Ananda Sampada

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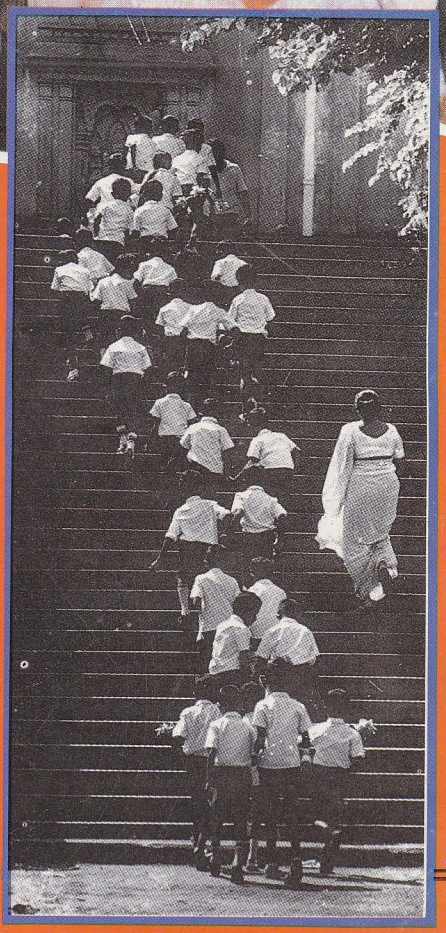

The DANGER of so little learning

October 1995 Vol: 3 Issue: 5 Rs. 30/-

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YAKKALA	Vidyodaya

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Counterpoint

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Asoka Padmasiri

An apology, an explanation and a plea for support

We are painfully aware that *Counterpoint* has disappointed its readers by not being on time. We do not wish to make excuses but you have a right to know that these delays are caused by severe financial constraints and staff limitations which are again tied to our balance sheet. Many of those who work for *Counterpoint* do so without payment, the handful who are paid receive token remuneration, not commensurate with their expertise and the time spent. *Counterpoint*, to use a cliché, is a labour of love. Yet, in a period of galloping inflation and spiralling costs, we are struggling hard to keep our heads above water. Clearly, love and fresh air aren't enough to keep a magazine alive!

With effect from the September issue we were reluctantly compelled to increase our retail price by five rupees for the first time in over two years. Of this, forty percent goes to the retailer. We have not, however, raised our subscription rates. This is not because we can afford not to, but because we feel a deep commitment towards those of you who have stuck with us through thick and thin, those of you whose encouragement and constructive criticism are our lifeblood.

A magazine such as ours often pays its way through advertising. We are still finding it difficult to obtain paying advertisements, but there are indications that this situation is changing, but, again, these changes are slower than we would like.

Moreover, it is only because our overheads are so low and because we are beholden to columnists and contributors who work for a pittance that we have hung on for so long.

Therefore, we ask you to bear with us for a month or so more, as you have done so far, until we can streamline our production division. We need to reorganize our printing schedules, improve production quality and expand the scope of the magazine. For instance, our last issue was with the printers for nearly 3 weeks!

For all this we depend on your continued support and generosity. Ours has never been a populist venture, nor one that indulged in partisan politicking. We have neither asked for nor received any special favours from any government, business enterprise or individual. Even our advertisers know that we reserve the right to be critical of them should the occasion arise.

Unfortunately, such critical independence and non-opportunism offers little financial rewards, save from impartial readers. We humbly apologise, sincerely, for our tardiness, and assure you of a satisfactory and expedient solution to this problem before the end of the year. **Please, therefore, consider helping us expand our readership through encouraging friends to subscribe, both locally and outside Sri Lanka.** It is only when we are assured of substantial subscriber support that we can afford to upgrade our print quality and ensure the employment of adequate staff required to maintain this magazine at its level of professionalism and credibility. ▮

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Circulation	Daya Kaluarachchi G.B.Panditha
Printer	Anuru Graphics, Mount Lavinia
Publisher	Ravaya Publishers (Guarantee) Ltd.

Head Office and Mailing Address

No: 83, Piliyandala Road, MAharagama, Sri Lanka
Tel. 851572, 851573
Fax. 851814

Published monthly.

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Will Racism Combat Terrorism?

THE security situation in Colombo has been causing increasing alarm. A parallel and equally unpleasant development is the institution of practices which discriminate against Tamils, notably in respect of employment and housing, but frequently also in respect of mere presence in public places. These practices not only violate basic human rights if Tamils but also have dangerous implications for Sri Lanka.

Most non-Tamils may not be fully aware of these racially discriminatory practices or of their implications. Unemployment is a problem which affects members of all communities, but Tamils who have been seeking employment are often told that they cannot be considered for employment on account of their ethnicity. Young Tamils, especially males are those worst affected. Even Tamils who are in employment, particularly in the private sector, feel very insecure. Several have lost their jobs on account of a single unsubstantiated anonymous petition. So long as there are indiscriminate arrests and detentions of Tamils and harassment of their employers, such racial discrimination will continue.

The racial discrimination in respect of housing us as pervasive or worse than in respect of employment. Again, most non-Tamils may not be fully aware of this, but Tamils who have been looking for housing quickly discover that many houses, apartments and, in particular, lodgings are not available to them and that many others are offered to them at rents much higher than to non-Tamils. Even Tamils who had found accommodation have been harassed by the police and neighbours and evicted on account of unsubstantiated anonymous petitions. In effect, there are two racially differentiated housing markets: the one for Tamils is significantly smaller, substantially higher priced and with less secure tenure than the one for non-Tamils. This is an unavoidable consequence of indiscriminate harassment of Tamils and of the owners of their houses/ apartments or of the chief occupants of their lodgings.

What is most unfortunate is that such blatant racial discrimination, which is contrary to the liberal and non-racist traditions of Sri Lanka, is aggravated not only because of the incidence of terrorism but also by measures adopted by state agencies to combat it. The repeated exhortations to report on all suspicious-looking people, without any caution against inconveniencing or discriminating against innocent persons, inevitably results in reports against virtually all Tamils. In this situation, ill-will flourishes in multi-ethnic neighbourhoods. Racist practices such as requiring all Tamils (and Tamils only) to register their residence, including temporary residence, with the Police Station through the owners of their houses/apartments or the chief occupants of their lodgings make a bad situation worse.

Racial discrimination and giving official sanction are utterly reprehensible; the ill-effects of these developments go even further. Many Tamils, particularly young males, have come out of the North or East to escape the conditions there; others have opted to remain outside the North or East; yet others have chosen to return to Sri Lanka from overseas. If they continue to face discrimination in respect of employment and housing and to encounter constant harassment, they may have no option but to return to the North or East and to accept the rules of life in that region. Even young Tamils long settled outside the North or East may be induced to go to the North or East if they find that they are not welcome elsewhere. This will promote not only racial segregation but also bitterness among those driven away on account of racial discrimination.

Some of those interested in human rights and national unity have taken up individual cases of Tamils who have been victims of racial discrimination. It does not appear that the broader policies and practices of racial discrimination and their implications for national unity have been publicly addressed. The security situation in many areas outside the North and East is indeed a matter of grave concern to all of us. But the remedy must cure, and not aggravate the illness.To seek to deal with acts of terrorism through racially discriminatory policies and practices is not merely morally flawed; such an approach is shortsighted and counter-productive in respect of national unity and security.

D. Nesiah
Colombo

Let's say NO to Corporal Punishment

I very much appreciate the contents of the article but at the same time wish to state that teachers should not be alone blamed for the discipline of children, and further it is not really acceptable to do away with corporate punishment completely for the following reasons :

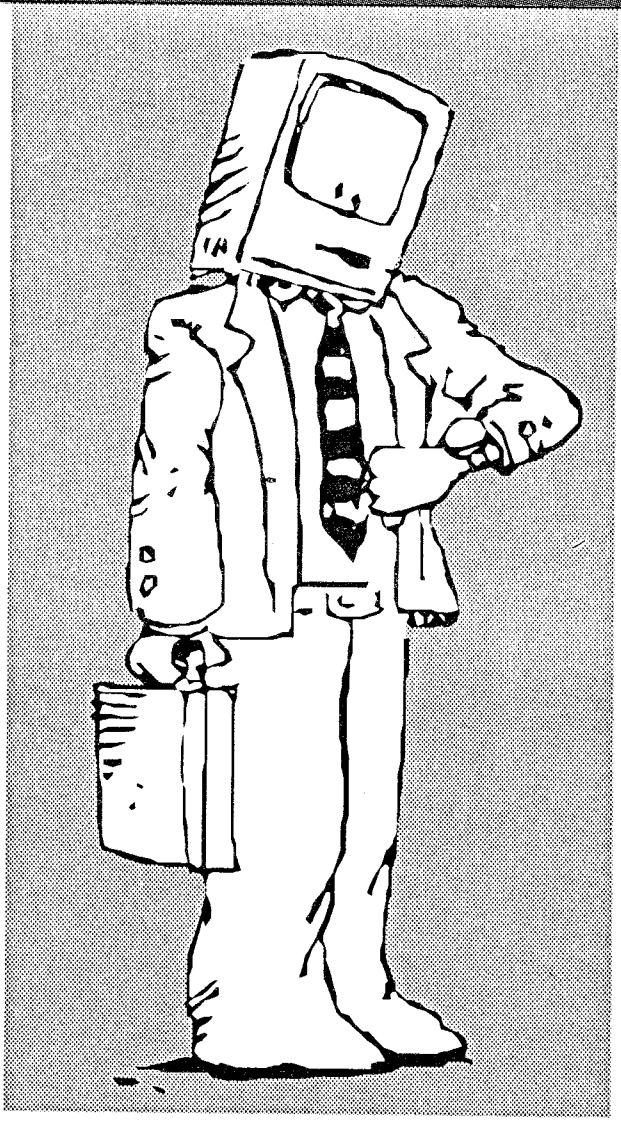
A child's behaviour is moulded from the infant stage. From the article it is seen that Mr. N.Y. Cassie Chetty, the new Head Master of St. Thomas College has not been subjected to corporal punishment at home or at school. He is lucky that he had good, understanding and well educated parents. I am definite he had been educated in a good school and also by a good set of teachers. This is not so for everyone. I am of the opinion that 90% of children's behaviour depends on their being brought up by their parents and only 10% by his or her teachers. A parent at the most has to look-after not more than 06 children in extreme cases, and the children spend about 16 hours a day with their parents and only 8 hours a day with a teacher. Nowadays a teacher will have to look after 40 students for approximately 40 minutes for each subject. With this the teacher will have to teach the students, correct exercise books and look-after their well-being. Therefore it will be extremely difficult for the teacher to concentrate on all students equally and also leisurely.

In Sri Lanka though each and every parent wants his or her child to be of very good behaviour and do well in life, are they contributing towards this genuinely? It is true that, psychologists say that high delinquency rate, dropping out of schools, result from violations of the self of children through various cases or types of violent abuses mild or strong. It is very easy to say this, but very difficult to implement. The concerned parent has brought out a case of a small child completely afraid of the teacher and it is very unfortunate that there are many cases like this. I am stating another extreme case that happened to a friend's son. He is also studying in a reputed school. In this case he had been harassed or hit by another student and when he reported this to the teacher the class teacher not only did not take any action against the student but has threatened that she will not give stars for progress in class work if there is any complaint. Don't you think by this the teacher is encouraging one student to do all sorts of harassing etc. and not taking any action to correct it? Maybe, the teacher did not want to do it or the teacher is afraid to do this. This is only one side of the picture concerning what is happening in the so-called well known private schools. Have we ever looked into the other schools which are about 75% of the total number? In these schools children of various types of backgrounds are studying. Even the staff in do not have proper facilities. With this the poor teacher had to teach the students and also compete with the well endowed schools to produce results and compete in all activities including discipline. Further, I wish to state that these students are with the teacher at most from 6 to 8 hours for only about 170 days a year. The other days go as public holidays and term holidays. If the parents spend at least one hour with their children personally every day, out of the 16 hours they are with them, they can produce far better results. Thus, because the children are at home it does not mean that they are looked after by parents. About indiscipline I will state the parents are to take more responsibiliy than the teacher though many may not with for this. I would say that we as parents contribute to the present state of indiscipline etc. by the students even at the University level.

When a set of students are ragged at the University at the extreme of sadism and also to damage the respect of the individual, as parents are we to encourage or condemn? It is very sad that some of the parents are keen on getting the culprit exonerated while they are not bothering at all with what has happened at the varsity and it is a fact that it is due to lack of discpline. Some parents give too many facilities to their children and a few children join them and go on the wrong track like smoking, drugs etc. which may not be possible for children of normal families. Further, some of us try to insist that our children ways do the correct thing and never try to advise them. Therefore, my view is that the abolishment of corporal punishment should not be taken as sufficient by itself. But it is necessary at least in some cases in schools. It may be in few schools like St. Thomas' College this may be possible to manage without corporal punishment. In other schools unless the parents take a big share and interest it may not be possible at all to abolish corporal punishment and as such corporal punishment will be inevitable.

Another Concerned Parent

Another computer fraud



THE Department of Immigration and Emigration called for a Tender to computerize its functions and the tender was closed for bids on 23rd January 1995. The Tender was to provide the computer Hardware, Application Software, Training Maintenance of the system for the next 5 years and conversion of existing paper based records to computer format. The Treasury allocated Rupees 150 Million from the1994/95 budget for this purpose.

Seven of the largest computer companies in the island were present at the Ministry of Defence to submit the bids. The bid was in two parts -- Technical and Financial and only the technical bids were opened on the tender closing date while the financial proposals were sealed and kept away.

It then took 4 $^{1}/_{2}$ months for the Ministry to appoint a Technical Evaluation Committee (TEC) to evaluate the tender. The Committee appointed after 4 $^{1}/_{2}$ months was headed by an Academic from NIBM while the second member was from the Treasury and the third was an officer from the Department. Naturally the computer knowledge of the two members are well below that of the academic and thereby they do not challenge any suggestions from the academic.

This particular academic from NIBM was not appointed to any large computer evaluation teams by the previous Government due to his alleged favouritism to the international computer giant IBM. Back in early 80's he apparently gave a false recommendation in favour of IBM for a tender at the Agrarian Research & Training Institute and after it was pointed out by another organization Datatech Limited to the then Minister Mr. D.B. Wijetunga this academic wrote another correct report by disqualifying his own previous evaluation. Since then he has been kept out of large or important evaluation teams.

Additionally, to the surprise of the Tenderers, the TEC completed the evaluation for the Department of Immigration within mere 3 weeks with only 4 sittings. The Tenderers wonder how, within a such a short time, the team managed to evaluate 7 comprehensive proposals prepared by the respective organizations over a period of 2 1$^{1}/_{2}$ months. The Tenderers also feel that the appointment of only one academic to a TEC will result in the academic leading the other members to biased recommendations.

After these 4 sittings the committee selected only 2 companies (IBM and NIXDORF) for the financial evaluation. Financial bids were opened on the 23rd August 1995 and the same committee completed their financial evaluation within the next two sittings recommending the award of the tender to the Evaluation Committee Head's favourite, IBM, for a price of Rupees 190 Million, thus exceeding the allocated budget by Rupees 40 Million.

The serious questions arise here are which:

1. Was there a fair tender evaluation in the first place?
2. Can 3 people within 4 sittings evaluate 7 proposals prepared by experts in the industry?
3. Is the evaluation committee very certain that the other 6 firms cannot provide an acceptable solution within the available budget?
4. Is this the way the Department of Immigration spends the poor man's money?

It is a fact that the same Department recently offered a contract to supply 2 Million Passports to the British company Harrisons for a price of Rupees 240 Million while the allocated budget for that project was also Rupees 150 Million, thereby overlooking the much cheaper and the quality offers from the existing supplier Thmas De La Rue and 5 others.

The Honourable Finance Minister is taxing the poor man to find money for the ongoing war while a Department under the Defence Ministry is wasting public funds under the very nose of both Ministers.

N.D. Perera

HIGHER EDUCATION, AND THEN?

EDUCATION is said to open the doors of opportunity. But as far as higher education in Sri Lanka is concerned, it seems to be closing, rather than opening doors. The pride with which we proclaim our democratic system of free education is now becoming mere wish-fulfillment in a context where there is a glaring mismatch between the nature of the degrees awarded, and the development and employment needs of the country. There is also the question of the "rat race".

From the GCE Advanced Level onwards, students face perpetual obstacles in obtaining their educational goals. Free education has come to mean almost nothing where even the poorest rural students seems to swear by their private tutors. Informal studies that need further corroboration indicate that nearly 75% of all students in the GCE Ordinary and Advanced Level classes attend private tutories.

And after the battle with the Advanced Level system [see Table 1.1], there is the question of entering university. In 1991/2, only 20.96% of those qualified to enter university were able to secure places because of limited vacancies [see Table 1.2], This too, specially in the cases of medicine and engineering, occurs sometimes after two or three attempts at the Advanced Level exam [see Table 2]. Yet, a large percentage of the "luckier" candidates enter university only to discover that what they have been striving for hasn't been worth the sweat. Most courses do not offer the graduate much hope in the competitive world of employment, and the degree only brings with it frustration.

Certainly, university education comes a very poor third to a good knowledge of English and an urban/semi-urban middle class background in private sector employment, where personal contacts and individual recommendations still wield the greatest influence in securing the plum jobs.

Political agendas ostensibly set up for the equitable education of

THE GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMME

THE Graduate Employment Programme conducted by the Ministry of Youth Affairs to assist graduates in securing employment reflects the predicament of the job-seeking university student. Most of the graduates who enrolled for the first batch (1990-4) are from the Arts- and Bio-Science-based courses. Conversely, public and private sector organizations require graduates with more professional qualifications in subjects such as Business Administration and Accountancy. As a result, there is a long waiting list of graduates within the programme. There is also the issue of permanent posts. During the 1 1/2-year training period, the Ministry grants the students an allowance of Rs.2500 per month. However, they are expected to be made permanent and paid by the respective organizations once the training period is over. The problem is, only 12 out of 6012 graduates under the programme have so far been made permanent. The others continue to be on government allowances with little job responsibility and job satisfaction. Right now, there are 9215 pending applications for the programme with the Ministry. They cannot be considered because in addition to the issue of the 6000 graduates without permanent posts, there is also the long waiting list of previous batches to consider.

the nation are questionable. It is certainly not a long-term plan of perceiving education as an investment, but of giving the electorates what they think they want. If the demand is for Arts-based courses in the universities, this will be provided, regardless of the dead-end most graduates face after three or four years in the university. This "democratic" gesture is much more insidious than it appears. In the first place, the prospective Arts students are not fully appraised of the dearth of jobs; in the second, due to the appalling lack of facilities and teachers in the remoter areas, these students have no option but to study in the Arts stream after passing the OL exam; in the third, no attempt has been made to adapt or even orient the university arts degree courses to employability, with the dictation and taking down of decade-old notes being the real heart of university education in these faculties.

