

Sinhala nationalists
should rejoice

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Tamil nationalism and
national homeland

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Prabhakaran has put the ball in the government's court - TNA

By A Staff Correspondent

Tamil National Alliance leaders said that the LTTE has put the responsibility of settling the Tamil problem on the Sinhala polity. TNA sources said that Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's suggestion that a settlement has to be reached by 2003 might not be realistic given the current climate of political uncertainty that prevails in the country as the December 5 dead line on the constitutional moratorium on the President dissolving Parliament at her sole discretion is just a week away.

"Pirapaharan has now put the ball quite unambiguously in the government's court. He has unequivocally stated that he is ready to accept regional autonomy and self government on the basis of internal self determination. We do not think he can come down any further by way of compromise. It is now up to the Sinhala polity to come up with the framework of an acceptable political settlement to the Tamil problem. The big question is whether the present government can get a two thirds majority from parliament for a proposal it works out with the LTTE. If the opposition continues its cur-

rent policy of shouting down anything related to the LTTE as treachery, as insidious plots to divide the country and weaken the Sinhala nation then there is no way to persuade them to vote for a proposal which the LTTE has had a hand in drafting", a TNA leader, commenting on Pirapaharan's Heroes' Day speech, told the Northeastern Herald.

"Given the slow but steady approach adopted by the army and the LTTE in their joint consultations about easing the day to day lives of Tamil civilians and given the enormous tasks of de-mining and resettling thousands of refu-

gees in their villages and towns the one year time frame proposed by the Sri Lankan Prime Minister needs reconsideration. Nevertheless we are certain the present atmosphere of mutual goodwill and international support would help the two sides tide over this problem", an LTTE official said.

Commenting on the same aspect the TNA leader told the Northeastern Herald that any settlement that is reasonably acceptable to the Tamils will have to necessarily get the approval of the people at a national referendum. "Explaining the settlement to the Sinhala people to gain their approval would have to

overcome many obstacles as it involves the removal of the entrenched clause on Buddhism as the state religion in the constitution and hence would require a long time to gain their acceptance", he pointed out.

Underscoring the radical shift in his stance, the LTTE leader in his Great Heroes' Day speech on Wednesday said: "We are prepared to consider favourably a political framework that offers substantial regional autonomy and self-government in our homeland on the basis of our right to internal self-determina-

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Prostate before the dead: Woman cries at the Great Hero's Cemetery at Visuvamadu

Pic. by Buddhika Weerasinghe

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CID submits confidential report on Chemmani graves

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) submitted its confidential report on the Chemmani mass graves' exhumation to the Colombo Chief Magistrate Tuesday afternoon, legal sources said. Further inquiry in regard to the Chemmani mass grave continues, CID officials told the Chief Magistrate.

The DNA reports on the human skeletons exhumed from the Chemmani mass graves have been sent to Hyderabad Forensic Laboratory in India for further examination. "We are awaiting for the findings from India," said CID official told court.

"We have sent a full report to

the Attorney General regarding the inquiry held so far. We will be taking further action on the instruction of the Attorney General," CID official submitted to court.

The Magistrate instructed the CID to furnish him report on the progress of the inquiry

The Chemmani mass graves murder came to light four years ago when corporal Rajapakse of the Sri Lanka Army before being sentenced to death in the Krishanthi rape and murder case told the Colombo High Court that between 300 and 400 Tamils who were tortured to death in the army custody have been buried in Chemmani during the military

operation launched by the SLA in 1995.

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) visited the 'Chemmani mass graves' on August 4, 1998 along with Sri Lankan Army corporal Somaratne Rajapakse, the first accused in the rape and murder case of Krishanthi Kumarasamy.

The CID commenced investigation first by recording a statement from Rajapakse on the instruction of the Attorney General. Meanwhile, the Human Rights Commission (HRC) also independently recorded a statement from Rajapakse on July 23, 1998

Karuna joins heroes day event in East

Special commander of Batticaloa-Ampara district Karuna, who is also the co-chair of the sub-committee on De-escalation and Normalization formed at the second meeting of the first round of peace talks in Thailand, lit the sacrificial flame at the Heroes day event at the Maaveer cemetery in Tharavai, 70km Northwest of Batticaloa town, held 27 November afternoon.

More than 25,000 residents of the area participated in the event, sources in Batticaloa said. Mathana military division, Anparasi military division, Visalakan military division, Viothan military division, Johnson artillery division, Jeyanthan military division and Mavadi Munmarikkoddam Intelligence division joined in a military pa-

rade at the cemetery grounds at 5.30 pm.

At the completion of the parade, Karuna amman, Batticaloa-Ampara military commander Robert, Batticaloa-Ampara military commander of women's division Nilavini, and other commanders including commander Prabha were led into the cemetery accompanied by military band.

Velupillai Pirapaharan's maaveerar day speech commenced at 6.05 pm Tamil Eelam time at the completion of which Karuna paid respects to the war heroes after lighting the flame. While the commemeration song was being recited, parents and relatives of the lit the flames at their fallen sons' and daughters memorial stones. The event concluded with an elaborate fireworks display

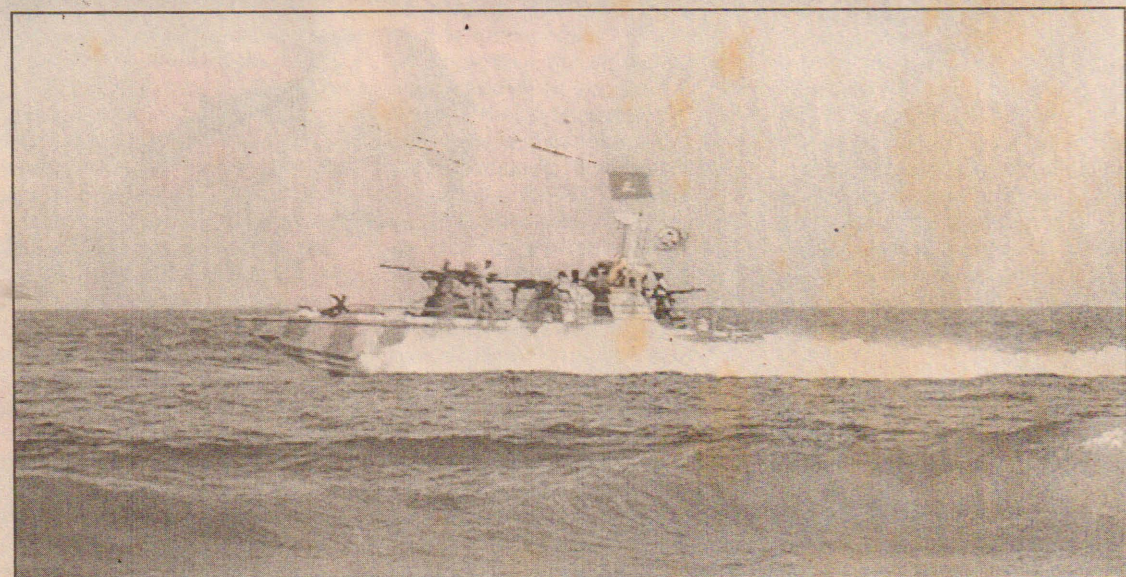
Prabhakaran ... Cont. from page 1

tion. But if our people's right to self-determination is denied and our demand for regional self-rule is rejected we have no alternative other than to secede and form an independent state.

Racism and racist oppression are the causative factors for rebellions and secessionist politics. The Sinhalese people should identify and reject the racist forces if they desire a permanent peace, ethnic harmony and economic prosperity. They should support, wholeheartedly, the efforts to find a political solution by peaceful means. The Sinhalese people should not oppose the Tamils' aspirations to manage their own affairs under a system of self-rule in their own homeland. It is the politics of the Sinhala nation that will eventually determine whether the Sinhalese could peacefully co-exist with the Tamils or to compel the

Tamils to secede.

We are pleased to note that the talks between the government and the LTTE are progressing forward under the conditions of mutual trust and goodwill. We are encouraged by the interest shown by the international community in the peace process and their willingness to offer assistance to rebuild the war damaged economy of the Tamil nation. It is our deepest desire that the current peace talks facilitated by Norway should succeed and all the communities living in the island should co-exist in harmony. If the Sinhala chauvinistic forces, for their own petty political reasons scuttle this peace effort which has raised high hopes and expectations and gained the support of the international community, the Tamil people will be compelled to pursue the path of secession and political independence".



Sea Tigers celebrating Hero's Day in Mullaitivu

Pic. by Buddhika Weerasinghe

Learning the lingo – as hard as stopping the war?

By Rajpal Abeynayake

Each time there is a thaw in the fighting between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government, there is a rapprochement that occurs between the Tamil and the Sinhala communities.

This time they say that it is more than a thaw. There is a palpable feeling that perhaps the destiny of the country is to exist as one entity – something, which will be productive both from a Tamil and a Sri Lankan point of view.

That is not a case for reviving old time worn and almost naïve ideas about making the communities merge into each other. The conflict is too far-gone and too complex for old-grandmother solutions.

But yet, it is strange that quite apart from this, why we Sri Lankans aren't more trilingual. With a pointed reference to the opening paragraphs, I have to stress that this article is not about to make a case for Sooty Banda style tri-lingual theater or tri-lingual verse as a panacea for eth-

nic ills. No, this is definitely not a case for tri-lingual thailaya.

That kind of tri-lingualism is as naïve as thinking that Jaffna is still the quaint old town of Austin A 36 cars, and palmyrah toddy, and baths at Keerimalai. That's a magical version of Jaffna, which was currency in a different era, and tri-lingualism as a way out of the ethnic quagmire is also a magical theory that was currency in a different time.

But that does not mean that individuals should eschew trying to be tri-lingual. The state should encourage it, and the private sector, which makes such a loud brouhaha about the need for peace should attempt to inculcate a tri-lingual culture among its workforce. This should not of course be done by coercion but by making available facilities for learning of languages other than the mother tongue.

There have been attempts made at official levels to make tri-lingualism compulsory in national schools, but these efforts have been rather apathetic and have met with an apathetic response. But, a space is opening up for

But making even a cursory acquaintance with the rudiments of Tamil has not been made any easier for instance, for Sinhalese. Tamil remains the language of the alien — and also the language of lampoon. If they want to make fun out of a Sergeant — the Sergeant has to be Nallathambi and he has to speak in Tamil

making profitable use of a knowledge of Tamil if one is Sinhalese and vice versa. But making even a cursory acquaintance with the rudiments of Tamil has not been made any easier for instance, for Sinhalese. Tamil remains the language of the alien — and also the language of lampoon. If they want to make fun out of a Sergeant — the Sergeant has to be Nallathambi and he has to speak in Tamil.

