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**LANKA**

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# SINHAPUTHRA

## TRENDS

### Off to Australia

Prominent UNP election campaign activist Wickrema Weerasooriya took off for Australia after the party's decisive defeat in the November 9 presidential election. Dr Weerasooriya teaches at Monash University.

### Government cuts food prices

In an attempt to peg down soaring food prices the government moved to bring down the cost of essential items, following a decision of the Government Parliamentary Group. Among the items: Mysoor Dhal at Rs 22 per kilo and rice at Rs 12, available at Co-operative Wholesale Establishment (CWE) retail outlets.

Also, sugar importers will be told not to increase prices. If they do, the government will issue licences to new importers.

## BRIEFLY...

### Election petition

The UNP is to file an election petition against the election as President of Mrs Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, according to *The Sunday Leader*. Mrs Kumaratunga won by a near two million majority. The UNP alleges widespread intimidation and rigging.

**FLASH:** The UNP has changed its mind.

### Commission to probe political killings

Justice Minister G.L. Peiris told a press briefing that the Government had decided to appoint a Special Presidential Commission to investigate the murders of political leaders. The first such killing to be probed will be that of DUNF leader Lalith Athulathmudali.

Among the other murders to be

probed: SLMP leader Vijaya Kumaratunga, Generals Denzil Kobbekaduwa and Vijaya Wimalaratne, President R. Premadasa and UNP minister Ranjan Wijeratne.

### Gamini Dissanayake killing: India responds

In response to Sri Lanka's request for assistance India has asked for a clarification as to the areas in which Indian experts could help in the investigation of the Gamini Dissanayake assassination.

The Sri Lankan government asked India for assistance following a letter to President Kumaratunga from Srimala Dissanayake, the assassinated UNP presidential candidate's widow, calling for the services of two Indian investigators who probed the Rajiv Gandhi murder.

### Vote on Account

Presenting a Vote on Account in Parliament for financing the government's day to day expenses till the Budget is announced next February, Deputy Finance Minister G.L. Peiris asked parliament for Rs 45 billion. Rs 29.9 was for recurrent expenditure and the balance was for capital expenditure.

Revenue for this period was expected to be Rs 31 billion. Prof. Peiris told parliament that the shortfall of Rs 14 billion would be met through commercial loans. The high fiscal deficit is largely a result of unanticipated expenditure in an election, he said.

The economy was expected to grow by 5 - 6 per cent, industrial exports by 9 per cent and exports by 8 per cent this year, the Deputy Finance Minister, who is also Minister of Justice and External Trade, said.

### Medicalmen strike

Assistant Medical Officers, (formerly Apothecaries) were on an islandwide strike in government hospitals, mostly in the provinces,

demanding the same facilities, privileges and perquisites available to "other medical grades"

"The superiority complex that the GMOA (Government Medical Officers Association) tries to bring about within themselves in the health service suppresses the rights of other categories in the Health Department", the AMOs argue.

### Skeleton unearthed in ashram

The skeleton of a Sri Lankan engineer was unearthed in an ashram in Fatimanagar, India. The skeleton was found following a confession made by a person arrested in connection with a sex scandal at the ashram involving a swami with Sri Lankan ties. The murdered engineer, named Ravi, is believed to have been tortured and beaten to death.

## LANKA

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# Contradictions and conflicts multiply

Mervyn de Silva

The first 100 days are over — for the P.A. administration, if not for the Kumaratunga Presidency which of course is much younger. But the PA's supporters would take the mid-August General Election as the Red Letter Day, the defeat of the 17 year UNP administration, the government of its traditional foe, the United National Party. The hopes were high, mass aspirations higher.

The Peoples Alliance is a seven-party (some say, eight) coalition dominated by the S.L.F.P. but an S.L.F.P. led by a radical (left-leaning, if not Marxist) charismatic young woman whose meteoric rise from Chief Minister Western Province paralleled the rise of Sirimavo Bandaranaike from party leader to Prime minister in 1959-60, after the assassination of the SLFP founder, Mr. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike. In short, it was a repeat performance. But not quite. Many things had changed since 1956-60 in Sri Lanka and even more dramatically on the international scene, including South Asia.

President J.R. Jayawardene's UNP administration had introduced two fundamental changes, the first a truly radical experiment in the region i.e. the IMF-World Bank supported (and supervised) "open economy" or free-market economic strategy and secondly, an elected Presidency modelled on the French Gaullist system. Since then South Asian regimes have gradually accepted the IMF's structural adjustment", and the open-market policy with modifications. Foreign investment has not only been accommodated and eagerly invited but generous concessions offered. Restrictive practices of the past were rapidly abandoned.

On the global scene, the Soviet Union had collapsed, socialism was in disgrace, and even China was taking "the capitalist road". But a more shattering blow to radical or Left-minded Sri Lankans was the break-up of Tito's Yugoslavia, a model for both the SLFP, the only serious challenge to the conservative UNP, and to the major Leftist party, the LSSP, which was fiercely opposed ideologically to the Soviet Union, and Stalinism. Its particular brand was Trotskyism-Titoism. For the "grand alliance" of 1970 (the SLFP-LSSP-CP united front) Yugoslavia was obviously the model — for Mrs. Bandaranaike's SLFP, the dominant force, it was non-alignment or foreign policy; for the LSSP, the largest *Leftist* formation it was anti-Moscow Titoism. The UF was routed by

JR's UNP. Socialism had failed to deliver. The 1977-1988 Parliament was Sri Lanka's "Long Parliament" under the JR Presidency installed in 1978. It was that decade which radically altered the "thinking" (some describe it as "value-system") of the Sri Lankan electorate, certainly its vast middle-class. The voter was soon hooked on consumerism, the reverse side of queue-and-quota shaped socialism. Soon even India, our huge neighbour, would follow this route.

In the constitutional-political sphere however, JR or more appropriately Junius Rex introduced parallel and necessarily supportive changes, as he would argue that sustained an increasingly authoritarian system. The electorate liked the free-market but not the authoritarianism and the growing abuse of power. Having suffered the vexations of the pre-1977 'socialism', the older voter, or the vast majority of older voters, were ready to tolerate the day-to-day ordeals but not the young who had no experience of the ration-card and cooperative store way of life. The new generation decided to vote the rascals out — and widespread corruption did breed a great many. That generational factor plus the minorities (or a majority of the minorities) gave the P.A. 105 seats, first but less than a majority. Not more than 50%.

The administrative machine, including the police, a vital part of the State apparatus, was in UNP hands. Once the UNP was defeated, voter psychology changed; so did the allegiance of the police-cum-bureaucracy. Our assumption that "the change factor" would be decisive was proved correct but the less than 50% PA vote suggested that we had underestimated the in-built advantages which the 'system' offered the ruling party. Once the Parliamentary result indicated the mood of the electorate, the charisma of Chandrika, the absence of Gamini a strong opponent and let's-join-the-winning-side psychology produced a landslide, with Thordaman (CWC) and the other minorities pushing her majority way over a record 62%.

## And now?

The bigger the majority, the larger the constituency, to satisfy, and more pressing the demands. In order to clinch the Nov. 9 battle, the PA raised even greater expectations, and held out more promises. But none of those promises was more critically important than the pledge to resolve the armed conflict in the north. Peace... but at what price?

In matters of "security", I have argued in the past, the armed forces have what I termed a "quasi-veto" in our councils (Security Council?) of war. Last week, the *ISLAND* announced quite confidently that the army commander Lt. General Gerry de Silva would not get the usual one year's extension when his term expired on December 31. An extension of one year or a DPL appointment is now a well-established tradition. Meanwhile, the weekend papers reported that defence secretary Lt. Gen. Hamilton Wanasingha would soon get marching orders. But the victory of the "peace candidate", it was widely felt, will see a change in the pattern of automatic DPL appointments for departing Commanders and top brass. Nothing happened. Both hold their respective posts.

However, it is the LTTE leader, Prabhakaran who has sent a message to Colombo that the LTTE was ready for a ceasefire. This was a response to the government sending the ashes of "Tiger" officer Col. Sinnathambay Pathmanathan, killed by the forces, to Jaffna, and agreeing to ceasefire on negotiated terms. The ceasefire for one-or-two weeks may begin before this issue of the *LG* is out.

The LTTE "regime" is not an elected administration. But it has its own constituency, and that surely prefers peace or, at least, some degree of normalcy, a sure sign of "war-weariness". However militarist it may be the LTTE must be receptive to its own constituency. It would be logical for the LTTE, not keen to isolate itself, to respond to Colombo's requests — always keeping its own powder dry, and ready to prove to the Tamil people that no Colombo regime is prepared to "recognise the legitimate rights of the Jaffna people", this side of secession. War may give way to jaw-jaw and diplomacy, chiefly because the government has been caught in its own trap — fulfilling election pledges (cost of living, primarily) without offending the IMF and World Bank, our faceless 'masters'. The economy, stupid .... as foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar realises when he is caught between the US/VOA and the Church, the All-religious Solidarity front, the farmers and the fishermen of Irana-wila.

If the UNP strategists had mastered their Mao, they would have said "Great Disorder under the heavens, the situation is excellent..." But the United National Party is NOT all that "United" or energetic, right now.

# The UNP debacle and the aftermath of the elections

Bertram Bastiampillai *(Dept. of History & Political Science, Colombo University)*

The assassination of Gamini Dissanayake, that affected the presidential election of Prime Minister Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga nor her late arrivals at public rallies deterred crowds from gathering to listen to her. It happened at the Ratmalana railway grounds ten days after Gamini Dissanayake's killing. To the last, the elections were exciting and entertaining, despite the tragedy that marred the campaigning. And when the elections did take place on 9 November 1994, the voter turn out was higher than anticipated. It is certainly more than what the Nepali elections could lure recently!

When the results came out, one by one, the bastions of the UNP fell like ninepins — it was akin to the manifestation of a domino phenomenon. Udu Nuwara, Maha Nuwara, the North Central Province, the North West, and Matale, all of them strongholds of the UNP, went into the hands of the PA. Kotmale, the birthplace of Gamini voted in a PA candidate. And Mr. Ranil Wickramasinghe, leader of the UNP, lost all the areas with which he had something to do.

The people seemed to have made up their minds — never a UNP executive President, but better a PA one who in any case was pledged to dismantle the Executive Presidential system. Whether it was under J.R. Jayawardene, Ranasinghe Premadasa or the exceptionally lucky D.B. Wijetunga, the voters appear to have experienced enough of the executive presidency which well nigh makes an elected president a superhuman political authority. Accountability and answerability to the people's representatives, openness to criticism, exposure to legal suit, and a leader who could be seen and heard in the legislature was what the people seemed to want. And Jayawardene's promised stability either was not there in spite of the Executive Presidency — the civil war with the LTTE raged on and the JVP rose up in revolt again in 1987-89.

The PA had repeatedly stressed that they would create a fear-free society, that corruption would be exposed and not remain an endemic canker; that transparency in dealings under the open economy would prevail, and above all peace would be ushered into the fractured strife-

ridden nation. They assured voters that extravagance would be severely pruned and that the opulent life-styles of the authorities would be curbed. Further, there were promises that the cost of living of the average and ordinary householder would be reduced, employment for the youth would be provided, and that the public services such as public health welfare, alleviation of penury and the education of children would be placed on a sounder footing. Concern and care for the neglected common people would be shown. Briefly, a better democratic society was guaranteed. Naturally, this programme attracted the attention of the voters and not the evocation of sympathy by the UNP which tried its best to exploit the emotions of the citizens by appealing to the tragic position of Gamini's widow. And communalism by painting a picture of the PA presidential candidate as more a representative of the minorities than the authentic spokeswoman of the majority, the Sinhalese Buddhists.

During its a little over two months tenure, the PA did deliver on some of the promises. The price of flour and bread dhal and garlic was decreased, pensioners received some of the long promised increases of the UNP which were not paid before, and even a preliminary round of routine talks by officials with the intractable enemy, the LTTE in the North, was held. Legislation on curbing and exposing corruption was enacted and the Foreign Minister pledged Sri Lanka's acceptance of some of the cardinal measures in respect of human rights observance on which the UNP had been prevaricating. Another welcome step that the PA had agreed to take was to bring about the depoliticisation of the public services; and the retirement of the senile "yes men" type of bureaucrats whose services had been interminably extended much to the chagrin of the younger and rightful aspirants.

No doubt, this was indeed a large agenda for any government that had won the general elections by a wafer thin majority. And to complicate the situation that confronted the PA the assassination of some of the principal leaders of the UNP, including the Presidential rival candidate, took place. This demanded the PA's leader making strenuous efforts to retrieve the

confidence of the security forces of whose leadership she had made some critical comments just a little before. However, in spite of the odds being stacked against her, she won a convincing victory that indicated that the faith of the masses in her remained unassailed, and that the credibility of her opponents had ebbed.

