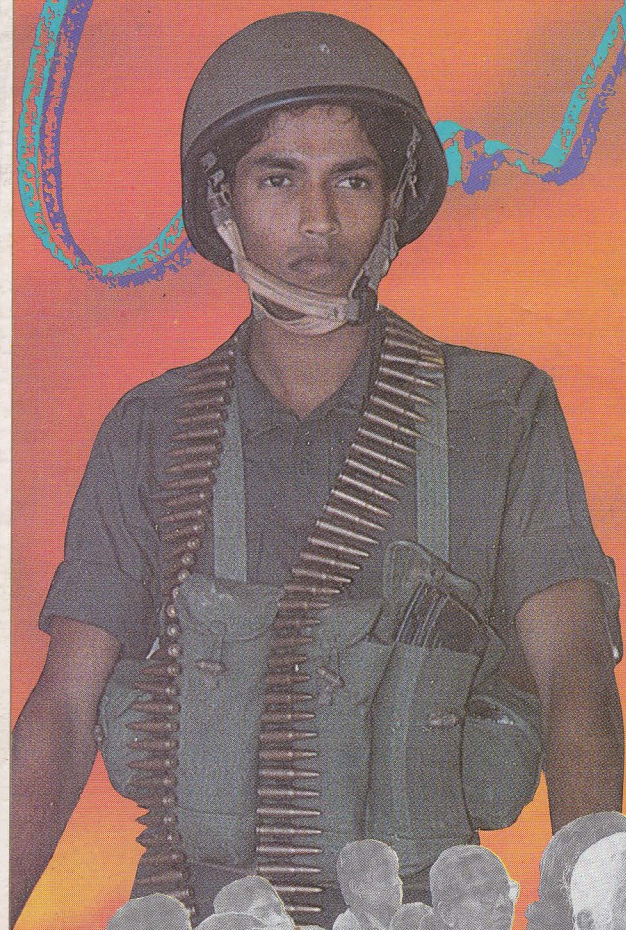


*Chiranjeevi*

A 'RAVAYA' PUBLICATION



**WAR**

**Meaningless  
but inevitable ?**



# ISLANDWIDE SALES POINTS FOR *Counterpoint*

ALAWWA	Nandanasiri Stores	Piliyandala	New City
AMBALANGODA	Royal Book Shop	Pitakotte	Pothgula
AMPARAI	Delicia	Ratmalana	Thusitha Book Shop
ANURADHAPURA	Mahajana Picture Palace	Thimbirigasyaya	Missaka Book Shop
BADULLA	Sathsara	Wellawatte	Windsor Book Shop
BALANGODA	Mahinda's		Rohana Book Shop
BANDARAWELA	Sunil Book Shop	EMBILIPITIYA	Vivian Traders
BATTICALOA	Leelasena & Sons	GALLE	Queens Hotel
CHILAW	Udeni's		New Aradhana Traders
COLOMBO	Mayura Book Shop		Vijitha Yapa Book Shop
Bambalapitiya	Charles Subasinghe	GAMPAHA	Thaksala Nalanda Book Shop
	Greenlands Hotel		Hema's Book Shop
	Lanka Traders	GAMPOLA	Udaya Stores
	Liyanage	HAPUTALE	Davasa Centre
Battaramulla	Shanthi Vihar	HORANA	Mallikarachchi & Co.
Borella	Pubudusiri Cream House	HIKKADUWA	Jayathu Hotel
	Madhawa Book Shop	KADUGANNAWA	Coral Garden Hotel
	Pushpa Stores	KALUTARA	Daya Traders
	Ketapatha Prakashana	KANDY	New Owen Joseph Book Shop
	Supipi Book Shop		Guneratne Distributors
	Sadeepa Book Shop		Seevali Book Shop
Dehiwela	Lakmini Stores		Vijitha Yapa Book Shop
Fort	Catholic Book Shop		Sithumina Book Shop
	Colombo Hilton		Malson Book Shop
	Holiday Inn	KULIYAPITIYA	Central Book Shop
	Taprobane	KURUNEGALA	Sastrodaya Book Shop
	Lake House Book Shop	MATARA	Sampath Traders
	Lanka Oberoi	MATALE	Nilmini Stores
	Macclum Book Shop	MIRIGAMA	Malaka Traders
	M.D. Gunasena Book Shop	MONERAGALA	Gamage Stores
Union Place	Salaka		Sumedha Book Shop
Homagama	Geethani Grocery	N'ELIYA	Sri Ramya Stores
Ja Ela	Perno Stationers	NEGAMBO	Shop No. 3, (Opposite Municipal Council)
Kadawata	Srimali Grocery		Nayana Book Shop, Kandana
Kandana	Jayabima		British Book Center
Kiribathgoda	Samanala Book Shop		Negambo Printers
Kollupitiya	Vijitha Yapa Book Shop	NITTAMBUWA	Co-operative Sales Center
	Malee Book Shop	PANADURA	Ganga Cool House
	A. Z. N. M. Marikar	PILIMATALAWA	Fernando's
Maharagama	Sasiri Book Shop	PUTTALAM	Jayasekera Traders
Maradana	Godage Book Shop	RATNAPURA	Lucky Newspaper Agency
	Dayawansa Jayakody	TRINCOMALEE	Pradeepa Book Shop
	I. P. B. Book Shop	VAVUNIYA	470, Navy Camp Road
	McCallum Book Shop	VEYANGODA	Kavidha Stores
Moratuwa	Wijesekera Grocery	WARAKAPOLA	Somagiri
Nugegoda	National Book Shop	WELLAWAYA	Ranjith Book Shop
	Sarasavi Book Shop	YAKKALA	Suhandu Traders
Pannipitiya	Nimali Book Shop		Vidyodaya

# Counterpoint

## COVER STORY 7

This month's Cover Story explores diverse perspectives of the current North-East context, ranging from a military analysis and an assessment of the impact of Eelam War 3 on civilians in the area, to prospects for the future.



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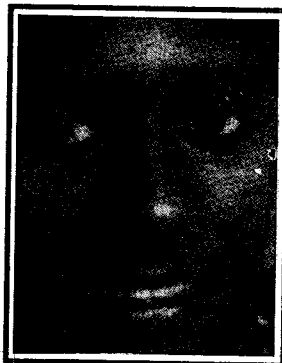
A recent snapshot opinion poll on the North-East crisis shows a drastic change in the mainstream view on a political solution, but presents a less intransigent populace than many analysts would allow.

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Air Vice Marshall Harry Gunatilleke, a former Air Force Commander comments on the current war, its modalities and consequences, including the startling revelation that his late son warned against the very sort of missile attack that claimed him and so many others as victims, but the authorities refused to listen.

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Cover  
Layout  
Asoka Padmasiri

# Accountability in War as a Preface for Peace

The simple opposition of war with peace is no longer applicable in the Sri Lankan context. The old cleavage between the "warmongers" and the "peacemongers" oversimplifies a complex reality that must take into account the less easily compartmentalized issues concerning, for instance, the nature of the LTTE on the one hand, and the constitution of the People's Alliance government on the other.

In this context, to talk exclusively about peace, to wash one's hands off the ugly reality of war, is to enjoy a luxury that immediately locates the speaker outside the North-East and in a privileged position, as Sinhala left-wing intellectual, for example.

The ongoing war shapes the lives of so many who directly suffer its consequences, who pay its price in blood and tears. There is no gainsaying this reality, so the rhetorical move to minimize the war as a minor hiccup on the road to peace, as a low-intensity conflict of little relevance to the peace process itself, is disingenuous and self-seeking at worst, misguided and misleading at best.

The ground situation in the Jaffna peninsula can best be seen from the fact that many schools in the region are virtually closed due to LTTE conscription of schoolboys and parents' refusal to send their children to schools as a result of this danger.

Chauvinist Sinhala forces cannot understand the dynamic of the war, nor the basis on which the LTTE operates, because they seek to identify the LTTE with the Tamil people and advocate a quick and merciless military solution. The predicament of the Tamil people, made worse by the numberless indignities and harrowing experiences they suffer at the hands of the military, is not taken into account by these chauvinists. The ordinary Tamil people become susceptible to LTTE rhetoric as their only hope to resist the "Sinhala Army", precisely for these reasons; in any case, any perceived, even imagined, resistance to the LTTE itself is ruthlessly crushed.

In this context, the war, then, is unavoidable, even if it is meaningless. Whether the long-term will provide a lasting and just peace for the Tamil people will depend, therefore, on the political initiatives and processes demonstrated by the Government, in which the military must be made accountable, not to the LTTE or other groups so much, as to the ordinary Tamil people.

This position differs from chauvinist warmongering because it sees the war neither as a "holy" one nor as a crucial opportunity for re-establishing Sinhala/Tamil hegemony, which ignores the plight of the ordinary people be they Sinhala, Tamil or Muslim. It has been said that this demand for accountability to the people remains merely rhetorical and is empty of meaning in the battlefield. Yet, to leave the war entirely to the Government, its elite apologists and its armed forces is to abrogate the responsibility of ensuring that this accountability has to be continually tested and monitored.

Recent events indicate that the Government is having cold feet about its earlier positions vis-a-vis the political solution, and their appears to be both a panic reaction to hysterical chauvinist rantings as well as a piqued backlash against LTTE provocation. We cannot allow the Government to slide back as governments have done for the past 40 years, otherwise all this carnage and suffering would have been in vain, and, contra Marx, history would be repeating itself as tragedy. It may be seen here that the Government which first sought to appease the LTTE is now seeking to appease the Chauvinists. Where in all this rhetoric lies the interests of the general Tamil public? It is for this reason that we advocate a democratic process of vigilance, systematic and organized, which can isolate the chauvinist forces and prepare the ground for the agenda of peace while not shutting its eyes to the harsh reality of war. ■

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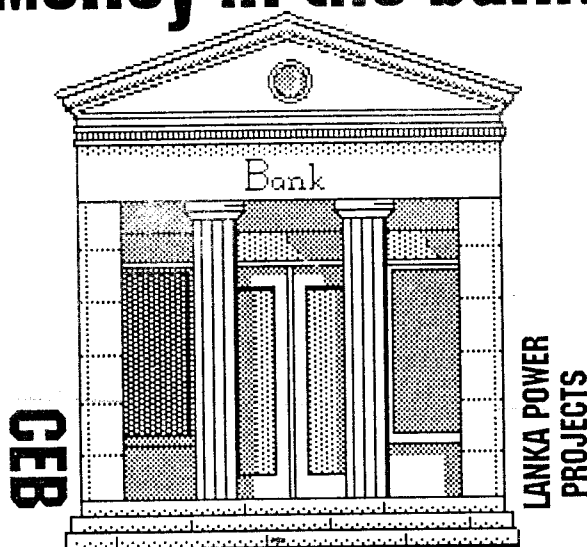


# Money in the bank

I have read an article which appeared in *The Sunday Times* of 16th April 1995 with great interest, and wish to draw your attention to the following:

Firstly, consider the letter which Lanka Power Projects (LPP) has written to CEB Chairman under the signature of Mr S S Siddambaranathan in which Mr Siddambaranathan says in Para 6 "They have indicated that given the special circumstances they are prepared at the request of Her Excellency, The President of Sri Lanka to considerably reduce this time by diverting an existing order to meet our urgent needs". It is extremely funny that the President of Sri Lanka is speaking to a foreign collaborator to deliver the equipment on an urgent basis without floating an international tender and without stating in the international tender that weightage will be given to a foreign collaborator who would install the equipment in the shortest possible timeframe.

Secondly, as a leading businessmen in Sri Lanka, I wish to point out that this company would be approved under BOI status. Therefore, all equipment would be imported duty free. The local collaborator could request Midland Electricity of UK to give them a commission of upto 20%, in this case amounting to US\$ 30 Million or Sri Lanka Rs 1.5 Billion. This money would, of course, be kept abroad. The Bank of Ceylon has no way



of verifying the true cost of the equipment. Thus, the Bank of Ceylon would be funding the project by getting the machinery as its security, whilst the realisable cost of the power generating equipment would be only 80% of what the Bank of Ceylon has financed. The 20% which is syphoned off will be the equity of the local partners.

In other words, the local partners would not have to invest even one Dollar on this project technically, as on the one hand they claim they are investing 20% equity, and on the other hand, they are syphoning out 20% by over-invoicing the purchase of equipment. Thus, they have no stake in the venture. The Government has accepted the fact that it is losing billions of rupees due to over-invoicing and, therefore, it has given a commitment to the World Bank that it would be bringing international surveyors to assist Customs to ascertain the value of all imported goods to Sri Lanka.

Please note that the promoters could sell their

shares in the local stock exchange once the company is publicly quoted. They can make a killing on this and off-load all their shares and disappear into thin air. The Bank of Ceylon is then left with a shell company with holdings scattered amongst many shareholders whilst the promoters of the venture have vanished. The Bank of Ceylon security for their financing which is the equity value would only be 80% of the true cost.

Thirdly, what is most horrifying in this entire deal is that under the caption project company structure is the clause to "(i) provide that GOSL guarantee the obligations of organisations and their successors to the Project Company in a form acceptable to secure project finance from international lenders." What this means is that the company has requested the Government of Sri Lanka to guarantee the loans which would be available under ECGD credit (i.e. British Export Credit). Thus, the Government would guarantee this loan which would benefit the joint

venture. In a BOO (Built Operator Owned) project, it is the private sector which takes the risk by investing venture capital. There is no government guarantee. In this instance the risk for the international lenders is a sovereign risk on the government of Sri Lanka. In such instances this is a sham which nullifies the whole concept of BOO.

It should also be noted that this project is based on Naptha. Naptha is to be purchased from the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation. One of Harry Jayawardena's Company Directors is Raj Obeysekera, a cousin of Anil Obeysekera, Chairman of CPC. The promoters of this project are already negotiating with CPC to have a long-term agreement for the purchase of Naptha at a price below the world market. This agreement if entered into would bind CPC and its successors.

If the project is feasible, then we are at a loss to understand why Merchant Banks in UK are not coming forward to finance this project. What happened during the previous government when state banks coughed up millions on the dictates of politicians appears now to be repeated by the PA Government which promised us the dawn of a new era. Is the dream of President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga no different from the dream of the UNP regime? ■

**L A Lanerolle  
Dehiwela**



I reply to Prof. K. M. de Silva's response to my first two articles on the Homeland issue. I had considered G. H. Peiris' and K. M. de Silva's papers together, as the latter had commended the former without reservation and had quoted from it generously in his conclusions. What I had principally argued against were their conclusions that were reinforced by creating a new myth: viz. . . . the interior, at least of the eastern parts of the island . . . remained throughout a traditional homeland of the Sinhalese peasantry. This point was also eloquently stressed by K. M. de Silva. Their conclusion was that colonisation of parts of the North-East, that has caused so much pain to the minorities, was just and necessary, with 'no evidence of discrimination against Sri Lanka Tamils'. Even the local accountability in colonisation envisaged under the B-C Pact was described by K. M. de Silva as dubious historicity 'elevated to the level of a fundamentally important principle.' These connections are important.

The bulk of my first two articles summarised the two papers and another document, presented carefully researched facts to the contrary, and put forward arguments based on the latter. K. M. de Silva had nothing to say on these. He has rather chosen to pour ridicule on me and on my articles. One means adopted is to pick on my use of 'Governor' in reference to van Senden as a demonstration of my alleged incompetence, asserting that there 'was no Governor in Trincomalee under the Dutch . . . ? This is the one tangible point in his letter that admits of a response.

The diary in question of June 1786 describes the author as 'Onderkoopman De: Jacques Fabrice van Senden Waerneemende het gezach te Trinkomalee'. This had been rendered 'Junior Merchant Jaques Fabrice van Senden, Governor of Trincomalee' in a

## The history of ordinary people in the East

translation issued by the early British Administration. A free translation of 'Waerneemende...' reads 'Taking care of the governance authority) of Trincomalee'. The rendering 'Governor of Trincomalee' is evidently justified in view of the content of his duties as appearing in the diary and the commonsense premise that the reader would distinguish between a 'Governor of Ceylon' and a 'Governor of Trincomalee'. Another authority I could cite is none other than Sir Emerson Tennant, colonial Secretary, in the 1840s, who in Vol II of his celebrated book on Ceylon, has on p.938 referred to van Senden as Governor.

With his considerable erudition, Prof. de Silva should normally have known better than to make an issue of what is, after all, a common dilemma of translators. A classic instance is the case of Pontius Pilate, Praefectus Iudaeae. The latter is normally rendered Governor of Judaea. This is adequate for his administrative role and his role in the crucifixion story. But other information is lost. For example, the praefectus or prefect is normally a member of the Equestrian rather than the higher Senatorial order; and the Praefectus Iudaeae was under the supervision of the Legatus Pro Praetore in Syria. Where this context is required, such as in discussing the aspect of an event that impinges on the internal politics of the Imperial Roman Administration, it is supplied by the writer.

One would have thought that the content of what van Senden had to say in connection with a subject of acknowledged research interest to K. M. de Silva, would have been of far greater

concern to him than the nuances of his rank!

I had made a remark on K. M. de Silva's lack of clarity on the territory ceded to the Dutch in the treaty of 1766. Had he exercised some patience, he would have found it unnecessary to reproduce a passage from his paper to demonstrate my lack of comprehension. The confusion, as I had indicated, lies in "...and some of the border territories" as described by K. M. de Silva, and the use of "districts" and "Batticaloa, Trincomalee with the places appertaining thereto", in Bell's translation of the treaty quoted by me. If one has made up one's mind that the East was nearly always the homeland of the Sinhalese with an unfortunate coastal presence of Muslims and Tamils, very much like a blight on the surface, the difference becomes irrelevant.

If, on the other hand, one allows these people the benefit of a history, and traditions going back several centuries that are deeply rooted in the land, then the difference becomes all-important. For example, the long-observed 'Laws & Customs' in the Wanniates of Thampalakamam, Cottiar and Kattukulampattu (vide H.W. Tambiah) have Koneswaram Temple as their focus. Thus, if one talks of 'Trincomalee with places appertaining thereto' it is quite something else.

Kingship in Ceylon, as I understand it, was a highly sophisticated institution whose legitimacy depended on respecting, supporting and sustaining the local traditions, customs and the individuality of the different provinces that were, in an important sense, sovereign territories. There is a strong hint of this in the reception and

distribution of Bo saplings during the reign of Devanampiya Tissa, and was very much part of the psychology of Kandyan kings. If border demarcation involved carving up individual wanniates, the Kandyan authorities would have been very reluctant to be part of it, and this may explain, in part, their refusal to co-operate.

