar, Mohankumar, Ranjithkumar, Nimalkumar and Tilakumar; brothers-in-law Karunakaran and Balanathan; sisters-in-law Kamalarani, Vijayalaxmi, Nirmala, Yasothara, Nalini, Kamaladevi and Sugirthadevi. - M. Ranjithkumar, 173 Kempton Road, Eastham, London E6 2PU. Tel: 0181 471 9311.



In ever loving memory of **Dr. Parameswaran Kandiah** Eight years ago on the 12th of May, we lost a husband, a father, an uncle and a friend. Time as always, has helped ease the pain of not having such a wonderful person in our life. He was someone, who was very much dedicated to his family, friend and his profession. Our memories are rich and distinct of images of his life which will continue to inspire us. Thank you God for giving the world a man, who gave so much love and care and asked so little in return. Sorrowfully remembered by his beloved wife Pathmasany and loving children Thayalan and Anjali. - 29 Mounston Close, Hartside Grange, Hartlepool. TS26 0LR.



In loving memory of **Mr. Thambidurai Shanmugarajah**, Attorney-at-law, J.P., U.M., of Kondavil East, Sri Lanka on the fourth anniversary of his passing away on 5th May 1994. Sadly missed and fondly remembered by his beloved wife Ananthavalli; loving daughter Sharmini; son-in-law Ranjit; loving grandchildren Praveen and Anjana and mother-in-law Mrs. Sivapackiam Navaratnam. - 102 Loutitt Street Yellowknife, N.W.T., Canada X1A 3M5.

**IN MEMORIAM Ctd.  
10th Death Anniversary  
of the late**

**Mrs. Ratnadevi Mandala-  
nayagam, beloved wife of the  
late Mr. S. Mandalanayagam,  
former Village Headman,  
Chunnakam, who passed  
away on 17.5.88.**



*In cherished memory of our  
dear Amma, who will always  
be in our thoughts. Fondly  
remembered by her children;  
Pathmalogini (Australia),  
Chellapah (UK), Sabanathan*

*(Singapore), Wigneswaran  
(Australia), Kamalalogini,  
Thokaiambikai, Nalinalogini  
(Canada), Koneswaran (Sri  
Lanka); sons and daughters-  
in-law and grandchildren.*

**FORTHCOMING EVENTS**

**May 25 6.00pm** Shruthi Laya  
Shangham presents Kenjit  
Kachcheri at Walthamstow  
Assembly Hall, Forest Road,  
London E17 by N.K.

Pathmanathan, Nadaswaram;  
R. Rathakrishnan, Violin;  
Ganashan, Thavil; and  
M. Balachandrar, Mridangam.  
Tel: 0181 788 0633.

**May 30 6.30pm** South London  
Tamil School presents  
Cultural Evening at Adult  
Education Centre, Sandown  
Road, South Norwood. Tel:  
0181 659 0505.

**June 1** Feast of St. Justin.

**June 6** Feast of St. Norbert.

**June 7 6.00pm** Carnatic  
Music Concert by Amudha  
Isai Vaani Smt Sudha  
Ragunathan of Tamil Nadu at  
Sivayogam, Second Floor,  
180-186 Upper Tooting Road,  
London SW17. Tel: 0181 930

3811/776 9881.

**June 7** Pirathosam, Most  
Holy Trinity.

**June 9** Full Moon.

**June 11** Feast of St.  
Barnabas.

**June 13** Feast of St. Anthony  
of Padua.

**June 14** Sangadahara  
Chathurhi.

**June 19** Feast of Most  
Sacred Heart of Jesus.

**June 20** Ekathasi.

**June 21** Pirathosam,  
Karthigai.

**June 23** Amavasai.

**June 27** Chathurthi, 6.45pm  
Tamil Orphans Trust presents  
M.S. Vijaya in Shower of  
Music at Acton Town Hall,  
High Street, Acton, London  
W3. Tel: 0181 908 1101/905  
0432.

