

● SIGNIFICANCE OF SARATH ●

LANKA

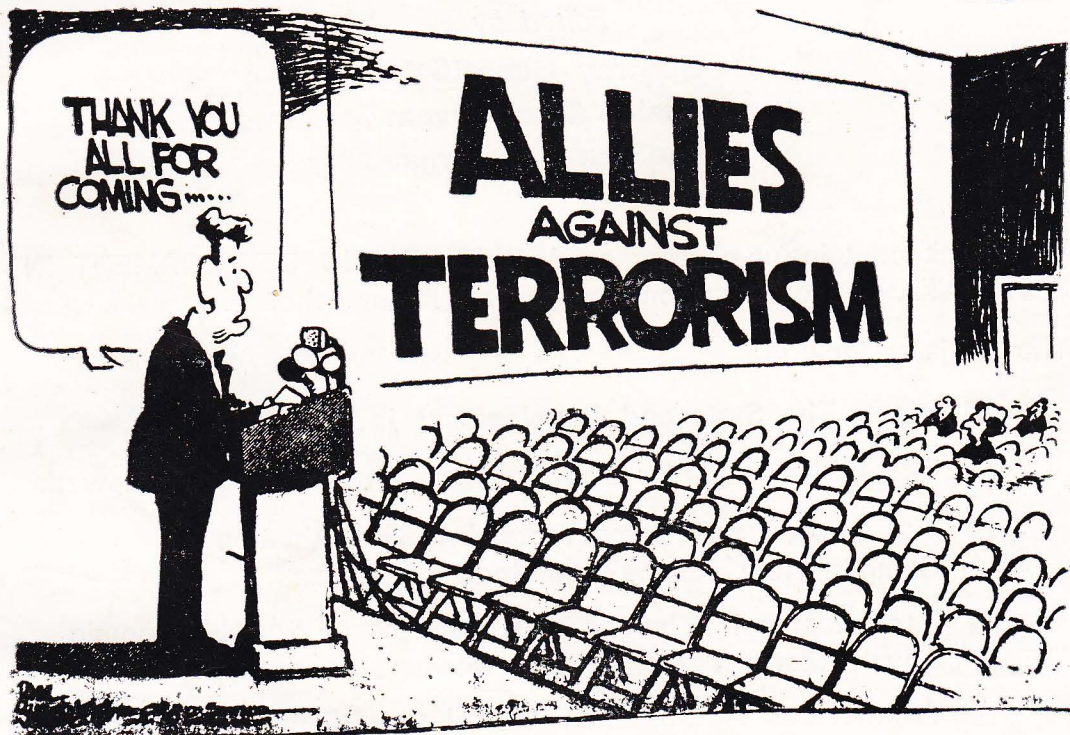
# GUARDIAN

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## 'RAMBO' BOTHA AND STATE TERRORISM

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**61 ISIPATHANA MAWATHA  
COLOMBO 5.**



## LAW AND DISORDER

Police Vs. "Mob" (people); Army vs "Mob". (people) And all in a week's work. By May 22, the IGP had ordered 15 policemen to be transferred forthwith from the Hulftsdorp Police station because of a clash the previous Sunday between police personnel and residents of the area. The police opened fire and injured seven civilians when an angry crowd advanced towards the station on hearing a suspect taken in for questioning screaming for help. The crowd damaged a police car parked in the street.

Meanwhile, the Army Commander had appointed an inquiry committee consisting of three senior army officers to report on the far more serious "battle of Malay Street" where 7 persons died, including a six year old child. The majority were Moslem while the only soldier who died was a Sinhala corporal.

Both the locality, Slave Island, and the ethnic factor (Sinhala soldiers from the Army camps nearby in a predominantly Moslem slum area) made the situation extremely dangerous. The ISLAND chose the occasion to write a thoughtful editorial on "Army and Discipline", a highly controversial topic ever since the foreign media began to focus on it in the context of the war in the north. But the two incidents raise other issues, point to more serious threats lurking in our society.

These "clashes", these sudden and increasingly frequent eruptions and the angry confrontations between groups of ordinary citizens and the custodians of the law, and the guardians of "security" indicate subsurface social tensions that are so easily sparked off. Violence is becoming the norm, the everyday phenomenon.

## TRINCO BLAST

One of the island's best known business magnates, A. Y. S. Gnanam, like many a small-time Sinhala mudalali who became a multi-millionaire, is a success story told many a time in the local press. He is the first Sri

Lankan industrialist to negotiate World Bank assistance for a private project.

In the present context, however, it was the fact of his nationality that made the Tamil rebel attack on his Cement Factory so newsworthy. Gnanam was a Tamil and the employees of Tokyo Cement (Ceylon) Ltd were chiefly Tamils.

The modern manufacturing facility with an authorised capital of Rs. 400 million had Japanese partners — Tokyo Cement, a subsidiary of the famous Japanese combine MITSUBISHI, and a smaller firm Shigyo Co. With an annual capacity of 200,000 tonnes, the company made a profit of Rs. 17, in 1984-85, its first year. Ten rupee shares stood at Rs. 24.

Why the attack on a Tamil-owned modern industrial plant which was such a flourishing venture employing several hundred Tamils? The answer given by security experts was 'It was in Trinco'. While the importance of strategically located Trinco is obvious, it is also Colombo's claim that security in that district is tight. As the fighting in the north subsided, the 'Tigers' demonstrated that even Trinco was vulnerable.

Only three days later, Mr. Gnanam was one of recipients of the new Award "Desha Bandu" on National Heroes Day.

## TRENDS + LETTERS

## A LOAN PAID — A DEBT HONoured

My God, not another massive loan from the British. This time, an outright grant for the Kantale holocaust. "Big mother benevolence" one may ask. "Not so" one may reply. — Thatcher and her Tories know which side their toast is buttered. — and "why not"; was not Sri Lanka apart from Britain, the only country to support the British P. M. in her hour of need? With the entire world censuring Britain at the U. N. on the Falklands fiasco was it not little Sri Lanka who stood by her. And was it not, Sri Lanka who, still steadfast and still firm stood alongside Margaret when later events proved that the Argentine cruiser the Belgrano was fired on when still out of the 30 mile zone. No, Britain's grant is only settlement (part) of a small debt and we, are still collecting. And I wonder... if our laudable foreign office who stood steadfast and firm knows what it was like living in England during the Falklands

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# OPERATION 'TURNAROUND' OR TURNABOUT?

NEWS  
BACKGROUND

Mervyn de Silva

**S**o we are all military experts now.

Did "Operation Turnaround of Troops" (also named 'Operation Short Shift,' by the SUN group) as routine as it was officially presented or was it a "major military offensive" as the state-run *Daily News* and the foreign media, notably the Indian, termed the 5 day fighting in the northern peninsula? (See Reuter despatches published on the frontpage of the *Int. Herald Tribune*).

The truth is that we are a bunch of amateurs, all armchair strategists trying to make sense of matters best left to the soldiers. But then the soldiers contributed to the confusion by an early press briefing which could hardly be reconciled with what the National Security Minister, Lalith Athulathmudali himself told parliament the same day (May 20). The Army for whom press briefings, especially in the face of combative foreign correspondents, is itself a new encounter, has promptly re-organised its media operation.

To take the official version first, the 'operation' had the following objectives:

(a) Turnaround of troops to relieve men who had served in the north, particularly in the Jaffna Fort, the main encampment, many more months than their normal tour of duty. More than one battalion had to be pulled out and replaced with fresh troops.

(b) The safest way to bring the men back from the barracks to which they were confined far too long — an experience which begins to tell on

morale and nerves — is by sea or air. That meant making the Karainagar naval base and the Palaly airport and their perimeters absolutely secure. When Vasivilan and Kayts were overrun by the troops, these two aims were fulfilled. Kayts has since been abandoned but only after the job was done.

(c) The third push from Elephant Pass towards Jaffna town was not part of a "three-pronged" attack as interpreted by some reporters. The fact that this advance was halted after a 1000 men and a convoy of thirty-to-forty vehicles had moved towards Jaffna was not a 'temporary setback' as observed by a army spokesman. The column was confronted by the 'Tigers' and in a pitched battle the Tigers lost 8 men. But the Tigers, according to some reporters, pulled back and took up defensive positions which they successfully held. However, this is of no great military significance because this was 'only a diversionary move' argued the Minister to tempt the Tigers into engaging the column while the other objectives (a) and (b) were achieved.

The army had to take to the air with SIAI MARCHETTI planes and helicopters mounted with guns to give air cover to troops who were under attack from rebel positions surrounding the Fort, the rebels using rockets, mortars and AK-47's.

It was these 'bombings and strafings (of non-military targets and on urban centres) which attracted world media attention most, thus introducing the international and propaganda aspects

of this dramatic development in the ongoing armed conflict, and invited the anger of the Indian government, thus emphasising the important diplomatic factor. In this, not three-pronged offensive but multi-faceted "war" (For another and crucially imported facet, the economic, see 'RONNIE on Defence').

Another popular account of the operation places the basic military objective much higher — the re-assertion of effective military control or dominance of the peninsula. If that is the test of success or failure, then what was accomplished hardly adds up to a famous victory. Even the amateur student of military affairs, and more particularly unconventional warfare, knows that what has prevailed since last year in the north is a military stalemate. **The rebels cannot drive out the army from the Fort; the army cannot expel the guerillas from the streets. (Anybody equipped with a schoolboy's pair of binoculars can spot from any perch within the Fort the machine gun 'nests' and sentry posts of the rebels).**

Secondly, almost all effective civil administration has collapsed, except that which functions by the tolerance or grace of the rebels.

And it is these two basic facts (the condition of the civil administration and the military stalemate) which make up the fundamental politico military nature of the conflict. (The diplomatic, the economic, the psychological-propagandist are highly important but fundamentally the interactive political-military elements are the vital).

(Continued on page 6)



# On the Northern Front

(Reuter despatches)

Residents of the northern city of Jaffna said air force planes and helicopters bombed and strafed the city as Tamil guerrillas strongly resisted a government drive to reassert control in the separatist stronghold.

The air raids marked an escalation of an operation to restore government control of the island's fourth largest city, which has been run by guerrillas for the past year.

Dr. C. S. Nachinarkinian, medical superintendent of Jaffna Hospital, said in a telephone interview that 54 persons were admitted to the hospital after the bombing, but he said that no deaths had been reported.

Other residents said more than five bombs were dropped from two Italian-made Siai-Marchetti light aircraft that can each carry four 50 pound (22-kilogram) bombs.

The residents said helicopters flew over the town for nearly 90 minutes firing at suspected guerrilla positions.

Mr. Nachinarkinian said at least two patients were wounded when bullets hit the hospital.

A spokesman for the Defense Ministry said planes and helicopters provided cover for troops in the day, but he refused to comment on whether bombing was involved.

Military sources said the bombing and strafing were ordered when troops came under fierce attack from rebels with rockets, mortars and machine guns.