Academic enterprise that seeks to deny a section of the people the right to their history also needs to, as a corollary, do the office of kingship in Ceylon, the grave injustice of rendering it crude and vulgar, merely focussing on military prowess and giant tanks.

Prof. K. M. de Silva qualifies his respect for *The Broken Palmyrah*, a book I had the privilege of co-authoring, by adding that its positive attributes could not have come from me. Our motivation for writing the book was to document and discuss how the ordinary people coped with the forces ranged against them. My own interest in history has little to do with kings, nations, races, treaties between powers, the great and the good.

In my recent articles I tried to explore how people lived in this country and particularly in the East. What I tried to show was that the story was complex, intertwined, but also having continuity, accommodation and a strong respect for traditions. Far from putting forward ethnic claims, mine was a plea to respect and preserve the healthier and pluralistic aspects of the past. I do feel angry when scholars with little feeling for how people lived and died in the East, invent a history that is concomitant with the ideology of the government of the day. I also feel I was right to express it.

For the rest, the reader is best left to make his own inquiries and judge between what K. M. de Silva and others have written, and what I have written. The issues are themselves too important to be side-tracked and personalised into ones between Professor K. M. de Silva and one Mr. Hoole. ■

Rajan Hoole



THE PREMADASA PATH

# A R E J O I N D E R

READING Mr Jinendra Basnayake's reply (Premadasa, A Third Path -- *Counterpoint* Jan/Feb '95) to our *Lanka Guardian* series, "The Crisis of Alternatives and the Second and a Half Road" was an extremely bewildering and humbling experience. Bewildering, because wading through Mr Basnayake's masterpiece was like being lost in a maze of words: humbling, because it forced us to a realization of the gross inadequacies of our vocabulary and cognitive process.

Even after much Herculean labour we only succeeded in understanding the general drift of Mr Basnayake's reply. Firstly, the unknown gentleman doesn't like us (but are we 'local Marxists', 'bourgeois intellectuals' or 'petty bourgeois apologists?'). Secondly, he is no fan of President Premadasa (who is oft castigated as a 'reactionary populist').

That moment of clarity apart, we found ourselves in a most unenviable position, similar to that of the unfortunate Sisyphus - the more we read the more unintelligible the article became. To mix historical metaphors, we have finally met our

Waterloo.

We reproduce the following sentences from Mr Basnayake's reply, picked at random (one from each page) for the purpose of securing the sympathy of our readers for our predicament: "Illustrating the prevalent superficial tendency, the authors extract a -- cleansed economic version of 'Premadasism' in a Western Marxist flavour of flirting with idealism and punctuating history". (p. 36)

"Dissolving continuity and evolving nature of society, the interruption of history is fundamental to the benevolent positioning of Premadasa". (p. 37)

"To retaliate any opposition against State repression was an enduring elaborate system of patronage". (p. 38)

Not having the powers of the Delphic Oracle, the deciphering of Mr Basnayake's reply is a task that is completely beyond us. We therefore most humbly request Mr Basnayake to translate his article into simple (intelligible) English, thereby providing us an opportunity and replying it.

Since facts and figures speak louder than mere words, we would like to end this brief note with some statistics which can be of assistance in understanding the impact of Premadasa's pro-people programmes.

distribution became more equal (the best performance in 12 years). It should also be noted that the relative income of the richest segment of the populace declined, from 49.3% in 85/86 to 40.58% in 90/91. All this

## Income Distribution

Decile	85/86	90/91
Lowest	0.4	1.6
Second	1.10	3.2
Third	2.0	3.9
Fourth	3.6	5.0
Highest (10th)	49.3	40.58
Gini Coefficient	0.58	0.47

(Source: Dept of Census & Statistics)

This clearly proves that a real and tangible improvement in the living standards of the poorest segments of society took place during the Premadasa Years. The significant improvement in the Gini coefficient demonstrates that income

demonstrates that during the Premadasa years a significant redistribution of income in favour of the poor took place -- a clear indication of the success of the Premadasa policies.

A number of other indicators confirm this trend.

## Unemployment Rate

1973	78/79	81/82	85/86	93
32.1%	20.7%	14.2%	19.5%	14.5%

(Source: Sri Lanka Labour Force Survey)



### Literacy Rates

Census	CF & SE Survey	LF & SE Survey	LF Survey
1971	81/82	85/86	95
78.5%	85.4%	84.2%	86.9%

(CF & SE Consumer Finance & Socio Economic Survey, Central Bank  
LF & SE Labour Force & South Economic Survey, Dept of Census and Statistics)



What all this data conclusively proves is that the living standards of the Lankan people in general and the poor in particular improved significantly during the Premadasa period, thereby causing a decisive reversal of the negative trend evident during '81/82 -- '85/86. Since these improvements could not have commenced during the turbulent period of '87-89 (and in fact it is reasonable to assume that the situation deteriorated even further) it is obvious that the turning point came during the Premadasa

period as a direct result of his various pro-people programmes.

It is important to bear in mind the context in which these impressive improvements took place - i.e. in the aftermath of several years of war in the North East and the Polpotist JVP's bloody and destructive attempt at capturing power, both of which caused colossal damage to the country and the economy. We must also remember that these improvements took place in a very short time - within the space of about 4 years. It's a performance that is remarkable by any international standards.

These irrefutable statistics clearly prove that our article was "not an attempt at romanticising the reactionary past" (one of the many accusations levelled against us by Mr Basnayake) but a necessary attempt at analysing and understanding the most pro-people and pro-poor experiments not only in this country but also in the rest of the dependent capitalist Third World. We challenge Mr Basnayake (and others of his ilk) to provide an example of a more successful attempt at creating alternative (pro-people, pro-poor) development strategies anywhere in the non-socialist Third World. ■

Tisaranee Gunasekera &  
Dayan Jayatileka

# One year more for military offensive

*Waruna Karunatilake*

THE third and perhaps the most crucial phase of the Eelam war has begun with a "bang". The LTTE as usual appears to be holding all the aces, at least at the start of hostilities while the military and the Government were caught flat footed once again.

The crucial differences in this phase of the war -- perhaps it'll go down in history as "Eelam War 3" -- is that now the LTTE is a fully-fledged conventional military machine. In Eelam War 1 from 1981 to 1987 the LTTE as well as the numerous other Tamil militant groups were mere guerrilla forces engaging in hit and run operations against the Army. The armed forces had total control over the air and much of the sea. The militants did use sea routes to operate from their bases in Tamil Nadu but had no offensive capability in the air or sea. Although the militants controlled most of the North after the Army was sent back to barracks during the 1985 ceasefire, the militants failed to overrun a single camp and did not pose a serious threat of being able to push the military out of the North altogether. Their weaknesses were exposed by Operation Vadamarachchi when then Brigadier Denzil Kobbekaduwa and Colonel Wijaya Wimalaratne broke through the LTTE defences and recaptured the area in just seven days with 3000 troops. The Navy and the Air Force gave the Army an edge which the militants could not counter.

In the face of the massive firepower of the Indian Army the LTTE again was essentially a

guerrilla force from late 1987 to 1990. In Eelam War 2 the main development was the LTTE's fledgling sea-arm. The Sea Tigers using suicide cadres and heavily armed fast speedboats posed a major threat to the Navy's control of the seas. The rebels realised that it was crucial to counter the Government's naval dominance if they were to push the Army out of the Northern theatre. Their aim was to block the Navy's ability to move freely and threaten the logistical lines to the military camps in the North. 90% of the food and military hardware necessary to maintain troops in the North are transported by sea. Operation Balavegaya to save the Elephant Pass army camp in 1992

announcing their pulling out of the peace process. While every single war expert was predicting that the Navy would be the first target in Eelam War 3, the sheer incompetence of the Navy itself to move quickly to secure its ships in the harbours of Trincomalee and Kankasanthurai surpassed all other disasters in the war. The Navy can be thankful that the two other ships anchored close by were not also targeted and that an alert sentry prevented a similar attack taking place in KKS. If the Navy continues in its incompetent manner it will not be long before the Navy Commander will be commanding a land-based navy. The sinking of the two ships and one just before the cessation of



-- the single biggest sea-landing carried out by the military -- would have been impossible without the total dominance of the sea and the air.

The importance the LTTE attaches to this was indicated by the blowing up of two naval ships in Trincomalee within hours of

hostilities has weakened the Navy but certainly not crippled it.

The Navy has lost half of its fleet costing over a billion rupees since the Sea Tigers were formed. The psychological damage done to the confidence and morale of the sailors who were already shaken by a series of successful suicide



attacks on their ships would have a more lasting effect. What is most worrying is that none of the top rankers in the Navy has distinguished himself during this crisis. Although there are some bright prospects at the level of Captain there is nothing much to choose from when it comes to appointing area commanders. In these circumstances there is little evidence that the Navy will bounce back from the recent reversals and come up with new tactics to counter the LTTE threat and take the fight to the rebels.

When the Peace process began in September 1994 the military had only one major advantage -- its control of the air -- and that advantage was crucial for the Army in both defensive and offensive situations. This air power was so effective that the LTTE was forced to launch its attacks on camps in the night when the Air Force was grounded due to the lack of night capability. Throughout the entire Eelam War 2 period the Air Force did not, for reasons best known to themselves, acquire night-fighting capability. However, the LTTE which, unlike the military, plans ahead taking into consideration the threat factor of each force, has in a single incident (whether one or two 'planes were shot down by missiles is still being debated by the Air Force) evened the scale to such an extent that it is the military that is facing the biggest crisis since the war began.

The damage caused by the blowing up of the Avro has many dimensions. Among those killed were the two most capable officers in the Air Force -- Group Captains Roger Weerasuriya and Shirantha Gunetillake. Roger Weerasuriya was the Northern Area Commander and Shirantha Gunetillake was deputy to Wing Commander Sunil Cabral who left the Air Force in disgust after being overlooked for promotion by the former Air Force Commander. It

was Sunil Cabral who mapped out the strategy for the Air Force in all operations conducted by General Kobbekaduwa who rated Cabral as the best man the Air Force had. These three officers commanded absolute respect from their pilots, a crucial ingredient when undertaking dangerous operations such as the landing in the Jaffna Fort during the siege of 1991. Their importance to the effectiveness of the Air Force can be gauged when some in the military equate their loss to that of the deaths of General Kobbekaduwa and Brigadier Wimalaratne. The Air Force, unlike the Navy, is slightly better off in this respect because it has a number of officers with the potential to replace these officers. Gagan Bulathsinghala, Kapila Jayampathy, and Ranil Gurusingha are all squadron leaders who are credited with most potential. However, they do not have the experience and the maturity to hold crucial appointments yet.

The Air Force now has to deal with its biggest crisis without three of its best officers. The fact that the military still does not even know the type of missile used in the attacks says a lot about the country's intelligence agencies which did not have a clue that the LTTE had even acquired anti-aircraft missiles. This disastrous intelligence failure is only second to the Air Force not having a plan in place to counter such a threat. It has been common knowledge for a long time that the LTTE was doing its best to acquire missiles, and the Air Force should have had a counter plan ready years ago. The argument that with limited funds available it is difficult to buy weapons for every eventuality is true, but what comes as a shock is that the Air Force had never come up with a plan to put into operation when required. (It does not cost money to do a little bit of forward planning). The Air Force

should have worked out possible scenarios and counter plans for each of these scenarios with the necessary weapon systems and possible buying sources identified. In fact, as the Interview with Air Vice Marshall Harry Gunatilleke the Air Force did know about the missile-threat but did nothing about an urgent secret repeat for over 1 1/2 years before sending it to the Defence Ministry. Instead, the country gets an Air Force Commander speaking flawed Sinhala putting on a pathetic performance on national television. If the performance was to calm the nation and give confidence, the result was the exact opposite.

The problem for the Air Force is that there are no quick-fix solutions to the problem. The ideal solution would be to have ground-based radar monitoring missile launchings and have all the aircraft and the helicopters equipped with anti-missile defences. No doubt the sheer cost of these systems would hamper the Air Force which will be forced to use less expensive and less effective methods such as drooping aluminium shrouds (heated metal) and firing magnesium flares to divert heat-seeking missiles. The most effective counter to the missiles as far as helicopters are concerned is to fly low and carry out certain manoeuvres, but when flying low helicopters are vulnerable to small arms fire and .50 heavy machine guns. The five zeros were the main anti-aircraft weapons used by the LTTE which introduced anti-aircraft cannon during the Elephant Pass siege. These weapons have not been used since that operation.

The sorry state the Air Force is in today is due to the lack of forward planning. The Air Force has only been interested in acquiring more and more 'planes and helicopters from whatever source possible without taking into account its structure or conducting

any kind of study into the future threat factors. This, after all, is the same Air Force which bought Chinese built F-7 supersonic interceptors in 1990 to defend our air space when the military was involved in a major war within the country. Once the 'planes were ordered and delivered -- just like Air Lanka's air buses -- no one could explain why 1970s generation interceptors were bought without even weapons systems. It is ironic that the same unarmed 'planes which were supposed to scare away the ultra-modern fighter aircraft of the Indian Air Force are now being used as bombers in the Eelam War and the Sri Lankan government is trying to get military help from India -- the once perceived enemy against whom millions of dollars were spent to buy interceptors (unless of course in the eyes of the Air Force the planes were to counter a possible invasion from the Maldives).

While both the Navy and the Air Force are struggling to face the new challenges, the Army is perhaps the only force of the three that came out of the peace talks with little damage done. Compared to the ground situation in June 1990 when the LTTE effectively controlled the entire North and East and the Army was scattered in the South, today the Army has been affected only marginally. The Army did not have to give up any areas it controlled before the ceasefire in the North or East although the LTTE was able to infiltrate hundreds of cadres into the East and re-establish their camps in the jungles. The LTTE will continue to be restricted to guerrilla tactics in the East and the Army will stabilise the area sooner than later. However, it is in the North that the LTTE will fully exploit its newly acquired conventional military capability. With anti-aircraft missiles keeping the Air Force at bay and the Sea Tigers

harassing the Navy, the LTTE cadres have a much better chance of not only over-running military camps but also for the first time to occupy those areas captured from the Army in the Jaffna Peninsula. The military will be hard pressed and for the next year or so unable to launch rescue operations like in Elephant Pass in 1992 and Pooneryn in 1994. Moreover, the Army will be hard pressed to defend their positions in the Peninsula and the all-important offensive on Jaffna itself will take a minimum of six months if not

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*The Army which is depending on track armoured personnel carriers and battle tanks to rip through LTTE defences and the speed of the armour to out manoeuvre the LTTE will have to wait for the dry season -- at the beginning of February -- before thinking of launching such an offensive. By this time the Air Force will have to get their act together because air cover will be crucial for such an offensive.*

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longer.

The Government certainly had little choice but to delay the crucial arms purchases that the forces wanted for such an offensive in the face of opposition from the LTTE to any weapons buying when peace talks were on. Although the Government is now facing mounting criticism from various quarters for not preparing for war while discussing peace, a government which is seriously pushing for peace cannot and should not jeopardise such moves although it is at a major disadvantage if war breaks out again. It is to the Government's

credit that it did not give in to LTTE pressure to withdraw the Pooneryn camp and allow its cadres to carry arms in the East. If those two concessions had also been given the ground situation would have been much much worse. However, what it had done is to delay an offensive on the peninsula. The Army will need at least six to eight months to take delivery of the new equipment and train soldiers to use them. It will also need a couple of months to put these in place in camps in the peninsula for the operation. If the clock is ticking now it will still be later this year that the Army will be ready for such an offensive. By then the Northeast monsoon would have set in. The Army which is depending on track armoured personnel carriers and battle tanks to rip through LTTE defences and the speed of the armour to out manoeuvre the LTTE will have to wait for the dry season -- at the beginning of February -- before thinking of launching such an offensive. By this time the Air Force will have to get their act together because air cover will be crucial for such an offensive. Without fear of air strikes the LTTE will not find it difficult to take on the tanks and the APCs with their rocket-propelled guns and landmines.

Essentially, then, the Army will be carrying out a holding operation in the North for the next year or so while regaining control over the East. To do that the Army has to have their most experienced officers in the field and not in the South, pushing paper. Brigadier Anton Wijendra, considered by many as the best field commander after Generals Kobbekaduwa and Wimalratne is now the Commandant of the Military Academy. Brigadiers Lohan Gunewardene, Shantha Kottegoda, Wasantha Perera, Angammana and Sarath Munasinghe are all in Colombo. The only officer of brigadier rank



# Summary of security Forces Personal, Civilians and Casualties North/ East from 1981 to 26 April 1995

Year	Army			Navy		Air Force			
	KIA	WIA	MIA	KIA	WIA	MIA	KIA	WIA	MIA
1981	3	0	-	0	7	-	0	0	-
1982	2	0	-	0	0	-	0	0	-
1983	13	0	-	0	0	-	2	0	-
1984	25	0	-	3	0	-	3	0	-
1985	100	72	-	16	2	-	1	0	-
1986	178	141	-	6	3	-	11	-	-
1987	231	184	-	12	0	-	6	0	-
1988	369	33	-	13	0	-	8	0	-
1989	36	0	-	5	0	-	0	0	-
1990	469	476	182	17	5	-	8	-	-
1991	1066	2694	102	26	72	-	8	13	-
1992	975	1060	48	20	30	-	65	82	-
1993	605	1293	282	28	82	106	6	6	0
1994	178	558	7	10	33	24	3	2	0
1995	31	90	1	12	21	-	-	-	-
Total	4281	6601	622	168	255	130	121	103	0

Year	Police			STF		Home Guards			
	KIA	WIA	MIA	KIA	WIA	MIA	KIA	WIA	MIA
1981	6	2	-	0	0	-	0	0	-
1982	8	7	-	0	0	-	0	0	-
1983	3	2	-	0	0	-	0	0	-
1984	67	55	-	0	0	-	0	0	-
1985	88	43	3	0	0	-	0	0	-
1986	42	180	-	0	0	-	0	0	-
1987	77	108	-	16	0	-	8	0	-
1988	28	18	3	4	0	-	36	0	-
1989	53	32	3	20	0	-	51	0	-
1990	438	113	-	0	0	-	20	0	-
1991	49	69	-	15	0	-	16	10	-
1992	68	61	-	0	0	-	36	8	-
1993	57	45	-	0	0	0	3	6	0
1994	48	80	2	13	15	0	9	5	5
1995	4	5	1	-	3	-	-	-	-
Total	1116	910	12	68	18	0	179	29	5

Year	Total		Civilians			Terrorists			
	KIA	WIA	MIA	KIA	WIA	MIA	KIA	WIA	MIA
1981	9	9	-	3	0	-	-	1	-
1982	10	7	-	5	0	-	-	1	-
1983	18	2	-	9	0	-	-	6	-
1984	98	55	-	253	0	-	-	34	-
1985	205	117	3	546	0	-	-	117	-
1986	237	324	-	576	0	-	-	1139	-
1987	350	292	-	867	0	-	-	883	-
1988	491	51	3	629	0	-	-	435	-
1989	165	32	3	779	158	-	-	524	-
1990	952	594	182	961	380	-	1461	2358	549
1991	1180	2858	102	436	407	-	2561	5158	3640
1992	1518	1251	48	677	538	-	881	2920	363
1993	699	1432	388	636	81	33	1053	1810	0
1994	261	693	38	83	116	56	402	106	33
1995	35	116	2	3	2	5	32	19	15
Total	6228	7833	769	6463	1682	94	6390	15511	4600

with vast field experience in the battle area is Brigadier Sarath Fonseka who is out of favour with the current military leadership because of his close links to the former Army Commander General Waidyaratne. It is true that all these officers have served in the battle zoned during most of the last 11 years. Yet, their experience and the respect the men have for them will be crucial if the Army is to come through the next difficult 12 months. Another crucial aspect of the "Eelam War 3" will be whether the Army could bury its internal factional fighting and unite as a fighting force. Whether the Army Commander General Gerry de Silva can rise above this plague that has affected the effectiveness of the Army for over a decade will be closely watched. The forced retirement of General Algama can only be excused if it will unify the Army. Otherwise, the retirement of the general who has proved that he can deliver (whether one agrees on the cost is a different argument) will only weaken the ability of the Army

to counter the LTTE who by all indications are going for an all out offensive to push them out of the North.

