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Oil Depots Set Ablaze in Bomb Attacks



LTTE commandos, disguised in Sri Lankan military outfit, stormed and set ablaze two major oil storage tank farms in Colombo on 20 October.



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*I do not agree with a word
of what you say, but I'll
defend to the death your
right to say it.*
— Voltaire.

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CONTENTS

News Review.....	4
Oil Depots Set Ablaze in Bomb Attacks.....	8
Mass Rally in London.....	9
Tamilis Tryst With Destiny.....	10
Will Devolution Lead to Peace..	13
Clearing the Hurdles to a Solution.....	14
Government's Peace Plan — An Evaluation.....	18
Towards a South Asian Times..	19
Sub-Continental Scene.....	21
Book Review.....	24
The Value of Dissent.....	25
Hindu Congress Appeals.....	26
Readers Forum.....	27

The Art of the Possible

Operation Leap Forward, Operation Frog Jump, Operation Handshake, Operation Thunderbolt, and Operation Sunshine. These are not war games played in movies or in TV shows to titillate and excite the innate affliction for violence, death and destruction in the human psyche. These are war games being 'played' in real life in the war-torn areas of northern Sri Lanka in military encounters between the Sri Lankan government forces and Tamil Tigers. One is treated to episodes of these games chosen selectively on the TV screens of Sri Lanka, and through video tapes produced and distributed by the LTTE both locally and abroad.

The question is whether the active participants enjoy their role in 'playing' these games. Whether it is so or not, the fact is that a large number of participants have been losing their limbs and lives for real. The death toll and the injured on either side demonstrate this fact beyond doubt. The fact is also that those who have laid down their lives have contributed to their own end-game and are not there to see the end of the game they were participating in. They have no opportunity to come back to life and know whether they have sacrificed their lives in vain or not.

But what is more tragic and impermissible is when the overwhelming majority of the civilian population in these areas who expect to lead a normal life as any other group of normal people aspire to do are called upon to sacrifice their limbs and lives in the course of these war games. Those who fell victims of the bombing in the precincts of the Naval church (on 9th July) or those unsuspecting pupils of Nagarkoil school who took cover under a tree and lost their limbs or lives (on 22 September 1995) in another bombing raid by the Sri Lankan airforce are typical examples of non-participants becoming unwilling casualties in these war games conducted by willing participants.

Without being judgemental about the merit or otherwise of the declared positions of the parties to the conflict, and taking into account the relationship of forces on either side, time and time again it has been our task to emphasise in these columns that the ultimate solution to the ethnic conflict and the ongoing death and destruction in Sri Lanka ought to be by the recognition of the legitimate aspirations of the Tamil people through political negotiations between the parties engaged in armed conflict, the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE.

It is precisely on the basis of the above assessment that views were expressed in these columns welcoming and enthusiastically supporting the cessation of hostilities agreement and the negotiations initiated between the government of President Chandrika Kumaratunga and the LTTE at the beginning of this year. That is why two months after the resumption of hostilities in June 1995 in these columns we posed the following question:

'Judging from the events since fighting resumed on April 19 between the Tamil Tigers and government forces following the withdrawal of the LTTE from both the peace process and the cessation of hostilities, Eelam War III promises to be more gruesome, grisly and ghastly than the two that preceded. The death toll on either side, including among civilians within a matter of seven weeks has risen to a staggering figure of over 600. That is approximately 85 human beings each week. By any standard of conflicts around the world, that must surely be a record.'

'One question that must be asked from those responsible for the sacrifice of this enormous number of human lives is a short and simple one: Has your aim of reaching your declared goal been advanced one iota in any meaningful and practical terms because of so many sacrifices made in such a short time?'

Since then, many months have passed, many more limbs and lives of both combatants and civilians have been lost, and many more thousands of people among the civilian population have been displaced in a revengeful aggravation of the tragic history of the past decade-and-a-half. But the question remains still appropriate and unanswered.

One is not seeking an answer to establish whether one is right or the other is wrong. In the ultimate analysis politics, as much as any other form of human relationship, is the art of the possible. Living in an imperfect world inhabited by people of differing cultural and social backgrounds with a variety of views and aspirations replete with contradictions, one must strive for the greatest happiness and satisfaction for the most number of people practicably possible in a given historical situation.

NEWS REVIEW

Military Offensive

18 October – After a week-long lull in the fighting in the northern Jaffna peninsula, Sri Lankan security forces launched the latest phase of their offensive code-named 'Operation Sunshine' against the Tamil Tigers on 17 October.

Colombo circles considered the operation as the final phase of the military effort to capture the Tiger-stronghold of Jaffna. However, military spokesman Brigadier Sarath Munasinghe said, 'It's not the big one. It's simply an operation.'

As the fighting escalated in the north with at least 10 to 15 thousand troops backed by tanks, airforce planes and artillery seeking to advance from their newly captured positions following 'Operation Thunder Strike', it was reported from the eastern port city of Trincomalee that a Black Sea Tiger suicide squad blew up a government cargo vessel anchored in the harbour, killing two naval officers, five soldiers and two civilians. The 21-metre vessel had been provided to the Navy by the Ministry of Fisheries to transport food supplies to the beleaguered northern Jaffna peninsula.

On the previous day (16 October), the Tigers killed at least 32 soldiers and wounded 23 more when they ambushed a contingent of troops on foot patrol at Chenkalady in eastern Batticaloa.

A LTTE news report said of the fighting in Jaffna that the security forces were resorting to heavy shelling and aerial bombardment and civilians were fleeing as the troops sought to advance amidst fierce fighting from Mathagal to Chulipuram and from Achchuveli and Puthur and that Valigagam north was being subjected to intense shelling. Heavy fighting continued in Navakkiri, Nilavarai and Urelu, 70 soldiers were killed, one army tank and two armoured personnel carriers were destroyed, a Tiger radio broadcast from Jaffna added.

The Operational headquarters of the army in Colombo was quoted as saying that more than 250 Tigers were wounded on the first day of the operation. The army lost 19 soldiers killed and 157 wounded.

13 October – The military offensive launched on 1 October was widely reported by commentators and diplomats in Colombo as an all-out effort to capture the northern Jaffna peninsula from Tiger control, but government spokesmen had described it as a 'li-

imited operation'. Besides the occasional shelling, no major incidents have been reported during the last few days.

However, informed sources in Colombo are of the view that since the Tigers unilaterally abandoned the peace process and resumed hostilities, the government is resolved to take on the Tigers militarily. The aim appears to be to fight the Tigers and take over Jaffna on a phase by phase basis, a defense analyst said.

Since the war with the Tigers resumed, government has been forced to spend billions of rupees to acquire military aircraft, naval gunboats and other forms of sophisticated equipment and weaponry to strengthen the fighting capacity of its armed forces. The government recently sought parliamentary approval for an additional 8.6 billion rupees (165 million US dollars) this year.

Speaking to reporters after addressing the army's 47th anniversary celebrations in Colombo, army commander Lt. Gen. Gerry de Silva said that the latest military offensive, 'Operation Thunder Strike' had put the security forces in a strong position for a final attack on Jaffna town, and added, 'Nothing is going to stop us. The LTTE will try to protect themselves in Jaffna at all cost. We know that they will not give up without a fight. If and when we take Jaffna, they will realise that they have been thrown out of their stronghold and out of their heartland.'

According to the army commander, 'We have entered the final phase of the war.'

'Operation Thunder Strike': Government forces numbering several thousand backed by tanks, artillery and attack aircraft launched another phase of their much anticipated offensive in Jaffna in northern Sri Lanka on 1 October reportedly resulting in hundreds of deaths among the resisting cadres of the LTTE and the advancing troops. Heavy shelling from naval gunboats and the Palaly airbase and the fear of advancing troops resulted in the displacement of several thousands of people from their homes. The LTTE also suffered a large number of casualties.

Following the first day of the offensive code-named 'Operation Thunder Strike', a military communique announced that the troops had advanced 21 square kilometres from their forward defence lines from their main northern military base at Palaly capturing Achchuveli, Thoppu, Navakkiri, Vasvilan, Puththur, Pathameni, Avarankal, Iddakadu and Vallai, and that 51 Tigers and 19 soldiers were killed in the fighting that ensued.

A convoy of naval supply vessels proceeding from the eastern port Trincomalee escorted by six navy gunboats came under attack on 2 October off the coast of Mullaitivu from 'Sea Tiger' boats on the second day of the offensive. One naval supply ship, 'Rana Gaja' was badly damaged, 15 members of the forces killed, and some 54 soldiers and sailors aboard were wounded in the course of the encounter. The Navy claimed that government forces counter attacked and sank eight LTTE boats killing at least 30 Tigers.

As the fighting progressed into the following days it was reported that scores of soldiers and Tigers were injured or killed as the troops advanced. Military spokesmen later claimed that the troops killed over 250 Tigers (later increased to over 300) when they tried during the early hours of 3 October to mount a counter attack against the troops in an endeavour to retake the villages captured by the troops in the course of their advance. Tigers in large numbers launched an attack on the troops in Punnaliakaduwan, Navakkiri and Puththur west area in the early hours of 3 October, but they were beaten back with heavy casualties on their side, an army spokesman stated.

Initially the LTTE denied reports of heavy casualties on their side and a statement from their London headquarters stated that only 8 of their cadres had been killed. However, the Tiger leadership later conceded that at least 150 of their cadres had been killed. According to reports from Jaffna, among the dead are a number of LTTE men belonging to its senior ranks.

A Tiger radio broadcast on 3 October said that heavy fighting was raging in the areas around Achchuveli. 'Thousands of civilians are fleeing their homes towards Chavakachcheri' (situated south of Jaffna town). Some 50,000 people had been rendered homeless since the offensive began, the broadcast said.

A military communique issued on 4 October announced that the dead bodies of 108 male and 10 female LTTE cadres were handed over to the International Committee of the Red Cross by the security forces. Sri Lanka's TV network and newspapers in Colombo published photographs of scores of dead bodies of Tiger cadres arranged in rows and displaying weapons captured from the Tigers. Brigadier Sarath Munasinghe said on 5 October that the armed forces had recovered 152 dead bodies of Tiger cadres after the battle on 3 October.

'Our information is that the LTTE lost over 300 of their trained and experienced cadres', he told a news conference in Colombo.

Munasinghe added that three senior ranked cadres, including the LTTE's women's wing leader, were killed in the battle. He speculated that there was much dissension at the level of the Tiger leadership and that the Tiger intelligence chief Pottu Amman had been removed from his position just before 'Operation Thunder Strike' began and replaced by a person identified as Kapil Amman.

A statement issued on 4 October by the LTTE said that 'A major battle took place between the LTTE forces and the Sri Lankan Government forces in Navakiri, Puthur, and Avarangal areas during the early hours on 3 October. The LTTE launched a counter offensive against the military at 2.30 am and a fierce battle lasted more than 4 hours. The counter offensive was led by the Tigers Women's Brigade which penetrated several kilometers deep into the military lines and attacked on several fronts with light mortars and light machine guns. During the counter attack the LTTE forces were confronted by a barrage of heavy machine gunfire, mortar attack and cannon fire. A massive blitz of several thousand shells was unleashed by the military to prevent the LTTE from overrunning their newly established positions. Close hand to hand fights erupted on several fronts.'

'During the four hours the military kept the skies above the battle field ablaze with continuous para flares. 150 LTTE fighters attained martyrdom in this battle. The military also sustained heavy casualties.'

'The Sri Lankan Government forces continued to shell civilian areas all day yesterday. This resulted in the death of 8 civilians including 3 children. More than 30 civilians were seriously injured. The shells were directed away from the battlefield into Point Pedro, Thunnalai, Irupalai, Kopay, Neerveli and Urumpirai.'

A Tiger broadcast on 5 October said that the civilian death toll in the latest offensive was 22 and the number of displaced people was 75,000.

Food Shortage: The intensified fighting between government forces and the Tamil Tigers in northern Jaffna has led to an acute food shortage threatening near starvation of the civilian population, according to reports from Jaffna.

'Areas like Puththur, Avarankal and Achchuveli where the fighting had occurred and have been captured by the troops are farming areas. Now

the farmers have been displaced, and so there is no production. Now there is no flour, nor vegetables,' a resident from Jaffna is reported to have said.

A statement released by the LTTE in Jaffna on 11 October said that, according to announcement from the Jaffna Secretariat of the Government Agent, all reserves of emergency food supplies have now been exhausted. The last stock of 40 tons of flour was distributed to bakeries in the Tenmaradchi area in the Jaffna peninsula to provide food for the significant number of displaced persons who had moved out of the areas recently captured by government troops.

The LTTE's statement added that the Director of Planning of the Jaffna Secretariat, Mr. K. Pathmanathan, had made urgent pleas to the government in Colombo for the immediate shipment of emergency provisions to the peninsula. In his message, he stated that 'such a situation has not arisen in the peninsula since 1990, the general population is on the brink of starvation. Furthermore, due to the unavailability of flour all production of bread, the essential staple food, has come to a halt as of 10.10.95. . . Even though all food brought in the last shipment was rationed there are no further stocks available in Jaffna. Please take immediate steps to send food supplies to the north'.

The Government Agent who was in Colombo confirmed on 11 October that food shortage in Jaffna was acute.

Children Killed in Bombing Raid: At least 68 people, including 42 school children, were killed and over one hundred others wounded when attack aircraft dropped bombs in the vicinity of a school in the village of Nagar-Kovil near Point Pedro in northern Jaffna on 22 September.

In a statement released in Paris on 23 September, Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) (Doctors Without Frontiers), which has some of its members working in war-torn Jaffna, said that nearly 200 persons were wounded when bombs fell near a school. Of some 150 children who were wounded 15 died within three hours of being taken to hospital, subsequently a further 27 children died in hospital.

Although military spokesmen initially denied any knowledge of the incident, it later transpired that the aircraft's target was a decorative tent erected near the school by the Tigers to commemorate Thileepan's death anniversary, but bombs missed the target hitting the school children who were waiting under a tree.

EPDP Leader Escapes Assassination Bid

The leader of the Eelam Peoples Democratic Party (EPDP), Douglas Devananda, MP, narrowly escaped assassination, when a squad of suspected Tamil Tiger gunmen stormed the party's fortress-like headquarters along Park Road in Colombo on 10 October.

Four of the EPDP leader's associates and bodyguards were killed in the attack while the EPDP leader is reported to have escaped by jumping out through a window at the rear of the building and taking cover in the neighbouring domestic garden. Until Devananda surfaced in public the following day, there was speculation that the Tigers had kidnapped him.

The attackers used AK-47 assault rifles, a barrage of grenades and a 40 mm rocket propelled grenade to penetrate into the heavily fortified premises, which doubles up as Devananda's home as well, with a steel-plated gate always manned by armed cadres of the EPDP.

'It is clearly the LTTE's work. They should know that it is not easy to kill me. We have been in this game before,' Devananda said. 'They want to get me because they know that we're emerging as the alternative Tamil leadership that will replace the LTTE in the north. The LTTE wants us wiped out because it has been affected by our strategy and approach to the Tamil problem and its fear of our increasing popularity,' he added.

Mr. Devananda said that he and his comrades fought off the heavily armed attackers for some 20 minutes before 'withdrawing' with others from the premises for lack of ammunition.

'I am certain it was an LTTE job. Their target was Devananda,' Colombo's police chief G.B. Koakadeniya told newsmen.

Tamil political parties, including the EPRLF, PLOTE and SLMC condemned the attack and the attempt on the EPDP leader's life.

Censorship

The imposition of censorship on military related news by the Sri Lankan Government as from 21 September came into severe condemnation mainly by the print media and organisations of journalists. The government's announcement required the obtaining of prior approval from the Competent Authority for the publication or trans-

Continued on page 6

Continued from page 5

mission of any 'military related news' within or outside Sri Lanka.

But within four days the government relented in the face of criticism and lifted the censorship on the foreign media. 'The government accepted the point that the censorship is damaging its standing in the international community, and decided to exempt the foreign media from being subjected to censorship', Mr. Edmund Jayasinghe, the Competent Authority said on 26 September. 'You are allowed to report everything as you had been doing. But please do not write anything that leads to a chaotic situation in the country', he added.

'The government has a right to impose censorship to safeguard military secrets and sensitive information. But it cannot use censorship as an excuse to crack down on the media', Waruna Karunatileke, Chairman of the Free Media Movement said. Referring to the lifting of censorship on the foreign media while continuing to subject the local media, Mr. Karnatileke said, 'If the argument for imposing the censorship was that the rebels were gathering intelligence from the media... they can still obtain this information from the international media.'

In the meantime, the opposition United National Party (UNP), has encouraged the newsmedia to institute proceedings in the country's Supreme Court alleging infringement of fundamental rights on the grounds that the government's censorship regulation discriminates between foreign and local media.

The Emergency (Restriction on Publication and Transmission of Sensitive Military Information) Regulation, No.1 of 1995 promulgated on 21 September prohibited the publication or transmission of 'any material containing any matter which pertains to any operations carried out, or proposed to be carried out, by the Armed Forces or the Police Force (including the Special Task Force), the procurement of arms or supplies by any such Forces, the deployment or use of equipment, including aircraft or naval vessels, by any such Forces.'

It has been suggested that the government's move to control the publication of military related news was linked to the ongoing war effort against the Tigers in northern Sri Lanka.

A government communique said, 'The government has subjected the publication and broadcasting of news within and outside Sri Lanka on the operations and related activities of the armed forces and police to the approv-

al of a Competent Authority. The government perceived that the irresponsible reporting of news related to the armed forces by certain newspapers and electronic media has harmed the interests of the country and the public. Distortion of facts on military operations impedes attempts to solve this national crisis and affects the morale of the forces.'

Facing a barrage of angry questions from journalists at a press conference in Colombo on 21 September, Minister of Information Mr. Dharmasiri Senanayake sought to defend the government against accusations that the imposition of the censorship was proof that the government had abandoned its free media policy.

Hoping that the censorship would be temporary and shortlived, the Minister said, 'We are a very liberal-minded people. The concept of free media culture has not been abandoned by the government.' Linking the government's decision to impose censorship to what he described as 'irresponsible reporting by some newspapers', he added, 'Certain sections of the press publish huge exaggerations. I don't think anywhere in the world the press makes such revelations and accusations.'

'Sometimes papers publish things which might even incite communal or ethnic violence. The government considers it a national duty to maintain communal peace and calm.'

Amnesty Appeals for Civilian Protection

Amid reports of a large-scale offensive looming in the northeast of Sri Lanka, Amnesty International has urgently appealed to the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to take all necessary measures to protect civilians and others taking no active part in the fighting.

'At the very least, safeguards should be introduced to avoid deliberate and arbitrary killings of civilians and those persons who, having taken an active part in the hostilities, are no longer involved in fighting because of sickness, wounds, detention or any other cause,' Amnesty International said.

The human rights organization is also urging both parties to ensure that detainees are not subjected to torture - including rape - and ill-treatment, and that the sick, the wounded and those who are detained or who surrender are protected from all acts of reprisal and violence - including hostage-taking.

Appeals are being sent today amid

reports of an escalation of the armed conflict in the Jaffna peninsula. The Jaffna area in the north of Sri Lanka is predominantly under the control of the LTTE - the main armed opposition group fighting for a separate Tamil state called *Eelam* in the northeast of the country. An estimated 800,000 civilians currently live there.

Although Amnesty International does not address the general issue of military tactics, the appeal is based on concerns for the life and safety of civilians, prisoners and the wounded in view of widespread human rights abuses reported in the context of previous offensives.

The organisation is calling on both parties to at least give unimpeded access to all areas under their control, including all places of detention, to fact-finding and other missions dispatched by humanitarian and inter-governmental organizations, including the International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees.

Amnesty International is also appealing for Sri Lanka to become a party to Protocol II Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 relating to the protection of victims of non-international armed conflicts.