The residents said at least 15 persons were injured when a bomb fell near the city's main bus station. The explosion set off fires in four nearby shops.

Some residents were moving out of their homes and into schools and other public buildings.

The residents said government aircraft had been spotted over Jaffna since troops launched an operation Saturday to regain control of

the Jaffna peninsula, but that this was the first time they had attacked the city.

A military spokesman said the death of soldier on Monday brought the toll of confirmed deaths since the operation began to 22, including 19 guerrillas, two soldiers and one civilian.

He said it was likely that many more rebels were killed.

In the first detailed account of the fighting, the military spokesman said rebels attacked five military camps on Sunday, including the main base in Jaffna city.

Troops were making very little progress because of heavy resistance, but guerrillas suffered heavy casualties in battles with rockets, mortars and automatic weapons.

Rebels were firing on military convoys from houses, churches, temples and other buildings.

The spokesman said that guerrillas also raided Jaffna's military airport at Palali in a bid to attack aircraft on the ground.

Residents of Jaffna said normal activity was nearly at a standstill

Monday as guerrillas set up machine gun posts and roamed the city with rocket launchers.

The spokesman said three columns of troops were inching slowly toward Jaffna from different directions as guerrillas attacked.

He said troops had advanced only one to six miles (2 to 10 kilometers) toward the city since the operation began Saturday.

"Terrorists continued to attack security forces' camps and convoys in an attempt to stop movement along roads and to keep troops confined to camps," the spokesman said.

He said the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, the most powerful guerrilla group fighting for an independent Tamil nation, was leading the resistance to the government's first major attempt in a year to impose its authority on the peninsula.

The Tamils, who say they are discriminated against by the Buddhist Sinhalese, are seeking a measure of autonomy on the island.

— Int. Herald Tribune

## On the diplomatic front

An uncompromising diplomatic reply to the Indian Government a day after Sri Lankan forces launched a major offensive in the Tamil northern peninsula is being read by Western diplomats in Colombo as a clear signal of a dangerous India Sri Lanka collision course.

On Sunday, Sri Lanka's High Commissioner in Delhi called on Mr. P. Chidambaram, India's Minister for Personnel Administration and told him that "unless the Tamil leaders came forward to discuss the latest Sri Lankan proposals" for a negotiated settlement, there was no purpose in providing the Indian Government

with the "clarifications and amplifications" New Delhi had sought from Colombo.

Mr. Chidambaram was Premier Rajiv Gandhi's special envoy to Sri Lanka earlier this month. After five days of talks, his delegation returned to New Delhi with a package of proposals on devolution of powers to proposed provincial councils. While India expressed satisfaction at "some advances" on the overall structure of devolution and on the vexed issue of land settlement, it sought clarifications on a basic constitutional point and on the sensitive question of law and order powers to be vested in the proposed councils.

# Peace efforts frustrated

John Elliott (*Financial Times*)

Tamil leaders in the southern Indian city of Madras said the Tamils had been successful in driving the government troops back to their base where they have lived for months without venturing out on patrol.

They claimed the attack had involved heavy bombing and civilian casualties, a claim denied by Sri Lankan officials.

The Sri Lankan attacks are likely to set back efforts being made by India to find a settlement to the running ethnic crisis of the island's minority Tamil community.

Tamil extremist leaders based in the southern Indian city of Madras yesterday said they intended to take a hard line against peace proposals put forward by the Sri Lankan Government.

The extremists expect to receive more support for their line from India following Monday's attacks on Jaffna which the Indian Government condemned in a toughly worded statement on Monday night.

The military operations had "frustrated" peace efforts, said the statement, which criticised "indiscriminate aerial bombings and strafing of Jaffna city."

Indian diplomats in New Delhi say privately that they suspect President Junius Jayawardene of Sri Lanka has only been cooperating with recent peace initiatives with India in order to buy time while he prepared for this week's military operations.

They say he also wanted to impress Western Governments, which meet next month to decide on their annual aid allocations

to the island whose economy is being hit by the crisis. These countries have been calling for a peaceful settlement.

India believes President Jayawardene is hoping international opinion will support his military initiatives because of two extremist bombs which blew up an airliner and a telegraph office in Colombo recently.

"The Jayawardene Government will soon realise that it is going to be very difficult for them to wipe out our guerrillas on the peninsula unless they are prepared for protracted warfare to last years," Mr. A. S. Balasingham, spokesman of the main Tamil Tigers extremist group said in Madras yesterday. "It is our territory, and we will hold on to it."

## India's options

Mr. Rajiv Gandhi who was questioned about Sri Lanka at the final press conference of his African tour was reported to have shown signs of emotion when he commented on his arrival at Delhi airport on the fierce fighting then raging in the northern peninsula. Already, Sri Lanka's High Commissioner, Mr. Bernard Tillakaratne had given 'take-it-or-leave-it' answer to India's request for "clarifications" and "amplifications" of Colombo's written proposals on devolution presented to the Chidambaram mission.

Mr. Gandhi took the next move. Unless Sri Lankan forces halted their offensive in the north, the Indian premier may have to reconsider his role as mediator in the conflict. But this message conveyed to President Jayawardene by High Commissioner Dixit did not resolve matters at all. On the contrary, Mr. Jayawardene is reported to have said while he was still keen on Mr. Gandhi mediatory efforts, the

Sri Lankan army will halt operations only 'when the terrorists end all acts of violence'.

The deadlock left Delhi to plan out its next moves. What are its options? President JR had spoken of a Cyprus, implying that India may play the same protective role which Turkey assumed vis-a-vis the Turkish Cypriots. But there are so many options before such a decisive step. If it is correct that Delhi has imposed restraints on the Madras-based militants, especially an interdiction of arms supplies, then the removal of those restraints alone can make quite a difference on the military balance in the north. And what is noteworthy here, is that EROS pulled a dramatic coup when it blasted the Mitsui-financed Tokyo Cement factory in Trinco and followed it up with a warning to foreign investors.

And then the LTTE moved in with a ruthless swiftness to Trinco district to massacre thirty

two Sinhala villagers — all people who had returned to the farms they had evacuated last year in the face of similar attacks. They had returned to these four villages, including Mahadiwulwewa, in the company of armed Home Guards, and more settlers were expected to follow them.

The target is highly significant strategically — not only because of colonisation, forward 'protected' Sinhalese farms and the vexed question of demography, ethnic balance and the 'traditional homelands' but because this area is the "link" between the north and the east.

While the situation on the ground in this area will be one of the major factors that will influence Delhi's policy planners in drawing an options chart, more important is the political situation in Tamilnadu. The 'bandh' which Mr. Karunanidhi's DMK has called on May 30 has to be watched and closely studied as a reflection of Tamilnadu opinion.

M.

# Colombo's need to compromise

**T**he sectarian war waged by Tamil separatists which has disfigured Sri Lanka over the past three years appears to have entered a dangerous new phase.

The two bomb explosions in the capital, Colombo, over the past week — one of which destroyed a civilian airliner, killing 14 people, mainly foreigners, and a second which devastated a packed central telegraph office — mark a significant escalation of the conflict.

The Government in Colombo has reacted by reaching for its gun. It asked for and received parliamentary approval yesterday for another major increase in defence spending. Despite their

denials, the Government maintains that Tamil separatists, based in southern India, were responsible for both atrocities and is signalling its intention to meet force with force. As an immediate response that seems understandable. **But it does not constitute a policy for solving a sectarian conflict which threatens to become as intractable as that in Northern Ireland.**

## Defence expenditure

The Government of President Junius Jayewardene is now faced with some new, if unpalatable, realities. These are, first, that the war is no longer limited to the predominantly Tamil areas of the north, and the eastern province.

The insurgents have demonstrated that they can now strike wherever and whenever they please.

Second, the Government's stated aim of achieving a military solution to the conflict before tackling a political one must now be seriously in doubt. Defence expenditure, which Sri Lanka can ill afford, has more than tripled in the past three years, with little visible impact on the army's success against the rebels.

Equally worrying is President Jayewardene's decision to turn to Pakistan for military assistance and advice. This is probably a ploy to spur India into forcing more concessions from Tamil groups

*(Continued on page 11)*

## OPERATION...

*(Continued from page 3)*

And it is in terms of these, the nature of the conflict, that the significance of the six-day 'war' must be measured.

Whatever his degree of conviction, nearly every prominent Sri Lankan politician is publicly committed to a political settlement of what he concedes is essentially a political conflict. Nonetheless the political settlement military solution debate rages on. In this debate, the National Security Minister is the most articulate spokesman of a point of view that rejects the dichotomy as too simplistic.

Mr. Achulathmudali argues that it is the separatists rebels, principally the 'Tigers' who are committed to a 'military solution' and therefore stand in the way of a negotiated settlement. It is the Tigers therefore, the next step in the argument goes, who must be convinced not the government, that "no military solution

is possible". The last formulation, incidentally, represents the consistent view of the Indian government, frequently re-stated stridently whenever the 'militarists' in Colombo, in Delhi's perception are in the ascendance. So, the National Security Minister firmly believes that the first step towards a political settlement is in fact to persuade the Tigers that they would be well advised to abandon all hope of a military victory. And the most convincing way of persuading them is to assert one's own military dominance.

The other virtue seen by the proponents of this "military dominance" theory is that one can then go to the negotiating table and negotiate from a "position of strength".

The third argument adduced in favour of this theory is that a demonstration of 'military dominance' will stiffen Sinhala morale and help the government to regain the ground it has lost in Sinhala opinion-making circles. That is why the "Six day War" must also

be related to the sudden break in the Indo-Sri Lankan dialogue just when "progress" was being reported in both Delhi and Colombo.

The government said the operation took only 3-4 days but Jaffna residents told the press that "normal conditions" were restored after six days with the sounds of aircraft flying high in the sky and helicopters buzzing about subsided only at the end of the week.

With the 'war' over, what strictly military lessons need to be drawn.

First, the security forces have ultimately relied on their naval supremacy and monopoly of the skies. On the ground the stalemate continues.

Secondly, will the guerrillas' armoury be changed qualitatively with the introduction of a weapon that can challenge the army's present air power. Meaning, of course, SAM-7's. **(SEE INDIA'S OPTIONS)**



# Aid and Human Rights

— *Judith Hart's appeal*

I venture to write to you about a question which I believe to be crucial, in the search for a political solution to the appalling near-civil war situation in Sri Lanka. I do so as Chairperson of the Emergency Committee on Sri Lanka of **International Alert**. You may recall that as Minister for Overseas Development here in Britain, I initiated the first stage of aid for the Mahawali scheme. I know Sri Lanka very well indeed; have always been a friend of President Jayewardene and his Government; and, like all of us, have respected and admired the social progress it has made, as a poor developing country: its low infant mortality rates, its high literacy rate, and other "quality of life" ratings.