**June 28 12.30pm** Chundikuli  
St. John's College, 175th Year  
Anniversary Celebrations at  
St. John's Church, Old  
Church Road, Stanmore,  
Middx. For details Tel: 0181  
952 9914/543 0065/551  
2183/882 2333.

**June 29** Sasdi.

**July 4 11.00am** Sixth Annual

Law - Medical Cricket Match  
at Millhill Park, Hammers  
Wise Lane, Millhill, London  
NW2. For details Tel: 0181  
904 1789/0181 795  
0648/0171 274 0100/01923  
825235.

**July 4 7.45pm** Bharata  
Nrityam by Dr. Padma  
Subramaniam at Queen  
Elizabeth Hall, South Bank.  
Tel: Box office 0171 960  
4242.

**July 5 6.30pm** Above at Beck  
Theatre, Grange Road,  
Hayes, Middx. Tel: 0181 561  
8371.

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

**June 5 7.30pm** Karnatic

Vocal by Ramprasad and  
Bharata Natyam by Indira  
Kadambi both from India.

**June 21 6.00pm** Karnatic  
Vocal by H.H. Prince  
Ramavarma of Swati, Tirumal  
Royal Family, Trivandran.

**June 26** Bhavan & Sargam  
present Bharata Natyam by  
Viji Prakash & Mythili

**Children's Thyagaraja Festival**

The above festival organised by the  
Lalgudi School of Music (UK) was held on  
25th and 26th April 1998 and was spon-  
sored by and held at Highgate Murugan  
Temple, London N6. The programme con-  
sisted of competitions in two divisions for  
Juniors and Seniors on (a) Thyagaraja  
krithis (b) Music Quiz and (c) Music  
Concerts. Juniors were expected to pre-  
sent a krithi while seniors were required to  
present a krithi suite comprising raga ala-  
pana, krithi and kalpana swaram.  
Improvisations like niraval and thanam  
were optional.

The Judges were Sri N.R. Prasanthi of  
Bangalore and Sangeetha Bhooshanarh  
Sri Sami Dandapani. The trophy for the

Young Junior Musician of the Year was  
won by Aparna Narendran, a vocal candi-  
date and that for the Seniors was won by  
Ravi Ramdas also for a vocal entry. The  
Music Quiz was conducted by Dr. Amala  
Raman and the winner was Ravi Ramdas  
who gave correct answers to all the ques-  
tions.

Lalgudi School of Music took part in vi-  
olin concerts in groups and solo. The violin  
trio by Parthipan Nagarajah, Ravi Ramdas  
and Piriyaali Sivagnanam and the solo by  
Kumar Raghunathan deserve special men-  
tion.

The Flute students of Mrs. Kamala  
Pathmanathan, the Veena students of Mrs.  
Malini Thanabalasingam and Mrs. Pavithra  
Mahesh, and the vocal students of Dr.

Lakshmi Jayan and Mrs. Manorama  
Prasad gave excellent performances. Two  
talented artistes Balaji Krishnamoorthy -  
student of Sri Somasundara Desigar and  
Ravi Ramdas - student of Sri Bhavani  
Shankar provided mridangam accompani-  
ment for all the concerts. The programme  
on both days was concluded with six vi-  
olinists from the Lalgudi School of Music  
playing Pancharatna Krithis with the ring-  
ing voice of Aparna Narendran.

Both judges were full of praise for the  
high standard of music presented by the  
young musicians and for the services ren-  
dered by Dr. Lakshmi Jayan to promote  
carnatic music in the UK. Many well wish-  
ers donated generously towards the pre-  
sentation of certificates, medals, trophies,  
audio cassettes, books and cash prizes.



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## Wrenched Away Forty Years Ago



Arthur Jeyaratnam Arumairatnam was only thirtyone. His young life was full of great promise when he was wrenched away from his dear ones by goondas urged by demagogues to kill the Tamils and loot their homes. It was the time the Government of Sri Lanka was embarking on an ill-conceived jingoist Sinhala Only fundamentalism. It had ample support from the Arya Sinhala-Buddhist intelligentsia and racist politicians, and political parties that opposed it were marginalised out of national politics.