The LTTE has to make use of the 12 month window it has before the military is re-armed and ready to achieve this objective. Once the new ships are delivered to the

Navy and the Air Force is equipped with anti-missile systems and the Army had taken delivery of new equipment, the scale will be back in the favour of the military. Therefore, one can expect the LTTE to take maximum advantage of their current superiority. ■

*It is indeed ironic that some of those who had been livewires in the peace process over the past three months, and who have gone on record to say that the resumption of the war is only a temporary setback to peace, were involved in a clandestine committee entrusted with the task of assisting the Government in its war effort, hardly a week after the LTTE violation of the ceasefire. The Committee which was headed by Presidential Secretary, Mr. Balapatabendi, included Dr. Jayadeva Uyangoda, Mr. Charles Abeyesekera, Military Spokesman Brigadier Sarath Munasinghe, the Assistant Secretary, Defence, and the Additional Secretary, Presidential Secretariat. The Committee was mandated to cover all aspects of the war other than military strategy. Specific areas of concern to the committee were propaganda, both local and foreign, political matters, psychological operations, rehabilitation and allied areas. The committee met a few times at the Presidential Secretariat but has since been superseded by other committees, and is now left only with matters pertaining to the Rehabilitation of the East. Is it finally a case of all's well that ends well, since no one can complain about the current mandate of the committee? The inescapable fact, however, that the most vociferous proponents of peace were, even for a short time, the salesmen of war is a telling indictment on our times. ■*



# Sri Lankan airman foresees his death?

**CP:** What is your assessment of the current situation? What do you think is most important about the recent developments ... particularly with reference to the North-East?

**HG:** I would start off by calling this Eelam War 111 which is going to end at the very least with the containment of the LTTE or it's going to be Eelam.

**CP:** This means that you don't agree with those who believe that the LTTE is interested in a limited war only, and that a full-scale war is not in their interest...

**HG:** Events have proved that position wrong even from Thimpu days. The LTTE let down JR Jayewardene in Thimpu (Interestingly, JRJ's brother was involved in that, and I don't know how he came to be there). ... Then we had the Premadasa episode for 14 months up to June 1990. Then we have this young lady [sic] who of all of them has done the most towards this peace process and it is clear even to the international community that she went every inch of the way for peace.

**CP:** Now, the charge levelled by many is that she had no backing either in her Cabinet or in the Party. Do you agree with this view?

**HG:** She took the limelight, and as Executive President she had to. ... And I think she believed so firmly that the peace process would work, so in that sense she did not pay too much attention to what others had to

**Harry Gunatilleke,** former Air Force Commander and father of Wing Commander Shiran Gunatilleke who was among those killed in the SAM missile attack on the second Air Force AVRO 'plane on April 29<sup>th</sup>.



say. She saw her 62% vote at the Presidential Election as a mandate for peace, whereas I see it as also a mandate for peace but more so a desire to get rid of a corrupt regime that was in power for 17 years. She probably misread that signal a bit. ... To certain extent she was right but that was not the only reason that

Governments are changed. ...

**CP:** On the other hand, do you feel that the resident of the Cabinet gave her adequate support, or were they shuffling their feet?

**HG:** The rest of the Cabinet wanted her to be very cautious, but probably having got this message across to her indirectly

they stayed very quiet. I don't think that they were allowed to play a role in the peace process. After all, who was it who went to the North for negotiations? It was said that "President's pals went." No Ministers were allowed. ... I am sorry to say this but the right people didn't go. ... Tamilchelvam, for instance, is supposed to be a military strategist as well as a political strategist. Who is the military strategist who went for the three rounds of talks? As I said, there were actors and bankers and architects -- and I have no doubt that they are very good in their professions -- but I don't think that they know much about the war.

**HG:** You see, by any standards anywhere in the world the LTTE is a formidable force. So you can see the kind of enemy that you are facing. ... But given the right equipment and the right training and things fall into place -- and there is the time factor also here, these things can't be done overnight -- they can get the better of the LTTE. Of course, I know that if there's an all-out war tomorrow they cannot win it because they are not ready. They are six months behind in preparation

for war because of the talks. As you know there was a major offensive planned for October last year, but the previous regime was not interested because it was election time, and this regime felt that it had a mandate for peace. As a result the services also became complacent. The theme during the peace talks was "if you are attacked defend yourself" or, at most, limited operations.

I am a great believer that attack is the best form of defence, so when the orders are not to jeopardize the peace process, our chaps would see these fellows roaming around but they couldn't do anything.

**CP:** *At the same time how does one protect against atrocities by the Forces?*

**HG:** As you know I have talked about my four stage plan, of which I have made public the first three stages. . . . Certainly, I am not a war-monger. I firmly believe that war is a last resort, but if you go to war it has to be with a vengeance. If I am put in charge of all operations I will ensure that there is no question of attacks on civilians or reprisal attacks like those that happened in Batticaloa recently. The Tamil civilians must be safeguarded. The Tamil and the Terrorist are two entirely different things. I am only going after the terrorists. Because they people can be used as a human shield we've got to put our thinking caps on and ensure that lives are protected. Residual attack from bombing and so on cannot be helped in war.

We still have the international community with us, but if there's reprisal attacks -- just because a comrade has died you go and destroy a village -- that has to stop. There is no question of allowing those to take place. I would even advocate field court martials on the spot as a deterrent. . . .

*But, in terms of the hypothetical case, if you were to say that to get at these three among the twenty, where the innocent are not allowed to go, and if it's only a question of the house being destroyed that's not so bad, but if the other lives are at stake, then call off the operation, and think of another method.*

**CP:** *To be against reprisal attacks is fairly safe. What about the more widespread argument from statistical probability or expediency? Take the hypothetical case where there's a community which you know there are two or three LTTE cadres hiding. You arrest twenty youth and kill them because you don't know which of the 20 are the Tigers. . . .*

**HG:** If you know the house, say, in which the Tigers are hiding, and if they're getting protection by the fact that there are 20 others, you need to appeal through leaflets and what not saying "get out of the place, we're coming there. Please go because we're going to destroy this house" If you know that it's an office or that it's being used for terrorist activity. You need to appeal to them to leave the surrounding area. . . .

**CP:** *The problem is that they will not be allowed to leave.*

**HG:** This is a part of my battle plan which I can only talk about later. . . . But that kind of situation can be tackled, but it has to be a state decision. . . . If you really want to solve this there's only one way, but it has to be a political decision. . . . But,

in terms of the hypothetical case, if you were to say that to get at these three among the twenty, where the innocent are not allowed to go, and if it's only a question of the house being destroyed that's not so bad, but if the other lives are at stake, then call off the operation, and think of another method. But that's exactly what I have a plan for -- to get over the LTTE using the Tamils as hostages or human shields which, however, I can only reveal later. . . .

You see, it is very important to keep this image we have earned with the international community which will help us in the long run.

**CP:** *Also the image among the ordinary people that this Sinhala government unlike the others is genuinely interested in their welfare. . . .*

**HG:** I think the Tamil people know . . . that the best chance for a just peace is through her. She has worked so hard. . . . So probably there is a little bit of disappointment among the Tamil community with that the LTTE is not making an effort to talk with Chandrika who believes so passionately in peace.

**CP:** *What about the atrocities and reprisals that have been reported in the East, then? And the bombings?*

**HG:** The atrocities have been only in the recent past, from April 19th. There have been a couple of incidents, and if this is true it should not be allowed to happen, whatever the provocation or the pressure. It should be firmly controlled. . . . Actually, you see, I don't know that we have the accuracy for pinpoint bombing. The Chinese F7s which are being used is like using a sledgehammer to kill a fly. For large concentrations of bunkers and so on it can be deadly, but not for strafing. After all, they fly at Mark 1



speed (above the speed of sound) at an altitude of about 15,000 - 20,000 feet. . . . One thing you need to remember about the reprisal attacks is the psychology of the persons responsible. I think that one of the crucial factors in the past is the view held by the soldiers that "the Government is not concerned about us so we must take care of ourselves. We must protect our lives at any cost." The way they protect themselves is by razing the surrounding villages to the ground. If they can see a proper plan, if they can see a direction, if they can see the light at the end of the tunnel, this sort of thing will be minimised. You ask the soldiers to be in the bunkers at night, and tell them if you are attacked defend yourself: surely, that's an idiotic philosophy?

**CP:** *There are many who believe that it is impossible to even begin meaningful devolution and so on while Jaffna is held by the LTTE, particularly from the point of view of the morale and living conditions of the Tamils resident there. What do you feel about this? Do you think that the taking of Jaffna is crucial to solving this crisis?*

**HG:** Yes, the dislodging of the terrorists from Jaffna is crucial and also feasible, and this is where I am proposing a plan. . .

**CP:** *What about the political package?*

**HG:** As I said in my four stage plan. The first is about the defence structure which I have spoken about elsewhere; the second is putting the country on a war footing. The third one is that the political package must be announced to the Tamil people, and the international community. The international community could then force the LTTE to discuss this by bringing world opinion to bear on them. . . If the package is good all

*My response is that we left battle plans to the military for the last 12 years, since July 1983, and nothing has come of it, so let them come out and say what these battle plans are. There's a lot of talk about battle plans and secret plans, but there's nothing concrete. I don't think that people want to know operational details, but they have a right to know when the secret plan is going to be launched and how long will it take before this secret plan brings peace to this country.*

moderate Tamils must say so.

**CP:** *Is it the case, however, that peace is inimical to the LTTE? The LTTE can't cope with peace, can they?*

**HG:** This is what I say. In fact Chandrika has exposed the LTTE. JR didn't expose Prabhakaran, nor did Premadasa. But she has exposed this man as a war-monger and not a peace-monger. . . . The world community also now seems him that way.

**CP:** *What do you think, then, of Mr. Thondaman's statement about Mr Prabhakaran being a freedom fighter?*

**HG:** I think that it was quite uncalled for.

**CP:** *In terms of your four stage plan, would you fault the government for not implementing number two? The country is not on a war-footing.*

**HG:** The Government wants to show the business and the international community that things are not so bad, that business is as usual, life is going

on. The UNP government did the same thing. . . . In trying to get across that image they can't put the country on a war footing, but I think that this is a must.

I am not asking that my plan be the only one considered, but even if they reject my plan they must have a plan. The people and the military want to see light at the end of the tunnel. . . . You are also asking the same question, "What next?"

The Deputy Defence Minister said that there was a secret plan. We don't want to know the details since this is obviously a military matter, but tell us whether this is going to finish in three months, three years, or thirty years! They owe it to the people, the fighters, our men. 4300 men have died; 1200 IPKF people from another country have died. We have 20,000 casualties and the IPKF had 3000. Of the 20,000 casualties 10,000 have lost a limb at least. At a wedding I met a service chief, whose name I won't mention, and he had heard about my battle plan. He said, "battle plans are best done by us." My response is that we left battle plans to the military for the last 12 years, since July 1983, and nothing has come of it, so let them come out and say what these battle plans are. There's a lot of talk about battle plans and secret plans, but there's nothing concrete. I don't think that people want to know operational details, but they have a right to know when the secret plan is going to be launched and how long will it take before this secret plan brings peace to this country.

**CP:** *On the other hand there's irresponsible reporting which endangers lives, like the account which mentioned that a top level team would fly out the next day to investigate the first Avro crash, on which your son*

*was to serve. They would surely have been sitting ducks, then, if the LTTE had SAM capability.*

HG: You are right. My son was the President of the Court of Inquiry. . . . But I would not like to comment on what the Air Force Commander did. . . . Incidentally, I have with me a document written by my son before he died. A Top Secret Report where he had warned about the missiles in September 1993. He had said that they would use the missiles only on important targets such as those carrying top brass. I am waiting to call a press conference and give the details. He put up a paper and the Air Force took more than one year to refer this to the Defence Ministry. After October 1994 the Defence Ministry must take the rap for the inexcusable delay.

*CP: What is India's role in this crisis?*

HG: I have always maintained that there is an India Factor to this situation. I still remember Indira Gandhi's statement that India cannot remain unaffected by events occurring in Sri Lanka. To that extent there is an India Factor. The signs are better now than before, after Rajiv Gandhi's death, because Madras was a haven for the LTTE before this. . . . I went to the Madras University a few years ago to give a lecture to the academic community on this issue, and when I mentioned that the Tamil Nadu people were sympathetic to the LTTE, and they said that I was wrong. After Rajiv Gandhi died this support had stopped. The sympathy factor for the LTTE has disappeared from Tamil Nadu after the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, they said.

Let's face it. India has proscribed the LTTE, but Sri Lanka hasn't. A lot will depend on the case in Madras. . . . I don't think India would want a

terrorist organisation in possession of missiles in her backyard. No country would want it, least of all India.

*CP: What do you think of the story that the LTTE has a small submarine?*

HG: I find it very difficult to believe.

*CP: The increase in the technological capability of the LTTE is going to prove detrimental vis-a-vis their relationship to India?*

HG: Yes. If the submarine story is true, India will go out of its way to help in maritime defence, for instance. . . . The control of the seas that we had up to a few months ago is not there anymore. To this extent the LTTE is somewhat freer to visit the Indian coast, but the Navy is in these waters as is the Indian maritime force but the LTTE can still do it. They are down, I think, to 4 ships now. . . . Douglas Devananda has been telling the Government that a shipload of arms came in around April, and I know for a fact that the LTTE was ready with its

*For instance, during the talks that Premadasa had with them, the woman who was responsible for the Maradana bomb was released by the Government. They could be going for the Pettah Busstand or maybe the Airport [This interview was recorded on May 21, so it has been disquietingly prophetic, resonating the terrible warning of his son.] The LTTE know that they have to create this psychology of fear in Colombo.*

missiles, the moment they trained on it and were ready, they resumed hostilities and began Eelam War 111. . . . Even the JVP was very quickly quelled because of air attacks using our helicopters which they did not expect and could not deal with, so air power has always proved crucial. . . .

*CP: What about the LTTE having planes or gliders?*

HG: I asked the Air Force Commander. He said they were apparently trying to clear a strip for taking off and landing. They were unable to confirm this. But it's not difficult after all, the Kilinochchi area has a lot of jungle. . . . If I were Prabhakaran I would equip myself with suicide planes. You know in World War 11 the Germans attacked Britain very successfully. This may be what the LTTE is trying to do. . . . Yes, they are ingenious militarily, but now they must be concerned about international opinion. If you can work on the Tamil people through the political package, informing them of it by dropping thousands and thousands of leaflets by air, so that it reaches every home in the North. Having created an international opinion in your favour, you now need to create a similar climate among the Tamil people. They are not allowed to receive any information from the state, they are somewhat brainwashed, so the only way you can do this is through airdrops.

*CP: The LTTE seems to be paranoid about infiltration by the Indian RAW. What do you think about this?*

HG: This may be possible but there's no way of knowing. . . .

*CP: What about the East?*

HG: It's a different ball game here, and they don't have the kind of hearts and minds control as they do in the North. Up to the time of the commencement



of the peace talks they were to some extent sidelined in areas such as Batticaloa and Trincomalee town, in Amparai and so on, within a radius of 3-5 miles of the town areas the writ of authority of the Government prevailed unlike in Jaffna. But during the peace talks everyone knows what happened. They were asking to move around with their weapons but this wasn't allowed. Then they put up an LTTE camp between two Army camps. To that extent they got mileage during the talks. They were roaming all over the countryside with impunity.

**CP:** *In fact, when I was in Batticaloa I saw the checking of Tamil civilians at the various checkpoints whereas armed LTTE cadres were allowed to move around quite freely. What an irony!*

**HG:** Quite right. If you were known to be an LTTE cadre you were allowed to proceed.

**CP:** *What is the possible scenario for the future?*

**HG:** If the LTTE is threatened in the North and the East, all they have to do is plant a bomb in Colombo, like they did in Maradana. For instance, during the talks that Premadasa had with them, the woman who was responsible for the Maradana bomb was released by the Government. They could be going for the Pettah Busstand or maybe the Airport [This interview was recorded on May 21, so it has been disquietingly prophetic, resonating the terrible warning of his son.] The LTTE know that they have to create this psychology of fear in Colombo. So they may concentrate their entire effort in Colombo. . . . This is why I suggested Vigilance Committees and so on.