Perhaps television can change a lot of this — because Sri Lankans seem to be more fond of South Indian movies than they are of Hindi movies. As for Tamils learning Sinhalese, there is every indi-

cation that the opportunities have virtually disappeared for the inhabitants of the North and the East.

Linguists will be able to enlighten us, but the core elements of Tamil and Sinhala despite the different roots of the two languages are not so far apart that the languages are mutually intractable. In other words, a lucid speaker of Sinhala should be able to pick up Tamil without much difficulty and vice versa if there is sufficient incentive and sufficient facilities for it.

But there does not seem to be any move towards a culture of tri-lingualism, particularly from

society's intellectual and business elite. There is also no recognition of the elements of social adjustment that should go with a lasting peace — or at least an expectation of a lasting peace.

If Colvin R de Silva said 'one language two nations - two languages one nation', and if his admonition now sounds almost like cliché, it would also mean that there has been an acknowledgement that at least in constitutional terms, language has to be removed as one of the sticking points in the ethnic tangle.

But nations are organic entities, and constitutions are but political instruments, which often do not transform aspirational goals into reality. But aspirations can be transformed into reality of there is 'vox populi' as opposed to the much hackneyed 'political will' that is often bandied about as the requirement for solving difficult problems. Two languages one nation is mostly a people's problem than it is a political one — and sooner the people of Sri Lanka realize that, it seems it would be the better.

Despite donors' meeting in Oslo, legitimacy eludes Tiger rebels

By Marwaan Macan-Markar

If the Sri Lankan peace talks in Thailand had convinced the Tamil Tiger rebels that they were on the way to achieving their Holy Grail — international legitimacy — then this week's meeting of donors in Norway shattered that illusion.

The three countries that are key to granting the Tamil rebels the legitimacy they crave — the United States, Britain and India — delivered an unequivocal message about how they view the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), as the rebels are formally known.

The most stinging rebuke was from the United States, which was one among the over 20 countries that assembled in Oslo, the Norwegian capital, on Monday to pledge money and political support for Sri Lanka's fledgling peace process.

Richard Armitage, the U.S. deputy secretary of state, told the one-day donors' conference on Nov. 25 that the LTTE should declare publicly that it was renouncing "terrorism and violence".

The Tigers have to "make it

clear to the people of Sri Lanka and indeed the international community that the LTTE has abandoned its armed struggle for a separate state," he asserted. "My nation stands firm in the resolve that the tactics of terror can never achieve legitimate aspirations."

For Anton Balasingham, the LTTE's chief negotiator at the peace talks who was at the donors' meeting, the implication of Armitage's message would have been clear: the Tamil Tigers will remain on Washington's list of terrorist organisations until they give up their killings.

Apart from being outlawed in the United States, the LTTE is listed as a terrorist organisation and consequently banned in Australia, Britain, Canada and India.

As significant a slight on the LTTE's quest for international recognition was the snub delivered to the Tigers by Clare Short, Britain's secretary of state for international development.

Short did not address the LTTE or acknowledge its representatives when she addressed the meeting to pledge Britain's support for the peace process, aimed at ending the over two-decades-long ethnic conflict in the South Asian nation.

India was as clear about its distaste for the LTTE through its token diplomatic presence, rather than representation by a high-level government official, at the Oslo conference.

India, as a result, affirmed its long held policy towards the Tamil Tigers — that it will not recognise the rebel movement, a position that remains a significant obstacle in the LTTE's quest for international respect, given India's political clout in South Asia.

This tough line stems from the Tigers being linked to the 1991 assassination of then Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. Tiger supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran is among the men wanted in India for the murder.

Balasingham did little to help the Tigers' cause by refusing to renounce violence as an LTTE strategy and disagreeing with Washington labelling the rebels as a terrorist organisation. It is "totally unacceptable," he said.

What is more, by the LTTE's reluctance to distance itself from its violent record — which has emerged as a prerequisite to gaining international legitimacy in the post-Sep. 11 political climate — the Tamil rebels have become more dependent on their arch foes, the

Sri Lankan government, to gain legitimacy.

The irony of this situation was clearly so in the run-up to the Oslo gathering, where Colombo played a pivotal role in helping launder the image of the LTTE as a responsible and equal partner in the peace process.

The LTTE also gained a few notches in legitimacy when Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe met Balasingham for closed-door discussions, in addition to the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE participating as equals at the donors' meeting and signing a joint statement.

It meant that Colombo was prepared to accord its adversary in the ethnic conflict a status normally given to government representatives at this first-ever international coming out event for the Tigers.

The tone for this, however, was set during the first two rounds of peace talks in Thailand in September and November this year to end Sri Lanka's conflict, which has claimed over 60,000 lives.

Colombo's negotiators admitted that they could work with their LTTE counterparts, a sign of accommodation that helped boost the Tamil rebels' image as a com-

mitted political partner in the peace negotiations.

The peace process have helped take away attention from the LTTE as a militant group that has used suicide bombers, conscripted Tamil children, killed its political opponents and ruled parts of Sri Lanka's north and east under its control with an iron fist. For Colombo, the talks are a political script with potential windfalls on a few fronts.

For one, it will mean the Tigers becoming increasingly dependent on the Sri Lankan government to portray it as a movement that has changed its stripes.

For another, keeping the LTTE engaged in the peace process will help attract the much-needed funds the country needs to rebuild its war-ravaged regions. The Oslo meeting resulted in pledges of around 70 million U.S. dollars.

But as the Tamil Tigers learnt this week, international goodwill does not translate into immediate recognition and legitimacy — the United States, Britain and India have made sure of that.

The LTTE, consequently, has been forced to swallow an unpalatable truth: it is still a pariah on the international stage. (IPS)

Merit-only policy: shutting stable door after the horse bolts

By Prof. S. Sandarasegaram

Professor K. Sivathamby's article on education in Sri Lanka through the Tamil language that appeared in your journal motivated me to add a few points on the same theme.

'No teacher' syndrome: Teachers are expected to play several roles in the classroom. They are disseminators of knowledge, motivators of children, imparters of the techniques and skills of learning, and managers of the classroom. The school system relies solely on teachers to realise the objectives a community would want achieved through its system of formal education.

Unfortunately however, schools catering to Tamil children in Sri Lanka are understaffed. This is irrespective of the geographical area where Tamil schools are located. When a suggestion was made by the author to the political authorities of the plantation areas to hire graduates to teach science and maths in the schools in the plantation districts from the northern and eastern provinces, the prompt rejoinder was that these provinces were also experiencing teacher shortages.

According to a World Bank study there is a shortage of 10,000 teachers in Tamil schools island-wide, which is almost equal to the number of excess staff in the Sinhala schools. The issue of teacher shortages is causing an enormous and adverse impact on the quality of teaching in Tamil schools.

In fairness it must be said the authorities are fully aware of this problem but remedies are slow in coming, apparently due to the dearth of finances and overall restrictions on recruitment to state services. The government is not in a position to allocate additional resources to meet this urgent problem in a satisfactory manner.

Deprivation of cultural rights: Education becomes meaningful only when its content is related to the environment and culture of the students. Since socialisation is considered one of the main functions of education, its content should reflect the values, ethos and cultural patterns of the community to which the students belong.

Margaret Mead went on to define education as "the cultural process, the way in which

Present trends in the south appear to be in favour of introducing a 'merit-only' policy on a step-by-step basis. Tamil opinion, once in favour of a 'merit-only' formula, cannot now even consider an about turn to take advantage of the benefits accruing to the Tamil districts other than Jaffna because the district quota system favours them

children are transformed into full members of a specific human society, sharing with other members a specific human culture." Recent studies on development have concluded that development is the process of creating a learning environment that should include understanding, respecting, maintaining or regenerating the cultural traditions of a society, including its language. These studies call for more culturally sensitive and meaningful learning environments for young people. Accordingly, educational reforms should aim at 'integrating the school and the economy with indigenous learning and culture.'

Westerners are less prone than us to using cultural yardsticks to weigh the efficacy and consequences of new concepts and ideas. They evaluate them primarily in terms of pragmatism. They therefore criticise modern pedagogical innovations for being overly concerned about negative cultural fallout.

In the case of Sri Lanka, which is now recognised as a multicultural polity, the question arises as to the degree of representation non-majority cultures enjoy in the school curriculum. Apart for very recent formulations such as teaching students to be able to appreciate cultural heterogeneity and see diversities in pluralism, very little has been done to articulate policies that demand the inclusion of non-majority cultures into the school curriculum.

There have been several complaints from certain Tamil quarters that apart from textbooks on the Tamil language and Hinduism, it is very rare to comes

across any references to minority cultures – either Tamil or Muslim – in textbooks on social studies, history etc. As far back as the late 1970s and 1980s, Prof. K. Indrapala and Reggie Siriwardene argued separately in the columns of the Lanka Guardian that while Tamil textbooks contained material that espoused the concept of a united Sri Lanka and the equality of its three communities, the Sinhala textbooks emphasised the Sinhala-Buddhist character of the Sri Lankan polity.

History presented Tamils as invaders and aggressors responsible for the destruction of Sinhala-Buddhist culture. All minorities were generally labelled outsiders, which Sinhala school-going children had to assimilate as historical knowledge. "In short, at a micro level, the content of education has virtually reinforced ethnic stereotypes and racism and has been rarely used to promote mutual understanding and develop a national identity," says leading Sri Lankan educationist Swarna Jayaweera.

These circumstances prevented any representation of non-majority cultures in school curricula. Education policies since independence have refrained from addressing this cultural grievance. The gradual diminishing of Tamil decision-makers in education has resulted in the domination of majoritarian cultures in the design of the curriculum.

Though not done purposely perhaps, a case could be put forward that education authorities are ignoring non-majority cultures when drawing up syllabi. Our system has, so far, failed to give serious consideration to the principle of taking non-majority cultures as a guideline in the task of curriculum formulation. As aptly pointed out by Jayaweera, resistance of the most important minority, the Sri Lankan Tamils, to cultural deprivation, 'relative

deprivation' and deprivation of basic rights, have escalated the ethnic conflict to tragic intensity."

University admissions: Another area of contention is university admissions since the 1970s. From 1942 onwards, merit was recognised as the sole criteria for admission to universities. Though little known, even before 1970 overall Tamil representation in the universities was far from satisfying. It had dwindled to 18% in the 1960s (1961 – 19%, 1962 – 18% and 1963 – 16%) – a sharp decline from 32% in the 1940s.

