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THE UNIONS ARE RESTLESS

Mervyn de Silva

In the new post-Cold War world, neither military power nor economic resources nor democratic practice is taken as the surest index of a nation's health. The Stock Exchange is the new oracle.

The downward movement of the indices at the Colombo Exchange into the fifth successive week, says the FORBES RESEARCH weekly review, was "far more significant" in the past few weeks than at any time in the past month or more. The Review underlined (a) the continued absence of many investors (b) low trading volumes and turnover levels were the main features. And why? In the idiom of the market analyst, this trend was largely the result of "negative sentiment created by the economic and political uncertainty in the country". This also explained the low trading volumes and turnover levels. The All-share index was down by 16.8 points, a 2.9% drop while the Blue Chip Index registered a decline of 35, 2 points, a 3.78% drop from the week before.

Meanwhile Trade Chamber President Patrick Amerasinghe has warned of a new danger — unemployment. So many companies have closed down that thousands have lost their jobs. And the effect of this has been quite severe because many private firms, alarmed about the P.A.'s "Workers' Charter", have adopted a policy of retrenchment. The Workers' Charter, a P.A. polls pledge and a strong personal commitment of Minister Mahinda Rajapakse, has caused mounting concern in the P.A. leadership.

As a result, President Kumaratunga told a party rally in Mirigama: "The time has come to say NO to strikes. First the war must be won, Second we have to develop the country and third we must accelerate the drive to create employment".

RESTLESS UNIONS

But the unions are restive. And the best organised unions are still controlled or affiliated to the Leftist parties, like the L.S.S.P., a major S.L.F.P. partner. The L.S.S.P. leader, Mr. Bernard Soysa is a Cabinet minister. Thus the trade

union unrest affects the P.A. just as any T.U.C. action disturbs a Labour administration in Britain. Already, Mr. Vasudeva Nanayakara M.P. would like Mr. Soysa to quit the Cabinet.

The main demand of some of the unions is a Rs. 100 pay hike — a step that would promote inflationary trends, already a cause of concern for the Finance Ministry.

But President Kumaratunga's counter-strategy is to remind the majority Sinhalese, the U.N.P. supporters included, of the army's splendid victory in the North against the L.T.T.E. "We have made vast strides in diminishing the strength of the Tigers. Since the government is not waging a war against the Tamil people, we have to redress their genuine grievances".

Since Mr. Vasudeva Nanayakara MP has already raised the question of the L.S.S.P.'s role as a constituent member of the P.A., this issue has now led to a serious debate in the P.A. hierarchy, and in the constituencies dominated by the Left. President Chandrika has thought it necessary to instruct Deputy Finance Minister Prof. Pieris to inform Bank employees that the government will NOT privatise the three State banks. So P.A. policy, under pressure by the SLFP's Leftist partners and the unions, moves forward, backwards and sideways — to the dismay of the World Bank and the IMF, the private sector and foreign investors.

RANIL'S LINE

Opposition Leader Ranil Wickremasinghe summed it up in a recent speech in Parliament:

"We have had a blackout due to an electricity strike. The Cabinet was not summoned. The Cabinet was not consulted. The Minister of Foreign Affairs wanted the agreement with the Tawakkal Brothers set aside. The Cabinet agreed. Suddenly there was a meeting between the Tawakkal Co. the officials of the Treasury and PERC and all of a sudden that decision was changed.....!"

What has happened today? There is a total loss of confidence in the government. The business community has lost confidence..... Investors big and small have lost confidence in the government..... I do not think all these concessions you have given, will get one more ship to Sri Lanka or create any more employment. Without investment how are you going to create jobs? Prof. Pieris, Deputy Finance Minister, meanwhile assured the Sri Lanka Independent Bank Employees Union that the Bank of Ceylon, Peoples Bank and the National Savings Bank will NOT be privatised.

Policy moves forward, backwards and sideways.

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Ethnic conflict and its wider dimensions

Tracing the genesis of the prevailing ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka and reasons for its exacerbation, the author feels that tackling the issues involved in their wider perspective would help in providing a solution to the conflict.

Rajiva Wijesinha

The Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka has roused considerable attention internationally. It has been seen as arising primarily from repression and resentments based on ethnic differences. While not claiming these to be of minimal importance, one can also trace other contributory factors based on the denial of individual freedoms in the pursuit of collective goals that were so fashionable a feature of the preceding half-century and which still form the rhetoric of most parties to the conflict. In short, I propose to examine the ethnic conflict to show that it also encompasses other areas of dissension involving economic, educational and deographical factors. Besides, it is apparent that the absence of practical mechanisms as well as motives for regional co-operation have also contributed considerably towards the exacerbation of the conflict.

A Comparison with Southeast Asia

In examining the situation in Sri Lanka it may be useful to glance at some other countries in the region who set about nation-building in the aftermath of colonialism. In this respect a sharp distinction between the nations of South Asia and those of Southeast Asia is noticeable: whereas on the one hand Pakistan split apart and is still racked by conflict; whereas India has had problems with minorities as well as various conflicts between states

and the central government; whereas Sikkim vanished as a nation after shifts in its demographic composition and whereas both Nepal and Bhutan are in different ways facing similar problems; Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and even Indonesia on the other hand have managed to evolve national identities that by and large transcend racial and religious diversities amongst their citizens. For instance, very few people are even aware now that the concept of a Thai identity is a Post-war creation, and that earlier, most of the people who now describe themselves as Thai were more conscious of being Lao or Muslim or belonging to particular tribes.

The same is true with regard to other countries in the region; and the difference struck me forcefully when recently a Tamil in Malaysia remarked that even though his grandparents were from Jaffna, he could not understand the rationale for a Tamil independence movement. "I am a Malaysian", he said. "That is my country. Of course I'm also Tamil, but that is not so important." Integration does not involve abandoning a cultural identity which is especially important with regard to business and marital relations. But the absorption of say the Sino-Thais or those of Chinese descent in to the countries they inhabit, even in countries like Malaysia and Indonesia, despite earlier racial tensions, testifies to the possibility of creating a nation on defiance of what sometimes seem to be the absolutes of nationalism based on racial or religious differences. And equally importantly, the minimisation of tensions between the Southeast Asian nations, has contributed towards the dwindling into insignificance of

sources of conflict based on distinctions between communities. Further, the development of contacts between individuals in the various Southeast Asian nations has nullified the nationalistic ethos that had contributed so much to the exacerbation of tensions across and within national boundaries. This is unlike South Asia where governments continue to be suspicious of each other.

Exacerbation of the Ethnic Conflict

The 1977 elections saw several Tamil parties coming together as the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) campaigning for a separate Tamil state. The United National Party (UNP) that won that election, defeating the incumbent Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), had in its own manifesto noted four areas of Tamil grievances that it promised to settle through an all party conference. Many Tamils voted for it but, instead of holding the pledged conference the UNP contributed by its own actions to the increasing violence that has now dominated Sri Lanka politics for over a decade.

Educational Discrimination

One area where the UNP government indeed acted swiftly enough (though within a couple of years it nullified its own action under chauvinistic pressures) was with regard to university admissions, where the preceding government had introduced a policy of positive discrimination to increase admissions from underprivileged areas. The major area to lose out as a consequence, apart from the capital Colombo, was Jaffna, the main Tamil city in the north, where education and academic qualifications had long

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been a cherished goal. But whereas the denizens of Colombo had other outlets, in terms of employment as well as education abroad for those who could afford it, such avenues were not open to the youngsters of Jaffna. This became a potent cause of disaffection. Later when the UNP government reimposed a system of quotas, resentment was particularly bitter. It was not surprising therefore, that a number of educated young people moved to the terrorist movements since nothing else seemed capable of resolving their problems.

Language Conflict

In some other areas of grievances that the 1977 UNP manifesto had identified, the problems were clearly intensified by the statism which the SLFP socialist regime had practised and which the ostensibly more right-wing UNP did nothing to change. One area was that of language rights. An earlier SLFP government had made Sinhalese the sole official language of the country. Though Tamil was subsequently permitted for official communications in some areas, the fact was that the vast majority of officials knew no Tamil. So even when Tamil was finally recognised as an official language in 1987, though it did help in assuaging the feeling, the people were not benefited in their dealings with government. The fact remained that the country consisted of two sets of people who spoke different languages, and state educational policy and practice ensured that they could have no language in common.

It may be useful in this regard to compare the situation in Southeast Asia, where a common language has in fact been imposed on those of different linguistic backgrounds. This has surprisingly caused little resentment. Indeed, even in South Asia, we do not find other instances of linguistic dichotomy. In India for instance, after the initial abortive attempt to impose Hindi, States have developed their own linguistic policies so as not to leave sizeable minorities in general

unable to deal with officials. In Sri Lanka the other hand, governments and policy makers, confusing language with identity, have maintained a rigid policy of apartheid. Perhaps it was a scrupulous desire to respect ethnic and therefore linguistic identities, seen against all historical evidence as indistinguishable, that led to the insistence that Sinhalese children learn in Sinhalese and Tamil children in Tamil (and that this take place in almost entirely segregated schools). No Tamil politician challenged this insistence, perhaps because it became a matter of pride to uphold at least the educational status of a language that lacked an official status. Ironically, the politicians who codified these positions communicated with each other in English. With that too downgraded, the stage was set thirty years later for two distinct groups unable to communicate and bound to feel alienated in a territory dominated by the other; and it was the Tamils who suffered the most, in that there were few roles to which they could aspire to, not only in the state sector but since that sector dominated the economy, in the nation at large.