Now she has to grapple with the problems that confront her and not forfeit the goodwill of the voters. There is the constitution, that would make democracy real and meaningful, that needs to be introduced. Welfare measures have to be reconciled with the demands of donors that expenditure on welfarism should be curtailed. Budget deficits have to be cleared. Of course, with her good team of ministerial auxiliaries she can proceed successfully if everyone in her team pulls together and hard.

An immediate need would be to rid herself, and her ministers too, of the "fair weather" friends who changed allegiances like a chameleon changing colours. She must jettison those immature sycophants who surround herself and her ministers insulating them from public observations and criticism. Such people who unscrupulously jump onto the bandwagon are those who could call the naked emperor clothed. They create complacency and leave no room for criticism to reach the President, the Prime Minister or Ministers. They fail to reveal the truth and lead the rulers along the path to folly. A skilled, efficient and honest set of administrators are needed if the government is to execute successfully its policies and programme.

The path to peace is going to be obstructed by many road blocks, and these have to be surmounted. One failure or mishap should not discourage and deter the pursuit of peace. In fact, much of the majority who rejected communal parties and chauvinist cries along with the minority substantially voted for the PA candidate, confident that she will, as her husband had endeavoured to do, work for peace and end the civil war that has divided the nation. Apparently, the present President has both the vision and the will to fight for peace unlike her predecessors who lacked courage and succumbed to chauvinist pressures in a plural society thereby

alienating the minorities. Peace as well as war is a matter for the politicians, and the President has courageously made this clear to everyone.

In recent times, in spite of much freedom being allowed, there still have arisen justifiable complaints in regard to the media. The electronic media, especially the Rupavahini, and to a lesser extent, the radio has come in for a lot of flak. This is due to overzealous officials who want to demonstrate that they are more pro-PA than the PA themselves. This misplaced and misused enthusiasm has to be nipped in the bud. More efficient and maturer officials should be entrusted with the responsibility for direction and public decision making.

Again, the Lake House newspapers, it is alleged have been forced to submit their publications, for proof reading and vetting. This should not be tolerated by the PA government. Over-enthusiastic guardians, arrogating to themselves such authority should be discouraged. The PA campaigned against censorship, partisan use of the media, and monopolising the media by the UNP. It is time that the PA gave up repeating these same practices. The PA has to be wary of those "yes men" of the UNP of yester year who have now crept into the PA because they could, as they did to the UNP, lead the PA to its downfall. How can the same people serve the ideologically different masters? In many statutory bodies those who flourished but misled the UNP are now with the PA. It is time that they are weeded out and efficient people of integrity are chosen to replace those officials. Some of them had even got better places in the PA owing to their patrons.

The UNP's fall from grace after seventeen long years of unchallenged authority is another tale of power intoxicating the holders of office. A party that was miserably reduced to an ineffectual opposition valiantly fought back to rise to a powerful position with a five sixths majority, thanks to the assiduous planning and campaigning by President Jayawardene ably aided by the late President Ranasinghe Premadasa. They became a law unto themselves and felt that they were invincible; the UNP turned to be arrogant and unmindful of the electorate.

Jayawardene ruled as he wanted to, making all instruments of governance and public mechanisms as the means to push through whatever he yearned for. His successor created a sense of fear of all those around him so that they became pliant, and never forewarned him. The challenge to him no doubt was there from

the beginning from two astute political leaders, Lalith Athulathmudali and Gamini Dissanayake. But with his unorthodox ways, Premadasa was able to counter even the impeachment move. Nevertheless, the rot had set in by now. Divisions and dissensions rent the party apart although for a while internecine strife was contained within by resort to many questionable means: silencing critics even by issuing frightful threats.

With his assassination however the splintered party was headed by an unimpressive and uninspiring leader, D.B. Wijetunga. He estranged the minority with his imprudent talk of "a tree and creepers", the right of the person who held the spoon to disburse patronage as he wished; and, of course, such other things like the unscrupulous involvement in the disgraceful "Francisco episode" also added to discredit the UNP. The UNP had to face bad times: presidential pardons were abused. Obviously, the President was under malign influences.

Wijetunga gave little leadership. Rectitude and propriety were abandoned and

a leadership that should have rightly gone to Ranil Wickramasinghe was "hijacked" by another and his coterie. The party lost all sense of even the little ideology it had professed in the past, and as Jawaharlal Nehru once confessed a party without an ideology became something like a drinking den. Such was the UNP — divided and degenerate.

When Gamini Dissanayake was murdered the UNP being bereft of leaders and surrounded by opportunists looking for easy ways to win the Presidential election ignored the claims of a UNP leader such as Ranil Wickramasinghe. Some of the senior but not so popular members aided by the relations and friends of Gamini Dissanayake chose instead his wife Sirima Dissanayake to contest the Presidency. She was a lawyer and had succeeded Gamini in the Central Provincial Council, but proved to be no match in the hustings for Chandrika who had already won the General Elections, and easily won the Presidency. It is now upto the UNP to put their house in order, if they are hoping to rise again.

## Awaiting the Frontiersmen

### Clown's Cantos 9

*It isn't easy (having talked of plunder)*

*To intonate sweet compromise*

*To mobilize plausibility*

*Reverse the old arguments*

*And arrive at a Post-Doctoral*

*Thesis on Globality.*

*Globality is Glassy*

*Doesn't throw Sintster shadows*

*Cloak and dagger on the cracked wall.*

*Whatever perspective viewed*

*Globalism dazzles, doesn't show*

*The clock turning slowly backwards*

*To the imperial Hour.*

*Turning on the smooth jewel of scholar's jargon*

*Coined in the Twenties for the Washington Conference*

*When Globalism heralded China's Sorrow*

*Resolved later beneath the Great Heavens.*

*No joy this for those who defend the Global thesis*

*Watching over their shoulder the Century turn*

*To whats left of Asia and the Pacific*

*Awaiting the Frontiersmen*

*The soldier-scholars*

*Jaws set to the Recessing Nineties*

*With no Gilt edge on the Dollars.*

**U. Karunatilake**

# IS DEVOLUTION TOO LATE ?

## Sunil Bastian's *Development and Devolution in Sri Lanka*

A. Jeyaratnam Wilson

Sunil Bastian has performed yeoman service in linking the twin problems that beset our contemporaneous body politic, through his editorship of *Devolution and Development in Sri Lanka*, published by Konark Publishers Pvt Ltd., Delhi 1994, in association with the International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Colombo, a centre which under the leadership of (Dr) Neelan Tiruchelvam continues to prosper as a hothouse of intellectual discourse in claustrophobic Colombo. The chief merit of Bastian's volume is that he has dovetailed the controversies that beset Sri Lanka on these inter-related subjects and edited a coherent and readable volume. The contributions of Bastian himself, Jani de Silva, Uyangoda and Shastri are of a piece and throw much light.

Bastian's "Introduction" read with his "Liberalised Policies and Regional Autonomy: focuses attention on the importance of reconciling the seemingly irreconcilable problems of development and inter-ethnic conflict. There are other instances but these are not exactly of the same kind. For example Latin American states promoted four stages in their development strategy by twinning repressive or gradualistic democratic developmentalist regimes with incremental stages of industrialisation. Sri Lanka, without aforethought, had followed such a path but not with much success until a different turn took place with the advent of the P.A. regime. The latter seeks to veer from the norm by a return to the Westminster system of parliamentary accountability, a reversion it must be admitted to the best in bourgeois democracy.

Bastian and Shastri raise the significant question as to whether the envisaged provincial scheme of autonomy can help in the much needed developmentalism. Individual styles mattered. JRJ envisaged a minimal devolution while Premadasa took away what the right hand had given (Bastian). Both Presidents were cheese-

paring. The solution however was not a question of style but of building institutions. Neither was interested. Provincial autonomy therefore fell far short of Tamil demands as Bastian has carefully posited.

There are three inferences. Sinhalese opinion is not prepared to make the adjustments. Uyangoda with surgical precision draws our attention to this fact. Sinhalese nationalism has come to stay. Bastian is meticulous in the clinical candour with which he points out that the 1987 autonomization exercise fell short of Tamil expectations. In a different publication, it is worth noting that Professor Lakshman Marasinghe (University of Windsor) in his "Ethnic Politics and Constitutional Reform: The Indo-Sri Lankan Accord" (*International Comparative Law Quarterly*, Vol. 37, July 1988, p. 582) confirmed exactly this conclusion when he wrote, "the reform package contained in the Provincial Councils Bill and Thirteenth Amendment is no more than the creation of an ethnically ascertained local government body exercising subordinate legislation". An additional fact which needs underscoring is that the Sinhalese politicalised class expects the war in the northeast to be encapsulated there, not taking into account the spill over effects and the costs (Rs. 50,000 a minute). Shastri in her "Provincial Council System in Sri Lanka: A Solution to the Ethnic Problem?" confirms with convincing evidence inclusive of first hand interviews, the failure of the Sinhalese to agree to power sharing and in the process ignoring the economic effects.

Bastian raises the relevant question of "different interpretations given to the law by the lists relating to the centre and the provinces". Here men/women judges pronounce verdicts. They have, as Harold Laski stated of British judges, "their inarticulate major premises". It was best exemplified in Sri Lanka by the dissent of

Justice Wanasundera and his brothers in respect to the Thirteenth Amendment. Embedded as an ineradicable inarticulate premise is the Sinhala view that the island is theirs. What hope therefore do the Tamils have in a bench with a majority of Sinhala judges? Nor does one need these days a pick axe to find out whether a Sinhalese or Tamil is communal minded. A mere scratch is adequate. There are of course a few rare exceptions. Add to this the dyarchical nature of the Provincial Councils Act (1987) which resembles the Government of India Act of 1919. The latter was a perversion of the promise of self government given to the Indians by the wartime government of Lloyd George (WW) and when compared with it, the whole Provincial Council system disintegrates as a crochet work of deceit.

Jani de Silva's "Centripetal Pressures and Regime Change in the Post-Colonial Sri Lankan State" delves deeply while simultaneously providing a nearly all pervasive overview. Her interpretations give a clear understanding. Whilst the dichotomy she poses between regime maintenance and the state as an independent agency may be valid in respect of her approach, one is nevertheless impelled to ask whether or not the two are also interconnected. To vary Marx somewhat, is not the ex-colonial state, the executive committee of the superordinate ethnic majority? Therefore are not the two (state and ethnic majority) one and the same where the distribution of the limited pie is concerned.

Uyangoda's insightful piece, "The State and the Process of Devolution in Sri Lanka" confirms that the "nation-state came to signify an ethnically exclusivist Sinhalese state" (p. 83). In effect in the contemporaneous setting, ethnicity takes command over economism. The traditional Marxian view that a solution to the economic question will mitigate ethnic antagonisms has been flung out of the window. Uyangoda's

chapter is central to this volume and must be read carefully.

What may we conclude from this richly rewarding volume? Compulsory reading, one daresay, it might be for students and decision makers? But at the same time we must firstly take note of the marked absence in Sri Lanka of salutary leadership, given that we are a polarized bi-lingual polity. Since independence political leadership has been deceptionist (D.S. Senanayake) if not haplessly unaware of the pitfalls (Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike). The historian, K.M. de Silva, has drawn our attention to the leadership role of D.S. Senanayake, the so-called Father of the Nation, namely, that "to the extent he shared the attitudes and prejudices of the great majority of Sinhalese politicians over the Indian question... his conception of a multi-racial polity was flawed" (*A History of Sri Lanka*, London, 1981, p. 491).

Secondly one hopes that Bastian and his colleagues will undertake a study of the island's multi-ethnic political culture and political behaviour patterns. Executive presidentialism suits the French temperament with its relative homogeneity, notwithstanding the Bretons. But Sri Lanka is ethnically and religionwise criss-crossed. Can even the Westminster model be considered a successful transplant in the light of 1947-72? There is a need for modification. Mr. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike system under the Donoghmore constitution.

Lastly aren't we, very sadly, a bit too late? The "time lag effect" (provincial councils delayed by at least ten years) and the "too little too late syndrome" (the measly sharing of powers provided for in the three lists under the Provincial Councils Act) have brought secessionism to our doorstep. We can still avoid King Solomon's judgment. All too often the demand by the Tamils for self-determination is mistaken for the right to secede. Uyangoda gives the answer when he refers to "the notion of self-determination and the right to autonomy". This is absolutely correct. The Tamils do not seek amputation of the polity. By self-determination they mean a recognition that they could sit round a table as equals with the Sinhalese and come to an agreement on resolving the question of autonomization.

