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# The Final Solution—Rajapakse's ploy to buy time and impress donors

President Mahinda Rajapakse is about to embark on another ill-advised exercise. He is to summon a meeting of the All Party Conference (APC) which will appoint a committee to devise a new constitution for the country – which he called the Final Solution to the Ethnic Conflict. If media reports are correct, the draft is to be presented to the LTTE once it is completed.

Once again – for the umpteenth time – the government, supported by certain other Sinhala parties, is embarking on a unilateral southern exercise to resolve the ethnic problem through constitutional means.

As in all other previous endeavours it will be an imposition on the Tamils – the most recent example being that of the 2000 Draft Constitution, which was drawn up by government of Rajapakse's predecessor at President's House. What is abundantly clear is that consent, which has to be the basis of any such exercise, is not particularly important to those who propose it.

The move to draw up a new constitution has been predicated by pressure imposed on the government by the international community and the donors to respond meaningfully to Tamil demands and aspirations. A meaningful response is probably the pound of flesh the international community expects from the government to reciprocate the proscription of the LTTE by the European Union.

One does not quite know whether this exercise initiated by the president

impresses the international community – they are easily impressed by such titbits when it is put forward by a state party – but it is certainly not something of priority for the Tamil people. At a time when the Tamils are battling with a brutalised army killing civilians with impunity, and the LTTE is demanding that Karuna and the other paramilitaries be disarmed to make the CFA viable, to talk about constitution-making is like a being given a stone when asked for bread.

It is important to note that this endeavour by the government is being supported by certain actors in civil society and elsewhere who are drawing up their own versions of The Final Solution to the ethnic problem. Under the circumstances we would not be surprised if it does not resemble the exercise under same name done by the Nazis to solve problem of the Jews!

In ploy to divert attention from the travesty of such an exercise, a controversy has been neatly manufactured between the JVP leadership and Rajapakse as to whether it would be in keeping with the tenets of that hallowed document *Mahinda Chintanaya*.

What has to be understood is that the Tamils take a very poor view of the timing of The Final Solution. If Rajapakse believes that he can use this to buy time and impress the donors that he is responding to Tamil demands, let him do so. But it should not find support with the Tamil political parties nor should it in anyway slow down the politico-military programme of the LTTE.

# Unquiet flows the river of political intransigence

By Professor Karthigesu Sivathamby

As things stand today, it is quite manifest, both politically and militarily, that Eelam War III is over and what we are seeing are the birth pangs of a new confrontation between the government and the rebel LTTE. It is also significant that the ceasefire agreement (CFA) is no longer workable.

The main reason for this is because one of the signatories – the present leader of the opposition and the then prime minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe – has been replaced by a group of politicians and ideologues in government who are critical of the CFA and say it has been harmful to Sinhala interests, right from the time it was signed.

However, whereas intellectuals and opinion-makers in southern Sri Lanka have fed media propaganda that the LTTE should be defeated militarily, the man or woman on the street is not ready for another confrontation in which soldiers return in body bags or are maimed beyond recognition, while bombs explode at unexpected places.

This has put the new president, Mahinda Rajapakse, in an unenviable position of having to demonstrate that he is willing to hold discussions on peace, whereas the forces that propelled him to power are not only against the CFA but the facilitators of the peace process – Norway – as well. It has therefore become politically important for him to ritualise the issue by showing readiness for talks without being ready at all to indicate definitively what is to be offered to the Tamils as a political solution.

While this pantomime was being played out in the political arena, on the military front there have been phenomenal developments beginning from the twilight days of President Chandrika Kumaratunga's regime. Even if we leave

aside the question as to who instigated dissent within the ranks of the LTTE in Batticaloa, once the split was politically and militarily an established fact, the security forces began to make use of breakaway group to their advantage.

Flowing from this development was the later refusal by the government to disarm the paramilitary forces in terms of the CFA, and the JHU and JVP leaders going to the extent of saying that without disarming the Tigers, the paramilitary groups should not be asked to decommission weapons. In short, they favoured Batticaloa in the east remaining thoroughly destabilised, while the Trincomalee and Amparai parts of the Northeastern Province having their specific problems that needed to be dealt with, also contributing to the chaos.

This was followed by exporting counterinsurgency used successfully in the east to Jaffna and the north. In the peninsula however, the military began its offensive using a different style of engagement. With pieces of black cloth masking their faces the army harassed and terrorised residents. An elderly woman who had withstood the rigours of the Vadamaradchi operation said that the army at that time (1987) was less ferocious. People became terrified. Gone were the days when doughtier elements could summon up the courage to at least burn a few tyres close to the army camp if something untoward happened in the area. What is more, this sense of fear began to creep under the skin of the body politic and political activists ranging from students upwards have begun to feel the pressure.

This constituted the beginning of what is now known as the 'claymore period.' It is important to note it were the people at large that were at the receiving end of

**How can the government, which is so single-mindedly committed to the eradication of the LTTE, think it possible to engage in a dialogue with that very 'undemocratic, fascist' group to resolve problems of the Sri Lankan Tamils?**

these attacks, because there were reprisals at all the locations where the claymore mines exploded. Militarily, this move was unprecedented, at least since 2002, when the CFA was signed. More ominously, there also emerged the trend of the white van surreptitiously taking away suspected supporters and benefactors of the Tamil cause. It is rumoured that there were 'other' groups supporting the security forces playing a pivotal role in these operations.

Soon Vavuniya was to become the cockpit for these abductions and abandoned corpses as the terror moved southwards from the Jaffna peninsula. All these brought about a non-battle front military offensive, which aimed at frightening civil society into submission. One cannot deny that these led to similar responses from the other side too. The picture became so gloomy that the Catholic bishops of Jaffna and Mannar called for UN intervention. This is quite significant because in the opinion of the Catholic bishops the situation in the northeast was as bad as in Dafur in Sudan.

It was at this juncture that Geneva I took place in late February this year. It became quite evident during the talks that the two sides read the CFA differently. Despite contradictory interpretations however, the text of the CFA itself proved decisive and it was pledged that attempts would be made to implement faithfully the new agreements reached by the two sides before the next round of talks, or Geneva II. But, paradoxically, Geneva I stands in the way of a smooth Geneva II. This is due to Rajapakse is under pressure to satisfy both international expectations, as well as obligations of domestic politics. Facing this impasse the government has called for the holding of a second round of talks at Geneva without any substantial offers on how it was going to fulfil the pledges it made at Geneva I.

Tragedies have a way of deepening themselves and the suicide killer at the army headquarters in Colombo on 25 April did just that. The reprisals had to take place and did take place, and with definite popular support from among the Sinhala public. This led to the merger of the military and the political lines. The new offensive emerging out of this merger revealed itself when Allaipiddy witnessed the murder of 13 persons in one night.

Thus, soon after Geneva I, the ghosts began to reappear as the irrepressible truth surfacing in an Ibsen play. Once again international concern was expressed. But this time unlike in the late 1980s, post 9/11 developments and direct as well as indirect American interests due to fears of what it calls "international terrorism," had begun to play a decisive

## SLMM's partiality compromised after EU ban

The European Union banned the LTTE recently on the pretext it was a terrorist organisation. The proscription was slapped on the rebels blithely unconcerned that the Sri Lankan government was equally if not more culpable for unleashing terror in areas of the northeast, as the Tigers.

It is within the context of the EU's proscription that the forthcoming talks in Oslo have to be viewed. The SLMM that was created with the express intention of monitoring the ceasefire comprised members of the Nordic countries including Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland and Finland. The LTTE agreed to these countries constituting the monitoring mission on the basis that they were largely neutral despite knowing of Norway's role in aiding abetting in Operation *Agni Kheela*, which was launched by the government on the Tigers after the peace process had been initiated and Erik Solheim had had talks with both sides.

But even this pseudo-neutrality that the LTTE respected was irretrievably compromised when the EU slapped the ban. One reason for the delay in imposing the proscription was because two Nordic countries that were both in the EU and SLMM — Denmark and Finland — were reluctant to consent to the ban. The media hailed their eventual consent, reportedly under US pressure, as a diplomatic triumph.

But the question is not pressure of the US or for that matter anybody else. What is at issue here is the perceived neutrality of the SLMM. How can the Tamils believe that the SLMM will perform its monitoring tasks in Sri Lanka shorn of the politics of the countries from which the majority of its members are drawn?

Most people are well aware of the diplomatic and political straightjacket a ban places on the countries that impose it. It would circumscribe their efforts to bring about a just solution to the problem. India's example is well known.

The LTTE delegation should bring this matter up at the talks in Oslo on Wednesday and Thursday. If not, it will ruin even the few opportunities that remain for a just peace to be found for the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict.

role, thus ushering in a situation that has culminated in a European ban on the LTTE. What is worse, the ban comes at a time when the government appears incapable of transcending its intransigence and acting with at least a little foresight.

Thus the world is treated to an interesting drama on the Sri Lankan stage. Domestically, the LTTE is branded as "terrorist, undemocratic and fascist." It is also said that there are "genuine democratic" forces within and among the Tamils, to which the LTTE is hostile. At least to the JVP and JHU these forces are the genuine sparks of democracy in the northeast. Internationally, the government is committed, as it proclaims, to a policy of democratic antiterrorism, and is extending its congratulations to those who are placing the Tigers in discomfiture, including banning it. It pressurised the EU to proscribe the LTTE and is now requesting the Middle East to follow suit.

In the Sri Lankan Tamil perspective, the unresolved paradox is how can the government, which is so single-mindedly committed to the eradication of the LTTE, think it possible to engage in a dialogue with that very 'undemocratic, fascist' group to resolve problems of the Sri Lankan Tamils. Could not it be asked "Why waste time with such an undemocratic force? Why not discuss the matter in an open, democratic manner with those 'non-fascist, democratic forces' among the Tamils and come to a settlement?" Then it could be said to the international community that the government had worked out a lasting political solution to the ethnic conflict with the democratic forces among the Tamils. Would not this be a better idea?

It is here that the shoe starts to pinch. Despite all the accusations and shortcomings, the LTTE today represents the political demands of the Sri Lankan Tamils that the government, supported by sections on the international community, is trying to ignore. This is not the place to analyse the reason how, despite all these so-called 'democratic' forces, the LTTE has come to represent Tamil opinion. Perhaps putting the question this way itself might be taken as a crypto-LTTE position. If so, the question could be phrased in the manner a young, rather naïve student of mine once asked: "If the LTTE was not on the scene what would happen to the Tamil demands?" The pattern of tragedy throughout time and space has been to overlook the obvious for solutions and insist on the non-existent.

**Professor Karthigesu Sivathamby is emeritus professor with a specialist interest in the social and literary history of the Tamils and their culture and communication. He is also involved in theatre studies and literary criticism.**

## Peace is a the need of the hour

— By Professor Bertram Bastiampillai —

Sri Lanka, called the Paradise of the East, unfortunately, has had to tolerate conflicts, riots, belligerences from time to time. Peace seems to be rare, and even unstable, so much so that paradise is not an appropriate description of the island. The last few weeks have been more than unusually disturbed by the explosion of claymore mines, use of grenades and other injurious weapons, and harmful incidents have caused fear and alarm among inhabitants.

