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

-Voltaire



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Email: prajan@gn.apc.org
editor@tamiltimes.org
admin@tamiltimes.org

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Cover :

Top: LTTE delegates and foreign representatives attending conference in Dublin 5-10 October; Below: Protest demonstration in Colombo by JVP against interim administration

A Testing Time

Now that the Dublin deliberations of the LTTE's Constitutional Affairs Committee, with inputs from foreign experts, are over, there is much speculation as to what the LTTE's response to the government's proposal for the setting up of an Interim Administration (IA) for the Northeast will contain. Given that the government proposal excluded subjects such as police and security, land, and revenue from the jurisdiction of the proposed IA, it is expected that these are the matters on which the gap between the government's and LTTE's positions will be the widest.

It is the claim of the LTTE that it has established de facto territorial control over large parts of the Northeast where it has put in place its own police force, judiciary and a tax imposing and collecting regime. This being the case, it is doubtful whether the LTTE would readily agree to the subjects excluded in the government proposal for the IA.

A clear indication of the LTTE's position in this regard was spelt out at the end of the recently held 'Pongu Tamil' event in Vavuniya. Though the event is presented as a people's event, no one doubts that it and similar events are orchestrated by the LTTE. At this event held on 24 September, a declaration was adopted which said, "The IA should include powers to deal with Land, Finance, Police and Judicial services," and "Such an administration should be handed over to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, who have been chosen by the people as their sole representatives."

The declaration further said, "The LTTE should never accept anything less than an IA with such powers.

The international community should urge the Sri Lankan government to provide such an IA. The North and East are traditional homelands of the Tamil people. The Sri Lanka Army should leave our lands."

In regard to the assertion of "Tamil sovereignty" in the Northeast, the TamilNet website on 8 October reported, "The branch of the Ceylon Tamil Teachers Union (CTTU) in Mullaithivu Wednesday evening urged the leader of the Liberation Tigers, Mr. Velupillai Pirapaharan, to secure an interim administration for the northeast 'without giving up even in least measure the Tamil nation's sovereignty.' ...The Tamils should be granted the right of self-determination."

Many close to the LTTE believe that the contents of the declaration at Vavuniya and the memorandum from the teachers echo the current view of the LTTE leadership which will be reflected in their response to the government's proposal for the setting up of the IA. If this turns out to be the case, what the LTTE will be seeking is a substantial alienation of executive and legislative powers from the centre to the IA. The question that will inevitably arise in such a situation is as to how the government will respond given two major hurdles it has to confront and overcome.

The first hurdle is fundamentally a constitutional one. The repositories of the executive and legislative powers of the people are respectively the President and the Parliament, and subject to the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, they cannot be alienated without a decision made by Parliament with a two-thirds majority and an affirmative decision in a popular referendum. In the present circumstances, such an outcome, even if the government wants, appears to be out of the question given its narrow majority in parliament.

The second hurdle is a political one. Already set in motion is a widespread campaign by opposition political parties that are committed against the handing over of the administration of the Northeast to the LTTE. Protest demonstrations and marches have already taken place and many more are being organised. Adding to the opposition from these parties is also the position of the parties representing the Muslim community. The Muslims parties are seeking an effective sharing of power in the proposed IA for the

Northeast, and how this can be reconciled with the control the LTTE is seeking over the IA will certainly poses a difficult problem. It must be noted that the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) is a constituent member of the government coalition and without its support it may lose its parliamentary majority precipitating its fall.

Such an eventuality will certainly produce a major political crisis putting the ongoing peace process in serious jeopardy. In the ultimate analysis, everything including the continuation of the peace process seems to depend on the scale and extent of the counter proposal for the IA from the LTTE leadership, and to what extent they are prepared to compromise taking account of the real problems, constitutional and political, the government has to contend with.

Since the signing of the Ceasefire Agreement in December 2001, the non-fighting has not only given a respite from the horrors associated with nearly two decades of the armed conflict. It has also produced in reality great improvements in the lives of the people generally and especially in the Northeast. Over three hundred thousand

internally displaced people have returned to their homes. Rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes have begun in earnest. There is greater degree of freedom of movement for the people.

What is important for the people at this stage is the consolidation of the ceasefire and a guarantee that it will continue to hold, armed conflict will not be resumed and a commitment by the parties to go forward to achieve permanent peace through negotiations. Presently the stage that has been reached is to the consideration of only an Interim Administration for the Northeast. The parties are not considering or discussing the terms of the final settlement. Those who are genuinely committed to peace will recognize and appreciate that there will always the opportunity in the future to seek to attain what is not attainable at the interim stage. This is not the time for adopting inflexible maximalist positions. We have reached a testing time and given the present political ground realities what is required is a pragmatic approach that will, may be slowly but steadily, take the peace process forward and not jeopardize it.

Over 300,000 get citizenship.

The Sri Lankan Parliament on 7 October unanimously passed the Grant of Citizenship to Persons of Indian Origin Bill. Accordingly, any person of Indian origin who has been a permanent resident of Sri Lanka since October 30, 1964 or a descendent of such a person shall be granted the status of a citizen of Sri Lanka. The number of persons who will benefit from the passage of this law is estimated to be around 300,000

Significantly, Parliament voted en bloc supporting the Bill without a single dissenting voice or vote.

Presenting the Bill, Minister of Interior John Amararatunga said the Sri Lankan Government had always been ready to fully solve the problems of statelessness of persons of Indian origin and also of any residue.

He said the first generation since 1964 may not be alive now or may be of old age. Their natural increase are residing in Sri Lanka without any connection with India. Those who continued to stay in Sri Lanka have contributed to the national economy and their future should be considered humanely, he added.

Presenting the bill Interior Minister John Amararatunga said it would enable any person of Indian origin who has been a permanent resident of Sri Lanka since October 30, 1964 or a descendent of such a person who is a permanent resident to gain citizenship. Those persons coming under these two categories will be granted the status of a citizen of Sri Lanka.

He further said: In October 1964, Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike and Shri Lal Bahadur Sashtri successfully agreed upon a solution. Accordingly the future of commonly called "stateless" but definitely of Indian origin persons estimated to be 975,000 was decided. Out of it, 525,000 persons are to be accepted as Indians and 300,000 to be granted Sri Lanka citizenship. Future of the balance 150,000 was to be decided at a latter stage.

Indo-Ceylon Agreement (Implementation) Act No. 14 of 1967 and its regulations were introduced to make provisions for the implementation of the Agreement.

As the main Act provided for grant of Sri Lanka citizenship and acceptance as citizens of India at the ratio of 4:7, Indo-Ceylon Agreement (Amendment) Act No. 43 of 1971 was introduced to introduce provisions for repatriation so that the grant of Sri Lanka

citizenship depended on the number repatriated.

In 1974 January, Mrs. Bandaranaike and Shrimathi Indira Gandhi agreed upon to accept 75,000 as Sri Lankans and 75,000 as Indians. Thus, the future of the balance 150,000 persons were settled.

Indo-Ceylon Agreement (Amendment) Act No. 47 of 1981 reverted the position by introducing grant of Sri Lanka citizenship should be based on acceptance as Indian citizens and not on repatriation. Out of 975,000 persons 375,000 were to be granted Sri Lanka citizenship and 600,000 were to be accepted as Indians and repatriated were the base of two Agreements. Only 506,000 had applied for Indian citizenship. The balance 94,000 had opted for Sri Lanka citizenship. Thereby Sri Lanka had to accept 469,000 persons as its citizens. To make provisions for the Grant of Citizenship to Stateless Persons Act No. 5 of 1986 was enacted

Out of 506,000 persons, who were to be accepted by the Indian side only 422,000 were accepted and the balance of 84,000 has to be accepted by them as agreed upon. Therefore, it is evident that a total of 168,141 Indian nationals and their natural increase are in Sri Lanka and in no way they could be called "stateless".

The first generation since 1964 may not be alive now or very elderly and the natural increase of them are residing in Sri Lanka without any connection with India. As all these persons have continued to stay in Sri Lanka and have contributed to the national economy, their future should be considered humanely. The proposed Bill is to grant the above category of persons of Indian origin the citizenship status of Sri Lanka, to confer them the rights and privileges they deserve.

'LTTE double military strength during truce'

Responding to criticism from opposition parties that the government had been negligent about the reported security threat in and around Trincomalee because of the alleged military buildup by the LTTE, Defence Minister Tilak Marapana, during a statement to parliament on 8 October conceded that the LTTE had doubled its military strength since the Ceasefire Agreement was signed nearly two years ago.

The Defence Minister said "When we entered into a ceasefire, our aim was to solve the problems we had with the LTTE not by the use of force but through negotiations.

If that is our aim, then we must try to give the peace process a genuine chance without once again dragging the country to a burdensome war. This is not to say that we should tolerate anything and everything and allow the LTTE to get stronger and stronger and be suddenly surprised by an attack which we are unable to withstand. We have to act judiciously, be mindful all the while and take every new factor into consideration to face any eventuality in the future.

"Sir, it is true that the LTTE strength in the areas surrounding the Trincomalee harbour have increased during the cease-fire period. I do perceive this as an increased threat.

"What happened with the cease-fire was that army did not move about from their camps into the area south of the harbour.

We claim this area to be under our control but we have, since the withdrawal of several camps and troops from this area in 1995, not been able to effectively dominate this area. The LTTE has taken advantage of this and increased their presence in this area. Mr. Deputy Chairman, to my mind the significance is not the number of camps in which this increased strength are stationed. What is important is the fact that the LTTE strength in this area has nearly doubled since the time of the cease-fire.

"We know that during the last 18 months or so gradually the LTTE have been coming into this area. They have been roaming in this area for a long time. They have gradually stationed themselves in this area. So, to our mind what is important is not that there are 12 or 13 camps but we consider the larger presence of the LTTE in the area as the threat that we have to contend with if some unfortunate incident is to happen. We have taken this into consideration.

That is in preparation of our military strategies to defend the harbour and the civilian population in this area as well as for the eventual offensive against the LTTE should the occasion arise.

"We know that. We are not oblivious to the obvious. We know that the LTTE cadres have gradually crept into this area and they have established a stronger foothold. We are concerned about the increased strength in the LTTE cadre and we have taken this all important factor into consideration and our strategies are so structured to meet any eventuality.

"Heavy artillery has been in this area. The Hon. Kadirgamar rightly mentioned that the most important factor, where the security of the harbour is concerned, is the presence of this artillery. I assure this House that it is not as though the Government and the forces have blissfully permitted the enemy to surround us without making adequate preparation to counter any threat.

"I certainly do not subscribe to that view that along with the peace process one cannot also strengthen our security. I believe that the two must go parallel to one another and that is always our thinking."

UNICEF Action Plan and Child Soldiers

Barely within 24 hours following the ceremony on 3 October that marked the LTTE's release 49 child soldiers under a UNICEF Action Plan for the demobilization and rehabilitation of children recruited by the LTTE, there was a chorus of appeals and protests mainly from eastern Sri Lanka about the forcible abduction of scores of children allegedly by the LTTE.

A statement dated 3 October issued from its office in Geneva, the UNICEF said: The first of three transit centers for child soldiers released by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was opened on 3 October. The ceremony, attended by senior LTTE

figures, high-level officials of the Government of Sri Lanka, Save the Children and UNICEF marks the first stage of a complex programme aimed at releasing children from the LTTE and bringing them back to their families, implemented under the Action Plan approved by the Government and LTTE in August 2003. Forty nine former child soldiers (27 girls and 22 boys) have been placed in the transit centre in Kilinochchi in the severely war affected north east of the island. Two other centers in Batticaloa and Trincomalee, will be opened in the coming months.

The transit centers are intended to be collection points in the first instance where the needs of children can be assessed in a non-military environment before they are returned to their families.

'This is a big day for the children who have been amongst the people at most risk during the conflict,' UNICEF Representative in Sri Lanka, Ted Chaiban said. But there are still cases of recruitment and it has to be understood that, if the re-integration of child soldiers is to be successful, then new recruitment of children has to stop. With the implementation of the Action Plan, we need to see an end to child soldiers in Sri Lanka.

Speaking at the opening, Mr. Chaiban stated that the maximum period a child can stay in the centre is three months. 'However, it is expected most children will be returned to their families within a shorter period'. The centers are one component of action plan for war affected children in the north and east of Sri Lanka.

The centers will be jointly managed by UNICEF and the Tamils Rehabilitation Organisation (TRO). Staff from the UN agency will be present in all the centers on a 24 hour basis for the duration of the project.

It is important to get the children into the family environment as soon as we have an understanding of their future needs and their family circumstances. Till then, these centers will be secure places where they will be able to meet their parents, prepare for their return home and receive medical treatment as needed.'

After the children leave the transit center and return to their families, their progress is followed up by Save the Children social workers. This is when the real work begins. With the support of the Government of Sri Lanka children will be given classes to help them catch up on missed schooling, and access to psychosocial and health care. The Save the Children social workers will ensure that the children and their families have access to vocational training with the support of international and UN bodies.

UNICEF has reports from parents of 1,155 children who are still with the LTTE. UNICEF is advocating for those children to be released to the transit centres.

Recent Recruitment

Hardly before the UNICEF's Action Plan got off the ground, reports from the Northeast indicated that a large number of children were being abducted so much so Mr Chaiban was forced to issue a statement of condemnation. The Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) that is overseeing the truce between the government and the LTTE confirmed the reported abductions and complaints from parents of children concerned.

A BBC report datelined 6 October said, "Tamil Tiger rebels abducted at least 23 children just a day after freeing 49 child soldiers, according to independent truce monitors in Sri Lanka. The Norwegian-led Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission said the children were taken from the eastern town of Valachchenai over the weekend (4/5 October). Three hundred Tamil students from the main school in the area staged a protest, sitting on the main road and blocking traffic all morning. They said they would repeat their protest - a rare show of defiance towards the Tigers - until their friends were released. The Tamil Tigers have denied involvement in the abductions, but BBC Colombo correspondent Frances Harrison says it is hard to imagine who else could be behind such a large number of children disappearing.

"The abductions saw several small groups of children taken away. Some children were taken from a school, others from a Hindu temple where religious ceremonies were under way. "Local police say they are finding it difficult to investigate the abductions because parents are too frightened of the rebels to come forward and make an official complaint. A spokeswoman for the truce monitors, Agnes Bragadottir, said they were trying to arrange a meeting between the Tiger leadership and the Tamil parents in an attempt to secure the release of the children. The abductions happened barely 24 hours after the Tigers ceremonially released 22 boys and 27 girls at their political headquarters in the northern town of Kilinochchi. The 49 children are being accommodated at a half-way home in the area set up by the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef). The UN agency plans to open two more such centres in the east of the island.

"The conscription of children is regarded a violation of the truce brokered by Norway, which is trying to secure a political settlement to the island's ethnic conflict which has claimed more than 60,000 lives since 1972." Another news report datelined 7 October from eastern Sri Lanka said, "Hundreds of parents and students have staged a protest campaign at Valaichchenai yesterday against the abduction on Saturday evening of 24 persons including school children allegedly by the LTTE. Military sources said that thirteen of them had been abducted while they were playing at the Hindu College, Valaichchenai school playground. The LTTE had allegedly abducted these students and taken them into their camp in several vehicles, sources said.

Later yesterday morning, the parents and the students had launched a protest campaign against the incident and informed the SLMM and the police about the incident. Sources also said that the LTTE had threatened the Principal of the College yesterday morning and warned him not to allow the protest, but by that time the students and parents had already started their protest."

"We have unconfirmed reports that several children have been abducted in Saturday evening around 6-7," SLMM spokeswoman Agnes Bragadottier told journalists. Our monitors went to the scene and were told that the LTTE forcibly took away 15 children and only three of them had been freed. We are now investigating the issue and in contact with the LTTE leadership to know how many children are in their custody and to get them released as soon as possible," Bragadottier said.

Calling upon the LTTE release all abducted children, UNICEF's Mr. Chaiban said in a media statement, "The time for child soldiers in Sri Lanka is now over and the UNICEF has called on the LTTE to immediately release these children from Valaichchenai."

"UNICEF teams on the ground are working to verify the exact numbers of children recruited, but the numbers are not the issue - the recruitment of just one child is a serious violation of children's rights. This continued recruitment of children is completely unacceptable and this type of action undermines the work and commitment of the LTTE towards making the Action Plan for Children Affected by War a success.

UNICEF has repeatedly stated that for the implementation of the Action Plan to be a success, we need to see an end to child soldiers in Sri Lanka and realise the full potential and bright future of children affected by war." Mr. Chaiban said.

Meanwhile University Teachers for Human Rights(J) in their latest 70 page report have given graphic details of the names, ages, addresses which include schools, colleges villages and areas from which and the dates on which children have been forcibly recruited since the signing of the ceasefire agreement in December 2001.

The report said, "Contrary to all expectations of the agreement signed with the UNICEF to oversee the demobilization of child soldiers, the LTTE has once again intensified its conscription programme, renewing its demand for one child per family in several eastern districts, while making aggressive intrusions upon school

children in the North."

The UTHR (J) further alleges that in a new move the LTTE is targeting children attending religious festivals, a factor which is forcing parents to avoid taking children to such ceremonies. It has given many examples of such abductions. The abducted include 14-year-old Kandasamy Kumar and 16-year-old Daniel Yogeswaran. Kumar was abducted on September 20 while observing a religious ritual at a temple in Batticoloa. LTTE men blindfolded him and took him away. Yogeswaran was abducted on September 9, while attending a temple festival in Eravur, Batticoloa.

For his part, LTTE official spokesperson, Daya Master dismisses the charges against them as baseless. "We deny all the abduction charges, which are made by spoilers of the peace process. There's a strong campaign to tarnish the LTTE's image," he says. He claims that, "Children have joined us voluntarily, and we hope to send them back to their parents through the rehabilitation program."

Talks to resume on SLFP-JVP alliance

Though it was reported last month that the talks aimed at forging an electoral alliance between the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) had collapsed over disagreement on questions such as devolution of power, the ongoing peace process and the sharing of cabinet portfolios, it now appears that renewed attempts are being made to restart negotiations between the parties. President Chandrika Kumaratunga, who is the leader of the SLFP, has appointed a committee to prepare a joint political programme between the SLFP and the JVP. The committee is composed of the General Secretary of the SLFP Maithripala Sirisena, Parliamentarians Nimal Siripala de Silva, Dr. Sarath Amunugama, Susil Premachandra and Tudor Dayaratne.

The Central Committee of the SLFP has now decided to resume talks with the JVP and they are likely start within the next two weeks, according to an SLFP MP who attended a special meeting of the Central Committee of the party on 7 October. However, JVP officials said that the SLFP had still not officially invited them to recommence talks, and unless they were officially informed they were not prepared to resume talks with the SLFP.

The reported decision of both parties to resume talks came in the wake of a statement by SLFP Media Spokesman Mangala Samaraweera that his party and the JVP had decided to continue the peace talks with the LTTE, in the event of the proposed alliance coming to power.

JVP officials also are reported to have confirmed that in the if talks recommenced with the SLFP, they only had to discuss in detail the issue of devolution of power as the solution to the ethnic issues, while all other minor details could be sorted out easily such as the ministerial portfolios issues and alliance position on other issues.

However the proposed political marriage between the SLFP and the JVP have also led to internal friction not only within the Peoples Alliance of which the LSSP and the CP are constituent parties which are said to be opposed such a move. It also has caused divisions within the SLFP itself. Its stalwarts like Anura Bandaranaike and Mangala Samaraweera are ardent advocates of the proposed alliance. However the President herself and the Opposition Leader Mahinda Rajapakse are said to be no so keen on the move. The recent formation of the Patriotic National Movement (PNM), at the head of which is the JVP, has added to the complications, primarily because that many ultra Sinhala national-

ist elements have jumped on its bandwagon, and it has been reported that the President is unhappy about this development.

PNM recently organised a well publicised and much attended five-day foot-march from Kandy to Colombo in which many leading parliamentarians of the SLFP participated despite President Kumaratunga's warning to all SLFP parliamentarians and party organisers not to take part at the protest march. Anura Bandaranaike, Mangala Samaraweera, Mahindananda Aluthgamage, Arjuna Ranatunga, Jayaraj Fernandopulle, Dilan Perera, Sarath Amunugama, Mahipala Herath, Wijithamuni Soysa, Janaka Bandara Tennakoon and Pavithra Wanniarachchi were some of the SLFP MPs who took part in the march.

Even as President Kumaratunga was contemplating as to what disciplinary action should be taken against those who took part in defiance of her warning, SLFP MP Dilan Perera has warned that he along with 11 other MPs would resign if Kumaratunga took disciplinary action against them for participating in the PNM's protest march. Mr. Perera had made this threat at a meeting held in Kurunegala "Twelve of us took part in the march, and I don't think there was anything wrong in taking part in it. There is no necessity to take disciplinary action against us," he said.

It appears that President Kumaratunga has consented to the resumption of talks with the JVP in an apparent move to prevent a split in her own party and avoid the JVP gaining the upper hand by forming a broad opposition coalition with some of her own members of the alliance. According to SLFP sources, President Kumaratunga had come under severe pressure from various quarters to resume negotiations with the JVP.

This became clear at the SLFP central committee meeting where many MPs and organisers spoke in favour of a broader alliance including the JVP.

Commenting on the divisions within the SLFP, a columnist in *The Sunday Times* (Colombo 5.10.2003) wrote, "The SLFP has suffered a major set back with the emergence of two ideologically separate groups in the form of pro JVP-SLFP alliance and a group opposing the alliance amidst a delay in plans to resume negotiations with the JVP.

The two factions are identified as Maithri-Mahinda group and the Anura-Mangala with party General Secretary Maithripala Sirisena and Opposition Leader Mahinda Rajapakse organizing SLFP-led campaigns while the other faction spearheaded by Anura Bandaranaike and Mangala Samaraweera wants co-ordination with the JVP to form a popular front. The latter group has taken part in many JVP-led functions.