**CP:** *What about the harassment of Tamil civilians in the city?*

**HG:** That should not happen

*I am saying all this because I have already lost one son and I have another in the Air Force. I have a greater stake in the war than others because I have two sons. And I want to know that all these Presidents and Prime Ministers and potential Army Commanders and Navy Commanders and these soldiers and civilians have not died in vain. SO if people think that I am talking out of emotion that's not true. It has nothing to do with emotion any more, it's a commitment.*

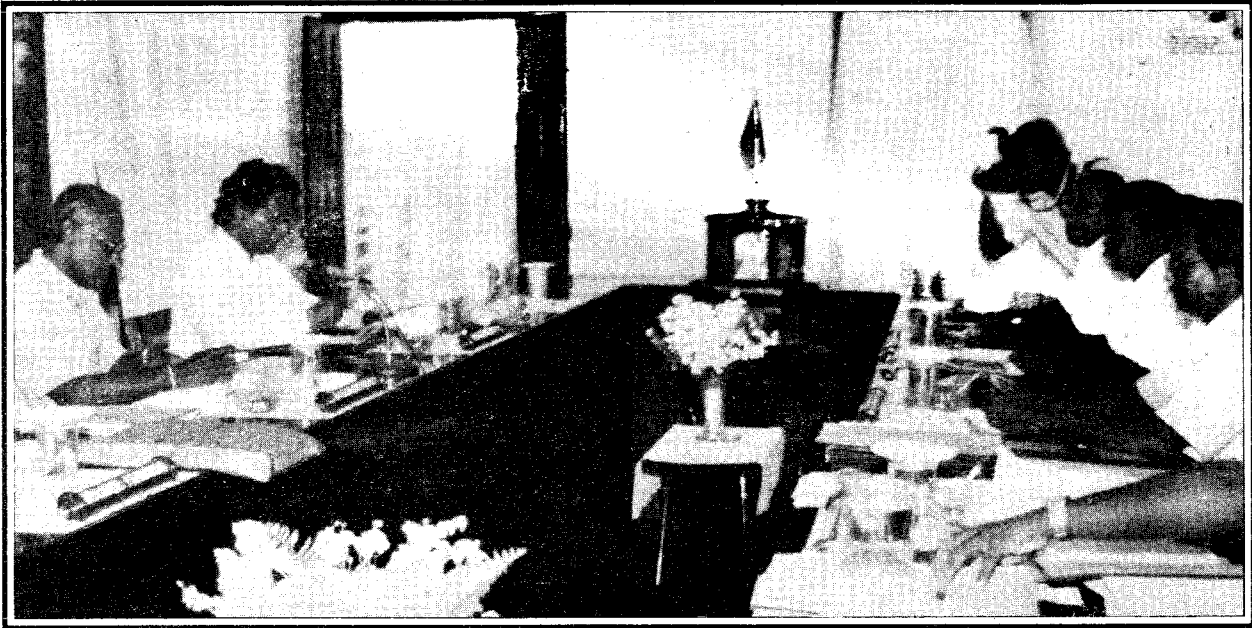
at all. . . . Localized Vigilance Committees can protect against this sort of thing. Where neighbourhoods look after themselves, but don't take the law into their hands. All they have to do is report suspicious persons, activity or objects to the authorities.

**CP:** *Any final comments on how the current crisis should be handled?*

**HG:** Well, I have recommended the formation of a War Council which is non-partisan, and where the Leader of the Opposition too is a member. In this way, the 35% of people that he represents too will be brought into the mainstream of decision-making. . . . A War Council doesn't mean that the country stops functioning. After all, activity can cease at, say, 10 pm and recommence at 4.00 am. You must cut out the tamashas and the ceremonies. There are so many people, ordinary people, who are willing to help in the

war effort, but who have not been asked to contribute their mite. For instance, I had two people who visited me during my bereavement who said that they wanted to help, one with repairing vehicles of the Forces and the other with any electrical work (he is an electrician), but they have no opportunity to do so. If you do not put the country on a war footing and enlist all the support that you can get, and have a carefully thought out plan, this war will go on for another twelve years. . . . Let me give you an example from World War 11 in England. The Queen who was then the heir to the throne was a driver with the fire brigade, I think. Each family had to give one member to the war effort. Not to the battle front, but to undertake civic jobs, like the Queen of England did. That was World War 11, and this is Eelam War 111 which is as deadly for us. 20% of our revenue budget is on defence. 30,000 civilians have died and so many soldiers. . . . 10,000 deserters is pretty high by any standard anywhere in the world, and they become lawless elements roaming the country. . . . An amnesty can help, but they may come back on their own if you put the country on a war footing and establish a plan which will end the war in a fixed timeframe. . . . I am saying all this because I have already lost one son and I have another in the Air Force. I have a greater stake in the war than others because I have two sons. And I want to know that all these Presidents and Prime Ministers and potential Army Commanders and Navy Commanders and these soldiers and civilians have not died in vain. SO if people think that I am talking out of emotion that's not true. It has nothing to do with emotion any more, it's a commitment. ■

# The use of force to share power



## Vyasa

WITH Mr Prabhakaran's fateful decision of 19 April, the question of a just and durable resolution to the ethnic conflict without the further use of force, has to be answered. The Sri Lankan government has tried war and failed and now it has tried negotiations, direct, transparent and unconditional and failed again. It is now time to use military force in the service of a generous political solution.

Indeed, the Government does not have many options and is very badly in need of a policy in the debris of Prabhakaran's decision and its own naivete. It is still committed to the peace process it initiated eight months ago and according to the Deputy Minister of Defence, it does have a plan that requires the greatest confidentiality, before it is unfolded in the near future.

Whatever the plan is, certain

factors should be clear to the Government and none is more crucial than a cogent statement of the political objectives of military force. Quite simply, the armed services and the country at large need to know what is being fought for. Without a compelling answer to that question there will be no solution to the ethnic conflict. Defeating the Tigers alone is not enough; defeating the Tigers has to be a means toward an end if it is to make sense and that end is a political solution to the ethnic conflict to which the LTTE is the principal obstacle.

Given the naivete, the lack of systematic planning and lackadaisical implementation that characterised the Government's approach to negotiations, for a period of six months at least the security forces are woefully ill-equipped to hammer the LTTE hard enough to force Mr Prabhakaran back to the negotiating table. And, that is, if this is at all possible. The

commitment to the peace process and Colonel Ratwatte's secret plan -- for that is what it is in effect -- will have to be taken on trust and good faith. It is a macabre Micawberish situation for the country to be in, but it seems to be what the Government expects of us in response to its Panglossian panacea.

In the meantime, Mr Prabhakaran will continue to wreak his deadly havoc and register daily fatalities in double figures as if it were a matter of course. With his missile capability and deadly resolve he is setting the agenda, literally calling the shots to force the Government into eventual massive retaliation as a *fait accompli*. Hell bent on soaking the President's hands in innocent civilian blood, Mr Prabhakaran is keen to establish his hegemony over the Northeast in perpetuity. According to him, he has to fight to liberate his people against successive governments, who have gleefully demonstrated their



penchant for merciless military force, as opposed to generous powersharing.

Highly debatable, even patently untrue no doubt, but all the same, badly in need of being shown up unequivocally as such. In the six or so months that Mr Prabhakaran has as his military lead time, the Government has no option but to seize the political initiative.

This also means, the principles and package of powersharing apart, that the security procedures outside the North are not conducted in a manner that is tantamount to humiliation or harassment of Tamil citizens. Basic decency and civility must be observed in dealing with law abiding citizens who accept the need for vigilance against violence. It should not be forgotten that Tiger propaganda and recruitment feeds off the spectacle of hapless civilians, manhandled and massacred, by officers of the Sri Lankan state. The state must always strive to be sensitive to the sensitivities of its citizens.

### Federalism as the way out

This columnist argued, even before the PA President initiated the peace process, that the priority and measure of success of the whole exercise had to be agreement on the principles upon which peace was to be founded. This has always meant a recognition by the government in Colombo that there is an ethnic conflict and Tamil problem and that it could only be solved by genuine powersharing through a federal system of government. Everything else could follow from this as the vital, essential core of a settlement.

Unfortunately, we never got to this in the last eight months. When the Tigers said they were ready, the Government did not seem to be and when the Government said it was, the Tigers were just not interested. Instead, they piled

precondition upon precondition, confident that the most unacceptable of them would result in the resumption of hostilities and ensure the indefinite postponement of the discussion of a political solution.

Now is the time for the Government to go public with its political package. Were the belief to still persist that Mr Prabhakaran ought to peruse the document first, it should be communicated to him with a 'respond by' date by which it will be shown to the other political parties. Once this is done, the Government will have to engage in the exercise of explaining and rallying solid support in the country for its proposals.

The package will have to be federal and there should be no equivocation on this point on account of some chauvinist bogey or some ultra-conservative vote bank that will hound the PA out of office. Let these forces, such as there exist, come up with an alternative that the country will find convincing. They should be met head on in the realisation that conflict resolution is first and foremost a political battle and like all battles, requires courage and foresight.

Federalism will have to be sold as the only mechanism of conflict resolution and the only constitutional formulation acceptable to the minorities. It is after all one of the few points of agreement bar the merger, that all Tamil groups, including the Tigers in their erstwhile shrewdly conciliatory moments, agree on.

Federalism must be sold as the constitutional framework with the best prospects of maintaining an united Sri Lanka. It must be sold as well, as a constitutional framework that ensures genuine powersharing and accordingly meets the demands for democratic checks and balances that have been so sorely lacking in our governance. The point will have

to be made and must be made, time and time again, that federalism isn't going to facilitate secession. Secession has succeeded to the point of the stultifying Tiger quasi-state, because of the obsession with the unitary state and its encapsulation of majoritarian democracy.

Finally, it is only on the basis of a federal solution that fighting the Tigers without losing civilian support in droves will be possible. It should not be forgotten that as of now no Sri Lankan government, including the present one, has offered the Tamil people anything meaningful in terms of a political or constitutional settlement of their grievances. Anyone who thinks the Thirteenth Amendment is meaningful should ask the President or read the UNP candidate's manifesto at the last Presidential Election.

### Hawks and Doves

One can envisage a chorus of protest against the above approach from both right and left, hawk and dove, on many grounds.

The hawks will argue that there is no need to risk popular support in this hour of national crisis on a political package. And as far as a federal one is concerned, they will exclaim, that to nail one's colours to the dreaded 'F word' is simply idiotic and self-destructive. All energies must be concentrated on the military effort. The Tigers can be defeated militarily. There is a military solution, if only the military are allowed to pursue it unfettered. This is a cardinal assumption of the hawks along with the thesis that there is no ethnic conflict, apart from the transparent camouflage it provides Mr Prabhakaran's drive for hegemony.

The doves will intone that it is not the time, as yet. Of course, it is to a political solution that we must travel and a federal one to boot, but there are other priorities in the

process of conflict resolution that must be first attended to. Somewhat chastened by their experience at the forefront of negotiations with Prabhakaran and his manifest disinclination to share in their belief in peace qua peace, the doves are looking, first and foremost, for a way out of war. There are good reasons too for this.

The use of force will entail civilian casualties and if the logic for the use of force is to hit Mr Prabhakaran hard to force him to the table, the greater these casualties. There is no assurance too of good behaviour on the part of the forces and no accounting for the political damage as well, that air strikes would wreak. Is it not better for the Government to investigate the prospects of a mediator and resume a dialogue with the LTTE, despite the resumption of hostilities?

The key question here, of course, is as to whether Mr Prabhakaran will agree to a resumption of negotiations. His outstanding demands are on the table and the very most the Government could concede now is to lift the embargo it reimposed in the aftermath of the resumption of hostilities. Moreover, it is unlikely that Mr Prabhakaran will consider negotiations before he has fully exploited his military advantage.

The dove position in the negotiations hinged on the argument that Mr Prabhakaran wanted peace and that if his psychological need for respect as the head of the quasi-state was fed, he would play ball according to mutually agreed ground rules. When this was dented, the argument was expanded to include the thesis that Mr Prabhakaran had to be trapped into accepting peace through negotiations.

There is a great deal of merit in this argument if it is anchored in a realistic appreciation of the LTTE *raison d'être* and *raison d'état*. The

doves unfortunately began to discover this on the job, as it were, and by then the game was going to be up, from where Mr Prabhakaran was sitting. To give the doves their due, since they were in the ascendant for the duration of the talks, they had Mr Prabhakaran trapped into talking, but were insufficiently solicitous about his determination to escape. Once he started talking, they started believing that he was doing so because he always wanted to.

The Government and the LTTE can talk about talking and fight at the same time. There is no escaping the conclusion, however, that there now has to be a military dimension to the leverage exerted to put the peace process back on the tracks. From the Government's perspective, some form of military parity will have to be restored. The Government can't be seen to be ducking the task of countering Mr Prabhakaran's missiles or being intimidated by them. Mr Prabhakaran, on the other hand, must have military objectives to secure in terms of military camps and political goals measured in civilian casualties at the hands of the government forces. Or else his unilateral decision to go to war makes no bloody sense.

The doves are as always, caught on the horns of a dilemma and if the Government were to take their position to its logical conclusion, they will be paralysed into inaction and without a policy.

### A National Consensus

The only coherent position is that of the use of force, underpinned by and in the service of a political objective. It must be one that makes sense and rings true to the civilians in the Northeast, in particular, as being in their interests and to the country at large, as being in the national interest. Therefore, there is no alternative but to fight the LTTE to establish a federal Sri Lanka.

Both the opposition UNP and the Tamil parties have to rally round the Government in this endeavour. They have to jettison fear and narrow partisan interest to achieve a truly national consensus on conflict resolution.

To this end, the President must restrain her natural impulse to lash out at her predecessors and their seventeen years of misrule. She must discipline herself to meet the profound challenge ahead. Were she to behave more like an embittered opposition politician than a statesperson, the greater the prospect of the UNP being silly as well. In this regard, the UNP proposal to move an impeachment motion against her on the grounds that her secretary negotiated under the Tiger flag, has all the makings of a puerile schoolboy attempt to get the headgirl when she is in trouble!

The position of some of the Tamil parties is unenviable, given the spectre of Tiger vengeance that haunts them. Easier said than done, but these are exceptional times. Moderate Tamil leadership must take the initiative and throw its weight, publicly, behind meaningful powersharing, if the Government is sensible and magnanimous. To be too solicitous of LTTE sensitivities and ire and to take refuge in an argument about the proper time and circumstances now, will only impede the formation of a national consensus on conflict resolution.

The time has come for a sober assessment of what should be done. Difficult questions have to be confronted, entrenched prejudices critically re-examined in terms of their contribution to conflict resolution, and fear overcome. Our conflict is unique in many ways, but it has one thing in common with all others. It is inherently political. It cannot be resolved without the people or fought for any other purpose, than their liberation. ■



# Poll indicates opening still for political settlement

THIS is a most interesting survey of public opinion at a crucial political juncture, and the nature of the districts considered would ensure that it is, if at all, skewed in favour of Sinhala respondents since the Jaffna, Vavuniya and Mannar districts have been left out. Given the obvious limitations spelled out in the survey report, therefore, this means that the general (Sinhala) public is less against the possibility of peace and a political settlement than is generally believed. A substantial of the public, it would appear from this poll, is still in favour of a negotiated peace, notwithstanding the visibility and outspokenness of the chauvinist lobby.

The change in the views held by respondents when compared over time indicates a significant decline since March 1995 in those who wish that the negotiations with the LTTE continue despite the unilateral breaking of the ceasefire by them. Even if one were to further reduce the percentage on account of the acceleration of hostilities and the increasing toll of casualties, there still remains over a fourth of the country that wishes to actively pursue a political solution. Moreover, the removal of the embargo on restricted items in January was endorsed by the respondents, contrary to what is said in the mainstream Sinhala press as general public opinion. Perhaps the most significant answer provided in the survey is in response to the question of the government's commitment and dedication vis-a-vis peace. Here 42% hold the view that the Government lacked commitment, while 49% thought that the Government acted appropriately. This implies that there was some responsibility on the part of the Government for the breakdown of the peace process; it indicates that nearly half the people

feel that there was more that could have been done at the time. On the other hand, the respondents are under no illusions as to the role of the LTTE in the process, as an overwhelming 77% felt that they were trying to deceive the Government, while only 10% thought that the LTTE was committed to peace.

In summary, then, this indicates

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**Of course, the longer the war drags on, and the greater the casualties, the less likely is this option to win public support. This poll can be read, therefore, despite its limitations of timing and scope, to be a signal that the addressing of legitimate Tamil grievances and the package of devolution is as urgent as ever before, and must not be confused with the exigencies and inevitabilities of the current conflict.**

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that the public is not entirely averse to a negotiated settlement even after the renewed outbreak of violence. Hence, the implementation of a political package cannot be as taboo as many political analysts seem to think. Even further negotiations with the LTTE, under drastically different circumstances, does not appear to be the anathema that it is held to be. Of course, the longer the war drags on, and the greater the casualties, the less likely is this option to win public support. This poll can be read, therefore, despite its limitations of timing and scope, to be a signal that the addressing of legitimate Tamil grievances and the package of devolution is as urgent as ever before, and must not be confused with the exigencies and inevitabilities of the current conflict. ■

## "Snapshot" Opinion Poll on the North-East Issue (May 1995)

THE following are the results of 5 questions from a "snapshot" Opinion Poll conducted by Research International (Pvt) Ltd (RI), regarding public opinion on the latest developments on the North-East issue. Following our islandwide (except Northern Province) poll conducted in March 1995, we decided to do this "snapshot" poll to see the trend in public opinion regarding the North-East issue after the violation of the cessation of hostilities by the LTTE on April 19, 1995.

This poll was conducted in major cities in all districts except the districts in the Northern province. In this report we analysed data in the following districts: Colombo, Kalutara, Kandy, Matale, N'liya, Galle, Hambantota, Kurunegala, Puttalam, Trincomalee, Ampara, Moneragala, Anuradhapura and Badulla.

The survey covered 618 people above 18 years of age and it consisted of 309 females. 352 people (57%) were between 18-30 years of age and 266 (43%) people over 30 years of age.

It must be noted that this is the first time that RI has attempted to do such a quick poll, and there are no previous polls to compare with to gauge the error in these results. The reader should also be cautioned that the interviews were conducted during April 28 - May 1, 1995, during which time the LTTE's first ever surface to the air missile attack on an Air Force AVRO took place, and hence the inclination of the public opinion towards a military solution may have been high during these particular days. ■

## Snapshot Opinion Poll on the North-East Issue (May 1995)

1. With regard to the conflict in the North-East, do you think the government should abandon the peace talks with the LTTE and look for a military option or continue the talks while limiting the forces to defensive operations?

