

SHAN: *"I am a Brahmin"* ²

— Dayan Jayatilleke

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TEN DAYS THAT SHOOK SRI LANKA

— Mervyn de Silva

ISLAM: Chandra Muzaffar, Kuldip Nayar, Abdur Rauf

L.T.T.E. AND PEACE TALKS — K. M. de Silva



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VIOLENCE: THE SOUTH ASIAN WAY

Mervyn de Silva

Few countries in this violence-prone post-Cold War world have been rocked by two political assassinations on this scale in less than ten days. Yet, the transition has been surprisingly orderly. Evidently, the Sri Lankan political-system can still absorb such shattering blows. But this is no reason to underestimate the gravity of these threats to the island's peace and stability.

In highly charged situations of this kind what is relevant is not what the investigations establish or who will be indicted but what the public believes. And there's little doubt that while the Athulathmudali killing has prompted many theories, almost all "politically" coloured, there is not much speculation about the Premadasa assassination. All the information in the press, particularly the "deep penetration" of the

Premadasa household, which took at least two years, and the final suicidal deed, showed the unmistakable signature of the LTTE, the world's most highly motivated separatist rebel organisation.

Did the LTTE plan include an anti-Tamil backlash? On Tamil opinion, the Madras-based *HINDU* is undoubtedly the most well-informed. Tamil sources argue, observed the *HINDU's* Colombo correspondent, V. Jayanth, "whether or not the LTTE is behind this assassination, they can be expected to strike again, possibly in Colombo, and it may not be a personal or political target. They say that to divert attention, the Tigers may try to provoke an ethnic or communal outbreak in Sri Lanka to attract international attention. That has been their pattern and they will whip up communal clashes and whip up sympathy for the Tamils and project themselves as saviours..".

With "refugee-fatigue", as it is termed in Europe, US, and 'white' Commonwealth countries, official support for 'refugees' in general is on the decline. This is certainly clear in the all-important U.S. as I saw for myself when talking to leading personalities of the "expat" Tamil community, including Prof. Benedict, the founder of the "Tamil Sangam", the first such body in the U.S.

The "backlash" theory was reinforced by the same paper the next day. Correspondent Jayanth wrote "The Sri Lankan security forces assured Tamils living in and around Colombo that there was no reason to panic Security has been strengthened...."

The President, Mr. D.B. Wijetunge was quite clear in his mind on the Tamil problem and the LTTE threat:

"It is more a terrorist problem not an ethnic one. Terrorism is a global phenomenon now. We expect the LTTE to come to some terms. They must tell us what they want. They are a group fanatics and extremists".

President Wijetunge who was speaking to foreign correspondents said "our main objective is to carry on with President Premadasa's program of work for the next 18 months. The search for a solution to the ethnic problem will continue. He was particularly anxious to assure foreign investors that the climate for investment had in no way changed.

It was left to Minister S. Thondaman, CWC boss to charge certain foreign correspondents of "adding to the fears of the minorities by warning of impending violence against them.

What is abundantly clear now is that Sinhala political opinion represented certainly by the two major parties, UNP and SLFP, have reached consensus themselves, what ever each may do in any given situation to maximise its own advantage by embarrassing the other..... and needless to add the opposition has the tactical advantage. It can talk; it need not Do anything.

THE QUIET LEADER

Both as a person and a politician, Prime Minister D.B. Wijetunge offered a contrast in style. If President Premadasa was irrepressibly combative, his Prime Minister was accommodative. If the President was a compulsive debater "D.B.", fellow parliamentarians called him was a good listener.

The happiest hint of quieter era was the extraordinary smoothness of the transition. Both western diplomats and the international observers now in the island to watch the Provincial council polls were deeply impressed by the smoothness of the transition. In large measure this was a direct consequence of the choice of a successor. As Prime Minister, Mr. Wijetunge had to carry the burden of managing parliamentary business, and this was a House quite different from that

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which President JR and Prime Minister Premadasa had to cope. Both had the huge advantage of a five-sixths majority, with the traditional rival, the SLFP reduced to 8 seats. As both President JR and Prime Minister Premadasa were to observe, the SLFP made a fight largely because Opposition leader Anura Bandaranaike had inherited some of the professional skills of his father, S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, parliamentarian *par excellence*.

The Parliamentary balance was hardly tilted in that fashion after 1989. The elections — presidential and parliamentary — had been conducted in the midst of "war" — two violent revolts, the secessionist LTTE-led insurgency in the north and east, and the JVP insurrection in the South. Both were made more violent and fiercer by the presence of a large foreign army, the IPKF.

The UNP won both but the polls were fiercely fought. The after-effects of these bitter battles were felt for a long time most of all in the House.

President Premadasa picked the right man, a party stalwart and a political veteran, for the post Prime Minister, D.B. Wijetunge, a man who could defuse tensions not inflame passions — the quite D.B. Wijetunge. What's more, he picked a very young man to assist him — Mr. Ranil Wickremasingha. The "balance" was perfect. The veteran "D.B." non-combative and conciliatory, and young Ranil Wickremasingha, Royal and Law Colleges, not only skilled in debate but a lawyer with a sound knowledge of parliamentary procedure, Erskine May and all that. The balance was evident not in age and background but in the contrasting constituencies — the upcountry Kandyan, and cosmopolitan Colombo.

The vote would have been by secret ballot. With the opposition and most of all, the SLFP, deeply (and publicly) torn by internal, ideological, and family disputes, the anti-UNP forces would have been foolish to field a candidate against the non-controversial, Prime Minister Wijetunge. The post-1989 Leader of the House has been rewarded for his services to party and Presidency.

THE SMOOTH CHANGEOVER

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasingha has now seconded the President's motion. In his TV broadcast, the Minister made it clear that there will be continuity in UNP policy. Since Prime Minister Wijetunge was also President Premadasa's Finance Minister, the emphasis on the government's economic policy in Mr. Ranil Wickremasingha's speech was doubtless marked by the business community, the agencies (IMF, World Bank and donors) and the island's investors.

With provincial polls round the corner, the stress on economic policy and performance was doubtless deliberate. Though some traces of ideological confusion can still be seen in the lately formed P.E.P., the SLFP-led alliance, it is in announcing a clear economic policy that this new version of the 1970 United Front, faces some obvious difficulties. How NOT to be capitalist!! How to be DIFFERENT from the UNP. It is often easy to do so in politics, even ideology, but rarely in the field of economic policy.

In the case of the post 1977 UNP (that is, JR and after) continuity is quite easily recognised. You cannot fool about with economic strategy. What President Premadasa did was to carry JR-ism into the rural areas. On a small scale, he adopted the Chinese strategy, now more dramatically used by the Vietnamese — using foreign investment to introduce capitalism to the rural, semi-rural areas.

The ideologues still describe as "socialism" — the same aims achieved by a different method. In President Premadasa's case, it was all a part of his populism, something of the old 1956 Bandaranaike-ism what SAARC Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia called "pro-people". The rest is South Asian politics on a tiny island-scale.

There seems to be some fever in the South Asian blood that no social scientist can fully diagnose nor any statesman cure. This may explain why the imaginative writer rather than the dry, proper academic seems to have a surer grasp of the dark forces unleashed by nationalistic, racial and religious conflict. As Ryszard Kapuscinski observes in a comment on the latest book on the Sri Lankan crisis, William McGowan's ONLY MAN IS VILE, it is "a deep and harrowing portrait of the Asian drama... the world which we may live in if the commonsense, rationality and high human values do not prevail."

Long before he ventured into national

politics, Premadasa seems to have found an anchor in Buddhist precept. To the very end, nonetheless, he retained something of the natural aggression of the "outsider". Caste made him so.

A distinguished prime minister of India and his political party regarded caste important enough an issue to be given high priority in the electoral agenda. That could not happen in Sri Lanka, the *dhammadeepa*, the island of the doctrine, the Buddha's rational, humane teachings "banished" from its birthplace. The Sri Lankans are the 'chosen people', the carefully selected custodians of the *dhamma* preached by the Enlightened one. Man is judged by his actions.

And yet caste exists, a subterranean force, often assuming subtler forms and deceptive guises. But the myth of its non-existence is sustained by some quaint conversational habits. Alphabetical games, for instance. "Is he actually G?" "I really don't know but his mother is definitely K?" "G" is an easily decipherable "code" for *goigama*. Meaning farmer, the largest of course in an primarily agricultural society. "K" stands for "karava" the fishing community. Mr. Premadasa was neither.

Since democracy is a numbers game, the caste composition of any constituency was logically an important consideration in the choice of a party candidate in the island's highly competitive and lively electoral politics.

With the obvious exception of Mrs Sirima Bandaranaike, a product of St Bridgets Convent, Colombo, an elite Catholic school, the prime ministers including Mr. J.R. Jayawardene, later president, came from two schools — Royal College and St. Thomas's College, Colombo. Not Mr. Premadasa. Did Premadasa study at St. Joseph's College Colombo, the male counterpart of St. Bridgets. Much investigative journalism, supported by some semi-academic research, was deployed to prove that Premadasa was a fraud who had never known the portals of St. Joseph's College. His funeral procession however was proudly led by the sixth formers of St. Josephs. Though trivial, these biographical details are useful in understanding what seemed his natural aggression, and often abrasive personality.

Caste has been a stronger formative force of modern Sri Lankan politics than class. It is certainly one explanation for the dismal failure of the Marxist left. Before

independence (1948) and certainly in the first two (2) post-independence decades the Marxist "left" not only controlled the trade unions but dominated the intellectual debate and contributed most to the national political agenda. But history, with some help from the farsighted British, chose to cheat the Marxists.

Once the British withdrawal from India had become inevitable, there was no further need for Ceylon, except for Trincomalee and some defence facilities. It was characteristic of the British to make their necessary withdrawal look like a reward for the good behaviour of the "model colony". The nationalist movement became a post-independence rather pre-independence phenomenon. And as usual, a subjective factor reinforced the objective need. When Mr. Solomon West Ridgway Dias Bandaranaike, Prime Minister (D.S. Senanayake's loyal deputy) realised that "the old man" had his son, Dudley, in mind as a successor, Bandaranaike quite the UNP and formed his own Sri Lanka Freedom Party. SWRD thought he did not do too well at the 1952 polls but he did better than the established Marxist left. Just four years later he trounced the mighty UNP. He preceded a heady policy cocktail from an anti-colonial, Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism, a welfarist radicalism, and a dynamic nonaligned. From the Marxists, he borrowed many ideas, nationalisation most of all. But by making Sinhala the only official language, he unwittingly planted a time-bomb with a surprisingly short fuse.

The young Premadasa, an early admirer of Bandaranaike and of the labour leader, A.E. Goonesingha, was smart enough to learn from both and borrow ideas selectively. Born in suburban Colombo, he grew up in a district which had many communities — Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims, Dutch Barghers, Malayalees, Buddhists, Christians and Hindus. The environment as well as the electoral demands of such a mixed constituency fashioned his thinking. Besides he was a "minority" constituent too, caste-wise. Long before "multi-ethnic" and pluralism and the nature of the Sri Lankan "polity" had entered the Sri Lankan discourse, he knew what it meant. Hence the praise that was showered on him at his funeral.

The two anti-systemic movements which ravaged the island, threatening both the State and the country's territorial integrity have underlined the role of caste and its mobilising power. The leadership of the JVP (peoples liberation front) which took to arms in 1971 (seventy one) was non-*goigama*. With a brave but naive,

romantic adventurism, they raised the banner of Che Guervara but beneath it was a gut-hate of the *goigama* dominated ruling elite. And this elite included not just the rightwing UNP. The government was a coalition led by Mrs Bandaranaike and the two main Marxist parties, the (Trotskyist) LSSP and the pro-Soviet CP.