Trade Unions Back Political Package

The final proposals of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Constitutional Reform 'should be capable of winning the confidence of national minorities', says a statement issued by a group of major trade unions. The grouping of 22 labour organisations, which has generally endorsed the Government's devolution package, comprises both trade union federation close to Government political parties as well as several large independent trade unions.

The union statement said:

'We consider the Peoples Alliance Government's presentation of devolution proposals for deliberation by the Select Committee of parliament as a bold and sincere attempt to bring about a political solution to the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. The Government's peace initiatives including its devolution proposals, have received sympathy and support of international circles which have called upon the LTTE to enter into peace negotiations with the government on that basis. We wish to underline that this development constitutes a vital factor for the success of the peace process launched by the government.'

'As the ethnic conflict intensified, the workers, in the Northern and Eastern regions drifted away from the mainstream of the trade union movement to the detriment of working class struggles. As the war escalated, the then government utilised the Public Security Act to trample upon and to put burdens on the working class. Under these conditions our trade unions campaigned consistently for a political solution to the ethnic conflict.

'Narrow communalist concepts fanned the flames of war for 12 long years at the cost of about 50,000 lives. People are being killed daily. Those who suffer loss of life in the war are mostly, sons and daughters of the working people. On the other hand war's ravages result in large scale destruction of resources that are vitally needed for the development of the country. It is our bounden duty to prevent this immense destruction of life and resources by bringing about a political solution conducive to restoration and consolidation of confidence among the nationalities in the country.

'A frame work for wider regional autonomy towards a just settlement of the ethnic problem is contained in the government's proposals. There is room for improvement of these proposals through discussion in the parliamentary select committee. The proposals are also currently being widely discussed in the country. These discussions are sometimes assuming the form of an attempt to devalue and weaken the proposals, rendering them unacceptable to the Tamil and Muslim minorities. Such endeavours do not represent an honest quest for ethnic peace. We appeal to all the working people to extend their cooperation for the solution of this conflict, taking into careful consideration all national and international realities, without giving in to communalism.

'Certain people are advocating the pursuance of the war without advancing proposals for devolution of power. They contend that the separatists can be defeated militarily without putting forward devolution proposals. As we see, it is only a utopian hope which ignores the national and international realities. The attempts to lay by the devolution proposals at this juncture are in fact a service rendered for the separatists. We cannot forget that the rationale for separatism was provided by none other than communalists on both sides.

'Even if it is assumed that the LTTE could be defeated solely by military means, that will not eliminate the causes that led to the war.

'Even though the LTTE has stated

that they reject the Government's proposals in toto, they cannot but take cognizance of them. If the parliamentary select committee can work out a solution successfully, it will undoubtedly be a powerful influence on the LTTE to enter into peace talks. In any case, we would like to draw the attention of the government to the fact that talks will have to be held even with the LTTE in working out a final solution to this conflict.

'It is quite clear that the final proposals of the parliamentary select committee should be capable of winning the confidence of the national minorities. It will be the duty of that committee to evolve a solution which will enable proposals for all nationalities to live peacefully as citizens with equal rights in a united Sri Lanka. We appeal to the working class to take the lead in realising the expectations of the large majority of Sri Lankan people today for peace.

US Congress Backs Negotiated Peace

A resolution encouraging the peace process in Sri Lanka was passed without dissent in the US House of Representatives recently.

US House of Representatives Resolution 181 called on 'all parties to negotiate in good faith with a view to ending the current armed strife in Sri Lanka and to finding a just and lasting political settlement to Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict while assuring the territorial integrity of the country'.

It said a political solution, including 'appropriate constitutional structures and adequate protection of minority rights' is the path to a lasting and comprehensive peace in Sri Lanka.

The House of Representatives also expressed a 'willingness in principle to provide the good offices of the United States to help resolve the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, if so desired by parties to the conflict'.

The motion deplored the resumption of fighting by the LTTE in April and called on the LTTE to return to the negotiating table, noting that the State Department has named it as a major terrorist organisation.

'The LTTE is widely believed to have engaged in political assassination including the murder in 1994 of a leading candidate for the Sri Lankan presidency and the killing in 1993 of President Ranasinghe Premadasa'.

The Representatives commended the commitment to democracy demonstrated by the Lankan people 'in defiance of brutal acts of wanton terrorism'. They also complimented the gov-

ernment for the significant improvement in the area of human rights.

Several speakers who addressed the House on the resolution commended the 'good efforts of the Sri Lankan government to work for peace,' adding that the motion recognised the 'very real efforts of the government to respect basic human rights and achieve a just peace'.

They also said that the LTTE withdrew from negotiations and resumed military operations against the government without provocation and in violation of the ceasefire.

Referring to the government's devolution package, they said 'we can all applaud this effort to settle Sri Lanka's problems politically rather than militarily. If our government can play a role it would be an honour for all of us to help end the bloodshed'.

Amnesty Welcomes Action Against Death Squads

Last week's arrests of 18 members of the security forces and seven civilian informants suspected of being responsible for the 'disappearance', torture and killing of at least 21 people should send a clear message to the security forces that human rights violations will not be tolerated, Amnesty International said recently.

Ten of those arrested are members of the Special Task Force (STF), an elite police commando unit, and there are also reports that the head of STF has been suspended by President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga.

'While welcoming the arrests and suspension, we urge the Sri Lankan government to take all necessary steps to ensure that the criminal investigations underway will progress smoothly and that those responsible will promptly be brought to justice,' the human rights organization said.

Amnesty International is also calling on the government to ensure that the fate or whereabouts of all people reported to have recently 'disappeared' be fully clarified and that the relatives of the victims be granted adequate compensation.

Thirteen of the victims found have been identified as Tamils abducted in the capital Colombo in the last few months; their bodies were later found in lakes and rivers in the vicinity of the capital.

During a press conference on 30 August, the head of the police's Criminal Investigation Department in charge of the investigations of the

Continued on page 8

Continued from page 7

abductions in Colombo announced that they had found evidence that the victims had been tortured and strangled with plastic handcuffs. The victims were then left in a disused toilet in the headquarters of the STF before being dumped in lakes and rivers in the vicinity of the capital.

On 29 June, President Kumaratunga had ordered an investigation into the discovery of, at the time, 11 bodies in Bolgoda Lake, south of Colombo.

Amnesty International had earlier expressed concern about the recent re-emergence of the pattern of 'disappearances' which had been so widespread in the period 1988-1990.

'Disappearances' started to be reported again, particularly from the northeast and the capital Colombo, following the resumption in mid-April of fighting in the northeast of the country between the security forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the main armed Tamil opposition group.

Oil Depots Set Ablaze in Bomb Attacks

22 OCTOBER – Huge fireballs lit up the pre-dawn sky as tens of thousands of tons of oil were put to the torch when Tamil Tiger commandos carried out a spectacular devastating early-morning attack on 20 October at about 1.45 am blowing up two oil storage tank farms located only a short distance away from Sri Lanka's capital. In two simultaneous attacks, the Tigers stormed the country's two largest oil storage facilities thus delivering what has been described as a big blow to the government's military operations in the north.

As government troops escalated their offensive operations in the Tiger stronghold of the Jaffna peninsula, the LTTE attack on an important installation close to the capital was described as a retaliatory attempt to move the theatre of war to the south and divert the military resources away from Jaffna. The message implicit in this attack from the LTTE high command seems to be, 'If you hit us in the north, we will hit you in the South.'

At least twenty-five security service personnel, including airforce men and two civilians were killed in the simultaneous attack on two oil installations, one at Kolonnawa and the other at Orugodawatte a few miles away. A Reuters' correspondent saw the bodies of seven airforce personnel, one policeman and two civilians at the main gate of the Kolonnawa oil storage depot and body parts of a suspected Tiger suicide bomber.

Security forces later seized a lorry (truck) with rocket-propelled grenade launcher, grenades, bomb-packed suicide vests, wirecutters, plastic explosives, medicines and some items of food, said to have been used in the attack. It is suspected that the attackers might have concealed themselves in the lorry which was stuffed with packing cases of fish and piles of old

newspapers. Four attackers arrived in the lorry, over powered the guards and planted explosives on the tanks. One of the attackers packed with explosives blew himself up, Colombo's Deputy Inspector General of Police, H.M.G.B. Kotakadeniya told newsmen referring to the attack on the Kolonnawa oil depot.

Two separate groups attacked the Kolonnawa complex from either side in order to ensure that at least one would make it through. This could be part of a wider LTTE effort to attack vital installations. We are increasing security around water facilities and national television,' Mr. Kotakadeniya said. He acknowledged that there were fears that Colombo's water supply facilities could be poisoned.

'About three hours after the fire broke out, eight gunmen tried to enter the Kolonnawa depot disguised as Sri Lankan soldiers in uniform, and opened fire at the Airforce jeep,' police told the press. At least 19 to 20 LTTE men were involved in the attack, they said.

The police also claimed they had arrested six LTTE commandos, including the driver of the lorry used in the attack who was later identified as a person from northern Kilinochchi, following the oil depot attack. The Inspector General of Police, W.B. Rajaguru, was quoted as saying that all those who participated in the attack had either been arrested or killed. It was also said that the police have located the premises from which the attack was planned.

The Kolonnawa and Orugodawatte storage facilities hold virtually all of the island's imported petroleum. As the fire spread, the blazing tanks of fuel shrouded the capital and its suburbs in black smoke, causing thousands of residents to flee their homes. Despite appeals on state radio

and television not to panic, terrified residents fled the area fearing that the fire could spread and engulf them.

As tensions escalated, two Tamil persons were violently attacked and killed in apparent revenge for the attack on the oil installations. A police spokesman said that the two men killed might have been mistaken for LTTE men who took part in the attack.

The government also imposed a curfew in the greater Colombo area ostensibly for the purpose of preventing a backlash against Tamils living in the south and also to help to carry out a search for the attackers. Security was tightened in the capital and important locations like the Kattunayake international airport, railway stations and other sensitive buildings were put under round-the-clock surveillance.

As a direct consequence of the destruction of almost the entire stock of oil, military officials expressed concern that the loss of the oil could affect the ongoing military operations in the north. The government also imposed restrictions on the sale of petrol to motorists and limited the supply of aviation fuel to international airlines which were advised to refuel their planes from outside Sri Lanka.

As troops and fire-fighters rushed to the burning depot, the attackers opened fire, cutting down 23 soldiers and wounding 36 others at the Kolonnawa depot. In the ensuing shootout between the attackers and the troops, the BBC correspondent in Colombo, George Arney, reportedly sustained shrapnel wounds to the neck and face when a bullet hit the wall next to him. 'I saw a group of soldiers running at a crouch and then one lifted his rifle and levelled it at us,' said Mr. Arney, who was with the BBC producer Razia Iqbal taking cover next to a small Buddhist shrine.

'I waved my notebook at him and said: 'Don't shoot, Press BBC'. And then he shot. I don't blame the soldier', Arney said. 'It was dark, he didn't know who I was. It just happened.'

The heat from the oil storage tanks was so fierce that firefighters had no choice but to watch helplessly as they burned out of control. The government appealed to India for personnel and equipment to put out the fire, and within a few hours of the request, Indian assistance had reportedly arrived on the scene.

The value of the tanks destroyed is estimated at £6 million and destroyed oil at £12 million according to the Chairman of the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation.

Ranil Wickremasinghe, the leader of the Official Opposition and the United National Party said in parliament that he was shocked that President Kumaratunga had flown out to attend the 50th anniversary celebrations of the United Nations in New York even after learning about the blasting of the oil depots.

Government spokesmen asserted that the attack on the oil installations would not result in the change of plans as far as the military operations in the north were concerned. 'Just because Kolonnawa is in flames, we are not going to change our plans. We will continue with determination,' the State Minister for Defense Col. Anurudha Ratwatte told the press.

73 Civilians Killed: Tension was further heightened when reports began to circulate about the slaughter of 73 Sinhalese civilians, men, women and children, from three villages in the east of the country during the early

hours of 21 October. Although the Tigers did not accept responsibility for these murders, the police promptly placed the blame on the Tigers for the massacre.

Most of the victims had been killed with knives, swords or machetes. 31 were killed at Poonalikuwa in Welikane between Polonnarwa and Batticaloa, 16 were killed at Managalagama in Amaparai and the rest were killed at Padaviya in the Welioya district.

As fears of renewed communal violence directed against them spread among Tamils living in the south, the government reimposed a full day curfew and troops and police were deployed in large numbers in the Colombo area to prevent any outbreak of such violence. Government and opposition politicians appealed to the people in radio and TV broadcasts to remain calm. They accused the LTTE of seeking to provoke a violent back-

lash against the Tamils by the Sinhalese as in July 1983. 'On behalf of the government, I wish to appeal to all sections of the people of Sri Lanka not to be influenced by rumours and false propaganda which will lead to a breach of the peace,' Information Minister Dharmasiri Senanayake appealed.

'The LTTE would very much like a backlash against the Tamils living in the south. For them, that is the best way to force the army to withdraw troops from the north. This is a national crisis and we must help to maintain law and order or prevent any violence against the Tamils living in the south,' Opposition Leader Ranil Wickremasinghe said.

However others speculated that these attacks in the east were aimed to distract the military from concentrating their troops in their northern offensive.

Mass Rally In London

An estimated 7,000 Tamils participating in a massive indoor rally at Alexandra Palace in London on 9 September, called for the recognition of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam as the true representatives of the Tamil people. This massive turn out was easily the largest ever indoor Tamil gathering in London. More than 25 Eelam Tamil associations in Great Britain participated in the Rally and condemned Sri Lanka's genocidal onslaught on the Tamil homeland and called for the ending of arm sales by Britain to Sri Lanka.

The five hour rally commenced with a live Nathaswaram recital and the Tamil Eelam flag was raised in the hall by a Tamil mother whose son had given his life in the struggle. Life size video clips of Velupillai Pirabakaran, moving amongst the people of Tamil Eelam were shown on a large screen on the stage, together with his statements on the underlying nature of the Tamil struggle for self determination.

The General Secretary of the United Kingdom Federation of Tamil Associations, Dr. N. Sathchitanandan who was the first speaker, said: 'It is not for President Chandrika Kumaratunga to determine who were the true representatives of the Tamil people. The Tamil people know who it is who has defended them and who it is who is struggling to establish their right to self determination. It is Velupillai Pirabakaran and the Liberation Tigers who are the true representatives

of the Tamil people.'

Speakers pointed out that the so called political package was a mask to hide the ugly military face of the Sri Lanka government. 'President Kumaratunga has already promised the Buddhist High Priests that nothing will be finalised until the war is over' they said.

Rev. Richard Wooton, of the United Church of Australia, who had specially flown from Australia for the Rally, expressed his solidarity with the Tamil struggle for self determination and pointed out that it was the oppression and violence of the Sri Lankan state which had led to the rise of the lawful armed resistance of the Tamil people led by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

Mr. M. Vasantharajah, who until five months ago had functioned as Chairman of Sri Lanka State Television, said that the Sri Lanka government had used the peace talks as a 'tactical episode' in its attempt to

undermine Tamil resistance and marginalise the Liberation Tigers. 'It was a tactic which had miserably failed,' he said to rousing applause from the audience. He said that he had little doubt that if Sri Lanka recognised the existence of the Tamil nation and its right to self determination and also recognised the Liberation Tigers as the true representatives of the Tamil people, the two parties to the armed conflict would be able to talk to each other on equal terms and work out durable peace in the island. Mr. Nadesan Satyendra, Legal Adviser to the International Secretariat of the LTTE also addressed the gathering.

The Rally concluded with the gathering standing up and declaring in unison: (1) 'We condemn the genocide of the Tamil people by Sri Lanka; (2) We call upon the British government to stop selling arms to Sri Lanka; and (3) We recognise the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam as the true representatives of the Tamil people.'

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Tamils Tryst With Destiny

by former Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer

The time has come for a full-fledged federal statehood for the Tamil community inhabiting the North-East of Sri Lanka for several cultural centuries, with linguistic-ethnic identity and territorial integrity, as a homeland within a sovereign Sri Lankan republic for whose economic development and ethological diversity the Tamils have made priceless, perennial contributions. The impregnable reality of Tamil human integrity was violated for a half a century by myopic leaders of the Sinhala majority, hardly realising that repression is the midwife of reprisal and timely statesmanship is the mother of conflict resolution.

The discriminatory acerbity reached exasperative extremes since the early Eighties; and Sinhala chauvinism, abetted by the state forces, made savage attacks on the Tamil minority and tore down a happy human future for that lovely island. When despair leaves no option but to 'do or die', even a pacific human collective, bonded by agony and ethnic, religious or other deep chord, will turn militant, terrorist or tigerish, since they have nothing to lose except their precarious life and self-defence becomes a sacred human right. So emerged from the harrowing ashes of inhumanity the menacing phenomenon of a death-defying youth with bloodshot eyes ready to inflict atrocities, all other doors being closed.

India, during Indira Gandhi's time tried to negotiate through G. Parthasarathy, but failed. Rajiv Gandhi benignly dropped food and medicine by air to the besieged people of Jaffna; but the mediation that followed betrayed the golden opportunity because of the canny cunning of MR. J.R. Jayewardene exploiting the goofy vanity of Rajiv whose constructive intent was entirely derailed.

Constitution

The rashness and immaturity made the Jayewardene-Rajiv accord an unwitting treachery where Indian blood was avoidably wasted on the island's north and turned a friendly community into a hateful enemy.

Humiliated, the great Indian army returned home and the LTTE proved its bitter bravery, military strategy and unconquerable spirit. And that dastardly, ghastly assassination of Rajiv was a hasty horror for which history may claim from the LTTE its price.

A serendipitous crescent of hope

arose from that long hunger for peace amid landmines and tragedies. Poignancy, long in gestation, produced a sudden new turn in the person of Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga who felt the urgency of a positive, daring, albeit dangerous, campaign for peace with honour, coexistence and amity under a sovereign Sri Lankan sky, granting a large chunk of autonomy as an inevitable price of self-determination harmonising with sovereignty.

Ms. Kumaratunga, with a convincing and courageous manifesto of peace with sufficient devolutionary space for the Tamils campaigned with stunning success and won the elections and a mandate from the Sinhala majority. Wan moonlight indeed, with Chandrika rising in the Sri Lankan political sky!

She accepted the proposition that for any negotiations to win, Mr. Prabhakaran had to be convinced. Tamils are more than the LTTE but realpolitik has its own logic and so, no Tamil settlement *sans* the LTTE acceptance has a dog's chance.

Waves of violence and the deprivation of their basic rights, through an Emergency, accentuated the torture of the Tamils. Of course, the LTTE, as sombre years of suffering passed, steeled their hearts, acquired mass destruction weapons and occasionally indulged in bloodthirsty barbarity as an alibi for Tamil human liberation.

In the light of later events an India-Sri Lanka Friendship Association was formed at Madurai with me as president. Our stand, at various conferences, was geared to the good of the islanders. When we, as a group, met in Hong Kong, specific constitutional recommendations emerged in the light of discussions held in a friendly atmosphere.

A full federal devolution of power is a categorical imperative of Sri Lankan stability. The flavour of the model must be uniquely Sri Lankan, meeting the specifics of Tamil aspirations and demographic composition. Again, in April '95 we met in Hong Kong with high level participation, even by those close to the LTTE and Colombo. Excerpts from the proposals are given below under the title 'Hong Kong proposals for expediting the peace process in Sri Lanka and projecting the direction and dimensions of devolution of powers (*vis-a-vis* the North-East)'.

We, who gathered in Hong Kong

from April 11 to 14, 1995, to discuss ways and means of expediting the peace process already under way in Sri Lanka, are presenting these proposals to the Sri Lankan Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the fervent hope that those would help the parties arrive at an early solution.

We specified immediate confidence-building measures and Constitutional changes.