Until those who follow different religions, speak different languages such as Sinhalese, Tamils and English, and adopt somewhat varying life styles decide firmly to live together in harmony there can be no dependable peace in Sri Lanka. Sadly, ever since the land became free from colonial subjugation in the late 1940s, division has separated not merely to live discretely but even as 'warring' tribes.

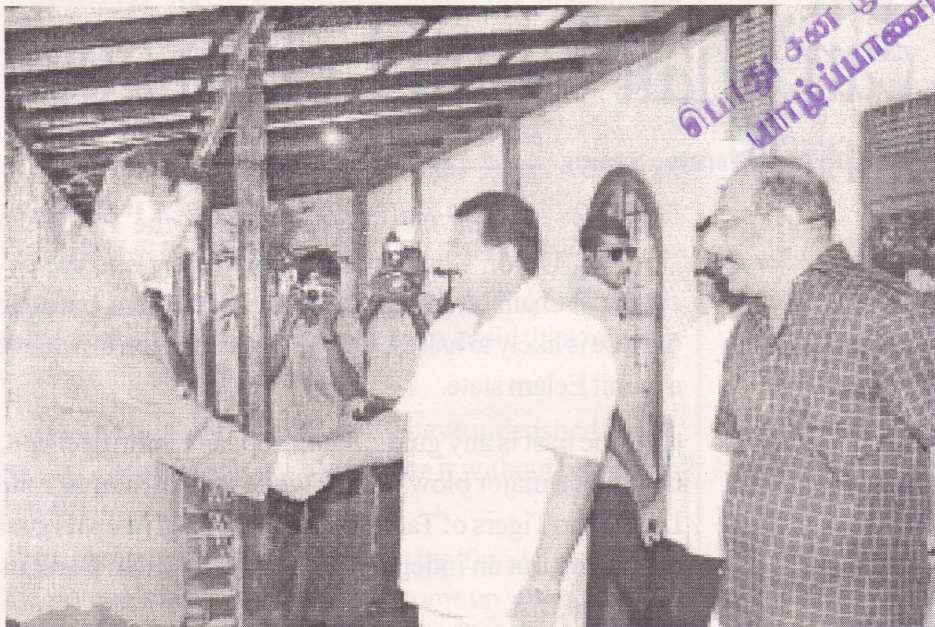
Education divided Sinhalese and Tamils in particular, and there is a tendency among those who form a majority of the population to create for themselves an image of primacy and dominance over other, smaller, groups like the Sri Lankan Tamils, the Muslims, Indian origin Tamils and Burghers. It divided the country rather than welded it together to forge and form a nation.

Imposition of Sinhalese as the sole official language to be used as the language of public administration by the then government estranged Tamil speakers from those to whom Sinhala was the mother tongue. Even Tamil-using Muslims got embittered and the Burghers to whom English was the language of the home felt excluded from their homeland in Sri Lanka and abandoned it to migrate to more hospitable lands where they could peacefully co-exist.

Attempts to bring greater understanding between the Tamils and Sinhalese however was stultified owing to insuperable discord between the communities stemming from chauvinist *bhikkus* and a few Sinhalese leaders who mustered a following built on communalism such as F. R. Jayasuriya or K. M. P. Rajaratne. They thwarted attempts to bridge over differences like Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam, or the Dudley Senanayake-Chelvanayakam agreements.

There were further instances such as the All Parties Conference and the political parties discussions under President J. R. Jeyewardene, which ended in naught as

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*Working the peace process in Kilinochchi*

well; to worsen discrimination and differences among the two communities, riots that hurt the Tamils recurred time and again in 1956, 1958, 1977, 1981 and kept the two communities apart, suspicious and fearful of one another.

Now once again the two communities appear to be irrevocably separated with the Tamils on one side led by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) who clamour for a distinctive, separate 'homeland' with more or less autonomous rule. The state maintains that it cannot surrender to such a want and has an army, air force, navy and the majority of the Sinhalese people on its side resisting the bifurcation of the population and country.

At one time even India was invited to settle the hostility by Jayewardene when Rajiv Gandhi was the prime minister of that country. Unfortunately, Ranasinghe Premadasa, successor to Jayewardene as president wanted Indian intervention to end and the attempt to work out a conciliatory arrangement for sharing authority collapsed. Once the Indian army left, the LTTE, soon drifted into disagreement with Premadasa and the dominant Sinhalese government and governance.

As Sri Lanka drifted into a state of intermittent hostility between the Tamils under the control of the LTTE and the Sinhalese armed forces and government, the real losers and victims owing to this state of militancy were the people, helplessly caught in the throes of armed conflict time and again studded with hit and run attacks. Deaths of civilians and soldiers, maiming and other similar injury, pain and loss were the lot of Tamils and Sinhalese.

Insecurity stalked the country. The day-to-day labour of the people, adversely affected, entailed economic losses

to both communities. The Muslims were also drawn into the animosity and struggle that involved the two larger communities in the fray.

Apart from the loss of lives from both the Tigers and the state security services, the entire country has been losing forward momentum, and progress has been retarded. Investors are understandably reticent, nay reluctant, to spend their money on projects. Consequently, chances of employment are lost while the need for jobs is dire indeed. Unless peace and stability prevail, no new enterprises will be readily established. The economy will not advance when

conflict looms imminent. Moreover, there will also be a flight of trained, experienced or talented and skilled manpower. This exodus is a grave blow to development and advances of industry, manufactures and import and export trade.

During the weeks before the Sinhalese and Tamil New year in mid-April, violent conflict was constant and continual, mostly in the north. Both the Tigers and the state must realise, immediately and vigorously, that peace is the need of the hour for the majority of the people in Sri Lanka. They should not lose time in reaching an understanding that fosters harmony and amity among the polarised belligerents – the Tigers and the state – so that peace could grow in an island plagued for decades by differences and disunity and quarrel.

At present the international powers have, along with Norway, urged a peaceful settlement in Sri Lanka and interceded in the protracted conflict. The best way is to use this opportunity sensibly and reasonably to conclude militant hostilities instead of dissipating energy, resources, and lives. The Tigers and the state should not miss this chance in the interest of ordinary peace loving citizens by getting their dispute, fairly and equitably, resolved: goodwill is needed from both parties. The chances appear bleak: but hope rises eternally among human beings.

**Professor Bertram Bastiampillai, former dean of the Faculty of Arts, and professor of history at the University of Colombo was also the parliamentary commissioner for administration (Ombudsman) after retiring from the university.**

# EU, co-chairs can't halt Tamil Eelam goal

By M.R. Narayan Swamy



LTTE Leader Velupillai Prabhakaran

Sri Lanka may be celebrating the European Union's ban on the Tamil Tigers and the co-chairs' warnings to further isolate them, but none of these is likely to halt the group's determination to achieve a Tamil Eelam state.

If the past is any guide, the European Union decision, no doubt a major blow to the Tigers, will fail to make the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) give up its goal of carving out an independent homeland in Sri Lanka's north and east.

It is even doubtful if the LTTE will come running back to the negotiating table in Geneva.

The statement of the co-chairs to the peace process, highlighting publicly the international community's frustration over Colombo's failure to provide a system of governance that takes care of the rights of minorities, is just one reason why the LTTE will remain wedded to its cause. But it is not the only one.

Historically, the LTTE, with its strong cult of martyrdom and devotion to its leader Velupillai Prabhakaran, has never danced to the tunes of outside forces even while giving such a picture, at times, for tactical reasons.

"The LTTE," Prabhakaran had once triumphantly declared, "will never allow a foreign force to intervene and dominate our people." The statement, made years ago, remains true even today and is applicable to all countries, be it India, Norway, Japan or the US.

Unlike Colombo, which often seemingly behaves in a confused manner, the LTTE, by virtue of being a highly centralised and militarised force, constantly does deeper analyses of events that affect its existence and future growth.

As months went by, it would have been clear to the LTTE that the Norway-sponsored peace process was aimed at arresting its goal of breaking up Sri Lanka. In other words, it is the LTTE that would be expected to give up its bottom line, not Colombo.

This itself is an asymmetry the Tigers would find it difficult to swallow. But they went along with the peace process as long as it helped them gain strength and recognition they crave for.



However, the peace process could not prevent the Tigers from striking at the enemy when they wanted, irrespective of the cost they knew they would have to pay.

Much of the outside world's simplistic understanding of the LTTE made them believe that the Tigers would not risk another war, notwithstanding the many threatening statements in recent times from their senior leaders.

The 25 April suicide bomb attack on the Sri Lankan army chief in Colombo shattered that wishful thinking. The general miraculously survived.

Had he died, Sri Lanka could have unleashed a war, and the Tigers would have gone into it without batting an eyelid.

Helping the LTTE to remain on the Tamil Eelam track is Colombo's seeming inability to come up with a credible devolution package that could greatly diminish the appeal of a group that runs today, with undisguised pride, a de facto Tamil Eelam state in Sri Lanka's northeast.

But as Prabhakaran stated in his November 2005 speech, the gulf between the Tigers and Colombo is very wide. It is now unlikely to be bridged.

The situation in Sri Lanka poses an enormous challenge for India. Having outlawed the LTTE, a good 14 years before the European Union, it has no leverage over the group and cannot even try to influence it. In any case, the Tigers are not going to listen to New Delhi.

But India has a certain clout in Colombo and it can make it clear to Sri Lankan leaders - forthrightly and without mincing words - that the only alternative to anarchy in the island is a genuine devolution of power to the Tamil and Muslim minorities.

If the decisions by India, the US and Britain to dub the LTTE a terror group did not force it to give up its ways, the European Union is not going to succeed with its ban.

Years ago, when he was based in India, Prabhakaran was asked what he would do if India stopped supporting the Tamils.

His reply was revealing: "India's sympathy is a morale booster but should India withdraw support it would not mean the end of our liberation struggle. After all we did not start our liberation movement with India's support or with the help of some other external forces. We will fight till we die. When I die, someone else will take over... If my generation dies without attaining freedom, the next generation will carry on the struggle."

Polemics? May be, and may be not.

(Courtesy IANS)

## LTTE armed attacks to warn president the futility of returning to war

By Analyst



Army commander Lieutenant General Sarath Fonseka

The LTTE attacked a paramilitary camp at Welikanda. While some were killed, others were captured. A van in which TRO officials had been travelling when they were abducted was retrieved from the camp, and a kidnapped businessman from Vavuniya, released.

The LTTE announced it had engaged in a limited strike in the army-controlled areas in close proximity to an army camp. (It is significant that the LTTE's late political head for Batticaloa, S. Kausaliyan, was also killed in this area). Following this, as they had earlier said, the Tigers undertook a sea journey to the east, where a confrontation took place between the Sri Lanka Navy (SLN) and the Sea Tigers.

More recently, another confrontation occurred between the Sea Tigers and the SLN in the Chalai sea area that began around 3.15 in the afternoon and continued till

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evening. The LTTE says that the SLN attacked them while they were engaged in naval exercises and they retaliated. Two Dvora's of the SLN were sunk. A troopship with 710 soldiers on board had to move into Indian waters in self-defence. This does not take away credit from the LTTE's well-programmed activity at sea.

