

• **ETHNIC CONFLICT:- *Urmila Phadnis'* last essay** •

LANKA

GUARDIAN

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THE SRI LANKAN CRISIS

Is there a way out ?

Neville Jayaweera

Kumar Rupesinghe

Tarzie Vitachchi

Periyathamby Rajanayagam

Bradman Weerakoon

Nagalingam Satchithanathan

Desmond Fernando

Godfrey Gunatilleke

Martin Ennals

Nadarajah Shanmugaratnam

Sunil Bastian

Werner Lottje

Ninan Koshy

• **MANKULAM** • **SAARC** • **GANDHI'S GAME**

TRENDS

HPT Directors Ordered Bail

Five directors of the collapsed finance company House and Property Trades (HPT) were ordered cash bail in Rs 75,000 and security bail in a million rupees each by the Colombo Fort Magistrate. They face charges relating to alleged failure to comply with Central Bank directives.

Human Rights of Sinhala Buddhists

The All Ceylon Buddhist Congress has complained to President Premadasa that the human rights of the Sinhala Buddhists, particularly of those living in the North and East have dwindled along with the security of Buddhist places of worship there.

The ACBC has told the President that the Government of Sri Lanka is not utilising

the powers vested in it by the Constitution (to protect) the human rights of the Sinhala Buddhists.

Arms: China No. 1

Sri Lanka will buy more arms from China, including gunboats, *The Island* quoting defence and diplomatic sources said. China has been Sri Lanka's biggest arms supplier in the recent past, according to these sources. These arms are expected this month or early next year.

Meanwhile, three Y 12 sixteen seater fixed wing aircraft have already arrived from China, increasing the total number of Y 12s (transporters) to nine. Sri Lanka is also likely to acquire Chinese built A-5 jets early next year, sources said. Other Chinese built weapons expected are likely to be T85 infantry combat vehicles.

Wijeweera's successor arrested?

A top ranking JVP'er who is believed to have taken over the leadership after the death of Rohana Wijeweera was reported arrested in the Southern province. The army's southern command did not confirm or deny the arrest. According to a report in the *Sunday Times* the army team that captured Daya Wanniarachchi (41) believed that they had got Somawansa Amerasinghe, the only surviving member of the JVP politbureau. But they later learnt, it was reported, that Amerasinghe was out of the country.

ICRC meet detainees

Detention camps holding Northern Tamil terrorist suspects and Southern Sinhala JVP suspects were visited by representatives of the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC). The ICRC representatives talked to the inmates.

"Continue your excellent work. . ."

— *Kumar Rupesinghe*

"The LANKA GUARDIAN has been well known for its advocacy and contributed to the debate on the conflict, and its resolution, in Sri Lanka... With regard to our exchange of letters, I think that the matter is closed and let me once again express my warm wishes to you and continue your excellent work. . ."

— *KUMAR RUPESINGHE, Director, PRIO, in a letter addressed to the Editor, dated 26/10/90.*

Readers will recall that we published two excerpts from the PRIO report (July 1 and July 15) when we received a telegram on 31st July objecting strongly to the publication (15/8). We then received a letter from Kumar Rupesinghe which we published along with our reply (1/9/90). We are glad that Kumar Rupesinghe has decided to "close" this matter, and wishes us to "continue" our "excellent work". In this number, we publish the concluding chapter of the final PRIO report. — Editor

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PROTRACTED WAR — the battlefield and the battle of ideas

Mervyn de Silva

“Bad, very bad...” said State Defence Minister Ranjan Wijeratne, commenting on the Mankulam battle which has been described by the state-owned “Daily News” as the “bloodiest battle in the separatist war”. Casualties (both sides) would definitely exceed 250..... closer perhaps to 300, said a top official source. The foreign press was informed by LTTE spokesmen overseas that some 50-60 ‘Tigers’ had been killed but the battles now in the jungle were not over. He was probably referring to the fact the soldiers who broke out of the besieged camp were fighting their way southwards to Vavuniya. The latest figures released by the Defence Ministry are 196 ‘Tigers’ killed, and “over hundred” army casualties.

The last attacks by the LTTE on a heavily fortified army camp were at Kokavil and Maviddapuram in the peninsula. That camp was one of the military gains of ‘Operation Janashakti’ launched by the Northern Commander, Major-General Dezil Kobbekaduwe. ‘Having liberated’ Palaly airport the main strategic objective the army advanced through heavily mined roads and pathways to establish four camps.

“About ten percent” of the peninsula is how General Kobbekaduwa described the “situation on the ground” i.e. the area under effective army control. For those Sri Lankans who thought (or devoutly hoped) that this was the beginning of

the total ‘liberation’ of the Jaffna peninsula, the “Eelam” heartland, General Kobbekaduwe’s remark ‘I am not interested in real estate’ came as a great disappointment.

But General Kobbekaduwe, a top professional, knew what he was talking about. The LTTE was waiting patiently for the Army to offer them fixed “targets” such as camps. The LTTE would then assess the troop strength in each camp, their capacity to defend the post, food supplies, communications, the possibilities for air support, and reinforcements, the weather etc, and then pick time and place, to launch an attack. Maviddapuram was the clearest example of not merely LTTE ‘tactics’ but the difficulties faced by the army — men, material, unfamiliar terrain and physical conditions, such as weather, right now heavy rain.

But Mankulam is “different” from Kokavil or Maviddapuram. It’s location. It is the only large camp between Elephant Pass, right up north, and Vuvuniya more than 50 miles south. It was defended by some 300 men. The LTTE is stepping up the war — on both ‘fronts’, the political and military. First the LTTE chased out the Muslims. Terror was the weapon. The LTTE had decided that the political-propagandist potential of the tactical alliance with the Tamil-speaking Muslims of the North-east had been exhausted. And in some ways, the Muslim groups, had become a liability — politically their demands were

too exacting; militarily, the armed anti-LTTE Muslim groups were an “intelligence” asset to the government. By pushing the Muslims out of the north, the LTTE was reinforcing the exclusivist ethnic character of the “homeland”, Eelam.

And now, the LTTE is seeking to chase out the (Sinhala) army out of “Eelam” or making certain that the new war does not allow the army to establish firm footholds in ‘Eelam’. This is its second objective in this protracted war.

The army relieved the Jaffna fort, breaking a long, long siege — winning a battle for morale. It quickly abandoned all ideas of keeping the fort and getting stuck in the same groove. The ‘Tigers’ marched in triumphantly and hoisted their flag, renamed the Fort in honour of martyr Thileepan, ... and left. A great morale-boost for the ‘Tigers’ who, like the army, did not wish to seize a building which would then become a target, by air and sea, for the armed forces.

Taking and re-taking positions, and abandoning these quite soon are all signs of the fluid nature of this clash of arms minus set-piece battles. In short, battles where the political and the psychological are often more significant than the strictly military i.e. numbers killed and wounded territory taken, weapons captured, physical “advances”.

(Continued on page 4)

SAARC grows up ?

So, SAARC will go in for some 'perestroika' of its own. At the meeting in Male, the Maldivian capital (21-23Nov.) the South Asian Seven decided that one of the main reasons for such dismally poor progress has been "the decision-making progress". It was from bottom upward to the summit, from experts committees on technical matters and action programs to ministerial level and then to the summit, explained a senior official. SAARC now wants to do it the other way, somewhat like the Commonwealth. The regular heads of State meeting will decide, and action will follow via each government. Its approach now is issue-oriented, said a top Indian diplomat.

The first problem that has been identified is the "drug menace" — drug abuse, drug trafficking, cross-border operations etc. The truth is that after the Afghan war, the drug trail from within Afghanistan and the Afghan-Pakistan border has become an important supply source as the 'golden triangle' in South-East Asia. And with drugs, comes the other money-spinning business, guns. With so many insurgencies in the region, and cross-border terrorism, gun-running has also become 'Big Business', part finally of the global trade controlled by cartels in the Americas.

The Male conference gave the two new Prime Ministers of the region's major powers, India and Pakistan, an opportunity for their first "face-to-face". It was at a SAARC meeting that Mr. Gandhi met the newly elected Pakistani Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto, and at least for some months, there was a marked lowering of Indo-Pak tensions. Both Gandhi and Bhutto are no longer in office.

It was the arrival of Mr. V. P. Singh which saw quite a dramatic

improvement — certainly with two neighbours that had many grievances, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

FACE-TO-FACE

Mr. Chandra Sekhar who ousted Mr. V. P. Singh and maintains himself in office at the will and pleasure of Mr. Gandhi's Congress has assured both the Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and the Sri Lankan PM, Mr. D. B. Wijetunge, who represented President Premadasa, that he will give high priority to strong bilateral relations and to regional cooperation. Mr. Chandra Shekhar discussed the question of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in Tamilnadu, having assured Mr. Wijetunge that Delhi regarded the ethnic conflict and the separatist insurgency as an 'internal (Sri Lankan) problem'.

So far there has been no legislative follow-up by each state to the "convention on terrorism" approved in Kathmandu. This terrorism has a distinctly "cross-border" character, largely because of the ethnic mosaic of the subcontinent, and the partition of British India, followed by secession, Bangladesh. Central to many an ethnic conflict which has assumed the character of terrorism and armed struggle is India. But India, in turn, accuses Pakistan of assisting Kashmiri and Punjabi militants, just as B.D. and Sri Lanka level the same charge against India.

Over and above all this is the so-called "asymmetry issue", the preponderant power of India, which many a neighbour believes is being used by an "imperial" India to dominate the area and control political developments. On its part, Delhi suspects that the "Six" (Pakistan, BD, Nepal, Lanka, Maldives and Bhutan) plan to "gang-up".

Now these fundamental problems will be ignored for the time being, while specific, and

immediate problems which offer some chance of resolution, will receive attention. Not menacing problems like drugs but others like tourism where regional cooperation can bring swift rewards for all. The next SAARC summit will be in Colombo. What was most heartening was a common recognition of the region's need to respond quickly and sensibly to the challenges of radical global change.

