

# Tamil **TIMES**



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The LTTE leader V. Pirapaharan, Anton Balasingham and S P Tamil Chelvam at the media conference on 10 April 2002 (top); V. Pirapaharan walking towards the media conference (left); and SLMC leader Rauff Hakeem and LTTE leader after their meeting on 13 April 2002 (below)





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*-Voltaire*



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**CONTENTS**

LTTE's Crucial Test	03
News Review	04
Pirapaharan Faces Media	09
Reactions to Media Conference	14
An Assessment	17
People & Politics	19
A Voice from the East	20
Pongu Thamizh - Cultural and	
Poilitical Antecedents	21
Budget 2002	24
Bringing hope and peace	29
Classified	30

# LTTE'S Crucial Test

There is no doubt that the appearance by the LTTE leader, Velupillai Pirapaharan, in front of over 300 international and local journalists was an unprecedented media event, not only for him, but also for the country as a whole. One reason that attracted journalists from far away places might have been the mystery surrounding the reclusive Tiger leader, who is rarely seen in public. Or it might have been the expectation of a dramatic announcement that would have made a breakthrough towards a solution to the protracted violent conflict in Sri Lanka. In the event, those who expected him to give up his quest for an independent state of Tamil Eelam or abandon the armed struggle as a means to achieve it must have been sorely disappointed.

However, those who are eager to see an end to the conflict in the island can draw comfort from his comments that he and his organisation were committed to the ongoing peace process, and that if a solution acceptable to the Tamil people could be worked out as an alternative to a separate state, they would go along with it. Critics may suggest that these comments are nothing but a repetition of the LTTE's old positions. But the significant difference on this occasion is that they are being made in the context of a peace process with Norwegian facilitation and accompanied by a binding ceasefire with the prospect peace talks commencing in the near future. One also should not ignore the fact that there is enhanced international interest and major countries in which the LTTE remains proscribed are watching closely the developments in Sri Lanka. The other important factor is that the LTTE also is seeking international acceptance and legitimacy by the removal of the proscriptions in these countries.

One of the issues raised at the conference was the forcible expulsion in 1990 by the LTTE of over 100,000 Muslims from Jaffna and other northern areas. We condemned this act of gross inhumanity then and continued to do so and find ourselves vindicated by the public apology made by the LTTE leader at the media conference. The LTTE has now, though belatedly, taken the right and proper step when its leader came to an agreement with leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress that provided for the return of the displaced Muslims to their former homes.

The LTTE leadership cannot be unaware of the fact that they have acquired a reputation for intolerance towards and targeting its political rivals, opponents and dissidents, particularly within the Tamil community itself. It was therefore not surprising that journalists raised the issue questioning the organisation's democratic credentials. Contrary to its past practice, it is to the credit of the LTTE that its leader's comments in response gave an assurance that all political parties, whatever their policies were, would be free to function and operate in the north-east.

Towards the end of last year, the LTTE encouraged the formation of the Tamil National Alliance consisting of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC), Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO) and the Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF-Premachnadran Faction), thereby reflecting an acceptance that these parties too have a role to play in the political process. These were all parties previously denounced by the LTTE as traitors, mercenaries and quislings and targeted for violent attacks. However, now these parties under the banner of the TNA have accepted the predominance of the LTTE and are generally supportive of it. Recently, all TNA parliamentarians were invited by the LTTE for discussions on matters of mutual interest and concern including the ongoing peace process. Similarly, the LTTE leadership also had a meeting with the SLMC leadership and came to an agreement on many matters that were of concern to the Muslim community. Contrary to its previously held position, the LTTE has also accepted the "unique identity" of the Muslim people although they too speak the Tamil language like Tamils, and hence the rightful role of the SLMC in participating and representing their interest in the proposed peace talks to take place in Thailand between the government and the LTTE. These are salutary developments in which one is able to detect trends towards the recognition of political pluralism by the LTTE.

There is no doubt that the LTTE has demonstrated its military prowess in the battlefield over the years, but it should also understand that some of its actions in the past have created for it powerful enemies. Dominance secured by military power is not a substitute for legitimacy earned through genuine democratic processes in which the people exercise their rights freely and choose their representatives.

The LTTE is expected to play an enhanced role in the Interim Council that is going to be set up to run the administration in the north-east pending a political settlement at the peace talks. It is in this context that the willingness and the capacity of the LTTE to recognise and respect the differing ethnic, religious, political, social and economic interests represented in the society as a whole will be put to the test and watched closely by many within Sri Lanka and internationally. The legitimacy that the LTTE seeks will depend on how it fares in this crucial test.

## ● PEACE PROCESS

All indications are that the projected peace talks in Thailand between the government and the LTTE which were expected to commence in May next month are likely to be further delayed.

The Tigers insist that the government should lift the four-year-old ban on the LTTE before peace talks can begin. The ban issue is not part of the Norwegian-brokered February 22 ceasefire agreement, but the LTTE has made it a precondition for direct talks. LTTE leader Pirapaharan made it clear at the April 10 media conference with international journalists that the ban on the LTTE should be lifted and the LTTE recognised as "the authentic representatives" of the Tamil people and only thereafter that it will participate in peace talks. At the same conference, it was also stated by the LTTE leader that proposed talks in Thailand would be confined to the issue of forming an interim administration for the Tamil dominated northern and eastern provinces, and its composition and structure thereby ruling out the prospect of talks on the substantive issues for a political settlement.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe is on record as saying that the government was not averse to lifting the ban on the LTTE and the issue was being considered. All the indications are that the ban will be lifted. However, he has also expressed the view that the ban imposed by other countries like the USA, UK, India, Canada and Australia should be retained. This view expressed publicly would certainly not have pleased the LTTE leadership for it was their publicly declared intention, following the anticipated lifting of the ban in Sri Lanka, to mount a campaign internationally to secure the de-listing the LTTE as a terrorist organisation.

Now the LTTE has announced that direct talks between the Tigers and the government could take place in Thailand in the middle of June only after the full implementation of the terms and conditions of an indefinite ceasefire agreement signed by the two sides in February. This view of the Tigers was conveyed on 17 April to the Norwegian delegation led by Norway's Deputy Foreign Minister, Vidar Helgesen, that met for two hours with Mr Pirapaharan, who was accompanied by his chief advisor Anton Balasingham and political wing leader S P Thamichelvan.

The LTTE, in an apparent move to bring pressure on the Sri Lankan government during the past few days, have got

# NEWS REVIEW

civilian groups to protest calling for the withdrawal of the army from certain areas on the grounds they were occupying civilian populated areas. For example, on 16 April, there was a protest in the Thennaratchchi division of Jaffna peninsula, led by a parliamentarian of the TNA, asking the Army to vacate the houses in the area that soldiers occupy at present. In a memorandum to the Sri Lankan Army, the protestors said they would block the recently opened Jaffna-Kandy A 9 highway if the houses were not vacated quickly. Eyewitnesses reported all military vehicles kept off the roads in Jaffna to avoid provocation of participants in the Pongu Tamil rally that was also taking place on the same day following the opening of the LTTE's political office.

Political analysts Colombo seem to think that the LTTE is already trying to dictate the agenda of the peace process by setting down preconditions for "talks about talks". On the issue of fishing rights, they point to the fact that the Ceasefire Agreement clearly states that, there would be a gradual relaxation of restrictions beginning from the day the Ceasefire Agreement was signed, and that all restrictions on day and night fishing will be removed on the conclusion of 90 days from the signing of the Agreement, except within an area clearly specified in the agreement. The issues de-proscription of the LTTE and the setting up of an Interim Council for the North-East are not matters that are covered by the Agreement.

Prior to going to Kilinochchi to meet the LTTE leadership, the Norwegian delegation led by Norwegian Foreign Minister met with Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe at on 15 April at the Bentota Beach Hotel in southern Sri Lanka and reportedly discussed modalities for the first round of negotiations with the LTTE. The PM and the Norwegians had in detail mapped out a work schedule for the first round of discussions scheduled to be held in Thailand next month. "What is important is not the speed, but the direction, and I am happy to say that the current peace process has both," Vidar Helgesen said after the meeting with the PM.

## ● PRESIDENT'S VIEWS

Meanwhile, President Chandrika Kumaratunga, wants the proposed in-

terim administration in the north-east to reflect the pluralism of the region and has stressed that its setting up should be linked to a time-frame for talks with the LTTE

for a permanent solution.

"The interim administration should be a part of the composite whole, a part of the entire peace process," the presidential spokesman, Harim Peiris, said.

It is generally recognised that the interim administration to be set up will be dominated and controlled by the LTTE. However, the interim administration should represent "the totality of the interests of the north-east", Mr. Peiris said.

"It must recognise that the area is multi-cultural and multi-religious. The interim administration must be civilian in nature," he said. A key issue would be the human rights of the Tamil people in such a set-up, and the President was eager to ensure that there was no deterioration on this front, he added. Ms. Kumaratunga wanted the Government to drive a hard bargain with the LTTE on this question as a price for legalising the group, he said. "We do not necessarily see the ban as an impediment to talks. At the same time, we do not intend to be dogmatic and stand in the way of anything that can help the peace process. But what we want is that the Government negotiate, and negotiate hard with the LTTE, not just flirt with them," Mr. Peiris said, adding that "the timing of the ban and the time-frame between lifting the ban and talks," should be considered.

President Kumaratunga, who is scheduled to leave for New Delhi to deliver the first Madhavrao Scindia memorial lecture on April 23, is expected to meet the President, the Prime Minister, and the Minister for External Affairs, and the Leader of the Opposition. She will be accompanied by the former Foreign Minister, Lakshman Kadirgamar.

## ● LSSP ON INTERIM COUNCIL

The LSSP cannot acquiesce to any arrangement resulting in the handover of the North and East to an armed LTTE, says a press release issued by the LSSP on 16 April.

"An interim administration should in fact be the process which allows the LTTE controlled districts of Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi to pass over to civilian administration which accords with democratic norms of administration and respect for fundamental and human rights of the people", the press release says.

"The media conference held by the LTTE leader in Kilinochchi and the

publicised response to it by the Prime Minister together project a new stage in the peace process. It is indicative of a carefully orchestrated move to allow the administration of the North and East by the LTTE. Although it is presented as an interim measure there is every likelihood of the UNP Government and the LTTE working on the major assumption that this is in fact the final solution. From what the LTTE leader stated at the media conference the indication is that there is already agreement between the UNP and the LTTE on the nature and meaning of the purported interim administration. "The Lanka Sama Samaja Party takes pride in the fact that it has always stood for a political solution to the ethnic problem. It cannot however acquiesce in any arrangement or strategy which would result in the handing over of the administration of the Northern and Eastern Provinces to an armed LTTE.

"An interim administration should in fact be the process which also allows the LTTE controlled districts of Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi to pass over to civilian administration which accords with democratic norms of administration and respects the fundamental and human rights of the people. The people living in these districts and in the Eastern province should be free of the threat to their rights by an LTTE that remains an armed political movement. "The LSSP sees nothing sacrosanct in the proscription of the LTTE. But it urges that the question of the de-proscription be considered only in relation to the proof the LTTE could furnish to the people of its genuine disengagement from its terrorist politics."

#### ● PEACE COUNCIL WELCOMES

In a statement the National Peace Council (NPC) based in Colombo said on 16 April that one of the positive developments arising out of the prevailing ceasefire agreement between the government and the LTTE, mediated by Norway is the increased engagement and dialogue between the LTTE and the outside world.

"The LTTE leader Velupillai Pirapaharan's briefing to the local and international media in the Vanni demonstrated the changing character of the LTTE from being primarily a military organization to that of a political force. In the course of the media conference, the LTTE leadership delivered an important message to the country that it was necessary to deal with legitimate Tamil grievances and aspirations in a principled manner.

"Another example of a positive development is the public admission by the LTTE leadership that the expulsion of the Muslim population from the north in 1990 was a political mistake. The acknowledgment by leaders that they are

responsible for the rise of inter-ethnic hatreds and tensions is an important component of the peace process. By being responsive to the hurts and fears of people, any apology is a major step forward in the process of reconciliation. "The National Peace Council also welcomes the LTTE's pledge that disciplinary action will be taken against its members who are alleged to have harassed the civilian population. A similar governmental pledge against political victimization by government members would strengthen the prospects for a bipartisan approach to the peace process that is currently absent and could threaten the stability of the peace process in the future.

"The fact that inter-ethnic tensions continue to simmer beneath the surface demonstrates that the peace process needs to gain in-depth so as to permeate all levels of society. Last week a property dispute between individuals in the western town of Beruwela led to communal clashes between Sinhalese and Muslims in which six people were killed and over a hundred injured. Similar incidents have been taking place periodically in other parts of the country as well.

"In this context it is very important that the government and LTTE should be more inclusive in their pursuit of peace. Civil society should not be seen and treated as mere spectators in the peace process but as part and parcel of the peace process. We urge the government and LTTE to be more inclusive in their pursuit of peace and to find ways to involve civil society in plans and actions that generate inter-ethnic solidarity and reconciliation."

#### ● JVP'S OPPOSITION

Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP, People's Liberation Front), which claims to be a marxist political party, continues to campaign against the Ceasefire Agreement, which it describes as a 'declaration of surrender', and the peace process which it regards as a 'gross betrayal'.

On 18 April, it announced plans for a mass public campaign against government's proposals to lift the ban on the Tamil Tigers and offer them an interim administration in the northern and eastern regions.

The JVP with 16 members in the 225-seat Parliament has been trying to build up its protest campaign against the peace moves, but they have so far not been able to gather mass support for their protests. In less than five months after the the parliamentary elections and with the majority of the people voting for the United National Front (UNF) government for peace, there is no doubt that the JVP is finding it hard to build up their campaign.

However, any delay in opening the proposed government-LTTE talks, and

further delay commencing talks on substantive issues leading to a political settlement could provide the context and the time needed to build its campaign.

JVP's propaganda secretary and parliamentarian, Wimal Weerawansa, told a news conference in Colombo that the party has begun discussions with other political parties including the main opposition People's Alliance to launch their protest campaign. "We do not believe that the talks with the LTTE will be successful. The LTTE should be militarily weakened before they are called for talks," Weerawansa said.

He said that the JVP plans to hold a mass protest from the main railway station in the capital to the Prime minister's residence on 23 April to mark their protest against the talks between the government and the LTTE due to commence shortly.

"We have analysed the LTTE leader's comments made at the press conference (on April 10) and arrived at the conclusion that the LTTE is not willing to give up its demand for a separate state. Our question is why do you need to discuss with the LTTE to give them a separate state," he said. He said that it appeared that the government was giving in to the demands of the LTTE, but the LTTE were not agreeing to fulfill their obligations. He said among the outstanding issues has been the full opening of the road between the Jaffna peninsula and the rest of the country. The JVP also called on Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and President Chandrika Kumaratunga to make their position clear regarding Pirapaharan's comments at the press conference where the LTTE's chief spokesman Anton Balasingham said that Pirapaharan is the "President and the Prime Minister of the State of Eelam".

#### ● HIGHWAY TO JAFFNA REOPENS

The last closed section of the A9 highway running from Kilinochchi to Jaffna was reopened on 7 April in a joint ceremony by senior officers from the Sri Lankan military and the LTTE. Following the opening of the highway at Muhamalai, fifteen cadres from the LTTE's political section entered Army-controlled territory to travel to Jaffna where they are to begin 'political work'.

The head of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission, Norwegian Major General Tronde Furohovde introduced the commanders from both sides at the ceremony. The LTTE was represented by Col. Banu, commander of the LTTE's artillery corps, Col. Theepan and Ram, another senior officer. The Sri Lanka Army delegation was led by Major General Sisira Wijesuriya.

The opening of this last section of the A9 links the northern Jaffna peninsula

with the sprawling Vanni district and the south of the island, will allow considerably easier and cheaper travel for the local population. Prior to the opening, access to and from Jaffna was by expensive sea and air transport.

**Dispute:** However, a dispute has arisen between the government and the LTTE on the issue of buses using the newly opened A9 highway which runs between the northern Jaffna peninsula and Vavuniya through LTTE-controlled areas.

The highway was opened on 8 April as provided in the Ceasefire Agreement to civilian traffic but no buses are being allowed to run through Omanthai in the LTTE controlled areas.

The dispute centres around the LTTE's reported plan to charge an entry tax from people travelling into areas of the northern mainland controlled by it when the main highway into the region reopened. The LTTE has said that if this was not acceptable, the alternative is to permit it to operate its own bus service on the stretch of the highway that cuts through its territory. According to the monitoring officials said both proposals violated the ceasefire agreement under the terms of which there would be free movement of people, vehicles and goods on the A 9. "It would amount to extortion and setting up of a different regime in that part of the country."

Following a complaint by government, it is learnt that the Norwegian headed Ceasefire monitoring Mission has ruled that the action of the LTTE in preventing the free movement of buses along the highway constituted a violation of the ceasefire agreement. The Monitors said they had given the government and the LTTE 30 days to resolve a dispute over bus service. "They will have 30 days from April 8 to negotiate the movement of buses," Norwegian Major-General Trond Furuhoed, who is the head of the SLMM.

#### ● TIGERS OPEN POLITICAL OFFICES

LTTE is currently engaged in consolidating itself, both organisationally and politically, in the north-east. It has already opened political offices in Vavuniya, Mannar, Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Jaffna. The opening of these offices have seen highly publicised occasions and the participation of many people of the area, including Norwegian members of the independent monitoring committees appointed under the Ceasefire Agreement to monitor violations, and in some cases even declaring them open by cutting ribbons.

Some have raised the issue whether it is appropriate for the Norwegian monitors, who are supposed to be independent, and government employees like Gov-

ernment Agents who are prohibited from engaging in political activity, to take part in and declare open political offices of the LTTE.

The LTTE's political office in Vavuniya was opened on 3 April with Rev. Siyambalagaswewa Thero, the chief monk of the Vavuniya's Buddhist temple, lighting the ceremonial lamp at the opening ceremony. The Vavuniya Government Agent Mr. K. Ganesh and the President of the Vavuniya Traders' Association, Mr. P. S Abdullah spoke at the meeting. Ms. Imelda Sukumar, the Divisional Secretary for Vavuniya, opened the name board of the LTTE office. Mr. Melavan, the officer in charge of the LTTE's political wing in Vavuniya made the inaugural speech. Mr. Harsha Navaratna, the President of the Seva Lanka Foundation and a close confidante of UNF minister Mr. S. B Disanayaka, cut the ribbon to open the LTTE's office which is located on Station Road in Vavuniya town.

Dr. S Nandakumar, the head of the Jaffna University's (Vavuniya campus) Department of Management Studies, Mr. Sivanathan Kishore, the President of the Vavuniya branch of the Sri Lanka and a member of the Ceasefire Monitoring Committee for the district also spoke at the function.

Four members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam arrived by sea from Mutur and symbolically entered Trincomalee on 9 April. The LTTE members led by Trincomalee district political administrative secretary, Mr. Iynkaran, were given an emotional welcome when they landed at the town civilian jetty. They were taken in a procession along Post Office Road, Power House Road to the district office located at Green Road. Large cut-outs of LTTE leader Mr. Vellupillai Pirapaharan were put up at the main junctions in the town, to mark the occasion. Thereafter the Trincomalee district political office of the LTTE was declared open by the head of the Trincomalee Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission Ms Victor Lund. The other foreign monitor Mr. Potsun Westrom was also present. Venerable Dharmaretna Thera, Viharadhipathi of the Buddhist Vihare participated at the opening ceremony of the district office. Major C Gunawardene represented the Sri Lanka Army.

Large numbers gathered to accord a welcome to the eleven-member political group of the Liberation Tigers who entered Batticaloa town on 8 April. The LTTE group, led by Mr. Visu, Batticaloa-Ampara district Political Secretary, entered the Sri Lanka Army held town through the Paddiruppu bridge. Mr. Wimalasena, Assistant Superintendent of Police of the Special Task Force (STF) was present at the scene.