He was in his home at Ratmala with relatives. In close vicinity was a Buddhist Temple. He held a responsible position with the Department of Postal Services and had worked in Trincomalee before his promotional transfer to Dehiwela. A little over an year earlier, he married the girl of his childhood dreams, he was proud of her, she was worthy of it and these sentiments were mutually shared. A gift of this happy marriage, a lovely little boy was just months old and they were in Jaffna at that time. Arthur was a good sportsman, excelled in cricket and soccer for Union College, Tellipallai, loved by family and was special to his friends. He loved jungle tracking and the thrills of adventure.

The fateful day of late May 1958 began with rumours of communal violence; suddenly the Tamils were game for Sinhala thugs instigated by race-religion-crazed southern politicians. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, the Dr. Faustus of Sri Lankan politics who courted the communal devil to seek power had by now virtually lost control of the country to political mobsters. A year later, unable to propitiate them anymore, he paid for his folly with his own life; ironically at the hands of a Buddhist monk. Somarama was his name and Buddharakkitha Thero, the chief priest at the Kelaniya Temple, the instigator and master conspirator.

As packs of goondas screamed death to the Tamils along Galle Road and down the lanes of Colombo and the suburbs, an evil brood that had taken residence in the nearby temple, gate crashed into a home and attacked the inmates without mercy and for the only reason that they were Tamils.

Thanks to the help of a Sinhalese-Buddhist neighbour at great risk to his own life, the women folk found safe refuge. There were many such angels.

Arthur was rushed to the Colombo General Hospital with life threatening injuries. Later he succumbed to them and became an early victim to Lanka's racial carnage. Since then four decades have gone past and thousands of Sri Lankans have perished. It still continues and the ethnic nightmare remains unresolved.

Victor Karunairajan.

## Janany's Stunning Veena Arangetram

Ten year old Janany, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Arunachalam of Allenby Road, Southall, Middx., and pupil of Guru Smt



Pavithra Mahesh amazed the packed audience at The Beck Theatre, Hayes, Middx., with her stunning performance at her Veena arangetram held on 25th April 1998. It was also a maiden effort in the UK for the Guru, a brilliant student of the living Music Maestro Lalgudi. G. Jayaraman and she came off with flying colours. She was ably assisted by a galaxy of able accompanists; Sri M. Balachandar on Mirudangam, Bangalore Sri R.N. Prakash on Gadam, Sri Kandiah Sithamparanathan on Morsing and Selvi Nirusha Vignakumar on Tambura. The evening was knowledgeably compered by Smt Yamuna Tharmenthiran.

The arangetram constituted the usual items presented including a well produced Ragam Thanam Pallavi and Thillana, The Chief Guest Smt Renuka Shriananda in her speech complimented the young artiste on her first performance with confidence, courage and fluency. She further stated, 'The selected pieces and the choice of the Ragas suited the occasion very well. She played with Raga bhava and accuracy of the Thala, which is an important aspect of any music, but a difficult one for an instrument player. The main challenge arises when compositions are set to a slow tempo. Janany has proved her talents on Veena playing.

Veena is a difficult instrument to learn, to perfect the techniques and intricacies and still maintain a high standard. Living in a

different cultural environment makes it even more difficult and I am glad that Janany has attained a high performing level at her tender age. When you master the Veena, it becomes a part of you and is like a friend sharing the ups and downs of life.

An Arangetram is only a first step and is the beginning for a new artiste. The more we learn, we realise how little we know. It is a humbling experience. Janany has made the first step with the support of her Guru and her parents. I hope that she will continue to learn with the same interest and become a talented artiste in the future. She was well supported by experienced accompanying artistes and that itself was a great experience. I wish her a very successful music career which can bring much pride to her parents, satisfaction to her Guru and encouragement to other children.'