The JVP theoreticians (Wijeweera had studied at Lumumba) spoke of "class struggle" but it was obvious that they had identified the enemy as the Westernised *goigama* elite. In that sense Mr. Prabhakaran was the other side of the same ideological coin. His foe, initially, was not the Sinhala state but the English-educated *vellala* (upper caste) federal party. The first important victim was the English-educated Mayor of Jaffna.

When the JVP re-emerged in the late eighties (80's) its battle-cry was anti-Indian. The presence of the IPKF after the India-Sri Lanka Peace Accord, a Jayawardene initiative which Prime Minister Premadasa opposed, found the JVP re-emerge as Sinhala-Buddhist patriots, branded Pol Pottists by the major Marxist parties.

JVP-LTTE

The JVP reign of terror was answered by a ferocious counter-terror that just about created conditions for presidential polls. The astute Jayawardene did not repeat not hesitate to nominate Premadasa. It left National Security Minister, Lalith Athulathmudali and the Lands Minister Gamini Dissanayake utterly dejected. They were true representatives of the upper-class professional class which had always determined UNP policy. But Jayawardene knew what he was doing. On anti-elitism and Sinhala-Buddhist patriotism (Premadasa criticised the 'accord' in the name of national sovereignty) the JVP could not repeat outmanoeuvre Premadasa. He defeated Mrs. Bandaranaike, crushed the JVP and found Mr. V.P. Singh responsive to his demand for the phased pull-out of Indian troops. The UNP also won the parliamentary polls.

Instinctively, Mr. Premadasa seems to have concluded that the LTTE was only a Tamil JVP. His quasi-alliance based on a mutual hostility to the IPKF (and "big brother" India) was founded on a grievous (and now tragic) misreading of the LTTE mind. SAARC gave him an arena where he could an arena larger than the Sri Lankan where he could display his strengths — boundless energy, project-oriented hard work, SAARC and Mr. Narasingha Rao opened the way to

qualitative improvement in Indo-Sri Lankan relations.

The disappointed duo, Mr. Athulathmudali and Mr. Dissanayake masterminded an impeachment plot which proved abortive. President Premadasa reminded this writer of the Sinhala cook who flavours the rice with a leaf called *rampay*. Once it is ready, the *rampay* is thrown away. He was in no mood, he assured me, to play the part of the *rampay*. Beated, Messrs Athulathmudali and Dissanayake formed the DUNF, a third force. With the assassination of Athulathmudali (the LTTE is also a suspect) the DUNF's fortunes are poorer, the only winner is the LTTE.

Mr. Anura Bandaranaike has drawn the right lesson. If the culture of the gun is not eradicated, the very existence of democracy and the nation are at stake. So says Vaclav Havel in his statement calling for a "world wide struggle against terrorism in all its forms". But it is the SAARC Chairperson conveyed the correct message. "Let us join hands in combatting mindless violence and senseless terrorism". On the terrain of ethnic and other conflicts, terrorism grows easily but its success has much to do with inter-state tensions, with each regime advancing its own interests, often using terrorism or terrorists as instruments of policy. The murder of Rajiv Gandhi and Premadasa demonstrates that it is the third force, weakest in the conventional sense, that gains the most.

Sri Lanka Identified As An Emerging Market

In a major study of Asia's investment prospects Sri Lanka has been identified as an emerging market. China, Hong Kong and South Korea are viewed as the most important markets in Asia for long-term investment, according to a survey by Euro-money*. Vietnam was named as newly-emerging market with the most exciting long-term potential.

Within Asia, the survey revealed that investors allocated 84.5 per cent in the developed markets — Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand — and 15.43 per cent in emerging markets, such as Bangladesh, China, Indonesia, Taiwan, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, South Korea, and the Philippines. Some 0.07 per cent was placed in "dormant or incubating" markets which include Brunei, Macau, Papua New Guinea, Vietnam, Bhutan, Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar.

* Asian Investment Survey 1993, Euromoney Publications, Nestor House, Playhouse Yard, London EC4V 5EX: 890.

Murders Set to Bring Passions to the Boil

Stefan Wagstyl and Mervyn de Silva

In his last speech before being killed by a terrorist bomb at the weekend, the late President Ranasinghe Premadasa of Sri Lanka issued a grim challenge to his political enemies: "Assassinate me by whatever means but please do not assassinate my character".

Such is the violent nature of Sri Lankan politics that the president's fatal wish was fulfilled during a May Day parade last Saturday. A tough streetfighting populist, who preferred village life to mixing with the elite of Colombo, Mr Premadasa died, as he had lived, milling with a crowd.

The president was assassinated by a suicide bomber just over a week after one of his main political rivals, Mr Lalith Athulathmudali, was shot dead at an election rally.

The prime suspects for both killings are the Tamil Tigers, the common name for the LTTE separatist movement which has been fighting for more than a decade for a home land in northern Sri Lanka for the minority Tamil community, in defiance of the majority Sinhalese.

Although the LTTE has denied responsibility, police say the evidence seems to point to the Tigers.

Whether or not the Tigers were responsible, the assassinations raise serious questions about Sri Lanka's future political stability. If violence spreads it could undermine the hard-won economic success that has made Sri Lanka's living standards the envy of other developing nations.

A crucial test will be how Sri Lankans behave on Thursday at the president's public funeral in Colombo and at provincial assembly elections due later this month.

As Mr Gamini Dissanayake, a close associate of Mr Athulathmudali, says: "The assassination of both the president and Mr Athulathmudali add up to a national crisis. It sends entirely the wrong

signals to the world".

Much will depend on how Sri Lanka's politicians react. Mr Premadasa was an authoritarian ruler whose departure leaves a vacuum at the top of the ruling UNP party.

He came from a poor background and was regarded as an outsider by the political elite, such as Mr Athulathmudali, a former president of the Oxford Union. But the UNP could not afford to do without Mr Premadasa's rapport with the island's rural masses.

Mr Premadasa became president in 1988 at a low point in the UNP's fortunes, just after the signing of an unpopular agreement with India which let India put 60,000 troops into Sri Lanka to try to tame the Tamil Tigers. Many Sinhalese showed their resentment by supporting an armed nationalist insurgency. Mr Premadasa was judged by UNP chiefs to be the only man to win back the disaffected Sinhalese.

He largely succeeded, primarily by securing departure of the Indian troops, though also with some tough repressive measures against the insurgents. He also gave strong impetus to a long-running economic reform programme.

He pushed ahead with privatisation, cut import tariffs and overhauled the financial markets in a bold effort to open Sri Lanka to domestic competition and foreign investment.

The economy grew at an average annual rate of 5 percent in the three years to 1992—a creditable achievement given the cost of the war against the LTTE. Foreign investment soared from under \$ 50m (£ 32.4m) a year in the mid-1980s to around \$ 200m last year.

However, the price of success was a revolt in the UNP, led by Mr Athulathmudali, who led a breakaway group which tried

to impeach Mr Premadasa. They failed last year, resigned their seats to create a new party, the DUNF, which claimed to be the true inheritor of UNP ideals.

The split left the way open for a revival in the fortunes of an alliance of socialist opposition parties headed by the SLFP, led by the veteran former prime minister, Mrs Sirima Bandaranaike, matriarch of a leading political family whose own husband had also been murdered when prime minister (in 1959).

A month ago, Mrs Bandaranaike was poised to do well in the forthcoming provincial election. Then, Mr Athulathmudali's death created sympathy for the DUNF. Now, the ruling UNP hopes for a boost.

In Colombo, white flags, signs of mourning for the president, fluttered around many buildings; but earlier, fire-crackers had been set off in some districts to celebrate his departure.

A senior government official said the UNP had rallied around Mr D B Wijetunga, the acting president. He said Mr Wijetunga would now have little difficulty securing a parliamentary majority allowing him to stay in office until the end of Mr Premadasa's term in December, 1994.

Whether or not they carried out the killings, the LTTE could profit from the confusion. A caretaker government is unlikely to give as strong leadership to the fight against the Tamils as Mr Premadasa. Also, Mr Premadasa advocated a two-prong policy of armed action coupled with tentative efforts at political dialogue.

The senior official said the new government may now face a backlash from Sinhalese demanding revenge against the Tigers. Such demand could play into the LTTE's hands by reviving international concern about the Tamils—not least from India.

Financial Times

Death Strikes a Steely President

Jefferson Penberthy

In the conflict over Sri Lanka. The suicide bomber has become a grisly artisan of terror. Knowing that, President Ranasinghe Premadasa had many bodyguards, as always, at a May Day march last Saturday in a northern neighborhood of Colombo, the capital. But they were of no avail in preventing a human bomb from penetrating the security cordon. A huge explosion followed. So chaotic and grim was the scene, with parts of bodies blown all over the Armours Street Junction, that for a time no one was sure whether Premadasa, 68, was among them. First reports had him whisked away to home or to a hospital. Then, hours later, the dark truth: "The President's entire staff are dead. He is no more", announced a shaken presidential aide, Evans Cooray, whose own life had been saved when he moved away from the noisy procession to take a mobile telephone call. The impact of the blast was so large that it had taken more than two hours for the President's personal physician to identify what was left of Premadasa's body.

At least 17 people were killed, and scores were injured. "The place was a shambles. There were arms, limbs and human flesh all over the place", said Sydney Chandrasena, a television producer at the scene. Exactly what had happened was not immediately clear. Some

eyewitnesses said a man on a bicycle carrying a portable radio rode up to Premadasa and his staff as the President prepared to greet the march. Others reported that a motorcyclist with explosives strapped to his body crashed into the group.

Colombo police were sure of one thing, however: the killing was the work of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, the Tamil guerrilla army that has fought a savage 10 year separatist war in the north eastern provinces of the island. The modus operandi was that of a fanatic L.T.T.E. suicide squad known as the Black Tigers. In 1991 a woman L.T.T.E. suicide bomber, Dhanu, killed former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi at an election rally near Madras, out of fear that he could again involve India in the Sri Lankan war. On the teardrop island itself, suicide bombings have become frequent. Among many: in 1991 a car bomb wrecked the country's joint operations command headquarters in Colombo, killing 20, and last November a motorcyclist's bomb killed the Sri Lankan navy chief, Admiral Clarence Fernando, near the military headquarters. As usual, the L.T.T.E. quickly denied involvement in last week's killing.

"The government blames the L.T.T.E.

for everything", said Paris-based spokesman Lawrence Thilakar. "But Premadasa had enemies everywhere".

Hours after Premadasa's death, Dingiri Banda Wijetunga, 71, the ruling United National Party's unassuming Prime Minister, was sworn in as acting President, and a 16-hour curfew was clamped on the entire island to curb further mayhem. Public reactions to Premadasa's death were mixed. Some celebrated the news by setting off fireworks in parts of Colombo and particularly in the south of the country, where government death squads in 1989 had mercilessly put down a rebellion led by the People's Liberation Front (J.V.P.), a Sinhalese extremist group opposed to India's involvement in the nation's affairs.

The President's killing came just eight days after the assassination of his former party rival and opponent, Lalith Athulathudali, a popular Oxford-educated lawyer who since 1991 had led the breakaway Democratic United National Front. Athulathudali, 57, was shot five times in the stomach and chest by an unidentified gunman at a local election rally at Kirulapona on the eastern outskirts of Colombo. While the government blamed his death also on the Tigers, D.U.N.F. officials had accused Premadasa of involvement, leading to political unrest in the capital.

Time

A Hole in Sri Lanka

Weak countries need strong leaders to hold them together, and strong leaders leave large holes when they leave their jobs. So Sri Lanka, after the assassination of its president, Ranasinghe Premadasa, on May 1st, is a weak country with a big empty space in the middle of its government. This is a dangerous position to be in.