Several leading members of the Tamil National Alliance, businessmen, students and public received the LTTE members. The LTTE's Batticaloa district political office is located at Thamaraikerni in Batticaloa town.

The Government Agent, Mr. N. Shanmuganathan on 15 April declared open the Jaffna District Political Secretariat of the Liberation Tigers at Potpathi Road in Kokuvil. Hundreds of people participated in the opening ceremony. Religious leaders of all faiths including His Holiness Swami Somasunthara Swamigal of Nalai Atheenam attended the opening ceremony. The LTTE opened a district political office in Kokuvil for the first time since it vacated the peninsula ahead of an Army offensive in December 1995.

Thousands of people in Jaffna today flocked to a pro-LTTE rally after the opening of the group's first political office in the northern peninsula since 1995. Eyewitnesses said the main Jaffna town was shut down and deserted as people streamed towards the university grounds in the suburb of Tinneveli where the Pongu Tamil or Tamil Rising celebration was held in support of the LTTE.

Several parliamentarians of the pro-LTTE Tamil National Alliance (TNA), and a leader of the central Sri Lankan estate Tamils, were among those present at the rally.

#### ● MEETING WITH TNA

The LTTE completed a well publicised round of important meetings with political parties representing the minority Tamils and Muslims. The meetings with the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), which had already accepted the Tigers as the 'sole representative of the Tamil people, the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) and the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC), representing the plantation population, were all called by the LTTE designed to consolidate its supremacy in the north-east of the island. This 'charm offensive' upon the SLMC and the CWC is seen as part of a new LTTE strategy to come to an understanding with these parties as early as possible, before it sits down for talks with the government in Thailand, a Colombo commentator said.

Before the TNA MPs met the LTTE leader on 12 April, it was announced that he had summoned them to his office in the Vanni "for a disciplinary session and give them guidance on how to function in Parliament."

Signed by the political wing leader of the LTTE, S.P. Thamilselvan, the invitation asked the TNA MPs to treat the meeting as a priority matter. The fax said matters such as the agenda for the LTTE-Government talks and the interim administration would be discussed at the meeting. Tamil daily *Dinakkural* carried

the text of his speech made on 4 April by LTTE spokesman and political advisor Anton Balasingham in which expressed dissatisfaction over the functioning of Tamil legislators who had won their seats on a pro-LTTE campaign plank.

Balasingham who once described the Tamil parliamentarians as mercenaries said, "Those who are sitting in Parliament after exploiting LTTE's name and declaring that the Tigers are the sole representatives of Tamils are now roaming behind the Prime Minister and other Ministers," "They can't hear us, if we address them from here. That's why our leader has asked them to come to the Vanni," he said in what seemed a warning to the Tamil Nationalist Alliance, "We need to bring all Tamil-speaking people under one national leadership. Those in Parliament should be told of our aims and what to say and how to function in Parliament. It is the responsibility of the leadership to give them guidance," Balasingham said.

However, the statement that was issued in Colombo by the TNA parliamentary group leader Mr R Sampathan did not suggest that any such ominous messages were given. The statement describing meeting at Killinochchi on 12 April between the LTTE leadership comprising Mr.V.Pirapaharan Messrs Anton Balasingham, (Political Advisor), S.P.Thamilchelvan (Political Head), Pottu Amman (Intelligence head), Karuna (Amparai-Batticaloa military commander), Pathuman (Trincomalee area commander), Karikalan (Political Head of the Amparai-Batticaloa district) and Ruban (Trincomalee political head), and representatives of the TNA delegation consisting of parliamentarians Messrs. Sampathan, V.Anandasangaree, Joseph Pararajasingham, Mavai Senathirajah, Appathurai Vinayagamoorthy, Raja Kuhaneswaran, K.Thangavadeivel, G.Krishnapillai, Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam, N.Raviraj, Sivasakthi Anandan, A Chandra Nehru, M.K.Sivajilingam and the Secretary General of the EPRLF Mr. Suresh Premachandran said,

"The cease-fire agreement entered into, the implementation of the said cease-fire agreement, the proposed interim administration and the political solution that could be eventually evolved came up for intensive discussion. The leader of the LTTE Mr.Pirapaharan and Political Advisor Mr.Anton Balasingham explained the position of the LTTE. The need of the LTTE and the TNA to work united was accepted by all participants. The need to take along the Muslim in the pursuit of a peaceful political solution was accepted by all participants. The exchange of views took place in a cordial atmosphere. In conclusion the LTTE leader Mr.Pirapaharan hosted all participants to dinner.TNA leader and the National List

parliamentarian Mr.M.Sivasithambaram did not go to Killinochchi due to ill health."

### ● MUSLIMS AND THE LTTE

The widely reported harassment of Muslims by the Tigers, particularly in the east of the country, prompted Muslim Members of Parliament belonging to all political parties to form a joint front irrespective of party affiliations to address the issue. They met the Ambassadors of Islamic countries such as Iran, Iraq, Libya, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the UAE among others and apprised them of the situation faced by the Muslims in the East. As the pressure mounted the Prime Minister too brought some of the allegation made by Mr. Rauff Hakeem to the Sri Lanka Ceasefire Monitoring Mission (SLMM) headed by the Norwegians.

At the LTTE leader's media conference on 10 April, in reply to questions, Mr Anton Balasingham repeated his previous apology made at a public meeting on behalf the LTTE for the forcible expulsion in 1990 of thousand of Muslim families from the north of the island. Describing the expulsion of Muslims from Jaffna by the Tigers as a "political blunder" that could not be justified, Mr. Balasingham is reported to have said: "Let us forget and forgive the mistakes made in the past. Tamil Eelam is also the homeland of the Muslims and we have to live in harmony and amity to promote peace and prosperity in the region."

Holding out an olive branch to the Muslims, who have been feeling increasingly besieged by the LTTE, particularly in the east, Mr. Balasingham said while the community had a "unique cultural identity", the Tamils and Muslims shared a common language and were inextricably intertwined" economically and territorially, and would therefore have to co-exist "as brothers" in the north-east.

At the April 10 media conference, Balasingham said that at the appropriate time the LTTE leader himself would make a statement asking the displaced Muslims to return. He also acknowledged for the first time that the problems of the Muslims would have to be resolved along with those of the Tamils. "We want the problems of the Muslims to be solved along with the problems of the rest of the Tamils," he said, adding that they wanted to engage the Muslim leadership in a dialogue, and indicated that leaders of the Muslim Congress had been invited to a meeting with the LTTE leadership for this purpose. The LTTE leadership appears to have taken the allegations of extortion and harassment of Muslims seriously, and at the same conference Mr Balasingham announced that the top leaders of the LTTE in the east, including Karikalan and Karuna had been summoned by the

LTTE leader for discussions on the matter.

The leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) and Cabinet Minister, Rauff Hakeem, flew in a Sri Lanka Air Force helicopter to northern Sri Lanka with five party colleagues for the meeting on 13 April.

Mr. Pirapaharan was assisted by Mr.Anton Balasingham, Mr. S. P. Thamilchelvan, Col. Karuna and Col. Pathuman.

The SLMC delegation comprised Ministers Noordeen Mashoor, A.L.M.-Athaulah, Deputy Ministers Basheer Segu Dawood and Mohamed Abdul Cader and senior members Mashoor Mowlana and Uduman Lebbe.

After the 3-hour meeting at Killinochchi with LTTE leader, Rauff Hakeem said that the LTTE had given him an undertaking that the harassment of Muslims would stop and invited the forcibly displaced Muslims to return.

Implicit in the agreement is the acceptance by the Muslims of the de facto authority of the LTTE in the north-east, soon expected to be legitimised by the Sri Lankan Government through an interim administration. Describing Mr. Prabakaran as "genuine and sincere", Mr. Hakeem said the preliminary confidence-building measures on "practical day-to-day matters" would enable the two sides to discuss the more "contentious" issues of power sharing in the proposed interim administration in the north-east later.

"I am sure from the mood and friendliness he was displaying that he meant business. The sincerity was very apparent in his attitude which was relaxed and reassuring," he told journalists after returning from the meeting.

Mr. Prabakaran and Mr. Hakeem signed a joint agreement under which the two sides agreed on the SLMC's participation in the talks on the interim administration that are to be held in Thailand later this year. "Our role in the interim administration will be discussed in Thailand and we will be a party to the negotiations," Mr. Hakeem said.

Under the agreement, the LTTE has undertaken to stop extortions from Muslims in the east with immediate effect and promised to return paddy fields it forcibly took away from Muslims. Mr. Hakeem said the two sides had agreed to appoint a joint committee to facilitate the return of 1,00,000 displaced Muslims who were expelled from Jaffna and the northern mainland by the LTTE 12 years ago. They are at present living in refugee camps in Puttalam. Refugees from 35 displaced villages in the east are also to return.

For Mr. Hakeem, the main victory is that the LTTE has endorsed his party as the representative of Muslims in the

agreement, which should immensely help him politically.

Under the LTTE-SLMC Agreement, according to Mr Hakeem, a joint committee comprising representatives of LTTE and SLMC would be appointed to co-ordinate affairs related to the return of displaced Jaffna Muslims to their own homes.

"Mr Pirapaharan has agreed to invite all displaced Muslims to return to their own places in the northeast," Likewise, it was decided that a suitable environment should be created for people displaced from villages in the east to resettle in their homes, the SLMC leader said.

"Mr.Pirapaharan and myself have signed a joint statement regarding the return of the displaced Muslims. It has been agreed to appoint a joint committee consisting LTTE and SLMC representatives to facilitate the process of resettling the displaced Muslims," Mr. Hakeem said.

It was also decided at the discussion that any negotiations that have a bearing on Muslims would have the participation of the SLMC, he said.

The SLMC-LTTE agreement states that cultivation by Muslims in untended Muslim lands in the North and East would be enabled. The practice of collecting funds from Muslims in the East would cease, SLMC sources said. A representative from SLMC will be appointed to enhance Tamil-Muslim relations in the districts of North and East and to liaise with LTTE senior commanders with respect to difficulties faced by Muslim people resident there. Top-level meetings between the SLMC and the LTTE will continue in the future to approach the basic political problems of the Muslims in the North and East and to maintain their unique political and cultural identity.

On being asked about possible opposition within Muslim quarters, in reference to the National Unity Alliance of Mrs. Feiral Ashraff, Mr. Hakeem said "we have not conceded or omitted anything to warrant any opposition. LTTE have given favourable answers to questions and concerns raised by us."

### ● LTTE-CWC MEETING

Politicians and parties of the Tamil dominated north-east have traditionally kept aloof from the politics of the plantation Tamils in which the Ceylon Workers Congress(CWC) has always played a dominant representative role. CWC's current leader's grandfather, Saumiamoorthy Thondaman, who played the role of an 'unchallenged king' of the plantation sector for over 50 years, never permitted the vagaries of the north-eastern politics to divert his abiding commitment to the interests of his own people.

At the meeting on 14 April held in Kilinochchi, the CWC delegation comprised of its current leader, Arumugam Thondaman, Muthu Sivalingam, Deputy Minister, R.Yogarajan, MP, and M.S.Sellasamy, Deputy Leader of the CWC. Anton Balasingham, S. P. Thamilchevan, and V.Balakumar assisted the Tiger leader Pirapaharan in the discussions that ensued between the two parties.

"The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) have come to an understanding to work together for the resolution of the Tamil national question", said Mr.Arumugam Thondaman, a UNF government minister Sunday. Mr.Thondaman, CWC leader met reporters at the Katunayake International Airport lounge Sunday afternoon on his return from LTTE held town of Killinochchi in the Vanni region.

Discribing the meeting with Mr.Pirapaharan as a historic and a constructive one, Mr Thondaman, said that the discussions with the LTTE leadership were wide-ranging and primarily concerned with the prospects and problems posed by the peace process. "The CWC would provide whatever assistance needed to take forward the present peace process which is brokered by the Norwegian government between the UNF government and the LTTE," he said.

Mr.Thondaman further said, "CWC and LTTE have agreed to work together for the right of self-determination of Tamils. The CWC would support all steps taken by the LTTE in its struggle in this regard."

### ● CALL FOR EXTRADITION

April- 16 - Tamil Nadu assembly on Tuesday, 16 April, adopted a state-government sponsored 17-paragraph resolution demanding the Central government to take steps to extradite LTTE leader, V Pirapakaran from Sri Lanka to India to face trial in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case, in which he was the prime accused. The resolution also demanded the Centre to send Indian army to Sri Lanka with the consent of the government in Colombo to arrest Pirapaharan if the Sri Lankan government was unable to capture him and opposed any permission being given for LTTE men to enter India.

The resolution was adopted amidst protest from the Pattali Makkal Kadchi (PMK) and the neutral stand taken by the main Opposition DMK led by former Chief Minister of the state, Muthuvelu Karunanidhi.

PMK legislators, wearing black shirts to protest against adoption of the resolution, shouted slogans in the house, while CPI-M And CPI legislators staged a walk out specifically on the issue of the pro-

posal for sending Indian army to Sri Lanka.

The Chief Minister Jayalaltha Jayaram said that the move against the Tamil Tiger leader should be deemed a part of the global war against terrorism, and in an effort to protect the integrity and sovereignty of the country. She claimed that India couldn't keep its eyes closed and remain a mute spectator when the leader of the most "dreaded terrorist organization" appeared before international reporters. She said that Pirapaharan had not change his mind and would never drop his demand for a separate. She said she would not allow any of the members belonging to the LTTE to set foot in Tamil Nadu even on humanitarian grounds.

India's main opposition Congress Party which also demanded Pirapaharan's extradition supported the resolution.

The DMK president, M. Karunanidhi, said that when there were many problems in Tamil Nadu which require urgent attention, the introduction of the resolution by the AIADMK Government was a diversionary tactic and an attempt to cloak all other issues.

The MDMK general secretary, Vaiko, described the day as a "sad day" and demanded that the Centre reject the resolution. At a time when peace prospects were bright, a resolution of this nature would only impede it. Armed struggle was 'forced' on the Sri Lankan Tamils because of the 'repressive measures' adopted by successive Governments in that country.

The Congress Jananayaka Peravai (CJP) welcomed the resolution and said it would not impede the peace process. The CJP, which was formed by the former Union Finance Minister, P. Chidambaram, protesting the decision of the Tamil Maanila Congress to ally with the AIADMK, said that any move to extradite the killers of the former Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, would be welcomed by it.

Though extradition might not be "practical", attempts needed to be made nevertheless, Mr. Chidambaram told press persons here. The DMK's stand of neutrality was "no stand", he said. The request for medical treatment for the LTTE ideologue, Anton Balasingham, did not hold water since better facilities were available in Singapore, Thailand and London.

The Pondicherry Assembly on 15 April also adopted a resolution urging the Centre to initiate steps to have the LTTE leader, V. Pirapaharan, arrested and extradited to India by the Sri Lankan Government. The resolution was supported by the ruling Congress and its ally, Tamil Maanila Congress, the AIADMK and the BJP. The DMK, main opposition, however, remained neutral. □



## LTTE LEADER'S MEDIA CONFERENCE

# Pirapaharan Faces World Media

The leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Mr Velupillai Pirapaharan, identified the recognition of a Tamil homeland comprising the northern and eastern provinces of Sri Lanka, acceptance of the Tamils of the island as distinct nationality and the right to self determination as the core fundamentals for a negotiated solution to the conflict in the island. He also said that lifting of the ban imposed on the LTTE by Sri Lanka was a precondition for face to face talks with the government.

Described as the largest media event ever held in the island, the significance of the event was marked by the scale of the international and local media interest that drew almost 400 hundred reporters, photographers and cameramen including over 30 TV crews from across the world to the war devastated town of Killinochchi in northern Sri Lanka.

It was a media conference organised by the Tamil Tigers on 10 April at which their leader Velupillai Mr Velupillai Pirapaharan (Mr VP) was to make his rare appearance in public and for which journalists were not just carrying notepads, pens and laptops. Asked to turn up at least 24 hours earlier, after registering themselves at the newly opened LTTE office at Vavuniya town, about 50 km south of Killinochchi, they were also armed with generators, flashlights, mosquito repellents and drinking water.

Such was the rush of foreign journalists that the government's Information Department in Colombo worked through the normally shut weekend to issue accreditation cards that the LTTE would want to see when reporters and photographers enter the Tiger-controlled territory. "I did not issue so many accreditations even during the SAARC summit in 1998," Information Department director Ariya Rubasinghe said referring to a meeting of heads of states of seven countries in this region.

Contrary to the handful of local Tamil reporters who attended his last press conference on April 1, 1990, in Jaffna town, this time hundreds of international journalists spent more than 24 hours in the LTTE guest houses and camps in the town and in surrounding areas on April 10 and went through a 10-hour security drill well before the conference began.



### Security blanket

A knowledgeable south Indian reporter commented that, to say that security was tight would be a gross understatement. The precision planning and secrecy for which the LTTE leader is well known was in full evidence at his first media conference in 12 years. Such was the security for Mr VP that nothing which could send out signals to the outside world from the venue of the conference was permitted. No amount of remonstrance by the journalists and editors about deadlines could convince the LTTE



otherwise. The security screening by the LTTE cadre would have put to shame some of the best intelligence agencies in the world, journalists commented.

The journalists who were separated into groups were taken away in vans driven by Tigers to their assigned buildings to be fed and spend night before the news conference. They were woken up at 5:30 in the morn-

ing, given an hour to change and taken to a LTTE building in Killinochchi for an intensive security check that lasted more than 8 hours. Only the most essential items were permitted in and even these were virtually dissected into parts and scrutinised. LTTE operatives confiscated all satellite phones so that the Tiger leader's whereabouts remained a mystery to the outside world. All were meticulously searched, including ears, mouths, shoes and socks and feet.

Every journalist was photographed and each set of equipment taken apart to be screened. Cameras were weighed, and no chances were taken. But even after all these checks, no one could carry their belongings to the venue. Everything, including pens and notebooks, were taken by the LTTE and put in plastic bags to be handed back to the journalists only when they reached the venue. The journalists were then transported from their overnight stop, in vehicles with tinted panes to prevent the location being identified. Live broadcasts of what was billed as a historic event was prohibited and the use of satellite phones and other communication devices were also disallowed.

LTTE cadres told journalists that the strict security measures had been adopted for the protection of their leader. "We are afraid of a repeat of what happened to Ahamed Shah Masood," they explained, in reference to the Afghan Northern Alliance leader killed last September by suicide bombers posing as a television crew.

### New image

Mr. Velupillai Prabhakaran (Mr VP) arrived at the conference venue, flanked by a posse of bodyguards, some of them in civvies, sporting dark sun glasses and others in combat fatigues holding guns on the ready, minus his trademark battle fatigues and Browning pistol on his hip and minus his moustache; if a cyanide capsule still hung round his neck it was out of sight. To journalists who have always seen him in combat military uniform and gear, here was Mr VP, leader of one of most militarily powerful guerrilla groups in the world which had confronted both the Sri Lankan and Indian armies and kept them at bay, clean-shaven and attired in a trendy grey safari suit reinventing himself presenting an of image of an emerging political leader of the Tamils of Sri Lanka committed, to let the world know that he was committed to the Norwegian facilitated peace process in Sri Lanka.

At the start, journalists were warned not to move in such a way so as to create a "situation of panic" during the press conference as all the cadres were fully armed.

Flanked by the LTTE's chief negotiator and political advisor, Mr Anton Balasingham (Mr AB), the head of the

LTTE's political section Mr. Thamil Chelvan, by two of his top military commanders, Col. Karuna and Col. Pathuman, Mr VP assisted by Mr AB fielded questions for over two and a half, sometimes chaotic, hours. Mr AB translated into English all questions and all of Mr VP's responses for the benefit of the international press. Mr AB also fielded questions or expanded on Mr VP's responses. Several times, Mr AB took it upon himself to reply, prompting a journalist to ask if he was speaking for himself or for Mr VP. One journalist commented that the Tiger leader's lengthy consultations with Mr AB, before replying to most of the questions, was completely at odds with the image that he had of Mr VP as a self-confident leader in his own right.