## U.N. AND WAR (4)

# Clinton's Yugoslav Policy

Horace Perera

Clinton came to Washington in January 1993 convinced that he had a mandate to give priority to domestic issues. In view, however, of his campaign statements on foreign policy issues, his promise of activism abroad was bound to clash with his intention to devote himself overwhelmingly to domestic issues, unless he avoided getting too involved in foreign political commitments. This was a daunting task as the war for Bosnia-Herzegovina was not the only problem calling for his attention. To mention a few, there were the issues in Haiti, Somalia, the former USSR and North Korea of deep concern to the United States. As far as Bosnia-Herzegovina was concerned he seemed to favour the second of the options mentioned in the previous paragraph; namely of assisting the Muslims. There were three principal ways of doing this. One was to supply them with effective weaponry to help them match the military strength of the Bosnian Serbs. The second was by aerial bombardment of of Bosnian Serbs forces, their military infrastructure and their lines of communication especially the bridges over the Drina River with Belgrade which was considered to be supplying their fellow Serbs in Bosnia. The third was massive allied military intervention in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The kind of action which the Economist called "Balkan Storm". Clinton chose the first of these but his reluctance to deal with foreign policy issues contributed to a tendency to proceed to a tactical day-to-day response rather than engage in longer range strategic plans. A classic instance of this was his having to summon his aides to a meeting specifically to consider new options when, to the bombing of Serb positions round Gorazde by NATO planes, the Bosnian Serbs retaliated by taking UN personnel hostage, bringing down a NATO plane by surface-to-air missiles and snatching weapons which, by an earlier agreement they had placed under UN control. Normally, when any form of military action is planned all possible reactions by the enemy are considered and adequate counter measures are put

in place for immediate response should the need arise. In any case, Clinton never resorted to the extensive aerial bombing that its protagonists had repeatedly urged. The "pinprick bombing" which was sanctioned had no real impact on the Bosnian Serbs and only strengthened their resolve and made them more aggressive. To a reporter's criticism at a news conference that his administration had constantly flip-flopped on Bosnia Clinton insisted that "there had been no constant flip flop". He was really and truly conceding the point, though in a sense he had not intended. Still bent on assisting the Muslims he toyed with the proposal to lift the arms embargo on Bosnia-Herzegovina which was a relic of the overall embargo on the whole of former Yugoslavia imposed by the E.C. and endorsed and tightened by the Security Council beginning with resolution 713 (1991), but when he was advised that to do this a fresh Security Council resolution would be necessary, with a possible Russian veto, but that the US could do so unilaterally he abandoned the idea giving the specious reason that to do so unilaterally would be setting a precedent and lead to states lifting, unilaterally, the embargo on Iraq, Haiti, Serbia etc. There was no parallel and therefore no precedent could have been set. Iraq and Serbia were proven aggressors and the Junta in Haiti was an illegitimate government with an atrocious human rights record. The Muslims were, on the other hand, victims of blatant aggression. Most appropriate in this connection is a comment made in the Economist that one of the few predictable things about Clinton's foreign policy seems to be that with every zig there will be another zag. Massive military intervention was ruled out by some of his advisers who, by a misreading of Hitler's invasion of Yugoslavia in 1941 conjured visions of a quagmire. General John Shalikashvili, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, was among the few who felt that only a massive ground intervention would stop the Serbs. But he opposed it on the ground that it had no backing in Congress. What this former artillery officer did not



know was that Congress never leads in foreign policy. It only reacts, criticizes or restricts when necessary. Moreover the US which had not joined its NATO allies in sending troops to participate in UNPROFOR's peace keeping operations was not likely to send troops for what could be a costly war, not merely in funds but in human lives. Moreover, he had not only withdrawn his election campaign recommendation of an international standing army but he also declared that were such an army to be formed the US would not be a party to it.

An overall review will reveal that the principal reason for the inability of the Western allies to bring the wars in the former Yugoslavia to a suitable end was that they lacked effective leadership from the one power that could give it and that was the US. The Clinton administration had at no time a clear and consistent goal in the conflict and consequently all it did was to resort to half-hearted measures far below what was necessary to match the requirements of the situation. The result is that the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina still lingers in spite of the map drafted by the Contact Group. Meanwhile Clinton is coming in for criticism at home and in Europe. Americans, like any other people would love to see their domestic problems solved, but they also have a vision of their country as a great land held in respect by the world. In a Gallup poll held at the end of April this year as many as 55% of Americans considered that Clinton was not effective as a world military leader. According to Jim Hoagland, writing in the Washington Post, there is also in Europe, even among America's best friends the feeling that in the absence of clear and consistent policies they cannot work constructively with him and are resigned to endure it. Europeans are accustomed, says Hoagland, to the US asserting its agenda and seeking their participation. They, on the other hand, have learned to respond to that approach and at the same time protect their sovereignty and their interests. What leaves them at a loss are the uncertainties and the omissions. For example, Britain and France felt that significant progress had been made when the US agreed to a Geneva Conference on Bosnia on a settlement giving the Serbs 49% and the Muslim-Croat Federation 51% of the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Barely 24 hours before the meeting

the Europeans discovered that the US had given its blessing to a plan that gave the Serbs 42% and the other party 58%. The State Department could not explain to Paris or London how this happened. But it finally accepted the 49% : 51% formula. In view of this growing disenchantment with the Clinton administration, Robert Kaplan, the author of "Balkan Ghosts" who has made an impassioned argument for deep US involvement in Bosnia-Herzegovina is willing to concede that the non-interventionists have one compelling argument in their favour, namely that this White House, with its muddled performance on national security issues, may not be upto the task.

### **The UN Barks but does not Bite**

In view of more effective measures than those taken by the E.C. and the Member States participating in the CSCE process since June 1991, the Security Council met on 25 September 1991 at the request of a number of States. At this meeting, which was officially welcomed by the former Yugoslavia, the Council adopted resolution 713 (1991) in which it commended to E and the CSCE for their efforts, endorsed the suspension of the delivery of arms and military equipment to Yugoslavia and called on all parties to abide strictly by the cease fire agreements of 17 and 22 September 1991. Since then and 22 April 1994 when the Council adopted resolution 913 (1994) in which, inter alia, it encouraged the "Contact Group's efforts to effect a settlement of the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Council adopted as many as 53 resolutions on the situation in that republic. A review of these resolutions show that the Council unequivocally considered the situation in the former Yugoslavia to be "a threat to international peace and security", reaffirmed its commitment to the preservation of "the sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity of the republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina", imposed on the former Yugoslavia sanctions which it steadily expanded and tightened and also declared that the present Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) was not entitled to occupy the place of the former Yugoslavia in the United Nations and that it would have to apply for membership (Res.777/1992). A study of the resolutions will also reveal the extent to which the Bosnian Serbs were prepared to go to achieve their objective which obviously

is to carve out a sizable part of Bosnia-Herzegovina, in total disproportion to their numbers, exclude from it all non-Serb elements, especially Muslims, and maintain it as an ethnically "pure" political entity or affiliate it to the rump Republic of Yugoslavia. In their efforts to achieve this they showed that they had no scruples at all. They disregarded agreements reached at Conferences, violated cease fire agreements with ruthless regularity, paid scant attention to Security Council resolutions which called for positive action from them or urged them to refrain from further perpetration of atrocities already committed. They deliberately attacked UNPROFOR and other UN personnel and also UN declared "safe areas" and committed appalling violations of the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and basic rights set forth in the principal international human rights legal instruments. These last included the forcible ejection of people from their ancestral homes, the widespread massacre of people of other ethnic origins, the detention of prisoners of war as well civilians (women and children included) in veritable death camps, the rape of women, particularly those who professed Islam, and the impeding of the delivery of relief aid thereby causing untold human suffering. Brutal atrocities of this kind naturally led to an increasing flow of refugees prompting the UN High Commissioner of Refugees to say that she knows "that wars create masses of displaced persons but this is the first time that she finds the creation of refugees as the purpose of a war". On the background of the heinous and horrendous crimes committed in Bosnia-Herzegovina, chiefly by Bosnian Serb irregulars, the violation of human rights in Haiti tend to pale into insignificance. Nevertheless the Security Council has seen fit to authorise the use of force to restore democracy and human rights in Haiti but only the use of air power in Bosnia-Herzegovina and that too for very specific purposes such as to protect UNPROFOR, other UN and Aid Agency personnel, to repulse attacks on UN declared "safe areas" and ensure the delivery of relief aid. Evidently the solitary Super Power and its Western Allies can pilot through the Council the kind of resolutions they want, provided they are not contrary to the national interests of the other two Permanent Members. In this post cold-war period there is a tendency for the Council not only to listen to its masters' voices but even to share some of their "vices".

# ELECTORAL POLITICS IN SRI LANKA

Laksiri Jayasuriya

## The Pre-Independence Period

Electoral politics in Sri Lanka dates back to the early part of this century with the gradual introduction of self-government by the British colonial administrators. The period 1931-48, immediately preceding the grant of independence in 1948, marks the inauguration of a fully elected, self governing Parliament with universal franchise, but still under colonial rule. The achievement of partial self government and the grant of universal suffrage in 1931 (just 3 years after it was introduced in Britain) has influenced every aspect of political development and dramatically transformed the history of the country (de Silva K.M. 1981). It is worthwhile noting that Sri Lanka was the first Asian country to enjoy the exercise of universal suffrage; for both men and women, which was not enjoyed at that time by many Western liberal democracies.

The adoption of universal suffrage was partly intended to overcome the tensions created by minority representation in the early stages of partial self-government granted by the British in the early part of the century. But, on the contrary, this form of representation only served to articulate more forcefully, sectional communal interests throughout the last four decades. However, as de Silva (K.M. 1981) rightly observed, universal franchise, achieved in 1931, is the most durable characteristic of the Sri Lankan democratic system, and constitutes its foundation. The right of the people to exercise their vote, to elect a government, is the key to understanding electoral politics in Sri Lanka. There were three General Elections in this early period, and as Sri Lanka mastered the basic principles of electoral democracy they have learned to use the vote precisely in the way Macaulay feared, when he wrote that by giving:

votes to all... you must expect the instinct of self interest — that same self interest which Adam Smith counted on to work in the economic sphere of laissez-faire — to lead to state interference with the inequality of incomes and prosperity (quoted in Fonseka 1989, p.9).

Sri Lankan politicians have, as 'political entrepreneurs' (Rabushka & Shepsle 1972), used the popular electorate effectively to woo Sri Lankan voters who have learnt to use the ballot box skilfully to achieve their political demands such as increased representation or a greater measure of equity and justice.

Not surprisingly, the foundation of Sri Lanka's welfare system, especially in the areas of health and education were laid during the pre-independence colonial period (Wickremaratne 1973; Jayasuriya, Fernando and Albrook 1986).

Equally, this period also saw the beginning of minority politics (communal politics) in a plural society, with claims by the Tamil community for a greater degree of political representation, and more equal access to benefits. Parity of representation in the form of the slogan 50:50 (popularly known as the fifty-fifty scheme) expressed the growing strength of organised minority opinion — Tamils as well as Muslim interests — which manifested itself politically. This envisaged the allotment of half the seats to Sinhalese and the other half to all minority groups. The beginnings of Sinhalese nationalist politics, in response to Tamil demands and expressions of nationalist sentiment (Wriggins 1960; Jupp 1978) which were manifest in the Buddhist revivalist movement, became evident during this period and influenced later developments.

## II. The Post-Independence Period (1948-94)

### *Phase 1 (1948-56): Elite Politics of Independence*

With the grant of independence from British colonial rule in 1948, the Constitution of 1948 established a Westminster system of government with an elected Parliament, a Senate and a House of Representatives. Only the Lower House — the House of Representatives — was based on an elected chamber. Elections to this chamber were made through single member territorial constituencies with additional provision for several multi-member constituencies designed to cater to minority interests. At the same time, with a view to giving adequate representation to sectional interests, there were several nominated members in the Lower House. Further safeguards for minority and sectional interests were provided by legislative provisions relating to principles that were to be followed by subsequent Delimitation Commissions to ensure that proper weightage was given to interest groups, in the carving up of electorates. This clearly shows that minority issues were well into the fore in the first phase of Sri Lankan political development, extending from 1948 to 1956.

At the same time, the framers of the 1948 Constitutions purposely deviated from the principle of one person, one vote, one value, to give weightage to sparsely populated and backward areas. This period also witnessed

the development of a body of electoral laws to prevent voting abuse. By virtue of these procedures, electoral abuses were greatly minimised and, as a result Sri Lanka has today an unenviable record of a system of efficient and fair elections which has in turn, generated considerable public confidence in the fairness of the electoral system.

Politically, this period was noted for the skilful management of the previously identified dominant themes of electoral politics, namely, minority and welfare politics. Welfare politics led to the establishment of a universalist welfare state system which 'guaranteed access to three basic amenities — food, health care and education' (Osmani 1988, p. 74). This was based on free food, free rice, subsidy on other essentials, free education from the kindergarten to university, and free health in a system of public hospitals. To this must be added subsidised public transport and several social assistance programs for those in special circumstances.

This phase of Sri Lanka's political development also marked the emergence of political 'parties', initially as loose associations of personalities, dominated by the 'old guard' — the comprador elite — who negotiated the transfer of power from the British colonial rulers. It is a phase characterised by relative economic affluence in a dependent economy which was based primarily on the exports of agricultural commodities (tea, rubber and coconut). In fact, the plantation economy served to underwrite welfare policies and public programs which were mostly beneficial to the urban sector.