In view of addressing the root causes to the current conflict, we believe the following Constitutional arrangements are necessary for the resolution of the conflict:

Article 1 of the Constitution of Sri Lanka shall read as follows:

Sri Lanka (Ceylon) is a free, sovereign, secular, independent and democratic socialist republic and shall be known as the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.

Article 2 of the Constitution of Sri Lanka shall read as follows:

The Republic of Sri Lanka shall be a Federal State.

The powers enjoyed by each state may vary according to its needs and circumstances.

The basic unalterable features of the Constitution: Notwithstanding any other provisions in the Constitution, the following shall be paramount. (a) The human rights enshrined in the chapter on Fundamental Rights, the dignity of the individual, the independence of the judiciary and the rule of law in conformity with the principle of equality before the law and equal protection of the laws shall be inviolable and enforceable at the instance of every citizen and against any official of the state and constitutional functionaries and authorities, without period of limitations.

(b) The boundary and the devolved subjects of the states shall not in any manner be amended without such amendments being passed by both the national assembly and the state assembly/assemblies to which such amendment is applicable.

Critique

(c) Every Fundamental Right inscribed in the Constitution shall neither be invalidated by any promulgation of emergency nor shall it be suspended or restricted either by the President or by Parliament.

(d) The right to life and liberty as laid down in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights shall be a basic feature of the Constitution.

(e) Any implementation of a truly federal Constitution will envisage

safeguarding its basic structure and no amendment should lead to the erosion of the federal character of the Constitution. The official language of Sri Lanka shall be Sinhala and Tamil. English shall be the link language.

The present temporary integration of the North-East should be made permanent, subject to the creation of separate regional councils which would ensure the realisation of the political aspirations of the Muslim minority in the North-East State.

We call upon the negotiating parties to take measures to alleviate the misgivings of the Sinhalese communities in the North-East. Fields of executive and legislative power in respect of the following subjects, among others, shall be exercised by the states exclusively: Land, law and order, education including higher education, regional taxation and regional foreign aid.

The federation shall reflect the national character, giving due representation of all the regions in all national institutions.

The signatories include me, Mr. Justice Dorab Patel, (Human Rights chief and formerly of the Supreme Court of Pakistan); Mr. Kannabiran, President, PUCL; Mr. Param Kumaraswamy (Malaysia), President LAWA-SIA; Rev. Wootton, General-Secretary, Australian Human Rights Foundation;

Representatives of the Sinhala monks and of the Christian community, Dr. Sathananthan (close to LTTE); Mr. Hakeem, MP of the Muslim Congress and others who have been in the Sarvodaya and other conciliation movements in Sri Lanka.

Our creative proposals, prepared with imaginative sensitivity and response to reality, were communicated to both sides without publicity at that confidential stage. But now battles have broken out. Violence often justifies itself. But why not give one last chance for truce and talks?

When people are gripped by passion, reason is muted but wisdom cannot retreat before unreason even if violence rages. Here we have a package of proposals presented by Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, seeking to redefine the specifics of her offer. On some untenable alibi, she has failed to communicate the new synthesis of Sri Lankan sovereignty and Jaffna self-determination to the one party which alone can deliver the goods, namely Mr. Prabhakaran & co. The alleged reason is that the battle drums are deafening and unless the arms are laid down, the LTTE is out of bounds for a creative conference. That is asking for the moon. The outright rejection of the

package by the LTTE spokesman is equally infantile. I beseech both sides to jettison prestige and argue for a just settlement in Sri Lanka's political, structural readjustment – a consummation to be devoutly wished for. Do get back to the negotiating table since blood and iron never inaugurate an *entente cordiale*.

Grievous

An analysis and a comparative critique of the Hong Kong proposals earlier referred to and the current offer of devolution of power may, perhaps, open the way to a resuscitation of the scotched negotiations. Maybe, had Ms. Kumaratunga done confidence-building moves fully and fast, the break-down of talks could have been aborted. The sovereignty of Sri Lanka is underscored by her. Naturally, she cannot be expected to preside over the liquidation of the island republic. The LTTE had, at a certain stage, definitely consented to Sri Lankan sovereignty subject to a vast and vital devolution of powers. That is how the Hong Kong document stressed this point, although one member even then asserted that if the fight continued Eelam would be won. I can only appeal, from, this distance, that the Tamils whose military and political fuhrer is indubitably Mr. Prabhakaran, that negotiations be revived and Ms. Kumaratunga sagaciously rise above reprisals.

It is beyond argument that the North-East is the homeland of the Tamils and an unconditional acceptance of their integrated existence as a provincial unit is basic. To treat the Tamil region just like any other region is to miss the categorical imperative that the North and East is an entity with a higher autonomy and foundational features, as distinguished from the other provinces. To carve out other areas and glorify them as regions may be a stroke of federal realism but the North-East is a 'quasi-Eelam' with more sub-sovereign powers and less Central presence than the other regions. Otherwise, the whole course of the decade-long bloody history will come to nought. Create regions everywhere, if you like, but the North-East is unique, the failure to recognise which is to debunk the struggle.

The Chandrika vision of Sri Lanka with all communities living in safety and security, human dignity and equality, together with a string of platitudes regarding human rights and fundamental freedoms does not take note of the core of the controversy, except to the extent of declaring an equal status for Sinhala and Tamil with English as the link language. The sharing of power of all

regions cannot be alike since that obliterates the relevance of the Tamil struggle which entitles them to a far larger protection regarding human rights, coexisting, as they are, with a snarling Sinhala majority and a Colombo power which has yet to grant equality and fraternity for the Tamils. The structure of devolution, good so far as it goes, makes the same mistake of treating the Tamil North-East Province like any other Province. The contiguous Tamil territory, with its integrity restored as before the disintegrative process during the last decade began, is important. Even the powers, administrative, legislative, and judicative have to be wider, deeper and beyond manipulation by a majority in Parliament. The grievous error in the 'Chandrika package' is its failure to instal the North-East as a special category. For instance, Jammu-Kashmir in India has a special status and a special Constitution. The Irish, certainly, will claim special provisions from the British, even as Quebec from Canada. The Tamil homeland, subject to Sri Lankan sovereignty, is a unique Constitutional entity and is not a mere Province like the others.

The idea of a Regional Council (a Presidential proposal) is centrifugal fairness and welcome. The Central and Regional Lists are a federal feature and are good. But, here again, the Tamil Province must enjoy wider legislative powers which may be settled with Constitutional generosity having regard to the demands urged by Jaffna all these bleeding years with adamant insistence. Surely, one suggestion which can be made straight-way is that the residuary powers (unlike in Item 97 of List 1 of the Indian Constitution) must belong to the Tamil province.

The office of Governor has dubious potential as the Indian experience shows. The mere provision that his appointment will be with the concurrence of the Chief Minister of the Region or that he maybe removed by a two-thirds majority is no guarantee of smooth running. Very careful and circumspect provisions are necessary to keep the Governor as a necessary figure but remaining as a glorified cipher.

Law and Order is an extremely sensitive subject and a clumsy arrangement with a dichotomy between a National Police Commissioner must come under closer scrutiny. Wisdom lies, so far as I can see now, in leaving law and order, including armed police, to the North-Eastern State, exclusively.

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Continued from page 11

Land and Land settlement, of which the Hong Kong proposals have a clear idea, require to be viewed in a special way *vis-a-vis* the North-East. Breaking up demographic and territorial integrity leads to bitterness and revival of violent clashes. The present provision in paragraph 4 is too abbreviated and inadequate, remembering the strategic importance of the subject and its Central misuse in the past. Education has always been fraught with conflict potential. The entire subject should be left to the North-East. Even if the national schools and universities are to be run in the North-East, they may have a disruptive role in the cultural integrity of the North-East, if concurrence with the N.E. Government is not mandatory. The Tamilian culture everywhere has been of profound concern to that linguistic community. The Indian experience is a lesson. Therefore, cultural statesmanship calls for greater autonomy in this matter to the North-East.

The administration of justice by High Courts is a good idea and must be welcome. The independence of the judiciary has not been sufficiently guaranteed in Part VI of the proposals. Even in India, there has been controversy regarding the authority of the judges. The concept of a Regional Judicial Service Commission has functional gaps and genetic flaws. The court is the citizen's final sanctuary and must be free from North-East and Central pressure. The Regional Attorney General, his appointment and functions, are a little curious, even dangerous. Between him and the Governor the laws made by the Regional Council may be imperilled. The North East Province must have a High Court of its own and the Supreme Court should have limited jurisdiction to reverse or otherwise interfere with the North-East Regional High Court.

Severity

A Commission on Devolution as a perennial process is a new idea. It requires to be expanded and discussed in greater detail. The Commission should not be a stratagem whereby the North-East will be deprived of its impregnable autonomy. Care must be taken for a veto in such cases.

Part IX desiderates a union of regions. But no emergency power exception cases of external aggression, no Central intervention (e.g. Art. 356 in India), no financial or developmental power, exercisable as Central grace is, unjust and undemocratic.

Military means alone, Ms. Chandrika concedes, cannot solve the minority

problems of the people; and so she falls back on political solutions. Noble sentiments have been expressed by her in her national address to rebuild a united sovereign republic and the regions and communities, she hopes, will become constructive partners of a stable, pluralistic democracy enjoying human rights and fundamental freedoms. She will win if Mr. Prabhakaran is convinced of her sincerity when she concludes:

'This is our moment in history. Let us together grasp it and dispel hatred

and distrust and frame a common future which we can be all proud of.'

All that friends of Sri Lanka and the Tamil fraternity, which has passed through traumatic severity in particular, can wish for is to begin again where they left off. As for all of us, it is good to conscientise ourselves to help in a happy and just termination of this bleeding feud and indelible wound. We have a role because 'there are no passengers on spaceship Earth - Everybody's crew'.

(*The Hindu*).

Will Devolution Lead to Peace?

by Dr. Neelam Tiruchelvam, MP

The proposals for the resolution of the national question by President Chandrika Kumaratunga are at the centre of the current political debate. The next stage in the political exercise would be for the proposals to be incorporated into a draft chapter of the Constitution and to be submitted to a Select Committee of Parliament in which all the major political parties are represented. The Select Committee is expected to receive a copy of this draft chapter by mid September and to devote the months of October and November to a detailed consideration of its provision. If the chapter is approved by the Select Committee, it would be submitted to the Parliament and the draft Constitution would require approval by a 2/3 majority of the Parliament. The Peoples Alliance and its allies in the opposition can command 139 votes while a 2/3 majority would require 150 votes in a Parliament of 225. The support of the United National Party, the principal opposition party is therefore critical to the success of this exercise. If a 2/3 majority is secured, a further constitutional hurdle needs to be overcome. A referendum needs to take place in the country and the new constitution would need to be adopted by a majority of persons who vote in such a referendum.

The devolution proposals presented by the Government emphasise the following important features. Firstly, they reiterate that Sri Lanka is a plural society with distinct ethnic and religious communities who have the right to protect and promote their distinct identity. This must include the right to enjoy their culture, practise their religion and to transact business with the state in the language of their choice. Secondly, Tamil and Sinhala have

been recognised as official languages and have been accorded equality of status. Although in 1988, after the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord, accorded recognition to Tamil as an official language, this is the first time that the two languages are accorded equality of status. In doing so, the proposals seek to redress a major irritant in ethnic relations.

Thirdly, the nature of the state has been redefined, Sri Lanka was regarded as a unitary state in the second Republican Constitution. In the present proposals, the state is described as a Union of Regions within a united and sovereign republic. In this regard, there is a conscious attempt to build on recommendations made by the Mangala Moonesinghe Select Committee that Sri Lanka should devolve power along the lines of the Indian Constitution.

Fourthly, legislative and executive power would be exclusively devolved in respect of the regional list of subjects to regions. Each region would ordinarily coincide with the province except in the North East wherein it is envisaged that new regions would be constituted by redemarcation of provincial boundaries. The concurrent list of subjects has been abolished and almost entirely added on to the regional list. Both land and law and order are devolved subjects and there is provision for a Regional High Court to exercise original appellate jurisdictions within the region.

Fifthly, with regard to the relations between central government and the Regions there are very significant departures from the existing 13th amendment. The Governor's powers have been signifi-

Continued on page 29

Clearing the Hurdles to a Solution

President Chandrika Kumaratunga announced the wide-ranging proposals for the devolution of powers to the eight regions on 27 July 1995. True to her earlier pronouncement, the devolution of powers is 'extensive' covering all the major subjects and functions which under the control of the central government dominated by the Sinhalese have facilitated various overt and covert discriminatory practices against the minority Tamils and the denial of their legitimate rights. 'One of the regions would be constituted by re-demarcating the existing boundaries of the present North-East province in full consultation with a view to reconciling Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim interests.' Provision for a sub-regional council for the Muslim dominated part of the East also exists. Regional council established democratically for each region will exercise exclusive legislative and executive powers within the devolved sphere. Colombo and Sri Jayawardenapura areas as well as those of the international airports and harbours would come under the purview of the Central Government. The distribution of the subjects and functions between the Centre and Regions is indicated under the Regional list (45 items) and the Reserved (Central Government) list (58 items), which have since been published in Sri Lanka and abroad (*T.T.* of August 1995 p6).

The proposals devolving powers to the regions have been assigned different labels: the 'peace package or plan'; 'political package'; or 'devolution package'. the aim of the package regardless of any label assigned is to end the ethnic conflict politically by adopting a constitution that removes the centralised and overriding powers of the government. The disclosure of the contents of the package after an anxious wait has instead of raising hopes for lasting peace in all parts of Sri Lanka appears to be having the opposite effect. The hostile actions of both the warring parties continuing since April 19 and inaction on the political front towards the implementation of the peace proposals give cause for concern. In addition the difficult situation is being exacerbated by the display of chauvinism by extremists on either side.

International and National Response

The EU and many foreign govern-

by Dr. S. Narapalasingham

ments have praised the bold devolution plan that offers broad autonomy to the Tamils. The proposals have been welcomed by all the Tamil and Muslim parties represented in Parliament. All have admitted that there are several positive factors in the plan. Sinhalese liberals too have commented very favourably, highlighting the most courageous and wide-ranging constitutional reforms ever proposed to unite all communities in Sri Lanka. Compared with the international response, the positive response of some Sinhalese politicians is either subdued or conditional.

The liberal democrat Chanaka Amaratunga has summarised appropriately the devolution package as 'the most radical, most enlightened and most progressive' of all devolution schemes proposed so far and if implemented 'in the spirit in which it must be, it provides the best chance yet, of the restoration of a united Sri Lanka.' (*T.T.* of August 1995).

Diehard opponents

In the group of diehard opponents are the extremists and racists who cannot unlock their minds to accept the principle of co-existence of multi-ethnic people under a political system that guarantees in practice the rights, equality and freedom of the members of all the different communities. The sceptics on either side would dismiss the proposals even without reading them just as Salman Rushdie was condemned by many who did not even see the colour of the 'Satanic Verses'.

The Sinhala chauvinists are obsessed with the notion that they alone have the inalienable right to rule over the whole of Sri Lanka. They insist that Tamils cannot claim territorial rights in any part of Sri Lanka, as the entire country is the homeland of the Sinhalese. They seem to ignore the historical fact that both the Sinhalese and Tamils originally came from India. The fact that the French have a homeland in France does not deny the 81% French Canadians in Quebec the right to a self-governing linguistic state with the federal union of Canada. Quebec's distinctness was acknowledged in the 1987 Meech Lake Accord.

Federalism is still an anathema to the few vociferous Sinhalese, who will

oppose any proposals to devolve powers of governance to the Tamils. There are also the dejected politicians who have been rejected by the people in the 1994 elections despite advocating communal policies. They continue to believe that the ethnic issue can be exploited politically to serve their own narrow and immediate interests. Some have placed belief in the Kataragama deity above faith in the people to get the package rejected. There are, of course, some opportunists living comfortably outside the war zone, whose continued economic gains for themselves and their families depend crucially on the continuation of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka.

Religion and Politics

Some among the Buddhist priests who claim to be the protectors of not only the faith but also the Sinhala race are once again in the forefront promoting not peace but aggression. They believe that protection can be guaranteed only by maintaining the dominant status of Buddhism and of the Sinhala people. Their advice to the Sinhalese leaders is not based on love and compassion, which are the very tenets of the teachings of Lord Buddha, but on enmity. When religion and politics are mixed and the prelates assume the dual role of religious and political mentors, the democratic process is seriously undermined. They can serve the followers of Buddhism far better by voicing their opposition to the anti-Buddhist activities that are tarnishing the reputation of Sri Lanka. The whole world is now aware of the existence of death squads in Sri Lanka that have abducted, tortured and strangled fellow citizens in large numbers, throwing the mutilated bodies in lakes, rivers, canals, sea and street fires. Mass burials had also taken place in secret.

According to human rights groups some 60,000 Sri Lankans 'disappeared' during the JVP uprising in this despicable manner. The vast majority of the victims were Sinhala Buddhists. The resurgence of the death squads following the resumption of hostilities between the LTTE and the government in which the victims of the horrible killers are the Tamils has shocked the present Government. It has condemned strongly this practice within its own establishment and a number of officers alleged to be behind this atrocious act have been arrested. The same condemnation has not come from the highest in the Buddhist establishment. Nor did it promptly appeal to the followers of the faith to stop killing the helpless Tamils during the several anti-Tamil riots in which many were

brutally murdered by Sinhalese hooligans, who were encouraged by their political masters.

Advocates of the Unitary Constitution

In this group there are the elected representatives of the people as well as 'responsible' persons who have expressed some reservations on the contents of the proposed package, specifically as they relate to the North-East. Invariably, their reservations can be traced to the transformation of the unitary character of the constitution and the permanent merger of the Northern and (the Tamil areas in the) Eastern provinces. The proposals relating to the devolution of control over state land to the relevant Regional Councils is also resisted. They want the centre to have absolute control over state land in all regions. They seem to ignore the fundamental principle of democratic rule that the government exercises control over the land on behalf of the people and certainly the people in any one region have the democratic right to assert that such land within the region should be under their control. This land right is fundamental to any meaningful devolution of powers and should not be seen in the same vein as, for example, the controls over international ports not devolved to the regions.

As before some have condemned the proposals as paving the way for the eventual division of the country along ethnic lines, although the proposed plan does not divide the country into two self-governing states as in the American formula of 'two in one' agreed by the local leaders to settle the conflict in Bosnia. It splits Bosnia into two separate self-governing entities within the single state, thereby retaining its territorial integrity. They also see a potential offensive Tamil army in the proposed regional police force!

Price to be Paid

Some are concerned about the cost of implementing the proposed system involving eight regional councils and a central administration. A price has to be paid to achieve lasting peace by ensuring that the costly mistakes, which divided the people and the country are not allowed to happen again. Have they thought of the cost already incurred by the people in continuing the endless war? Both sides have set up their own 'defence fund' and people have been asked to contribute liberally for killing fellow Sri Lankans and destroying their property. If the people of two or more regions wish to merge into one unit, provision could be made in the constitution for mergers. A

similar issue raised relates to the high degree of devolution to those regions where the majority of the inhabitants are Sinhalese. They have not clamoured for autonomous powers on this scale and they see no need for it either. The theoretical solution to this problem is to assign special status to the North-East council and have two different power structures for regional councils! Sinhalese nationalists will find this preposterous and offensive.

The antagonists of the proposals are under the illusion that after nearly five decades of bitter disappointment, the minorities could suddenly see some virtue in the same unitary constitution and that limited devolution of powers within its framework would remove the root causes of the protracted ethnic conflict! Their conversion of late to anti-discriminatory proposals have come at least a generation too late and would not be taken seriously by the Tamil people as a permanent solution to the ethnic problem. The existence of Sinhalese nationalism and Tamil nationalism in Sri Lanka is real and any realistic solution to the ethnic crisis has to recognize this. Both have advanced to such heights by the policies and attitudes of past governments pursued vigorously for political advantage, it is now infantile to pretend that only the nationalism of a homogenous people exists in Sri Lanka. The only pragmatic way to accommodate the two, is to accept the constitutional frame supporting the devolution proposals which seek to maintain the unity and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka.