Even at that time when merit was the sole criteria for university entrance, the achievement of Tamils in higher education in general was limited to these low percentages. But the Tamils did not complain because they continued to dominate entry into the prestigious faculties (also based on merit), which enabled a relatively high percentage to be gain admission to the universities' engineering and medical faculties (both 48% in 1969).

The introduction of media-wise standardisation was to reduce the number of Tamils entering these two faculties. At least that was the net result of this new exercise. In the words of a leading historian, Professor K. M. De Silva, "the effect of this (policy) was to place the Tamil students at a great disadvantage in that they needed to obtain higher aggregate of marks to enter the ... medical and science sections." The percentage of Tamils entering these faculties began to decline drastically – from 48% in 1969 to 16% in 1974 (engineering faculty) and 48% and 25% in the corresponding years in the medical faculty.

Media-wise standardisation, removed Tamil domination in the two faculties. This parlous situation did not undergo any change for the better under the district quota policy, which came after media-wise standardisation was withdrawn. The district quota is still applied to admit 60% of the total intake.

In actual fact there was no significant loss Tamils experienced in university intake after the 1970s, but they could not attain the eminence they enjoyed in education during the pre-1970s period. Further, they gained substantially as a result of the abolition of medium-wise standardisation policies and the introduction of the district system. At least they were able to find a few more placements in the universities than their ethnic ratio.

Tamil response to the standardisation was vehement and vociferous. For them, it was

not just the case of losing seats in the university; it was an insult to their collective pride. They regarded this change in the university entrance policy as patently and deliberately discriminatory. According to K. M. De Silva, "Sri Lanka soon secured the doubtful distinction of becoming frequently quoted example of the perils of affirmative action, especially where it was designed to benefit majority groups against minority groups."

In the case of USA and India, affirmative action was adopted to benefit the minority Afro-Americans and the 'scheduled' class people respectively as compensation for historical loss experienced during the past several centuries. These minority groups were kept away from the mainstream of education for a long time. In India, affirmative action was defended as ethically correct to compensate for the injustices perpetrated against large sections of the people (23% of India's population) on account of their social origin. In the Sri Lankan case, the policy of affirmative action has not been aimed, for example, on the downtrodden estate workers, but the majority ethnic group.

Between the years 1989-1996, the total number of Tamil students admitted into the university system was oscillating between 537 (1992/93) to 1189 (1995/96). The lacklustre performance was due mainly to war in the north during this period. The Jaffna district managed to increase the number of entrants from 399 in 1992 to 999 in 1995. These figures reveal that after a temporary setback in 1992, with its traditionally high standards of excellence in academic performance and the commitment of its teachers as well as students to learning, the Jaffna district raised its head once again in 1995.

The alienation of the Tamil youth due to acts of discrimination radicalised them resulting in open and sustained ethnic conflict and civil war says Jayaweera. This was the result of the frustration and bitterness among Tamil youth who regarded the new formula for university admissions were an "iniquitous system, deliberately designed to place obstacles before them." Almost all writers on Sri Lanka's ethnic problem are agreed on the view that the standardisation formula was the major factor in driving the Tamils to give up moderate politics in favour of militant methods to win back their lost rights.

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Breakdown in percentages of Tamils for selected faculties (1975-1988)

Year	1975	1977	1979	1981	1983	1985	1988
Engineering	14.2	19.1	30.0	28.0	28.0	18.0	17.0
Medical	17.5	27.8	30.9	23.0	22.0	25.0	30.0

Reviving Buddhism in Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka

By Professor Karthigesu Sivathamby

Addressing a meeting in Jaffna, the leader of the Liberation Panthers, Thirumavalavan narrated an incident worthy of careful observation in terms of the religio-cultural traditions of Sri Lanka. He narrated how one of his party members expressed surprise over the fact that he (Thirumavalavan) could be critical of President Chandrika Kumaratunga. His surprise was how could a Bauddha Sahothari (Bauddha Soyuri) be so bad. The politics behind this episode apart, it amply reveals the type of estimation dedicated Tamil workers from the depressed communities of Tamil Nadu have towards Buddhism. In their opinion Buddhism is an egalitarian religion freeing people from their social shackles.

Buddhism as is known very well has a long history in Tamil Nadu. It has had indelible impact on the intellectual development and traditions of Tamil Nadu. Buddhism has contributed greatly to secular Tamil culture. Equally important is the Tamil contribution to Buddhist thought and literature.

Manimekalai, a Tamil Buddhist epic by the poet Saattana (circa sixth century A. D.) reveals the kind of intellectual discourses which Buddhism generated in Tamil Nadu.

Even under the Pallava and Chola dynasties whose reigns are identified with Hindu assertiveness, Buddhism along with Jainism were very powerful intellectual forces.

It is a fact seldom highlighted that two landmarks in Tamil grammar – Veerasoliyam and Nannool – were written by a Buddhist (Buddhamithra) and a Jain (Payanadhi) even in the heyday of the Chola empire which had brought in such vast changes in the social life of Tamil Nadu, including its language.

Incidentally, it is well known that Veerasoliyam served as a model for the 13th century Sinhala grammatical work Sidat Sangharawa.

What is perhaps more revealing of the extent to which Buddhism as a philosophy had established itself in Tamil Nadu. It is brought out very well in a theoretical work on Saiva Siddhantha – Sivagnana Siddhiyar – a work of about 13th century. The work refutes four schools of Buddhism, one of which is Sautantrika school of Buddhism. I have heard eminent Buddhist scholars stating that in spite of its repudiative tone this is the almost the only text available for reconstructing Sautantrika thought.

The increasing Sanskritisation in Tamil Nadu, discernible from

This column wishes to highlight those omissions and inadequacies, which have led to neglect and an alienation of Tamils in Sri Lanka. The writer is not for creating further divisions, but earnestly hopes to heal those already there.

There were two discernible trends in the Indian Theosophical movement. One was symbolised by Annie Besant who became an ardent admirer of Hindu traditions and the other was Col. Henry Steele Olcott who was keen on rediscovering Buddhism

the late Chola period, established itself firmly under the authority of the Vijayanagara Emperors and their Nayaks (governors). In fact these Telugu rulers had enough political reasons to accentuate the Sanskritisation process in Tamil Nadu. It may be said that at the more articulate level of society, the Buddhist influence were becoming thinner and thinner.

When Tamil Nadu came under British rule in the early nineteenth century, there began a very slow process of democratising or bringing into focus those sections of Hindu Tamil society, which were hitherto repressed. The beginnings of the Indian independence movement also encouraged this process.

Those caste groups, which came into close contact with British officialdom, especially as domestic labour and soldiery, became aware of intellectual developments in the west. This led to a sense of modernity spreading among these caste groups. And as they, becoming more and more exposed to western influences, they began to realise both the social institutions and ideologies that restrained them socially and economically.

Thus there began a movement against Brahminism and Hindu hierarchy. It was during this time that the Indian Theosophical Society was establishing itself in the then Madras. The significance of this movement in modern Indian renaissance is too well known to be recounted here. There were two discernible trends in the Indian Theosophical movement. One was symbolised by Annie Besant who became an ardent admirer of Hindu traditions and the other was Col. Henry Steele Olcott who was keen on rediscovering Buddhism.

Olcott established contact with the emerging movement for social emancipation in south India. He was a key figure in the Buddhist Theosophical society in Sri Lanka. Published and unpublished records from the Theosophical Society in Adaiyar, Madras show that Olcott played a

major role in fighting against the non egalitarian trends and casteism in Hinduism. He seems to be responsible for introducing the thoughts of the American rationalist philosopher Robert Ingersoll to the activists of the movements for social emancipation in Tamil Nadu.

It was in this historical setting that one energetic youth from the Pariah caste called Kaattavarayan got exposed to the anti-Brahminic, anti-casteist traditions of Tamil Nadu through his teacher Pandit Ayothidas. The young Kaattavarayan came to know of Buddha and his teaching through this teacher. Kaattavarayan took on the name of his teacher when he launched his public life. This Ayothidas (1845-1914) was responsible for

the movement for the advancement of the lower caste groups in Tamil Nadu. He started a paper called Oru Paise Thamilan (One Penny Tamil) in 1894. His writings attracted the attention of the Tamil scholars of the day. The activities and writings of Ayothidas are taken as the beginning of the rationalist movement of Tamil Nadu. Until recently it was generally believed that the rationalist movement started with E. V Ramasamy Naicker (Periyar), the founder of the Self Respect Movement.

The efforts of Ayothidas to get official recognition for his Buddhist activities and ceremonial blessings for his own conversion to Buddhist were realised when Col. Olcott brought him to Colombo in 1898. They first visited the chief incumbent of the Vidhyodhaya Pirivena, Ven. Rahula Thero. Thereafter, Ayothidas was taken to the Vidyalkara Pirivena and finally to Kandy for an audience with the Malwatte Nayaka Thero, the chief prelate of the highest order of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Here Ayothidas and his friends were officially received into the Buddhist fold i.e. their conversion to Buddhism received official sanction from the Malwatte chapter.

Newspaper reports of Ayothidas's conversion claim it as the official Buddhist recognition of his movement for social justice. Historians who have worked on this subject use the

opinion of both Ayothidas and Ambedkar ensured social equality and assured them against Brahmin supremacy. The appeal to Buddhism was taken over by the rationalist movement and its offshoot, the Dravidian movement. Modern Tamil Nadu's concept of Buddhism is synonymous with social equality. Thus it has gained great acceptance among the socially downtrodden Tamils. The Dalit movement in Tamil Nadu considers every Buddhist as their true friend in its fight against social inequalities.

It is a pity that the egalitarian aspect of Buddhism highly treasured by the Buddhist revivalist movements of Tamil Nadu and later of Maharashtra took no root in Sri Lanka. The answer to this lies in the fact that official Sri Lankan Buddhism is Sinhala Buddhism which focuses on its Sinhaleanness and elevates it as its distinguishing characteristic, little realising that this Sinhaleanness inevitably inveigled cast norms into the Sangha. These caste norms have no doubt come from Hinduism. But what is important and irrefutable is that this caste system with its own specificities is as much Sinhala as it is Hindu. For a student of Buddhism, especially of the way it was rediscovered in modern India, it is a stark fact that the Catholicity (universality and liberality) of Buddhism has been forgotten in Sri Lanka's Buddhist revival.