Miss Hilary Mellows, Retired Headmistress of Janany's former school and Mr. M.T. Selvarajah, Deputy Headmaster of West London Tamil School spoke in glowing terms about her academic excellence.

## Republication of Panniru Thirumuraigal

Panniru Thirumuraigal which are hymns on Saivism composed by the saints (Naayanmar), Thirugnanasampanthar, Thirunavukkarasar, Sundaramoorthy, Manickavasagar, Thirumoolar, Sekhilar and others, many centuries ago are very difficult to obtain in their full compilation.

Arulchelvar Pollachi Dr. N. Mahalingam, President of Ramanantha Adigalar Charities Trust has caused the republication of these volumes, which will be released in July 1998 in Chennai (Madras), South India. These compilations are to be contained in twenty four vols, which would contain the original hymns and their meanings (moolamum uraium). Each volume would run into between 300 and 750 pages totalling 11,284 pages in all the 24 volumes.

With the sole aim of making them available to all those interested at an affordable price, the present price of 2500 Indian rupees for all 24 volumes has been drastically reduced to a pre-publication price of 1000 Indian Rupees in Chennai. In addition those purchasing the 24 volumes will be rewarded with Thiruvilayadart Puranam (moolamum uraiyum), in four volumes running into 1500 pages and costing Rs 400. Saiva devotees all over the world would rejoice at this republication and must be grateful to Dr. Mahalingam for this gigantic effort. It is expected that all interested Hindus would seize this opportunity to have these volumes in their homes and in places of religious and cultural interest.

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In the UK, The Murugan Temple (200A Archway road, London N6 5BA, Tel:0181 348 9835) is making arrangements to get these volumes for all those interested.

Other interested parties could contact Varthagamanam Pathipagam, A.A.R. Campus, 141 Usman Road, T'Nagar, Chennai 17, India. Tel: 8257995 Chennai.

## Bharatanatyam Arangetram of Sitalakshmi



The Bharatanatyam Arangetram of Sitalakshmi, daughter of Dr. M.N. Nandakumara, Bhavan's Executive Director and Mrs. Janaki Nandakumara was held in the Mountbatten Hall of Bharata Vidya Bhavan on May 10th 1998. This was a particularly joyous occasion for the whole family of the Bhavan as Sita has been a familiar figure since her birth, steeped in the music, dance and culture of India. The years of devotedly studying Bharatanatyam under her Guru, Sri Pragash Yadagudde and music under Smt Sivasakthi Sivanesan came to a beautiful first flowering on this day. Accompanied by her Guru on Nattuvangam and with the vocal accompaniment of Smt Sivasakthi Sivanesan, the mrdangam of Sri M. Balachandar, the violin of Sri Balu Raguraman (all resident teachers of the Bhavan) and flute of Sri Gnanavaradan, Sita began the performance with a Pushpanjali to Lord Ganesha in Raga Amrita Varshini, Adi tala following it with an Alarippuin Raga Nattai, Tisra Eka tala. From the beginning one was aware of the dancer's true joy in her art, emanating a sense of controlled power and energy as she gradually revealed all the movements of her body, from tiny movements of the eyes and head to flowing stretches of the limbs. This impression of strength was confirmed by the scintillating Jathiswaram, where the pace, precision and neatness of her footwork matched the grace and clarity of line and use of eyes. The movingly sung Kirtana 'Bho Sambho' with an inspired mrdangam accompaniment, followed Sita depicting the power and beauty of Lord Siva, the devotion of his devotee Markandeya and the ferocity of Siva's despatch of Yama, the God of death, beautifully, conveyed tranquillity, total dependence and tremendous power with equal ease.

The contrasting Varnam, 'Na Inca Mayam' in Raga Dhanyasi, Adi tala showed Sita's mastery of both Nritha, pure dance and Abhinaya. Portraying the pranks and loves of Lord Krishna she used her beautiful eyes to great effect as she showed us the loveable child and the teased and adoring Gopis, alternating with bursts of fleet footed, joyful dance.