There are different interpretations of these recent events. The SLMM and countries that comprise the co-chairs of the Sri Lankan peace process are perturbed by such actions.

The peace process shows the LTTE's diplomatic finesse and sophistication. It is now understood that the Tigers use it depending on their agenda. Therefore, their responses are not at random or impulsive, nor should they be interpreted as such. Let us examine certain recent events in the light of this statement.

It appears there is a pattern in the responses of the LTTE to recent events. And examining them could bring to light a certain trend.

First, why was the shadow war used to make an attempt on the life of Lieutenant General Sarath Fonseka? Fonseka was not an exponent of the art of war. Nor was he a successful commander. Nor did he prove himself a battle hero. In Operation Yaldevi (1993) where he fought, in the confrontation with LTTE commander Colonel Balraj at Iththavil during the operation on the Elephant Pass base, or for that matter in the other battles he took part in, Fonseka was decisively beaten. If he had been killed, another general would have taken over the command as is normal in a conventional army. Therefore, that would not have been the military reason for the LTTE to have targeted him. What then was the reason?

The actual reason for this was that Fonseka instilled confidence in the government that it could get the better of the LTTE in a military

confrontation. It was also because of the extreme attitude he took while he was Jaffna security forces commander against resettlement in the high security zones (HSZ) which led to the committee that was appointed to look into this matter becoming moribund.

He inspired confidence in the government through his words that there could be victory in future military confrontations that would result in a change in the balance of power. He was a factor in the government's refusal to pursue the path of peace. It was probably these reasons that he had to be selected as sacrifice for the shadow war.

Second, the assault undertaken by the LTTE on the paramilitary forces was a limited strike. The military thought it could reap great benefit through the Karuna Group. The first three-fourths of this four-year peace process experienced a lull in the fighting. The final quarter resulted in a silent war. The government has recommenced the war by characterising the attack carried out openly by all three services on Sampoor, in the Trincomalee District, as a 'limited strike.' However, due to the global situation and the role of the international community in implementing the Ceasefire Agreement, the chances are that confrontation between the two sides remains a silent war for the time being. This is why the term 'limited' had to be used.

When Ranil Wickremesinghe claimed he was laying an international safety net, that day saw the birth of the silent war. Peace began to nourish the war. That is why the LTTE said the Tokyo Conference was trap.

President Mahinda Rajapakse who thinks there is a way to stabilise himself through war also believes he has a chance of winning it. It is also significant that that his defence advisor, G. B. Kotakadeniya, has said the present situation could be transformed by capturing the Tiger-controlled areas through war. The shadow war broke out when the president decided he



**Tigers, realising what the Rajapakse regime believed were its advantages to win the war against its enemy (LTTE), and what it thought were its enemy's weaknesses, dealt blows to shatter those illusions**



யொது சன நூலகம்  
யாழ்ப்பாணம்.

Sea Tigers engaged in exercises

could force the LTTE to take up arms so as to denigrate the LTTE in the eyes of the international community and make the world their enemy.

It could be said the Tigers demonstrated their political maturity on this occasion. Rather than lose patience and initiate a confrontation, they either facilitated or urged civilians supporting them to raise a force called the *Ponguthamil Uprising Army (Ponguthamil Elurchchi Padai)*.

The shadow war that began thus necessitated talks in Geneva. The government agreed at the end of the talks to disarm the paramilitaries. It was accepted in the statement issued after the meeting that the EPDP, EPRLF (Varathar Group) and the Karuna Group were paramilitary units of the government security forces.

Following the Geneva talks, attacks by the *Ponguthamil Uprising Army* ceased and peace prevailed.

But attacks by the paramilitaries did not stop. Government ministers, contrary to what they accepted in Geneva, realising that disarming these groups was not possible, began issuing statement claiming there was no link between the army and these groups.

Twelve civilians were killed in quick succession. With the death of V. Vigneswaran of Trincomalee, the shadow war resumed and the *Ponguthamil Uprising Army* began strikes afresh. In response, a pogrom was unleashed upon the Tamils of Trincomalee. The attempt on the life of Fonseka is also a part of this shadow war.

War resumed when the three services responded by openly attacking Sampoor, followed by the death and displacement of civilians. Due to the international environment, it was not the intention of the government to begin a total military confrontation. But the LTTE had no option but to respond to attacks from land, sea and air.

Certain southern politicians and Sinhala media organisations believe that the Karuna Group is a military asset. Therefore, they are confident of victory in future wars.

The LTTE has shown that in the event it attacks a Karuna Group camp, resulting in a confrontation, the Karuna Group is no big deal. The Tigers have also shown that they have to remain spectators because of the peace process. After the Geneva talks, they said that if the government appeared incapable of disarming the paramilitaries they would be forced to undertake the job themselves. By using this opportunity to disarm the Karuna Group they have put the onus on the government and the international community to do the same.

Third, there was a general belief in the south that after the tsunami the Sea Tigers' fighting ability was greatly impaired. Colombo was also convinced that the LTTE could not gain any major victories in a future war without its navy. This was also a factor for the south to pursue war as an option.

The LTTE was waiting for an opportunity to dismiss these delusions entertained by the government. The opportunity presented itself when the government claimed the operation at Sampoor was a limited strike. Using the attack on its boats involved in naval exercises off Chalai as an excuse, the Sea Tigers demonstrated the current status of their naval capability.

The Tigers, realising what the Rajapakse regime believed were its advantages to win the war against its enemy (LTTE), and what it thought were its enemy's weaknesses, dealt blows to shatter those illusions.

Therefore, the LTTE's actions were an attempt to prevent the talks from collapsing and getting the president to cooperate in the peace process. The LTTE wanted to be free from blame if the Rajapakse government tried to force it to act in anger so that the government could point the finger at the Tigers as the provocateur.

At the same time the LTTE had to prove its forbearance was not due to weakness. The Tigers had to also convince civilians who were blaming them when the army killed people everyday that their organisation did not lack sympathy. The LTTE's recent moves are answers to all three elements. But it appears that the international community is reading these signals differently.

## UN Human Rights Council continues hypocrisy of its predecessor

By Taurus

It is to be noted with regret that countries like Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, which are among the worst perpetrators of human rights violations have been elected as members of the newly-established United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC). In fact, the purpose of establishing the UNHRC in place of the Human Rights Commission was to get rid of those states with questionable human rights records who were shielding themselves by being members of the commission.

Out of these four countries, Pakistan and Bangladesh do not even have national human rights commissions based on the Paris principles although Bangladesh has been promising to establish one for the last 10 years. This is one more black mark for the South Asian Association Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries whose home ministers met recently and discussed many matters, but conveniently forgot human rights. When such states do not even have national human rights commissions (leave alone functional ones) one cannot expect militancy waged to attain human dignity to be eradicated, unless of course certain groups consent to be second class citizens perpetually.

Pakistan is ruled under the leadership of an army general. Sri Lanka is listed as a Partly Free Country (PF) by the INGO Freedom House and has only recently been mentioned as a 'failed state' in The Failed States Index, prepared by the Washington-based independent research group Fund for Peace (FFP). It has in good company with Ethiopia and Rwanda before and after it.

Less said about Saudi Arabia and its human rights record the better. One can recommend a host of books and reports as material for discerning readers, amongst them: *Amnesty International* annual other reports, *Torture in the Eighties* – 1984, *Torture, Detention and Arbitrary Arrests* – November 1990, *An Upsurge in Public Executions* – May 1993 and *Behind Closed Doors: Unfair Trials in Saudi Arabia* – November 1997.

It is to be noted that the international policeman and the so-called international community close their eyes



*UN Secretary General Kofi Annan at a UN Human Rights Commission meeting*

regarding human rights violations in this country because they need its oil and it is alleged that British companies even sell instruments of torture to Saudi Arabia. It is a shame that these countries even speak about human rights.

Sri Lanka has the worst human rights record in this part of Asia except Myanmar (Burma) and Nepal. Tamils of this country bear witness to this as highlighted by the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) regularly. Starting with the anti-Tamil race riots of 1956, 1958 and 1977, they culminated in the 1983 July pogrom. Massacres of Tamils in Ampara and Batticaloa by the special task force (STF) including Karaitivu, Kokkatticholai, Saththurukkondan (mostly women, children and elders), Eastern University refugee camp at Vantharumoolai, Trincomalee Hospital and the army camp at Plantain Point (as stated in the Presidential Commission Report on Involuntary Removals and Disappearances in the Northeast) are cases in point.

In the north there were disappearances from Mandaitvu, Allaipiddy and Mankumpam in the 1990s (It is indeed sad that the cycle of violence is on the ascendance at Allaipitty one again with the gruesome murder of 13 persons including a four-month-old infant and a four-year-old child. Over to you UNICEF and Human Rights Watch – of course you will find it hard to write reports against state parties!)

The murders of Tamil journalists M. Nimalarajan, P. Nadesan, D. Sivaram and S. Sugirtharajan; the 12/4 Trincomalee looting, arson and killing by the armed forces and Sinhala mobs; the killing of innocent civilians on 25 and 26 April through aerial bombardment by Kfir aircraft, artillery fire from land and shelling by Dvora fast attack craft from the sea at Muttur and schools such as Sampoor Murugan Tamil Maha Vidyalayam and its students are examples.

The horror of such violations come across best perhaps in the brutal killing of five innocent Tamil students at the Dutch Bay beach Trincomalee on 2 January 2006 by the STF of the Sri Lanka Police.

No one from the international community seems to be interested in asking as to what happened to the perpetrators of these crimes and as to whether a commission of inquiry should not be appointed by the state to probe the occurrences in Trincomalee on 12/4. Perhaps an Independent Concerned Persons Commission like what was appointed in India to inquire into the Gujarat massacre of Muslims with retired Justice of the Supreme Court of India V. R. Krishna Iyer heading it may be the answer. But then India is at least prima facie a democratic country.

June 2006

# A university without a VC and VC without a university



*Student protests at Jaffna University*

**T**he tragicomedy behind the appointment of the vice chancellor (VC) to the University of Jaffna has assumed proportions previously unheard of in the annals of university education in this country.

The appointment of this former member of the University Grants Commission (UGC) was made by President Mahinda Rajapakse in preference to the recommendation made by the UGC in the three names it submitted to the president. The president of course has the right to do this. But unfortunately, the appointment has taken a completely unexpected turn.

The appointee, Professor Ratnajeewan Hoole, is a well-known academic and also known for his administrative

capabilities. There was an initial misunderstanding of confusing him with his brother of University Teachers for Human Rights – Jaffna (UTHR-J) fame. Following the presidential appointment, there was a protest from the university community, especially the students. A parliamentarian and former student leader of the Jaffna University led the protest. This gave the impression the LTTE was behind the agitation.

Events began to take a serious turn when the newly-appointed VC responding to student protests issued a press communiqué stating his credentials as a fighter for the cause of higher education among the Tamils, but resigning because

of student protests. At least that was the impression received at some of the newspaper offices.

However, the UGC says it did not receive Hoole's letter of resignation and functions on the basis that the president's appointee is continuing in office. In the meantime, finding that it was not possible for him to travel to Jaffna, the VC began to issue orders from what was described as the "office of the VC of the University of Jaffna in Colombo" to the head of the administrative staff – the acting registrar.