M. de S.

Indian PM on good neighbours

Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar has told the Times of India that India and Pakistan should live like brothers. He told an interviewer who asked him what he would have to say to Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif when the two men met at the SAARC summit at Male: Only that we have been brothers. It is unfortunate that because of a turn of history we have separated ourselves; but as brothers we should live together in peace and tranquility and co-operate with each other in solving the problems of the people".

About his perception of India's position in the world, and how it should deal with its neighbours, the new Prime Minister said: "Our first task should be to have the best of relations with our neighbours. It is good that the SAARC meeting is taking place at this moment. We should try to impress upon leaders of other countries that we should work together in order to solve the basic problems of our people. Our position is that India does not want to browbeat anybody, but we are not going to be browbeated by others either. In international policy we believe in the sovereignty of all nations. There should be no intervention from outside".

Mossad Inquiry: Ostrovsky to testify?

Victor Ostrovsky, author of "BY WAY OF DECEPTION" is ready to testify before the one-man Commission appointed by President Premadasa to investigate several sensational disclosures in his book. The ex-Mossad agent who was a case officer (*katsa*) in the Sri Lankan operation made two claims that stunned the Sri Lankan Establishment and shattered the UNP High Command, although Mr. J. R. Jayewardene who invited the Israelis is no longer Head of State.

The main disclosures were :

- 1) That Mossad trained the "Tigers" while also training Sri Lankan military personnel at camps close to each

other. (Dr. Subramanian Swamy now a Minister in Mr. Chandra Shekar's cabinet has admitted that it was he who established LTTE-ISRAELI links.

- 2) That funds given for the World Bank sponsored Mahaveli Development Project, which was almost entirely financed by foreign aid, were diverted to a "covert" operation which involved MOS-SAD instructors and top Sri Lankan political, military personnel and civilians variously connected to the UNP administration. □

Counter charge

Incensed by Congress leader Rajiv Gandhi's observation that Tamil Nadu was under the control of the LTTE, Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi has charged that Mr Gandhi, when he was Prime Minister of India, gave the "Tigers" crores of rupees for buying arms. Mr Gandhi had later turned against the Tigers because they had refused to be his slaves, the Chief Minister was quoted in the *Indian Express*.

Budget: World Bank job say Opposition

Opposition MPs charged that the 1991 Budget of the UNP Government was dictated by the World Bank in its major features. One of these features was the removal of the subsidy to the CTB. The Government was carrying out policies outlined in the World Bank Policy Framework Paper on Sri Lanka, the MEP's Bandula Gunawardena MP said during the budget debate in parliament.

NSSP leader Vasudeva Nanayakkara MP denounced it as a capitalist budget that offered nothing to the workers and peasants.

A media commission

The Press Council will be replaced by a Media Commission; the Government has announced. Members of the Commission will be appointed by the President from names recommended by a nominations commission comprising representatives of political parties drawn up according to their proportionate presence in parliament.

The 15-member Media Commission will have a life of five years. Once appointed, nobody will be able to issue directives to the commission, presidential advisor Bradman Weerakoon told a press conference. The commission will not be under any minister but report directly to the President. It will also report to Parliament.

Loans to buy buses

To support the government's policy of encouraging private bus operations Rs 1,200 million will be disbursed through the National Development Bank to people or companies who want to import buses. As a further in-

centive, there will be no customs duty or BTT levied. Route permits will also be liberalised.

PROTRACTED WAR...

(Continued from page 3)

In that sense, President Premadasa won a major psychological battle by visiting Jaffna on the 24th, the first Sri Lankan head of state to do so in nearly a decade. The writ itself may not run but Jaffna is part of Sri Lanka and its inhabitants, Tamils, Muslim or Sinhalese are members of the Sri Lankan family. That was the message that President Premadasa wanted to convey, and in these matters of popular psychology he is streets ahead of his predecessor, President Jayewardena who couldn't care less about mass sentiment. Indeed, mass psychology and mass "communication" are his forte.

In that, symbols are vital; religious symbols in particular, in this, our multi-ethnic society. At Nagadeepa vihare, he said:

"We are certain to receive the blessings of the Triple Gem on this hallowed ground, Nagadeepa, once made sacred by the visit of the Buddha, in our effort to re-establish unity among our people and to lead all communities towards peace and prosperity through such unity".

The President then visited the Nagapooshani Amman Kovil, a short distance from the Vihare. A large gathering of Hindus Tamils and Muslims accompanied him. The battles on the ground may be brutal and bloody, and the casualty figures heavy. But the more fundamental conflict is the struggle between a separate Eelam and a united multi-ethnic Sri Lanka.

Tax chief frowns on evasion ruses

Commissioner General of Inland Revenue, T. Ratnasunderam said that the private sector resorts to various ruses to pay excessive terminal benefits to its top management and avoid legitimate taxes.

"One method that is often used is to heavily inflate the senior management officers last months salary, that is the last salary that he draws before retirement, so that uniformity remains applicable when he/she is paid their retiring benefits", the commissioner general said.

At present terminal benefits which include gratuities and provident fund, under the law are exempt from taxation up to a limit of Rs. 200,000/-, the balance is taxed at concessionary rates of 5, 10, 15 per cent, provided such payments are made

under a scheme uniformly applicable to all employees.

"The government has now introduced a upper limit of Rs. 700,000/- to be taxed at the normal progressive rates. Any sum in excess will be heavily taxed and could go up 40 per cent. This is to prevent big sums from qualifying for the concession", Ratnasunderam said.

The Commissioner General said that under the Inland Revenue Act No 28 of 1979 section 20 (A) there was a tax exemption for all non-traditional exports in the form of a tax holiday for 5 years. In April 1984 a blanket exemption for non-traditional exports for 7 years was given. This exemption comes to an end on March 31, 1991.

(Daily News)

Government servants massively redundant

A government study has revealed that Sri Lanka has eighty to ninety thousand redundant public servants. An administrative reforms committee which looked into the problem of over-staffing has estimated that of the half million public servants employed in 26 ministries 20 per cent could be pruned without any loss of quality in service.

The committee has also recommended that the number of ministries could be reduced to about 16. The study has revealed that at least five government departments could be scrapped altogether.

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Canberra Initiative

The leader of the Australian Democrats, Senator Janet Powell, in a letter to Bama Sagadeva, President of the Canberra Tamil Association has said:

"The Australian Democrats regard the continuing violence in Sri Lanka with horror and distress; one of our Senators, Sis Spindler, passed your concern to the Australian Government after addressing a recent rally in Canberra."

She concluded: "We will continue to support constructive proposals to resolve this conflict, based on principles of non-violence, justice and democracy. This includes the establishment of a democratic quasi-state in the north-east of the country".

Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans has also told the Australian Senate that he was extremely concerned by the situation in Sri Lanka. He added: "We are concerned about the bloodshed, especially the deaths of non-combatants, about the breaches of human rights and about the implications for Sri Lanka's future as a nation".

Mr. Gareth Evans went on to say: "Certainly there is no question of me or the Australian Government condoning abuses perpetrated by the Government security forces."

He said that in view of their growing concern about the situation and their firm belief in the need for a negotiated settlement he had discussed with President Premadasa ways of making progress towards a settlement, including the possibility of involvement by the Commonwealth or some other appropriate multilateral mechanism.

**THE HINDU
comment from Colombo**

Meanwhile The Hindu correspondent in Colombo, Thomas Abraham reports: "In the first significant move towards international mediation to end the war in Sri Lanka's north and east, Australia has suggested a Commonwealth initiative to restore peace. The Australian Prime Minister Mr. Bob Hawke has

written to the President, Mr. R. Premadasa, offering Australia's services to start a Commonwealth peace initiative. . . The Australian initiative comes at a time when India's Sri Lanka policy remains in a state of paralysis, and the birth of a Commonwealth initiative could result in India's total marginalisation in Sri Lanka, something that the Sri Lankan government would probably not be unhappy about. . .

"Given that India has a vital interest in the outcome of the conflict in Sri Lanka, and also, given that it is hamstrung by its own internal weaknesses and unable to act decisively to influence events here (Colombo), the logical step would be for India to associate itself with and influence any Commonwealth peace initiative. Through imaginative diplomacy, India can still transcend its domestic weakness and help to bring peace to Sri Lanka by starting and guiding initiatives in multilateral groups such as the Commonwealth. Unfortunately, there is a tendency in South Block to regard South Asia as India's backyard and to discourage efforts to involve international bodies such as the Commonwealth and United Nations in South Asian disputes. Given India's internal weakness; this is a conceit that should perhaps be dispensed with."

NEW DELHI 'Kept in Dark'

Meanwhile a news report from New Delhi, quoting unnamed, "Sri Lanka observers in South Block" says that Canberra and Colombo kept India "in the dark" on the Australian initiative. Not sourcing the report to any news agency or any known correspondent, the *Indian Express* says:

"The Sri Lanka observers in South Block are puzzled at the sudden move by Australia. One view prevailing is that 25,000 Sri Lankan Tamils who are highly competent technologists insisted that Australia take up the lead. . . Three letters have so far been exchanged between Sri Lankan President Premadasa and the Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke in this regard. The contents, though not officially released to New Delhi; is known

to Indian officials. South Block has expressed concern, over the Sri Lankan diplomats' attitude. This is also one of the main reasons for the cancellation of Foreign Minister I. K. Kujral's proposed official visit to Colombo. Lanka observers also fear that one of the superpowers might be interested in indirectly entering the scene through the Commonwealth."

(*Tamil Times*)

LETTERS**Red rag to a bull**

Show a red rag to a bull; or mention Stalin's name to a confirmed Trotskyite — the reaction would be identical.

Proof — Mr. Amaradasa Fernando's shrill invective in response to the mention of Stalin in my article.

I said that Stalin accurately predicted that if objective economic laws are flouted, the forces of production will come into contradiction with the existing relations of production and that this warning went unheeded.

Mr. Fernando says that Stalin was like God himself — omnipotent and omniscient. Obviously not.

Pity.

Tisarane Gunasekera

**A little bit of
perestroika will help**

Mr. Siriwardena is not the kind of man to give up easily. Though this is an admirable quality in itself I could hardly cheer him when I see him labouring a point.

He doesn't seem to realise the harm he is doing to his cause. For his tenacity gives the impression that nobody should doubt what he says or even dissent from what he is saying.