Despite the appointment of a five-member SLFP committee last Friday to resume negotiations with the JVP, the committee until this Friday had not had a single meeting nor has the JVP been officially informed about the proposed renewed talks."

'Conspiracy to divide country'

Oct 3 - The joint opposition and sections of the Buddhist clergy have vowed to press on with their protest campaign to save the motherland from what they called a tripartite conspiracy to divide the country on ethnic lines. SLFP/PA, JVP and MEP leaders accused the government, the Norwegians and the LTTE of planning to hand over the north-east to an LTTE dominated provisional administration.

"Today, we are not an independent country but a colony of neo-imperialist forces. We stand united today over political differences and pledge to save our motherland," JVP parliamentary group leader Wimal Weerawansa told a large gathering which reached the Lipton Circus ending their 72-mile march starting from Kandy city five days earlier.

Weerawansa said that the formation of the Patriotic National

movement (PNM) was a need of the hour to save motherland being divided and sold out. "Patriots walked along with us despite scorching sun, heavy rain. We have come here with a strong message to the government - it's time for you to go home!"

"We have started leading the way to save this country. This alliance we formed today overrides our political colours. We do not want this country to continue as a colony and we are convinced that our alliance can send this government home and save motherland from danger," he said.

Thousands of by-standers and party supporters waited along the roadsides as the marchers reached their destination. Leading the march were displays of pictures of 1818 rebellion leaders Keppetipola, Puranappu, Kudahapola Thero and Duraisami. The line of marchers was more than two kilometers long.

PA MP Anura Bandaranaike said that whatever barricades may come the JVP/PA leaders will move ahead and cross all of them to form the alliance to topple this government. "We had difficulties and differences. But the time has come for us to prioritize our motherland. We must definitely form the alliance to protect our country. All patriots must gather around the Patriotic National Movement."

"We have formed the alliance; this is it," said Elle Gunawansa Thero. He had never appeared on political platforms before, but this was time, which called for sacrifices and come forward to save the motherland. The PNM has initiated a gigantic task of freeing the motherland and lead the nation to liberation.

MEP Leader Dinesh Gunewardena said that the PNM would lead the nation to the supreme duty of achieving freedom from western imperialist forces. "This is a common front of political leaders, Maha Sangha, intellectuals and all patriotic forces. Let us march forward till we free our motherland which was saved by our forefathers sacrificing their lives," he said.

PA parliamentarian and captain of the World Cup winning team Arjuna Ranatunga requested patriotic forces to line up under the banner of PNM to regain the pride of our nation. "We always are proud of our national anthem and flag. Now the nation is confronted with the threat of being separated and sold out to foreigners. We must join together to stop this and bring back the pride we had for our independent nation," he said.

Writer Gunadasa Amarasekera said: "Today is the first day of national liberation. We have a national struggle before us to free our country from becoming a colony. We have started it, and I'm convinced that we can make it."

Leader of the Sri Lanka Green Party, Piyal Parakrama and Western Provincial Council member Mohammed Naffi also addressed the gathering.

Another dispute over Bribery Act

The proposed amendments to the Bribery Act appear to have created another dispute between the government and President Kumaratunga who has complained that the amendments have been decided upon without consulting her.

In a letter written to Premier Wickremesinghe strongly objecting to such unilateral action and suggesting such amending legislation, if considered necessary, may be introduced in consultation with her and others concerned, the President says that there is "no rationality" to increase the number of commissioners from 3 to 5 since there has been no complaints that the present number of three commissioners was insufficient.

She has also pointed out that what is required was "capacity building and improving the facilities, infrastructure and investigative capability" of the Commissioners rather than increasing the number of Commissioners.

She has further said that the draft amending legislation seeks to remove the higher judicial qualification required of members of the Commission. "The Commission is a quasi judicial body and accordingly appointees should have judicial training and experience in the Superior Courts. The removal of this criteria is unwise."

President Kumaratunga insists that any changes to the Bribery and Corruption Act should be discussed with her and be subjected to consultation with all the political party leaders represented in Parliament so that it will receive the widest debate in the legislature.

The President pointedly told the PM, "Your lack of consultation is surprising since you contend on many occasions that even Executive Presidential decisions should be in consultation with relevant ministers and the Premier. In that context I cannot comprehend the reason for this hasty legislation, while you delay the nomination of the third bribery commissioner."

In a note to the Cabinet the President said that in addition there were 812 complaints which could not be investigated while the cases of several public servants under interdiction due to allegations of bribery or corruption could not be finalised due to the non-functioning of the Commission.

This has resulted in a loss of credibility in the commission, the President has said, urging the Constitutional Council to immediately fill the vacancy created by the death of one member of the Commission.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe in his reply to the President has said, "I have taken note of the matters mentioned therein and shall revert to you no sooner I return to the country at the end of September."

The Bribery Commission has continued remain non-functional for a long time. Some 1322 investigations including 50 indictment cases are pending before the Bribery or Corruption Commission since it became defunct, but the President and the government are still having disputes over how to get it back on track.

Despite a number of letters exchanged between the President and the Premier and an agreement to take up the issue of amendment by the end of September, upon the Premier's return from the United Nations, the Presidential Secretariat said there was no such meeting scheduled between the two in the near future.

Meanwhile, stepping into the Sri Lankan controversy, Transparency International Sri Lanka (TISL) said that the amendments now proposed to the bribery law by the Government would neither sufficiently address the issues nor would it make the present Commission against Bribery or Corruption more effective,

In a press release TISL Executive President J. C Weliamuna called upon the Cabinet and Parliament not to hasten amendments to the bribery law, as mere amendments would not make the anti-corruption institute active, unless the stakeholders study the systemic failures that have confronted the Bribery Commission.

"We had on more than one occasion pointed out that subsequent to the release of the annual report of the Bribery Commission, there were concerns expressed by various persons and organizations. The TISL held a seminar and submitted its observations and recommendations in this regard," it said.

Therefore, TISL requested the Government and all stake holders to examine the proposals presented by the TISL, alongside a systemic study of the Bribery Commission. It said such a study is imperative prior to any concrete steps hastily taken to change the law. TISL has already written to the President, Prime Minister, Justice Minister and the National Law Commission on the proposals of the TISL, it said.

Deserting soldiers turning to crime

Army deserters have become an issue of serious concern, especially in the wake of escalating crimes, much of which is being attributed to these men who once took an oath to serve the country.

Police investigations into various crimes have revealed deserters to be involved in thefts, rape, murder and gang warfare. Many are also said to have links with underworld gangs often undertaking contract killings.

Army estimates put the number of deserters at one-third its total force. What compels a soldier to desert his regiment and what motivates him to take up a life of crime?

A path breaking survey on Army deserters, carried out by the Sociology Department of the Peradeniya University gives some interesting insights into an issue that has become a national problem with wide-socio-economic implications. The study conducted with the objective of identifying the reasons why soldiers desert the service, the problems faced by them after desertion and their links with the increasing crime rate in the country reveals that up to now 49,143 army personnel including 623 officers have been listed as deserters. Significantly the numbers amount to one third of the army's total strength.

The total strength of the Army in 1978 was 15,920, including 1103 officers. It was increased to 175,195 in 1998 with the intensification of the war. Though the figure indicates a 10-fold increase, it is still 60 per cent less than the approved cadre, indicating continuous shortage of manpower from 1978 to 1998. But since the debacles of 1995 and thereafter, the Army had been functioning below strength. And the situation had been further compounded by the increasing numbers of deserters.

The study points out that the number of soldiers killed in action had also increased from 152 in 1985 to 11,400 in 2001. Over 8,000 soldiers had also been totally disabled. Although Army desertions is not a new phenomenon, the study reveals that the numbers opting out of the Army without due release, had increased rapidly after the Wannu debacle in 1995. Around 1,500 soldiers are said to have decamped immediately after the incident. Previously the number of deserters had been around 10 per year.

The research report attributes severe unemployment, poor education standards, higher salary, free food and accommodation provided by the Army, advertising that appeal to the macho image of young men facilities to improve talents in sports and opportunities to serve the country as reasons why young men join the Army.

More significantly it identifies Poor Leadership, enlistment of unsuitable officers, poor administration and insufficient training, fear, escalation of the war, lack of strategies to retain people, family and personal problems as the reasons for the mass desertions.

And going a step further, it attributes the loss of stable income, difficulty in finding jobs due to legal and social barriers as the main reason why the deserter ends up as criminals.

Pressure by friends and other elements such as underworld gangs, because they have undergone training and are skilled at handling weapons, have also forced many deserters to take up a life of crime, as have their training in escaping through various means. The report points out that the army is facing a severe shortage of manpower due to the high rate of desertion and acknowledges that deserters become a threat to society.

It also identifies desertion as one of the reasons for the poor response to recruitment drives. The report while recommending that deserters be absorbed to society urges enhanced punishments and relaxation of certain legal barriers with regard to the compulsory service period in a bid to stop soldiers from deserting the Army.

Lord Nataraja idol for UNESCO

A five-foot sculpture of Lord Nataraja made of panchalolkha sculpted by the Sthapathis, Radhakrishnan Sthapathy, Srikandan

(continued on next page)

Current State in the Peace Process

● LTTE's Dublin discussions

A delegation of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), led by the head of its Political Wing, Mr. S.P. Thamichelvan, has been meeting from 5 to 10 October in Dublin, Ireland, with legal experts from the Tamil diaspora who took part in the Paris discussions in early September.

The meeting in Dublin from 5 to 10 October has been convened by the LTTE to finalise its proposals on the Interim Administration for the North and East to be submitted to the government of Sri Lanka through the Norwegian facilitators.

It is understood that the meeting of the Constitutional Affairs Committee of the LTTE which discussed the draft LTTE response was preceded by a forum where rehabilitation, reconstruction and economic development issues were discussed with several Tamil experts from the diaspora.

It is learnt that during the later stages of the meeting members of the LTTE's the Constitutional Affairs Committee met with international experts from Canada and Ireland for dis-

cussions.

Mr. Thamiselvan along with Eastern Special Military Commander, Karuna and a woman activist, Thamivilvi boarded a Sri Lanka Air Force helicopter from Kilinochchi on October 2 to leave for Dublin via Colombo. The others traveled overland via the Omanthai entry-exit point to reach Colombo.

It is the first time a senior member named Thamivilvi of the Women's political wing of the LTTE has joined to deputise Thamiselvan at the discussions. Thamivilvi was one of the members in the LTTE delegation that went on a tour studying the Federal system in certain European and Scandinavian countries recently.

The LTTE delegation from Sri Lanka left from Kattunayaka International Airport early on 3 October on board a Zurich-bound SriLankan Airlines flight, the sources said. From there, the ten member group headed directly to Dublin as members of an organisation proscribed by the British they were unable to travel through UK.

Before his departure, Thamichelvan told journalists, "We would be having

discussions with Irish experts who were associated with the peace process in Ireland. The Irish have also struggled for their rights like us. Their experience and knowledge will help us better understand the intricacies of negotiating peace"

"We need to examine matters relating to the interim administration once more with our constitutional experts. This is intended to be the conclusive meeting of our constitutional committee. We will also be meeting experts who are knowledgeable in peace negotiations. Their advice would be useful to us", Mr. Thamichelvan said, speaking to the press about the purpose of the LTTE's team's visit to Ireland.

According to Mr Thamichelvan, while the LTTE delegation is expected to discuss matters with foreign experts who have been invited to the meeting, they would not be involved in discussions specifically relating to the LTTE's draft response to the government proposal. "We would be getting useful and constructive advice on constitutional and legal matters from international experts. But the deliberations on the draft proposal would be held separately with our experts of our own constitutional affairs committee."

"Our program in Ireland will take a week and will be in three stages. We have created a body for planning and economic development. We will be meeting economic and development specialists from the Diaspora in Dublin for this purpose. Then our constitutional affairs committee will meet. And finally we will have consultations with international legal and constitutional experts", he said.

All those who took part in the Paris discussions last month are reported to be participating in the Dublin meeting and they are LTTE Political Wing Leader, Thamiselvan, LTTE Special Commander for Batticaloa and Amparai Districts, Col. Karuna, Economic Advisor, Planning and Development Unit, Dr. Jay Maheswaran, Director, Sub Committee on Immediate Humanitarian and Rehabilitation Needs (SIHRN), Selvin Ireneuss, Professor of Law, National University of Singapore and Fellow, Centre for Petroleum and Natural Resources Law, University of Dundee, Scotland, Prof. Somarajah, Professor (Political Science), National Uni-

(continued from page 8)

Sthapathy and Swaminathan Sthapathy at Swamimalai is to be shipped to Paris shortly for installation at the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) headquarters in the metropolis of Paris.

The exquisite piece of art will be installed at the main building of the UNESCO along with two other sculptures one of Lord Buddha and another of Mahatma Gandhi both sculptured in Gujarat - and unveiled on the 2nd of next month on the occasion of Gandhi Jayanthi.

Speaking to the press persons at their workshop in Swamimalai (named after then father Sri Devasenapathi Sthapathy, National Awardee), the brothers said that the World Peace Centre at Pune (which has sponsored and borne the whole cost) initially approached them for all the three pieces but they could accept only one so as to be able to do full justice to the work within the given time of barely three months.

They said, while the sculpture of Lord Nataraja depicted Indian art and culture (Bharathanatya) and the philosophy of cosmic dance (creation and destruction), that of Buddha and Gandhi depicted peace and non-violence to the world community.

Explaining the style adopted, they said the historical Chola traditions have been adopted, combining the best of the three well-known Nataraja idols - found at the big temple (Thanjavur), Konerirajapuram temple and the Thiruvangadu temple.

For the 'Kona' (angle) they have adopted the style of Chidambaram Natarajar which is angled like in Srichakra, the Thanjavur and Konerirajapuram models are six angled). The hairstyle adopted is after the Thiruvangadu model. The sculpture weighing nearly 250 kgs and worth Rs. 2.5 lakhs (INR) is mounted on a teak pedestal 1 foot high.

The sculptors said, they have put their full artistic ability on the work.

(Indian Express)

versity of Malaysia, Prof. P. Ramasamy, Professor of Law, University of Sydney and Professor of Tax Law, University of Western Sydney, Dr. Manuelpillai Paul Dominic, Former Attorney General of Sri Lanka and PC, Sydney, Australia, Shiva Pasupathi, Legal Advisor and Chartered Engineer, MIGEM, Visvendran LLB (Hons), and Constitutional Affairs and International Legal Affairs Advisor, Ruthirak-umaran.

The last phase of the discussions in Dublin is reported to have been an academic discussion on areas of global ethnic strife and enacted solutions; South Africa, Quebec in Canada with special emphasis on the Meech Lake accord and Charlottetown Agreements, Northern Ireland and its Good Friday Agreement, Bougainville Agreement of East Timor, etc, will be on the agenda.

The Tigers had also invited some international experts on these areas to participate in these discussions. One such expert is Prof. Gil Remillard, former Quebec provincial justice and intergovernmental affairs minister from Canada.

London based International Work-

ing Group chief Peter Boyle, Ulster University Law Professor Christine Bell and Professor Anthony Reagan participated in the discussion. The discussions focused on the application of principles of post conflict transformation into the Interim Administration for a people based development, according to LTTE sources. Professor Bell is an authority on the Northern Ireland peace process. Prof. Reagan played a crucial role in the Bougainville peace process.

Present too was Eric Solheim and Lisa Gold from Oslo as observers. It is not known whether or not Mr Solheim had any detailed discussions when he had a private meeting with Mr Tamilchelvan on 8 October.

The absence of the LTTE's hitherto Chief Negotiator Anton Balasingham at the discussions seemed conspicuous, but the official reason given by LTTE sources is that his health condition did not permit his attendance.

● PM's UN speech

"After 20 years of conflict our people are now enjoying the fruits of 20

months of peace. The role of the international community in enabling us to move from war to peace has been outstanding. The facilitation that Norway provided, has resulted in bringing the Government and LTTE together in several rounds of negotiation. President Chandrika Kumaratunga's continuing declaration of commitment to a political solution has been invaluable," Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe said while addressing the 58 Sessions of the UN General Assembly on 26 September.

Pointing out that his government had initiated fundamental changes in moving from conflict to peace and shifted from confrontation to negotiation, Wickremasinghe said "The success story that Sri Lanka is fast becoming also demonstrates the value of the support of the international community acting in concert. That the global community moving with a common purpose can succeed in re-establishing peace, democracy and prosperity has been amply demonstrated in the Sri Lankan experience."

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He thanked India, Japan, Canada, US, EU and other countries for the moral and material support extended to Sri Lanka as front line sponsors. He pointed out that in Oslo last November international partners endorsed and underwrote a paradigm shift in policy when the Government and LTTE accepted that the future political order in Sri Lanka would include moving towards a federal polity where the unity and territorial integrity of the country would be ensured. Wickremasinghe also said "I must however inform this Assembly that like in all negotiations of a peace process we find ourselves today at a temporary impasse in the talks. Within the next few weeks we should know the results of a comprehensive review undertaken by the LTTE in response to our earlier proposals regarding an interim administrative arrangement for the north and east of our country. That they should take so much time and effort can be seen as a positive sign. We in turn will look positively at the proposals put forward by the LTTE and will do everything in our power to keep the peace process moving forward to a successful conclusion," he said.

Ranil Wickremasinghe has said that LTTE's response to the Sri Lanka Government proposals on the Interim Administrative (IA) structure for the north-east, which is expected to be submitted by the end of this month, needs to be discussed openly. Addressing public meeting in Bentota, a tourist town in the south of the island he said open discussion on the LTTE counter proposals is imperative if Sri Lanka is to achieve lasting peace. "My government and the LTTE would have a separate discussion the latter's counter proposals at a date that will be fixed once the LTTE submits its response. The Peoples Alliance (PA) wants the LTTE counter proposals to be reviewed within the framework of a final political solution of the ethnic conflict. We want to encourage open discussion of the proposals by all parties," he added. The Muslims are also hoping to join the talks with their own proposals on interim administration. Denying any knowledge of the contents of the LTTE response to government proposals he said "We only know what the media has speculated. The concept of establish-

ing an interim administration for the northeast is not a new idea. The issue was discussed during the past two general elections," the PM said.

● Norway's View

Speaking at the UN General Assembly, Norwegian Foreign Minister Jan Petersen said on 30 September that Sri Lanka's peace process was at a decisive juncture, adding that it was "vital that the parties reach agreement and resume direct peace negotiations within the timeframe envisaged." He stressed, "Norway remains firmly committed to the role of facilitator of the peace process between the government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE."

"We are hopeful that the parties will soon be able to embark on negotiations towards an interim administration for the north-east province," Petersen said. Calling on the "international community to engage in the efforts for reconstruction and rehabilitation in Sri Lanka," he said "While dealing with the peace process, the parties should take care to proceed with the important task of reconstruction and development."

During his last visit to the island, Deputy Foreign Minister Vidar Helgesen said that proposal by the LTTE to be submitted shortly was significant because it was the first such document from the Tigers since 1985.

"Since the Thimpu principles, the LTTE has never presented a draft, never worked out a proposal and presented it... They are taking this very seriously, they are aware of the historic event it is," Helgesen told Reuters news agency.

Thimpu, the capital of Bhutan, was the site of the first peace talks in 1985, which, like three later efforts, ended in renewed bloodshed. Because those breakdowns always led to fighting, Helgesen said the fact the two sides were getting set to return to talks in the coming months was historic. "If the parties return to the table after six or more months of break without outright armed hostilities taking place, that is actually an historic event in the course of this conflict," he said. The Tigers had withdrawn from the talks since April this year.

Helgesen also said human rights and problems caused by the Tigers rejecting rulings by the international mo-

niters overseeing the Ceasefire would also be brought up once the talks start.

In a recent newspaper interview, Norway's Deputy Foreign Minister Vidar Helgesen, who is directly involved in the facilitation process admitted that there had been a crisis in the peace process over the past six months, leading to a political stalemate. However, Norway was prepared for a "quick resumption of talks" after the LTTE presented its proposals during October.

In an interview with "The Island" given in New York he said, "We share and understand the concerns of ordinary people about certain breaches of the ceasefire agreement as well as disregard for SLMM rulings," adding that Norway's view was: "We see breaches of the ceasefire agreement as unacceptable," he stressed, in unusually strong comments. "Political assassinations are unacceptable. Disregard for SLMM rulings is unacceptable. We have made that very clear to the LTTE."

Helgesen noted, however, that there was improving dialogue between the SLMM and LTTE on addressing those concerns. There have also been some "positive contacts" between Tiger and army representatives.

Asked how Norway would reassure Sri Lankans that recent glitches did not mean the peace process was a failure, Helgesen admitted that his country could offer no guarantees. "We are not in a position to guarantee to the people that this process will be an uninterrupted series of successes. There will be breakdowns. There have certainly been breakdowns and hiccups over the past six months... a crisis in the process leading to a political stalemate and there were some serious issues related to the ceasefire agreement and political assassinations," he said adding "It is important to be open and frank about the situation, there is no smooth road for peace in Sri Lanka."

Highlighting that the breakdown in talks had not led to a resumption of hostilities, as was historically common, Mr Helgesen said the parties now seemed to be "on their way back to the negotiating table"

Speaking on the SLMM, Helgesen pointed out that the monitoring group was never intended to have enforcement capacity. "Enforcement lies entirely with the two parties, not with the

SLMM," he said.

On the issue of Muslim representation at the talks, Mr Helgesen said the government and the LTTE had agreed previously to invite a separate Muslim delegation to the sessions. Norway expected the two parties to stick to that agreement. It was especially important as the interim administration and the ground situation are up for discussion in the forthcoming rounds of talks, he said.

● Change of format

It is learnt that the government is to propose a change in the format of peace talks depending on how the LTTE would respond to the government proposals for an interim administrative structure. Government spokesman and chief negotiator G.L. Peiris told the weekly Cabinet briefing that the three-day duration of talks might be increased by a few days to address comprehensive issues. "We may have to put emphasis on Committee work at the next round with legal issues taking a longer course," the Minister noted adding that "There is however no question of a unilateral decision to be taken by the government, it will be done with the consent of the LTTE of course."