What should be addressed, rather, is the employment needs of the country, and the provision of educational facilities for science, commerce subjects etc. in rural schools so that more opportunities are given to students in areas where a job market does exist.

As Mr R. H. M. Piyasena, Additional Secretary of the Academic Division, University Grants Commission, points out, "There are no surveys being done as to what our country needs in education and employment. How many Doctors do we need? How many in the humanities is too many? This is because there is no overall development plan for the country".

It is a wonder that this mismatch had not been addressed years ago. At least the distinct signs of youth unrest and related problems cropping up all the time should have been a cue to follow. But for two decades now, students have been passing out of six universities offering the same kinds of traditional courses based on the Oxbridge model, and for years now there has been a distinct glut of unemployed graduates in the market. The populist alternative, of course, is to provide them with teaching appointments, so that, typically, Arts graduates can be found in kindergarten classes of rural schools, spreading frustration and hopelessness all round. Students passing out of fields such as Sociology and Bio-Science have eternally had problems finding degree-related employment as evidenced by the Graduate Employment Programme [see box 1]. The irony is, that at the same time, there is an urgent need in the country for experts, preferably with degrees, in areas such as hotel management, surveying, pharmacology, environmental studies and a host of other "modern" subject areas.

Additionally, we have one of the lowest standards of medical care in Asia with a ratio of 1:6000 for doctor per patient, as compared to 1:2580 in India. Not even 50% of the demand for doctors (which amounts to 1500 per year) is met through our medical colleges. And the developments that have occurred in medicine, and even engineering, have failed to address the requirements of the country.

In other fields as well, those who do pass out of the traditional courses have not been contributing significantly or systematically enough to the sustainable development of the country. The glut of Sociology degrees in the country could very well be used for development programmes incorporating gender, class and ethnic issues. They could also work towards educating society, an education which is vital for the sustainable development of the country. Agriculture specialists, like those in India, could help make Sri Lanka a major exporter rather than importer, of agricultural goods. But graduates are not being utilized to make significant contributions in either of these, nor many other, areas.

What is the University Grants Commission and the Ministry doing in the midst of this predicament in higher education? Good intentions of the officials there have hardly been transformed into deeds. Most of the activity is talked of in the future tense, and the past and the present only offer stories of misfired attempts, or of no attempts at all.

The Ministry of Youth Affairs is planning a comprehensive review of the social sciences curriculum through workshops that will take into consideration the issue of modern course work and the question of "dying" subjects such as History, Oriental Studies, Pali and Sanskrit. The series of workshops will be held in conjunction with the UGC, the Education Ministry and Technical

TABLE 1.1

A/L EXAMINEES AND THEIR PREDICAMENT

	1991	1992	1993	1994
NO.SAT	129220	131556	123380	126345
NO.QUALIFIED	50347	55126	59308	56738
NO.ADMITTED	8192	8800	9039	Not Releasd

Source: Dept.of Examinations

Colleges. The Ministry is also planning a training programme on pedagogy for university teachers where their role as teacher and researcher will be stressed. But actual results occurring through such dialogue are yet to be seen.

Other than a few non-systematic changes here and there, such as the introduction of courses in Microbiology and Industrial Science at the University of Kelaniya, and innovative courses such as a degree in Textiles and the University of Moratuwa, the academia has proved to be resistant to course reform. According to Mr. S. Edirisuriya, Director of the Graduate Employment Division of the Ministry of Youth Affairs, "The professors are only thinking of their convenience. They just want to teach what they have learnt".

There is much evidence to demonstrate the academics' and students' resistance to changes that would facilitate the enhancement of the job market: a recent example is the protests against the Affiliated University Colleges system which was part of a programme to create an intermediate tier in higher education for a more job-oriented two-year Diploma course. The course was designed so students would be more useful on the job, with six core subjects (i.e. English, Computer Science, Management, Sri Lankan Studies, Environmental Studies and Marketing) with a professional bent. However, as Mr. Piyasena points out, "students agitated with the instigation of political groups, and the system is soon to be closed down."

TABLE 1.2

PERCENTAGE OF ELIGIBLE STUDENTS ADMITTED TO UNIVERSITY

SUBJECT STREAM	89/90	90/91	91/92
Arts	13.71	17.96	15.52
Commerce	12.13	15.38	12.52
Physical Science	44.78	68.05	61.24
Biological Sciences	24.50	31.32	29.98
Total Average	18.74	24.00	20.96

Source: UGC

Not even 50% who sit the Advanced Level exam manage to get through and out of those who do pass, as little as around 25% actually enter university, except in the case of the Physical Sciences and Medicine.

The point is not that degrees cannot be awarded on the same basis, but that there are too few resources to go around for so many degree-awarding institutions in Sri Lanka, and too many specialists needed in many professional areas, so that the issue cannot be overlooked.

Whereas in the case of the Affiliated University Colleges, students agitated for degree-awarding courses, the story in the medical field has been different. Here, attempts to upgrade the Assistant Medical Practitioners' Course to a degree has been vociferously shouted down by doctors and the GMOA for fear that their qualifications (privileges?) will be in jeopardy. What was intended through this upgrading, however, was that a large number will opt for the course and remedy the shortage of medical personnel.

Also, Assistant Medical Practitioners would then have been more instrumental in the developments in paramedical areas, research work and community medicine, and the more capable practitioners would have been able to follow through to an MBBS course. But as always, innovative educational systems to meet the development needs of the country are hardly seen for what they are by the professionals in the respective fields, many of whom want to protect vested interests in the name of maintaining unrealistic standards that their own ilk observe in the breach.

Further, student resistance has been evident in the UGC attempts to introduce the progressive step of the course-unit system to universities. The students went on strike as soon as it was suggested. The University of Kelaniya is a case in point where the students were able to outmaneuvre the Vice Chancellor and Senate, postponing the changes yet another time.

Now, the UGC has arrived at a compromise with these various strands of objections through the introduction of three modern universities meant to address employment issues and Sri Lanka's development needs in a more direct sense. Of these, the University of Oluvil has already been launched and the Rajarata University, with faculties at Anuradhapura, Kuliyapitiya and Polgolla and the Sabaragamuwa University with faculties at Balangoda, Ratnapura and Buttala have also been gazetted. These universities will replace the Affiliated Colleges and award more job-oriented degrees. It is hoped that the new universities

will also cater to the modern concept of the intellectual as a productive individual involved in policy formulations and the addressing of social issues in the country.

This does not mean however, that the traditional universities can rest on their laurels, if they possess any, that is. Major changes have to occur in course work so that they fall in line with the three new universities, not to mention almost uniform global trends.

Meanwhile, the frustrations created by an ineffective university system are reflected in the general student mood. Even as they enter the university, undergraduates know that their degree will have little bearing on their ability to secure a job, and that they are consistently marginalized in a system of employment where the more affluent youth with less qualifications than them, (and perhaps less ability) have better chances of gaining the limited slots in the job market. As one first year student in the Commerce Faculty of the University of Colombo puts it, "We choose out subjects without any target, because there's nothing to choose from, and we end up like a whirlpool caught in a storm".

They also know that the statutory requirement of teaching English to students is only being paid lip service. Groups of students interviewed were in almost unanimous agreement that the regional GELT course conducted for them prior to university entrance and the ongoing English courses conducted during term time are not geared to their immediate needs in learning the language, that of English as an aid in their studies.

For with no substantial facilities for reference material in Sinhala and Tamil, students without the ability to use English reference material are at a distinct disadvantage. Furthermore, students in the medical and engineering faculties have to follow their lectures in English with little prior academic training in the language. The university English courses, however, fail to give the students the necessary reading comprehension skills to fulfil their objectives. One student said, "There is no relationship between the English we learn and the subject matter we study. They should train us to read and teach textbook material, then we will be more keen on the English classes".

Schools certainly have nothing to offer the rural students in terms of English Language Education. The English textbooks used in schools, as the students themselves pointed out, are entirely unrealistic in a situation where the teacher, leave alone the student, is not proficient in English. As one undergraduate from Anuradhapura says, "that text book is good for people who already know English. What are we supposed to do with a book like that in 45 minutes?".

Unless the language issue is circumvented, discrimination against 90% of the university student population is going to persist in the job market. As Mr Piyasena points out, language problems cannot be addressed after entrance to the university. It has to be a part of the education system, particularly at secondary level. But plans to offer students a systematic islandwide English Course from Grades 6-10 (Years 7-11), rather than from Grade 3 (Year 4) are only being talked about, not implemented.

This many-faceted disillusionment of the undergraduate transforms itself into an aggression which is most evident in the students' approach to issues such as ragging. There is

TABLE 2

NUMBER OF ATTEMPTS AND ADMITTED CATEGORY

		Arts	Comm.	Law	PhySc.	BioSc.	Med.	Eng.
1989/90	1st att.	786	229	83	211	175	162	159
	2nd att.	401	159	36	329	219	167	158
	3rd att.	117	24	15	126	127	52	45
1990/91	1st att.	1297	265	69	139	99	229	194
	2nd att.	542	168	30	211	144	200	170
	3rd att.	127	41	12	96	99	70	43
1991/92	1st att.	1129	271	95	90	62	188	163
	2nd att.	634	160	42	193	179	249	215
	3rd att.	184	40	15	90	143	95	61

Source: UGC

The high rate of second and third attempts in the Physical and Bio Sciences is due to the fact that most students in these areas are attempting to get in, respectively, to the Medicine and Engineering streams. Very few of them succeed, so they enter the physical and bio fields instead.

an almost perverse notion among certain groups of university students that ragging is the "only way" of getting to know the freshas. "Otherwise they wouldn't come if they are merely called". What they fail to see is that within the culture of ragging, students are certainly not going to heed a mere "call". Another student said, "We decide on the rag according to the people. If a fresha wears a beard, then he will get it bad". Some students went so far as to say that the name "rag" should be changed because it carried wrong connotations! Even the first years who had just gone through a nasty spell of ragging seems to conform to this view.

According to one student, "welcome parties are all nonsense, we never get to know the freshers that way" and according to another, "we are able to create a sense of unity through the rag, that is why politicians are against ragging"(!). Most seemed to agree. These statements make many things clear. First, a perception that aggression fosters cordiality among students, and that student tendencies of "blaming it on the politicians", which is reasonable in some cases, has been taken to absurd proportions here.

The students also seem to be able to draw a non-problematic line between "harmful" and "harmless" ragging. They fail to see that even the most "innocent rag" (whatever that is) can have traumatic effects on certain types of student.

Those among the students who first opposed ragging, particularly the young women, later silenced themselves during group interviews in what was a clear case of indirect intimidation. Those who did venture to oppose the rag were jeered at as "cry babies".

According to a Fine Arts undergraduate at the University of Kelaniya, the rag is also the starting point for political mind-bending to gather support for the university's political parties. And for vulnerable students from rural areas with little financial [see table 3] or social security, these "raggers" become the ultimate saviours in an alien and unsupportive environment. "It is through the rag that the political groups feed their half-truths about capitalism and so on to the freshers. According to them, even if I wear a pair of denim jeans, the World Bank is to blame."

However, it is important to see these tendencies as springing from a general bitterness towards a system they have little power to fight. This bitterness begins with issues within the university itself, the provision of computer facilities, for example. One Commerce student from the University of Colombo says, "We get no computer literacy at all in the first two years, even though we have one of the most advanced computer institutions in the country. They have made the ICT (The Institute of Computer Technology at the University of Colombo) a money-making institution."

This bitterness extends to the outside world as well where the university student is prejudicially perceived as an anarchical and unsavoury element in society, a conclusion unjustly drawn from the spate of strikes and demonstrations occurring within universities.

Then there is the battle with the private sector, an increasingly important sphere of employment in a context where many government departments that earlier provided around 90% of the graduates with jobs, are now being closed down to slash state expenditure.

However, the demands of the private sector and the contributions of the local university graduate seems to be increasingly at odds. The university student is perceived by

TABLE 3

FAMILY INCOME OF UNIVERSITY ENTRANTS IN 1991/92 (IN RS '000)

ANNUAL INCOME	TOTAL NO.	%
LESS THAN 4	601	8.46
4-16	1823	25.67
16-28	1342	18.89
28-36	518	7.29
OVER 36	1791	25.22
NOT AVAILABLE	1028	14.47
TOTAL	7103	100

Source:UGC

According to the above figures, 60.31% of the university entrants' families earn less than Rs.3000 a month. The economic situation is so bad for most of the families, that some students even send half of their Mahapola or university grant of Rs.1250 home to their parents and siblings. These financial circumstances are in stark contrast to the statement of one government official who told **Counterpoint**: *"The poverty story is no longer valid. I don't think that this kind of poverty exists now. Income levels have gone up with the new economic system".*

the private sector as being over-educated, anti-establishment and non-productive. The prime concern of the private sector employer, naturally, is optimum productivity and not the fate of the disillusioned university student.

As Dian Gomes, Managing Director of Slimline, the one of the largest employers of graduates and CIMA qualified people in the private sector, says, "Graduates are not good trainees, because by the time they pass out, they are about 25 years old, and they don't want to be trainees, they want to be executives. They think their degrees carry a premium, but it means nothing to us until they are trained". Many private sector executives spoken to held similar views about the graduates they had employed.

Sure enough, after a two year wait before entering university, and after three or four more years (or, indeed, five or six!) in the university, what they want is immediate results in the job market, an unrealistic objective as far as the employer is concerned. This mismatch between graduate aspiration and employer expectation has unfortunately proved disastrous over and over again.

In one case, twelve engineering graduates recruited by a private firm didn't last more than two weeks on the job because their work didn't fit the career image they had built up for themselves. The undergraduates themselves attest to the fact. As one student said, "Graduates don't like to go in for small jobs. So they take up a teaching post at a school, and wait till they get a good post at a company".

For them, then, it is a question of "integrity" and "identity", a question that has to be addressed when designing courses for these students for whom the prime objective is employment. A professional component is essential in degree courses so that they don't enter the market as novices both in terms of experience and knowledge.

Yet the private sector too is culpable in many instances. There is an implicit, and sometimes even explicit, classism that operates in certain private institutions that gives precedence to "personality" and "polish" in students. This factor, and an obvious preference for foreign degrees, can easily be interpreted as a preference for employees from a certain class. However, that many private sector executives are fighting this prejudice is a promising sign. Yet, here too, the promises of change have not been matched with tangible results.

Thus, higher education and related issues are fraught with problems that need to be addressed through a continuing and far-reaching dialogue. A dialogue between curriculum developers, university teachers, employers, and most important of all, the students themselves. These issues also have to be discussed within the framework of an overall development plan for the country. There is not much use in implementing curriculum changes, if employment opportunities are not created in keeping with these amendments. It is futile, for example, to launch a degree in pharmacology if simultaneous steps are not taken to develop the local drug manufacturing industry. But within a cohesive development plan, a reformed agenda for higher education and a systematic English Language Teaching programme for students at all levels can do wonders in finding solutions to the predicaments in Sri Lanka's higher education. ▮

THE STORY OF SUGATH

The story of Sugath is the story of an inflexible university system. Sugath is a blind student who passed out of the University of Colombo in 1994 with a First Class in a History Special degree. A First Class is the highest honour a student can achieve, and only a handful of the most outstanding have achieved this in History since university education was instituted in the country. No vacancy existed for him in the university's History Department, so he joined the Graduate Training Programme, where they had trouble finding employment for the three enrolled blind students. They were finally recruited by the Government Brail Printing Office, where they were assigned the task of cleaning the rust out of old Brail plates for reprinting. According to Sugath, they were also treated badly because the others at the office had a complex due to their lack of education. Sugath also engaged himself in transcribing educational books into Brail.

Now, a post has been created for Sugath as the Information Officer of the Students' Councillor's Office at the University of Colombo, where he still earns Rs.2500, the same amount he earned as a graduate trainee. Here, he discusses tutorial topics with undergraduates and gives them general advice.

Sugath loves to teach, but is not bitter about the absence of a post at the university. Yet, it is strange that a student in a "dying" subject such as History is not being encouraged, and unfair that someone who has achieved so much by circumventing not only the general obstacles faced by the average university student, but also the difficulties resulting from his blindness, should not get a chance when he deserves it. ▮

"Lowering of Standards"?

IT is the general perception of academics and the not-so-general public that standards at universities are steadily on the decline. "In the (good) old days..." has become so common a beginning to any conversation on the university system -- be it about ragging, academic performance, English language proficiency, graduate employment, whatever -- that the decline in standards has become an incontrovertible fact in certain circles. And this, many add, is the direct result of the District Quota System which accounts for around 60% of the student intake each year. Based on the district quota system, students from educationally disadvantaged districts such as Trincomalee and Moneragala are able to enter university with a much lower aggregate than their counterparts in Colombo or Jaffna. For example, while students from districts such as Colombo and Jaffna needed a minimum aggregate of 289 and 290 respectively to enter the Engineering Faculty last year, students from Moneragala needed only a minimum of 191, a hundred marks less that their counterparts in the more privileged districts.

In addition, certain vacancies, such as the quota for Physical Science in districts such as Vavuniya, Mulaitivu and Mannar cannot be filled because of the absence of qualified applicants in the field. Faculties such as Law which are extremely competitive, but which have the additional requirement of a Credit in English at the GCE Ordinary Level sometimes have a lower cut-off mark than Arts (with the largest number of entrants and often the lowest aggregates within the system) due precisely to the fact that very few candidates from, say, Moneragala have credit passes in English at the O/L.