Against that background I have become most deeply concerned — as have the members of my Committee about the escalating scale of violence in the conflict between the Government and the Tamils of the North and East. We were shocked of the Government statements that only a military solution was possible. We reached the conclusion in January that in these circumstances, when innocent civilians were being killed, and when **Amnesty** and other independent reports had documented the abuses of human rights which sadly seem always to accompany conflicts of this kind, it would be right to call for donor countries to review their aid to Sri Lanka, in order to exercise influence towards a reasonable political settlement of the dispute. I should add that we also believe that arms supplies to both sides in the conflict should cease.

I myself went to India and Sri Lanka last month. I had talks in Delhi and with Tamil representatives in Madras, and then went on to Colombo. The essential purpose of my visit

was to inform President Jayewardene personally of my Committee's decision, before we made any public announcement. (This followed in Geneva on 24th February: I attach our press release).

In the event, I had some ten hours of talks with the President and his Ministers. They are still my friends. But I am all the more convinced that the question of aid is crucial. I attach a brief paper which sets out the pertinent points.

Between now and June, aid donor Governments will be considering their approach to the Consortium meeting. May I hope that you will share our view that it is no longer possible for the international community to stand aside? I would be happy to come and discuss the matter personally with you, or to have a meeting here in London with your Ambassador, if that would be helpful.

I add only one last point. Since Sri Lanka was informed of our decision to "lobby" aid donors, Government Ministers there have again begun to talk of the need for a political solution. I am certain that "leverage", although it has a neocolonial flavour in normal circumstances, can bring about the necessary steps towards peace.

## BACKGROUND:

1. Violence is seriously escalating on both sides, with the use of landmines and air attacks. In the last month, about 90 Tamil civilians and about 40 Sinhalese civilians have been killed. It is believed that considerable numbers of the Lankan army are at present in training in Pakistan; and on the Tamil side, some 125,000 refugees and militants are arousing support and involvement in Tamil Nadu.

2. The prolonged effort, sponsored by India, to seek a political settlement in the Thimpu talks, has, sadly, failed. A full account can be provided of the factors leading to the breakdown of the talks. It can be said, however, that the Sri Lankan Government lacked any effective will to reconcile differences. There is, however, good reason to believe that a political solution is possible, involving effective devolution but not separatism. There are extremists and moderates on both sides. It is necessary to encourage the moderates and reject the demands of the extremists: on the Tamil side, for a separate Tamil state, and on the Sri Lanka side, for a military solution.

## The Importance of the Aid Dimension

3. (i) Continued successful development is of critical political importance in Sri Lanka.
- (ii) The administration of aid in the north and the east (poor regions) is becoming increasingly difficult, if not impossible.
- (iii) Continued aid flows allow Sri Lanka's own resources to be spent on arms.
- (iv) The proposal of a cessation of aid appears to have had some limited influence already.
- (v) The problem of human rights in Sri Lanka has reached a point where it becomes right to reconsider aid provision.

## The Committee's proposal on aid

4. It is **not** suggested that present commitments on aid should
- (Continued on page 8)

# Economy Nearly Ruined, Minister Warns

**E**conomic recovery in Sri Lanka will take at least 10 years even if the guerrilla war fought by Tamil separatists ends immediately, Finance Minister Ronnie De Mel estimates.

In a gloomy assessment of the Sri Lankan economy following bomb attacks in Colombo that killed 28 persons and wounded 200, Mr. De Mel said that the budget deficit was soaring. He said this was due primarily to military spending and a rising debt-service ratio.

In an interview this week, Mr. De Mel said the war in the north and east of the island had taken about one-quarter of the country out of the economy.

Falling foreign-exchange reserve and foreign investment, he said, also were helping to bring down the Sri Lankan economy, once a model in the Third World.

"There is not one silver lining on the horizon," he said. "If the war ended tomorrow it would take 10 years to restore the economy."

Mr. De Mel said he expected a tough time from Western nations during a meeting in Paris next month of the 16-country consortium that gives aid to Sri Lanka.

A senior Western diplomat confirmed that consortium members were concerned about the lack of progress toward settling the guerrilla insurgency.

"Last year we pulled our punches," the diplomat said. "If there are no signs of progress in peace talks over the next few weeks, we won't this time."

Mr. De Mel said he planned to ask the consortium for about \$ 500 million, almost as much as the \$ 550 million given by the consortium in 1985. He said he would

argue that a further cut in aid would only aggravate Sri Lankan problems.

The budget deficit, he said, had more than doubled to 8 percent of gross domestic product in the six months since he estimated a 3-percent figure in the annual budget.

Mr. De Mel blamed the sharp rise exclusively on military needs. After an emergency request to Parliament last week following the bombings, the military budget accounts for more than 10 percent of government spending.

Since the November budget there has not been one sign of improvement in the economy, he said.

Foreign exchange reserves were down to three months of exports from six months in 1984, while the debt-service ratio to pay for external debt had widened from 19 percent at the end of 1985 to 25 percent.

Mr. De Mel said the debt position had become so worrisome

that the cabinet recently decided to stop foreign borrowings except for purely commercial ventures that could service these debts.

The trade gap has widened every month, he said, as world prices have fallen for tea, rubber and coconuts, the main Sri Lankan exports.

Mr. De Mel said that tourism, a main foreign-exchange earner, had fallen by 40 percent since the guerrilla campaign became a full-scale insurgency about three years ago.

Foreign investment was more and more stagnant, he said.

"In the good old days we used to get about 30 or 40 proposals a month," he said. "Now we get only five or eight."

Mr. De Mel, who has guided Sri Lankan financial affairs for nine years, said he was surprised that the economy has survived this long.

"But now it is all decline, decline, decline," he said. "I don't know how long we can last any more."

— (Herald Tribune)

## Aid and Human . . .

(Continued from page 7)

be abandoned where these involve on-going programmes, and where their administration is still possible. It is suggested, however, that in approaching the forthcoming Consortium meeting, donor Governments should indicate that no further aid pledges and programmes can be undertaken in the present circumstances of Sri Lanka. An early indication of this approach could be of importance.

5. It is further suggested that undertakings could be given that more aid will be provided when peace is restored as the result of a political settlement, particularly to as-

sist in the process of rehabilitation which will be essential.

6. It is believed that such an approach can significantly affect the situation. Were this not so, it would not be proposed.

## The Aim

7. What is necessary is a cease-fire, effectively monitored; and new negotiations for a reasonable political settlement, involving acceptable devolution of specific functions to the North and the East. There is reason to believe, from confidential discussions which have taken place, that the moderates on both sides would be ready to seek such a solution. But international involvement at this stage is thought essential, if such an outcome is to be achieved.

## SARATH — Straddling the Great Divide

The time of day mattered little. Or the weather. Sarath drove his badly battered little motor car from Colombo to his constituency in Kalawana or to some other remote part of the island, for a rally, for a case in courts or some other call of duty. Not for this MP, the Mercedes Benz, the Peugeot or the brand new Japanese Pajero, the preferred vehicles of our latter-day politicians, so generously assisted by a selectively benign State.

Dinesh Gunawardena, a leftist MP closer to Sarath's generation than the other luminaries in the sadly depleted ranks of the Opposition has made a thought-provoking point about Sarath's journeys between his town house and rural constituency. Not about his lack of show or his sense of duty, but of

his easy passage, emotionally and psychologically, between the urban, westernised social groups and the rural masses. He felt equally at ease with both. It had much to do with his birth, and his upbringing.

The Kuruvita ratemahatmaya who was Sarath's father was no exploitative, arrogant feudal 'aristo'. He was one of the most warmly loved and respected men in the Sabaragamuwa. Sarath was lucky to inherit that "touch". The modern, outlook, the progressive ideas and the intellectual "opening" to the world came of course from St. Thomas College and the Law school and his natural drift into the then vibrant Left movement.

The reason why Sarath's untimely death was so instantly taken as a tragic national

loss lies elsewhere. Greater, more grievous, far more costly to the people of this country today is another divide; not town and country, but community and community, Sinhala and Tamil. It is this communal divide which Sarath straddled.

Hence the salute of silence in Jaffna, the bowed heads in Kalawana and the rich tributes in Parliament from all sides of the Assembly. Sincerity, courage of convictions and dedication to the cause he had chosen helped him to achieve that minor miracle where Jaffna, Colombo, Kalawana, could at least for a day feel and think as one.

He was a man of unusual quality. The tragedy of our times made him a rare politician.

— EDITOR

## Imposition of Compulsory Leave on Tamil Employees

The Council for Liberal Democracy deplores the decision of the Government to send Tamil employees of state institutions considered to be sensitive from the point of view of security, on compulsory leave. The CLD strongly asserts that our just outrage at the increasingly bestial acts of violence committed by terrorists should not lead us to view with suspicion law-abiding citizens of this country on the basis of race. An attitude of suspicion extended to all our people who happen to be Tamils is offensive to a liberal conception of society and human relationships. An attempt to associate in the public mind, all Tamils with terrorists is fatal to any sensible settlement of the crisis which engulfs us now. A response

based on racism, a blanket condemnation of people whose only crime is their birth, is the worst possible response at the present time.

It is incumbent upon the Sri Lankan State to demonstrate unequivocally that all its citizens, including Tamils, have equal rights and freedoms, that they can all live their lives in freedom, peace and dignity. Such a demonstration, alone, can be the starting point of an effective destruction of campaign for Eelam and the murder and mayhem caused in its name.

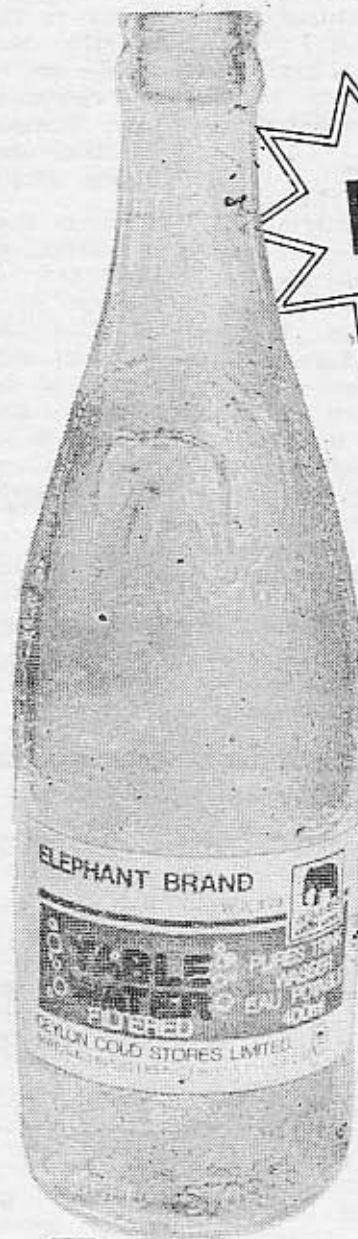
It is by asserting both here and abroad that the Tamil people have a great and honourable

place in the life of this nation, that the terrible conflict that rages now threatens their future as much as the other sections of the Sri Lankan population, and that it is in the common interest of all Sri Lankans to bring this conflict to an end, that settlement can be brought about.