On the question of minority politics, the governments of this period espoused an 'integrative secularism', based on an alliance between the elite of the dominant and minority groups, all of whom were drawn from urban, western educated classes. According to one commentator (Wilson 1988), this was a period of 'responsive cooperation' between two Western educated groups, this is best described as 'elite accommodation'. Its success at this time was because it represented a class alliance between two Western educated elite groups, with common interests in maintaining relative peace and stability.

From the outset, the dominant themes of competitive politics were built around minority and welfare issues. Welfare politics was also the means through which an assertive left wing was kept at bay. Furthermore, in a period of economic affluence, governments were also able to make skilful use

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of welfare statist policies as a method of state regulated control of the wider population.

### *Phase 2 (1956-70): Nationalist Welfare Politics*

In the next phase, extending from 1956-1970, we begin to observe the first manifestations of competitive electoral party politics, and in particular, the evolution of a bi-polar political system. While there are many reasons for this development, it is widely agreed that the two-party model was in many ways an inevitable result of the 'plurality' system of elections, i.e., voting by the first past the post voting system. To quote de Silva (C.R.):

any electoral system based on a plurality system generally confers disproportionate benefits on parties with the highest poll... [Thus] a party with much less than 50 per cent of the vote could obtain a majority of seats and form a stable government (1981, p. 121).

Accordingly, there emerged two main party blocs, the *United National Party* (UNP), and the *Sri Lankan Freedom Party* (SLFP). The UNP is essentially a non-sectarian Centre-Right patrician party whose leadership was comprised of the comprador elite, 'the old guard' of Sri Lankan politics, representing the landed aristocracy, the bureaucracy and big business. The UNP, in this early stage, was paternalistic in approach to politics and was led by a highly westernised middle class. As the political analyst, Kearney (1973) rightly points out, in these early days the UNP was essentially a 'pragmatic party with little sense of mission or dedication to the pursuit of social economic goals', plagued by schisms and family 'squabbles' (the clash of cousins for leadership).

The main opposition Party to the UNP, *Sri Lanka Freedom Party* (SLFP), was formed in 1952 and was initially a collection of breakaway politicians from the UNP. It was led by a brilliant patrician politician, S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike who remains a pivotal figure in the politics of Sri Lanka. Manor (1989), in his authoritative study of Bandaranaike and his politics, described him as 'a complex, inconstant, visionary', broke away from the UNP with a small band of followers to form a centre Party with strong nationalist leanings. Bandaranaike's guiding ambition as a political leader in his own words was, 'to capture the national imagination' which he said had not preceded independence as Sri Lanka had achieved freedom without a national struggle. Hence, the SLFP's resort to cultural nationalist sentiment was a means of gaining popular support.

Though billed as a party of the 'common man' with a strong rural power base, it was not a peasant party nor a party of the pea-

santry; it was more truly representative of the Sinhalese rural middle class, such as village leaders, which included teachers, the Buddhist clergy, indigenous physicians, and petty landowners. One of the main aims of the SLFP as a political party was the destruction of the privileges of the establishment class — the western educated ruling elite — through a series of nationalist and egalitarian social reforms such as the removal of English as the official language, land reform measures and agricultural tenurial policies, and social welfare measures to ensure a greater measure of distributional equity for the rural sector. In short, the SLFP, in its search for political power, alongside its strong expression of Sinhalese nationalist sentiment, vigorously espoused 'welfare statist' policies and state intervention in the management of the economy.

At the same time, the SLFP, soon recognised that it could not gain political ascendancy through the ballot box without the support of the more urban, rural-urban, voters, particularly the urban working class and lower middle class which formed the power base of several well established Left Parties (Trotskyists and Communists). These parties had a sizeable electoral base, approximately 20%, areas marked by urbanisation, high levels of education and wage employment, especially in Colombo, its environs and the Southern region. The SLFP's pursuit of equity and justice, through welfarism, was directed mainly at the urban middle and working class groups, and was greatly influenced by the Left Parties. Hence, the SLFP negotiated 'electoral pacts' during this period, 1956-1977, as a necessary condition of its gaining political power within the parliamentary system. The support of the Left Parties has been a key factor on every occasion that the SLFP has gained power.

Its triumphant entry into government in 1956 was a watershed because it ushered in a new regime which was to alter the course of Sri Lankan politics for the next few decades. Whether in office or out of office, the SLFP — largely because of the Left Party influences — maintained a strong commitment to progressive social reform, and the maintenance of a strong public sector within a mixed economy. Unlike its rival, the UNP, it was avowedly an interventionist party.

However, the achilles heel of the SLFP, in its claim to recognition as a national political party has always been its vacillation on ethnic minority issues — its inability to command any confidence from the minority parties, especially the Tamil parties, that had come to the fore during this period. One of its notable achievements was the successful resolution of the question of the status of the 'stateless' Indian Tamil plantation workers in 1964-65 as a result of the Sirima-Shastri Pact (1964). As a result, over time, a substantial

number of Indian Tamils gained citizenship status, and the Indian Tamil question has become a 'non-issue' in Sri Lankan politics.

With the coming into being of the two party blocs — the UNP and the SLFP — the minority parties and other smaller parties had declining fortunes with few opportunities to bargain with the two main party blocs. One direct consequence of this changing political scenario in the 1970s was to use the constitution as an instrument of social and political change. The more recent phase of Sri Lanka's political development, especially since 1970 is dominated by the way electoral politics has been fashioned by constitutional changes which in turn have had important implications for the evolving political process in Sri Lanka.

### *Phase 3 (1970-77): The Failed Socialist Experiment*

The third phase of Sri Lanka's recent political history extending from 1970-1977, saw the return of the SLFP government for the third time. This relatively short, but important phase typifies Sri Lanka's 'turnover' pattern of politics, which is revealed in Appendix Table II showing the strength of the parties in the 10 General Elections since 1947. As Dissanayaka (1994) notes: 'in the entire third world only Jamaica has a comparable "turnover pattern" in a country with a two-party system'. The landslide victory of the SLFP in 1970, as in the 1956 Election, was again not in its own right, but in coalition with a group of Left Parties. Although the coalition gained a massive majority of seats, it should be noted that the outgoing UNP, despite the small number of seats (17 out of 168), still obtained a larger percentage of votes than the SLFP (UNP, 38%; SLFP, 37%). In the evident bi-polarisation of the political spectrum, the 1970 results clearly indicated that the electoral fortunes of the SLFP depended heavily on the success of electoral pacts with minor parties such as the Left Parties whose electoral strength has traditionally been in the South.

Importantly, it was this alliance with the 'socialist left' in 1970 that served to transform the SLFP into a genuine Centre-Left Party of social reform firmly committed to maintaining a strong public sector in a mixed economy and continuation of welfarism. More importantly, the 'left' influence on the SLFP served to mitigate, if not to control, the extreme nationalist elements within the SLFP. In short, the Left Parties, were not just the soul of the SLFP as a progressive force in politics, but also became the 'theoreticians' of the new government. One of its main achievements was to introduce a new 'socialist' constitution in 1972, the Republican Constitution of 1972 which replaced the Constitution of 1948, with an autochthonous Constitution.

The 1972 Republican Constitution was also 'in many ways a symbolic assertion of nationalism' (de Silva 1977), and reflected the dissatisfaction with the conservative and pragmatic Constitution of 1948, a legacy of British colonialism (Jupp 1978). The main criticism of the earlier Constitution was that it was a conservative document which did not guide policy makers towards any progressive social and economic changes. It merely served to reinforce and sustain Westminster traditions and practices such as a bi-cameral legislature and the Queen as the nominal Head of State. Thus, the 1972 Constitution, was an 'indigenist constitution' which, in addition to establishing a President as the nominal head of State, ventured — through its statement of Principles of State Policy — to enshrine socialist principles such as full employment, distributional equity and a state regulated economy — in justification for the expansion of the public sector in a carefully regulated and planned economy. It was, in essence, meant to be an expression of a new nationalism as well as the embodiment of progressive socialist ideals of people's power and centralised planning.

Perhaps, the most significant feature of the 1972 Republican Constitution was that, 'the National State Assembly as the supreme instrument of State power of the Republic was vested with the legislative, executive and judicial power of the people' (Zafrullah 1981, p.20). Zafrullah adds that, in theory, this envisaged a fusion rather than a separation of powers' (p.21). The supremacy of the legislature, embodying the power of the people, was to be exercised through the National State Assembly which had ultimate power over the judiciary and the bureaucracy. According to Jupp (1978) the placing of bureaucratic and judicial posts within the political area [was] more in the American than the British tradition of constitutional government characteristic of the 1948 Constitution'. 'The colonial Platonism' which had inspired the architects of the 1948 Constitution Jupp (1978) states 'was replaced by a cruder, but more politically realistic assertion of majority demination' (p.25). Not unexpectedly, the conservative UNP vigorously resisted the concentration of all power in the National State Assembly it decried the principles and constitutional practices of the 1972 Republican constitution.

The 1972 Republican Constitution in effect, as I have argued elsewhere (Jayasuriya 1977), established a 'legitimised dictatorship' of Parliament which led to a blatant misuse of political power by the curtailment of individual liberties and freedoms through the use of political patronage and favour, as well as government control of, and interference with, the independence of the judiciary.

Politically, this period also witnessed the 1971 Youth Revolt, a radical revolutionary youth movement in the southern parts of the country led by the JVP or People's Liberation Front founded in 1969. This was, probably, the first significant attempt in recent times, before the 1983 Tamil revolt, and the later JVP insurrection of 1987-1989, to gain 'extra-parliamentary' control of government. This revolt was sparked off by the intractable economic problems confronting the Sri Lankan economy, especially galloping inflation, high unemployment and a stagnant economy whose rate of growth was rapidly falling. Although the economic system was strained to the utmost, it did not reach a point of collapse because of the continued maintenance of welfare policies and programs which enabled the vast majority of people to survive in 'relative poverty'.

These adverse social and economic conditions of this period also contributed to the growing disenchantment of the Tamil community with mainstream Tamil political parties, all led by affluent, western educated urban, middle class professionals, mainly located in Colombo. A relatively strong economy had previously enabled nationalist politicians to ameliorate these forces. However, the increasing state domination of the economy in the 1970s led to the politicisation of distributional issues on ethnic lines. This was evident in the opposition of Tamil parties to the standardisation of university entrance marks and the introduction of district quota system for university admission as evidence of discrimination. It is significant that the mainstream Tamil parties, though demanding a Federal Union, remained committed to a unitary state. They nevertheless vigorously opposed the provisions of the 1972 Constitution which they argued relegated Tamil language to a secondary status.

The coalition government — influenced by its left allies — attempted unsuccessfully to build bridges with the Tamil minorities by such acts as the appointment of Tamil politicians to responsible positions and the grant of concessions for the use of the Tamil language in official matters. Even the cooptation of Tamil politicians into the Cabinet, conciliatory moves on university admission, as well as the establishment of a University Campus in Jaffna catering to Tamil interests proved utterly ineffective in appeasing Tamil opinion which remained resolutely opposed to the SLFP government.

Ethnic relations continued to deteriorate sharply and the Tamil leadership began shift away from the mainstream Tamil parties to young, educated militants in the traditional homeland of the North, who were committed to violence and secession. The all these militant groups, the Liberation Tamil Tigers

of Elam (LTTE) have "remained the strongest and most determined off all guerilla groups... nearly all other groups in existence derive from it either through fissure or imitation (p67 Hellman-Rajanayagam 1986 p.67). In an instructive and revealing account of the history and ideology of the several groups besides the LTTE Hellman-Rajanayagam (1986) states that the only other group which can measure up to the LTTE is the Peoples Liberation Organisation of Tamil Elam (PLOT or PLOTE), founded in 1981 by Uma Maheswaran. With this shift in the power base of Tamil politics, a new chapter in ethnic relations was beginning to emerge, but the Sri Lankan government failed to grasp its significance and respond meaningfully to these new powerful minority interests which had made the Colombo based Tamil leadership ineffective and irrelevant.

#### *Phase 4 (1977-94): The Politics of Economic Reform*

The 1977 General Election marks the beginning of the fourth and most recent phase of Sri Lanka's political evolution which lasted for 17 years until the UNP defeat at the recent General Election of August 1994. In 1977, the UNP, under the able leadership of the astute patrician politician, J.R. Jayawardene, a master political strategist, inflicted a crippling electoral defeat on the SLFP government, which had broken its alliance with the Left Parties in 1975. He was the dominant political figure of this era whose 'overriding goal appeared to be to preserve and extend his own personal predominance regardless of the costs to Sri Lanka' (Moore 1990, p.381). Besides the personality cult politics of Jayawardene and Premadasa of this era, this period is significant for many social, political and economic changes. Some of these include the radical constitutional changes: the introduction of new economic policies; the growth of the Tamil secessionist movement, and above all, the militarisation of Sri Lanka. The latter was a consequence of two events of historical significance in the political development of Sri Lanka: the armed revolt of Tamil groups in the North and East, and the radical insurrection in the South — the JVP revolt (1987-89).