This arrangement too ran into difficulties because it seems that a VC assumes office before of the registrar of the university. Placed in that position, the acting registrar, it is said, did not want to respond to the orders of the VC who had not officially assumed duties.

A few days later the new appointee appointed in turn one of the dons of the University of Jaffna (who was then in Colombo) as the deputy VC. The problem however is that there is no office of Deputy VC at the Jaffna University. It is also not clear whether the newly-appointed VC who had himself not assumed office could appoint somebody as a deputy to him. It is understood that the VC had stated in the letter he would get covering sanction for the appointment he was making.

Whether it was the difficulty of accepting deputyship from a new appointee who had not set foot at Jaffna University after his appointment or other reasons, even the intended deputy VC backed out.

The current situation, we are told is that the Professor Hoole has gone out of the island. Nobody seems to know how the UGC granted him leave in view of the parlous circumstances existing at Thirunelvely.

It is said he was prevented from resigning his office by politically motivated persons but this is an unsubstantiated story. The truth of this notwithstanding, he is yet the VC but evidently on sabbatical leave.

**Is it fair to hold an institution to ransom for obviously political reasons? Which other university in Sri Lanka has no political involvement, but is not shabbily treated because of its politics?**

The politics surrounding this appointment is seen from the president's choice from the three names sent to him by the UGC. Politics took a different turn when the JVP-controlled student's union the Samajavadi Sishta Sangamaya (Socialist Students' Union) protested against the reservations expressed by the students of the University of Jaffna and warned that if the new appointee was not permitted to return to Jaffna, all the (ethnically) Tamil dons working in universities outside Jaffna would be sent to Jaffna.

All told, the University of Jaffna has no VC. Without the VC the University Council cannot officially hold meetings. It is said the UGC has intervened and is

trying to maintain the continuity of administration at Jaffna University. But the humour is that the registrar cannot act for a VC for more than seven day at a stretch. So evidently the UGC issues letters once is seven days. This of course is wonderful material to any comedian.

It is reported a meeting of the university council has been scheduled thereby officially enabling the registrar to act. Humour apart, is it fair to hold an institution to ransom for obviously political reasons? Which other university in Sri Lanka has no political involvement, but is not shabbily treated because of its politics?



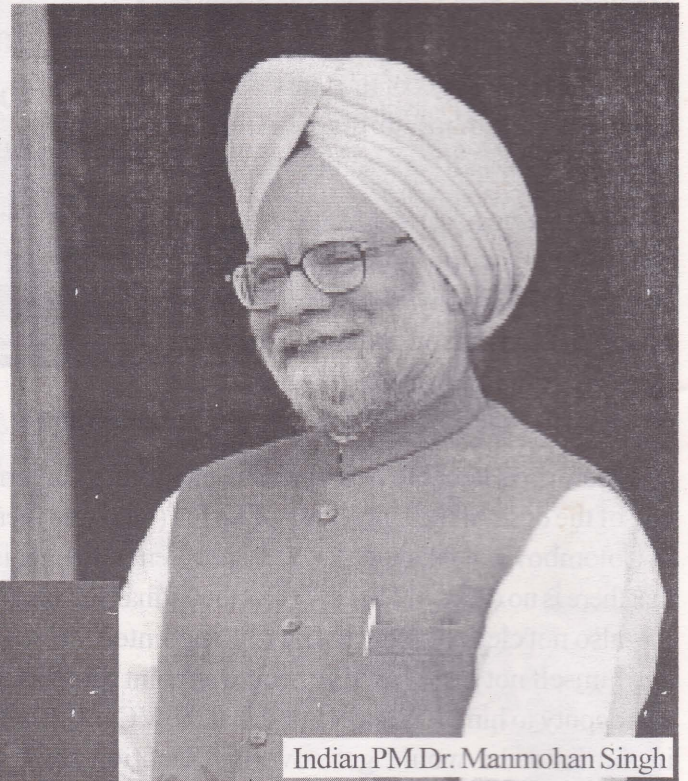
A procession of university students in Jaffna

# Does India hope to intervene through proxies in Sri Lanka?

By J. S. Tissainayagam

International events connected with the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict that occurred during the last week of May 2006, proved to be a mixed bag for the Tamils. On the one hand the enforcement of the European Union's (EU) proscription of the LTTE, which was decided upon in principle earlier, was construed as being detrimental to the peace process.

But the statement of the co-chairs after their meeting in Tokyo on 30 May, appeared to deal with the two protagonists more even-handedly, and was therefore more encouraging: "The co-chairs call on both parties to take immediate steps to reverse the deteriorating situation and put the country on to the road to peace."



Indian PM Dr. Manmohan Singh



Ranil Wickremesinghe meeting former Indian Premier Atal Behari Vajpayee

terrorism and violence. It must show that it is willing to make political compromises needed for a political solution within a united Sri Lanka."

- Commenting on the government the EU statement continued, "The government must show it is willing to address the legitimate grievances of the Tamils. It must immediately prevent groups based on its territory from carrying out violence and acts of terrorism... The government has failed to prevent attacks of armed groups including Karuna and violent elements of the EPDP."

When the EU proscription was confirmed there was consternation that the LTTE might use the ban as an excuse and refuse going to talks in Oslo scheduled for 8 and 9 June on strengthening the SLMM's monitoring role in the Sri Lankan peace process.

Referring to the Tigers the statement said, "The LTTE must re-enter the negotiating process. It must renounce

strengthening the SLMM's monitoring role in the Sri Lankan peace process.



It now appears there are chances of the LTTE going to Oslo. It could be to the Tigers' advantage because: (1) they can conveniently use the forum to refer to the violations of the CFA, which constitute the core of their grievance against the government.

(2) The LTTE expressed keenness to go to Oslo even for the first round of talks on the CFA, but was prevented by the intransigence of the government; the Tigers could legitimately exploit the forthcoming meeting to strengthen their image politically though within the constraints imposed by Oslo.

(3) The willingness to parley in Oslo would mean a massive compromise for the PA government because its allies the JVP and JHU believe Norway is partial to the LTTE, while the JVP has even demanded the Norwegians abdicate their role as facilitators.

While the Oslo meeting is expected to discuss strengthening the SLMM's presence in the northeast it will be instructive to recall the words of the Japanese Envoy Yasushi Akashi during his recent visit to this country. He said that observing the way the CFA was being violated with impunity by both sides the United Nations (UN) might be required to monitor the peace in Sri Lanka.

This was followed by another statement made by Akashi just before he left the country. Referring to the meeting of the co-chairs of the Sri Lankan peace process scheduled for 30 May, he said it might be beneficial if India would attend the meeting as an observer.

Though obviously not said in so many words, the international community has begun to look at India's role in Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict with some degree of concern. India has maintained the position of supporting the international community acting through the peace facilitator Norway to bring the two warring parties to the table for a negotiated settlement. The question is: would India, the hegemon of the South Asian region be content with that, or is it playing the wallflower only because it wants somebody else to do all the hard work while it plays the waiting game, seeking the most opportune to take on a more visible role.

If one were to analyse the behaviour of India at least from the time the President Mahinda Rajapakse assumed office, one finds New Delhi, now ruled by a coalition of forces led by the Indian Congress Party, but dependent for political stability on regional parties from Tamil Nadu, consistently maintaining a stance of supporting Sri Lanka's unity and territorial integrity but insisting Tamil aspirations

ought to be met including that of devolution of power within a federal form of government. In fact, on one occasion, senior Sri Lankan officials visiting India were walked through the rudiments of Indian federalism by home ministry officials there, while numerous study tours of Sri Lankan civil society personnel and seminars have been organised on the subject.

At the same time, Tamil Nadu, though not making it a significant issue in the recently-concluded state assembly elections, has become much more publicly responsive to Tamil refugees from the northeast arriving at Rameshwaram, with veteran Tamil nationalist politician P. Nedumaran, saying recently that "India must warn the Sri Lanka government to stop the killing of Tamils," and even urging Delhi despatch a ship to ferry the fleeing.

Leaving aside the political rhetoric what is significant is that from early this year, when Sri Lankan security forces began unleashing violence against Tamil civilians in the northeast in retaliation to the LTTE taking on military targets, nearly 2000 refugees have reached Indian shores, but no formal complaint about it has been forthcoming either from Delhi or Chennai. Besides, the usually vigilant Indian coastguard and the navy have made no attempt to interdict such refugee movements as they did in the past.

Further, when the Sri Lankan government went with a long shopping list of military purchases to India what was offered was only non-lethal military equipment such as radars. What is more, the defence agreement, long proposed by the Sri Lanka government, remains shelved for the moment. In a bid to play traditional rivalries, Sri Lanka took the shopping list to Pakistan and China. However, it is believed the Indian government has told Colombo they could shop where they wished as long as military purchases did not undermine India's strategic concerns in the region.

The confluence of the LTTE's burgeoning military and political power, Tamil Nadu's open sympathy for the plight of the Tamils in Sri Lanka, and the influence Tamil Nadu politicians have in New Delhi has led to the Indian government believing that the time is approaching for it to demonstrate that its role in the Sri Lankan crisis is far greater than it cared to show openly in the recent past.

It is precisely this reason that makes New Delhi turn a blind eye to the influx of refugees coming to Rameshwaram. Their presence on Indian soil would be a potent weapon in galvanising popular sentiment urging intervention. It is probably with such designs in mind that Delhi declined from participating as an observer at the co-chairs' meeting of 30 May too. New Delhi believes that it could manipulate popular sentiment that demands its role be wider and more decisive in Sri Lanka than it could ever be in a collective entity such as the co-chairs.

Similarly, Akashi's statement of bringing in UN troops as ceasefire monitors is to probably have the Indians involved in the northeast but within an institutionalised set up such as a UN peace-keeping force.

With the bitter experience of the IPKF in Sri Lanka still fresh, it is unlikely New Delhi hopes to intervene directly. And it is with this in mind that proxies operating in Sri Lanka known to have strong anti-LTTE sympathies are being quietly groomed. They are both political and civil society based. It is believed that the entry point for their intervention would be as 'a democratic Tamil alternative.'

There is every possibility the makings of the 'democratic Tamil alternative' will include the Karuna group (TMVP), the EPDP, EPRLF (V) and former MP and leader of the TULF, A. Anandasangaree. It is interesting that the first three figured in the list of armed groups the LTTE wanted disarmed by the government.

Karuna's TMVP has strong connections with the ENDLF, which is creature of India. The head of EPRLF (V) A. Varathrajaperumal has had close links with New Delhi ever since he became the short-lived chief minister of the Northeast Province in between 1988-1990. Anandasangaree's servile devotion to Indian federalism - on which he tried to lecture the JVP and was politely told to shut up - is too well known to bear repetition.

At the level of civil society, there are moves to lavishly fund various NGOs thereby bringing them under one umbrella or at least achieve a consonance in thinking. Under the rubric of 'strengthening democracy,' funding is already being targeted at selected civil society organisations in the northeast involved in education, gender-based programmes, research and even the media. In the guise of 'strengthening democracy,' they will challenge the LTTE's self-identification as the sole representative of the Tamils and create spaces for political organisations such as the EPDP, TMVP and EPRLF (V) to infiltrate.