	Abandon Talks and go for Military Option	Continue Talks with only defensive military actions	Other / No Answer
Percentage	57%	33%	10%

The following table a comparison of the results for the question on the type of solution that people want for the North-East issue from 4 previous polls conducted by Research International (Pvt) Ltd.

Do you think the government should defeat the LTTE at war and then negotiate with the democratic Tamil groups, or do you think they should continue negotiations with the LTTE?

	April '94	July '94	Nov '94	March '95	May '95
Continue negotiations with LTTE (political solution)	57.8%	52.1%	65.9%	53.8%	33%
First defeat them at war, then negotiate with other groups	16.1%	12.5%	21.0%	30.6%	57%
No answer	26.1%	35.4%	13.1%	15.6%	10%

2. Was the government correct in allowing the transport of essential items to the North in January of this year, in view of the ceasefire?

	Approve	Disapprove	Other/No Answer
Percentage	47%	40%	13%

3. Do you think it was correct for the government to reimpose restricted [sic] food, fuel and other essential items after the violation of the ceasefire on April 19?

	Approve	Disapprove	Other/No Answer
Percentage	71%	19%	10%

4. Do you think that there was a lack of commitment or dedication on the part of the government when conducting the peace talks, or do you think the government acted appropriately?

	Lack of commitment from the government	Government acted appropriately	Other/No Answer
Percentage	42%	49%	9%

5. Do you think the LTTE acted with real commitment to peace during the last 3 months after the commencement of the ceasefire, or did they try to deceive the government?

	LTTE was really committed to peace	LTTE was trying to deceive the government	Other/No Answer
Percentage	10%	77%	13%



THE WAR AND THE CIVILIANS (19 APRIL - 29 MAY)

# Demanding military accountability against LTTE provocation

*Public Eye*

THE recommencement of war, unforeseen only by those who persistently refused to acknowledge the LTTE for what it is, has now been with us forty days. Whatever the LTTE did was predictable and entirely unmindful of the civilians. These were in part aimed at increasing insecurity among the Tamils, by inviting reprisals, deepening Tamil-Muslim animosity and by attacking Sinhalese villages. The deadliest in the last category was the attack on traditional Sinhalese fisherfolk of Kallaru, 30 miles north of Trincomalee, in which 42 civilians were killed. As a number of analysts have been saying, what would be crucial in making this bout of war different from what has obtained over the past 12 years since early 1983, would be the ability of the state and the forces to demonstrate that they have the interests of the Tamil people at heart, and are capable of reversing the communalism with which the state has been identified for more than 40 years.

It is now 40 days into the fresh bout of war with a new PA government at the helm, and we could map out some tendencies with a view to seeing what needs to be done to minimise the proposals of deterioration and to build on positive aspects that are discernible.

If one compares these 40 days with the first 40 days of Eelam

War 2 which commenced on 11 June 1990, there is certainly much to be thankful for. During those 40 days of 1990, around 2000 Tamil civilians were massacred by the forces and the spate of massacres continued into October 1990, until the tide began to ebb. Then the East was completely paralysed, and any Tamil attempting to travel did so at great risk. Nothing approaching that has happened this time. Among the reasons for this are no doubt continual pressure brought on by the vigilance of international human rights agencies and some reappraisal within the armed forces themselves. Most of all, one must credit the political will on the part of the new government to steer away from the worst misdemeanors of the past. The previous 17 years of the UNP rule amply demonstrated that in any violence that was communally motivated, the state was the key player.

Again, it must be said that the forces did go on the rampage a number of times, and the potential for the worst excesses was continually in evidence. There were civilian fatalities of five or less on more than three occasions. One took place on 6 May when the LTTE killed five soldiers near the Muslim village of Pulmoddai 25 miles north of Trincomalee. Soldiers then went into the village and killed five civilians, including an old lady and two children. On the night of 22 May the LTTE attacked Jayanthipuram police

station, a refugee widow from Pullumalai and mother of two was killed. The following morning the police took three youths, whose dead bodies were later found. A mother who objected to the removal of her son by the police was shot dead, although her son was subsequently released. During early May in Chenkalady two youths were killed by the Army. One, a school boy who shied away from an army patrol was followed into his house and killed. The other, taking food for his father working in the fields, was shot dead by soldiers who thought him carrying food for the LTTE. Another is the case of the policemen running amok, burning huts in Pottuvil following reportedly an accidental discharge from the policeman's gun. The Army had also regularly beaten up people during routine searches around Batticaloa, and about the end of April an old lady in Batticaloa who was mistakenly shot, bled to death, because the Army was in a nasty mood and refused permission for the lady to be taken to hospital.

Despite this alarming picture, a key difference reported by Tamil MPs, is that both the service chiefs at local levels, and the Government at presidential level are readily responsive to complaints made by them. To be more specific, an MP for Batticaloa said that a boy of 18 had complained to him that he had been taken into an army post and assaulted and was willing to go before the military authorities.



The matter was taken to the Brigadier, following which an officer and some men were punished. In another instance he said that following his complaint to DIG/STF, the STF stopped the forced use of civilians for jungle clearing work near its camp in Kokkadichchola. He also said that the general practice of beating civilians during army searches that was alienating a large number of youths and been very much reduced following complaints made. A similar picture of responsiveness was given by an MP for Trincomalee. Following the home guard killings in Mutur, the DIG/Police and SP in Trincomalee had ordered a full investigation and arrest of the culprits. Following the massacre of Sinhalese fisherfolk by the LTTE in Kallaru, the same officers had instructed individual police stations to ensure that the situation remained calm and that there was no communal reprisals. Despite some immediate anxiety, the public peace was maintained. Although the forces had suffered some heavy casualties in the East, there have been no general reprisals.

The STF, which had a very bad record until 1991 had suffered 19 dead in a recent ambush, has also independently come in for some commendation. During the police rampage in Pottuvil, calm was restored by STF action. On 24 May the LTTE fired at a passenger

vehicle in Thalankuda near Batticaloa killing 2 STF men and 3 women passengers. Again no misbehaviour was reported.

The picture that emerges is therefore very much an advance over that which prevailed under the UNP regime. President Jayewardene used his forces in a brute and abrasive display of power, and seemed to derive pleasure in humiliating Tamil MPs and showing them up as powerless before their constituents. President Premadasa listened to Tamil leaders very courteously, promised action, and very little was seen to happen on the ground. At present, there is at least a measure of confidence that one could go through an MP and get some remedial action. Yet, it falls short of accountability to the ordinary civilian. This is where the danger lies. The first case given below suggests a continuation of the same tendency -- when the investigation begins to be awkward it stops. There is far too much going through an MP, through a Brigadier, a DIG or orders for a report from the President's office; too much dependent on political exigencies in Colombo and in the Parliament. It is still a far cry from individual officers in the forces, as an institution, becoming sensitive to the basic rights of civilians. There has been no systematic overhaul to change the outlook of the forces. One needs to ask, why, for

instance, did the Army start beating up civilians in Batticaloa simply because the LTTE resumed hostilities as was expected of it? For one, neither the forces nor the Government did any serious thinking to prepare for this most evident of eventualities. For the rest one needs to also question Tamil politics, the NGO sector and also the peace movement.

### Other Factors

As to the vulnerability of Tamil civilians, the Tamil politicians too have a case to answer. The TULF was in many respects, for example the political package, working closely with the PA government it supported in Parliament. But what was coming out in the public statements of some members were pro-LTTE noises with the usual hints that the main problem lay with the Sinhalese armed force and government. Even while the LTTE was brazenly going against the spirit of the ceasefire and using it, as all could very well see, to gain a position that was militarily advantageous, a leading MP stated that the main difficulties of the civilians resulted from army movements and army camps. These were far from the desires and sentiments of the ordinary people. Yet the result of the double talk would have increased the feeling among service personnel that they were being cornered from

every direction, although the game was well understood among the Southern elite.

The NGOs and others engaged in peace activity too refused in general to prepare for a fresh outbreak of war. Contrary to their grass-roots pretensions, too much capital was invested in the belief that with the right concessions the LTTE could be persuaded to talk. Little thought was given to the people, particularly in the East. With 40 days into the war hardly any group has gone into the East to obtain precise information and express solidarity by marking a presence. It only requires some of the NGOs to pool their resources and to release a few from their routine commitments. NGOs too have come a long way from the 70s when activists used bicycles and public transport. On occasions like this, even when people travel about freely, security for vehicles could act as a significant deterrent to the NGOs.

On the question of Tamil-Muslim relations again, what the LTTE would do was predictable, such as taking pot shots at Muslim home guards, as happened in Mutur. What the home guards would in turn do was predictable. The TULF leaders again enjoy excellent personal relations with their counterparts in the Muslim Congress. But their political posturing does not allow them to extend these excellent relations to their respective followings. Only this would have enabled them to discuss what needed to be done in the event of the LTTE action and take pre-emptive measures by involving the people.

### Some incidents

2 May, Karadipooval, Vellaimanal, China Bay-Alankerni Ferry Road, Trincomalee District:

Asirwatham Mariathas (Barber, police among his customers) father of four, and V. Sivalingam (Fisherman), father of one, were

taken from their homes at 2.00 am by men who came in an official vehicle. Neighbours identified abductors as Air Force Personnel from a camp nearby. Complaint made by the respective wives Mehala and Umadevi to A. Thangathurai MP, who in turn raised it with SP/Trincomalee. Latter promised to have detainees released. Mariathas as it turned out was well known to the Police and had good relations with them. **Action taken: Not known, Results: to date, nil.**

20 May, Mutur, Trincomalee District: LTTE shot dead Karim, a Muslim home guard. Other home guards subsequently stopped Tamil civilians between Mutur and Kattaiparichchan, several of whom managed to run away. The following three were killed: Pakiarajah Ravindran of Kattaiparichchan, Alagiah Thambirajah of Sampur and K. Nagarajah of Pachchanoor refugee camps. A. Thangathurai MP who visited Mutur said that press reports in the *Virakesari* that a further 24 civilians are missing could not be substantiated. No one is missing from the villages neighbouring Mutur, he added. But confirmation from villages further interior from where persons regularly come to Mutur on business, would take some days. On the basis of representations made, he said the SP/Trincomalee has ordered ASP/Mutur to conduct a full investigation and apprehend the culprits. **Results: not yet known.**

23 May, Jayanthipuram, Batticaloa: Incident related above.

The three youths whose bodies were found after being taken by the police are: Nadarajah Pararajasingam (21), Ravi Ragunathan (20) and Rasiah Mariathas (37). Upali Hewage, the police chief in Batticaloa had said that the first named was an LTTE helper, so-called 'leader for Mamangam', who had led a supposedly pro-LTTE

demonstration. Joseph Pararajasingam, MP said that following complaints made, 2 platoons of policemen were transferred out of Batticaloa.

This together with the case of killing by the Army of two boys in Chenkalady, shows that although the new government is publicly committed to the rule of the law, the substance of impunity remains.

### Colombo District

Here too the harassment of Tamil civilians in the name of security checks often takes on nightmare proportions. Even the most irresponsible anonymous tip-off is acted upon, causing great inconvenience to many Tamils in the city. A hurriedly drawn sketch map, given to a newcomer to the city, indicating the shortest route from Liberty Plaza to Union Place resulted in a youth being in custody for one week, which lost him his job. In some cases no female officers have been on hand to frisk the young women rounded up on suspicion, who are, then, subjected to the indignity of a body search by men, as in the Maradana Police Station in early May. For instance, 200 Tamils were arrested in a round-up in Pettah on May 3, of whom 75 were young women. The women complained of manhandling, even slight torture, while 2 of them were detained without even the most basic of amenities. In fact, the females had to spend the night with the men who were detained.

In general, the modus operandi of security personnel is designed to cause the maximum aggravation and pain of mind. The crucial question posed is "Are you Sinhala or Tamil?" the answer to which determines whether a search will be conducted in earnest or not. The horrendously simple dictum, "Don't trust a Tamil, living or dead", comprises the totality of instructions given to those who man checkpoints or conduct searches/round-ups. ■



# Could the Talks have Taken a Different Tack?

*Ram Manikkalingam*

WHAT could the government and the Tigers have done differently to keep the peace process going?

In the case of the Tigers there is simply one thing. Assuming they wanted peace, they could have continued negotiating and not violated the cessation of hostilities. If it is clear to any political novice that the PA Government needed peace politically and economically, it must be clear to the Tigers. Moreover, even if the PA Government was reluctant about peace, it was the duty of the Tigers, who claim to represent the interests of the Tamil people, to go that extra mile to achieve it. After all, can there be any doubt the Tamil people want peace?

The Government could have done three things differently. First they could have ignored the Tigers and taken a series of unilateral steps that addressed the problems of the Tamil people. These steps could have begun with the lifting of the embargo, continued with the transport of food and medicine, and eventually led to the unveiling of a political package and its eventual passage through Parliament and a referendum.

All of this could have been done without communicating a single word to the Tigers. At this point, the Government could have sent the package to the Tigers for their consideration and begun negotiations for peace. These negotiations would have been from a position of political and military strength. The government was doing best when it was setting

and following its own agenda.

Second, even if the Government had to negotiate with the LTTE, they could have avoided a cessation of hostilities. By the time the cessation of hostilities agreement was signed on January 8th, hostilities were at a very low level. This trend could have been maintained without formalising it with an agreement. Thus neither party could have used the military situation on the ground to enhance their bargaining positions. Ultimatums about breaking ceasefires would be irrelevant in the context of negotiations without ceasefires, so would the final Tiger demands -- the removal of Pooneryn and the presence of armed Tigers in the East -- that led to the collapse of the peace process. Moreover, many ordinary Tamil civilians in the East were strongly opposed to a ceasefire because they knew from past experience that they would be the first victims of its collapse.

There would have been considerable pressure to enter into a ceasefire. After all, the argument would go, how can you have a peace process without a ceasefire (ignoring the fact there have been a number of cases, including El Salvador, where it was the political negotiations that paved the way for a comprehensive peace and not vice versa).

Thirdly, if the government was compelled to agree to a ceasefire, they could have still released the political package early on. The ideal moment for this was the policy statement to Parliament on January 6th. The Government could have withheld the details for negotiations with the LTTE,

while presenting the outlines of the political package. At the very least, it could have used the words federalism and merger, and there would have been no backlash at that time. Polling data suggests that in March more than 50% of Sinhalese supported merger, while a far greater percentage supported federalism.

Unfortunately, the Government succumbed to the view that even revealing an outline of the package without first giving the LTTE the opportunity to examine it, would be considered unfriendly in the context of ongoing negotiations. And since the Tigers were not ready to consider a political package, it could not be revealed. Once the Government agreed to negotiate, to ceasefire and to wait for the LTTE to discuss a political package, it foreclosed all other political options. Instead of a broad political program, the peace process then became confined to talks with the LTTE.

## The Balance Sheet

Where do the two parties stand politically and militarily now that the peace talks have collapsed and war has resumed? It is clear that all the Tiger's gains are military ones, while all the governments gains are political.

The Tigers will now try to translate their military advantages on the ground into political advantages internationally, among the Tamil people and at the negotiating table, if talks ever begin again. The Government will seek to turn its political advantage, internationally and with the Tamil

people, into military advantages on the ground that can either cripple the Tigers and/or force them to the negotiating table.

Militarily, the Tigers re-infiltrated the East (but with nowhere near the same control they had in 1990). They recruited new cadres and trained them. They had three months to rest and regroup. And they acquired newer and more sophisticated weapons (SAMs). All of these are important military advantages, though it is unlikely they will be able to alter the military balance on the ground in any significant way. The East will continue to be a contested area with the army having the upper hand. The North will continue to be primarily in the hands of the Tigers.

Politically, the Government has completely turned around the position of the international community. The Tigers have now taken the place of the Sri Lankan Government in the international doghouse. The government has maintained support for peace in the South despite severe provocation by the Tigers, including the massacres of innocent Sinhala villagers and the killing of the Dimbulagala monk. And most importantly they have created a crack in the Tamil support for the Tigers.

If this crack is pried open, it can lead to pressure on the Tigers to negotiate a settlement or lead to their political isolation. If the crack cannot be pried open, the Tigers will continue to have the political power to wage a bloody war indefinitely. Whether or not the government succeeds in prying open this crack, depends on how the government handles two immediate dangers.

### Twin Dangers

First, despite the government's commitment to peace, it may be compelled to revert back to militarism and Sinhala

nationalism to confront the Tiger threat. This is because the government is being dragged into a war for which it is politically and militarily ill-prepared, and may be tempted to go down the path of least resistance. Second the government may find it easier to shelve or dilute its proposals for powersharing with the Tamils, now that hostilities have begun, rather than take up the challenge of mobilising Sinhala support for it.

The first danger can only be addressed by ensuring the basic rights of civilians in the Northeast

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*Whether President Kumaratunge likes it or not, Tamils in the North and East will judge her sincerity based on the behaviour of the Army, the STF and the Police. The Tigers know this only too well, and will try their very best to provoke the Armed Forces into retaliatory attacks.*

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are protected in the midst of war. As far as Tamil civilians in the war zones are concerned, the only representative of the state they come into contact with is the soldier. Whether President Kumaratunge likes it or not, Tamils in the North and East will judge her sincerity based on the behaviour of the Army, the STF and the Police. The Tigers know this only too well, and will try their very best to provoke the Armed Forces into retaliatory attacks. As Commander in Chief, President Kumaratunge will have to ensure the armed forces are carefully monitored. Officers and men who engage in egregious acts of violence must be punished. Those who deal with civilian problems in a sympathetic and understanding manner must be rewarded. To ensure that civilians

are protected, monitoring committees that include the commanding officers of the area, government officers, NGOs and citizens must be set up with formal authority. Their reports and concerns must be taken into consideration when carrying out operations.

The reports from the East so far are mixed. While the number of civilian casualties has been small when compared with past operations, there is little doubt that abuses continue to occur. Three main incidents that come to mind are the burning of Tamil homes by the Police in Pottuvil, the killing of three Muslim civilians in Arafatnagar and the shooting of three civilians at Jayanthipuram. In Pottuvil, the Police went on a rampage, but the Special Task Force rushed to the scene, fired in the air and forced the police to return to the police station. In the Jayanthipuram incident, the officer concerned was transferred pending an inquiry. It is critical the armed forces act swiftly and openly to deal with transgressors.