The LTTE response, to be finalised after the current second meeting of Tiger legal consultants in Dublin is expected to be handed over to the Government through Norwegians this month, the Minister added.

The Minister was also critical of the manner in which the Opposition was attempting to "whip up" the emotions of the people by carrying out protest campaigns against the peace process. He questioned the rationale behind them at a time when all political parties in the country recognized the need for an interim administrative structure, although there may be dissent about the degree of power to be granted.

Prof. Peiris said that at the first round of negotiations between the Government and the LTTE they were able to achieve fruitful results as both parties could reach agreement over substantial devolution of power within the country and identify a federal structure as a solution to the ethnic conflict. However, the Minister said the next round of talks will be more complicated as the both parties are expected to come

to an agreement over the details of powers of the interim administrative structure.

Prof. Peiris said that there was no difference of opinion on the necessity for interim administrative structure among the major political parties of the country. Commenting on the opinions of the major political parties on the proposed structure, he said, "There is convergence of opinion and agreement about the need for an interim administrative structure. However, the question is with regard to the power functions of the Interim Administration structure - that is the degree of power vested with it which is essentially a matter for discussion," the Minister added.

Prof. Peiris anticipated a gap of differences between sets of proposals on the framework of the proposed interim administrative structure already presented by the Government and those to be submitted by the LTTE. The direct discussions that are expected to follow will be aimed at narrowing down these differences, he added. Minister Prof. G.L. Peiris said at the weekly Cabinet press briefing: "We are aware certain mischievous elements within the Opposition are attempting to launch a very emotional campaign against the alternative proposals of the LTTE." The Government will launch a massive campaign to counter this and enlighten the public with facts on the proposed IA structure and the Government's view of the final solution. UNP backbenchers will be entrusted with carrying the message to the grassroots level and 100 activists from each electorate will be appointed to carry out the task.

● LSSP seeks consensus

Batty Weerakoon, General Secretary of the LSSP has recently issued a statement which reflects the party's position in regard to negotiations between the Government and the LTTE:

"To all appearances the UNP government and the LTTE are preparing themselves for negotiations on what both parties declare as the creation of an interim administration for the Northern and Eastern provinces.

The LTTE has made no secret of its intention to be the major factor in interim arrangements and the Government's secretiveness on this question has caused anxiety in the Sinhala and

Muslim people. The Lanka Sama Samaja Party understands that the principal cause for this anxiety is the scant respect the LTTE pays to its commitments under the ceasefire MoU and the apparent helplessness of the Government and the Monitoring Mission in the face of this.

The LSSP wishes to reiterate its position that respect for the MoU has to be strengthened and reinforced before the question of an interim administration is considered.

This is especially so in a situation in which the Government has taken no meaningful steps to reach consensus with the President and the PA on the political solution to the problem that gave rise to what has been essentially a civil war. The Government cannot ignore the need for and the actual possibility of such consensus in the face of HE the President's categorical declaration that she stands by the political solution to the conflict embodied in the PA government's constitutional amendment that was presented to Parliament in August 2000.

This is a forthright statement which the UNP should not be allowed to ignore or refuse to take into account.

The President owes this statement to what can be considered as political rectitude in a situation of intense pressure on her from rank communalist forces.

The consensus that is called for is on the delineation of what can be regarded today as a final political solution to the conflict. The LTTE cannot rationally expect interim arrangements on administration of a multi-ethnic region by placing itself as the major player without agreement between itself and the Government on the basics of the needed political solution. It should also realize that the Tamil people too are wary about its intolerance of democratic processes within the Tamil community itself. The UNP on its part cannot brush aside the suspicion it has earned in the South from the Sinhalese, and the Muslim community in particular of the East, from what can be fairly described as its hide-and-seek tactics in an exercise that may be seen as deception.

It cannot expect to lightly overcome the possible disquiet of the people over the likelihood of an interim adminis-

tration of the North and the East being made the substitute for a duly enacted political solution to the conflict.

The LSSP has tirelessly pointed to the need for broad consensus on all matters that arise in the wake of the MoU.

It remains confident that given openness on the part of the Government the LTTE can be made to realize the constrictions within which the Government has to seek success. It is equally confident that openness on the part of the Government and its rejection of undisclosed agendas will bring it success in its peace endeavour despite the mischief planned by disrupters who have their own political objectives."

● EPDP briefs Mandela on LTTE

Meanwhile in the run up to the Dublin talks, the Eelam people's Democratic Party (EPDP) has written to Nelson Mandela, former president of South Africa, who had been invited to be a distinguished observer at the confabulation of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) being held in Dublin, and to Brian Cowen, Irish minister for foreign Affairs, with the intention of briefing them of the real nature of the LTTE. Describing the LTTE as a terrorist organisation which is masquerading as a liberation organisation, the EPDP in its letter states, "Although 20 months have elapsed since the ceasefire was declared, the LTTE has showed no interest in discussing substantive political issues. In fact, the LTTE pulled out after a few months of preliminary talks. The ceasefire period was used by the LTTE to strengthen itself military and to eliminate democratic Tamil politicians and civilians. More than 40 democratic Tamil politicians and activists were assassinated during this period. Further, child conscription, extortion and intimidation by the LTTE reached alarming proportions during the period.

The LTTE has done more damage to the cause of the Sri Lankan Tamils than any other player. The Ltte had sabotaged every attempt at a reasonable political solution to the ethnic problem of Sri Lanka. The sole aim of the LTTE is the establishment of a one-party fascist regime by the name 'Tamil Eelam' in the North-East of Sri Lanka, initially as a confederation and finally as an independent state." □

Peace process and PM's UN speech

Jehan Perera

The appearance of a weakening of governmental popularity relative to the opposition has been reversed in recent weeks due to a combination of factors. One was the failure of the PA-JVP talks aimed at securing an alliance between the two largest opposition parties. The fact that the main ideological difference separating the two was the peace process, and President Chandrika Kumaratunga's principled commitment to the devolution of power, has served to strengthen the peace process, and ironically the government which is its foremost champion.

Another reason for the relative weakening of the opposition has been the inability of the JVP to mobilise genuine people's enthusiasm for its crusade against the peace process. Its long marches have still not succeeded in generating large scale participation of the general public. The present march from Kandy to Colombo has brought together an eclectic collection of groups whose only common interest is toppling the government by describing the peace process as a betrayal. But this is a hard message to sell, as the peace process has brought a greater degree of unity in the country than during the years of war.

Undoubtedly, there would be certain aspects of the peace process that most Sinhalese (and Muslims) would be feeling uncomfortable with. An example would be the LTTE build up of camps in the east that is being highlighted by the opposition. But the feeling of concern is not of such a degree as to mobilise the masses of people to direct action. The reason for this is the enormous peace dividend of a society free from war.

Besides there is a third and very powerful factor coming into play, and that is the economic peace dividend. Despite the five month suspension of peace talks, there have been sections of the donor community, such as the World Bank, that have been continu-

ing to disburse their commitments of aid to the country. In recent weeks the government has been announcing massive governmental investments to be made in rural infrastructure, such as roads and electricity. Not without reason, government politicians can claim that the employment and ripple effects generated will spark off an economic boom in the near future.

The possibility of an economic upturn is likely to pose the greatest challenge to the opposition's desires for a quick return to power. The JVP's increased activism, and the efforts by a section of the PA to rebuild the PA-JVP alliance, would be related to the need of the opposition to unite and act before the economic peace dividend makes its presence felt across the population.

Partnership

An element of potential instability in this optimistic scenario is the continued deprivation being suffered by the most severely war-affected parts of the country. These parts of the country are under LTTE control, and their continuing deprivation would put the LTTE leadership under pressure to show economic peace dividends to convince its cadre that the peace process is worth the silencing of their guns.

The problem for the LTTE is that they seek economic peace dividends that they alone should implement and distribute to the people of the northeast in the manner of sole benefactors. No doubt they feel that they are the ones who have single mindedly fought for Tamil rights over the past two decades at tremendous cost. But economic peace dividends cannot be unilaterally obtained. They come from partnership, and by adhering to the rules of partnership with donors, such as transparency and accountability, and respect for human rights.

One has only to travel the length of

the A 9 highway from south to north to see a different reality emerge when entering or leaving the LTTE controlled areas. In the LTTE controlled areas there is the shocking sight of the utter destruction of war and spartan conditions of living bereft of the basic amenities of motorable roads, electricity and telephone lines. A systematic effort to reconstruct public buildings, such as government offices and schools, is yet to commence. The half destroyed Kilinochchi central school in the capital of LTTE territory, without its roof and top floor, stands as mute witness to the inadequacy of the present peace process to improve the material lives of the people in a reasonable way.

There are two concrete reasons for this unhappy state of affairs. One is the failure of the government and LTTE to develop an appropriate mechanism by which funds can be made available for the development of LTTE controlled areas. Prior to the suspension of peace talks in April 2003, the LTTE was on the verge of signing an agreement to establish the North East Reconstruction

Fund (NERF). The government had already signed it and the World Bank had to sign it after the LTTE did so. The LTTE decided to suspend peace talks with the government and the signing of the NERF agreement was also suspended, presumably as they did not wish for any more partnership with the Sri Lankan government at that time.

If funding for the LTTE controlled areas is to be obtained from those donors who wish to assist those areas, the LTTE needs to reconsider its rejection of the NERF mechanism. Together with the Secretariat on Immediate Humanitarian Rehabilitation Needs (SIHRN) which was also based on joint government-LTTE partnership, NERF was a mechanism of partnership.

The World Bank, with the consent of the Sri Lankan government, expressly developed this mechanism, to channel international donor funds directly to the LTTE controlled areas without going through the government.

It is to be hoped that when the LTTE presents its counter proposals regarding an interim administration for

the north east this problem will be addressed in a problem-solving manner.

A second reason for the neglect of LTTE controlled areas is the LTTE's reluctance to permit foreign donors to come in directly to those areas. This is not a problem limited to donor agencies, but extends also to commercial ventures. For instance, an expatriate Tamil business venture, led by a person with sound Tamil nationalist credentials, was unable to make much headway for a project it had for the Wann. The reason was the LTTE's reluctance to provide statistical information and survey data that were needed for the feasibility study.

Donor requirements

The LTTE's security concerns are understandable. The peace process is still not a guaranteed one. As an organisation that has powerful antagonists and is still banned in several powerful countries, security concerns would be paramount in the LTTE's calculations. Due to these security concerns, as well as its ideology of being the sole repre-



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sentative of the Tamil people, the LTTE balks at power or resource sharing with others.

The LTTE do not wish foreign donors to prescribe the criteria for partner organisations, whether they be governmental agencies or NGOs, that will carry out development work. The LTTE would strongly prefer that international donors should give them what the north east requires, and leave the LTTE to do the rest. This desire of the LTTE to be sole benefactor in the north east is not partnership.

But foreign donors have their own criteria that is set by their head offices and even by their Parliaments. Besides the LTTE is not internationally recognised as a legitimate governing authority to which financial disbursements can be made.

The establishment of an interim administration, however, would facilitate this process of legitimisation. But that would also require the government and LTTE to agree on an interim administration with basic democratic features.

The basic requirement in a democratic system is free and fair elections. The interim administration will, however, be an appointed body and not an elected one. This would inevitably diminish its legitimacy which needs to be compensated by supreme adherence to other canons of democracy. Foremost among these is political pluralism and respect for human rights.

The continuing assassination of the LTTE's political opponents is a major obstacle to the international recognition of the LTTE as a legitimate political actor. Making the situation more difficult where the disbursement of international donor funds is concerned is the fact that at present there is very little transparency and accountability in the LTTE's decision making and budgetary allocations.

The secrecy with which the LTTE currently conducts its affairs, and distributes resources would have to end if the donor community is to make substantial financial commitments to the interim administration.

In their dealings the international donor community insist on transparency and accountability as mandated by

the people of their countries.

In their recent meetings with members of the international community, the LTTE has been reassuring them that their proposals regarding an interim administration will be reasonable. They have also pointed out that their counter proposals have been prepared in consultation with internationally based experts, including a former Attorney General of Sri Lanka.

The manner in which the LTTE handles the issues of human rights, accountability and transparency will be important criteria for the international community in their future disbursements of assistance.

Accepting the need for partnership between the government, LTTE and international donors will be another important pre requisite to reduce the growing asymmetry between developments in the government and LTTE controlled parts of the country.

PM backs US war

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe has found himself at the centre of a minor political storm. Speaking at the UN General Assembly he made an astonishing defence of the invasion of Iraq by the United States and its role as the world's policeman. While saying that there were many countries in the UN that passionately opposed the war on Iraq, he said that there were others who understood that the US had no other option, putting Sri Lanka into the camp of those who did understand. He then added salt to the wound by justifying the self-assumed role of the US as world policeman in the absence of an effective UN policing mechanism.

The Prime Minister's controversial performance at the UN General Assembly needs to be viewed in the context of the main challenge facing the country and which he has set himself the task to resolve.

There is no question that the main problem that beset the country for the past twenty years was the civil war that pitted government and LTTE forces against each other.

The war resulted in vast destruction of lives and property, widened the polarisation between the ethnic communities, and shrank the space for any sort

of reconciliation and bridge building to be done.

The same sort of disaster is increasingly becoming visible in Iraq today. When assessing the government's performance since its election in December 2001 it is possible to see that the main success of the government has been its ability to end the war that was destroying the country.

Further it appears that the government's main concern is to ensure that the war does not break out again.

This accounts for the criticism levelled by government leaders against the conduct of its own armed forces when they used their relative autonomy to militarily destroy LTTE cargo ships suspected of bringing in weapons.

The other notable feature of the government's conduct is its reluctance to spell out its own vision of what the solution to the ethnic conflict would entail.

It is inevitable that in a plural and democratic society split asunder by ethnic and political conflicts, achieving a unity of understanding as to the root causes of conflict would be next to impossible. An outsider who talks to the average Sinhalese or Tamil citizen about what caused the ethnic conflict is likely to hear two different versions.

A perusal of Sinhala and Tamil language newspapers would show that the choice of news stories and the content therein are at variance with one another. Besides, even within the same community there are multiplicity of views, some of them determined by loyalty to different political parties. Not even the LTTE's assumption of the mantle of sole representative of the Tamil people has been able to quell the spirit of plurality within it.

Minimalist approach

Broadly put, there are maximalist and minimalist approaches to conflict resolution. The maximalist (or positive) approach would be to address the root causes of conflict, have a comprehensive vision of the desired solution, and a strategic plan to achieve it.

The minimalist (or reactive) approach would be to identify the main challenge at the present time and take effective steps aimed at coping primarily

with it, but without getting involved in other conflict areas. The government's approach to the peace process appears to be of the second kind. On the other hand, both the major parliamentary opposition party, the PA and the LTTE appear to be preferring the first approach.

The Prime Minister's present approach to conflict resolution can be described as minimalist. It is an approach that seeks to strengthen the international safety net and prevent a relapse to war. At least this is the public impression. This is unlike the more maximalist approach taken by the former government headed by President Chandrika Kumaratunga.

The former government sought to obtain international support and to generate an internal debate on the root causes of the conflict that could lead to the remaking of the country. But that attempt failed due to the lack of disciplined focus.

It is quite possible that the Prime Minister and his team of advisors have a vision of the final solution and the maximum they are prepared to concede in terms of sharing of power with the LTTE. But they are unable to disclose this at present. On the one hand, the opposition political parties are likely to claim that this is too much, while on the other hand, the LTTE may deem it too little and threaten to withdraw entirely from the peace process rather than get enmeshed in a peace trap.

However, among the general population both north and south there has been a significant movement towards consensus on one major issue. That is

the erosion of faith in the military option utilised by successive governments as a tool for conflict resolution.

This has the implication of leading to a rejection of the resort to war and is a recent development, no doubt influenced by the huge escalation of the costs of war that took place during the latter period of the last government.

As recently as 1998 when the National Peace Council carried out a pioneering public opinion survey on people's attitudes towards the ethnic conflict only one half of the respondents expressed their preference for a negotiated settlement as the way to resolve the conflict.

But over the past two years, the series of public opinion polls carried out by the Centre for Policy Alternatives have shown that upwards of 80 percent of people support the present peace process.

The inability of the JVP and assorted Sinhalese nationalist groups to make headway in terms of mass mobilisation has been evident in the limited effectiveness of their repeated long marches. This is mainly due to the inability of the groups to present a reliable war-free alternative to the present peace process. Even those who feel that the government is conceding too much to the LTTE hesitate to actively give their support or join the long marches whose only promise is a breakdown of the peace process.

Irony

Not surprisingly Prime Minister Wickremesinghe has come in for severe criticism by the opposition parliamentary parties for his speech at the UN, some of which are contemplating a vote of no confidence on him.

The inability of the US to get UN approval for its war on Iraq, and its present unsuccessful efforts to share the burden of governing Iraq, indicate that the US policy on Iraq has few international backers.

Sri Lanka's open support for the US might have even caught the Americans by surprise.

But it is unlikely that there will be any serious threat to the Prime Minister either within Parliament or in terms of his present popularity with the general population. The reason is the widespread belief in the country that the US holds the key to continued peace in Sri Lanka without relapse to either war or terrorism. Especially after the events of September 11, the US is a superpower no country or organisation, not even the fiercely independent LTTE, would wish to challenge in the slightest way. With its global influence there is much that the United States can do to help Sri Lanka, perhaps more than any other country.

While nationalist sections of the Sinhalese, who oppose compromise with the LTTE, focused on the Prime Minister's subjection to US domination, the much larger majority who want the peace process to succeed will take satisfaction in his confident pledges to continue with it at the UN General Assembly.

The Prime Minister also went the extra mile to meet with a multitude of world leaders, and even the Prime Minister of Uganda, in his bid to strengthen the international safety net.

To the extent he succeeds in keeping renewed civil war at bay, the great majority of Sri Lankan people will be with him.

In his single mindedness the Prime Minister has no rivals. The best hope of Sri Lanka's recovery lies in a continuation of the no-war situation. This is the basis of national recovery and reconciliation.

But ironically, in his commitment to safeguard the current peace process, and the situation of no-war for which the people voted him into power, the Prime Minister has supported a course of action in international politics that is contrary to what he stands for in Sri Lanka.

There is a troubling dichotomy here. The principles of conflict resolution that are espoused for one's own country must be what are espoused for others as well. As the scripture says, the world is one family to the wise. □

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● Kofi Annan Skips Sri Lanka Visit

Days of uncertainty about UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's proposed visit to Sri Lanka during the second week of October ended with the announcement that he would not, after all, visit the island though he would keep his appointment with the Indian Prime Minister in New Delhi. Sri Lanka's permanent representative to the United Nations Charlie Mahendran was informed by UN officials that Annan put off the visit because he was pre-occupied with Security Council matters.

It would have been the first visit by a UN Secretary General in more than thirty years, but it was not to be.

However, according to informed sources said that the cancellation of the visit was not unconnected with the controversy that arose following the a request made on behalf of the Tamil Tigers that the Secretary General should also meet with LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran in his northern stronghold, Wannu. After all, it is not usual for the Secretary General of the UN representing 191 nations to have meetings with rebel leaders in other parts of the world. Small wonder therefore that the proposal raised problems.

Reportedly the government had opposed this suggestion, saying it would send out damaging signals. They had, however, offered the alternative of a meeting between LTTE leaders and Annan in government-controlled areas such as Olanthai, Jaffna or the capital, Colombo.

The proposed three-day visit to Sri Lanka by Annan was to have started on October 9, and according to a tentative agenda that had been prepared by the Sri Lankan foreign ministry, among other appointments Annan was to have addressed a parliamentary committee. He would also have been hosted to dinner by President Chandrika Kumaratunga,

Meanwhile, Norway denied a report in a Colombo newspaper that they had been acting as middlemen to promote a meeting between the LTTE and the UN Secretary General. The report said that Norway had told LTTE Political Wing leader S. P. Tamilselvan that Annan was prepared to meet a Tiger representative in Colombo or at the

People & Politics

Katunayake Airport, but Tamilselvan had replied to Norway's ambassador in Colombo that the LTTE would like to receive him in Wannu. A Sunday newspaper said, "It is learnt that Norwegian facilitators are however keen to ensure the Secretary General calls on the LTTE leadership to maintain their impartial role in the peace process."

Denying the report Vidar Helgesen, Deputy Foreign Minister, is quoted as saying, "Norway would never dream of applying pressure on or even advising the UN secretary general with regard to his travel schedule. We do not know the reason for the Secretary General's decision to change his schedule. Sri Lanka is a well respected member of the world organisation, and it would have been inappropriate of Norway to interfere in relations between the UN Secretary General and the Government of Sri Lanka."

● No-trust move against Govt

Taking issue with the Prime Minister on the pro-US stance that the Prime Minister has taken in his recent speech at the UN General Assembly, the People's Alliance (PA), Sri Lanka's main Opposition, is threatening to move a no-confidence motion against his Government. Mr Wickremesinghe has disgraced the whole country and its sovereignty. He has supported the US unilateral military invasion on Iraq, whereas Reflecting the view of the opposition, PA's spokesman, Dr Sarath Amunugama said that his speech was an insult not only to the non-aligned community but also to all fair-minded people throughout the world adding that substantial sections of the American people and the member countries of the UN Security Council had opposed the invasion of Iraq.

In his speech concerning the invasion of Iraq, the Prime Minister said,

"There are members in this hall today who believe passionately that the United States and their allies were wrong in intervening in Iraq. Then there are those of us who feel that the United States and their allies had no choice but to intervene, that the failure of the United Nations had created the need for a world policeman however reluctant it might be. But Iraq is more than the divergence of views on a major issue. It shows the inadequacies of the present collective security system. A decision making system which grappled with the issue of Iraq for over a decade without solution had created a deadlock at a most crucial time."