### Peace Process

On the ongoing Norwegian facilitated peace process, the LTTE leader said that he was very, very pleased with the development of the peace process and wanted to compliment Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe for the bold action he had taken to promote it and the goodwill measures he had taken in the north east. "We are sincerely and seriously committed to peace and we hope that the peace process will succeed," he said.

Dismissing accusations directed in the form of questions from journalists that the LTTE was insincere about peace and that the Tigers were under pressure due to the international war on terrorism since September 11, Mr VP pointed out that his organisation had, among other moves, unilaterally observed a ceasefire for four months early last year which was not reciprocated by the then government. Apart from this, "The LTTE has undertaken peace initiatives before the September 11. I met with the Norwegian peace envoy Eric Solheim and gave him an assurance that the LTTE wanted peace and a negotiated political settlement," he said.

The LTTE leader made the intentions of his organisation clear when he said that only after de-proscription would LTTE take part in face to face peace talks with the government. He stressed that the LTTE would not accept a temporary suspension of the ban. Mr AB added. "We want to be described properly..... We want to be accepted as the authentic representatives of our people, so we can participate in talks with equal status."

And after the ban was lifted by the government, he said, the Tigers would mount an international campaign to be de-listed as a terrorist group by the United States, Britain and other Western nations. Mr VP said, "It is true that several countries have imposed a ban on the LTTE. These bans were imposed on our organisation because of the malicious campaign launched by the

Sir Lankan government against our organisation. This is why I have requested the government to de-proscribe our organisation. Once the ban is lifted in Sri Lanka we will campaign in the world to lift the ban on our organization."

To a question, making reference to LTTE's past record of resumption of armed hostilities following talks, as what assurance he could give and as to why the rest of the world should believe that on this occasion the ceasefire would lead to peace, Mr VP replied, "This is the first time a third party, that is the Norwegian government, has involved itself in facilitating the peace process. It has never happened in the past other than Indian mediation. With the facilitation of Norway, I believe this process will succeed."

Mr VP said that unlike in the past, the current ceasefire could lead to a durable settlement as the process was being facilitated by a third party, Norway, and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe was taking bold steps to strike a deal. Mr AB was however more circumspect. He said the immediate goal was an interim settlement through the establishment of an interim administration in the north and east.

### Eelam and Core Demands

Asked about whether the LTTE was prepared to drop its goal of an independent state of Tamil Eelam, Mr VP indicated that as of now the LTTE is not prepared to give up its struggle for an independent Tamil homeland. Mr VP said. "So far as the demand for Eelam is concerned, the LTTE has not made any decision so far as whether to give up the demand or accept an alternative," adding, "The right conditions have not arisen for the LTTE to abandon its policy of independent statehood. "The struggle for political independence is the demand of the Tamil people ever since 1977 when the Tamils fought the elections on the issue," he said.

The LTTE leader asserting that the government should lift the ban imposed on the LTTE before any talks began, spelt out three core demands to which he said the Tigers remained committed which should be recognised by the government, and they were: a Tamil homeland in the north and east of the island, accepting the Tamils as a nation; and the right of the Tamils to self-determination.

"Once these are accepted or a solution recognising these core issues are put forward and are acceptable to the Tamil people, then we will consider ending the fight for a separate state," he said.

In response to further questions on the same issue, Mr AB said that the LTTE's key demands were for self-determination and autonomy for the Tamil community. He also said that it was for the Sri Lankan Gov-

ernment to provide an alternative to the Eelam demand of the LTTE.

Asked as to what the LTTE meant by self determination, Mr AB explained, "We mean the right of people to decide their own political destiny - it can also apply to autonomy and self governance. If autonomy and self governance is given to our people we can say that internal self-determination is to some extent met. But if the Sri Lanka government rejects our demand for autonomy and self-governance and continues with repression, then as a last resort we will opt for secession - that also comes under self-determination. Therefore we say if the Sri Lanka government offers the Tamil people a form of self government and autonomy in recognition of our homeland, nationality and the right to self-determination, then we will consider that offer. But if the government refuses to give proper autonomy then we have no other option but to fight for autonomy and self determination."

### Faith in the PM

Mr VP doubted the capacity of the present government led by Prime Minister Wickremesinghe to offer the LTTE political package that would lead to a permanent solution to the conflict. "We do not think that Ranil Wickremesinghe is capable of addressing the core issues and offer us a permanent solution at this stage; because the executive powers of governance are vested with the President and his powers are limited to parliament. We wish to insist that the Ranil's government is not politically stable or authoritative or powerful enough to take up the core demands of the Tamils and offer us a permanent solution. It is because of that we are suggesting the formulation of an interim administration set up in which the LTTE can participate in the north-east. In the meantime Ranil Wickremesinghe will have enough space to build up southern Sri Lanka economically. So it will be advantageous for the Tamils as well as for the Sinhalese to work out an interim set up for the time being. Once this is set up then we are prepared to discuss the core issues and negotiate for a permanent settlement to the ethnic issue."

"As far as we are concerned we have faith in the present government and we will continue to work with it until a solution is reached," Mr AB said.

To a question whether he would accept the hegemony of Sri Lanka and accept a federal structure of states like in India, Mr VP said the LTTE had not taken any decision on this so far. "It is a matter which has to be decided yet. The question whether we accept hegemony of Sri Lankan state does not arise because we have not started the peace process yet."

"Do you accept that Wickremesinghe is your Prime Minister?" a reporter asked



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Mr VP, but Mr AB quickly butted in, making it clear that the LTTE did not recognise the authority of the Sri Lankan state, to say, "Wickremesinghe is the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka. Pirapaharan is the Prime Minister and President of Tamil Eelam".

Asked whether he expected President Kumaratunga to scuttle the peace process, Mr VP said he did not think President Chandrika Kumaratunga could derail the peace process. "Even if she tries to scuttle the peace process it is up to Ranil Wickremesinghe to ensure that such difficulties do not arise and ensure the peace process succeeds."

Replying a question on what the LTTE would do in the event the peace talks collapsed this time Mr AB said, "As far as we are concerned we have faith in the present government and we are prepared to work with this present government until we are convinced the talks have failed."

The LTTE leader added that if a solution is worked within the democratic political framework, "our organisation will seriously participate in that process and our cadre also will be absolved into the political mainstream."

#### Peace Talks

As if the LTTE has already decided on the agenda for the proposed talks to take place in Thailand, Mr VP said that the

LTTE's negotiators led by Mr AB "are going to Thailand with the objective of discussing the formation of an interim administration." Asked to elaborate on the proposed interim administration, he said, "The functions and duties of the interim government, the distribution of power, are issues that we have to discuss. So we cannot comment on the structure and nature of the interim administration now."

Asked whether he would participate in the forthcoming peace talks in Thailand, Mr VP, who had never personally participated during previous negotiations with former President Premadasa or the current President Kumaratunga, said he would not be there in person but send Mr AB. But when negotiations for a permanent solution take place, "we will consider my participation."

To a question whether he would accept any position of responsibility in the proposed interim administration Mr VP said, "That question does not arise now as the dialogue for an interim administration has not yet arisen. Only when that arises I will think whether to accept that responsibility or not."

When asked if the LTTE would give up the armed struggle following a permanent solution, Mr VP said: "We will seriously consider renouncing our armed struggle if a solution acceptable to the people is

worked out."

Responding to a question, the Tiger leader said that his instructions to his cadre to kill him if he compromised on the goal of an independent state remained.

#### On terrorism

Mr VP rejected the accusation that the LTTE deserved its reputation as one of the world's most ruthless terrorist groups. "We are not a terrorist organisation but a liberation movement. We are fighting for the liberation of our people. You have to distinguish between what constitutes terrorism and a liberation struggle," adding, "Those who are waging war against terrorism should come out with a clear definition of who is a terrorist and who is a freedom fighter."

"Even though we have been fighting an armed struggle our objective is political emancipation of our people. The LTTE is a politico-military organization and therefore we constantly develop our political structure. The overwhelming masses of Tamil people support the LTTE which is clearly indicated in the Pongu Tamil movements and when LTTE cadre have now entered military controlled areas under the present ceasefire agreement, the massive welcome they have received is a clear indication. We are a national liberation organization," he said.

When asked whether, after engaging in armed struggle for a separate of Tamil Eelam all these years, the 'Tiger was changing its stripes' by now adopting a different political path, Mr VP responded, "Our political struggle for the Tamil people began in the form of non-violence, through peaceful methods. ... It is because this peaceful non-violent agitation was crushed by military repression, that we were forced to take up arms to defend ourselves. But whenever there were opportunities for peace in the past, we have opted for negotiations to resolve these problems," he said.

Questioned further about their reputation as terrorists for using suicide bombers, Mr AB said, "Since we are now committed to peace, we don't want to make any comment about suicide attacks at this stage." Answering further questions on the same issue, Mr VP said, "The times are changing. We are adopting new strategies," adding, "When a permanent solution is reached we will not only bring an end to all forms of violence but also consider seriously removing the cyanide capsules from our cadres."

The LTTE leader added that if a solution is worked within the democratic political framework, "our organisation will seriously participate in that process and our cadre also will be absorbed into the political mainstream."

Asked about the display of "Hail Hitler" Nazi salute at 'Pongu Tamil' rallies which indicated that the LTTE was a fascist organisation, Mr VP responded, "The Pongu Tamil celebrations were not organised by the LTTE. It is a mass movement that supports the peace process and we have no idea what you are talking about a Hitler type salute. This is merely a demonstration for peace. Please don't misunderstand and misinterpret this form of expression."

#### **On India and Rajiv murder**

It was on the issue of the assassination of the former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and the LTTE's call for its ban in India to be lifted the LTTE leader was confronted with a barrage of quite uncomfortable questions. Mr AB appeared visibly irritated when Indian journalists mainly from Tamil Nadu closely questioned Mr VP on the assassination and related issues. At one stage directly addressing these journalists Mr AB said, "You want to dominate the press conference. You have come all the way to ask these questions. We are now involved in a peace process and you want to rake up the past."

The LTTE leader made it plain that he wanted to mend fences with India and his organisation was engaged in an exercise of rapprochement with India which proscribed it following the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi.

"We want the government of India to lift the ban on our organisation. At the appropriate time we will raise the issue with the government of India. We want to renew

our friendship and friendly relations with India," the LTTE leader said.

Mr AB added, "India's participation is crucial for the peace process. We do not want to alienate or isolate India. India is a regional superpower. Without the active support and sympathy of the people and government of India, this problem (ethnic conflict) will not find a permanent settlement. India's active participation in the peace process is crucial for the Tamil people. We have suffered a lot, as a result of contradictions between India and the LTTE. We want to establish friendly, positive and constructive relations with the government of India."

Mr AB added, "VP and I have openly said we want to establish friendly relationship with the government of India. I have openly requested India to offer me a venue so that I could land in India for logistical reasons and medical reasons. I wanted India to provide me a passage to land in Tamil Nadu. They have to consider this for the sake of our people and the resolution of the ethnic conflict. At the same time India's active participation in the peace process is crucial. We don't want to alienate or isolate India in the peace process."

"Since India was not taking any active interest in the process, the government of Sri Lanka as well as the LTTE requested the Norwegian government to play a facilitatory role. At the same time our intention is not to alienate or isolate India. We want India to play an active role. We have requested the government of Norway to make an official representation of our request and the government of Norway has told us they have made this request and the government of India is considering this issue. They have not come back to us yet - but it is still on the agenda," Mr AB said.

"We want to engage the government of India. Our people love India and the people of India. We are culturally and ethnically linked to the Indian subcontinent. India is our fatherland," Mr VP said.

Side stepping a direct question, "Are you denying any involvement in the assassination?", Mr VP said, "It is a very sensitive issue. It is a tragic incident that happened 10 years ago."

Responding to persistent questioning on the issue, the LTTE leader said, "There are four people who have been condemned to death. We are seeking an amnesty from the government of India. Therefore, at this particular juncture we don't wish to make any comments."

When some Indian journalists persisted on the subject, Mr AB said that no more questions would be entertained on the subject saying, "You are raising an issue that has happened ten years ago. It is a tragic incident and therefore we are not in a position to make any comments at this stage. It is a tragic incident, don't try to dig into the past."

Asked if the LTTE was prepared to for-

get about the war with the Indian Peace Keeping Force, Mr AB said that "at a particular stage in history, the government of India wanted to help the Tamil people by resolving the problem. They mediated; and unfortunately the proposals envisaged by the government of India did not satisfy the aspirations of Tamil people. We had discussions, and expressed our disapproval and finally the contradictions between India and the LTTE led to an armed conflict, and the IPKF committed quite a lot of atrocities amongst our people. But yet, with all that, our people love and respect India. India and the people of India are different from the power structures or the armed apparatus of India. We are culturally and ethnically linked to the Indian subcontinent. As Tamils we have our roots in India."

#### **Rights of Muslims**

Asked about the forcible expulsion in 1990 by the LTTE of tens of thousands of Muslims families from Tamil dominated areas in the north of the island and the massacre of Muslims inside mosques in the east of the country, Mr AB said, "It is I who made an apology to the Muslim people for what has happened in the past and that we are willing to talk to them and resolve these issues. We know these are the manifestations of violence due to ethnic war. Our people have also suffered. We have lost 60,000 civilians and 17,000 fighters in this war. There has been several incidents of violence in the South. We don't want such incidents to continue that is why we have decided to observe a ceasefire and this peace process. So far, as far as the plantation Tamils and Muslims are concerned we have invited Arumugam Thondaman (leader of Ceylon Workers Congress) and Rauf Hakeem (leader of the Muslim Congress) for discussions and they are coming to the Vanni to meet us and we will engage them in constructive discussions to see how we can help to resolve their problem and bring about a final resolution."

Responding to the question on whether he has taken any concrete steps to allow the displaced Muslim people living in refugee camps for the last 12 years to come back to Jaffna, Mr VP said that "proper objective conditions should be created for these people to come back. After these conditions are in place, I will make an appeal for the Muslims to come back to Jaffna."

Questioned about harassment of Muslims in the eastern province and the statement that the LTTE's Eastern commander, Karikalan, had reported to have made that Muslims had no land rights in the eastern province, Mr AB replied, "Whether such statements are endorsed by the leadership or not is the question. We want to tell you that we have called the senior commanders of the eastern province to discuss the alleged harassment of Muslim people. Furthermore following a call from us, Karikalan arrived the day before yesterday and we are talking to him to find out what

has gone wrong. He has assured us that he had not made such a statement to the press. We believe that there is no dispute as far as the LTTE leader is concerned on the issue of the Muslim people owning land in the east. When the Muslim Congress leader Mr. Hakeem meets us we will discuss these problems with him."

Answering further related questions, Mr AB said, "We don't want to go into those details in the East. You will understand now that almost all Tamil parties in the north-east are supporting the LTTE. But there are some armed Tamil groups and they support the Sri Lankan armed forces in its war against the LTTE. So we have requested the Norwegians under this present agreement that these armed groups be disarmed. Now the situation is that all the Tamil parties are backing the LTTE. We will allow all Tamil political parties to carry out their political work."

To a question on whether the LTTE would allow Muslim participation in the peace process, Mr VP replied, "Certainly we will allow Muslim representation in the process. It is very important that the questions of the Muslim people are resolved along with the Tamil people."

With regard to the issue of prisoners of war being held by the LTTE, VP said, "Only a few prisoners of war are being detained by the LTTE and the ICRC regularly

visits them and has established contacts with the prisoners and their families. The LTTE have been releasing quite a large number of prisoners war. We may consider releasing the rest at an appropriate time there is only a few with us right now," he said.

Responding to questions on LTTE prisoners being held in Colombo, he said, "We have been constantly campaigning for the release of LTTE suspects arrested and kept in prison without any trial. Therefore we have also requested the Tamil political parties to agitate for their release. At the same time we are going to request from the government to repeal the Prevention of Terrorism Act which is being used to hold these people."

#### Other parties

Asked as to whether it would permit other political parties to freely operate in the north-east, Mr VP said, "We can assure you that other political parties, whatever their policies may be, will be allowed to function in the north-east and participate in the democratic electoral process."

When asked why that assurance should be accepted, when the LTTE had previously targeted and killed leaders and members of other parties, the LTTE leader said, "We are going to meet four Tamil political parties in two days. These are the parties once upon a time that had serious contradictions

with our organisation. Now the whole scenario has changed and we are inviting them here to talk and discuss about various issues. If we are an authoritarian organisation trying to suppress other political organisations, there is no need for us to call them and discuss with them. Similarly we are calling the Muslim leadership and the plantation Tamils' leadership also. Therefore the times have changed and we are adopting new strategies."

One Western journalist asked Mr VP why anyone should take the Tigers seriously on their promise of democracy and freedom when journalists had been "photographed and searched by men who looked like goons," Mr AB butted in to take the question and said the LTTE had to take extraordinary

precautions because government forces had in recent times infiltrated the area to carry out assassinations of senior LTTE leaders.

When asked his opinion on the Janatha Vimukthi Perumana (JVP), Mr VP said, "We do not consider the JVP a progressive political force because of their chauvinistic attitudes towards the Tamil people."

Asked about the Tamil community in the central plantation areas, Mr VP said, "We want build a better relationship with the leadership of the plantation Tamils. We have invited them here. We will discuss their concerns and problems and co-operate with them in their struggle for the political rights of the plantation Tamils."

On the issue of forcible recruitment of child soldiers by the LTTE, rejecting the allegation Mr VP said, "This accusation that we are recruiting children is unacceptable. Recently, following the UN resolution, we have decided to recruit people from the age of 18. In future we want to recruit for the purpose of involving our people in political and administrative purposes. I want to add that the younger people who came to join our organisation have been sent back and we are collecting letters from the parents to say these children have been given back to them. It is impossible for the LTTE to conduct an effective conventional war with child soldiers or babies. You can see from our documentaries that we don't have children in our ranks. We in fact have child welfare centres where the LTTE have been feeding and educating children who have been orphaned as a consequence of this war. In future we want to recruit for the purpose of involving our youth in political and administrative purposes."

Denying allegations of widespread extortion by the Tigers from the civilian population, Mr VP said that "just as the Sri Lanka government imposes and collects taxes from the people to run the state administration, we also levy taxes in areas under our control to run our administration."

Asked about the LTTE's economic policy, Mr. Mr VP said that it would be based on "open market economy" and pointed out, "We can only think about a proper economic structure when the ethnic problem is resolved..... What form and what structure this economic system is to be instituted can only be worked when we have a permanent settlement or an independent state." Mr AB said the LTTE was pleased with the overwhelming response from the international media.

"When we made the invitation last week, we expected only the Colombo-based international news agencies to come here for the press conference. We never expected such a vast presence of journalists from all over the world. We were rather surprised and pleased. This clearly shows how the global media is concerned and interested in our struggle."

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## Reactions to LTTE Leader's Comments to the Media

Reactions to LTTE leader Mr V Pirapaharan's comments at the media conference on 10 April have been mixed within Sri Lanka, but by and large hostile in India.

However, the United States reacting to the LTTE leader's media conference on 10 April, welcomed his commitment to peace and a negotiated political settlement to the conflict in Sri Lanka.

In a press release issued on 12 April the US Embassy in Sri Lanka, welcoming the LTTE leader's commitment to a peaceful resolution of the conflict, called upon the LTTE renounce the use of violence unequivocally.

"The United States welcomes Mr. Prabhakaran's commitment to peace and a negotiated political settlement of the 19-year long ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. We also welcome his acknowledgement that the questions of Sri Lankan Muslims must be resolved alongside those of the Tamil people. We are encouraged by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam's willingness to work within a political process and to renounce violence. We have long believed that violence cannot achieve the Tigers' stated objectives, and urge Mr. Prabhakaran to abandon its use unequivocally. As we have said earlier, we are pleased by the existing cease fire and the prospect of direct peace negotiations between the Sri Lankan government and Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, which could begin in May or June. A political solution to the conflict which maintains Sri Lanka's territorial integrity would be welcomed by the international community, and we urge all parties to continue to work toward that goal. If Sri Lankans on both sides continue to approach talks constructively and show a willingness to compromise, we believe peace can return. The United States fully supports the Norwegian government's efforts to facilitate a settlement."