One cannot hide the pain of mind a student of Tamil literature is bound to experience in the manner Buddhism was presented to the average Tamil people in Jaffna and Batticaloa. The Buddhist establishments in the Tamil towns never wanted to present Buddhism in Tamil to the Tamil people, a feature seen at least to some extent in the activities of the Maha Bodhi society of Madras. This society has published Tamil books on Buddhism. The society's monograph Puththar Sarithiram (History Buddha) is a brilliant introduction in Tamil to Lord Buddha and his teachings. I wonder whether any such publications have come out in Sri Lanka. On the contrary, the Buddhist temple and the Buddhist priest have been seen as Sinhalaising forces, very much like the Christian missionaries of the Portuguese and Dutch periods who were also viewed as part of state hegemony.

Lord Buddha would never have even thought of such a situation for he took his teachings to the people in their own languages.

We seek refuge in the Buddha.

It is a pity that the egalitarian aspect of Buddhism highly treasured by the Buddhist revivalist movements of Tamil Nadu and later of Maharashtra took no root in Sri Lanka. The answer to this lies in the fact that official Sri Lankan Buddhism is Sinhala Buddhism which focuses on its Sinhaleanness and elevates it as its distinguishing characteristic, little realising that this Sinhaleanness inevitably inveigled cast norms into the Sangha

starting a movement for converting Tamils to Buddhism.

That the young Ayothidas discovered Buddhism from his teacher in Coimbatore (Kongu Nadu), in the northwestern parts of Tamil Nadu gives us reasons to believe that Buddhist traditions were alive in the Tamil country well into the 19th century. Ayothidas established contact with Col. Olcott when he (Ayothidas) began his movement for converting Tamils to Buddhism. Ayothidas was becoming increasingly active in

term Tamil Buddhism to refer to the Ayothidas's movement. What is historically important is that Ayothidas's movement for Tamil Buddhism precedes the much-publicised activities of Dr. B. R Ambedkar, the chief architect of the Indian Constitution. As one belonging to the underprivileged Mahar caste of Maharashtra, Dr. Ambedkar wanted downtrodden Indian castes to become Buddhists. He was not happy with Gandhi's Harijan concept – Hari's (God's) Children – that sounded too patronising. Buddhism in the

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A question of sovereignty

The High Court's verdict leading to the acquittal of the 18 military personnel alleged to have be the murder of 35 civilians at Mailanthanau village near Punani brings out in stark colours the basically injustice that Tamils are victims of by merely being citizens of Sri Lanka.

What is indeed damning in the latest verdict is that is not necessarily officialdom that has handed down the verdict. It comes from persons who were in the jury, who essentially are 'normal citizens' we would meet everyday. But they were citizens the defence, which requested a Sinhala-speaking jury to hear the case, had no objections to.

Though Judge S. Sriskandarajah was clearly in favour of conviction, it was the 'normal citizens' who determined the 18 alleged offenders were not guilty. The verdict only reinforces the deep-rooted scepticism Tamils entertain in the judicial system.

The inevitable conclusion that one came come to under these circumstances is the regime of impunity the security forces and other law enforcement agencies enjoy in Sri Lanka have been augmented by deliberate connivance on the part of its Sinhala-speaking denizens who seem quite prepared to exonerate persons the judge wanted to convict. Further, semi-judicial bodies such as the Human Rights Commission has been criticized for not being proactive and working better to uphold the rights of the Tamil people, who are by and large the most frequent victims of the excesses of the state. Government appointed bodies such as the Kanchirankudah commission have also displayed a woeful lack of objectivity in their reports, compelling us to believe that some of the commissioners are biased.

The sovereignty of a country is vested in its people. The people exercise that sovereignty, among other things, through the judicial system. But in Sri Lanka, Tamil people are denied the exercise of their sovereignty through the judicial system because fundamentally it is made to work against them. This has been strengthened by the PTA that remains in our statute books despite the best efforts of human rights lawyers and NGOs who have tried to persuade the government to remove them.

What is amusing in all this is the pomposity of the United States government's Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage in Oslo this week. Among the pronouncements he delivered was the LTTE should accept Sri Lankan sovereignty.

We have to understand the matter is not whether the LTTE accepts Sri Lanka's sovereignty or not. It is whether the Tamils are prepared to do so. The obvious conclusion is that if Tamils cannot exercise their sovereignty through the judiciary they will be daft if they accept Sri Lanka's sovereignty!

Let us not confuse things. The fact that 35 soldiers have not been convicted despite the judge moving for a conviction has very little to do with the LTTE. It has all to do with those poor, miserable wretches of Mylanthanai who have been awaiting justice for 10 years and have not got it.

Therefore Tamils cannot be coerced into accepting Sri Lankan sovereignty though the American Secretary of State in his folly seems to think so. The fundamental fact is that the government of Sri Lanka has to obtain the consent of the Tamils for governance, which despite over 50 years of independence it has not. And if the courts continue to hand down verdicts like that of Mylanthanai there is very little reason to expect it will.

Sinhala nationalists should rejoice

By D. Sivaram (Taraki)

Sinhala nationalists should rejoice now rather than gripe and whine ad nauseam that Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and his men have perfidiously betrayed the Sinhalese people to the LTTE.

The world's sole superpower has reiterated its commitment to firmly support the Sri Lankan state to stop the LTTE from undermining its sovereignty.

Richard Armitage could not have been more lucid when he called on the LTTE to renounce violence and to accept the authority of the Sri Lankan state in all parts of the island.

Didn't Sinhala nationalists note the fact that the US did not demand the Sri Lankan government with equal fervour to grant the Tamil people substantial regional autonomy?

They could not have thought of a greater friend at this critical juncture when many of them assumed and lamented that the Prime Minister is going to get international recognition for an abhorred terrorist organisation.

That the LTTE's advisor Dr. Anton Balasingham should have categorically rejected the US demand that his organisation give up violence and separatism is obviously sweet music to all Sinhala nationalists.

They should rejoice that the LTTE has dared to challenge the world's sole super power and has brazenly refused to obey its dictates. Hence the Tigers may be in great trouble. The might of the US would be the plague that Sinhala nationalists want on Pirapaharan's house.

Sinhala nationalist editorialists, opinion makers and politicians who unceasingly grumble that the LTTE is taking too much out of the ceasefire, fail to appreciate the solid gains they have made in recent times in strengthening their position against the Tigers internationally.

Firstly, they have got a group of powerful countries led by the US and its main ally in arms UK, which is not, as in the case of India during 84-87, explicitly linking the reining in of the LTTE to a fair solution to the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. India strengthened the LTTE militarily to put pressure on the Sri Lankan government. The US led group of countries is applying all possible pressure on the Tigers to submit to the authority of the Sri Lankan state.

The US is Sri Lanka's largest trading partner. Japan, America's main strategic partner in global affairs after UK, comes next in terms of its economic influence in Sri Lanka.

Their combined leverage in this country is many times greater than what India could have hoped to achieve even at the height of Tamil

militancy in 85-87. Therefore, in principle, US and Japan should be able to create enough material discomfort to the Sri Lankan state in order to compel it to cough up a settlement to the conflict under duress as India did by other means in 1987.

Instead both countries and those leading nations of the world such as Canada and Australia that are treaty bound to toe the US line are only too keen to strengthen Sri Lanka's hand.

Sinhala nationalists should study how the US and NATO back the Turkish state which continues to deny the Kurdish people even rudimentary autonomy. The Kurdish region is still occupied by the Turkish military despite a recent truce. The Kurds are discouraged to learn their own language. Human rights violations by the Turkish army in the Kurdish region during unmitigated military operations were rampant. In fact the Turkish military is well trained and armed for large scale counter insurgency operations by the US and its allies. They helped Turkey by arresting and handing over to its military the leader of the Kurdish rebel movement, Abdallah Occalan who was them made to call on his fighters to give their armed struggle and settle for peace.

The US and its allies are not twisting Turkey's arm, compelling it to grant substantial regional autonomy to the Kurds. Instead they bail out its weak economy whenever it slides into crises.

While Turkey, the staunch US ally, persists, with the acquiescence and sometimes the support of its backers, in repressing the fundamental rights of the Kurdish people, Iran, branded a member of the 'Axis of Evil' by President George Bush, has granted them regional autonomy and promotes the study of their language and culture. The US ignores the plight of the beleaguered Turkish Kurds but is all out to protect with the might of its airforce their brethren in Iraq.

This is so because Turkey is strategically important in America's quest for unhindered access to global resources and hegemony.

There is good reason for the US and its allies to be keenly interested in the affairs of the Sri Lankan state even at the cost of basic Tamil rights.

The Voice of America agreement is coming up renewal next year. It was originally signed in 1951 but a revised agreement was entered into in December 1983 intended to significantly increase the VOA's broadcasting strength. The 83 agreement was to continue in force for 20 years, renewable in 10 year extensions. The official Soviet news agency Tass at the time called the VOA station "a new branch of the US engaged in psy-

chological warfare against socialist and developing countries".

Japan is the USA's main strategic ally in Asia. Eighty percent of its oil supplies are carried on sea-lanes that skirt round Sri Lanka's coast and pass through the Malacca Straits which India dominates.

Indian and Russian defence analysts have recently argued that unhindered access to Central Asia's resources is a key element in USA's global military strategy today. But the only access that the US has to this region is through the Arabian Sea. Therefore ensuring the protection of sea-lanes in this part of the Indian Ocean is paramount for the US, they argue. Sri Lanka which is strategically located vis-à-vis these sea-lanes is hence indispensable to the US at this juncture, according to them. The Acquisition and Cross Servicing Agreement (ACSA) that the US is desirous of signing with Sri Lanka would give it a strategic handle in this emerging regional scenario.

It is no secret today that the US government's global war on terrorism is helping it reach into and consolidate its military and strategic influence in many parts of the world which were hitherto inaccessible to it. The US has established many long term military bases in Central Asian Republics under the pretext of fighting Islamic terrorism in those countries.

Given the emerging strategic scenario in the Arabian Sea region it may not be without reason that the US and its treaty partners keep the LTTE banned as a terrorist organisation. Calling the LTTE terrorist after all may have its uses.

If it has to strategically position itself in this region it is important for the US and its allies to stabilise and strengthen the Sri Lankan state.

In this situation the US and its allies are very likely to back the Sinhala nationalists' insistence on preserving the unitary nature of the Sri Lankan state at whatever the cost.

To them the Tamil question is dispensable if the Sri Lankan army defeats the LTTE. Did they not buy time from the LTTE for the SLA in the name of a unilateral ceasefire to prepare for Op. Agni Kheela to retake Elephant Pass?

Do the Sinhala nationalists who burn the Norway's flag know this?

It is clear that at least now they know they can do a Turkey on the Tamils while the US and its allies turn a blind eye and help to stabilise the Sri Lankan state economically.

With friends like these the Sinhala nationalists have little to fear in making their writ run across the length and breadth of the island.

