

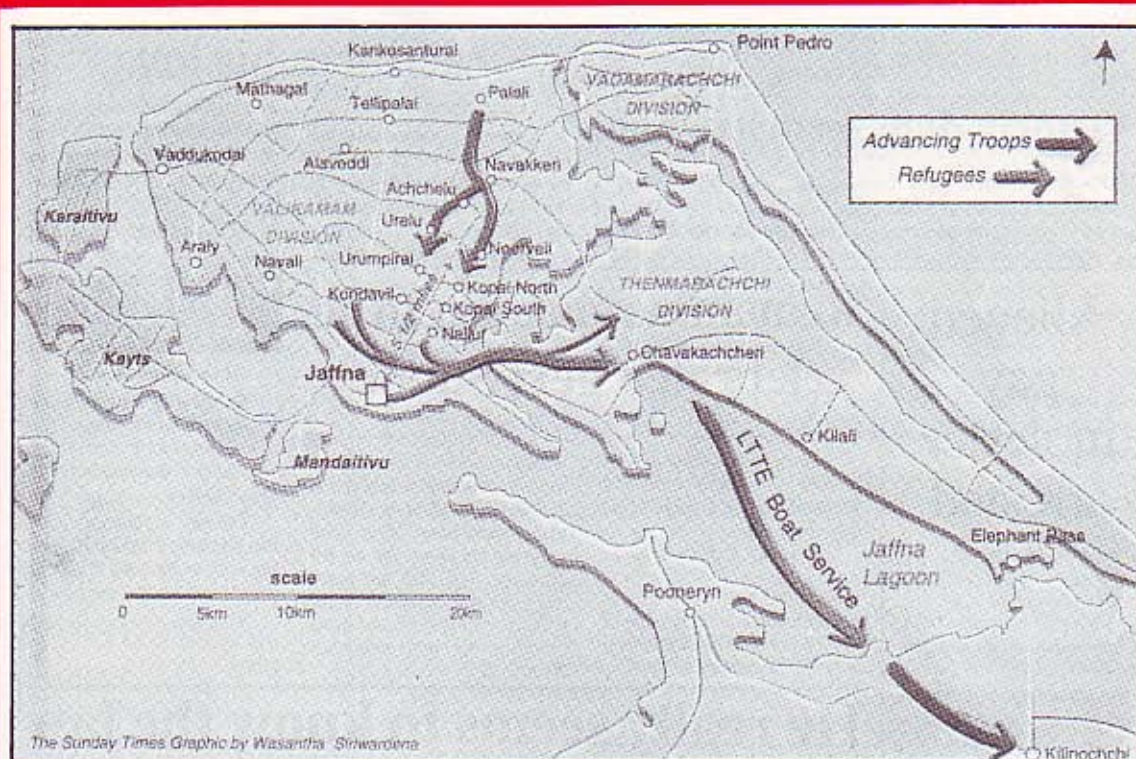
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Mass Exodus As Army Enters Jaffna



(Above) Army advance into Jaffna and civilian exodus (courtesy of *The Sunday Times*) and (below) Tamil civilians from Jaffna arriving in Vavuniya





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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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The Ultimate Tragedy

In the ongoing armed conflict between government forces and the LTTE, the recent turn of events in northern Sri Lanka has led to the perpetration of the ultimate tragedy upon the Tamil people. Almost the entire civilian population of Jaffna comprising several hundreds of thousands have been subjected at short notice to a Rwanda-type enforced evacuation from their homes leading to a humanitarian disaster of catastrophic proportions. The sheer magnitude of the tragedy that has struck the civilian population is unprecedented in the annals of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. Never before have so many people at such short notice been so cruelly uprooted from their homes and compelled to turn themselves overnight into refugees.

The abrupt breakdown of the peace process and the resumption of armed hostilities in mid-April this year led to the present disastrous phase of the decade-long conflict in the island. The menacing ferocity with which Eelam War III has been fought from its commencement, the scale and extent of the commitment the parties in conflict have brought to bear in its prosecution, the lethal nature of the weapons used in pursuing it, the vast resources poured in bolstering up the weapons-capability on either side and the self-deceptive dangerous illusion of invincibility on one side and the unconvincing rhetoric of peace through war on the other side soon guaranteed its inexorable escalation to almost a point of no return.

Whether or not those engaged in this brutal war anticipated the present tragic turn of events, the ordinary people of Jaffna upon whom this war was thrust would certainly not have expected even in their wildest dreams that within a matter of just six months that the entire civilian population would be uprooted from their homes to become refugees with no food or shelter. Whatever privations they might have been subjected to over the past years, they were a settled people in the land of their birth and living in their own areas and homes. Presently their plight is one of unbelievable misery and suffering, and their future has become uncertain to say the least.

Will the displaced Tamil civilians be permitted to return to their homes in Jaffna, and if so when? Or are they to be condemned to live in misery as refugees in makeshift camps in the Wannai and Kilinochchi districts depending for their survival on handouts from humanitarian benefactors as the war is fought to the bitter end? In the end – one hopes there will be an end to this horror some day – if they survive and if and when they return, will their homes remain for them to live, or will it be to a land without houses, schools, hospitals etc.? In the meantime, how are the medical, educational, social and economic needs for a refugee population of an estimated 400,000 people going to be met, and who is going to provide them? In short what is going to be their fate?

The fate of these unfortunate and tragic people is in the hands of those who are engaged in this brutal and unconscionable war. The government may entertain the hope that once Jaffna is captured and the Tigers are weakened, they will be offered talks on the political package and the LTTE would respond positively. The LTTE may refuse to talk to the government from a position of weakness in military terms and continue the war in the hope that it will assume military parity or superiority vis-a-vis the government. If that is the prospect on offer, the fate of the displaced hundreds of thousands Jaffna civilians is likely to be grim – suffer silently in refugee camps in a state of abject dependence for their sheer survival with no sign of an end to their pitiable plight. How and why this happened to a proud people once described as self-reliant and industrious is a matter for all those concerned to ask themselves and seek answers objectively and in spirit of introspection.

Whatever the future may hold for these people, it is the immediate and inescapable moral and political responsibility of the government, irrespective of military or sectarian political considerations, to cater to the urgent humanitarian needs of the displaced people. For whatever reason if it finds itself unable to meet those needs through the state machinery, then the government should not hesitate to use the various international humanitarian organisations which are already in the island. The government also should readily accept the offer of other international agencies specialised in the field of providing humanitarian assistance. That is the least the government is duty bound to do in the present circumstances.

NEWS REVIEW

Mass Exodus as Army Enters Jaffna

November 20 – Troops belonging to the Sri Lankan army are reported to have entered in large numbers within the perimeter of the Jaffna town centre following the biggest and most sustained military offensive code-named 'Operation Rivirasa' launched almost a month ago. 'It is just a matter of time before we take control of the city centre', an army spokesman is reported to have said. But LTTE sources claim that their cadres are continuing to confront the army offering fierce resistance.

While being jubilant about the success of the military operation against the Tigers, the government appears to be dismayed by the mass exodus of almost the entire population of Jaffna leaving it an empty town except for the sick, old, infirm and those looking after them and the Catholic Bishop of Jaffna who has apparently refused to leave.

According to news reports, on 20 November thousands of soldiers stormed through Nallur, where the famous Kandaswamy hindu temple is located, on the eastern edge of Jaffna town shortly after dawn overcoming stiff resistance from Tamil Tigers. 'We are in Nallur. It means we are now in Jaffna. The advance is continuing,' a military spokesman said adding that troops backed by tanks, artillery and the air force were advancing slowly because the Tigers had booby-trapped almost every building and mined every street in the town.

Another column of a large number of soldiers remained stalled at Thirunelveli on the town's northern outskirts, but was poised to enter the town at the time of its choosing. However, reports attributed to LTTE stated that the Tigers were offering fierce resistance and inflicting heavy casualties upon the advancing troops. The army admitted to over one hundred soldiers killed or wounded on 19 November, but claimed that the casualties among the Tigers ran into the hundreds.