Though yet uncertain, political groups belonging to the 'democratic Tamil alternative' might be initiated into the governing structures of the northeast in the form of an interim government, where such a body might either work by itself or in conjunction with the LTTE. On the other hand, the Northeast Provincial Council might also be revived as an interim government. It is also probable that notwithstanding the Indo-Lanka Accord moves will be initiated to bifurcate the north from the east. *The Northeastern Monthly* of January this year referred to some of these issues in the article 'The real reasons behind murder in the cathedral.'

Time does not appear ripe yet for some of these moves to bear fruit. Therefore, India is said to be playing a waiting game. Meanwhile, the LTTE insists that its priority at talks with the government will be disarming the paramilitaries. But how could paramilitaries such as Karuna and the EPDP be disarmed if they are expected to play such a decisive role in the future? Therein lies the rub.

# Oil interests behind Aussie support for Timor unrest

By Maryann Keady

Three years ago, I wrote a piece talking about attempts to oust Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri in East Timor, then a new struggling independent nation. I wrote that I believed the US and Australia were determined to oust the Timorese leader, due to his hardline stance on oil and gas, his determination not to take out international loans, and their desire to see Australia friendly President Xanana Gusmao take power.

Three years later, I am unhappy to say that the events I have predicted are currently taking shape. The patriotic Australia media, that has unquestionably fallen into line over every part of John Howard's Pacific agenda - including the Solomon's excursion - is now trumpeting the ousting of Alkatiri, a man who has gamely defied Australia's claims over its oil and gas, many of the paper's foreign editors clearly more in tune with the exhortations of Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade than the sentiments among Timorese.

I arrived in Dili just as the first riots broke out on 28 April this year - and as an eyewitness at the front of the unrest, the very young soldiers seemed to have outside help - believed to be local politicians and 'outsiders.' Most onlookers cited the ability of the dissident soldiers to go from an unarmed vocal group, to hundreds brandishing sticks and weapons, as raising locals' suspicions that this was not an 'organic' protest. I interviewed many people - from Fretlin insiders, to opposition politicians and local journalists - and not one ruled out the fact that the riots had been hijacked for 'other' purposes. The prime minister himself stated so. In a speech on the 7 May, he called it a coup - and said that "foreigners and outsiders" were trying once again to divide the nation. I reported this for ABC Radio - and was asked if I had the translation wrong. I patiently explained no - we had carefully gone through the speech word for word, and anyone with any knowledge of Timorese politics would understand that is precisely what the prime minister meant. No other media had bothered to go to the event - the Australian media preferring

to hang out with the rebel soldiers or Australian diplomats that all wanted Alkatiri "gone."

Since his election, Alkatiri had sidelined the most important figure in Timorese politics - President Xanana Gusmao - and the tension between the two has been readily apparent. Alkatiri, has a different view to Gusmao about how the country's development should take place - slowly, without "rich men feasting behind doors" was the way he described it to me, a steady structure of development the way to develop a truly independent nation. His ability to defend Timor's oil and gas interests against an aggressive Australia and powerful business interests, and his development of a Petroleum Fund to protect Timor's oil money from future corruption never accorded with the caricature created by his Australian and American detractors of a "corrupt dictator."

The campaign to oust Alkatiri began at least four years ago - I recorded the date after an American official started leaking me stories of Alkatiri's corruption while I was freelancing for ABC Radio. I investigated the claims - and came up with nought - but was more concerned with the tenor of criticism by American and Australian officials that clearly suggested that they were wanting to get rid of this 'troublesome' prime minister. Like Somare, he was not doing things their way. After interviewing the major political leaders - it was clear that many would stop at nothing to get rid of Timor's first prime minister. President Xanana Gusmao, three years ago, did not rule out dissolving parliament and forming a 'national unity government.'

Gusmao and his supporters (including Jose Ramos-Horta) have privately called Alkatiri an "Angolan communist" with his idea of slow paced development not something Gusmao and his Australian supporters agree with. Other than that, it is hard to work out why President Gusmao would allow forces to unconstitutionally remove this prime minister. In Timor, many see Gusmao at fault here, for disagreeing with the prime minister over the sacking of the soldiers (it should have been resolved in private) while others see him as the architect of the whole fiasco, his frustration with his limited political role allowing him to be convinced by his Australian advisors to embark on a needlessly bloody coup.

In the last few days we have heard from young Timorese writers currently at the Sydney Writer's Festival. They have

**Since his election, Alkatiri had sidelined the most important figure in Timorese politics - President Xanana Gusmao - and the tension between the two has been readily apparent.**

a different take from the Australian media on what is happening in Timor. Take this quote by one young writer:

"... it is suspicious and questionable. It is difficult to analyse why Australia wants to go there. I think it is driven by concerns over Australia's economic security, including the oil under the sea, rather than concern for the people of East Timor. I am scared it is less about East Timor's security than Australia's security and interests."

Gil Gutteres, the head of Timor's journalists association TILJA similarly last month said old style fears of communism, and economic interests of Australia were driving the anti-Alkatiri campaign, and were behind the violence. In fact, there

is hardly a person in Timor that doesn't understand that this is about big politics - helped by internal figures wanting to control the oil and gas pie.

And yet the Australian press is full of "our boys" doing us proud. This does not equate with sentiment on the ground, or answer the question as to where the rebel forces could have received support for this foolhardy campaign that has led to many Timorese being frightened, distressed and homeless.

Just this evening, witnesses spoke of Australian army personnel standing by while militia fired on a church in Belide. During the early violence, not one UN soldier intervened to stop the small band of rioters, and the recent actions of the Australian troops add fuel to speculation that they are letting Timor burn.

Alkatiri, for his part is refusing to step aside, saying that only Fretlin, his party, can ask him to resign. If he does go, the Timorese have the Australian media to thank for their unquestioning support of this coup. Perhaps they can explain to the starving citizens (that were already ignored by Australia for 25 years) why Australia now controls their oil and gas. More importantly, the politicians in Timor that have been party to the violence will have to explain to the people their involvement in this latest chapter of its traumatic history.

மியான் கேடி ஓஸ்டிரேலியாவில் உள்ள  
புத்தாளி ஆசிரியர்.

(Znet)

**Maryann Keady is an Australian radio producer and journalist who has reported from Dili since 2002. She is currently a professional associate at Columbia University's Weatherhead Institute looking at US Foreign Policy and China.**

# Violence against women – what it means in a society struggling for freedom

By S. Jeyasankar

Statistics reveal that violence against women at home is much higher than what is experienced by them at their places of work, or out on the streets. But when concerned people, mostly women, start to speak out on violence against women at home, or domestic violence, there is a loud outcry by men that women are creating chaos within the home and breaking-up families by interfering in matters that are, essentially, between husband and wife, or at most within the extended family.

No one says women should get out of their homes because of domestic violence perpetrated by men,

particularly husbands or fathers. But at the same time, the home is

not a torture chamber for women. It should be a place where there is love, peace and understanding. Raising the issue of domestic violence is to make the home become a place of love for all members of the family.

It should be the same story when it comes to places of work. Work places are not only for men but also for women. If anyone is harassed or experiences violence in their work place, the perpetrators must be held



NGOs protesting against domestic violence (Picture by Roshini Yogarajah - courtesy Oxfam)

accountable. Meanwhile, gender balance of the work place must also be maintained.

The question is: when women face harassment and abuse – especially sexual harassment at the work place – is it reasonable to ask them to leave the place of employment for their own safety or dignity? The answer should be no. On the contrary, the perpetrators should be dealt with and the security and dignity of the victim restored. But restitution, which is a common rule applied whenever injustice is committed, has become an exception for women.

## Let's protect women's right to work, let's end violence against women!

Following the media hype about a woman NGO worker allegedly appearing in a CD with pornographic material, a press statement titled 'Let us protect women's right to work; let's end violence against women,' was issued by a group of 28 NGOs on 26 April demanding that women's right to work be respected and to end all forms of sexual exploitation. The statement said:

“Over the past few weeks there have been a number of leaflets and rumours containing allegations and making threats against women working in NGOs in Batticaloa and Ampara districts. These allegations have focused on issues of sexual exploitation of women, and have called for women to be stopped from working in NGOs and also in private businesses.

“As members of organizations concerned with promoting the equality of women in society, we are pleased that MPs of Batticaloa have publicly denounced these leaflets aimed at denying women the right to work, a right which is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

“Women play a vital role in the field of social development, and are often those who work directly with communities and families. Blanket allegations and rumours against ALL women working in NGOs have unfairly damaged the reputations of these women and their families. It has also given an opening to opportunistic persons to threaten and harass women workers in their communities and during their work. This has caused great anxiety and difficulties for women workers and their families.

“We call on all organizations - government, nongovernmental and private - to ensure harassment does not take place at the workplace, to create work environments that deter violence against women, and to put in place mechanisms for anyone facing harassment to be able to come forward in confidentiality and have their complaints dealt with satisfactorily. We cannot protect women from violence or exploitation by locking them away from society.