The Endurance Test

Ironically, some have argued that rapid economic development can only be achieved through the integration of the entire economy and that this would result in the removal of the causes of the conflict. One wonders where these pundits were since 1948 when the development of the entire economy was the responsibility of all the successive governments elected by the people under the unitary constitution! In 1948 Sri Lanka's annual *per capita* income averaged US\$ 200, the same as that of Singapore. Now Singapore's level is thrice that of Sri Lanka's average income of around US\$ 500 per head. There are many political reasons for Sri Lanka to have fallen behind many comparable Asian countries in economic development and the lack of integration of the economy *per se* is not one of them. National development was not pursued by the UNP and the SLFP governments on the premise of an integrated economy, political and ethnic differences that separated the

North-East region from others playing a crucial role.

In sum, the arguments against the devolution proposals are practically the same that have been used before to prevent earlier attempts to devolve (limited) powers to the provinces. People have already paid a heavy price as a result of being duped by the scaremongers. The will of the majority cannot be imposed on the minorities by oppression or force for ever. The consequences of such methods are blatantly clear to all who have suffered in one way or another since 1983, following the outbreak of civil war in Sri Lanka. Even after the 'Operation Leap Forward', 'Operation Tiger Leap', 'Operation Dragon-fire' and 'Operation Handshake 2', nothing tangible has been achieved by either side in terms of their declared objectives. On the contrary the tremendous death toll as well as other losses of scarce resources to both sides have escalated further. The resumption of the military operations by the Government forces anticipated to follow the 'Operation Leap Forward' has also resulted in civilian casualties. Despite the censorship on all defence and military related news imposed prior to the renewed attack, these have been reported by international media through foreign channels. The brutality of the renewed war belies the commitment to a peaceful resolution of the conflict. Each side appears to be testing the endurance of the opponent Sinhalese and Tamil people who in the end stand to lose more, if the hostilities continue.

The role of the print media

The independent press appears to be playing a dubious, if not a mischievous role, judging from the materials published by some on the devolution issue. Some works are intended to embarrass leading members of the present government and to torpedo the package even before the first hurdle is cleared. The print media seems to be rekindling the emotional feelings and racial hatred, which cannot in any way facilitate a political solution to the ethnic problem. Presently, the discussion on the package is mostly clouded by emotion and distrust. The performance of the media controlled by the Government is pathetic in illuminating the contents of the package, let alone allaying the unfounded fears and exposing the many myths propagated by some, which are frustrating the courageous efforts taken to unite the divided country in the most democratic way.

What is being conducted in the

Continued on page 16

Continued from page 15

name of constructive debate in the local media is mostly chauvinistic propaganda, which only exacerbates the ethnic divide. The mutual dependence of Sinhalese and Tamil extremism is being reinforced by the mischievous work of some agitators in the Sri Lankan media. It appears from a recent private opinion poll that 41% of those surveyed did not know the details of the devolution proposals. This proportion would be very low in the areas under the control of the LTTE as information is also controlled by the rebels. The wishes of the majority of the Sinhalese and Tamil people, who are war weary and want an early end to the killings and suicides are being ignored, let alone being supported by the supposedly responsible national press. There has been hardly any discussion on the present *de facto* division of the country and the consequences of rejecting the package. Peace and unity will have to be sought and achieved through pragmatic compromise and not by exhibition of jingoism. Responsible persons and institutions cannot afford to remain silent at this critical time. They have a duty to enlighten the public of the *raison d'être* for the proposed structure of democratic rule and also forewarn about the adverse consequences of rejecting it.

LTTE's Catch 22 Situation

The extreme and uncompromising position of the Sinhalese nationalists on the government's proposals discussed earlier is equalled by the commitment of the LTTE to establish the independent state of Tamil Eelam. However, in the case of the latter there have been mixed signals discerned from the statements issued at various times by the LTTE's chief spokesmen. From these it is surmised that a viable alternative to an independent Tamil Eelam in which the security of life, territorial rights and freedom of the Tamils are guaranteed and their political aspirations fulfilled would be acceptable to them. However, LTTE's expressions of its readiness for another round of peace talks has not been taken seriously at present by the Government, following LTTE's unilateral action in April to break the truce and resume hostilities.

LTTE's stand on a political solution appears to be intertwined with its assumed role as the sole representative of the Tamils. It is very assertive when that claim is sought to be undermined in the course of exploring a political solution to the Tamil problem. In this situation, its response to any covert or overt moves to alienate it from the Tamil people would predict-

ably be hostile. The outright rejection of the package by the LTTE should, therefore, be seen from this angle, particularly when the Government has declared that its strategy to settle the conflict peacefully is first to weaken the LTTE militarily. LTTE was not officially given the devolution proposals during the currency of the peace talks because they are alleged to have refused to receive them and discuss the subject.

The LTTE spokesman is reported to have said in Jaffna that 'this peace package does not pave the way for a permanent political solution but does pave the way for a long term war.' The rebels have urged the Tamils not to support the package and those supporting it are traitors!

LTTE's leadership has insisted throughout that all proposals and suggestions to end the war must be discussed with them only. According to them the other Tamil groups have done nothing to win the rights of the Tamils and, therefore, have no right to come in on any solution. The Government on the other hand has ruled out further talks with the LTTE under the present conditions. The Government is also under pressure from other Sinhalese parties and particularly the influential Buddhist clergy to continue the military operations against the LTTE. In fact some have even objected to the announcement of the devolution package before 'defeating' the LTTE. There is a strong opinion within the Government that 'softening the LTTE militarily is the only way to bring them to the negotiating table'.

Importantly, there are other questions besides those mentioned above which indicates the existence of a Catch 22 situation for the LTTE and the Government to start again the process of negotiations for a political settlement of the ethnic conflict. Will the LTTE accept the framework of the devolution package as the basis for a political settlement? Any agreed formula for a political settlement that requires changes to the constitution cannot come into effect until the present constitution of Sri Lanka is amended accordingly. LTTE has already objected to this and that is by implication to the majority Sinhalese deciding the political future of the minority Tamils. LTTE's statement (T.T. of August 1995, p7), notes: 'Having passed all these hurdles, the Sinhala people have to approve the proposals at a referendum. The Tamil people have the right to determine their own future. If any attempt is made to impose an arbitrary political settlement on the Tamil people through military means, the LTTE

will resist it.' Unless there are constitutional provisions for forming a (interim or regular) regional council without conducting elections, it is difficult to see how the power to govern the North-East region differently, can be handed exclusively to the LTTE. This is a formidable problem that appears to have been overlooked. Any political solution must be not only acceptable to all but also feasible from the standpoint of constitutional amendments. Otherwise, the agreed solution will only end in a stalemate.

LTTE has so far boycotted all elections. Will it be prepared to allow free and fair elections to be conducted in the areas under its control in terms of the amended constitution? In short, the question boils down to whether the LTTE will accept the single constitution of the Government of Sri Lanka applicable to all the regions? It is important to recall that various pronouncements of the LTTE leadership on their one-party system of governance are based on a separate constitution for the Tamil region.

LTTE should reconsider carefully its own strategy from the standpoint of achieving the common aims of the Tamil people taking cognizance of the embroiled situation described above. It is common knowledge that any movement claiming to fight for the legitimate rights of the people it represents would negotiate from a position of strength. The experiences of recent liberation movements which waged wars for decades, indicate that in the end they have to negotiate with their opponents to win their demands. Any miscalculation of the most opportune time to negotiate can be disastrous to the achievement of the common aims of the people even at any foreseeable point in time.

Unsympathetic Buddhist Leaders

The joint memorandum dispatched to President Kumaratunga by the Most Venerable Mahanayake Theras of Malwatta and Asgiriya Chapters in consultation with the Karaka Maha Sangha Sabhas of both Chapters calls for the withdrawal of all the important powers to be devolved to the regions, which are considered by the peace seekers as decisive to the resolution of the ethnic conflict. First, they want the Government to wipe out 'terrorism' in the North and East. After that only any political solution should be introduced.

Any one perusing the memorandum cannot fail to notice the kind of power structure the prelates want the Government to preserve in order to continue the dominance of the Sinhala Buddhists. Their intentions are also

obvious from the recommendation that the 'proposals to set up new Provincial Councils should be introduced in Parliament as a separate Act and not as a constitutional amendment in view of the fact that in the event of that law being passed as a constitutional amendment, it would not be possible to change or amend it again.' At the same time they have expressed the view that since the PC's Act No. 42 of 1987 is in operation, there is no need for a new PC's Act! In sum, the memorandum serves to reinforce the distrust in the minds of the Tamils of the true intentions of Sinhala-Buddhist supremacists to retain a unitary (lopsided) constitution. The power structure indicated in the above memorandum only adds insult to injury and if the amended proposals give any similarity to it, then not only the LTTE but others too will have valid grounds to object.

All-Party Consensus

Having examined the positions of the LTTE and the Buddhist establishment, attention is now turned to the key political parties in the democratic mainstream. This is important under the procedures which the Government is committed to follow to change the present constitution. The proposed plan has to go through a complex and time consuming process before it is accepted and then implemented in its final form on the presumption that a broad consensus can be reached on the framework.

The draft constitutional amendment giving effect to the devolution proposals will have to be placed before the Parliamentary Select Committee on Constitutional Reform. After it has examined all the submissions, the approved version has to be presented to Parliament and passed by a two-thirds majority. The main opposition party, the UNP, has indicated that it will express its views on the proposals only after they are presented in a draft form as constitutional amendments. It has so far acted responsibly, stating that it is not against devolution as long as it is not a stepping stone to a separate Tamil state. Without the support of the UNP there is no chance at all for the PA Government to get the required two-thirds majority. It has only a very thin majority with the SLFP having only 113 out of 225 seats.

Among the coalition partners in the PA Government, the DUNLF has openly expressed some reservations on the devolution proposals through a draft memorandum. This also contains recommendations which in essence amount to retaining the unitary character of the constitution. The SLFP needs the support of the DUNLF to be

assured of a simple majority in Parliament. Another partner, the SLMC, has already welcomed the package stating 'that the Muslim political dimension in the country has been given due recognition'. Although all Tamil parties represented in Parliament have expressed support, it is unlikely that this will remain intact, if the contents of the package are changed drastically. Although the CWC is supportive of the original package, its future position will depend on the nature of the amendments agreed by the UNP and the SLFP. It cannot afford to antagonise any party that can sway support or damage the interests of the Tamils in the up-country.

Whether the plan substantially in its present form can clear all the above hurdles depends on the willingness of all the major parties in the democratic mainstream to support the framework of the plan. At present the outlook for all-party consensus does not appear bright. One can only hope that the present generation of political leaders, unlike their predecessors, will have the courage and foresight to agree to the peace plan. They must also be conscious of the fact that in the current situation, there is no electoral advantage in denying the rights of the minorities so as to be seen promoting the privileges of the majority community.

The final hurdle that must be cleared is the approval by the people at a referendum. An island-wide people's movement (involving the liberals, peace activists and all the NGOs campaigning for peace, racial equality, human rights and justice) urging the local and national leaders to discard party politics and to agree to the peace plan along the lines proposed is crucial at the present time. Without this crusade, the leaders will continue to take for granted that they can form public opinion as they wish. The candid warning of Fr. Tissa Balasuriya: 'If this effort too fails Sri Lanka may be doomed to further decades of war and perhaps continued division of Sri Lanka', is real and most timely (*The Sunday Times* of 10/9/95 - SL).

President Kumaratunga said recently that her devolution package was a historic chance for the country to resolve the ethnic crisis. She hoped that the people would not miss this chance through sheer stupidity or a mistaken sense of patriotism. She also appealed to the people to eschew communalism and embrace peace, emphasizing that everyone had to face the reality that there was no military solution to the ongoing conflict in the north.

Whatever valid grouse she may have against the LTTE after the fiasco of the peace talks that began on her initiative, the indiscriminate actions of the forces under her command proclaimed to achieve the aim of weakening the LTTE militarily are not seen by the Tamils in the same light. The President as head of the armed forces cannot avoid responsibility for their actions in the battlefield. Her declared commitment to a political solution to the Tamil problem is being undermined by the actions of the armed forces under her command. The Government's strategy to weaken the LTTE first by pursuing the kind of military operations, which claim many civilian lives and destroy their property may instead of producing the intended result, bring the people closer to the rebels. This negative trend was observed following the recent indiscriminate artillery shelling and aerial bombing of some towns and villages close to Jaffna. The idea to look for peaceful methods of sidestepping the attitude that LTTE has steadfastly been adopting towards the governments has also been suggested by some political analysts. But this will be impossible, if the Government does not change its attitude towards the suffering Tamil people in the areas affected by callous military operations and the economic embargo. Both have not helped in any way to win the hearts and minds of the Tamil people but only provided ammunition to the propaganda machinery of the militants. The dominant attitude of the critics of the package also tends to justify the stance of the Tamil sceptics, who are cynical of a political solution to the Tamil problem.

Judging from the approach taken to incorporate the proposals in the constitution, it appears that the President planned to get the support of the people by direct appeal. The presumption being that the other major political parties will be influenced by public opinion in favour of the proposed devolution plan. Knowing the magnitude of this uphill task, the failure to implement immediately a plan to raise awareness among the people of the need for a different system of government and to explain the package has been a serious blunder.

It is paramount that the counterproductive dual strategy of 'peace through war' to settle the ethnic conflict is abandoned and replaced by a pragmatic one, which focuses on winning the support of all the people. Otherwise, the Government itself may miss 'the historic chance for settling the ethnic crisis' before the people get a chance to give their verdict on the peace plan.

Government's Peace Plan

- An Evaluation

by Prof. Kopan Mahadeva

Mrs. Kumaratunga was elected Executive President in November 1994 as the candidate of her SLFP's People's Alliance with other parties, which won the General Election in August 1994 making her the Prime Minister for 81 historic and meteoric days. Her mother Sirimavo, now again Prime Minister, became Chandrika's Minister without Portfolio during UNP President D.B. Wijetunge's remaining term in office.

Manifesto Promises

The main vote-winners at the above elections were her promise to create peace in the island through negotiations with the LTTE, the indisputable 'de-facto' leaders of Tamils, and to abolish the controversial executive presidency around July 1995. Although she did arrange for four rounds of one-day talks with LTTE by varying teams of her officials, LTTE pulled out of the talks after 104 days of cessation of hostilities. They have explained that even the agreements reached during the talks regarding immediate commodity relief to the Tamil areas, pending negotiations on a permanent political solution to the ethnic conflict, were not being honoured and implemented. The war soon resumed, and Mrs. Kumaratunga continues as the Executive President to date.

Peace-Package

One concrete thing she has managed to do towards peace during the past one year is to bring out a political package for resolving the ethnic conflict, as a sort of semi-official green-paper, for discussion by various political groups. It has, very sadly and conspicuously, not been sent to the LTTE for their views. Though her proposals do go further than the various partial offers of previous governments, allegedly with Tamil and Muslim welfare in mind, a recent pilot opinion poll reports that only 8% of even the majority-Sinhala are in favour of her package. Out of the 92% of Sinhala who are opposed to her paper, happily for the cause of justice and peace, there is a vast number who feel that she has not gone far enough to meet Tamils' grievances in a way that solid foundations for a lasting peace could be constructed at this stage itself.

The proposals, which were apparently not discussed in Cabinet, run to just 12 typed A-4 sheets, with only four lines in the last page, and a one-page Preamble. An Appendix occupies the last four pages, with a Reserved List, and a Regional List of functions to be devolved by the centre.

Proposed Form of New Government

The present centralised unitary state is envisioned to change into a 'united and sovereign republic' of eight regions with 'consistent' devolved powers and functions. Each of their 'Regional Councils will exercise exclusive legislative and executive competence within the devolved sphere' - para 10.1 of Proposals.

Now, decentralisation is indeed an idea in the correct direction for Sri Lanka, with a bottlenecked bureaucracy. Also a just assertion of the LTTE is that Tamils have not realised their rights effectively under any past unitary government. But the way that a union is being forced down the throats of the regions from the top-centre, without their independence and their say, firstly, has unacceptability built into the President's proposals.

Question of Languages

Sinhala and Tamil are to be recognised as official languages, and English as a link language - Preamble, Clause (d).

This is a sensible principle to have been applied all these years since Independence in 1948. It is well known that the Sinhala Only (Official Language) Act of 1956 introduced by Mrs. Kumaratunga's father Mr. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, was the selfish discriminatory germ which created Tamil militancy and the LTTE. Hence the new principle is fair, to be followed by any form of central government, and would also be conducive to peace if it is graciously accepted by all regions. But its success will depend largely on the extent and speed of ethnic goodwill which could be created under a constitutionalised pact.

For a New Constitution

The need, not merely for constitutional amendments but for a new constitution has been well realised by the Government. But, the Prevention of Terrorism Act and the 6th and 13th

Amendments to the 1978 Constitution must be removed or replaced, a Bill of Rights must be incorporated which is justiciable, and also the spirit of Section 29 of the 1948 Soulbury Constitution confirmed, for protection of the minorities, to make the new Constitution workable and fair to all ethnic groups, regionally and holistically.

Provisions For Law and Order

Regional Police Commissions and Regional Police Services are provided for, but their powers are subtly and badly crippled. E.g. the proposed National Police Commission will have the power to transfer regional police officers inter-regionally. This is bound to propagate all the oppressive problems the Tamils have faced all these years. Also, the regions will have no armed services of their own. With the 72% Sinhala forming over 97% of the armed services, this restriction can never offer security to Tamils, at least in the near future, after all the recent happenings.

Central & Regional Functions

The spirit in which the President's proposals have been formulated have been marred by the control-grip which is being retained by the big Central List of Functions. E.g. Land & Land Settlement are Regional Functions, but the Centre has its right to regional lands required for its central functions. Also, the damage done by government-sponsored colonisation schemes of the past in Tamil areas of the Northeast, is to be left undone. Education is a regional function, but there could be National Schools and Universities in the regions, of which, the Centre will be in charge. Since education and language are closely related subjects, the above provision could present severe problems in the Northeast Region. And another bone of contention is likely to be the Trincomalee Harbour in the Northeast Region which, according to the Proposals would still come under the Centre. Although a Commission Devolution has been provided for, in order to

Continued on page 29

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Towards a South Asian Times

by Santasilan Kadirgamar, Tokyo

Tamil Times now in its 14th year of publication has established itself as a well-edited, balanced and informative monthly that is read in several parts of the world. The contents of *Tamil Times* in recent years reflect a broader coverage giving readers a much needed insight into what is happening in India. Recent issues have also brought into the pages of the *Tamil Times* an interesting and on-going debate on Christianity and Hinduism, a debate that goes beyond the confines of the religions and cultures of the Tamils, having a broader South Asian relevance. The destinies of the peoples of Lanka be they Sinhalese, Lankan Tamils, the Hill-Country Tamils, Muslims and others are irretrievably linked to India and the other states of South Asia. This is a plain geo-political fact. In addition there is an underlying cultural unity among the peoples of this region. In spite of the friction and in some cases bitter inter-state and ethnic conflicts prevalent in the region one cannot wish away the factors that unite. Unity in diversity has been a perennial theme in the history of South Asia.

Modern nationalism and the nation-states in Europe are hardly two hundred years old. In some cases less than a hundred years old. We have in the last twenty years seen these states moving towards a new regional formation – the European Union with a European parliament. France and Germany after having fought three bitter and brutal wars between 1870 and 1945 are today the pillars of the EU. Though Allies in the 20th century, it is worth recalling that Britain and France fought seven wars between 1689 and 1815, from Louis XIV to Napoleon, in Europe, Asia and America. They remained rivals for empire throughout the nineteenth century. K.M. Panikkar, the Indian historian named what is popularly called the first world war – the European Civil War. While nationalism still remains a potent force (often given expression to in soccer hooliganism!) the future points towards an increasingly integrated and united Europe.