'About 150 combatants have also been injured on both sides in close-quarter fighting. The Tigers are blasting houses in built-up areas to slow our advance,' army spokesman Brigadier Sarath Munasinghe said. As reports quoting army sources said that the Tigers were indiscriminately blasting public buildings and private houses

and had slaughtered the livestock after asking the civilians to evacuate, statements from the Tamil Tigers accused the military of engaging in indiscriminate aerial and shell attacks resulting in several civilian casualties. The State Minister for Defence, who has been personally involved in directing military operations, said, 'The Tigers are destroying the town knowing they will soon lose it to us.'

It is estimated that since the latest military offensive began, the army has reportedly lost nearly 400 men and several hundreds more injured and the LTTE lost over a 1000 of its cadres with many more injured.

Concurrently with reports of the army's entry into the vicinity of the Jaffna town, the LTTE through its 'Voice of Tigers' radio on 20 November directed all civilians in the Jaffna peninsula, including those who had fled to Vadammaradchi and parts of Thenmaradchi (Point Pedro-Chavakachcheri areas) during the previous week, to cross into the mainland outside the Jaffna peninsula which had remained the almost unassailable stronghold of the Tigers for at least five years. 'Everybody has been asked to go to the Wanni region south of the peninsula', a person who monitored the radio said. Already over 80,000 people have moved across the Kilali lagoon in boats operated by the LTTE into Kilinochchi, a district which is situated south of the peninsula and under the control of the Tamil Tigers. As days pass, the figure is increasing rapidly.

During the previous two weeks, the troops smashed through the LTTE strongholds of Neerveli, Kondavil, Kopay and Thirunelveli in spite of stiff resistance from the Tigers whose top leadership including its leader, Mr. V. Pirabhakaran, is reported to have moved out of the Jaffna peninsula into the Wanni area in the mainland. In the course of the advance, the army claimed that the forces captured a well-equipped underground hospital at Neerveli which had been catering for the medical needs of the LTTE leadership and its injured cadres, its political headquarters and intelligence training camp at Kondavil and the Tamil Eelam Development Organisation head office at Kopay. The training camp included 'an elaborate network of roads and a well laid-out building complex with lecture halls and underground bunkers,' the army said.

Even before the army closed in around Jaffna, it gave the appearance of a ghost town following the enforced evacuation of almost the entire civilian population except for the sick, the aged and disabled and those who had

to look after them. The people in their thousands fled within a space of 48 hours in pouring rain with the minimum of belongings leaving behind most of their prized possessions including their homes. Almost the entire civilian population of Jaffna, numbering over 400,000, was being evacuated in anticipation of the military moving in. While the majority of the people trekked their way to Vadammaradchi and Thenmaradchi, an estimated one hundred thousand people crossed the narrow lagoon that separates the peninsula and the mainland in small crowded boats towards the LTTE-controlled Kilinochchi district.

In late October, the Tigers ordered civilians to evacuate Jaffna town. Thousands of people packed the road south-east to Chavakachcheri in a human tide of misery, lashed by monsoon rains as the Tigers fought to hold Navatkuli bridge. Ten people were killed in an air attack on a makeshift refugee camp at Ariyalai a few miles south, LTTE claim. . . .

'A handful of Jaffna civilians crossing into Army-controlled territory at the northern frontier town of Vavuniya have spoken of the horror of the mass exodus from Jaffna. Mallika, her two children clutching her sari, sobbed as she described how old people and children were crushed underfoot as thousands of civilians fled Jaffna in panic after the Tigers toured the town with loudspeakers announcing that 'a demonic force will attack us from several directions. We will respond likewise. Since we are going to resist every inch against the state drunk with racism, you people must evacuate this same night' (Sri Lanka Monitor).

Tens of thousands of leaflets dropped from the air in Jaffna stated, 'This war is not against you. The war that is being currently fought is not of our choosing. It is a path we are regretfully compelled to tread but we are determined to continue our journey towards peace. . . . Ours is a battle for peace. In no way is it a war against our Tamil brethren.' But the governments attempt to halt the movement of the civilian population met with no success as the exodus continued. The government accused the Tigers of perpetrating a 'contrived exodus' and using the 'civilians as a human shield for their own protection'.

The Jaffna General Hospital has ceased to function following the transfer of all its equipment and staff to Manthihai in the Point Pedro area in Vadammaradchi. The International committee of the Red Cross also has ceased all operations in the Jaffna town and moved to Point Pedro. The University

of Jaffna has been closed down and it is expected to function from its agricultural faculty located in Kilinochchi.

'When the army moves in such great numbers and with heavy fire-power, it is not advisable for us to engage them in direct confrontations. We will do our utmost to prevent the army from entering Jaffna, but not at the cost of losing thousands of our cadres,' the Paris-based international spokesman for the LTTE is quoted as saying to 'Time International'. Commenting on the enforced exodus of civilians from Jaffna, the leader of the PLOT Mr. Dharmalingam Sidharthan is quoted as saying, 'The LTTE wants to show that the army can capture the land but not the Tamil people. This is an attempt by the LTTE to frustrate the Government's effort to restore its writ in Jaffna.'

Meanwhile a statement from the London-based International Secretariat of the LTTE said that its 'civil administration' had been moved from Jaffna to Thenmaradchi. Following the mass exodus of civilians from the Jaffna city and areas of Valikamam, the Jaffna Secretariat and all other local government administrative bodies had been relocated in the Thenmaradchi area. To avoid being trapped by the Sri Lankan army, functioning government agencies and civil administrative bodies had also been moving to the new population areas of Thenmaradchi, the statement added.

As the mass exodus of civilians from Jaffna increased to unprecedented proportions, Tamil parties in Colombo called for third-party mediation to end the conflict and urged the supply of food and medical supplies to the displaced people. They also called for an immediate cessation of hostilities.

The Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) 'recognised that bodies like the UNHCR, the Red Cross and other organisations of a similar nature can play a decisive role in ensuring that the food and medicines supplied by the government get across to the people who need these. Every possible facility should be afforded to these bodies in their functioning at this very difficult time. This is the time when our friends outside can also be most helpful.'

The Secretary General of the United Nations, Boutros Boutros Ghali, expressed deep concern on hearing reports of the massive displacement of the civilian population in northern Sri Lanka and urged all concerned to facilitate humanitarian relief assistance to the affected population by humanitarian organisations.

However, a statement from the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry rejected the

idea of any third party mediation and asserted that the government would provide the required relief assistance to the displaced people with the assistance of local and international humanitarian agencies operating in the north like the ICRC, CARE, Save the Children Fund, MSF etc.

The Tigers shot down a Chinese-built Y-8 cargo plane on 17 November when it was approaching to land at the military airbase at Palali in the Jaffna peninsula. Undaunted by the setback it has suffered in its northern front, the Tigers have been stepping up their attacks on security forces in the east of the country inflicting heavy casualties. On 19 November, they killed at least 38 and wounded 24 soldiers in a fierce two-hour gun battle in the eastern Batticaloa district. Meanwhile, reports from the district state that the Vice Chancellor of the Eastern University located in Batticaloa was abducted allegedly by LTTE cadres on 7 November and has not been released yet.

★ In a statement issued on 11 November from its London-based international secretariat, the LTTE said that the commander of its Women's Wing, Lt. Col. Akhila was killed in battle. The statement said that 'Akhila attained martyrdom on October 30 during the defence of Jaffna.' Hailing from Manipay (Jaffna), she joined the LTTE in 1987 and fought the Indian forces. She was also a veteran of several battles during Eelam War II and III and proved invaluable in assisting the development of the LTTE women fighters division, the statement added. Following the LTTE's announcement, newspapers in Colombo and India were quick to point out that Akhila was one of the main accused in the ongoing Rajiv Gandhi murder trial.