There were varied reactions in the Sri Lankan media to the Tamil Tiger leader's comments at his press conference. The Tamil dailies, 'Veerakesari' and 'Thinakural' approvingly asserted the LTTE's commitment to a peaceful resolution of the conflict, and warned that the war would never end if the demand for recognition of Tamil aspirations as articulated by Mr Pirapaharan were not addressed. But the Sinhala and the

English language dailies were more sceptical and even critical suggesting that the LTTE leader had not shifted from his

commitment to a Tamil separate state. Some papers said Mr Pirapaharan's refusal to give up the demand for a separate Tamil nation was an obstacle to peace. 'The Island', a daily which normally does not disguise its doubts about the peaceful intentions of the LTTE said that if the objective of the news conference "was to demonstrate to the world his sincerity and commitment to peace, he would have convinced only his unswerving faithful," adding, "He had discarded his feline striped jungle fatigues and instead put on a more conventional safari suit, probably to signify a change from the terrorist to a politician," but "a tiger cannot change his stripes," commenting on LTTE leader's statement that the time was not ripe to give up the demand for a separate state.

The state-owned Daily News, however, wrote, "Some critics of the peace process are certain to have seen red on hearing the Tiger leader reiterating the principal demands of the LTTE for the working out of an acceptable solution: the granting of a Tamil homeland and the recognition of Tamil nationhood and Tamil rights," adding "Their demands are anathema to some ears but a solution is unlikely to emerge if they go unrecognized."

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe saw "a window of opportunity" in Mr Pirapaharan's comments. He drew comfort from the fact that for the first time the LTTE had said that its demand for giving the Tamils the right to self-determination need not be seen as the penultimate step to a separate Eelam.

Citing the definition given by Anton Mr Balasingham at the LTTE leader's press conference on the concept of right to self-determination, Mr Wickremasinghe said that the LTTE had for the first time defined what they meant by this concept. "They mentioned about internal self determination. They further said external self determination should only be considered only if the internal self determination was unsuccessful. Their statement about "internal self-determination, that is an acceptable alternative to a separate state" holds the key to a political solution. I think that was the most important aspect of the media conference and it shows that they are willing to work within the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka if we can come up with that solution," the PM said.

To the PM, "This is a big metamorphosis compared with the time of the LTTE's inception. They said North and East is their

homeland. They chased away the Muslims saying the North-East belongs to them. But now, the LTTE leader accepted that the North-East belongs to the Muslims too."

"We will start negotiations in June. At present, we are implementing the Ceasefire Agreement. Although there are certain violations reported, we are not shooting at each other. We are complaining to the Norwegian monitors. There is a problem regarding passenger transport on A9 road. We are prepared to issue permits even to those operating buses in the Vanni. We are prepared to issue permits to run buses from Colombo to Jaffna and not from Colombo to Oman-thai or Muhamalai. Although A9 road has been opened it will take another four weeks or so to clear the immediate surroundings of the road of land mines. We hope to start the bus services in a month's time. The road ahead is not easy. Though it is difficult, there won't be death and destruction of property. We will travel on this road, we will carry world opinion with us. That is our strength," the PM said.

On the issue of the lifting of the ban on the LTTE as a precondition for its participation in peace talks with the government, Mr Wickremasinghe said he would not allow the ban to get in the way of the talks and the government would be "looking at its options" adding that "The government would now favourably consider the LTTE's demand for its de-proscription in Sri Lanka."

Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister Vidar Helgesen, who is playing leading role in the peace process said in Oslo, "I think it's a very good sign of establishing a normal process. I think his phrasing of the separate state issue was pretty balanced."

Analysts say that the LTTE leader's statement: "The right conditions have not arisen for the Tigers to abandon the policy of independent statehood. The struggle for political independence is the demand of Tamil people," would have dampened the enthusiasm of those government negotiators who had believed that the Mr Pirapaharan was edging towards relinquishing his demand for full independence in return for some form of autonomy.

Some commentators in the island seem to think that the LTTE leader's statement points to a willingness on his part to give up the demand for a separate state. "It was a very mixed bag, enough to raise hopes and fears at the same time," said Rohan Edirisinghe, a constitutional analyst at the University of Colombo. As for Jehan Perera, media director of the National Peace Council, Mr Pirapaharan's goal of a separate state is now largely a negotiating position to be yielded in return for concessions at talks. "It's a question of when, not if, he gives up Eelam. But how can he do that before talks have begun and when he has nothing in return?"

According to Jehan Perera, in many ways, Mr Pirapaharan's responses to ques-

tions from journalists were a repeat of what the Tamil Tigers have been saying in the past with one exception - the leader himself was saying it. He said that the Tiger leader's comments showed a lot of confidence in the peace process. "He demonstrated a liberal attitude and concretised the proposals for proper autonomy. He also did not renounce the armed struggle or the goal of a separate state of Eelam, saying that it was too early to review the strategy at this stage of the peace process. I think that was the right answer," Perera noted.

"What we cannot assume right-away is that they have renounced secession. What they are saying is that we might renounce it at the point at which we think there is an acceptable solution," said P. Saravanamuttu of the Centre for Policy Alternatives. But, he said, it was crucial to pick up the gauntlet. "Whether it is bona fide or mala fide, they are willing to consider alternatives at this time, and the challenge is to yoke them into the process," he said.

However a foreign diplomat based in Colombo said, "They are being very shrewd. They are saying they are willing to consider alternatives but at the same time giving themselves enough space to wriggle out of it."

At this crucial moment when the LTTE has signed a ceasefire agreement with the Government it is necessary to lift the proscription imposed on them in order to commence early peace talks which are immensely needed to end Northern conflict, NSSP leader Dr. Wickramabahu Karunaratna told the press. He said: "It is very pleasing to note that the LTTE which once went on the rampage has stopped all forms of guerilla activities against the troops in the Northern areas and ordinary civilians and come to the negotiating table." "This clearly indicates their willingness to pursue peace and bring an everlasting solution to this war. So there is no obstacle preventing the Government from lifting the proscription at this juncture," Dr. Karunaratna said.

Referring to the LTTE's concept of a separate state of Eelam Dr. Karunaratne said that this problem will not arise and it will be abandoned by the LTTE if the Government is prepared to meet the major demands and fulfil the obligations of the Tamil people in the North.

Asked about the extradition of Prabhakaran to India following the recent request made by India's main Opposition party led by Sonia Gandhi and also the comments made by Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayalalitha, Dr. Karunaratne said that both countries must mutually come to a settlement as it is a matter concerning law and order as well as politics. "As we know the law is completely different from politics", Dr. Karunaratne added.

#### In India

By and large, the comments at the LTTE leader's press conference appear to have pro-

voked renewed hostile reactions in India and rekindling the issue of the LTTE's involvement in the late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's assassination by a woman suicide bomber in September 1991.

The call by the LTTE leader for lifting the ban on his organisation and for a rapprochement with India describing Gandhi's assassination as a "tragic incident" that happened ten years ago that should better be forgotten would appear to have produced just the opposite reaction. Comments made by Mr Pirapaharan and Mr Anton Bala-singham in an effort at rapprochement with India would appear to fallen in deaf years. Only some small parties in Tamil Nadu, well known for their support of the LTTE, reacted with some sympathy.

On 10 April, even before the conference took place, India's main opposition Congress party came down hard on the LTTE chief and his organisation saying, "It's a designated terrorist organisation and banned in India, while Prabhakaran is a proclaimed offender responsible for the assassination of the former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi." "The objective of the press conference by Prabhakaran is an attempt by him to legitimise his political status in world public opinion...and to get out of his organisation being labelled a terrorist organisation," in a statement to the press. It said Mr Pirapaharan's attempt could not "obfuscate the fact" that the LTTE "is a violent terrorist organisation and Mr Pirapaharan, the architect of its violent policies".

New Delhi officially said its request for the extradition of Velupillai Mr Pirapaharan still stood valid. "It is a proscribed organisation, it is a terrorist organisation and I am not aware of any reconsideration of that issue" foreign ministry spokeswoman Nirupama Rao told reporters on 12 April, adding that, "The request for extradition was made about seven years ago in 1995 and that remains and it is still valid." She said a fresh request would depend on "further examination of the issue".

Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee promptly ruled out any role by India in the proposed talks in Thailand between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE, and said that a ban on the Tigers in India would remain. "We are not going to be part of any negotiations or interfere in any talks between the Sri Lanka government and the LTTE," Vajpayee said in his first reaction to Mr Pirapaharan's plea that India play a role in the peace process. However, Vajpayee said that the government would "sympathetically" consider the request to give medical assistance to the ailing Tigers spokesman, Anton Mr Balasingham, in India.

Asked about Pirapaharan's proposal for Indian participation in the peace process, Vajpayee said, "In front of us, there is only one proposal and that is for providing medical treatment to Mr Balasingham in the country."

J N Dixit, who was India's High Commissioner in Sri Lanka when the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement was signed in August 1987 and when India became deeply embroiled in Sri Lanka with the deployment of Indian troops in the island, however, insisted that India could not stay out of any solution to the Tamil problem in neighbouring Sri Lanka. "The durability and sustainability of any peace process will depend on India's support," he said.

Meanwhile, the senior Congress leader, Arjun Singh, spoke against any "soft corner or concession" for the Tamil Tiger leader. In a written statement, Mr. Singh, member of the Congress Working Committee, called Mr Pirapaharan's statement during his press conference about Rajiv Gandhi's assassination 10 years ago as a 'tragic incident' as "offensive to the sensibilities of all Indians."

Describing Mr Pirapaharan as "the sole architect of this tragic incident", Mr. Singh said "we can never forget this," and called upon the Government of India "to take all legal steps necessary to bring Mr Pirapaharan to justice in this case," Mr Singh said that "Rajivji lives in the hearts and minds of millions and millions of Indians, who looked forward to his leading a resurgent India in the 21st century... Our dreams and hopes were cut short by the diabolical planning and brutal act of assassination. We cannot tolerate anybody making light of this unfortunate event."

Congress president Sonia Gandhi on 13 April referred to the fact that the LTTE chief, Mr Pirapaharan was the main accused in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case said. "According to the law of the land Prabhakaran stands accused in the plot to assassinate Rajiv Gandhi for which his extradition was sought by the government," a visibly emotional Gandhi told a press conference in Guwahati. Referring to the LTTE request for lifting the ban on the outfit, the Congress president said her party was for Prabhakaran to face trial in the country as he stood accused in the assassination case. Addressing journalists on 12 April in Madurai, Congress leader and former Union minister Vazhapadi K Ramamurthi said he said the Government of India should act swiftly and urge Lankan authorities to extradite and hand over Mr Pirapaharan and Pottu Amman, two of the prime accused in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case. Vazhapadi criticised the Lankan Government for permitting LTTE, a banned outfit, to convene an international press conference. If the neighbouring country fails in ensuring the trial of the LTTE leader in India, it may have to face consequences in the international fora. Vazhapadi said CBI chief Sharma had visited Sri Lanka two months ago meet his Lankan counterpart in Colombo and requested the Government to arrest the Tiger leader on whom the Interpol had issued a 'red card'.

N Varadharajan, State Secretary of the

Communist Party of India (Marxist), said India should not become a shelter to the LTTE. Addressing journalists on 12 April, Varadharajan said armed struggle would in no way solve the ethnic issue of Sri Lankan Tamils and added that a lasting and peaceful solution to the issue could be evolved only through peaceful dialogue. More powers for autonomy should be given to the areas where the Tamils live in large numbers. If any endeavour is made to find a solution through dialogue we would welcome the same, he said. However, neither India nor Tamil Nadu should be allowed to become a haven for harbouring of LTTE cadres given the bitter experiences in the past, he said.

"The Hindu" in its editorial on 12 April said, "The manner in which Mr. Prabhakaran fielded questions on his complicity in the assassination of India's former Prime Minister and political leader, Rajiv Gandhi, testifies to the LTTE leader's total lack of remorse for the ghastly act. His unrepentant attitude is compounded by a complete absence of any denial of the LTTE's involvement in what he dismissively characterises as a 'tragic' incident. It is high time that New Delhi took steps to seek Mr. Prabhakaran's extradition."

The chief minister of Tamil Nadu, Jayaraman Jayalalitha, has refused permission to Mr Balasingham to use Tamil Nadu as a base for peace talks. "We will not allow any member of the LTTE to set foot in Tamil Nadu

for whatever reason," Jayalalitha said. While welcoming the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee's statement that the Centre would not get involved in the peace talks between the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE, the Chief Minister expressed her opposition to the Centre "sympathetically considering" the LTTE request for treatment of Mr Balasingham in India. "We are firmly opposed to this." At the same time, she said she was hopeful that the Centre would not do anything to pressure Tamil Nadu on this issue now that the State Government had expressed its objection. But, if despite the State's objection, the Centre allowed Mr Balasingham into India, the AIADMK Government would not let him enter Tamil Nadu, she said.

Jayalalitha said that the AIADMK was firm that Mr Pirapaharan should be extradited to India for Gandhi's assassination, and that the Sri Lankan government should allow India's armed forces to carry out his arrest. Saying that Prabhakaran was declared a proclaimed offender by a designated court which conducted the trial, she said that the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly would pass a resolution on 19 April demanding extradition of Mr Pirapaharan to India for facing trial in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case in which the LTTE leader was cited as the prime accused.

Reacting to LTTE leader Mr Pirapaharan's request, the MDMK leader Vaiko

Gopalaswamy, well known as a staunch supporter of the Tamil Tigers, urged the central government to revoke the ban on the LTTE, adding that India, which had ethnic and cultural links also, had a strategic interest in Sri Lanka and therefore should play its role in the peace talks. On the request by Anton Mr Balasingham that he be given a transit through India to enable him to shuttle between Thailand and Sri Lanka during the peace talks, Vaiko said transit and medical help should be granted on humanitarian grounds as Mr Balasingham had recently undergone a kidney transplant.

Leader of the Tamils National Movement and another ardent supporter of LTTE, P Nedumaran, asked the Centre to accept the 'hand of friendship' extended by the LTTE and help in finding a smooth solution to the ethnic strife in Sri Lanka. "We all should forget the bitter past and as a first step allow Anton Mr Balasingham to take medical treatment in our country," he told reporters in Chennai.

"When the entire world has welcomed the Norwegian-brokered peace process, why should a section of the Indians oppose it" he asked. Condemning the Congress for its views on the LTTE, he alleged that Congress did not want peace to return to Sri Lanka and described its demand to extradite Mr Pirapaharan as "impracticable and unworkable".



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# LTTE Media Conference - An Assessment

Jehan Perera

**L**TTTE leader Velupillai Pirapaka-ran's media conference was an unprecedented event with nearly 300 local and foreign journalists making the tortuous journey to his heavily guarded headquarters in the Wannu. For Sri Lanka this was an unprecedented media event, indicating the impact of the LTTE on the country, and the mystery surrounding its leader, which enticed even the world media. The media conference received mixed reviews from its viewers, which would have included virtually the entirety of the Sri Lankan population with access to television. But one thing is certain. The demon-like and superhuman images of the once elusive Tiger leader disappeared in the glare of the television lights. Mr. Pirapakaran came across as extremely human and perhaps even ordinary. Especially at the initial stages of the media conference he appeared uneasy and perhaps even trapped as he faced a hostile and critical barrage of questions from foreign and mostly Indian journalists. The human side of Mr. Pirapakaran may be reassuring to those who believed him capable of superhuman feats and therefore felt threatened to the point of irrationality by him.

## LTTE and JVP

The battle for hearts and minds through the television screen is entirely different from the battle for military victory, which Mr. Pirapakaran has specialized in and in which he has an undoubted genius. The art of persuasion in which politicians excel is entirely different from that of imposing by force, which is what the LTTE has excelled in up to now. Perhaps Mr. Pirapakaran will learn to perform more sophisticatedly at future media conferences as a politician might have done. But for this time it suffices that he came across as speaking without bluff or bluster, addressing the point of the question for the most part and saying why he would not elaborate on other questions. The LTTE leader's lack of political sophistication was evident in some of his answers. For instance when asked to comment on the JVP, he gave it short shrift, dismissing it as a chauvinistic party with

little public support. It is not correct that the JVP has little public support. Further, its chauvinism is a mirror of the LTTE's own. Both the JVP and LTTE dismiss ethnic pluralism within the territorial entities that they consider as being theirs. The main difference is this: the JVP, being Sinhalese-based, considers the entire island to be the appropriate entity; whereas the LTTE, being Tamil-based, considers the north-east to be the appropriate entity. When shorn of their rhetoric, both these parties claim that the ethnic majority should rule within the entity they consider to be their homeland.

Those who expected the media conference to herald a startling breakthrough to peace were disappointed. The LTTE leader neither withdrew from his aspiration for an independent state of Tamil Eelam nor did he guarantee that his guns would be spiked forever. On the other hand, there was also relief that Mr. Pirapakaran did not strike an intransigent posture that could have undermined the ongoing peace process. While sticking to his old positions, he seemed to wish to communicate a determination to stick to the peace process as well. This may account for his repeated assertions that he had faith and confidence in the sincerity of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe.

## Thimpu Principles

The LTTE leader also made an important concession when he said that a solution based on the Thimpu principles could be an alternative to Tamil Eelam indicating that the Thimpu principles fell short of separation. This point was strengthened when the issue of internal self-determination was brought up by the LTTE speakers at the conference. Indeed, there was nothing contradictory in Mr. Pirapakaran asserting that his goal still remained Tamil Eelam and also saying that he believed in the sincerity of the Prime Minister to find a political solution that would be an acceptable alternative. At the peace talks in Thimpu in 1985, all Tamil parties present, including the LTTE, took the position that the Tamil people were a nationality and entitled to the right of self-determination

within their traditional homeland.

One question that has troubled the government is whether the right of self-determination includes the option to secede. In the media conference Mr. Pirapakaran speaking through his theoretician Dr Anton Balasingham clarified for the first time that internal self-determination could be acceptable, thereby pointing out that the right of self-determination could be exercised by the Tamil people internally in Sri Lanka and without having to secede. It is clear therefore that the Thimpu principles hold the key to the longer-term political solution that will have to be worked out by the government and LTTE.

There is a need to de-mystify the contentious terms of nationality, self-determination and homelands. Other countries have dealt with these issues in a satisfactory manner that has led to a large amount of social peace within them. South Africa is an example of a country that had to deal with the issue of self-determination in its constitution. Spain is an example of a country that had to deal with the term nationality in its constitution. Canada is a country that has been dealing with the issue of a distinct society within the larger Canadian society and the land claims of its indigenous population.

Civil society organizations may need to take the lead in discussing the issues pertaining to the Thimpu principles and creating a greater awareness of them in society. At present there is strong support and near unanimity among the general population for ending the war. However, there will not be that same unanimity about the type of political solution that can bring about a permanent solution to the ethnic conflict. Much educational work has to be done in that area for which civil society organizations are better equipped than the government, which has political considerations to bear in mind of not running too far ahead of the people.

## International Image

Whatever may be the LTTE's motivation for calling the media conference at this time, it clearly did not result in a decisive outcome one way or the other. As in all political encounters, it was but one step in an ongoing process that needs to be encouraged. Perhaps one motivation for the holding of the media conference was the LTTE's desire to use the euphoria of the present peace process to create a better image of itself internationally.

In recent years the LTTE has seen its

international image hit rock bottom in a manner that cannot befit any organization that seeks to represent an entire people. The beginning of the LTTE's international decline was undoubtedly its assassination of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi under the most treacherous circumstances when he was garlanded by a woman suicide bomber during an election rally.

Elections are the most sacred arena of a democracy's life and those who violate that sanctity can never be respected in the modern world. Having rejected electoral politics, the LTTE cannot understand that the electoral process cannot be trifled with, if international respect is sought after. The beginning stage of the Norwegian-mediated peace process might have seemed to be the ideal opportunity for the LTTE to present itself in a new light. Better now than later might have been the LTTE's calculation, considering the uncertainties of the peace process as time goes on. However, after the media conference the LTTE would have a more realistic assessment of this prospect.