Political observers feel that though the UN Government has a slim majority in parliament, it will be able to defeat any no-confidence move against it and ward off any attempt to topple it with the help of minority parties like the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), Tamil National Alliance (TNA) and the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC). The TNA has assured the government its fullest support in the event of any Opposition ploy to bring it down. All Ceylon Tamil Congress President A. Vinayagamoorthy, a senior member of the TNA, has declared that the TNA is ready to sustain the government at any time, to ensure the peace process continues.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga is reported to have recently informed a group of Opposition MPs that the PA has the support of over eight Ministers. She has also been quoted as claiming that she has had discussions with several other ministers and deputy ministers to gather their support to win the no-confidence motion against Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe.

She appears to have told a group of PA MPs comprising Rohitha Abeygunawardena, Mahindananda Aluthgamage, Dilan Perera and several other MPs at her residence that she also hoped to obtain the support of these Ministers to defeat the government's next budget, which is due next month.

● Lanka, a US lapdog?

Figuring prominently in the midst of widespread criticism of the PM's pro-US stance in his UN speech is Jim Robertson, an American, who is the Economic Advisor to the Prime Minis-

ter. He was the man who created a rumpus at the recently held World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting in Cancun, Mexico as a member of the Sri Lankan delegation. It is said Robertson was responsible for Commerce Minister, Ravi Karunanyake to abandon the common stand taken by developing countries at the WTO and side with the US and the EU during hard fought negotiations.

According to sources close to the government it is Mr. Robertson who virtually runs the Ministry of Policy Development and exercise control Trade policy, though it is a subject assigned to the Commerce Ministry. It has commented that it was probably the first time in the history of independent Sri Lanka that a foreigner was included in a Sri Lankan delegation to an international conference. An economic analyst has been quoted as saying that it was a shame for Sri Lanka and since it had an American in its delegation, it did not have access to the developing country groups. He pointed out that since India was a leader of the G22 Group of Developing Countries and India may not have been happy about Sri Lanka's stance, which was blatantly pro developed countries of the West. He questioned, "How could we even talk about Free Trade Agreements with India and Pakistan when we have abandoned our neighbours and the third world?" Incidentally, it is reported that Mr. Robertson is paid Sri Lankan Rupees one and a half million a month with other facilities for his services.

In a scathing attack on the government's stance, *The Island* newspaper in its editorial (29.10.2003) under the heading "Sri Lanka as a hireling" said, "Sri Lanka under the UNF government is in an unenviable position where its foreign policy is concerned. Minister of Commerce Ravi Karunanyake pulling so hard as he did recently in Cancun, Mexico, for the developed countries led by the US, made Sri Lanka a pariah of sorts in the eyes of the developing countries which took up cudgels for the rights of their farmers. The interests of poor Sri Lankan farmers being crushed under the spiralling cost of production and driven to suicide as a result, mattered very little to the government delegation.

Not to be outdone, Prime Minister

Ranil Wickremesinghe in his address to the UN General Assembly on Friday kicked, well and truly, into our own goal by subscribing to the much disputed view that the US-led allies had to invade Iraq *faute de mieux*. He didn't stop at that. He sought to justify the emergence of a global policeman by blaming it on what he perceived as failure of the UN.

The Prime Minister and the Minister of Commerce may have been patted on their backs by the rich of the world for the services rendered. But the problem is that those compliments come at the cost of Sri Lanka being isolated from her friends in the developing world where it belongs."

● Muslim Unity

Meanwhile, reportedly significant efforts are being made to bring unity among the Muslims, especially in the context of problems the community faces in the east of the island, by bringing together the different factions of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) which suffered a major split last year. SLMC leader and Cabinet Minister Mr. Rauff Hakeem at a recent public rally in Kalmunai called upon all SLMC rebels to rejoin the SLMC, saying that a stronger Muslim political party would benefit the community.

However, a senior Muslim politician said that the SLMC leader should make a sincere effort to amalgamate the factions with his party and not only limit his invitations made at public meetings through verbal means.

Mr. A. Kalaam of the National Unity Alliance (NUA), the leader of which is Mrs F Ashraff, the widow of the founding leader of the SLMC, advised Mr. Hakeem that he should stop the ramblings in public rallies about Muslim unity, and invite the members officially to join the party. "You are only limiting your invitations at rallies, but once you get down from the platform, you forget about your invitation, why don't you write to them instead and request them for a meeting and discuss the issues, rather than only limiting your invitation to the stage, Kalaam asked Mr Hakeem.

Meanwhile the SLMC rebel group has put forward a set of proposal to Mr. Hakeem, and have said that if he agreed to those proposals they were ready to

re-join the party. Among the proposals are the establishment of a Supreme Council within the party leading to the weakening of the powers enjoyed by the present leader, as decisions cannot be taken by the leader alone but could be made only after consulting the supreme council.

● Strike kills mother and baby

The real victims of the spate of recent strikes in the health sector are the members of the public, especially the poor as the rich somehow manage to rely on the private medical sector. In Sri Lanka even the doctors, who are relatively better off in their pay and conditions, and many of whom engage in private practice while employed in government hospitals, seem to resort to strike action regardless of the dire consequences to the public. Even other employees in the health sector behave in the same fashion.

The problem for the public was graphically illustrated by the tragic deaths of a 28-year-old pregnant mother and her child reported from the southern town of Galle during the recent the health sector strike.

In an advanced state of pregnancy, Parasivam Mariamma had tried to admit herself to the Galle Mahamodara Maternity ward as she developed labour pains but the doctors had reportedly refused to admit her because she had more time for the delivery. Having returned home in Yakkalamulla, she had had given birth to a still born baby early two days later.

According to the police, Mariamma's husband Rasaiyya Balakrishnan, had rushed his wife and the still born baby to the same hospital. Nobody had taken care of his wife who had been bleeding profusely, the husband had charged. He said a doctor had come after about twenty minutes and pronounced her dead.

The police also said that the hospital authorities had taken the body to the mortuary without any supporting documents. Karapitiya Chief Coroner Nandanatha Arambawela in his report said the death was due to excessive bleeding while the child was still born. Mr. Arambawela said that both deaths could have been prevented if the hospital authorities had admitted the victim two days earlier when she went to the hos-

pital for the first time. The Coroner said he had warned the hospital director over the placing of the body in the mortuary without any supporting documents.

Meanwhile, it was reported that a GMOA spokesman while condemning the incident had said its members were not involved in the strike and hence could not take responsibility!

● New U.S. Ambassador

Oct 27 - Jeffrey J. Lunstead, the new US Ambassador to Sri Lanka has presented his credentials to President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga. The presentation took place at President's House. Ambassador Lunstead is a member of the Senior Foreign Service with the rank of Minister-Counselor. He was sworn in as Ambassador to Sri Lanka and Maldives on July 28, 2003.

He entered the Foreign Service in 1977 and has served in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and Malaysia. In Washington, DC, he has served as South Asia Bureau Coordinator for Afghanistan and as Director for Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh. He has also served in several positions dealing with international environmental issues, including the post of Director, Office for Environmental Policy. He has received two Superior Honor Awards and one Meritorious Honor Award.

The Ambassador received his B.A. degree from the University of Notre Dame in 1969 and his Ph.D. (with distinction) in South Asia Studies from the University of Pennsylvania in 1977. He is the author of several articles on ancient and modern South Asia. He speaks several Asian languages. He served in the United States Navy in 1969-1970. Mr. Lunstead is married to Deborah Sharpe-Lunstead. They have two daughters.

● Jaffna Public Library

Senior Advisor to the President on Foreign Affairs, Lakshman Kadirgamar who took up the role of being the custodian of a collection of valuable material donated by a former US ambassador from the Library of Congress has handed them back to the present US Ambassador Jeffrey J. Lunstead to be housed at Jaffna university.

The collection of material including microfiche and microfilm of the

Morning Star, Hindu Organ Jaffna, Inthuthsan and Eelakesari publications which had been destroyed when the Jaffna library was burnt in 1981 was according to Mr. Kadirgamar very much a 'welcome donation' presented by former ambassador Shaun Donnelly.

"My role as the custodian is over. I think it is only proper that the material goes directly from the embassy to the Jaffna Library as that was the intention of the US government when Ambassador Donnelly presented them to me for safe custody until they could be received by the Jaffna Library," Mr. Kadirgamar said.

Mr. Kadirgamar was the Foreign Minister and co-chair of the Presidential Committee for the Reconstruction of the Jaffna library when President Chandrika Kumaratunga was elected to office in 1994.

"The President made available a sum of Rs. 60.84 million and another Rs. 35.1 million for the renovation of the library," he said. Expressing concern at his inability to open the library officially, Mr. Kadirgamar said however he is happy that it is operating as an interim library. This library, however, he said would become a bridge between the people of North and the South and the books will serve as the building blocks of peace.

The occasion was the first attended by Mr. Lunstead since he was sworn in as the new US Ambassador. He said that he is happy that it is now possible to house all these materials in the library. The US Ambassador said that he was happy to have them back and his country was trying to give back to the people of Sri Lanka a little bit of their history. He said, "Sri Lanka is re-building its society and the US is contributing significantly. It is important to me."

The Jaffna library was destroyed in 1981 and the reconstruction work of the library commenced in 1998. The library was scheduled to open on 14 January this year by the Mayor of Jaffna Municipal Council while the leader of the TULF V. Anandasangaree attending as Chief Guest. However library's opening was given up due to the intervention of the LTTE. It is still not clear when the library would be opened to the public.

● A wake-up call for India

Sep. 28 - Advocating a more active

role on the part of India in Sri Lanka, former Foreign Secretary M. Rasgotra said the recent developments in the island nation and the involvement of too many countries in the peace process would have both security and strategic implications for the country.

"The current situation is a wake-up call for the country," he said while inaugurating a seminar on 'Sri Lanka: One year after the peace accord,' organised by the Observer Research Foundation in Chennai.

Squarely blaming the LTTE for not maintaining the status quo under the ceasefire but augmenting its strength by recruiting more cadres, he said the Sea Tigers were beginning to be seen as a third navy in the Palk Straits and such a development did not augur well for India.

Rasgotra went on to accuse the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission of pampering to the LTTE and turning a blind eye to its innumerable cease-fire violations. He was particularly critical of the SLMM proposal to accord recognition to the Sea Tigers.

He expressed his concern over the involvement of countries like Japan and Norway in the peace process and charged that the Japanese were getting embroiled only with a view to acquiring a greater profile in the community of nations and that way bag a permanent seat in the UN Security Council.

N Ram, editor-in-chief of The Hindu, said the initial euphoria over the peace process had evaporated thanks to the LTTE's behaviour.

Stating that the LTTE's track record showed it remained committed to Tamil Eelam and achieving it through armed struggle, he said, "the basic model of the LTTE was to overthrow the government by all means, and they never indicated that it would settle for anything short of a separate Tamil Eelam."

He said the only solution to the ethnic tangle would be on federal lines

Dr P Saravanamuthu, the executive director of Centre for Policy Alternatives, Colombo, however, noted that thorny, tricky questions such as self-determination, federalism, the merger of North and East and the structure of the Sri Lankan state had not been addressed.

"Nor has been the decommissioning of arms and status of the LTTE police

force and courts in the territory under their control," he added.

Journalist K Venkatramanan said members of the international community like India and US had their own dilemma over which type of solution would suit their interests best and that constrained them from playing an effective role.

V Suryanarayan, former director of the Centre for South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Madras, Devanesan Nesiiah, director, Marga Institute, Colombo, Prof Gamini Samaranyake, University of Peradeniya, The Sunday Times consultant editor Iqbal Athas, Rtd Col Hariharan and historian S Muthaiah participated in the seminar.

● Sponsoring terrorism in Lanka

Pakistan has accused India of sponsoring terrorism against Sri Lanka and other neighbour states. Pakistan's top envoy to the United Nations told the General Assembly that the first suicide bombers - those of the LTTE - had been trained

in India.

"One can concede that India knows a lot about terrorism," said Munir Akram, Pakistan's permanent representative to the UN. "It is, to use the popular phrase, the Mother of Terrorism. It has sponsored terrorism against each one of its neighbours."

Quoting Sri Lankan author Rohan Gunaratna's book about Indian intervention in Sri Lanka and the role of India's Intelligence Agency, Akram said more than 20,000 Tamil militants had been based in India during the eighties. He observed that the first and second batch of training had been provided by the Indian Foreign Intelligence Agency in Uttar Pradesh at two Indian military facilities. After that, he said, they set up their own training camps in South India.

"Let us remember that the first suicide bombers came from this batch trained in India," he pointed out. Akram was responding to Indian Premier Atal Bihari Vajpayee's speech before the

UN General Assembly. Vajpayee had accused Pakistan of cross-border terrorism and refused to "negotiate with terrorism". He also said Pakistan had publicly admitted to sponsoring terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir.

● Lanka in corruption league

A global corruption index released 7 October by sleaze watchdog Transparency International highlights countries perceived by business leaders, academics and risk analysts to be the least and most corrupt.

Sri Lanka has been placed 66th in the list, along with China, Panama and Syria. Sri Lanka's corruption 'score' is 3.4 out of a possible perfect 10. The new index lists countries in terms of the degree to which corruption is perceived to exist among public officials and politicians.

Last year only 102 countries were listed. This year's total of 133 relates to the fact that more valid and reputa-



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ble sources have been incorporated, the watchdog says. Finland topped the list which means that it is the least corrupt country surveyed. Iceland came next, followed by Denmark and New Zealand. Singapore, in fifth place, emerged as the least corrupt Asian nation.

Sweden, Netherlands, Australia, Norway, Switzerland, United Kingdom, Canada and Luxembourg were next in the list.

Bangladesh ended up at the bottom of the table (133rd place), i.e. the most corrupt nation. It was preceded by Nigeria, Haiti, Myanmar, Paraguay, Angola, Azerbaijan, Cameroon, Tajikistan, Indonesia and Kenya.

Japan was placed 21st while Malaysia and the United Arab Emirates tied for the 37th place. South Korea was placed 50th. Thailand occupied the 70th place while India was 83rd.

● Scandal hits police

Scandal surrounds the top brass of Sri Lanka's police force following the recent raid of the premises of a man law enforcers say is one of the country's leading drug barons when detectives found a video tape and photographs of police brass including the IGP who were guests at the five-star birthday bash of the suspect's infant daughter, according to a report in *The Sunday Island*.

According to the report, police raided a luxury home in Polgasowita following the recent arrest of two men described as the drug king's associates with over two-and-half kilograms of heroin.

Following these arrests at Mulleriyawa, police raided the luxury home at Polgasowita belonging to the main suspect and found a video tape and photographs of the birthday bash of the suspect's infant daughter at a 5-star hotel in Colombo demonstrating that several high ranking policemen and their wives had been guests at the party.

The 35-year old wanted man, now on the run, is considered a major player in the lucrative narcotic trade getting his supplies from India.

Police sources said that among guests at the birthday party were a recently retired DIG in charge of a range, a recently retired SSP and his wife and even the present IGP T.E. Anandaraja.

Investigators say that several policemen serving in Colombo, lawyers and businessmen involved in shady

deals were present at the party where the music was provided by a leading band.

There is suspicion that the wanted man had fled, possibly after being tipped off by a policeman following the Mulleriyawa arrests. Police have arrested a youth working for the suspect who first denied the connection but later admitted the wanted man had been in contact with him over the phone ordering him to recover the incriminating photographs and the videotape of the birthday party.

More embarrassing for the present IGP was the fact that the story hit the headlines as he was in Spain representing the Sri Lanka police force at the Interpol's annual general assembly.

An authoritative police official said that the police brass had probably attended the party without knowing the background of the host. "There is no doubt that they enjoyed his hospitality but that does not mean that they were in his pay," he said. This source said that if that was the case, the police bosses wouldn't want to be seen with him at a hotel. But he agreed that the policemen had been suckered.

"All aspects of this case are being investigated. We have established the involvement of a police inspector in the heroin trade and will be making an arrest soon," sources close to the investigation said.

The suspect was known to regularly peddle influence on behalf of junior policemen seeking his assistance to intervene with superiors to get transfers or cancel transfer orders.

The besieged IGP at a press conference held at the Interior Ministry on 7 October admitted that had attended a birthday party of drug kingpin Jesudasan's daughter two years ago. But he maintained that although he attended the party, he was not invited by Jesudasan but by a by a close friend of his known as "Udayan", and at that time he knew nothing about Jesudasan's drug dealing activities.

The IGP further said that he had known Udayan who hailed from Kalmunai for more than 20 years and his (Udayan's) continuous pestering left him little choice but to attend the function. According to the IGP, Udayan had phoned 3 or 4 times requesting him to attend the party. "Since I was at the time a DIG and was in close touch with the public throughout my 36 year career, I

attended the party in March, 2002 trusting my friend, Udayan, the IGP said. I was at this five star hotel for about 45 minutes where the party was held and left and thereafter I had no contacts with the host of the party."

However, it has now emerged that in the same month the party was held attended by the top brass of the Police, the Police Narcotics Bureau (PNB) had received information from a marine boat owner, also a drug trafficker alias "Boat Ranjith", that Jesudasan was a hardcore drug trafficker and was actively involved in the drug business. An attempt to net in Jesudasan by the PNB had failed when Boat Ranjith's wife had given the tip-off to Jesudasan about the PNB plan, DIG PNB, Gerard Ignatius said.

"However all these details were kept very confidential with even the IGP not privy to them," DIG said adding that the disclosures were brought to the open only after the recent drug raid in Mulleriyawa.

Interior Minister John Amararatunga has ordered an immediate inquiry into allegations that linked a number of top police officials including the IGP T. E. Anandarajah with drug dealers.

Commenting on the situation the top police officials and the IGP find themselves, a columnist in a Colombo newspaper wrote, "No doubt some will be calling for the head of the police chief, particularly those a few rungs below him in the hierarchy of the police headquarters.

But Mr. Ananad-arajah's blunder - if we may so called it - is not unprecedented because some officials even in higher ranks and even certainly top politicians have been reported to have been frequently seen in the company of well known criminals. Not only drug barons but bookmakers, arms dealers, gunrunners are rubbing shoulders with the high and mighty quite openly in high society. It is openly said that some top notchers in government are notorious timber fellers and even active in human smuggling! Others are generous hosts to terrorists of the North. And they continue regardless of public exposures. In this paradise isle politicisation of criminals and criminalisation of politicians are in rapid advance. Old fashion adages such as 'Man is known by the company he keeps' is no longer taught or heard in this age of the criminal." □

Anti Conversion Law: some issues

Sameer Saran

Researcher, International Centre for Ethnic Studies

The call to introduce anti-conversion laws in Sri Lanka has been around for several years, championed by some groups. It is a direct reaction to the growth of the Evangelical Christian Church in our predominantly Buddhist/Hindu land.

The Minister of Buddhism and Legal Reform, W.J.M. Lokubandara, has now taken up this cause. Initially, it was Minister of Hindu Cultural Affairs Mr. Maheswaran, who championed the cause for an anti-conversion Bill, after his return from a visit to the Indian State of Tamil Nadu in November 2002. By July 2003, the draft legislation, modeled on the Tamil Nadu Bill was sent to the Attorney General's office (in keeping with procedure) prior to being presented in Parliament. The anti-Christian lobby, endorses this.

Tamil Nadu

The draft legislation is apparently modeled on the Tamil Nadu legislation called the 'Tamil Nadu prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion Act 2002'. It bans religious conversions "by force, allurement or fraudulent means". Violators are subject to three years' imprisonment and a fine of up to Rs. 50,000. The penalty is four years and Rs. 100,000 if the conversion relates to women, minors, or schedule castes and schedule tribes. In every instance, both the convert and the minister involved have to report to the Magistrate. The definitions in Section 2 of the Tamil Nadu legislation are believed to remain the same in the Sri Lankan draft.

For example:

"Allurement" - offer of any temptation in the form of a gift, gratification, either in cash or kind, or a grant of any material benefit (monetary or otherwise).

"Convert" - to make one person to renounce ones religion and adopt another religion.

"Force" - includes a show of force or a threat of injury of any kind including threat of divine displeasure or social ex-communication.

In order to enter the debate on the proposed legislation, involving the issue of right to freedom of religion, let us begin with examining a few of the prominent international Human Rights instruments:

Article 18 of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights states:

1. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.

2. No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.

Article 1 of the Declaration of the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief states:

1. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have a religion or whatever belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.

2. No one shall be subject to coercion in which would impair his freedom to have a religion or belief of his choice.

Wholesome perspective

To gain a more wholesome perspective, let us also look at some of the articles of our constitution which have a direct bearing on the issue at hand.

Article 9 of the constitution of Sri Lanka states that:

The Republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the State to protect and foster the Buddhasana, while assuring to all religions the rights guaranteed by articles 10 and 14(1)(e)

Article 10 of the constitution of Sri Lanka states that:

Every person is entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including the freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.

Article 14(1)(e) of the constitution of Sri Lanka states that:

Every citizen is entitled to the freedom, either by himself or in association with others, and either in public or in private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.

The first concern that comes to mind is that if the constitution of Sri Lanka guarantees, the right to practice and teach one's religion, then will not a ban on religious conversions be in violation of this right?

In the first week of August 2003, the Supreme Court, interpreting Articles 10 and 14(1)(e) of the constitution, ruled that although it was permissible under the constitution for a person to manifest, observe and practice ones religion, it does not guarantee a fundamental right to 'Propagate' religion. The judgment was in response to a petition filed by Anula Irangani Fernando against a Bill titled 'Provincial of the Teaching Sisters of the Holy Cross of the Third Order of Saint Francis in Menzigen of Sri Lanka (Incorporation)'. The leave to introduce the Bill was granted in July 2003. The Bill sought to incorporate the above said organisation for the purpose of carrying out the objectives set out in the Bill. The objections raised by the petitioner challenged the constitutionality of

clause 3 and clause 5 of the Bill.