★ Six Tamil Jesuit priests who were taken into custody by the police on 11 November on suspicion of links with Tamil Tigers were released after being held for nearly 20 hours. The priests were taken into custody in the course of a raid by the police on a Jesuit Conference held in the Sri Lankan central city of Kandy, said Rev. Harry Miller, an American Jesuit priest who has worked in the island for decades.

The police claimed that they had information that there were 'subversives' at the conference and that they raided the place to check the identities and passports of the priests.

★ In Colombo security has been intensified fearing an LTTE counter-attack on important installations and personalities in the south in response to military reverses it had suffered in

northern Jaffna at the hands of the security forces. All schools in the south of the island were declared closed in early November, a month ahead of the usual December holidays, allegedly in fear of the Tigers targeting schools for attack.

'The atmosphere is mixed with jubilation at the military success in the north and tension in anticipation of a Tiger backlash. It may not happen soon, but it will certainly happen. the LTTE is known for its meticulous planning. When the Tigers strike, they make it count for something,' an analyst in Colombo said.

★ The government has offered a reward of \$50,000 for information regarding the whereabouts of the LTTE leader, Mr. Velupillai Pirabhakaran. According to knowledgeable circles in Colombo, this move appears to be a prelude to the Attorney General filing a motion in the High Court asking that the LTTE leader be extradited to India in connection with the Rajiv Gandhi murder.

★ Mr. Bal Thackeray, the leader of Shiv Sena, the extremist Hindu militant outfit in India, said on 19 November that he would warn the Sri Lankan government not to 'massacre any more Tamil Tigers.' That is Hindu blood they are spilling in their genocide,' he said, adding, 'I will not tolerate any more of it. I am proud of the Tamil Tigers.' On the other hand the Tamil Nadu state unit of the Bhartiya Jantha Party (BJP) has demanded that the Central government of India take over the security of the Tamil Nadu coastline in the wake of intensified military action against the LTTE in northern Sri Lanka to prevent any movement of Tamil Tiger cadres into Tamil Nadu.

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Prospect of an 'Olive Branch' To the Tamil Tigers?

by Rita Sebastian, Colombo

20 November – Despite the euphoria in southern Sri Lanka that the capture of the LTTE stronghold of Jaffna will be a mortal blow to the rebel group and the beginning of the end of the war, the political leadership has not lost sight of the fact that it will only be another battle won, not the war.

Winning the war, is winning the hearts and minds of the people of the peninsula and putting into place a negotiated political settlement and a durable peace.

In an interview to the *Sunday Island* the deputy Minister of Defence Colonel Anuraddha Ratwatte, who has adopted a hands-on policy in the current operation 'Riviresa', has said that following the capture of Jaffna the army will launch a 'winning hearts and minds' exercise.

Ratwatte does not think it will be difficult. For in his own words 'our boys are disciplined and have already won the hearts and minds of those living in the liberated areas'.

Not everyone will agree with his assessment of the Sri Lankan armed forces as being 'one of the best armies in the world where courage, discipline and fighting abilities and the like are concerned'.

Army excesses in the past, as well as recent bombing and shelling raids in the peninsula, which has taken a heavy toll of civilian life and property has not endeared the army to the people. But in fairness to the army it must be said that foreign aid agencies have confirmed that in the current phase of military operations civilian casualties have been minimal.

But the Tigers and the army have been trading charges against each other about damage to property. While the Tigers claim that the advancing troops have flattened the northern landscape, the army charges the Tigers of blasting buildings and key installations in the town as they make a last ditch attempt to prevent the capture of Jaffna.

Minister Ratwatte has also spelt it out in unequivocal terms that even after capturing Jaffna, military operations against the LTTE will con-

tinue. He knows only too well that even if the Tigers fail to defend Jaffna, it will still be a formidable guerrilla force to contend with.

Ratwatte attributes the recent successes of the army to political will and the necessary military hardware which was missing during the tenure of the previous United National Party Government. 'We have them both', he says. 'The President gives direct orders and I and the military carry them out'.

And strangely it is on the eve of the capture of Jaffna that political commentators and military analysts argue that this is the best time to invite the Tigers back to the negotiating table. And as one of them puts it 'the invitation should be extended with respect, as in a war there are no winners and losers. In peace all are winners'.

The Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) is projected as the best example of how an army, the fourth

largest in the world with its trained manpower and sophisticated equipment failed to bring the Tigers to their knees or apprehend Tiger leader Vellupillai Prabhakaran.

According to *The Sunday Times's* military analyst the timing is just ripe for offering the Tigers the olive branch, but at the same time continuing the fighting.

The bottom line in counter insurgency according to him is politico-military and not just one or the other.

And offering the olive branch he feels will demoralise those in the Tigers who have portrayed a demonic image of the Sri Lankan government and its military. It will also prevent the Tigers driven into desperation to attack the Sinhala border villages.

The key question however is whether the government is ready to move in the direction of peace talks with the Tigers at this stage. There are hardliners both in the government and the army who would be against any such move.

And the Tiger leadership itself would not want peace talks on the assumption that they have been militarily weakened by government.

Whither 'Operation Sunray'?

from Rita Sebastian in Colombo

In the monsoon lashed northern peninsula the countdown for the capture of the rebel heartland of Jaffna has begun. Thousands of Sri Lankan soldiers, backed by a massive military arsenal are just four and a half kilometres away from their target. But that four and a half kilometres, riddled with Tiger mines and booby-traps is the island's deadliest terrain at the moment.

For the Tigers, who last fortnight, announced their withdrawal from the town, where for almost five years they ran a *de facto* government, the undisputed kings of the territory they held, the decision must have been difficult indeed. For it was not many weeks ago that the Tigers assured Jaffna's citizenry, traumatised by 12 years of a bitter and bloody civil war, that they would defend Jaffna and inflict such massive casualties on the advancing forces that the army would rue the day it decided to march into Jaffna.

But the tide seems to have turned. Government forces who suffered several humiliating reversals in their

battle against the Tigers in the past, have had their sagging morale boosted by a series of recent triumphs.

Military operations for the final assault on Jaffna began in July with 'Operation Leap Forward'. But the military hype that Jaffna was almost within seeing distance when four brigades broke out of their forward defence lines at the northern Pallaly airbase on July 9 and marched forward meeting with little rebel resistance soon faded away when troops returned to base and the operation was cynically dubbed operation 'Leap Backwards'. Other operations were to follow culminating in operation 'Rivirasa' (Sunray), launched on October 17, now making a slow and steady move forward.

'The decisive moment is still ahead. First the army will have to capture Jaffna, and secondly the question is what next? In a way it will be a hollow victory for the forces because the government's twin objectives would not have been achieved', says military analyst Iqbal Athas.

The twin objectives are 'liberating the people of the north from the clutches of the Tigers and militarily marginalising the Tigers'.

The Tigers with an estimated 17,000 cadres have still not been militarily marginalised. And the army will find no people in Jaffna to liberate because there has been a mass exodus to Thenmarachchi, Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu in the wake of operation 'Rivir-asa' (Sunshine).

The government of course believes that once Jaffna is captured people can be wooed back on the promise of safety and security.

The displaced persons in the peninsula as a result of the ongoing operations is estimated by agencies as well as the Tigers, to be around 400,000. A figure disputed by the government who not only alleges that the displacement was a creation of the Tigers, but also a clever ploy to internationalise the humanitarian aspects of the conflict.

This massive displacement of people depriving them of shelter, adequate access to food and medicines and the basic amenities has quite naturally stirred the world's conscience. No less a person than the spokesman for the Secretary General of the United Nations, Boutros Boutros Ghali, expressed 'deep concern about the plight of the displaced and called on the international community to help, 'humanitarian assistance on a significant scale would be essential to minimise suffering' the statement said.