For a city that has seen plenty of violence, Colombo was curiously calm after Mr Premadasa's death. That may be because people have got so used to killings: after the murder of Lalith Athulathudali, one of Sri Lanka's two main opposition leaders, on April 23rd, the assassination of the president who some suspected of involvement in his rival's killing was no great surprise. And there is, as yet, nobody clearly to blame. The police have indicated that they believe the Tamil Tigers were responsible for the bomb, but people

are sceptical: Mr Premadasa was the closest thing the Tigers had to a political friend. Still, Tamil shops in some areas closed. Memories of the 1983 riots, when thousands of Tamils were butchered in Colombo, are lively.

Mr Premadasa's five years in office have left Sri Lanka with a taste of the best and the worst that it can do. The south and west of the island have prospered. Liberal economic policies, including deregulation of trade, financial services, and privatisation, have created a flourishing zone of small industries — clothes-making, shoes, toys — of just the sort that a poor country needs. In the past two years, tourism, the country's single biggest earner, has revived.

The east and the north, where most of the Tamils live, are a different country. Violence has blighted the economy. Five years ago the northern peninsula, Jaffna,

used to be a cosy place, with neatly kept houses and well-maintained streets. Now the Tamil Tigers run a totalitarian state, blockaded by troops, without electricity, running water or sewers, and often short of food.

In the past decade of war, terrorists and soldiers have killed tens of thousands of civilians. About 500,000 Sri Lankans, out of a population of 17m, are reckoned to have left the country because of the war. But over time Mr Premadasa's approach to the problem changed: foreign pressure and the failure of the military solution to terrorism combined to persuade him that the army needed to be discouraged from indiscriminate killing. According to human-rights workers, the number of people disappearing has dropped from 6,000 a year in 1989 to around 60 last year.

Mr Premadasa tried to close the gap between Sinhalese and Tamils. He reve-

rsed some of the laws on language and education which discriminated against Tamils, and took to visiting some of the Tamils' Hindu temples, even attempting the odd public statement in Tamil. He set up a select committee with the job of trying to devise a political settlement to the problem of Tamil separatism; but it got nowhere.

The government has been quick to say that it plans to continue the economic policies that have pleased businessmen and kept the country relatively well-off. But Mr Premadasa's approach to the Tamil question is less likely to be followed. His belief that compromise might be possible and necessary had few followers in the ruling United National Party (UNP).

It did not bother Mr Premadasa that he was disliked by most politicians, including many in his own party. He paid little attention to his cabinet, taking most decisions by himself and keeping ministers in ignorance. Most colleagues of any stature were forced out of the party or left of their own accord-like Lalith Athulathmudali, once a UNP national-security minister, who tried to impeach Mr Premadasa.

As a result, the UNP, which has run Sri Lanka since 1977, is weak and demoralised. Mr Premadasa had groomed no successor. Dingiri Banda Wijetunga, who has been appointed acting president and will probably get the job permanently because the UNP has enough votes in parliament to secure it for him, is an unassuming 71-year-old compromise candidate. (It may, however, be worth remembering that Indira Gandhi became prime minister of India as a compromise candidate who others thought they could manipulate.)

Sri Lankans, who have lost two of their three main political leaders within eight days, will be asked their opinion of the remaining politicians at provincial elections on May 17th. A presidential election is due next year, and parliamentary ones in 1995.

The persistence of elections is perhaps odd. Democracy might be expected to collapse under such pressure. But Sri Lanka, which held its first general election with universal suffrage under the British in 1931, has stuck doggedly to the system.

Perhaps it is because Sri Lanka's politicians have, in the past, been people of some stature, and the army used to be kept small. But the army has more than quadrupled in size during the war, from 26,000 in 1982 to 112,000 in 1992, and at least within the UNP, the stature of the politicians has shrunk. Probably some politician or party will grow to fill the hole that Mr Premadasa has left. But if the chaos continues, the attitude of the army will be worth watching.

Economist

Did the Tigers Stalk Him?

It took a full half hour for the Government and the police to realise that President Premadasa was no more, since none of his security personnel was to be seen in the vicinity of the explosion that shook Central Colombo that black Saturday.

The first premise was that Premadasa had been escorted out safely from the site. The then Prime Minister, Mr. D.B. Wijetunga, and other Ministers were in different segments of the May Day procession.

When the police could not trace Premadasa anywhere, they immediately alerted the then Industries Minister and Cabinet spokesman, Mr. Ranil Wickeramasinghe, who was at the head of the procession, which was continued for quite some time after the assassination.

Mr. Wickeramasinghe took a Rupavahini vehicle nearby to the Defence Ministry office to monitor the situation. A quick contact with all the hospitals and the President's residence made it worse, because Premadasa had not reached anywhere. Then came the realisation.

All the Presidential bodyguards and aides along with Premadasa had been wiped out in the explosion set off by a suicide bomber riding a bicycle. The President's body was not immediately identified. Only at the morgue could they identify his nose, the watch and ring — to confirm the lurking suspicion.

Mr. Wickeramasinghe thought quickly and wisely too. Orders went out to send commandos to isolate the Prime Minister and escort him safely to the Presidential Secretariat.

Mrs. Hema Premadasa was away in Kandy and a helicopter was rushed to bring her back at once and then break the news to her. Curfew was clamped throughout Sri Lanka and Mr. Wijetunga sworn in the acting President, as per the Constitution.

There were striking similarities between the assassinations of the former Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, and the Sri Lankan President, Premadasa. Both were carried out with precision by "human bombs" and had the limited effect of wiping out the immediate circle around the targets, who were unfortunately sitting ducks trying to be with the people they loved.

By a strange coincidence, Ranasinghe Premadasa's last public meeting, an election rally, was in suburban Kirillapone on

Friday night. Exactly a week before, the Opposition leader, Lalith Athulathmudali, was gunned down by another assassin in the same suburb. This again reminds one of both Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi's farewell visits to Orissa before meeting with their end.

Like Indira Gandhi's emotional speech pledging to shed her last drop of blood for the country, Premadasa told the Kirillapone audience: "Assassinate me by whatever means, but please do not assassinate my character — an asset I have treasured from childhood."

Premadasa was not believed to be on the LTTE hitlist, only because the Tigers knew he was their only hope to return to the negotiating table anytime they want. But even after Lalith's assassination, he would not take the security precautions his officers prescribed. He had to be in the middle of the road, with his people and that too in his own Central Colombo constituency — where he imagined he was safe.

Little did he realise that the assassin, believed to be a Tamil Tiger, though not confirmed, moved very freely for two years in and around his 'Sucharita' residence, cultivating the contacts and waiting for the right time to strike. He had worked his way to contacts within the President's residence to gain confidence and information. And struck a deadly blow on May Day, strapped with explosives on his waist.

Somewhere down the line, his unwritten understanding with the Tigers had snapped. In a characteristic manner the decision to get rid of him had been taken well over two years ago. The assassin had been selected, acclimatised and allowed to integrate in the atmosphere and then the date must have been set. The police confess that the slain President could have been an easy target any time, any day.

Though the investigations are proceeding cautiously, sources say the only motive could have been to destabilise the country and the Government, eliminate many political leaders, create anarchy and then bargain.

It requires a measured and mature response on both the security and the political fronts, without confusing the terrorist menace with the ethnic issue and restore order and peace in Sri Lanka.

V.J.

A Smooth Transition in the Island

V. Jayanth

A politically tall leader, with an authoritarian grip over Sri Lanka, gaining in regional and international stature, has been eliminated. The President, Ranasinghe Premadasa, fresh from basking in SAARC's glory and waiting to test his popularity through the Provincial Council elections, was assassinated by a suicide bomber while organising his United National Party's (UNP) May Day rally.

Two quick assassinations in a matter of eight days have robbed Sri Lanka of two towering leaders — Premadasa and his arch rival, Lalith Athulathmudali.

The Sri Lankan police appear to be in no hurry to identify the assassin, though they are convinced it is yet another deadly blow inflicted by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

Mrs. Hema Premadasa, widow of the assassinated President, vowed at his funeral to serve the people and continue to work for his ideals and policies. "My future and that of my children lies in your hands," she told the international audience and the mourners. Though she may not jump into the fray right now, Mrs. Premadasa has made it clear to the UNP that she has to be accommodated in the future scheme of things. To Premadasa's supporters, this must be a shot in the arm.

Transition, a peaceful funeral and prevention of a possible backlash were the priorities of the interim administration under the acting President, Mr. D.B. Wijetunga. Every effort was made to achieve these objectives.

Much to the disappointment of the Opposition parties, the ruling UNP managed the transition very smoothly and effectively, rallying behind the non-controversial, soft-spoken but grossly underestimated the then Prime Minister, Mr. Wijetunga.

The country's Parliament subsequently elected Mr. Wijetunga as the President, in which office he will continue till January 2, 1995, when the term of Premadasa was to end.

By making the election through Parliament, as provided for in the Constitution, unanimous, the Opposition parties too have displayed a spirit of understanding and cooperation at this hour of crisis.

Such a response at this juncture sets the tone for a healthy and constructive dialogue between the Government and

the Opposition — something that was lacking and considered impossible under the dynamic, but strong and controversial leadership of Mr. Premadasa.

There is a sudden feeling of openness, fresh air and room for compromise or consensus on the political horizon. One of the Opposition leaders, Mr. Anura Bandaranaike, set the pace for a new effort to launch a consultative and concerted approach to end the problem of violence in Sri Lanka. This comes in the wake of the realisation that the cult of violence should be ended and the image of the island abroad resurrected.

A similar offer came from the Democratic United National Front (DUNF) leader, Mr. Gamini Dissanayake — a former UNP Minister himself, turned rebel. But he wanted the initiative to come from his erstwhile colleagues.

The President, Mr. Wijetunga, is ready to reach out his hand in cooperation. But it may take some time for a political reconciliation to take place, especially between the UNP and the DUNF. The former President, Mr. J.R. Jayewardene, has rushed back from New Delhi, and could provide a behind-the-scenes healing touch.

Soon after assuming office as President, Mr. Wijetunga appointed the Industries Minister and Cabinet spokesman, Mr. Ranil Wickeramasinghe, as the Prime Minister. Mr. Wijetunga has retained the same team of 22 Cabinet Ministers with the same portfolios they held under Premadasa.

From an omni present President who wielded all the powers, the new administration is expected to decentralise in the real sense and make the Cabinet Ministers more independent, effective and functional. Premadasa held key portfolios such as Defence, Policy Planning, Higher Education and a few others, while Mr. Wijetunga, as the Prime Minister, was in charge of Finance and Labour to name just two. Indications are that a new Finance Minister will have to be named with a fresh thrust on Foreign Affairs as well. Defence and Security assume special significance in an atmosphere vitiated by two successive assassinations.

There is also this eagerness to signal the continuity in policies and programmes of Premadasa, at least for the next 18 months. To keep the economy going,

attract and retain the foreign investments that were coming in, the new Government will have to launch a renewed political and foreign affairs thrust to reassure the nation and the international community that Sri Lanka has the resilience and strength to overcome this setback and continue with its policies.

When the pressure from foreign donors and financial institutions was increasing on Premadasa himself to find a solution to the ethnic issue and end the war in the North-East, Mr. Wijetunga will be under greater stress from all these sources.

Without losing time or worrying about the political consequences, the Wijetunga Government will have to sit together with the Opposition parties and the minority groups to hammer out an early and acceptable political solution to the ethnic tussle. Whether or not the LTTE enters the negotiations process, a political package to meet the legitimate aspirations of the Tamils, Muslims and Sinhalese in the North-East, will have to be evolved and implemented within a time span.

But the first and daunting hurdle ahead seems to be the Provincial Council elections, scheduled for May 17. Strangely, all parties want to go ahead with this poll, because it could provide the real support base of each of them in the present political scenario where two major contenders for the mantle have been eliminated.