Such arrogance and intolerance rightly belongs to politicians who think they are Sir Oracle, and when I open my mouth let no dog bark. Perhaps a little bit of perestroika taken three times a day will help to rid him of the totalitarian trend of his mind and be less wicked to Bandaranaike.

S. Pathiravitana

INDIA:

Rajiv's Congress Waits to Pick Up the Pieces

S. Nihal Singh

NEW DELHI

The collapse of Vishwanath Pratap Singh's government 11 months after he took office means two things. The second failure of a coalition or minority government experiment since independence in 1947 signifies that in India nothing but a stable majority government can work. And Rajiv Gandhi's Congress Party can hope to return to power after the next general election.

The immediate cause of the downfall of Mr. Singh's minority government was the withdrawal of support by the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party. In reality, the contradictions and quarrels in the dominant component of the National Front government, the Janata Dal, were too many to permit a stable government.

Although Congress failed to win a majority in the lower house, it was returned as the largest single party. But Janata Dal, under the umbrella of the National Front, obtained support from the BJP and the Communists — the two poles of the political spectrum — to cobble together a government and keep Congress out.

V. P. Singh had emerged as the symbol of opposition to Congress, and he promised a clean and open government. His problem was that he had no political base of his own. The moment he set about building one, he created a crisis in Janata Dal and changed the BJP's attitude.

Mr. Singh cultivated Muslims (roughly 11 percent of the population) and went on to announce the reservation of certain government jobs for specified lower castes. This caused a furor in

northern cities and towns, where scores of students immolated themselves. The BJP interpreted his moves as an attempt to cut into its Hindu vote bank.

The only ideological issue in Indian politics in recent years, not counting the lip service everyone pays to Fabian socialism, has been the BJP's concept of a Hindu state. India's first prime minister and Rajiv Gandhi's grandfather, Jawaharlal Nehru, built today's India on a secular model, which was unsuccessfully challenged in the early years of independence.

Thanks partly to the Khomeini revolution in Iran and the Islamization of Pakistan under the military dictator Mohammed Zia ul-Haq, there has been a Hindu backlash in northern India. The BJP has exploited this backlash to suggest that the minorities, Muslims in particular, have been coddled.

Electoral arithmetic works against the BJP because while Hindus constitute about 75 percent of India's population of 800 million plus, they tend to be divided into castes and sects. Muslims and other minorities, such as Sikhs and Christians, are numerous enough to play a key part in the outcome in many constituencies. It is to the BJP's advantage to arouse passion among Hindus so as to induce the bulk of them to vote for it despite their reservations.

After Mr. Singh sprang his surprise on reserved jobs for the lower castes, the BJP decided to exploit a festering controversy over the building of a Hindu temple on the site where a mosque stands in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh. The party's president, L. K. Advani, led a cavalcade of cars across

thousands of miles toward Ayodhya, seat of the temple of Lord Rama, the popular Hindu god. The cavalcade was finally stopped before Mr. Advani could reach Ayodhya. He was arrested, but not before he succeeded in surcharging the atmosphere. That led to a string of clashes between Hindus and Muslims. The mosque at Ayodhya was copiously protected, but BJP volunteers briefly reached its domes, inflicting superficial damage.

The BJP withdrew support from Mr. Singh, who, on the verge of his government's fall, donned the cloak of great secularist and statesman intent on lifting up the lower castes. Congress, on the other hand, succeeded in causing a split in Janata Dal, and offered support to a breakaway faction led by Chandra Shekhar to form a government.

Behind the maneuvering lay the simple fact that Congress, like most other parties, did not want to face the electorate just yet. The highly charged inter-community atmosphere in the country would pose a law and order problem, and Congress did not want to see its chances of returning to power spoiled by the religious passions aroused by the BJP and by Mr. Singh's high-profile support for the lower castes. (some estimates say that these castes comprise 52 percent of the population, but they are not monolithic.)

Congress plans to keep supporting Mr. Shekhar, the new prime minister, until spring, then go for elections. Inevitably, the chances of Congress receiving majority support swell after the instability caused by a coalition or minority government.

(Continued on page 8)

From the South Asia Summit, Outlook for Region Is Shaky

Barbara Crossette

MALE, MALDIVES

The leaders of seven South Asian nations begin a meeting here Wednesday, at a time of more widespread internal turmoil and greater uncertainty about this region's place in the world than these countries have known in decades.

Four of the seven regional nations — India, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka — have new governments, all born of controversy and violence to one degree or another.

Of the remaining three Bangladesh has been consumed by anti-government riots in recent weeks; Bhutan is suffering its first political unrest, and the Republic of Maldives, the host country, has prepared for this meeting by whitewashing walls, cleaning streets and locking up more than a dozen prominent intellectuals and politicians who might take advantage of the the international spotlight to criticize the regime.

One measure of the atmosphere leading to this meeting of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation — whose total population of more than 1.1 billion includes many of the world's poorest people — is that it was repeatedly postponed.

For more than a year, Sri Lanka refused to take its turn in holding the meeting because Indian troops were on its soil. Less than two weeks ago, the collapse of the Indian government caused a last-minute delay of two days. Leaders will be meeting Wednesday through Friday at several locations in this Indian Ocean nation of 1,190 islands.

The leaders arriving Tuesday or early Wednesday to take part in talks on regional problems

and projects are Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar of India, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif of Pakistan, Prime Minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai of Nepal, Prime Minister Dingiri Banda Wijetunga of Sri Lanka, President Hussain Mohammed Ershad of Bangladesh, King Jigme Syngye Wangchuck of Bhutan and President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom of the Maldives.

For the first time, Nepal will not be represented by its king, Birendra Bir Bikram Shah. The president of Sri Lanka, Ranasinghe Premadasa, has vowed not to leave his country until ethnic strife there has ended.

At the association's last meeting in Islamabad, Pakistan, in December 1988, attention was focused on the meeting of Rajiv Gandhi and Benazir Bhutto, both then hailed as promising young leaders who might end the hostility between India and Pakistan.

This year, there is much less hope riding on the first meeting of Mr. Shekhar — whose minority government is now the weakest in the region — and Mr. Sharif, whom many Indians regard as a protégé of the former Pakistani strongman, General Mohammed Zia ul-Haq.

As the meeting in the Maldives neared, Mr. Shekhar was still struggling to name a cabinet; foreign ministers here have been meeting for the first time without their Indian counterpart.

South Asia is facing severe social problems, with population growing rapidly in every country except Bhutan and Sri Lanka.

All these countries have seen their economic problems, such as inadequate export growth, increased borrowing and domestic inflation, compounded unexpect-

edly and alarmingly by the crisis in the Gulf. Hundreds of thousands of South Asian professional and contract laborers had been employed in Kuwait and Iraq.

In addition, much of the region's oil came from Kuwait or Iraq, while many products, such as tea or jute, were exported to those countries.

In foreign affairs, India has been drifting for more than a year as successive governments in New Delhi failed to respond to a rapidly changing international environment. India considers itself as leader of the Nonaligned Movement, now all but defunct as well as a close friend of the Soviet Union.

Lately, however, New Delhi has watched President Mikhail S. Gorbachev draw closer to the United States, while preparing to jettison many socialist policies that some Indian leaders still espouse.

(NYT)

Rajiv's Congress...

(Continued from page 7)

Whether the Congress plan succeeds remains to be seen, but India is decidedly in a transition phase. The anachronism of a breakaway faction forming a government is all too apparent. The country faces horrendous problems, what with the sharper divisions on communities and castes, plus serious insurgencies in Punjab, Kashmir and Assam. The new prime minister also faces an economic situation worsened by the Gulf crisis.

As backseat drivers, Congress leaders hope that they will not be held responsible for Mr. Shekhar's failures and that the people will opt for stability next time round, as they have done so often in the past.

— *International Herald Tribune.*

THE PRIO REPORT

Report of a meeting held to discuss the outcome of Neville Jayaweera's fact-finding mission Nobel Institute, Oslo, 11 June, 1990

The conference was opened by Sverre Lodgaard, Director of the international Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO) who welcomed the participants. He explained that the aim of the conference was to discuss the report *Sri Lanka: Towards a Multi-Ethnic Democratic Society* and the recommendations of Neville Jayaweera's mission to Sri Lanka. The mission, which took place from the last week of November 1989 until the end of March 1990, was initiated by PRIO.

Lodgaard outlined current research at PRIO related to the conflict in Sri Lanka. One of the main foci of PRIO's Research Programme on Ethnic Conflicts and their Resolution (ECCO) is Sri Lanka. ECCO has previously organized seminars and published reports on the internal conflict in that country.

The objective of Jayaweera's mission was to collect information on the parameters for the development of a multi-ethnic democratic Society in Sri Lanka. This was done principally by interview. While PRIO recognizes the quality and integrity of the report, the recommendations are the responsibility of its author.

Financial support for the mission and the conference was provided by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, NOVIB in the Netherlands and the Human Rights Desk of the Evangelical Churches in Germany (EKD).

The official opening statement was delivered by Knut Vollebaek, State Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Norway. Vollebaek said that he was not a specialist on Sri Lanka, but that he visited the country during his assignment at the Norwegian Embassy in New Delhi, and considered himself a friend of Sri Lanka.

26 October 1990

Dear Mervyn

I am pleased to forward a copy of the final version of **Sri Lanka, Towards a Multi-Ethnic Democratic Society** by Neville Jayaweera which was commissioned by the International Peace Research Institute (PRIO) and sponsored by the Norwegian government, Diakonisches Werk - EKD and NOVIB.

The report contains a review of the history and causes of the conflict and examines the role of political parties, ethnic and religious groups, the military, vigilante and guerilla groups and non-governmental organizations in the conflict and in the pursuit of peace.

The report was submitted for discussion at a meeting of the Norwegian Nobel Institute in Oslo, 11 June 1990. A number of donor agencies, international organizations and Sri Lankan NGOs, and Sri Lankans representing the government and other organizations were present at the meeting. There were many views, criticisms and comments expressed at the meeting some of which have been incorporated by the author and some included in the report of the meeting in appendix 9 of the report. We hope that you would now be able to publish the conclusion in the report as well as the various criticisms and views expressed in appendix 9.