The statement brought a sharp rejoinder from the government. Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar said the statement had been made without a true knowledge of the situation. In a letter addressed to the UN Secretary General, Kadirgamar pointed to the fact that 'despite the terrorist initiated violence that has plagued Sri Lanka for over a decade, the government has given the highest consideration to the humanitarian needs of the people in northern Sri Lanka and has been supplying essential food and other items to them with the full knowledge that a substantial portion of the supply was being appropriated by the Tigers'.

The government's inadequate relief efforts have also come under fire from local Tamil political groups. The moderate Tamil Liberation Front (TULF) a once close ally of the government issued a scathing indictment on the Kumaratunga government.

It accused the government of an 'appalling insensitivity to the humanitarian issues of the conflict and bitterly criticised the government's military offensive in the north calling on both parties to the conflict to recom-

mence the political process.

The government is quite firm that there can be no return to the negotiating table unless there is a cessation of hostilities, a symbolic laying down of arms by the rebels and a specific timeframe for a negotiated political settlement.

The laying down of arms, even symbolically is anathema to the Tigers so there seems no prospect of negotiations. Besides the government has turned down the offer of third party mediation, and reiterated its position that the war will not be abandoned but fought to a finish.

The tragedy of the Sri Lankan military according to political commentators is that its war strategy in the past has often crossed swords with the country's political will. Ordered to strike at Tiger targets, troops would just as quickly be ordered to pull back and abandon territory captured at great cost. It is only now that the military and the government seem to be of like minds on the military option. Added to it all was a deeply divided army.

The divisions have not gone away, except that adopting a hands on policy defence deputy, Colonel Anurudha Ratwatte, effected changes in the command structure on the battlefield with anybody who did not fall in line unceremoniously moved out.

'Today's military strategy is being mapped out not so much by the army on the battlefield but by Minister Ratwatte' says a retired army official. Ratwatte has given an year and timeframe to capture Jaffna and force the Tigers back to the negotiating table.

Although there is considerable scepticism in the south as to whether Ratwatte can achieve what he has set out to do, there is no denying that he has the support of a significant section in the south.

For the Sinhala hardliners there is no alternative to the war. It is also the thinking of a powerful section of the Buddhist clergy. And in prosecuting the war President Kumaratunga has become the toast of the south.

In the short term it is the taking of Jaffna that has become the key issue. But in the long term it will not only be the holding of Jaffna but winning the hearts and minds of the people of the peninsula and demonstrating in no uncertain terms that the government is committed to a negotiated political settlement that is just and fair, and ensure a durable peace.

What then of Tigers supremo Vellupillai Prabhakaran and his men? There is no way that a militarily marginalised rebel group like the Ti-

gers will be forced back to the negotiating table from a position of weakness as the government hopes they will. Nobody has, and nobody will, write them off. They will continue their guerrilla operations from the Mullaitivu jungles, the Wanni and the east, building up pockets of resistance, and strike when least expected. For the Tigers it is a fight to the last man.

And while the battle rages, inflicting heavy casualties on the two warring sides speculation is rife that President Kumaratunga might go in for a snap general election.

Her wafer-thin majority in parliament is a constant worry with most of her time spent negotiating with her coalition partners.

According to a political observer a snap election would bring President Kumaratunga an additional 10-15 seats. Although this would not give her a two-thirds majority in parliament, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) will be able to impose its will on policy issues without depending on its very demanding coalition partners.

But there are others who argue that her going for an early election is not without its risks, since the government has failed to deliver a whole series of election promises like generating employment and providing income support promised an year ago.

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- ★ Sinhala-Tamil Fighting for 2000 Years
- ★ Colombo's Illusion of Winning the War
- ★ Attack on Muslims, a Mistake
- ★ Prabhakaran is a National Hero

The following are excerpts from an interview to A.S. Paneerselvam, Chief of Bureau in Madras of the Delhi-based journal 'Outlook' (8.11.95) by the main spokesman and ideologue of the LTTE, Mr. Anton Balasingham, on 9 October 1995:

Q: Why did you kill Rajiv Gandhi?

A: I've the same answer for this oft-repeated question. We did not kill Rajiv Gandhi.

Q: The investigations are over and the Special Investigation Team charge sheet clearly states that the LTTE had assassinated Rajiv.

A: No, the trial is still going on. The Indian Government so far has not proved the LTTE's involvement in the assassination. As far as Prabhakaran's extradition is concerned, it is an academic matter. Everybody knows it's practically impossible for the Sri Lankan Government to catch Prabhakaran. The Indian Army was here for two years and couldn't do it. The extradition request is a political move to discredit the LTTE rather than a practical way to get at the truth.

Q: Why should the LTTE be targeted?

A: Any comments will have serious implications. We were not involved in the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi.

Q: Recent Indian Intelligence reports say you are planning to eliminate top Indian leaders, including Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao.

A: This is not true. I think some vested interests are spreading these rumours.

Q: What is the role of the LTTE in India?

A: As far as the LTTE is concerned, we consider India a friendly ally. Even now, we don't have any animosity towards the Indian Gov-

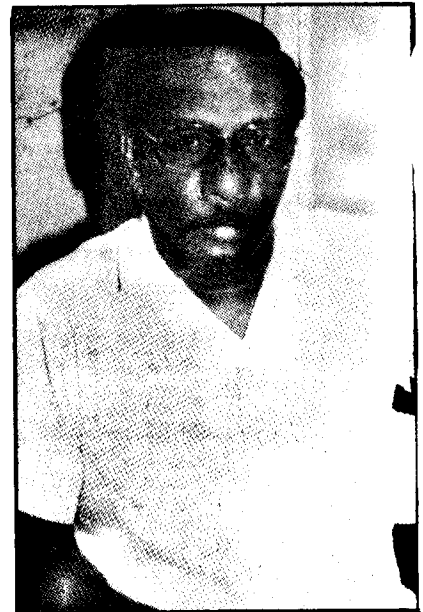
ernment and people. We are not involved in any insurrectionary or terrorist movements in India. The LTTE will not contribute to or get involved in the Indian secessionist politics. It is not going to act in any manner inimical to the national and the geopolitical interests of India. Our struggle for self-determination here is legitimate. It is primarily because of the intolerable state oppression.

Q: But why should the LTTE generate such a fear psychosis in India?

A: Our struggle is not properly understood. And that has led to the problems between the Indian Government and the LTTE. India's intervention at that time was to strengthen the hands of the Tamil freedom movement. Besides, they had their own political objectives. India thought it should align with the former Soviet Union to prevent the spread of US Imperialism in the Indian Ocean. But now in a new world order old alliances have snapped. In this context, India feels that our liberation struggle is no longer valid. Therefore, it is untenable to maintain the present level of hostility towards us. We need the support of the people, political parties and the Indian Government.

Q: But your internal discussions reveal that you still suspect India. In the Mahattaya case (the LTTE deputy leader who was arrested by the Tigers' Intelligence wing in 1993), it was charged that he was collaborating with the Indian State.

A: The struggle of the Tamil people is legitimate. We have nobody. We have no sympathisers anywhere – neither in Tamil Nadu nor in India. So the Indian position has helped the Sri Lankan racist state to intensify its operations. We are concerned that the Indian attitude – which is hostile – helps Sri Lanka in pursuing its ruthless policy against our people.



Anton Balasingham

Q: You have not answered my question. There is talk in Jaffna that the various jail-breaks by LTTE cadres in Tamil Nadu were not jail-breaks but efforts by India to send back some cadres who could gain access to Prabhakaran and kill him.

A: I can't comment on that. There is some element of truth in the RAW intrigues. We know very well that they might send agents to kill LTTE leaders or assassinate Prabhakaran. We don't want to talk about it.

Q: What happened to Mahattaya?

A: He was arrested and subjected to interrogation for one year. We found him guilty and he was sentenced to death. He was involved in a plot to kill Prabhakaran and take over the LTTE.

Q: Is there any room for a negotiated settlement now?