#### Indian hostility

Without public repentance, a new leadership or vindication by standing for elections, the LTTE has an uphill task to convince a skeptical international community about its bona fides. At the media confer-

ence it was evident that the most unforgiving component of the international media was the large contingent of Indian journalists. The assassination of their former Prime Minister loomed very large in their sharp and hostile questioning. They kept on pressing the LTTE leader on this matter to which his response was the only one that is possible at this time - to put the past behind and look to the future, while recognising the irreversible tragedy of the past.

Many who oppose what the LTTE stands for would have taken satisfaction in the hostility of the Indian journalists to the man whom they believe murdered a great son of their land, a Prime Minister who was the son and grandson of two Prime Ministers. His was a precious life in a sea of tens of thousands of lives that have been lost due to the ethnic conflict. But an intransigent Indian attitude towards Mr. Pirapakaran will pose a major roadblock to the peace process in Sri Lanka, which almost all Sri Lankans with a few miserable exceptions yearn for. The LTTE will be loath to join the mainstream of a non-militarised Sri Lankan society if they feel that their leader will be nabbed by India as a result.

For peace in Sri Lanka, and perhaps anywhere else in the world, the past has to

be buried and the future must be looked towards. Sri Lankans, Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims, have to bury the past regarding each other's atrocities against each other. Sri Lankans also have to bury the past with regard to their great neighbour India, which once trained and armed Tamil militants including the LTTE to attack the Sri Lankan government. As a good neighbour, which it is to Sri Lanka at this time, and for the sake of peace in Sri Lanka, India needs to find a way to let go of the past that it once aided and abetted in an underhand way to create.

The announcement by Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee shortly after the LTTE leader's media conference that India will consider permitting Dr Anton Balasingham to make use of Indian territory for his health needs is positive in this context. It is a humanitarian gesture that may include a desire to assist in the success of the Sri Lankan peace process. On the other hand, some of the Indian opposition parties, including the Congress Party that Rajiv Gandhi once led, have called for Mr. Pirapakaran's extradition to face murder charges. These sentiments are understandable, but they will not help Sri Lanka's peace process and therefore should not be rejoiced in. ●

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### ● Too Committed to Give Up?

If any one knows the mind of the LTTE leader, V Pirapaharan, it has to be Anita Pratap, the internationally reputed journalist and author of "The Island of Blood" released last year, who is credited with interviewing the LTTE leader more than twelve times.

LTTE leader Pirapaharan is a man who has the ability to convert adversities into opportunities. Can he be trusted to keep walking without laying traps for his opponents? He is always a guerrilla mastermind who makes tactical moves all the time, writes Anita Pratap. In her latest column Pratap says that Prabhakaran is too committed to Eelam to give it up permanently. She says, "You trust him at your peril. So, if I were Sinhalese, I would trust Prabhakaran simply because I must. It is a historic necessity and an opportunity. But, I would never let my guard down." She says that she would not automatically assume that he has given up Eelam or that he has even renounced his war effort and as long as there is breath in him he would be prepared to face any eventuality, the only eventuality, resumption of war. Pratap adds that if that happens Pirapaharan would be in a stronger position to resume war and that he would be better, not worse off for it. In her article she describe Prabhakaran as a person who never let his guard down.

### ● A Constitutional Coup?

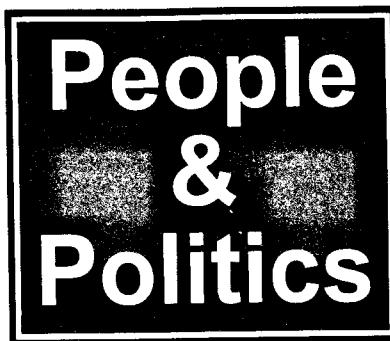
The governing United National Front under Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe appears to be moving fast in the direction of introducing a constitutional amendment in Parliament in May this year to allow members of parliament to cross-over from the opposition to the government side or vice versa and to vote in contravention of the decision of the parties to which they belonged without having to face the prospect of losing their parliamentary seats.

Under the current constitution members of parliament are liable to automatically lose their seats if they acted contrary to the decision of their party or joined another party.

The government's legislative move comes in the context of reports that as many as 20 parliamentarians belonging to the opposition Peoples Alliance, whose leader is President Chandrika Kumaratunga, might cross over to the governing party. Not only this move is aimed at bolstering up the narrow majority the governing party has in parliament, but also it is aimed at clipping the powers of the President which she constitutionally enjoys. The government is likely pursue this course of action if a sufficient number of parliamentarians from the opposition cross over resulting in the governing party able to command a two-thirds majority in parliament needed to enact the necessary constitutional amendments.

### ● Renewing an Oil Interest

Fifteen years after the signing of the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord, India seems to be projecting an interest in one of the more controversial provisions of the treaty that gives it first preference in the running of an oil storage facility in the eastern district of



Trincomalee.

The Indian High Commissioner, Gopalkrishna Gandhi, and Counsellor (Commerical Affairs), V. Ashok, visited the oil farm on 1 April accompanied by the Indian defence adviser, M. Gopinath. The visit, the first ever by an Indian High Commissioner to Trincomalee and the oil farm since the signing of the 1987 accord, comes against the backdrop of a ceasefire between the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE, and amid moves to privatise the country's petroleum sector.

A report datelined 3 April in 'The Hindu' said that the Indian interest has also resurfaced soon after a recent nationalist celebration by the LTTE in Trincomalee, a strategic town integral to the group's demands for a Tamil homeland and regarded as the capital of the northeast.

Its future status and who gets to control it, even in the interim administration now being contemplated for the northeast, would be of immense significance to the peace process.

Over the last three months, the new Government has been sending feelers at the highest level to India to step into Trincomalee as it fast-tracks the peace process as well as the privatisation of the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation.

Under the terms of the 1987 accord, the work of restoring and developing the oil farm would be undertaken as a "joint venture" between India and Sri Lanka. The accord also recognises India's strategic interests in Trincomalee harbour.

India has never shown a serious intent yet in developing the oil farm, but to keep alive its strategic interest in the region, has periodically asserted its right over it, most recently in 1996 when the Sri Lankan Government approached a Singapore firm for its restoration.

### ● Objection to Pass System

The Ceasefire Agreement provides for freedom of movement for all civilians. However, residents of the Vanni complain that they still have to obtain permits from the LTTE to enter or exit the areas under its control although the government has abandoned the system.

Residents say the system is continuing to be used by the LTTE and that they have to pay a sum of Rs. 200 for each permit. They complain they have to undergo a lot of hardship as a result, but are afraid to complain to the relevant authorities to stop in

and take action. They hoped that the Norwegian headed Monitoring Mission would look into the matter with a view to getting the Pass System removed.

### ● JVP's Anger Against Norway

Denouncing the Norway of being 'colonialists', the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) has accused the Norwegian government of interfering in the internal affairs of Sri Lanka and seeking des-tabilise south Asia.

In a letter dated sent to the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Colombo, the JVP states: "The so-called Oslo 'Peace' accord your government heralded as the path to justice for the Palestinians and peace to the Middle East has collapsed within very short period with disastrous consequences. The Israel armed forces have resumed the massacre of Palestinians. We of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna do not believe that there is anybody on the face of earth who is not aware of the murderous military campaign of killing and destruction conducted by the Israeli Armed forces, specially during these last few days.

"While the people of Palestine are facing this cruel onslaught of Israel, it is surprising to observe the silence of the Government of Norway who was the main outside player in creating the Oslo 'Peace' accord. Norway, who is proven failure in Palestine, who maintains a peculiar silence in the face of these killings and does not capable of bringing peace to any other country. We stress that Norway has no moral right to interfere in such activities elsewhere.

"While the facts remain so, the government of Norway has interfered in an internal problem of Sri Lanka. From a position of facilitator of the 'peace process', Norway has now become a direct mediator in it. We believe that due to this unwelcome interference, people of Sri Lanka of all ethnicities will one day have to face the same fate that has befallen the Palestinians.

"We stress that the government of Norway is intentionally carrying out a process of destabilizing the South Asian region, strengthening separatism and specially dragging our nation and all her inhabitants towards a disaster.

"The aim of our protest today is to urge the Government of Norway who has disgracefully failed in the Middle East, to stop interfering in internal problems of Sri Lanka and also, to urge you to condemn the Sharon government who is directing the slaughter of the Palestine population and the destruction of Palestine. Colonialists, Get Out of Sri Lanka!"

### ● UN Convention on Financing Terrorism

A new and potentially more powerful anti-terrorism measure, the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism, came into force on 10 April after being ratified by more than the required 22 countries.

The convention is aimed at impeding the flow of cash to terrorists by coordinated global action. Countries have to bring their national laws into agreement with the Conven-

tion's provisions and are expected to develop and implement mechanisms to meet the standards it sets out.

For example, they must take measures that would allow "legal entities" to be held liable for actions taken by a person responsible for the management or control of that entity. They must also ensure that criminal acts covered by the Convention will not be considered justifiable for any political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic or religious considerations.

The Convention obliges State Parties to prosecute offenders or extradite them to parties that suffered from their illegal acts and assist other states in investigations and preventive efforts.

The Convention was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in New York on December 9, 1999, and was opened for signature on January 10, 2000. As many as 132 countries have signed the Convention and 26 have completed the ratification process which makes them parties to it.

#### ● VHP Casts shadow on Sri Lanka

What is India's extremist rightwing ultra Hindu Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) with its global arm, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) up to in Sri Lanka, is the question that many are asking.

Reports from Colombo quoted the India Abroad News Service as talking to a senior VHP preacher in Colombo who said he was working among the island Hindu Tamils, including areas under the control of the Tamil Tigers. He said there are already dozens of VHP-linked units working across the country.

It is said that the VHP is to mobilise Hindus Tamils against the country's powerful Christian church.

"Hindus in Sri Lanka are disintegrated. We are trying to bring them together," VHP

official Swami Vigyananand was quoted as telling the press after a month-long tour that took him for the first time to areas in the north controlled by the LTTE.

Vigyananand, 38, dressed in giveaway saffron robes like a wandering monk, attended the April 10 press conference of LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran as an accredited representative of a VHP publication. Although he has been to Sri Lanka 10 times since 1999, this was the first time he went to LTTE-held areas in the north of the island.

Vigyananand has been a few times to Batticaloa, Trincomalee and Amparai in the country's east and managed to interact with what he believed were LTTE members, he was quoted as saying. In Trincomalee, the VHP had started a Sunday school that teaches religion and the Hindu way of life.

The VHP, he said, was also active among Indian plantation Tamils who are mostly employed in the tea estates of central Sri Lanka. The group was also interested in helping Hindus to retain control of an ancient Hindu shrine at Kataragama in southern Sri Lanka, which he said had come "90 percent" under Sinhalese-Buddhist influence.

But otherwise Vigyananand, who knows only Hindi and English, seemed to have no objection to Buddhism and sought to emphasise that Buddhism was also facing threats from the clergy. "I advised Buddhist monks to go to villages to spread their religion and to counter Christianity like we have done in India," he said. "As a religion nobody is suppressing Hinduism in Sri Lanka. But with the exodus of Tamils, Christian influence growing, Hindus here face problems," he says.

He also accused the Christian clergy of playing a major role in fuelling the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka and blamed it for caus-

ing a military showdown between the Tigers and India in 1987-90. "The more the conflict rages, the more will be the hardship and poverty among Tamils. And the Christian clergy will try to convert Hindu Tamils."

Vigyananand was greatly impressed by the de facto Tamil state the LTTE runs in the north. "They have put up a parallel administration with their own penal code, judiciary, banks, police and orphanages," he said. "It is a full-fledged state. We have a lot to learn from them."

#### ● Global peace award

The San Francisco-based Global Security Institute is presenting its inaugural Alan Cranston Peace Award to UN Under-Secretary-General Jayantha Dhanapala, who heads the world body's disarmament Affairs department. The award honours "visionary leaders who share the late Senator Alan Cranston's conviction that nuclear weapons are unworthy of civilisation". The award is also meant for those who, through their efforts, demonstrate exemplary service in eliminating weapons of terror. The institute says that Mr. Dhanapala, who for 30 years has been steadfast in his dedication to global peace and security, "has made countless contributions in strengthening the international arms control, nonproliferation and disarmament regime". The award was presented at a ceremony on April 16 at the United Nations.

#### ● Change of Name

Reports quote a broadcast from the Voice of Tigers radio say that the Tamil Tigers changed the name of their organisation to the Liberation Tigers of Tamileelam from the current name, Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. It is learnt that the change has been made to conform with the grammatical use of the Tamil language.

### A VOICE FROM THE EAST

*Here in the East there is a feeling of fear all around me*

*People bowing to things because of fear;*

*People doing things saying things because of fear*

*Losing their ability to decide,*

*No longer do they chose to act*

*They act out of fear.....*

*Voicing protest in the safety of their homes*

*That too in muted tones*

*Lest someone hears.*

*Their fear transforming to be my fear?*

*Those who were with me falling in line*

*I fear*

*Being left alone, isolated,*

*The wave so powerful*

*That I can't seem to stop any from joining in.*

*I have no influence, no power*

*In this overwhelming wave*

*I am trying hard to be me*

*Trying not to bow to what most say*

*Is Inevitable.....*

*I cry out for support*

*Struggling alone,*

*To come to terms with my feelings*

*Acquiescing, adjusting, justifying,*

*Now this is our reality; so do the best in it.*

*Travel along this road and soon.....*

*Their thoughts will be my thoughts*

*No independent thought*

*Living to survive the day.*

*Pongu Tamils an uprising!*

*Seeing all those people*

*Can I ask each of them "what brought you here?"*

*Being part of such a massive crowd*

*Does it make you feel the futility of struggling*

*Against the tide you have stepped into?*

*Think again;*

*I know it is easier to merge with them.*

*They speak my language, they are part of my culture*

*Not an alien culture hostile to me*

*And so I am ready to celebrate,*

*I am one of them.*

*I even forget what I need to stand up for.*

*I looked around for at least one face, one person*

*That may cry "foul!"*

*Nobody did, nobody dared.*

*A mass of humanity without a heart*

*Poetry without the poet*

*Story without its author.*

**- By Anonymous**

# Pongu Thamizh: Cultural and Political Antecedents

Rajan Philips

The phrase *Pongu Thamizh*, while not a new addition to the Tamil political lexicon, has been receiving considerable prominence in the current debate over the ceasefire agreement. Translated as 'Tamil upsurge' or 'Tamil awakening', the recurring *Pongu Thamizh* rallies in the Northern and Eastern Provinces have been described as a new mode of political mobilization of the Sri Lankan Tamils. Commentaries and interpretations have varied from fascination to condemnation, depending, of course, on the eye of the beholder. Seymour Martin Lipset, the political sociologist, once commented that a high degree of involvement and participation in elections is a sign of political instability, a sign of disagreement over current and/or fundamental political issues. One might extend this to include political mobilization, protests, and rallies. 'Official' and organized political rallies have long been obsessive rituals in South Asian and Sri Lankan politics. Rallies have a life of their own, and political organizations invest a great deal of resources in ensuring their success. In years past, the lengths of May Day processions in Colombo were used as indicators of the strengths of political parties. Even in Jaffna town, in the 1980s, when there were more militant groups than working class organizations, May Day processions and rallies were staged by the different militant groups with the competitive edge of an inter-school sports meet. But the fun disappeared when guns got in the way.

The *Pongu Thamizh* (PT) rallies, on the other hand, are emerging when the guns are purportedly on the way out. Opinions differ, however, as to whether these rallies are in keeping with the spirit of the current Ceasefire Agreement, or a violation of it. Nonetheless, despite a handful of contrarians and relatively minor hiccups so far, the ceasefire is holding steady. As well, 'surging' political rallies are a small

price to pay to keep Sri Lanka from the deep hole that the state of Israel has fallen into, dragged down by the moronic militarism of its Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon.

That said, even those who support the peace process were concerned about the potential backlash that the PT rallies in the NE Provinces might cause among the Sinhalese in the South and the consequences for the peace process. The worriers were naturally reminded of the collapse of the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact of 1957, which was partly precipitated by the then Transport Minister's unilateral decision to send to Jaffna buses bearing Sinhala Sri license plate numbers, the Tamil protest against these buses in the North and the backlash in the South. A beleaguered Bandaranaike declared that "the pact stands abrogated". Over the next few years, the Sri issue disappeared without a trace, but the damage was done. Forty five years later the Sinhalese appear to have gained political maturity in ignoring the calls for counter rallies in the South to *pongu Thamizh* in the North, the East and even in Nuwara Eliya. The question has been raised whether the Tamils are showing new signs of immaturity and intolerance.

A favourable view of the PT rallies is that they are not provocations against the Sinhalese but occasions for the Tamils of the NE Provinces to release their pent up frustrations and energies after 25 years of political dormancy, 25 years since the last time decent elections were held in the NE Provinces. The rallies are also seen as transformative steps for the LTTE as it adjusts to the new requirements of an open political life from the old imperatives of a military cloister. For those who oppose the

peace process and demonise the LTTE as being democratically irredeemable, the *pongu Thamizh* rallies represent separatist triumphalism and LTTE's fascism, even comparable to Hitler's Nazism.

Without being overly judgemental, it is possible to see the PT rallies and slogans about self-determination and Eelam as statements about everything traumatic that the people in the NE Provinces have gone through in the last twenty years and about the huge uncertainties that still hang in front of them. The Tamil people are not an army of fascists in brown or black uniform, backed up by an industrial-military complex at home and colonial markets abroad, and mobilized to conquer the world in the name of a superior race. That was Hitler's Germany, the centre of the Axis, flanked by Italy and Japan. The comparison to Hitler and Nazism is unfair and insensitive, even as it is anachronistic, betraying deliberate or real ignorance. If sociological comparisons are needed, one might turn to cultural and political antecedents across the Palk-Straits and not across the oceans. Comparisons closer home will also show how a 'separatist' movement that surfaced among the Tamils in South India was successfully internalized within the still surviving Indian federation.

## Symbolic and Poetic Roots

What does *pongu Thamizh* culturally and politically signify? '*Pongu*' in Tamil has several meanings - to rise or surge like rice or milk while cooking, like floods, rivers and the rough seas, or like fermenting toddy. *Thai pongal* is an auspicious harvest festival. *Pal ponguthal*, or the rising of milk while boiling, is auspicious, while the rising of fermenting toddy is inauspicious. "*Poorana kudathu neer naravil pongumal*" (the water in the auspicious fulsome pot will rise like toddy to warn of impending danger) is a line from Kampan, the early medieval Tamil poet and considered to be the king of Tamil poetry, where the term *pongumal* is used to describe the auspicious pot (*nirai kudam*) turning into an inauspicious omen.

The best known and politically evocative use of the term *pongu* appears in the mid-twentieth century South Indian Tamil poet Bharati Dasan's roaring poem, written in the heyday of Tamil cultural nationalism in Tamil Nadu. It is a poem of four powerful stanzas and the late V.R. Nedunchezian, DMK's (Dravida Munnetra Kazhaham) and ADMK's (Anna DMK)

long time General Secretary, Finance Minister and the greatest literary orator ever in Tamil politics, was known to conclude his speeches with a stirring rendition of the entire poem to leave a long effect on his audiences.

The term *pongu* is in the third stanza of the poem, as *pongu Thamizhar*, which can be translated as 'surging' or 'aroused' Tamils. Interestingly, the poem refers to Sri Lankan Tamils as the brave 'southern kin' in the land of the Sinhalese. In an earlier and better known poem celebrating South Asian Regionalism, poet Bharati, the first Tamil poet of note in the modern period and Bharati Dasan's mentor and predecessor, had alluded to a cultural bridge from South India to the 'Sinhalese isle'. Classicists will recall Milton's description of Ceylon (then Taprobane) as 'India's utmost isle'.