Employment In State Sector

Given their disability in the language in which most state business was conducted, fewer Tamils found government employment than their numbers warranted. Yet, no government thought it necessary in the interest of nation-building to take action about this. Whereas successive regimes developed quota systems to benefit Sinhalese who complained about disparities with regard to university admissions, no government even thought of a quota system for Tamils with regard to state employment.

State-Aided Colonisation

And the same applied to the grievance of state-aided colonisation, which in time came to assume perhaps the greatest practical significance. The complaint was that since independence

this had contributed towards the changing of the demographic composition of what were termed the traditional homelands of the Tamil speaking people. It was unquestionably true that in the fifties and the sixties, a great many Sinhalese had been settled in the Eastern Province through irrigation schemes. However, this was in areas not previously populated. The Sinhalese had been targeted because there were far greater numbers of landless Sinhalese than Tamils in overpopulated areas. In addition, while the eastern coastal areas had long been inhabited by Tamil speaking people, that the jungle beyond it was part of the same province was a matter of historical contingency rather than demographic rationale. Nevertheless, the fact that mainly Sinhalese had benefited from these schemes became an emotive issue in the seventies. And certainly the composition of the Eastern province had changed, in that the Tamils were no longer in an absolute majority there.

Strong Arm Tactics

It was these issues then that the UNP highlighted in its 1977 manifesto, but then proceeded to ignore or exacerbate the conflict while in government. Instead of the promised all-party conference, its leader J. R. Jayewardene, introduced District Development Councils. Apart From the fact that these Councils had minimal powers, the government alienated the Tamils of Jaffna even further during the elections by intimidation that involved the burning of the Jaffna Public Library. As a consequence the most extreme Tamil terrorist group, The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), whose demand that the election be boycotted the TULF was able to ignore, was immeasurably strengthened. A few years later when the LTTE ordered the TULF to boycott the local elections, the TULF promptly withdrew its candidates.

By then it was clear why Jayewardene had been so cavalier about the

Tamils whose votes had helped him get the massive parliamentary majority that had allowed him to amend the Constitution. In 1980, he removed the civic rights of the SLFP leader Mrs. Bandaranaike, so that he practically had a free run at the Presidency the following year. After that he announced a referendum to extend the term of the existing parliament for another six years. He won that referendum by an incredible amount of violence and intimidation, amply detailed even in the Election Commissioner's report on the referendum. What is even more shocking is the manner in which many governments which claimed to uphold democracy continued not only to countenance Jayawardene's regime, but even to support it actively. Even though Jayawardene had taken more of the economy into state control than his socialist predecessor, his opening up of the economy in some respects allowed him to enjoy uncritical favour from the West. It cannot be too strongly stressed that it is such responses that have led Human Rights Groups, and in particular those associated with governments, being suspect in countries such as Sri Lanka. The inevitable result of Jayawardene's policies within the country was the marginalization of democratic opposition and the emergence of terrorist groups as the dominant force amongst the young who felt disenfranchised.

Having thus got away with perpetuating his power, in mid-1983, Jayawardene attempted to hold the all-party conference he had originally promised six years earlier. No one came. He fixed another date; and inspired perhaps by the success of his strong arm tactics in other areas, he permitted an assault on the Tamils in Colombo and elsewhere in July 1983, which he claimed on television was the understandable response of ordinary Sinhalese to Tamil separatism. There was little doubt then, and none now, that the attacks were organised by government supporters. However, Jayawardene had not perhaps anticipated the levels of violence that occurred, which may

explain why, after his first indulgent reference to the perpetrators of the mayhem, he announced that it was the communists who were responsible. It is doubtful, however, whether even his most fervent supporters in the West were taken in. Certainly it was too late as far as the Tamils were concerned.

Accord with India

The number of Tamils accepted internationally as refugees increased apace, and they and other Tamil residents abroad began to contribute more concertedly to the cause. They now were represented more prominently by the various terrorist groups, and in particular by the LTTE. India too, already alienated by Jayawardene's attempts to belittle its position in the region while he sought alliances with the West, began to involve itself more openly with the terrorist groups. Though the government lurched between military action and attempts at negotiation, it became clear that in the end it would have to concede far more than it had initially ever contemplated. In part this was because Jayawardene was determined to ignore the SLFP, so that at no point did he try to present a generally acceptable package of reforms. Instead it was clear that he would only yield to force; and India inevitably proved most forceful so that he signed an Accord in 1987, ostensibly designed to settle the conflict in Sri Lanka but in fact designed more to affirm Indian supremacy in the region.

Certainly the Tigers were of the view that the Accord served India rather than the Tamils. Other terrorists groups accepted the proposals and tried to contest elections, but the Tigers held that they should be put directly in charge of an interim administration. When agreement could not be reached on this, hostilities erupted again, with Indians this time marching on Jaffna; and though they were able to take control of the area, the result of the violence for which they were consid-

ered responsible was that the Tigers emerged as the unquestioned favourites of the people of the North.

Negotiations with SLFP

There is no point going into details about the development of the conflict since then, and the steady increase in violence. For the present what should be noted is that the current SLFP-led Sri Lankan government depends for its parliamentary majority on minority parties, and despite renewed hostilities by the LTTE, the general impression amongst both minorities and the international community is that the President, Mrs. Kumaratunga, is genuine in seeking a fair settlement.

The negotiations that she initiated however broke down in April 1995, when the LTTE withdrew unilaterally and launched a series of military attacks. The excuse offered was that the President had reneged on various commitments while failing to put forward any concrete proposals. Certainly it is true that she had been restrained from granting many of the LTTE demands by an army which was convinced that the LTTE was using the cease-fire to build up its striking power. That this was happening was unquestionable, though the LTTE position was that his was unavoidable, given that it could not rely on the government.

In the context of mistrust developed over the preceding decade, such suspicions on either side are eminently understandable. At the same time, it is generally acknowledged that Mrs. Kumaratunga has always upheld a pluralistic approach, and it is more likely than most politicians to propose measures that would address the grievances of the Tamils. This indeed was substantiated when in the midst of hostilities she unveiled a package that in principle satisfied the requirements of the other Tamil parties. Equally it was recognised by observers of all communities that the LTTE was unlikely to accept any measure that

did not leave it in overall charge of the combined North Eastern Province which it claims is the traditional homeland of the Tamils, even though Sinhalese and Muslims, who now consider themselves distinct from the Tamils despite sharing a common language, comprise 2/3rds of the population of the East.

Conflict Resolution

Intra-Regional Co-operation

In seeking solutions to the present conflict, it would make sense to look at the wider dimensions as well. The deteriorating relations between India and Sri Lanka in the eighties clearly contributed to its escalation. The absence in this respect of institutional mechanisms to resolve regional problems before they reach crisis point is very much regretted. Yet, given the damage caused to all countries by lingering suspicions as well as actual hostilities, it is clear that forceful efforts to ensure co-operation is an urgent necessity. In this respect the region can learn from the example of the ASEAN Countries who have succeeded in building up by and large coherent nation states that work together in promoting their mutual interests. The importance of economic co-operation, particularly between to private sector organisations, can be seen to have contributed significantly to the awareness that security and mutual confidence provide the best guarantees of prosperity.

Need for Constitutional Safeguards

With regard to the actual conflict within Sri Lanka, clearly the principal concern should be the restoration of confidence between the communities. There is little doubt in my mind that the primary responsibility for the conflict lies with successive Sinhala dominated governments who have displayed a callousness towards minorities, and a tendency to assert power on the basis of parliamentary majorities without a due process of consultation.

Yet it should also be recognised that such governments have been destructive towards Sinhalese too, and it would be absurd to subject Sinhala and Muslim minorities to similar abuse under Tamil dominated regions as compensation for previous suffering on the part of Tamils. Rather, what is essential is the development of constitutional safeguards against the abuse of power by any government, central or regional, and the expansion of individual choice in areas where restrictive policies have encouraged the alienation of communities and regions from each other.

English as Medium of Instruction

The extensive damage caused by the present education system has prevented the integration of the races. When children, and indeed adults, cannot communicate with each other, it is obviously impossible to build up confidence. In the present context, it would be insensitive to expect Tamil children to learn Sinhalese (besides they would have no incentive to do so) and Sinhalese children to learn Tamil. English as the medium of instruction would be the obvious answer, but that at present is confined to the extremely rich, who attend so-called International Schools which though technically illegal will never be closed for the simple reason that most leading politicians send their own children to such schools. This shows the callousness of these politicians who have made no attempt to extend such opportunities to poorer Sinhalese and Tamil children held now in divisive straitjackets by governmental fiat.

International Pressure

Meanwhile in the short term there are steps that the international community can take to expedite the peace process. While international condemnation has been vital in ensuring that government forces refrain from action against civilians, it is equally important that abuse of civilians by the LTTE

be condemned. In addition, renewal of terrorist activity by the LTTE should be discouraged through constraints applied internationally, unless the LTTE is prepared to return immediately to the negotiating process.

Such actions must of course be dependent upon the government pursuing not only the package it has proposed but also ensuring that the constitutional changes finally decided upon are based on clearly recognisable and generally justifiable principles rather than mere responses to the excesses and abuses of previous governments. This it has suggested it will do, by announcing a comprehensive revision of the constitution that will also fulfil its pledge to abolish the executive presidency; but proposals with regard to electoral reform for instance still suggest a hankering after the massive majorities of the seventies and eighties that nullified any tendency towards seeking consensus.