A: You will have to ask the Sri Lankan Government this question because it has ruled out a negotiated settlement. Our door for peace is open. We are for peace provided the Sri Lankan Government stops the war and creates conditions for normalcy in the north and east.

Q: But they say you unilaterally called off talks and resumed hostilities.

A: Parleys were held for six months. There were four rounds of talks in Jaffna. Fifty letters were exchanged between Prabhakaran and Chandrika Kumaratunga. We asked for an embargo relaxation. We asked the government to permit the people to use the land route by

relocating the Pooneryn camp. Mind you, we did not ask for the withdrawal of the camp. These were not the demands of the LTTE, but of the people. If the government wanted to act, it could have done so in 24 hours. If it is not prepared to meet this small demand, how can we expect it to resolve major problems.

Q: What about the latest Lankan offensive?

A: There is a qualitative difference between the current offensive and the past ones. This is the first time that all troops have moved into the Peninsula. Forces have been pulled out of the east and consequently, we have taken it over. Colombo is under an illusion about winning the war. Even if they take over Jaffna, it will not be a military success. The North-east is a vast area and our guerrilla movement cannot be crushed in conventional battle. The Indian Army realised this truth after a two-year bloody conflict. The Lankan forces can take over the territory. But they cannot hold on. We'll strike back.

Q: But Jaffna Peninsula is not just a territory, it is the symbol and metaphor of the LTTE resistance. If the army captures Jaffna, will it not be able to start a dialogue with a weakened LTTE?

A: First, to take over Jaffna is not easy. Secondly, it took the Indian Army, a much larger and sophisticated force, two months to capture Jaffna. At that time we were a small force, but things have changed. We are stronger now. Suppose they succeed in taking over Jaffna, they cannot take over the entire territory. Do they want to leave the entire Wanni jungle region and the other three districts in the east to us?

I am not talking about this aspect. What will the metaphorical and psychological impact of the capture of Jaffna be? As a guerrilla movement, we do not attach any importance to any place. We attach importance to mobility. The LTTE will not talk from a position of weakness. Military pressure will not force us to talk. Concentrating only on the north actually means that the east is virtually free for us. We are not going to keep quiet there.

Q: Do you mean the government is unaware of its vulnerability in the east?

A: There is no military strategy behind this war. It is the outcome of the government's desire to dominate

Tamils and destroy Jaffna, a desire which has been there for 2,000 years. It is not Chandrika's strategy. Believe it or not, we have been fighting the Sinhalese for 2,000 years. The very idea of a military conquest of the Tamil people is wrong. It is essentially racism.

Q: What about the present package announced by the government?

A: With bombs falling on our heads, we do not have time to discuss such proposals. We are at war with the government. We are clearing our guns and have no time to go through this document. The proposals were not sent to us. The proposal itself is a tragedy. It talks of peace through war. It is aimed at deflecting the international community's attention from the ongoing repression and genocide in the north.

Q: Do you think you can win independence on military terms?

A: Independence is the wrong word. It is our right to decide our political destiny. That is the meaning of 'right of self-determination'. The LTTE is a result of the state military operation. For four decades we have had non-violent struggle. We are confident that one day the Tamils of south India, the Indian Government and the world community will recognise our legitimate struggle. But if Colombo decides to stop the war and settles for a negotiated settlement, we are prepared to accept it. We have even suggested that a federal form of autonomy is acceptable to us.

Q: Very few believe that you are ready for a plural society. The forceful eviction of the Muslims from the north is cited as an example of your intolerance.

A: It was an unfortunate affair and we apologise. But there was communal tension and we asked them to leave the place without doing any harm to them. It was a mistake. We have told them that they have an inalienable right to live in peace in the North-east. Once normalcy is restored, they can return to their homes.

Q: Prabhakaran has been compared by some to Mandela, by others to Arafat, Netaji, Stalin, Hitler or Pol Pot. How do you describe him?

A: Prabhakaran is a national hero. He is a military genius too. One essential difference between Prabhakaran and the other leaders is his deep commitment to the cause.

Even under Indian military pressure he was prepared to die rather than give up. He is generally misunderstood by others. Our methods of warfare are unacceptable to various people. But Prabhakaran as well as our movement had survived precisely because of these. This is the only struggle that has been going on for 20 years without any assistance from anywhere. The willingness of our cadres to die for our cause must be viewed as self-sacrifice rather than as self-destruction. This structure which has been created by Prabhakaran must be understood and not undermined.

Q: Then who is responsible for the growing discontent within the LTTE? Even today (9.10.95), the Sri Lankan Radio announced that Pottu Amman has been sacked.

A: The recent news is not true. There are some changes that have taken place. But the story about Pottu Amman is not true. He is air intelligence wing chief. This does not reflect any disunity. We can tell confidently that LTTE remains a disciplined organisation and there are no conflicts among the leaders.

Q: In that case do you suspect an Indian role.

A: We can't comment on who are the forces that were behind the plot. All I can say is that Mahattaya was involved in a plot to kill Prabhakaran.

Q: How do you look at the present stage of your struggle?

A: All armed struggles have various stages of historical evolution. We started as a tiny armed group. Then various groups started appearing on the scene and there were at least five major groups which received support from India. The other groups have been reduced to a status of collaborationist mercenary functionaries in Colombo. We have emerged as the dominant politico-military organisation here. In this long struggle, we have not confined to armed struggle alone. It is also a political struggle on one side and an economic struggle on the other side. While we are engaged in an armed struggle to liberate our homeland, we have created various civil and administrative structures in the North-East. So we have reached a stage where actually we are a *de facto* state in the North and East. And this is reflected in the nature of Sri Lanka's latest offensive.

Civilians and the Jaffna Offensive

The following is the text of the Information Bulletin No.8 issued by the University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna) on 8 November 1995:

A recent evacuee from Jaffna described the situation thus:

'You cannot look at the expressions on the faces of the people – staring eyes, frozen with fear. No one talks any sense. The continuous noise of shells is unbearable. There are wild stories going around about atrocities of the army in recently captured areas with no way of verifying them. People do not want to take chances. They have lost their ability to think and act. For many years we have been treated like sheep and now we are behaving like sheep. Only the survival instinct works. It is maddening. There was an aerial attack near where I was staying. I was told that several people had been killed. I did not go to look. I did not wish to know more. Few in fact know with any accuracy. Had I remained two more days. I would have gone mad. I left Jaffna with my family, crossed the lagoon and brought them to Kilinochchi.'

A large number of people leaving Jaffna and moving into very difficult conditions in Thenmaratchi, having frequently quit their homes under pouring rain, has received publicity worldwide.

In the meantime the LTTE had launched a series of massacres on largely unprotected Sinhalese villages close to the border of the Eastern Province. Among the hundred or so killed indiscriminately at close range were many women and children.

The LTTE had made it clear in a variety of ways that it wanted people to quit Jaffna. On 30th October the LTTE made a loudspeaker announcement in Jaffna in which it stated: 'No one must take this announcement lightly. We are doing battle intensely and bravely with a demonic force. It will attack us from several directions. We too will respond likewise. Since we are going to resist every inch against a state drunk with racism, you people must evacuate this same night and leave for Thenmaratchi and Vadamaratchi'. When questioned later by Jaffna Hospital authorities, a key LTTE leader said that whoever announced had not said that it was the LTTE, but stated that those staying may not be able to leave as the periphery of the ICRC zone would be mined by them, in the event of either party breaking the 'agreement'. Elsewhere masked LTTE cadre went to houses and acted intimidatingly. There were also a large num-

ber of refugees at John Bosco school next to the ICRC. Here the LTTE fired a kind of shells, which people thought were rubber shells, at the refugee camp to force their evacuation.