The *pongu* poem is full of sound and fury, with images of battlefields and enemies borrowed from the 'heroic genre' of Tamil classical poetry. The poem mirrors the cultural and political context in which it was written, especially the mid-20th century euphoria created by the print-popularization of ancient Tamil classical texts (the so called *sangam* literature) that had been 'rediscovered' during the seventy five years between 1850 and 1925. In particular, the few *sangam* poems of the pre and early Christian period that depicted 'war' and violence (mostly involving tribal fights among kindred Tamil groups over cattle raids and grain robbery) became convenient motifs for populist political rhetoric among 20th century Tamils infected by modern nationalism. The *pongu* poem is a good or bad example of this genre. The poet's purpose was to employ images of war, heroism and enemies to rally sup-

port for Tamil cultural nationalism. The enemies were not external or outsiders, but South Indian Tamil Brahmins, the Tamil upper classes who detested DMK's populism, and the Congress Party whom the Brahmins and the majority of the Tamils then supported. But neither the poet nor the DMK ever intended or committed violence against anybody. There have been, of course, violent clashes between South Indian political party supporters as everywhere else in South Asia, but they have more to do with alcohol and thuggery than the DMK's cultural nationalist rhetoric.

### Allegorical Assessment

I have taken the liberty, I believe justifiably, of using *pongu Thamizhar* as an allegory to describe a strand of South Indian Tamil nationalism that was anticipated by the formation of the Justice Party in 1916, asserted itself in 1944 with the transformation of the Justice Party into the mass based Dravida Kazhaham (Dravidian Organization), and became the dominant strand when a powerful section of the Dravida Kazhaham (DK) broke away to form the Dravida Munnetra Kazhaham (DMK, Dravidian Progressive Organization) in 1949. From thereon it was an upward climb for the DMK, as the only significant regional challenge anywhere in India to the All India Congress Party, and it achieved political power in 1967 to form the first non-Congress government in Madras State (now Tamil Nadu). All of this was achieved under the remarkable leadership of C.N. Annadurai, the foremost Tamil political and cultural leader of the 20th century, whose speeches and writings virtually revolutionised the Tamil intelligentsia and culturally en-

ergised every Tamil anywhere in the world who spoke and read Tamil. I would suggest that the *pongu Thamizhar* ascent stopped with Annadurai's death in 1969. His successors in the DMK and its splinter ADMK have barely stayed the course on the plateau to which their great 'Anna' had brought them. But the two parties have managed to alternate as governing parties in Tamil Nadu, despite their notoriety for corruption, banal excesses, family bandyism and obsessive feuds. Annadurai's alliterative motto for the movement: *kadamai, kanniyam, kattupadu* (duty, honesty and discipline), its rhetorical effervescence, literary lustre, agenda of far reaching social reforms and emancipatory populism that marked the *pongu Thamizhar* era under Annadurai are long gone.

A few commonplaces are necessary to summarize the meaning and achievements of the DMK's *pongu Thamizhar* era. The nationalist infection of the Indian subcontinent manifested itself in multiple ways. The dominant nationalist currents were the pan-Indian secular nationalism spearheaded by the Congress Party and the anti-Hindu Muslim nationalism of the Muslim League. Regionally isolated Hindu nationalist forces, although contained at the Centre by the Congress until the 1980s, always lurked beneath the surface with not infrequent outbursts in the form of anti-Muslim riots and the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. Beneath these dominant themes emerged both secular and religious regional variations, overwhelmingly based on language (or religion, as in the case of the Sikhs in Punjab) and territory but internally driven by caste and overlapping class contradictions. There are several aspects to the nationalist infection of the South Indian Tamils in the Madras Presidency. The first nationalist expression in Madras, though it came later than in Calcutta or Bombay, was the Home Rule movement, dominated by the Brahmins, that soon merged with the independence movement of the Congress Party. The formation of the Justice Party and its subsequent transformation first into the Dravida Kazhaham (DK) and later the Dravida Munnetra Kazhaham (DMK), provided a counter expression of nationalism among the Tamils.

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The Justice Party's origins were the grievances of non-Brahmin Tamil upper castes triggered by the Brahmin dominance of urban South India in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It found a convenient ideological vehicle in the Dravidian-Aryan dichotomy that was first formulated by European Tamil scholars to make a purely linguistic distinction between Tamil (Southern, Dravidian) and Sanskrit (Northern, Aryan), and to emphasize the incongruence between the Vedic (Northern) theory of the four-fold *varna* caste system and the multiple caste structure of the Tamils (this incongruence is not limited to the Tamils, but is common throughout India). The British administrators (and not European Christian Missionaries) used this dichotomy to instigate the non-Brahmin Tamil upper castes of Madras against the Brahmin Tamils. The Dravidian movement politicised this dichotomy and used the Dravidian ideology and the concomitant demand for a Dravidian state to build a mass movement on an ambitious and eclectic agenda of aggressive social reforms, anti-clerical rationalism, radical socialism, the liberation of women, and the emancipation of the *pahtali* (the common man) - a rubric for the vast, illiterate mass of Tamil society's subaltern castes and social margins.

The eminent Indian Sociologist, M. N. Srinivas, introduced the concept of Sanskritisation to describe the historical process of inter-caste mobility, a process by which lower castes in improving economic and political circumstances resort to coopting the ortho-practices of the higher castes and the Brahmins. Sanskritisation was coined to explain the assumed osmosis of the so called the Great (Sanskrit) Tradition into India's multiple Little (local) Traditions.

The essence of DMK's achievement in Tamil Nadu was its attempt to turn Sanskritization on its head. The DMK used the power of the spoken and written word and every available form of art and communication to challenge the orthodoxy and the orthopraxis of the Tamil society in every aspect of culture and social structure. - values and beliefs,

customs and rituals, art and literature, women's status, and caste-based social hierarchy.

### Democratic Culture and Indian Federalism

My argument is that *pongu Thamizh* under Annadurai's leadership effectively became the metaphor for a progressive agenda of social and cultural reforms. There were other aspects to Annadurai's leadership and the *pongu Thamizh* ethos. When the Congress legislators and state governments resigned as part of Gandhi's Quit India ultimatum to the British, the British administrators in Madras invited the Justice Party to step in and fill the void. Annadurai, then a member of the Justice Party under Periyar E.V. Ramaswamy, protested and convinced the Party and its leader that there should be no collaboration with the British colonial rulers regardless of the Party's differences with the Madras Brahmins. The anti-colonial position of Periyar and Anna-durai is remarkable in that only a short time earlier both of them had vehemently opposed Rajaji's (then Congress Chief Minister in the Madras Presidency) ill-advised move to introduce compulsory teaching of Hindi in Madras schools. Both Periyar and Anna were radical socialists at that time, but they did not follow the inexplicable (Indian) Communist Party line, under dictates from Moscow, to oppose Gandhi's Quit India call and support the British war effort. A nostalgic footnote to the South Indian history of this period is that the Lankan Sama Samajists, Bernard Soysa, S.C.C. Antonypillai, Hector Abhayavardhana, V. Karalasingham and others, who were then in exile in India, worked with Annadurai and other progressives in common anti-colonial protests in Madras.

As I have alluded to before, DMK's Tamil nationalism was the dominant strand among the nationalist currents in Madras, but it was not the only strand. The euphoria over the rediscovery of the Tamil classical texts and the literary revivalism that ensued touched all sections of the Tamil literati, and they included the Brahmins. In fact, it was the tireless

search of the veteran Brahmin Tamil scholar, Dr. U. V. Swaminatha Iyer, that brought to light the hitherto lost *ola* manuscripts of the *sangam* literature. Annadurai and the DMK never tried to suppress the different currents of Tamil nationalism. Instead, they challenged their opponents by invoking the legacy of the rediscovered Tamil classics over the established orthodoxy of the Brahmins and the conservative dominant castes. Annadurai was a genuine democrat who believed in the plurality of the political process. A great polemicist and debater, he encouraged the clash of ideas, and hugely enjoyed debating his opponents especially those belonging to religious traditions and orthodox schools. He is the only one I know who tried to foster a 'democratic culture' in Tamil politics through his writings in Tamil.

His profession of a separate Dravidian state had more to do with its attractiveness as a concept and a metaphor than any compelling material circumstances. Redeemingly, DMK's separatist ideology was not narrowly based on Tamil ethnology or blood brotherhood, but encompassed the Telugus, the Malayalees and the Kannadas. But the Dravidian state was a non-starter because the appeal for Dravidian solidarity never found any resonance among other non-Tamil Dravidian people of South India, namely the Malayalees of Kerala, the Telugus of Andhra Pradesh and the Kannadas of Karnataka. In fact, a part of the inspiration for pan-Dravidian separatism might have arisen from the geographical boundaries of the Madras Presidency under colonial rule, that included vast tracts of the present day Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. The DMK hardly developed a programme for separation either through constitutional means or armed insurrection.

The truth of the matter is that the DMK never had to develop such a programme thanks to the remarkable working of Indian federalism in southern India despite the northern location of central power. The Indian state is not unknown for brutal oppression but there



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has hardly been - with the exception of the mildly offensive but unsuccessful attempts to impose Hindi - any instance of nationalist oppression of the South Indian Tamils by Delhi. On the contrary, every cabinet of the Central government since independence has had prominent Tamils in powerful portfolios, often based on individual merit and not regional cooption. India has had quite a few Tamils and other South Indians as Presidents and Vice-Presidents, starting with the redoubtable C. Rajagopalachari (Rajaji) as independent India's first Governor General. The Indian Civil Service, Judiciary and the Armed Forces have also had a good record of openness to recruitment and promotion of South Indians, often to the highest positions in these branches of the Central government. The most important aspect of Indian federalism, however, has been its provision of space and authority for regional autonomy. In a sense, Annadurai and the DMK were able to focus almost exclusively on their cultural and social reformist agenda until they formed the State government in 1967, because of the competent economic management by successive Congress State governments in Madras.

The DMK and Annadurai were relieved of their separatist burden in 1963, with the passage of the 16<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Indian Constitution to ban secessionist political parties. The Amendment was brought in the wake of India's border dispute with China and in a rising mood of bellicose Indian nationalism.

The DMK officially dropped its separatist demand from the Party programme, but Annadurai's speech opposing the Amendment during the debate in the Rajya Sabha in Delhi, has been described by an American scholar as one of his "most professional performances". Annadurai based his opposition not on narrow chauvinism, but on the higher principles of liberal constitutionalism, challenging Nehru to leave the constitutional authority with the people - that is, leave it to the people to democratically decide whether his plea for separation was acceptable or not, and not to let a Parliamentary majority deny him his right to advocate separation. After 1963, Annadurai or the DMK did not have any cause to revisit the issue of separatism. When Annadurai became Chief Minister in 1967, he caused the name of the southern Tamilian state to be changed from Madras to Tamil Nadu - a symbolic consummation of *pongu Thamizh* that overlies the reality of Tamil national autonomy within the Indian federation. ●

## Budget 2002 Too Little Too Late

Muttukrishna Sarvananthan\*

### Introduction

The new United National Front (UNF) government of Sri Lanka, which came to power in December 2001, inherited an economy that has recorded negative growth (-1.3%) for the first-time in the post-independence period. The Sri Lankan economy today faces two fundamental problems; one is the structural and institutional weakness in the macro-economy and the other is the civil war-induced economic woe of the country.

The much-awaited first budget of the new government presented belatedly on March 22<sup>nd</sup> has failed to adequately address both of these fundamental problems in the economy. Firstly, the Budget 2002 has proposed very little structural and institutional reform of the economy, which are long overdue. Secondly, the government has not taken advantage of the ceasefire agreement with the LTTE by infusing public investment in infrastructure like roads, power, and telecommunications in the war-torn areas that could have boosted the overall economic growth.

This paper is organised as follows; Firstly, we critically look at the proposed public expenditure of the government. Secondly, we discuss the potential 'peace dividend' and impediments to realisation of the same. Thirdly, we look back at the fiscal profligacy during the closing months of the last government and make some suggestions to prevent a reoccurrence of such a predicament. Fourthly, we evaluate the fiscal measures enunciated in the budget. Fifthly, we outline some of the structural and institutional reforms that need to be undertaken in order to attain a sustainable high growth rate.

### Public Expenditure

The total public expenditure for 2002 (January 01 to December 31) is proposed to be almost LKR 346 billion, out of which LKR 220 billion is recurrent expenditure and LKR 126 billion is capital expenditure (Table 2). That is, out of the total public expenditure proposed 64% is recurrent expenditure and 36% is capital expenditure. Table 1 catalogues the Ministries (and combination thereof) that receive more than 1% of the total public expenditure in a descending order.

Accordingly, the Defence expenditure (including Defence and Interior Ministries) is once again the single largest pub-

lic expenditure consuming almost 20% of the total public expenditure. The Finance Ministry consumes the second largest with 18%. The Ministry of Home Affairs, Provincial Councils and Local Government (12%), and the Ministry of Public Administration, Management and Reforms (8%) incur third and fourth largest public expenditures respectively. The Health and Education expenditures, with around 7% of the total public expenditure each, consume fifth and sixth largest public expenditures respectively. The public expenditures on defence, health and education as proportions of total public expenditure in 2002 are greater than in 2001. In sum, 15 Ministries (and combination thereof) as catalogued in Table 1 receive 92% of the total public expenditures earmarked for 2002. These figures indicate that there is no letup in the militarisation of the economy of Sri Lanka despite an indefinite ceasefire in place. The entire ministerial allocations are provided in Table 2.

The Samurdhi poverty alleviation programme receives 4% of the total public expenditure during 2002 (Table 1), which is higher than last year in absolute amount as well as a proportion to the total public expenditure. A Welfare Benefit Law is proposed in the budget that would define eligibility and exit criteria for claimants of Samurdhi benefits and outline statutory management procedures for the Samurdhi programme.

However, it would be very difficult to legally verify a household's income or wealth, especially among marginalised income groups. If, so many people can evade income tax payments then what guarantee is there that the proposed Welfare Benefit Law would weed out ineligible claimants of Samurdhi benefits? There is no convincing proposal in the budget to reform the much-criticised Samurdhi programme.

The Ministry of Women's Affairs receives a negligible 0.04% (LKR 145 million) of the total public expenditure (Table 2), which is the same as last year. However, in absolute terms there is a drop of LKR 5 million on women's affairs this year compared to last year. This meagre budgetary allocation goes against the government's pledge in its election manifesto to improve the livelihood of women. However, the government spending on women could come out of other ministerial allocations as well.



Table 1: Selected Public Expenditure Proposed for 2002

	Recurrent + Capital Expenditure (LKR Million)	As a % of Total Public Expenditure
<b>Defence Expenditure (1)</b>	67,445.4	19.51
<b>Ministry of Finance</b>	62,219.0	18.00
<b>Ministry of Home Affairs, Provincial Councils and Local Government</b>	42,752.7	12.37
<b>Ministry of Public Administration, Management and Reforms</b>	26,390.0	7.63
<b>Ministry of Health, Nutrition and Welfare</b>	24,421.0	7.06
<b>Education Expenditure (2)</b>	22,952.3	6.63
<b>Ministry of Samurdhi</b>	15,383.0	4.45
<b>Ministry of Power and Energy</b>	10,397.0	3.01
<b>Ministry of Highways</b>	9,651.0	2.79
<b>Ministry of Housing and Plantation Infrastructure</b>	7,925.0	2.29
<b>Ministry of Transport, Highways and Aviation</b>	7,872.8	2.28
<b>Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock</b>	6,166.0	1.78
<b>Ministry of Mass Communication</b>	5,750.0	1.66
<b>Ministry of Irrigation and Water Management</b>	5,225.0	1.51
<b>Ministry of Port Development and Shipping</b>	3,672.4	1.06
<b>Selected Public Expenditure</b>	<b>318,222.60</b>	<b>92.06</b>
<b>Total Public Expenditure</b>	<b>345,675.30</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: The Appropriation Bill presented to the Parliament on February 19, 2002.

Notes: (i) Defence Expenditure includes the Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Interior. (ii) Education Expenditure includes the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Education and Cultural Affairs, Ministry of Tertiary Education and Training, and Ministry of School Education.

#### Peace Dividend

The Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on February 22&20, 2002 respectively, for a mutually agreed ceasefire with the facilitation of the Royal Norwegian Government. This indefinite ceasefire agreement is expected to provide a peace dividend to the economy of Sri Lanka.

The anticipated peace dividend has two components; one is the anticipated reduction in defence expenditure, and the other is the anticipated increase in domestic and foreign investment, foreign aid, tourist arrivals, etc, due to the ceasefire and restoration of normalcy throughout the country. However, disappointingly, the peace dividend expected from a reduction in defence expenditure has not materialised in the Budget 2002. In fact, the defence expenditure as a proportion of the total public expenditure has risen from 18% in 2001 to 20% in 2002 (both these figures are derived from budgeted expenditures and not the actual expenditures). The recurrent expenditure of the defence budget has increased by 10% from LKR 52.54 billion in 2001 to LKR 57.87 billion in 2002, while the capital expenditure of the defence budget has decreased by 12% from LKR 10.85 billion in 2001 to LKR 9.57 billion in 2002 (again these are budgeted expenditures and not the actual expenditures). In the past several years the actual defence expenditure has always been considerably higher than the budgeted expenditure<sup>2</sup>.

The expected boost to the Sri Lankan economy as a result of the MoU may ac-

crue from two sources; one is through the revival of the economy in the North-East province as a consequence of the lifting of the economic embargo, and the other is through the increased productive activities in the rest of the country. The anticipated rise in domestic and foreign investment, foreign aid, tourist arrivals, etc, due to the MoU is expected to take sometime to materialise. For instance, the War Risk Surcharge imposed in the aftermath of the July 24<sup>th</sup> attack on the Katunayake airport has still not been withdrawn in practice.

Further, there is a long way to go to realise the potential benefits to the national economy by the revival of the North-East economy due to a variety of factors; primarily due to infrastructural bottlenecks and taxation at both sides of the territorial divide. The roads in the LTTE-held areas are in a deplorable condition, which increases the transport cost of goods. Even after the opening of the A9 highway from Vavuniya to Jaffna the road transport cost is expected to be abnormally high because of heavy wear and tear to vehicles plying that route. Further, the arbitrary tax imposed at both sides of the territorial divide on vehicles carrying goods are another key factor that pushes up the transport cost even higher.

The lack of electricity and telecommunications are another major impediment to the economic revival of the LTTE-held areas in the North and the Jaffna peninsula. The lack of electricity in the LTTE-held areas prohibits manufacturing activities. The limited number of electric generators used is totally inadequate to cater to the needs of the producers and consumers alike. The limited

supply of power in the Jaffna peninsula is far short of the requisite. The absence of telecommunication with the rest of the country greatly increases the transaction cost of businesses in the LTTE-held areas. Even the limited telecommunication facilities available in the Jaffna peninsula are totally inadequate to fulfil the demand.

The lack of storage facilities is yet another impediment to economic revival in the LTTE-held areas. For example, though the free flow of petroleum products to the LTTE-held areas is ensured under the MoU there is a lack of demand for diesel and petrol in those areas. This is mainly because almost all the vehicles (two, three, and four-wheelers) in the LTTE-held areas have been converted to run on kerosene (paraffin) during several years of economic embargo. Moreover, there are no underground storage facilities for petroleum products in LTTE-held areas, and over-ground fuel tanks are wasteful due to evaporation.

Furthermore, storage facilities for agricultural and fishery produce are also lacking for want of suitable buildings and ice manufacturing plants. Therefore, the export of perishable agricultural and fishery produce of the LTTE-held areas to the rest of the country is undermined. This calls for the revival of the construction industry in those areas. However, due to the dearth of bank finance (loans and overdraft facilities) to fund construction activities the construction industry is still dormant despite the lifting of the embargo on construction materials such as cement, bricks, asbestos, tiles, etc.