The same trends are evident in Southeast Asia where the Association of Southeast Asian States (ASEAN) constituting Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand have completed twenty years as a regional grouping. Vietnam has been the latest to join this group.

This would have been unthinkable ten years ago. Bitter hostility prevailed in some ASEAN states against Vietnam throughout the Vietnam war and the later Vietnam-Cambodia conflict. Soon Cambodia and possibly Myanmar (Burma) will be joining ASEAN making it into a powerful and comprehensive regional organisation.

Other regional groupings that have been formed in recent years are the North American Free Trade Association (NAFTA) composed of the USA, Canada and Mexico. The recently inaugurated Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation group (APEC) is a loose grouping of several Asian states including the ASEAN states, China, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, together with Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the USA. Meanwhile Prime Minister Mahathir of Malaysia has been propagating an Asian Caucus of South East and East Asian states. But strong US pressure exerted on Japan is preventing it from joining a grouping that excludes the USA. The worsening trade relations between the USA and Japan and periodical Japan bashing in the USA could push Japan into such a group. As it is Japan has in recent years increased its trade and investment in the Asian region, gradually moving away from the USA. Moves are afoot to increase trade and technical cooperation between India and the ASEAN states of Malaysia and Singapore, where there is a substantial community of Indian descent.

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation composed of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka will soon complete ten years since its founding in 1985. The leaders of SAARC recently held their annual meeting in India. Bilateral problems, particularly with India, have hitherto stood in the way of closer cooperation. The summit held in April this year has however made some progress with the initiation of SAFTA – the South Asian Free Trade Association. The Indian economy is expected to grow at a rapid pace in the next decade. The 21st century, it is being widely predicted, will be the Asian century. Much of the focus has been on South East Asia where Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand have been making rapid progress. Recently Vietnam has attracted much attention and increasing investment, so much so that the United States, for fear of being left behind, has estab-

lished diplomatic relations with Vietnam. In East Asia in addition to Taiwan and South Korea with their strong and booming economies, all eyes are now on China. Let us not forget that hardly ten years ago and prior to that at the peak of the cold war hostile relations among some of the states of both East and Southeast Asia were far worse than what prevails among some of the states of South Asia. Some of these political disputes and tensions still persist. But these are being increasingly overshadowed by the drive for economic development, regional trade, investment, migrant labour and technological cooperation.

Sometime around 1980 the Jayawardene government put out some feelers proposing that Sri Lanka seek ASEAN membership. The writer happened to participate in two symposiums on this subject. One was in the University of Jaffna and the other at the MARGA discussion as observers. The consensus at both symposiums was to reject ASEAN membership. The participants stressed the need for closer cooperation with India and the other states of South Asia. It was observed that in that in addition to the obvious geographical proximity, we had much more in common with these states culturally and politically than with the ASEAN states. At these symposiums it was pointed out that politically the South Asian states are open societies where democratic rights and processes and relevant civic institutions have taken root. Most ASEAN states were perceived as semi-authoritarian states where socialist dissent punished with imprisonment or exile. There were severe restrictions on personal freedoms, especially the right to a free press, discussion and free expression of opinion, and the right to form political parties. On the contrary Sri Lanka is a country in which traditions of dissent are strong. These factors together with geographical factors precluded Sri Lanka's participation in ASEAN. As it turned out the ASEAN states were not interested for their own reasons.

In South Asia, Pakistan and Bangladesh are notable examples of states where repeated attempts made by the security forces to establish dictatorships have failed. In India, Mrs. Gandhi's attempt to subvert democratic processes was challenged and reversed in 1977. In Sri Lanka in the Jayawardene and Premadasa periods there were grave violations of human rights. The semi-authoritarian rule of 17 years under the executive presidential system was overthrown by the historic

Continued on page 20

Continued from page 19

verdict given by the people in August and October 1994. In Nepal democratic rights and representative institutions have recently made advances. In brief the peoples in the states of South Asia have demonstrated again and again, that in spite of the pressing problems of poverty, ethnic strife and conflict, they seek solutions within the framework of an open society, with democratic rights and civil institutions.

Fifty per cent of the people in the South Asian region live below the poverty line. with the exception of Lanka, problems of illiteracy (especially illiteracy among women) and health care, population growth rates, infant mortality rates life expectancy and other social and economic indicators place the region among the more backward regions of the world. In Lanka the present never ending conflict has begun to take its toll on our once proud social welfare system and its resulting high Physical Quality of Life Index. While this is true, on the other hand the human resources we have in the region is one of our great assets. This region has the largest number of scientists and technically qualified personnel next to the United States and perhaps Russia. In September last year the Tamil Medical Doctors in the UK organised a conference to focus on the health situation in the war affected areas in Lanka. An observer rightly pointed out that the conference demonstrated the wealth of human resources available among the Lankan Tamils, and said that the findings arrived at this conference and the expertise available should be made available to the whole of the South Asian Region, if possible to all the Third World countries where similar conflict situations prevail.

With 1.2 billion people constituting a fifth of the world's population and with its growing middle-class of over 250 million, South Asia has the potential to become a major player in the changing world economic scenario – as a market for both international and intra-regional trade and investment, and as a source for skilled and unskilled labour. In addition in the area of culture and education (especially scientific and technical studies) there is immense scope for cooperation that could be beneficial to the peoples of the region. To cite just one example, from the 1920s to the 1950s, it was the teachers from Kerala (and to a lesser extent from the then state of Madras) who laid the foundations for a well developed system of education in the sciences in the Jaffna schools. This lasted until Jaffna students educated

in Indian university colleges (science graduates) were able to take their places. University of Ceylon graduates took to teaching much later. it was this cooperation propelled at that time by the stronger Ceylon rupee that gave the Jaffna schools the pre-eminent place they continue to occupy in the country's educational system.

At the moment the single major issue that stands in the way of peace in the sub-continent is the problem of Kashmir, which in turn fuels Hindu-Muslim tensions and violence in India. Asian and African leaders at the time of decolonisation slavishly accepted and adopted the European model of the nation-state, which was artificially created by the colonising powers to suit their own interests. Tactics of divide and rule by these same powers during the colonial period, and American and European interests during the cold war helped perpetuate national rivalries, disharmony and conflict in the first four decades after decolonisation. The end of the cold war and the weakened American and Western economies have now finally freed the peoples of Asia from western domination that began with the arrival of Vasco da Gama in India in 1498. The peoples of Asia now have a fresh opportunity to look at themselves and to seek their own destinies. The whole South Asian Region has its unresolved problems of ethnic communities, which to a large extent is a legacy of colonialism. They are extremely important in so far as they concern freedom from oppression and discrimination, democratic and human rights and a high degree of autonomy. These no doubt call for relentless efforts and statesmanship of a high order. But these conflicts have little relevance to the eradication of poverty, nor can they lead to resolving the vital economic and social problems in the region in this modern era. In retrospect the wars and violence in particular will be seen as futile and senseless wars. Cooperation in non-controversial social, cultural and economic issues, especially trade and its consequent stimulus to economic development could help create the climate for peace. The late Prof. Kodikara, the acknowledged expert on Indo-Sri Lanka Relations and SAARC, in his concluding remarks at a seminar held in Colombo in August 1993 said that there are several bilateral problems among the member states of SAARC. These cannot be under-estimated. At the same time he said there are numerous matters that are not controversial and in which cooperation is possible. Prof. Kodikara called for action in these latter areas. The establishment of

SAFTA is one such step towards closer cooperation.

Venkat Narayan the well known Indian journalist has posed the question 'From "SAARC" TO "United States of South Asia?"' (See Lanka Guardian June 1, 1995). That is no doubt a challenge that has to be faced. The nation-state is in crisis everywhere and appears to have outlived its usefulness. But let us not have illusions of its imminent demise. It is likely to go through a process of slow death. But we can learn from the lessons of history. The trends worldwide are towards regionalism at the macro level. The problem is at the micro level – to guarantee and protect the autonomous and democratic rights of ethnic groups and indigenous peoples however small they may be. There is a compelling need to guarantee the collective rights of these people. Once this is done narrow nationalism and the trend towards a proliferation of nation states are likely to give way to larger regional entities. We could thereby avoid terrible tragedies by skipping the break-up process and by consciously moving to larger regional entities encompassing a variety of smaller autonomous units. The lessons are there to be learnt from the European experience. Need we repeat the disastrous and tragic history of Europe with its numerous dynastic, religious, nationalistic, ideological and imperialistic wars that lasted 400 years, culminating with the Second World War and the terrible holocaust, only to arrive at European unity in the second half of this century. Or is there another path that can be consciously and deliberately taken, that is peaceful, gradual and evolutionary.

We are apparently in the early stages of an epochal change driven by economic imperatives. At this juncture in history the task is to set the climate for greater cooperation and understanding so that we could move towards the regional ideal in the long run. And this must begin with a forum for discussion. The *Tamil Times* drawing from its own history and its commitments can make a major contribution in opening its columns for news, exchange of opinion and discussion on political, social, economic and cultural issues that cover the South Asian region and cater to the needs of a wider readership. The tradition that *Tamil Times* has established in making its columns available to diverse opinions while remaining strong and unwavering in championing the rights of the oppressed, and its commitment to human rights and democratic

Continued on page 29

Has the Count-down Begun for Jaya's Fall?

T.N. Gopalan

Sorrows come not in single spies, but in battalions only. Whether Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayalalitha is a tragic heroine or not, the fact remains that suddenly she seems to be all too vulnerable, buffeted as she is on multifarious fronts.

The Enforcement Directorate is closing in on her confidante Sasikala and her nephews, the Income-Tax department hounding out both her and the Sasikala clan and superstar Rajnikanth threatening to enter politics besides, some opinion polls are predicting a humiliating defeat for her in the next polls.

Her cup of woes would never have so much overflowed as it does today. Angry at the turn of events she seems to be on the point of unleashing her cadres against the Centre.

Again as in a Greek Tragedy where the climax immediately signals the beginning of the end of the protagonist, the celebrated wedding of Jayalalitha's foster-son V.N. Sudhakaran, on September 7 marked the beginning of almost endless troubles for her.

Various billed as the mother of all weddings, the marriage of the century and a fairy-tale wedding, the marriage of Sudhakaran with legendary thespian Sivaji Ganesan's granddaughter Sathyalakshmi did prove to be an important turning point in her roller-coaster ride.

In fact the world came to know that Jayalalitha had a foster-son a few days after a screaming statement from her denouncing media reports to the effect that the Enforcement Directorate was interrogating her aide Sasikala in connection with some hawala racket as 'motivated, mischievous and malicious'. That was in May last.

Soon thereafter she announced that her foster-son Sudhakaran, a nephew of Sasikala, was getting married to Sivaji Ganesan's granddaughter.

The betrothal, though closed to the Press, was a grand gala function by itself, what with a fleet of 18 cars, a panoply of liveried servants carrying costly jewels as wedding gifts and so on.

And when they started putting up pandals on a huge 35-acre site in the heart of the city and word was sent to partymen at all levels to make it to the 'family occasion', the media started

carrying fantastic stories of the 'astrominical celebrations' on the cards. Some Press reports projected costs around Rs.10 crores. Jayalalitha only made matters worse by asserting that it was nobody else's business as to how much money was spent on the wedding and anyway the style would be befitting that of the foster-son of a CM. The media hype only increased in pitch.

The actual celebrations were perhaps a scaled down version, but enough to set the tongues wagging. The marriage eve procession was indeed a grand spectacle - decorative lightings over long stretches, cardboard structures resembling ancient fortresses, rows after rows of folk-dancers, orchestra, a regal chariot to carry the bridegroom, Jayalalitha walking beside a suitably bedecked Sasikala, and the scribes went overboard.

More than 1.5 lakh persons partook of the marriage feast the next day. The huge cut-outs of Jayalalitha on the roads leading to the venue, ornate lamps, viewing galleries, the gigantic pandal, all these made it look as if for that day everything else came to a grinding halt and what mattered was the wedding.

The IT department was on the job immediately and various persons connected with the wedding of the century including cooks, contractors, suppliers of provisions were grilled, provoking Jayalalitha to come out with a statement lashing out at the 'vindictiveness' of the Centre.

But meantime things had started happening on other fronts. T.T.V. Dhinakaran, another nephew of Sasikala and actually the eldest brother of the CM's foster-son Sudhakaran, and involved in a hawala racket had been served summons and his persistent pleas before the courts for anticipatory bail and the quashing of summons did not yield any fruit. For more than two months now he has been evading arrest and it is a reflection of the state of affairs that a person so closely connected to the ruling circle should successfully brush aside the long arm of the law.

Incidentally during a hearing in the High Court, the CBI counsel said that the racket in which Dhinakaran was involved had anti-national ramifications.

Even as the Dhinakaran affair was hogging the newspaper headlines, a more innocuous hawala racket, but involving persons closer to Jayalalitha broke out.

The JJ TV floated by the Sasikala clan was charged with paying five lakh US dollars to a US-based satellite firm for hiring a transponder without the knowledge and permission of the Reserve Bank of India, thus violating the Foreign Exchange Regulations Act (FERA).

While the older brother of Sudhakaran and managing director of the JJ TV, Bhaskaran, has already been arrested in this connection the other two directors of the firm, Sasikala and Sudhakaran have been served summons by the Enforcement Directorate. Jayalalitha who had earlier denounced rumours of interrogation of her aide as motivated has now chosen to keep quiet.

Even while studiously ignoring the enforcement drive, she is concentrating her fire on the IT inquiry into the marriage extravaganza and her partymen are running amok, attacking central government establishments in the state for harassing their leader and her extended family.

Almost every one of the family besides Speaker Sedapatti R. Muthiah and a couple of other senior ministers are under scrutiny by the IT. All of them have piled up assets 'totally disproportionate to their known sources of income', and through calculated leaks to the Press, the IT is keeping the heat on the lot.

It looks like only some political move can help the beleaguered lady wriggle out of the current mess - meaning some kind of rapprochement with Narasimha Rao.

However the political environment is no less frustrating for her. The local Congress leaders are so cheesed off with her that they have sternly warned Rao against making overtures or reacting positively to any approach from her.

They were able to prevail on him against attending the wedding despite a personal invitation from her. In a reluctant bid to mend fences with Governor Channa Reddy she had also called on him and invited him over, but he too cold-shouldered her.

And to make matters worse for her, superstar Rajnikanth is threatening to enter politics anytime now, perhaps float a party of his own, in the company of that old war horse and MGR's lieutenant R.M. Veerappan, recently

Continued on page 23

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Continued from page 21

sacked from her cabinet, and strike an alliance with the Congress.

He is generally perceived to have an enormous following, among the youth especially, and if only he throws his hat into the ring, he would surely triumph, it is believed. In fact a survey by a reputed market research firm has revealed that her popularity is at an all time low and Rajni could sock it in her eye.

However Rajni still looks cagey and has steadfastly refused to make his intentions clear. Apparently he wants an assurance from the Congress that if he does enter and the alliance romps home, he would be made the Chief Minister.

But there are others who claim that the happy-go-lucky guy he is, he does not want to be encumbered with the burdens of office or trapped in the dust and din of politics, though he does realise his charisma.

In fact while issuing a statement saying that time was not yet oppor-

tune for him to enter politics and that it was for God to decide on the matter, he lambasted the Jaya misrule and said that if only she were returned to power in the next elections, not even God could save the people.

Evidently he is determined to keep her unsettled and perhaps he would even campaign against her even if he does not float a party of his own.

It is the Congress without any charismatic personality to boast of and desperate to get even with Jayalalitha which is egging him on.

Other parties like the DMK and MDMK are also scared at the prospect of Rajni's entry. While Karunanidhi is afraid that after all his years of consistent anti-Jaya campaign, Rajni could snatch the victory from his hands at the last moment, Vai.Go., who counts hundreds of youth among his followers, would stand to lose a lot if Ranji does take the plunge.

Whoever win or loses, the count-down for Jayalalitha could be said to have begun.

Jain, supposedly a tantrik who could perform the most esoteric of rites and win all kinds of favours from the Gods above, has prospered enormously in this country of the gullibles. He had won the esteem of personalities like Mrs. Gandhi, but his most consistent and most devout loyalist has been none other than the present Prime Minister Narasimha Rao.

It was he who is believed to have introduced the Swami to the higher echelons including Mrs. Gandhi. However it is the more mundane job of wheeling-dealing which has earned the glib-talking pseudo-monk a lot of followers the world over. From African Presidents to arms dealers like Kachoggi to ambitious call-girls like Pamela Bordes to an array of bureaucrats, they have all vied with each other to court the Swami, an acknowledged expert in swinging deals.

One does not need any more damning testimony of the Swami's credentials than the fact that his most unabashed supporter is Dr. Subramaniam Swamy.

He has been involved in many a fracas in the past, has even been jailed once for his involvement in a shady deal, but he has successfully come on top every time adversity stared him in the eye.

If Mr. Pilot had thought he would put such a man in his place or at least embarrass and stay the hand of the PM, he was sadly mistaken. Pilot was the one who was put in his place, he was shunted off to the Environment Ministry. Though the CBI cops went through the motion of interrogating Swami on the disclosures of Babloo, it was clear in less than a fortnight that no harm would come to the Swami. Even the writ petition in the Delhi High Court challenging Pilot's arrest order was withdrawn.

Finally, as we go to press, a group of sadhus led by Chandraswamy, were preparing to hold a big yagna right inside a reserved forest area, giving scant regard to the environmental regulations.

The various departmental heads concerned are wringing their hands in despair, but the police would not dare touch them. When interviewed by the pressmen, the sadhus asked arrogantly, 'Whose permission do we need to carry on God's work?' Incidentally the state of Delhi has a BJP government. Though there is no love lost between Chandraswami and the BJP, they would not run the risk of being perceived as anti-Sadhus or anti-yagna.

Godmen Call the Shots

T.N. Gopalan

The citizens of India, that is Bharat, woke up on the morning of September 21 to a startling phenomenon. The apparently lifeless idols of Lord Ganesha had suddenly become inordinately thirsty – all over the country they had started drinking milk avidly.

It looked like the day of the apocalypse. The pious thronged through the temples in thousands. Thousands more sought to feed the idols kept in their own homes. But there was one limitation. The Lord chose to drink only the milk offered in table-spoons and kept close to his nostrils.

The scientists scoffed at it as an instance of surface tension – milk in the spoon attracted to the moist idol and spreading through capillary action, mostly collecting below the idol, but overlooked by the devotees in their mystic communion.

Even as the rationalists were despairing over the lack of scientific temper and the Hindutva forces were gloating over the ways of God, 'arousing the Hindu consciousness', the notorious godman Chandraswamy declared that it was he who had conjured up the phenomenon, just to make the people understand how close he was to God and warn his enemies to lay off.

He had been in some difficulties that week with the CBI unravelling his connections with the underworld, and

a junior minister in the Narasimha Rao Government even had the audacity to order his arrest.

However it was Chandraswamy who came up trumps ultimately with the godman-fearing Rao clipping the wings of the impetuous minister and the CBI dragged its feet in the matter.

Babloo Srivastava, India's 'most-wanted inter-state criminal' and involved in 42 different cases, some of them murder and kidnapping, extradited recently from Singapore, had once been given refuge by Chandraswamy, when he was a fugitive. Besides Babloo's links with the notorious don Dawood Ibrahim suspected of having engineered the mind-numbing blasts of Bombay in January 1992 are a matter of speculation.

Hence it was the CBI that sought to arraign the extremely well-connected godman. Mr. Rajesh Pilot, the then dynamic Minister of State for Internal Security, once a trusted trouble-shooter of the Prime Minister, but since fallen from grace following a serious series of clashes with his boss, Home Minister, S.B. Chavan, sensed that he was going to be shifted to a lowly ministry and so, a few hours before the expected cabinet reshuffle, directed the CBI to arrest the godman, even though technically the CBI did not fall under his purview, and thus set off a big furore in the country.