One of the first acts of the new government was to introduce a radically different constitutional structure by introducing fundamental changes to the Westminster style of parliamentary government that had existed since the grant of independence in 1948. This second Republican Constitution of 1978 was a complex and sophisticated document which has attracted considerable interest among constitutional theorists and in particular, analysts of political developments in developing countries.

*Next: 1978 and after*

## **Journalistic decisions with far reaching repercussions**

**Dr. Peter Tachau**

East meets West, and West encounters East — and old question since many generations already. It's been a long history with innumerable pitfalls and detours — a history of misunderstanding, disenchantment, complex conflicts and even brutal wars. But it has also been a story of mutual enrichment and fruitful encounters. However, the question still remains, although it is as old as any travel of mutual discovery: Do we understand each other? Do we relate to each other properly? Can we understand each other at all? — Some of you might think now, that this is indeed a very philosophical question, beyond our realm of giving a concrete answer. But, I am convinced, this should not be an argument for us here and now — out of two reasons:

It is the mere fact of every single article in "Newsweek", in the "Financial Times", in the thousands of dailys and magazines that come out in Western Europe and the international world. And it is the mere fact of every single news-item and feature on radio and on the screens of our TV-sets, that must be questioned and analysed in terms of its connection to truth, balance and trustworthiness. We are communicating already, before any philosophy. But is it true, is it fair, is it to the benefit of the people? — These are not only questions of ethnics in journalism, but also questions with regards to the basic foundations of global communication. Repercussions of lousy and lazy research, of biased reportings, of false news can be tremendous — no doubt: also correct and fair conveyance of news can be disastrous, if the reality reported about has to be described this way since it is not the journalist, who produces the news, the reality, but it is the event and the situation — good or bad — which is to be conveyed by the journalist as a tool with high responsibility. Communication between East and West and vice versa takes places already — and that is good. Further more: Communication on all channels, so to speak, although we should concentrate (these days here in Tutzing) on the print media. I must admit, though, that the TV and the print media slip together. They are almost comparatively fast. Looking to the screens, watching the same news take place at the same minute in Colombo and in New York, and reading the "International Herald Tribune" or the "USA-Today" happens at the same day, if not at the same hour in Manila and in Paris. Bad or good? We can't change it, wie might not even want to change it. Therefore: Good. But it is really good enough?

The second reason is as simple: World politics require world communication. Since

time immemorial political entities, societies on all levels, even just two human beings would only be able to survive, if they can communicate with each other adequately — the history again is full of misunderstanding, differing words and sentences, pretended understanding, but of course also of successful reciprocal communication. But communication — orally, in writing, with mutually accepted signs and symbols — is a 'conditio sine qua non': without the desire and will to relate myself to another person a society will not exist and master the problems of its presence and future. — There is no doubt to me that East and West have met since long already and have come closer to each other over the decades, and probably some observes and interpreters are right in pointing out that a world society is in the process of becoming. There are estimates that in the year 1000 B.C. there were some 500,000 political entities, like hordes, tribes, groups, peoples. Nowadays, some 3,000 years later we only can count a little more than 200 — an astonishing process of nations-building. Language always has played a vital role in this admittedly complex history, language always has been the frame, maybe the foundation for the ever larger becoming assembly of people, that grows together. If, for that reason, sooner or later conflicting parts of the globe, more or less isolated spots and areas will merge — whether we like it or not — to a world-society, that would require a common understanding, forms of communication, maybe not a common language (which I am not opting for, to be clear), but mass media that could reach — at the same time — all people. The world-society presupposes world-synchronisation. Whether we like it or not: international news agencies, global networks of communication, the equality of time in all parts of this world — this is already a reality. And for that reason let me pose the question: what kind of language do we use? What kind of news do we report? What kind of ethics in journalism is to be set up? What means and tools should we develop for the daily work of a journalist, who has got to work in this system of worldwide and synchronized interconnection?

If we would imagine people from the outer space watching our ways of communication, they would probably see a new religion coming up on the globe: human beings sitting in front of their individual altars in their houses and practising a new cult: the cult of catastrophies. For: what are the main topics every evening? scandals, desasters, catastrophies — in Ruanda, in Haiti, in Papua New Guinea, in Sri Lanka at a breathtaking speed? (acc. to an idea by Sloterdijk). — Worldwide

communication to all corners at the same time leaves the question open: what are the criteria for selecting the news and the stories, and who is he, who is doing the job of selection?

These are some of the questions that need to be answered urgently, and with this workshop here in the midst of Western Europe we'd like to initiate some thinking, since it is a genuine concern of journalists and Christian Churches to know more about the elements of a global society. And, I am convinced, it is a Christian virtue to balance hopes and frustrations that come upon us when observing the global network of information-exchange.

Since we observe societies grow together and at the same time conflicts grow bigger and gulfs increase between differing groups and people, one will easily point out to the important role of religion in reconciling the opposite, but also in dividing people even more.

Religion and culture seem to be element that divides the regions of our one globe. A prominent professor in Harward University (Huntington) recently has come out with the argument that it will be mainly the division on the lines of difference between religions, traditions and cultures that will shape the conflicts of the future — right or wrong: reporting about conflicts on the religious line seem to presuppose special sensitivity as it very often implies repercussions that cannot be mastered anymore by the journalist who is doing his job correctly or wrongly. Journalistic competence and responsibility are required.

For all these questions we have chosen Asia as an example, since the Asian continents undoubtedly are of very special importance: the mere number of people living there, the forthcoming economical weight of the Asian nations — versus the predominant weight and political supremacy of the "West".

For our deliberations these days we have selected two examples — the Philippines and Sri Lanka. They shall stand as case studies, symbols of a problem that can be observed almost everywhere: How is to be reported about the NPA in Mindanao, the government and the resistance-movement, how is to be reported about tourism in Sri Lanka, is it safe or not so very much? Journalistic decisions with far reaching repercussions.

Well, let me break off here with these open questions and let us start with the two lectures for tonight...

# Reporting ethnic-religious-nationalist conflict: Western media and Asian realities

Pradip N. Thomas

During the next day and a half we will attempt to grapple with issues related to reporting Asia by the media in the West. We may at the end of the sessions come away with an understanding, of the whole and perhaps draw conclusions as to what can be done to better the situation. We have become accustomed in the fashion of current affairs reporting on television to collapse weighty and complex issues within the manageable time-frame of a sound-bite. It would, however, be wonderful to come away from this meeting with something substantive and I look forward to this.

## Western Understandings & Asian Realities

It was George Bernard Shaw, the English dramatist who once defined newspapers as "a device unable.. to discriminate between a bicycle accident and the fall of a civilization". Many of us here would agree that this is a rather harsh and wholly cynical definition but it does make a significant point. Reality is complex. Media reports however, by their very nature, cannot afford to be too complex. For they are in the business of dealing with the here and now. Ethno-religious-nationalist conflicts in Asia are often caused by a host of factors, fed by multiple-streams — the memory of oppression, both real and imagined, the trauma of accentuated globalisation processes and the devaluation of tradition, conflict over scarce resources, amongst other factors, fuelled by the politics of identity. It is possible to come to a general understanding of a particular conflict, even of common patterns and shared features between conflicts. But beyond this knowable foreground is a background, whose weave differs from conflict to conflict.

Some of you must have heard the story of the Englishman who on being told that the world rested on a platform that rested on the back of an elephant that in turn rested on the back of a turtle asked the question — what did the turtle rest on? The reply — another turtle. And that turtle? Ah, Sahib, after that it is turtles all the way down. It sometimes takes a bit of effort to scratch the surface. The point is that there are different depths and surfaces in Asia. The story of the victim is markedly different from official versions and the versions given by demagogues. Western journalists covering Asia typically resort to using a few theoretical handles, essentialist understandings in their

interpretation and representation of Asian realities. A balanced truth is better than received wisdom even if it seems to mirror dominant opinion. For a dominant opinion may be little more than the perspective of the majority and this does not necessarily have to be the truth. The hallmark of a responsible journalist is one who has a feel for competing truths and who mirrors as complete an understanding as possible of an event or situation.

Journalists like other members of society bring along with them a baggage of understandings with which they make sense of reality. There is a common yardstick by which one measures the worth of happenings and events. Thus, in the West, journalists tend to believe resolutely in the primacy of parliamentary forms of democracy, individuals rights and freedoms, the centrality of reason and other Enlightenment values. These are taken for granted and there is an unsaid belief in their universal currency. Taken together as a whole, journalists from any region make what Edward Said terms a 'community of interpreters'. This community shares a common history and exercises a certain sensibility with respect to the objectives and parameters of their trade. Let me illustrate this with an example of a reporter who is quite well known in Asia.

John Pilger happens to be a journalist that I admire for his courageous investigative reports on Cambodia and more recently on the Gulf War and East Timor. In the English speaking press he is a voice of conscience and I can tell you they are in desperate need of one. And yet, the more I read his recent reports, the more I am convinced that he is out of touch with what ordinary Cambodians and Timorese want — and that's peace, not an interminable war, dialogue — even with your enemy, even with those who have been implicated in genocide. There are traditions in Asia that do not believe that the concept of evil or good can ever be clearly defined and who also believe that there is always a continuity between the aggressor and his victim (Nandy, 1978). I am not for a moment suggesting that questions of justice are invalid. I am merely pointing out that the process of coming to a consensus on issues related to justice varies. There is no universal process, fixed for all time. And it is unwise to have fixed expectations of the outcome of conflict or of the nature of democracy. The democratic imperative may be universal but it is common to most if not all societies in Asia and is expressed through a great variety of ways — through the institutions and proce-

sses of modernity as well through tradition, ritual, notions of harmony and the languages of local politics and conflict resolution processes. Even in the West, democracy sometimes triumphs in the most unexpected of ways. The British media's response to the recent declaration of peace by the IRA bordered on the quizzical at best and contemptuous at worst — and this was the case across the board. It almost seemed that the speed of unexpected change was difficult for the media to handle particularly when a 'terrorist' group suddenly became a 'peacemaker'. As Roy Greenslade writing in *The Guardian*, Sept. 5, 1994 remarked "...if the press is not to find itself dangerously out of step with the wishes of all those in Britain and Ireland who want this peace to last, editors must come to understand that the news agenda is different. How many times have commentators thundered: the problem with the Irish is that they keep looking back instead of forward?" Let me illustrate the way in which news values work by citing the BBC's coverage of the storming of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya a few years ago.

## The BBC, the storming of the Babri Masjid and news values

The storming of the Babri Masjid mosque in Ayodhya by an organised group of right-wing Hindus merited prime-time coverage in media throughout the world. There was dramatic footage of frenzied *kar sevaks* in the act of demolishing the mosque, the breaching of the security cordon around the mosque and the skirmishes between military-police and numerous bands of saffron-clad volunteers. There was also less dramatic footage of an inept, complicitous and complacent state and central government who had neither the will nor the courage to act decisively. While the independent press in India took sides on the issue, the vernacular press, particularly Hindi, was in general, blatantly partisan in their handling of the conflict. The state-controlled broadcasting establishment however refused to cover the actual storming of the mosque for fear that it would inflame passions and lead to civil unrest. BBC's coverage of the incident elicited criticism from the government as well as from different quarters of the majority community. We have become accustomed to hearing conflicting opinions with respect to reporting ethno-religious-nationalist struggles. Governments justify their action or inaction by citing reasons of intra-national security and media institutions like the BBC in turn articulate their defence by foregrounding principles of democracy including info-

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mation rights, free flows, etc. There is, as yet, no end in sight with respect to this controversy. But one can be sure that the regulation of transborder data flows is bound to take centre-stage sooner than later not only in Asia but in the West as well. The stakes are just too high.

I happened to be in India during the Ayodhya incidents. In its immediate aftermath there was sporadic violence throughout the country, particularly in the North. The violence spilled over into neighbouring Bangladesh diaspora communities in England and Canada were also affected by its fall-out. While it would be wrong to ascribe to the media primary responsibility for the violence, in a situation characterised by heightened communal tensions, the media do, wittingly or unwittingly reinforce, contribute to, provoke and inflame passions. There is of course a lot of difference between media that is used for implicitly propagandistic purposes and the so-called quality, mainstream media that is avowedly and expressly in the business of a non-partisan reporting of issues and events. And yet, in the context of interpreting ethnic or religious conflict, the mainstream Western media frequently come to an understanding of the TRUTH when in reality there are multiple truths. The trouble is reality is ambiguous. We strive to come to an understanding yet there are different understandings. We would like to believe in the primacy of values rooted in a tradition of Judeo-Christian, Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment understandings, yet there are 'other' traditions whose value system may or may not approximate to our measure of what is right and good. I am not for a moment advocating for the relativity of truth. I am merely saying that great care needs to be taken when the particular is interpreted according to the canons of the universal.