However, that it is the district-based entrants who are responsible for the poor performance at examinations has not been backed by any official research. Furthermore, in Districts such as Moneragala, educational facilities for A/L students are very poor and sometimes non-existent. The direct effect of this on the students' A/L results, and the improved opportunities offered them within the university system make it impossible for anyone to presume that the correlation between examination failures and the district quota entrants is a positive one.

The point is that university teachers and others concerned must look for more complex, more inter-connected reasons for this much- vaunted decline in standards, and, to be sure, these reasons must acknowledge the culpability and complicity of the entire academic community within the country. ▮

Campus Racism

IN spite of the university students' claims to "fostering unity" in the campus through activities such as ragging, this "togetherness" and "loyalty" are certainly not that obvious when it comes to race relations. With the ongoing offensive in the North and the resulting spate of suicide bombers in the South, each Tamil student within the university, just like each Tamil in society in general, has become a potential LTTE terrorist. Students, who normally resent and abuse the Police, have freely given information about the supposed suspicious activities of their colleagues, often on the flimsiest of grounds ("He was speaking softly *in Tamil* with his uncle in the hostel"), and the university system itself has fallen into the trap of following double standards -- one for Tamil students and one for the others. In one hostel of the University of Colombo, the only student who doesn't have a bed is a Tamil student, and he happens to be one of the few legitimate occupants of the hostel, whereas those who have beds are not registered at all! On another occasion, a Tamil student who was attending a special class at the university which was over at 8.00 pm had great difficulty in gaining admission to the hostel despite giving prior notice of the class to the authorities, and despite being brought to the hostel in the lecturer's own vehicle. No small wonder, then, where the administration, the security apparatus and the students have come together to alienate, isolate and even intimidate the Tamil students of the university, that a racial polarization of the worst kind has resulted. ▮

The Peradeniya Confrontation

THE current crisis at the University of Peradeniya is delicately symptomatic of many of the issues confronting higher education in this country. The root cause of the present stalemate was the ragging of freshers at the beginning of this academic year. Some seven students were caught ragging in the Arts Faculty, an inquiry was duly held, and punishments recommended to the Council, the governing body, which were carried out. Since the offence included the use of a knife, some of those found guilty were expelled, while others were suspended. The students concerned and their associates in the Student Union agitated for leniency, and the Council agreed to consider these requests at the end of the year. This, however, was not good enough for the students who wanted an immediate reconsideration. Tremendous pressure was brought to bear on the Vice Chancellor, not the least from the Minister of Higher Education, Richard Pathirana, who made uninformed and irresponsible public statements in general sympathy with the raggers but later (when the going got really tough, of course) faded back into the woodwork. Students staged protest marches, pickets, rallies, sit-ins, boycotts, poster campaigns, a satyagraha, and finally a fast *(upavasa)* in rotation. They also fished out a red herring in the form of long-standing allegations against the university's Bursar. Their battle cry became the demand for an immediate investigation against the Bursar, but the clear subtext was still the reduction of the punishment meted out to the raggers.

The other faculties did not take part in the boycott of lectures organised by the Arts Faculty, so more radical steps were required if the whole deal was not to fizzle out. Even in the Arts Faculty the agitators formed a small minority, but, as always, the majority remained apathetic even in disagreement. Yet, some students defied the threats and harassment of their colleagues, and attended lectures. They were bathed with buckets of water mixed with faecal matter and promised acid baths next.

In the meantime, some of the same crowd had attacked a vehicle and its occupants on the public highway that runs through the university, allegedly because they were "defiling the purity" of the campus. Clearly a serious escalation of the situation was required. The students forcibly occupied a part of the Economics building and installed an unauthorized public address system which disrupted all work in the Faculty. This open defiance led to legal action being taken by the authorities, and in the court proceedings about 20 students are facing charges. The case against those who assaulted the outsiders on the public road has also led to some arrests. In the latest development, some of the students who were intimidated and attacked have apparently been persuaded by the authorities to give evidence against their assailants, and another bunch of students has been charged by the Police.

The Government has in the interim capitulated to the students' pressure and appointed a three-member commission to inquire into the entire situation, without insisting on any preconditions from the students. Thus, the students reserve the right to continue with their illegal and disruptive activity on the university premises, while their grievances are being investigated, and they can also choose to reject the Commission's findings if they do not come out in their favour.

The familiar symptoms are these:

1 The university has hardly ever been able to make any punishment against stick. Invariably, after the piling on of pressure and the use of threats, these have been reduced or rescinded, and faced with this kind of network, one hardly needs to wonder why!

2 From the student perspective, the one cardinal rule appears to be that no one (within the university or outside it) has the right to punish any student for whatever reason at all. This means that both university rules as well as national laws can be broken with impunity by undergraduates within the university.

3 Student politics is invariably controlled from outside, by national political parties or revolutionary groups. The Universities of Peradeniya, Sri Jayawardenapura, Kelaniya, Moratuwa and Ruhuna are controlled by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), while the Colombo University is ruled by the Janatha Mithuro, a group ideologically similar to the JVP but even more Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinist than them. IT is the JVP-controlled Inter-University Students' Federation that is manipulating the Peradeniya predicament to its own ends. The signs are that the JVP, proscribed because of its attempt at an armed insurrection in the 1987-1990 period, is on the prowl again. Clandestine meetings are being held in the provinces, and the universities has always been its main breeding ground. The JVP hand behind the blowing up of this issue is telling, and an ominous harbinger of things to come. Some analysts estimate that the UNP government decimated 60,000 people in an attempt to root out the JVP, but hardly 5 years later they are back in business. Surely, this must be a warning to the PA government who apparently seek to do the same with the LTTE in the North? To lay the JVP to rest (or the LTTE, for that matter), one must address the reasons for its existence, causes for its continuance, otherwise one is doomed "to scotch the snake, not kill it."

4 Peradeniya also shows the way politicians do not want to antagonize the student body at any cost. In this endeavour, the Vice Chancellor and staff are fair bait, thereby demoralizing and debilitating the university system itself. University autonomy cannot stand up against political expediency even in the newer dispensation.

5 History is repeating itself at Peradeniya, and the Police have stepped in, charging altogether over 30 students for various offences, ranging from assault and intimidation to the illegal use of loudspeakers. This means that the original issues and principles have been lost in the process, the rest of the universities will see those charged as victims, even martyrs, and the brave few who defied their threats in attending lectures will now become ogres who have betrayed and destroyed their colleagues. The entire incident has reached epidemic proportions which has to be in the interest of the agitators and their JVP backers because the authorities cannot sustain such a campaign against the entire student body.

At the time of going to press, the Engineering Faculty had just decided to join the boycott in support of the Arts Faculty, and a 300-400 strong Police posse had destroyed the unauthorized structures put up by the students who have occupied a hostel, Hilda Obeyesekera Hall, and are continuing the Protest Fast from there.

WHAT NEXT...?

Vyasa

AND so the Army will march into Jaffna, the civilians will return, credible Tamil political representation will emerge to take over the civilian administration and to eventually implement devolution, investment will flood in and the Tigers, first contained and then subsequently marginalized in the jungles. This appears to be the Government's scenario for post-offensive conflict resolution. Everything will turn out okay. This is the beginning of the end of ethnic conflict. Or is it?

There are sound grounds for arguing that this is a fantasy concocted by a bunch of amateurs whose notion of strategy is no more than a hope and a prayer and whose idea of conflict resolution is fatally compromised by arrogance and naivete.

It is more likely that this offensive has led us back to the future of occupation, ambush, attack, atrocity and attrition. Having taken Jaffna, what happens next ?

The offensive has not endeared this government to the Tamil civilians. Together with the LTTE, the Government must bear responsibility for the humanitarian crisis that is unfolding and moreover, since it has seen fit in these circumstances to demonstrate its political virility vis-a-vis the NGOs, the Government must take full responsibility for whatever shortcomings there are in the management of this crisis. The Army will be an army of occupation confronting a population that wants to be well shot of them. Paradoxically, as an army of occupation it will also be an army that wants to get out of there fast and not be vulnerable to guerrilla attack. The exit route, nevertheless could prove to be elusive. It certainly won't be conveniently posted.

Consequently, the political movement envisaged in the fanciful scenario outlined at the outset, will be especially difficult to initiate. In these circumstances, can the Government find Tamil civilians who are willing to risk their credibility and lives by cooperating with the Government to get its political chestnuts out of the fire ? One would imagine that the civilians want to be sure that the Government is serious about devolution first, and most importantly, that the LTTE are effectively marginalized and no longer a key player. Bringing in former militants to front or implement the exercise, begs the question of their political credibility. And that the TULF will not play ball is assured.

In any event, the Government's package is of indeterminate status and in limbo. It has yet to begin that long journey through select committee, parliamentary approval and a national referendum. Accordingly, the interim period of quite a few months, even in the unlikely event that the process is commenced pronto, will be one of tension and stalemate. Whilst the package proceeds through its various stages at a pace not dissimilar to that of the Army getting to Jaffna, the best we can hope for is that conflict resolution will be in limbo rather than retarded!

There is no discounting the possibility that the majority community political constituency, fed on a diet of military victory against terrorism, will turn its back on devolution and powersharing. There is no guarantee that this victory will breed magnanimity and that arguments will not be advanced that a favourable balance of military forces is just as politically unfavourable to devolution and powersharing as an unfavourable military balance was deemed to be!

The impending political disaster stems in large measure from the Government's inability to fully understand the ethnic conflict it says it wants to resolve. As a consequence, it cannot differentiate between what it can do about the LTTE as opposed to what it would like to. The lack of clarity of purpose and the failure to orchestrate the political and military dimensions of conflict in tandem towards a clearly defined goal of conflict resolution, characterize the current offensive and will frame the perpetuation of conflict in its wake.

What is this offensive supposed to achieve in conflict resolution terms? The destruction of the LTTE to the point that they cease to be a key player, the marginalization and containment of the LTTE so that they either join the mainstream of devolutionary politics initiated by the Government or just wither away in the jungles, or the softening up of the LTTE to come to the negotiating table and settle for an agreement that is nearer the Government's interests than their

own ?

There has been no clarification of the objective, probably because the Government does not really know what it can achieve. Therefore, strategy is made on the hop or crawl as the case might be, with all the damaging political ramifications caprice entails.

Can the Government knock the LTTE out as political and military players with the available resources at its disposal ? Can the Government obtain the necessary sacrifice from the rest of the country to acquire the necessary human and material resources to do this without adverse political repercussions?

Once Jaffna is occupied there is still the question of what is to be done about what remains of the LTTE. The logic of what has been done so far will impel the Army to go after them, rather than sit in Jaffna, vulnerable to guerilla attack. What if the LTTE shifts its focus to the East ? Do we have enough forces to defend, consolidate, attack and destroy the LTTE in the peninsula, leave aside the entirety of the territory they claim as the 'traditional Tamil homeland' ?

This offensive must then breed more conflict before it can be realistically concluded. Any other conclusion, be it the symbolic hoisting of the lion flag over the Jaffna fort or any other salutary photo opportunity will be a sham and more. It would belie the reality that instead of the conclusion of the conflict, it signifies the commencement of a new phase of it. Moreover, it will be as much of a psychological humiliation for the Tamils as it would be a psychological victory for Sinhala nationalists. As such, it would deepen the already deep ethnic divide.

Were the objective to be the softening up of Mr Prabhakaran to impress upon him the futility of conflict and intransigence and thereby lead him to accept a solution more on the Government's terms than his, the question arises as to whether the offensive has created circumstances in which Mr Prabhakaran will negotiate. On the available evidence the answer would be a firm no. As much as the Government will not negotiate from weakness, neither will he. Defeat breeds defiance and this means more conflict.

My guess is that as long as Mr Prabhakaran believes he has the capacity to harass and deny the Government control over the entire northeast, he will not negotiate. He will calculate that he is still a player who can raise the costs of the Government's military victory to hopefully intolerable levels. Rather than the Government exposing the futility of his use of military force, Mr Prabhakaran may well calculate accurately that he can yet expose the futility of the Government having placed primary reliance on military force.

This offensive must then breed more conflict before it can be realistically concluded.

There is another dimension to this. Supposing, the objective was to get him to the table and he agreed. Is there not room for him to strike a hard bargain on the grounds that even after their successful offensive, the Government still needs his cooperation to end the conflict? That they still need him after claiming to have thrashed the daylights out of him, must reflect on the limited utility of the thrashing.

It is clear that the Government is unclear as to how to deal with the LTTE. Do they want to finish them off because there can be no honourable settlement with them or do they want to deal with them because they believe they have to, but only after having hammered the LTTE into a shape that is nearer their heart's desire? Moreover, there is the key task of winning the hearts and minds of the civilians whilst the Government decides what it is to do about the LTTE. The offensive has not helped.

Very clearly, the aggressive attitude towards the NGOs regarding the humanitarian crisis and the use of thuggery to disrupt the meetings of the NGO Forum together indicate that the Government and the Sinhala nationalist lobby are determined that nothing must distract or detract from the taking of Jaffna. That is an objective in itself and it is paramount. Human suffering by a people whose support is vital to the resolution of this conflict, has been relegated to secondary consideration.

There is a scenario being sketched which, if an accurate account of government thinking, points to a general election on the back of the military victory as the objective of this offensive. It has variations, but the one that offers the most potential in salvaging the political fall-out from the offensive runs along the following lines: The devolution package will be presented to the Select Committee and the UNP will be pressed for a quick 'yea' or 'nay' on it. Were they to opt for the latter, a quick election would follow with the Government silencing the chauvinists with its military victory and winning over the minorities with the promise of implementing the package once re-elected with the requisite majority to do so. This is nevertheless also problematic.

It will still remain the case that political action will be decisively conditioned by what happens on

the ground in the North. Moreover, given the reaction to the NGO Forum and the rise in chauvinism, there will be a number of forces to make the point that the objective of a Falkland-style election is not to be magnanimous and share power. There will surely be elements within the PA who are far from enthusiastic about the package who will be returned to parliament, after having campaigned on the basis of military victory. Whilst the devolution package may be dear to the President's heart, there is still a long way for it to go to be seen in similar terms by the overwhelming majority of PA members.

In this respect, the manner in which politics is played in the South once the Army enters Jaffna, is just as important as how it is conducted in the Northeast. The point needs to be made very clearly that entering Jaffna is not the end of the conflict and that crucially important political issues are outstanding, foremost amongst which is the political settlement. What is especially worrying is that the very constituency which is the natural political home of the President, is coming under attack. Liberal political opinion is being allowed to be castigated as anti- Sri Lankan and traitorous.

The President must arrest this descent into vicious, myopic chauvinism and ensure that if there is to be an election, the PA stands firmly on its commitment to a political settlement to the ethnic conflict. Failure to do so would imprison her in the dangerous populism she has hitherto defined herself against, and doom this country to fatal majoritarianism.

When the Government launched this offensive, there was a 'lets see what will happen' character to it. Now that the Army is to enter Jaffna, this seems to have changed very little if at all. The answer to the question of what next, is this and more.

Let's see what will happen and lets hope and pray, some things won't. ∎

Winning their hearts and minds *after* the war...

Counterpoint interviews
Sri Lankan Army Commander Lieutenant-General
Gerry de Silva

The question everyone is asking is whether there will be a resumption of offensive operations against Tamil Tigers in Jaffna?

It will definitely happen unless the LTTE withdraws or surrenders. (laugh)

How do you assess the first six months of Eelam war 3?

I think we have been right on top. The beating they got in Weli-Oya I think set them back. It has been a tremendous drawback to their command and control structure. Also, the series of operations we had in the Jaffna Peninsula commencing with the Leap Forward Operation to the latest 'Operation Thunder Strike'... where they have admitted to 260 killed, but we feel it is a little more -- about 300 killed in action and I think a similar number wounded, more than 60% seriously. So that, for a terrorist organisation of the strength they have, is a severe setback to their plans.

Do You believe that these military offensives can force the Tigers back to the negotiating table?

Well, That is the aim of the exercise. Any military action contemplated with the blessing of the national political authority is to bring them to the negotiating table. That is the ultimate aim. Of course, for us it is a better bargaining position.

The Tigers seems to be recruiting younger and younger cadres. Can you explain why they are doing that?

I think it is because their recruitment campaign has failed.

They need large numbers; they have appealed to the parents of even students. In fact our intelligence is that they even go and try to forcibly conscript even from schools. Parents have had to escort children to school. Perhaps also because of the severe drawback they have had losing so many in the last couple of months. For a terrorist organisation of that size it is difficult without forced conscription, specially when things are going against them. They have been forced to resort to children of 12 years and above.

The Army faced recruitment problems as well. So how is the recruitment going on now?

Very well, I must say. The response has been even better than normal. Perhaps because we are now on a winning note. There is no dearth of recruits joining the Army.

While you have concentrated on the North you have lost ground in the east...

Everything has been planned out. When we decided to take the battle to the North, we realised that there would be voids in the East. Because we had to move almost 50% of the manpower that we had in the East to the North. It was during the ceasefire that the LTTE came into the East in a big way. It was during this time that the LTTE re-organised their structure in the East. They started training and recruiting large numbers and generally got a better hold on the terrain. This is probably why they have made an impression in the East. But that will not set us back. Our aim is to dominate the Jaffna Peninsula and when that has been completed, the troops will go back to the East.

Do you think the Tigers will put up a fight in the peninsula or withdraw into the jungles of the northern mainland?

I am sure they will. We have had stiff opposition all along in these recent operations that were conducted. In fact, during Operation Thunder Strike in Achuveli they met us in strength and their aim I think was to drive us back. But I am happy to say that we went into Achuveli and we are holding the areas we planned to take: Around 25 square kilometres of land.

What does Jaffna really mean for the army?

Well, to the LTTE first. I think they will try to defend Jaffna at all cost. That is their heartland, that is where the LTTE movement began. They're not going to give it up without a fight. We are expecting that. On our part when we get to Jaffna that will prove to them that they have been thrown out of their stronghold, their home, their heartland, and they are going to lose credibility among the Tamil people whom they have so far professed to protect.