Efforts by Human Rights Organisations

Efforts made by international human rights organisations in this regard would help in dispelling the notion often propagated in Sri Lanka that such organisations concern themselves with minorities alone and ignore the abuses suffered by a majority community. I have argued above that there is some truth in such an allegation, given the international support extended to the Jayawardene government despite its subversion of all democratic norms; and I should stress again my view that it was precisely because of that subversion that the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka developed so horrendously. I should end therefore by reiterating that there can be no question of classifying some rights as important and others as less so. While trying to understand clearly the situations that have caused the conflict, those concerned with the resolution of conflicts have to be constantly on the alert to note and object to violations of fundamental rights and liberties in all contexts.

The Contradictions of Consensus

Neeraj Kaushal

A consensus of sorts appears to have emerged among Indian political parties regarding economic policies. The minimum economic programme of the United Front government, which is a conglomeration of 14 political parties, and is supported by the Congress (I) from the outside, promises to proceed with what should be called 'alternate reforms'. The programme, most of which is unlikely to be opposed by even the Bharatiya Janata Party, the main opposition party, has done away with politically unpalatable reforms. These are reforms with a human face.

However, there is one basic contradiction in the minimum economic programme: while Finance minister, P Chidambaram has promised to increase the food subsidy and government expenditure on education, he has also promised to reduce the fiscal deficit to four per cent of the GDP from 5 per cent promised by his predecessor, Manmohan Singh merely three months ago.

No one believes Mr Chidambaram. At the moment, he must be tightening his girdles to scrounge around for at least Rs 15,000 crore of additional funds to perform this heroic task in a few weeks when he presents the Union Budget for 1996-97. (Around Rs 10,000 crore to bring the fiscal deficit down by one per cent of the GDP and at least Rs 5000 crore to cover the additional food subsidy bill and additional educational expenditure).

How will he do this? By slapping additional taxes? He can try but will find that higher tax rates do not often lead to increased tax collections.

By cutting down expenses? Good

idea. But Dr Singh has not left Mr Chidambaram with much of a choice. In the past five years, the Congress (I) government had borrowed so heavily, that several future governments will have to cough half or more of their annual revenue in repaying this debt.

Mr Chidambaram will find that out of every one rupee of government revenue, 50 paise will be used in repaying past debt. With the remaining 50 paise, Mr Chidambaram will have to run the affairs of this huge government. Plus, pay for the increased food subsidy and the additional education expenses proposed in the minimum economic programme.

So what should he do?

At least four things. One, slash defence expenditure. The timing is perfect with defence hawks lying low after Benazir Bhutto's announcement to improve trade ties with India. Manmohan Singh proposed a Rs 2319 crore hike in defence expenditure for 1996-97. But at that time, Ms Bhutto was engaged in a strong rhetoric against India and the defence hawks on both sides of the border were pitching high. But things have changed now. Mr Chidambaram should freeze the defence capital expenditure at last year's level. Thus, he will save Rs 1590 crore. Apart from saving this precious money, such signals will go a long way in improving friendly ties between the two countries.

In the meantime, the present government should initiate the process of modernising the army. India should have a small, modern and young army, in place of the present over one million

strong army, which is not qualified to use modern war machinery. Besides, ordnance factories should be trimmed and asked to operate on commercial lines. Defence forces often have to purchase from ordnance factories durries, jackets, caps and several other things at double or three times their market price.

Two, Mr Chidambaram should put the fifth pay commission's report on hold. The commission has proposed fancy salaries for government employees. Mr Chidambaram should insist that his government will review the entire report. He may not save much money in the process, as he will find that although the Congress (I) had promised to accept the commission's report, its government did not provide for any funds for it in this year's budget. But this step will check any sudden sharp increases in government expenses on this account.

He should also take steps to prune the size of the government. Several departments have become redundant after reforms. Workers in these departments should be retrained and relocated to other departments of the government.

Three, introduce a minimum tax on the net worth of companies. The 1995-96 corporate results show that while profits have continued to boom for the third consecutive year, a large number of private companies, which include corporate giants like Reliance, TISCO, do not pay any corporate tax as they avail of tax concessions for new investments. The finance minister should introduce a minimum tax, of around one per cent on the net worth of companies. This will ensure a

minimum contribution by corporates in the country's tax kitty.

Four, the government should enact a law to make presumptive tax compulsory. At present, the presumptive tax is voluntary, and a large number of small businesses simply do not pay this tax.

These four steps will not take Mr Chidambaram close to the magic number of Rs 15,000 crore. But it will send the message that he is serious in bringing the fiscal deficit down; that the government cannot be profligate with him as the chief controller of its finances.

However, if he has to bring the fiscal deficit down to four per cent of GDP, Mr Chidambaram may cut the government's capital outlay. His predecessor, Dr Singh often used this option. But Mr Chidambaram may not repeat all the mistakes that Dr Singh made. With private investment in infrastructure sectors like power, roads not coming forth, public sector investment in these areas will have to be raised to ensure a sustained growth in the medium to long run. Cutting down plan outlay may take the economy off the high growth trajectory on which it is at the moment. That may not be acceptable to his political bosses, who have promised the best of everything to everybody.

So what should Mr Chidambaram do?

I suggest, he should wriggle out of this promise. The minimum economic programme has been vague about the time over which the fiscal deficit would be reduced. Mr Chidambaram should claim that the programme will be implemented gradually over the next three to five years. In the present, however, he will merely try to honour his predecessor's promise. He can be sure that he may never have to face the embarrassment of not fulfilling his

government's promise.

Mr Chidambaram will, in fact, realise very soon that even keeping up Manmohan Singh's promise may not be an easy task. His staff will soon inform him that Dr Singh did not provide for several small expenses. And with the additional subsidies that his government has proposed, it may be difficult to honour even Singh's promise.

Mr Chidambaram has one last option: go back on some of the promises he made to his leftist bosses, like reducing the PDS price of foodgrains. However, this may bring his government's untimely demise. And Mr Chidambaram certainly does not want that. Besides, despite what his team of officials in the finance ministry may claim, this may not be a desirable option.

There is enough evidence to suggest that fiscal bankruptcy and economic reforms have not treated the poor kindly. High economic growth of the past four years has not been able to mitigate poverty. Some estimates even claim that poverty worsened in the first three years of reforms. Prices of foodgrains under the PDS have risen by over 120 per cent in the past five years. Attempts made by Mr Chidambaram's previous boss, Narasimha Rao to put his human face on reforms by tinkering with a few anti-poverty programmes did not make reforms politically acceptable. If the present government wishes to give reforms a human face it should see to it that the upward spiral in foodgrains prices is restrained.

A revamp of the existing public distribution system is very much on the cards. A study by Prof Kirit Parekh shows that not more than two per cent of the poor in the rural areas of some of the poorest states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh get any foodgrains from the PDS. Therefore,

proper targeting of PDS is required.

In other words, the human touch in the minimum economic programme of the United Front government is essential to bring the poor out of their penury existence. But the means to reach this end is not merely to allocate more funds. But to use them in such a manner that their benefits actually reach the poor.

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Electoral Politics in Bangladesh

Neelan Tiruchelvam

In no other part of the sub-continent has the question of free and fair election is so central to the political discourse as in Bangladesh. Controversy relating to integrity and fairness of the electoral process has traumatised the nation and deeply divided the Bangladesh polity. It brought the parliamentary process to a standstill and severely disrupted the social and economic life of ordinary people.

The role of Civil society in bringing about the national consensus which resulted in June elections was critical. Bangladesh has distinguished itself in the innovation and success of its non-governmental organisations in managing developmental projects. Two of these organisations BRAC and the Grammeen Bank have gained international recognition. In addition, there were many important human rights groups which continued to document human rights abuses and engage in legal literacy programs. The Free Election Monitoring Alliance (FEMA) is one of the largest and probably the most effectively organised domestic election observation group in any part of the sub-continent. Public outrage over the lack of moral and legal legitimacy of the February 15 elections galvanised these civil society institutions. They formed a broad coalition of non-government organisations, business house and professional organisation to support the dissolution of the government and of the Parliament installed by the February 15 election. The assertion by civil society of its political right to a free and fair election culminated in civil disobedience by the bureaucracy which almost brought the entire civil administration to a standstill. These forces played an important part in facilitating 13th amendment to the Bangladesh constitution which defined the institutional framework within which a new Parliamentary elections would be conducted.

The 13th amendment to the constitution established a non-party caretaker government to be headed by the former Chief Justice Mohammad Habibur Rahman with a mandate to render to the Chief Election Commission all possible assistance for holding a general election to the Parliament, 'peacefully, fairly and impartially'. The caretaker government was further directed to carry out routine functions but not take any policy decisions. The establishment of a non-party government was decisive in creating conditions favourable to free and fair elections. It was however important to note that there were significant differences in the legal context within which interim administration headed by Justice Shahabuddin operation in 1991. The constitution provided that the Supreme Command of the defence services shall vest in the President and the exercise thereof shall be regulated by law. The 13th amendment further added that "such law shall during the period where there is a non-party caretaker government under article 58b be administered by the President". This provision has been interpreted to exclude the armed forces from the executive authority of the caretaker government and to place them under the President. This resulted in creating a form of dyarchy where the conduct of the elections and the routine functions of the government were entrusted to the caretaker government while the President retained responsibility for defence and the control of the armed forces. This distinction was of more than academic significance. A constitutional crisis was almost precipitated by the dismissal of two senior generals and the Chief of Staff almost on the eve of the elections. The President continue to assert his authority over the defence forces even after the elections had been concluded on the 12th June by further dismissing 8 other senior army officers thereby further contributing to intrigue and uncertainty which accom-

panied the electoral process. Another gap in the constitutional arrangement was that it was the President who would decide to choose the next Prime Minister and in the exercise of this discretion, he was not required to seek the advice of the Board of Advisors. In 1991, Chief Justice Shahabuddin was not only the Head of state but also the Head of Government and was entrusted with the power to choose the Prime Minister.