Once the results of these polls come in and the relative strengths and weaknesses of the political parties are clear, there could be a pragmatic approach to reconciliation. This naturally entails the strengthening of the democratic process and the institutions, including Parliament.

Whatever the policies of the Government in power, for which they receive a mandate, the need of the hour and the demand from all parties seems to be for a more democratic, less totalitarian system of governance.

The first few months could be crucial for the new Government and Mr. Wijetunga and his Cabinet will have to impress the people and the world about their ability to carry on. Their performance will decide whether they can earn a fresh mandate from the people next year or lose out to the Opposition. Their future is in their hands and the hope lies in the fact that they realise this.

Hindu

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Shan, the Long March and Eelam

Dayan Jayatilke

But a revolutionary movement required above all, a correct revolutionary theory. That in itself is no guarantee of success, but is a prerequisite. And Shan's dogmatic adherence to the strategy of the New Democratic Revolution in a social formation in which the national bourgeoisie had become hegemonic as far back as 1956, deprived his party of this most vital of all preconditions for successful praxis. Being an eclectic and a semi-plagiarist (so quintessentially Sinhala) Wijeweera intuitively grasped the nature of the Lankan social formation and the state of the Lankan Revolution more correctly than Shan. Linking that understanding to rancorous social resentment and Sinhala ethnic prejudice, he spawned in a paroxysm of paranoid rage, a movement that pushed Shan's far behind.

Perhaps it was uneven development which made it impossible to keep the various sectors of Shan's party together. Perhaps it was the 60's. Or because he was middle class, middle aged and English speaking, while his followers were not. Or because he was blessed with too happy a family life. Or perhaps it's the destiny of every rational, radical but uncreative Marxist party, such as Shan's was, to be but the midwife of every dependent society pregnant with its malevolent, marginalised offspring. Or may be he failed because he was a Tamil in a racist society.

Shan made two attempts at rectification. At the Party Congress in '68 and after his release from Sirima Bandaranaike's jail in 1972. The first was organizational and the second political. But they were in the wrong sequence and too late. The publication of his essays penned in prison provided a renewal of recognition and a degree of intellectual influence. That his writings, eminently readable but rather basic, constituted a literary labour unsurpassed by the Lankan Left leadership, is a sharp indictment of that leadership itself.

Shan's political destiny was part of the involution and implosion of Maoism. Briefly rehabilitated when The Four were in ascendancy in 1976, the third and permanent coming of Deng Hsiao Peng saw the final parting of the ways between Shan and the Chinese Communists. When Enver Hoxha who had fired the first shot against Krushchevism — even before the Chinese party — correctly concluded

(though not without a large streak of sectarianism and dogmatism) that Mao and not just Deng was in error, Shan consistent and faithful as ever, took up cudgels against Tirana. From then on his faith had no repository in a ruling Communist Party. It found an abode in the grouping called the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement (RIM) the most serious thing about which was its relationship with the Peruvian Sendero Luminoso. It's perhaps unsurprising that Shan did not long survive the disgraceful capture and puerile exhibitionist antics in custody, of Abimael Guzman.

Locally, the sporadic attempts by Shan and that most sincere and exemplary of old revolutionaries, comrade Wimalapala (K.V. de Silva), to reunify 'Marxists-Leninists,' failed, not only because of the machinations of mannikin Machiavellis but also because the prodigals who returned home were not immune to the old temptation of political parricide. If the Bible had Lankan origins it would have read "In the beginning was the Ego". Long before feminism, in Sri Lanka the personal was always the political.

Shan was more pedagogue and polemicist than theoretician. He did more to popularize the fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism than did any other Lankan Left leader. One of his greatest merits was his uncompromising and unremitting ideological struggle against Trotskyism, reformism, modern revisionism and the JVP (which he had undying suspicion and contempt for and which categorised in his memoirs as "communal and semi-fascist"). No Trotskyist, in this, the traditional homeland of Third World Trotskyism, ever got the better of him in a polemic — or came even close. He flattened them all. As for the 'Cotta Road Clique', as Shan scornfully termed the pro-Soviet CP, they never dared to debate him, contenting themselves with meaningful asides about the publicity he received from the bourgeois Lake House press and insidious mutterings about his ethnicity. The 'Masala Vadai' line, was the C.P.S.L's and *Aththa's* 'ideological' response to Shan's anti-revisionist rebellion.

Ideologically, Shan's weakness was a blinkered fundamentalism. Fidel, who today guards the pass at Thermopylae, and Che, whose purity will never cease to inspire at the same time that it shames

us, he turned permanently hostile to, after an initial sympathy in 1964. He had nothing but scepticism, verging on contempt, for Latin American revolutionaries. Gramsci of the diamond intellect, he was dismissive of, while Althusser (without whose distinction between 'ideology' and 'theory' one cannot accurately situate Shan) and Poulantzas counted for nothing. Even Dimitrov's landmark speech in 1935 to the Seventh Congress of the Comintern, which gave the anti fascist Resistance an invaluable strategic perspective, was regarded unenthusiastically by Shan as containing the seeds of revisionism. Marxism-Leninism-Maoistse Tung Thought was to him a closed, self-sufficient system — a catechism of certainties.

Shan's ironclad ideology protected him against a crisis of faith, and the collapse of the USSR probably burnished it, but it falls far short of the Jesuitical theoretical sophistication needed today, to spearhead the Marxist Counter Reformation, globally. Shan had the faith and the denunciatory fire of a John the Baptist, but today the world movement has need of an Ignatius Loyola.

The last decade of Shan's life spanned the most eventful, traumatic and blood drenched years of this century, for our country. Blighted by a multiplicity of illnesses (the cure for one which was often incompatible with another) Shan displayed the stoic fortitude of the true Communist. Rendered increasingly inactive by physical debility, Shan reacted to the cascading horror the only way he could — by writing, and later, dictating, his thoughts. These appeared as articles in the 'Lanka Guardian' and 'Race & Class' and of course, in his autobiography. (The writing of one should be regarded by all Left leaders as a mandatory duty and act of recompense).

Shan's place in Tamil politics and his complex relationship to the Tamil Movement is not for me, a Sinhalese, to judge or assess at length. Denying the primacy of the national contradiction and even the existence of a distinct Tamil nation at the time some of us were supporting that national liberation struggle, Shan, however, instinctively sympathised with the recourse to armed action and guerilla warfare. The shock of July 1983 confronted him with his inescapable Tamil-ness and inse-

rted it, insinuated it into (at least) the semi-periphery of his consciousness. He applauded the Tigers' struggle against an enemy of his that was older than it had been of Wijeweera's — Indian Expansionism — but he wrote repeatedly and with a note of increasing desperation against their flouting of the protocols of People's War. His attempts to ideologically intervene in and influence the Eelam struggle were never really successful. Shan, who suffered politically among the Sinhalese petty bourgeois Left for being Tamil, was to suffer politically among the newly awakened Tamils, for having been too integrated with the Sinhalese proletariat.

In Jaffna, Shan's Maoism had preceded the Eelam struggle, but Eelam Maoism was choked in its infancy. Vishvanandadevan ("Chutta"), its most dedicated and theoretically literate product and founder of the NLFT, disappeared at the hands of the Navy — another friend we've lost along the twisting way. T. Santhathiyar of PLOTE, abducted and killed by Muhundan's murderous thugs, EROS leader V. Balakumar, whom I last met in Shan's home in 1990, now tailing behind the Tiger, in the hope of outliving it.

Despite twenty years of Prabhakaran's armed struggle, the extent of territory 'liberated' remains unimpressively modest by comparative international standards and the water, the populace, is flowing away from the fish. When Prabhakaran finally fails, the myriad reasons for this will be condensable into one — he ignored the iron laws of Peoples War, as urged upon him by Shan. He should have had more respect for a man, who had met Mao, the colossus of protracted guerilla warfare in the 20th century.

And now, some words of personal gratitude, the inadequacy of which is unredeemed by the awareness of it, for the Little Red Book, the Selected Works of Mao, the polished bamboo badge, the Mao tunics — all sent through his friend, my father, or gruffly gifted at our house on his return from his many trips to China. But most of all, a debt of gratitude which could not be publicly acknowledged during his life time, for such are the rules of the game, observed by anyone but a dilettante: thanks for the months of shelter and support during my subterranean years.

From the low-voiced nighttime conversations of those months then, a single phrase of self description uttered after a pause, by Shan, which remains for me, his self definition and self-portrait: "In matters of ideology, I am a Brahmin".

Non Entits Tale

Part III

*Our Hero soon found the Caliphate
Wasn't that Omni Potentate
And he had been rather naive to think
Freed price was free to rise and sink*

*The Multi-King was Banjo-Suisse
Who puppeted price to rise and rise
Prompt now allegiance moved to Banjos
Made over Condensaries, Spray-Plants and Ranchos
In a lightning exercise
In retrn, he said, for Expertise
The Expertise was somewhat moot
As Hoof and Mouth soon claimed Horn and Hoof
May be this was just what Banjo wanted
As from their Empire, they Suisse-Spray imported*

*While on TV their Milk Maids teased
Local cows not yet diseased
The Caliphate in a Press-Release
Said the Stock Market bouyed on Banjo-Suisse*

*The Scarecrows with their village herd
Waited sad eyed till their milk was curd
May be Bio-Tech from Banjo-Suisse
Will compost the curd for Bondo-Teas
Come back in triumph to their highland Glen
Hitting the trail with the World Bank men*

*Having privatised the Public Fate
Sensing a Fate worse than Death awaits
Our Heros in their ravaged land
Banjo, Bondo, and the World Bank band
Rally forth and give them a hand
To a distant Global Strand*

*Lets hope they lay their sainted bones
Across the seas and far from home
So that in the fulfilled Triple Grace
Of Third World Myth they take their place
Having displayed their Triple Style
To us natives Rank and File
Yokels, we are left to grudge
Why Want and Hunger will not budge*

*Thus ends the Tale of the Old School Tie
Banjo, Bondo and the World Bank Guy
Now we down our Harp lest a Royalty
They levy for starring in our Minstrelsy*

U. Karunatilake

Delusions of Grandeur

Arden

When Alexander Borgla was elected Pope he said "Now that we have the papacy let us proceed to enjoy it". J.R. Jayewardene, at last prime minister after 35 years in the wings, said "I have climbed the greasy pole" (echoing Disraeli's jubilant exclamation when he became prime minister of Britain). His euphoria was unbounded and delusions of grandeur soon assailed him. On his 71st birthday, which was a few weeks after he was sworn in, he declared a general amnesty for prisoners, a prerogative of ruling monarchs, not customarily available to elected politicians temporarily in office. Soon it became obvious that his obsession with identifying himself with royalty was an *idée fixe*!

The constitution was amended making the incumbent prime minister the president and executive head of the government. It was enacted that wherever in any statute the words "prime minister" occurred the word "president" should be read. He was going to eat his presidential cake while continuing to hold on to his prime ministerial one. It was also provided for the executive president to hold ministerial rank and administer departments like any ordinary cabinet minister. The executive presidency was a hotchpotch institution tailored to the personal idiosyncracies and ambitions of Jayewardene.

The president revived a custom of the ancient kings of Sri Lanka of participating in a paddy cultivation ceremony known as the vap magula. This was to become a regular feature in his official life.

A resplendent uniform of red and black was designed for the guards at the presidential palace. A SUN reporter took a picture of brassware worn by these guards which bore the letters ER, obviously left over from pre-republic days. The SUN carried the picture causing public amusement. The Daily News published Jayewardene's comment: "The letters should really have been JR for Junius Rex". He was not really joking.