It is likely that scholars would present their own views and criticisms separately to you and I hope that the Lanka Guardian would stimulate an active debate.

The Lanka Guardian has been well known for its advocacy and contributed to the debate on the conflict and its resolution in Sri Lanka. We would be grateful if you also would provide some space for advertising the publication, a copy of which is enclosed. The publication is available for sale at the Marga Institute.

With regard to our exchange of letters, I think that the matter is closed and let me once again express my warm wishes to you and continue your excellent work.

Kumar Rupesinghe

Vollebaek pointed out that the issue of a multi-ethnic society is indeed a very important one. The recent developments in Eastern Europe have led to a greater awareness of ethnic problems. At the same time, these developments might create a "nearsightedness", i.e. it may become more difficult to draw people's attention to

Third World affairs. Understanding ethnic conflicts is important for the future of Sri Lanka, but also for other, similar conflicts in the future.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was happy to be involved in the report. Sri Lanka used to be regarded by many as a "model", due to its combination of social

achievement and democratic institutions. It was only realized during the 1980s that an underlying ethnic conflict and large-scale human rights violations existed.

The conflict in Sri Lanka had made a deep impression in Norway. Since 1977 Sri Lanka has been one of Norway's main partners in development aid. Norwegian development aid to Sri Lanka seeks to promote living conditions in rural districts, and focuses on the young and unemployed. Since 1983, the Norwegian Foreign Ministry and NGOs have been involved in rehabilitation and reconstruction projects.

The complexity of the problems in Sri Lanka are now more realistically perceived, and the present detente will hopefully lead to a democratic process. Jayaweera's report should be seen as a stepping stone for finding ways and means for solution of the conflict.

He then pointed to the broader context of regional conflict resolution and underlined the importance of using the improved relations between the superpowers to achieve this. In this context, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs is making available funds for "building democracy", as a partner in positive development in various countries such as Chile, Sri Lanka, Eritrea, Cambodia and Afghanistan. Western countries have an obligation to assist in laying the basis for positive developments taken by the people of those countries.

Vollebaek recognized the fear of Third World countries of being bypassed in the rush for development aid, and he pointed out that this fear was not quite unfounded. Assistance to Eastern Europe should not be taken from aid designated for the Third World, although in the longer term, the changing situation in Eastern Europe may also have positive economic and political effects for developing countries.

Neville Jayaweera then introduced the report by underlining

that it is itself a *process* and that he was open to other perceptions of the evidence presented.

During his visit to Sri Lanka, Jayaweera talked with representatives of almost all political actors, except the LTTE, although he made several attempts to do so. He stressed that the mandate of the mission was not to investigate human rights violations, nor to put the government or any other group on trial. Rather, the aim was to look for evidence of progress towards a multi-ethnic democratic society. This evidence was to be sought through analysis of the legal structures, ideology, pronouncements by leaders, party manifestos, the media and the role of NGOs.

A central question is whether the multi-ethnic society is only an ideal or whether it is real, although at an early stage of development. The evidence for this has to be located within the frame work of the modern history of Sri Lanka. Since Independence in 1948, the country has been engaged in two awesome tasks: nation-building and restructuring of the economy. But nation-building is a task that has taken some 400 years in Europe, and almost every major nation in Africa is involved in this process. At the same time, almost no post-colonial economy has managed fully to reconstruct itself.

The conflict in Sri Lanka should also be seen in its international context, which includes the availability of modern weapons and their part in the discourse.

The crisis in Sri Lanka can be broken down into eight dimensions:

- the civil war
- the threat to territorial integrity
- the threats to the state from within, in particular by the JVP
- intra-communal conflicts
- systematic violations of human rights
- the economic crisis

- the dissolution of civil society
- the threat to democracy as a consequence of all these factors.

During the last months, various positive developments had emerged—there was a truce, Indian troops had withdrawn, the threat of the JVP had been eliminated, the intra-Tamil conflict had stopped, there was less evidence of human rights violations, the economy was picking up, and civil society functioning.

But Jayaweera warned that present euphoria should not be taken too seriously. The underlying trends continued to exist, but space and time now existed to find solutions to conflicts which may surface again. He distinguished between governments (which can be replaced), states (that can be built up again) and civil society (which can be threatened by complete disintegration).

Jayaweera argued that the government, NGOs and the international community should act cooperatively. It should positively support the existing breathing space, and resources and assistance should not be withheld. NGOs should come to the realization that a new mentality was needed, they must expand their social base, and there was a need for a comprehensive common programme. The government should flush out elements of violence and human rights violations, it should alter its strategy of dealing with the JVP, include the NGOs, and set up a Permanent Peace Committee.

It would be an important step forward if the commitment of President Premadasa, reiterated in the interview (Appendix 3) that he rejects human rights violations, led to identification and dissolution of groups which violate human rights.

Jayaweera concluded by saying that both the particular and the general perspectives needed to be combined.

After the break, the floor was opened for comments and questions.

Kumar Rupesinghe, Director of the ECCO Research Programme at PRIO, thanked Jayaweera for his report and stressed that the document was a working document and PRIO would invite critical comments. The final document would reflect the proceedings and comments of all the participants. The meeting was therefore intended to reflect on the report and the important issues raised in it. The meeting was a forum for representatives of the Sri Lankan government, donor agencies, international NGOs and Sri Lankan NGOs to explore possibilities for a multi-ethnic society.

The situation in Sri Lanka should be looked at within a comparative perspective. The current phase of democratization would bring new types of conflicts into the open, particularly ethnic and identity conflicts. There were currently about 37 internal wars in the world with more than 1000 casualties, all in developing countries. Most of the armed conflicts were based on territorial claims with a strong ethnic component.

The vulnerability of the state when faced with several conflicting claims from different sources should be considered. Young states in the Third World face the possibility of external interference along side the challenge of modernization. Youth and the marginalized have become a major demographic factor, and when consumerism and the influence of effective communications contribute to a sense of deprivation such groups often turn to arms to resolve perceived conflicts.

With regard to the situation in Sri Lanka the relative stability and the sense of normalcy which prevailed did not automatically mean there was an institutional capability to meet the various crises with which the country would be confronted in the future. Prolonged states of emergency contribute to continued human rights violations and it is important to think in terms of institutional capacities

for meeting continued crises. That armed conflicts may continue to be a way of life has to be accepted. Can governance and civil society during periods of intense armed conflict be countenanced? How can the civilian population be involved in asserting law and order? How can the government and the guerrilla forces be called upon to be accountable to civic institutions? These are difficult issues but ones which must be considered. Civil society must expand the space for conflict resolution and transform conflicts into a less violent process.

Rupesinghe mentioned two examples of active involvement of the civil population in situations of armed conflict. In Colombia, a country ravaged by armed conflicts, in some regions the peasantry organized themselves and invited the military and guerrillas to account for their behaviour to them. In the Philippines, the NGOs have declared peace zones in some areas where the military and the guerrillas cannot operate. There are many more such examples.

Tarzie Vittachchi, a renowned journalist, said that values need to be identified which can lead towards reconciliation, and there is a need for a change from tribal values to values of a common society, from distrust to trust despite separate identities, and from elite power to people's power. Credible information is a key element for maintaining trust, and a free and pluralist information system needs to be established. At present, broadcasting is a state monopoly, and the state has also control over a large part of the press. Vittachchi proposed a liberalization of the press-public sector broadcasting could be run by a public corporation, and more competition in the print press would increase its credibility. He suggested that training and education programmes be launched for communicators in media and NGOs (including organizations of Buddhist monks).

Private armed guards, which can develop into private armies, need to be prohibited.

There is also a need to acknowledge the reality of India (and the Indian Army) as a neighbour. Sri Lanka owes its religion and culture to India, but Sri Lanka has always been a distinct society, never ruled from India.

Periathamby Rajanayagam, editor of the *Tamil Times*, said he agreed with the general thrust of the report. However, he had problems with accepting certain fundamental premises, and wondered why Jayaweera had refrained from investigating human rights violations. Rajanayagam pointed out that "human rights" not only refers to killings, disappearances and torture, it includes also democratic rights, and these are always an important aspect of life in civil society.

He also questioned whether nation-building and economic development were the fundamental issues in post-independent Sri Lanka. At the time of Independence, there was a high literacy rate and a reasonably good economic basis. The plantation Tamils were deprived of their citizenship rights unnecessarily.

There should be a willingness to accept giving up power. If not, there would be recourse to extra-parliamentary means of action, and the report fails to note this. He also took issue with what he saw as Jayaweera's perception of militarism—militarism is not the possession or number of guns, but a military designed specifically to meet internal enemies, and the creation of a national security ministry. The government must meet JVP terrorism, but not by barbaric means.

Rajanayagam saw the institutionalization of violence as a contributory factor to the violations of human rights and democracy, the subversion of the electoral process, and the erosion of respect for the rule of law and the judicial process.

The Sri Lankan NGOs should not be expected to provide the basis for broad-based representative groups on issues such as multi-ethnicity because the NGOs are small and have a history of taking up positions for which there was little popular support.

Bradman Weerakoon, Special Advisor on International Relations at the Sri Lankan President's Office, was grateful for the opportunity to act as a representative of the government at the meeting.

The report is very balanced and problems are considered in an objective manner. The remarks on peace, euphoria and whether the present peace is transitory or is due to war weariness are debatable points. President Premadasa was totally committed to the establishment of a MEDS. It was the Sinhala majority who will have a bigger say in promoting a MEDS and there was therefore a need to strengthen MEDS consciousness among the ordinary masses. As far as the government was concerned, the role of confrontation was closed and President Premadasa had emphasised consultation, compromise and consensus. In the UNP manifesto, emphasis was given to peace, harmony and progress as guidelines. There was normalization on both fronts. The question is how can the window of opportunity be used to establish lasting peace. The NGOs and the donor countries should also consider how they could contribute to the maintenance of peace. The Tamil people had suffered in the past and the government was determined to meet their aspirations. President Premadasa with his strong base in the Sinhala-Buddhist community is in a better position than anybody else to deliver the goods. It should be mentioned that some of the important steps such as the convening of the All Party Conference (in August) and the appointment of the Youth Commission (October) were taken at the height of insurgency when the civil society was in total

disarray. There were twenty issues before the All Party Conference and all Tamil parties are represented (although the LTTE and EPRLF not regularly) in the deliberations. The smaller parties have found a forum in the All Party Conference which was a very positive factor.