Another factor which contributed significantly towards creating conditions favourable to free and fair elections was the reconstitution of the Elections Commission. The Elections Commission in Bangladesh was by convention headed by a member of the High Court and the Commission enjoyed security of tenure. But the February 15 elections had so deeply eroded public confidence in the Commission that the political parties were adamant that a new Commission should be chosen by the caretaker government through a process of consultation with political parties. The entire Commission including its Secretary were called upon to submit their resignations and a new Commission and a Secretary appointed. The caretaker government took further legal steps to amend the People Representation Order to disqualify bank defaulters. This was ostensibly done to minimise the use of such funds to distort the electoral process. The Commission also framed a code of conduct for candidates which was made legally binding. An electoral inquiry committee was established to inquire into pre-poll irregularities and even leaders of major political parties such as Sheikh Hasina and Khalida Zia were made accountable to such a committee. The caretaker government also took visible measures to disarm and detain potential law breakers and to clarify that the role of the army would be limited to assisting civil forces in the maintenance of order.

The writer, a T.U.L.F. M.P., was a member of the S.A.A.R.C. "Observer Group".

Impressions of Bangladesh Poll

Nikhil Chakravarty

The general election in Bangladesh has many lessons to impart to its neighbouring democracies in the South Asian region. This is largely because the problems and responses to them are similar, as also because Bangladeshis have a tremendous attachment to their mother tongue, Bengali, which has been the bedrock of their freedom struggle and their fidelity to democracy.

The week spent around the poll day on June 12 as a member of the non-official observers' team from four SAARC countries — Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and India — was extremely rewarding as it gave one the opportunity to learn about the cross-currents of Bangladesh politics, while at the same time witness the massive upsurge for the election at the level of the common citizen, in which the women not only spontaneously came in large numbers but in a mood of assertion. One has seen large political turn-outs at the polls in India, but the difference between those and the one just witnessed in Bangladesh lies in the fact that such mass mobilisations in India are largely the outcome of the efforts of political parties, but in Bangladesh it has been an overwhelmingly spontaneous movement which went far beyond what the accredited political parties could do. The long and patient queues that one could see stretching out for hours while women with babes in arms patiently waited outside the polling centres provided a memorable sight. And this assertion of people's will was dominated by the emergence of only two giant parties — the BNP (Bangladesh Nationalist Party) and the Awami League.

In the 1991 general election although the Awami League which was virtually the national platform in the fight for liberation, came second to the BNP largely swinging round the personality of the former Prime Minister Khaleda

Zia, this time the BNP has come a close second, despite the discredit its party President has had to suffer because of the fiasco of the February poll which was boycotted by the entire Opposition and had to be cancelled. In reality, these two parties dominate the Bangladesh political scene, with the imprisoned General Ershad's Jatiya Party, much smaller than both of them, holding the balance. A significant development this time has been the virtual elimination of the Jamaat-e-Islami, gaining only two seats in a House of 300, with most of the other parties doing no better. In other words, the politics of Bangladesh is today faced with the polarisation between the Awami League and the BNP. The people overwhelmingly made their choice between these two parties. Despite brisk campaign, there was comparatively little violence. Except for the pockets in Chittagong and Comilla, there was no violence. The casualty toll was low — five dead and a few scores injured in a general election in the country with the highest population density in the world. Repoll was ordered in 27 constituencies, and their outcome is yet to be known when these lines were written.

What is striking is that despite occasional outbreak of military intervention into politics, Bangladesh has demonstrated through two general elections of 1991 and 1996, that the democratic urge of the common people has proved to be irresistible and this urge is linked to the basic needs of an acutely impoverished and underprivileged people. This is a point which the leaders of these two major parties have to keep in mind — what Indira Gandhi had sloganised as *Garibi Hatao* and what Zulfikar Bhutto had articulated in the demand for *roti, kapra, makan*. The poor showing of the Jamaat is no doubt a sign of the times, though the struggle against religious bigotry and obscurantism is realised

as an urgent task by a large section of the intelligentsia as could be sensed by meeting the community of enlightened intellectuals who place their prime attachment to the mother tongue Bengali, than on religion as gleaned from their culture and intellectual activities.

During the election campaign there were reports of clashes in areas where there is a high concentration of minorities — Hindus, Baudhyas and Christians — but these were very few as against the huge number of over 26 thousand polling centres in the country. Such tensions are mostly the outcome of the suspicion by rival parties that the minorities might vote enbloc for one party and not for the other. The election machinery faced strain as the huge turnout was obviously not expected, some places as high as 72 per cent, and on the average of over 60 per cent. This debunked the anxiety of some political pundits that the fear of clash between the two giants, the Awami League and the BNP, might keep a large section of peace-loving voters away from both; actually, the very opposite had happened, and the large concentration of voters in front of every polling centre seemed to have scared away the miscreants, and the Election Commission, despite all the handicaps it had to face, managed to keep the election process under effective control. One could see that as a result of many of the new restrictions — particularly against ostentatious, lavishly money-spending campaign — the candidates had to depend largely on door-to-door campaigning. Although the rules against ostentatious spending were publicised, there was no monitoring on this score during the election campaign as in India. An interesting feature of the Bangladesh People's Representation Order is that it disqualifies bank defaulters from becoming candidates, while the code of conduct

for candidates is legally binding.

The Army has played a complex role in Bangladesh politics from the very beginning. The BNP was founded by General Ziaur Rahman who had taken over power after the turbulence that followed Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's killing in 1975. General Ershad when he later seized power formed his own party, the Jatiya Party. The fact that Begum Khaleda Zia, the leader of the BNP, resides in the cantonment is often the subject of polemics against her by her political opponents.

Against this background, one has to take note of the fact that after the flop of the February election, the BNP Government had to concede the setting up of the caretaker government. Unlike as in 1991 when the caretaker administration (under the then Chief Justice-turned-President) was born out of a political agreement among parties that had brought down General Ershad's rule, this time the Constitution itself was amended — the Thirteenth Amendment — which set up a caretaker administration under a Chief Adviser (a former Chief Justice) but the portfolio of Defence was held by the President, who is known as an ardent BNP stalwart. Since the Opposition parties had won their point in the setting up of the caretaker government to conduct the election, they did not wait for the removal of the anomaly of the President controlling Defence.

Obviously, the Opposition did not bargain for President Biswas' move who soon after removed the Chief of Army Staff, Nasim, which drew strong protests from the Opposition. Some other changes in the Army structure were also announced. All this was strongly resented by the Awami League. It was soon obvious that the President had virtually forfeited the confidence of the biggest Opposition party which has turned out to have scored higher in the election than the BNP. Towards the end of the election campaign, the BNP lodged a complaint with the Election Commission that in as many as 111 constituencies the election had not been fairly conducted. This seemed as a move to reopen

the entire election issue, though it is unlikely that this could nullify the election as a whole, which all foreign observers commended as being free and fair.

One of the important features of the Bangladesh election has been the high voter turn-out which to a large measure could be ascribed to the steadfast work of a broad coalition of non-government organisations, business houses and professional groups and organisations which came out in support of the demand for the dissolution of the government and the Parliament after the farcical election of February 15. Out of this movement of what may be called citizen's activism was born the FEMA (Free Election Monitoring Alliance) which could rope in a large number of local observers in about 25 thousand polling stations throughout the country. In fact, the FEMA experiment can be regarded as a significant contribution by Bangladesh to the liturgy of parliamentary election in South Asia.

Did India figure in Bangladesh elections this time? One of the points of the BNP polemics against the Awami League was that it was under its rule the Indo-Bangladesh Treaty had been signed in 1972. This point was, however, punctured on the television when two of the topmost Bangladeshi journalists asked the BNP spokesman what his party had done when in power to repudiate the Treaty — a point which is actually more eloquent than the charge. It would, however, be a mistake to think that the Bangladeshi parties have no complaint against India. All parties in Bangladesh and an overwhelming majority of the public cry out about the shortage of river water, as a sequel to the Farakka project. Over the years, the governments of both the countries have been unable to settle this vital demand of the citizens of Bangladesh. It is time that our present government in New Delhi took this up as a matter of urgent priority concern for the future of India-Bangladesh amity.

Waiting - 25

Letter from Grasmere

Making do, as home from home
Wales was beautiful and not quite wild
As at home
There was the breath of old Kingdoms
And the lilt of song
Usk river and the hills
Talked, hushed, of Camelot
To you, there was no mystery
In legend, much like ours
Only the grace of faith in ancient truths
And quests not of this world.

But in this wild Northward borderland of lakes
The afternoons darken for Thunder
In the strange half light and stillness before storm
Unredeemed by human voices
Cattle scatter troubled from the pasture.

Within Dove Cottage and Rydall Water
Made prim and victorian by Museum men
There is no echo of prattle and laughter.
But through the windows the high crags
In the daylong night of ravine
And on the lake awaiting the gnash of wind
The hymn from the heaving, purple water
Leads you, to the Lake Poets altar.