To go back to the reporting of the Ayodhya incident, it is quite obvious that the dominant standards of newsworthiness were a point of contention. The images and reports of the dramatic, the tragic, the violent and the confrontational coalesced to form a representation of the 'Other' — the state of Indian society as inherently unstable, irrational and unredeemable. There were few attempts at providing information on the background to the conflict. Stereotypes were often used as a means to explaining the reasons for this conflict. It was between Hindus and Muslims thus implicating all members belonging to each community in the conflict. It was Hindus who demolished the mosque. None verified the fact that the stormtroopers of the right, the *kar sevaks*, were specifically mobilised for the occasion from the South. Or that there was a tradition of Hindu-Muslim amity in Ayodhya prior to the conflict; that a Muslim had traditionally been in charge of one of the more famous Hindu temples at Ayodhya; or that the source of the conflict may have had to do more with economic rather religious reasons. There were few attempts at highlighting the opinions of people other than those belonging to the Hindu Right, to politi-

cians or to official sources. It must be kept in mind that a few months later, in by-elections in Uttar Pradesh, the state in which the city of Ayodhya is located, the ruling BJP state government was ousted by a political combine consisting of poor, middle and low-casts Hindu and Muslim peasants. Unfortunately, given the dominant, international tradition of newsworthiness, this vote for humanity was just not dramatic enough to be reported on. Quite obviously a scoop for humanity is just not in the same class as a scoop for the media.

### The media as definers of identity

Most of the time we take the media for granted and we seldom acknowledge the fact that the media in direct and indirect ways influence the way we think and do things. In the west and increasingly in other parts of the world, the media have begun to command a large chunk of the leisure time of people. Traditional definers of meaning — organised religion, education and the family have been forced to accommodate and reckon with an increasingly dominant definer of meaning — the media. The media inform and interpret, they provide frameworks within which we make sense of and respond to events and issues, domestic and foreign. In this sense the media have a claim on consciousness. They clearly compete in the enterprise of making meaning, in the arbitration of value, the moulding of attitudes and the disbursing of belief. And as such they do play a role in structuring identities — local, trans-local, national and global. Inevitably, this process of defining identities is a selective process. Boundaries are defined, differences established and distinctions made between 'us' and 'them'. We are constantly subjected to a discourse on 'origins', continuities and futures, implicated in the structuring of nationhood and in the celebration of citizenship. And we are taught to distinguish the 'other' in our midst.

### Defining the 'other' in our midst: the media in Europe

Let me illustrate this with some examples. The Europe of today is vastly different from the Europe of a century ago. Most European capital cities, for instance, have substantial pockets of people whose origins are from cultures that are other than Judeo-Christian and who come from various parts of the globe. Yet, in very many European countries these people are still treated as guests and not as full citizens in spite of the fact that many are second or third generation domiciles. Britain for example, has pretty large populations of people from the Caribbean and from the Indian sub-continent. The media, however, routinely name them in terms of their ethnic affiliation thus making a distinction between the true 'Brits' of Anglo-Saxon origin and the 'others' who belong to a different racial stock. Both the tabloid and liberal press for instance almost always qualify people of non-Caucasian stock in spite of the fact that they are British by birth and nationality. This trend is probably repeated in other parts of

Europe. It goes to show that the unwillingness of the media in Europe to support and accept multi-culturalism is a problem that needs to be urgently tackled. For unless attempts are made to accept the 'other' living in one's back-yard, it may be more than idealistic to expect Western journalists covering Asia to be sensitive or sympathetic to Asian realities. There is, in other words, a need for the media in the West to accept the reality of a multi-cultural Europe, to celebrate the heterogeneity of nations and cultures and their role in defining the nation as well as national heritage. The role of the media is absolutely crucial to the establishment of a multi-ethnic public sphere in Europe. In Britain, for example, support for this has come from the strangest of quarters. Prince Philip, in a recent statement, did for example, question the privileged relationship between the Anglican church and the monarchy and suggested that the monarch should represent the diverse nature of peoples and beliefs in Britain. Such suggestions are a rarity and by and large the media in Britain do not provoke debate on such matters. In fact, it can be argued that the media in Britain actively demote the expression of multi-culturalism particularly its institutional expressions. When there are controversies with local people in the context of building a temple, mosque or synagogue, it is almost always the case that the majority is given a privileged hearing. Not that the majority is always wrong or that minorities are always right. But that witting and unwitting bias, a provocative headline, choice of language and tone, use of inaccurate statistics, selection and omission can result in consequences that can get out of hand. As one correspondent put in 'In sensitive situations, war or not, a superficial correspondent is a guided missile'.

### The changing balance of power

If the need for sensitivity is an important first step the second is for Western journalists to have a bit of humility, to confront and accept the real changes that are taking place in global political and economic power equations, particularly as this has affected Asia. While levels of development in Asia vary considerably, there are quite a few countries in North and South-East Asia that are economically more robust than many countries in the West, let alone other regions in the South. There are emerging giants like China who have the potential to become a leading world power. Wealth and sustained growth have often been the catalyst for the many self-assured responses made by Asian governments to the challenges posed by global pressures often mediated by the Western media, particularly broadcasting and the press. In the Pergau dam affair for instance, Britain had a lot more to lose than Malaysia at least in the short-term. When the Dutch complained about the Dili incident, Indonesia opted to cancel Dutch aid and the World Bank fashioned financial arrangements without donors from the Netherlands. In spite of Tiannamen, China enjoys most favoured status as a trading ally with the USA.

In spite of Chris Patten, Hong Kong will be shaped according to China's dictates. And in spite of the International Telecommunication Unions rulings with respect to orbiting facilities, China has recently stationed a satellite where it pleased. Does a free media inevitably reflect a democratic state or the lack of one a despotic state? With or without the media there was the Tiananmen incident in China, Ayodhya and various other communal disturbances in India and routine violence in many parts of the Philippines.

There are many in the West and I am sure there are some of us in this room who are likely to view these actions by Asian governments as a cover-up for their own shortcomings and their reluctance to abide by universal standards with respect to human rights and freedoms. This position is entirely justifiable in some cases for they have been recent instances where draconian laws have been enacted, freedoms curtailed and where the dignity of human beings have been compromised as is the case in Indonesia today. The issue at stake is not whether journalists from the West should or should not report issues in Asia which are sensitive or politically volatile. Journalists have a job to do. The key issue, I believe has to do with the interpretation of fundamental Western universals including whether or not the principle of free speech is universally valid and whether the global media has an intrinsic right to abide by the normative claim of free speech together with the commercial claim of free flows. There are times when the language of rights is virtually indistinguishable from the language of privileges.

#### Selective amnesia and elective justice

How many of the media in Asia or for that matter in Europe have reported on the restrictions placed on the Sein Fein leader Gerry Adams from speaking with his voice on British television? Very few I would think. Yet

the media in the West routinely criticise press restrictions in Asia. How many of the media have upheld the principle of free flows with respect to the recent Hollywood-French film industry controversy over US programme imports and their consequences for European culture? Selective amnesia seems to be a recurring illness and memories tend to be short. When the McBride Commission recommended that equal flows instead of free flows become the norm in North-South media flows there was near unanimous condemnation by governments in the West to the extent that a few even pulled out of the UNESCO. The problem is, there are double standards at work and there is no moral ground that the West can legitimately claim to hold and speak from. The fundamental norms underlying media professionalism in the West — commitment to objectivity, balance and ideological neutrality has been called to question time and again. It seems perverse to hide behind a veil of objectivity when it is plain to see that news and views are socially constructed. We do not need to be exceptionally gifted to recognise the fact that there is an ascending order of priorities with respect to the West's handling of the Gulf War, the crisis in the ex-republics of Yugoslavia and the desperate situation in Rwanda. The US government actively supported the 1965 mass killings of so-called Communists in Indonesia, the German government played its part in recognising Croatia thus allowing an excuse for war, and the British government has given large amounts of aid to fund various environmentally unfriendly projects all over Asia that have resulted in incalculable damage to the livelihood and rights of indigenous people. Asian governments increasingly tend to say that Western forms of democracy are a luxury, that civil and political rights need to be curtailed in the interest of economic development, that the media work in the interest of national development and that the foundations of

democracy in Asia need to be based on a symbiotic rather than antagonistic relationship between the individual and the state. Given the fact that Western forms of democracy have a pedigree of less than fifty years in most parts of Asia, it would be unwise to pre-judge the results according to standards set by a single yardstick of progress. Or to co-opt emerging, indigenous, multi-dimensional understandings of democracy.

I was tickled pink at the pompous, self-righteous, hurt reactions of the British press when the Indian government turned down the offer of British aid in the aftermath of the earthquake that struck parts of Maharashtra earlier last year. Although I am no great supporter of the Indian government at the best of times, their decision to rely on local sources for the aid effort was a statement of strength, a vote of confidence in local capabilities to respond to the need for relief. This was not how the British media saw it. In the midst of the Rwandan crisis, the British media barely reported the presence of cholera experts from Bangladesh in Rwanda for after all this was a Western aid effort and all the expertise was in the West. Some attitudes seem to never change. Asian countries are attempting to forge locally-valid strategies of growth. Most of these are not perfect, have not resulted in equitable growth and there are numerous instances of the abuse of authority and crimes against the dignity of common people. Western journalists need to be firm when reporting the frequent lapses of Asian governments but according to standards that are recognised as just fair. They also need to recognise that Indonesia is not East Timor, India not Ayodhya, Sri Lanka not the Tigers and Malaysia not Mahathir. This is a bare minimum.

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## ASIAN FEMALE LEADERSHIP (3)

# No Institutional Base ?

Linda Richter

Women have tended to move into top positions of power in south and southeast Asia under the most dramatic of circumstances — as a result of assassinations, coups, sudden death of the previous leader or by moving to the forefront of the opposition against nondemocratic forces. Only rarely has there been any long-standing power base. Thus, the powerful women leaders considered here do not have an *institutional base*, a *regional constituency*, an *administrative track record*, or a *military niche*. While both Benazir Bhutto and Indira Gandhi had party leadership roles in the strong parties their fathers had shaped, Bhutto's party was in disarray from long years

*of political exile under General Zia. Indira Gandhi was better placed, but she served as political leader of the Congress Party for less than a year in 1959 before coming to power in 1966. More important was the fact that her father had purged many of her likely rivals for power shortly before his death. He asked for the resignation of all cabinet officers and chief ministers in a supposed gesture of Gandhian selfless renunciation of power. They complied, but he selected only six Cabinet and six chief ministers, several with significant power bases of their own. After his death, a mild and diffident Lal Bahadur Shastri briefly succeeded him before dying himself in January, 1966. With no heir appa-*

*rent, Indira Gandhi was able to win the support of the chief ministers and assume power with few expecting her to be more than an interim prime minister<sup>36</sup>.*

*In general, however, women leaders have lacked an institutional base. This appears to be a most serious disadvantage vis-a-vis the army. In many of these countries the military has been the de jure or de facto government. While the least traditional institution in many respects in most developing nations, it is the institution least accustomed to deferring to female decisions in societies where women are relatively invisible. One only has to remember how difficult it was for Americans to*



see Geraldine Ferraro as a potential commander-in-chief to appreciate why Pakistan, Bangladesh, Burma and the Philippines might see a woman leader as a threat to military prowess and morale<sup>37</sup>. Each of these countries has experienced periods, sometimes long periods, of martial law during its postindependence history. Each of these countries has major dissident groups with which to cope. Faced with the need for military aid, presence of domestic strife, and a highly politicized military, it is not surprising that female leaders like Aquino and Bhutto have lacked credibility with the military and that their greatest challenges have come in trying to appease the military establishment without abandoning their domestic agendas<sup>38</sup>.

In Indonesia, Thailand, and Vietnam, all countries with traditions of *de facto* if not *de jure* military control, women have not been serious contenders for top posts.

Only in India and Sri Lanka with their traditions of apolitical military systems have women come to power without major opposition from elements of the military. Significantly, however, Mrs. Bandaranaike faced a major coup attempt within two years of coming to power. While the coup plotters were opposed to her husband, it was to remove her that a coup attempt was launched. Politically "she pursued much the same course as he (Bandaranaike), ...but her inexperience...and her apparent lack of restraint gave the officers no confidence in her ability...As the officers assessed Mrs. Bandaranaike in the first year and a half of her stewardship, she was a weak and uneducated politician, susceptible to manipulation by her equally inexperienced...nephew...Mrs. Bandaranaike, wrote Sir Charles Jeffries, 'was a woman and inexperienced in the art of politics or cricket'<sup>39</sup>.

While few would argue Mrs. Bandaranaike was a particularly enlightened leader, it is interesting to note that it was her administration rather than any others that was challenged militarily. In India, however, a savvy Indira Gandhi kept military, police and paramilitary authority divided and in balance<sup>40</sup>. War also enhanced her credibility.

It was the successful Indian war against Pakistan in 1971 which gave Mrs. Gandhi her ultimate prestige and also her ultimate kind of deification, as Durga on the one hand, an imposing leader of her country on the other. Afterwards, as Dom Moraes wrote, "She has achieved the status of myth. She was Joan (of Arc) without the inconvenience of prison, fire and cross"<sup>41</sup>.