A rupee coin was minted and put into circulation with Jayewardene's head on it. Pretty heady stuff for an elected politician while still in office. At the army tattoo in the Anuradhapura Stadium, he was reported

to have said: "I am a king all right, with all the powers of a king, but I shall never exercise these powers". (The government-owned Daily Mirror of 16 October 1978). The same paper on 17 October carried a correction. What he had really said was: "parliament has given me the powers of a king, but I am not a king". He protested too much. His kingly powers existed only in his imagination.

Many years later, at the Commonwealth Summit held in October 1985 in Nassau, he is still on the theme. Addressing his bemused Commonwealth colleagues he said:

"Our recorded history is ancient, and goes back in an unbroken sequence to the arrival from North India of King Vijaya in 543 B.C. There have been ruling our country since then, kings and queens of various races and dynasties — Sinhalese, Indians, Cholas and Telugu, British — Hanover and Windsor — and two Presidents, one selected in 1972 and myself, elected in 1977 and 1982, the 193rd in this long and unbroken line of heads of state, possibly the oldest of its kind and unique in the world".

(It was typical that he should have got it wrong. Since the last king before the British occupation was the 191st. Jayewardene could not cast himself as 193rd "in this long and unbroken line" unless he omitted the Hanovers and the Windsors of whom there were nine* from 1815 to 1972). While all this information was, no doubt, of unending interest to Jayewardene, his distinguished audience could hardly have failed to be distressed and embarrassed by the posturings of this vain old man.

On 20 October 1986, addressing the students of Richmond College, in Galle, we find him saying: "I am trying my best to be a just ruler (sic)". Colvin R. de Silva (whose 1972 constitution was the immediate cause of the Tamil leaders' decision to take up arms against the government)

said of the 1978 constitution that under its terms it was well-nigh impossible to get rid of an incumbent president even if he were guilty of grave misconduct or rendered incapable by physical or mental illness. "We may have to put up with not merely a bad president but even with a mad president" was the way he put it.

In his address to the 28th sessions of the U.N.P. President Jayewardene claimed he was "above both parliament and

the judiciary". (The Island 27 February 1985).

On 8 August 1984 President Jayewardene addressed a conference of the world's attorneys-general held in Colombo. On this occasion he quoted from a private letter written by Abraham Lincoln in which Lincoln said that his oath to preserve the American constitution imposed on him the duty to take even unconstitutional measures to preserve the nation. (The Island 9 August 1984).

This letter clearly had made a lasting impression on Jayewardene for, a few weeks later, addressing the Magistrates 'Courts Lawyers' Association, he referred to it again, adding that "there were occasions when in the clash of arms the laws were silent". (*silent enim leges inter arma* Cicero: Pro Milone).

During World War II in Britain Lord Atkin, in *Liversidge v. Anderson* (1942), said: "In this country, amid the clash of arms, the laws are not silent. They may be changed, but they speak the same language in war as in peace. It has always been one of the pillars of freedom, one of the principles of liberty for which we are now fighting, that the judges are no respecters of persons and stand between the subject and any attempted encroachment on his liberty by the executive, alert to see that coercive action is justified in law".

As for the "unconstitutional" step Lincoln felt obliged to take it was the suspension of *habeas corpus* at a time of crisis. In his own words:

"The constitution provides that...*habeas corpus* can only be suspended in cases of rebellion or invasion. I have decided that we have a rebellion, and I have suspended, in certain cases, the writ of *habeas corpus*. It is insisted that the

* George III (1815 — 1820) George IV 1820 — 1830 William IV (1830 —) Victoria (1837 — 1901) Edward VII (1901 — 1910) George V (1910 — 1936) Edward VIII (1936) George VI (1936 — 1952) Elizabeth II (1952 — 1972)

power to do this is invested not in me but in Congress. But the constitution is silent as to which of us is to execute this power. As Congress was not in session when rebellion endangered the city of Washington I acted as swiftly as I could to preserve the city".

(Gore Vidal: Lincoln. 1984)

In December 1985, the president was chief guest at the Royal College prize giving. He said: "All I can say is, for good or for bad, follow my example in word and deed. Where you will end I do not know, but you cannot be (sic) far from the top". (Daily News 4 December 1985).

In February 1986 he is back on the theme of his near-kingship.

Speaking at a farewell ceremony for one of his secretaries, he reminisced about his days at the bar: "H.V. Perera was there, so was L.A. Rajapakse and E.B. Wikremanayake. All of them became King's Counsel, except myself. But I became president who could make King's Counsel". (Daily News 26 February, 1986). Jayewardene could not make King's Counsel. What he could make was President's Counsel — P.C.'s. ("Polyester cotton, not silk," sneered an old-time Queen's Counsel).

Keerthisena, a fitter, was convicted of murder and was sentenced to death by the High Court of Galle on 13 September 1981. On appeal, the sentence was reduced to one of eight years imprisonment. His old father appealed to the president for clemency for him on the ground that he needed his son to look after him. The president called for a report, in the usual way, from the Minister of Justice. The report said that the prisoner had already received substantial relief and recommended that the president should not intervene. Normally such recommendations are routinely accepted. The president ordered the prisoner's immediate release. In his appeal, the prisoner's father had called the president "Our only visible God on earth". (Sunday Observer 12 April 1987).

On 31 May 1987 President Jayewardene speaking at the Biyagama Export Processing Zone Said: "For 2500 years we have held our own with the biggest countries in the world.... In 1815 we gave over our kingdom and exchanged the king of Sri Lanka for the king of Great Britain. I am the successor to that monarchy". (Daily News 2 June 1987)

The state-controlled media often referred to the president's address to parliament as "the throne speech".

THE NEW GOVERNMENT'S PRIORITIES

While the new government was being sworn in, the violence that had been building up in the Jaffna peninsula spilled over into the rest of the country and once more the Island was engulfed in ethnic violence. Unlike Jaffna Tamils, the Indian Tamils had voted for the U.N.P. in the elections. It was the Indian Tamils that got the worst of the fresh violence. The government, enjoying its post-election euphoria, was so recklessly out of touch with events in the country that it was unable to protect its Indian Tamil supporters, many thousands of whom later joined the ranks of the separatists of the north. 98 Tamils (mostly Indians) and 30 Sinhalese died in the violence.

On 18 August, almost a month after he was sworn in, Prime Minister Jayewardene addressing parliament said: "The reason for this conflict I do not know". This was a surprising enough confession from the man who had promised the electorate to solve the ethnic dispute by calling an all-party conference (a conference he never did get around to calling). But it is clear that the ethnic dispute was a subject in which Jayewardene was not greatly interested and consequently not well informed about. His lack of interest and lack of information went on too long. Thus as late as September 1981 we find him, as president, telling S. Venkat Narayan, senior editor of India Today: "These disturbances arose as a result of (sic) the murder of over 20 police officers in the Jaffna District. They were largely Sinhalese and some Tamils". (Daily News of 7 September 1981). Had he done his homework he would have known that at the time he spoke exactly 20 police officers had been killed by the terrorists of whom 13 were Tamils, 1 was a Moslem, and only 6 were Sinhalese, and that the killing of the police officers was not the reason for the conflict but one of the consequences of the 1972 constitution which, together with the disdainful refusal of the then government to dialogue with the Tamil leaders, caused them to retaliate by indoctrinating the youth of the peninsula with a deep hatred for the majority ethnic group. At the same time they started a world-wide propaganda campaign for a separate state. Albert Speer, in his book "Inside the Third Reich", relates that a few months before the war began Hitler addressing the chief editors of the German newspapers said: "Certain events should be presented in such a light that unconsciously the masses will automatically

come to the conclusion: 'If there is no way to redress the matter pleasantly, it will have to be done by force; we can't possibly let things go on this way'." The Jaffna leaders could have taken these words as their text.

The president's lack of information on the reasons for the ethnic conflict (after four years in office!) was no different from the insouciance of the previous government.

J.R. Jayewardene was sworn in as P.M. and announced his cabinet on 23 July 1977, while a 9 p.m. to 5 a.m. curfew was on in Kandy, Matale, Kegalle, Divulapitiya, Minuwangoda and Nittambuwa. There was unrest in Jaffna too but acceding to a request from Mr. Amirthalingam the P.M. did not enforce a curfew there.

From the moment he assumed duties as prime minister Jayewardene's posture became near-dictatorial, even monarchical.

Solving the ethnic dispute had to wait — there were more urgent priorities demanding the new P.M.'s attention. High on the list of these were:

1. silencing all dissent and criticism from whatever source;
2. crippling the P.M.'s political foes, chiefly Mrs. Bandaranaike whom he regarded as his most charismatic and therefore most dangerous political opponent;
3. enacting a new constitution making him an all-powerful ruler.

The pro-S.L.F.P. Times group of newspapers was taken over within ten days of his becoming P.M., under the provisions of the Business Acquisition Act (which he had condemned and promised to repeal). This take-over did not inhibit Jayewardene from continuing publicly to proclaim his dedication to the freedom of the press, which he kept insisting was vital for the preservation of democracy.

On 4 October 1977 the second amendment to the constitution was passed with a two-thirds majority making the incumbent prime minister the executive president while retaining all the powers of the prime minister. A parliamentary select committee was appointed to draft a new constitution.

The Special Presidential Commissions of Inquiry Act No. 7 of 1978 was passed. A Special Presidential Commission comprising two supreme court judges and a judge from the minor judiciary was appointed on 29 March, 1978 to inquire into and obtain information with regard to the abuse of power during the period May 1970 to July 1977.

ISLAM: Western Perceptions

Chandra Muzaffar

Is there American hatred towards Islam and the Muslims as alleged by some Muslims themselves?

While hatred may be too strong a word, there is no doubt that the influential and articulate stratum of American and indeed Western society is guilty of a whole range of negative attitudes towards Islam and the Muslims. At one end of the continuum is ignorance compounded by prejudice; at the other end is aversion alloyed with antagonism.

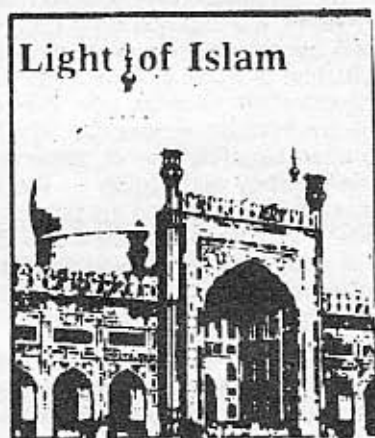
These negative attitudes are deeply embedded in the Western psyche. From time to time, in the course of the last 1000 years or so, they have manifested themselves through religion and scholarship, folklore and literature, education and the media, domestic politics and foreign policy.

Starting from the 12th century onwards, the Church, for instance, through distorted translations of the Quran sought to disparage Islam and the Prophet Muhammad. There was a deliberate endeavour to tarnish Muslim history, to vilify Muslim society. As a result images of Arab despots and bloodthirsty Muslim tyrants gained a certain notoriety in medieval Europe. Unedifying images of this sort were often embellished by ugly portrayals of the wanton lust of lascivious Arab Sheiks wallowing in harlot studded harems. Even in the writings of illustrious European poets and playwrights — Dante and Shakespeare to Byron and Shelley — there were pejorative references to the Quran and the Prophet, to 'Moors' and 'Saracens'. They became part of the regular intellectual diet of many a European student right down to the present.

The Islamic Threat

Today, the mainstream Western media portrays Islam or what it describes as 'militant Islam' or 'fundamentalist Islam' as a threat to the West. Writing in 1981, Edward Said notes, "For the general public in America and Europe today, Islam is 'news' of a particularly unpleasant sort. The media, the government, the geopolitical strategists, and — although they are marginal to the culture at large — the academic experts on Islam are all in concert: Islam is a threat to Western civilization. Now this is by no means the same as saying that only derogatory or racist caricatures of Islam are to be found in the West. What I am saying is that negative images of Islam are very much more prevalent than any others, and that such

images correspond, not to what Islam "is" ... but to what prominent sectors of a particular society take it to be: Those sectors become more prevalent, more present, than all others".