The second danger can only be addressed by initiating a political campaign in support of a political package of devolution for the Tamil people. The President must argue that devolving power to the Tamil people is part of her program of peace, prosperity and democracy. Thus the constitutional reforms can include the changes in the Presidential system, the transformation of the electoral system and the devolution of power to the Tamil people. No doubt Sinhala extremists will argue the President has a mandate for peace, not one to devolve power (as if peace is possible with the centralisation of power).

It is only by addressing these twin dangers forcefully and confidently that the PA government can engage the entire country in a peace process that will marginalise Sinhala and Tamil extremists. ■

# Why did the Peace Process fail?

*Wg, Cdr. Mark Seneviratne. Retd*

AROUND mid 1991, an year after Eelam Two War had begun, *Frontline* a South Indian magazine, described details of a proposed peace process between the Government and the LTTE. That peace plan, evidently initiated in India, was programmed for a 100 day peace negotiation, followed by a 180 day Provincial administration of the North-East province during which time necessary amendments would be effected to the Sri Lankan Constitution. Next was to be a sixty day period wherein elections were to be held for the Provincial Council, and finally the installation of the North-East Provincial Council, tentatively fixed for 15th May 1992.

The first 30th day of the 100 day of peace negotiations were earmarked for the settling of preliminaries and modalities. It was to be initiated by President Premadasa inviting the LTTE for peace talks, and followed by both declaring a cessation of hostilities. That was to be followed by a Negotiator, accepted by both parties, conveying to the LTTE, the Government's documented proposals for the North and East. Those proposals were to have included an expanded provincial lists, proposals for a provincial police force, the absorption of the LTTE cadres into the armed forces and police, the vesting of land in the Provincial Council, as well as all financial arrangements.

By the 20th day, the negotiator was to have obtained the LTTE's response to the Government's proposal, and if favorable, negotiations would have begun

on day 31. Meanwhile on day 26, both sides would have declared a ceasefire.

The first 30 day round of peace negotiations, scheduled to begin on day 31, was to have included discussions on devolution, etc. The next 30 day round of negotiations was to be centred round the Provincial Councils, elections, restoration of normalcy etc. During the final ten day round of peace negotiations, the Government and the LTTE were to make their separate draft Agreement prior to moving on to arriving at a common agreement. The President was to have met the LTTE leader on the 98th day and on the last day, they were both to sign the agreement.

Unfortunately, however, the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi had prevented that peace plan being implemented. The concept, the approach and the programming of that peace process was evidently highly professional. Emotion, sentimentality and suchlike were conspicuous by the absence. It was a businesslike programme for a peace process, just what it should have been.

Professionalism was however something lacking in that peace process of the P.A. Government and as such, it could not possibly be described in terms similar to those of the proposed peace negotiations in 1991, because in this peace process, the major factor was seen to be emotion and to a lesser extent, headline-seeking. The emotion was evident even after the peace process had been sent to the rocks at Trincomalee, when the Government in denouncing the International Eelam Lobby propaganda explaining the LTTE's action,

stated that, "As an earnest of the President's and the Government's sincerity of purpose in this regard, the Government has itself embarked upon a course of action aimed at resolving the physical hardships suffered by the Tamil community in the Jaffna peninsula....."

Unfortunately, however, that earnest of the President's and sincerity of purpose of the Government, turned out to be the only feature in the eight month long peace process. Hardly anything else was achieved other than, using the government's very words, "lifting the embargo placed by the previous regime on a wide range of consumer items; supplying urgently needed food, medical supplies and fuel also placed by the previous regime."

Perhaps initially the Government's intention may have been to collect more votes. Then the President's unprecedented majority at the Presidential elections as well as the effusive enthusiasm with which her personally nominated peace delegation to Jaffna was received, possibly lured Mrs Kumaratunga to become more emotionally involved in the peace process, and thus further release banned goods to the North. She should, however, have known that emotion does not score at all when dealing with guerrilla and liberation groups.

That became evident when the Tiger pounced on that manifested weakness, and decided to get the most they could get out of it by using the northern people's day-to-day difficulties as a ploy to feed the emotion already set rolling by the President. This could be seen in the LTTE's Political Committee statement, issued in London after



breakdown in the peace process, saying that, "When the peace process talks begun, it was understood that priority would be given to the human needs of the peoples in the North...In fact the initiative for the agenda in the talks came from the government itself" (the emphasis is mine). There lay one major weakness which contributed to the collapse of the peace talks.

It is very unlikely that the Government would have created any worthwhile degree of confidence among the LTTE, in the Government, which element is no doubt a *Sine Qua Non* for the success of any peace process. The Government could possibly not have done so considering the statements made by the President both internationally and nationally. For instance, she has told one of her foreign interviewers that Prabhakaran could not be extradited to India because the Government could not apprehend him. That would not have in any way been reassuring to the top Tiger nor the other Tigers, because they were already involved in a peace process which if successful would have required Prabhakaran to meet the Government.

At the same interview Mrs Kumaratunga had also compared the LTTE with the PLO as a basis for her assertion that the peace process would succeed. The top Tigers would no doubt have been bemused and reflected on how little she had prepared herself for the peace talks. The inadequacy of the President's preparation for such a serious matter as peace talks, was also seen in her claim to a large assemblage of SLFPers that LTTE ideologue Balasingham's statement that they were prepared to drop their claim for an Eelam in favour of extensive devolution, was the biggest victory so far in her government's march for peace. Obviously the Sorbonne educated lady had not done her homework because she evidently was not

aware that in June 1986, prior to the Indo-Lanka discussions on the Unit of devolution, Balasingham had told his interviewer Bagwan R Singh of THE WEEK, "...if a framework is worked out to meet the political aspirations of our people and if it is endorsed through a referendum, then we are prepared to reconsider our basic position -- the demand for Eelam."

No small wonder then that the LTTE kept on through those eight months only demanding more and more for their people, because they could not have gained any confidence in the success of the peace process, because of such statements from the Government. But that however was not all of Mrs Kumaratunga's display of a lack of knowledge of the Tigers and the Tamil people. In early March she claimed that, "the people in the North are already on our side whatever the LTTE do. We have won their hearts and minds." What a laugh that would have provided the Tigers!

For years the Tamils have been distrustful of the Sinhalese governments. That is known to us and also, that the older ones in the North have been convinced while the younger ones have been brainwashed that the Tamils have been oppressed, tortured, raped and massacred, and their property destroyed, by successive Sinhalese governments and their security forces, for no other reason than that they were Tamils. In most of those years it has been the LTTE that they have looked upon as their saviours. And into such a scenario come the P.A. Government, who lifts the economic embargo on the north and expects those people to forget their inherent distrust of the Sinhalese government as well as the horrible things that had been done by them, to drop the LTTE like hot potatoes and to give their hearts and minds to the government! The LTTE's cynicism if such naivete was expressed in

their statement on the disrupted peace process, which they stated, "One can understand a ruling party trying to woo the Tamil people over the heads of the liberation movement, fighting for their rights. It can be a useful ploy worth attempting..."

To cap it all, after the peace process had been shattered, Mrs Kumaratunga declared at Matara, that the Government will achieve peace, with or without the LTTE. That may have sounded ridiculous to many people because it had been the President herself who just a few months earlier had replied her foreign interviewer's questions, "...But you feel that the LTTE should be the principal intermediary in the peace process? Is there no other way out, in terms of relying on the people in the north themselves?" with, "Tell us any other way out. We need to see the possibility". Also later in that interview she said, "Yes, but to make the package work we have to first go in with the LTTE's agreement. They are in total control of that part of the country..." and also, "The basic premise is that we are the government; we are the government of the entire country; but whether we like it or not, there is another group of people who are in physical control of one part of the country for which we are the government".

And yet Mrs Kumaratunga claimed at Matara that her government will achieve peace with or without the LTTE! Unless what she meant that she would go far to achieve peace, how much confidence in her government would such a statement engender in the LTTE, the people in the North, and even in the International community?

From even before the inception of the peace process the government spoke of, what appeared to be a predetermined solution of extensive devolution or the people of the North. One

would have imagined from that, that the ethnic war had begun because the people of the North did not enjoy extensive devolution and not yet because they had been discriminated against, and oppressed for many years without any hope of redress. Most of us however know that it was the latter that caused the ethnic conflict. The LTTE themselves confirmed it in their Political Programme where they stated, "The history of the Freedom struggles of the oppressed people of the world shows that revolutionary armed resistance as a radical mode of political struggle arises when non-violent, peaceful forms of political agitations are violently repressed. When Constitutional paths are blocked, when the oppressor shows callous disregard to the legitimate aspirations of the oppressed and to the spiritual and human values underlying non-violent struggles. The Tamil nationalist independence struggle underwent a similar historical course."

The Government should therefore have first addressed itself to satisfying the basic aspirations of the Tamils, by redressing their grievances which are claimed by them were:-

- a. The Tamil language not being brought on par with Sinhala, both by legislation and implementation,
- b. The Standardisation laws for entry into Universities,
- c. Denial of equal opportunity to Tamil in education and employment,
- d. State aided aggressive colonisation of Tamil land
- e. Isolation Tamil areas from national and economic development projects,
- f. Permitting and unleashing communal violence against Tamil like those in 1956, 1958, 1961, 1974, 1977, 1979, 1981 and in July 1983,
- g. Terrorising, torturing and imprisoning Tamil youth,

h. Giving Buddhism a foremost place under the Constitution

i. Imposing unacceptable Constitutions and Conditional clauses on the Tamils.

Should the government have redressed those Tamil grievances before getting on to other stages of the peace process, and maybe after the initial lifting of the 28 banned items, they would surely have won the goodwill, support and acceptance, not only of the Tamils in the north and east, but also of the Tamils elsewhere in the country, and of course of the

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*Even in this matter of hearts and minds, the government badly misjudged the psyche of the people in the North, and so embarked upon a scheme to steal their hearts and minds for the LTTE, rather than essentially winning their hearts and minds. Stealing them would intrinsically have been aimed at putting the people against the LTTE.*

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International Community too. By failing to do that, and instead going for a devolution package, the government continued to let the distrust of the Tamil people in the Sinhalese governments remain, thereby enhancing the chances of the peace process failing.

Even in this matter of hearts and minds, the government badly misjudged the psyche of the people in the North, and so embarked upon a scheme to steal their hearts and minds for the LTTE, rather than essentially winning their hearts and minds. Stealing them would intrinsically have been aimed at putting the people against the LTTE. But no one with a knowledge of guerrillas and liberation movements would have tried such a thing by using remote controlled methods such as lifting

embargoes, radio and press propaganda, because they would have seen the futility of it.

The Government should have embarked upon a direct campaign to win hearts and minds of the people in the North, and thus be in a position to persuade them to influence or even pressurise the LTTE, to get on to discussing the political solution. That the Government had only aimed at stealing the hearts and minds of the people from the LTTE became quite evident when it promptly reimposed the economic embargo and the ban on fishing, after the LTTE breached the cessation of hostilities. That unfortunately was indicative of the Government not really caring about the sufferings of the people in the North.

We could now see that the collapse of the peace process was inevitable. In fact it could have been seen from the time the LTTE leadership asked the President to refrain from uttering statements of mistrust.

It would have been normal for the LTTE, just like other guerrilla and liberation groups, to have constantly felt threatened, because they were pitted against the entire gamut of the government and its superior advantages. To that was added gradually, the Government's getting the International community in support of its peace effort. That would naturally have made the Tigers' feeling threatened, even more ominous. In such a situation however, if the Government had done everything possible to allay those fears, the peace process may have still been in progress. But as we have seen, the Government by their statements and attitude, only contradicted those fears of the Tigers.

It was in that context, not surprising when the LTTE, acting characteristically and naturally, broke the agreement to cease hostilities, before the threat that they perceived could overwhelm them. ■

# DEJA VU? Not really

## *A Special Correspondent*

ARMY camps and police stations under attack across the eastern province, as hundreds are killed within the space of a few weeks. Last ditch efforts to rescue peace talks continue as the fighting begins to escalate. Each side



blames the other for not being serious about peace, as the country -- after a brief respite -- prepares for another resumption of war.

That was June 1990 -- and at first sight, not a lot seems to have changed in the last five years. But make no mistake, this is a new phase in the north-eastern conflict, not a return to square one.

Five years ago Ranjan Wijeratne was promising to wipe the "Baby Brigade" off the face of the earth in

a matter of weeks. Fresh from his role in the crushing of the JVP, he probably sincerely believed his own rhetoric. The Kumaratunga government, on the other hand, is trying to be more sophisticated in its approach, even after its peace overtures seem to have been rejected.

It is far more difficult to wage peace than to wage war, and the choices the government makes in the coming weeks will reveal a lot about its true intentions. It has to mix its military and political responses carefully, and overcome the inevitable accusations that it has simply been naive in its

been an inaccurate perception in Colombo that the international community is somehow excessively sympathetic to the LTTE. That's never really been the case, but the actions of the Sri Lankan military in attacking civilians in the past has coloured the international response.

Since the latest resumption of hostilities by the LTTE, though, the international community has come down firmly in the government's favour. From Washington and London, from Delhi and Canberra, have come statements of admiration for the Kumaratunga government's peace efforts.

That's one reason why the Government must ensure that it is seen to clamp down quickly on any excesses, whether committed by soldiers or politicians. No one should need reminding that events such as the burning down of Tamil



dealings with the LTTE.

The Government has certainly scored points with two vital constituencies -- the international community, and Tamil civilians caught in the conflict. There's long

shops in Galle are a gift for the LTTE propaganda machine.

The second important shift in perception is that, for perhaps the first time since before 1983, large sections of the Tamil community -



-in the North and East as well as in the south -- believe that the government of the day is interested in a genuine political solution. The rapturous welcome accorded to government peace negotiators who visited Jaffna was one visible symbol of that feeling.

Those are changes for the better. What hasn't changed, it seems, is the attitude of the LTTE, especially that of Vellupillai Prabhakaran. Take a look at the few published interviews the LTTE leader has granted over the years. The language hasn't changed a bit. Leave the short term manoeuvring to others is the message, Prabhakaran the purist is still going for gold.

The problem with the Tiger leadership is that it continues to suffer from an extreme form of bunker mentality. It doesn't seem to have realised -- or perhaps it knows, but doesn't care -- that the world outside the Jaffna peninsula has changed.

The one senior Tiger leader who broke free to some extent from this collective paranoia was Kittu -- who committed suicide in 1993 to avoid capture by the Indian Navy as he tried to return to Jaffna. His enforced absence from the country had given him a perspective which those holed up in the peninsula still notably lack.

In that respect, India's formal request at the beginning of June for the extradition of Prabhakaran and others is a bitter-sweet moment. The extradition request is another encouraging sign for the Sri Lankan government of how isolated the LTTE has become internationally, but it will also make eventual negotiations more difficult. What, it may be argued, has Prabhakaran possibly got to gain from peace?

Given all these factors, how should the Government now proceed? Clearly there has to be a continuing military response of some kind. Fighting force with force is perhaps the only language the LTTE understands, and the

offensives against Tiger camps in the eastern jungles are the most logical way to begin.

But the military campaign must be carefully considered. Remember the strategy outlined by the late General Denizil Kobbekaduwa. Don't take the fight into built up areas, he argued, but continue a hearts and minds campaign (real not just rhetorical) to win the trust of civilians.

If the LTTE wants to fight, fight them in the jungles -- try to isolate and destroy. An offensive against Jaffna might seem to be an attractive proposition at this stage, but it could well be counter-productive. For one thing, it would destroy any notion among civilians in Jaffna of a government which is "on our side". Secondly, it might encourage the feeling among armchair strategists in the South that there is a purely military solution to this conflict. There isn't.

That's why, at the risk of sounding repetitive, the distinction must be publicly drawn again and again between the LTTE and the civilian population. The basis of the Government's strategy has to remain political -- and that means publishing the details of its political package as soon as possible. No more excuses, no more delays.

One of Prabhakaran's greatest strengths has always been absence of a viable alternative. Producing a courageous political package doesn't mean giving in to the LTTE. It means giving hope to a civilian community which has seen normal life turned upside down for more than a decade. That sense of hope would be a more powerful weapon against LTTE intransigence than any amount of new military equipment. It would begin to destroy their power base from within.

As with any controversial political proposal, there are bound to be parts which people don't like. But President Kumaratunga needs to have the courage of her

convictions. Far better to have Sri Lankans arguing about the real issues, than to let rumour and innuendo dominate political discourse.

Of course, the package needs to be sold as carefully in the South as it is in the North. But it should be done positively and enthusiastically, not apologetically. People need to be reminded over and over again about what could be achieved -- for the whole country's benefit -- with the billions of rupees which are being spent on the war.

Above all, the Government mustn't be scared off by linguistics. Use the F word. Federal. It doesn't hurt. And it's about time to dispense with the absurd notion that a federal constitution would somehow destroy the concept of the Sri Lankan state. There's been far too much reliance on distorted mythology on both sides of this argument for far too long.

One more point. The only realistic solution at the moment is one which includes the LTTE. That may seem a deeply unpalatable prospect; but look around the world at Israel and the PLO, or Britain and the IRA -- it can happen, although no one should pretend it is easy. The challenge will be to tempt the Tigers to enter the political process. Once that happens, the LTTE will either have to change radically, or face self-destruction.

So, despite the disappointments of the past few months, the political initiative remains with President Kumaratunga. On the ethnic issue she has emerged as the most formidable challenge to the status quo -- in the North and South -- since the conflict began.

Chandrika still has a chance to move decisively away from the policies of the past. Will she prove to be a true stateswoman, prepared to go the extra mile for peace? Or will she become just the latest victim of Sri Lanka's destructive political paralysis? Only time will tell. ■

# Sustaining the gains of the peace process

Rajan Hoole

WITH the resumption of war, the enthusiasm built up for the peace in the South stands in danger of giving way to despair. On the other hand the Tamils in the North-East who are voiceless in the matter brace themselves to be crushed between Tiger machinations on one side, and the irrational anger and moronic predictability of the Sri Lankan Forces, extremely adept at dancing to the Tigers' tune, on the other. Also unhelpful has been the confusion created about the nature of the LTTE, calculatedly by a Tamil elite lobby, and also by a section among peace activists willing to take the bait. All of a sudden we were being treated to a series of claims which should have normally looked bizarre -- viz. the suggestion that the Tamils wanted Peace with Democracy was obscene and opportunistic; Despite their struggle over decades for a political solution what the Tamils now wanted was a normalization of flow of materials into Jaffna, etc. While tardiness on the part of the Government was being highlighted as bad faith, not so the warlike preparations of the LTTE, including extortion and virtual conscription. When purely military demands were also pressed, such as the removal of the Pooneryn camp, acknowledging the right for LTTE cadre to move about in the East with arms and the right to fish near naval establishments, the obvious implication was often missed.