Obviously the army has decided fight the LTTE in the North. How would the forthcoming monsoon rains affect the momentum

Well, I don't think that it will affect the momentum at all in the sense that that infantry can battle in any weather. It is the mechanized columns because of the nature of the terrain, will find a few draw backs. That is to be expected, we have planed for that and infantry can go anywhere at anytime under any circumstances.

There is one school of thought that the monsoon will force the Army to suspend operations in the North.

I think I have stated this earlier. Nothing is going to stop us -- this time.

Jaffna is a heavily built up area. There are bound to be civilian casualties in any operation. What are you going to do to minimize civilian casualties?

That has been foremost in our minds. This is what delayed us in the last 12 years in going to the peninsula -- that number of civilian casualties that would be caught up in the war. You see, despite instructions to the civilians over a period of time to move out from known areas of LTTE camps, despite the operations we conducted earlier, we still find that certain people are stubborn and want to remain in their homes. Specially the older crowd.

But the troops have been warned, troops have been made aware of the laws of war and up to now they have behaved very well. So if there are civilian casualties, be assured that they are unintended. Our aim too is to try and minimize it because some day even after the occupation of the peninsula we have to win the hearts and the minds of the people and it will be counter-productive if there are too many civilian casualties. That is foremost in all field Commanders' minds, and troops have been warned right down to the last infantryman in battle. We are very conscious of this.

But the troops have been warned, troops have been made aware of the laws of war and up to now they have behaved very well. So if there are civilian casualties, be assured that they are unintended.

Don't make Kilinochchi the nursery of a new enmity

Lucien Rajakarunanayake

SAVE me from my friends, I can look after my enemies, is something the Government would do well to keep in mind, as the initial euphoria of Operation Riviresa, given way to a damnable apathy about the plight of Tamil and Sinhalese refugees (or displaced persons, to give the more sterile and fashionable description).

All the international goodwill and sympathy that President Chandrika Kumaratunga and the PA government won, through her bold peace initiative and the manner in which the LTTE forced the resumption of war, could vanish as a mere puff of smoke, unless the Government begins to save itself from its new found friends.

If the ill-informed and crudely racial shouting against the devolution proposals have almost died down, with the weakness of the opposition arguments and the people's unchanged desire for a lasting peace, there is a new cause for the opposition to the wider devolution being muted.

It is the reality of war. The blood-lust of those who have been calling for a military solution is being whetted and even sated by the reports of slow but steady progress on the front, and the number of Tigers killed. The ready contribution by the Tigers with the massacre of civilians in the border villages only adds to the demand for more blood. It is in this situation that the Government can well find itself in the midst of friends, it could well do without, and had better.

When the *Daily News* gives top billing to Mr. Gamani Jayasuriya and the Sinhala Arakshaka Sanvidhanaya's support for the government's current moves with regard to NGO operations in the North, one has to hear the alarm bells ringing out loud. As for me the news would have been if Mr. Jayasuriya and his self-appointed Sinhala Security Service or SSS had not supported the moves which may curb some NGO activity.

While more important news items about the Government remain uncommented upon officially, a statement by MIRJE is quickly and harshly contradicted by the Presidential Secretariat. And, the state-run Rupavahini carries the rejoinder without the original offending piece. Shades of old disorder back again, possibly with even more venom in the racial field.

The progress of war can bring in its trail the whole rag-tag of racial extremists who see a new opportunity for their messages of hate, which have been rejected by the people, and consistently opposed by President Kumaratunga. The danger is that as the thrust of the troops moves on, the sound of those who cry for the humane treatment of the Tamils will get more and more stifled, under accusations of being NGO agents or any other convenient anti-Sinhala conspiracy label which could be attached.

The Government has done well to appoint a Focal Centre, as it is called, to direct aid in food and kind to the people crowding Kilinochchi and Vavuniya. But, the manner in which it was pushed into doing it, after the UN Secretary General issued a statement, and after ignoring the pleas of interested NGOs and diplomats for several weeks, gave a massive score of negative points to its image abroad, and possibly caused irreparable damage.

Whether the appeals for help come from NGOs or churches (who are also in the dump of collective suspicion), from individuals or foreign diplomats, it is not possible to wish away the fact that Sri Lanka is in the midst of a refugee crisis of major proportions.

While many journalists and commentators keep worrying about how the North East monsoon will affect the troops and the fighting, there is little heard or asked how it affects the people who have on their own, or under LTTE compulsion, fled their homes in the Jaffna peninsula. Many of the stories are shocking. Women have given birth on the refugee trail. Kids have died of cold through lack of shelter.

While all this is going on, people debate whether the number of displaced persons is 500,000 -- 400,000 -- or just 100,000. Whatever it is, the number is in hundreds of thousands. As the fighting extends, according to the pronouncements of the Government and Defence spokesmen, the numbers will certainly increase.

There is no point in trying to heap blame on the LTTE that it is planning to use the harassed and suffering civilians as human shields. No doubt that is one of

their most likely aims. Another is their use as pawns in a call for fresh negotiations, without agreeing to the eminently reasonable terms laid down by the President.

The accusations have been many that the PA government was ill prepared for war, in terms of military action. The reported success of the various operations launched by the Security Forces seems to give the lie to this charge. But the truth is that no government since this war began has made any plans for the crisis of displaced civilians, refugees dammit, which is now becoming part of the tragic harvest of this war.

The problem is not confined to the Kilinochchi corner of SriLanka alone. The crisis of displaced Tamils is assuming increasing proportions in Colombo too, with the regulations that no shelter be given to unfamiliar persons. Landlords who have for year had Tamil tenants, are now demanding the eviction of the relations of their tenants who have sought shelter with their kith and kin. The landlord cannot be blamed. The tenants are often forced to take the painful decision of sending away those who came to them for succur. Lodges and hostels which housed Tamils are been closed, possibly for very good security reasons, but what steps are being taken to house the people who have being living in such places, who have no known links to the LTTE or any other subversive group?

Slowly, but surely, we are letting things build up to a major refugee crisis in Colombo and the suburbs, unless speedy action is taken to house these people in one or two places, and give them the basic facilities they need. It is obvious that their supervision could then be a much easier task too.

While that is the plight of the Tamils, there is also a growing problem of displacement among the Sinhalese. In areas such as Padaviya, the villages are fast being depleted of their populations due to fear of attack by the Tigers. There is certainly no means by which the Government could protect all the "border" or threatened villages as they are euphemistially described. The richer people have moved to towns such as Anuradhapura. But the poor have to fend for themselves. Some of these villages now have no women at all, and the few men left live in constant fear of attack.

It can well be argued that this is the price one has to pay for war. But the price certainly need not be so high. The problem of the border villages can never be solved by issuing arms to party favourites. To make matters worse, if the LTTE mounts attacks on villages with Ak-47 carrying men, it can be very well to tell the world that they did not attack unarmed civilians but an armed militia.

In as much as the schools were closed when fear gripped the parents, there is the time for some collective solution to keep our Tamil neighbours out of the scheme. Should they also not be entrusted with a share of the responsibility, and made to feel like members of the single nation, the President speaks so often about? A simple example. What could be the impact if Civil Defence at Wellawatte is left in the hands of the Sinhalese only?

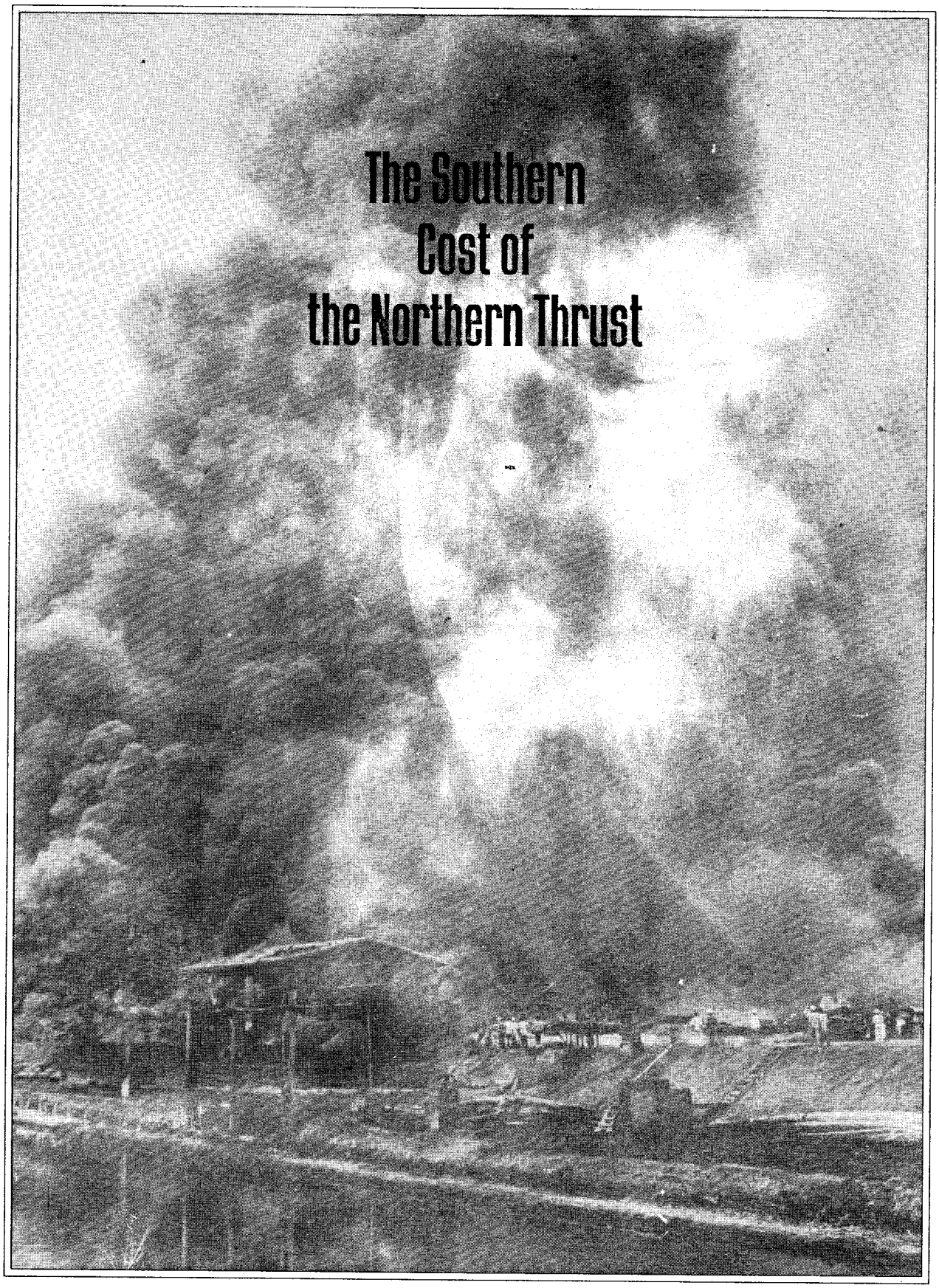
While all this goes on, the Government will no doubt be showered with praise by those who not so long ago were its strongest opponents. As this rate of progress (or regress) there will soon be no shortage of people who, untill recently, viewed Chandrika Kumaratunga with great suspicion as one who would betray the Sinhalese, but are now ready to praise her as the real saviour of the Sinhala race. Another Vihara Maha Devi in the making?

The sign of the emergence of this set of racially motivated political villainy are as clear as the obvious absence of the posters which demanded that the "real war" (Niyama Yuddhaya) be launched. The message to the President and her government is very clear. The embrace of these new friends, rushing in on a tidal wave of suffering of Tamil civilians can only mean the embrace of death. The death of the good image that Chandrika Kumaratunga was able to bring to Sri Lanka, and the death of her persistent position that all peoples in our country should have the right to equality.

The achievement of peace at the cost of human dignity can never amount to a lasting peace. The new waves of suspicion and hate that are being spread by both the state and private media may sound like sweet music to some who are ensconced in power. But they have no relevance to Chandrika Kumaratunga's talk of boldly declared commitment to a peace with equality. Civilian travail made worse by governmental delay, indecision and a proneness to blame the bearers of bad news can make a mockery of the President's own laudable concepts which are embodied in the "Sudu Nelum" programme.

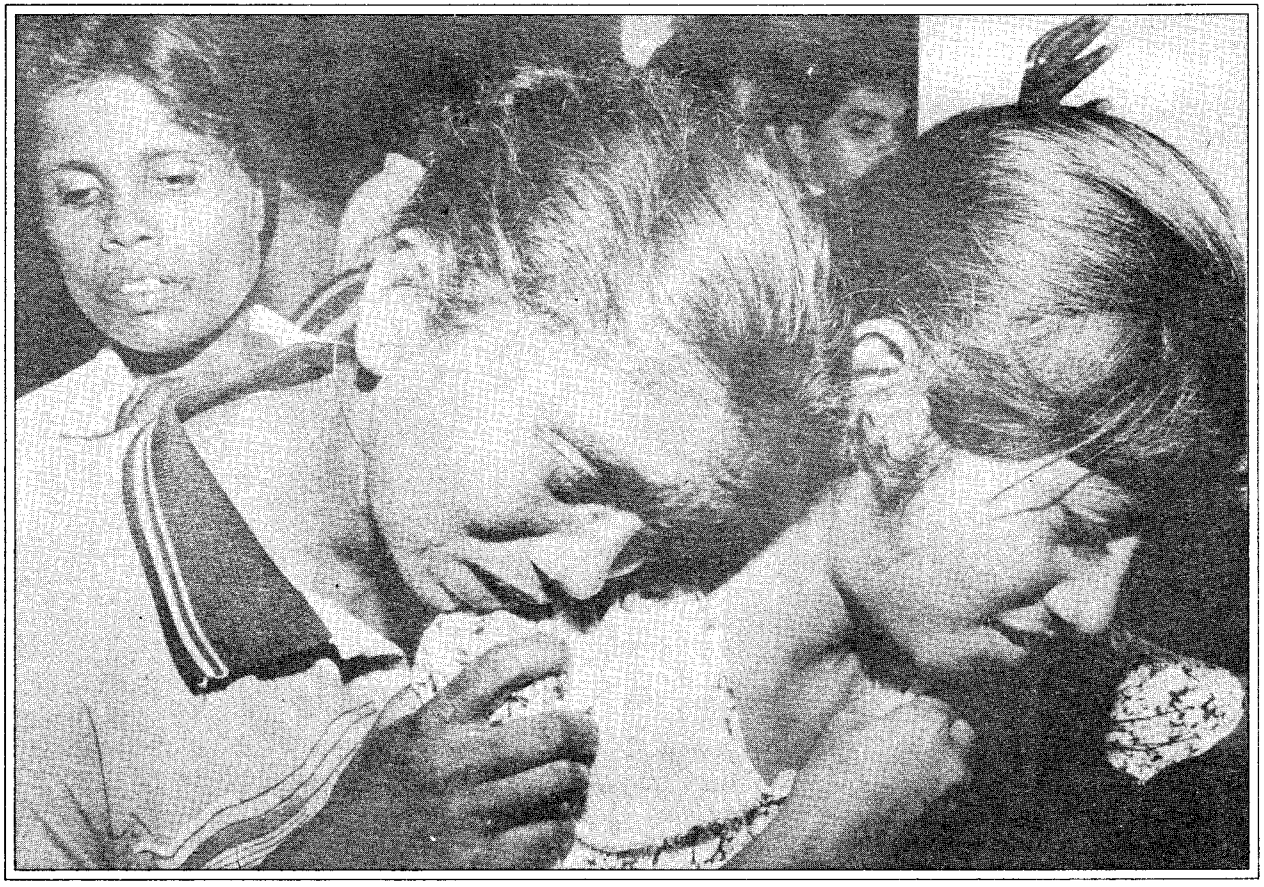
There is a whole world to of even greater sympathy too be gained by firm, swift and concerted action to ease the sufferings of all victims of war. There is also a world of re-born sympathy that awaits the LTTE if this is not done. That is the danger that the new camp -- followers in war who say cheers to blood and thunder will never point out. Those who seek to block relief to civilians of whatever ethnic group trapped in the vice of war, are in fact sowing the seeds of further hatred and division in Sri Lanka. If the hope of the Battle for peace is the restoration of mutual trust between Sinhalese and Tamil, then the real beginnings should be made immediately at Kilinochchi, with the help of all who offer a genuine measure of relief. ▮

The Southern Cost of the Northern Thrust



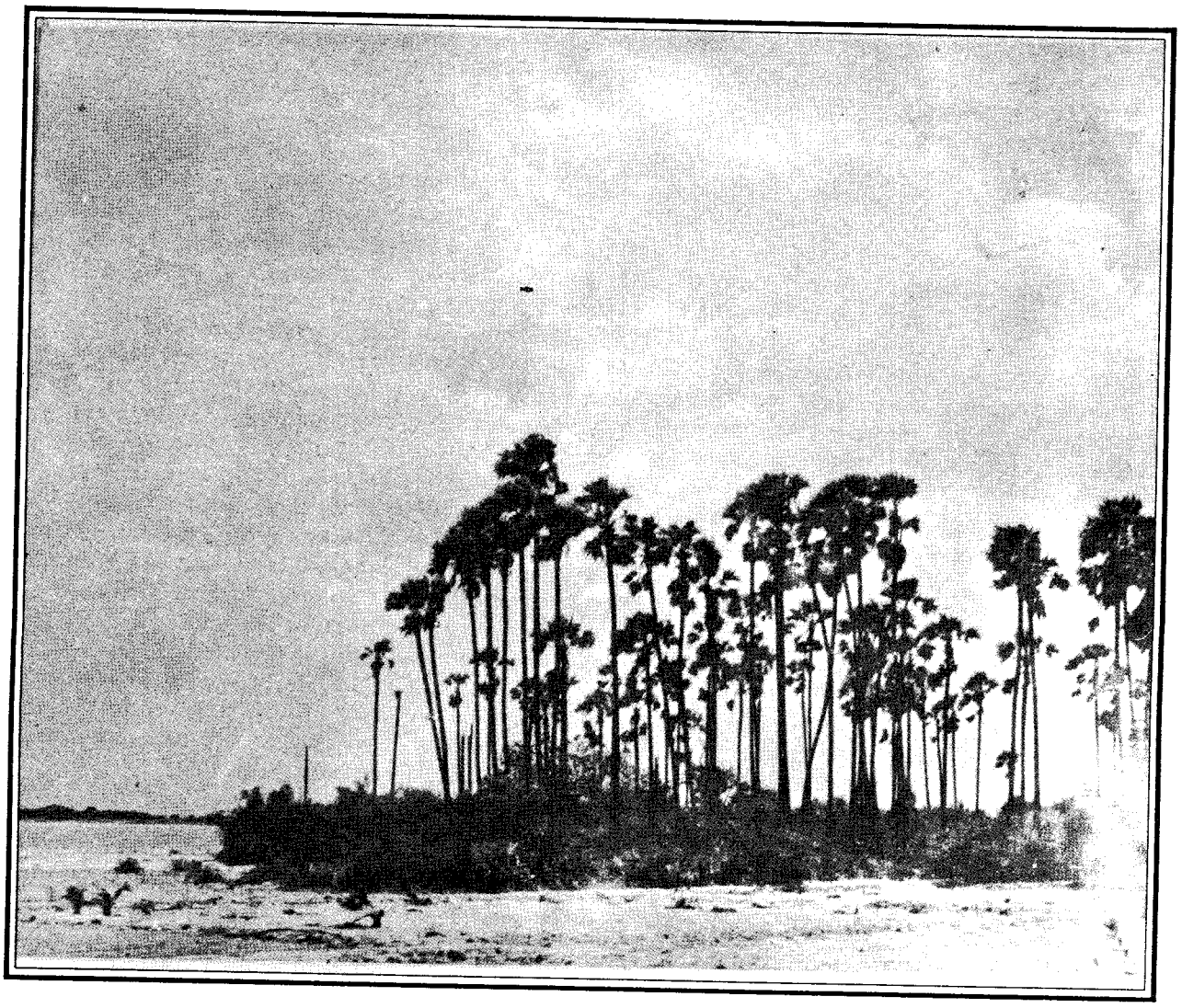
Like the fall-out of some monstrous atom bomb, the eruption of the oil storage tanks at Kolonnawa and Orugodawatta filled the entire sky with billowing black smoke. Though at the time it seemed as if nothing could prevent every drop of oil in each of the 40-odd tanks from burning, the terrorist attack destroyed only a quarter of these huge containers. It took the assistance of a team of Indian experts to douse the fire in five days, but the economic and human cost is irreplaceable.