The court concluded that clauses 3 (right to observe and practice a religion) and 5 (right to hold property) of the Bill are unconstitutional, because (It reasoned) if a Christian organisation owns property, that might induce others to convert, thus violating their freedom of religion. Clause 5 deals with the right of holding and receiving property both movable and immovable and or the power of disposing of such property. The court stated that this clause when combined with the objective of observance and practice of a religion or belief (clause 3), would necessarily result in imposing upon people who are defenceless, vulnerable or in need, improper pressure and inducement to adopt a religion or belief. This they stated, would violate Article 10 of the constitution which guarantees the freedom of adopting a religion or belief.

State religion

The Supreme Court further ruled that as Buddhism is the State religion, it is unconstitutional for Christian organisations that propose to carry out proselytization of the Christian faith to be able to be incorporated under an Act of parliament. Article 9 of the constitution guarantees Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly, casts a duty upon the State to protect and foster Buddhism. The Supreme Court held that the purpose of the Ministry in question "the spread of knowledge of the Catholic religion and to impart religious, educational and vocational training to youth" (clause 3) is inconsistent with Article 9 of the constitution; and therefore denied the right of incorporation. The object of clause 3 was seen as a threat to the very existence of Buddhism.

In two previous judgements against 'Sahanaye Doratuwa' ministry in 2002 and 'New Harvest Wine Ministries' in January 2003, the Chief Justice had ruled that incorporation of a Christian organisation that proposes to carry out proselytisation of the Christian faith is unconstitutional.

In India, in two cases, Reverend Stainslaus v. State of Madhya Pradesh and Yulitha v. State of Orissa and others, involving similar legislations in the states of Madhya Pradesh and Orissa, the term 'Propagation' was interpreted.

The Sri Lankan constitution, unlike the Indian constitution, does not guarantee 'propagation' under the right to freedom of religion, so discussions on this topic would be of little relevance in our context.

Freedom of religion

Apart from the evident premise of the Supreme Court judgement being a number of conjectures and suppositions regarding the activities and intentions of the ministry, interestingly enough, the courts have also significantly overlooked the freedom of religion of the person getting converted. Conversion is equally the right of the person who is sought to be converted, as such it is of no consequence to her if it is not a part of the freedom of propagation of the religious group to which conversion is made, provided she is not subjected to force/fraud and inducement.

On examining the legislation and the Supreme Court judgement in light of the international instruments mentioned earlier, the Bill and the judgement seem to be encroaching upon the right to freedom of religion enshrined in those documents. There is a clear guaranteeing of the right to practice, teach and adopt any religion of one's choice and it cannot be denied that the proposed legislation, in effect, seeks to curtail the same right.

While there is no fundamental right to convert, there is a fundamental right to choose one's faith. It may be argued that the right to change one's religion is inseparable from the right to freedom of religion and it seems like a valid argument to make, but the real situation is rather multifarious.

In India

In India, most of the conversions take place among the tribal, dalit and the SC/ST population. The caste system forms one of the prominent reasons for certain sections of the populace (depending on the levels of social acceptance enjoyed by them) to convert to what they perceive as a more egalitarian religion.

The presence of a strong caste system in India leaves these segments of the population at the bottom rung of the social ladder and a history of such circumstances has left them structurally disadvantaged. It is reflected in the fact that this population is also often the

most economically backward. Thus it is understandable on the part of the 'Lower' castes to feel that they must convert to any supposedly egalitarian religion to win self-respect and a sense of empowerment. In view of that, these religious conversions are in a way the collective quest on the part of the oppressed for social equality. So these people by embracing other faiths are not betraying their religion but simply throwing off the shackles of 'upper' caste slavery.

The other major characteristic of the population often targeted for conversion is poverty. Incentives in the form of money or a better community/social support system are regularly used to entice people into converting their religion.

The questions we need to ask are that if one converts because doing so accords her respect and gives her a sense of identity and belonging, where is there the question of forcible conversion? If one chooses to follow the faith of those who have helped and are helping her the most, as opposed to those who torment her, can she be faulted?

Politically outcast, economically poor, uneducated, socially ignored, the poor have only their faith. And if instead of giving them strength and comfort, this faith itself becomes a tool for the oppressor, then why should they stay part of that faith?

The anti-conversion legislation seems to be loaded with various assumptions. There is an assumption that most conversions happen because of some material allurements being offered by the converting parties. The idea, that people should trade away their religion or conscience under some inducement, is considered reprehensible. While this may be true, it seems a little hypocritical to be left aghast by the immorality of such people, but continue to be part of societies where people are routinely put in such positions of deprivation that 'Selling one's soul' seems like the most humane thing to do.

Another peculiar assumption is that if force is being deployed to convert someone, we need special legislation. I suppose it would not be wrong to assume that forcing someone to do anything against their will is illegal in itself to begin with, whether it's making them convert their religion or some-

thing else; so why the need for a special legislation? Allurement is too unclear a term and doesn't Prima facie strike most people as a crime. And on the issue of conversion being a threat to law and order, well, it is a threat to law and order only when groups interfere with the right of individuals to exercise their free choices, for their own reasons. and is not the present Bill also proposing to do just the same thing?

There is also the assumption that particular groups need protection because they cannot manage their own beliefs and are more susceptible to being duped than everyone else. It is yet another example of our patronising attitudes towards the poor and marginalised. It seems highly patronising on the part of the Government to just assume this role of an unwarranted benefactor and protector. (To be continued)

Should state govern morality?

An even deeper worry about this attitude is that should the state really be governing the morality of people? People choose or change their religion of all kinds of motives, marriage, com-

munity support, money, etc.

While it may be one thing to disapprove of or condemn some of them at a private level, but it takes on a completely new dimension when the State makes this matter its concern and promulgates a law to regulate it. In a liberal society the State ought not to be prying into the ethics of people's reasons for taking decisions on matters which fall into the realm of their private lives.

But there is a flip side to this coin too. The constant accusation levelled against the evangelical churches is 'Unethical conversion'. So much so that the words 'unethical conversion' have become synonymous with 'conversion'. The accusations that conversion is carried out by duping the poor to embrace a foreign religion by tempting them with material benefits and money. The advocates of the Anti Conversion Bill allege a definite strategy by one religion to convert the members of other religions. According to them, this conversion business is not about religious freedom, but about one religion triumphing over all the other religions. It is about making all the members of

humanity follow one religion, giving up and, generally, denigrating the religion which they have been following. Christian missionaries are converting innocent and ignorant people to Christianity by offering various inducements such as free education, free medical facilities and employment opportunities. These institutions receive funds and other contributions from foreign countries and are controlled by the churches of foreign countries.

Supporters argue

The supporters of the Bill argue that the law does not prohibit Christians from selflessly helping out others in need. Their argument is that social uplift and charity are good, but should be separated from religious conversion and therefore if Christians genuinely wish to help poor people, they should offer help without any constraints or expectations; hence there is nothing wrong in enacting laws that prevent conversion by deceit, bribery an other forms of coercion.

One might ask why is it so problematic if conversion is a prerequisite

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for most missionary organisations to offer help/support/benefits as long as the people who are getting converted do not have a problem with it?

To answer that, one must take a look at the Joshua project, ponder over the Vatican's programme Evangelisation 2000, then look back and see where the original religions of the peoples of Albania, Africa, Brazil, Canada, Mexico, Malaysia, etc., have vanished. Politics in the garb of religion is the major problem. As Jomo Kenyatta said in *Absurdities in the name of Religion*, "When the missionaries arrived, the Africans had the land and the missionaries had the Bible. They taught us to pray with our eyes closed.

When we opened them, they had the land and we had the Bible." The phenomenal financial wherewithal available for Christian missionaries for proselytisation and evangelistic activities to facilitate conversion of people of other religions to Christianity is indeed mind-boggling.

Focal questions

But then again, the focal question still remains, why is it so unethical and appalling to change one's religion in exchange for any small or big, short-term or long-term benefits? And what gives the right to a government to regulate someone trading their religious orientation for whatever advantage they gain from it? The answer is that religion is viewed differently by people in different circumstances. People in the majority, see conversions as a tool to increase the numbers of Muslims and Christians at the cost of followers of their religion, and in our communal times and democratic society, numbers translate into voting power. For this very concern, the minorities seek to increase their numbers while the majorities seek to protect theirs.

Representative democracy has taken a new meaning and in our political climate, there is a steadfast refusal to see conversion for what it might essentially be. It might be a form of political dissension, a form of social protest, and an act of choice in a world which gives many of those who exercise it very few choices. In effect, anti-conversion legislation is an abridgment of fundamental political freedoms as well. Anti-conversion ordinances of the Tamil Nadu variety are illiberal in their very conceptualisation. They care nei-

ther for the sentiments of the religious communities, nor genuine religious piety.

They are manifestly aimed at the sole objective of consolidating constituencies on religious grounds.

Trading

At the end of the day, is not using religion in this manner equally unethical as trading religion for monetary or other benefits? And is offering money, education, etc. in lieu of conversion anymore unethical than forcibly preventing people from changing their religion to serve someone else's selfish interest?

Forcing a religion on to a person is a violation of her right, whether the State does it or the Christian missionaries.

What is more important, saving a culture and religion for the perpetuation of interests of the people who are in an advantageous position due to it, or allowing the people the choice of renouncing it for whatever reason they choose to?

A major issue which does require thought is that there is no real change in the problems of the people even after conversion (in most situations). So, can it not be rightly termed as committing fraud on those who convert? But I say, the law preventing conversions is not the remedy for this. Maybe what we need is a system of guaranteeing fulfilment of these promises. Institutionalisation and monitoring could be better responses than a total ban.

The right approach

In my view, the right approach to tackling the so-called problem of conversion would be to identify the problems faced by the people who choose to convert and eradicate them. Efforts should be targeted at abolishment of the caste system and descent based discrimination and ensuring a just and equitable distribution of resources in the society. Providing disadvantaged people with a better social status and a stronger support system would go a longer way in giving them a feeling of being part of the culture and religion, making them embrace it willingly rather than forcefully confining them to it.

This is the strategy that the protectors of religion and culture should adopt.

Moreover, there are several prob-

lems that may arise at the time of the practical application of the Bill, if it does take the form of a legislation. Unless conversion takes place on a large-scale and is reported, there is no way of monitoring it, because people or families converting in small numbers would go unnoticed by authorities.

A major fear about the ordinance arises due to the unclear language employed.

Allurement is an elastic term and can be stretched far to mean anything and police can book anyone under this. Even the term fraud is susceptible to being stretched to any limits. The ambiguity of the Bill gives the police and other authorities ample opportunity to abuse and misuse it.

Christians fear the new law will hinder their free exercise of religion by embroiling them in restrictive regulations.

The law may also encourage many to bring false charges against Christian ministers and intimidate new Believers. Some fear that chapel services in Christian schools, hospitals and children's homes may even be viewed as violating the new law. The anti-conversion Bill is legitimate as far as it prohibits forced or coerced conversions, since a common tactic used by the missionaries is to induce the fear of after life and eternal damnation, etc. in the minds of the people; but it should not be allowed to take the form of a comprehensive ban on conversion per se.

Deplore the methods

With these considerations in mind, I suppose, one must deplore the methods used by some missionaries, Christian, Muslim as well as Hindu, which include fraud, inducement and threats of the terror of eternal damnation. Every religious group ought to enjoy the right to practice, preach and publicise its faith, but this must be conducted according to well-defined ethical criteria, for even in so vital a matter as religious faith, seemingly noble ends can hardly justify unethical means.

On the other hand, to attempt to ban all conversions, in the name of protecting 'national security' or a particular 'culture' or 'religion' is equally unethical and undemocratic, and can only lead us further down the fascist path, stifling all voices of dissent and protest. □

Ban on strikes: A judicial excess?

V.R. Krishna Iyer

A TWO-JUDGE Bench of the Supreme Court declared a ban on labour's right to strike without investigating the grievances of the Government employees. The Court disposed of the matter without discharging its adjudicatory function of examining the central issue under challenge — the vires of the Ordinance dismissing over one lakh staff sans enquiry under Article 311, sans chance to make representations. The Court, however, was eloquent about the disruptive, illegal, iniquitous, anti-social and unconstitutional dimensions of strikes generally, which, it felt, held the public to ransom.

The judges observed: "Strike as a weapon is mostly misused which results in chaos and total maladministration. Strike affects the society as a whole and particularly when two lakh employees go on strike en masse, the entire administration comes to a grinding halt. In the case of strike by a teacher, entire educational system suffers; many students are prevented from appearing in their exams which ultimately affect their whole career. In case of strike by Doctors, innocent patients suffer, in case of strike by employees of transport services, entire movement of the society comes to a stand still; business is adversely affected and number of persons find it difficult to attend to their work, to move from one place to another or one city to another. On occasions, public properties are destroyed or damaged and finally this creates bitterness among public against those who are on strike."

Indeed, the irrational frequency and impertinent frivolity of intimidatory strikes are self-defeating operations, which sound trade unionism never sponsors. But are all strikes illegal, immoral, unjust or liable to be suppressed by state authoritarianism, employer reprisal or judicial allergy by angry negation of writ relief? My understanding persuades me to critique

respectfully the Rangarajan ruling which seems to hold all strikes as productive of havoc in a democratic society and a menace to public interest. Trade unions are a legitimate, lawful instrument of the working class and strikes, under necessitous circumstances, are a strategic weapon, which has legal sanction under just conditions.

Unwittingly, class bias may creep into their overt impartiality. Professor J.A.G Griffith, in his book "The Politics of the Judiciary", gave reasons to hold that judges, being but human, may not be immune to class bias, never intentional but subconscious in their surrender to partiality. He quotes Winston Churchill: "The courts hold justly a high, and I think, unequalled pre-eminence in the respect of the world in criminal cases, and in civil cases between man and man, no doubt, they deserve and command the respect and admiration of all classes of the community, but where class issues are involved, it is impossible to pretend that the courts command the same degree of general confidence. On the contrary, they do not, and a very large number of our population have been led to the opinion that they are, unconsciously, no doubt, biased."

With due deference, I dissent from the macro-negative proposition based on broad assumptions. "Now coming to the question of right to strike, whether fundamental, statutory, equitable. Moral Right-in our view, no such right exists with the Government employees." The court's dicta have gone beyond Government servants and condemned strikes as unjustified "on any equitable ground".

The court counsels labour on its patriotic duty: "In the prevailing situation, apart from being conscious of rights, we have to be fully aware of our duties, responsibilities and effective methods for discharging the same. For redressing their grievances, instead of

going on strike, if employees do some more work honestly, diligently and efficiently, such gesture would not only be appreciated by the authority but also by people at large. The reason being, in a democracy even though they are Government employees, they are part and parcel of governing body and owe duty to the Society."

No doubt, our country will be transformed if Ministers travel less and work more, if secretaries visit Delhi less and dispose of files more without paper-logging, if public offices slumber less and devote to duty more, if judges hear with more business-like thoroughness, bring down the appalling backlog of dockets and pronounce judgments to the point without prolonged procrastination.

Freedom of speech and freedom of association are not mere abstractions or purposeless inanities. Collective action is implicit in these basic freedoms. In express terms, there is no freedom to strike writ into the Constitution. But collective bargaining for legitimate causes is best served by a creative combination of speech and association, of course, without breach of law and order or transgression of other people's human rights. Once this perspective, sanctioned by constitutional initiative, is correctly and curatively interpreted, industrial jurisprudence becomes a process where both managements and workers have rights. When claims are justly made based on the contribution of labour to the progressive profit-making capacity of industry, an arbitrary refusal even to discuss may lead to tension which may mount to the point of peaceful, though militant expression by a collective withdrawal from work, otherwise called strike.

A profusion of citations may be avoided by a reference to B.R. Singh's case (1989 SCC 710) where Justice Ahmadi, speaking for the Bench, observed: "The right to form associations or unions is a fundamental right under Article 19 (1) © of the Constitution. Section 8 of the Trade Unions Act provides for registration of a trade union if all the requirements of the said enactment are fulfilled. The right to form associations and unions and provide for their registration was recognised obviously for conferring certain rights on trade unions. The necessity to form unions is obviously for voicing the de-

mands and grievances of labour. Trade unionists act as mouthpieces of labour. The strength of a trade union depends on its membership. Therefore, trade unions with sufficient membership strength are able to bargain more effectively reduced if it is not permitted to demonstrate.

"Strike in a given situation is only a form of demonstration. There are different modes of demonstrations, e.g., go-slow, sit-in, work-to-rule, absenteeism, etc., and strike is one such mode of demonstration by workers for their rights. The right to demonstrate and, therefore, the right to strike is an important weapon in the armoury of the workers. This right has been recognised by almost all democratic countries. Though not raised to the high pedestal of a fundamental right, it is recognised as a mode of redress for resolving the grievances of workers. But the right to strike is not absolute under our industrial jurisprudence and restrictions have been placed on it." (1989 4 Supreme Court Cases 710 para 15)

A Bench of seven judges, in the Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board Case, considered in great detail the meaning of the word industry. A passage from the leading judgment therein is relevant: "The International Labour Organisation has had occasion to consider freedom of association for labour as a primary right and collective bargaining followed by strikes, if necessary, as a derivative right."

It is not without significance that in the Gujarat Steel Tube case (1980 2 SCC 593), the majority on the Bench held that it was a fundamental flaw to equate illegal with unjust strikes. A strike may be illegal by a technical violation, but need not be necessarily unjustified. It is surprising that the dubious legality of the Ordinance, extraordinary in its character and timing, had not awakened the court's jurisdiction into considering the constitutionality of the executive legislation affecting a colossal number of public servants. Some day, some Bench of the apex court may be conscientised into scanning the constitutional jurisprudence of the Ordinance Raj.

Criticisms apart, the judges in the Rangarajan case need a meed of praise for restoring instantly most of the employees who were sacked by an ireful

The neglected cancer patients of Jaffna

Dr, N Sivarajah

Head, Department of Community Medicine, University of Jaffna

Cancer is a disabling and mostly a terminal illness. It could occur in almost any part of the body. The prevalence of cancer varies from country to country. In Sri Lanka 48 males and 56 females per 100,000 people get some form of cancer.

A study was carried out during a five-year period from 1973 to 1977. In

this study, 24,029 biopsy specimens examined at 9 provincial hospitals were reviewed by Prof. R G Panabokke (Panabokke R G (1984) The Geographical Pathology of Malignant Tumors in Sri Lanka. Ceylon Medical Journal. 29:4; 211-15.)

The incidence of cancer in the nine provinces was as follows:

Province	Cancer per 100,000 population	
	Males	Females
Northern	96	81
Western	80	87
Central	55	60
Uva	28	31
North-western	28	34
Sabaragamuwa	27	28
Eastern	21	39
Southern	16	21
North Central	12	12
Sri Lanka	48	56

Taking by ethnic groups, Tamils had the highest incidence of cancer. 108 out of 100,000 Tamils were affected by cancer, while 91 Singhalese and 57 Muslims per 100,000 were affected by cancer.

The commonest sites for cancer among the Tamils were the Gastro-In-

testinal tract (mouth, esophagus & stomach), liver and breast. For every 100,000 Tamil people, 47.5 got cancer of the mouth, 37.4 got cancer of the esophagus, 19.7 got breast cancer and 8 got cervical cancer. This was in the 1970s.

During the recent past, the incidence of cancer appears to have increased. One third of the patients transported by the ICRC ship from Jaffna to Colombo (via Trincomalee) were cancer patients.

Two decades ago, the Northern Province Cancer Society commenced a fund to start a cancer treatment center in Jaffna. It collected a nucleus of Rs: 300,000.00 and solicited a gift of Rs: 1,200,000.00 from the family of the late Mr. G G Ponnambalam. This money went towards the construction of the building.

The Federal Republic of Canada presented the cobalt Unit to the Center.

The unit was functioning until 1987, when the Sri Lankan military removed the cobalt unit to an unknown

Government, although it baffles me that Government employees for helping themselves back into office have had to apologise and undertake not to strike ever thereafter. This condition is an *ad hoc* humiliation, which I presume the court never meant.

In the provocative context of the contra-strike pronouncement, the learned Attorney General, with alacrity and authority, repudiated the theory that the right to strike is anathematic. This historic right cannot run riot nor turn berserk but, within socially sensitive bounds and liberal legal limits, has a permissible home in Indian jurisprudence. □

-The Hindu, 2.10.2003

location in the south of Sri Lanka for "Security reasons". This has still not been replaced.

The hospital area was declared a high security and the entire hospital was closed down and patients transferred to a section of the Green Memorial Hospital, Manipay (which is a 100 year old Private hospital which was being underutilized) and subsequently to another private hospital at Tellippalai - the Cooperative Hospital.

In 1986-87, The Northern Province Cancer Society constructed a 'Home for incurables' at Varuthalaivilan in Tellippalai, near the Cancer Treatment Center, on a land donated by Mr. T Thambirajah of Urelu. It could accommodate 25-30 patients. The cancer Home was started on 27.01.1989. Dur-

ing a six month period (February '89 to December '89, 62 terminally ill cancer patients were accommodated at this Home. This building too is now within the 'security zone' and remains unused and overgrown with shrubs and probably mined.

With the closure of the cancer treatment centre at Tellippalai, cancer patients have lost their opportunity to be treated near their homes.

Cancer in most cases is a terminal illness and cancer patients need the psychological support of their family. This support is denied when they are treated at Maharagama, 400 km away from their homes, and in quite a different environment, with difficult transport and communication between Jaffna & Colombo.

Cancer patients need frequent and

regular follow up. They have to live in 'lodges' in Colombo, during the periods that intervene between radiotherapy. They cannot return home (in Jaffna) during the intervening period because of difficulties and high cost of travel, between Jaffna & Colombo.

Following appeals to the Health Ministry and other agencies, the damaged buildings at Tellippalai were repaired. The security forces have allowed access to the buildings at the Tellippalai hospital But the Cancer Treatment Centre and the half-way home for cancer patients' still remains closed and non-functioning.