The realisation of the full potential of the lifting of the economic embargo is de-

layed primarily because of infrastructural bottlenecks such as poor conditions of roads, and lack of electricity and telecommunications. Though there is a surge in the export of consumer goods such as bicycles, bicycle parts and accessories, motorcycles, plastic furniture, office machinery, stationery, radios, televisions, building materials, etc, from the rest of the country to the LTTE-held areas since the lifting of the economic embargo on January 15, 2002, there is a long way to go to exploit the full potential.

Another critical factor inhibiting the realisation of the full potential of the lifting of the economic embargo is the arbitrary taxation of goods *en route* to the LTTE-held areas by the Tamil paramilitary groups in Vavuniya, and taxation by the LTTE on their side. The taxation by the LTTE, though is justified in order to run a parallel administration in the territory under their jurisdiction, extends to goods meant for personal use as well. This arbitrary taxation at both sides of the territorial divide is debilitating to the entrepreneurial instinct of the masses, especially in the LTTE-held areas.

Due to the abnormally high transportation cost and extra-legal taxation the prices of goods in the LTTE-held areas are still quite high though lower than during the embargo time. The recent newspaper reports suggest that generally business turnover in the Jaffna peninsula is quite low nowadays, because people are postponing buying non-

essential goods in anticipation of drop in prices once the goods begin to be transported to Jaffna via the A9 highway. Perhaps this is partly a wishful thinking, as we do not think that there would be any significant drop in prices in Jaffna as a result of the opening of the A9 highway because of abnormally high transportation cost and arbitrary taxation.

Therefore, in sum, early realisation of the peace dividend is a mirage despite a lot of hype about it.

#### Fiscal Profligacy

The previous government exhibited fiscal profligacy in the last quarter of 2001, as political survival became the priority. The government breached its own undertaking to enforce a moratorium on public sector hiring on several occasions in later half of 2001. The armed forces (army, navy, and airforce) continued to recruit personnel. The recruitment of schoolteachers went on unabated. In October 2001, the government made over 40,000 casual employees in the public sector permanent as a gesture of goodwill to the masses in light of the impending parliamentary elections in December.

Again as a gesture of goodwill to the masses in light of the impending parliamentary elections, the employees of public service, semi-governmental institutions, and public corporations and statutory boards

were provided a pay hike of LKR.1,200 per month effective from October 2001. As a corollary, pensioners were also offered a hike of LKR 750 per month. Whilst acknowledging the rapid rise in cost of living during 2001 and the consequent hardships faced by the masses, those pay hikes were premature for an ailing economy.

There were other fiscal sweeteners to the electorate as well; diesel vehicle taxes, save the nation contribution, and import duties on raw materials of the construction industry were abolished. The national security levy was reduced to 6.5% from 7.5%. Import duty on cement was reduced. All commercial bank loans of LKR 20,000 and below to farmers were written off. The prices of gas and wheat flour were subsidised by the government in order to prevent price increases. Duty-free imports of motorcycles were accorded to the employees of the *Samurdhi* authority, *Samurdhi* Commissioner General's Department, and research officers of the Department of Agrarian Services.

All these pay hikes, tax concessions, and public sector recruitment were a manifestation of fiscal irresponsibility by a defunct government amidst a deepening economic crisis and political morass. These politically motivated relief measures were fiscal opulence an ailing economy could ill afford.

The shortsighted fiscal profligacy during election times has become a hallmark

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of Sri Lankan democratic polity. This was the case in 1994 and again in 2001. Therefore, it is high time Sri Lanka introduces a system of statutory controls on public expenditure, during normal times as well as during election times. The history has shown that the politicians of Sri Lanka (whichever political party they belong to) cannot be trusted to manage the public finances prudently and efficiently.

It is time to stipulate legally binding targets and ceilings on public expenditure by any government in power. For instance, there should be statutory ceilings on budget deficit and defence expenditure as proportions of the GDP and the total public expenditure respectively. Further, there should be statutory targets for public spending on social sectors such as education and health. That is, a maximum threshold of public spending on defence and a minimum threshold of public spending on selected social sectors as proportions of total public expenditure should be statutorily earmarked. Likewise, a statutory ceiling on the budget deficit as a proportion of the GDP should be stipulated.

The total outstanding public debt (both domestic and external) of Sri Lanka was more than the total GDP of Sri Lanka in 2001. This is not the first time the total public debt has surpassed the GDP in a particular year. During several years in the 1980s this has happened so. Therefore, it is not a new phenomenon and has no political colour. The interest payment on the total public debt during 2001 was LKR 94 billion, which was considerably higher than the total defence expenditure. The statutory public spending controls proposed above may be the only means of arresting fiscal profligacy of the politicians and the total public debt of Sri Lanka.

#### Fiscal Measures

The government's decision to increase the threshold income for personal income taxation, the proposed reduction of the top rate of personal income tax and the corporate tax in the next couple of years, and a series of tax incentives to the private sector are designed to improve compliance and reward entrepreneurship. The proposed amalgamation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) and the National Security Levy into a Value Added Tax (VAT) is a positive step. However, the VAT rate on essential goods and services will be 10% and on other goods and services will be 20%. It is important to note here that hitherto essential goods were exempted from the GST. Hence, the VAT covers more goods and services than the GST. Therefore, the cost of living may rise as the government revenue is expected to increase by LKR 3.5 billion in 2002 as a result of the introduction of the VAT.

The rationalisation of fiscal instruments in the budget indicates a continuing reliance on indirect taxation rather than direct taxation. The indirect taxation is regressive while

direct taxation is progressive, because the latter is based on one's ability to pay whereas the former is not. Sri Lanka is fast becoming a middle-income country and high time it relies more on direct income taxes rather than indirect taxes. As a way of broad-basing the direct income tax regime the public sector employees should be made to pay income tax. The public sector employees in India, for example, pay income tax and contribute to state pensions.

Almost one-fifth of the total labour force in Sri Lanka is in the public sector (including public corporations, statutory boards/authorities, and semi-government institutions). That is, about 1.2 million out of the total labour force of 6 million was in the public sector in 2000. The public sector in Sri Lanka is already overstaffed. There was 1 public sector employee for every 24 citizens in Sri Lanka in 1978, which has shrunk to 1 per every 16 citizens in 2000. The per capita public sector employee in Sri Lanka is the highest in Asia.

The Sri Lankan population has become very dependent on the State for providence of jobs, free health care, free education, free pensions, etc. This dependency has resulted in gross inefficiency and low productivity in the public sector. More alarmingly, in a survey conducted among the youths of the island in the late-1990s Prof. Hettige found that the major aspiration of the rural youth (both in the South and the North) is obtaining public sector employment. It is high time that this dependency culture is discouraged.

The most important incentives for people to seek public sector employment are the exemption from Pay As You Earn (PAYE) tax and non-contributory pension scheme. Therefore, the best way of dissuading the youth from seeking public sector employment is to withdraw these two privileges enjoyed by the public sector employees. In this regard, the proposal to make the new recruits to the public sector contribute 8% of their salary to their pensions in this budget is opportune. However, the government should go further and net the public sector employees into the PAYE scheme. It is high time to inculcate the principle of paying direct income tax according to ability in Sri Lanka.

A debit tax of 0.1% proposed on all debit transactions in all formal financial transactions is a regressive step. Sri Lanka is perhaps the only country in the world that has introduced such a regressive tax. Though it is mentioned in the budget that this tax is temporary there is no time limit mentioned. This tax may encourage informal financial transactions.

#### Structural and Institutional Reforms

It is disheartening to note that very little structural and institutional reform of the economy is proposed in the Budget 2002. The reform of the bloated bureaucracy, state-dominated financial sector, antiquated labour laws, and the state-ownership of 80%

of the land area of Sri Lanka are some of the critical reforms need to be undertaken. These reforms are long overdue. There are no concrete proposals at all to reform the public sector or the financial sector. But, there is some indication in the budget about the proposed labour and land market reforms.

It is always politically convenient to undertake unpopular but necessary economic reforms in the early years of a new government. With the public endorsement of the government policies in the recent local government elections it would have been easier to push through long overdue structural and institutional reforms of the economy. The government's reluctance to bite the bullet, so to speak, is disappointing to say the least.

#### Conclusion

The government's decision to increase the proportion of public expenditure on defence is self-defeating, because on the one hand the government seems to be quite optimistic about the current peace process but on the other hand has not delivered its own peace dividend to the economy. This dichotomy of government policy in the political and economic spheres provides a confusing signal to the potential investors (both local and foreign) and the foreign donors alike.

Moreover, the government has shrugged off the opportunity to inject public investments in infrastructure such as roads, power, and telecommunications in the war-torn areas that could have been a catalyst to kickstart the ailing economy of Sri Lanka. Only a paltry sum of LKR 300 million is earmarked for public investment in infrastructure in the war-torn areas for 2002. Perhaps the government is expecting donor assistance to undertake these critical investments.

The allocation of LKR 2,800 million or just 0.81% of the total public expenditure to the Ministry of Rehabilitation, Resettlement, and Refugees (Table 2) is yet another indication of the government's failure to deliver its own peace dividend to the beleaguered economy. Out of the total allocation of LKR 2,800 million only LKR 466 million is allocated for capital expenditure. Perhaps the government is expecting the international donor community to foot the major part of the bill on rehabilitation and resettlement.

If the government could not demonstrate its faith in the peace process by slashing the huge defence budget how can it expect the private sector, foreign investors, and the foreign donors to have faith in the peace process? Further, if the government does not want to put the money where its mouth is how could it expect the private sector, foreign investors, and the donors to do it? An economy in the red requires a bolder and faster economic reform agenda than what is proposed in the Budget 2002.

Table 2: Public Expenditure Proposed for 2002

	Recurrent Expenditure (LKR Million)	Capital Expenditure (LKR Million)	Total (LKR Million)	As a % of Total Public Expenditure
President's Office	290	38	328	0.09
Prime Minister's Office	55.9	50	105.9	0.03
Ministry of Defence	41,000	9,000	50,000	14.46
Ministry of Interior	16,871.8	573.6	17,445.4	5.05
Ministry of Human Resource Development, Education and Cultural Affairs	10,064	5,319	15,383	4.45
Ministry of Tertiary Education and Training	5,444	1,970	7,414	2.14
Ministry of School Education	18.7	136.6	155.3	0.04
Ministry of Samurdhi	15,222	161	15,383	4.45
Ministry of Health, Nutrition and Welfare	19,331	5,090	24,421	7.06
Ministry of Employment and Labour	901	143	1,044	0.30
Ministry of Public Administration, Management and Reforms	26,239	151	26,390	7.63
Ministry of Policy Development and Implementation	528.8	236	764.8	0.22
Ministry of Power and Energy	483	9,914	10,397	3.01
Ministry of Transport, Highways and Aviation	4,402	3,470.8	7,872.8	2.28
Ministry of Highways	41	9,610	9,651	2.79
Ministry of State Transport	1,383	4.2	1,387.2	0.40
Ministry of Finance	19,648	42,571	62,219	18.00
Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock	5,227	939	6,166	1.78
Ministry of Enterprise Development, Industrial Policy and Investment Promotion	585.3	1,290	1,875.3	0.54
Ministry of Industries	25.5	100.7	126.2	0.04
Ministry of Port Development and Shipping	95.4	3,577	3,672.4	1.06
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	3,118	134	3,252	0.94
Ministry of Eastern Development, and Muslim Religious Affairs	110	281	391	0.11
Ministry of Housing and Plantation Infrastructure	244	7,681	7,925	2.29
Ministry of Housing Development	25	89	114	0.03
Ministry of Estate Infrastructure	67	119.6	186.6	0.05
Ministry of Urban and Public Utilities	27	95	122	0.04
Ministry of Fisheries and Ocean Resources	343	1,522	1,865	0.54
Ministry of Women's Affairs	69	76	145	0.04
Ministry of Justice, Law Reform and National Integration	1,197	567	1,764	0.51
Ministry of Irrigation and Water Management	1,428	3,797	5,225	1.51
Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources	578.8	1,317	1,895.8	0.55
Ministry of Home Affairs, Provincial Councils and Local Gov	35,234.9	7,517.8	42,752.7	12.37
Ministry of Social Welfare	88.9	55.9	144.8	0.04
Ministry of Plantation Industries	368	1,484	1,852	0.54
Ministry of Tourism	125.6	110	235.6	0.07
Ministry of Southern Region Development	60	398	458	0.13
Ministry of Western Region Development	138	1,445	1,583	0.46
Ministry of Central Region Development	30	709	739	0.21
Ministry of Cooperatives	112	54.5	166.5	0.05
Ministry of Mass Communication	3,916	1,834	5,750	1.66
Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs	109	25	134	0.04
Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports	498	305	803	0.23
Ministry of Rehabilitation, Resettlement and Refugees	2,334	466	2,800	0.81
Ministry of Land	940	473	1,413	0.41
Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Affairs	210	78	288	0.08
Ministry of Economic Reform, Science and Technology	427	1,042	1,469	0.42
<b>Total</b>	<b>219,654.6</b>	<b>126,020.7</b>	<b>345,675.3</b>	<b>100</b>

\* Research Fellow, International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Colombo. A paper presented at the seminar on Budget 2002 organised by the International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Colombo, on March 26, 2002. Views expressed in this paper are solely of the author and not of the ICES. Correspondence [sarvi@sit.lk](mailto:sarvi@sit.lk)

<sup>1</sup> This does not include debt repayments.

<sup>2</sup> The actual defence expenditure during 2001 will be known only by end of April 2002.

## LETTER FROM JAFFNA

# Bringing Hope and a Smile

Monday 11 February was a red-letter day in the history of the Jaffna Teaching Hospital and the people of Jaffna. On this day arrived in our midst the plastic surgery team, Interplast UK which spent two weeks in Jaffna. When they left on 25 February, they had succeeded in bringing a smile to many faces and hope to many at heart.

Interplast is an international charity whose work includes sending teams to various parts of the world to carry out plastic surgery procedures. There had been eighteen such visits to Sri Lanka in the past mainly by Interplast teams from Germany. This was the first ever visit to Jaffna and was by its UK branch.

The Teaching Hospital in Jaffna is providing a service to the community under very difficult circumstances. One of the major problems is the serious shortage of senior and junior medical staff. Out of the cadre of 32 specialists only seven are filled. On the surgical side too there is a serious shortage of general surgeons. There are no specialists in other surgical specialities except neurosurgery at present. The hospital has never had a plastic surgeon.

Many conditions and problems cannot therefore be dealt with in Jaffna and patients have to be sent to Colombo undergoing all the hardships that entails. Children with conditions such as cleft lip and plate and those who have deformities from birth or that have resulted from burns cannot be successfully treated in Jaffna. So the need for such a visit by a specialist team has been a long felt one.

To Mr Charles Vivekananda, senior plastic surgeon from Middlesborough must go the credit for making this trip a reality. He had been hoping to bring a team to Jaffna for some time. Though this trip was planned several months ago, it came to fruition at a time when circumstances in the country had undergone a dramatic transformation. Following the elections in December not only was there a new government in power but once again a ceasefire was in place and the peace process back on track. The Interplast team that therefore arrived in Jaffna included four Tamil doctors, from the UK and Zimbabwe. They were accompanied by an English family comprising an optometrist and optician. In Sri Lanka they were

joined by two English nurses based in this country as well as three Sinha-lese nurses from Ratnapura who had worked with Charles Vive on his previous mission.

The Interplast team comprised of: Mr Charles Vivekananda, Plastic Surgeon, UK; Dr Declef Erdmann, Plastic Surgeon, Germany; Dr K Rajaratnam, ENT Surgeon, Zimbabwe; Mrs S Rajaratnam, Dr T Sivagnanam, and Dr E Velauthapilli, Anaesthetists, UK; David Florence, Rachel France and Frank Smith, UK; Andrea Falkner and Deidre Cusack, UK but based in Sri Lanka; Nanda Weligepola, Punchikumarihamy and Manel de Silva, Ratnapura, Sri Lanka.

Their trip was coordinated by the German Help Foundation from Colombo who were able to get the help of the Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation in the North (RRAN) to undertake the cost and arrangements for flying the team to Jaffna from Colombo. The camp was inaugurated in the Hospital by Dr Jayalath Jayawardene, Minister for RRAN.

From day one the team were about their mission with dedication and enthusiasm. The screened 600 patients in the clinics and carried out 154 operations (including 2 on a visit to the offshore island of Nainathivu). There was close cooperation with medical and nursing staff from the hospital and the latter benefited greatly from this experience. Local consultant surgeons as well as other doctors working in surgery assisted, learned and carried out plastic surgery procedures. Anaesthetists benefited from working closely with this team. Dr Charles Vive, Dr Velauthapillai and Dr Sivagnanam also gave lectures to doctors and medical students during their stay. As the team was accommodated in the hospital doctors' quarters they were able to interact with the local doctors and the experience was of mutual benefit. The team worked very hard but still managed to find the time for a visit to Cashurina beach and to Nainathivu. Towards the end of their stay the hospital staff organised an evening of entertainment and felicitation and hosted them to dinner. It was the first time that such a social function was held so late in the day after many a year. Another sign of the times!

Another very important aspect of this team's visit was the presence of an op-



tometrists and optician. They conducted eye testing clinics at Manipay, Inuvil, Pt Pedro, Moolai and Nallur and gave away free spectacles to those attending. They tested around 600 people and have promised to send more spectacles from England. The doctors had brought large amount of drugs, sutures and dressing for this mission. A significant amount was also donated to the hospital include delicate instruments.

The mission was an exciting one for the hospital and people of Jaffna. It coincided with the relaxation of various restrictions including on medical supplies together with security clearances for travel out of Jaffna. However the basic problem of lack of medical staff at the Hospital remains. The presence of four expatriate Tamil doctors in this team was of great encouragement. Equally so was the arrival in the Hospital at the same time of Dr Karuniyan Arulanathan, Paediatrician from the USA to work here for six weeks. It is hoped that this will encourage many more Tamil doctors in various specialities to consider coming to Jaffna, even if for a few weeks, whereby they can in like manner benefit the people and the Hospital here. In fact it is hoped that this may encourage expatriate Tamils in all walks of life, be they teachers, engineers, commuter experts etc. to do likewise.

The Jaffna community is deeply grateful to the Interplast team and all who made their visit a reality. Their visit brought a smile to the face of Jaffna. There is an old English saying, that "a single swallow does not a summer make". It is to be hoped though that this visit together with other recent developments might mean that at least the gloom of winter is finally giving way to spring for the people of Jaffna.

**Dr D C Ambalavanar FRCS Ed**

Dept. of Surgery Teaching Hospital,  
Jaffna.

**NOTE:** Any expatriate doctors and other medical or para-medical staff interested in helping by working and teaching in Jaffna, even if for short spells, should contact the Director, Teaching Hospital, Jaffna, or the Dean, Faculty of Medicine, University of Jaffna.

## CLASSIFIED ADS

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### MATRIMONIAL

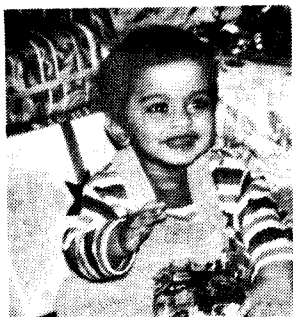
**Jaffna Hindu father in Colombo seeks professional partner from suitable family background for qualified accountant son, 33, 6'1", employed in London. Please send horoscope details. M 1284 c/o Tamil Times.**

**Jaffna Hindu uncle seeks professional partner for his niece, 27, 5'8", slim, working in Sri Lanka with UK Charity. Please send horoscope, details. M 1285 c/o Tamil Times.**

**Tamil Hindu parents seek professionally qualified groom for pretty daughter, 29, holding senior position in bank. Has Mars affliction. Please send horoscope details. M 1286 c/o Tamil Times.**

**Jaffna Hindu parents seek attractive doctor or (medical student or Sriankan qualified) bride less than 27 years for UK qualified doctor son, horoscope/vegetarianism optional. Please send photograph (initially) promptly returnable. M 1287 c/o Tamil Times.**

### BIRTHDAY



The second birthday of Aaron, son of Ravi & Surai and grandson of Mr. Rasiah Rajendra and Mrs Jeyarane Rajendra was celebrated at "Bleserene", their residence at Rayners Lane, Harrow, UK with prayers and God's blessings bestowed by a large gathering of friends and relatives from UK and abroad.