This Airman's desperation is symptomatic of the pain and frustration felt by those who tried to keep the crowds away from the blazing fuel storage facility. At least three civilians paid the supreme price for their insatiable curiosity. . . .



Villagers from the border areas in the East of Sri Lanka are among the most helpless victims of the war. Many of the Muslims and Tamils have become refugees in alien lands in the safer regions, as have most Sinhalese. Those who have "chosen" to remain because they have no other viable option have become pawns in the deadly power game between the military and the LTTE. Here, alas, the price to be paid is too terrible to bear, as for these devastated mothers who look upon the mutilated bodies of their children...

A Celebration of Pluralism



Rajan Hoole

A war that is being fought by both sides with callous disregard for the civilians, thinking about the future may appear futile. Yet it is often because we do not think enough about the future, about what kind of a society we want, that we condemn ourselves to sectarian strife and to imaginary fears about others. The Tamils in particular need to have a clear vision about what sort of future they envisage for what is today the North-East Province. Pluralism is a way of accepting differences in culture and outlook, and yet being pleasantly surprised to discover that these are no barriers to the deepest of friendships, together with goodwill and understanding. Once that step is taken it would do a great deal to straighten out one's political outlook.

The Wanderers

The thought of writing this piece came to me some months ago when I was placed in a

situation of being an inadvertent listener to a conversation among a group of Muslims expelled from the North by the LTTE. They were relating their adventures. Some of them had arrived in Kalpitiya upon being expelled from Mannar Island in October 1990, after a 60 mile journey under inclement weather in overcrowded boats. At first, fellow Muslims at Kalpitiya had welcomed them. Within months relations had turned sour and the refugees found themselves often addressed disparagingly. They warmed up to talk about the exceptions. Some families were on a coconut estate. One night the owner's son-in-law ordered the refugees to quit. A group of despairing refugees went immediately to the house of the owner, an English teacher of about 80 years and woke him up. Having given them a hearing, the owner declared, "While I am alive you can stay here as long as you please. But do look after the coconut trees."

Another group had been placed in a similar position by a lady who had inherited the estate. The refugees appealed to her husband who declared, "As long as the lady desires to be my wife, you stay. If she insists that you leave, I would divorce her, give her custody of the children, and I will follow you wherever you go."

One described how when he went back to Mannar and was crossing a barrier to look for a cow a Tamil policeman punched him on the chest. A Tamil doctor who came along reprimanded the policeman. The policeman was killed by the LTTE a few days later. "It was not just because he did it to me", the speaker added, "He must also have ill-treated so many others". He went on, "We often experienced the worst from Tamil speaking persons. Look at our own AGAs and GSs. They are also Muslims. But when you are not educated they know that they could mislead you and misappropriate what is your due. Recently I was travelling to Mannar by boat from Kalpitiya with my wife and young children, and so was late. All the other passengers had boarded. A naval rating stopped me and said harshly that I cannot go! But an officer intervened: Mind the woman and children, let them go! You see, among the Sinhalese servicemen, many are rough. But there is bound to be one man who takes pity at least because of the women and children."

He then talked about refugees in Puttalam who had suffered from a fire caused by accident and had supposedly received a quit notice from the LTTE, "I told them, when we were in Mannar we lived in houses and lacked nothing. When we were chased away we went with suitcases. I tell you now, leave even those. If you must quit, then go with a few things in shopping bags. We will somehow manage."

Their culture was Islamic, but their approach to humanity was very open. Their theology was simple. They believed in a God who was all-powerful and dispensed justice. One might not readily agree with their belief that educated men are likely to be better than others. It was a reminder to me of the plea of king David, a forebear in their nomadic faith:" .... I am a stranger with thee: and a sojourner, as all my fathers were. O spare me a little, that I may recover my strength: before I go hence, and be no more seen."

The Nobleman

It was an unusual circumstance under which to encounter the history of a people. Jayasekera, aged 77, a native of Panama or Panahe South of Pottuvil. He was equally fluent in Sinhalese and Tamil and having studied in Lahugala, worked in Pottuvil. His most pressing problem was to do with his daughter Kumarimenika, whose Tamil husband, Tharmaratnam, had disappeared on 2nd August 1990 during those notorious abductions by the STF & Police. Jayasekera now had to support his three fatherless grandchildren (15 & below). After more than $3\frac{1}{2}$ years, the state was yet to respond to appeals for basic compensation and Tharmaratnam's salary arrears.

Jayasekera's ancestor had been a Nindagama Rala in Miyangoda in the Moneragala District in the Buttala-Wellawaya area and had migrated to the East during the Kandyan Rebellion of 1817/18. More about his origins were found not in any standard book on history, but in the **'Guide to Yala National Park'** issued by Fauna International Trust:- viz. "An aristocratic family of Kandyan origin living in the Koslanda area, accompanied by their retinue of attendants migrated down the Kumbukkan Oya to Kumana Wewa (Tank) and settled here during the Uva rebellion in 1818. This family of Kandyan origin later moved from Kumana Wewa to Panama Village, where their progeny live to this day. The attendants opted to stay behind, but later shifted their residence from Kumana Wewa closer to the estuary, where Kumana village stands to this day."

Jayasekera's fate symbolises that of Kandyan nobility who chose obscurity to taking sides with the British and were indeed persecuted by other nobles who took the British side. It is the latter who went on to make history and their descendents to become nationalists and to champion Sinhalese ideology in the 20th century. As for the former, their history was fit only to be lumped with fauna and other curiosities of the land. In the eyes of today's patriots, even their Sinhaleseness was suspect. Indeed, during the dark days of 1990 following the STF establishing a camp at Panama, even Sinhalese, including a school master had disappeared. They had either been close to

Tamils or had family connections with Tamils. Several such Sinhalese villages in the region (eg. Bandaraduwa) have suffered neglect because they did not fit into the dominant ideology and refused to integrate into the electorally important Gal Oya colonies. Yet that did not stop ideologically motivated scholars from using people like Jayasekera, who are victims of ideology, to argue that the "interior of the East, at least, was throughout the traditional homeland of the Sinhalese peasantry".

To add to the misery of these Sinhalese villages that felt no hostility towards the Tamils, some of them had been the targets of brutal LTTE attacks particlarly during 1990/91.

Thiriyai & Gomarankadawela

There is a great deal in the North-East that would not fit into either nationalist schemes of history. The Naduccadu Chronicle **(Taprobanean Vo II)** speaks of **'Rasapaksa Mudali'** who perhaps about the 17th century was a prominent resident of the area and a benefactor of the Thirukkovil temple and the Karaitivu Amman Kovil. Prince Sapumal who conquered Jaffna on behalf of the King of Kotte about 1443 AD is credited with building the famous Nallur Kandasamy Kovil and Jaffna town. His name is invoked daily in the temple as **'Sri Sangabodhi Bhuvaneka Bahu'** (the VIth). The Yalpana Vaipava Malai also speaks of the presence in Jaffna of Sinhalese during the 15th century.

Today the predominently Tamil village of Thiriyai North of Trincomalee is largely deserted. Gomarankadawela or Kumaresan Kadavai to which hard pressed Kandyan Sinhalese emigrated during the 19th century lies in obscurity behind a security blanket. But not long ago the people from the two villages were very close. The latter used to cultivate the fields of the former, attend each others' weddings and celebrate harvests by having bullock cart picnics. If some one was bitten by a snake at Thiriyai, a snakebite doctor would come from Gomarankadawela and stay on until the victim was cured.

The North-East

The question that confronts the North-East today is, do we take our cue from the pluralism of the past and try to recapture its healthier elements, or do we go along with the politics of fragmentation? The argument for the latter is that it is not easy to erase the bitterness of recent times. At least from July 1983 Tamil politics has pressed for a North-East merger on grounds of security as well as for protection against

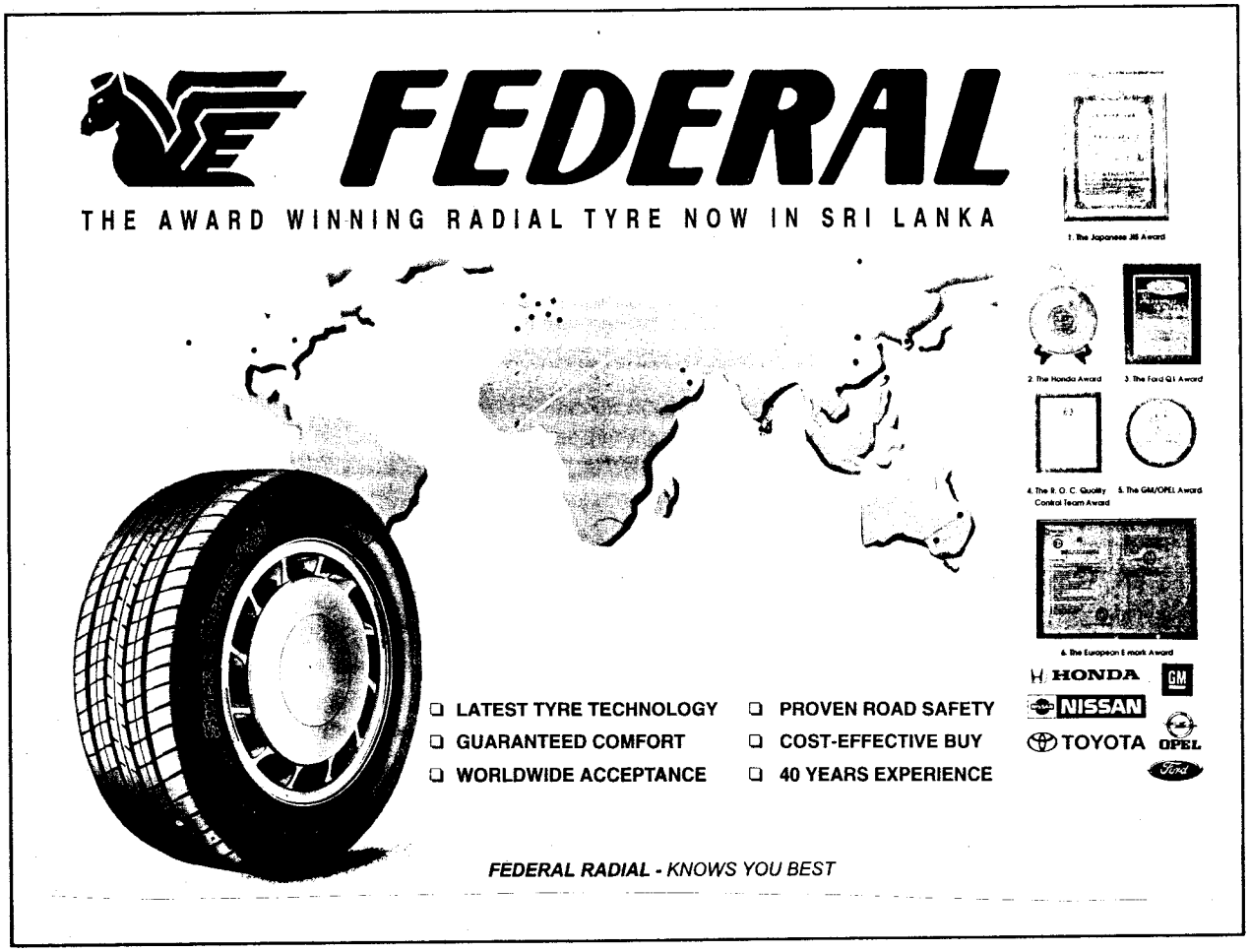
the long pursued agenda of the state to Sinhalise the East and marginalise the Tamils. Weli Oya was among the most brazen and ugliest expressions of this agenda.

On the other hand, Tamil massacres of Muslims and Sinhalese in the East has created among these communities a fear of living in a Tamil dominated polity. The Government's package seems to envisage a compromise by carving out certain Sinhalese dominated areas from the North-East. This too would not be easy for the Tamils to accept and to sunder their historical and cultural associations with parts of the region and acquiesce to the intentions and results of state sponsored colonisation as a *fait accompli*. Kantalai, for example, was dedicated to Koneswaram Temple in Trincomalee and the tradition was held in great esteem by the Kings of Polonnaruwa, Kotte and Kandy, as borne out by inscriptional and historical records. Vilgam Vihara or Rajaraja Perumpalli bears testimony to devout Buddhists among 10th and 11th century Chola officials and among Tamils.

It is also true that the Tamils in the East have reservations about the North-East merger. The healthier political outlook articulated by the Jaffna Youth Congress .... who did much for education and the co-operative movement in the East.

It is also true that the Tamils in the East have reservations about the North-East merger. The healthier political outlook articulated by the Jaffna Youth Congress in the 1930s produced many service oriented Jaffna men who did much for education and the co-operative movement in the East. The politics of Jaffna today is a very different matter. I also suspect that given a time of peace the differences between the communities in the East are not unbridgeable. There are still several schools that take in both Tamils and Muslims. In the Mutur area Tamil farmers and Sinhalese farmer-colonists too get on pretty well.

A possible approach to resolving the dilemma may be to retain the North-East merger as it is, with the regional body having powers as envisaged, while maintaining institutions that recognise administratively the distinctiveness of the East. If at some point of time the three communities in the East reach a consensus on separating from the North, that could be done painlessly. Such an arrangement would also pose a challenge to those in the North and to those running the central Government, to conduct their politics in a more sensible manner. Then, whatever happens would be for the better. ▮



The state of the art in the STF

Of rotten apples, state terror & the ruling class

A Special Correspondent

IT came as a shock to this country when recently personnel from the elite STF and other intelligence operatives were detained in connection with the water borne corpses of Tamils that had being making their appearance during June and July. Among the things revealed was that some of those killed had been held in the corridors of the STF HQ in Buller's Road amidst very respectable surroundings. This suggests that the killers had been confident of the impunity they enjoyed even after the election of a new government that espoused a Human Rights platform. Such would seem rash and even stupid unless one takes into account the social dimension of ruling class interests. To blame these recent events on a few rotten apples is an understatement having no relation to reality.

A remarkable revelation was made in the *Sunday Times* of 10th September by a retired army officer, Major Gen. H.V. Athukorale. Writing about the years 1979-83 he averred. "This period in Jaffna witnessed the climate being created for the launching of state terrorism which followed with the burning of the Jaffna Library and the disappearance of the ballot boxes during the DDC Elections (i.e. June 1981).... There were many things that were achieved in this 'operation'. The Army was politicized and political commissars emerged. The Army Commander's powers were usurped by these political Commissars to carry out acts of state terrorism and torture against innocent civilians."

Athukorale was referring to the immediate aftermath of the passing of the Prevention of Terrorism Act in July 1979. President Jayewardene then had bypassed the Army Commander and given a written brief to his relative Brigadier Tissa Weeratunga, 'to wipe out terrorism in all its forms from the Jaffna District' by the end of the year, placing at his disposal 'all the resources of the state'. Claiming successful accomplishment of the mission, Weeratunga submitted a secret report to Jayewardene, the contents of which remained unknown even to the Army

Commander. This article was the first time such a stark admission came from within.

We shall see that such actions remained a part of the scheme of things bequeathed by Jayewardene as the country plunged further into chaos, and terror as a means became inseparable from ruling interests. As a result, the Army is yet to recover anything like a disciplined structure capable of carrying out rational policy.

Post July 1983

We now turn to the very informative book ***For a Sovereign State*** written by Herman Gunaratne, who comes out as a very honest narrator except about what was then happening to ordinary Tamil people. He was among a group of officials and professionals in the Mahaweli Authority, who even in the wake of the battering the Tamil people received throughout the island during July 1983, saw Tamil ghosts haunting them from every quarter. Inspired by the "revelations" of high conspiracy by the vanishing breed of Tamil government officials, as related by civil servant T.H. Karunatilleke, this group purposed to act urgently to save the Sinhalese Race. While the Tamils were cowering as refugees, this group received alarming 'reports' of organised Tamil encroachments on Mahaweli project lands. They then used the Mahaweli Ministry's funds to organise a crusade of Sinhalese encroachers marching into the Maduru Oya basin led by the monk Dimbulagala Thero.