Chandraswamy nee Nemi Chand

Continued on page 29

Rushdie Waves His Wand Again

The Moor's Last Sigh

by Salman Rushdie, Jonathan Cape, 437 pages, £6.95.

Review by V. Abdullah

Salman Rushdie's 'The Satanic Verses' made him an apostle of freedom of expression and thought in our time. This happened because the late Ayatollah Khomeini sentenced him to death as being an apostate from Islam on the basis of hearsay evidence – not heresy – since the revered Imam had not bothered to read the book. This is now part of the world's cultural history.

The intelligentsia of the world know Salman Rushdie as the author of 'Midnight's Children' which won the prestigious Booker Prize and which has now been christened the 'Booker of Bookers' as the best novel to win the prize. Then came 'Shame' on the birth of Pakistan (what the author called a case of 'multiple pregnancy'), which was very promptly banned in that country. These and other works have earned for Rushdie awards and recognition from many parts of the world. 'The Satanic Verses' was his last major work: it brought him fame and a great deal of undeserved notoriety. Since its publication he has been living in hiding fearing death at the hands of some insensate fanatics.

Now comes 'The Moor's Last Sigh' described by the author thus: 'Mine is the story of the fall from grace of a high-born crossbreed – Moraes Zogoiby, called Moor... the only heir to the spice trade 'n' big business millions of the da Gama-Zogoibies of Cochín.' The 'da Gama' in the name points to descent from Vasco da Gama, the first European trading marauder to land in India at the tail-end of the 15th Century. The story is woven in the now familiar style of magic realism and in its flow takes in every major event of present-day India.

The dominant figure in the narrative is Aurora, heiress to the da Gama-Zogoiby millions, who herself is the product of an Indo-Portuguese Mangalore-Catholic alliance. She on her part marries a Cochín Jew who seems self-effacing but is a genius in business. He manipulates the joint family business and plantations in such a way that they are able to sell off their Cochín property in spite of family feuds and settle down in Bombay on the heights of the aristocratic Malabar Hill in a magnificent mansion of many hues and designs (even le Corbusier

having a hand in the designing of it).

The Zogoibies, Abraham and Aurora, beget four children, one son and three daughters, all of whom go different ways. The son is the 'Moor', the narrator of this story, who was born in four and a half months after conception, thereby indicating that his growth is at double the speed of ordinary mortals. At the age of five he looks ten, at ten twenty years old and at fortyfive ninety years old. His one arm is deformed and ends in a clump of flesh without fingers with the strength of a sledgehammer.

Aurora is a great dancer who dons her ankle bells only once a year, on Ganesh Chaturthi night, and dances with naked feet on the crest of Malabar Hill. Apart from being a danceuse she is a gifted painter who creates vast murals in her palace of a house. Eminent painters and artistes throng her salon. She is friendly with the great ones in the land, Ministers and politicians and political leaders. The Prime Minister, Nehru himself, writes to her and one of his letters to her is quoted (acknowledged in the appendix as one from Nehru to Indira).

Other characters who figure in the narration include 'Raman Fielding' who incites a mob to do whatever he wants in Bombay; it is not difficult to guess the original of this 'remote control' personage. The events take place in Bombay with its underworld of dons and dasas appearing in the hazy backdrop. The late Babri Masjid looms large like a crumbling shadow while the Bombay riots flash gorily across the pages. The story goes back to Henry the Navigator, the intrepid Portuguese explorer, and ends with the Bombay riots and the serial explosions. It is divided into four parts: 'A House Divided', 'Malabar Masala', 'Bombay Central' and 'The Moor's Last Sigh'. The dominant influence of the Moor's mother, the one and only Aurora, and the shadowy, none the less powerful presence of his father Abraham, overshadow the story. It is difficult to set out in sequence the events that take place; the narration is a fantasised version of actuality. Everything of importance that has happened in recent times finds a place; the ebb and flow of political power, religious and communal passions mushrooming into senseless riots, the currents of violence and revenge in the underworld, of drug trafficking in secret and of business scams done aggressively in the open. The way events are described often throws the reader's

BOOK REVIEW

brain into a whirl, the frightening enormity of it all making one gasp.

Rushdie's mastery over English adds spice and humour. Talking of the harsh reality that is Aurora, his mother, he says many of the events were 'like a gallant coat laid over the filthy mud-puddle of her soul' – an expression redolent of Elizabethan England shorn of knight-errantry.

Talking of Mrs. Gandhi, of her years in power and the tyranny of the Emergency, Rushdie says: 'There was no final morality in the affairs of State, only Relativity.' He advances a new variation upon the Einstein theory. 'Corruption was the only constant... for a relative we can bend a point... the truth... [even] the law.'

At another place: 'Many think that death is the door to God's chamber of glory but that is an empty room. Eternity is here on earth. Money can't buy it. Immortality is Dynasty.' Is there a better description of events in India during the Seventies and Eighties when the glories of that bastard breed of democracy, called dynastic democracy, were dinned into our ears by persons who should have known better?

Bombay City, beloved of the author as the place of his birth, is central to this narration. It is called 'the bastard child of a Portuguese-English wedding, and yet the most Indian of cities.' Rushdie turns sentimental with what he calls 'the magic that stirred this *insaan* soup, the harmony that emerged from the cacophony.' He asks in despair: 'Did you not see that what was beautiful in Bombay was that it belonged to nobody, and to all? Did you not see the everyday live-and-let-live miracle thronging its overcrowded streets?' One wonders whether the re-christened 'Mumbai' will hear this cry from the heart.

As the story moves along, crafted by a master of the language, the Moor finds himself in violent love with one Uma Saraswathi – again a symbolic composite character – who is responsible for cutting the umbilical cord that bound him to his mother. Eventually he finds himself a forlorn criminal wanted by the Bombay police. He is put in a filthy prison from where he is rescued by none other than Raman Fielding who nominates him one of his star 'hit men'.

Meanwhile his mother dies, slipping from the rocky precipice where she

was doing her annual dance. Later his father lures him back into the parental fold and big business. He learns of the deep ramifications of his father's business empire which takes in the underworld of drug trafficking among other things. He becomes aware of the many secrets of his mother's life as well and he swears vengeance on Raman Fielding who had engineered her death. But he finds he is forestalled in the attempt. Come the Bombay blasts and the Moor finds himself fatherless, a refugee on the run from his native India.

The Moor makes a beeline for Andalusia, once the cradle of Moorish civilisation, to a place called Benengali where a former *chela* turned enemy of his mother, Vasco Miranda of Portuguese descent, lives in a castle on top of a hill. He is taken prisoner by Miranda who has become eccentric, on the verge of insanity, a slave to drugs. The Moor and a Japanese prisoner, a women artist with the strange name Aoeue, are chained together night and day. There the Moor writes his life story, reconstructing it chapter by chapter. The mad Miranda in a final fit of violence shoots Aoeue and dies, his body bursting with blood gushing out of every pore. The story ends with the Moor writing the last chapter of his life, his 'last sigh'. The Moor finds himself in a cemetery, resting on a grave. He gazes on the glory of the Moors, their triumphant masterpiece, the Alhambra, 'Europe's red fort, sister to Delhi's and Agra's... a testament to love that endures beyond despair... to the most profound of our needs for flowing together, for putting an end to frontiers, for the dropping of the boundaries of the self.' He wants to lay his head on the tombstone with the hope he would 'awaken renewed and joyful, into a better time.'

If 'Midnight's Children' was a tale of hope, however phantasmagorical, is 'The Moor's Last Sigh' one of despair? It is difficult to say, for much of the symbolism abounding in the book may be interpreted in different ways by the reader, depending on his basic mental make-up. Says the Moor to his Japanese artist companion, before her last moments: '[this is] our story in a nutshell, our tragedy enacted by clowns... we are consonants without vowels, jagged, lacking shape.'

There are a number of events which come careening down memory lane for an alert Indian reader. For example that long-forgotten kiss that was implanted on Abbas Ali Baig on his brilliant near-double century in a match against England - it is made the subject of one of Aurora's early paintings and it almost brings on a

communal riot at the behest of Raman Fielding - for the kisser was a Hindu damsel and the kissed one belonged to another community!

We read of an Indian Miss Universe in the person of one Nadia Wadia whose name is the subject of numerous limericks; she is also the unattained object of Raman Fielding's lecherous lust. She becomes a part of the story when she marries the Moor for reasons of social convenience, a point made clear by the narrator.

We are told of the super financier V.V. Crocodile, who is charged with the extraordinary crime of bribing

Union Ministers. The exploits of Khazana Bank International are also trotted out. Though one may not let out peals of laughter, one does chuckle and titter at the way the author makes light irreverent fun of all the sacred cows in Indian public life. Many self-important balloons are pricked to let out empty air leaving the owners in defenceless deflation.

It is heartening that Rushdie has written another masterpiece to delight his large readership and make them think, despite his sojourn underground to escape fundamentalist *fatwa* toters.

The Value of Dissent

After six years' detention by the military authorities, Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi of Myanmar (Burma) was released from house arrest on 11 July. On that day, the Civil Rights Movement (CRM) of Sri Lanka issued the third in its series *The Value of Dissent*, which includes some of her writings. The publication is in English, Sinhala and Tamil.

In the face of the military rulers' attempts to silence their critics, Aung San Suu Kyi has continually spoken out for democracy and human rights. In one of the extracts in this booklet, she describes how authoritarian governments regard dissent as a challenge to be confronted and crushed, whereas in a democracy, which acknowledges the right to be different, major differences of opinion can be resolved peacefully in open dialogue. Moreover, the discussion and resolution of such differences is the root of social change, which is anathema to authoritarian governments. She calls for a change in political values in her country, to transform a system based on absolute power to one based on genuine respect for justice, liberty and human rights.

This booklet is the third in a series issued by the Civil Rights Movement of Sri Lanka. The material in them ranges across the centuries from Gautama Buddha to Stephen Spender, and covers subjects as diverse as Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, Rosa Luxembour's *The Problem of Dictatorship*, and a statement by Jawaharlal Nehru on civil liberty. Also described is Galileo's persecution for his treatise on the solar system, which went against established religious authority of the time. In 1992, over 350 years later, the Catholic Church officially admitted it had been wrong. The latest publication includes excerpts from leaflets issued by the 'White

Rose', a small group of young Germans critical of the ruthless totalitarianism of Nazi Germany. Twenty-one year old Sophie Scholl (whose photograph shares with Aung San Suu Kyi the front cover of CRM's booklet) was among the members of this group who were executed in 1943.

The unifying thread running through this selection is the danger of suppressing dissent. The piece on Galileo shows that scientific ideas which were seemingly outrageous are often later recognised to be important scientific advances.

While many of the writings in this collection derive from the past, the suppression of ideas because they in themselves, or the person who voices them, are inconvenient or politically disturbing continues to this day. Only in recent weeks, United Nations officials deleted certain passages in a book they had commissioned for the 50th anniversary of the UN. In protest all the authors who contributed articles to the book, as well as its editor, have withdrawn their names from the publication.

One of the passages censored was a statement by the Dalai Lama to a public gathering in Vienna where he had been banned from addressing the 1993 UN World Conference on Human Rights. By a timely coincidence, CRM's new booklet quotes an excerpt from the same speech, where the Dalai Lama says that he cannot share the view of some Asian governments who contend that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights sets out Western standards, which, because of differences in culture and economic and social development, cannot be applied to the Third World. 'I am convinced that the majority of Asian people do not share this view', he says, 'for it is

Continued on page 26

Hindu Congress Appeals

The All Ceylon Hindu Congress has appealed to the government to bring an end to the ongoing war and announce a package for the political solution of the conflict. The following are extracts from the Congress's recent statement:

'We do not relish the ongoing war. We do not condone the killing of any person whether he is a Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslim, Burgher to whatever religion he may belong. By this ruthless war, valuable lives that could contribute to the development of this country are wantonly destroyed. The finances that could be used for economic emancipation of the masses is used to destroy them.

The information we gather from various sources, (mainly from those coming from Jaffna), express in no uncertain terms that there is very heavy loss of life among civilians. A large number suffer from injuries (substantial numbers of the latter also die in hospitals due to the non-availability or non-adequate medical care at hospitals due to inadequacy of drugs and medical personnel). There is wanton destruction of properties. Our information is that unaccountable number of dead bodies are found in hospitals even outside the mortuaries due to inadequacy of storage space. We come to gather that over three hundred have died, over two thousand have been injured and over three hundred thousand have been made homeless. All these have happened due to indiscriminate bombing and shelling. From these one is never near wrong if he concludes that this is a war perpetrated on the Tamil Population by the Government.

Continued from page 25

the inherent nature of all humans beings to yearn for freedom, equality and dignity... Diversity and traditions can never justify the violation of human rights'.

In publishing *The Value of Dissent*, CRM aims to show that intolerance from whatever source - from government, opposition groups, other factions within society, or from society as a whole - is dangerous for us all and must be identified and opposed. The questioning of authority and convention, and the free exchange of ideas, are essential for social development and scientific advance.

**Suriya Wickremasinghe,
Secretary, CRM.**

As Hindus we are aggrieved and dismayed as the military targets for bombing and shelling have fallen on places of worship to mention a few, Selvasannathy Temple, Valvettiturai, Sivan Temple, Sangaraththai Pathirakali Amman Temple and Naval St. Peters Church.

Her Excellency Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga came to power with the vast majority of the Tamils voting for her. She got a mandate from the citizens of this country to bring peace and prosperity. It is evident from the present happenings that she is not allowed to take a step forward on the mandate to restore peace by solution of the ethnic problem. On the contrary to our dismay we observe that Her Excellency's Government has taken steps leading to war and destruction. The Government has chosen a military solution which will result in the decimation of Tamil population. Tamil people will not forgive the State sponsored atrocities presently perpetrated on them. As it is a pure Sinhala army, navy and air force fighting in the north is *de facto* Sinhala war on Tamils.

All governments of the post independence era in this country have aroused violence against the Tamils (either State inspired and or State directed) when Tamils expressed their grievances democratically, non violently against injustices perpetrated on them. The militancy against the State was forced upon the Tamil youth, Tamil youth taking up arms was a rebounding force to State terrorism. We agree with the present president when she said that 'we can suppress the present LTTE by force but without acceptable political solution there could emerge another LTTE'. A war of a future will be much more violent than the present unless peace is achieved now. The most essential thing for peace is immediate stoppage of this war by both sides. Her Excellency Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga was thought of as a Messiah emerging to bring peace and prosperity to this land. We are sure she will not fall a victim to the dictum 'honours mutant mores'.

We reiterate that the war should cease immediately and the proposed package of political solution should be made available soon.

We appeal to Her Excellency President to put an end to this war and announce her political solution. We appeal to the LTTE to reciprocate.

We appeal to the Hon. Minister of Health and Social Services to

(a) send adequate number of doctors to the North-East to meet this disaster situation,

(b) send medical supplies to meet this situation.

We appeal to the Hon. Minister of Ports, Shipping, Relief and Rehabilitation to help in ending life in refugee camps early so that there could be prevention of disease that usually occurs in epidemic proportion under crowded conditions. We also appeal to him to provide early and adequate relief for those who lost their homes and belongings.

We appeal to the N.G.O. community to supplement or complement relief measures which they had been contributing lavishly at this time of need.

We appeal to the diplomatic community in this country to use their influence with the Government to put an end to this war against Tamil people.

We appeal to all Tamil Members of Parliament (on whose support this government survives) to bring pressure on the Government to stop this war and bring out the political package for peace very early. We also appeal to them to withdraw their support to this government if their demands are not conceded.

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READERS FORUM

A RESPONSE TO UYANGODA, HOOLE AND ANANDA

JAYADEVA UYANGODA (*Tamil Times*, 15.09.95), like many of the enthusiasts for the 'Peace Package', seeks to oversimplify the problems of peace in Sri Lanka by blaming 'extremists', and in this instance the LTTE is at the receiving end of his attack. The LTTE is certainly not the voice of moderation and one should not forget that it was the product of the failure of the politics of moderation in the face of Sinhala chauvinism. Uyangoda considers A.T. Ariyaratne, the Bandaranaike and Dudley Senanayake as voices of moderation. But these individuals have dabbled in Sinhala chauvinist politics during their long careers in public life and have failed to stand up against the politics of chauvinist extremism when it really mattered. I do not think that Rev. S.J. Emmanuel's (*T.T.*, 15.09.95) is a voice of extremism. The fears that he expresses about the peace package are real as far as a large section of the Tamil people are concerned. They will continue to remain as long as the benevolent voices of moderation and reason that defend the government's handling of the peace process view the solution to the national question as an act of kindness by the majority nationality. Given the record of the Colombo governments during the past four decades, the Tamil people have every reason to be apprehensive about the intentions of any government. Even if the PA government means well, as Uyangoda and others believe, it has to act in a more convincing way if it is to secure peace in its lifetime. To a large section of the Tamil people, the government talks peace but its actions emphasise war. Even before the package has been formally presented the government shows signs of yielding to pressure from the small section of Sinhala chauvinist extremists.

R. Hoole is correct in drawing attention to the importance of the question of territory. Advocates of the envisaged peace package have generally neglected this aspect of the problem. The fear that the proposals will only legitimise recent politically motivated colonisation in the East cannot be ignored. I am somewhat surprised by Hoole's disappointment in some of the eminent Sinhalese professionals for placing their signatures on documents rejecting federalism and an interim

council for the North-East. It was eminent professionals who raked up communal muck during the controversy about standardisation during the early '70s and spread wild allegations about Tamil academics around 1980. I also remember that some who were reputed to speak with a voice of moderation at that time refused to sign an appeal for sanity. Formal education is no guarantee of honest and clear thinking. Intellectuals are members of the very society that generates prejudice, hatred, oppression and injustice. An intellectual fascist is worse than a less educated one because he can find good academic arguments to justify evil and he can also dress up fascism in a fashionable way. The BJP is not short of intellectuals and Jaathika Chintanaya is led by intellectuals. One hope for mankind is that intellectuals rarely transform society. As far as statements by intellectuals go, the contents tell us about the worth of the signatories and the names of the signatories say little about the value of the contents.

I am not sure whether Hoole really means that the Tamil struggle of the '70s was not predominantly nationalist. Events during the 1970-77 UF regime triggered secessionist thinking among some Tamil youth, and the struggle as a whole was not really secessionist until after the atrocities in the wake of the Dharmishta society born in 1977. Tamil nationalism was the child of Sinhala chauvinism and the Tamil people have been continuously reminded of their Tamil identity for several decades. Tamil nationalism was an expression of the desire to safeguard that identity and preserve their existence as a nationality. Despite Hoole's dislike of the LTTE, it is the main representative of the Tamil people's struggle for liberation. It will continue to play this leading role for some time, unless the genocidal war waged by the government's armed forces is brought to an early end and peace with justice is established. The government has to take the initiative in ending the war, and if it is serious about peace it has no choice except to negotiate with the LTTE.

Hoole's subjectivism in criticising the LTTE goes to the extent of blaming the LTTE for everything that goes wrong for the Tamil people. He even cites approvingly a 'leading citizen' from Mattakkalappu (who in turn quotes an Indian army officer) to argue that it was LTTE's struggle that enabled the continued settlement of Sinhalese in the East. His accusation that the LTTE is responsible for the Tamil-Muslim clashes in 1990 fails to

take into account the role played by the IPKF and the clients of India among the militants in worsening Tamil-Muslim relations. The unhealthy attitude of nearly all groups of Tamil militants towards the Muslims is something that they inherited from the Federal Party and the TULF. One should also not overlook the mischief of the government in systematically using a section of the Muslims against the Tamils. I fully endorse the view of Hoole that the government has to take the initiative in reversing the 'course of disintegration' and believe that he means that the government should make a serious bid for peace. There is a lot to be desired in the way that the average Tamil in Colombo is treated by the security forces. I hope that the advocates of the peace package will also pay attention to this aspect of the problem.