Nagalingham Satchithanathan introduced himself as General Secretary of the Federation of Tamil Associations in the UK. In 1987, the Federation recognized the LTTE leadership role in the Tamil struggle, and the LTTE uses the Federation to have its views represented. The LTTE would like to be represented at international fora where the Sri Lankan situation is being discussed, and he asked NGOs to make resources available for this.

Satchithanathan criticized the report, saying that some aspects of it were very dangerous. It absolved the government of responsibility for human rights violations over the last thirteen years and questioned the fact that human rights violations were the fundamental cause of the conflict.

It also trivialized the Tamil struggle. He strongly objected to the use of the cartoon (Appendix 5) to illustrate the reality of the current problem. The LTTE (tiger) has a gun and the President's access to an army is not shown.

The LTTE has consistently appealed to be allowed to participate in the democratic process. When Mr Jayaweera asked to be introduced to Tamil leaders in London the answer was that they were talking to the President as the only person they could trust and did not want to lose their credibility by talking to anyone else.

The LTTE seeks to promote development in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, and he called the attention of the NGOs to the fact that it is involved in rehabilitation work with orphans through the North-Eastern Relief and Rehabilitation Agency.

The government was recommended not to use the military option to address the problems of the Tamils; it is the responsibility of the government to foster peace. He supported the remarks of Mr Vittachchi on multi-ethnic democracy and Mr Rajanayagam on human rights.

Nevertheless, the goodwill expressed in the report was a positive contribution.

Desmond Fernando, President of the Sri Lanka Bar Association, congratulated Jayaweera on the report. He criticized the government of President Jayawardene for attacks on the judiciary, including attempts to remove the Chief Justice. The legal profession had a more positive opinion of President Premadasa, and was glad that he inaugurated the Annual Session of the Bar Association. President Premadasa was committed to maintaining the rule of law. There had been a decrease in ferocity against the judiciary, although threats to some lawyers continued.

A positive development is that army officers had shown interest in the promotion of humanitarian law.

One of the problems to be addressed was the continuing state of emergency. Fernando proposed a temporary solution in which the state of emergency would be limited to certain provinces. This could be achieved by bringing detainees to large prison camps in provinces where the state of emergency would be maintained. Prison warders needed to be educated on the rules regarding the treatment of prisoners as laid down in the Prisons' Ordinance.

The LTTE should allow the expression of dissenting views in the Northern Province.

Neville Jayaweera thanked the speakers for all comments and suggestions made, and said that he would not respond directly. He referred Satchithanathan to a paragraph in Chapter 5 of the report under the heading "The LTTE" saying that the chauvinism of the Sinhala majority was the primary reason for aggravating the conflict and the violence.

The afternoon session was chaired by Kumar Rupesinghe. He suggested that the meeting should focus on particular issues and proposed the following themes:

- the role of civil society and governance, especially proposals to sustain civil society under conditions of armed conflict
- demilitarization and behaviour of the armed forces
- the democratic process, including the holding of elections, the responsibilities of the Sinhala majority and the minority communities, the space for tolerance and expressions of dissent
- the need to reverse the vicious cycle of violence into the virtuous cycle of peace
- the role of information and communication
- the human rights issue: how to sustain the protection of citizens and their physical security
- devolution of power
- the role of the economy in the process towards a multi-ethnic democratic society.

Godfrey Gunatilleke, Director of the Marga Institute, expressed his gratitude for the initiative that had been taken and the report that had been presented. The report was particularly valuable in that it provides a unique framework of communication in which the different parties and communities can enter into a constructive dialogue on the nature of the future of Sri Lankan society and how they can build it together. One of the major problems preventing such dialogue in the past was the difference in perceptions of the nature and causes of the conflict which each community entertained and the entrenched biases and grievances with which they approached the problems. In a project which the Marga Institute had recently undertaken representatives of different communities were writing a common history of the ethnic conflict. The exercise would illustrate the intense discipline that each

community has to go through to arrive at an objective and self-revealing understanding of the country's recent history. In such a context of deeply conflicting perceptions, the Jayaweera report would be valuable for developing a common framework of values and a common language that would promote peace and reconciliation.

An analysis of the current situation with the stress on the fragile state of the peace that has been restored, was likely to miss some of the positive features of the inner strength and resilience of the system. Three elements needed to be emphasised, first, the civil-military relations are of a kind that will sustain democratic institutions. The recent past had demonstrated that Sri Lanka did not fit into the model in which internal conflicts lead to authoritarian militaristic forms of government. Second, the democratic party system and the electorate in the major part of the country had shown the strength and responsibility to face up to the unprecedented violence and intimidation that threatened to subvert democratic institutions and had been able to uphold the electoral process, despite real risk to lives and personal security. This had to be perceived as a major affirmation of the democratic process. Third, there had been a far-reaching change in the consciousness of the people particularly among the Sinhala majority in regard to the ethnic problem. The type of indiscriminate communal violence as it occurred in 1983 was not likely to occur again. This is borne out by the fact that the massacres in Anuradhapura, the killings of Sinhala villagers in the North East, the massacre of Buddhist monks, and the bomb explosions in Colombo did not provoke violent communal responses of the type witnessed in 1983 and earlier. The efforts to promote peace and reconciliation should draw strength from all these positive elements.

Multi-ethnic democracy makes sense and can become a reality only if it is a central issue in the ideology of the Sinhala

majority. Some of the recent discussions on national identity as well as the search for a national ideology by the elites of the majority illustrated the enormous complexity of the problem. Can multi-ethnic values become the basis of popular democracy? Is it possible to discover in the strong liberal tradition in Buddhism the core values that can promote and sustain a multi-ethnic democracy? These questions had to be addressed in an effort to build the foundation of values and ideology needed for such a democracy.

The manner in which the state dealt with the violence in 1989 resulted in the gross violation of human rights by various groups who appeared to be acting with the sanction of the state. Some of these excesses were attributed directly to state forces themselves. There was a need to examine carefully how a state can deal with extraordinary situations of civil unrest and violence so as to minimise the human cost and protect human rights. Some have argued that the actions of the state and the counterviolence was inevitable. As the situation worsened, the professionals with moderate humane approaches became ineffectual and hardliners were moved to positions of authority. The different actors who had to deal with that situation needed to look back at the crisis and ask themselves why they acted as they did. Why did civil society collapse in the way it did? Could the government and security forces have dealt with the situation differently, safeguarding human rights, while at the same time quelling the violence effectively and speedily? What are the residual elements that remain in the system which threaten human rights and how can they be eliminated?

The report sees the NGOs as important actors. While this was true, the limits within which they work had to be recognized. NGOs have limited constituencies. Each has a limited field of action. However, to the extent they act with commitment and mobilize themselves collecti-

evly, they could become a critical mass which can influence the power-holders. This process can be helped if the government can give NGOs in different fields an accredited role in the shaping of policy and legislation. Consultative mechanisms could be established for this purpose to promote a regular dialogue between the government and the NGOs. At the same time, there have to be appropriate structures of accountability for the NGOs. They neither have the systems for public accountability of state organisations nor the accountability which private enterprises have to the investors and shareholders. It was therefore essential for the NGOs to address themselves collectively to this problem and develop systems of accountability which would ensure the necessary managerial standards and promote full public confidence in them.

With regard to the economic dimension, Gunatilleke stressed that peace and development are closely interrelated. The availability of adequate resources and a pace of development that will effectively deal with the problems of unemployment and poverty are preconditions for peace. There was, however, a need for greater efficiency in the use of the resources that are made available to the country through aid. The development strategy of devolution had to be strengthened to promote a pattern of development which was equitable in relation to all ethnic groups. Therefore, one important ingredient in a strategy to build a multi-ethnic society is a multi-ethnic partnership in development.

Martin Ennals, Secretary-General of International Alert, addressed the role of the international community, in particular international NGOs, in solving internal conflicts. He pointed out that common problems exist in various countries, and that one can learn from different experiences in a comparative approach between, for example, the situations in Sri Lanka and Northern Ireland. Commenting on Jayaweera's report, he said that he hoped that in the final version implied criticisms of the

missions from other NGOs could be edited. Each mission had its own mandate and many organizations had sent missions to Sri Lanka with the full consent and cooperation of the government, and of the President. Mr. Jayaweera's report was excellent in its presentation and substance and would be of considerable assistance to all those concerned with the creation of long-term peace in Sri Lanka.

The peace in Sri Lanka is still fragile and there was little time for negotiation. What was needed now was to make full use of the existing network of NGOs, universities and research institutions in an attempt to create a consensus for peace and reconciliation through existing movements. He suggested that seminars be held under the auspices of national and international institutes to create awareness of the need for a multi-ethnic and politically equal plural society. In this context he offered the collaboration of International Alert in association with others.

The guerilla groups also needed to be brought into the political arena and to accept their responsibilities both in armed and non-armed conflict.

The democratic process itself was in need of defence. The use of the All-Party Conference as a means of consultation and decision-talking was seen by some groups as being a means of bypassing the democratic constitution.

Finally there is constant need for training, in information-handling through organisation such as HURIDOCS, and in monitoring of events, including human rights violations by non-governmental entities. Government is responsible for the administration of justice but guerrilla movements which effectively control areas and which aspire to replace governments should be expected to behave in accordance with international standards of human rights and humanitarian law.

Nadarajah Shanmugaratnam of NORAGRIC, pointed to the need for a new discourse in Sri Lanka on the national

question, including development issues. The current conjuncture was unique, and hopefully the conference would contribute to the peace process. An issue to be discussed was whether the unitarian character of the state should be preserved, or if a federal option is a sound basis for a multi-ethnic society. Attention needed to be paid to the future position of the Muslims and the upcountry Tamils. The last group lives and works on plantations which are economically unsustainable and socially undesirable. The possibilities for multi-ethnicity will have to be tested in particular in areas with a mixed population, i.e. the North and the East.