Jayewardene himself was seeing his share of ghosts during the months that followed July 1983, and imagined himself surrounded by conspirators. For this reason he came down hard on the Maduru Oya affair. The India-brokered Annexure C Proposals were first accepted by Jayewardene and turned down. India then trained Tamil militants as the Government geared itself for war with the appointment of Lalith Athulathmudali as National Security Minister. About this time Ravi Jayewardene returned to this country in aid of his father, the President, as a security advisor. He also, at least on occasions, sat on the National Security Council. Although not known at that time, he comes out as more powerful than Athulathmudali, and relations between the two were no doubt tense. That was President Jayewardene's style.

During the course of 1984, the Government drove away Tamil settlers from the Kent and Dollar farms in Manal Aru, Mullaitivu, and brought in criminals serving sentences to start the Weli Oya settlement. This set off a series of massacres. In the kind of set up run by Jayewardene, who was responsible for what, is a tricky question. Weli Oya was of course executed by the JOSSOP, one among the several nebulous agencies, headed by ex-Navy chief Asoka de Silva, assisted by D.J. Bandaragoda, former Additional Secretary to the Mahaweli Ministry. The plan was based on a report submitted by the zealous T.H. Karunatilleke of the Mahaweli Ministry on 12th October 1983, on a suitable alternative settlement site for the expelled Maduru Oya encroachers.

Lalith Athulathmudali in late 1984 announced the policy of conquering the Tamils by settling criminals and other rough elements among them. He certainly got lots of brickbats. But we do not know to what extent he initiated policy and the extent to which he was acting as a high-profile scapegoat for the ideas of others. Whatever the discomfort, hopes of being Jayewardene's successor kept him going.

With the LTTE massacre at the Kent & Dollar farms on 30th November 1984 and the fleeing of Sinhalese settlers, Government policy was facing a crisis. A group comprising some of the cream of Colombo's high born met on 23rd December 1984 as part of Ravi Jayewardene's team, most of them old Thomians and Royalists. Gunaratne it appears had already converted Ravi to the Mahaweli Ministry's ideas for saving the Sinhalese Race. Ravi Jayewardene, closely admired by Guneratne, got involved in the task of arming and training Sinhalese villagers in border areas -- a tragic fiasco as it later turned out.

One incident gives up some idea of the power wielded by this group. Following the Anuradhapura massacre of May 1985, a new chief for the newly created Joint Operations Command had to be found to replace Lt. Gen. Tissa Weeratunga who was retiring to become High Commissioner in Canada. Ravi J decided on Brigadier Cyril Ranatunga who had retired for appointment as JOC Chief. Among his qualifications as presented euphemistically by Gunaratne, is this:

"During the 1971 [JVP] insurgency he was co-ordinating officer -- Kegalle. Kegalle was under insurgent control for several days.... Brigadier Ranatunga brought Kegalle under control quickly. A number of lives of Sinhala youths were lost during this period."

RJ asked his team to exert maximum pressure at every level, while he would speak to the National Security Minister & the President. Months later Ranatunga was promoted to Lt. General and made JOC chief.

The Special Task Force (STF)

The STF, as Gunaratne confirms, was created by Ravi Jayewardene in 1984 as a unit in the police force, using 'hand-picked' men, under Zernie

Wijesuriya as its first commandant. He conceived this as a striking force along the lines of the British SAS. For this purpose ex-SAS mercenaries were hired from the Channel Islands-based security firm Keeny Meeny Services (KMS), run by an ex-SAS Major David Walker. The 40 or so mercenaries were paid about £ 20000 per annum tax free. According to security sources in Britain, the deal was endorsed by MI6 and approved by Whitehall. The mercenaries are said to have trained in addition specialist army & navy units.

KMS had already drawn attention to itself for other reasons. Because of possible repercussions in the USA, President Reagan had sub-contracted KMS for the Administration's covert operation in Nicaragua, where it was funding, arming and training Contra rebels to overthrow the Leftist Sandinista government that overthrew the US-backed dictator Somoza in 1979. Neither this nor the STF deal were ordinary ones. The Labour Foreign Affairs spokesman George Foulkes had tabled questions in Parliament asking Prime Minister Mrs. Thatcher about her meetings with David Walker and the commitments she had made.

Mrs. Thatcher's personal interest in pushing security deals may have sounded a bit odd then. The British ruling establishment's close, and no doubt profitable, friendships with arms merchants Khasoggi and Said are now common knowledge. That Mrs. Thatcher's son Mark, for one made about £ 10 million in commissions out of British Aerospace's £ 20 billion Tornado deal has been alleged repeatedly in the British press (eg. *London Observer* 10/5/92).

Once on the job, discontent grew in mercenary ranks and there were rowdy scenes at local resorts. The British side of the story was given in an exclusive report by Nick Davies in the *London Daily News* of 4/3/87 under the headline "Soldiers in Tamil Protest".

"...But more serious problems followed. The Special Task Force moved into the island's Eastern Province and the KMS men began to hear reports of atrocities. The mercenaries, many of whom have long SAS experience of counter-insurgency, complained that this was a fatal error. They wanted the "Task Force" to win the hearts and minds of Tamil villagers to cut off the support they offered Tamil guerrillas. They complained that the Task Force was making enemies of them all and made a series of protests to the senior mercenary on the ground, en ex-SAS colonel who joined the KMS after being targeted by Irish terrorists. He could do nothing. Discontent among mercenary ranks grew. Less qualified "cowboy" reinforcements were sent from London, including one man who had served a jail sentence for armed robbery.

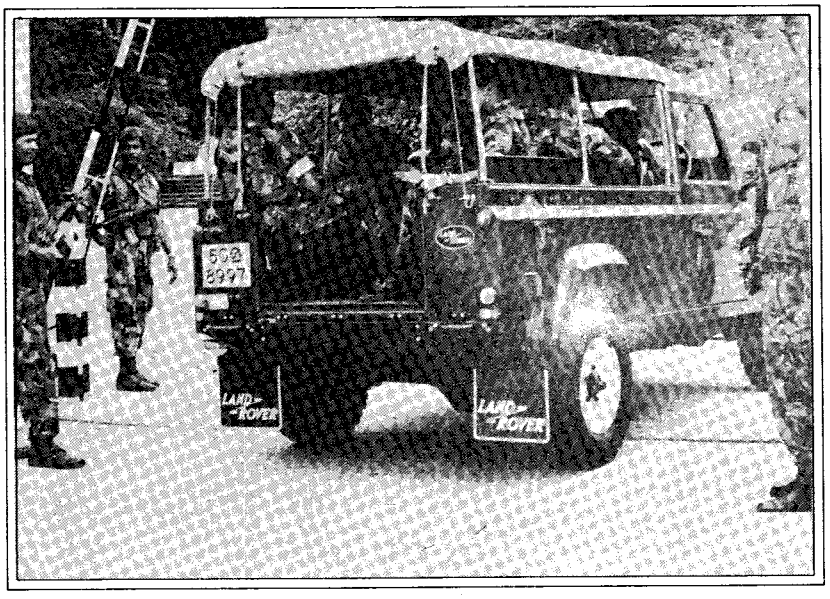
"Then Israeli security consultants arrived on the island, and unhampered by restrictions from their own Government, began to take over the KMS operation.

"Now senior ex-SAS men have refused to renew their contracts and others have walked out.... David Walker, who is believed to be still in Sri Lanka, is reported to have sacked KMS teams who had been training other specialist army and navy units for the Sri Lankans, in an attempt to save the contract with the STF---"

Once deployed in the East the counter-insurgency efforts by the STF make gory reading. One of their tasks was to stir up Tamil Muslim enmity. From 12th to 14th April 1985 they put together a band of Muslim thugs and took them to attack the Tamils in Karaitivu

Once deployed in the East the counter-insurgency efforts by the STF make gory reading. One of their tasks was to stir up Tamil Muslim enmity. From 12th to 14th April 1985 they put together a band of Muslim thugs and took them to attack the Tamils in Karaitivu. This policy has had tragic repercussions down the years for both Tamils and Muslims. On 11th May the STF's mob set fire to Tamil houses in Oluvil. On 17th May 1985 the STF abducted 23 young Tamil men from Naipattimunai, who were killed and buried in Thambattai, South of Akkaraipattu. It was this that brought the STF into the limelight when Paul Nallanayagam, a Citizens' Committee activist publicised the incident. He was charged under the catch-all Prevention of Terrorism Act. His case was successfully fought by the Civil Rights Movement. The STF became a byword for terror-cum-impunity.

Among the worst incidents from 1985-July 1987 were the Kokkadichcholai Killings, particularly of the prawn factory employees at the end of the first week of 1987. Reports then said that 120 civilians were killed by the STF soon after they took control of the area from the LTTE, losing 20 of their own men. Gunaratne who visited the area soon afterwards in a party that included the journalist Iqbal Athas was



characteristically complacent. He wrote, "I too started talking to the civilians ... They did not seem to have any fear of the STF. I asked ... "Does the STF harass civilians?". Their clear answer was 'No'... Iqbal Athas too was convinced that the stories against the STF were gravely overstated. John Rettie [of the BBC] later admitted that one of his sources had misled him..."

The families of those killed have since received compensation. People of the area, many of whom lost their family members, had this to say: "More than 80 prawn factory employees were lined up and asked to come one by one with their identity cards into a screened area. They were killed one at a time. The executions went on until late in the evening." The STF probably has a record of this somewhere...

The JVP insurgency August 1987-89.

With the coming of the Indian Peace Keeping Force and the outbreak of the JVP insurgency, the STF was deployed in the South. A notorious group known as the 'Green Tigers' then emerged, Ravi Jayewardene was accused of being in charge of this unit and the unit which was identified with the STF. In an interview with Lasantha Wickrematunge in the *Sunday Island* of 21/2/88 RJ rejected both charges. However, Gunaratne has this to say : "He [RJ] told me many times 'This is not the STF type of war. They must be recalled soon.' He was batting it out with the politicians to withdraw the STF; he finally succeeded in doing so in July 1988.... 'Victory is certain' 'Jaya Niyathai' was the STF motto. Ravi was talking about victory against the separatist rebels. He was a very disappointed man when the STF dirtied their hands in the South". To state it differently, the STF was meant to kill Tamils, but they had now killed Sinhalese instead.

Post June 1990

Once the IPKF left and the LTTE unexpectedly resumed the war in June 1990 amidst continuing talks with President Premadasa, the STF was back to form. Lionel Karunasena, the STF chief, told the people publicly that if any had links with the LTTE, he and the STF were the most guilty. They, he said, had been of late in the business of supplying the LTTE with arms and war materials, as agreed to between the LTTE and the Government, for it to fight against the IPKF and its allies. He promised not to punish people for past links with the LTTE, but that future links would not be tolerated. This was just public relations. The STF had already been killing people only because they were Tamils.

In Arugam Bay, near Pottuvil, then under the command of Inspector Hassan, women looking for their sons saw them in the STF compound, but could not talk to them. They had since disappeared. On 2nd August, 120 or so Tamil refugees who returned on an assurance of safety from the STF were rounded up by the STF and Police. Billows of smoke were then seen rising from the Police compound. About that time 35 refugees were lined up on Kallar beach and mowed down by an STF Buffel armoured car. In Thirukkovil, then under the command of Inspector Ratnayake, from late September to early October 1990, more than 40 headless bodies and severed heads were washed ashore along a 5 mile stretch of the beach. Ratnayake, subsequently promoted to ASP, was under the new Government moved to the Presidential Security Division, another of RJ's creations. Akkaraipattu, then under Inspector 'Kalu Ranjith' too earned notoriety. Torture and executions were routine at the larger camps. The STF has since improved its

public relations. But impunity remains an essential part of its functioning. The recent 20 or so corpses around Colombo have been in comparison with its past, a greater embarrassment. One should not, however, put down the whole history and ethos of an institution to a few rotten apples. The founder and his high society pals clearly knew what they wanted, or had willingly subjected themselves to a grand delusion.

Institutionalisation of Anarchy

To get back to the point made by Major General Athukorale, we shall see how this culture of terror with its shuffling of responsibility affected the Armed Forces as a coherent operational unit.

On 5th September 1990, 159 refugees were taken from the Eastern University by the Army Brigade at Valaichenai under the command of Brigadier P.A. Karunatilleke, first to Valaichenai. (It is not clear from Gunaratne's book if he is the Major Karunatilleke who attended the first meeting of Ravi Jayewardene's group in December 1984 to give them advice.) All the detainees disappeared. Major General Gerry de Silva then in charge of the East visited Eastern University 3 days later on 8th September, along with Brigadiers Karunatilleke and A.M.U. Seneviratne. General de Silva was already aware of 159 refugees having been taken away, but could not give any assurances about their release. Most people believe the detainees to have been killed by then. Many believe General de Silva to be a 'gentleman' who would not do nasty things, but simply had to cover up.

A.M.U. Seneviratne who communicated better and was in charge of Batticaloa did not earn the same notoriety as Karunatilleke. But there were also many disappearances under his command. In one incident on 9th September 1990 more than 180 villagers in the Sathurukondan area were marched off by the Army and murdered.

To a query regarding those abducted from Eastern University, Defence Secretary Air Marshal Walter Fernando replied that only 31 were taken for questioning and that all of them had been released.

Try to imagine how the system works. General de Silva did not want to know what Brigadier Karunatilleke did. Brigadier Seneviratne did not want to know what his Colonels and Majors were doing. The Defence Secretary did not want to know what Gen. de Silva did. That explains a good deal about the Sri Lankan Army's performance. It has been suggested that in 1990 the order given to the Forces was to thin down the Tamil youth population in the East. There will no doubt be some revealing books and articles coming from those leaving the Forces.

The Social Dimension of Terror

The institutionalisation of terror is ultimately a product of the insecurity and arrogance of the ruling establishment. Once the structures for democratic accountability are dismantled and individuals have power to act with impunity, those at the top themselves are never sure whom to trust. Then we are in a situation of anarchy with a multiplicity of agencies keeping watch over each other, and headed by sycophantic individuals.

The Mahaweli doctrine of cornering the Tamil minority by establishing militarised settlements of Sinhalese is again the expression of a ruling class that is no longer sure of itself. The ordinary Sinhalese people to whom this brought enormous suffering were just objects in this scheme. Terror finds a natural, and even indispensable, place in the articulation of such a doctrine. Once it had been decided that this was the only way to deal with the Tamils and that there were no other options, then any immorality could be justified, even 'going to the devil', to borrow an expression from President Jayewardene. It is the same with Tamil nationalists who have decided that Thamil Eelam is the only option.

The result was that internationally Sri Lanka was taken down the street of shame. All the time the strategists were working towards their discomfiture, giving India occasion to intervene as it did. The Indian intervention, it must be remembered, was approved with relief worldwide because of the shame this country had brought on itself, particularly since July 1983. The JVP uprising it triggered off flowed from the banning of the JVP as a scapegoat for July '83. The uprising was thus not so much an anti-Indian expression, as the final unravelling of the bankruptcy of the ruling class.

The group around Ravi Jayewardene and their associates who approved of their actions did not want to take their share of the blame. They had treated politicians with disdain for being cautious and two-timing, who for reasons of their own survival were forced to recognise more than one side to a matter. Thus, S.L. Gunasekera could indignantly break off links with the UNP leadership and stay with his legal practice. Ravi Jayewardene whose stated aim it was to 'protect Sri Lanka and the Buddha Sasana' could go back to Australia after having placed both in further jeopardy. For the ordinary people of the country it was very different.

How deeply entrenched this culture of terror, was and the vested interests it represented became very evident soon after

the new PA Government came to power in August 1994. The first moves were made to bring to book those in the armed services responsible for violations in the South. Some soldiers, including a brigadier, were produced in court. 'Undercurrent' writing in the newly launched pro-UNP ***Sunday Leader*** accused the Government of a Dracula-like obsession for digging up graves. A similar line was taken by 'Islander' in the ***Sunday Island***. The chorus was joined in by Ranil Wickremasinghe, who is now the leader of the UNP. The line of argument was that these men in the services had acted to protect democracy and restore law and order, and that bringing them to account would demoralise the services at a time they were fighting the LTTE. Their answer to discredited policies that had made the LTTE larger than life, was, **more of the same.**

There is more to this than meets the eye. The ***Counterpoint*** in its November 1993 issue and Amnesty International broke the story of a covert operation in Colombo where some Tamil youths were killed. Among those security operatives revealed as having been involved was Captain Munas, alias Dias Richard, alias Martinersz, who earned notoriety in Batticaloa. Late in November 1993, the ***Sunday Island's*** columnist on security matters writing under the pseudonym 'Ravana' claimed that Munas had been killed during the relief of Pooneryn camp that was partially overrun by the LTTE. The ***Yukthiya*** however reported that Munas was much alive and was among those detained over the recent corpses in Colombo. Following the Government's imposition of censorship on security matters, Ravana, Munas' killer on paper, resurfaced in the ***Sunday Island*** with a plea for press freedom! Unconfirmed reports allege that "Munas" is now free again to terrorise Tamils at will.

Rumours began to circulate last August that the Government was going to move against sections of the STF and other security personnel on the corpses affair. ***The Island*** came out with a lead item by Shamindra Ferdinando quoting unnamed security sources, expressing concern that the anticipated crackdown would jeopardize security in the City of Colombo.

This leaves us with the picture that the role of significant sections of the mainline press is hardly other than sinister. Harassment of the press under the present Government is a matter for concern. But also serious is that of significant sections of the press combining to justify, cover up and conspire in denying justice to tens of thousands of ordinary people who were victims of terror and had lost near ones as the result of state terror. That gives a grim picture of the interests these so-called journalists represent and whom they work closely with. The values they articulate have little to do with truth, freedom, democracy and justice for the people at large. Many of them who despised the Free Media Movement during the UNP regime are now earnest advocates of it.