### WEDDING BELLS

We congratulate the following couples on their recent wedding.

**Thanuja** daughter of late Dr. Jeganmohan and of Mrs Jeganmohan of 27 Sandford Road, Bromley, Kent BR2 9AL, UK and **Prasanthan** son of Mr. & Mrs Balakrishnan of 4 Merlin Close, Parkhill, Croydon, Surrey CR0 5UQ, UK on 24th March 2002 at Tolworth Recreation Centre, Surbiton, Kingston, Surrey.

**Ramanan** son of Mr. & Mrs Ganeson of 59, Summit Road, Northolt, Middx UB5 5HL, UK and **Sharmiha** daughter of Mr. & Mrs Gopalan of 10, Jalan Cuepacs 2, Taman Cuepacs, Batu 12, Jalan Cheros, 43000 Kajang, Selangor, Malaysia on 24th March 2002 at Federal Institute of Technology Hall, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

**Janani**, daughter of Dr. S and Mrs Jegatheeswarie Puvirajasingham of 76 Rating Lane, Barrow-in-Furness, Cambria LA13 9LD, UK and **Ishwara Kumar** son of Mr. P & Mrs Indira Pathmanathan of 14 Grafton Close, Worcester Park, Surrey KT4 7JY, UK on 30th March 2002 at The Decorium, Wood Green, London N22.

**Janani**, daughter of Dr. & Mrs Navaratnam of 5, Windy Hill, Hutton, Brentwood, Essex CMI3 2HF, UK and **Sivaganeshan**, son of Mr. & Mrs. Sivaloganathan of 16 Ravensbury Avenue, Morden, Surrey, UK on 31st March 2002 at Guildford Civic Hall, Surrey, UK.

### OBITUARIES

**John Thambu Kandiah** of Urumpirai, Retired Inspector of Police, J.P. and Inquirer into Sudden Deaths; beloved husband of Ruth Rasamalar; loving father of Sri Rangkanathan (KSA), Sathianathan (USA), Mahendra-

nathan (UK), Ruby (UK), Jeganathan (Australia), Yoganathan (Canada), Daisy (Canada) and Loganathan (Australia); father-in-law of Sarojana, Lali, Shantha, Michael, Amirthini, Raji, Thevapalan and Renuka; grandfather of Sudarshini, Lorinda, Cryshanthi, Nylanthy, Naomi, Jason, Angelina, Andrew, Priyan, Roshan, Amirtha, Arni, Rebecca, Hannah, Jessica and James; great grandfather of Joel and Sebastian passed away peacefully on 18th March 2002. The funeral was held on 23rd March in Melbourne, Australia.



The members of the family wish to thank all friends and relatives who attended the funeral, sent floral tributes and messages of sympathy and assisted them in various ways during the period of bereavement. No. 1, Windmill Close, Epsom, Surrey KT17 3AL.

### IN MEMORIAM 20th Death Anniversary Remembrance

In loving memory of **Mr. Elayathamby Thambipillai** who passed away on 1st April 1982.

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by his children **Thuraisingham** (Colombo), **Jegajothie** (Jothie) (London), **Sundaralingam** (Suntha) (Jaffna), **Pathmanathan** (Path) (London), **Rajaledchumy** (Raji) (Vavuniya) and **Pushpalingam** (Lingam) (London), grandchildren **Pradeepan**, **Malarvili**, **Sivadeepan**, **Piramila**, **Kokila**, **Deborah**, **Uthayan**, **Thulasei**, **Selina**, **Setha**, **Addavan**, **Kavitha**, **Pirapoo**, **Jason**, **Dwaragan** and **Lathini**, great grandchild **David**. - Mrs **Jothie T.V. Lingam** (Andrew), 23 Adlington Close, Edmonton, London N18 1XJ



In loving memory of **Mr. Visvalingam Sivasubramaniam**, Principal Emeritus, Skanda Varodaya College, Chunnakam on the sixth anniversary of his passing away on 26th April 1996.

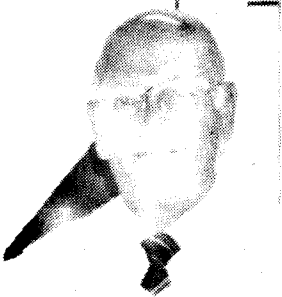
Sadly missed and fondly remembered by his beloved wife **Sironmani**; children **Dr. Sivanandarajah**, **Sivagnanasunderam**, **Dr. Sivapalan**, **Sivathanan Sivarathan**, **Sivamanoharan** and **Sivaloshanadevi**; son-in-law **Thavarajah**; daughters-in-law **Manimahaladevi**, **Anandhi**, **Yogeswary**, **Kamaladevi**, **Supathiradevi** and **Devahi**; grandchildren **Sutharshan**, **Priyatharshini**, **Suseenthiran**, **Suhanthan**, **Sutharshika**, **Suloshan**, **Suthaharan**, **Sulakshan**, **Arooran**, **Gajamohan**, **Gajaharan** and **Vaishna** - 135A Sudbury Avenue, Wembley, Middx HA0 6AW. Tel: 020 8385 0477.



In loving memory of **Mrs Thaiyalnayaki Sivalingam** on the third anniversary of her passing away on 18th April 1999.

Greatly missed and fondly remembered by her loving children **Jeyakumaran**, **Kaladevi**, **Gnanendran**, **Dr. Jeyagowri**, **Sureslikumar** and **Sivasuthan**; sons-in-law **Ganeshamoorthy** and **Dr. Kumaran**, daughters-in-law **Yogendradevi**, **Vallinayaki**, **Malathy** and **Balasuhanthini**; sister

Sethunayaki Sivasithamparam; grandchildren Havitha, Sinduja, Kalyan, Neruban, Rathulan, Pratheeban, Aparnah, Geevithan and Abisha - 24 Sixth Cross Road, Twickenham, Middx TW2 5RB. Tel: 020 8977 6277.



In loving memory of Mr. **Vaithilingam Sivagnasundram** (Churchill) on the third anniversary of his passing away on 11.4.99.

Fondly remembered by his beloved wife Nageswary (Lily); loving children Ranjan, Mohan, Thayan and Gowri; daughters-in-law Renuka, Radha and Premini; son-in-law Ajan; grandchildren Mathangi, Sangavi, Ranjitha and Harshini; brothers, sisters and their families. - 11 Jesmond Crescent, NSW 2119, Australia.



In loving memory of Mr. **Vellupillai Kumarasamy** on

the third anniversary of his passing away on 20th April 1999.

Fondly remembered and sadly missed by his beloved wife Sarojini; loving children Nirmala, Baskeran, Shymala and Dayaharan; sons-in-law Rasalingam and Uthayakumar; daughters-in-law Gnana-manohari and Sujatha; grandchildren Gayathiri, Gajan, Arjun and Shivani; relatives and friends. - 24 Rowlands Avenue, Hatchend, Middx HAS 4BH/ 37 Mississippi Road, Seven Hills, NSW 2147, Australia.



Six month remembrance of Mr. **Appapillai Navaratnam**, Former General Manager, National Savings Bank and Deputy General Manager, Bank of Ceylon who passed away on the 2nd of October 2001.

Six months have passed, since you left us, Dear Appa, we are missing you a lot Appa. With love, deeply missed and affectionately remembered by your loving wife, children, grandchildren and family members. We wish to thank all those friends who sent kind words of appreciation

**Remembering a Gentleman**

I write this note with a deep sense of appreciation of a gentleman of high esteem, who lived a full life practising the principles and precepts of the religion he followed.

My first acquaintance with Mr. Appapillai Navaratnam was in 1953, when I joined the Bank of Ceylon, when he functioned as officer in charge of clearing at the City Office. As a new recruit, I found every activity, that took place in the Bank new and confusing, especially the terminology used in banking. Mr. Navaratnam was one of those mentors, who true to his character, explained in detail whenever some work was assigned to a new recruit. This was the most welcome gesture as against some other officers, who gave out instructions, which were seldom understood. As a graduate of the London University and an LLB, he had a good grasp of the procedures and the legal system that went with banking and banking practices. This knowledge and his devotion to work moulded him in later life as a prominent banker of repute.

He served as Manager of many provincial branches and was one of those responsible for the quick development of the Trincomalee branch and rural banking in that area. After having served as Regional Manager of the Northern Region, he was transferred as the Chief Manager of the London Office, a coveted position where he contributed his best talents to develop the business of the London

branch. On his return to Colombo, he was promoted Assistant General Manager and in 1981 retired as Deputy General Manager. Soon after retirement, the National Savings Bank was quick to enrol him as General Manager, which position he held till 1984. He also worked as Consultant to banks in the Middle East and advisor to international organisations.

Later in life, I used to meet him and observed that even at that senior age, he displayed very intelligent and well informed understanding of deep rooted principles of high ethics. He avoided controversy and received the admiration and appreciation of all his peers, colleagues and subordinates and behaved as one among equals in both branch and office administration. His clarity of thought, analytical mind and judicious decision making process always earned for him, high reputation and respect. I will always remember him as a guiding light.

We miss a gentleman par excellence and a banker of repute.

May he attain peace.

**K. Sivagananathan**

Banking and Financial Consultant - Central Bank of Sri Lanka  
Former Deputy General Manager - Bank of Ceylon.

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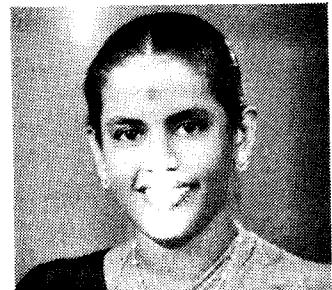
Born: 11.10.1909 Rest: 02.03.1982

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by sons Sara, Brem & Dubsy; daughters-in-law Lalitha and Shyamala; grandchildren Janarthan, Mehala, Uthistran, Arani and Anuja - 19 Huxley Place, Palmers Green, London N13 55U. Tel: 020 8886 5966.

**In Loving Memory of our**

We speak of you with love and pride  
Years may pass and time may fly  
Memories of you both will never die  
And shall live in our hearts for ever.

**Mummy Vemalaranee Kanagaratnam**



10.07.1923 to 31.03.1990

**Forthcoming Events****May 1** Feast of St. Joseph**May 2** Shashthi; Feast of St. Athanasius**May 5** 6.30 p.m. Tamil Performing Arts Society presents two dramas - *Kannaady Vaarpukal & Pirathiyeka Kaadchy* directed by Mr. K. Balendra in aid of the London Sivan Kovil at London Sivan Centre, 12A Lee HighRoad, Lewsham, London SE1.  
Tel: 020 8318 9844/8690  
0401/8942 8036.**May 7** Eekathasi**May 9** Pirathosam**May 11** Arnavasai; South London Welfare Group Drop In. Tel: 020 8542 3285**May 12** Karthigai**May 14** Feast of Matthias**May 16** Shathurthi**May 17** Shashthi**May 20** Feast of St. Bernadine of Siena**May 22** Eckathasi**May 24** Pirathosam**May 25** Full Moon; Vaikasi Visakam**May 26** Feast of St. Philip Neri**May 27** Feast of St. Augustine of Canterbury**May 29** Sankadakara Shathurthi**May 31** Feast of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.**At Bhavan Centre, 4A Castletown Road, London W14 9HQ. Tel: 020 7381 3086/4608.****May 4** 6.30 p.m. Carnatic Vocal by Manorama Prasad.  
Website: [www.bhavav.net](http://www.bhavav.net)  
E-mail: [info@bhavan.net](mailto:info@bhavan.net)**Siva Pillai Honoured**

Mr. Kanapathipillai Sivagurunathpillai (Sivapillai) of Bowmead, Mottinsham, London had his schooling at Jaffna Hindu College from 1951 - 61. His fellow students and teachers at that time little realised that he was being given the right foundation for many great things in the years to come. There were no computers in the college at that time.

Mr. Sivapillai has been Computer Officer/Lecturer ICT at Goldsmith College of the University of London for several years and has done Media presentations on the Teaching of Community Languages especially Tamil at several recent conferences and for Web users. These have been well received and greatly appreciated. He has released several CD's such as CARE CD Computer Assisted Religious Education (English-Tamil-French-German), CALL CD Computer Assisted Language Learning (English-Tamil), "My First e-Tamil Book" which fulfils part of the UK language teaching levels called Key Stages 1-3 and several others.. He has also published seven bilingual books. The web-site language learning techniques developed by him are of invaluable help to Tamils and others.

The Jaffna Hindu College Old Boys' Association honoured him recently with a Distinguished Services Award for 2002 in recognition of the credit he had brought to his Alma Mater through his achievements and contributions made to Teaching Community Languages, especially Tamil using Computer Related Techniques and the direct and continuing support provided to the College Computer Centre.

**Introducing  
"Secrets of the Mansion"**

I am delighted to introduce a children's book - 'Secrets of the Mansion' by Maulia Selvarajah- which is an imaginative and fascinating tale to emerge from the pen of a thirteen year

old Sri Lankan girl born in Jaffna. The young lady seems to have already mastered the fundamental basics of good story telling at this tender age an interesting plot, a smooth narrative style, clearly drawn characterisation and provides a moral theme for the thoughtful reader.

**The Plot:** The background setting is England during the Second World War. The author has done her homework well. The picture of the countryside; the reaction of the common people to the war; the actual details of the war (e.g. the sinking of the Athenia); and several other events are accurately recorded providing an authenticity to the tale.

The story revolves around a young girl Jenny and her brother Ted; along with other children being evacuated during the war following bombing attacks on her country; leaving her mother behind, while her father is fighting for their country with the Army.

The two children are sent to Brecon Beacons where Jenny, her brother and two other young children have their adventures, helping the police to foil an enemy spy smuggling plans and maps from their country. This is an Enid Blyton-type schooldays adventure seen through a child's eyes.

**Narrative Style:** Although occasional use of highflying words (e.g. claustrophobic) are the hurdles for a young reader to climb, the narration is generally easy flowing and maintains continuity without interruptions. The dialogues are practical, down-to-earth and realistic.

**The Theme:** It is a traumatic experience for children to live through a war sharing the experiences of fear, pain, cruelty, atrocity and torture without a clear understanding as to why men and nations go to war.

The children are waiting with faith and hope, when all this mayhem would come to an end; and for the day they would be re-joined with their families.

This is a universal theme - true of many children in many war-torn lands

including Sri Lanka - where the young ones live in misery and grief, looking forward to a dawn of peace and harmony.

**The Verdict:** The book is an extremely commendable effort from this young lady Miss. Maulia Selvarajah. I could predict without hesitation that she will turn out to be a top grade writer in the years to come.

**Dr. S. Thiagarajah**

Copies are available from the author, 48 Hallwick Road, Luton LU2 9BH Tel: 01582 703786. Price £ 3.50 (including postage)

**SANAATAANA**

Two generations ago portrayals of life in India and Africa came predominantly through the words of novelists such as E.M. Forestar and Graham Greene. Now that novel by writers of Indian and African origin find pride of place in our bookshelves, has our perception of these cultures changed. Yes, they should have and they have.

I have been watching, devouring and absorbing Indian performances in the Arts and while keeping abreast with reviews and observing the audience reactions at performances. If standing ovations are an indicator there are



more and more Westerners and others who stand up and give vent to the impact on their senses. Similarly critics acknowledge positively changes in their perceptions.

Recently I had attended three programmes, each of different character but all stemming from the bedrock of Indian classical dance, sure winner with an audience of mixed nationalities. First my curiosity was aroused by Fusion in Dance. I have witnessed a few Fusion concerts in music - Indian and Western. But Fusion in dance was something new I was keen to experience. The concept of Fusion is currently in vogue. I heard of Shobana Jayasinghe's Fusion in Bharatanatyam production on British TV but regretfully missed it.

### SANAATAANA

On 14th September, significantly an explosion of Indian and Western classical Music and Dance was staged in a thematic programme called 'Sanaataana' by Institute of Fine Arts at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, South Bank London. Sanaataana had an exemplary mix of Indian and Western mix music and dance items.

Opening with the great Master M.S. Gopalakrishnan in violin solo traditional Karnatic music was portrayed and Prasanna Ramaswamy followed with current trend in Karnatic music on Western instruments with deft handling of the electric guitar. However the accent was on dance.

Traditional Bharatanatyam dance choreographed by Krishnaveni of Kalakshetra and Maresa of Association Ballerina Sensei, Italy, a dancer very fluent both in Bharata Natyam and Western Contemporary dance, was performed by dancers from India, Italy and the U.K. portraying the primordial conflict between the Devas and Asuras (good and evil, light and darkness), the world premiere of a new work choreographed and danced by Maressa and her contemporary dance troupe.

This dance revisits the primordial conflict between Devas and demons interpreting them in a more abstract way. This was written by Prasanna for Western and Indian musicians. The dance translated the conflict into contemporary, historical, and literary events.

The highlight of the evening was the 'Fusion' a new synthesis between Bharatanatyam and contemporary dance to represent the healing or reconciliation between good and evil based on the legendary story of King Asoka. The two forms alternatively exchanged the music to which they are

normally accompanied. Contemporary sequences were set to sollukatt (vocalisation of rhythm in Indian music and dance) and Bharatanatyam adavus (rhythmic sequences) are set to western music.

The fascinating elements of Bharatanatyam such as rhythm, mudras, abhinayas were "stolen" and suddenly or imperceptibly appeared in contemporary dance sequences. Similarly the tight set movement in Bharatanatyam slowly or suddenly unravelled and metamorphosed into the more extended vocabulary of Western contemporary dance. The traditions of the Bharatanatyam and the contemporary dance did not appear to be compromised. This was 'Fusion' in dance.

The innovative music was composed by Prasanna who used the new contemporary Music Ensemble comprising flute, oboe, cello, harp and electric guitar with the soprano voice of Ms Frances and with Karnatic percussions - mirudangam (Poongulam Subramaniam) and ghatam (Karthik). Every syllable of the percussions enhanced the drama which unfolded.

The final union of voices of Raji Gopalakrishnan (virutham) and Frances Lynch (medieval chant) culminated effectively stirring Emperor Asoka's reconciliation from being a warrior underscored the fusion. Prasanna's versatility in Indian classical, western classical, jazz and blues was the hallmark of this 'Fusion'.

Better judicious and imaginative design and execution of stage lighting and other production elements would have left a stamp on this production as innovative Dance Theatre. Fusion of West and East music and dance would become another medium for Dance Theatre in the future when there is so much exchange and interaction amongst artistes globally. Culturally the world is getting more close linked.

**Siva Sivananthan**

## THE MESSAGE OF THE GITA

Bhagavad-Gita is a conversation between Lord Krishna and Arjuna in the battlefield of Kurukshetra. Arjuna, a prince and a warrior of great repute, unable to face the challenge in the battlefield, collapses. Lord Krishna revives him with the refreshing knowledge of Vedanta. Arjuna wakes up from his delusion, fights the battle and more importantly wins it. The story is symbolic. Every individual is eloquent when solving others' problems. But when he is confronted with a challenge, he succumbs. Ignorant of higher values, his mind overpowers his personality, destroys both his peace and productivity. This idea is well portrayed in the famous metaphor of the chariot. The chariot represents the individual; the horses, the senses - eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin; the reins are the mind and the charioteer, the intellect. When the charioteer is strong, he holds the reins firmly and guides the chariot safely. But if he is weak, the horses run helter-skelter, destroying the chariot and its occupants. Similarly, with a weak intellect, you destroy your personality

Whereas a strong intellect keeps the mind and senses well under control and leads you to your desired goal. The study of the Bhagavad-Gita strengthens one's intellect. You combine dynamic action with effervescent cheer, emerging successful in your respective field of activity.

Gita Lectures are held at the Saiva Munnetta Sangam Hall every Monday from 8p.m. to 9.30p.m at 4 Salisbury Road, Manor Park, London E12 6AB Tel: 020 8514 4732.

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