Jeeva S. Anandan makes some interesting observations in his article inspired by his enthusiasm for the peace package. I do not share his views about Gandhi and this is hardly the forum to debate that matter. I am tempted nevertheless to draw attention to a few of the factual errors in that article. Kashmir is not the only state facing a secessionist struggle. Punjab is back on the secessionist agenda and Naga and Mizo struggles for secession were not controlled on the basis of Gandhian principles. The comment about the DMK responding to the kindness of Nehru in pledging to retain English as the link language misses the point that the DMK learned soon that 'Draavidanaadu' was a dead duck and what they put forward as Dravidian nationalism was in fact a brand of Tamil nationalism. In 1962 Nehru used the pretext of the Sino-Indian border conflict to make any demand for secession illegal and the DMK gladly complied to safeguard their interests in electoral politics which they entered in the late '50s. The DMK like the Tamil elite in Sri Lanka was hostile to making the language of a neighbour the official language and preferred the domination of English and it is the class interests of such bankrupt elite that is holding India together. One should not forget the ease with which Delhi dismisses state governments when they threaten the power of the centre. Nehru did it in 1957 with the Kerala government, and his descendants have loyally followed suit.

The *Panchayat* system was not the brainchild of Gandhi. It existed in the subcontinent for centuries and was free from party politics to some extent.

Continued on page 28

Continued from page 27

I think that it was Rajiv Gandhi who, by making Delhi control the funds to the *Panchaayats*, sought to drive a wedge between the state government and rural local government to the benefit of the centre. The possibility of governing India by a system of traditional *Panchaayats* requires a vast degree of decentralisation and does not seem realistic in the context of the modern Indian state. Gandhi himself, despite his dream of 'Graama Raaj', was close to India's industrial magnates and was hostile to the struggles of agricultural workers against landlords. His opposition to the caste system was so ineffective that Ambedkar rejected Gandhi's approach and chose to register his protest against the caste system by initiating mass conversion to Buddhism.

Anandan's parallels with Europe are weak since we are dealing with a different kind of nationalism in a different era. India, the child of and successor to the British Raj, became independent in 1947 only to surrender to the multinationals and their agencies. There is a need to re-launch the struggle for the independence of the subcontinent, this time with the oppressed people in the lead. Self-determination of minority nationalities, overthrow of caste oppression and women's liberation are more important than a bogus unity that serves the interests of a tiny minority and their imperial masters. I am pleased, however, that Anandan has reminded us about the importance of *ahimsa* to Buddhism, especially at a time when the government with its historic proposals for peace is gleefully endorsing the recruitment of members of the Buddhist clergy to the army.

S. Sivasegaram

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C. SUNTHERALINGAM: A CENTENNIAL TRIBUTE

AUGUST 19 marked the centennial anniversary of the birth of Chellapah Suntheralingam, one of the colorful intellectuals of colonial Ceylon, who also represented Vanni Tamils in the parliament between 1947 and 1960. If Suntheralingam is alive today, he would have been pleased that his prophesy of a separate state for Tamils has turned out to be almost a reality.

As described by A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, in his 1994 book, *S.J.V. Chelvanayakam and the Crisis of Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism, 1947-1977*, four decades ago (24 June 1955 to be

exact), Suntheralingam moved an amendment to the Throne Speech, for 'the formation of a separate independent state of Tamil Ilankai, comprising Tamil-speaking peoples in Ceylon, within the Commonwealth'.

Suntheralingam was a rare bird in the then colonial Ceylon. Following a B.Sc. degree from the University College, London in 1917, he earned an M.A. degree at the Balliol College, Oxford in 1920. For the next couple of years, he also served in the Indian Civil Service and the Ceylon Civil Service, and quit these posts after being bored by the lack of intellectual challenge in such 'distinguished jobs'. His wisecrack was that he could not spend his entire life 'signing the issue of gun licences'. After briefly serving as the Vice Principal of Ananda College in 1922, Suntheralingam landed his first real job as the professor of mathematics at the Ceylon University College, and held this position till 1940.

Suntheralingam's services to the Tamil community in politics began in 1947, when he was elected as an independent MP for Vavuniya in the general election. He also joined the cabinet of D.S. Senanayake as the Minister of Commerce and Trade, only to quit a year later in opposition to the Ceylon Citizenship Act of 1948. He was successfully returned to the Vavuniya constituency in the 1952 and 1956 general elections as well. When I was a schoolboy, I was advised by one of my mathematics teachers at the Ratmalana Hindu College that one should read the *Hansard* to relish the mathematical wit and wisdom of Suntheralingam in his debates with the 'heavyweights' such as S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, N.M. Perera and Colvin de Silva.

Jeyaratnam Wilson had observed in his 1988 book, *The Break-Up of Sri Lanka*, that Suntheralingam was 'a man of integrity who acted according to his convictions, he was best described as a Ceylon Tamil who would neither lead nor follow'. I would say that at least in providing their versions of the Tamil history for posterity, Suntheralingam showed leadership which surpassed the performance of G.G. Ponnambalam and S.J.V. Chelvanayakam. In the absence of primary documents, contemporary historians in Sri Lanka are spinning tales about what happened between D.S. Senanayake and G.G. Ponnambalam or between S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike and Chelvanayakam or between Jayewardene and Amirthalingam. But, Suntheralingam as a teacher, knew the importance of written history. His 1967 book, *Eylom: Beginnings of Freedom*

Struggle - Dozen Documents by C. Suntheralingam with 'Candid Comments and Criticisms' by Lord Soulbury, is a worthy publication in this regard. I could only speculate that since Ponnambalam, Chelvanayakam and Amirthalingam were lawyers, their *modus operandi* was limited to presenting and arguing their 'Tamil case' in front of a 'judge' (Speaker of the parliament) and on occasions submitting petitions to a higher authority. So, they did not bother much to place their versions of history in written record. I consider this as a serious lapse as far as Tamils are concerned.

Suntheralingam slipped badly on the 1968 Maviddapuram temple-entry conflict. He projected himself as the spokesman of 'Defenders of Saivism'. Bryan Pfaffenberger had written an analysis on this issue, which was published in the *Journal of Asian Studies* in February 1990. Suntheralingam's controversial stance on this delicate issue was that his 'objection was not to untouchable temple entry *per se* but rather to any attempt to coerce the temple management into changing its views and to any interference by the Colombo government in Hindu religious affairs'. Pfaffenberger had inferred that 'Suntheralingam may very well have been sincere, but his statements were widely taken as just so much rhetoric intended only to sugar coat the conservative position'.

Suntheralingam also had a final fling at the 1970 general election contesting the Kankesanthurai constituency against Chelvanayakam and campaigned on a divisive catchy slogan '*Siluvaiyaa Velaa?*' (Are you going to choose the Cross or the Vel?). His appeal was rejected by the Kankesanthurai voters. In one sense, his standing in Sri Lankan Tamil politics can be equated to that of Periyar E.V. Ramasamy Naicker's role in the Dravidian movement in India. Both provided the 'original sparks' for the excitement and explosion which followed in the Tamil 'self-respect movement' in India and Sri Lanka. Both faltered late in their careers.

One can reject the transgressions of Suntheralingam's political actions in 1968 to 1970 to senility. But his services to the Tamils in the area of education and politics between 1922 and mid 1960s (upto the publication of his 1967 book, *Eylom: Beginnings of Freedom Struggle*) cannot be forgotten. As Chelvadurai Manogaran has stated in his book, *Ethnic Conflict and Reconciliation in Sri Lanka* (1987), Suntheralingam 'was the first Tamil politician to use the name 'Eelam' to refer to the independent Tamil state of Sri Lanka, which the Tamil United

Liberation Front and militant Tamils proclaimed in the 1970s.'

Suntheralingam's influence on the events related to the Tamil society badly needs an in-depth study. Apart from the few citations I have quoted, not much has been written on his role as a 'sentinel of Tamil conscience'.

Sachi Sri Kantha

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Japan.

Continued from page 20

The moral of this not-too-edifying story is that in this great land of saints and savants it pays to be a godman if only one has the right connections.

NTR Falls: However, another politician who captured the imagination of the masses through his portrayal of a variety of gods, Mr. N.T. Rama Rao, came to grief last month.

Barely ten months after he was voted to power with a massive majority in Andhra Pradesh, he found himself out in the cold when his MLAs led by his own son-in-law Chandrababu Naidu revolted against him protesting the extraordinary powers enjoyed by his wife (half his age and whom he married only a few years ago).

Even extra-constitutionalism seems to have its own checks and balances. A timely reminder to Chandrasamys, Narasimha Raos and Jayalalithas perhaps.

Continued from page 18

arbitrate on such issues, the devolved functions still smack of subtle moves to retain central control over the Tamils and Muslims in every possible constitutional manner.

Summarised Conclusions

Although the President in her 'address to the nation' on 3 August 1995 accepted unqualifiedly, '... the fact that the Tamil people have genuine grievances for which solutions must be found', because, 'during the 50 years since the end of the colonial era, the aspirations of the Tamil people were not adequately fulfilled within the parameters of the political process' and also 'instead, a regrettable feature of the history of contemporary attempts to address their demands consisted of disingenuous methods resorted to by successive governments...', it is the Author's conclusion in this necessarily brief analysis, that the President's proposals are very unlikely to succeed in their present form, for the above reasons and other shortcomings, such as side-tracking of the central issues of Tamil nationhood and homeland.

Continued from page 23

rights, are values that this periodical can bring to this broader task. This will make it possible for peoples of all linguistic, religious and ethnic groups in the region to interact as we grapple with common problems and visions for the future. There is a vital need for a popular periodical to meet this need. *Tamil Times* both by the location in which it is situated - the United Kingdom - and the ideals it is committed to, is best suited to take the initiative. The U.K. is home to thousands of expatriates from all the communities in the region. In addition to the long historical connection between the U.K. and South Asia, intellectual, journalistic and library resources available in the U.K. make it an appropriate location from which to publish such a periodical. Will you take up this challenge and provide for the peoples of the region a South Asian Times?

Continued from page 13

cantly reduced and he can no longer be regarded as a mere nominee of the President. The appointment of a Governor would require the concurrence of the Chief Minister and the Governor so appointed will have no power to disallow laws and will in almost all cases be required to act on the advice of the Chief Minister. The Centre's power or dissolving the region which almost replicate the existing provisions of the Indian Constitution have been significantly limited. The proposals recommend that the Chief Minister cannot be removed from office so long as he enjoys the confidence of the Regional Council.

Several commentators have welcomed the proposals as a bold and serious attempt to address the underlying grievances of the Tamils and Muslims and to bring an end to the conflict in the North East. The President herself pointed out that the new approach is predicated on unqualified acceptance of the fact that the Tamil people have genuine grievances for which solutions must be found. A critical issue however relates to the unit of devolution in the North-East. The approach outlined in the proposal calls for the redemarcation of boundaries in such a manner as to reconcile the interests of Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims. This will remain a very contentious issue on which tough negotiations should be expected within the next few months.

Although the proposals represent a significant advance from all pre-

vious attempts of ethnic reconciliations, many important features represent an existing consensus between the major political parties in the south of Sri Lanka. Nonetheless, hardline critics of the devolution proposals continue to argue emotively that the proposals would lead to the disintegration of the nation-state. They have particularly objected to any change in the unitary character of the state and to the devolution of powers with regard to land, fisheries, irrigation and law and order. They further contend that Regional Councils should not be allowed to directly obtain foreign investment or international grants and loans. Even issues which were resolved by the 13th Amendment are being recanvassed in a highly charged political atmosphere.

The future of the exercise depends on the ability of the Government to remain firm and not to allow the proposals to be progressively diluted by the forces of Sinhala nationalism. This by itself would not secure the success of the exercise as the United National Party needs to be persuaded to support the draft chapter. UNP hitherto has remained cautious while in principle recognising the need for devolution and for a political resolution. The TULF leader Mr. M. Sivasithamparam has repeatedly urged the government to forward the proposals to the LTTE and to engage in direct political negotiations. Without such a process the proposals even if they are accepted by the people at a referendum will remain largely an academic exercise.

(Translation from *India Today*).

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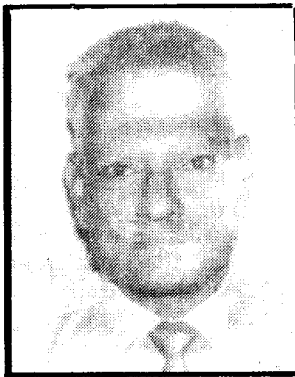
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OBITUARIES



Mr. Namasivayam Sivaneson, Fellow of Ford Foundation, former lecturer of Colombo University, Sri Lanka; subsequently at University of Brunei and University of London; passed away on 10.9.95.

Sadly missed by his beloved wife Rani, sons, daughters, daughter-in-law, sons-in-law and grandchildren. Cremation took place at Chelmsford Crematorium, Essex on 13.9.95.

The members of the family thank all friends and relatives who attended the funeral, sent floral tributes, messages of sympathy and condoled with them during the time of great sorrow. - 69 Foxglove Close, Witham, Essex CM8 2XW. Tel: 01376 517879.

Mr. Sinnathamby Thiagarajah, of Karainagar, Thirunelvely and Canada, Retired Investigating Inspector and Second Secretary to the Minister of Postal and Telecommunication Services, Sri Lanka; son of the late Mr. & Mrs. Sinnathamby; son-in-law of the late Mr. & Mrs. Sivasamboo; beloved husband of Parameswary (Canada); loving father of Ravinthiran, Rubenthiran (both of Canada), Renuka (Australia); loving father-in-law of Sarojini, Umayal (both of Canada), Devaraj (Australia); loving grandfather of Darren, Myuran, Denuja; brother of late Senathirajah, Selvanayagi, late Nadarajah, Thangarajah and Sivanayagi passed away peacefully on Thursday, 31st August in Canada and was cremated on 2nd September. The members of the family thank all relatives and friends who attended the funeral, sent messages of sympathy and assisted them in various ways. - 611/3575 Kanett Crescent, Mississauga, Ontario L5A 3Y5, Canada. Tel: (905) 279 0179.



Ratnammal wife of late Mr. Veerasingham Kulathunga Sundharam, formerly of 'Manar Veedu', Kadaisamy Kovil Road, Vannarponnai, Jaffna; daughter of late Mr. & Mrs. S. Mututamy; sister of late Mrs. C. Somasundaram, late Mrs. G.

Rajadurai, Mr. M. Theagarajah (London), Mrs. M. Emmanuel (Kuala Lumpur), Mrs. S. Rasiah (Kuala Lumpur), Mrs. V. Saravanamuttu (Sydney), Mrs. V. Balasingham (Sydney) and Mrs. Y. Mahesa (Toronto); loving mother of Mrs. R.S. Nadarajah - Mani (Sydney), Mrs. P. Kathirkamathasan - Baba (London), Mr. K.S. Kumarasingham - Raju (Colombo), Mrs. P. Senathirasa - Pathma (Toronto), Mrs. T.S. Kumaresan - Thilaga (Jaffna), Dr. V.K. Balasingham (London), Mr. K. Muthukumarasamy - Rajan (Colombo), Mrs. S. Padmeswaran - Gowri (Brunei), Mrs. K. Nagendra - Asai (Sydney) and Mrs. A. Cumarasingham - Rasathy (Sydney) passed away peacefully on 9th October 1995 while on holiday in London and was cremated on 12th October. She also leaves behind many loving grandchildren and great grandchildren. Members of her family wish to thank all friends and relatives who extended their sympathy and support - 54 Torrington Drive, Harrow, Middx., HA2 8NF. Tel: 0181 248 3526.

IN MEMORIAM

Lovingly remembered on the 6th anniversary of the passing away of



Daniel Selvarajah Sanders, Ph.D., ACSW
 Sept. 28, 1928 - Oct. 14, 1989
The Fifth Annual Daniel S. Sanders Peace, Human Rights and Social Justice Lecture

Internationally known as a leader in efforts to achieve world peace, human rights and social justice. Daniel S. Sanders was Dean, Professor and Director for the Center for Study of International Social Welfare Policies and Services, **University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, School of Social Work, USA** from 1986-1989; Also Dean, Professor and

Director of International Program, **University of Hawaii School of Social Work, Honolulu, Hawaii, USA** from 1971-1986. Founder and First President Inter-University Consortium for International Social Development, USA from 1980-1989.

Dr. Harriet Jakobsson, School of Social Work, University of Lund and University of Orebro, Sweden, Consultant to the United Nations High Commission on Refugees gave the Fifth Annual Daniel S. Sanders Memorial Lecture on March 22, 1995 at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Her subject was **A LOST GENERATION: THE YOUNGEST VICTIMS OF WAR AND REFUGE**.

George Warren Brown School of Social Work. Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri USA has established a scholarship in honor of Dan. The Daniel S. Sanders Scholarship will be awarded each year to an incoming MSW student from abroad. The first such award, in the amount of \$6,000 will be made in academic year 1996. Dean Shanti K. Khinduka said: 'Dan was an indefatigable advocate of international social development. It is a pleasure to have his name associated with a scholarship earmarked for such an important direction in social work education.'

Christobel Chelvathy, Selvaranee, Chandra, Chandran. Balan, Ariam, Alagan, Sanders Niles families, 614 West Florida Ave., Urbana, Illinois 61801 USA.



Mr. Viswalingam Shanmugavadivel
 Rtd. SPHI, Valvetiturai
 Born: 31.07.1922
 Departed: 28.9.1990

Sadly missed and fondly remembered on the fifth anniversary of his passing away by his loving wife Ra-

ganthi; children Amirthakala (Canada), Ratnakumar (VVT), Swarnakala, Nandakumar (UK), Premakumar, Uthayakumar (both of Germany), Sivakumar and Sugirthakala (both of UK); sons-in-law Subashchandrabose (Canada), Ponnambalam (Switzerland) and Gobiratnam (UK); daughters-in-law Chandraleka (VVT), Aputhamalar (Madras), Yogamathi and Yogasarojini (both of Germany) and Helen (UK); grandchildren Kavitha, Janitha, Jawagar, Sitharth, Aravinth, Anusha, Kousigan, Shobana, Pradipa, Thushyanthini, Priyan-

thini, Shanmugapriyan, Satheesan, Shamini, Prashanthan, Nivedita, Ainkaran, Nishanthan and Mahison - 9 Portland House, High Trees, London SW2 3PD. Tel: 0181 671 9209.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

November 1 Feast Day of All Saints.

Nov. 3 Eekathasi; Third Iypasi Velli.

Nov. 4 Pirathosam.

Nov. 6 Full Moon.

Nov. 10 Last Iypasi Velli.

Nov. 12 Remembrance Sunday.

Nov. 15 Feast of St. Albert, the Great.

Nov. 16 Feast of St. Margaret.

Nov. 18 Eekathasi; 5.00pm Toronto Alumni of Jaffna College and Uduvil Girls College present Christmas Bhajanai in Carnatic Music at Milliken Wesleyan Methodist Church, Kennedy Road - 1/4 mile north of Steeles. Guest Speaker: Bro. J. Abu Bakker. All welcome.

Nov. 20 Pirathosam; First Karthikai Somavaram.

Nov. 21 Feast of the Presentation of Our Lady.

Nov. 22 Amavasai; Feast of St.

Cecilia.

Nov. 26 Sathurthi.

Nov. 27 Second Karthikai Somavaram.

Nov. 30 Feast of St. Andrew.

At Bhawan Centre, 4A Castle-town Road, London W14 9HQ. Tel: 0171-381 3086/4608.

Nov. 18 7.00pm. Utsav presented by 'Srishti' Nina Raja Rani Creations.

Nov. 24 7.30pm Sargam presents Vocal Jugalbandi, Hindustani: Lakshmi Shankar, Carnatic: Sivasakti Sivanesan with live accompaniments.