Another disadvantage has been the tendency to assume that these women were *temporary leaders* chosen to unite the country during a short-term leadership void or crisis. It is hard to believe now, but in 1965 Morarji Desai referred to Indira as "a little princess," strongwilled but capable of guidance should Desai ever take power<sup>42</sup>. Two months later "the little princess" was the compromise

choice of the chief ministers who thought Morarji Desai would be harder to deal with than "Nehru's daughter." They clearly miscalculated. Except for two and a half years, Gandhi led India for the next eighteen years until her assassination in 1984. Even then she died not for her timidity but for her decision to end violently a state of siege in the Sikh Golden Temple, in Amritsar. The bloody battle to capture the Sikh terrorists and hostages inside convinced one of her own bodyguards to be her assassin.

Bhutto, Aquino, Aung San Suu Kyi and Mrs. Bandaranaike have also been considered symbols for the opposition to rally around<sup>43</sup>. Aquino, especially, was seen after Benigno's death in the Catholic Philippines as almost a Madonna, a saint in contrast to the wily, corrupt Marcos. She was reluctantly drafted to run against Marcos. Even other opposition figures did not take her very seriously, and Marcos professed to be "embarrassed to be running against a woman." "Women," he none too gallantly claimed, "belong in the bedroom." Given the powerful roles in which he had placed his wife, daughters, and sisters, there was irony not to mention error in his remarks<sup>44</sup>.

Even Salvador Laurel, the man who agreed for the sake of unity to run as Aquino's vice-president, was convinced that she would be a mere figure-head allowing him to do what he does best, behave as the professional politician. Laurel was a man accustomed to surviving politically by accommodation. Indeed, his father had been a collaborator during the Japanese occupation of the Philippines. But Corazon Aquino did not step aside. She did not even let him control cabinet choices, policy decisions or much of anything. He was incensed. For awhile he used his portfolio of foreign affairs to go abroad seeking support for his own position. She then relieved him of that. Today, he stands stripped of all authority except his position as vice-president. He may lose even that given the many who would like to see him impeached for his apparent support of coups against Aquino.

Still, being underestimated has its political price. Six coups have been launched against President Aquino in less than four years. The military, politicized by twenty years of Marcos rule and years of martial law, is clearly unreliable. Despite inheriting an intolerable political situation Corazon Aquino has made much progress, but the frequent political and military challenges cripple efforts to secure foreign investment and aid, or to reorganize the bureaucracy.

Another factor contributing to the perceived weakness of Aquino, Bhutto and Aung San Suu Kyi is their *explicit bias for democratic rule*. Following authoritarian rule — even if those regimes were despised — the perception is that tolerance of dissent, willingness to compromise, insistence on democratic procedures and even political amnesty toward opponents are the result of timidity rather than courage, weakness rather than

strength. As one newspaper editorialized concerning Aquino: "The Presidency of the Philippines is not for the faint hearted"<sup>45</sup>.

If critics act on such perceptions female leadership indeed can be weakened. Consider the case of Aquino: In her first two and a half years in office she survived five coup attempts, turned a negative growth economy to one moving at about 4 1/2 percent per annum, negotiated three ceasefires, renegotiated the nation's foreign debt, reversed the flight of capital, recovered some of the money stolen by the Marcos family, gathered major sources of aid abroad, freed political prisoners, insured basic civil rights, had drafted and ratified a new constitutional order and held congressional and local elections. Does this sound like the record of a demure woman who critics insist is weak and who friends fear is reluctant to use power?<sup>46</sup> As Aaron Wildavsky observed: "Would-be egalitarian leaders are in trouble before they start. Leadership implies followership — in other words, inequality....Meetings are lengthy, discussions interminable. Would-be leaders must dissemble at once being persuasive about the right course to follow and self-effacing....Exercising leadership in hierarchies is a lot easier"<sup>47</sup>.

This was very clear in the criticism of Aquino's first year when she was operating cautiously while the new constitution was being fashioned. Friends and critics alike faulted her far more often for not ruling more by fiat than for being too bold.

Nor do the current democratic political institutions fashioned in the Philippines allow her readily to remedy public perceptions of timidity. Like the United States, the Philippine government is designed to thwart tyranny more than to facilitate leadership<sup>48</sup>.

Ironically, for many women leaders in Asia religious orthodoxy also thwarts leadership and discretion. While the support of the Catholic Church has been a marked asset for Aquino, it also creates parameters for her policy leadership, especially in such areas of social policy as divorce, abortion, and family planning. Despite a PPP manifesto calling for equality of the sexes, Benazir Bhutto also confronted the strong constraints erected by the mullahs and their conservative Islamic followers. Emboldened by their growing influence during the twelve years of General's Zia's rule, they were adept at keeping Benazir Bhutto on the defensive and unable to take initiatives that might benefit women or liberalize society generally<sup>49</sup>.

If there are so many disadvantages these Asian women share in attempting to lead at the top, are there any advantages that appear to mitigate these factors? Not many. Most of the women were able to tap into some sympathy or *compassion* among the populace during their early period in power (or in the case of Burma's Aung San Suu Kyi during her resistance to military pressure). They were seen as *uncorrupted*, removed from the shadier transactions of even close relatives around them. "Don't get your

hands dirty. Keep them clean and vote for Gertie" was the 1989 campaign slogan of Gertie Suvama, the Anglo-Indian sister-in-law of a prominent politician in India<sup>50</sup>. It highlights the tendency for female candidates to emphasize their incorruptibility. Imelda Marcos is a spectacular exception to this assumption.

Even today as Corazon Aquino's government is being savagely attacked for corruption, nepotism and ineffectiveness, the president herself is not considered personally tainted. Indira Gandhi's rule (or reign) lasted long enough that she was later to be accused of ethical wrongdoing, but even then charges were largely couched in terms of her blindness to her younger son's overzealousness and his financial and political irregularities.

While no Indian leader of independent India was no occasion more undemocratic than Indira Gandhi, there is generally an assumption that female leadership is *more public spirited and less power hungry* than that of males. That is only a theoretical advantage, however. Other power brokers may well worry whether female leadership will behave in reasonable and predictable political ways and whether such "accidental leaders" will be decisive and tough enough to use power effectively.

Not only are these assumptions about female leaders held in south and southeast Asia but in those regions, class and family remain more salient than gender, meaning they are probably more accepted and so less of an issue there than in the west. Politics is more personal and familial in most of south and southeast Asia.

### The impact of female political leadership in south and southeast Asia

Measuring the impact of any one individual's leadership is a methodological nightmare even in a dictatorship, let alone in societies ostensibly more broad-based in their authority. Several studies of women figures elsewhere in the world have concluded that women are more likely to operate with "a different voice" and style than their male counterparts. They are ostensibly more interested in domestic than foreign policy, are more supportive of the environment and social spending than defence expenditures, and more likely to support women's issues regardless of political affiliation than their male equivalents. Such studies drawn from roll call votes and surveys of women in western legislatures are not available for most Asian legislatures. They are also drawn on the basis of the typical 3 to 6 percent female representation in such western legislatures.

While parallel information on national legislatures in south and southeast Asia is absent, the Indian parliament does not seem to fit such observations. Indeed, it has been a complaint of liberal feminist journals like *Manushi* that the women in parliament made little difference in terms of policy<sup>51</sup>.

In Pakistan, a woman like Nusrat Bhutto was an influential liberal voice only as long as her husband was in power. Her daughter, Benazir, had very little policy latitude given the legacy of Zia's conservative rule and her own precarious grasp of power.

Aung San Suu Kyi's bravery in the face of the brutal Burmese repression surely inspires others, when as a "mere woman" she confronted military troops and rallied dissidents. Whether in power she would pursue a distinctive political course is only speculation.

Corazon Aquino's spunk and demeanor were also important, but her more lasting impact was in terms of her appointments of women to key positions and especially in her selection of delegates to the 1986 Constitutional Convention. Six of the forty-six delegates she appointed were women including the president of the Constitutional Convention. The Philippine constitution then, had "foremothers" as well as "forefathers." Those delegates made a difference. They fought for and succeeded in getting many key phrases written in, including a guarantee of sexual equality. They did not get everything they sought but their struggle made a difference in gaining the adoption of the nonsexist language of the document and many of its provisions<sup>52</sup>. The presence of those women was also critical because of their intense commitment. The mobilization of scores of women's groups behind their positions encouraged male acquiescence if not enthusiasm.

The evidence of policy impact is then mixed and inconclusive, but the example of talented, female leadership is clearly important as a role model for others in those societies. However, since their presence reflects many other variables besides gender, the role model impact may be less powerful than in societies like the U.S. and Canada where gender is more salient, organized support for female candidates exists, and where class allegiances are more blurred.

### Prospects for female leadership in south and southeast Asia

The foregoing sections lead the author to believe that south and southeast Asian women have generally come to power in ways historically more distinctive and exceptional than leadership routes for men. These career paths are especially divergent for those holding their nations' highest political and party posts.

Once in power those at the very top confront particular gender-specific obstacles and stereotypes. Asian women at all political levels have both advantages and disadvantages common to their gender and status. Little empirical data supports any definitive conclusions about their likely policy impact on women.

Despite the current prominence of several women leaders in the region, one can make few sanguine assumptions about the political prospects of other women. The conditions

bringing a few women to political power are sufficiently exceptional and tragic in the lives of these cited that they scarcely portend greater general female political power. In fact, unlike in western nations where there is a gradual increase in the representation of women, at state/province levels, a reverse pattern is emerging in the formerly colonized powers. The percent of women in elective politics is actually *dropping* in many nations as women in those countries become more detached from the political socialization impact of their independence efforts. Nor in these countries would a decrease in class stratification and national poverty or even increased female education likely enhance female leadership opportunities. Experience in Japan, China and in the west suggest that a change in such factors may actually reduce female leadership, since the leadership has in large part been drawn from those who are already the most affluent.

While Margaret Thatcher's and Golda Meir's impressive leadership should have stilled any doubts about female toughness, encouraged caution regarding any female stereotypes about policy impact or nurturing, and qualified any generalizations about the importance of social class, they are exceptions in the west and without peers in Asia.

While Asian cultures have not been without their female leaders (even Japan had its famous Heian period), then as now gender equality has been elusive. Opportunities for female leadership have been rare and *in spite of* gender inequality have not been harbingers of political liberalism.

### Notes

36. Linda K. Richter, "The Kamaraj Plan," 1966.
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38. Carolina G. Hernandez, "The Philippines in 1987: Challenges of Redemocratization," *Asian Survey*, vol. 28, no. 2 (February 1988), p. 238.
39. Donald L. Horowitz, *Coup Theories and officers' Motives* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 157.
40. Fraser, *The Warrior Queens*, p. 310.
41. *Ibid.*
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43. Fraser, *The Warrior Queens*, p. 307.
44. Linda K. Richter, "The Constitutional Rights of Women in the Post-Marcos Philippines," *Pilipinas*, no. 2 (1988), pp. 33-48.
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49. Anita M. Weiss, "Benazir Bhutto and the Future of Women in Pakistan," *Asian Survey*, vol. 30, no. 5 (May 1990), pp. 433-45.
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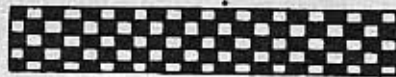
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# The Buddhist Female Benefactor

Kumari Jayawardena

I shall now briefly delineate two roles for women, outside the wife/mother roles, that were accepted, and approved of the Buddhist patriarchal model. The first is the role of the female benefactor of the religion. A Buddhist woman who has completed her 'duties' to the community in the matter of reproduction is allowed a certain freedom, especially if she is a rich widow; she is then at liberty to decide on how to distribute largesse to Buddhist causes. Having passed a certain age, she is presumed to have transcended the age of sexuality and therefore she should not be in need of rigid rules of conduct.

Woman as benefactor is one of the most acceptable of role models for older Buddhist women. Buddhist religious lore is replete with tales of the wives of traders and merchants who were among the staunchest lay disciples of the Buddha. These women were important personalities in their own right; the most notable of them was Visakha, who in Sri Lanka has been projected as the ideal Buddhist woman: devout, educated and benefactor of Buddhist causes, often cited as an outstanding symbol of the emancipated independent women of Buddhist India. Her grandfather was Mendaka, "a great merchant of illimitable wealth"; her father, Dhananjaya, was also a leading merchant, and she married Punnavaddhana, the son of another wealthy merchant. With all this wealth behind her, she became the chief lay benefactress of the Buddha. She advised and criticised and even mediated in debates on the doctrine among monks. It is clear from her example that certain privileged women were able, by reason of their wealth and social standing, to lead independent lives and to be accepted as the intellectual equals of men (Horner, 1930, Part III, Chap. 5). The other role models from Buddhist history included Mahamaya (Buddha's mother), Yasodara (Buddha's wife), Sujata who supplied him food, and in later times Sangamitta, daughter of King Asoka, who brought a sapling of the sacred Bo tree to Sri Lanka. Significantly, Buddhist girls' schools in Sri Lanka have been called after these personalities (Sangamitta, Sujatha, Visakha, Mahamaya and Yasodara).