The Peace Process was a necessary and courageous step, to open up minds, to establish the

Government's bona fides, and to take the issues to the people. The Government was also right to insist that the LTTE come for talks on the political package. If not, it would have been a long picnic followed by disaster. Now, to begin with, there should be no confusion about the LTTE and the moral bankruptcy of the social order that has mushroomed under its regime.

## Liberation through Child Snatching

When we were little children in Jaffna, our elders and teachers used to tell us: "Do not loiter about after school, go straight home"; "Beware of strangers who stop you on the road", "Do not accept lifts in vehicles of strangers" and so on. We are told that there were wicked folk who caught children, put them in sacks and took them away to be sacrificed to certain gods or to be

that brought any comfort, and then give up. If they traced the child to a camp, they were often told not to become traitors to the cause.

Among the senior boys recruitment is often something of a joke. They may laughingly tell the recruiters to try their luck with the juniors. During the ceasefire, an A Level boy in a leading school in a government-controlled area went a step further. While having no intention of joining himself, he tried to recruit some juniors. On one occasion he beat up four ten-year-olds who refused to join. The parents of the latter then went to his parents and shouted at them, and then reported the matter to the Principal. Now, the LTTE has left, the senior boy continues in school and the Principal is faced with getting into trouble whether he takes disciplinary action or not.

One might instinctively regard this senior boy with the strongest

*In turn, the LTTE's apologists .... expect the world to give them the indulgence of seeing sense in their explanation that the Tamils were forced to resume the war because the Government was slow in sending unbanned items such as petrol. They must also answer whether going to war will solve this problem of materials or help the people in any way; whether it is a cause over which one is justified in throwing away the lives of other people's children who could hardly know what they are doing; and whether it is a cause for which they would use their own children.*

used in magical rituals or potions. In recent times, teachers who gave such advice had been pulled up by the authorities. Children are stopped on the streets, 'persuaded' to join the struggle and are whisked away without a trace. All that the parents could do was to shout at the school authorities, if

contempt. Yet, on the other hand, that is a good description of how the Tamil social hierarchy operates, under the paralysis induced and sustained by the LTTE. Everything adds up to a huge child-catching machine -- whether it is speeches made by senior dons on Tiger platforms,

whose children are exempt; Bishop Savundaranayagam of Jaffna turning a blind eye on the systematic strangling of common morality and piously pronouncing the LTTE's position that what Tamils want first is not Democratic Rights, but Fundamental Rights (meaning the easing of material restrictions by the Government, but not those, including restrictions on travel by the LTTE); Fr. Emmanuel, Vicar General of Jaffna, claiming that the new resort to war was a step the Tamil people, collective, were forced to take; Dr Sathanathan railing that Peace with Democracy was an opportunistic slogan to divide the Tamils from the Tigers, and speaking glibly about "the LTTE's successful armed resistance and the sacrifices of the Tamils"; or "Ananthi" of the BBC Tamil Service who has allowed the listeners few hints of the reality in Jaffna, but has allowed LTTE spokesmen long slots to read out tutorial answers over the BBC.

Such cold callousness towards their own people has become a career compulsion of some. The nurture and well-being of children is the most fundamental concern of any society and of any parent. How can a force which institutionally adopts such a deceitful approach to children so as to play with their life and limb, while denying basic accountability to parents, be even remotely identified as leaders and representatives of the people? This is, moreover, accomplished behind a phenomenon of repression and torture, showing that human rights are far from abstract. In the name of his Tamil heritage Fr. Emmanuel appears to even find theological justification for the cult of suicide — not of himself but of other people's children amidst moral emptiness, meaninglessness and often despair.

I ask those legitimizing the LTTE, some of whom I have named

above, to write in and say if I am lying, and if then, say what the reality is. Obviously, their moral choices have been made.

whether going to war will solve this problem of materials or help the people in any way; whether it is a cause over which one is

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*Being a very efficient organisation, the Bishop suggested, the LTTE found it difficult to understand the slowness at this end. If the reality was not convincing enough then, subsequent events have made it much clearer that this was a gross misjudgement about the nature of the LTTE. One need not be a sophisticated intellectual, just a modicum of moral judgement should enable one to differentiate between friendly hand-shaking individuals and the institutional nature of the LTTE. Moreover, the church and the NGOs have had access to an enormous amount of material about the LTTE which they have no excuse for not taking into account, and no excuse for judging moral issues.*

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The LTTE with its powerful institutional links with the international underworld is already geared in a certain direction. It can get its weaponry, but is trapped in its choices, trapped in its rhetoric, trapped in the Eelam notion drummed into recruits, trapped in the emotions of a surviving cadre who believe the dead died for Eelam, and trapped in the karma of mass murder.

But because of the disillusionment it has created, the one thing it cannot get are recruits who are healthy, mature and willing. It, therefore, is forced to put away the last vestiges of a mask of benevolence and become virtual child-catchers. Torture can be hidden away and done in secret places in the dead of the night. But not so with what amounts to child-catching. In turn, the LTTE's apologists too are compelled to uncover their masks and soar to new levels of insanity. They expect the world to give them the indulgence of seeing sense in their explanation that the Tamils were forced to resume the war because the Government was slow in sending unbanned items such as petrol. They must also answer

justified in throwing away the lives of other people's children who could hardly know what they are doing; and whether it is a cause for which they would use their own children.

Those like Bishop Kenneth Fernando and others whose judgements have influenced the role of the NGOs and churches in the search for peace have also some explaining to do. For this is not the last time they are going to make judgements. The Bishop in a television interview was close to saying that had the goods in the North been sent speedily the war could have been averted. Being a very efficient organisation, the Bishop suggested, the LTTE found it difficult to understand the slowness at this end. If the reality was not convincing enough then, subsequent events have made it much clearer that this was a gross misjudgement about the nature of the LTTE. One need not be a sophisticated intellectual, just a modicum of moral judgement should enable one to differentiate between friendly hand-shaking individuals and the institutional nature of the LTTE. Moreover, the church and the NGOs have had access to an enormous amount of



material about the LTTE which they have no excuse for not taking into account, and no excuse for fudging moral issues.

As for the LTTE, it is a phenomenon that by its own nature cannot find rest until it destroys itself, as was said most powerfully by Rajani Thiranagama in *The Broken Palmyrah*; The challenge now is to save the Tamil people from the fate envisaged for them by the LTTE, as far back as Yogi's May Day speech of 1987.

### The Challenge

There may be little immediate prospect of ending the war. Yet, the mass movements which came to life during the peace process have an important role to play. Organisations like the LTTE which are lacking in any liberating outlook thrive purely on the alienation of the people. That is also their weakness. The causes of alienation have been long understood. But the pace of change has been slow and indecisive. Tackling the causes of alienation requires a more activist approach. Take a few issues like the humiliating manner in which Tamils are detained and questioned in Colombo; the renewed beating or worse of civilians, who had no choice in dealing with the LTTE, by the forces in the East; and the hideous shame of Welioya which is as unfair by the Tamil civilians evicted as by the Sinhalese civilians cornered and settled there. The Government knows all these extremely well, but has its own short-term compulsions. Little is going to be done without activist pressure and exposure. I have heard some good ideas from



thoughtful activists, such as, insisting that Tamils in Colombo taken for questioning should be brought to community centres, and not police stations, and questioned by officers in civil with voluntary social and religious workers being present in shifts to see to their welfare. I have also heard suggestions about maintaining hot lines to the East and some reliable channels with the North, so that in the event of misbehaviour by the farces, statements could be quickly made and the authorities taken to account. When it comes to the forces, the Government cannot be trusted to do the right thing. On

11th October 1994, two days before the first peace talks, in response to an LTTE provocation, the Army ran amok in Mannar, beating up civilians, even children, and killing the only Sinhalese civilian living in Mannar. The Government had all the facts, and nothing was done. In their preoccupation with talking to the LTTE, the people were forgotten. There has been no re-evaluation of the conduct of the forces over the last many years by an independent body, and no reorganisation for the forces to play a politically sensitive role. This is an area where the Government needs to be constantly pressurised. Official lies are already eroding the Government's position among the Tamils.

The other area is the political solution. In my last article I gave my perception of the question of borders. Districts, like Trincomalee for instance, have their historic associations in a pluralistic tradition. In suggesting that we should carve it up on ethnic lines we are destroying some of the older and healthier traditions of our history going back centuries. In place of it we are accepting and giving legal form to a notion that we cannot live together except in an adversarial context.

Most of all, we should realise that if we came to legitimise bombing, shelling and massacres of civilians to fight a bankrupt force like the LTTE, which has shown its weakness by the manner in which it uses children, that in itself is defeat. We also need then to accept our own moral ineptitude and prepare for the worst. ■

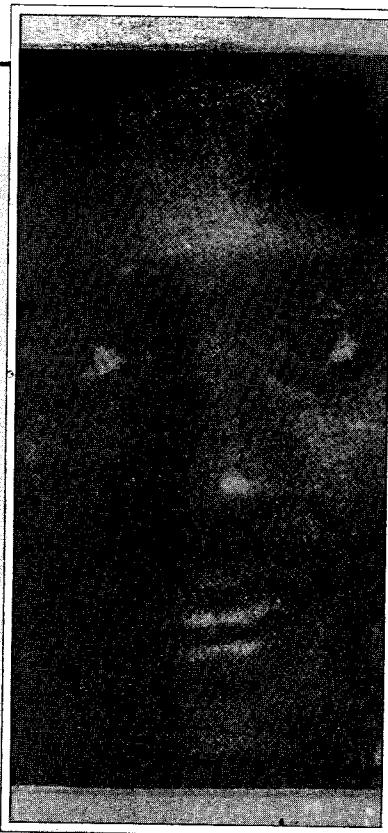
# Too gay for the liberals, too liberal for the gays?

**CP:** Now, in a sense, *Funny Boy* has been acclaimed by Colombo's upper-middle class as a successful novel. Given the content of the book, can you explain why you have become the darling of Colombo's elite?

**SS:** One of the reasons is the international recognition which seems to override other considerations... I think also there are other reasons that are very complex. For instance, within a single room, different people accept me for different reasons. Some people say outright that the theme is great, but others accept me mainly because of the international acclaim. I was just discussing with a friend, how different the reaction would be if it had been a lesbian writing. Honestly, my reception here is still at such a beginning stage, that I can't even judge it yet.

**CP:** In terms of "coming out" and being openly gay, has Colombo changed very much in the last ten years?

**SS:** Yes. And the reason I say so is that I have been talking to other gay people who have been "out" and they confirm that there has been a marked change in attitude. I think Colombo is much less homophobic than it was ten years ago. This is so because there is much greater exposure, through Video for instance. Hollywood itself has taken up this issue in a limited way with films like "Philadelphia", "Longtime Companion", and even films such as "Mrs Doubtfire" which is presented as family entertainment with stars like Robin Williams featuring a happily married gay couple. So there has been a far greater exposure through video.



*Counterpoint* interviews Shyam Selvadurai, author of *Funny Boy*, which was shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 1994.

**CP:** Even though it is pleasing to say that attitudes have changed drastically, it is still unthinkable for, say, a politician to "come out" or for lesbians to be open, isn't it?

**SS:** Yes, of course.

**CP:** Could it be that there is a certain complacency about gayness that is "classed"? Is it that members of the upper class in an urban milieu can flaunt their homosexuality with impunity, even a certain trendiness, whereas

in the middle and underclass, there is a massive backlash. Take the newspapers as guardians of public morality: a few days ago, there was an editorial about child prostitution and homosexuality in the same breath. There is a constant linking of being gay with crimes such as child prostitution and pederasty.

**SS:** I agree with you that there is a clear class distinction in this arena. I feel this very strongly... There is also an idea in the upper class that "if I'm O.K., it's O.K." This does not relate only to the issue of sexuality, but to others as well, such as the women's issue. I'm reading about the Women's Franchise debates in England, where this becomes very clear; the upper class women were very happy to get the vote for themselves, but were not really interested in the others. This hasn't changed, I think.

**CP:** To get back to your book, because you deal with the ethnic issue and your treatment is what I call liberal--it is not radical in the sense that you are confined to your class and milieu, for whom identity and Tamilness is tied to being threatened (July 1983); one is a member of Colombo's cosmopolitan society until one is threatened and challenged in July 1983 and then one's Tamilness is something one has to run away from--so it is not radical, whereas your dealing with the experience of "coming out" is radical.

Is it the case that the liberal treatment of the ethnic issue allows people to claim this as an eye-opener of their complicity with July '83, as a wonderful account of the problem and so on, and then, not coming to terms with the

exploration of sexuality in the book? Whereas those who are interested in the "coming out" can ignore the ethnic issue. Firstly, do you agree that your treatment of ethnicity and Tamil identity is not the main focus of this book?

SS: I think there are two main focuses to the book. On the one hand, there is the awakening to one's ethnicity and on the other, the awakening to one's sexuality. I don't think either is stronger than the other. For me they ran together as themes in the book.

CP: In terms of the central problematic of the text as you have explained it -- the awakening to one's ethnicity and the awakening to one's sexuality -- the former is very powerfully expressed, but the latter is narrowly classed. To put it very simply, the boy realizing that he is different may cut across class, though the repercussions would not be the same...but for the young Tamil, the implications of being Tamil would be different depending upon where he is, his class, and so on... One's sexuality is something one becomes aware of in, perhaps, one's early teens, so the word "awakening" is appropriate. But how would one say that one "awakens" to one's ethnicity?

SS: In the context and milieu that I was writing about, among the urban upper class Tamils who considered themselves very Colombo people, their ethnicity impinges upon them... If I were to take my own case, I considered myself Sri Lankan really, from Colombo and had close contact with all races within my social stratum...

CP: So could it be that to be "awakened" to one's ethnicity, is a luxury only available to the urban upper class; so if one were not, of the urbanized upper class, one would be, as it were, thrust into one's ethnicity at birth so to speak.

SS: Yes.

CP: Clearly, parts of the book are autobiographical, just as other parts of the book are non-autobiographical. Is this deliberate fusion a comment on the fact/fiction binary?

SS: I think you would have to say that this character only very roughly fits into "my slot". The boy grows up in a very different family from mine, and a much more conservative one. The whole dynamic of my family was different by virtue of the mixed marriage of my parents and the fact that my mother was a working woman... I think fact and fiction blend in very interesting ways in this book in terms of using factual events and their impact on fictional characters. I know that's what fascinated me in this attempt. Taking the '77, '81, '83 riots, the tortures in Jaffna...the brutality in schools, and imagining how these things impinge on fictional characters... Sometimes the characters are purely fictional: Jegan is a good example because, there is no one in my life who even remotely resembles him. I wanted to explore the difference between privileged and non-privileged Tamil men, as well as why boys would join the movement. So it is purely out of this intellectual preoccupation that Jegan grew...

CP: Many of the recent creative efforts by Sri Lankans, especially those living abroad, seem to posit an idyllic, at times even a pastoral, Sri Lanka and/or an urban upper class milieu which the authors cannot transcend. You are trying to deal with issues and individuals and contexts outside your milieu, however diffidently. What comments, if any, do you have to offer about these other authors?

SS: I think the writer has the responsibility to bring in the total canvas of a particular context within his or her specific milieu. For myself as a writer, it is very important to stay fixed or true to my milieu. I have no desire to write about the village life, nor do I think it is authentic to do so. I can't write either about a Burgher family, or a Muslim family living in Galle Fort, or for that matter a Tamil family living in Jaffna. I feel very reluctant to do that, but within my milieu, I feel I have to pull them in, in some way. I feel that I have an obligation to pull them in...

CP: On the one hand then you have a position which values personal experience above all else, while on the other you mention the need for research. Would you explain this to our readers?

SS: Let's talk of research in terms of *Funny Boy*. I wrote a novel before I wrote *Funny Boy*, a novel which was about ethnicity starting in the fifties and coming to the present. At that time I had not read many books on the question of ethnicity, and having gone to books by people like, say, Kumari Jayawardena, I felt ashamed, because I had also unconsciously perpetuated the myths about ethnicity that Kumari and others had been questioning and debunking. I had to get beyond my own limits about Tamil superiority and Sinhala jealousy, for instance. The notions of "hardworking Tamils swatting it out, while those Sinhala buggers sit in the shade." I had to get past that, I had to see the issues more clearly. Research is also for me, a way out of the almost inevitable complacency that comes out of living in the West.

CP: Does this mean that the writer who deals with complexity as opposed to those who present simplistic unchanging idyllic scenes loses out in terms of Western readership? There are quite a few exotic texts, not only about Sri Lanka, coming out, aren't there?

SS: Yes, there is a lot of exotic stuff coming out, but side by side there seems to be a growing desire for another type of book as well. My book has done well, for instance... I think there is a change going on in the West by the non-white community, a change which is impinging on the whites in terms of the debates on, say, the appropriation of voice. These are debates that a white lecturer in post-colonial literature is exposed to. They have become very aware and sensitive to these issues... There are still books, however, which are unresearched and so on, which are read and accepted by conservative whites. The pendulum swings one way, then the other. I don't think there is a

complete victory for either side. It is a continuing debate... I also think that Canada is in a particularly advantageous position in this regard. The structure of Multiculturalism has brought about some really interesting critical work. And this had led to the "discovery" in the '70s of a Canadianness. The established Canadian writers had to undergo the same struggles that I had when they had to work against American and British domination. As a result they are very supportive and encouraging.