Some of the other main causes for the exodus however are all-too-evident in the attitudes of the Sri Lankan Government and the actions of its armed forces. These had failed to provide any tangible reassurances to the people of Jaffna that the Government was duty bound to provide. The official military spokesman claimed on 2nd November that there had been at best 10 unconfirmed civilian deaths, dismissing the figures given by Government Agent/Jaffna. President Kumaratunga in a television address a little earlier again minimised civilian casualties and claimed that the military operation had been highly successful. But aerial attacks have taken place and shells have fallen far away from areas of actual fighting, and civilians were forced to flee after hurriedly burying the dead. The Government claimed to be attacking LTTE targets and asked civilians to keep away from such places. Where are then such safe places when even refugees camping in temporary shelter on the outskirts of Jaffna were attacked? The experience of the people is of fear and devastation. If targeted aerial attacks were a fiction earlier, the claims now are totally unsustainable. The LTTE's unconscionable massacre of Sinhalese civilians along the Eastern border had also no doubt added to the fear among civilians of reprisals by the armed forces.

If anything, the Government is fooling itself with denials behind a mask of censorship which few others believe. Indeed, the censorship has contributed to the Government's conduct which lacks evidence of the civilians having featured in any significant way in its thinking. Although little is known of the situation in areas under control of the army, the indications are that strict instructions have been given to the security forces to be sensitive to civilian interests. The overall military operation has however been very dependent on intense shelling and unwarranted bombing. Against this, instructions given to the soldiers to be on their best behaviour become meaningless, since the effective thrust of the operation is to drive the people away from their homes and villages.

Civilian Casualties:

For the month of October this was placed at 104 killed and 194 injured by the Government's administrative machinery in Jaffna. The breakdown is as follows:

Date	Dead	Injured
4th October	22	90
17th "	6	15
18th "	20	23
26th "	10	10
30th "	46	56
Total	104	194

The dates refer to the date of receipt of report and the figures record the progress of the army from Atchuvally to Kopay. These figures are generally conservative and are lower than those given by civilians leaving the area, since they are mostly based on claims by families for government relief.

Figures given by other agencies (eg. NGOs) may differ in some detail according to the source (eg. Jaffna Teaching Hospital) and time of record. The ten killed on the 26th were sheltering in a coconut estate in Ariyalai, in the eastern extremity of Jaffna town, 5 miles from the combat zone. They were victims of an aerial attack at 7.00 A.M. First reports placed the number killed at 20 to 30.

The 46 reported on the 30th were civilians killed on the 29th when there was intense fighting between the SL Army and the LTTE for the control of Neervely, six miles from the Jaffna town centre. Shells fired by the army from early morning reached the edge of Jaffna's municipal limits 2 miles from the centre, particularly about the Nallur market area along Pt. Pedro Road. Civilians had to flee in pouring rain. Most civilian casualties however occurred in aerial attacks six to nine miles from the scene of fighting.

Of the 46 recorded by the government administration, 42 were killed in aerial attacks and 4 in artillery shelling – 30 in Anaikkottai, 12 in Chavakacheri and 4 in Kokkuvil.

Other sources accounted for several among those killed in aerial attacks on the same day. One witness was near the area when rockets fired by Puccaro aircraft hit Potpathy Road in Kokkuvil quarter of a mile from the University of Jaffna. The number killed were reported as six including an unidentified old lady. He had helped to bury the pieces of 'mangled flesh'. Other sources said that the rockets fell either on or near an LTTE camp – one among many interspersed among civilian dwellings. The Roman Catholic parish priest in Anaikkottai reported 14 killed (two sisters, [ages 8, 10], two boys

[7, 12], girl [14], three women [25, 26, 30] and six others). Koolavady, Manipay – 5 dead, 10 injured. At Navalay near the Catholic Welfare Centre – 1 girl [15] killed and 4 boys injured. At Chavakacheri missiles fired from the air hit houses opposite the old police station. 12 were killed including an old lady after admission to hospital. All were refugees, some bodies were in pieces and two remained unclaimed. All these incidents took place in the morning. The discrepancies between reports are mainly due to the circumstances of the sources and the demarcation of areas.

On Wednesday 31st October bombs were aimed at Chemmani bridge just before Navatkuli on the Jaffna-Kandy Road along which civilians were streaming towards Chavakacheri. Two civilians were killed. Other sources said that it is difficult to put a number on those killed at Anaikkottal on the 29th since several bodies remained unidentified at that time.

During breaks in the rain clouds, the aircraft were seen as small specks at a distance whose sound was barely heard. The sound was heard as the aircraft swooped down, followed by a 'flash of lightning and a boom of thunder', with the aircraft keeping well outside the range of a possible missile attack. Even during the 80s when Sia Machetti aircraft used to dive low to attack, it was mainly civilian dwellings that were hit.

Refugees

From about the 20th of October those already in refugee camps began leaving Jaffna. They were mainly people from Valikamam North and the Islands who had been refugees for 3 years or more after their areas came under army control.

They were given free transport by the LTTE across Jaffna Lagoon to Killinochchi. These are people over whom the LTTE has exercised patronage by becoming the effective channel of all relief, as among displaced populations in the Wanni areas. Those seeking refuge in the Wanni are among the poorest.

Then came others who were required to show a receipt to prove that they had the contribution recently demanded for the LTTE's national defence fund, before being allowed to cross Jaffna Lagoon. Several others moved to Chavakacheri 9 miles east of Jaffna and to refugee camps in Thenmaratchi, often on foot or on bicycles. These were mainly people displaced recently with little hope of returning to their homes or even finding them other than as rubble. Many of those last remaining in Jaffna were those

still having some modest property to go back to.

By 29th October those remaining in Jaffna had moved to schools and places of refuge close to their homes. Among these are the ICRC protected Jaffna Teaching Hospital Zone. Other places of local refuge were Jaffna Railway Station, St. Patrick's College, St. John's College, Chundikuli Girls' College, Nallur Kandasamy Kovil area, University of Jaffna and several other schools and places of worship in these areas. The University had about 5000 persons. Kandasamy Kovil and precincts formed the largest refugee concentration during the October 1987 Indian Army advance into Jaffna. People living north of Adiapatham Road in Kokkuvil, Kondavil and beyond had either quit their homes or did not spend the nights in them. On first November Jaffna Hospital was functioning with the medical staff and patients totalling about 200. Reports received a few days later suggested that the movement out of Jaffna had increased after the LTTE announcement referred to earlier. Messages had been received for the Government to be informed that a number of people are remaining in schools and places of worship. NGO sources placed the number remaining in Jaffna at about 50,000.

A report giving the situation on 3rd November quoting NGOs put the figures at 73,000 new refugee in the Chavakacheri area (Thenmaratchi AGA Division) & 25,000 families waiting to cross Jaffna Lagoon into Killinochchi. A government administration report on 6th November placed the number of peninsular refugees in Killinochchi at 110,000 of whom 70,000 were new arrivals. Taking the normal population of Vadamaratchi and Thenmaratchi to be 300,000, that leaves a further 100 or 200 thousand. They would either be old refugees or persons not accounted for.

The latest reports say that only a few doctors remain in Jaffna Hospital. Patients had little choice but to be evacuated to very crowded conditions in Chavakacheri Hospital which was only a base hospital. The beds were reserved for LTTE patients and civilians were forced to take the floor. Among those refugees forced to leave Jaffna, many elderly and infirm were seen sitting on the roadsides as if they could not move any further. Some seemed lifeless and no one seemed to know who they were. Two LTTE high rankers were heard sharing a joke: 'Give two months and the people would forget all this'.

Relief supplies:

Both the Government and the LTTE

have contributed to the problems of civilians in Jaffna over several years. But the responsibility for relief has fallen on the Government while the LTTE had not made matters easier by insisting on keeping closed the trunk road to Jaffna through Elephant Pass. There are difficulties in sea borne deliveries arising from the weather and docking facilities. The tendency has been to blame the Government exclusively whenever there was a crisis in Jaffna, without any reference to the fact that the LTTE has compounded civilian suffering for political and military gain without any acknowledgement of responsibility for the people.