The indiscriminate measures taken against Tamil employees of Government institutions achieves the opposite. The Council for Liberal Democracy therefore appeals to the Government to abandon this unjust and unconstructive measure.

**Chanaka Amaratunga**  
Jt. Sec. Council for  
Liberal Democracy





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# Botha follows Reagan's Lead

**A**t the UN Security Council session last week, Zambia's chief delegate Joel NGO said: "The bombing of Libya by the U.S. last month encouraged no doubt the racist regime in South Africa to set up these acts of aggression. We have been witnesses to State terrorism at its worst". The Council took up South Africa's air attacks on the capitals of Botswana, Zimbabwe and Zambia which Pretoria justified as raids on 'the bases' of the outlawed "terrorist" African National Congress (ANC) a member of the non-aligned movement and the leader of a liberation struggle that has now reached a new and critical stage in AZANIA, the African name for South Africa.

Ambassador NGO said that a UN transit camp for refugees was one of the "targets" hit.

US Ambassador Herbert Okun's reply exposed not only the complexity of this international problem but the ambiguities of US policy and Washington's embarrassing failure to impose its will on America's western allies, with the possible exception of Thatcher's Britain. There was no parallel,

said the US representative, between the US Bombing of Libya and the aggressive actions of the Pretoria regime. Washington, he argued unconvincingly, had acted in "self-defence". President P. W. Botha could say the same!

Of course, the White House spokesman had expressed the US administration's "outrage". So indeed had the British foreign secretary who found a convenient loophole — or it seemed — by condemning the attack on Commonwealth countries, as if the Commonwealth label gave special immunity from Pretoria's state terrorism. But Sir Geoffrey had to place the question of sovereignty first for the targets were all "sovereign" states. However, Libya was sovereign too — though not a Commonwealth member. And for the Commonwealth as a whole, it was Secretary-General Ramphal who spoke to ask for the 'ostracizing' of the barbarous apartheid state.

If Washington finds itself cornered, it is because what was done to Libya was **not** really the result of a well-conceived or mature policy but the knee-

jerk reaction of Reaganite 'Ramboism', a vulgar 'macho' act to win hearts and minds at home and ride high in the public opinion polls.

"There is a war fever in Washington" said an American official who must remain anonymous" wrote IAN DAVIDSON, former foreign editor of the **Financial Times**. "In general, US military muscle-flexing in response to terrorism looks disturbingly like yet another manifestation of the current mood of belligerency in Washington" he concluded.

Stand up and be counted. Words come easily; votes not so. When South Africa's "Libyan" aggression came up for a vote in the UN Security Council, Mrs. Thatcher once again found herself in the doubtful company of President Reagan. The US and UK used the 'veto' to protect the racist regime from the anger of the UN and the international community.

## Colombo's...

(Continued from page 6)

demanding a separate state. But it introduces an unnecessary and potentially dangerous regional complication into an already precarious situation.

India is already under growing pressure from its own 50m Tamils to impose a settlement on Colombo amid growing accusations of atrocities by Sri Lanka's predominantly Sinhalese armed forces. If the situation on the Island deteriorates further, the danger to Sri Lanka's Tamil community and the presence of Pakistan military advisers might provoke India to intervene directly.

In searching for solutions to the present crisis it is important for the Government to distinguish between the acts of terrorism committed by Tamil extremists and the root causes of the conflict. Addressing the latter issue need

not imply succumbing to pressure from the former.

## Substantial devolution

Even Mr Jayewardene's ruling party, in its manifesto for the 1977 election which swept it to power, conceded that there were Tamil grievances over land distribution, language, economic and educational opportunities.

Unfortunately this perception was not translated into a realistic devolution policy. When the Government recently offered to set up provincial councils in the north and east even moderate Tamil opinion, which had steadily lost ground to the extremists over the years, felt bound to reject this concession.

A political solution is much more difficult now than it would have been in 1977, but it is still not impossible. It involves two distinct but related moves. The first is for India, as regional-power,

to construct a set of proposals which it can sell to the Tamil separatists under its aegis. This will, inevitably, fall short of Eelam or independence. But any plan must be rooted in substantial devolution of power to the Northern and eastern provinces with some form of loose link between them.

The second is for President Jayewardene to fashion a Sinhalese consensus which will back such a settlement. This means striking a bargain with Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike, the former Prime Minister and effective leader of the opposition, whose star has waxed as the Government's has waned.

The events of the past week demonstrate that Sri Lanka is perilously close to civil war. Only compromise on both sides and determination on India's part can pull it back from the brink.

— **Financial Times**  
May 9th 1986

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## The Crisis of Sri Lanka, and Mrs. B — need for a new agenda

Chanaka Amaratunga

**T**he real conditions in which the case for a general Election needs to be considered are dominated by the Tamil Problem and the economic, social and political dislocation which it has partially brought about and of which more is ominously in the offing. This perception of the conditions of our country is widely accepted, but as I have already attempted to establish, the wider crisis of liberal democracy which I believe, is primarily responsible for the appalling deterioration of communal relations in the last six years, is less widely recognized. It would be very misleading for us to analyse the efficacy of a General Election at the present time without being aware that the propensity towards violence and intolerance in Sri Lanka today — a propensity to which the almost daily casualty figures stand eloquent testimony — is overwhelmingly the result of a lack of respect for individual freedom and diversity and of a narrow intolerance exacerbated by a jealous desire for the concentration of political power. These tendencies which have been manifest in the United National Party as it transformed itself from a genial if rather lethargic liberal-conservative party into the brash, authoritarian party of today, finds its brutal, exaggerated reflection in the dangerously simplistic Tamil groups committed to violence.

In considering the context in which an election is requested, it is also necessary to recognize the hopeless futility of the apparent attempts of the Government to resolve the Tamil Problem by negotiation. While I would not for a moment understate the intransigence and propensity towards unconstructive procrastination, of the various groups of Tamil terrorists and guerrillas, and certainly do not, as the Government apparently did in the

period of Thimphu, have a naive faith in Mr. Rajiv Gandhi's altruistic commitment to a resolution of this crisis on terms acceptable to most Sri Lankans, I am convinced that the lack of seriousness of the Government, in approaching negotiations, has been the principal reason for the unresolved and continuing state of crisis in which we now find ourselves. The continued timidity and/or shabby populism of the Sri Lankan media has concealed from all but a handful of us who have made it our business to study the various proposals put forward, that little or nothing has been given away in the form of genuine autonomy amidst all the elaborate structures of district, regional and provincial councils and a second chamber that have been at various times suggested. This does not mean that the Government ought to agree to an amalgamation of the northern and eastern provinces into a single unit as suggested in the TULF proposals. So large and so patently racial a unit of devolution makes a nonsense of a more rational, non-sectarian form of provincial autonomy which can and must be applicable throughout Sri Lanka. The point of relevance here, which must act as the explanation for the reluctance of the Government to make genuine concessions to accommodate moderate Tamil feeling and to ignore the commitment in the United National Party manifesto to convene an all party conference on the problems of the Tamils for six years and until after the appalling riots of July, 1983, is that the Government's intransigence is not exclusively or even primarily motivated by racist sentiment.

The true explanation for the Government's lack of willingness to concede genuine provincial autonomy without retaining reserve powers to itself and more parti-

cularly to the President, which makes a nonsense of the devolved structures, is its determined unwillingness to delegate and to renounce any of its real powers. The history of Sri Lankan politics over the last sixteen years has been a history of the intense concentration of power in the state. The power of the State in the contemporary era, which has also seen a partisan politicisation of society has meant the concentration of immense and quite unjustified power in the hands of a few politicians. While it is undeniable that the Government of 1970-1977 contributed substantially to this process, it has to be emphasised that the current Government has displayed a desire for the obsessive concentration of power in an increasingly narrow group of persons at the very apex of the political system which easily surpasses any similar tendency on the part of all its predecessors. The structuring of the constitutions both of Sri Lanka and the United National Party and the shaping of the power relationships in both Government and party make indisputably clear. From such a Government, it is in my view impossible, that the generous and constructive attitude to the sharing of power, without a negotiated settlement becomes a platitudinous exercise in propaganda devoid of all real chance of success, would ever be forthcoming.

In assessing the possibility of this Government, as presently constituted, from successfully resolving the most immediate aspect of our crisis — for the wider crisis I have emphasised is primarily of its own creation — we must consider its relationship with the Tamils. Even if it is acknowledged that direct negotiations with the extremists, who as recent events have so clearly demons-

trated are becoming more mindlessly bloodthirsty and intransigent, are neither feasible nor desirable at least within the present framework of relationships, I find it difficult not to believe that this Government has developed so hostile a relationship with the entire Tamil community, in the Northern and Eastern Provinces and in the rest of the island that no settlement is possible even with those Tamils who could be characterized as moderate. We must recognize that the United National Party's relationship with the Tamils is soured by a very strong element of unfulfilled expectations, of broken promises, in a word of betrayal. Until 1977 with one notable exception in the late fifties, the United National Party was, in broad terms, the party of national unity while the Sri Lanka Freedom Party was historically, the party of Sinhala nationalism. In the period from 1965 — 1975 the UNP's relationship with the principal forces of Tamil nationalism, the Federal Party and the Tamil Congress essentially warm and mutually supportive. Even was in the build-up to the General Election of 1977, the Tamil United Liberation Front (as the FP and the TC had now become) had cordial relations with the UNP and President J. R. Jayewardene has himself stated in an interview with an Indian journal that the following section of his party's manifesto at that election was drawn up with the closest consultation with and collaboration of, the TULF:

#### **PROBLEMS OF TAMIL-SPEAKING PEOPLE**

The United National Party accepts the position that there are numerous problems confronting the Tamil-speaking people. The lack of a solution to their problems has made the Tamil-speaking people support even a movement for the creation of a separate State. In the interest of national integration and unity so essential for the economic development of the whole country, the Party feels such problems should be solved without

**loss of time. The Party, when it comes to power, will take all possible steps to remedy their grievances in such fields as:**

- 1. Education.**
- 2. Colonisation.**
- 3. Use of Tamil language.**
- 4. Employment in the public and semi-public Corporations.**

**We will summon an All-Party Conference... and implement its decisions.**

The subsequent attitude of the United National Party to the Tamil Problem, in particular its disregard for the implementation of the promises above and its hamfisted handling of the District Development Councils and in particular the DDC election in Jaffna in 1981, its failure to stop the riots of July, 1983 and its stupefying immediate response the Sixth Amendment to the Constitution, to say nothing of the crude techniques of propaganda of the state-controlled media which makes little effort to distinguish terrorists from the Tamil people, has created the bitterness and lack of trust between itself and the Tamils which only a once-close relationship destroyed by a betrayal of hope can achieve. The prospects of a Government regarded by so many Tamils as having treated them abysmally of reaching a settlement are very slim indeed.