In general, the parameters of civil society needed to be discussed in relation to the development of a welfare state. A new Sri Lankan consciousness needed to be created. Often, new development projects in Sri Lanka had been created while existing ones were not finished or consolidated. There should be some restructuring of development administration.

Sunil Bastian, researcher at the International Centre for Ethnic Studies in Sri Lanka, said that one should be wary of the sense of stability prevailing in the South because it had been preceded by a period of such violent upheaval that the contrast may give a false impression of stability. In fact, after an unprecedented level of military activity, few people were talking politics in public places as they used to. It should be recognised that there are four basic ethnic groups in Sri Lanka. A lot more work needed to be done on making the country truly bi-lingual at the level of administration, media and education. A start had been made towards devolution, but the new institutions such as the Provincial Councils raised a lot of questions about how they could be strengthened. There should be more effort to wrest control of the media from the state; even the multi-ethnic New Year referred to in the report was really a Sinhalese New Year put forward as a national New

Year. On the point made earlier that NGOs often express a minority point of view, it is important to have groups which present a minority view in order to promote and win support for them.

Werner Lottje, Human Rights Secretary for Diakonisches Werk der EKD, the Social Services Organisation of the Protestant Churches in Germany, said that his agency and others had not tried to reduce the problems in Sri Lanka and other developing countries to human rights problems. In fact, they had been and were still trying to provide development support for the most marginalized sectors of the populations in developing societies, thus trying to help these societies to find their way to genuine and equitable social and economic development. However, during the 1970s and 1980s donors were confronted with situations in various countries where development aid was reduced to securing survival of their partners and target groups. Mr Lottje stressed the point that those forces who extensively violate human rights are to be held responsible if the problems of a country seem to be reduced to human rights issues, and not those groups who try to stop such violations or to help the victims. The Human Rights Desk of Diakonisches Werk of EKD was in the first instance created to protect and assist victims of human rights violations. Choosing for victims can lead to conflict with those in power. Experience shows that promotion of the rule of law is a precondition for sound and successful development. There is a need to monitor government actions in relation to human rights in order to protect the integrity of development aid.

Lottje stressed the point that not only governments should be held responsible for human rights violations, also "quasi-state entities" like liberation movements should be made accountable for human rights violations. This is sometimes difficult for solidarity groups whose sympathies lie with liberation movements, but for human rights workers there can be no distinction made as human rights are indivisible. Mr.

Lottje mentioned Nicaragua after 1979 and the actions of the SWAPO against their own dissident members as examples.

For this reason he strongly urged the LTTE to allow democratic process in the territories under their control and to safeguard the human rights of the population. The LTTE could not be judged differently from the government when it comes to human rights.

Although it had not been possible to lack of time, EKD was glad to provide support to the peace efforts which the report is an important part. EKD recognized the importance of addressing the underlying problems of human rights violations. The need for continued dialogue should not stop the addressing of human rights violations: in this dilemma situation between dialogue and advocacy what is best for the victims of human rights should govern the choices made.

Ninan Koshy, Director of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches, expressed his appreciation for the valuable report, and welcomed the recommendations made to the international community. The manner in which Sri Lanka's problems are solved is of significance to a large number of international NGOs, and also to the WCC. There is a proliferation of ethnic conflicts in many parts of the world, and the WCC constituency is often affected.

With regard to Sri Lanka, the first task of the international community was to interpret the new situation and examine the possibilities which that situation offered. Support should be given to building a national consensus on the basis of the new understanding of national unity. The international community should support the building of institutions within the country for sustaining a pluralist society, and also continue to be concerned with human rights issues in the form of support for institutions in Sri Lanka to promote and defend these rights.

A new discussion should take place on minority rights and self-determination—this was ac-

celerated by Eastern Europe. rights are exercised should be examined.

Religious and ethnic identities are often overlapping, and religion is used to promote or defend nationalism. This has unfortunate consequences in many countries. But religion can also play a positive role in promoting pluralist, multi-ethnic societies.

After the tea break, Desmond Fernando addressed the issue of different ways of solving problems. There was a need for working out a contingency plan in case efforts at achieving peace fail, law and order break down and an emergency arises once again, as happened during the JVP uprising in 1989. He recommended that a task force be set up for this purpose, with representatives of the government and NGOs.

John de Silva pointed out that the environment also suffers when the rule of law breaks down. In Sri Lanka, there had been wanton destruction of the environment; which had serious consequences for the population. It is important to create pluralistic media which cover development and environmental issues. Linkages need to be established between NGOs and journalists, in order to ensure the process of liberalization of the media. The Indian example of the Doordashan may show it is possible to disconnect state control from the broadcast media.

Tarzil Vittachchi proposed that the President should appoint a commission to liberalize the media, so that they will be more pluralist. The ownership of the nationalized press needs to be broadened.

Also, Sri Lanka should participate more actively in the SAARC, in order to develop the community sense in the region, which was latent.

In reply to issues raised, Bradman Weerakoon said that within the All Party Conference discussions were being held on the liberalization of the media and the TULF and Liberal Party were playing a leading role in this regard. The Youth Commission had also recommended

such liberalization and this had been accepted by the president. As for the Task Force, PRIO perhaps could take the initiative for consultations on peace and democracy. This can be a two stage process beginning with the local NGOs and with other organizations at a later stage. As for the PPC there are certain difficulties. This will not be a reality unless all the parties were prepared to take part. The experience with the North-East Peace Committee was not very encouraging. The proposal can be considered within the aegis of the All Party Conference. As for demilitarization in the South, questions are being asked about why the LTTE were allowed to carry arms. Many of the suggestions made by ICRC have been accepted. There should be a proper mix between equity and open economy and the JSP was an important component. As for human rights, there were proposals before the All Party Conference on the appointment of an Ombudsman and the establishment of a human rights commission. There should be signals from the international community to encourage these positive developments.

Elizabeth Jarek of Redd Barna stressed that concrete strategies needed to be developed on how to involve children in building a multi-ethnic democratic society. The Convention on the Rights of Children had been passed by the UN, and Sri Lanka should consider becoming a signatory.

Periathamby Rajanayagam said that while fundamental rights were strengthened by the government, in practice there were still many problems, in particular because of the PTA and the Emergency Regulations. Many regulations should be declared invalid as they did not directly relate to the purpose for which they were said to be established. Persons deliberately inciting racial hatred should be prosecuted.

With regard to *habeas corpus* the legal process had become time-consuming, and needed to be speeded up, so that cases would be handled within a certain time limit.

The Attorney General was playing a double role, and was not independent of the government. This was inappropriate and should be remedied.

Threats to lawyers needed to be condemned by the government. The culprits had to be brought before law.

The question of the restoration of the judicial process in the North and East was crucial.

Bea Stolte, member of the Executive Board of NOVIB, stressed the importance of local initiatives. She said that more attention should be paid to the role of women in conflict resolution. Women play an important role in peace education, and are often the first to take up new initiatives. She called upon the donor community to recognize this important role.

Nagalingham Satchithanathan thanked PRIO for hosting the meeting. He said that the role of children is important, and there is a need for educational programmes of make them understand multi-ethnic society.

Human rights violations are part of the conflict. The LTTE invited journalists and NGOs to visit the North and the East. The LTTE could be judged on human rights issues since it took up arms to protect human rights. Handing over arms was an important aspect in Sri Lanka, and the LTTE could not escape its responsibility (nor could the government of Sri Lanka and the Sinhala population). The role of the majority community is crucial. If it is willing to work towards a political solution there is no need for the LTTE to keep its arms.

As soon as there is political will to live in peace in the North and East, the legal basis for a multi-ethnic society can be found. An independent judiciary can guarantee the protection of human rights. Help from the international community in setting up this legal framework may be required since the average of the LTTE fighters is 36 and they lack experience in such matters.

Kumar Rupesinghe closed the session. He said that PRIO

had been involved in monitoring the Sri Lankan conflict for several years and had closely observed its various ramifications. When the government of President Jayawardene talked of militarization and war as a means of resolving the conflict, PRIO was associated with the efforts of the international community which called for respect for human rights and the restoration of peace. President Premadasa had expressed a concern for peace and reconciliation when he invited the LTTE and the JVP to join the democratic process. The language of peace should be respected. The government's initiatives should be supported as long as the language of peace prevails. However, the peace process was extremely fragile and there were forces hostile to peace on either side of the conflict. If language of war and hostility persisted then PRIO would continue to exercise its right to express criticism.

In many parts of the world guerrillas are willing to abandon arms and join the democratic process. This means that people should be provided with alternative security and institutions which can manage these conflicts in a nonviolent way. He recalled the way in which resources were concentrated in constructing the accelerated Mahaweli Project—an irrigation project of thirty years was completed in six years. Similarly, there should be an accelerated multi-ethnic programme. International organisations should make this a priority issue and donors should consider ways and means of supporting peace making. This requires a new way of thinking by donors.

The report of the meeting would be published and disseminated widely within Sri Lanka. Rupesinghe thanked the sponsors of the report and the conference. The PRIO staff was thanked for its efforts to organize the conference, especially Beth Steiner, Rune Ottosen, Per Olav Maurstad and Arild Ruud for their untiring efforts to make the conference a success, and Magne Barth, Susan Hoivik and Berth Verstappen, the rapporteurs.

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Role of State in Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka

Urmila Phadnis

A violent revolt against the anti-democratic tendencies of the state as well as the high caste-class character of its power wielders had found an expression in the 1971 Sinhala-Buddhist insurrection of the JVP which had been quelled with external assistance but the simmerings against the non-democratic, highly centralised and increasingly personalised tendencies of the state persisted as was evident from the resurgence of the JVP in the 1980s.

Underlining the youth unrest had been the politicisation and perception of the abuse of political power by the youth, more so since 1970 when, with the parliamentary victories involving massive majorities led not only to post election violence but also to the perception that 'winner takes all'. A Presidential Commission on youth unrest summed up the perception of the youth vis-a-vis the abuses and excesses of politicisation as follows:

- (a) abuse of political power in the recruitment of personnel to the public service;
- (b) misapplication of political power in the grant of public licence and contract to the supporters of the ruling party;
- (c) the abuse of political power in the undermining of existence democratic institutions; and
- (d) political interference in the day-to-day governmental administration.