If anything, that notion of a 'threat' to the West has become even stronger in the nineties. As John Esposito, one of the few balanced non-Muslim American scholars on Islam put it in a recent book, "In some ways, the attitude of the West towards communism seems at times transferred to or replicated in the new threat 'Islamic fundamentalism'". He suggests that selective presentation of facts and biased analysis of Islam have contributed to this perception of the religion within mainstream Western society. 'As a result', he says, "Islam and Islamic revivalism are easily reduced to stereotypes of Islam against the West, Islam's war with modernity, or Muslim rage, extremism, fanaticism, terrorism. The 'f' and 't' words, 'fundamentalism' and 'terrorism' have become linked in the minds of many. Selective and therefore biased analysis adds to our ignorance rather than our knowledge, narrows our perspective rather than broadening our understanding, reinforces the problem rather than opening the way to new solutions".

On numerous occasions, policy-makers and politicians in the West, particularly the United States, have exploited this ignorance, this narrow perspective to

advance self-serving foreign policy objectives. In the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution and the hostage crisis, for instance, they used all the major American television network and newspapers to whip up mass hysteria against 'militant Islam', the Shiites, Khomeini, the Mullahs, purdah and so on. 13 years later, following the 26 February 1993 bomb blast at the World Trade Centre in New York, one hears a similar — though far less strident — shriek about Islamic terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism. In spite of the flimsiest of evidence, American investigators, and more so the American media, have concluded that the blast was the work of Islamic fundamentalists, also known as 'Islamic terrorists'. Though there are solid theories that implicate other groups — notably Israeli intelligence, the Mossad — in the bombing, the US establishment had decided to put the blame on the Muslims. And, as the writer Jane Hunter points out, "...in a society with very little understanding of the Middle East, there is a danger that all Arabs and Muslims will be stigmatised".

Conquest and Crusades

Why, one may ask, are Muslims stigmatised in this manner? Why is there so much bias and antagonism against Muslims within certain crucial segments of Western society? Part of the explanation lies in the Muslim conquest and occupation of parts of Western, Southern and Eastern Europe for long centuries. Though Muslim rulers were, by and large, just and fair to the Christian and Jewish communities under their charge, there was, nonetheless — and understandably so — a certain degree of resentment towards the alien conquerors. The infamous crusades which ended in the defeat of the Christian invaders of Arab-Muslim lands in West Asia also heightened European antagonism towards Islam and its followers.

It is a measure of the intensity of European antagonism that Western civilisation has consciously chosen to downplay, even ignore, the immense debt that it owes Islam and the Muslims. In almost every facet of life, from medicine and algebra to law and government, Islam had laid the foundation for the progress of medieval Europe. In the words of the distinguished Irish scholar-diplomat, Erskine Childers, "In every discipline upon which Europe then began to build its epochal advancement, European monarchs, religious leaders and scholars

had to turn to Arab sources. When once any Western student of history manages to learn of this Arab inheritance buried out of sight and mind Western historiography, the astonishment that the very facts of it do not appear in Western education is the greater because the proofs are literally in current Western language". Childers describes the unwillingness of the West to acknowledge the intellectual inheritance of Islam as "a collective amnesia".

Colonial Subjugation

However, what perpetuated this collective amnesia through the centuries was not just the mere memory of conquest and crusades. The West was determined to block out Islam for yet another more important reason. This, in a sense, is at the root of contemporary Western antagonism towards Islam and the Muslims. It is the persistence of Muslim resistance to Western colonialism and neo-colonialism. At the height of Western colonialism in the 19 and 20 centuries, Muslim groups were amongst the fiercest opponents of alien subjugation. Even in preponderantly non-Muslim societies like India, Muslim elements were often the earliest to express their rejection of Western colonial rule. This is why Muslim freedom-fighters like Siraj-ud-daula and Omar Mukhtar and Syed Jamaluddin al-Afghani were often defamed and denigrated by the colonial authorities. Of course, there were a number of illustrious non-Muslim freedom-fighters too who incurred the wrath of the mighty colonial powers.

Oil and Domination

Since the end of formal colonial rule, Muslim societies are discovering that they are once again the targets of new forms of Western domination control. This is primarily because most of the world's oil reserves — the lifeblood of Western civilisation — lie beneath Muslim feet. Controlling Muslim and Southern oil has been a fundamental goal of US foreign policy for at least the last 4 decades. Anyone who dares to resist American control, or worse, challenges its hegemony, is at once branded as an 'extremist', a 'radical' or simply 'a threat to peace and stability'. This was the fate of the Iranian Prime Minister Muhammad Mossadegh who for a brief but spectacular moment in 1953 nationalized his country's oil. This has been the fate of the Iraqi and Libyan leaderships ever since they gained control of their oil in the early seventies. This is also the fate of the Iranian leadership which since the Islamic Revolution of 1979 has tried to exercise sovereignty over oil and other mineral resources. Whatever the ideological orientations of these leadership — and indeed each of them relates to Islam in a different way — the West has decided that they are all Muslim militants

and sponsors of terrorism. What the general public in the West and even in the East does not realize is that the conscious denigration of these leaderships has less to do with their misdemeanours (which do exist) and more to do with their assertion of authority over their one most precious natural resource.

Zionism

The desire to control oil and the determination to perpetuate Western domination are. However, not the only forces behind the depreciation and disparagement of Islam and the Muslims. Zionism has also played a big part. Zionist attacks on Islam and Muslims, which began in the 19 century itself, became even more intense with the creation of Israel in 1948. With their disproportionate influence over Western media and Western scholarship, Zionists have been targeting specific aspects of Islamic theology and society — like the question of polygamy and the position of women — in order to discredit the religion and its adherents. They also sought to depict Islam as a militant faith and Muslims as individuals prone to violence.

It is not difficult to understand why the massive Zionist propaganda machine has chosen to project Islam and Muslims in such a derogatory light. By presenting Islam as evil and Muslims as loathsome, the Zionists are, in fact, trying to justify their own illegitimate, immoral usurpation and annexation of Palestinian and Arab land. In other words, the aggressors, in their craftiness, are attempting to camouflage their violence and oppression by depicting the victims of their violence and oppression as the aggressors. This explains why those Palestinians and Arabs who resist Israeli occupation and subjugation — the real freedom-fighters — are invariably described in the mainstream Western media as 'terrorists' and 'militants'.

Islamic Resurgence

It is quite conceivable that negative portrayals of Palestinians and Arabs resisting Israeli and Western domination may get worse in the coming years. This is partly because the main thrust of opposition sentiment to not only Western domination but also to local regimes which are in cohorts with Western powers, is now being channelled through the ideology of Islam. Indeed, Islam is rapidly emerging as the ideological rallying point for Muslims everywhere as they aspire for genuine liberation from the fetters of both local despotism and global authoritarianism. Given the prevailing perceptions of Islam within the major centres of power in the West, one can expect its political elites and opinion-makers to respond to Islamic resurgence with even more anger and antagonism.

This would be a real pity. For it can only lead to greater strife and conflict, exacerbated by all the prejudices and misunderstandings of Islam and the Muslims with an 'openness of mind and heart' which is sadly missing today. As the Christian scholar, Karen Armstrong put it, in her analysis of Western-Muslim relations. "We in the West must come to terms with our own inner demons of prejudice, chauvinism and anxiety, and strive for a greater objectivity". In the process, one hopes that the West will realize that if there is to be genuine peace and harmony between the West and Islam — and within the human family as a whole — those structures which allow the few who are powerful to dominate the many who are powerless would have to be replaced by new institutions that promote equality and justice for all.

At the same time, as the West evaluates itself, so must the Muslim world examine itself critically. The rise of Islam with all the emotional power it commands makes it incumbent upon us to ask some searching questions about certain Muslim attitudes and priorities. Is Islamic resurgence giving enough attention to some of the crucial challenges confronting the Ummah — challenges pertaining to poverty and hunger, disease and illiteracy? Have Islamic resurgents gone beyond rhetoric in addressing issues of education and knowledge, science and technology, politics and administration, economics and management in the alternative Islamic social order that they envision? Isn't it true to some extent that Islamic resurgence as a whole tends to be pre-occupied with forms and symbols, rituals and practices? Isn't there a tendency within Islamic resurgence to view laws and regulations in a static rather than a dynamic manner? Does the conventional position of Islamic resurgents on the role of women in society and the place of minorities in a Muslim majority state, accord with the fundamental values and principles of the Quran and the Sunnah? Isn't it true that the exclusiveness of Islamic resurgence reflected in a variety of matters ranging from charity to politics is a betrayal of the letter and spirit of the Quran? Are Islamic resurgents, by insisting upon their interpretation of Islam, as the only correct approach to the religion guilty of promoting sectarian sentiments within the Ummah? Have Islamic resurgents themselves contributed, perhaps unwittingly, to the factionalisation and fragmentation of the Ummah?

Perhaps it is time that we conceded that there is also another side to the truth: the we Muslims are also responsible, to a certain degree, for the negative perceptions of the religion and the community in today's world.

Time to Retrieve Muslims

Kuldip Nayar

I had not realised the extent of hurt the demolition of the disputed Babri Masjid had caused to the Muslim psyche till I went round the country. The wound is deep and raw even after nearly five months. The Muslim community feels humiliated and helpless. The demolition has severely hit its elan as well as confidence. In the last few weeks, I have travelled through parts of Assam, Bihar, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal and met a cross section of Muslims. Even a small talk with them ended up in a serious discussion on their loss of faith in the law and fairplay.

The injured feelings are similar to the ones I found among the Sikhs after the Golden Temple was stormed in Amritsar in 1984. There is, however, one big difference. The then President Zail Singh and Prime Minister Indira Gandhi flew to Amritsar within 48 hours. Narasimha Rao has till today not visited the site to make some sort of amends for what has happened.

The historic city and traditional importance of the monument should have impelled the government to be more demonstrative in its response. The package of building a temple and a mosque and referring the issue to the Supreme Court is a cold, official approach to a problem that requires human and sympathetic handling.

Therefore, the solution-seekers have to keep in mind the sensitivities of both the Muslims and Hindus and none of the two should have a feeling of defeat. So far it has been a one-way traffic. The structure has been demolished, a make-shift temple has been allowed to come up on the site and the Muslims have been told that the Masjid will be built "somewhere else". Rao has also not reiterated his declarations to rebuild the Masjid and to remove the make-shift temple.

Perhaps he did not perceive the realities on the ground — not a healthy trait in a Prime Minister — when he assured some

Muslim leaders on December 6. The worst is that Rao has shut his eyes to the emotional strength that the Hindu communalists have gained in the name of the temple. He has been too slow, too reluctant to take action when it was required. I am not commenting on the rights or wrongs of the case but stating an unfortunate reality.

It is time to retrieve the Muslim community from the stranglehold of fundamentalists. They are beginning to realise that their future lies in aligning themselves with secular forces. If this does not happen, they will get back to the fundamentalists and the so-called Muslim leaders with a vengeance. They may fall a prey to desperation and violence, a few examples of which have already been seen

Yet, rebuilding the temple on the site where the Masjid stood will be rubbing salt in the Muslims wound. It will amount to giving legal sanction to an illegal act. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and its front organisations like the BJP and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad will only feel emboldened. The presentation of a fait accompli is no basis for according recognition. There has to be a settlement, give and take. Otherwise, it will be a dictation, with far more adverse effects on the Muslims' morale than at present.

The reference to the Supreme Court is an attempt to pass the buck. The judiciary should not be brought into such messy situations. The problem is political, not legal. The government knows it. And the way the Supreme Court is proceeding at the initial hearing indicates that it does not

want to get involved. It may drag the matter unnecessarily. The passage of time will aggravate the problem further, allowing the fundamentalists in both religions to polarise the society still more.