Perhaps the most powerful of the pragmatic considerations in favour of an immediate General Election is the totally unrepresentative character of our politics today. A major stumbling block to negotiations is that no one can speak with any authority and so make the civilized compromises which can only come of authority. **Who speaks and for whom? This is the most legitimate question of our time.** The elected representatives of sixteen constituencies in the areas vitally concerned, the Northern and Eastern Provinces have been forced to resign. Their seats have been vacant for almost three years. None of the local authorities in these areas function today. A number of armed groups function there instead while most of the

TULF is in voluntary exile. So who represents the Northern and Eastern Provinces? What do the people of those areas who have been subjected to so much violence, to so much economic and social dislocation think? Does anyone presume to know where they stand today? It seems to me that our first priority must be the arrangement of a ceasefire for the specific purpose of holding an election, under appropriate international supervision, so that we can discover who the people of the North and East support. It is with those freely elected to Parliament that the non Tamil parties must negotiate — for they would then be dealing with a body of persons who have authority to speak and know where they stand.

But who is to negotiate for the non-Tamil section of the population? Can a Government elected on the votes of those outside the Northern and Eastern Provinces at the General Election of 1977 dominated by economic issues and the state of the democratic process outside the North and East, claim to be able to say anything with authority on the Tamil Problem? When such a Government owes its existence to a referendum of doubtful legitimacy, held in a climate of intimidation and in which the most disingenuous and misleading conspiracy theories were propounded, is it not patently absurd and impossible for it to give a lead in the radical changes in our politics without which a settlement cannot be achieved? It did not take the result at the Akmeemana by-election to establish that the undoubted mandate achieved in 1977 is now moth-eaten beyond repair, a sad relict of a by-gone age so totally irrelevant to the crises of today.

It will also be obvious to most sensible people that no settlement of the Tamil Problem can come without bipartisan co-operation. We are a people obsessed by history but we have not learnt anything from history. We have not learnt, as the fate of the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact and the Senanayake Chelvanayakam pact ought to have taught us — that



without the co-operation of the principal party of the Opposition no resolution of the Tamil problem is possible. Such co-operation is impossible while the Opposition remains so badly underrepresented and continues to be denied an opportunity of putting its case before the people. A General Election, even one which freely and fairly returns a UNP Government, will have two very important advantages which this Government lacks. It will be able to approach negotiations from the confidence and strength of having the support of a majority of the electorate and it will have a better chance of co-operation from an Opposition whose strength in Parliament (the election contemplated must of course be under proportional representation) will more accurately reflect its strength in the country and which will recognize that it has been fairly defeated. On the other hand, a Government led by Mrs. Bandaranaike would be able to approach the problem afresh and with far less of a burden of intolerance and authoritarianism, would have a better chance of dealing with the wider crisis of liberal democracy which is the root of our problems. **A General Election, is therefore, whatever the result it may produce, the only rational way out of the impasse in which this country now finds itself.**

The leadership of the Government scarcely agrees with me. Indeed it can scarcely be expected to, for the first instinct of so many Governments is survival. The Government argues that it is "madness" to call for a General Election when the nation is at "war". At first sight this argument carries the ring of plausibility and I freely concede that there are many whose gut sentiment favours it. But is the validity of this argument born out by history? In the governance of nations does the saying 'you cannot change the helmsman in a storm' carry more than emotive force? History the history of democracies in particular provides evidence for believing that it is the opposite which is true. Abraham Lincoln did see the American Civil War to a

successful conclusion but he knew exactly what he was about when he resolved to make war rather than permit the dismemberment of the United States of America. More often politicians have blundered unconsciously into war and crises of different sorts. Politicians who blunderingly take their countries into crises are not the ones to successfully take them out. In Britain the Prime Minister at the outbreak of the First World War, Herbert Henry Asquith, who had been a successful Prime Minister for six years in time of peace was replaced in 1916 by David Lloyd George, who was regarded as a great deal more suited to lead Britain in war. The Second World War provides an even more glaring example of changing the leadership of a nation precisely because it was at war, in crisis. After the fall of Norway in May, 1940, the unsuccessful conduct of the war was debated in the House of Commons. On the occasion of that debate Lloyd George, the victorious Prime Minister of the previous war had this to say of Neville Chamberlain:

**The Prime Minister must remember that he has met this formidable foe of ours in peace and war. He has always been worsted. He has appealed for sacrifice. The nation is prepared for every sacrifice so long as it has leadership. I say solemnly that the Prime Minister should give an example of sacrifice because there is nothing which can contribute more to victory in this war than that he should sacrifice the seals of office.**

It was after that debate that Chamberlain resigned and Winston Churchill became Prime Minister. That final line of Lloyd George is so true of the collective personality of this Government. **The only way to resolve a crisis is often to replace those under whom the crisis has come about.**

It is now apposite that I deal with the final part of my title. I entitled article "The Crisis of Sri Lanka, a General Election

**and Mrs. Bandaranaike. Why 'Mrs. Bandaranaike'?**

The insistence of the leader of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party on an immediate General Election in which any party or group should be free to participate without restrictions, her emphasis on the immorality and injustice of the referendum, of the invidious role that the deprivation of her civic rights has played in the recent politics of our country and her emphasis on a political settlement of the Tamil problem reveals that she has, alone among the major actors of our politics, recognized the fundamental unity which underlies the multifaceted aspects of the Sri Lankan crisis. In this recognition by the effective leader of an alternative democratic government lies our best hope for a resolution of the crisis.

This is not to say that Governments led by Mrs. Bandaranaike have contributed nothing to the crisis of liberal democracy in Sri Lanka of which I have said the crisis of communal relations forms a part. One of the lessons we ought to take from history is that political parties do not remain constant. A comparison of the UNP of Mr. Dudley Senanayake and the UNP of Mr. J. R. Jayawardene makes that blindingly clear. But equally it is usual for there to be a fundamental unity of political character underlying individual political personalities. The consistent theme of Mrs. Bandaranaike's political life has been that she is a reformist and essentially a democrat. Of course it is the hazard of those who undertake great reforms that great also are their opportunities for error. And I do believe that Mrs. Bandaranaike presided over two Governments whose errors were great. But her reformist spirit combined with her fundamental democratic spirit (the authoritarian steps taken by her Governments were primarily the work of those who now fortunately wield no influence over her party) makes her the vital element of constructive change in the future.

(Continued on page 18)



# Of Cultural Bondage

Our slavery to English is astonishing. It is such that it seems to be the only social and cultural indicator, in certain exclusive social gatherings. It is usually said that 'when in Rome, act like the Romans...'. In Sri Lanka that takes on new dimensions. That is, 'when in Sri Lanka act like the English...' and then all doors will open to you. Our colonial hang-over has been painfully prolonged. In the university, students are of two distinctive groups — the English-speaking and the non-English speaking. All other considerations race, religion, caste etc., — are secondary. A staff-writer of the Observer, I remember, drew attention to it — when she spoke of how her seniors asked whether she was 'hi-fi' and that she thought it was very smart to retort, 'no, she was stereo'. It highlights a deep malaise which is eating into the very fabric of our society. English, it suggests, has become a very important culture-maker (I use Culture in the 18th century sense of the word) and it accentuates class differences so that in Sri Lanka at least, class, wealth and social positions in society are irrevocably linked with one's ability to (smoothly) converse in English.

It began in 1956. In fact 1956 is memorable for it gave rise to more than one problem — the language policy of the Sinhalese governments which is a major grievance of the Tamils surfaced as well, in addition to the "Sinhala in 24 hrs." decree. The motive behind the declaration was laudable, but the rule applied only to the less fortunate in society. They had to conduct their affairs — domestic, public and academic in Sinhala but the ruling classes remained outside the range of the policy. This is where a major social injustice was perpetrated by a government committed to the welfare of the people. To say it began in 1956, is not to simplify the issue of nearly 1½ centuries of British imperialism, when the British practised the

policy of divide-and-rule in all its colonies. They made our society into a dependent one both economically and culturally. The scars of both forms of subordination still remain. To over-see the efficient working of a British political and administrative system, they trained a group of native elite. They were given those top administrative jobs reserved for the natives and they were also made aware of their cultural superiority based on nothing but their ability to converse in English. This helped them to get the best education available as well as the best jobs. So we became subordinates in mind as well as in body. The native elite aped the British. They stopped using the 'vernaculars' almost totally. These 'hamu mahatmayas' and 'appos' were more 'English than the British' and the smattering of Sinhala or Tamil they knew were reserved for communication with their menials. They were the favoured darlings of the British rulers, for they could depend of them for the smooth functioning of their system in the colonies.

So the British sowed the seed for one of the major social menaces of our time. No one denies the need to have access to a 'world' language, (a 'world language' is one that is not limited to one speech community but is used in many parts of the world). It facilitates communication with people of other races and countries. To broaden our outlook and our knowledge, we need to know a language which is used in more countries than one. It gives one access to the literatures and scientific, literary publications of other countries. English, French, German etc. are considered to be in the 'world' class — the justification is based on European imperialism, so that these languages are the second or third languages in many countries. English is the obvious choice for Sri Lankans, since the British were our colonizers, and hence it is English which is widely known as a second language in

this country. Yet English is not treated merely as a second language in this country. It occupies a very special position in the hearts and minds of the people. People pay special pooja to it every day. Those who know it, bask in the glory of it. They write verses to it. And those who don't know it, try to acquire it by hook or by crook. They go to any tuition class which claims to teach English in 3-6 months. Many questionable books on English grammar are written and these are snapped up like hot cakes by a majority hungry for that special social distinction obtained by being able to speak English effortlessly and like the Englishmen.

English has a snob value attached to it. No one would deny it. So much so, that the only other language that could have acted as a deterrent to the present national crisis, has in reality become a 'weapon of division'. (Prof. Thiru Kandiah) So it would not be effective as a 'link language'. It only emphasizes the existing class differences. Those who know it, use it to get themselves special concessions in the competition for employment, for promotions, for better marriage and social prospects even. They speak English (especially the younger generation) at high frequency level in a bus or train or wherever they gather, to establish their identity as a race apart. The older generation still display the colonial heritage in their enunciations of such very Sinhalese names in such a distorted fashion: for instance, Galle, Tangalle, Kegalle, Kurunegale etc. . . Such meaningful family names as Wijayawardana, Gunawardana etc. are massacred; the underlined section is pronounced the same as the English 'war'! One knows what the Sinhalese 'wardana' means, and what the English 'war' means; Gunawardana when you articulate it properly, means someone who cultivates his ethical sensibility, but when 'war' becomes 'war'

then it is senseless. Yet they are proud of it — the fact that they are not familiar with their indigenous languages. A friend of mine, pronounces 'makaral' (an indigenous vegetable) as 'mackerel' and was not ashamed when I pointed out the phonetic variation on the word. Yet she laughs at the so-called 'notpot' crowd who make blunders wielding a foreign language. There are those among us who cannot give a proper speech in Sinhala or Tamil. Theirs, would make those of us who are concerned about reviving the national languages, weep for despair! Yet this is not something to feel ashamed about. They are English-educated, and have been abroad. Some who go abroad, strangely enough forget their Sinhala in one year! One can acquire an accent with just one trip to the Katunayake Air port! These 'kalu suddhas' (see the paradox-black-white people) or brown sahibs are treated with respect, though one laughs at the hapless victims of a foreign language. I remember the poet Ramanujan, on a visit here, who spoke of the Indian situation. According to him, he speaks Kannada at home, Hindi outside and English only when he attends a learned, literary convention where foreigners participate — that too, is when all the participants have a working knowledge of English.