At present three ships ply between Trincomalee and Jaffna carrying supplies that are handed over to the Government Agent after being unloaded at the improvised pier at Pt. Pedro. There are sometimes breaks in schedules due to technical problems such as unavailability of labour in Trincomalee on certain days or due to other disruptions such as the hijacking of the passenger vessel Irish Moana by the LTTE and the recent attack on the petroleum installation in Colombo. A total of 96,500 tonnes of supplies were scheduled for delivery in Jaffna as agreed to between GA/Jaffna and the Ministry of Rehabilitation. The delivery was due to have been completed by October-end before the North-East monsoon set in. But only 58,000 tonnes had been delivered by October-end and deliveries are continuing into the monsoonal weather.

The Government too has at times opened itself to accusations of being grudging and vindictive when it should have been seen to be going extra lengths in showing concern for the very deprived people of Jaffna. Following the LTTE attack on the petroleum installation, apparently citing a shortage of fuel, the Government Agent/Jaffna was asked to leave behind a part of the kerosene purchased and taken to Trincomalee for shipment to Jaffna. The matter was resolved after he argued his case and lobbied through concerned persons in the South.

For the last year or so the relief supplies reaching Jaffna are placed by Government sources at 30 to 40% of what is required. For the poor this has often meant missing meals. The recent rise in the refugee population has made matters significantly worse.

Salient features of the military operation:

1. No change of practice regarding the use of aerial bombing and shell-

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CHRISTMAS DINNER DANCE

This annual fund raising event which was planned for 9th December 1995 at the Ealing Town Hall has been cancelled as a mark of our deep concern for the plight of several thousand Tamils who have been forced to flee their homes and reduced to the status of refugees to escape the military offensive on Jaffna. Over the years, people living in the Tamil areas have been similarly displaced, but the scale of this current exodus represents a human tragedy of unprecedented magnitude.

We are in the process of making available all our residual funds and the special donations from our members to support the massive relief operations undertaken by our local NGO contacts and international agencies that have been permitted by the Government to work in the area. More funds will be required as the needs and priorities become clearly identified. We would therefore take this opportunity to appeal to readers of the 'Tamil Times' and the wider community to support our initiative with a donation to the 'Relief Fund' which we have set up to deal with this emergency.

If you wish to make a contribution, please send your cheque drawn in favour of 'SCOT RELIEF FUND' to:

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United Kingdom.**

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ing. Despite well-known absurdities and fiction, there has been no reassessment based on past experience.

2. The rejection of reliable information about civilian casualties has shown a continuing lack of sensitivity to civilian voices.

3. No clear strategy to give confidence to the people through tangible practical measures such as providing at the outset safe areas and procedures. No contingency plans for possible outcomes of the operation and no clearly thought-out policy towards civilians.

4. No proper mobilisation of NGO and government machinery to coordinate relief work and provide food and shelter for civilians in anticipation of different scenarios.

5. Censorship and the barring of

journalists from the war zone has effectively shown that the Government is prepared to negate the interests of civilians for short term military gain.

The humanitarian crisis

For the moment at least the humanitarian crisis has overshadowed totting up scores of LTTE and army casualties. It is partly a crisis engineered by the LTTE and in part one arising out of Government negligence and even callousness. Whether the number is 200,400 or 500 thousand is not the main issue. It is true that large numbers have lost their homes, been turned out in inclement weather and live in utter want. It is true that children have died of exposure who would otherwise be living. In a BBC Tamil Service interview, a key government official described how a weary woman who had crossed Jaffna La-

goon had asked for plain-teas with poison for herself and her children, such instances are often dramatised for propaganda against the Government. But anyone familiar with Jaffna would know that it is a subtle indictment of both sides by those rendered helpless and disillusioned. That is the state of mind among the people.

The initial wrong-headed decision to impose censorship has led the Government step by step to a position where it cannot rationally face up to the humanitarian crisis. The apparent decision on 7th November to suspend GA/Jaffna was a symptom of it. The priority of the Government should have been to address the problem rather than quarrel with GA/Jaffna about technicalities and figures. By making this an issue so much is being sacrificed, and in particular the political process initiated for which the Government has duly received credit.

Mass Exodus of Civilians from Jaffna and the War

by Dr. S. Narapalasingam

The horrendous news about the mass exodus of Tamils from Jaffna after the Sri Lanka army entered Neerveli on October 30, one of the strategic towns of the LTTE in the war to defend that part of the Northern province which had been under their control for the past 5 years, caused much distress in the Tamil community living abroad. Emotions rose to feverish level, especially when the scale of the human disaster was reported by foreign news agencies and international relief organisations. The most heart-breaking news came over the air waves when foreign correspondents interviewed a few refugees, who had struggled to reach Vavuniya, the border town beyond which foreign journalists are not permitted to proceed by the Sri Lankan army. Since the latest offensive began on October 17 journalists are not allowed to enter the war zone.

The Government administrator in the Thenmarachchi area still under the control of the LTTE, where the displaced persons from Jaffna have sought refuge was also interviewed and was in tears while describing the misery of those who had been forced to walk miles in heavy rain and to cross the lagoon in small boats. Some had walked for four to five days sleeping rough without food and proper sanitation to reach Kilinochchi. Many had lost their loved ones either crushed by

the simultaneous mass exodus of panic-stricken and frightened people along narrow roads or through sheer exhaustion having had nothing to drink or eat. The reading of the narratives reminded one of the Bosnia-type exodus. Even babies born on the way out of Jaffna gave a lot of similarity to what was heard before in the war in Bosnia. One interviewee mentioned that the road was so jammed that it took an hour to move one step forward!

According to another it was the children and the very old who had departed on the way, ending their miseries in this wicked and brutal world. Many were so traumatised that they could not even speak. Others could not believe that they would be in the miserable plight of not having a roof over their heads and nothing to drink or eat. One lady who had struggled to make the long and tedious journey found her child had died while crossing the lagoon. She cried saying that it was for the sake of the child she moved out of Jaffna as instructed along with others. Another lady had told the officer when she was asked what she needed most, she replied just a plain cup of tea without sugar or milk but with a little poison so as to end her misery as well as the officer's predicament.

According to Gerard Peytrignet, the head of the ICRC in Sri Lanka about

half of the 400,000 Tamil refugees are living and sleeping outdoor in heavy monsoon rains. The rest are holed up in churches, temples, schools and relatives' homes. The refugees have very little food or proper sanitation.

The answer given by a lady to the vital question: 'Who asked you to leave Jaffna?' was short but crucial viz. 'They'. This short answer speaks volumes of the dilemma of the ordinary Tamils who have been suffering immensely since the ethnic conflict turned into a bloody war. They have become an important tool for some in winning the war, while for others they are inconsequential in defeating the enemy! The lady even in her condition of extreme distress was careful not to be explicit in her answer!

Neglected people

The statements issued by the military have highlighted the numbers of rebels killed and wounded in the latest offensive codenamed 'Sun Ray' that began on October 17 to capture Jaffna, the headquarters of the LTTE. The centre of its own administration, justice and law and order was until recently in Jaffna town. Civilian casualties and destruction to property as a result of aerial bombing and artillery shelling were not reported by them. On the rebels' side, their statements highlighted both the enemy and the civilian casualties as well as the bravery of the LTTE cadres. Despite the conflicting estimates, the fact that both sides have incurred heavy losses recently in the most gruesome war cannot be concealed. The suffering of the people consequent upon not only

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the offensive operations of the military (claimed to be directed against the rebels as if the means were available to separate them from the civilians from afar places) but also the acute shortages of food and medicines in the rebel areas was brought to the attention of the Sri Lankan Government and the outside world by the international relief agencies and by the Government's own administrative officers in the affected areas.