As regards the Tamil youth, such abuses of political power among the two dominantly Sinhalese Buddhist political parties was such as to further peripheralise his position in the decision making processes and op-

portunity structures. However, alongside the tendencies leading to the JVP phenomenon, the Tamil discontent had another dimension — an ethnic edge — connoting a revolt against the majoritarian thrust of the Sri Lanka state. More so, while the JVP had as its ostensible objective a radically restructured Sri Lankan state, the Tamil militants had its break-up — a separate Tamil Eelam — as their goal on the plea that the Sinhala-Buddhist domination of the Sri Lankan state had been such as to afford hardly any leeway for the Tamil community to have a stake therein and to live with a sense of honour, equality and justice. The roots of such a feeling of discrimination and deprivation of the Tamils lay in the policies of the State in the post-independence era which tended to be amalgamative and not pluralistic.

V

This scenario can be traced to mass politics asserting itself in electoral arena. The first rub of such a Sinhalese-Tamil divide had come in the promulgation of Sinhala only as the official language in 1956 instead of the parity of Tamil and Sinhala as had been promised by the two dominantly Sinhalese parties namely, the United National Party (UNP) and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) only to be abnegated later by both. Such a move symbolised a reassertion of the Sinhalese nationalism and, a new dignity to its Sinhalese educated middle strata with race, religion and language providing a strong conglomerate to such a Sinhala consciousness marked by a thrust on its distinctiveness as well as its pre-eminence vis-a-vis other minority communities.

While the Burghers, in view of their small numbers found greener pastures in other countries in the wake of such Sinhalese-Buddhist thrust of the Sri Lankan state, the Muslims appeared to reconcile with such a situation. Besides, dispersed as they were all over the island (except in the eastern region) and with business and trade being the major avocation of a large number of them, the linguistic-cultural assertion of the majority community did not create a major crisis for them.

However, for the Tamils, particularly Sri Lankan Tamils of the north, the promulgation of the Sinhalese only as the official language was perceived as catastrophic for subjective as much as objective reasons. Denial of Tamil the official status was perceived as a slur to their language — one of the oldest languages — as much as to their linguistic-cultural distinctiveness. Besides, the status of the Tamils as an advantaged community hinged on their high share in governmental jobs as well as some of the other prestigious professions like law and medicine. In the Sri Lankan situation, with state emerging as the largest employer, they feared that with the replacement of Sinhalese over English as the official language, their employment prospects would shrink, more so because political spoils system, as elsewhere, was in any case bound to restrict their chances. That their fears were well-founded was evident from their shrinking number in government jobs.

Added to this was the Sri Lankan Tamils sense of grievance regarding education, colonisation and regional autonomy which got increasingly intensive over the decades. Thus, in the realm of education, with the

mother tongue being the mode of communication from school to the University level after 1960, it was becoming increasingly difficult for the university educated Tamil youth to cope with the old confidence in the job market.

Worse still, in 1970, soon after coming to power, the United Front Government decided to replace merit as the criteria for admission by a system of weightage which worked in favour of Sinhalese students. It introduced a system of standardisation which specified a system of credits which were higher for students writing in Tamil and lower in the case of Sinhalese aspirants.

The ultimate result of the quotas and standardisation system was a progressive decline of Tamil students in the science based courses in which earlier, they had done very well. Though the situation was ameliorated to some extent during the UNP regime, the discriminatory aspects of the SLFP policies were deeply etched in the Tamil psyche.

Alongside educational policies, the land settlement or colonisation policies of the earlier governments were perceived with mistrust. It was maintained by the Tamil leadership that the Sinhalese dominated state's land settlement policy was a device to dilute the demographic character of the Tamil homeland in the north and east.

Last but not the least was the issue of regional autonomy. Time and again, the Tamils had sought regional autonomy as a structural mechanism to ameliorate their grievance as well as to provide a certain autonomy in governance at provincial levels. However, since 1956, even when these efforts were made by the ruling regimes, they tended to be abortive because both the UNP and the SLFP — as and when in opposition — spared no efforts to cash in on Sinhalese Buddhist

populist sentiments, with the plea being that any effort towards federalisation signalled a danger to national unity. The abrogation of Bandaranaike-Chelvanayagam Pact in 1957 on the regional councils in the north and east, the abortive debate on the formation of District Council during the 60s and 70s reiterated the same story.

Though the induction of Provincial Councils in 1988 was arrived at it is noteworthy that the major opposition party — SLFP — boycotted these elections. The Provincial Councils even when established in the northeastern region could hardly be functional. In the North-eastern province for instance, the issues involved were not merely that of delineating the jurisdiction of the Centre and the Province but that of the credibility and confidence of one in the other. Thus, though creating the Provincial Council in somewhat exceptional circumstances, the state leadership could hardly harmonise its activities with the Provincial Council and *vice-versa*.

VI

During the initial five years of the UNP regime (1977-83), its policies towards Tamils appeared to be a mix of cooption and coercion, with coercion having an edge over its promise of 'national reconciliation'. The reasons for the government's inability to contain the Tamil militancy were partly because of contending perceptions for a solution within its own party and partly due to the pressures and pulls from the major opposition party — the SLFP — trying, as the UNP had done in the past — to make political capital out of the ethnic issue through its political intransigence and at times ambivalence. Also, the intensity of the Tamil militants' sense of grievance was presumably inadequately appraised by the ruling regime despite repeated warnings on this point by the TULF in parliament which, had emerged

in an unenviable position after 1977 elections. With a bare 18 seats in the legislature of 168 members, it emerged as the largest opposition party. With Eelam being its major election slogan, the TULF could hardly perform the old oppositional role in an era of new types of militancy and violence in which the state-initiated and sponsored violence increasingly had got deadlocked with the violence of the Tamil militants.

While the UNP constitution of 1978 did ascribe Tamil the status of 'national language', it still fell short of the earlier demand of the Tamil federalists for its parity with Sinhala as the official language. Besides, its proposal for the formation of District Development Councils, providing a certain degree of regional autonomy was such as to rupture the TULF with its youth wing perceiving it as a subversive step vis-a-vis the Eelam. In due course the moderate Tamils were sidetracked by the militant Eelamists.

Moreover, violence and counter violence took an ethnic turn in 1977, 1979, 1981 and 1983. While the communal violence of 1977 had engulfed large parts of the country, in 1979 it was principally in the northern province. The insurgent's hit and run activities coupled with bank robberies resulted in the proscription of the Tamil Tigers in 1978, the Prevention of Terrorism Act in 1979 and the promulgation of emergency in Jaffna in 1979. During the insurgency, the high-handedness of police and armed forces kept the ethnic cauldron simmering. And though the major explosion came in 1983, by this time, the dialogue between Colombo and the TULF had virtually broken down. The military operations in Jaffna had become increasingly harsher with a sudden swoop on the civilians, arrest of young men and even discriminate burning of places (like Jaffna library) and burning of property particularly when a segment of them

was incensed by the terrorist killings of their compatriots.

The triggering of the anti-Tamil riots on July 20, 1983 after the ambush and killing of 13 Sinhalese soldiers is a story too well known and well documented highlighting the indifference of the police and armed forces on the one hand and the complicity of a segment of the ruling party in the killings, looting and burning of the Tamils and their property.

The ferocity of the Sinhalese chauvinist elements with tacit approval of the state apparatus reached such proportions that the entire Tamil leadership found itself with no option but to flee the north and northeastern provinces and seek refuge in Tamil Nadu. Moreover, with the government simultaneously intensifying its military operations, thousands of refugees also sought refuge in Tamil Nadu.

This was the prelude for the emergence of the India factor in the domestic Sri Lankan ethnic strife. Initially, New Delhi had watched with cautious concern the inability of Colombo to find a negotiated settlement of the Tamil Question with the Sri Lankan Tamil leadership. But the events of 1983 were such that the government of India could no longer remain a passive spectator because of the arousal of the Tamil sentiments in Tamil Nadu.

The immediate impetus of Delhi to act was the July 23rd massacre of Tamils in Colombo and elsewhere in the southern parts of the island. There was a public outcry in Tamil Nadu against these killings with an implicit prodding on the Government of India that it should intervene militarily in Sri Lanka as it had done in the case of erstwhile East Pakistan in 1971. Far from doing so however, the Indian effort was to make an attempt to prevail upon the Government in Sri Lanka not to seek a military solution but to secure a politically negotiated settlement.

It needs to be noted here that while India publicly maintained its stance that it stood for the territorial integrity of the island-state and was against the secession of the Tamil provinces, it had not refrained from encouraging the separatist element with material support besides providing sanctuary to the extremist elements in Tamil Nadu to continue their insurrection activities with the major premise being that the Sri Lankan Government's moves on the security — foreign policy front were prejudicial to its security concerns. Added to the India factor was also the support which the militants received from the Tamil expatriates all of which resulted in a such greater resource endowment to the struggle for Eelam than had been hitherto.

It is in the totality of this complex situation that the Indian intervention in Sri Lanka has to be evaluated.

This phase of Indo-Sri Lankan relations began when the late Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister, took the initiative of getting in touch with the then Sri Lankan President Mr. Jayewardene with the offer her good offices to help Colombo finding a negotiated settlement of the Tamil Question. This was followed by visit of her personal envoy, G. Parthasarathy, to Colombo, and the convening of the All Party Conference to evolve a national consensus on the Tamil Question. This however proved abortive as also the subsequent attempts.

An explanation for this failure has to be found on the one hand in the increasing militancy of the Sinhalese chauvinist elements and on the other, the equally intransigent approach of the Tamil militants particularly the LTTE, to a negotiated settlement. Incidentally, the main motivation behind both the Sinhalese and the Tamil extremists was that any negotiated settlement would subvert their stated anti-systemic objectives.