This is the case in many other former colonies as well. Ngugi wa Thiong'o the Kenyan writer (he changed his name from the English James Ngugi to this, when he realized the absurdity of displaying one's colonial heritage so many years after Independence) has stopped writing in English and uses Swahili to tell the people the need to break away from one's colonial heritage. Prof. Sarachchandra, another world-renowned artist, interested in evolving a national theatre, gives this example; that the great Indian film producer Satyajit Rai has an Indian name, and the well-known Japanese producer of a similar standing is Akira Kurosawa, but the Sri Lankan producer of such standing is called Lester James Peiris! But as he points out, an artist represents

his country and through his art, projects the conscience of the race and is (or should be) contributing to a national spirit. But the acquired or borrowed names we have, do not help the others to place our artists in their proper national context. In fact it is misleading. A Mendis (a corruption of the Portuguese Mendez) would suggest someone from Portugal or Latin America, and so are such names as Perera, de Silva, de Mel or Fernando. Therefore Ngugi says, the need or challenge "for the artist who is opposed to the system of oppression of one class over another, or one nation over another is in fact to create a literature... which is a total negation of that kind of process..." This, I feel was the point in that series of articles written by Qadri Ismail, especially the one titled "The Social Misfit and the Conscience of the Race", though he got bogged down in a morass of personal denigrations and thus the message was lost.

The challenge before us is to open up a fruitful dialogue on the validity of the English language, as the be-all and end-all in mass-communication. The time has come for some soul-searching — to ask ourselves, (the English speaking intelligentsia,) whether we have not over-rated the function of English in our cultural and national set-up, at the expense of our national languages. That inferiority complex in the mind of the speaker of the 'vernaculars' is generated by us, who use English as the tool to assert our social and cultural precedence over them. Go for a job-interview, the knowledge of English is a gilt-edged surety to ensure one's selection. For most white-collar jobs the ability to speak English is a 'must'. The privileged few who can, are also members of the upper-strata of society-educated in the popular missionary schools, given the best opportunities to cultivate their talents, whether in sports, studies or music. Take the University for example: though the age of colonialism is long since over, the new socio-economic and political environment has given occasion to a new breed of elite-English

speaking, well-dressed, and very much pro-establishment. They are very intent on maintaining the status-quo, and are of that exclusive set-up who are against strikes and other disturbances which threaten the well-ordered landscape of their lives. Their social awareness is nil, and their complacency generates in the observer a futile frustration. They are very much a race apart, and are so treated by the mainstream of the university students, who use terms like 'kultur' and 'kadu faculty' to stress their separateness. This group usually comprise of students from all the ethnic groups in the island — Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslim, Burgher, Malay et al. so that one would have thought they would increase understanding and contact between the various mediums and communities. But rather than defuse the tension, they only add to the existing schisms. They cut themselves off from the concerns of the rest of the university, and their concerns are such hifalutin' topics as Drama, Music, Debating etc. . . So as Dr. Kandiah says the 'kaduwa' has become a weapon of social division and only increases the differences in a society already threatening to blow apart for lack of cohesion and unity.

All this may appear to suggest a writer who is anti-English, anti-establishment etc. This is certainly not the case. I cannot be, I am even at this moment writing in English. No one could deny the usefulness of an international language, especially one that is used in various geographically-different locations in the world, and is spoken by the second largest number of people (the first is Chinese). But as I pointed out earlier, it is not treated merely as a second language of international standing or simply as a viable medium of communication. It has a social function in preserving and safeguarding the Status-Quo against eventual infringements of the lower classes or against social reformations which would displace those on top. Really, social reformations are unknown in this country. As Prof. Sarachchandra says (in



his book *Pin Athi Sarasavi Varamak Denne*) our own independence struggle was not really a fight by people who were fully convinced and totally committed to the overthrow of British rule. Their own zest was the reflected echo (and a subdued one at that) of the struggle of the great Indian Nationalist Movement. Or if it had any motive where the self was involved, it would have been a selfish one—to take over the reins of power and authority which they had formerly enjoyed vicariously through the British. So there was no real devolution or handing over of power, and consequently no real social transition from the colonial era, to a new one of post-Independence. Selfish scrambling for power and wealth, the continuance of family dynasties are common features, where there should have been a more genuine desire to better the conditions—both social and economical—of those who are under-privileged. And English is closely linked with this discrimination. The antagonism and tension generated by this unfair treatment has long remained a great social evil, until perhaps the 1980's when the ethnic crisis took precedence.

And what of the so-called common man, who by the misfortune of birth and background is relegated to a life-time of servility and discrimination in education and employment? He knows that at least in this country (to quote Lyly) "English lays bare the key to knowledge", social prestige and a better financial position. To protest and fight against this injustice, or to take firm steps to eradicate this social malaise it is not possible or he doesn't want to. It is only a few select scholar and academics Sarachchandra, Kmmaratunga Munidasa, Prof. Malalasekara, Siri Gunasinghe, Martin Wickremasinghe among them who by their contribution to the indigenous literatures and their upholding of nationalism who have in some way tried to erase the cancerous persistence of English as the prestigious language of communi-

cation. Yet they have not (sadly enough) succeeded. The 'common' Sri Lankan uses English to unfair advantage over others if he knows it, or tries to learn it anyhow, so as to be included in that exclusive English speaking social milieu. Tutories professing to teach English in three months to six months have sprung up like mushrooms—so have books written (mind you!) on spoken English, where they give a set question-answer response which (seemingly) suit every occasion the learner may face in real life. People will spend large amounts of money on buying such grammars. To us the privileged, their struggles pathetic and also amusing. We will speak facetiously on 'English with a smile' or 'English without a smile': but for them it certainly seems as if English comes with blood, sweat and tears! So they struggle on, and envy those who have mastered it. Their envy can take on extraordinary forms in the university. This might result in sudden outbursts of anger against, or harassment of 'kadu' students.

So the time has come to evaluate the role of the English language in Sri Lanka. We have two sets of criteria with which to measure its function. On the one hand there is its utilitarian function as a language which gives us access to knowledge world-wide, and on the other hand, its snob-value linked with its prestigious function. One cannot make full use of the English language—exploit its resources fully if one does not do away with its ill-effects as a means of social division and unfair discrimination. So at this moment of national crisis, we have to conduct an honest soul-searching, not only into the cohesiveness of our society along the lines of multi-cultural and multi-religious harmony, but also consider the other means of class compartmentalization, and class friction. Should English continue as the language of learning and communication (international or otherwise) or should we seriously consider the possibility of an

alternative? English seems the easiest to use as a fairly well-known International Language since it is already in use. But is it also the most effective, when one considers the social and ethical aspects to it? Or should we forget our social obligations and our cultural independence in a society where ethical sensibility and independence (cultural or economic) are already almost non-existent? These are the questions we should ask ourselves.

— OSTRICH —

## *The Crisis of...*

(Continued from page 15)

There can be no question of Mrs. Bandaranaike or the SLFP being conferred a blank check. **The crisis of Sri Lanka cannot be resolved without a fundamental reform of our political agenda.** Such a new agenda must contain a generous infusion of liberalism and social democracy. A new constitution that is premised upon individual freedom, a policy that takes provincial autonomy and privatisation as the vital engines for constructive process, a new advance of the welfare state, a liberal policy on education and a foreign policy based more on liberal democratic solidarity and less on us third-world consciousness based on double-standards must be vital aspects of this new agenda. It also goes without saying that the new politics of democratic reform must banish the old politics of sectarian intolerance. I believe that Mrs. Bandaranaike is more than sympathetic to such a new agenda. The challenge of our times is to ensure that it is accepted by the wider mass of our people. That too, ofcourse, cannot happen without an immediate, free and fair, General Election.

(Concluded)



### Part III

## Nationalism : Sinhala and Tamil Myths

Radhika Coomaraswamy

The Sinhalese have always claimed that they were the original inhabitants of Sri Lanka, with the Tamil presence always being that of invader. The Sinhalese chronicles, the Mahavamsa and the Dipavamsa, are used as evidence of this claim to priority. To combat this myth of origin, Tamil scholars such as Ponnambalam have this to say:

"According to tradition, the Tamils of India and Sri Lanka are the lineal descendants of the Naga and Yaksha people. (According to Harry Williams) Nagadipa in the north of Sri Lanka was an actual kingdom known to historians and the people who occupied it were all part of an immigrant tribe from South India, Tamil people called Nagars... The conclusions that could validly be drawn from the new historical data clearly establish that the ancestors of the present day Tamils were the original occupiers of the island long before 543 B. C. which the Pali chronicles date as the earliest human habitation of Sri Lanka."<sup>10</sup>

Ironically, the assertion of the rights of one ethnic group results in the need to delegitimize the other. Latter day Sinhala nationalists, using the Mahavamsa, delegitimise Tamil claims by portraying them as foreigners and invaders. The Tamil response to this allegation is to assert that there is no such thing as a Sinhalese. While the Tamils are "the lineal descendants of the original inhabitants of the Island", the Sinhalese lack pedigree, "no matter what the racial origin, little remains of the original stock, except belief in it." Finally, the King who accepted Buddhism for Sri Lanka is described as Devampriya Theesan, a Tamil Hindu King of Lanka.<sup>11</sup>

It is perhaps time that both Tamils and Sinhalese accept the

findings of such researchers as Seneke Bandaranayake who have clearly pointed to the fact that Tamils, Sinhalese, and Muslims in Sri Lanka are a racially mixed group. Waves of immigration and internal migration have obliterated any claims to racial exclusivity. Sinhala and Tamil may be products of ethnic and religious consciousness but there is no racial basis for differentiation whether as noble Aryans or glorious Dravidians. Seneke Bandaranayake writes:

"It is becoming increasingly clear, however, that the peopling of Sri Lanka and the formation of its ethnic variety have been an extremely complex process which we do not fully understand yet... Again, it is important to keep in mind that the ethnic composition of the Sinhalese both in cultural and also bio-ethnic and demographic sense was not the product of a single historical period or a unilinear process, but, one that took place through-out a long history... the same methodology can be applied to other nationalities."<sup>12</sup>

### SAIVA SIDDHANTA:

The notion that saivism was the original religion of the Tamil people from pre-Aryan days and that being Tamil is synonymous with the practice of Saivism has also to be challenged:

"And though through the vehicle of the Tamil language came Saivism a religion which the Oxford scholar G.U. Pope" called the most elaborate, influential and undoubtedly the most intrinsically valuable of all religions... Many have regarded Saivism and Tamil as being almost synonymous and that one cannot exist without the other. It is rightly said "Thamilum Saivamum, Saivamum Thamilum".<sup>14</sup>

It must be said in all fairness that not all are agreed on this

*From the forthcoming volume  
Facets of Ethnicity in Sri Lanka  
by the Social Scientists' Association.*

approach to Tamil identity. Satchi Ponnambalam for eg: strongly believes that the Tamil identity has no religious base and that religion for Tamils is a matter of conscience.<sup>15</sup> But, any attempt to link religion and community can lead to exclusive tendencies and has chauvinist potential.