This is perhaps the reason why Pirapaharan is expanding and strengthening his naval forces and army.

Tamil nationalism and national homeland

By V.T.Thamilmaran

"Territory is the product and indeed the expression of the psychological features of human groups." - Gottmann J., The Significance of Territory, 1973.

A large number of states have of course been created with 'artificial' boundaries that encompass different ethnic groups, with linguistic and religious cleavages. In these states, boundaries were largely laid down well before the concept of nationhood was conceived of all the peoples within them.

This inevitably arrests the development of economic, intellectual, military and other resources of the populations tied down thus to artificially drawn boundaries. Hence these become 'forced communities' and it is natural for them to assert their identity in order to realise their potential in terms of individual and collective rights. This explains why National identities can't be created in vacuum.

Nationalism is thus to an important extent constituted by its unique location in space and time. Whether expressed in popular sentiments, organised movements or state policies, it's a territorial form of ideology.

Also, nationalism is generally understood as something that aspires to statehood. As statehood is always involved with territoriality, one can't think of statehood and hence nationalism without having an idea of a territory over which political power is sought to be exercised.

In other words, nations and nationalism would remain mere political concepts or entities until the territories on which they are predicated are physically secured, cleared of threats and stabilised. There was a Jewish nation and nationalism but the territory they had in their mind was in dispute until 1947. Similarly today, there is the Palestinian nation but again, the territory is in dispute. Palestinian statehood depends clearing the hurdles for ousting the forces occupying Palestinian territory.

Remember that nations are cultural as well as political. They are cultural in the sense that territorially defined communities are welded together by particular traditions, practices, language and common history. They are political in that these national communities are closely linked to statehood. The political aspirations of a national community can be realised either in an existing state with which it quintessentially identifies or by establishing its own state. In the case of former, nationhood and statehood be-

come identical and the nation is created out of the territory already earmarked and successfully defended.

In the case of latter, looking outward, it tends to divide the 'state-nation' and create the 'nation-state'.

Because of the above condition it is always assumed that nationalism is both internally unifying and externally divisive over space, i.e., territory.

In both cases, the question of territoriality can't be divorced from the ideology of nation. The irony is that most of the states created in the post-colonial period with the blessings of the colonial powers focussed their attention only on state-making instead of nation-making. Many of the African, Asian and Latin-American states were created in this fashion ignoring all cultural and political sentiments and particularities of the people concerned. That's why the boundaries drawn by the colonial masters have become 'artificial'.

Out of nearly 200 states, less than a quarter can be considered culturally and politically homogeneous today. The rest of them, depending on their willingness and ability to project themselves as 'nation states' remain as sovereign states on the world map. If the nation in some way or the other feels that the state in some sense belongs to it, then it becomes a nation state.

There are two distinct ways in which the process of nation-making can successfully take place. It can take place in the territory of already existing (political) boundaries. Here, the boundaries predated the formation of a national community and defined its character. This is what is referred to as a 'state nation'. In this instance, boundaries were not in dispute and the need was felt for unifying the people within that territory.

England and France stand as classic examples of this type of process of state nation building. The English or the French, irrespective of the fact of their predetermined territories, don't feel that they were forced to live within those territories without their free will. Contrarily, if the boundaries were 'forced upon certain communities', they have to struggle for their identity and survival within the territory which by all means remain 'foreign' for them. Asian countries such as India, Indonesia and Malaysia; African countries like Nigeria, Kenya and Ethiopia; Latin American countries Brazil and Argentina are some of the countries whose political boundaries and community identities were determined almost simultaneously. However, these countries have, to a considerable extent, suc-

In the Sri Lankan context of the issue of ethnic conflict, it has been very clear through the period of modern history that (at least from 1833), the identity of the ethnic group of Tamils was strongly tied down to the clearly identified territory. All the subsequent attempts to negotiate a settlement between the ethnic groups have openly recognised this fact and to certain extent accepted it as a reality as well

ceeded in forging the necessary unity and understanding to form themselves into a single unified nation. The communities, in spite of whatever their other irritations might be, feel proudly that they were not forced to become one nation but did so on their own volition. The respective constitutions have been the source of this attitude. This in other words is what nation-building means.

Nationalism presupposes not only statehood but also more access to power. It opens up the possibility that at least some sections or classes in the nation state might achieve the objectives which would be unattainable without nationalist mobilisation. Achieving a nation-state postulates the creation of a nation or a national movement in the first place, and, typically, the overcoming of opposition from the existing states and their state-sponsored nationalism.

Conflicts arose all over the world when the colonial powers exported their nation-making experience to their colonial territories. For example, powers like Britain and France had thought that they could imitate what was adopted and suited for them in their territories for nation-building could be applied to the communities which have had diverse characteristics. This was in effect equal to presuming the boundaries of a political community first and then forcing that community to become a (cultural) nation defined by those boundaries.

However, this artificial nation worked only in certain colonial territories and failed in many. If it had worked in a few, that was also due to the balance of powers prudently exercised between the different communities when negotiating the sovereignty of those people within the boundaries as demarcated by the 'masters'. It failed in many because the respective communities within the boundaries did not succeed in their negotiation for forging the new nation or were hoodwinked by the majority com-

munity, sometimes with the connivance of the colonial 'masters'.

Irrespective of whatever the common or shared values which bind the people together and forge them into a nation, nationalism has been always aimed at influencing and demanding control over a particular territory without which the shared values can't be meaningfully respected and realised. In fact, the notion of 'distinct identity' itself inherently embodies an element of territoriality.

Furthermore, in a much broader perspective, it is said that nationalism demands that nation and state should as far as possible coincide. The real and pragmatic meaning of this proposition is that each should possess a political voice and exercise the right of self-determination. Where a national group has an uncontested claim to its own clearly delimited territory, the 'internal-external' distinctions of self determination do not make any sense. This is so because that group's self determination can only be realised in spatial terms i.e. the national homeland.

Debates on the deference between internal self-determination and external self-determination would remain meaningless academic exercises as long as this reality is not grasped.

For example, instead of creating nation states, attempts to beget state-nations have led to suppression of the political voice of the communities which were reluctant to become part of the one and the only political community within the already determined boundaries. Depending on the degree of oppression, the political voice would become louder or muted. If it is muted, there the assimilation succeeds. It becomes louder, the struggle begins adopting either non-violent or violent methods.

In the Sri Lankan context of the issue of ethnic conflict, it has been very clear through the period of modern history that (at least from 1833), the identity of the ethnic group of Tamils was strongly tied

down to the clearly identified territory. All the subsequent attempts to negotiate a settlement between the ethnic groups have openly recognised this fact and to certain extent accepted it as a reality as well. Although all these attempts ended in failure because of the opposition from the majority community, one could see the element of territoriality as the fundamental feature of the Tamils' identity was included in those talks.

Whenever people talk of traditional homeland of Tamils, fears have been expressed that it would undermine the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Sri Lankan state and lead to the denial of human rights of the other groups that live within that homeland. It all centered round the core question of whether to accept the Tamils of Sri Lanka as nation or not. If their nationhood is accepted then the attribution of territoriality to that claim can't be separated and disputed either in political or even legal terms.

Although the phrase 'traditional homeland' is familiar in Sri Lankan political vocabulary, I think it really means the national homeland of the Tamil nation without which the distinct identity of it would be seriously jeopardized. A nation can't exist without any idea of a territory over which it seeks political control. In other words, it may be said that is the political expression of the nation in a physical sense.

The advice given by the Assistant Secretary of State of the USA, Richard Armitage at Oslo seems to emphasise that the sovereignty of the state of Sri Lanka can't be challenged by any means. It goes back to what I have referred to above that the 'State-nation' has been already established and is non negotiable. It negates the very foundation of the aspirations of a particular community. If the nationhood of the Tamils is not accepted they have to remain within the boundaries delimited by the British as a forced community. I think Armitage missed the point by not realising that there is state called Sri Lanka but it has never been a nation.

The answer to the question whether the national homeland of Tamils should remain within the boundaries of the Sri Lankan state is in the hands of the Sinhala nation. It would have been much constructive / productive if Mr. Armitage had reiterated that both parties should equally realise the fact that this answer could be found only politically and not militarily.

In the name of the people

By J. S. Tissainayagam

High Court Judge S. Sriskandarajah on the unanimous verdict by the jury that they were not guilty acquitted eighteen soldiers of the 7th Gajaba Regiment of the Sri Lanka Army, who were accused of the murder of 35 persons and the attempted murder of six others at Mylanthanai, a village near Punani in the east.

The incident that occurred on 8th August 1992 was the first massacre where the state agreed to try the accused before a court of law. The massacres that took place earlier came either before commissions of inquiry (such as the Kumarapuram massacre) or military tribunals and needless to say the perpetrators were not adequately dealt with.

Movement for Interracial Justice and Equality (MIRJE), which came forward to look after the interests of the victims (it was subsequently taken over by Centre for Human Rights and Development) fought tooth and nail to initiate civilian action against the alleged perpetrators of the massacre of Mylanthanai and the eventual consent of the government to do so was hailed as a victory for human rights.

But the courtroom drama last Monday was anything but a victory for human rights. In his summing up Sriskandarajah clearly indicated he was in favour of a conviction. When the jury returned after deliberation and pronounced the 18 accused "not guilty," the judge said that he disapproved of the verdict and asked the jury to reconsider it.

"You should not simply reject the evidence without reason and must also consider the evidence pertaining to each individual victim and separate charges made against each accused," Sriskandarajah said. But the jury returned after reconsidering its verdict to only repeat its earlier pronouncement giving the judge no option but to order the acquittal of the 18 soldiers.

The details of the 10-year long trial are too long to be recounted here (see *Northeastern Herald* of 9th August 2002 for a resume of it) but when the state agreed to hear the trial before a jury, there was a request made by the defence, which is provided for by the law. The defence wanted a Sinhala-speaking jury because the accused soldiers were Sinhalese and a seven-member Sinhala jury was allowed.

It may be construed from that the defence believed (for whatever reason) the alleged perpetrators would get a fairer hearing from a Sinhala-speaking jury than a jury that was not Sinhala-speaking. The wish of the defence has been amply realised.

The trial and the verdict bring up two sets of issues that need to be separately dealt with: a) the importance of ethnicity in the appli-

cation of the law in Sri Lanka and b) the reflection of the jury's verdict on the legal system in general.