With the peace moves, the people of Jaffna are hoping that the Cancer Treatment Center will re-open. For how long will they have to wait? □

UNICEF launches HIV/AIDS programme:

22 Sept - The UNICEF organized five-day training of trainers programme for a group of trainees on Life Skills Based Education (LSBE) on HIV/AIDS and substance abuse prevention among young people affected by the conflict in the northeast province concluded last week in Trincomalee. The trained resource personnel would begin their training programme in their respective areas in the province in the coming weeks to take forward the LSBE on HIV/AIDS at the grass root level organizations, UNICEF sources said.

The training programme was the first of its kind in the conflict-affected province. The Provincial Director of Education, Mr.S.Mahalingam, inaugurated the programme, which was conducted from Monday to Friday last week at the Trincomalee Hotel Club Oceanic. Provincial health ministry officials addressed the conference.

The chief co-ordinator of the training programme was UNICEF Regional Project Officer (HIV/AIDS) Ms. Ulrike Gilbert, who is working in the UNICEF's regional office for South Asia, located in Katmandu, capital of Nepal. The UNICEF's Trincomalee zone head, Ms. Gabriele Elroy also participated, sources said.

"We have trained a group of thirty two participants from the districts of the northeast province. Participants represented health, education, youth service, non-governmental organizations and two from the health and education units of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)," said Dr. Harischandra Yakandawala, UNICEF's Consultant for Adolescent and HIV/AIDS unit in Colombo, who is also the additional co-ordinator of the programme, sources said.

While HIV/AIDS and armed conflict have long been recognized as critical issues, the link between them and their impact on children are just now moving on to the international agenda, said UNICEF sources.

LTTE allows Muslims to trade: Sept 22 - The LTTE, which chased away some 70 Muslim businessmen from a shopping bazaar in eastern Batticaloa, has allowed them to return and carry on their trade, National Unity Alliance MP M.L.A.M. Hisbullah told the press.

NEWS TRACK

Following a strong protest lodged by several Muslim leaders to the government, and the intervention of the Norwegian facilitators, the LTTE had

agreed to allow the traders back again to Chikkalady, Batticaloa. The LTTE chased away the businessmen on September 1, following their refusal to pay an increased tax of Rs. 250/- to the LTTE. The traders who used to pay only Rs. 50 had told the Tigers that they were unable to pay such an amount, as their daily earnings itself was around Rs. 150.

International Aid groups meet LTTE: Sept 22 - A team of representatives of the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the United Nations Development Plan met with Mr. S.P. Thamichelvan, head of the Political division of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, at the LTTE's Peace Secretariat in Kilinochchi Monday, sources in the Vanni said.

The International Aid groups' representatives discussed matters relating to the progress of on-going projects undertaken by their respective organizations, and the humanitarian needs of resettlement, rehabilitation and reconstruction in the Northeast. The representatives said after the meeting that they agreed on the importance of an effective Interim Administration for the Northeast, given the urgency of meeting the humanitarian needs of resettlement, rehabilitation and reconstruction.

The visiting team comprised Mr. Jeremy Carter, Senior Resident Representative of the IMF, Mr. Miguel Bermeo, Resident Representative of the UNDP, Mr. John R. Cooney, Country Director of the ADB and Mr. Peter Harrold, Country Director for World Bank in Sri Lanka.

Thai soldier supplied arms to LTTE: Sept 22 - A Thai soldier confessed today to supplying small arms to contacts of Sri Lankan Tamil Tigers arrested in southern Thailand earlier this year, police in Bangkok said. A special investigative team searched the home of chief warrant officer Surachai Sompong in the eastern province of Chonburi and arrested him after finding a pistol and two grenades, Police Major General Panupong Singhara told reporters. Panupong said the suspect confessed to supplying 13 pistols to

contacts of Sri Lanka's LTTE. "He confessed that he had supplied 13 pistols to the contact group arrested in Ranong," he told reporters.

The three LTTE contacts were nabbed in May in Ranong city, some 570 kilometres (353 miles) south of Bangkok, where police seized 10 nine-millimetre pistols, three 11-millimetre pistols and 45,000 rounds of ammunition. Intelligence sources said at the time the weapons came from Bangkok and were to be smuggled out of the country.

The Thai soldier said he had received three cheques each worth 10 million baht (246,305 dollars) from the Sri Lankans, Panupong said. Local reports, meanwhile, said police had started questioning the owners of eight gun shops in the historic quarter of Bangkok after nine Thai police officers were investigated over helping to supply arms to the contacts.

UNICEF inaugurates children survey: Sept 23 - The second phase of a house-to-house survey, conducted by the UNICEF to identify children who do not attend schools or who have dropped out, was inaugurated Sunday at Seruvila Vidiyalaya in the Kantalai education zone in the Trincomalee district, UNICEF sources said.

The first phase of the project was launched in the Tampalakamam division last month. The final phase of the project would be launched in the Eachilampathu division, in the LTTE controlled area in Muttur east, on September 29, UNICEF sources said.

Inaugurating the house-to-house survey in Seruvila, the UNICEF's Trincomalee zonal head, Ms. Gabriele Elroy, said, "education is a fundamental right of every child." "Education is compulsory from age 5 to 14 in Sri Lanka. Still many children in Sri Lanka have never been enrolled in schools or attend irregularly. Drop-out is also in the increase," said Ms. Elroy.

The objectives of the house-to-house survey is to mobilize all stakeholders from community level up to the provincial department of education level to work toward education for all, and raise awareness on the importance of children going to school even in difficult circumstances, thereby reducing the dropout rate and the number of children not attending school, UNICEF sources said.

Four killed and six abducted: Sept 24 - Non-LTTE Tamil groups, EPRL, PLOTE and EPDP, have complained to the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) at Batticaloa to take immediate action to put an end to LTTE atrocities

They alleged that the LTTE has killed four, abducted and wounded six others belonging to these political parties during the past three weeks. Civilians too have been subjected to harassment, they alleged.

Of the victims, four persons have been brutally hacked to death, while four have been abducted and another two have been wounded. The four persons killed have been identified as Thangaturai Navanedan alias Satkunam (30) an EPRLF member, Sabaratnam Saundaranayagam alias Sabha (27) attached to the Rasik group, Kandaiah Chandramohan (26) of the (TELO) Varadan group and Subramaniam Sinnarasa (33) of Ampara killed on September 21. The headless body of Subramaniam Sinnarasa was recovered from the 40th mile post near Thirukkivil.

The four victims of abductions have been identified as Thangarasa Kumar (30) a former member of TELO, Ananda Rasa Vigneshvaran (27) of PLOTE, Gnanasekaram Embarasa (27) and the brother-in-law of Chenkaladi Pradeshiya Sabha leader of EPRLF Thurairaja Thushyanthan. The two wounded have been identified, one as an army supporter and the other a civilian who had managed to escape earlier.

Lanka did not pay for peace talks expenses: Sept 24 - It has been reported in parliament that the Sri Lankan government did

not bear any expense of the peace talks conducted in Thailand and Norway. Responding to a question from JVP parliamentarian Wimal Weerawansa, Minister Mahinda Samarasinghe stated that all expenses had been borne by the countries facilitating the peace process. The minister replying on behalf of the prime minister also said Sri Lankan government did not spend any amount on behalf of the representatives of the LTTE. In reply to another question from the same MP the Minister said that five members of the intelligence division of the three armed forces had been killed since the implementation of the ceasefire agreement. Four of them had been murdered by the LTTE. The group responsible for the other killing has not yet been identified. The minister added that 11 Tamil or Muslim youths have also been killed during the period on charges of providing information to the armed forces.

'Pongu Thamil' in Vavuniya: Sept 24 - "If we desire permanent peace let us negotiate a permanent solution to the conflict," said many of the yellow-red banners in the Pongu Thamil celebrations being held in a festival atmosphere in Vavuniya. The normal activities of the town came to a standstill from noon as all business establishments and other private institutions had put up their shutters.

The day started with special prayers for peace in Hindu temples and churches between 8am and 9am in Vavuniya town and surrounding villages. Thousands of Tamil men, women and students from all walks of life thronged the urban council ground from about 4 pm from five corners of the town to attend the Pongu Thamil festival meeting. Processions commenced from Vavuniya Tamil Maha Vidiyalayam and Irambaikulam St Anthony's Church were led by Tamil National Alliance parliamentarians Mr. Selvam Adaikalanathan and Mr. Raja Kuhaneswaran. The other three processions started from Kurumankattusanthi, Jaffna road and Poonthottam junction. Students from schools, universities, Colleges of Education, Technical Colleges and government servants participated in the processions in large numbers.

People carried banners, placards, Tiger flags and cutouts of LTTE leader Mr. Pirapaharan and shouted slogans such as :- The Sri Lankan Army should leave our homes and lands; Establish interim administrative council in the northeast immediately; Permanent solution would bring permanent peace; We want our land; and Please do not make us to go to war again. The participants at the Pongu Thamil made a declaration emphasizing Tamil people's aspirations, and said that to restore the people's normal life, an interim administration (IA) with adequate powers should be established. "The IA should include powers to deal with Land, Finance, Police and Judicial services," the declaration said.

LTTE flags remain atop buildings: Sept 24 - LTTE flags, hoisted at Jaffna University, Co-operative Store at Neerveli and other public buildings continue to remain atop despite the ruling by the SLMM to the contrary, a military official claimed. He said troops on routine patrol observed despite earlier pleas made to them by the SLMM, the LTTE has raised flags atop these buildings in connection with a commemoration.

This was duly brought to the notice of the SLMM who ruled that such hoisting of LTTE flags in government controlled areas was violation of the ceasefire agreement. Meanwhile, traders and businessmen at Nanaddan town, about 13 km southeast of Mannar, were forced to raise LTTE flags in connection with a commemoration. It was also reported LTTE cadres had also placed a photograph of a LTTE cadre for public display inside Mannar Divisional Secretariat premises and also at the bus terminal.

US mine-clearance training: Sept 24 - The first batch of Sri Lankan troops trained under a US-government demining program have completed their month-long course, the US embassy said.

The training conducted by RONCO Consulting Corporation, a US-based company, was a continuation of humanitarian assistance to Sri Lanka, the embassy said in a statement. "The objective of this new phase of demining assistance is to prepare Sri Lankan military forces to clear mined areas of Sri Lanka to international standard," the statement said.

The training program which began on August 24 will continue until February 2004, the embassy said adding that it was expected to cost the US about 2.2 million dollars.

Between April and October last year, the US-funded Quick Reaction Demining Force (QRDF) removed nearly 1,000 mines and 150 unexploded ordnance in the northern peninsula of Jaffna.

The QRDF cleared an area of 120,000 square meters from March to July this year in addition to a similar area cleared last year. However, unexploded ordnance and explosives still claim victims - a mother and her seven-year-old fell victim to an accidental blast in the northern district of Vavuniya recently.

LTTE directs strikers to go back to work: Sept 24 - While hospitals in other parts of the country have been crippled by a strike, the LTTE has ordered striking workers in the Jaffna, Batticaloa and Vavuniya General Hospitals to return to work immediately.

Police said LTTE regional leader Illanpirai had ordered Jaffna Teaching Hospital employees to get back to work immediately and warned that if they failed LTTE cadres would be brought in to maintain hospital services. More than 1200 employees of Jaffna hospital were reported to be on strike.

In Vavuniya LTTE regional leader Amirthab and about 20 cadres reportedly visited the hospital and ordered the striking workers to return or face repercussions. In contrast to Jaffna, most striking workers are reported to have returned to work at the Vavuniya hospital which was said to be near normal yesterday. Vavuniya DMO

P. Sathiyalingam said all strikers had returned and there was no need to deploy security forces. Reports from Batticaloa said similar orders had gone out to striking workers at the Batticaloa hospital but their response was not immediately clear.

Workers in LTTE controlled areas in Kokkadacholai, Navakudah and Vakarai did not join the strike. Workers in the Velvetihurai and Point Pedro hospitals in Jaffna district also did not strike.

Commenting on the LTTE orders and the response of the strikers Health Services Trade Union Alliance leader Ravi Kumudesh said he believed the LTTE action was not against the strikers but intended to prevent the security forces from coming into hospitals.

Patriotic Movement formed: Sept 24 - A new organisation, called the Patriotic National Movement(PNM) was formed today. The organisation comprises of several political parties and other organisation including religious organisations. The leading organisation in the PNM is the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) which is adopting a hardline against the ongoing peace process.

The JVP leader Wimal Weerawansa addressing the movement's first news conference said that the main aim of the PNM was to be stronger than a political party and to defeat the United National Front government's present destructive ways, which is leading to the division of the country. "This party is not been formed for political victory but to safeguard our motherland," he said.

A five day protest march against the UNF government which was earlier to be led by the JVP, will now be led by this newly formed movement. The march would start from Kandy, and end in Colombo on October 1.

Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, Jathika Bikshu Peramuna, Mahajana Eksath Peramuna, several SLFP Members of Parliament are associated with the PNM.

Ethnic Reconciliation Programme launched: Sept 25 - The Trincomalee District Development Association (TDDA), founded twenty years ago to provide relief to victims of 1983 violence in the district, inaugurated an Inter Ethnic Reconciliation Programme (IERP) with the opening of a computer-training centre and a training hall with the assistance of the Canadian International Development Agency.

The District Programme Officer of the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), Mr.S.Sivasothy, declared open the training hall named "Kalai Aruvi" and the computer training centre by Mr.S.Sivarasasekaram, a computer engineer, sources said.

Presiding over the event at the office of the TDDA, its president, Mr.S.Lukshmanan, said that the TDDA was formed in 1983 to assist the victims of violence in the Trincomalee district and providing relief. From 1990, the TDDA assisted in resettling the internally displaced families in their own villages and the IDPs were resettled in about ten villages. Later, the TDDA launched development projects in the rehabilitated villages during the period of war amidst much difficulty.

He said the TDDA has now launched the Inter Ethnic Reconciliation Programme with the sole aim of resolving the misunderstanding and differences that has arisen between two communities in Muttur.

Under the project, fifty youths from Tamil and Muslim communities who have passed GCE ordinary and advanced level examinations have been selected for a six months computer training course.

DRC's District Programme Officer Mr.Sivasothy said that the basic tenet of the IERP is based on the social cohabitation of the communities.

Jaffna Osmania College reopened: Sept 25 - The Jaffna Osmania College, closed in 1990 following the expulsion of Muslims from the Jaffna district, was reopened today with the participation of

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Mr. Kavianban, the Jaffna district education head of the LTTE, according to sources in Jaffna.

Jaffna District Director of Education, Mr. P. Vikneswaran, was the chief guest at the event. The Co-ordinator of Shipping, Ports Development, Eastern Development and Muslim Religious Affairs Ministry, Mr. B. A. S. Subia, also participated at the opening event.

With the re-opening of the A-9 highway after the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), several Muslim families displaced from Jaffna and living elsewhere in the country have returned and resettled in their lands, sources said. In order to provide education to the children of the resettled Muslim families, the Osmania College has been re-opened, education sources said.

The Welfare Society, now operating in Jaffna to look after the interests of the resettled Muslim families, reconstructed the damaged college, and Mr. M. S. A. M. Mubarak has assumed duties as Principal of the College.

Madhu road reopened for civilians: Sept 25 - The Madhu road in Mannar district was reopened today for the use of over 13,000 villagers living in 11 villages around the historic Madhu church by the Sri Lanka Army after several years.

The Rehabilitation Minister of Sri Lanka, Dr. Jayalath Jayawardene, the Mannar Government Agent, security officials including Major General Susil Chandrapala, the Vanni SLA commander, the Mannar district political head of the LTTE, Mr. Amirthab, and parliamentarians participated in the reopening event.

The SLA has still restricted the use of large vehicles like buses, trucks and lorries, allowing only cycles, motobikes, mini buses, and multi-purpose co-operative union lorries to use the road.

The use of the Madhu road was restricted to pilgrims worshipping Madhu church, and until the previous day civilians were not allowed to use the road for their daily travelling purposes on security grounds.

The opening of Madhu road, despite the restrictions, now enables civilians residing in 11 villages around the church to cut short the time to reach Vavuniya and other Sri Lankan government controlled areas by 3 or 4 hours, as they can travel through the Uyilankulam SLA checkpoint to reach Vavuniya and other Sri Lankan government controlled areas.

Clashes in Jaffna Campus: Sept 26 - Clashes which erupted between freshmen and Junior year students of the Jaffna University over a ragging incident continued for the fourth day. Arts faculty freshman, Mr. P. Thanaraj of Kalmadu in Vavuniya, was injured in clashes inside the premises of Jaffna Campus, police sources said.

The injured student was taken to the Jaffna teaching hospital in the Vice Chancellor's car. Earlier two freshmen were injured due to ragging by Junior year students. One of them Mr. Gunasingham Suthas of Ganeshapuram in Alaveddy was still in the Jaffna teaching hospital. Jaffna university authorities have suspended two Junior year students for ragging freshmen.

Muslim MPs seek debate on peace talks: Sept 26 - Muslim parliamentarians at a meeting today agreed on the request by the leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) and Minister Mr. Rauff Hakim that a motion should be moved for a one day debate in parliament on the participation of Muslims as an independent group at the peace talks between the Government and the LTTE when the talks resume. The meeting was held at the residence of the former Peoples Alliance (PA) minister and currently a PA parliamentarian Mr. A. H. M. Fowzie.

Parliamentarians Mr. M. L. A. M. Hisbullah, Mr. Myown Mustapha, Mr. M. P. A. Azeez, Mr. K. M. Thowfeek, Mr. K. M. Thowfeek, Ms Ferial Ashraff, Mr. Rishad Badiudin and Mr. Noordeen Mashoor participated in the discussions.

Minister Mr. Rauff Hakim further said at the meeting that action should be taken to create awareness among the Muslims on the day the motion is to be taken up for debate in parliament, sources said.

Thileepan honoured: Sept 26 - Jaffna came to a standstill today as thousands gathered at the Nallur Temple grounds to observe the sixteenth death anniversary of Lt. Col. Thileepan, the LTTE leader who fasted unto death in 1987 when the Indian army was in occupation of Jaffna and most parts of the northeast. Shops, offices and workplaces were closed to mark the final day of the weeklong remembrance.

Community leaders, priests, and LTTE officials garlanded the LTTE martyr's image in his memorial column in the morning. An image of Lt. Col. Thileepan was taken in a long procession along the Jaffna-Pt. Pedro Road and was placed in a special tent erected at the spot where the LTTE martyr fasted to death. Officers from the Sri Lanka army's 51-2 Brigade and members of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission were present at the start of the procession.

Similar commemoration meetings were also held in Trincomalee and Batticaloa areas.

British HC officials meet LTTE: Sept 26 - A team of officials from the British High Commission (HC) in Sri Lanka, led by Ms. Margaret Tongue, the head of the Press and Public Affairs division at the HC, met with the Amparai district political leaders of the LTTE at its Akkapparipattu political secretariat, according to local sources.

On behalf of the LTTE, the Amparai district political head, Mr. Bawa, and his deputy, Mr. Kuyilpan, participated at the meeting.

"We have experienced the brutality of the war and we abhor war. But it was the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) that thrust the war on us. The international community should pressure the GOSL, as they do the LTTE," the sources quoted Mr. Bawa as telling the British HC officials.

The British HC team took up the allegations of taxation, underage recruitment and the killing of members of paramilitary groups. On the taxation issue, the LTTE officials told the visiting HC officials that taxation had been in effect since the inception of the LTTE's administrative structure, and this was applied throughout the areas in their administrative control without any discrimination.

On the allegation of underage recruitment, the LTTE leaders said that orphaned and destitute children flocked to the LTTE, as the GOSL had shown scant interest in their welfare, but the LTTE is handing them over to the UNICEF in the presence of their parents.

On the killings of members of paramilitary groups, the LTTE leaders said that these paramilitary groups had been involved in anti-social activities and had made several enemies among the general public. "Actions of anti-peace elements and internal conflicts among the members of these paramilitary groups are the reasons for such killings," the LTTE leaders had said.

Ex-EPRLF cadre shot dead: Sept 27 - Velupillai Yogendran, 39, a former member of the Eelam Peoples' Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) was shot dead by unknown gunmen at 8pm today at Pandiruppu in Kalmunai area, according to local reports. At the time of his killing, Yogendran was working as a laborer at the Research Laboratory of the Batticaloa Government Hospital. The EPRLF has accused the LTTE of carrying out the murder.

Protest march begins from Kandy: Sept 27 - Leaders of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), Sri Lanka Freedom Party

(SLFP) and Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP), Buddhist Monks and thousands of party activists, supporters joined together under the Patriotic National Movement banner today morning and started a five-day, 116 kilometers foot march from Kandy to Colombo as a protest against the establishment of separate an interim administrative structure for the northeast province and United National Front (UNF) government.

Former Prime Minister Rathnasiri Wickremanayke, SLFP parliamentarians Sarath Amunugame, Mangala Sameraweera, Jeyaraj Fernadapulle, Dilan Perera, Janaka Tennakoon, Pavitra Wanniarachchi, Arujuna Ranathunga, Mahindanada Aluthgamay, JVP propaganda secretary and party parliament group leader Wimal Weerawansa, Anura Dissanayake, Anjana Umma and MEP leader Dinesh Gunawardena lead the foot March.

The marchers carried the Sri Lanka National flags and anti-Government placards, and shouted slogans condemning the peace process between the Wickremesinghe Government and the LTTE.

Before the march started, Rev. Ellay Gunawansa thera, Former Prime Minister Rathnasiri Wickremanayake, JVP secretary Tilvin Silva, and MEP leader Dinash Gunawardena addressed the assembled marchers. They told the marchers that the Wickremesinghe Government was selling the country to the Liberation Tigers and people should join together to defeat the United National Front.

11 suspended in Jaffna campus: Sept 28 - Eleven first year students attached to the Arts and Commerce department of the University of Jaffna were suspended from attending lectures for allegedly bringing outsiders into the campus to attack senior students on September 26 night, according to local media reports.

Following violent incidents, the university administration had banned members of public from entering the university premises as clashes between seniors and freshmen continued at the

Parameswara road junction and inside the university premises during the night for about six hours.