Meanwhile, Sri Lankan government went ahead with its offensive against the Tamil insurgents and though it did succeed to some extent in clearing the eastern province, the stronghold of the LTTE which was the northern province continued to be beyond the reach of the security forces and Colombo's writ hardly ran there. With such advantage as the security forces could gain in the Eastern province, the Sri Lankan government decided to concentrate its forces against the Northern Province which entailed heavy civilian casualties, particularly in Jaffna. The government had also imposed an economic blockaade in early 1987 which did cause hardship to the civilians. This was the stage in which the government of India's military involvement began with the symbolic air dropping supplies to the Jaffna peninsula flouting Sri Lankan airspace.

Whether it was so intended or not, President Jayewardene seemed to have taken this as a signal of India's intention to come to the rescue of the Tamils militarily. Forthwith Mr. Jayewardene appears to have considered it to be more prudent to come to an understanding with India partly because of his apprehensions of a coup against his regime in Sri Lanka itself and partly because of his fears of India's intentions as well as the unwillingness of extra-regional powers to get involved in Sri Lanka's ethnic strife partly because of the possible repercussions it might have in their relations with India. Instructively in this regard was a marked tendency on the part of both the super powers to let India handle the situation.

This was the background to the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord which the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi signed with President Jayewardene in Colombo on July 29, 1987. Under the Accord, India agreed to secure arms surrender from the Tamil militants while the Sri Lankan

government agreed to take steps not only to meet the Tamil aspirations for self-government but also tacitly to concede to the demand of the concept of a Tamil homeland, namely, an amalgamated single unit of Northern and Eastern Provinces.

The immediate aftermath of the Accord did not seem to be conducive to the termination of the conflict between the Sri Lankan and the Tamil militants. On the one hand, the LTTE refused to go beyond a formal surrender of arms and on the other it generated a Sinhalese Buddhist backlash with Mr. Jayewardene's Prime Minister, Mr. Premadasa, himself abstaining from the signing ceremony of the Accord. Thus, if the Indian government found itself unable to fulfil its commitment to disarm the militants, except by initiating military action against the LTTE, Mr. Jayewardene found that the Accord had fuelled further the conflagration which had been ignited by the JVP by touching the Sinhalese Buddhist sentiments on the raw of a national offence committed by the presence of foreign troops on the Sri Lankan soil.

In a rather feeble attempt to head off the JVP's appeal to the Sinhalese sentiments, Mr. Jayewardene's successor, Mr. Premadasa, made the withdrawal of the IPKF one of the major issues in his presidential election campaign in 1988.

As it happened, a change of government in New Delhi and the assumption of power by the opposition National Front, which had questioned the wisdom of Mr. Gandhi having committed Indian troops, to Sri Lanka helped Mr. Premadasa to redeem his electoral pledge and the IPKF was duly withdrawn from the island in 1990.

Not illogically, there was a congruence of immediate objectives between Mr. Premadasa and the LTTE which had been fighting the IPKF as an 'army of occupation' in the Tamil homeland. After a brief interlude of unofficial contacts starting in April 1988 Sri Lankan government and the LTTE

leadership decided to come round to negotiations on finding a peaceful settlement. There were several rounds of formal talks lasting several months which took place in Colombo between government representatives and the LTTE leaders.

However, despite the conciliatory gestures of Colombo which included, the abrogation of the Sixth amendment of the Constitution, dissolution of the Provincial Council (which had come into being as a result of elections held under the terms of the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord) and fresh provincial elections, the LTTE could not be persuaded to carry on the talks to a successful conclusion. Its leadership preferred to return to its quest for a total dominance of the Tamil areas through the resumption of its insurgency.

This quest for dominance in the past had included physical elimination of all the Tamil groups which were contesting its sole claim for power. Its confrontation with Colombo on a somewhat trivial issue leading to its take over of some of the police stations brought it in direct military confrontation with the armed forces as in 1983 but with one major difference. The conciliatory gesture of Colombo had already been internationally publicised and though the Tamil political groups were sharply divided on the rationale or justification of the LTTE's confrontation with Colombo the aerial bombing by the state in the north did evoke a criticism of government action from the oppositional Sinhalese as well as Tamil parties and groups.

VIII

The role of the state in the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka has been, in effect, a manifestation of the various facets of the structural crisis of the Sri Lankan state. Embedded in such a crisis have been two levels of class and ethnicity. Initially they seemed to be mutually reinforcing as was evident from the political coalitions and patterns of power sharing in the institutions of power and authority of the state

by the elite of the two communities.

In the post-independence era, with mass politics gaining ascendancy and the Sinhalese Buddhist lower middle strata, perceiving itself as deprived as well as discriminated vis-a-vis the alien as well as minority group interests, had succeeded in pushing Sri Lankan politics to endow it a majoritarian thrust through the agency of Party politics. Electoral dynamics such that two major political parties to be increasingly partisan and avowedly moving towards the Sinhalese Buddhist ideology as the ideology of Sri Lankan nation and state.

This was viewed with serious concern by the elite of the most forward community for identity assertion as well as group mobilisation to safeguard its interests. However, identity, as in the other cases, has been a significant but not a sufficient requisite to evoke ethnicity. It was the interest in power sharing and its management that prompted the power elite of the minority community to mobilise an already politically conscious community by choosing, selecting and standardising select symbols for its identity assertion and focus a sense of grievance vis-a-vis the reference group i.e., the Sinhalese.

Ironically, the ethnicisation of politics and politicisation of ethnicity was operative in a manner as to make the majority-minority relationship virtually a zero-sum game, particularly since the 70s when the vernacular educated lower middle strata of the Tamils belonging to some of the emergent castes like karaiyars decided to revolt against not only the high caste and upper class based Tamil leadership but also against the state power-structure as the JVP had done earlier.

With an overheated polity, a maldeveloped economy and a multiethnic society, the earlier equilibrium of Sri Lankan state — of mediating competing interests through alignments or amalgamation became increasingly tenuous.

Contending perspectives, conflicting perceptions and misperceptions marked the increasing chasm. On the one end of this continuum lay the perspective of the Sri Lankan (i.e., Sinhalese Buddhist) "nation" in siege and on the other end emerged the perspective of Eelam — the vision of a separate Tamil state.

In such a clash of identity and pluralism there is no doubt that majority dominated regimes adopted measures which could hardly mitigate the Tamil sense of grievance and even if they did to some extent, they were hardly implemented. Besides, in the violent activities of the Tamil secessionists, the government's military measures were hardly synchronised with political measures to alleviate some of the Tamil demands. The military content of external inputs on both the sides exacerbated the cleavage. Thus, as regards the militants their enhanced capacity and skill to hit the state apparatus led to an increase of armed forces and an escalated defence expenditure. If such escalation was inimical to the already tottering economic development of Sri Lanka, in the case militant groups, the nexus of arms with drugs imparted a pernicious angle to the ethnic strife.

Besides, whether on the Sinhalese or on the Tamil side, the phenomena of political violence has been such as to encompass particularity in recent years, the shadowy extra legal vigilante groups on the Sinhalese side. The subterranean currents of political violence have been equally strong leading to insurgent, guerilla like warfare at random, not to north between the speak of the open war being waged at this juncture in the state forces and the LTTE.

Unless and until the state policies and measures are radically restructured and politically reoriented, the Sri Lankan forces in the north may at best have a pyrrhic victory. In this respect, major challenge of President Premadasa's regime continues to be that of bringing the Tamil in the mainstems politics in order to recreate their stakes in the Sri Lankan political

system. Eelam has not only been an ideology but a movement for which Tamils — young and old — have lost their lives and continue to do so. The edge of the struggle can be blunted only through political solution and not through military recourse, a point on which most of the Sri Lankans agree — but find themselves hapless to get it effected.

Besides, with the majority-minority relationship cleaved further during the past decade, the bridging of the ethnic divide as has been stated earlier, can be brought about only in the overall gamut of the crisis of the state on the one hand and imperatives of peace on the other. It is noteworthy, that during the past few years the Muslim community in Sri Lanka too has felt deeply aggrieved and insecure as perhaps never before during the post colonial era.

At present, the state machinery is hardly operative in the north and is limping in the east. The first prerequisite thus of the mitigation of ethnic divide has to be the need for action for restoration of law and order and civil authority.

Going by the experience of the other Provincial Councils, the Provincial administrative set-up seems to be a going concern. To what extent and in what way can Colombo help ensure the installation of a functioning institutional structure is going to be its major challenge. So is the effectivity of devolution, taking into consideration the lacunae therein as repeated by the first chief minister of the region, Varatharaja Perumal.

Equally significant measures for an enduring peace in the island are the devices for greater inter-ethnic group interaction. In this respect, the promised quota system for the minorities will have to be worked out with circumspection lest it may intensify Jaffna-Colombo cleavage and may not, in the long run, foster the majority-minority harmony either.

Some of the recommendations of the youth commission, highlighting the damage due to political interference and sopils

system, the mismatch between employment and education, the Sinhalese-Tamil divide as a result of linguistic dualism, the racial bias in the books, particularly the Sinhalese ones, the need to harmonise values of pluralism over identity are on doubt commendable but in the civil society of Sri Lanka afflicted by fear of the known/unknown adversary and uncertainties regarding the future, the laws of the jungle seem to attract the youth more than the yearnings for a just and peaceful political order. This is particularly so with the Tamil (and to some extent Sinhalese youth) who have been virtually grown in an environment of alienation and aggression with the collective manifestation being political violence not merely vis-a-vis Sinhala but also Tamils.

Not only this, the events during the past years — violation of human rights, 'disappearances' and killings of political dissenters — conote a disturbing trend with the state increasingly assuming the features of a 'National Security State' as has happened in a number of Latin American countries. The comment of the Civil Rights Movement in Sri Lanka are pertinent in this respect: the state needs to be particularly circumspect in the use of its coercive power. "If the state acts or is popularly believed to act, with the same degree of contempt for law and human values as its adversaries, then it undermines its own moral, ethical and legal basis".

With the Non-governmental organisations in Sri Lanka being under continuous pressures from various quarters, the 'peace constituency' in Sri Lanka needs to be strengthened through collective support and efforts of similar organisations abroad. But more significantly, in such a task it appears to have an ambivalent if not anti-thetical relationship with some of the state institutions which needs rectification.

Will the state leadership rise to the occasion to fulfil its promise of 'national conciliation, consensus and compromise'? This remains a daunting question which only its performance will vindicate in the years to come.

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