AUSTRALIAN NEWSLETTER

Sydney Tamils Hold Peace March

A large gathering of over 2000 Tamils assembled at Martin Place, Sydney at about 11 a.m. on 19.8.95 to protest against the Sri Lankan army offensive and the continued economic catastrophe in the North. Almost all Tamil organisations were represented and there were speakers from the Uniting Church, the Catholic Church, Hindu Organisations, Students Movement, Civil Liberties Organisations and Women's Movement. They condemned the Sri Lankan Government for causing extreme hardship and suffering to the civilians in the Tamil areas.

Mr. Lawrie Ferguson, a Federal M.P. expressed sympathy for the plight of the Tamils in the North and East of Sri Lanka. Mr. Thanabalasingam of the Eelam Tamil Association spoke in Tamil. Mr. Anarajasingam of the same organisation gave a run-down of recent political events in Sri Lanka and pointed out that the Sri Lankan Government was telling the world that the LTTE had rejected the latest peace proposals, whereas in fact they have not been formally submitted to them. A number of young people, many of them Australians addressed the gathering.

A group of little girls performed a Kolattam dance and then a Freedom Dance accompanied by stirring music. Hundreds of white and red balloons were released into the sky to signify the thirst for peace and freedom.

The meeting was followed by a march in which the processionists carried hundreds of placards and shouted slogans, traversed several streets in the heart of the city and reached the New South Wales Parliament House.

It was a very successful demonstration of the strong feeling amongst Tamils in Sydney about the plight of their brethren in the North and East of Sri Lanka.

Sri Ganesh Visarjan Festival was held for the fifth year in succession on 3rd September. The venue for this festival

which has become the biggest and most popular annual Hindu festival in the whole of Australia is the Sri Venkateswara Temple in Sydney. As in past years over 30 religious and cultural organisations participated. Satguru Sri Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, Founder of the Himalayan Academy in Hawaii, who had on his visit to Sydney in 1990 urged the Hindus to unite to organise this festival and blessed the Ganesha Visarjan Committee which was formed then, visited the temple after the lapse of five years and honoured the devotees. It is no wonder that the festival has been growing in popularity every year with over six thousand devotees participating this year. After Kalasa Stapanam, Maha Abishekam and Deeparadhana, the Sri Ganesha Utsava Murthy, beautifully decorated in garlands was taken in procession around the temple on a 'Thandikai' to the accompaniment of live Nathaswaram music, the ringing of bells, the clash of cymbals and the blowing of the conch.

A large Visarjana Ganapati made out of clay was decorated and after poojah was taken in procession to the nearby Stanwell Park Beach and immersed in the waters of the Pacific Ocean.

While the religious ceremonies were being conducted inside the Temple, a cultural show was in progress in a marquee specially erected for the purpose. Proceedings commenced with the lighting of the Jyoti by Dr. A. Balasubramaniam, President of the Temple Association. Several associations contributed items for the cultural programme. Highlights of the day were the spiritual lecture by Satguru Sri Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, the address by the Chief Guest Hon. G. Parthasarathy, High Commissioner for India and the speech by Mr. Ian McManus, M.P. representing the Premier of New South Wales.

An important item of the festival every year is the Ganesh Colouring Competition for children under 15 years divided into three groups according to age. Hundreds of children took part in the competition and were awarded prizes and merit certificates. The canteen organised by lady volunteers served both North Indian and South Indian food, it was very popular and earned most of the funds needed to organise the festival.

Carnatic Music Concert: Carnatic music

lovers in Sydney were enthralled by the vocal music recital of Sri Sanjay Subramanian on 10th September at the Wallace Theatre, University of Sydney. Sri Subramanian, one of the most promising vocalists in Madras had already toured Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. He held the audience spellbound from the moment he began singing and his rendering of Vasudevayoni in Kalyani and Palinstu Kamakshi in Madhyamavati were outstanding. He also sang several compositions by Arunagirinathar in praise of Lord Muruga. He was accompanied by Sri R.K. Shriramkumar on the Violin and Sri Arun Prakash on the Mridangam and received a standing ovation at the end of the recital.

New South Wales Senior Citizens' Association: At the 4th Annual General Meeting of the Association held on 26th August '95, at the Santa Maria Del Monte School Hall, Strathfield, the following were elected to office. **President:** P.S. Segaram; **Vice President:** E. Vijayarajam; **Secretary:** S. Senathirajah; **Asst. Secretary:** Col. V. Ramanathan; **Treasurer:** V. Sivasubramaniam; **Asst. Treasurer:** R.S. Gasperson; **Committee Members:** C. Alagendram, M. Balakrishnan, L.S.C. Canagasingham, Mrs. N. Nadarajah, N.C. Rajanayagam, Mrs. S. Rajapoopalasingam, C.S. Sebaratnam and I. Wijeyanayagam. The association has a membership of 290.

Book Release: The launching of a book on 'Water Resources Development - Jaffna Peninsula' by Mr. K. Shanmugarajah took place on 17th September 1995 at the Homebush Primary School, Homebush. The author who was Deputy Director of Irrigation, Sri Lanka; Adviser on Irrigation Development to the Ministry of Water Resources, Nigeria; Engineer for World Bank, FAO and United States Agency for International Development observes that as there are no rivers or streams in the Jaffna Peninsula and the topography does not permit the construction of reservoirs, water resources development of the peninsula must be based on its ground water. Conversion of the lagoons in the peninsula to fresh water lakes is identified as the most feasible method of recharging the underground aquifer. Books are available from the author at \$30 per copy at 95 Weaver Street, Erskine Park, NSW 2759, Australia. Tel: (02) 834 3467.

CANADIAN NEWS LETTER

The Federation of Associations of Canadian Tamils (FACT) held a seminar on 'Towards a Peaceful Resolution of the Sinhala-Tamil National Conflict' on 7th October 1995 at Tamil Eelam Society of Canada, 861 Broadview Avenue, Toronto. Discussion papers were submitted by Prof. A.J. Wilson, Mr. Adrian Wijemanne, Mr. Visvanathan Rudrakumaran and Mr. M. Vasantha Rajah. All four were of the view that a separate state for the Tamils in Sri Lanka would promote peace between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. They were of the view that President Chandrika's Devolution proposals contained flaws such as (a) The NE region is given the same autonomy powers as the other regions. (b) The emergency powers wipe away even the limited autonomy. (c) The Constitutional Council and the Boundary Commission are bound to be Sinhala dominated blocks. (d) A future Sinhala majority parliament can easily nullify everything now negotiated and settled. The consensus of those present was that any settlement short of separation has to be mediated by a third party and implementation guaranteed.

In the evening over 300 persons attended a fund raising dinner in aid of Rehabilitation of Tamils in Sri Lanka at Oriole C.R.C., Don Mills. The guest speakers were Mr. Adrian Wijemanne and Mr. M. Vasantha Rajah.

Passing Away of Athmajothi N. Muthiah: The Sri Lankan Tamils and the Hindus in particular suffered a great loss in the passing away of Athmajothi N. Muthiah on 8th September 1995 in Montreal where he was on a visit. The late Mr. Muthiah was an erudite Tamil scholar and an ardent Hindu saivite. He was fond of prayer meetings and led a crusade for prayer meetings in every Hindu home. Though born in Jaffna, he spent most of his life in Nawalapitiya where he was a teacher and later the Head Master in Kathiresan College. On his retirement he accepted the heavy responsibility of running the Kaithady Hindu Orphanage. He was 77 years old.

Shakespearean Plays: The Shakespearean village in Stratford in Ontario becomes alive here in summer and autumn each year. This year they staged 'Merry Wives of Windsor', 'Comedy of Errors' and 'Macbeth'. These plays attract many visitors from the States. Stratford is just two hours away from Toronto. a busload of Sri Lankans made their annual visit to Stratford on 8th September to witness 'Macbeth'.

Ambika Delights In Edmonton: Ganna Bhooshanam Smt Ambika Thamotheram, the well-known carnatic musician gave a recital of vocal music at the Velma Baker School Hall, Edmonton on 30th September 1995 before an appreciative audience. The recital was sponsored by the Tamil Cultural Association of Alberta, Canada. It was an evening of lively, enchanting Tamil music.



Ambika who was on a holiday from the U.K. was ably supported by local talent. R. Rajanna was on the Miruthangam, Vinoth Bhanij on the Harmonium and Flute, P. Vigneswaran on the Tabla and V. Damayanthi on the Tambura.



Mrs. Rasammah Kanagasabai - 17.4.1904 to 01.9.1995 - An Appreciation

Mrs. R. Kanagasabai who passed away following a brief illness was a household name in educational circles in Jaffna since the 1930s. Mrs. Kanagasabai (Rasakka to her colleagues and friends) had her education at Uduvil Girls' College. She embarked on a teaching career and very early in life took on the onerous responsibility of being the Head Mistress of the Saiva Mangayakarasi Vidyasalai, a prestigious educational institution, in the precincts of the hallowed Kandasamy temple in Nallur. She held this position till her retirement in 1964. Many leading professionals hailing from that part of Jaffna had their early training and education at this institution and are living testimony to Mrs. Kanagasabai's dedication, commitment and expertise. Despite the tragic loss of her husband in a road traffic accident in 1937, she combined her motherhood of four young children and her profession in an exemplary manner so much so that her children have excelled in their chosen fields. In later years she not only had the pleasure of seeing her own children doing

well but also her grandchildren, not to mention generations of others' children who passed through her school.

She was an intensely pious person, very outgoing and hospitable and her home in Nallur was both a haven and a refuge for innumerable young people who found in her a caring foster mother. Many would recall with amazement her incredible memory of people and events concerning even their own lives, which they themselves had difficulty in recalling.

Mrs. Kanagasabai is survived by her only brother, Sandrasegaram and her children Kanagarajah, Dr. Thilagarajah, Satkunarajah, Chandra and their families.

'To live in hearts you leave behind is not death'.

Bharatha Natya Arangetram of Kavitha



The arangetram of fourteen year old Kavitha, daughter of Dr. & Mrs. Nadesalingam, took place at Logan Hall on 16th September. The 'Vinayagar Vanakkam' sung by Mathini Sriskandarajah in her captivating voice gave the initial momentum for the occasion.

Kavitha commenced her arangetram with Ganesha Vandhanam in Raga Natta followed by Alarippu, Natesa Kauthuvam in Raga Hamsadwani and Jathiswaram. Kavitha is naturally blessed with a good figure, poise and grace. She performed to perfection. The 'Varnam', as we all know is the most difficult and elaborate piece requiring great concentration and stamina, was performed with absolute synchronisation of Bhava, Raga and Thala.

An interesting item is 'Nritta Vadhyava Vinyasam', where Kavitha danced with great artistry for Muthu Sivarajah's entrancing Miruthangam, Chithambarathan's excellent morsing and her Guru Ragini Rajagopal's crystal clear Nattuvangam. The Keerthanam 'Nadanam Aadinar' has been performed at many arangetrams but Kavitha brought the dance alive, effortlessly throwing in some difficult 'Karnas' in a unique style.

The chief guest Neila Sathyalingam in her speech said: 'Today on this stage I saw Dance come alive with Miruthangam and Morsing. For an arangetram artiste to have that amount of understanding in rhythm is a great thing'. 'She has a beautiful figure, very expressive face, lovely aramandy, beautiful hands, fingers and all the best assets a dancer needs. She is a wonderful artiste. She should never give up dancing even for her studies'. Knowing Neila Sathyalingam's fame one cannot resist quoting the proverb 'Vashishdar Vaayal Brhamma Rishi'. When she accolades as such, who am I to utter anything to the contrary?

From Kavitha's Head Teacher Mrs. Marsha Elms of Kendrick School, Reading, we heard with pride and astonishment that Kavitha also surpasses in her studies and several other pursuits. She has passed grade 4 violin, grade 5 ballet and grade 6 piano. She is a member of The Berkshire County Youth Dance Company and a county Badminton player who earned a National silver medal in 1993.

The credit for this arangetram presentation obviously should go to Kavitha's Guru Ragini Rajagopal for the selection of pieces, for her resourceful choreography and for recognising and exploiting Kavitha's talents to produce such a performance.

All the artistes involved are worthy of praise. The engrossing singing by Mathini Sriskandarajah, the entrancing Miruthangam by Muthu Sivarajah, the enthralling violin by Thiruvurur Kothandapani, the enchanting flute by Gnanavarathan Pichiappah, the excellent morsing by Kandiah Chidrambaranathan, the resonating compering by Ravi Sanguhan and the astounding lighting rendered by Ambikai Seevaratnam, all contributed a great deal to make this arangetram a memorable one.

Sita Venkatraman.

Skanda Old Students Celebrate Their Tenth Anniversary

The UK branch of the Old Students of Skanda Varodaya College, Jaffna celebrated their tenth anniversary with a reunion lunch and variety entertainment at Holy Cross Convent School Hall, Sandal Road, New Malden, Surrey on Sunday, 17th September 1995.

After lunch the variety entertainment was provided mainly by the old students and their children. Shobitha Sathianandan and Arthee Yogendran from the junior group and Janaki Kuanendran, Hari Sivanesan, Karthiga Gangatharan from the senior group provided two fascinating veena recitals. Bhayiravi Ganeshwaran entertained the appreciative audience with her melodious music from the violin. Mr. K. Jananayagam gave a flute recital which held the audience spell bound. Mr. M. Sathiyamoorthy sang light songs which drew rounds of applause. The grand finale was a scintillating Bharatha Natyam recital

by Brintha Baladasan. Jason Pararajasingham, Angello and Marino Kumarathan, very versatile artistes in their own right in addition to their performances on the miruthangam provided the accompaniment for all the items. The audience showed their appreciation of the excellent entertainment provided.

The Annual General Meeting which took place halfway through the variety entertainment resulted in the election of the following office bearers for the ensuing year 1995/96. **President:** N.S. Kandiah, **General Secretary:** Dr. T. Gunasuntharam, **Treasurer:** R. Vimalendran, **Vice Presidents:** S. Kanagasabai & S. Sivagnanam, **Sports Co-ordinator:** S. Nimalananda, **Cricketer Secretary:** K. Gangeswaran, **Football Secretary:** M. Sivanathan, **Netball Secretary:** Dr. (Mrs.) M.J.K. Sabanathan, **Cultural Secretary:** M. Sathiyamoorthy, **Committee:** Dr. M. Chellappah, Mrs. V. Gangatharan, N. Leyrang, S. Nadesan and P. Ranjan.

Amman Temple Has Benefit Show

The Raja Rajeswari Amman Temple, Stoneleigh in Surrey had a very successful cultural show in aid of the temple building fund at Rutlish School Hall, London SW20 on 9th September 1995. The picture below shows Dharani Baladharan during her Bharatha Natyam recital.



On the whole it was a highly enjoyable evening and the other items were a carnatic vocal recital by Manickam Yogeswaran; a humorous drama produced by Pulavar Sivanathan, a veena recital by Vathani Varatharajah and a folk dance by the pupils of the Kingston Institute of Tamil Culture.

His Lordship, Councillor Cyril Fraser, Mayor of Epsom and Ewell, who was the chief guest, recalled his visit to India and Sri Lanka some years back, when he appreciated the cultural values of the people in these countries and congratulated the temple authorities on the success they have achieved with the temple and the excellent cultural show presented that day.

A.G.M. of Sri Lankan Tamil Lawyers

The Sri Lankan Tamil Lawyers Association of Great Britain held their A.G.M. recently in South West London and elected the following office bearers for 1995/96. **President:** Wimal Sockanathan, **Vice Presidents:** P. Rajanayagam & Arul Ponnambalam, **Secretary:** R. Sivaganeshan, **Asst. Secretary:** K. Vettivel, **Treasurer:** A. Sriharan, **Asst. Treasurer:** K. Mahesan, **Executive Committee:** S. Yogarajah, C. Sithamparapillai, R.D. Ratnasingam, S. Paramalingam, Shirani Thevarajah and M.K. Sritharan.

A Left Handed Competence



The Mridangam Arangetram of Dushan, son of Mr. & Mrs. Joseph on 2nd September at the Lewisham Theatre was unique in the sense that Dushan, unlike what we are used to watch, is a left hander. This fifteen year old student had his early training under Balasri and Sivarajah and later came under Bangalore Prakash for intensive training for the past five years. The Arangetram performance to accompany top level musicians, Chandrika (vocal) and Jyotsna (violin) specially commissioned from Bangalore, India, an experience that would have normally rattled any fresher, enthused Dushan with a challenge. Chandrika's string of brigas and Jyotsna's equal challenge did not deter young Dushan from exhibiting his own rapturous play. His thani avarthanam for the pallavi in Kanta Triputai was remarkable. As the Guest of Honour Sri P.P. Kanthan suggested, now that Dushan has exhibited his natural talents, further exposure along with senior musicians should build him up as a top percussionist.

S.S.S.

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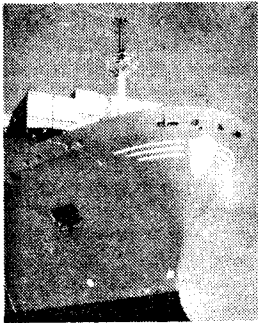
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14 Allied Way, off Warple Way, Acton, London W3 0RQ
Telephone: 0181 740 8379/0181 749 0595

Fax: 0181 740 4229

BONDED WAREHOUSE

Laksiriseva, 253/3 Avissawella Road, Colombo 14 Tel: 575576



TRICO INTERNATIONAL (SHIPPING) LTD

TRICO SHIPPING SCHEDULE

YOUR GOODS MUST BE AT OUR WAREHOUSE 5 WORKING DAYS BEFORE DEPARTURE

Vessel Name	Closing Date	Sailing	Arrival
Hanjin Long Beach	5.11.95	10.11/95	26.11/95
Hanjin Kaohsiung	19.11.95	24.11/95	10.12/95
Hanjin Oakland	03.12.95	08.12.95	24.12.95

CANADA

Trico Shipping – 685 Lansdowne Av.,
Suite 202, Toronto, Ont. M6H 3Y9.
Toll Free: 1-800-565 6190
Tel: 416 536 0090 Fax: 416 536 1901

AUSTRALIA

Unit 8, 24-26 Carrick,
Tullamarine,
Victoria 3043
Tel. 631 3388 5978

Our modern warehouse and offices are under one roof with ample car parking facilities where our customers have the extra benefit of packing their goods themselves with our assistance.

We offer a friendly and professional service at competitive rates. Once your goods are in our hands, we guarantee a safe and efficient delivery to your destination. We also offer FREE STORAGE to our customers for a period of ONE MONTH in our bonded warehouse in Colombo.

**THE LEADING SRI LANKAN SHIPPING AND FREIGHT
FORWARDING COMPANY IN THE UK**

Trico International Shipping Ltd

Unit 4, Building 'C' The Business Centre at Wood Green,
Clarendon Rd, London N22 6XJ

Tel: 0181-888 8787 Fax: 0181 889 5445



UNIWEST INTERNATIONAL

30 Friern Barnet Road,
London N11 1NA

Tel : 0181-361 5087 / 4937

0181-368 9544

Fax : 0181-361 8498

All goods are lodged in a modern, fully computerised.
Bonded warehouse (outside the Port)
Ceylon Shipping Lines, 294/10 D.R.
Wijewardena Mawatha, Colombo 10. Tel: 432994/5

**WE ARE STILL THE BEST
AND CHEAPEST**

NO HIDDEN CHARGES

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Travel Agents for Kuwait, Emirates, Gulf Air,
Air France, KLM, Royal Jordanian, PIA and Balkan
Airlines.

Ship Your CAR in a Container for £795 + Insurance
Our Colombo Office Warehouse is Staffed by 2
Experienced Officers to Ensure Personal Attention
and Speedy Clearance of Your Goods
Branch Offices in Toronto & Paris