This is not the first time the columns of the *Northeastern Herald* have highlighted the stark divide that exists between the Sinhala and Tamil communities when non-judicial bodies/persons are appointed for adjudicatory functions. The best example that has to be quoted at the expense of repetition, is the complete contrast between the main report of the Kanchirankudah investigation committee where Air Vice Marshall Harry Goonatilleke (Rtd.) and Retired Judge Oliver Weerasena exonerated the STF for opening fire at civilians demonstrating at Kanchirankudah STF camp, while a dissenting report by the sole Tamil member of the commission, Samithamby Vivekanandan, attributed the blame squarely to the STF. That is how stark the divide is.

Accusations can always be raised that it is simplistic to look at the problem purely from an ethnic angle. If that is so, the bias has to be pro-state versus anti-state. But once again the dichotomy is tenable because it is based on the fact the Sri Lankan state is a Sinhala-Buddhist state and not one that recognises or gives weight-age to the multicultural dimension of Sri Lanka's polity. The cause of Tamil rebellion was the mono-ethnic character of the Sri Lankan state, which is yet to change.

The same problems are manifest in the Human Rights Commission (HRC). Reports show how indifferently the commissioners, who are not judicial officials, have functioned when taking up urgent matters affecting the Tamil community, and wasting their time adjudicating on the promotions and transfers of schoolteachers or clerks.

So the basic divide of Tamil/Sinhala remains well entrenched in the system, irrespective of the way it might manifest itself. And when adjudicatory functions are carried out within the system, necessary cognisance has to be taken of this negative reality.

Similarly, the move to appoint a jury, who are not legal professionals to hear the Mylanthanai case and pronounce a verdict, has backfired severely on system of justice in this country. This is clear from the obvious disagreement of Sriskandarajah with the verdict. What is worse, unlike in the case of a trial-at-bar where the judge has to give reasons for his verdict, the jury has to merely say "guilty" or "not guilty." Therefore the bottom line is that in a trial by jury, where an accused is tried by his peers, the jurors can get off without stating reasons for their verdict, even if they go against what the judge feels is just.

So let us be very clear on this matter: a Sinhala-speaking jury defending alleged Sinhala perpetrators who are an arm of the Sri Lankan state for atrocities against Tamil civilians, have shown how deep ethnicity runs in our society.

The deep-seated shortcomings of juries have been commented upon before. In classical Athens where ju-

So let us be very clear on this matter: a Sinhala-speaking jury defending alleged Sinhala perpetrators who are an arm of the Sri Lankan state for atrocities against Tamil civilians, have shown how deep ethnicity runs in our society

ries were used extensively in the dispensation of justice (very probably for the first time in human history) an Assembly of all the citizens controlled the affairs of state. There were no professional judges and cases were tried before a panel of jurors, varying in size depending on the case. The principle of trial before a jury was that the perpetrator appealed to his fellow-citizens for justice.

Travesty of justice was well known in ancient Athens. The most celebrated case was no doubt the trial of Socrates, also by jury. The non-specialisation of the average citizen in the art of governance, including the dispensation of justice, which Plato found abhorrent, was to make him insist in *The Republic* that governance was an art that had to be cultivated and not left to the shamming amateur. The Mylanthanai verdict shows non-professionalism of the juror has not changed in the last 2,500 years!

What is worse is legitimacy accorded to juries because of their 'democratic' credentials. It is indeed easy to represent the jury in the Mylanthanai trial as a body of independent citizens that delivered its verdict not by a majority, but unanimously, while the professional dis-

penser of justice, Sriskandarajah, was left looking helplessly on. The assumptions we make in associating jurors with democracy give them a sort of sanctity.

There are widespread allegations that the LTTE is orchestrating a political campaign to have the EPDP thrown out of Delft under the guise that 'the people' of Jaffna want it done. While this allegation is not strictly true, 'the people' (or the citizen-jurors) in the Mylanthanai trial lend an aura of truth to their verdict because they are seen as a democratically chosen body of citizens, whose commitment to justice is such they are prepared to even go against the judge.

The second set of issues concern Tamils and the law. It needs no reiteration here the failure of the law to uphold the rights of Tamils was one reason for armed rebellion and call for a separate state. When legislation passed by parliament was challenged in court the result, Tamils felt, merely upheld the discrimination spearheaded by the legislature. Later, when Tamils sought relief through the law against assault on their personal rights and liberties by the executive and administration, they had to confront the same nega-

tive attitude of the state.

In other words, Tamil armed rebellion was because of a profound distrust in Southern-run institutions, which, willy-nilly, are dominated and controlled by non-Tamils. That is why there has been Tamil support for the LTTE to capture and hold territory, where the jurisdiction of the Sri Lankan institutions do not penetrate. One of the most important institutions needed to run a parallel system in the Tiger-controlled areas are the courts of law. It is the Tamils' need for a territory where their aspirations – including that of justice – can be met that has helped the LTTE to establish and run institutions in the areas, under their control, much to the ire of the south.

What is also ironic is that while 200 years is being awarded to Velupillai Prabhakaran by the High Court for his alleged involvement in the Central Bank bomb blast, the killers of 35 persons in cold blood are allowed to walk free. This is not to question the judgement of Justice Sarath Ambeyepitiya for a moment, but when seen in conjunction with the verdict on Mylanthanai by the jury about which the Sriskandarajah himself expressed reservations, Tamils find their faith in Sri Lanka's legal institutions eroding further.

We may conclude from this the areas not covered by the MOU – both in geographical terms and in subject matter – will continue to bedevil Tamils. While negotiations drag on to find a political solution to the war, the conflict deepens everyday as new problems arise for which there seem to be no foreseeable remedy available within the Sri Lankan system. Will the parallel system in the LTTE-controlled areas offer a solution?

Merit-only policy...

Cont. from page 4

Present trends in the south appear to be in favour of introducing a 'merit-only' policy on a step-by-step basis. Tamil opinion, once in favour of a 'merit-only' formula, cannot now even consider an about turn to take advantage of the benefits accruing to the Tamil districts other than Jaffna because the district quota system favours them. The change of heart in the south towards the merit-only policy, shedding the long-standing deference to an anti-merit policy in the media-wise and district quota standardisation may be due to rising frustration among high achievers at the GCE (A/L), who are denied university admission under the existing criteria.

The globalised world defends and promotes meritocracy in every aspect of life in the 21st century, described as the knowledge-based century. While giving weight-age to claims of equity-based education, it is also prudent not to disregard merit from whatever quarter it emerges. Using the best available talent for economic development is

the most appropriate strategy for a knowledge-based society.

For Peter Drucker, a renowned management scientist and futurologist, knowledge is the primary resource for the economy, while traditional factors of production – land, labour and capital – become secondary. This could be the best rationale to turn to a 'merit-only' policy. Is this the rationale having an impact on southern consensus on this policy? I hope this wishful thinking comes true.

Southern scholars who now speak about two decades of war as a result of discriminatory admission policies were silent spectators when these policies were introduced in the 1970s. Events subsequent to the introduction of admission policies, which were based solely on ethnic configurations, are eloquent testimony to the lack of vision and a futuristic perspective among the then designers of this country's education policy. They could not foresee the demand that occurred for university seats in the 1970s. The policy-makers did not project

this increasing demand and were merely responding to crises as they emerged from time to time. Ad hoc decisions were made without any consideration to for the long-term effects of such decisions.

The mistakes and miscalculations of education pundits during the early 1970s have taken Sri Lanka on a suicidal path and now the entire country is paying for it. The then government could have contained the situation by accommodating merit-based non-majority aspirations by expanding and diversifying university education without resorting to shortcuts to distribute existing university seats. This was not possible because of the shortsightedness of education policy-makers in the 1960s to take advantage of the boom that was taking place at senior levels in school education. Only in 1970 did they wake up to the very limited space available in the universities and the issue of 'over-representation' of Tamils in selected disciplines in the universities.

A unitary state in law and in fact

By Adrian Wijemanne

"Unitary state in law and fact," is the pregnant phrase used by Minister G. L. Pieris at the very first session of the first round of peace talks at Sattahip in Thailand. He asserted that any settlement had to be within the framework of such an entity. Clearly he felt such an entity was threatened by the events of the last 18 years of war and the long succession of military defeats suffered by the state's forces at the hands of the LTTE's terrestrial and naval forces. The preservation of that particular form of state seemed more important to him than any serious engagement with the reasons why that state had been the theatre for the disastrous turmoil of two civil wars and the secessionist war that have bedeviled the country's history in the last 31 years of independence.

The talks in Thailand, now being continued in Oslo, are about bringing peace to the people living on the island of Sri Lanka. Despite the existence of the unitary state, at least in law if not altogether in fact, there has been a failure to secure peace for the people living on the island. This failure is not due to the unitary structure of the state. The vast majority of unitary states in the world provide peace and security for the people resident in them. Sri Lanka is one of the few exceptions. It is very important now to examine seriously why this has been so.

Every state has unique features. So does the Sri Lankan state. These unique features derive intrinsically from the moral convictions of the people resident in the state as to its purpose and its importance. From these convictions flow assumptions as to the power and powers of the state and its rights in relation to its citizens and their rights. There is an ambivalence as to whether the state is sovereign or the "People" are sovereign and that ambivalence is powerfully affected by the absence of homogeneity in the "People". The state is a legally constituted entity; the "People" is an amorphous mass containing great diversities. This confers immediately on the state an advantage, which tends to reverse the relationship of which is master and which servant. The state slips effortlessly into the role of master with rights superior to those of its servants, the "People".

The diversity of the "People" tends to reinforce this role reversal. The larger element of a diverse "People," the "majority" in

ethnic terms, sees in a powerful state an ally to secure its own particular objectives. The supremacy of the state is easily used through electoral dominance to secure and further the supremacy of the majority in every sphere of life - political, economic, social, and religious. The state is invested with powers to safeguard and extend its own security at the expense of the rights of the people because the state itself is in cahoots with the majority. It is then but a short and barely noticeable step for state rights to supersede the human rights of the "People" at large.

Sri Lanka is, perhaps, the supreme example of this baleful evolution. The country's constitution, replete with lip service to the rights of the "Sovereign People" which are made "Justiciable" through the courts of law, also contains provisions to set aside these rights by recourse to "Emergency Legislation" to safeguard national security - the common euphemism for the security of the state. Draconian laws outlawing normal political activity find easy passage into the statute book. The constitution itself is amended to secure the rights of the state, which have by now become identified with the rights of the "majority," i.e. the larger ethnic group. A legitimate political aspiration of the minority is transformed into a heinous crime by a constitutional amendment. The politicians who see some virtue in this course of action fail to understand how counter-productive it is for it merely drives underground what should be an open discourse. And underground it becomes immensely dangerous to the state itself.