U. Karunatilake

The violent tendencies of the Sinhalese

Kamalika Pieris

The violent tendencies of the Sinhalese is presented through references to the several attacks on minorities, notably the Tamils and Muslims. These are presented as taking place without provocation. However, the 1958 riots were prefaced by considerable amount of overt Tamil resistance, including a Hartal in 1956, the Anti-Sri Campaign, and the defacing of buses. In the Eastern province there was some violence against the Sinhalese at the start. (This does not mean that I condone these riots) It appears that the Sansoni Commission found that the main cause for the 1977 disturbances was the Eelam cry. This report gave a detailed account of aggression on the Tamil side. (Vittachi. "Sri Lanka what went wrong, p 63) Michael Roberts has looked at the Muslim side of this. He has found 14 Sinhala-Muslim confrontations between 1899-1915. He suggests that the 1915 riots were a chauvinistic operation, not merely a protest against British rule. ("Exploring confrontations")

The International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Colombo has had a project to systematically monitor and study cases of ethnic violence. It was at an ICES conference on ethnic violence, Kathmadu, 1987, that Roberts was encouraged to turn his attention to the 1915 riots. ('Exploring confrontations p53) when Tamils were attacked in Galle in June 1955, ICES sent a team and issued a report. Clearly, in the publicity given to ethnic violence, there is relatively little emphasis on the death and displacement of Sinhala and Muslim villagers from the east, or the departure of the Sinhala bakers from Jaffna. However it is only fair to report

that the ICES project does cover some of these areas as well.

The violent tendencies of the Sinhalese is presented through references to the several attacks on minorities, notably the Tamils and Muslims.

It has published reports on the LTTE massacres at Welikada (1992). Also at Medirigiriya (1992) where the Muslims retaliated by attacking a neighbouring Tamil village. The report on the Bo-atte village (1995) noted that the LTTE had targetted the Sinhalese and avoided the Tamils. ICES has also held a Retrospective on the 1983 riots, and some of its conclusions deserve mention. The participants at the seminar agreed that there had been a measure of state complicity which had not been there in the earlier riots, and that parochial disputes such as shop-keeping rivalries were also played out at this time. This seminar also noted the assistance rendered by the Sinhalese in rescuing Tamils who were affected. Finally it noted that there had been no repetition of the riots, despite continuing ethnic tension. (Thatched Patio Vol 6(4) 1993)

Writers of English language fiction and poetry have also been very helpful in this respect. They have written a lot on July '83. Jean Arasanayagam in her work 'All is burning' refers to the Diary of Anne Frank in her description of July '83. There is a reference to the persecution of Jews

in an account of illicitimmigration into Germany. This is of course a suggestive linking of the Tamil separatist cause and the Nazi persecutions. This will probably be effective with a western audience. Arasanayagam writes in an 'ethnic mode' but many of her writings lack action, character or resolution, so the ethnic references sound artificial.

And now let us look at the lighter side of the modus operandi related to Tamil ethnonationalism. Any ethnonationalist group is entitled to take steps to keep the ethnic issue 'high', but some of the activities in the cultural field are artificial. In my review of 'Framework 37', which provided an excellent coverage of contemporary Sri Lankan cinema, I queried the need to devote so much space to Tamil cinema when there were hardly any Sri Lankan Tamil films. (Daily News 8.7.92 p15) Regi Siriwardene uses a critique of post modern literary criticism to draw attention to 'Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism'. Reference is made also to '1958, 1977, 1981 and 1983' (sic). The existence of 'Swabhashas' in the plural is questioned, while in fact, there were two language streams in secondary school at the time. The idea of pleasure generated from good writing was discussed with reference to death and starvation. Specific reference was made to the pleasure of observing the writer's craft using examples from ethnic violence. They were, Anne Ranasinghe's Holocaust poetry and Arasanayagam's poems of July '83. (Pravada, Nov 1995 p 23, 26)

The literature on the ethnic issue in Sri Lanka contains some interesting manoeuvres intended to influence the

reader. One method of bolstering up the Tamil separatists cause was mystify it. This was attempted largely through the pronouncements of intellectuals. Durand Appuhamy has called this 'argument from authority' (Daily News 29.1.96 p 14) In order to achieve this, groups of professionals were marshalled into what was fondly imagined to be a monopoly of the academic areas relating to ethnic relations. This group included some of the best social scientists in the country, certainly several whom I greatly respect. Also many very able lawyers. However the ideas put forward were so shaky that professionals and intellectuals outside this circle had little difficulty in contesting them. In addition, statements by professionals supporting the Devolution proposals were promptly countered by statements from other professionals opposing the Proposals. A statement supporting, I believe, Tambiah's "Buddhism Betrayed" was so badly worded that it merely evoked amusement. In addition, there is also plenty of empty rhetoric. Lucian Rajakarunayake observed that people still had 'the audacity to ask what problems the Tamil people have' (Sunday Leader 4.2.96) He does not enlighten us on what these problems are. There is dismissal. 'Our precious colonial heirloom, the unitary state' (Sunday Leader 28.1.96 p 9) elsewhere 'the sacred cow of a unitary state'.

Next we come to unfortunate examples and unlikely bedfellows. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike and Leonard Woolf as advocates of federalism for Sri Lanka (Thatched Patio Vol 5(4) 1992 p 6) Sir Ponnablam Arunachalam and Handy Perimpanayagam as freedom fighters (Daily News 3.2.96 p 19). In addition to S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, the propaganda also presents Colvin R de Silva as a champion of the Tamil cause. Colvin R de Silva's statement 'one language, two countries, two languages, one country' has not been supported by events. We now have two languages and are about to get nine countries. It is scarcely possible to consider him as a supporter of

minorities. The 1972 Constitution for which he was chiefly responsible took away Provision 29(c) of the previous Constitution, though this provision safeguarded the minorities. Further, in the 1972 Constitution, the Tamil language was to be considered under subordinate legislation.

Tamil separatist propaganda no longer refers to various federal Constitutions from all over the world, but the example of Switzerland remains.

Tamil separatist propaganda no longer refers to various federal Constitutions from all over the world, but the example of Switzerland remains. Switzerland was selected as an example because of certain superficial similarities, particularly the similarity of ethnic proportions. The Swiss canton system was sustained by the country's mountainous topography, but this fact is generally ignored. The Swiss embassy in Sri Lanka has more than once indicated that Switzerland is no model for Sri Lanka. It has been pointed out that the Swiss system was very complicated, not always rational nor efficient and that it was not a transferable model. It did not solve a minority problem so much as prevent one. (Swiss Day Supplement of 1.8.91)

Lastly let us look at the impact of the ethnic issue on the development of the social sciences in Sri Lanka. Some very good studies have resulted. Michael Roberts study titled 'Ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka and Sinhala perspectives: barriers to accommodation' published in "Modern Sri Lanka Studies", 1978 vividly describes the development of a Sinhala Buddhist consciousness and its fears. This is an excellent starting point for anybody wishing to parachute into the topic. There is also Kumari Jayawardene's excellent and greatly underrated work

on the relationship between ethnicity and class in Sri Lanka. Lastly, there is Newton Gunasinghe's study of the 1983 riots. He suggests that the riots could be looked at in economic terms. The open economy had created certain tensions. People were now forced to compete with each other for economic survival, the rules of competition broke down and this resulted in open violence. Both these studies could be found in the Committee for Rational Development's 'Sri Lanka the ethnic conflict'.

However not all the work dealing with the ethnic issue could be commended. Susantha Goonetilleke looked at this area some years back and concluded that there was an 'ethnic studies industry' in Sri Lanka (Lanka Guardian Vol 10 (11) 1987) Some aspects of this are not healthy. Researchers are attacking "the inhibitions of the middle class" and the 'Jathika Chintanaya' when they should be studying them. Some researchers are now getting Marginalised.

This material may eventually come up on charges related to the uses and abuses of social sciences. But such charges will have to be made by a person totally devoid of a sense of humour. These writings are full of blunders and howlers. Michael Roberts says that the word for 'relic' and for 'semen' is the same in Sinhala, 'dhatu'. This is a natural mistake for a person not familiar with Sinhala, but in this case it is a serious error. ("Exploring confrontation" p 51, 67) Look at the notes to Kapferers 'Remythologizations of power and identity: Sri Lanka' in the book 'Culture of violence' edited by Rupesinghe and Rubio. The notes can be read independent of the text and they are very entertaining. Michael Roberts says that one of his essays on the 1915 riots was rejected by the referee for the Journal of Asian Studies on the grounds of jargon and incoherence. Referee observing that 'night' was not 'space' but 'time'. (Exploring confrontations' p 24)

(Concluded)

The Colonial Aspects of "Images of Sri Lanka through American Eyes"

Jeanne Thwaites

Images of Sri Lanka Through American Eyes is a collection of writings by United States citizens all of whom visited the island of Ceylon over a period of 150 years - from 1813 to 1968. The first travelers arrived before electricity, before trains, before motor transport, when America was breaking away from British colonization. The last came when the United States was an industrial giant and had become the number-one world military power. The entire British Empire was coming apart at that time and Ceylon had been declared a dominion, that is, it was no longer a mere British colony. Four years later the island was to become the Republic of Sri Lanka.

H.A.I. Goonetilleke the editor of *Images* is the Island's best known librarian besides being the world authority on its literature. At the request of the U.S. Ambassador to Sri Lanka, Christopher Van Hollen, he put this book together in 1972 as a U.S. 200th anniversary issue (xi). The librarian had already compiled a list of works written by visitors from many different countries and he selected from his American collection 41 writings from a long list of 227. These are listed in the book's Bibliography.