One need not wonder why this country produced a stunted journalism with hardly any investigative reporting particularly in the English media, during the UNP regime. One would find these totalitarian values also being articulated in many of Colombo's elite fora and professional bodies.

A most ironic sentiment appearing towards the end of Gunaratne's book is not to be wondered at: " History must ultimately record that Prabhakaran [the LTTE leader] took on the might of the Indians. To the Sri Lankan Fat Cats who say 'what alternative do we have' Prabhakaran has given the answer".

The difference is that the LTTE developed a machinery to trap the entire Tamil people and drive them as a suicidal machine. The Sri Lankan establishment on the other hand had to make do with a few prisoners, such as whom they used at Weli Oya, and with poor and helpless Sinhalese border villagers whom they could neither control completely nor deny the alternative of running away.

Something about the author of ***For a Sovereign state*** is also in general very instructive about the ruling class. He had admired Brigadier Ranatunga for the severity with he had crushed the JVP rebellion in Kegalle in 1971. But during 1987-89 the JVP had become a much harder nut to crack and was paralysing the South. But this time the author and his friend Minister Thondaman had become trusted go-betweens, trying to negotiate between the JVP and the Sri Lankan Government. Likewise, his other friend and fellow Thomian, S.L. Gunasekera, an advocate of the Mahaweli doctrine who could not see that the Tamils had any serious problem, and who also held the Tamil militants in contempt. But as the civil war approached a stalemate in 1985, he went for the talks at Thimpu hosted by India and sat with the Tamil militants.

The first thing about the ruling class is that they worship power, whatever its source, and are little concerned about the moral and political rightness or wrongness of actions. **That is what a good public school education is about: First respect power, and then play the game.**

The most important thing is to recognise that the totalitarian mindset among the ruling elite is a pathological condition rooted in ideology. The struggle for Human Rights will therefore be a difficult one and the risks should not be underestimated. ▮

Old Wine in New Bottles

Arjuna Parakrama

CONTRAY to popular misconception, I am not always hell-bent on shocking people, on being an iconoclast. I resent the patronizing niche of *enfant terrible* that I have been slotted into by the literati who then don't have to take what I write/say seriously. I have become increasingly peace-loving, even conservative in my old age; so much so that the powers-that-be in the Arts Council in general, and the Drama Panel in particular, have really taken advantage of my naive timidity.

But, enough is bloody enough, and the literary establishment is hereby challenged to justify itself or be damned. My reluctance to make grandiose pronouncements in public on the New (but hardly improved as I shall demonstrate) Arts Council was based on the premise that they had to be given a chance; these, so the story went, were the progressives, our fellow travellers who had inherited the UNP's legacy of propaganda-cum-sycophancy, and were trying valiantly to break away from 17 years of corruption. Yes, it does seem that the old arguments that we used to justify supporting the PA election campaign are being replicated here, and we have suffered the same disillusionment where these arguments have kicked our teeth in.

I was one of the judges picked for the semi-final round of the 1994 State Drama Festival. The seven judges were Prof Tissa Kariyawasam (Chair), Mr Jayantha Aravinda, Dr G Delabandara, Dr Neloufer de Mel, Mr E. M. G. Edirisinghe, Mr Sugath Watagedera and myself. At the meeting held to decide on which plays were to be selected for the final round we reached a unanimous decision that three plays **Yakshagamanaya, Antigone** and **Baraniya** were to go in. After some discussion **Adhipathiyage Marana Manchakaya** was added to this list, and the unanimity of the panel was maintained. There was some question about the absence of any original plays in the list selected, but the general view was that none of the original plays staged at the semi-finals were worthy of

inclusion in the final. This decision (the inclusion of the four plays) was duly recorded, the entire panel signed it and the meeting was adjourned. I had mentioned earlier that I had to leave by 4.00 p.m., but this wasn't a problem since by then it was all over. I left at about 3.55 pm and so did Dr de Mel since there was nothing more to discuss. Incidentally, the Chairman, Professor Kariyawasam was over 20 minutes late for the meeting which was scheduled for 3.00 pm on July 9, 1995.

Imagine my surprise, then, when I read a month later that (in addition to the four plays listed above) a fifth play, **Prometheus**, had been selected for the finals. I was so sure that it was a mistake that I tried desperately to contact the Chairman and other members of the panel in order to have an immediate correction issued.

It was only at this point that I was informed that the rest of the panel had changed its decision *after* we had left, *after* the meeting had been officially terminated, and *after* we had all signed the decision-sheet certifying that four plays had been selected for the finals. In this connection too I was later informed by panelists Dr Delabandara and Mr Watagedera that they had been dissenters but had acquiesced since the other three members had been in the majority. Now, I had made it very clear that I was opposed to **Prometheus** being selected and so had Dr de Mel during the discussion at the properly constituted meeting. This meant that of the panel of 7, 4 members were clearly opposed to the selection of **Prometheus** whereas only 3 were in favour.

Yet, by the ruse of terminating and thereafter "reopening" the meeting, the minority of 3 prevailed, lending an aura of pre-meditation and conspiracy to the proceedings and implying that some members may have had a hidden agenda. This surmise is borne out by the fact that we were never informed, either verbally or in writing, of the addition of another play to the list of finalists, though this would have been the most natural thing to do in normal circumstances. The only explanation that I can adduce is that it was deemed important to keep this information away from Dr de Mel and myself until it became "too late" to call for a new and legitimately constituted meeting to discuss the change.

As soon as I heard about this change I wrote to the Drama Panel of the Arts Council, outlining in great detail the sequence of events of the meeting. Prior to this, on hearing of my dissatisfaction, some members of the Drama Panel had visited my home, leaving a written message in my absence, imputing that my unhappiness stemmed from the fact that I disagreed with the majority decision of the Panel of Judges. In my letter to the Drama Panel I categorically stated that I objected to the manner in which this decision was taken, to the fact that it contradicted a formal decision arrived at by the full panel, that the "reconvening" of the meeting was both irregular and unethical, and that, perhaps worst of all, neither Dr de Mel nor I had even been afforded the courtesy of an intimation of this changed "decision". The substance of my outrage is not that **Prometheus** was unfit to go into the final round (about this too I have no doubt at all!), but that it was smuggled in through the back door, despite a majority of the judges opposing its selection, and that even thereafter both the Chairman of the Panel of Judges and the Drama Panel itself were culpable in covering up this shoddy and disgusting charade.

All I got in reply from the Drama Panel was a long-winded, self- righteous and patronizing account of its policy of non-interference in the decisions of the panels. There was not one word about the serious charges I had made, nor was there any attempt to inquire into the matter further. I was asked to forget the whole issue by putting it down as a mere "misunderstanding" of no real consequence, and was invited in a subsequent letter to serve as a judge for the finals! No doubt this was a consolation prize, and was also meant to show me that the Drama Panel harboured no hard feelings against me for rocking the boat. It was also a shrewd move in order to show to the world how magnanimous, impartial and liberal they were.

I had remained publicly silent because I felt that I owed it to the members of the Drama Panel, many of whom I knew and respected (note the past tense), to give them a chance to inquire into the matter and do the right thing. To this end I repeatedly spoke to members of the Drama Panel as well as my fellow judges. There was already much dissatisfaction over the exclusion of **Sakvadawela** and the inclusion of **Kapuva Kapothi** in the semi-finals. ***Kapuva Kapothi***, Sarachchandra's et al translation of Chekhov's ***The Proposal*** was originally staged over 20 years ago. Now, his wife has "revived" the play, using the same translation with no changes whatsoever. Yet, the Drama Panel saw no problem in allowing this play to enter the second and final rounds ***for the year 1993***, the main criterion of eligibility for which has traditionally been that the play "must be NEW", either as an original work or as a translation/ adaptation. It is indeed shocking to me when I recall that two years earlier Dr Sunil Wijesiriwardena himself was instrumental in the elimination of a version of Brecht's ***Caucasian Chalk Circle*** on the grounds that the translation was too similar to Henry Jayasena's ***Hunuwataye Kathawa***, even though the acting and direction was clearly different. Sunil examined the two texts carefully,

reporting to the panel of judges for the Semi-Finals (of which I was a member together with many others who hold office today) who determined that the translation was not sufficiently original for consideration for the final round. That was during the UNP's "Reign of terror", of course, where everyone was a rotter, no?

Now, under the enlightened new dispensation, it appears that the same old judges are more free to make self-seeking new judgements! The fact that Mrs Sarachchandra was originally on the Drama Panel would certainly not have had anything to do with this, perish the thought!

I am reliably told that the "argument" used at the meeting was that since the Director of the play was different this time, the production had to be different. True. And the actors, and the audience, and the costumes, and the make up used, and the sound system, even the venues, and the over-arching social context, all these and more are different, surely? But, then, in this sense, every play is an original. The Drama Panel should scrap the category of translation altogether, and consider every play as an "original" of some form or another. Moreover, each performance is different from its predecessor, so what's being evaluated is a unique single, never-to-be-repeated theatrical event and not "a play" which presupposes continuity and a common sense understanding of theatre.

I am suggesting here that ***Kapuwa Kapothi*** was included both in the second and final rounds for reasons which are not in any way connected to judgements as to what is or is not eligible for selection in terms of the tradition and mandate of the Drama Festival. Personal reasons triumphed here too, and a hasty make- shift rationalization was trotted to give it the semblance of objectivity. Naively, perhaps, I decided that I had no desire to become a pawn in someone else's game of chess. After all, these were friends, fellow-travellers, progressives, people with their hearts in the right place, or so I thought.

My only regret now is that I've left it too late. I am unaware of the results of the 1994 Festival as I write this piece while out of the country. This is for the best, I'm sure. Or else, I'd be even angrier to discover that **Prometheus** has won the award for the best original play of the year.

This is not really about **Prometheus**, nor about standards and criteria of judging drama in particular or literary work in general in this country, though a continuing dialogue on this is long overdue. It is not even about partisan decisions, about pleasing friends by giving them awards, or of playing safe and trying to keep everyone happy, of covering up, of trying to bullshit one's way out of a crisis. Don't get me wrong. I think all these issues are at stake here, but there's an even more bedrock concern which is about valuing basic decency, the lowest common denominator of civilised human life.

Mr Ariyawansa Ranaweera, Mr Lakshman Fernando, Dr Sunil Wijesiriwardena, Mr Edirisinghe and the other distinguished members of the Sinhala Drama Panel of the Arts Council, you appall, disgust and disillusion me. I find it hard to believe, still, that you are such cowards, compromisers and charlatans. This piece, then, is a last attempt to jolt you into standing up for what you believe, at whatever cost. If you feel that you did the right thing to ignore the substance of my letter, to wilfully and consciously keep Dr de Mel and myself in the dark as to the "revised" decision of our panel, to condone the behaviour of the Chairman of our panel whose letter to you contains, I understand, a gratuitous diatribe against us in particular and English academics in general, then stand up and publicly defend yourselves. If you sincerely believe that it is more important to close ranks and pretend that nothing is wrong, then say so in the press. Sadly, I have no further recourse through the "privacy" of personal correspondence since you trivialise my protests. I can only, therefore, demand an open public response from you.

Remember what is at stake, finally, is the theatre that we all love so much. You are merely the politically-favoured trustees, not the owners of the Sinhala stage today. Therefore, you do not have the luxury of your individual idiosyncrasy for non-confrontation.

History may or may not judge you for your peculiar taste in drama, or for the real or imagined conflicts of interest you straddle. My own hunch is that hindsight is a poor teacher, and some of us can fool the people all the time. No, your nemesis will not be posterity -- non-entities like us will be swallowed up without a trace -- but the fact that you have lost the courage of your conviction forever. You can cling to your niches of cultural power until this government gives way to another (some of you are sure to even survive a newer dispensation), but you have failed the acid test. You are no different from the rest.

The point, is course, that nothing has really changed: a brand new set of clowns with a brand new set of vested interests have emerged. Moreover, the hegemony of dominant culture being what it is, the new power bloc does not differ radically from the old. History repeats itself, Marx wrote, first as tragedy and then as farce. Marx was wrong. History keeps repeating itself as tragicomedy. We're the fools who want to believe that there's some improvement.

Translating *Yerma*, or where ignorance is bliss!

Arjuna Parakrama

SARACHCHANDRA and Ariyaratne won not merely the main award for the Best Dramatic Translation at the State Literary Festival in 1994, they remain, in the dominant view, both the epitome and standard of all that is best among the Sinhala literati. Sarachchandra wields a tremendous influence on both academics and creative spirits alike. In fact, at the awards of the Drama Festival for 1993, virtually all the prize winners worshipped at the altar of Sarachchandra, seated among the distinguished invitees in the front row, both on the way up to receive their trophies and on the way down after bagging them.

Not only is it the case that whatever Sarachchandra does receives accolades, the conferring of the award for *Yerma* further reinforces this as a model translation, an example for all to follow. The question is, of course, whether Sarachchandra's name has proved more important than the quality of this translation, ensuring all the bouquets that it received by scholars and critics.

I hope to establish that as a translation/adaptation of Lorca this work is woefully inadequate and slipshod, while as a text in its own right it is superficial and unsatisfactory.

Gross Mistakes

First, then, the charge of crass ignorance and, worse, utter unconcern for the original text. Lorca's play is well-known and much studied. There are numerous critical works that discuss his achievement. There's even a Spanish learners' text with glosses on difficult words, explanations of nuances and a host of background material. Sarachchandra and Ariyaratne have, however, chosen to use the Penguin English translation by James Graham-Lujan and Richard L. O'Connell (published in 1946) as their only source, without any explanation or defence. I am less sure about these things, so I looked at four of the seven or so English translations available, and at the Spanish original, though I have much less Spanish and perhaps smaller English than these great men. It is, I keep reiterating, a question of responsibility, a new-fashioned honest-to-goodness commitment to the seriousness of the act of translation/adaptation/transgression.

Here, then, are a few of the most glaring of misunderstandings, gratuitous distortions and general ignorance that permeate this translation. In a song sung by Yerma in Act One, she says

The oxen low for the ox-herd

which has been rendered by Sarachchandra and Ariyaratne as

ගව රළ එනතුරු ගවියෝ හඬති. [p. 14]

where the absurdity of the cattle lowing for the herd of cattle has resulted from the ignorance of the translators who have translated "ox-herd" literally.

The crassly know-nothingist translators have not bothered to discover what the well-known word "arroyo" means in Spanish, so, despite its use in the English without a capital letter and despite its appearance as "the arroyo" in the text, they have presumed that arroyo is a place name. Instead of saying that the second girl went to the stream, therefore, they say, ඇරෝයෝවලට යනවා [p 27], and worse still,

We'll go as far as the arroyo

is translated as

අපි මෙයාව ඇරෝයෝවලට ඇරලමු. *[p 51]*

One gets the impression that the entire translation was done with an English dictionary and/or an English-Sinhala dictionary by people who have no understanding of idiomatic English. For instance, Dolores who is "disturbed" (as in worried, uneasy) when she tells Yerma that she'll come with her as far as the corner if Yerma is afraid, has been described as බාධා කරමින් [p 56] which, though one of the dictionary meanings of the word "disturbed" is clearly inappropriate in context as she is neither cutting into Yerma's speech, nor interrupting her in any other way.

Similarly, stage directions as well as the descriptions that build up atmosphere are distorted, travestied. "The FIRST SISTER enters with a lamp that must not give the stage any light other than its own" has been rendered as

පළමු නැනණ්ඩිය පහනක් රැගෙන එයි. එයින් එළියක් රංගභූමිය මත නොවැටිය යුතුය. *[p 51]*

There are many, many more such examples, but surely, my point has been made?

Rough or Gist Translation

Yet, one can argue that these are mere trifles, and that where it matters the translators have got it right. The defenders of the faith would say that as a translation, even as a work on its own terms, it is effective despite these slight errors. The truth of the matter, however, is that these are no less than symptoms of the malaise, and that these symptoms cannot be wished away purely on the basis of the fetishizing of individual genius, whatever that means.

Missing the Bus

One of the key elements of Lorca's play is the question of Yerma's sexuality. It is not only the motor that runs the plot, it also provides the dramatic tension and intensity which leads to the final denouement. All this requires, however, a careful attention to the nuance of the language, the tone and variation of Yerma's responses to her husband, for example in contrast to her dialogues with Victor. This translation remains blissfully oblivious to Yerma's predicament, as it is painstakingly built up by Lorca, as the following extracts will show:

Juan says laughingly to Yerma, "Our work goes well, we've no children to worry about." To this she responds, "We've no children ... Juan!" There is a certain uniformity here in all the English translations I read, and the difference in attitude between Juan who doesn't want children and Yerma who does is clear, if understated. Moreover, Yerma's maternal urge is her driving force for which she is willing to sacrifice everything, even her freedom. The Sinhala translation of this dialogue is self-explanatory in its careless obliteration of this difference:

යුවන් (sic): අපේ වැඩ කටයුතු හොඳින් කෙරෙනවා: ළමා ළපටින්ගෙන් කරදරයක් නෑ.

යෙර්මා: ළමා ළපටින්ගෙන් කරදරයක් නෑ ... යුවන්! [pp 12-13] (my emphasis)

In the very next lines we see further examples of this crass reduction of Lorca's writing to the lowest common denominator of plot (or "what happens next"). The repeated citing of these lapses and faux pa will make boring reading and the exigencies of space require a stringent economy, so I shall rest my case with one more from the same section.

Yerma is describing to Juan how different she was from other girls on her wedding night. She says, "I know girls who trembled and cried before getting to bed with their husbands. Did I cry the first time I went to bed with you? Didn't I sing as I turned back the fine linen bedclothes? And didn't I tell you 'These bedclothes smell of apples!'" The point in the third sentence is that she makes this remark as she turns back the linen just before getting into bed with Juan for the first time. In what has now become a predictable exercise in futility, Sarachchandra and Ariyaratne translate this crucial passage as follows:

මං දන්නව තමුන්ගෙ මිනිහන් එක්කල ඇඳට යනකොට වෙවුලල අඩපු ගෑනු ගැන. මං ඉස්සෙල්ලම ඔහෙන් එක්ක ඇඳට ගිය වෙලාවේ එහෙම ඇඩුවද? ලස්සන සිනිදු ඇඳ ඇතිරිලි අස් කර කර සින්දු කිව්වෙ නැද්ද? ඒ ඇඳ ඇතිරිවල ඇපල් සුවඳ තියනව කියල. [p 13]

Here, Yerma is singing while involved in the domestic chore of arranging the bed linen, not in the act of entering her nuptial bed. Note also that the "alien" smell of apples has been retained without change, lending credibility to the conclusion that the translators were, in fact, attempting as faithful a translation as possible.