These are the moral concepts that underlay the numerous laws from the very first years of independence openly declared to be framed to secure the rights of the majority, which had suffered under colonial rule. The hackneyed theme of colonial misrule was wheeled out to justify the moral turpitude of the majority as exercised through a supreme state. Soon, and understandably, that supremacy had to be militarily enforced. That in turn engendered the armed resistance that finally overwhelmed the state.

Is this the state that Pieris wants to re-establish on an island-wide basis? Surely it cannot be so. There is now a countervailing power in the land in the form of the LTTE that will prevent it from being so. If it is a single unitary state holding sway throughout the island that Pieris wants to re-establish, it will necessarily have to be a fundamentally different state from the one that has failed so dramatically and, even more



Can we begin to understand that the preservation, observance and extension of human rights is itself the highest form of national security and affords the only promise of a peaceful future?

importantly, it will have to be founded upon moral assumptions diametrically the reverse of those that have corrupted and destroyed the outgoing state.

Far more important than the form and structure of the state is the state of mind of the majority. It is becoming fashionable now to pay lip service to the burgeoning accumulation of human rights, but more often than not it is done merely to wrong-foot the LTTE. The subordination of human rights to state rights within the Sinhala state is seldom or never presented as a monstrous wrong which needs root and branch reversal. Can the state be reconstituted to give overriding primacy to human rights, both in times of war as well as in times of peace? Can we begin to understand that the preservation, observance and extension of human rights is itself the highest form of national security and affords the only promise of a peaceful future? The widespread assumption that in times of war human rights have to be temporarily suspended in the interests of national security

has been shown to be a monstrous fallacy. The very opposite is what the national interest demands if the national interest is best served by the freely given consent of the governed.

What is the "national interest" where there is no single nation? On the island of Sri Lanka there are many national interests which do not coincide and which collide at every turn - national interests, which by militaristic interventions have been driven to contradiction and conflict. In the 21st century it is not "the national interest" or "national interests" that will hold a country together, but the freely given consent of the governed. That can only be achieved by negotiation between the various elements of "the governed" to arrive at the lowest common denominator which will secure the freely given consent of the disparate elements that dwell in the country. First, there needs to be a cohesive country of which the new state can only be a reflection. War has driven all who live in the island to confront and to examine closely

the very foundations of the country.

When there is agreement on what kind of country people of all kinds are willing to live in by way of a "social compact," thoughts about a state appropriate to such a country can begin to take shape. What the outcome of such a far-reaching opening up to fundamentals regarding the nature of the country will be is unpredictable, but such a course is unavoidable if peace is to be secured for the diverse peoples dwelling upon the island of Sri Lanka. We must deliver ourselves from the facile and shallow concept of "a unitary state in law and in fact" uttered by the Minister and face up to ineluctable reality.

A return to the failed unitary state is impossible now. The construction of a new state needs to be preceded by agreement among the disparate peoples living on the island on a social compact as to the nature of the country. Only thus can the mediaeval hegemonistic concepts of the Sinhala people be banished, the supremacy of state rights over human rights be outlawed and a modern state based upon the consent of the governed and the strict Rule of Law be founded. It is only such a new state that can offer even a vestige of hope to all the people living on the island of a life of peace and civility in the future.

(Illangai Thamizh Sangam)

Murdoch editorial justifies assault on democratic rights

By the Editorial Board

In the wake of the Howard government's release of a sweeping terrorist alert last week, the Australian media has lined up behind the government's efforts to condition public opinion to the far-reaching assault on democratic rights that is currently underway.

No commentator has questioned the timing or political purpose of the government's November 19 declaration that it had received "credible information of a possible terrorist attack in Australia at some time over the next couple of months". The vague warning coincides with the build-up to the expected US-led invasion of Iraq, to which the Howard government has committed itself unconditionally.

One editorial stood out, however, for its open justification for tearing up basic civil liberties and its branding of any opposition to police-state measures as tantamount to giving succour to terrorists. The November 21 editorial in Rupert Murdoch's *Australian* denounced all those who have criticised the recent violent police raids on Muslim families or have suggested the Howard government's policies have made ordinary Australians vulnerable to terrorist attack.

According to the editorial, "tolerance-worshipping, selective civil libertarians of Australia's Vietnam generation" and "anxiously affluent, fashionable post-modern, faux-bohemian babyboomers and their ideological offspring" have displayed "a stubborn refusal to face the reality" that Australia has become a target for "terrorists of the religious-fascist extreme Islamic persuasion".

The editorial asserted that this "new reality" made it necessary to accept far-reaching measures. "We can no longer carry sharp objects on passenger flights; un-

attended bags will be viewed with more suspicion; some people will be raided by ASIO [the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation]." It is an absurd amalgam: relatively minor airport precautions, to which there have been no objections, are equated with unprecedented raids by heavily-armed police that provoked significant public outrage.

These measures do not mean, the *Australian* proclaimed, that "we will abandon our respect for freedom and the rule of law." But that is exactly what is signalled by the ASIO raids, during which houses were broken into, terrified families interrogated at gunpoint, and their belongings seized—all without the laying of any charges. Moreover, in the name of fighting terrorism, legislation currently being enacted by state and federal governments will give police further powers to make arbitrary searches and to detain and interrogate suspects.

The *Australian* editorial not only defends these measures but also seeks to create a poisonous public climate to stifle any criticism. Significantly, in its rush to identify the current opposition with the "faux-bohemian babyboomers," who opposed the Vietnam War and anyone who failed to swallow wholesale the Cold War ideology of the time, the newspaper evokes "the reality of the communist threat in the McCarthyite 1950s."

The McCarthyite 1950s in the US have, until now, been notorious, even in the mainstream media, for the vicious anti-communist witch-hunt that took place. On the basis of a network of anonymous informants, public servants, actors, journalists, scientists, academics, trade unionists and others were accused of being part of the communist "fifth column" and dragged before the House Un-American Activities Committee. Thousands were hounded, stripped of their jobs, blacklisted or jailed.

If the *Australian* refers approv-

ingly to the McCarthyite period, it is because it feels the methods are appropriate today. The editorial's conclusion is a diatribe from New South Wales (NSW) state premier Bob Carr defending the ASIO raids, in which he declared: "If someone has done military training in Afghanistan, if someone is a member of [the Islamic fundamentalist Jemaah Islamiyah] JI ... if someone has expressed sympathy for Osama bin Laden, I would want to know why ASIO and the federal police have not interrogated them."

The *Australian*'s singling out of Carr for praise is not an accident. His Labor government in NSW has been in the forefront of implementing a series of police state measures. Last week it announced a Terrorism (Police Powers) Bill granting "special powers" to the police whenever police commanders declare "an imminent threat of a terrorist act".

The Bill will permit police, without warrants, to stop, search and demand identification of individuals, and to enter and search premises and vehicles, and seize goods, with or without the knowledge of the occupant or owner. Anyone, including a child, who resembles a "target person" or is near a "target area" or "target vehicle," can be strip-searched. Even children under the age of 10 can be frisk-searched.

Police can use "reasonable force" in exercising these powers and anyone who "hinders" them faces up to two years imprisonment. If anyone objects to being searched, or is charged with any offence under the Bill, they must prove a "reasonable excuse" and will be tried summarily before a Local Court. No legal challenge can be made to the declaration of special powers, which can last up to 14 days at a time.

The Bill defines "terrorism" in the same sweeping way as the federal legislation adopted in June. It permits the government and the

police to move against many traditional forms of political dissent, including demonstrations, lobbies, pickets and strikes. They can be classified as "terrorist acts" because they seek to "coerce or influence by intimidation" a government for a "political, religious or ideological cause".

Led by Carr, the state governments are all enacting laws to hand their "anti-terrorist" police powers to the federal government, to overcome constitutional doubts about the new federal laws. This substantially expands federal power and represents a major shift in the legal and constitutional framework because, since Federation in 1901, domestic law enforcement powers have remained with the states.

In addition, Carr has announced moves to boost the surveillance and electronic tapping powers of the state police, reviving the notorious undercover activity of the former police Special Branch. He has also established a 70-strong para-military anti-terrorism unit and called for the deployment of the SAS and other military squads to patrol sites in and around Sydney.

The other state and territory governments, all Labor, are matching Carr's measures. In Victoria, Premier Steve Bracks has outlined laws authorising the police to conduct covert searches of the homes and vehicles of people suspected of links to terrorist organisations.

At the federal level, Howard's government has renewed the push for the delayed ASIO Bill, currently before a Senate committee. If it passes, anyone suspected of having information relevant to terrorism—whether they be a journalist, lawyer, priest, family member, work mate or neighbour—can be held incommunicado for interrogation for up to a week at a time. They will be denied access to a lawyer for 48 hours and then only permitted to speak to an ASIO-vetted lawyer, with ASIO monitoring their conversations.

These measures are not aimed

at protecting ordinary people from terrorist attacks; they are part and parcel of an unprecedented security, police and intelligence build-up directed against working people. Well before the September 11 attacks in the US, in the lead-up to the 2000 Sydney Olympics, the Howard government and the Labor opposition combined to pass military call-out legislation authorising the deployment of troops internally against "domestic violence"—civilian unrest—that the police forces are unable to quell.

The *Australian* claims that the only opposition to the anti-terrorist measures comes from a "small but self-important section of Australia's media and political elite". But if that were the case, the tone and contents of its editorial would be inexplicable. In fact, there are real fears in ruling circles that the views denigrated by the *Australian* have broad currency and reflect deeper undercurrents of unease, hostility and outright opposition to the impending war against Iraq and the economic and social policies of governments of all political persuasions.

The editorial's targeting of the "tolerance-worshipping, selective civil libertarians of Australia's Vietnam generation" is something of a Freudian slip. As the Howard government prepares to join the Bush administration in invading Iraq, there is a distinct nervousness in the ruling elite that this imperialist adventure will evoke a broad opposition to the war, to the political establishment and to capitalism on a scale that may surpass the radicalisation of the late 1960s. The police state measures now being enacted, along with the *Australian* editorial's open support for the abrogation of democratic rights, are a sharp warning of the methods that will be used to deal with any opposition.

(WSWS)

Irish Government refuses access to prison researchers

"Amnesty International is disappointed at the Irish Government's refusal to allow researchers of a joint Amnesty International and Irish Penal Reform Trust project to visit several named Irish prisons to investigate the issue of racism in Irish detention establishments", the human rights organization said today.

As part of its ongoing work as an international human rights organization, Amnesty International monitors compliance with international standards in prisons throughout the world.

Amnesty has, in the recent past, had access from high-security prisons to detention centres

in countries such as Afghanistan, Brazil, Nigeria, Russia and the USA.