**CP:** *In a sense, however, for this text, your critical audience is Sri Lankan. Have you received any critical insights and comments locally, or has it been only praise?*

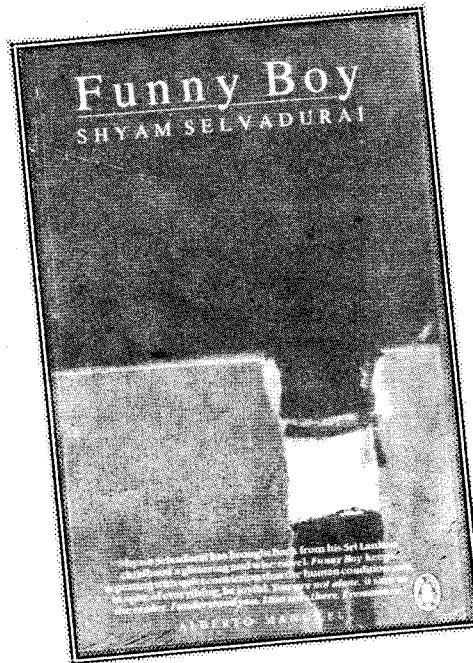
**SS:** I have had lots of praise, but some criticism too. This story about a response from a gay Lankan reader is instructive. He had come all the way from the outstations to listen to me speak at the British Council, but told a friend of mine there "Why does he have to talk about this gay stuff? We were doing fine until he came and stirred up a hornet's nest". The contradiction between this attitude and his coming all the way to listen to me is important, isn't it? There is a very interesting push-pull happening in the gay community here.

**CP:** *The visible gay community in Colombo appears to be extremely conservative politically. Has there been no antagonism to your treatment of the ethnic issue from this or any other quarter?*

**SS:** Nothing directly, but how could people tell me such a thing to my face? One only hears things on the grapevine... Many Sinhala readers have told me that they never saw July '83 from this perspective... I think I have shaken up some Tamils too who had grown complacent after July '83. Someone who is Tamil was telling me that he read the book during the recent election campaign and it resonated for him very concretely... I also plan to translate the book into Sinhala, to start with, and later into Tamil.

**CP:** *There is the comment that in your book, you personalize the political, that you individualize the carnage and the horror. What do you say to this?*

**SS:** I think it's very powerful to do this. What I didn't want to have



was massive accounts of the carnage, because this is what is represented in the western media: "200 people killed in Pakistan"; the two hundred people have no names or faces. I think it's better to focus on one family... So when the grandmother is killed and that house is destroyed, you live in that house, so you feel its destruction more potently than if I'd written pages and pages about unknown people. I think it's much more powerful this way.

**CP:** *Then what about the "Riot Journal"? Was that more for the uninitiated reader, a kind of index of what went on? Why did you feel that it was necessary?*

**SS:** It was necessary because it was what the whole book was leading to. I think there are two climaxes in the book. One is the sexuality climax at the end of the fifth story, and the other is the ethnic climax which is the Riot Journal... The reason it is at the end is that the riot itself does not fit into the conventional categories of

beginning, middle, end, epiphany, climax, or resolution, or any one of those things. I tried it in the conventional story structure and couldn't; it didn't work.

**CP:** *Which leads me to a question about the structure of your novel. What I find interesting about the Riot Journal is precisely that it refuses to fit into the conventional model. Even though your subject matter may be radical, the structure of Funny Boy remains within the conventional well-made novel. If you look at the more important post-colonial interventions in the novel form, they have dispensed with linear narrative structure, chronological sequence of events, uniform single narrative voice, and conventional form. How do you see your novel in the light of this phenomenon of post-coloniality?*

**SS:** I wasn't self-conscious about the way in which the Riot Journal broke with the conventional narrative structure, nor, with this as a symptom of post-coloniality. I just used this as the best available option. The task that I wanted the text to perform was not structurally possible within the conventional confines.

**CP:** *What do you see as the role of the writer within the social crisis that you described in your novel?*

**SS:** I feel that if I had anything more to add to what has already been said, it's up to me to do so. In this case, I didn't think I had anything to add. I think what's interesting is what you don't realise you had to say, which comes out of the voice of your characters... Yes I think there is a sense in which your characters do take over, and they express a part of you that you may not yet be conscious of. In this sense there may be something mystical about the writing process, but when you publish it, you have to take responsibility for what you have written. ■



# Changes in Algeria, but not for women

*Qadri Ismail*

THIRTY years ago the party and the people united to kick the colonizer out. Thirty years ago, together, they danced in the souk.

Whenever things got bad thereafter, the party reminded the people of that magic moment. Patience, it said, things will improve. But as prices rose and jobs froze the people eventually rioted, forced an election. At the polls they said go, party. Which replied: hell no, we won't -- asking, instead, the army to take over. The generals obliged and promptly annulled the vote.

Yet another sorry third world story? No. It was the left this time, not the right, which executed the Algerian coup. At the election last December, the fundamentalist Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) pole-axed the National Liberation Front (FLN), the socialist party that led the anti-colonial struggle against France and had ruled Algeria since 1962. The FIS then brought out the daggers from under its cloaks. When a regime in power for decades gets defeated electorally, one might expect three Allahu Akbars for democracy from the opposition. Not this time. Soon after the vote, FIS ideologue Sheikh Abdelkader Moghni told the world: "The Algerian people have given victory to Islam and defeated democracy, which is nothing but apostasy." What? After going through hell to make sure they

could choose their own government the Algerian people voted to end all votes? Sheikh Abdelkader, may your tribe decrease. The Algerian verdict was as much a negative one, delivered against the corrupt and often dictatorial FLN, as it was pro FIS, which benefitted from being the only organized alternative, as well as the rhapsodic support of younger men.

Since the military marched in a year ago, the Algerian people have increasingly found themselves caught between the officers and the fundamentalists. Making choose and lose the name of the game, especially for women. The world according to FIS has the public sphere as male-order: where

women remain inside, looking after the kids, kitchen and clothes; all women except widows and divorcees, who alone can work outside the home. And yes, compulsory veiling will be enforced.

Oh Islam, what sins are committed in thy name! Not just in Algeria but all over the Muslim world, where fundis are gushing out the ground quicker than petrodollars these days. Every long beard, of course, does not speak the same language: Iranian theocrats, Saudi monarchists and Pakistani republicans have, as it were, dialectical differences. But they do sound alike on the related questions of women and democracy.

The Moroccan sociologist Fatima Mernissi is best known in this country for her *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Muslim Society*. Through the category of woman, she enters into a discussion of Islam and democracy in her latest work, *Islam and Democracy: Fear of the Modern World*. But, after being invoked at the beginning, women get erased its middle sections, despite Mernissi's feminist convictions and avowed desire to examine the "nuances" and "ambiguities" in the relationship between the two constructs. Her argument isn't nuanced or sophisticated, simply pits two monolithic subjects against each other. One, the West, is good; the other, bad: classic Orientalism, where everything "wrong" between Tunisia and Iraq can be explained by one word: Islam.

Fundamentalism, as the Syrian critic Sadiq al-Azm has argued, is the other side of Orientalism. Mernissi, though adamantly anti-fundi, strays often into that kind of logic:

"When we speak of the conflict between Islam and democracy, we are in fact talking about an eminently legal conflict. If the basic reference for Islam is the Koran [sic], for democracy it is effectively

## ■ *Islam and Democracy:*

### *Fear of the Modern World*

by Fatima Mernissi,

Addison-Wesley,

\$ 24.95

## ■ *Women of Algiers in their Apartment*

by Assia Djebar,

University of Virginia Press,

\$ 19.95

the United Nations Charter, which is above all a superlaw."

I looked carefully, Mernissi's tongue is nowhere near her cheek. Boutros Ghali might be pleased by this exalted status for the U.N. Charter, but reducing Islam to the Quran is precisely what the fundis do. This text is a product -- a sordid symptom, perhaps -- of post-Gulf War Arab demoralization, where the choice seems polarized between pro and anti-West. But, if everybody takes on the long beards this way, the battle will be lost before it even begins.

In her better moments, Mernissi sees the weaknesses of such a strategy. Early in her text, she shows how Islam could be interpreted not just as compatible with, but as almost compelling democracy. Elsewhere, she even reveals some understanding of politicized Islam's appeal to many disaffected young men in the post-Gulf War Arab world: the "call for Islam in the 1990s expresses diverse needs that are not always archaic and are certainly not always of a spiritual nature." But such insights are never followed up, the analysis is never complicated so doing would not only upset the binary structure of the book, but its political project. Mernissi must represent Islam as essentially anti-democratic in order to beg the West to save the Arab masses:

"It is a given that the West...bears responsibility for the future of humanity...It alone decides if satellites will be used to educate Arabs or to drop bombs on them."

West equals the United States: a Camelot where everyone enjoys freedom of expression and there ain't no racism, sexism, poverty, homelessness, etc. Mernissi's descriptions of Islam and of the West make V.S. Naipaul sound sane.

In *Islam and Democracy*, the entire dynamic within the contemporary Arab world boils down to fear: the fundis fear modernity; they also fear the present, the past, the West,

individualism and so on. This ain't explanation, but rant. Mernissi doesn't see the contemporary growth of fundamentalisms as a third world-wide phenomenon. The contradiction between third world "fundamentalisms" and "modernity," as the Indian popshrink Ashis Nandy notes, isn't about fear but the need for certainty and belonging: modernity is no longer the ideology of a small minority...[M]any Indians...see the society around them...leaving no scope for a compromise between the old and the new...The[y]...have now come to sense that it is modernity which rules the world and, even in this subcontinent, religion-as-faith [as opposed to "religion-as-ideology"] is being pushed to the corner. Much of the fanaticism and violence associated with religion comes today from the sense of defeat of the believers, from their feelings of impotence, and from their free-floating anger...

Nandy, like Mernissi, has no place for capital and the international division of labor in his narrative; unlike her, he does see nativist ideologies -- for whose Hindu variant he is an apologist -- as an attempt to construct an alternative modernity. But for whom? The word "impotence" doesn't appear in that passage by chance. The fundamentalist project, whether Islamic as in Algeria or Hindu as in India, is spearheaded by mostly petty-bourgeois third world men who feel emasculated by the (capitalist) West and react enraged.

Third world women, not the West, are the primary victims of this rage. Recall how they solved the FISCAL problem: men don't have jobs, so we'll sack the women. Mernissi's previous work, notably *Beyond the Veil*, showed a deep commitment to feminism. Not this text. Which suggests that, to Mernissi, the women's question isn't implicated in the "larger" issue of "democracy." Nevertheless, unable to erase them completely, she concludes by falling back on

that old essentialist shibboleth, "a woman's intuition." Despite all the shit thrown at Arab women by these pigs, fundamentalist or otherwise, she finds that "Women have already taken flight...are performing the pilgrimage that their grandmothers dreamed of for so long: to dance without a mask..."

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, which owed substantially to his Algerian experience, Frantz Fanon described the colonized native's dream of freedom thirty years ago:

"The first thing which a native learns is to stay in his place, and not to go beyond certain limits. This is why the dreams of the native are always of muscular prowess; his dreams are of action and of aggression. I dream I am jumping, swimming, running, climbing; I dream that I burst out laughing, that I span a river in one stride..."

Freedom as unrestricted access to the public sphere; as dancing with or without a mask, anywhere, alone or with anyone, dancing without fear. This was the freedom Fanon's native achieved at independence. With one crucial catch: the native, Fanon's national agent, is gendered. The fact that Algerian women, many of whom played heroic roles during the struggle, couldn't dance publicly after the victory is amply illustrated in Assia Djebar's collection of stories, *Women of Algiers in their Apartment*, now available in English.

Anybody into po-co fiction won't find better alternatives, even on a sunny day, than reading Djebar. Her novel *Fantasia*, first part of the projected 'Algeria quartet,' explodes official history with quiet anger. Most narratives of national liberation present the experience of one gender as that of the nation. What might the history of the nation look like, this all too rare novel asks, if examined from the other side of the gender divide, from the perspective of women participants, victims and onlookers.

*Women of Algiers* is a collection

of three brilliant longer stories, three good short ones, a theoretical postface and an 'Afterword' by Clarise Zimra which also serves as an introduction to Djébar's work. Written between 1958 and 1978, dealing with the revolutionary and post-independence periods, these pieces are located in an almost exclusively female and domestic - "restricted" -- setting. The first thing a woman learns, Djébar suggests, is to stay in her place and not go beyond certain limits.

In the 'Overture,' Djébar calls these stories "a listening in," situates herself as spy-cum-interpreter of other women's experiences, a theme that recurs in her work. A writer in French, she's listening to people speaking Arabic, people whose world doesn't always overlap with hers. This stance also highlights a different point: that, denied a public and published history, "never having appeared in the sunlight," women only have word of mouth to keep their stories alive. Many women, seated, lying down or ill -- that is, in passive positions, tell their tales in *Women of Algiers*. In 'Nostalgia of the Horde,' we hear a great-grandmother, a woman forced to lie, contain her dreams and conform to a patriarchal order; who had five sons but no daughters. 'There is no Exile' looks at how women must maintain and reproduce the nation, even when abroad. At 25, its narrator has divorced and lost her two children. Though living abroad, her parents force her to marry again:

"I was thinking how everything had changed and that, still, in some way everything remained the same. They were still concerned with marrying me off. And why exactly?... Just so I could have worries that never change whether it's peace or wartime, so I could wake up in the middle of the night and question myself on what it is that sleeps in the heart of the man sharing my bed.... Just so I could give birth and weep, for life never comes unaccompanied to a woman..."

The fact that she has no interest in re-marriage is irrelevant. Even in exile women have to contend with the same old shit.

The tone, if anything, is darker in the title story, where women reveal their wounds to one another, have only each other to hear and listen: the masseuse, married off at thirteen to a drunken soldier, who fled him, had to turn prostitute and, when too old to spread her legs, worked at the baths; Leila, the revolutionary heroine who seeks refuge in narcotics because there isn't room for her in post-revolutionary Algeria. (The only man who has time for her now that the battle is over is a gay painter.) Sarah, the protagonist of 'Women of Algiers,' doesn't only listen; she responds:

"For Arabic women I see only one single way to unblock everything: talk, talk without stopping, about yesterday and today, talk among ourselves, in all the women's quarters, the traditional ones as well as those in the housing projects. Talk... Not the voice of female vocalists whom they imprison in their sugar-sweet melodies... But the voice they've never heard, because many unknown and new things will occur before she's able to sing..."

In moments like this, *Women of Algiers* becomes a text of resistance, however pessimistic in tone. The unknown and new things heralded here include women coming together, forming community, without which they cannot sing, or dance. A point reinforced in the postface, where Djébar takes off from Eugene Delacroix's obtrusively transgressive painting of colonial Algerian women in their harem which gives this collection its title. Naming Delacroix as "thief... spy... voyeur," Djébar asks, is the "right to stare... [a] male prerogative"? Then stares right back, turning the gaze into an inquisition -- of male complicity in female subjugation.

In her long and useful afterword, Clarisse Zimra, says that Djébar's

"regressive feminism" has been found fault with by some critics who demand inspiration. Read in the precarious context of contemporary Algerian women, Djébar's pessimism doesn't seem in the least out of place. 'The Dead Speak,' for instance, sounds remarkably predictive. It's set at the wake of Hadda, a rural Algerian grandmother who took her life into her own hands, moving to the city after her second husband proved to be sleeping around. Symbolically enough, Hadda dies one week after independence. Aicha, who lived with Hadda after losing her own husband some years before, sits by the body as the "nation" embarks on "liberation," pondering her own empty future and that of other women:

"Those whose destiny it had always been to be the ears and the rumors of the city, whose vocation it has been to crouch down at the feet of the husband coming home in the evening and to undo his shoes and who, for the most part, had anything to undo but their anguish..."

Djébar's prose reads sinuously, is exacting and exact, even in translation. At times, however, it halts; which makes one wonder why Gayatri Spivak's sixty pages of comments on improving it weren't taken into account.

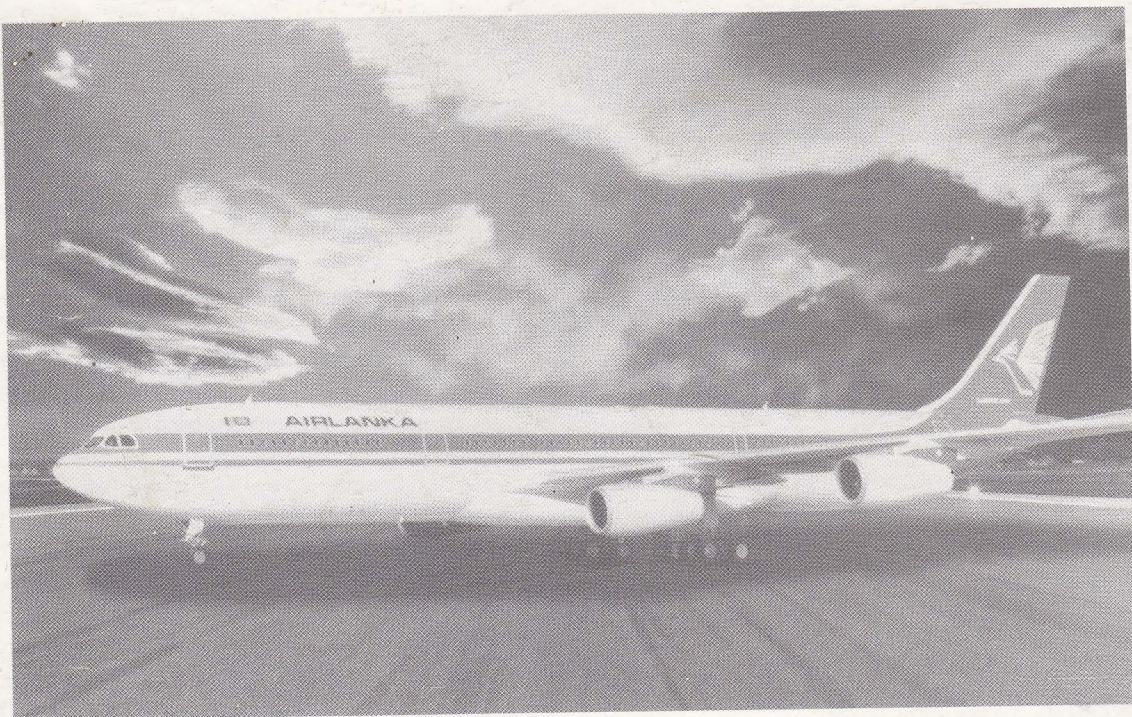
'The Dead Speak' ends with Hadda's war-hero grandson Hassan at the independence celebrations, unable to conceive that women may be responding differently to the music and fireworks; meanwhile Aicha, at a nearby cemetery, tends the grave of the grandmother, with only memories to anticipate. The young woman once gave refuge to Hassan during the war, fell in love. But he had no time for her then, has none now. Women, these stories suggest, won't be inheriting the post-revolutionary future.

Thirty years later, everything has changed in Algeria. For the women, however, things have remained the same. ■





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