Adaptation or Sticking Close to the Original

Though there are no hard and fast rules about whether a translation should stick close to the original or be innovative, it is generally possible to use the protocols of the translation itself to determine the consistency and efficacy of the choices made by the translators. I am not, therefore, suggesting that a translation that seeks meticulously to capture the exact nuances of the original is, *a priori*, better than one that adapts and indigenizes.

Throughout the text there has been no attempt to localize or change any of the context so that it becomes more familiar to the Sinhala reader. In fact, "fields" in the English version has been translated as *ඇපල් වත්ත [p 41]* which shows that there was no strong desire to localize the material.

Inconsistency and Ignorance

So, the translators have attempted a faithful copy, not an adaptation. The deviations, then, are, most often, errors of omission and commission. Here too, however, an inconsistency has crept in which can best be explained as the result of carelessness and unconcern for the original. Anyone familiar with Lorca's work, or anyone who takes the trouble to find out, would know how carefully realistic his settings are, how topical his allusions and references, how significant his locations in terms of the practical effects they have on the lives of the people he portrays. The very translators who chose to insert apple orchards into the text in order to achieve an authentic atmosphere have "chosen" (through ignorance?) to substitute for the image of the miracle-working saint (which Lorca in turn substituted for the portrait of Christ on a tapestry in a temple at Moclin) the *කපු මහත්තයා [p 60]*. Considering that Lorca is using this section to launch a powerful attack on the Catholic church and its belief in miracles, this localizing misses the bus badly.

Interpretation, Nuance and the Murder of Lorca

The tragedy is that none of these considerations probably even figured in the deliberations of the panel of judges, just as they hardly concerned the two illustrious translators. Sri Lankan critics have established a strange tradition of evaluating a translation without any reference whatsoever to the original. If this were a matter of literary principle it would have been something, but, alas, this is only the recourse of the lazy and the ignorant.

Despite everything I still find it difficult to believe that Professor Sarachchandra can be both so ignorant and so careless. Perhaps, his crime was merely to "lend" his name to Ariyaratne's work, but this cannot let him off either the moral or literary hook. Over to those of you who find me insufferable, Sarachchandra et al infallible, and adjudged *Yerma* the Best Translation for 1994. ∎

CAN WE POUCH THE KANGAROOS TOO?

'Twixt Slip & Gully

THE Sri Lankan cricketers left for their nine week tour of Australia with their morale skyhigh and a determination to do well against what is now arguably the best cricketing team in the world.

Enjoying one of their finest periods in recent times, our cricketers set off for an arduous tour of Australia where they will play three tests and travel over 25,000 km on a nine-week tour which also features a Triangular one-day series with West Indies and hosts Australia.

On our previous tours to Australia too we have had to criss-cross the country several times and the Aussies here too are only doing what most host nations do these days -- ensure that the touring team has the roughest possible tour itinerary to give the hosts as much advantage as possible.

Unlike our previous tours, however, our present form has earned a new respect for Sri Lankan cricket among the other test playing countries and we are no longer there only to make up the numbers and to enable other players and countries to feed on us for their records.

We embark on our fourth overseas tour this year after having returned triumphant from all three previous tours.

In March this year we recorded our first overseas test win when we beat New Zealand in the first test and then took our first overseas series win by drawing the second test.

In October, after suffering an innings defeat in the first test we bounced back to beat Pakistan convincingly in the next two tests to take the three match series 2-1. We repeated the performance in the one-day series to win 2-1.

Later in the same month we beat West Indies and Pakistan in a triangular one day series in Sharjah and fully justified being tagged the pre-tournament favourites.

Most connoisseurs of the game reckon our one-day match against the West Indies at Sharjah was stuff right out of the movies! Our refusal to be overawed by a mammoth target of 333 and falling just short in a last gasp effort by West Indies clearly emphasised that Sri Lanka's cricket had come of age. The fact that our top four batsmen totalled just 26 in a total of 329 says it all.

Our squad to Australia bears a familiar look with the majority of the side having played together for some time -- perhaps another reason for our change in fortunes!

Captain Arjuna Ranatunga will be making his fourth tour and his second as skipper, and the majority of the others have been to Australia at least once before. A veteran of 59 tests Ranatunga is not only the longest surviving test player but also one of the shrewdest captains around.

The batting will once again revolve round the four most experienced players -- Skipper Ranatunga, Vice Captain Aravinda de Silva, Opener Roshan Mahanama and batsman Asanka Gurusinha. The foursome have played a total of 180 tests and have 21 test centuries amongst them.

Aravinda de Silva, fresh from his exploits in England this stummer, will no doubt be hoping to repeat his form on their last tour to Australia when he scored heavily in the tests.

Chandika Hathurusinghe has eight fifties in tests and a healthy average of 32.31 although he is still striving to record his first century. He, however, seems set to open the batting with Mahanama but could well find Sanath Jayasuriya breathing down his neck for the opener's berth if he fails.

With two test centuries in seven tests and an ability to bat anywhere in the order, Sanjeeva Ranatunga is a useful player to have on a long tour when players are bound to get injured.

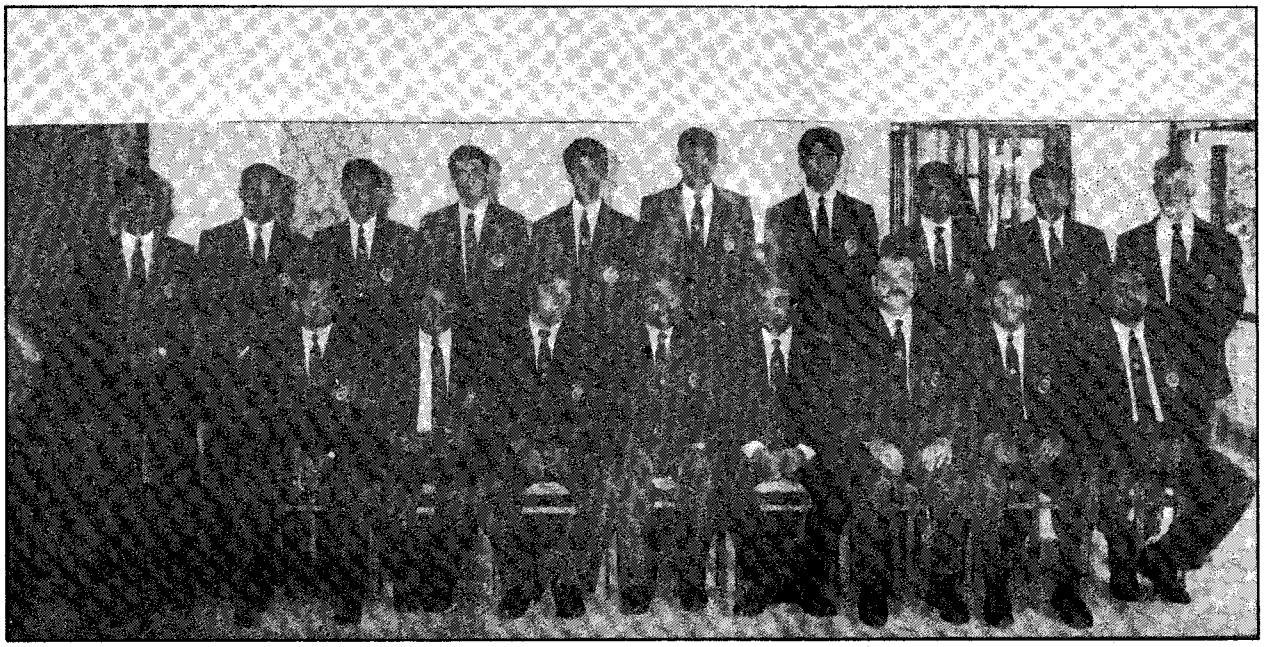
No test playing country has ever had the luxury of having their number six batsman leading the batting averages but that is where the most reliable batsman Hashan Tillekeratne has to bat. With an average of 40.87 and three centuries to his credit, Tillekeratne is the only Sri Lankan to figure in the top ten world ranking for batsmen.

The wicketkeeperís berth is likely to be a close contest between Romesh Kaluvitharana and Chamara Dunusinghe with little to choose between their ability behind the stumps. Both players distinguished themselves with the bat in their test debuts. Kaluvitharana making an unbeaten 132 against Australia in 1993 and Dunusinghe a gallant 91 against New Zealand early this year.

Kumara Dharmasena is another talented all-rounder and lends a lot of balance to the side.

Our most potent weapons however will be left arm fast bowler Chaminda Vaas and off spinner Muttiah Muralidharan. Vaas our most promising discovery in recent years, has 39 wickets in just nine tests while Muralidharan, our leading wicket-taker, has a similar strike rate with 78 wickets in 21 tests.

Paceman Pramodaya Wickremasinghe rediscovered his



form in the latter part of the Pakistan tour and should give Vaas good support. Eric Upashanta, Ravindra Pushpakumara and new boy Manjula Munasinghe lend a certain depth to our fast bowling cupboard which has been quite bare for some time.

Left arm leg-spinner Jayantha Silva is an interesting selection and he could prove to be quite a handful to the Australians who are susceptible to genuine spin.

It would take a lot of courage for the selectors to go into a test with two high class spinners in Silva and Muralidharan and two fastbowlers supported by Hasthurusinghe's medium pacers but that could be the winning combination for us.

We would certainly have the kangaroos on the hop then! ▮

SUSANTHIKA
VICTIM OF JEALOUSY AND INEPT OFFICIALS

The Trackmarker

SUSANTHIKA Jayasinghe won the hearts of all Sri Lankans when running the race of her life she took the Gold medal in the 200m sprint event at the Asian Games in Manila. Only the previous day she had been denied a Gold medal by the merest fraction of a second in the 100m event.

We Sri Lankans have had hardly anything to cheer about on the athletic field and now in Susanthika we have a top class athlete who if properly handled could bring Sri Lanka its first ever Olympic medal at the next Olmpics in 1996.

Many foreign experts who witnessed Susanthika ripping past the Chinese and other hitherto "invincible" Asians have predicted a bright future for this village girl who can easily be a star for the whole Asian region.

Then suddenly the bubble burst -- Susanthika tested positive for a banned drug -- and the local anti-Susanthika rabble were jubilant. An affair which should have been treated confidentially and tactfully was allowed to get out of hand by interested parties. A well-planned leak to the media began and soon the Sports Ministry was conducting a press conference to announce the fact that Susanthika had tested positive for use of a performance-enhancing drug.

Susanthika is still considered the holder of the Gold medal until the IAAF gives its final verdict and decides to strip her of her award, but sadly, the young woman who is yet to be proved guilty by the IAAF has already been condemned by her own people! Within 24 hours of the "press conference" all the local newspapers and officials had condemned a lass who has not yet been prove guilty even by the International Federation.

The total apathy of the sports administrators in this case has left many Sri Lankans wondering whether there are other sinister motives behind all this.

It is well known that Susanthika

has been continually harassed by a certain faction within the athletic association, her only fault being that she is the best among the sprinters and has begun to attract more attention than others. At different times in her career she has had her shoes stolen, her bag pinched and her camera and other personal effects stolen. All these incidents occured at crucial points just prior to her event at important meets and were all calculated to upset a person who was bringing credit to her country. Matters didn't stop there -- when Susanthika was overseas her house was stoned and the windows are still smashed -- a testimony to how we Sri Lankans treat our heroes!

To this date NO formal inquiry into Susanthika's case has been held by the local authorities which is the most basic step that the authorities should have taken. Nobody is disputing the findings of the IAAF but neither does anybody believe that Susanthika took drugs to enhance her performance. Somewhere in between these two premises lies the truth and it is the duty of the authorities to clear the name of the country and the innocent young woman!

Did Susanthika take more than the normal dosage of the PERMITTED drug Primulat_N by starting the dosage earlier than expected? It is well known that the onset of menstrual periods cannot be always predicted accurately and Susanthika herself had begun taking Primulat_N regularly for about ten days. Has the good doctor prescribed any OTHER drug which could give the same results, and have the authorities suppressed this fact? Were the forms accurately filled in at the time of the taking of the urine samples regarding the dosage that Susanthika had taken? Was any other vital information kept secret even from those conducting the tests?

Why didn't we have a competent person present at the testing of the Sample B? Does the Sports Ministry sincerely believe that Dr Geethanjan Mendis (remember the fitness fiasco with our cricketers?) is the right person for the job? Can a Doctor stand in for an experienced analyst when it is knowledge of Chemistry that is a more important factor at this type of investigation?

It is high time the Sports Ministry appointed a doctor who understands sports and sportsmen and whose integrity is unquestionable. In today's highly competitive environment when Sri Lanka too is on par with other international competition it is essential that a very competent person or persons are appointed as Consultants on Sports medications. The names of Dr Thurairajah, Dr Maiya Gunasekera, Dr Fred Perera, spring readily to mind and all these people have graced the sports field with distinction.

It wasn't until A.R.L.Wijesekera a former Government Analyst and W.H.O.Consultant raised this matter on his own that the authorities even considered that some grave injustice may have occurred. Wijesekera, himself a former Sri Lankan sportsman, came forward with the theory that both the permitted drug Primalut_N and Nandrolone which is banned have similar properties.

Another aspect which most international sports bodies should look into is the present system of having both samples of urine tested at the SAME laboratory. Why go to the same Doctor for a second opinion??

When the samples of urine are taken the specimens are sealed in tamper-proof containers under supervision of the team managers. Sample B is deep frozen to be used only if necessary and Sample A is tested immediately. If the laboratory used for testing has any malfunctioning equipment or if the technician (and it is actually only a technician!) makes an error in judgement it is likely that these will occur again if the second test is conducted in the same place under identical conditions.

There is talk now of a THIRD sample being taken from Susanthika and the use of this sample would be only to establish a basic level of normal urine characteristics. If there is a high level of testerone in the Sample C, Susanthika may well have some other medical complication which is showing excess testerone.

Over to you Mr Minister: Clear the name of an innocent lass and this country, before all is lost. ▮

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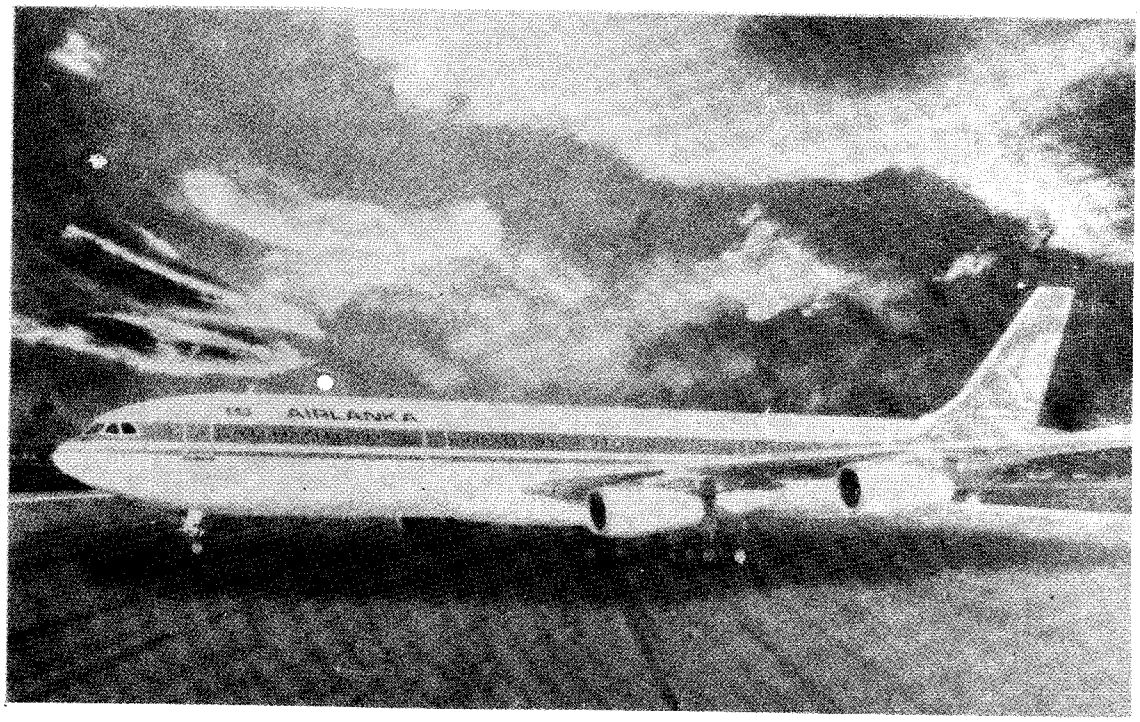

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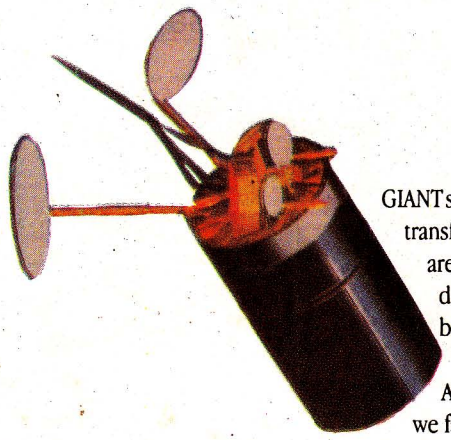
Future in Focus



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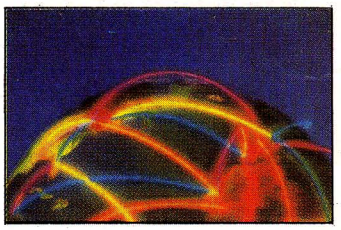

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