After the interval, the programme recommenced with the Padam 'Yamanelli Kana' in Raga Sivaranjani, Adi tala notable particularly for the violin of Sri Balu Rahuraman. Lively portrayals of the Avatars of Lord Vishnu brought these famous stories to life; the ferocious energy of Narasimha emphasising Sita's own extraordinary strength and stamina. The Javeli 'Sako Ninna Sneha' in Raga Kapi, Misra Chapu tala, particularly ornamented by the haunting flute of Sri Gnanavarathan, brought a whole different range of expressions to Sita's Abhinaya as she showed us the lovelorn heroine and the wayward Lord Krishna. Sivasakthi's soul stirring music added life to the dance especially in the items 'Bho Sambho' and 'Yamanelli Kana' where there was excellent scope for Abhinaya.

As guests of honour, Mrs. Skinner representing the Headmistress of St. James' School for Girls, Dr. John Marr, Hon. Gen. Secretary of the Bhavan and Sri Maneck Dalal, Chairman of Bhavan, gave speeches praising the dedication and attainment of the dancer and the love and encouragement given by her parents, grandparents and devoted teachers and staff of the Bhavan.

The programme concluded with a Tillana in Raga maand, Adi tala, the intricately choreographed fast rhythmic patterns with their emphatic footwork alternating with beautifully balanced sculptural poses. At the end of the mangalam, Sitalakshmi, her Guru Sri Prakash Yadagudde and the accompanying musicians received a well deserved standing ovation. The performance was excellently introduced and compered by Miss Vena Greerawo. Bhavan's Guruji, Sri Prakash Yadagudde, with affection and dedication had introduced his 20th promising dancer to the Bharatanatyam stage.

Wendy Marr.

## Tamil Enterprises in Toronto

The latest Tamil directory, **Thamilan Valikaaddi**, records nearly 200 Tamil establishments in Toronto apart from grocery shops and business enterprises. There are 89 community organisations including sports clubs, 45 temples and churches, 38 alumni fraternities of schools in Sri Lanka, six television and radio establishments, 20 newspaper and magazine publishers. There are also a number of dance and music schools most of them housed in the basements of private homes. **Thamilan Valihaaddi** is one of the four trade directories published annually which within three years, has become the foremost publication in this category among the Tamils.

## Scarborough M.P. Woos Tamil Voters

Federation of Associations of Canadian Tamils (FACT) which represents the Canadian Tamils in the international arena, officially declared open an administrative office on 19.4.98 at 2191 Warden Avenue. This office was declared open by the Scarborough West M.P. and Deputy Solicitor General Jim Brown. The welcome speech was made by the federation leader Mr. Sittampalam.

Following it, Scarborough Agincourt M.P. Mr. Jim Kariagiannis, who belongs to the ruling Liberal Party, who had arrived as the chief guest said in his speech that he had great pleasure in this office being opened in his constituency and his share in Tamils' welfare will continue. Following it he thundered 'Victory to the Tigers! Long Live Tamil Eelam'.

Mr. Sam Duraisamy expressed his gratitude to those who gave their presence.

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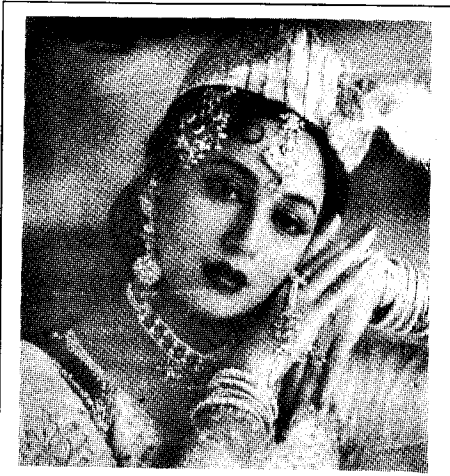
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