Images can be read on different levels. I find it particularly interesting as a study of colonial and post-colonial writing. It gives us an opportunity to examine whether the Americans saw themselves more like the British colonizers or the colonized Ceylonese they were encountering or as separate to both groups. What was the extent of their identification with their own country (a once-British colony) when brought face-to-face with those same colonizers in total control of another people? I particularly wondered if the Americans would express pity for the Ceylonese as the underdogs they themselves had once been, or whether they would disassociate from their own colonization and show racial bias - for they came from a country riddled with racial bias. Would they feel contempt for the Sri Lankans' inability to break their shackles, or would they see the British as oppressors who had taken

advantage of the island people because they were unable to hit back? It was also possible they would admire Britain for its fine, if self-serving, administration. One of the most insidious affects of colonization is that it always leaves behind wide-spread permanent crippling that takes a couple of generations to recover from. A once-colonized people often look back nostalgically on those days when the very lack of equality and freedom enforced order - as in a penal institution inmates become unable to cope outside its confines because in jail they have not imposed any moral or social discipline on themselves but merely followed orders or enjoyed breaking them.

The United States Today

It is not well understood outside the United States that the American who has been educated in his own country grows up with a strong sense of what a young independent country it is. Americans are ferociously protective of what they see as their so recently gained freedom. You can see this self-protectiveness when they persist in voting against gun control showing their paranoia about a possible military take-over. One hears, "If every household is armed even our government cannot take us over," as the speaker lists some militarily dictatorships and army rule all over the world. "That couldn't happen to us," he will continue happily, "That's why our founding fathers protected us and gave us the right to bear arms". The fact that this right is used by hoodlums to gun down innocent people is seen as the lesser evil.

Britain was the enemy in the American Revolution and, even if that country has lost its world clout today and is obviously no threat, Americans have not yet got over their love-hate relationship with it. Behind American arrogance is this sense of a victory after a battle won. The attitude to those who criticize the states is: "Tough! If you don't like us what are you going to do about it? You want us to prove *again* that we're stronger than you?" This attitude is particularly directed at once-enemies and countries which have shown territorial designs on others.

There is however much cultural heritage and a language shared between the U.S. and England, besides a desire to keep in touch and be proud of one's foreign ancestors. The U.S. is a country of immigrants: people who came seeking a better and fairer life. Today Britain has been relegated to the role of a once-tyrannical old grandfather who has become fun to visit during the summer vacation. If he tries his old tricks you can pack your duffel bag and go somewhere else. Visiting Grandpa has become like a trip to Disneyland - a place of mere entertainment. The Royal Family's dilemmas are soap opera scripted for American t.v. - once family entertainment now R-rated because the players came up with the Tampax-tapes, nuisance phone calls and various revelations of infidelity.

The American attitude to other countries is not the same as to England. Canada is a deeply respected and trusted brother; Australia a cousin somewhat in the wild west tradition. The continent of Africa with so many countries trying to work themselves out of their Third World blues and colonial oppressions is applauded. Russia alternates between being a powerful ally and respected enemy.

With regard to colonization, this then is the United States today: it has disrespect. It also has wide-spread confusion for it remains an adolescent who has never quite matured. What was it like in 1813, 1878 or 1910? The answer is less in history books than in writings such as those which fill *Images of Sri Lanka in American Eyes*.

The Editing of *Images*

In 1994, while on a Fulbright scholarship to Sri Lanka, I was able to find out more about the collection from Ian Goonetilleke himself. As always, with a book you want to examine closely, there didn't seem enough of it. I wanted it longer. I had questions as to the choice of material - that is, the omissions. He had made the final selection himself, he told me, but had only four months to deliver the book to the printers and would have liked more time. He talked of a sequel to come but more recently has written to me that the idea has become a "fugitive dream".

Jeanne Thwaites is a citizen of both Sri Lanka and the United States.

In the book's introduction, Goonetilleke describes the first American travelers to Asia: "They were brought up on the nostalgic European image of the peccant and savage nature of a composite Asian man, waiting to be liberated by God's untiring and unerring compassion..... the American missionary view" (xvii). "Then came educated Americans who visited Ceylon because of their fascination with Hindu and Buddhist philosophy. Letters and commentaries from mavericks provide a refreshingly individual approach. There were also doctors, clerics, sailors, diplomats, businessmen, writers, artists and students among the travelers. Each seems bursting with excitement at the business of adjusting to a culture which is drastically different from his own. The book has gone to several printings.

Racism, Bigotry and Orientalism

The Ceylonese, during the years covered in *Images*, were the victims of both racism and orientalism.

"Racism" is not the same as bigotry. Racism is the declaration by one race with the military power to make it stick that another race is lesser. A potent example of racism is the pattern of behavior in a male-dominated society in which the putting down of women by men is automatic rather than rational (as if they are an inferior race). Because almost any man has superior physical strength to almost any woman the female is powerless to protest effectively. A woman may know she can out-think her husband, for example, but she still has to bow to his superior wisdom and clean his shoes if he requires that. Once the concept of the inferior-woman is in place, any womanly quality becomes a subject for derision: her breasts, her tears, her higher voice and so on. Even if a powerful woman claws her way past some of the prejudices and by sheer brilliance and aggressively establishes herself as equal or better than men in her field - she is explained away as "masculine".* The word sometimes used is "dyke" - she is presumed to be unfeminine. But the whole point of racism is that she must be compared to a man and there she will always be found lacking because she has no penis.

The attitude of the Ku Klux Klan towards Afro-Americans is racist. No matter what the Afro-American does to prove he is equal to a White - whatever

* The words *powerful, strong, aggressive*, are, in such a society, used as a compliment to men and an insult to women.

he does proves him only "almost as good" for he does not have white skin unless he has the resources of Michael Jackson. He can never hide that.

Bigotry is not as wide a concept as racism although it too embraces many people. Deciding a man is not as good as you because he is homo-sexual or of illegitimate birth is bigotry, as is one family deciding that all members of another are inferior because the father has a particular job. The person discriminated against is not seen as intrinsically lacking but guilty.

A racist must have the muscle to get away with his stand - because he cannot back it with fact. One of the deplorable outcomes of racism is that otherwise pleasant people simply swallow the concept whole. If your mother tells you your birthright has made you better than your dark-skinned neighbor, you accept without question that you belong to a lucky sperm club.

"Don't worry about her," your mother says when you notice this neighbor is mourning her lost child, "To *those* people life is cheap".

So you give that neighbor Rs. 200 instead of putting your arms around her.

It's always "us" and "them". "We are not as awful as they are. We cannot be. We were born that way.

There is no such thing as being a little racist any more than one can be a little pregnant. All colonists are. The Portuguese, the Dutch and the English all colonized Ceylon and were racists when in power. Without power they could not be. They were the mighty race of the moment. When these Europeans fought each other, however, they did so as ordinary enemies. When the people fought each other they did so as real enemies. They honored their opponents. They married their women. Henry V made Catherine the daughter of the defeated king of France his queen. When a colonial demolished a Ceylonese he acted as if he had stepped on a fly.

A form of racism is known as *orientalism*: a word coined by writer Edward Said. Orientalism is that form of racism applied by westerners to all those who live east of the Suez. The proof given is that orientals are not as good as occidentals is that orientals gabble unintelligibly instead of speaking normal western languages. They write in scrib-

bles. They dress comically. They look peculiar. Their skin color is not fair enough. Their facial features are un-European. They worship the devil.

Western literature and movies have reinforced the oriental male as being either evil or obsequious. Oriental women's best chance to escape their own men even in quite recent Hollywood movies was in the arms of a white man, preferably one taller than an oriental and with blue eyes.

The Missionaries

Equality in the eyes of God was conspicuously absent in the early American missionaries who had been brought up in the orientalist tradition - their prejudices were tight when they arrived.

Definitely, the first part of *Images* is the most engrossing as accounts from these several missionaries overlap and set up in juxtaposition a powerful cross-work view of the earnestness and often manic eagerness with which young Christian men and women risked their lives to save what they perceived as hordes of lost souls - only to appear most unChristlike themselves. As there were few early 19th century writings to choose from almost all are included**: letters and diaries. The missionaries never question the validity of what they are doing. They see the native Sinhalese and Tamils through a warp as without culture as if their ancient arts, engineering skills, philosophies and traditions have to be a violation of the teaching of Jesus.

In the early 1800s Britain closed India (but not Ceylon) to American missionaries. Some came intending to return to India; others were en route to Africa. To their delight, they found thousands of nameless-faceless pagans to convert. Rev. Samuel Newell exults: "What a field is here for missionary exertions" (2). The eight missionary accounts confirm Franz Fanon's view that, "the serf is in essence different from the knight, but a reference to divine right is necessary to legitimize this statutory difference" (40).

The missionaries are formidable in their sincerity and willingness to die for god. Nineteen year old Harriet Newell (1813) wrote to a friend when she was about to depart for Asia with her missionary husband:

** Works excluded are such documents as The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions' *Annual Report 1811*.

All will be dark, everything will be dreary, and not a hope of worldly happiness will be for a moment indulged. The prime of life will be spent in an unhealthy country, a burning region, amongst people of strange language, of a returnless distance from my native land, where I shall never more behold the friends of my youth (129).

It is no surprise that Mrs. Winslow (1819), "approached with trembling the hideous figure called Boodhu" (33) in light of what she had "read and heard in America" (33). She never did behold the friends or her youth again for she became sick and died shortly after arrival. The missionaries seem curiously careless about their health both courting infection and not seeking adequate medical help. Probably, they were suspicious of the native medicines offered and were, of course, without the anti-bodies to protect themselves from malaria and other tropical diseases which abounded.

They had no motor transport and often covered hundreds of miles in palanquins and ton-jons (chairs set onto two bamboos carried on the shoulders of two men) but commented only on their own discomfort and the relief at being set down from time to time. One does wonder why, with so many buffalo and cattle used as beasts of burden, they didn't move by cart. Possibly human carriers were cheaper.