"The Irish authorities now have the dubious distinction of joining the governments of Turkey and Egypt in denying Amnesty International researchers access to their prisons.

In January Irene Khan wrote to the then Minister for Justice requesting the cooperation and assistance of his Department to facilitate the research project, undertaken jointly by Amnesty International and the Irish Penal Reform Trust, on whether racism is an issue in prisons in Ireland.

Having received no reply, the Secretary General wrote to the

new Minister, Michael McDowell, which was followed by another letter from the Director of Amnesty International Ireland, Sean Love. The Minister of Justice finally sent a written reply refusing Amnesty International's request for access on the grounds that his Department was conducting its own internal review on racism.

"But the 'review' is an internal review; one of many reviews on efficiency and training which are part and parcel of the public service. It is absolutely no substitute for an independent research mission", said Amnesty International.

Even though Amnesty International understands a draft report

has been circulating internally for some time, details of the Department of Justice's internal review are not available to the public. Two Freedom of Information applications on its content made by Amnesty International have been rejected by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. And with the greatest respect to the National Training and Development Institute, charged with the government's internal review, it is not a human rights research body. Nor is its review independent, as its terms of reference have been written by the Department, it is funded by the Department, and its report will first be vetted by the Department before it can come

into the public arena.

"The project commissioned by the Irish authorities is not a substitute for an independent, impartial and objective assessment of the issue of racism within Irish prisons," said Irene Khan in a letter to Taoiseach Bertie Ahern. "Furthermore, the project commissioned by the prison authorities and our project are not mutually exclusive," she said.

The critical point here is denial of independent access. Amnesty International has now been left wondering why the Irish authorities have continued to deny access to its researchers.

(Amnesty International)

Sri Lanka army psychological operations come of age

Psychological operations (psyops) are an important component of any conventional military formation. In this information age, psyops are assuming an increasingly central position in military strategy. The US successes in the Gulf War, in the bombing of Yugoslavia and now in its global campaign against terrorism have relied heavily on sophisticated psychological operational methods, mediated in no small measure through the several influential international media networks.

Being a professional force modelled on the British military, the Sri Lanka army realised the need for an effective psyops strategy as soon as the Eelam War began in earnest in 1983.

A small psychological operations unit, comprising two Colombo-based journalists and a very intelligent LTTE surendee, was set up in the old Joint Operations Command in 1984 under the supervision of the military intelligence headed at the time by the present army commander Lt. Gen. Lionel Balagalle.

The greatest achievement of this unit was the Radio of the Communist Party of Tamil Eelam. This broadcast sowed confusion in the ranks of many Tamil militant groups that were active in the northeast at the time.

Interesting news and programs produced with authentic information culled from monitored Tamil militant communications from intelligence operatives on the ground (humint) and reliable open sources quickly acquired a wide audience for the radio.

However the radio and the psychological operations unit could not continue for long due to practical and bureaucratic problems.

Years later the Sri Lanka army recognising the importance of psyops in the general war strategy against the LTTE, established a Directorate of Psychological Operations (DPO).

Several programs with clearly discernible psyops agendas aimed at the Tamil population in the northeast and the Tigers were launched after the DPO came into being.

The popular Makkal kural (Voice of the people) broadcast on an SLBC slot produced by the able second in command of the EPDP, Ramesh, and the Vanampaadi broadcast were designed to wear away the Tamil public from the LTTE.

Psyops units in the east functioning under the military intelligence have produced leaflets



and posters with the same objective – a popular theme of these being the regional disparities between eastern and northern Tamils.

In recent years the performance of the DPO and the general appreciation of the great value of psyops among the SLA officer corps have greatly improved largely under the tutelage of US special forces.

In early 2000, the US Army

Psychological Operations Group trained personnel of the Sri Lanka Army Directorate of Psychological Operations on new techniques to devise more sophisticated strategies aimed at the Tamil population and the LTTE.

The current head of the SLA's Directorate of Psychological Operations is Brig. P Pannipitiya. That SLA psyops have reached a high level of sophistication in this key aspect of conventional

warfare is evident from a following write up on the subject by Colonel D.P. Dissanayake, USP, deputy commandant, Sri Lankan Military Academy.

His analysis explains to the soldier in simple terms the most fundamental technique of psyops – face-to-face communication.

A US Army Psychological Operations Field Manual (No.33-1) defines it thus: "Face-to-face (in-

terpersonal) communication is the most effective means of transmitting a persuasive message. It is employed in rallies, rumour campaigns, group discussions, lectures, show-and-tell demonstrations, social organizations, social activities, entertainment, and individual person-to-person contact, all providing a participating experience for the individual or group to recall later."

A paradigm for psychological operations (PO)

By Colonel D.P. Dissanayake

As we all know, communications play an important role in moulding the lives of people. In fact many things in life revolve around or evolve through communications. In strictly military parlance, communications is restricted to verbal interaction between two or more people. But common understanding is that communications also include writing and expressions.

The true definition though, is, "it is the exchange of information between two or more people in a way that it creates understanding and a desired set of behavioural patterns".

This, therefore widens the scope of communications to include even actions of individuals. In essence, this is exactly what is wanted in PO (psyops). Be it talking, writing, expressing or doing what is needed, is to have a desired set of

behaviour. All the while, when discussing PO, more emphasis is on the audiences, themes and the means of dissemination. The importance of these cannot be underestimated for sure.

But do we stop by: to think of the impact needed and how best it is achieved? Seldom. I tend to think that the core of PO is the skill of communications. And this aspect has to take precedence over all others. It is communications that binds human beings together.

The simple example is language. Today English is part of globalisation. The understanding created by communications can have positive and negative effects. Negative effects can be fatal and disastrous. Many a times we have heard of aircraft accidents taking place as a result of communication errors. Similarly, the Kargil campaign brought to light; information communication is a cutting edge

and a tool of war. More than the impact that military operations had on the situation it was probably the communication of information that brought about a change in world opinion in favour of India.

I was watching the Kandy Esala Perahera on TV and came to know that even the 'Kasa Karyas' were communicators. They were the ones who gave advance information to the people that the perahera was around, through the noise they made. Come to think about the 'Anda Bera Karaya,' of the past, he too was an important communicator. Thus, one could without hesitation, conclude that communications become singularly important in changing the attitudes and behaviour of people. Therefore, this aspect not only needs emphasis in PO, those dealing with the subject, should have a thorough knowledge and grasp of communications if we are to

succeed.

In my article, I would like to quote a PO conducted by a group of soldiers deep inside enemy territory, whilst under LTTE custody. It was however not a risky and intricate operation, rather a simple and practical one. The story appeared in the *Lankadeepa* Sunday publication on 29th Jul 01. Of course, the intention of the article was to convey a different message to the reader. But I thought this classic unorthodox operation should be made full use, to learn a lesson and to inspire others on conducting PO. The important extracts of the article are being reproduced in English.

Priyantha Jayakody of Sinharaja Jayakody, Marada, Nattandiya narrated his four years in LTTE captivity. Following the disclosure of his details to the ICRC by the

Cont. on page 12



Black Tiger women cadres marching at the parade to commemorate great heroes on 26th November in Thnmaratchi

Pic. by Buddhika Weerasinghe

A paradigm...

Cont. from page 11

LTTE, he had been granted many facilities and privileges. In fact he had forgotten that he had been living in an LTTE prison camp in the shadows of death.

"One day, a principal from a school in Konavil, who used to visit the LTTE camp, approached me and requested us to help the children who were preparing to have an art exhibition. I readily agreed, and went with my friends to help the children. These were children who had no other experience in life other than the war. As such, there was no design or decision in their work. There was no creativeness. I pulled out my wallet and took out a two hundred-rupee note and hung it, so that the Sri Dalada Maligawa could be visible. I made a giant replica of it, the paper and the other material was brought by the children.

"The local leaders of the LTTE and the principal visited the exhibition and wanted to know what it was. I went on to explain what it was, what they had not seen, what some of their own had

tried to destroy. They never uttered a word. To my dismay, I later came to know that my one had been selected as the best and I was presented with a mouth organ. I presented it back to the school when I came back and it gave me immense satisfaction.

"The ICRC used to bring us cigarettes, biscuits and Nescafe. Since none of us use to smoke we sold the cigarettes and bought sugar with the money.

"There were boxes of biscuits too remaining with us. So we decided to have a *Dansala* with the items that we had collected, on Vesak day. We thought LTTE would obstruct our efforts. On the contrary, we were fortunate that nothing of that nature happened. It was a roaring success and we never anticipated it. We had it for three days and cadres from far away places too appreciated our hospitality. We had to explain to them and tell them that it was the custom

of Buddhists to give alms on such days to bestow merit on them. And it was well taken but they were surprised. Posing dawned some time later. Jayantha and his friends roamed around and collected some reeds and made lanterns and decorated them with polythene." They had hung one to see the reaction of the LTTE.

"It was not only LTTE cadres that came to see it but many from the neighbourhood. We were so moved by the enthusiasm, we quickly lit the others too. It was virtually a carnival. The LTTE cadres brought the candles to light the lanterns.

"During this time I heard over BBC news that my father had expired. And this made me home sick. By this time I was also suffering from catarrh. When I requested the ICRC to secure my release, they recommended it and the LTTE readily granted it. Before release, I was taken to the tailor and new clothes were stitched. I was well fed and looked after well, even while I was transit."

This in fact, is a special operation conducted single handedly by a few young soldiers. They were neither trained in PO nor were they literate in the subject. Their intuition and initiative paved the way for magnificent feats to be accomplished even in a hostile environment. Not only did they take the challenge to communicate to people, to change their attitudes and perceptions, but they were also able to change their behaviour. Eventually, the LTTE even released Jayantha. This was no accident, it was rather by design and planning, remember how they watched the reaction of the LTTE. Even though they had no formal training their mission was clear. They displayed their superior communication skills in various ways when the right opportunity arose. The penetrating message that was conveyed, I'm sure will be remembered by all who received it.

The concern by Jayantha and his comrades was genuine and

sincere. In short, the theme he developed was, "seek ye first to understand and then to be understood." At a time when we are more accustomed to talk about the successes in the Gulf and other places, here is a gallant soldier who did his best, unsung and unwept. Incidentally, I believe, giving publicity to own successes is part of PO. There may be many more informal operations like this, which go, unheard, unnoticed and unrecorded. Therefore this is also an attempt to show gratitude, appreciation and inspire such operations. It is therefore our responsibility to educate men on such things if we are interested in 'bridging the gap.'

Finally, we must not forget the impact communications can have on PO, not only through talking and writing but through action as well. More importantly, the skills of communications if mastered can have a decisive impact on Military Operations other than war.