The formula that building of the temple be allowed on the disputed site is relevant if the RSS family can win the confidence of the Muslims. That means renouncing its anti-Muslim stance on which it has fattened itself. I have noticed a change among the Muslims. They are willing to give up their claim on the Masjid if it can help solve the problem, but they want to be sure that by doing so they can end the process of claims on other mosques and ensure for themselves and their children a secure future.

The Narasimha Rao government has spoilt things by sitting pretty. It should at least make a public announcement that the temple will not be built on the Babri Masjid site. This does not restore the mosque to the Muslims but it does not placate Hindu chauvinists either. Probably the best way out is to leave the site as a vacant plaza so as to remind the generations to come of the wound inflicted on our values and traditions on December 6.

The plea by some Muslim leaders before the Prime Minister the other day to rebuild the Masjid at the same place may be a good tactic but not a good strategy. They have to take the dispute out of the Hindu-Muslim arena, away from the status quo ante. What was pulled down on December 6 was known as the Babri Masjid but it was a historic monument, representing India's long, traditional composite culture. True, the Muslims have been wronged but so have been those Hindus who have faith in that culture. The two must come together to express their protest. And they are in a majority in the country.

Some of the Muslim leaders still live in their make-believe world. They have

planned an All-India tour — they go to southern India from May 14 — to consolidate Muslim opinion. This will only provide the grist to the anti-Muslim propaganda mill of the RSS family. Whatever their grievances, the Muslim leaders must find ways for a secular expression, try and consolidate non-communal forces. The politics of arraying Muslims as Muslims is counter-productive. This is probably yet to penetrate the Muslim leadership.

The memorandum that the All-India Muslim Personal Law Boards (way out of its avowed purpose) and a few others have submitted to the Prime Minister justifiably asks for steps "to squarely deal with the menace of Hindu chauvinism". But Muslim chauvinism has to be equally met with steps. At least a couple of leaders, who were in the delegation meeting the Prime Minister, are no less undesirable than Murl Manohar Joshi and L.K. Advani to the BJP.

It is admitted in the memorandum that "the Muslims and all justice-loving anti-fascist citizens were betrayed" when the Babri Masjid was destroyed. Strange, none of the "anti-fascist citizens" was even consulted when the cliché-ridden memorandum was prepared. There is yet no effort to get out of the religious syndrome and make a common cause with the forces fighting communalism.

However, I have noticed the exasperation of ordinary Muslims with their traditional leadership.

It could acquire speed provided an average Muslim sees that justice is being done to him on the Babri Masjid case. On the other hand, the secular forces should give him confidence because he does feel lonely.

In fact, this is the time to retrieve the Muslim community from the stranglehold of fundamentalists. They are beginning to realise that their future lies in aligning themselves with secular forces. If this does not happen, he will get back to the fundamentalists and the so-called Muslim leaders with a vengeance. He may fall a prey to desperation and violence, a few examples of which have already been seen in the country. Any other frame-work may solve the problems temporarily but will spell ruin in the long run.

West's Unfounded Notions of Islamic Wars

Abdur Rauf

Biased western orientalist's notions of *Jihad* suffer from a multitude of twists and exaggerations. In his famous work, *A Study of History*, thus writes Arnold Toynbee: "In the first place we can discount the tendency which has been popular in Christendom to over-estimate the extent of force in the propagation of Islam. In the conquered provinces of the Roman and the Sasanian Empires the alternatives offered were not 'Islam or death' but 'Islam or a super-tax,' — a policy traditionally praised for its enlightenment when pursued long afterwards in England by a Laodicean Queen Elizabeth" (P.488).

The plain fact is patent on record that even the early wars of the Muslims had the least of the element of hostility and aggression involved in them. Commenting upon the situation a famous orientalist, Lichtenstadter, writes in her work, *Islam and the Modern Age*: "Even at the time of the conquest in the first century of Islam, actual fighting played a comparatively minor role. Most of the conquests were achieved by surrender and peace treaties. These invariably contained clauses under which 'the people of the Book' in the conquered territories could retain their faith subject to certain, on the whole not too painful, conditions. The notion of 'conquest by fire and the sword' does not conform to reality. Even the 'pagan' population of the conquered territories were not put to the sword."

The foregoing observations are frequently shared by a large number of other equally outstanding historians. They are literally true of the wars of the Holy Prophet (PBUH). The wars that he waged can by no stretch of the imagination be called 'war' in the customary connotation of the term. When studied against the perspective of the humanitarian regulations governing the conduct of war, which the Holy Prophet (PBUH) prescribed and implemented so meticulously, those wars look a blissful package deal for the persons and parties involved in the conflict. The minimal incidence of bloodshed, total absence of customary war-time excesses and immoralities, the unexpectedly liberal and often even underserved amnesties showered over the vanquished foes and their socio-cultural transformation, proved extremely blissful for them. Such parallels are hard to find in any account of conflict taking place any time and anywhere in the entire history of mankind.

Cases of *Jihad* abound wherein force

as an inevitable evil was reduced to optimal minimum. Such cases are the clearest to demonstrate that the focus of the Muslim defence policy revolved round educational orientation and cultural indoctrination rather than blind fanaticism or territorial Lebensraum. This fact is best illustrated by the standing orders of the first Caliph of Islam, Hadrat Abu Bakr Siddiqui (RA) issued to the Muslim army commanders when they were about to march off for the first great campaign to Syria. In his enlightening work, *The Caliphate — Its Rise, Decline and Fall*, William Muir quotes these historic orders thus: "Men I have ten orders to give you, which you must observe loyally — deceive none and steal from none; betray none and mutilate none; kill no child, nor woman, nor aged man; neither bark nor burn the date palms; cut not down the fruit trees nor destroy crops; slaughter not flocks, cattle, nor camels except for food..."

The Muslim of the vanquished people and places was exceptionally civilised. Human history abounds in instances of the non-Muslim population of the conquered territories preferring the Muslim conquerors to the erstwhile rulers of their own kith and kin, cult and creed. Such feelings were spontaneously voiced, for instance, when the Muslim army reached Jordan and Hadrat Abu Ubaidah camped at Fahl. A series of similar instances are also patent on the annals of history of the Muslim conquest of India. Muhammad bin Qasim's conquests, for instance are known for the voluntary surrender of the Hindus than for bloody battles. In fact Muhammad bin Qasim was so popular with the people of the liberated areas that they are reported to have wept copiously on his sudden departure for home.

The Muslim conquests were invariably characterised by their disciplining factor and the civilising core. Just visualise the havoc wrought by the Goths, the Huns, the vandals of earlier eras and the Mongols of the later days. One readily finds the differential feature characterising all Muslim wars. It is they who ushered in a new era of civilisation and culture in a world which had drifted headlong towards naked aggression and gross injustice, chaos confusion. Emerging as a powerful, purposive and popular civilising force Islam soon began to modify and reform the fossilised social and cultural structures of the vanquished races. It thus reclaimed them from the very brinks of suicidal ignorance and all-round destruction.

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The Prelude to the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord of 1987

Negotiations Between India and Sri Lanka, November 1984 to Mid-1987

K. M. de Silva

Although both governments, the Indian and the Sri Lankan, were anxious to treat the TULF as the main representatives of Tamil opinion in Sri Lanka, there was an element of unreality in giving them this status. By living in self-imposed exile in Tamil Nadu and elsewhere — largely because of fears of assassination by LTTE 'hitsquads' — they had cut themselves off from the Tamil people. To convert the position that had been conferred on them into a hard political reality the TULF would have had to give up living in exile, and to face up to the challenge posed by the separatist activist groups who had filled the vacuum caused by the TULF's absence. This the TULF were not inclined to do, and yet the longer they stayed away their chances of a political rehabilitation became more of a chimera than they already were. Thus the negotiations with them were an exercise in futility. Yet they were the only group who could understand the complexity of the devolution exercise and could negotiate the details in a spirit of give and take. Nevertheless they themselves were stuck with the concept of a Tamil ethno-region — a Tamil homeland — which had gained currency since the early 1950s with the Federal Party. They had abandoned this in the 1960s but revived it after 1976.²²

The main Tamil separatist group the LTTE had established their position among the Tamils through their resistance to the Sri Lankan armed forces, as well as by a series of bloody internecine encounters in which they had eliminated their rivals. They were in no mood to accept anything short of a separate state. Nor were they inclined to respect the new status which the two governments had devised for the TULF. On the contrary they were intent on treating them in the same way they had their other rivals, as an intolerable challenge to their own position.

Throughout the second half of 1986 Indian mediators made a sustained effort to break the deadlock caused by the TULF's insistence on the creation of a

Tamil ethno-region linking the Northern and Eastern Provinces. They — the Indian mediators — came up with a proposal to divide the Eastern Province into three units, one Muslim, one Tamil, one Sinhalese, with the Tamil unit being linked to the Northern Province by a narrow land corridor. When this proposal won no support, least of all from the Tamils, the Indian negotiators prevailed upon the Sri Lanka government to consider the excision of the Sinhalese parliamentary electorate of Amparai from the Batticaloa district of the Eastern Province, so that the Tamil ethnic component in the province would reach a level of parity with the other ethnic groups there. This suggestion had come from A.P. Venkateswaran. Although Venkateswaran himself was abruptly dismissed by Rajiv Gandhi in the middle of 1986, his suggestion on the excision of Amparai from the Eastern Province continued to be official Indian policy till the end of the year. It formed part of 19 December 1986 formula which the Indian government proposed should be the basis of further negotiations between the Sri Lanka government and the Tamils. The LTTE, however, rejected the formula as totally unacceptable. Nor was the Muslim minority, who formed a substantial element (40%) of the population there, willing to accept it.

The proposals agreed to in September 1986 formed the basis of discussions between President Jayewardene and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi when they met in Bangalore at the summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) on 17 and 18 November. These were accompanied and followed by discussions at a ministerial level. Rajiv Gandhi and his advisors were also engaged in frenetic negotiations to bring the rival Tamil separatist groups, and in particular the LTTE, to accept the proposals that had emerged from several years of quiet diplomacy as the basis of a workable framework for an honourable peace in Sri Lanka. Most of these groups were

willing to accept these proposals or at least to give them a try. At the end of the Bangalore conference it was announced that:

"Apart from the subjects of finance and administration which were not clarified with the TULF, the matters which require further clarification and agreement [were]... fully set out in [a] working paper on [the] Bangalore discussions, dated 18 [November] 1986."

The LTTE alone adamantly refused to accept these proposals. The Indian government showed its displeasure by imposing restrictions on Sri Lankan Tamil activists operating from Indian territory. This was the first time that such restrictions had been imposed. The initiatives of the Indian government in this regard were nullified by the Tamil Nadu government's uncooperative reluctance to co-operate in these moves. In addition the Indian government sought to prevent the LTTE leader Prabhakaran then operating from Tamil Nadu from leaving India for Jaffna. These pressures succeeded until the end of 1986 by which time Prabhakaran and the LTTE ideologue Balasingham slipped across the Palk straits to the Jaffna peninsula, to continue to fight from there.