Mrs. Harriet Winslow, the great grandmother of John Foster Dulles, (Dwight Eisenhower's Secretary of State), came to Ceylon with her husband Rev. Winslow and alone shows some compassion for "the poor bearers who waded with their burdens in deep water" (35). But the couple observe, tell and do nothing to relieve the situations they deplore. They shift the responsibility to their creator: 'Can these dry bones live were it not for the promises of God?... Common laborers will carry heavy burdens in the sun, from morning to night without taking nourishment in the mean time. They look very thin; but see them after they have eaten their rice and you might think they have swallowed a pumpkin" (32 and 39). There seems to be no feeling of "there but for the grace of God go I".

The Protestant missionaries also deplored the Catholics who were scooping-up souls for their crucified Savior and his mother with pagan abandon. Prote-

stant Rev. Warren (1816) was repelled by a Catholic service attended by "six or seven thousand persons," which lasted from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Two large basins were placed to receive the flow of offerings. In one ritual, a statue of the Virgin with seven swords thrust through her heart was brought out and placed on top of Jesus on the Cross so she could be made to embrace her son. Then the statue was removed for an hour or two to whet the excitement of the crowd and after the suspense become intolerable it was produced again and this somewhat incestuous titillation repeated (24).

Theosophist Henry Olcott (1880-1906) was to take a different view of Catholics: "In truth these protestant Missionaries are a pestilent lot. With the Catholics we never had a hard word" (146).

Olcott (1880-1906) puts the blame for orientalism on the Christians and their image of the "pagan." In 1875 Olcott and Madame Blavatsky founded the Theosophical society. He came to Ceylon alone and is responsible for the revitalization of Buddhism which was disappearing rapidly. His religious teaching was enchantingly anti-colonial - he never pretends any foreigners are there to help the local people. He becomes furious when the local Buddhists begin to venerate him. Statues and other likenesses of Olcott are still on public display in Sri Lanka. He taught that Christianity had made the Buddhists forget their finer philosophy. The early Christians provided schooling for the pagans, which brought them many converts. Olcott opened 205 Buddhist Theosophist schools and compiled a Buddhist catechism. His message was that all you had to do to get to Nirvana was to stop making negative karma because you'd have to reincarnate if you did.

The Later American Visitors

As the years progressed the choice of material becomes wider so more of the available writings have had to be excluded. There are some texts in the bibliography list which might have broken up a sense of sameness in some of the material which soon becomes a weakness which makes the words less potent. I feel as if this were a Sri Lankan tea where love-cake is not served - only patties and sandwiches which I also enjoy. Ordinarily, I would be merely grateful for being invited at all but if

someone were to say to me, "Was it a four-star tea?" I would have to reply, "It would have been if there was love cake." On reading this book in my particular context, I find the love cake occasionally lacking.

An omission I deplore is Duke Ellington. All other world-famous Americans listed in the bibliography are included. I was initially surprised at the omission if only because the American jazz pianist is Afro-American and the other writers are all "white". Why exclude the only available writing by a Black American? Ellington's genial account of his visit to Ceylon would also have been the only one, besides Thomas Merton's, with no mention of skin color. I wondered if Goonetilleke, a once-colonized man, was being careful to please the white Van Hollen; or (which is really the same thing) had he detached himself from the responsibility to those dark-skinned like himself? Had he been what Memmi calls "condemned to losing his memory" (103)? Had he been like the teacher who doesn't realize he is favoring one child over another just because of the way that child looks?

On meeting Mr. Goonetilleke I brought up the subject and he seemed startled. Plainly he had not realized that he had omitted the only Black American. He later wrote to me, "I am not in the least affected by race, class, caste, religious, colour or other biases" which was my own conclusion after meeting him. His omission of Ellington, he explained, was because the account was so "meagre" - it is only a couple of pages long. Ellington's brief account of his visit to the Island, however, would also have been the only one which showed how deeply interested the people of Ceylon are with music - here the jazz of America. The Colombo racecourse is used as an outdoors arena and thousands stood in it to hear "the Duke" who was astonished at their numbers. There is also an incident unlike any other which gives insight into the acumen and worldliness of some Ceylonese. Ellington wanted to buy a large number of precious stones but did not have enough cash with him. The jeweler told him to take the stones and that when he himself was in New York next he would visit Ellington and pick up the money.

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US-Sri Lanka Relations in the 1980s

By Dr. Ambalavanar Sivarajah, Kandy, Sri Lanka : Institute of Higher Education, 1995, pp 1-150, Rs. 350.

Reviewed by: Ananda Welihena

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Relations between a small State and a big, powerful, extra-regional State is an interesting area for investigation because one can identify the special context of and the reasons for the emergence and growth. In South Asia, small and big State relations can spawn suspicions and conflicts if it is pursued carelessly without an in depth analysis. The South Asian region constitutes the presence of a giant State at the centre surrounded by six small states. The actual inter-state relations among these States have progressed since the formation of the SAARC; it has become more cordial and friendly. The South Asian association has enhanced regional co-operation, but it does not necessarily follow that these states must remain like a fish in a water tank or neglect their extra-regional State relationships.

National interest

The decision-making of small to pursue relations with extra-regional big powers is impacted or motivated by factors of national interest. Sri Lanka's cordial relations with a big, extra-regional state does not imply that it is pursued to jeopardise the intra-regional state relationships. In principle it should not ever be so.

It is fruitful to examine how the intra-regional states of South Asia and in particular India perceive Sri Lanka's decision-making to pursue friendly relations with a big powerful, extra-regional State USA. But this is not the intention of Dr Sivarajah's book.

The author's endeavour is to examine US-Sri Lanka (SL) relations in the 1980s and discuss three aspects in particular: First, "how the internal political and economic changes in Sri Lanka since 1977 had affected its relations with the USA"; Secondly to "analyze how the political changes at regional level affected US relations with Sri Lanka" and

thirdly "to test the assumption that Sri Lanka followed a pro-USA foreign policy in the 1980s" (p.4). The book is divided into five chapters and planned to help the reader to grasp the factors that led to the pursuit of friendly US-SL relations since 1977. Each chapter, though distinct, is inter-related.

System analysis

The first chapter is on the theory of systems analysis and the US-SL relations. This approach is a new addition to the discipline of political science. System analysis is common to many disciplines but political scientists have used this tool of analysis to achieve their research aims. It directs the mind to "environmental factors which condition both the actions of nations and operations of the system and the relation between the dominant system and the subordinate system" (Ibid., 4). These environmental factors are principally political and economic, and they impact upon the system, stimulating it to resort to decision-making to safeguard its national interest. The system approach to the study of politics and government has enabled the students to understand the nature and function of the state or the political system. It shows how the political system maintains itself when faced with a crisis. It is useful to know what S. P. Varma, a political theory scholar has to say on systems analysis:

"The very designation of a system as open, places before us immense possibilities of going deeper into the problems under study and trying to find out to what factors and influences the system is open, what the boundaries between one system and another are, how far the influences that creep through this boundary line are a case of damage or destruction to the system and how far they are helpful in maintaining it, and finally, what this concept of maintenance would involve, whether stability, equilibrium or survival itself" (S. P. Varma, 1975, Modern Political Theory: A Critical Survey. Delhi: Vikas, 187).

Chapter two presents the essential features of US-SL relations since 1948-

1976. In the preface the author admits that Ramprasad Sinha has already examined this time-frame. A brief overview, the author thinks, would be fruitful to delineate the continuity and change in the proceeding period of 1987 - 1989.

Chapter three analyzes the US-SL inter-state relations from 1977 by addressing the economic and political factors:

Non-alignment

The first major political change was the UNP's 1977 election victory. Its foreign policy of non-alignment remained unchanged, but it did not experience "too much dynamism" as in the past which the government purported would be harmful to the national interest (p. 38). USA endorsed the UNP foreign policy and promised to resuscitate the economy of Sri Lanka.

Second factor was the domestic constraints of Tamil secessionist and Sinhala youth uprisings. They encouraged the state to violate the principle of non-alignment by increasing its dynamism towards the West for help (p. 47). Most states recognised the pre-eminence of India in South Asia, and despite this fact Sri Lanka pleased USA by criticising USSR's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Since then, South Asia was a priority region for USA. Sri Lanka's response to global issues during the UNP regime did not radically differ from the Western standpoints. The issue of violation of non-alignment principles is evident in the government's approach to issues of Trincomalee harbour, Trincomalee Oil Tanks, The VOA, and the Israeli Interest Section. The official Sri Lanka visits to USA to sort out political and economic issues were important for the strengthening of friendly ties between the two states. It is true that India's relations with Sri Lanka in the 1980s were not too cordial, because of its role in the ethnic conflict of Sri Lanka, and it could have been an impulse to shift toward USA.

Chapter four is on economic relations since the 1980s. During the UNP era market economic policies compelled Sri Lanka to adopt closer ties with USA

and the latter was pleased with the economic attempt of Sri Lanka. Encouragement was granted to revive the economy; the author indicates that GDP increased marginally, unemployment declined, and private investment satisfactory. USA provided aid to the accelerated Mahaweli project, Free Trade Zone, Greater Colombo Development and the Housing programme. This chapter provides statistical data on trade some of which are annexed in the appendices. But all this did not elicit political development and democracy and it failed to address the issue of growth with equity.