Mr. N.Rajani, a freshman at the Arts faculty and a native of Kilinochchi, has been admitted to the Jaffna teaching hospital with grievous injuries sustained in the clashes. Since the eruption of clashes between freshmen and senior students in the Jaffna University during the previous week, three freshmen had been admitted to the Jaffna teaching hospital for treatment, police sources said.

The University administration's decision to prohibit the public from the university premises followed an investigation after complaints by some senior students, alleging that outsiders had been brought in to assault them. Several posters were seen Saturday evening on the walls of the office of the Vice Chancellor, condemning the VC and his administration, and demanding immediate action against using outsiders to attack students inside the university premises. Meanwhile, the Jaffna police started recording the statements of the injured students warded in the Jaffna teaching hospital, police said.

Career Center for youth opened: Sept 29 - The Trincomalee district parliamentarian, Mr.R. Sampanthan, declared open the Career Guidance and Counseling Center of the Trincomalee Technical College, constructed with the assistance of the Tertiary Education Ministry of the Sri Lankan government. The Ministry has opened fifty-two Career Guidance and Counseling Centers in the country from September 22 to September 28, and the Trincomalee center is one of such centers.

The aim of the center is to provide necessary guidance to students who have failed to enter university and drop outs to select suitable technical education that will ensure self-employment with a bright future in the society, College Principal Mr.V. Suntharalingam said. Mr. Suntharalingam said the Trincomalee Technical College, which was founded with fifty youths and three training courses in 1993, now had 518 students and it provides technical education in 18 disciplines.

At the commencement of the event, Mr.Sampanthan, who was the chief guest, and Ms. Ranjini Senasinghe, the special guest, accompanied by the Principal Suntharalingam were taken to the venue with the Sri Shanmuga Hindu Ladies College band in attendance. Thereafter, Mr. Sampanthan lit the traditional oil lamp and opened the centre by cutting the ribbon. Religious dignitaries of all faiths blessed the occasion. Trincomalee St Mary's Girls College Principal, Rev. Sister Therese Raneer and several others also spoke at the event.

Severed head of former LTTE cadre found: Sept 29 - The severed head of a former LTTE member allegedly killed by LTTE cadres was found on the beach at Shivam Kovil in Akkraipattu police said.

Police say that the victim S. Sundararajah (33) was a former LTTE member who deserted the LTTE about five years back and after being rehabilitated at the Bandarawela Bindunuwewa Rehabilitation Camp was living in Akkraipattu. Police are yet to find the remaining part of the body.

Sailor escapes from LTTE custody: Sept 29 - A sailor who was held under LTTE custody for nearly five months has escaped. The sailor had after fleeing the LTTE camp reached a Sri Lanka Army camp in Batticaloa on 29 September and he was later handed over to the Sri Lanka Navy. Reports said that the sailor attached to a Navy camp in Batticaloa went missing on May 13, whilst he was on training exercise. However a few days later, the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission in Trincomalee confirmed on May 17 that the missing sailor was held in LTTE custody at Kaddawan LTTE camp in Batticaloa. Even though on several occasion the Monitors demanded

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for the sailor's release, the LTTE had declined their requests saying that the sailor had entered an LTTE controlled area and so was arrested. The LTTE had said that entering their areas without permission was a violation of the Ceasefire Agreement.

Tension following demolition of Catholic shrine: Sept 29 - Mannar town was tense following the demolition of a catholic shrine in Erukkalampiddi, a Muslim village in the western part of the Mannar Island. Officials from the Mannar District Secretariat, the Liberation Tigers and officers from the Sri Lanka army and Police were engaged in talks to defuse the situation amid a sit in protest in the town by more than a thousand catholic fishermen from Pallimunai, a coastal suburb of Mannar town, who had built the shrine.

Muslim owned shops and businesses closed when reports of the attack on the shrine reached the town.

A group of persons from Erukkalampiddi village had attacked and demolished the shrine of St. Anthony at Oosi Mookkan Thurai between 7.30 and 8.30 a.m.

Three persons were injured during a fisticuff between some local Muslims and a group of Pallimunai fishermen when the latter visited the spot upon hearing reports of the attack later, Police said. They were admitted to the Mannar hospital.

The Mannar region remained tense and a large number of Police personnel have been moved into the town, he said. Military and Police guards have been posted at the in mosques in Moor Street, Uppukulam and Periyakadai, according to him.

Mannar GA and the Bishop of Mannar spoke to the protesting Pallimunai fishermen around noon to defuse the escalating tensions. Brigadier Sarath Fernando, the commanding officer for Sri Lanka army's 2-5 and 21-2 Brigades in the Mannar District and Senior Superintendent of Police for Vanni, Mr. Mohammed Miskin were also present at there.

LTTE men released on bail: Sept 30 - The Point Pedro Magistrate, Mr. K.Ariyanayagam, on 29 September allowed cash and surety bail to two activists of the LTTE when they were produced in court on a complaint of abducting a private vehicle and possessing pointed weapons on September 23.

According to reports filed by the police in courts, the police had taken Mr.Paveanthan and Mr.Mathi of the LTTE's Sea Tigers Unit into custody at the Vallipuram checkpoint of the SLA. The Police filed complaints charging the LTTE activists for abducting a vehicle belonging to an individual and taking pointed weapons and concealing them in the vehicle.

Foreign NGOs criticised: Oct 1 - In the Jaffna peninsula, the rehabilitation and reconstruction assistance plans of several international NGOs and aid organizations have not made any discernible improvement in war-affected people's lives, and some families receive only marginal assistance or no assistance at all, said the Consortium of local NGOs in Jaffna, in a letter to the Government Agent (GA) of Jaffna.

Once a plan is implemented, the people's feedback and their opinion ought to be sought and given due review. The international NGOs should stop the practice of spawning multiple new organizations and instead use the local NGOs that are already op-

erating among the people to implement their plans," the consortium said in its letter.

"The NGOs should disclose the details of the finances and other resources they receive to the GA," said the letter. "They should adopt a policy of sharing resources. Disclosure should also be made of the value and nature of their projects. An officer should be appointed to hear complaints from the people."

The consortium urged the GA to ensure that the people benefit from the plans of international NGOs and aid organizations.

PNM vows to thwart division: Oct 1 - The leader of the Patriotic National Movement (PNM), Venerable Elle Gunawansa Thera, addressing the public meeting held at the conclusion of the five-day anti-peace march said that the majority Sinhalese people would not allow foreign elements now involved in the peace process to divide the country. He further said Buddhist monks would sacrifice their lives to safeguard their mother country. "The UNF government used several non-governmental organizations to sabotage the protest march from Kandy to Colombo. However, the sabotage attempt was thwarted with the support of patriotic citizen," the Thera said.

Mr.Anura Bandaranaike, People's Alliance (PA) parliamentarian and brother of President Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunge, said Prime Minister Mr.Ranil Wickremasinghe had laid the foundation stone for dividing the country by signing a ceasefire agreement with the LTTE. "Allowing Mr.Ranil Wickremasinghe to continue in power would bring irreparable disaster to the country," he stressed.

Sri Lankan Cricket star and PA parliamentarian, Arjuna Ranatunge, highly regarded writer and intellectual championing Sinhala nationalism, Dr. Gunadasa Amerasekara, JVP propaganda secretary and the party's parliamentary group leader Wimal Weerawansa, also addressed the meeting.

SLA intelligence officer killed: Oct 2 - Mr T.Vigneswaran, an intelligence officer of the Sri Lanka Army working at the 221 Brigade headquarters located in Plantain Point in Trincomalee was beaten to death with pointed weapons and iron rods by unidentified persons, Trincomalee police said.

Some unidentified persons assaulted him when he was returning home after work from the brigade headquarters in Orr's Hill in Trincomalee, police said. Police said Mr.Vigneswaran was earlier with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and later joined the SLA as an intelligence officer.

Immediately, Sri Lanka's army and police tightened the security of the area where the incident had taken place, sources said.

WB projects not affected: Oct 2 - Director of the World Bank in Colombo, Peter Harold and Country Director of the Asian Development Bank in Colombo John Cooney said that suspension of peace talks between the government and the LTTE had not affected their programmes in the North and East of Lanka. He said that the ongoing programmes continue with no noticeable impact. However the World Bank and the ADB had not approved new programmes since the Tokyo declaration. Harold said, "We work on the assumption that the peace process would continue. Our projects are providing fundamental needs such as schools, education, health services." He described rehabilitation of tanks, schools, fisheries,



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income generating projects, power and housing as projects to be implemented.

ADB Director, Cooney said that proper coordination among the major financial agencies was very critical for Sri Lanka the agencies were working very closely with the government. He said "Our programmes in the North and East of Sri Lanka accounts for less than 5%. There is a perception that there is a larger donor concentration on North East of Sri Lanka. It is not and the South of Sri Lanka is the biggest beneficiary. However it should pick up pace in the North/East soon."

Two youths die in SLA truck collision: Oct 3 - Mahalingam Lingaruban, 21, of Urumpirai and V. Rasakumar, 30, of Point Pedro were killed instantly around 5 p.m. today when a Sri Lanka Army (SLA) truck collided with their motorbike at the Gurunagar water tank junction in Jaffna town, police said.

Tension prevailed in the area when members of the public gathered at the site and prevented the SLA soldiers from removing the bodies of the youths before the magistrate and the police arrived at the site.

Army soldiers opened fire in the air as the angry crowd continued to block their attempt to remove the bodies, sources said. The soldiers also fired tear gas into the angry crowd as some in the crowd threw stones. However, a group of army soldiers later handed over the bodies of the youths at the mortuary of the Jaffna teaching hospital. Sri Lanka police officials inspected the bodies of the youths at the hospital mortuary, police said.

US reimposes ban on LTTE: Oct 3 - The United States today redesignated 25 militant groups as "foreign terrorist organizations", including the LTTE and Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network.

In a notice published in the Federal Register, the State Department renewed the groups' blacklistings, all of which had been due to expire tomorrow. "We have preserved our ability to take action against them," the official said.

Sanctions reimposed against the groups include a ban on US visas for their members, freezes of their assets in the United States and a prohibition on any US citizen or person under US jurisdiction providing assistance to them.

In a meeting held Monday, September 29, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage told visiting Sri Lankan Minister Milinda Moragoda that the United States can revoke this designation at any time provided we are satisfied the organization no longer meets the statutory criteria for designation as an FTO. The Deputy Secretary told Minister Moragoda that the United States will consider revoking the LTTE designation as an FTO and will be prepared to deal with the group as a legitimate political entity in Sri Lanka only after the organization renounces terrorism and ceases terrorist acts. The United States looks forward to a timely resumption of peace talks in Sri Lanka and hopes that proposals by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam for an interim administration in the North and East of the country will be reasonable and practical enough to form the basis for resuming talks.

The 25 groups affected by Thursday's move were all placed on the blacklist in 1997 or 1999.

They include the Abu Nidal Organization, the Abu Sayyaf Group of the Philippines, Algeria's Armed Islamic Group (GIA), Japan's Aum Shinrikyo or Aum Supreme Truth cult, the Basque separatist group ETA, Gama'a al-Islamiyya of Egypt, the militant

radical Palestinian group Hamas, Harakat ul-Mujahideen, The Lebanon-based Hezbollah, al-Jihad of Egypt, the radical Israeli group Kahane Chai, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), Sri Lanka's Tamil Tigers, the armed Iranian resistance movement Mujahadeen e Khalq (People's Mujahadeen), Colombia's leftist National Liberation Army (ELN), Palestinian Islamic Jihad, The Palestine Liberation Front - Abu Abbas Faction, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine - General Command, al-Qaeda network, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), Greece's Revolutionary Nuclei and 17 November, Turkey's Revolutionary People's Liberation Party/Front and Peru's Shining Path.

Rs. 180 m for star hotel in Jaffna: Oct 3 - Tilko Holidays (Pvt) Ltd signed an agreement with the Board of Investment (BOI) for Rs. 180 million, to develop a 50-roomed three star hotel in Velanai Island, Jaffna. The hotel will be in operation by mid of 2004 and this investment is expected to generate over 100 jobs in the area.

"The objective is to provide star class accommodation to business clients, expatriates and locals visiting Jaffna," said Tilko Managing Director, Tilakar Thilagaraj. He expressed confidence in the current investment climate in the country and said that he was looking at developing more lands in and around the North and East Province, to build guesthouses, restaurants, shops and office complexes.

Another Army informant killed: Oct 3 - Suspected LTTE cadres beat to death yet another Army informant in the highly secured area near 22 Division Headquarters of the Sri Lanka Army, in Trincomalee on 2 September, Defence sources said. The informant a former member of LTTE and an informant attached to the Army was walking towards his residence in Oor's Hill Road, Trincomalee. Police investigation have revealed that a group of three had perpetrated the crime using a iron rod and swords and have escaped from the scene. The deformed body of the informant had been found by a passerby woman 20 minutes after he left the Army camp.

Army, Police clash with protesters: Oct 4 - Widespread clashes occurred between Sri Lanka army and large crowds of angry residents in the Jaffna town suburbs of Gurunagar and Paashaiyoor this morning. Three civilians were injured in the clashes that rapidly spread to all the neighbourhoods of these densely populated coastal suburbs, Police said. Four people and a Policeman were wounded when Police tried to break up a protest at Kondavil junction in the northern environs of the Jaffna town.

The clashes erupted and spread when a group of residents demanded the removal of an SLA camp in the northern town near the scene of an accident the previous night in which two youth were knocked down by a speeding military vehicle. The northern town was tense as hundreds blocked road and junctions in protests against the SLA in Kondavil and Thinnevely. Newspapers in Colombo reported that, taking advantage of the previous day's accident in which two persons died, the Tamil Tigers had orchestrated the protest demonstration with a view to get the army camp removed.

Members of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission rushed to the area and tried diffuse the tension by meeting the SLA officials and those behind the protesters.

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Another intelligence unit member killed: Oct 4 - It is reported that Eramba Moorthy Sabanayagam, a member of the intelligence unit of the Sri Lanka Volunteer Force and who was hiding in Matale town has been abducted tactfully and killed at Kochkodacholai, Batticaloa. Security sources said the LTTE tried to assassinate him several times earlier.

Moorthy was a father of six children and due to injuries received in a blast in one of the operations, the army paid him Rs. 150,000 as compensation and he lived in a rented house in Matale town. A 60 year old man from Karativu who came on the pretext of being a friend of his father had become friendly with him. He had come on an earlier date to Matale by prior appointment to purchase a tractor from Polonnaruwa. Four armed youths who joined them had given him something to drink containing a substance and he lost conscious afterwards. They had later fled in a white van informing Moorthy's son that the father was not well. He had initially been taken to Karativu, and then to LTTE camp at Kokkadacholai and murdered there.

Ex-EPRLF cadre shot dead: Oct 5 - Subramaniam Kirubakaran, 36, a former member of the Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) was shot dead in Araiampathy in Batticaloa district on the morning of 4 September..

Two gunmen approached the victim as he was walking and shot him in point blank range and disappeared, security sources said. Kirubakaran was earlier a member of the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO) and later a member of EPRLF for several years. Heleft EPRLF (Varathar wing) two years ago and was employed at the auto-security section at the Araiampathy

common market, according to local sources. His body was brought to the Batticaloa Teaching Hospital for postmortem examinations.

Anniversary of LTTE leaders remembered: Oct 5 - The sixteenth death anniversary of twelve LTTE cadres, including senior commanders Lt. Col. Pulendran and Lt. Col. Kumarappa, who committed suicide while in the custody of security forces, was held at Theeruvil in Valvettithurai in Jaffna district with the opening of the renovated memorial tomb, which was destroyed by the Sri Lanka Army when it captured the peninsula in 1996..

Lt. Col. Pulendran and Lt. Col. Kumarappa and ten other LTTE cadres were arrested by the Sri Lanka Navy in the Mullaitivu Sea and handed over to the Sri Lanka Army located in Palaly headquarters sixteen years ago on this day. When the SLA attempted to remove them to Colombo, they committed suicide on October 5, 1987 at the Palaly SLA headquarters, which is said to have precipitated to the war between the LTTE and the Indian Peace Keeping Force in the northeast province.

LTTE Jaffna district political head Mr.C.Illamparuthi delivered the keynote address. Vadamarachchi north fisheries societies federation secretary Mr.P.Suriyakumaran, Jaffna district Tamil National Alliance parliamentarians Mr.A.Vinayagamoorthy and Mr.M.K.Sivajilingam, Jaffna university lecturer Mr.P.Chandrasekaram and Sea Tigers activist Maravan also spoke.

No more polythene: Oct 5 - The government has decided to ban the use of polythene in all schools and government institutions beginning from this week. The gazette notification on the matter is to be published shortly.

The decision to ban the use of polythene was taken at last cabinet meeting. All persons will be banned from bringing polythene bags, more famously known as 'sili sili bags', lunch sheets, and other polythene products to schools and government establishments, an official from the Environment Ministry told journalists. The Ministry has warned of strict action, against those who defy the newly imposed rule. This move has also been welcomed by nearly all-environmental organisations.

Child development program launched: Oct 6 - The North East Provincial Department for Social Services, Probation and Childcare launched a project aimed at improving the care for children currently living in children's homes as well as children at risk of being admitted to children's homes across the province, in collaboration with the UNICEF and with the direct support from Volunteer Service Overseas (VSO), which is said to have a solid background in childcare and child development.

The main aim of the project is to strengthen the services of the Provincial Department of Social Welfare through a comprehensive training program primarily targeting the Probation Officers (PO) and Child Rights Promotion Officers (CRPO), but also managers of children's homes, divisional secretariat officials and grass root workers currently involved in the children's future.

The focus of the training is on improving the knowledge and skills of the POs and CRPOs, sources said.

The first three-day training program for POs and CRPOs under this project was inaugurated in Trincomalee Monday morning at the provincial guesthouse located at Uppuveli, and participants were POs and CRPOs from Jaffna district.

The UNICEF's Trincomalee zonal head, Ms Gabriela Elroy, lit the traditional oil lamp and was followed by the Provincial Governor's Secretary, Mr.S. Amirthalingam, the Provincial Director of Social Welfare and Probation and Childcare, Ms. N.R.Ranjini, and VSO consultant Ms. Helena Postma and others.

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Over 49000 Army Deserters: Oct 6 - A recent survey carried out by the Sociology Department of the University of Peradeniya says that up to 49, 143 Army personnel including 623 officers have been listed as deserters. According to the report the numbers amount to one third of the army's total strength. Total strength of the Sri Lankan army today is 134,000. The reasons given for desertion are poor leadership, enlistment of unsuitable officers, poor administration, insufficient training, and fear, escalation of war, lack of strategies to retain people, family and personal reasons.

The survey reveals that the desertion increased rapidly after the Wannu debacle in 1995. Nearly 1500 soldiers are said to have decamped immediately after the incident. Pressure by friends and underworld gangs had also forced many army deserters to take up a life of crime according to the report.

Electrical goods confiscated: Oct 6 - Kaleel Ahamed of Ulapane has complained that the LTTE tax collectors in Kilinochchi had confiscated his electrical goods worth Rs. 450,000 on September 1. although he had made representations to the LTTE Tax Chief, G. Thevanesan and the SLMM in writing, no redress has been forthcoming.

The LTTE Customs had levied him a duty of Rs. 132,437 on electrical equipment taken to Jaffna for sale and they confiscated without aducing any reason. Kaleel Ahamed had written to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, IGP Anandarajah, Opposition Leader Mahinda Rajapakse, Internal Affairs Minister John Amaratunga, the LTTE Supreme leader Velupillai Prabhakaran and LTTE political leader, Thamilselvan.

'War has ruined education of students': Oct 7 - The Dean of the Faculty of Business Studies in the Vavuniya campus of the Jaffna University, Mr.R. Nanthakumar, Tuesday said that the twenty-year war has ruined the education of students in the Northeast province, and the standard of education among Tamil students in the province has gone down to the extent that more students enter universities on district quota system than on merit as in the past.

He reminded the audience who attended the World Teachers Day celebrations held at the Trincomalee Sri Koneswara Hindu College that one of the primary causes for the freedom struggle of Tamils in this country was the introduction of standardization of admission to university. In those days, Tamil students demanded admission solely on merit. "It is sad to note that the twenty year old war has ruined the education of the Tamil students in the province, and the northeast Tamil students today have to gain admission to universities under the district quota schemes," said Mr. Nanthakumar in his keynote address.

The Principal of the college and the President of the Ceylon Tamil Teachers' Union, Mr.S.Thandauthapani, said the Sri Lankan government has not formulated a code of ethics for teachers of the country. Every time when educationists discuss educational reforms, all would suggest that teachers needed a code of ethics. However the lawmakers forget it thereafter, he said. Those in power who remind the duties of teachers at every seminar and workshop deliberately forget to ensure the rights of teachers, he said.

300,000 get citizenship: Oct 8 - The Sri Lankan Parliament on 7 October unanimously passed the Grant of Citizenship to Persons of Indian Origin Bill. Accordingly, any person of Indian origin who has been a permanent resident of Sri Lanka since October 30, 1964 or a descendent of such a person shall be granted the status of a citizen of Sri Lanka. Significantly, Parliament voted en bloc supporting the Bill without a single dissenting voice or vote.

Presenting the Bill, Minister of Interior John Amaratunga said the Sri Lankan Government had always been ready to fully solve the problems of statelessness of persons of Indian origin and also of any residue. He said the first generation since 1964 may not be alive now or may be of old age. Their natural increase are residing in Sri Lanka without any connection with India. Those who continued to stay in Sri Lanka have contributed to the national economy and their future should be considered humanely, he added.

Muslim group off to UK: Oct 8 - Meanwhile it has been reported that the Constitutional Council of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) will leave for England later this month to study the federal system practiced in certain parts of the country. According to SLMC sources, the 11 member group will discuss power sharing arrangements for minorities in a federal set up, which is been practiced in several parts of UK. The group is expected to leave for London on October 25, and will comprise of SLMC leader Rauff Hakeem, Hasan Ali, M.L. Cader, A.M. Naushad, Y.L.F Hameed, Nizam Karriappar, M.Z.M. Mohideen, M.H.M. Salman, A.M. Faiz, Shibly Aziz and Jayampathi Wickremaratne. The group is also expected to meet several UK constitutional experts.