Saiva Siddhanta appears to have two sources with regard to its philosophy. Shivapadasunderam in his book on the Saiva School of Hinduism states that the authoritative works on Saivism are the twenty eight Sivagamas which are originally in Sanskrit... A chapter of the Raurava Agama, called Sivagnanabodham and consisting of twelve couplets said to have been revealed to Saint Nandi, as the essence of Agamas, was translated into Tamil in the twelfth century by Meikandar who also added to it a commentary. This was expanded by his disciples and later saints into what is now considered the Saiva Siddhanta doctrine. It is also said that some of the thoughts on Saivism were drawn from the original works in Tamil such as the Thirumanthiram of Thirumalar written in the first century. The philosophy of Saiva Siddhanta became an important part of Tamil identity in Sri Lanka when Arumuga Navalar, the great nineteenth century reformer, revived the doctrine in Jaffna and South India.<sup>16</sup>

It is, however, a grave mistake to think that Hinduism, let alone Saiva Siddhanta is synonymous with Tamil. Tamil Nadu was the center of Buddhist and Jain learning until the tenth century. In fact, it is argued that the great Hindu revival of the ninth and tenth centuries was a reaction to the powerful intellectual influences of Buddhism and Jainism.

Some great Tamil works such as the *Silappadikaram* and the *Mannimekalai* were Buddhist and Jain texts. Tamil religious history has thus been pluralistic and cannot be confined to one specific doctrine.

Saiva Siddhanta as it exists today is an erudite philosophy which supposedly explains the essence of Siva worship. Sri Ponnambalam Arunachalam summarizes this essence as follows... Saiva Siddhanta postulates three entities — God (Pati), the Soul (Pasu) and Bondage (Pasam). The scheme of the Universe has for its aim the removal of the Soul's impurity and its union with the Lord Siva so as to destroy duality and *maja* (illusion). The devotional aspects of Bhakti worship are combined with the more philosophical tradition of the Vedanta. Saiva Siddhanta is said to be extremely metaphysical and it is claimed that some of the concepts such as the term for primordial energy can only be communicated in the Tamil language. However, it is unlikely that the refined doctrine of Saiva Siddhanta is the basis of the religiosity of the majority of Tamil people in Sri Lanka. Popular religion is rarely found in this abstract form. The vast majority of Hindus in the North are Bhakti worshippers, devout followers of Lord Muruga, Ganesha, Amman and Shiva. To claim that all Tamils are followers of Saiva Siddhanta is an artificial attempt to construct a monolithic religious doctrine to unite the Tamil people. This is not only unusually doctrinaire but goes against the essence of Hindu philosophy which has had a strong tradition of syncretism, drawing from all religions and popular traditions.

The use of Saiva Siddhanta as a gospel for the Tamil nationalist movement also poses major problems. This gospel of Saiva Siddhanta, as a part of Tamil nationalist political discourse must be as alienating to the non-Hindus as Buddhism was for a pan-Sri Lankan identity. If the Tamil movement is to be seen as being historically progressive in the Sri Lankan context, then it must

be a movement which is secular and which accepts the multi-ethnic character of our society.

### LINGUISTIC NATIONALISM:

The Tamil language has been one of the most important rallying points of the Tamil movement. The demand for the recognition of a Tamil Linguistic Region is a product of this consciousness. Given the fact that Tamil grievances gathered momentum in Sri Lanka after the passage of the Sinhala Only Act, it is not surprising that the Tamil language should be a focal point of Tamil identity. In addition, it is the Tamil language as spoken in Sri Lanka which provides an identity to the Sri Lankan Tamil distinctive from his or her Tamil Nadu counterpart.

Even before the current ethnic conflict, Sri Lankan Tamils have expressed pride in their Tamil language in no uncertain terms:

"Tamil is one of the oldest languages of the world and it flowered both in South India and Sri Lanka. It is a language that has given the world the distilled wisdom of the *Kural* in which it has been said there hardly exists in the world a collection of maxims in which we have no lofty wisdom"<sup>18</sup>

Since 1956, the Tamil language has lost status in Sri Lanka, from "rights" value to "use value". Legislation such as the Sinhala Only Act struck at the heart of Sri Lankan Tamil identity. Though denial of language rights is an aspect of political oppression, in asserting these rights one must be aware of the pitfalls of linguistic nationalism. Recent writings by such writers as Benedict Anderson point to the fact that linguistic nationalism is often the most virulent form of nationalism. Sinhalese nationalism as articulated by vernacular speaking elites is a classical example of this type of virulence. Critical social scientists must however ask the question as to what group or class benefits from this type of nationalism. Benedict Anderson researching forms of nationalism throughout the world comes to the

conclusion that is the ideology of the elites educated in the vernacular, harbouring tremendous resentment against races and classes which have prevented their upward social mobility. This class is radical with regard to imperialism and international capitalism but conservative with regard to its own nationalism and ethnic pride. Anderson points to the fact that this ideology is particularly powerful because the vernacular speaking elites usually control the communication system in any given society. The fact that the Tamil language has been discriminated against since independence can be well substantiated by historical fact. However, it may be necessary to see whether Anderson's thesis is relevant with regard to Tamil nationalism. Sri Lankan Tamil writing, due to the recent diaspora, is no longer dependent on the Sri Lankan state for publication and dissemination, self-criticism, in line with Anderson's thesis, may therefore have to become an essential part of Tamil social science.

### TRADITIONAL HOMELANDS AND SINHALESE MYTHS:

Even as we critically assess myth creation on the part of Tamil writers, we have to be watchful of the continuing process of myth reiteration on the part of Sinhalese scholars. Given the fact Sinhalese nationalist ideology has State backing this type of enterprise may have disturbing consequences. As mentioned earlier, myths with regard to "Aryan", "Sinhala" and "Buddhist" have been under scrutiny from critical Sinhalese scholars since the 1960's. (See introduction) however, there have been a series of recent articles on archaeology and settlement which in an indirect way reinforce Sinhalese myths about history. Though many writings have appeared, I would prefer to concentrate on what appears to be a genuine scholarly attempt to deal with the relationship between settlement history and ethnic conflict. This is a Paper by Professor G.H. Pieris, references to which have appeared in the national press, and which is entitled



"An Appraisal of the Concept of a Traditional Tamil Homeland in Sri Lanka".<sup>20</sup> In his Paper G.H. Pieris states that the Sinhalese and "Sinhala purana" villagers were the original settlers of the Eastern province. Whether the Nagas were Tamil and whether they were the first inhabitants of Sri Lanka or whether Sinhala purana villagers were the original settlements in the eastern province may be of interest to historians and geographers but is this really relevant to the current political debate? G.H. Pieris cannot even argue that his paper is a balanced non-political, piece of writing because he presents his argument in no uncertain terms as a polemic against Tamil political demands:

"Among the various exemplifications of Tamil nationalism in Sri Lanka, those related to claims over territory have acquired increasing prominence during the recent past. These claims are based on the perception that certain parts of the country belong exclusively to the Sri Lankan Tamils"... The present study is an attempt to place this perception under critical scrutiny".<sup>21</sup>

Some scholars may contest Professor Pieris' empirical findings but to do so is to return to the debate on myths of origin who came first to the eastern province etc... the type of debate which has characterised our research and accentuated the ethnic conflict. I prefer, instead to contest his premises and assumptions.

One could argue that scholars who analyse Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict are divided into two schools; those whose approach comes from a desire for modern solutions to contemporary problems of justice and democracy and those who argue from a vantage point of historical right. The former use modern sources usually from comparative history; the latter draw their inspiration from history and archaeology.

A theory of social justice which primarily or exclusively rests on an analysis of historical research and historical right has enormous

pitfalls. For example: it may be interesting to ask G. H. Pieris whether if independent, convincing research were to really show that the Tamils came first to the Northern and Eastern province and had a historical presence there, would Tamils therefore have the right to a separate state? If it is proved that the Nagas were in fact Tamil, does this mean that the Tamils have the right to rule the whole island even in areas where the Sinhalese are a majority? And what about the Muslims, what claims do they have in this era of competing historical Rights? The reverse type of questions could be asked of Satchi Ponnambalam and N. Satyendra. Any claim to modern justice based on an analysis of early history, must be treated with extreme skepticism. However in refuting the historical claims of one ethnic group, say the Tamil, many scholars end up reiterating the historical right of the other ethnic group, say the Sinhalese. As a result they get trapped by the subject of inquiry into the discourse of land claims and land rights. These are self-perpetuating debates that are somewhat escapist especially during times of crisis and confrontation. The current debate on traditional homelands and archaeological settlement is one such exercise in futility.

Another problem is that scholars such as G. H. Pieris treat the concept of "traditional homeland" as a geographical concept rather than a political one and in doing so construct an elaborate argument on who lived where and when. Though there is a claim to objectivity, his own political bias comes into evidence when he quotes E. B. Denham as part of his resume — "among the races that are most numerous in Ceylon, only one race can regard Ceylon as the home of the nation and the shrine of its national traditions".<sup>22</sup>

Why this quote? One must seriously consider whether articles such as these which object to the concept of Tamil traditional homelands come from an understanding of the political concept

of traditional homelands or from a belief that Sri Lanka is the ancestral property of the Sinhalese. Prof. Pieris attempts to tear down Tamil claims to traditional homelands not with the critical scientific intention of scoffing at all political enterprises which mystically connect land with people but with the seeming purpose of legitimising the profoundly Sinhala myth that Sri Lanka is a nation-state, a land which historically belongs to the Sinhalese, even though some parts have been "Tamilised":

"There is indeed a mass of evidence which shows that upto about the 13th century the more powerful Sinhalese rulers did exercise sovereignty over the entire island..."<sup>23</sup>

But is this the historical norm? K. M. De Silva seems to think otherwise:

"Indeed one had to look further back into the past to find a period when Sinhalese rulers had control over the whole island to the second half of the 11th century and the first half of the twelfth. But, even this had been in effect an interlude of indigenous rule sandwiched between two phases of South Indian domination".<sup>24</sup>

In fact K. M. De Silva argues that British rule was a turning point with regard to the effective administration of a centralised state.