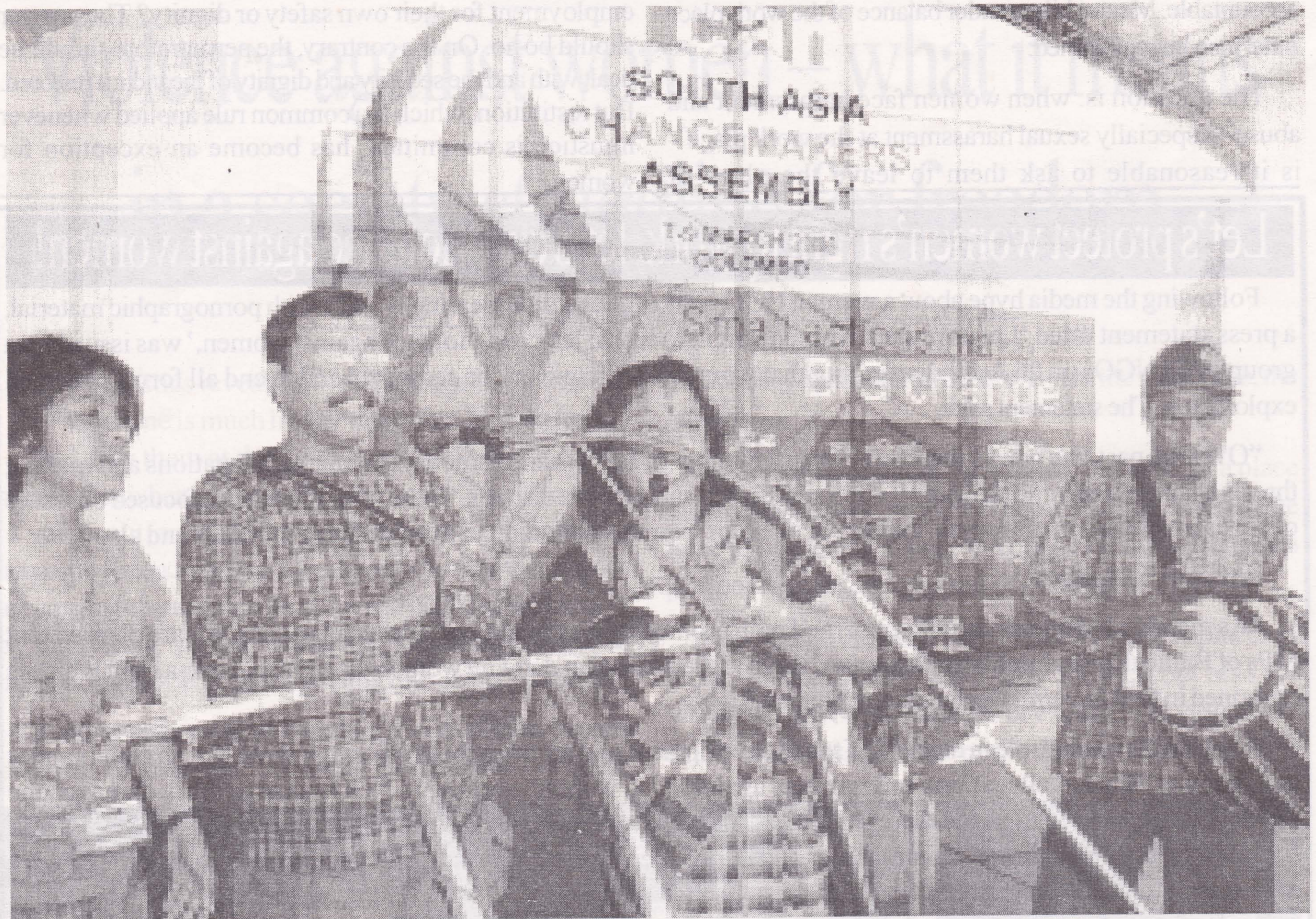
“The issue of sexual exploitation of women is a serious matter, and individual cases must be systematically investigated and justice must be sought for the women concerned. Perpetrators of exploitation must be penalized not women. Any process of obtaining justice for these women, must be sensitive to their individual needs and circumstances and should avoid causing them further suffering. Women who have suffered exploitation should be assured of full support by their employers, the community and the legal authorities if they wish to come forward.

“All community members have a role to play in supporting the rights of women to work whether in NGOs, within hospitals, within schools or within private enterprises. Community members should not attribute stereotypes or rumours uncritically to all the thousands of women who work in the social service sector to do so is to further victimize women.

“We call on all members of society - members of public (men and women), civil society actors, intellectuals, religious leaders and the media - who believe in the rights of people to take an active role in ending all forms of violence against women and in supporting women's right to work.”

*Community Development Fund, Eastern Self-Reliant Community-Awakening Organisation, People's Welfare Association, Enfants and Development, Palameenmadu Welfare Society, CARE International Sri Lanka, Zahira Welfare Committee, Thiruperanthurai Community Development Organisation, Suriya Women's Development Centre, Sikaram Social Development Fund, Eastern Social Development Forum, Caritas-EHED, FORUT, ACTED, Helvetas, Viluthu, World University Services – Canada, Save the Children in Sri Lanka, Norwegian Refugee Council, Thiruchendur Welfare Society,*

*Koralai Pattu North Development Union, OXFAM (Australia), OXFAM (GB), Arche Nova, LEADS, Point Pedro Institute of Development, World Concern, World Vision - Tsunami Response Team*



*'We can' South Asians raising awareness on domestic violence (Picture courtesy Oxfam)*

This is the theme of the saga involving the infamous CD with pornographic material that was circulating in the Batticaloa and Ampara districts around the time of the Sinhala and Tamil New Year and sensationalised by the media with palpable glee.

The girl who had allegedly appeared in the porn CD was identified as a native of Sri Lanka's east and located as working in an NGO or INGO. A story was then fabricated and disseminated with the ingredient of a death threat included, based on the 'information.' This was apparently done to safeguard the dignity of the women working in NGOs and INGOs.

But the whole thing boomeranged when it made working women in the NGO sector easy targets in the hands of their own brethren in every sphere of their day-to-day existence – particularly during the Tamil New Year.

The situation took an ugly turn when personal grudges began to be played out under cover of the death threat and the accompanying humiliation. Some individuals identified certain women workers as "the girl" in the porn CD and concocted stories. These rumours gained currency and began to haunt the families of many young girls working

in NGOs and INGOs. Thus the misplaced attempt at preserving female 'virtue' led to a tragedy in the lives of working women in this sector.

A girl committed suicide, and there was talk of other girls too contemplating taking their own lives. Whatever it might be, it is undeniable that all the working women and their families in the Batticaloa and Amparai districts who are working in the NGO sector have suffered deep mental distress.

Mothers of young working women in the NGOs and INGOs have also become victims. Mothers not only feel ashamed and humiliated because of the gossip, but fear death threats on their daughters could be carried out. What is more, they fear for their future in societies where even a hint of scandal could lead problems in finding husbands.

Ironically, working women in the NGOs and INGOs did not experience humiliation in the hands of 'enemies.' The usual forces resisting enemy atrocities kept silent and treated the issue as a private matter only concerning women.

The character assassination campaign against individual working women in NGOs and INGOs was a way to

humiliate them and bring them to disrepute. The representation of these women as 'loose' puts their safety and security into question. Apparently, a society's conventional understanding of safety and security of the individual does not apply to the security of working women in relation to the perpetrators of cultural violence.

Even though the cry of cultural degeneration brought about by the 'misbehaviour' of women working in NGOs and INGOs are very loud, no one is bothered about the true identity of the girl or spare a moment of sympathy for the predicament in which she is now. Nor does anyone care about the man who appeared in that particular pornographic CD, or what motivated the perpetrators to do what they did. Instead the incident was brutally exploited to demoralise working women in the NGO sector so as to 'domesticate' them.

It is very important to discuss why the working women in the NGOs and INGOs are targeted. It's a very bad symptom of a dangerous sickness and the community must be raise its concerns about it.

Is society nervous about the smart and self-reliant, independent women?

The other important issue is the silence of the males – especially the top brass of NGOs and INGOs despite all these organisations claiming to be gender sensitive and concerned about gender components in their programmes.

It is also interesting to note that important social and political issues in Batticaloa and Amparai raise a host of responses based on ethnic, religious, caste and other differences. On this occasion however, all social groups appeared united in banishing women back to the kitchen.

Because of the strong NGOisation of gender, modern and progressive male intellectuals and male artists usually claim that the issue of gender and feminism are imported (but not modernism or Marxism or nationalism).

Role of print media in this regard is very critical. The print media came out as one sided and authorised and legitimised the manipulation of the invisible hand which affected the dignity of working women in the NGO sector. It is very sad to note the role played by the print media in that it failed to take into account the suffering of the victims of the 'information manipulation.'

The interesting side of the story is how the print media in English, which carried articles on the problem regularly, mostly on their front pages, represented the issue. Not a single media institution was concerned about the vulnerable

situation of working women in the NGO sector. Nor were they interested in applying rigorous standards of investigative journalism that they apply to politics or in relation to political killings.

The collective violence waged against women working in NGOs and INGOs in the Batticaloa and Amparai districts is a serious issue and has to be dealt with. And it has to be dealt with as the problem per se and not on how it affects the political and ideological persuasions of the various actors – individual and collective (and mostly male) – who have been using such issues for selfish ends. The manner in which it is dealt would also be a good yardstick to evaluate the true nature of a society which has been involved in a freedom struggle for more than three decades.

## Elegy for Thamil New Year 2006

Mothers mourn silently  
In fear and in shame  
On the eve of  
The Thamil New Year 2006  
For the fate of their  
Working daughters  
In the NGOs and INGOs

Not because of  
The atrocities  
Of the aggressors

But because of their  
Very own and  
Invisible sons

Innocents victimized  
In order to domesticate  
And the perpetrators  
Silently harboured

The new version  
Of an age old custom  
Manipulated invisibly  
But celebrated harshly

- S. Jeyasankar

June 2006

# Is it at all possible to restructure the Sinhala state?

Dr. S Sathananthan

What is the political implication of a full-fledged armed conflict between the Tamil National Movement and the Sinhala state? It means above all the movement's cutting edge, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), has decisively broken the Sinhala state's monopoly of armed power. The state launched several military campaigns from 1979 onwards to annihilate LTTE's armed forces and turn the clock back. In this military power struggle the state dismally failed to re-establish its monopoly control of the instruments of force. This is underlined by the movement's control of most of the territory within the majority Tamil-speaking North East Province (NEP) where the state's authority simply does not run.

The Sinhala state complemented its military operations with key political manoeuvres – ranging from multi-party conferences to direct 'talks' with the LTTE – lumped together as the so-called 'peace process.' The 'peace process' is the power struggle in the political arena. Here the state makes two important tactical moves. First, it feints interest in formulating a political solution to the armed conflict; second, it projects the LTTE as the principal obstacle to a negotiated settlement.

The state and its backers, the Co-chairs (US, Norway, EU and Japan) of the Sri Lanka Donor Consortium, have strained every nerve to inveigle the Tamil people to swallow these two canards. That, they calculated, would undermine Tamils' support for the LTTE-led armed resistance and politically emasculate the organisation; then, the plot goes, they could corner and compel the LTTE to decommission weapons.

What is the alternative path to a negotiated settlement from the Tamil perspective?

President Mahinda Rajapakse should honour the commitment made at the February 2006 Geneva talks. Then he could begin genuine negotiations with the LTTE, based on the agreement reached at the December 2002 Oslo talks, towards "a solution founded on the principle

of internal self-determination in areas of historical habitation of the Tamil-speaking peoples, based on a federal structure within a united Sri Lanka." The stages of implementation of a solution by the state would be linked to phased decommissioning of weapons by the LTTE. That procedure was followed with respect to the 1987 Indo-Lanka Accord and is the only humane and non-violent path to peace.

What alternative do the Sinhala peaceniks who profess liberalism offer?

They have a fascinating take on the state's attempts to blunt LTTE's military capacity. Their assertions go something like this:

1. Sinhala polity feels threatened by the LTTE's military power.
2. Sinhala extremism feeds and grows on this threat and opposes any political solution.
3. If the Sinhala state decimates LTTE's military power, two things will happen. First, the threat level from the LTTE would quickly subside. Second, Rajapakse will secure cast iron credentials as an indisputable Sinhala warrior and win the unqualified trust of the Sinhala people.
4. Starved of the threat perception, soon Sinhala extremism would rapidly wither away.
5. With the Sinhala nation solidly behind him and Sinhala extremists too weak to oppose him, Rajapakse would be emboldened to push through constitutional reforms to end the armed conflict.
6. Rajapakse – no doubt ably assisted by Sinhala peaceniks – could then begin to demilitarise society and usher in liberal democracy.

## Cul de sac of Sinhala liberalism

The above scenario with the apparent happy ending is underpinned by three key assumptions.

The first assumption – which puts the cart before the horse – is that Sinhala extremism is largely a response to,





The peace process is a power struggle in the political arena

வெகு சன நூலகம்  
யாழ்ப்பாணம்.

and is conditioned by, the perceived threat posed by the armed power of the LTTE-led Tamil National Movement. However, that is refuted by recent history. The LTTE arrived on the political stage in 1974; Sinhala extremism surfaced long before.