The progress made in the Bangalore discussions could be gauged by the fact that the working paper based on them set out a tentative time-table for the signing of an accord. The first of the steps indicated was for the Sri Lankan government to give its final consideration to the proposals in the paper, as well as its response to the suggestions made by the TULF on the Sri Lankan paper, to the government of India by 25 November 1989, that is to say, within a week. The latter would then consult the Tamil groups and convey their responses to the Sri Lanka government before 2 December. A draft accord was then to be prepared by the Sri Lankan government and given to the government of India before 9 December, and the latter in turn was to secure acceptance of the draft accord, before 16 December. The final stage the signing of the accord presumably by the two governments, was to take place as soon as possible thereafter,

preferably in January 1987.²³

Chidambaram and Natwar Singh visited Colombo again — their second visit — on 24 November for further discussions with President Jayewardene. The Eastern Province was still the insoluble problem. No headway was made on this occasion as well. At a meeting of Muslim organizations with President Jayewardene on 11 December 1986 opposition to any merger of the two provinces, or an excision of the Amparai electorate, much less the Amparai district, was made abundantly clear. When Chidambaram and Natwar Singh visited Colombo again on 17 December for discussions with the Sri Lanka government this issue remained the thorniest and most contentious. While agreement was possible on all others, this defied settlement. Not a single group saw any positive advantage in it. Muslim MPs who met the leaders of the Indian delegation expressed their strong opposition to this proposal.²⁴

An official statement issued after the 19 December meeting made the following points:

"President J.R. Jayewardene and the two (2) Indian Ministers discussed further ideas in continuation of the discussions held in the past. At the end of the discussions the following proposals emerged:

(i) The present territory comprising the Eastern province minus the Ampara Electoral District may constitute the new Eastern province.

(ii) A Provincial Council will be established for the new Eastern province.

(iii) The institutional linkages between the Northern province and the Eastern province discussed earlier will be further refined in order to make it more acceptable to the parties concerned.

(iv) The Sri Lanka Government will be willing to consider a proposal for a second stage of constitutional development providing for the Northern province and the new Eastern province coming together subject to modalities being agreed upon for ascertaining the wishes of the people comprised in the Northern province and the Eastern province separately.

(v) The Sri Lanka Government is willing to consider the creation of an office of Vice President to be appointed by the President for a specified term.

(vi) The five (5) Muslim M.P.'s of the Eastern province may be invited to visit India and to discuss matters of mutual

concern with the Tamil side under the auspices of the Government of India."

At this stage a LTTE group, in surprising move, sent out a feeler for direct talks with the government. The intermediary in this insistence was a government party (UNP) MP.²⁵ Although wary of the offer, the government decided to test the waters. A small delegation was sent for this purpose to Jaffna to hold secret talks with the second rung LTTE leadership. The two groups met at Kankesanthurai on 27 December 1986 in the office of the Town Council there. Among those attending these unofficial and essentially exploratory discussions was a knowledgeable official, E.F. Dias Abeysinghe, who kept a record of what was said on this occasion. Dias Abeysinghe who was then secretary to the Political Parties Conference, and had served as secretary to the Sri Lanka delegations from the time of the Thimpu talks, had been associated with all negotiations and discussions in India.

He noted that the LTTE group's chief spokesman had begun by saying that "what we say is unofficial, our private views as ordinary citizens of Jaffna."²⁶ The LTTE spokesman

"had made it evident that they were suspicious of the stand of the Indian government in the negotiations. India was using the situation for her political gain and her internal security. Even when a cease-fire had been arranged about the time of the Thimpu talks in 1985 India was supplying arms to all 5 Tamil groups. He stated emphatically that the LTTE would not be 'puppets of the Indian Government.' They would resist any invasion by Indian forces. They were the only Tamil group who were resisting them, but at the same time they would not break with them or act without their awareness and consent in their mediatory process.

They were distrustful of the S[ri] L[anka] Government too. [It] had always gone back on promises."²⁷

These discussions were more useful for the insights they provide to the thinking of the LTTE at that time than for anything else. The invitation to informal talks were clearly intended to drive a wedge between the governments of India and Sri Lanka at the very moment an accord on the settlement of Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict seemed ready for signature. The LTTE spokesman suggested secret talks with the top LTTE leaders, Prabhakaran and Balasingham who were then in India and — so the LTTE spokesman said — unable to get out. Clearly this was not possible for any government delegates since the need for visas to India would make it impossible to maintain secrecy. (The LTTE, of course, had their own methods

of illicit entry). More to the point, the government spokesmen stated quite categorically that

"India has always played a mediatory role and was interested in helping S[ri] L[anka] to achieve a solution. We cannot distance ourselves so from India"

Even more significant, in view of future developments, was that the LTTE insisted on being recognized as the one group with which the government would negotiate on issues relating to Sri Lanka's Tamil problem. There was no response to this from the government group but they did take particular note of this request. As for their principal demands, there was no evidence at all of any anxiety to compromise. They did talk of being prepared to "accept any practical solution, but they asserted also that because they have been let down over the last thirty years"... "we therefore decided to ask for the maximum, Eelam."

The only encouraging sign was that the LTTE spokesmen expressed the wishes that secret and informal talks would be followed by formal talks with the government at a future date. And, on a more piquant note, the spokesman asked the government representatives to ignore any bellicose comments uttered by the LTTE leadership from India.

CONFLICT

Prabhakaran's return to the island early in 1987 marked the beginning of a more activist and violent phase in the on-going conflict between the Tamil separatist groups spearheaded by the LTTE, and the Sri Lankan forces. It would appear that the LTTE was intent on scuttling the agreement that the two governments were on the verge of signing and as a means of prevention this they hit upon the notion of an unilateral declaration of independence in the north of the island. The Sri Lanka government's response to this was predictably tough. In an attempt to pre-empt such a declaration government sent troop reinforcements into the Eastern and Northern provinces with instructions to clear these areas of the LTTE and other separatist groups. Contrary to expectations, the LTTE did not put up much of a fight. The LTTE's retreat was anything but orderly. The LTTE forces fled to the Jaffna peninsula.

The Indian government, much perturbed by this turn of events, put considerable diplomatic and political pressure on the Sri Lankan government to abandon these military moves and to resume the search for a political solution. These public expressions

ssions of displeasure from New Delhi strained relations between the two countries in February and March 1987. On 14 March 1987 an Indian emissary, another Minister of State, Dinesh Singh was sent to meet President Jayewardene in the hope that the political process could be revived. In response, the Sri Lankan government offered the Tamils a cease-fire for the duration of the national holidays in April 1987. The LTTE spurned this offer and responded with the Good Friday bus massacre where 130 persons were mowed down by automatic weapons on the road from Trincomalee to Colombo. The LTTE's allies followed this up with a bomb explosion in Colombo's main bus station in which over 100 persons were killed.

Faced with a serious erosion of political support as a result of these outrages, the government decided to make an attempt to regain control of the Jaffna peninsula. 'Operation Liberation' which began on 26 May 1987 in the Vadamarachchi division on the north-eastern part of the peninsula was directed at preventing the hitherto easy movement of men and *materiel* from Tamil Nadu. By the end of May Sri Lankan forces had gained control of this area. The LTTE, the most formidable Tamil separatist group, had suffered a serious setback, and in a region they had dominated for long. This demonstration of the LTTE's failure as a fighting force triggered off the chain of events which resulted eventually in Indian military intervention in Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict.

At this point India moved swiftly to prevent the subjugation of the Jaffna peninsula by the Sri Lankan forces. The Indian High Commissioner, J.N. Dixit, pointedly informed Lalith Athulathmudali, Minister of National Security, that India would not permit the Sri Lanka army to take Jaffna.²⁸ The same message was conveyed to President Jayewardene himself on 27 May.²⁹ That afternoon he had ceremonially opened the Bank of Ceylon's new headquarters building. In the course of his speech on that occasion he had dwelt at some length on the Vadamarachchi operation, and the government's intention to proceed with that till the LTTE forces were defeated. In the evening Dixit called on him at his in Ward Place and conveyed a message from the government of India. The gist of it was written by Dixit (on an envelope!) It read as followed:

1. "Deeply disappointed and distressed.
2. Thousands of civilians killed since

1983 has aroused tremendous indignation.

3. Your latest offensive in Jaffna peninsula has altered the entire basis of our understanding.
4. We cannot accept Genocide.
5. Please do not force us to review our policies."

The "review of our policies" which Dixit threatened on behalf of the Indian government came very quickly. There was first a well-published monetary grant of US \$ 3.2m from the Tamil Nadu government to the LTTE and its allies. The Indian government, for its part, escalated the level of its own involvement in the Sri Lankan imbroglio when it announced that it was sending shipments of food and petroleum products to Jaffna which, it claimed, was facing a severe shortage of these items through a blockade by the Sri Lankan forces. Despite the refusal of the Sri Lankan government to accept this offer, or concede the need for it, a first shipment, in a flotilla of about 20 Indian fishing vessels, was dispatched on 3 June 1987 but was turned back by the Sri Lanka navy. When this happened, the Indian air force in a blatant violation of international law and of the Sri Lankan airspace dropped food and medical supplies in Jaffna on the following day. All these constituted an unmistakable demonstration of Indian support for the Tamil separatist movement in Sri Lanka. The Indian supply of food to Jaffna continued over the next few weeks by sea with the formal but clearly reluctant agreement of the Sri Lankan government. The result was that, by the end of June, Indo-Sri Lankan relations were mired in mutual recrimination and deep suspicion. And the island's ethnic conflict seemed headed for prolonged and debilitating deadlock.

The north-east coast of the Jaffna peninsula — the smugglers coast — was under the control of the Sri Lanka army and navy, and the camps the army had newly established in that narrow strip of territory braced themselves to withstand the attacks the LTTE was certain to launch against them. The fact that the LTTE had been dislodged from the north-east coast of the Jaffna peninsula came as a morale booster to the army. But the Tamils of the Jaffna peninsula had taken heart from the Indian intervention — the air-drop of food, and the more formally correct but not very welcome supply of food sent by ship. The message India appeared to be sending seemed clear enough: we will not permit either the military subjugation of Jaffna

with the bloodshed it would cause, nor would we permit an economic blockade of the Jaffna peninsula to bring its people to their knees. The Indian High Commissioner in Colombo through its first secretary H.S. Puri figured very prominently in this food distribution campaign in Jaffna. The ecstatic welcome the Indians received in Jaffna — it was garlands cheers all the way — was one of the most conspicuous features of this episode. Those who masterminded the distribution of food on this occasion were left with the illusion that they had Jaffna literally in the palms of their hands. They were to learn soon enough that nothing is so evanescent as the plaudits of a hard pressed people in their first encounters with their presumed liberators.

In the rest of the country the mood was a mixture of anxiety over a long war of attrition in the north (there was less anxiety about the eastern coast) and among the people at large as well as among large sections of the intelligentsia an attitude to India which ranged from atavistic fear to a helpless rage, an attitude which the then Prime Minister's (R. Premadasa's) speeches mirrored all too accurately.

NOTES

22. On the problems of the Eastern Province and its links with the concept of a traditional homeland of the Tamils, see G.H. Peiris, "An Appraisal of the Concept of a Traditional Homeland in Sri Lanka" *Ethnic Studies Report* Vol IX (1) January 1991, pp.13-39; K.M. de Silva, *Traditional Homelands of the Tamils of Sri Lanka: A Historical Appraisal*, ICES Occasional Papers, No.1 1987.
23. This is extracted from paragraph 11 of "The Working Paper on the Bangalore Discussions," 18 November 1986.
24. Two groups of MP's from the Eastern Province met the Indian delegation on 18 and 19 December. The first was led by K.W. Devanayagam, Minister of Home Affairs, and the meeting was held at the Parliament building on 18 December. The second group consisted of five Muslim MPs from the Eastern Province.
25. Vincent Perera, MP for Yatiyantota, and later District Minister for Amparai.
26. These extracts are from Dias Abeysinghe's notes.
27. *ibid.* The LTTE spokesman on this occasion was Balasubramaniam Kanagaratnam better known by his *nom de guerre* of Rahim, and associated with him was Sathasivam Krishnakumar or Kiddu.
28. Athulathmudali made this known to President Jayewardene and the Cabinet on 12 August 1987. J.R. Jayewardene Mss.
29. This note is now in the J.R. Jayewardene Mss. Whether the warning to Athulathmudali was prior to this note is not certain.

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