The final chapter is an assessment of US-SL relations since 1977. It notes that Sri Lanka's foreign policy was "greatly influenced by the internal political development as well as the new economic policies introduced by the UNP government" (p. 90). One can argue that India's role in the ethnic conflict of Sri Lanka stimulated US-SL relations, particularly during regime of Indira Gandhi whose doctrine was to drag the small states of South Asia under India's influence. But the Indian 'hegemonic' impact diminished with the change of Indira's government. The policy of India toward its neighbours was more cordial and friendly. The non-congress govern-

ments regarded neighbourly relations as more important than friendly ties with the Western states. SAARC was strengthened, and it enabled the Western powers to recognise the pre-eminent position of India in South Asia.

Indian factor

Sri Lanka's relation with USA must not be perceived as a threat to the Indian national interest. It is more beneficial to Sri Lanka to pursue friendly relations with USA without antagonising Indian sensibilities, because national issues of Sri Lanka can be addressed and resolved with the co-operation and support of both States of USA and India. This is how Sri Lanka's foreign policy would differ from that of Pakistan.

The students and readers must be pleased that they have access to information on US-SL relations. Dr. Sivarajah has continued from where Ramprasad Sinha has stopped and it is time that one examines what has happened in this field since the 1990s.

There is an on-going interest in SL-US relations due to two principal domestic issues:

First the market-based and labour-expanding development strategy of the

PA government, attempting to execute with extra vigour than the previous UNP regime, demands an enhanced relations with the USA government of the Democratic party of President Clinton. The PA government's market economy and the labour-expanding development strategy is centred on employment generation from foreign direct investment. Technology, skills, finance and expertise are essential if Sri Lanka is to attain the status of NICs like the States of East and South East Asia.

Secondly, the promotion of SL-US relation is essential because the PA government has initiated a peace process to diminish the adverse impact of the violent Tamil political strategy on the economy and polity by introducing a package of devolution of proposals. Its aim is to increase the scope for good governance and political modernization with democracy and justice for all. These two factors will determine, stimulate and promote healthy and cordial relations between USA and Sri Lanka. But the success of these relations would depend on the healthy relations between Sri Lanka and the SAARC, particularly India. SL-US relations must not ever become a threat to India's pre-eminence in the region nor act to the detriment of its national interest.

CORRESPONDENCE

The Muslim Claim

Your esteemed *Lanka Guardian* of March 1st 1996 carried a heading under "News Background", Muslims: No more an invisible minority. Hon: Minister Ashraff, is reported to have said "we go step further and say whether the North and East is merged or not, the Muslims of the country need a separate unit for themselves as there is general agreement among all for the devolution of power". He was quoted in another newspaper, the *Thinakaran* of 28th of March 1996, under the heading "North and East Region belongs to the Muslims" published an appeal by the Hon: Minister Ashraff, calling on all Muslims in the Island to support, his effort to establish North and East as the homeland of the Muslims". We have finished with the claim that North and East is the traditional homeland of the Tamils. Now Minister Ashraff is staking his claim to the North and East as the traditional homeland of the Muslims. It is this type of careless talks, that has created problems to the

Muslims of the Jaffna Peninsula, Mannar, and the Muslims of the Eastern Province.

Let me enlighten Minister Ashraff, that we Muslims claim every inch of Sri Lanka as our homeland just as every Singhalese and Tamil is entitled to claim. Portuguese record, when their ships approached Colombo, they saw the white painted minarets and the white turbaned Moors. The Portuguese who were coming after the crusades against the Moors as they called the Muslims of Morocco, declared their enmity to the Muslims.

The invasion by the Portuguese was met with opposition by the Singhalese. The Muslims joined the Singhalese in thousands, in the army of Mayadunne and fought by the side of the Singhalese. Portuguese have recorded, that in one battle the Portuguese killed 5,000 Muslims. Under the Portuguese occupation Muslims were the most persecuted. It

was the Singhalese kings and the Sanga who protected the Muslims. History records, that the Portuguese rounded up Muslims and killed them. In Matara, when Muslims of old, cross the bridge, they recite the Koran in memory of over 2,000 Muslims, who were beheaded by the Portuguese on the bank of the river. Even during the reign of the Dutch. Every effort was made to make life impossible for the Muslims.

This is the land for which Muslims died along side the Singhalese. The kings of Kandy settled the Muslims in strategic places to defend the kingdom. The presence of Muslims in Ganetenne, Galagedera, Gampola shows the trust the kings had in the Muslims. In the battle at Ganetenne, it is recorded that the blood of the Muslims flowed with that of the fellow Singhalese.

Minister Ashraff must know how the Muslims, came to be settled in the

Eastern province. It was to prevent the Indian marauders invading the area. Therefore Minister Ashraff must know that his claim to homeland in the Northern and Eastern province is fictitious and baseless, just as the claim of the Tamils.

We in the All Ceylon Muslim League have considered this ethnic question, as far back as 1939. We have discussed the Muslim view, with the Tamil leaders like late G.G. Ponnambalam and late federal Party leader, Mr. Chelvanayagam. Our late President Dr. T.B. Jayah addressing a Muslim political conference on protection of minorities, in 1939 had this to say "that does not mean, that we should have a Tamil raj or Sinhala raj, a minority raj or a majority raj. It simply means that when a majority or minority is spoken of, that term must be understood not in religious sense or racial sense but in a political sense as understood in all democratic countries of the world". He also warned, "but if you have a permanent racial or religious minority invested with plenary powers, you are only creating an organized tyranny of a kind which is calculated to subvert the political foundation of the country". Even Minister Ashraff with his seventeen Muslim Congress Provincial Councilors, was helpless when the Tamil National Army of the EPRLF government massacred the Muslims.

I, as the President of the All Ceylon Muslim League, appeal to the Muslims throughout Sri Lanka, specially those in the Eastern and the Northern Province, that every Muslim must consider every inch of Sri Lanka as his homeland, just as it is the homeland of the Sinhalese and the Tamils. Minister Ashraff intends to barter the Muslims of Batticaloa, Eravur, Trincomalee, Muttur, Kinniya, Mannar, Vavuniya, Mullaitivu and Jaffna, for a homeland around his house, comprising not even 10% of the Muslims in Sri Lanka. The rest of the Muslim community will have to face another Bosnia. Instead of making every effort to see that the Muslims who are refugees are settled back in their homes in Jaffna and Mannar, Minister Ashraff is trying to create more refugees out of Muslims in the Eastern Province as well. Please remember, that when the Tamils of Jaffna and Mannar joined forces with the LTTE, to drive the Muslims out of Jaffna peninsula and Mannar, it was the Sinhalese who welcomed the refugees to their midst. You, Hon: Minister owe them a sense of gratitude.

A.L.M. Hashim
President
All Ceylon Muslim League

Bernard Soysa's Amnesia

"We (of the LSSP) have persistently stood for parity of status for Sinhala and Tamil as official languages for the past four decades and we continue to forge this policy with the objective of a united nation. We still say, one language means two nations and two languages mean one nation, and in this process we have made great sacrifices".

This quite astonishing asseveration is reported to have been made by Mr Bernard Soysa at a meeting at the Saraswathie Hall, Bambalapitiya. Bernard Soysa's friend J R Jayawardena, now pushing ninety, has of late shown some signs of that sort of amnesia that inevitably afflicts the very old. (Example: JR's claim, made to a reporter, that he never demanded undated letters of resignation from his MPs just before the 1982 referendum.) But Bernard Soysa, one would have thought, has still not reached that stage of senility. So how could he have forgotten the LSSP's antics from around 1963, when they found that parity was getting them nowhere?

Has he forgotten the Masalavaday Line? Has he forgotten the openly communal, anti-Tamil editorial policies followed by his party papers? Has he forgotten the January 1966 march from Vihara Maha Devi Park to Parliament to protest against Dudley's bill to introduce regulations under the Reasonable Use of Tamil Act of 1958? Has Bernard Soysa forgotten that Colvin R de Silva

enshrined the Sinhala Only Act in his constitution thus ensuring that it could not be amended or repealed by an ordinary Act of Parliament? Has he forgotten that in that same constitutional provision Colvin rubbed salt in the wounds of the Tamils by specifying that any regulations made for the use of the Tamil language "shall not in any manner be interpreted as being a provision of the constitution but shall be deemed to be subordinate legislation"?

And now here is Bernard Soysa assuring us that the LSSP always stood for parity and had to make great sacrifices in the process! One would very much like to know exactly what "great sacrifices" the LSSP made. Was it the cabinet posts they had to do without? A few members of the LSSP have shed their blood and even lost their lives, albeit not in the cause of parity. But they have always been working class people, never the gentry. One isolated case was the exception: Colvin felloff a table he was standing on and injured his knee when the police fired tear gas shells during a May Day rally which JR had banned. There was some bleeding. Unarguably, a great sacrifice, but again, not in the cause of parity.

The voters of Sri Lanka are not, and do not relish being treated as, gullible fools.

V. P. Vittachi
Colombo 3.

The Nemesis of Nonsense

Lovers of plain English who have been appalled by the disease of post-modernist language that has infected so much literary-critical and social science writing today may take heart from a recent episode in the American academic world. Dr. Alan D Sokal, a physicist at New York University, sent a paper to the journal *Social Text* (revealing name) about a new theory of 'quantum gravity', which he claimed had important social implications. He proceeded to spell these out, using fashionable post-modernist language and citing fashionable names (Lacan et al).

published the paper, whereupon Dr. Sokal wrote to another journal, revealing that the paper, 'liberally salted with nonsense', had been written as a hoax, in order to expose 'the intellectual arrogance of Theory — post-modernist literary theory'.

Can we be surprised that post-modernist gobbledegook has reached the point where some of its practitioners themselves can't distinguish sense from nonsense?

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