With the Buddhist revival in Sri Lanka in the late nineteenth century, there emerged a number of women - especially widows - who followed these early Buddhist examples and achieved fame as benefactors. Some examples can be cited from this period. Colonel Olcott and Helena Blavatsky, founders of the Theosophical Society, on their arrival in Sri Lanka in 1880, stayed in the house of Mrs. Wijeratne, a rich widow of a

contractor for merchant ships in the port of Galle, who, according to Olcott, "lavished every hospitality upon us" (Olcott, 1954, pp. 158-159). And among the early woman funders of the Buddhist revival in the 1880s was a widow, Mrs. Cecilia Dias Illangakoon, described by Colonel Olcott as a wealthy Buddhist lady of "saintly piety" who financed the Sinhala and English editions of Olcott's "Buddhist Catechism" and who donated valuable books to the Theosophical Society library in Madras (Olcott, 1954, p. 199).

The rich foreign widow could also be a funder. Anagarika Dharmapala, for example, was dependent on Mary Foster, an American Theosophist in Hawaii, whose father and husband had made fortunes in shipbuilding. She was the largest funder of Dharmapala's Buddhist projects in India, Sri Lanka and Britain. As he was to say, "I owe everything to my parents, to Madame Blavatsky and to Mrs. Foster" (Guruge, 1965a, p. 768). Between 1903 and 1908, she sent \$ 8,000 to him, followed by large donations at later dates of money, bonds and a bequest of \$ 50,000 on her death. "But for her wonderful liberality and personal affection I would never have accomplished the work I had undertaken," wrote Dharmapala, who referred to her frequently as his "Foster Mother" and in Buddhist terms as Maha Upasika (The Great Female Lay Devotee) (Guruge, 1965a, pp. 155, 668 & 672). Dharmapala named a school and hospital after her and Foster Lane in Colombo still serves as a reminder of her links with Sri Lanka.

Dharmapala's mother, Mallika Hewavitarna (1842-1936), also figures prominently in Buddhist revivalist history. She was the daughter of Don Andiris Dharmagunawardena, a rich merchant, and her husband, H. Don Carolis, who had a furniture business in Colombo, was one of the few Sinhala Buddhist entrepreneurs of his time, Mallika Hewavitarna is highlighted not only as daughter, wife and mother of important men, but also in her own right as benefactor of many charities and especially of her son's projects, being the first contributor towards his purchase of three acres of land in Samath, Benares (Guruge, 1965a, p. 732). Her name is commemorated in the Mallika Home for the Aged, begun in 1921 and still existent in Colombo. She also followed her son's advice and wore the sari and propagated its use. Her biographer gives a portrait of a pious widow who, during times of "foreign rule when Sinhala women were confined to their homes, came forward to perform a great national service" (Seneviratne, 1986, p. 10). Mallika Hewavitarna's role was particularly highlighted by the Buddhists because social

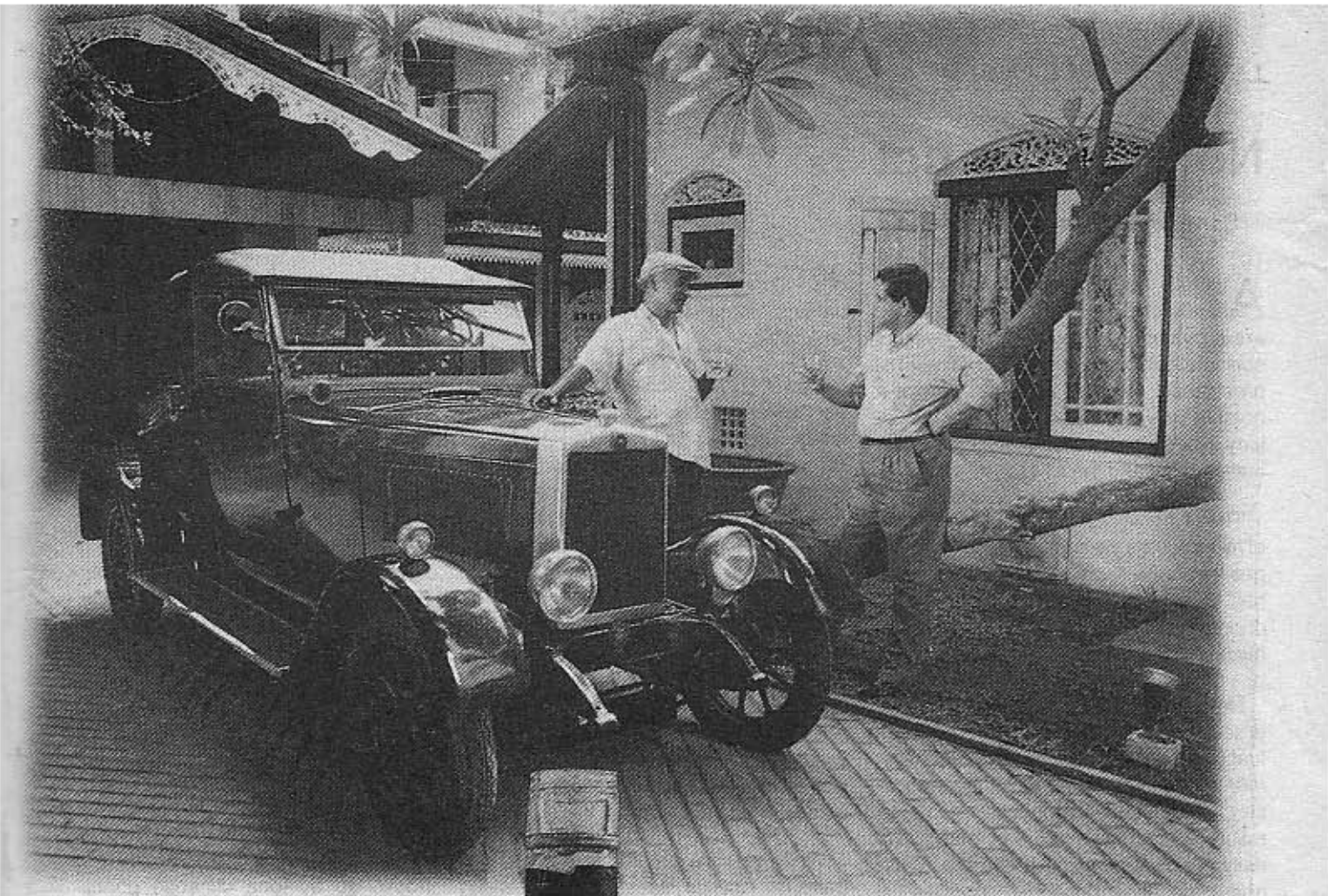
work and non-government institutions for the poor were at that time mainly in the hands of Christians and foreign missionaries.

Another important Buddhist benefactor was Selestina Dias, widow of P. Jeremias Dias, one of the largest liquor traders and land owners of the late nineteenth century. Her father Solomon Rodrigo of Panadura had also been an arrack renter and owner of large extents of land. On her husband's death in 1902, Selestina Dias took over "the manufacture of arrack.... in all its forms, in addition to the management of the estates" (Wright, 1907, p. 678). The latter included coconut, cinnamon, rubber and tea plantations, and she was assisted in their management by her four sons. Jeremias Dias had been a large benefactor of the Buddhist revival and was the chief lay supporter of the Buddhist temple in Panadura, the Rankot Vihara. Selestina Dias continued this philanthropy and gave land for additional buildings to the Rankot Vihara, and large donations to Buddhist charities, including Visakha Vidyalaya, the leading Buddhist girls' school.

In the 1930's, this tradition was continued by rich women like Badrawathie Fernando, wife of a rich merchant and land owner. She donated large sums of money to the restoration of Buddhist monuments like Ruwanwelisaya, and to temples and girls' schools; and as a result she became a legend in her lifetime among the Buddhists.

These generous benefactors, who were generally designated as *maha upasika* (great female devotees), played an important role in endowing temples, in fund-raising, as well as in organizing Buddhist lay groups. They were, however, definitely a part of the laity, living in their own homes and participating in lay activities. There are another group of women who renounced the lay life, yet do not form part of the order of monks; this is a role for Buddhist women that has become acceptable during the last two decades. The emergence and acceptance of this new role has to be located in the context of another development in Sinhala Buddhist consciousness. This is a tendency to effect certain purifications in the Buddhist religious order and in the practices of lay life so as to approximate the ancient glory of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. It implies a going back to textual Buddhism and an attempt to eradicate certain "corrupt" practices of contemporary popular Buddhism; this has remained primarily an intellectual trend, but has manifested itself in the public acceptance of women as religious figures.

(To be Continued)



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## News in the net

Samson Abeyagunawardena

Australia is crisscrossed with thousands of Sri Lankan networks which are activated whenever there is news of special significance, such as a general or presidential election, assassination of a notable by a suicide bomber, or a particularly bloody encounter between the Sri Lanka Army and the LTTE.

These networks spreading thousands of miles across the continent carry messages by phone — about every home here has a phone and many have mobile phones too — by fax machines and by electronic mail.

Here's an instance of how a network is activated. Koswardena in Sydney habitually listens to the BBC's world news roundup relayed by the national broadcaster, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), between 5 a.m. and 6 a.m. daily. One morning he hears the report about the assassination of presidential candidate Gamini Dissanayake. Unable to keep the news to himself, he wakes his wife and three children up to tell them the news, then phones several friends, including one in Melbourne and another in Canberra. These friends in turn phone their friends and so it goes through the network.

Once the network has been activated, people in it keep phoning one another for bulletins regarding further developments until they are satisfied they have wrung every bit of news flowing from the event.

When their appetite for straight news has been satiated, they want analysis of the news. Why was this done? What do the police say? What will Chandrika do? Will the presidential election be cancelled? To get instant analysis of the news, they phone friends who they believe have access to other sources of information, including contacts in Sri Lanka. Many of these analyses are amateurish, more

often than not reflecting the political inclinations, interests and naivety of the 'analysts'.

However, for people with a reputation as 'thinkers', this is a time for one-upmanship. Thambiliratne regards Polratne as someone who has superior knowledge, so he phones him to tell him what he has heard and ask him what he knows. Polratne tells Thambiliratne that the news he has told him is old hat and proceeds to give him the latest inside information he claims to have got from a Sri Lankan VIP in the course of a long distance phone conversation. Thambiliratne, suitably impressed, can hardly contain himself. He phones several of his friends to tell them what he has heard from Polratne who he claims "has access to people in high places in Sri Lanka".

When you are a member of a network, there is special satisfaction in letting others know that friends in high places in Sri Lanka phone you to give you hot news as it breaks there. Which is why when someone gets hot news he/she loses no time dispersing it, without bothering to check its veracity. Several weeks ago, at a Sri Lankan wedding in a small town here, a guest burst in late to the hotel room just as the registrar was solemnly pronouncing the couple husband and wife. To the guests who turned to find out what the mild commotion was about, he said: "I was about to leave home to come here when I got a call from Colombo. The homes of ..... and ..... have been burned down. Looks like it's going to be a bloody election".

Much of the conversation at the wedding dinner was about this news. A couple of days later, when there was no further confirmation, it became evident that this news was not true.

A Sri Lankan Buddhist monk, the incumbent of one of the many temples in Australia, is a special news source because of his nocturnal habits and his powerful short wave radio. Before turning in at the

end of his late night meditation session, he tunes to a radio station broadcasting news in Sinhala from the Philippines between 1 a.m. and 1.30 a.m.

Informal news networks are especially important for the news hungry expatriates because most Australian newspapers give scant coverage to news of the South Asian region. The media depend on freelancers' reports from Colombo and on syndicated reports from newspapers in England and the US, especially the *London Times*, the *Guardian*, *The New York Times* and *The Los Angeles Times*. These reports are usually a rehash of what the wire services such as Reuter and Agence France Presse have reported.

The ABC has shown more enterprise in its efforts to get background information on the news. Its Asia-Pacific specialist, who has extensive contacts in the region, hooks up by long distance phone Sri Lankan politicians, scholars and media commentators with various points of view to comment on events there. Of course some of these comments cannot be expected to please everybody, which is why so often after a broadcast of comment on Sri Lankan news the ABC's switchboard is jammed with calls from infuriated expatriate listeners.

A question many expatriates have been asking since the conclusion of the presidential election is: "What's going to happen to *so-and-so*?"

*So-and-so* is a reserved Sri Lankan expatriate whose property and lifestyle are those of a millionaire. It is generally believed that contract work awarded to him in Sri Lanka is the source of much of his wealth.

Asks an envious expatriate: "What will happen now? Will he continue to get contracts?"

Replies a wise old owl: "He says he is well connected to both sides. He will survive".

*The writer, who began his career in journalism in Sri Lanka, now works in Australia.*

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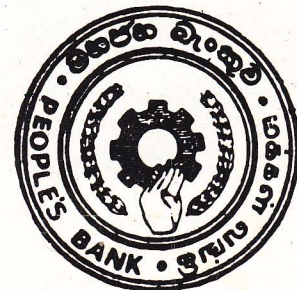
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