The organisation was not around when Sinhala Prime Minister D. S. Senanayake disenfranchised Up-Country or Kandyan Tamils in 1948, when Sinhala Prime Minister S. W. R. D. Bandaranike fuelled Sinhala chauvinism by legislating Sinhala the sole official language in 1956; or when Sinhala politician J. R. Jayewardene invigorated Sinhala extremists on the infamous anti-Tamil Kandy march a couple of years later; and the then non-existent LTTE could not possibly have provoked the 1958 pogrom or the subsequent state terrorism and ethnic cleansing of Tamils in the south through the 1960s; and the organisation simply cannot have catalysed the 1972 Constitution, in which the Sinhala oligarchy enshrined and institutionalised Sinhala-Buddhist extremism by declaring Buddhism as the virtual state religion. In short, Sinhala society brought forth, nurtured and strengthened its own extremists independent of and prior to the LTTE. The LTTE emerged later as the inevitable armed Tamil response to Sinhala extremism and state terrorism.

The second and utterly bizarre assumption is that Rajapakse should go to war, and kill, maim and rape Tamil civilians in the NEP, to prove his loyalty to the Sinhala

nation. Some casually explain away the death and destruction Tamils would suffer, though regrettable, as ‘acceptable’ in the lofty search for peace. ‘Acceptable’ to whom?

The third one is that Rajapakse is a ‘moderate,’ unlike most chauvinist politicians in his government. His image promoted by the peaceniks is one in which he is walking a political tightrope between the LTTE on the one side and Sinhala extremist parties on the other. After the LTTE is vanquished, it is claimed he would marginalise the Sinhala extremists and voluntarily promote a political settlement out of sheer altruism.

The scenario and its assumptions are not new. Sinhala peaceniks had used almost identical arguments to support President Chandrika Kumaratunga’s ‘war for peace’ in 1995. ‘Moderate’ Kumaratunga – after all, they asserted, she is a ‘woman and a mother’ – was ‘compelled’ to ‘take’ Jaffna to strengthen her hand against Sinhala extremists so that she could confidently go ahead and formulate a political solution. Immediately after the so-called ‘fall’ of Jaffna city in December a prominent Sinhala peacenik, attached to a well-known ‘peace’ council in Colombo, took immense pride in the NGOs’ war contribution. In fact he demanded



### *Challenging the sovereignty of the Sri Lankan state*

“the human rights NGOs have to be given their share of ‘credit’ for the governmental victory in Jaffna” (The Island, 10/dec/95); and, one may add, for the unprecedented humanitarian tragedy – including disappearances and mass graves – that later unfolded in the Jaffna peninsula.

And what are the contours of Rajapakse’s sought after political solution?

After militarily defeating the LTTE, his second step is to dismantle the de facto Tamil state covering most of the NEP that took root under the protective umbrella of LTTE’s armed forces. Otherwise, peaceniks helpfully explained, the Sinhala people regretfully would not support the president, and Sinhala extremism will resurge. Once the de facto Tamil state is out of the way

Rajapakse could begin the ‘historic’ task of ‘restructuring’ the state.

### **Restructuring the state?**

Lately some Sinhala peaceniks allege that through ‘talks’ it is possible to politically ‘restructure’ the unitary state, to facilitate ‘democratisation,’ ‘power-sharing,’ ‘pluralism,’ ‘inclusiveness’ and so on. As usual they are dangling the succulent political bait in front of war-ravaged Tamils while being deliberately vague about the exact contours of this restructuring.

Tamils raised the obvious practical issue. Is it at all possible to restructure the Sinhala state?

It is not an accident that the Sinhala oligarchy centralised state power. The semi-feudalistic oligarchy, ignorant of liberalism, is made up of a motley crowd of plantation

owners, export-import merchants, arrack tavern owners many of whom masquerade as parliamentarians, casino operators and their underworld enforcers, Buddhist monks trapped in medieval mindsets, and so on. Centralisation of power is the oligarchy's logical response to contain challenges to its rule.

From the mid-1950s class contradictions and caste antagonisms in Sinhala society deepened in direct relation to the decline of the moribund colonial plantation economy. These social forces dramatically crystallised in the 1971 insurrection by the Sinhala-extremist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP). The oligarchy brutally put down the rebellion, slaughtering an estimated 20,000 Sinhala men and women, and almost immediately paid attention to transforming the largely ceremonial army into a professional military machine rather than indigenous economic development.

On the political front, the 1972 Republican Constitution entrenched the primacy of Sinhala-Buddhists and fortified the unitary state. The Sinhala oligarchy created the executive presidency under the 1978 Constitution and further centralised power in that office. It strove to neutralise the traditional threat to its power from within Sinhala society and to eliminate the new one posed by the emerging armed Tamil National Movement in the NEP.

The class contradictions and caste antagonisms intensified over the next two decades. Economic 'liberalisation' imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the late 1970s and through the 1980s widened economic disparities and caused further social dislocations. Sinhala working class organisations rose up in protest in the south and culminated in the second JVP uprising in 1988/89. The oligarchy armed the state with a cluster of repressive legislation and ruthlessly eliminated an estimated 60,000 Sinhala men and women to crush the uprising. The oligarchy also rapidly militarised the state. It Sinhalaised the armed forces and bureaucracy and enacted the 1979 Prevention of Terrorism Act, under cover of which it unleashed widespread state terror against the Tamil people. But it could not arrest the fast-growing armed power of the LTTE-led Tamil National Movement.

Far from abating, precipitous economic decline and the maturing Tamil National Question energised the opponents in the 1990s. The politically bankrupt Sinhala oligarchy

did what it does best; it expanded, strengthened and further empowered the armed forces.

The result is the military-bureaucratic unitary state, loosely described in Sri Lanka as the 'national-security state.' The economic and political conditions are infinitely worse today and continue to deteriorate with each passing day. Incapable of formulating effective economic programmes, the oligarchy is driven to further centralise power; and it crucially relies on the authoritarian state to protect its interests and power in an increasingly hostile environment.

Democratic restructuring would reverse the trend, weaken the oligarchy's direct hold on power and make it more vulnerable to opposition within the Sinhala polity and to the Tamil armed resistance. Not surprisingly the oligarchy is extremely wary of such reforms. In fact, it has implacably opposed democratisation tooth and nail from 1971 to the present.

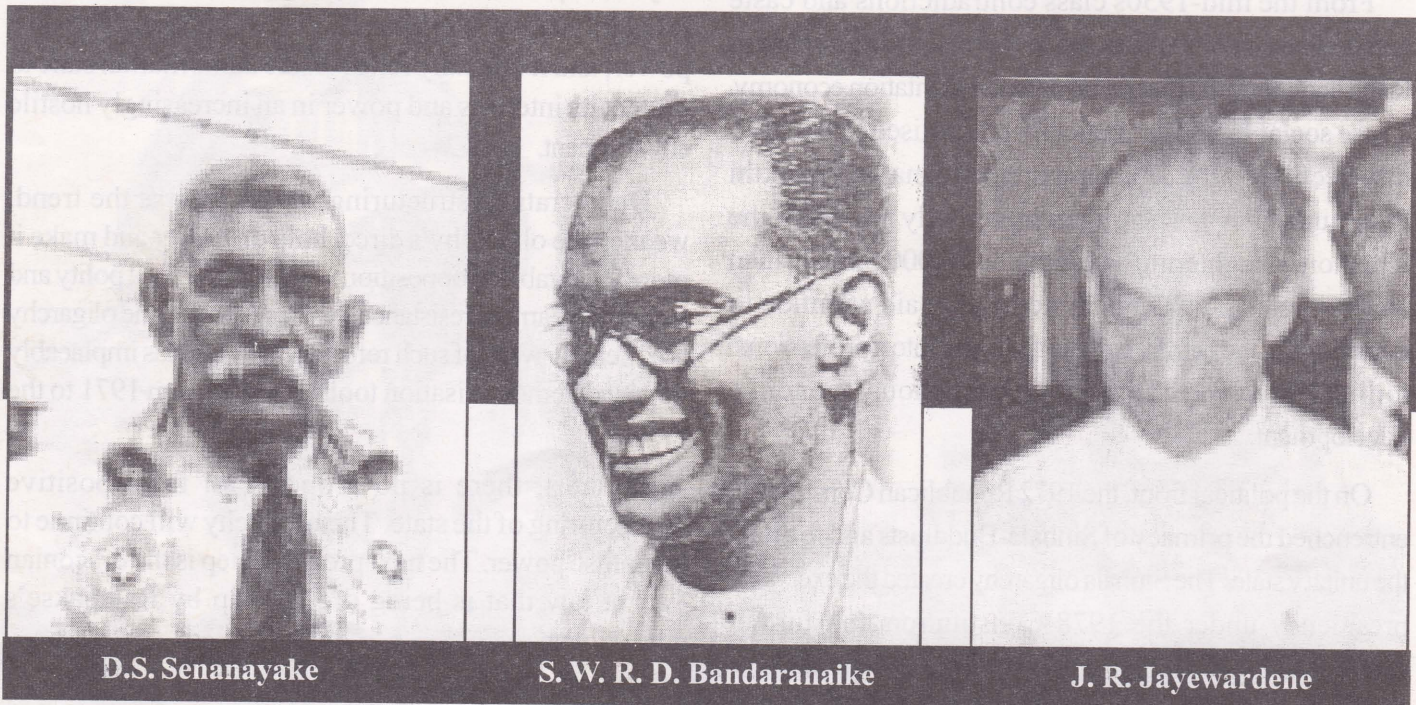
In short, there is no scope at all for a positive restructuring of the state. The oligarchy will continue to centralise power. The next probable step is the draconian Patriot law that is being dredged up by Rajapakse's government.

The utopian musing of the handful of Sinhala liberals about restructuring to facilitate devolution of power imputes a non-existent democratic potential to the military-bureaucratic state; by extension it also masks the state's grotesque authoritarianism. At the very least that is dangerously misleading.

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# Negotiating with someone who says what is mine is mine, only what is yours is negotiable

By C. C. David



D.S. Senanayake

S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike

J. R. Jayewardene

**A** factual and analytical assessment of Sri Lanka and the course of historical events which have brought the country to its present state require study that the international community should seriously undertake. Once having gained knowledge of the historical and factual background, the international community should take a pragmatic, independent and totally dispassionate view of the problem.

Sri Lanka, known to the world as Ceylon prior to it becoming a republic, is a country populated by three distinct ethnic groups: Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims. The Sinhalese and Tamils were ruled by their own kings in separate territories, and during the course of history, there were several instances where the Tamil kings were ruling the Sinhala areas from Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa, while during certain periods, Sinhala kings invaded Tamil areas as well.

When the first colonial rulers, the Portuguese, arrived in 1505 there were two separate kingdoms on the island. The Portuguese by treachery and force of arms took over the Sinhalese and Tamil kingdoms and in due course conquered most of the maritime areas except the Kandyan kingdom. They were involved primarily in trading and converting locals with fanatical zeal. The Dutch came after the Portuguese and continued their trading and religious conversions. They were mainly responsible for chasing the

Muslims from trading. The Dutch had separate governors for the Tamil and Sinhalese regions.