Curfew imposed in eastern Sri Lanka: Oct 9 - Police imposed a curfew in the eastern Sri Lankan town of Kinniya after unrest erupted between Muslims and Tamils over a land dispute, police said. There have been occasional clashes in the past between Muslims and Tamils in the east of the island but of late relations took a turn for the worse with such clashes becoming more frequent.

Youths beaten for watching movie: Oct 9 - Seven Tamil young men were subjected to severe beating reportedly by LTTE cadres for watching a Tamil movie which had been banned by the Tigers. According to army sources the incident had taken place in a village in Vavuniya in northern Sri Lanka. All seven youth are reportedly in serious condition and have been admitted to the Vavuniya Base Hospital. The LTTE has earlier banned the movie, saying it was an adults only movie, and so was prohibited for screening, however these seven youths had rented the movie from a club, and they were abducted while watching the movie. The severe beatings to which they were subjected had resulted in severe injuries to their hands, legs and heads. The victims are: D. Maheshwaran (18), Najendram (18), M. Yogeshwaram (20), N. Kedishwaran (17), K. Mannimadu (22), F. Pradeepan (23) and Naguleshwaran (18). This movie is currently being screened in Sri Lanka and India simultaneously, and according to entertainment sources said this was a movie that could be watched by the entire family and not an adults only movie.

LTTE delegation to visit Norway: Oct 10 - A delegation of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, led by Mr.S.P. Thamilselvan, head of the political division of the LTTE, will visit Norway during October 14-17, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said. Col. Karuna, the LTTE commander for the East, will be part of the delegation.

The same delegation is currently in consultations in Dublin, Ireland, with constitutional and legal experts from the Tamil diaspora, and will visit Denmark before visiting Norway. In Oslo, the delegation will meet with the Norwegian Foreign Minister, Mr Jan Petersen, and the Norwegian facilitators of the peace process in Sri Lanka, as well as with members of the local Tamil community. The delegation also plans to visit the city of Bergen, according to the Norwegian foreign ministry.

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About People and Events

OBITUARY



Spencer Selvadurai Sabanayagam, Retired Inspector

of Co-operative Societies of Wyman Road, Nallur, Jaffna, passed away in Colombo on 18th September 2003. He is the husband of late Parameswary (Retired Teacher); father of Kamalini, Padmini and Sivakumaran (all of U.K), Nirmala, Sugumaran, Kalavani and Dhamayanthy (all of Canada), Karunakaran and Vijayakumaran (both of USA); father-in-law of Rajendran, Nagarajah, Sivaji, Mohan, Sivadas, Vasuhi, Gunanayaki, Rahini and Rathika; grandfather of Nirooshun, Yalini, Nirshanthan, Parthiban, Maithili, Aroon, Tanya, Lavanya, Bhairavi, Arjun, Arooran, Jeevakan, Nirthana, Anitha, Divya, Dharsun, Suruthi Sai and Sai Shyan and the brother of late Sabaratnam, Sinnamma, late Sabalingam, Saraswathy and Thaiyalnayaki. Funeral took place in Toronto, Canada on 27th September 2003. - Rajendram & Kamalini 020 8892 8094; Dr. Nagarajah & Padmini 020 8449 4050; Sivakumaran & Vasuhi 020 8778 9013.

IN MEMORIAM

Second Year Remembrance of Late Mr. S. Sivagnanasekeram



lovingly remembered by his ever loving wife Gnanadevi, sons Ranjan, Mohan, daughter-in-law Pavithra, relatives and friends.

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- Mrs Sekeram, Ranjan, Mohan and Pavithra, 43 Lynton Road, New Malden, Surrey

FORTHCOMINGS EVENTS

Nov 1 All Saints Day
2 All Souls Day
4 Sukkla Eekathasi; 6.45 p.m. Memorial meeting to pay tribute to the Late Iyall-Isai Varuthi Brahmashree Yalpanam N. Veeramani Iyer and commemorate his services to Carnatic music and Bharathanatyam at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 4A Castletown Road, London W14 9HE. All welcome.
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6 Pirathosam
7 Iypasi Velli 3
8 Fullmoon
9 Karthigai; Feast of the

Dedication of Basilica
10 Remembrance Sunday
11 Feast of St. Martin
12 Sankadakra Sathurthi
14 Iypasi Velli 4 (last)
15 Feast of St. Albert The Great
16 Feast of St. Edmund
17 Karthikai Somavaram 1
19 Sri Arumuga Navalar Guru Pooja
20 Krishna Eekathasi
21 Pirathosam; Feast of Presentation of The Blessed Virgin Mary
23 Amavasai; Sri Sathiya Sai Baba Birthday Celebrations
24 Karthikai Somavaram 2; Feast of Christ The King
26 Sathurthi
28 Shashti
30 Feast of St. Andrews

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Abhiram Shines in Computing



Twelve year old Abhiram who aspires to be a computer wizard has completed his ECDL (European Computer Driving Licence) in August 2003. ECDL is an internationally recognised IT skills qualification, which normally attracts mature students and the working environments. He attends the John Lyon School in Harrow and was admitted to the Westminster College of Business Computing at Wem-

bley by his father to keep him educationally busy during the summer vacation and he excelled here completing all the seven modules with high grades. "I am proud of him, he is really amazing and fast" says the Director of the Westminster College of Business Computing.

Abhiram is the only son of Dr. and Mrs Sahathevan of Wembley, Middlesex.

BOOK RELEASE FUNCTION

Dr S. Ahnaimugan - Specialist in Obstetrics & Gynaecology at the Palmerston North Hospital in New Zealand took Britain by storm with his book on Obstetrics & Gynaecology in TAMIL. British Tamil media gave him wide publicity, London's popular MW Radio, - IBC, which also broadcasts 24 hours on Satellite, carried an interview followed by a phone in. Extremely anxious young mothers-to-be phoned in with queries on their pregnancy, childbirth and showed keen interest in the book. The book was of course targeted towards those women for whom English was not their first language.

British Tamils also hosted Dr Ahnaimugan in a grand Function to officially release the book in the UK. This function at the Harrow High School Hall was very colourfully compered by Wimal Sockanathan, Lawyer, Broadcaster and Political Commentator together with Srimathi Gowshi Ravishanker, a reputed Broadcaster with IBCRadio.

The Compere Wimal traced a brief bio data of the writer and said that although Dr Ahnaimugan may be regarded by some as a Sri Lankan qualified Medical Practitioner now working as a Specialist in distant New Zealand, the essential fact is that he is British in every respect and is part of the British Tamil community as his most respected FRCOG qualifications were obtained here in London and that he had in the past lived and worked in Britain at the Nottingham Womens' Hospital and at the Northampton Govt Hospital.

Dr Ahnaimugan's Tamil Book - "Mahap Perrum, Mahalir Maruthuvam" was then critically analysed and reviewed on stage by a Physician Dr Mrs Sashi Kala Rajamanoharan, a Gynaecologist Dr V Sivapathasundaram and a Journalist Mrs Rita Fatimaharan. The writer was then formally introduced on stage with an excellent resume by Professor Arulkumaran (Professor in Obstetrics & Gynaecology at the St

Georges University Hospital Tooting). The writer, Dr Ahnaimugan then spoke on his book - supported by slide presentation on screen.

The Publication was then officially released with a speech by Veteran Lake House Journalist Pon Balasundaram who also honoured the writer with a Pon aadai (Golden Shawl). Mr S Shivaranjit, Managing Director of IBC Radio proposed a Vote of Thanks. Srimathi Anandhi Suriyapirakasam Senior Broadcaster with the BBC World Service was invited to purchase the first copy. Copies of this Medical Book were then purchased by members of the audience. The writer Ahnaimugan a keen follower of the great Tamil scholar Prof. A S Gnanasambanthan is now writing two Tamil books with emphasis on Spirituality.

This Medical Book (672 pages with coloured photos and illustrations) written in simple Tamil and aimed at the ordinary Tamil Woman & Tamil Man wanting to help with problems of his wife, mother sister or daughter. For further details contact the writer on New Zealand 00 64 6 35 78 071 (e mail: ahnaimugan@inspire.net.nz

Australian Newsletter

The Annual Ganesa Vusarjan Festival was held at the Sri Venkateswara Temple, Helensburg on September 7th 2003. According to Indian tradition it was held a week after the holy day of Ganesh Chaturthi.

This year there were several stalls, both religious and commercial. The religious ceremony began with the Maha Ganapathy Moola Mantra Trisuthi Homam at about 8 a.m. The Vishesa Abishekam began at 10.30a.m. followed by Alankaram and Maha Deeparadhana. At 2 p.m. the pooja for the Visarjana Ganapathy began and the procession to the Stanwell Park beach started at about 2.45p.m.

The Visarjana Ganapathy which was made of clay by a devotee and beautifully decorated with flowers and jewellery was taken in a car to the beach by the temple priest. The Nathaswaram Vidwans and the devotees followed in cars and buses. At the beach, Arathi

was performed by the priests for the Visarjana Ganapathy, while devotees sang, beat drums and danced around him. He was eventually carried shoulder high to the accompaniment of Nathaswaram music, into the water. As he was immersed in the waters of the Pacific Ocean, cheers rang out from the crowd of more than 1,500 people present. Flower garlands were thrown into the water as a great big wave suddenly appeared and swept the Visarjana Ganapathy into the wide open ocean. The feeling of extultation felt by the crowd was palpable and everyone said they were not going to miss the event next year.

Thousand of people started pouring into the Temple from about 9.00a.m. that day. There was a cultural show featuring songs and dances to entertain the crowd. The temple canteen was very busy from morning serving North Indian and South Indian food, as well as sweets and savouries.

The Sri Venkateswara Temple which is on the outskirts of Sydney is the first Hindu Temple to be built in Australia according to the Agama Satras.

The Temple includes a Vaishnava complex and Saiva complex. It is also the largest Temple in the whole of Australia.

Aradhana. The grand variety concert ARADHANA was held on September 14th 2003 to raise funds for the completion of the Rajagopuram project of the Sri Venkateswara Temple, Helensburgh, New South Wales.

Three Rajagopurams had been planned for the Temple - one for Sri Venkateswara, one for Sri Shiva and one for Sri Thiripurasundar for several years. The gopurams were not completed because of various problems. However, since the end of 2001 when a new Executive Committee took over, work has been proceeding at a rapid pace with a new Sthapathi and a new group of Indian stonemasons. Now the Rajagopurams are complete, but there is still work to be done, viz., painting and new flooring for the Vishnu Complex and the Shiva Complex.

A group of ladies who have been ardent devotees of the Temple for a long time decided to organise a variety programme to raise funds. The pro-

gramme featured dances and music from all over India. The concert began with prayer songs followed by a Bengali group dance. This was followed by two eight year olds dancing to a song from 'Lagaan'. This item captured the hearts of the audience. After that, there were Gujarati, Tamil and Maharastrian dances. The last item just before the interval was the "Pinnal Kolattam", performed by students of Smt. Jayalakshmy Kandiah, Director of Natanalaya School of Dancing. This beautifully choreographed dance was one of the highlights of the programme and won loud applause. Before the interval Dr. Michael Vasudevacharya, a Hindu scholar spoke on the unique features and qualities of the Sri Venkateswara Temple. He was followed by the Chief Guest Mr. M.

Ganapathi, Consul-General for India in Sydney. An unexpected guest was the Hon. Mr. Ramesh Bais, Minister for Mines in the Indian Government and Mrs Bais, who were on an official visit to Australia. Mr. Bais spoke on matters of interest to the expatriate Indians and the policies of the BJP government.

The concert was held at the theatre in the Campus of the University of Technology. It accommodates 1000 people and every seat was taken. Dinner was served free to everyone during the interval. The interval was followed by a rollicking 'Bollywood' style, North Indian group dance, a Kannada dance and a Malayalee group dance.

The President of the Sri Venkateswara Temple Association, Dr. A. Balas-

ubramaniam, then addressed the audience. He thanked the organisers of the concert and announced that a magnificent sum of over \$ 75,000 had been realised by them. Over \$ 38,000 had been raised from sponsorships and advertisements in the souvenir, over \$ 10,000 on outright donations and over \$ 27,000 from sale of tickets and the raffle. He thanked everyone who had helped to make the function a success.

The vote of thanks was followed by a Kuchipudi dance by Sudhakar Durgam, a professional dancer from India. The general consensus among the audience at the end of the evening was that it was one of the best variety programmes that they have had for a long time.

Seychelle Newsletter

Seychelles, the Indian ocean island nation, being the hub of global eco-tourism saw important visitors and happy events over the past few days. Bill Gates, the micro soft computer tycoon flew in his private jet and stayed for three days in the exotic island of Fregate on a private holiday. The tycoon who spends most of his fortune to improve global health was in Mozambique in Southern Africa to make a grant of US\$167 million to accelerate Malaria Research.

There was the coincidence of the 54th Independence day of India, the 10th anniversary of the Third Republic of Seychelles and the 134th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. A large delegation of 50 representing defence, industry, trade and culture lead by Shri Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, the Vice-President of India and Dig Vija Singh, the Minister of State for External Affairs spent five days in the paradise islands. Among the many bilateral agreements signed a one million US\$ grant by India for developmental projects and another donation of US\$ 50,000 for the supply of anti-retroviral medicines for HIV/AIDS were worthy of note.

On the cultural side the well acclaimed Pandit Satish Vyas on Santoor and Mukundraj Deo on Tabla entertained the audience with a number of

recitals. For the Gandhi birthday anniversary on October 2nd there was an essay competition for children, cultural show and to cap the event there were two mastreos - Purbayan Chatterjee on Sitar and Anubratna Chatterjee who got initiated to Tabla at the tender age of three to entertain the captivating audience.

The driving force for such inter-cultural events and to promote and strengthen further the Indo-Seychelles economic and cultural ties is the ever dynamic Indian High Commissioner here, His Excellency Malay Mishra who has initiated the first global bi-monthly magazine Samudra Manthan published by the High Commission.

V. Sivasupramaniam

Medical Institute of Tamils

The 16th Annual General Meeting of the Medical Institute of Tamils will be held on 06th December between 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. at the Post Graduate Centre, Luton & Dunstable Hospitals, Luton, Beds as follows:-

10 a.m. to 1 p.m.: Workshop on The role of the diaspora in Medical needs, Social well being and educational needs for N & E Sri Lanka. (Jaffna, Vanni, Trinco, Batticaloa and Mullaithivu) followed by Lunch

03 p.m. to 10 p.m.: AGM followed by Dinner

Those interested to contribute for the Workshop please contact the MIOT office.

North Thames Region MIOT

The North Thames Region MIOT's AGM will be held on 12th December 2003 at Post Graduate Centre, Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Woolwich, London.

The AGM also includes "Robin Memorial Lecture".

North Thames Region 7th Tear Drops 2003 Cultural Programme

A Tear drops cultural programme has been MIOT North Thames Region's primary fund raising event to help the needy children of N&E Sri Lanka and performed by our youngsters. This year's programme will be held at Beals High School Hall on Saturday, 25th October 2003 at 06.30 p.m.

The committee has agreed to send the funds raised from this programme to 1. Paediatric Dept, Jaffna Hospital 2. Annai Illam Counselling Centre, Kili-nochchi. 3. Paediatric Dept, Batticaloa Hospital. 4. Thilagavathiyar Mahalir Illam.

As usual it would be performed with high standards of cultural programmes of Drama, Dance, Instrumental events etc. Please give your valued support. This would encourage our youngsters to develop their skills and help the needy children in our motherland. Tickets: Family £ 20 and Single £ 10

M T N Veeramani Iyer

1931 - 2003



Plunging the world of Carnatic Music and Bharath Natyam enthusiasts in great

sadness, the veteran carnatic music exponent, Maha Vidwan Iyall-Isai Varuthi Brahmashree M. T. N. Veeramani Iyer, passed away on Wednesday, 8th October 2003, at the age of seventy-two at his residence at Inuvil in the Jaffna district. He was born on 15 October 1931.

Becoming a legend in the entire world of music in his own life-time, he was one of the most popular and great poets and an illustrious exponent in composing music. He was also reputed for the research he accomplished in Bharatha Natyam. His mastery in the rare talents in composing were readily recognised by all while he was in the renowned Kalakehsetram centre. He was trained under Smt. Rukmani Arun-dale, the world famous danseuse. He has been honoured and commented upon by many famous exponents including Papanasan Sivan.

He was a lecturer at Palali and Kopay Teachers' Training Colleges and Univer-

sity of Jaffna Ramanathan Academy of Music. The title "Gowrava Mud-ukali Maman" was conferred upon him by the Jaffna University. Veeramani Iyer has been hailed by various organisations and the Government of Sri Lanka by conferring laurels and awards. One of his famous books published recently (in 2002), "72 Melakarta Raga Thirumayilai Karpa-gambal Kirtanas" is credited to have the compositions on all the Melakartas. This book published in the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mylapore, Madras has computerised those divine hymns through Tamil. The compositions captivate both the learned and the commoners alike. Vee-ramani Iyer has used Murti Mudra, Sthala Mudra, Ambal Mudra and Raga Mudras in these Kirtanas. This book exhibits its masterly craftsmanship.

His body was cremated at the Inuvil Hindu cemetery, in a ceremony attended by a large gathering. At his funeral, several educationists and musicians delivered funeral orations recalling the services rendered by the late Brahma Sri Veeramani Iyer to the car-natic music.

With Veermani Iyer's passing away, the world of Carnatic Music and Bhar-atha Natyam has lost one of their greatest exponents.

\$649m aid committed to Northeast

"The World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNDP, the World Food Program, the European Commission, Australia, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States have committed a total of US\$ 649 million to the North East to date. The donor community stands ready to support reconstruction and recovery in the conflict-affected areas," said a joint donor press release issued from the offices of Worldbank in Colombo on 14 October. The full text of the press release follows:

Sri Lanka has enjoyed an unprecedented period of peace since the Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) agreed on a permanent cease-fire in February, 2002. This has been the longest cease-fire to hold in two decades and has re-opened the space for a political settlement. The cessation of hostilities led to increased levels of economic growth in the country and facilitated the revival of commercial activity in the North East. The international development community, in turn, demonstrated its support to the peace process with significant financial commitments. The World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNDP, the World Food Program, the European Commission, Australia, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States have committed a total of US\$ 649 million to the

North East to date. The donor community stands ready to support reconstruction and recovery in the conflict-affected areas.

Sri Lanka now has a rare opportunity to strengthen peace, reduce poverty and broaden the space for economic development. The road to Jaffna was reopened after 12 years, the economic embargo on LTTE-held areas lifted last year and large tracks of land de-mined. 311,000 IDPs have returned to their homes since the cease-fire. This represents 40% of the internally displaced population registered in January, 2002 and over 50% of the IDPs who had indicated a willingness to return to their homes in a joint Government-UNHCR survey conducted in mid-2002.

The extent of land under paddy cultivation in the North increased by 35%. Provincial statistics indicate that paddy production in the North East increased five-fold from 84,000 metric tons in 2000 to 400,000 metric tons in December 2002/January 2003. The total fish catch in the North East almost doubled from 44,000 metric tons in 2000 to 85,000 metric tons in 2002.

20,000 school drop-outs have returned to school in the North East. 35,000 children in the region now have tables and chairs in their classrooms. Catch up education is provided in all 8 districts. The Government and LTTE have developed an Action Plan for Children Affected

by War to address the needs of 50,000 vulnerable children. This is the first time in Sri Lanka that there is a formal mechanism to address reported cases of underage recruitment.

The donor community pledged increased financial resources for relief and reconstruction in the North East in response to a joint Government-LTTE appeal in Oslo in November, 2002. 55 schools and 25 health facilities have been reconstructed using donor funds. Another 93 schools, 90 health care centers and 75 office buildings in the North East have been identified for repair in 2004 using US\$ 12 million of international resources. 45 kilometers of the A-9 highway have been rehabilitated and work on the remaining 50 kilometers almost complete. Donor resources financed the repair of 238 kilometers of rural roads, 108 irrigation tanks and 156 wells. 32,734 IDP families received the donor-financed Unified Assistance Scheme cash grant of Rs 25,000 as at September 30, 2003.

International donors also provide significant levels of assistance to the South of Sri Lanka where levels of poverty exceed the national average. The donor community remains committed to the development of the South evidence of which came to the fore at the recent floods disaster in May 2003. Several agencies have supported education, health care and community water initiatives in the South. The international community pledged US\$ 4.5 billion for development initiatives throughout the island at the Tokyo Conference on the Reconstruction and Development of Sri Lanka in June, 2003. However, much of the future programs will take into account progress made in the peace process as reiterated in the Tokyo declaration on the reconstruction and development of Sri Lanka.

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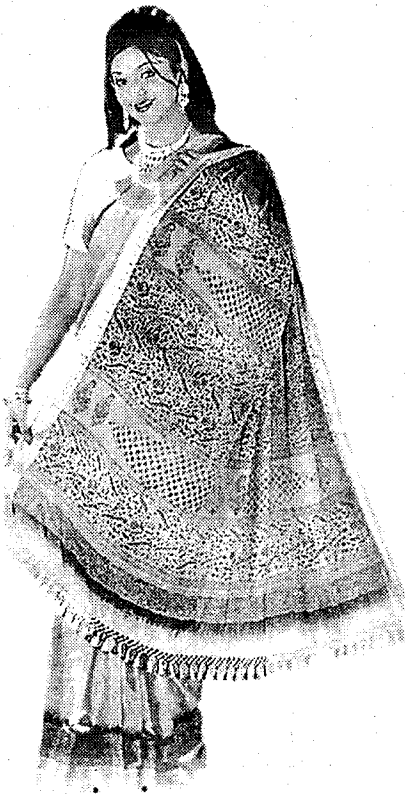
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