Using the framework of a Rajarata Region which has been subsequently Tamilised, G. H. Pieris goes into imply that the presence of Sinhala purana villagers in the Eastern Province in ancient and medieval times justifies modern day state aided colonisation schemes which are altering the ethnic power balance of the province at the time of independence as it exists today.

It may be convenient to caricature political problems associated with state aided colonisation schemes as a primordial struggle over ancestral property. To do so, however, is to miss the point. Tamil claims against land settlement policies result from their present fears and destruction of their



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political power and economic security. Their claims are against the post-donoughmore Sinhala dominated state which held out the promise of a Sri Lankan nation. The problem of colonisation is a modern problem of ethnic minorities who are alienated from a state which reflects the interests of a seemingly hostile ethnic majority. These are sensitive political issues that surely cannot be conceptualised as a simple quarrel over ancestral lands.

In addition G. H. Pieris' concept of settlement and of history in the North and the East is unilinear. In terms of settlement as well as political history he assumes that the Sinhalese and the Rajarata civilisation came first and then around the twelfth century the region was "Tamilised". This unilinear approach to ethnic settlement has rarely been accepted by social scientists who see settlement as a complex dynamic process, autonomous from the forces of political and dynastic history. This antonymy provides for a different type of process leading to what is now termed "subaltern studies". One of the accepted premises of this understanding is that history of archaeological settlement cannot be analysed using modern political categories as they exist in modern nation states. R.A.L.H. Gunewardene writes for eg:

"The disparate nature of the early settlements in the island, with each village clustering around a small reservoir would not be conducive to the development of strong group identities. . . it will be evident from the preceding survey that the nature of Sinhala identity as well as the relationship of the group brought together by this identity with other groupings based on religion, ritual status and languages varied in different periods of history."<sup>5</sup>

In fact, one has to ask what is "Tamilised" and what is "Sinhalese" and which came first? Gananath Obeyesekere writes:

"Except perhaps for the oldest stratum of settlers prior to 500 B.C. almost all subsequent

settlers in Sri Lanka came from South India, mostly from Tamil Nadu, Orissa and Kerala and quickly became Sinhalese".<sup>26</sup>

Michael Roberts has a similar view of migration of some of the Sinhalese castes:

"In common with such castes as the Salagama and the Durava, the Karava (were) made up of relatively recent Dravidian migrants. Nevertheless they slotted into the structure of caste-regulated corvee service and came to be regarded as Sinhalese castes"<sup>27</sup>

Of what real significance are the modern political identities of "Tamil" and "Sinhalese" and the modern political debate on land

policy to studying settlement patterns of ancient and medieval Sri Lanka? How relevant were they to the group identities and self-perceptions of those dots in settlement maps? The history of settlements and the political history and ideology of states cannot be collapsed into one research realm. Scholars have long ago come to terms with differences which exist between political history and political discourse on the one hand and migration and settlement patterns on the other. In addition, to try and read the past through present controversies is often an unnecessary and misplaced enterprise, such an approach to the present conflict will only compound existing problems.

## (TRI) STAR WARS

*So you died to prove a point  
The debate, unfortunately, wasn't yours  
Cry pity as these experts joint by joint  
Fix you, and the Airline brings the flowers.  
The pieces the politicians cannot paste  
Will be swept swiftly under the terrorist carpet  
But this is human flesh and all the haste  
Cannot stem the rising stench of rot.  
After this will Reagan read his sermon  
Sign the proxy and despatch the bombs  
Will it be laser, cluster, or just Napalm  
More effective than the lumpens and the mobs  
And when both sides have tried all arsenals of hate  
To gasp frenzied on their sector of the fence  
Cry why still does not the inferno abate  
And turn full circle to pious old slogans hence.  
You, the dead and maimed must hear us  
We, the simpletons of this unlucky isle  
Mourn, as deep we feel the break up,  
Civilization shatters in our smile.  
Listen, our dead too are puzzled  
Mown down in the bright fields of the gun  
Sniped in the dark jungle or dazzled  
In mine blast, or killed on the urban run.  
Folk on both sides are confused but dimly suspect  
That puppeteers who prance the rising Pol Pots  
Also have their homework clear in perspective  
Choreography for fading Bonapartes.*

— U. KARUNATILAKE

The failure to distinguish between the actuality of settlement and the imperatives of ideology also poses problems for the understanding of the concept of traditional homelands. In his haste to treat traditional homelands as a geographical concept, G. H. Pieris does not attempt to come to terms with the concept of traditional homelands as it is actually used in anthropological and political science literature. The term originated in anthropological literature with attempts to describe the lifestyle of tribal groups. In political science the term, traditional homelands has become a part of the arsenal of liberal, democratic discourse and is used in situations where a territorial ethnic minority which does not control state power asserts its rights against the State, especially when the state attempts to dilute the political power of the ethnic group or to alter its social and economic life-style. **It is in this context that the Tamil claim to traditional homelands can be best understood.** Ironically, the concept of traditional homelands is an aspect of political discourse which attempts to find solution of ethnic conflict within the framework of a nation-state. In fact in South Africa the term is anathema precisely because of its collaborationist connotations. In the Sri Lankan context, the term traditional homelands has been "primitivised" into a primordial debate over territory, history, claims and counter-claims.

It must be accepted that the concept of traditional homelands differs from the notion of promised land, a chosen piece of territory for a chosen people. The concept of *Sinhadvipa* is a variant of this type of political discourse. It is true that some aspects of Tamil nationalist writing also speak in these terms and in terms of an exclusive homeland for Tamils. In his article, Professor Pieris presents us with some quotations of this type of Tamil nationalist claims. In such a context, it is vital that these attempts at creating mystical connections between land and people be confronted and criticised, but not from a

vantage point of attempting to stake a superior claim for a particular ethnic group but from the perspective that all claims to promised land always lead to ethnic chauvinism and a desire for territorial expansion.

With the intensification of the present ethnic conflict, we, as a society have forgotten, or have chosen to forget, the deeply humane aspects of our respective traditions. Instead, many writers and ideologues from various communities continue to emphasize those aspects of our culture and history which accentuate differences and which see ethnic loyalty as the supreme human value. Modern political categories are used as mirrors into the past and history is used as a weapon in an ethnic war of words. The issues of justice and oppression get lost in a discourse of historical fact and counter-fact. Ironically, in this struggle for the "correct" historical interpretation, other more universal social values are often forgotten. Perhaps, at times such as these it is best to remember Ashis Nandy's famous truism, "that knowledge without ethics is not so much bad ethics, as inferior knowledge".<sup>28</sup>

#### FOOTNOTES

10. S. Ponnambalam, p.18
11. Ibid p.20
12. Ibid p.20
13. See S. Bandaranayake, *The Peopling of Sri Lanka: The National Question and Some Problems of History and Ethnicity*, SSA ed. op. cit. P.V.III
14. N. Satyendra p.89
15. S. Ponnambalam p.33
16. See S. Shivapadasunderam, *The Saiva School of Hinduism*, London, 1934.
17. Also see P. Arunachalam, *Studies and Translations, Philosophical and Religious writings*, Colombo, 1937 p.87
18. N. Satyendra p.88
19. See B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, London, 1983.
20. A paper presented at a *Workshop on the Economic Dimensions of the Ethnic Problem*, ICES, Kandy, 1985.
21. G. H. Pieris, "An appraisal of the Concept of a Traditional Homeland" p.1
22. Ibid A.34
23. Ibid p.8

24. K. M. De Silva, "Sri Lanka: The Dilemmas of Decentralisation", Cross-National Workshop on structural Arrangements, Taita Hills, September 1981.
25. R. A. L. H. Gunawardena op.cit p.43
26. G. Obeyesekere, "Political Violence and the Future of Democracy in Sri Lanka, Toronto, Lanka Review, 1984. p.10.
27. Michael Roberts, *Caste Conflict and Elite Formation: The Rise of a Karava Elite*, Cambridge, 1982, p.1.
28. Ashis Nandy op.cit p.113

#### LETTERS . . .

(Continued from page 1)

war. For make no mistake it was a war. It was like the days of 'rule Britannia' 'Brittania rules the world'. Those halocyn times of white supremacy and British colonialism. Yes, our foreign office did wonder for the immigrant in England by supporting Britain in her hour of want. In her hour of need when a brown or black skin on British streets at the Falklands height was a sure sign for assault.

Lakshman Umagiliya

Colombo 7

#### NOT HARVARD

A brief note relating to a minor factual error at page 7 of May 1st issue.

Mr Balakrishnan of the Home Ministry is alas not a Harvard man. He is, however, a first rate constitutional lawyer having worked with G. P. on the Kashmir and Mizoram negotiations. Mr Chidambaram, however, did go to the Harvard Business School and secure a M. B. A. degree, having taken his basic degrees from Presidency College Madras. He incidentally was in the 'baby class' with N. Ram of the Hindu! He had a highly successful legal practice before the Madras High Court and the Indian Supreme Court, before being inducted into the Union Council of Ministers.

T. N.

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## Our business goes beyond tobacco.

For well over five decades we have been involved in the tobacco industry in Sri Lanka. We are pioneers in tobacco growing, promoting self-employment and generating income for the rural farmer. We contribute to government revenue and earn foreign exchange for the country.

Utilising our expertise, we have ventured into other fields. Horticulture and alternate fuels are just two of them.

We have established a tissue culture laboratory, mainly for the development of new varieties of orchids. We also produce tissue cultured strawberry and house plants for export.

In our search for alternate fuels, we have perfected the manufacture of briquettes out of waste coir dust. These briquettes offer a solid fuel alternative to fuel oil and to firewood.

We also offer consultancy services in energy conservation.



**Ceylon Tobacco Company Limited**

A member of the B.A.T. Group.

## **WE ARE A DIFFERENT KIND OF GUARDIAN TO YOU !**

*There are a multitude of guardians during your lifetime*

- They who guard the freedom of speech & expression
- They who protect the basic human rights of mankind
- They who guard the democratic freedoms to which each of us are entitled to as citizens

*Each of us is a guardian to others who view us for their  
dependency in day to day life*

**BUT THE DIFFERENCE IN OUR GUARDIANSHIP  
RESTS ON OUR DEEP CONCERN FOR YOUR FUTURE  
WE ARE TRUSTED GUARDIANS OF YOUR HARD-EARNED  
MONEY, GUIDING YOU ON HOW TO SPEND AND HOW TO SAVE  
FOR YOU AND YOUR DEPENDENTS' TOMORROWS**

**SO REACH OUT TODAY  
FOR YOUR LIFE-LONG GUARDIAN**



# **PEOPLE'S BANK**

***A Different Kind Of Guardian For You***