The British took over from the Dutch and initially Ceylon was controlled for administrative purposes from India. It came under the Madras Presidency. In due course, the British shifted from Madras and established a separate administrative system to rule for Ceylon – Colombo having conquered the Kandyan Kingdom in 1815. They achieved this with the help of treacherous Sinhala chiefs, who joined the foreign power and handed over what remained of local rule. It must be stated that the last king of Kandy Sri Wickrama Rajasinghe was a Tamil and his Tamil name was Kannasamy, an Indian from Madurai. The terms of surrender referred to as the Malwana Convention of 1815 was signed in Tamil by the king and also in Tamil by most the Sinhala chiefs.

The British became colonial rulers of the entire country and commenced establishing total administrative control all over Ceylon. In order to ensure central control of the country, they divided it into nine provinces and ruled from Colombo. Thus, a unitary form of central governmental authority came into existence. The British system of civil service, government agents, the *kachcheri* village committees etc. became a network of administrative authority backed by a civilian-controlled police force to preserve law and order and of course an army loyal the British crown.

The thirst for independence by the colonies conscious of their identity and the natural desire to be free from foreign domination grew from small beginnings to formidable proportions of revolt, mainly in India. World War II gave an opportunity, especially in India, to demand independence where the Indians fought against imperial domination. India gained her independence in 1947. Following this, Ceylon too got freedom in 1948.

Sri Lanka attained independence without shedding a drop of blood fighting for it. However, consequent to gaining independence, a river of innocent blood is flowing – probably to compensate. It is an irony of fate, and unfortunate one at that, that the Sinhalese majority appear to be under an illusion that they have obtained sovereign authority to act as successors to the colonial rulers.----- This is precisely the root of the present ethnic conflict, which has in due course accumulated a host of contentious accessories in the form of language, religion, territorial issues, form of government etc.

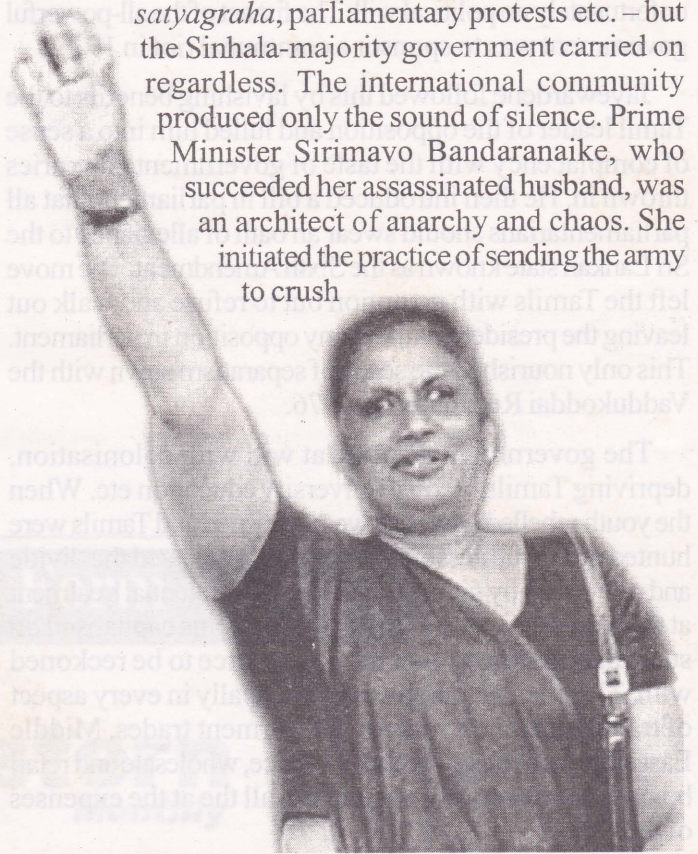
In addition, the recent upsurge of a section of the Buddhist clergy preaching the gospel of communal discord and suppression of the minorities by force has become the order of the day and the rule of law and safeguards for the citizen by the judiciary are fast eroding to make this country a haven of communalist resurgence.

This beautiful island located most strategically in the ocean's cross-roads as it straddles the main sea routes of the Indian Ocean and referred to as the Pearl of the Orient had the potential to be an economically prosperous country. Every god-given resource was available, but unfortunately the vital ingredient which is imperative for such growth was lacking. The people, primarily the majority, from the inception had a leadership that failed miserably to have a far-sighted vision to build on the resources that were available aplenty.

The country's first prime minister D. S. Senanayake, embarked on the short-sighted policy of unleashing Sinhala chauvinism by suppressing Tamil rights and aspirations. Tamil areas were colonised by Sinhala convicts with state aid and military backing. Disfranchising Tamils of recent Indian origin came later, using a pliant Sri Lankan Tamil leadership through design and guile. The leadership of the country then embarked on a dangerous and damaging policy with another leader coming to power on the racist slogan of "Sinhala-only in 24 hours." This policy initiated by Prime Minister S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike signalled the beginning of the end of fraternal harmony and set alight the flames of destruction with waves of communal rioting and strife. The police and the military took an active part in fanning the flames of racism while the prime minister maintained the policy of not seeing, not hearing and not acting.

Economic destruction of the Tamils and colonisation of Tamil areas were executed with a sinister plan. The Tamil community tried every path of democratic protest –

*satyagraha*, parliamentary protests etc. – but the Sinhala-majority government carried on regardless. The international community produced only the sound of silence. Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike, who succeeded her assassinated husband, was an architect of anarchy and chaos. She initiated the practice of sending the army to crush



*"Imagining herself as a conquering queen Chandrika Kumaratunga started a 'war for peace' with her uncle General Anuruddha Ratwatte, but lost more territory than ever before, to the LTTE"*

Tamil *satyagrahies* without concern that they too were citizens. She lived up to the saying "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned," because she expected the Tamils to cringe and submit to state terror and tyranny. Her rule was a classic case of chaos and misrule that brought about an insurrection by the Sinhala youth in 1971, which was crushed with the most brutal severity where the security forces massacred over 20,000 young Sinhalese.

The country was fed up and at the general election the UNP opposition led by J. R. Jayewardene gained a 5/6th majority in parliament. Even Tamils in Tamil-majority areas voted en masse enabling for the first time Tamil representatives to form the main opposition in parliament and a Tamil MP to become leader of that opposition. The election of 1977 presented a golden opportunity for the country to be salvaged from the abyss. The UNP had a parliamentary majority with complete Tamil participation in the opposition. The policy of liberalisation brought about the resurgence of the economy. There was international support available in plenty and Jayewardene had some of the most talented ministers in his cabinet.

But Jayewardene who introduced the executive presidential system and became the first incumbent of that office was the very incarnation of evil. He had good opportunities with a strong presidency, a parliamentary majority, talented ministers, a good civil service and law and order machinery, a yet uncorrupted judiciary, but

unfortunately no political will. The first act of the all-powerful government was to sponsor a communal riot in 1977.

Jayewardene followed this by lavishing benefits to the Tamil leader of the opposition and lulled him into a sense of complacency with the taste of governmental luxuries thrown in. He then introduced a bill in parliament that all parliamentarians should swear an oath of allegiance to the Sri Lankan state known as the Sixth Amendment. The move left the Tamils with no option but to refuse and walk out leaving the president without any opposition in parliament. This only nourished the seeds of separatism sown with the Vaddukoddai Resolution in 1976.

The government went on at will with colonisation, depriving Tamils of jobs, university education etc. When the youth rebelled, violence was unleashed and Tamils were hunted down ruthlessly. Jayewardene also used the divide and rule policy by giving the Muslims preferential treatment at the expenses of the Tamils. The Muslims capitalised on such an opportunity and became a force to be reckoned with. They began to dominate practically in every aspect of trade, including the gem and garment trades, Middle East employment, government service, wholesale and retail business and property ownership, all the at the expenses of the Tamils.

At the next general election in 1994, the UNP lost and Chandrika Kumaratunga assumed the office of president. Kumaratunga's stewardship of 10 years was probably the most damaging for the country, following closely Jayewardene's. She came into power as an angel of peace and commenced her administration with a peace initiative. However, as usual, routine Sinhala policy of abrogating agreements became the cause for the destruction of the peace talks. In addition, the UNP-led opposition of Ranil Wickremesinghe ensured the continuity of political chaos.

When Kumaratunga found that her peace initiative was a failure and the LTTE had reverted to hostilities, she too embarked on a full-scale war to destroy and annihilate the Tamil areas. Imagining herself as a conquering queen she started a 'war for peace' with her uncle General Anuruddha Ratwatte, but lost more territory than ever before, to the LTTE. The government of Kumaratunga was the most corrupt in every from and brought the economy of the county to zero.

Election of the UNP government under Wickremesinghe in 2001 ushered in peace and security with the prime minister signing a ceasefire agreement with the LTTE. There were six rounds of peace negotiations with meetings held abroad and agreements reached. But again, the agreements were not implemented and the LTTE refused to go for further talks bringing about a stalemate. Since Kumaratunga was the president, she and her Sinhala extremist ally the JVP, shouted hoarse from the rooftops that

Wickremesinghe was betraying the country to the LTTE and by deception and her ability to appeal to popular sentiment, stumped the UNP and dissolved parliament.

The elections that followed saw the PA, JVP, JHU allies returning to power with a very slender majority. Wickremesinghe lost the election because he suffered the delusion that he could outsmart the Tigers when conducting negotiations with them. He negotiated an international safety net by trying to enter into an arrangement with the USA, but in attempting to draw up a defence agreement he was out-manoeuvred by the LTTE.

The Asian tsunami struck in December 2004, presenting another golden opportunity to re-build the country by joining forces of all communities. Further, there was plenty of aid that was pouring in and international help and support. The government could have, on such basis, initiated a peace formula like what happened in Aceh in Indonesia. But it squandered every opportunity and the aid that flowed was grossly mismanaged and corruption swallowed a bulk of the funds leaving affected people destitute. As stated earlier, Kumaratunga's term was the most corrupt and she abused presidential powers to ruin every strand of decency in administration, preservation of law and order, the judiciary and the country descended to the lowest depths of economic ruination.

With Mahinda Rajapakse taking over as president however, Kumaratunga has withdrawn from the political arena though somewhat reluctantly. Rajapakse is now engaged in the same old pattern and practice of playing politics without a genuine programme for peace except promises that are never meant to be kept. He is riding the wave of Sinhala chauvinism with a sugar coated smile and guile. There is no point in playing a game of hide and seek when the nation is in the brink of a fratricidal war.

The LTTE is a consequence of state terror and not its cause to be branded as terrorists. International governments which condemn and brand the Tigers as terrorists are defenders of the state that provoked a peaceful people to take up arms to survive in the land in which their forefathers had lived and ruled with dignity and freedom. The Tamils have finally come to the last barrier and have to decide whether they want to be free or continue to live in a military state and Sinhala mob rule.

Former US president, John F. Kennedy once said: "Freedom is not negotiable. You cannot negotiate with someone who says what is mine is mine and what is yours is negotiable."

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