Western relief agencies have accused the military of blocking desperately needed aid. The restrictions are reported to be preventing the delivery of drugs, tents and blankets as well as equipment to build latrines. Even materials needed to help the wounded are said to be unavailable to the relief workers. Food and medicines would appear to have become weapons in the war to capture Jaffna. As I have pointed out in my previous articles, the Government has not been serious about winning the hearts and minds of the people especially when its declared aim of capturing Jaffna was to liberate the people from the rebels' domination. It failed to appreciate the difference between winning the battle and the war. As a result, the Government allowed itself to be portrayed as a tyrant waiting to destroy the Tamils in Jaffna. Undoubtedly, Government is handicapped by its inability to communicate by conventional methods with the people in the areas under the control of the LTTE but this is not a valid excuse as seen from the air-dropping of pamphlets in Tamil and English belatedly over the war-torn Jaffna peninsula. It served little purpose as the damage had already been done.

As a result of indiscriminate attacks on civilian areas by the military, the people had also the justifiable fear that their safety was no longer guaranteed. It was only concerned about capturing Jaffna just 3 miles away after capturing Neerveli at tremendous cost and no attempts were made to assure the people of their safety. This fear would have deepened when it became known that the LTTE was also moving its headquarters to Thenmarachchi taking the heavy weapons with them. The Government would have gained a lot of support had it also facilitated the supply of basic essentials to the rebel-held area, notwithstanding the fact that some would have been used by the rebels. It was important to have known, on balance, the political advantage of such humanitarian measures. Going by the well meant declarations of the President reiterated by

her recently in a booklet presented to the world leaders she met in New York and the contradictory actions on the ground by the military, there is considerable confusion as to who is calling the shots!

If the Government was apprehensive of being criticised by a few extremists for appeasing the Tamils or still worse prevented by the rebels from assisting the Tamils under their protection, it had the means to convince the whole world of the rightness of its actions. The failure on this front only made matters worse for the Government, as it gave the impression of alienating the Tamils in the rebel areas.

Even ten days after the mass exodus of Tamils to Thenmarachchi, the ICRC reported hearing the sound of shells exploding just outside the Jaffna city. If the Government can assure the safety of the Tamils who fled the town and take sincerely all measures to get them back to their homes, it can even at this late hour convince the people that it cares for their well-being.

The actions of the military at enormous cost in relation to what has been achieved so far and the set goal as well as the inaction of the Government on the diplomatic and humanitarian fronts, have not helped to evade responsibility for the present catastrophic tragedy in which the victims are the civilians, whose political, social and economic freedoms both sides have claimed to be their main concern. The war now bears all the hallmarks of taking revenge for the losses incurred by either side. Unless the two sides come to their senses and stop the carnage, there will be no end to the suffering of the people in the North-East and the anxiety of those in the South.

Why the exodus?

Foreign diplomats and impartial observers in Sri Lanka have given several reasons for the instantaneous displacement of hundreds of thousands (the numbers vary between 300,000 to 500,000) of Tamils from Jaffna city and its environs. According to relief workers Tiger Radio had made urgent broadcasts telling the people to evacuate as quickly as possible and the people responded taking whatever they could with them.

One explanation for ordering the civilians to leave their homes in Jaffna after the military entered Neerveli was to deny the latter the strategic victory of taking over the prized town with its population. Another reason advanced was based on the unusual aspect of the exodus involving boats seized from fishermen and used by the

LTTE to ferry the fleeing people across the lagoon to Kilinochchi. It was alleged that the LTTE was enhancing its reputation among Tamils as their protector in times of distress. Significantly, the LTTE had closed the road back to Jaffna, telling the people that the town might fall and would be dangerous for them. Some analysts were careful when they said that the motive for helping Jaffna civilians to leave the town was unclear; whether they were doing it as good samaritans or as good strategists. Others had suggested that the exodus was orchestrated to show the world that there was havoc in the North...

The most damning report on the subject was from the Tamil human rights group released on November 9. According to this report, masked Tamil guerrillas moved from house to house threatening civilians to force the evacuation of Jaffna town. They had also ordered people by loudspeakers on October 30 to evacuate the town saying they were fighting a 'demonic force'. A school next to the Red Cross premises which was used as a refugee camp was also forcibly emptied. The group also said air attacks by the Government forces were partly responsible for the exodus.

Why the secrecy?

It will not be long to know for certain whether the people were used as pawns in the war. Truth has been a big casualty in this war. The aim of secrecy is to hide the truth, which no doubt seems to be useful to both sides in the short term. Eventually, truth will surface and questions will be asked by the people in the North and south on the human costs of the war. Hopefully, the most tangible gain from the senseless war will be the lesson not to get deceived by leaders who act using the instrument of secrecy or duress to achieve their war objectives. Their actions, however damaging to accepted norms of human behaviour and tolerance not just in the short term but importantly for generations to come are portrayed as essential to promote and/or safeguard the interests of the people! People will also discover the enormity of the cost incurred just to learn this lesson. This is perhaps the price to be paid for being gullible. The estimated defense spending of Sri Lanka Government in 1996 is a staggering 745 million dollars, which is 18.8% higher than the 1995 estimated expenditure. Defence expenditures in 1996 will swallow nearly one-third of the national budget. Can the Sri Lankans expect the sound of artillery fire, aerial bombing and war-planes to vanish in 1996?

Community in disarray

Many from priests to politicians have thrown in the slogan of peace and unity in their acrimonious speeches and writings. The simple truth is that either one cannot be had without the other. All the indications are that the bulk of the Tamil society has lost its bearings by their indifference to the long-term goals of peace and unity, not least the repercussions of the present adverse trends, which ironically are being glorified. A case in point is the use of children in the war as combatants in the front lines to shoot and kill. Recent experience in Africa reported by UNICEF, indicates the difficulty in reintegrating later these children who survived the war into the society. It has been found that their instinct to kill even fellow members of the society for trivial reasons remain intact. According to recent Reuters' report (November 9) based on information provided by aid workers, LTTE has intensified recruiting school children to fill its ranks after heavy losses in recent clashes.

Tamils living abroad have protested against the Government's military operations in the North. The more sensible demand of the Tamils should be to ask both sides to stop the endless war immediately and start talking with the help of outside intermediaries. Many foreign governments and organisations have offered to help if requested by both sides. It is the foreign governments that are actively pressing both sides to stop the war and settle the conflict peacefully through negotiations. Britain's foreign office minister of state Jeremy Hanley in a Commons written reply said: 'We condemn the recent brutal massacres of civilians which have taken place, especially those in the villages of the north and east of Sri Lanka. . . . We deplore the loss of life and destruction resulting from this conflict and urge both the government and the Liberation Tigers to take all further steps to avoid civilian casualties.' He urged the warring factions to seek a peaceful solution. The following appeal is significant especially coming from outside. 'We urge all who are concerned to see a lasting and peaceful settlement to the conflict to make every effort to persuade the Liberations Tigers to respond positively to the constitutional opportunities now emerging.'

Danger in intransigence

Compared with the mounting international pressure on both sides to return to the negotiating table, the Sri Lankan's attitude to the human disaster in their own country is somewhat muted. Perhaps the domestic cen-

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Time is Ripe to Resume Talks Open Letters to President and LTTE Leader

Dear Mrs. Kumaratunga,
Madam President:

The political path which you pursued at the time of campaigning for your PA at the 1994 General Elections, as well as during the Presidential Election, was statesman-like. Your Sinhala people supported you in your search for peace through constitutionalised justice to Tamils and other ethnic minorities by firstly stopping the war and talking to the Tamils' LTTE. The Tamils greatly admired your correct and courageous stand and gave you support as best as they possibly could. I myself was taken up by your spirit of justice. The whole world urges you along that path.

You did start talking to the Tigers, but not wholeheartedly, not sincerely. You made the correct promises to ease up the urgent burdens of the Tamils. But those were not readily and fully implemented. One thing led to another, and the LTTE lost their patience and regrettably broke off the cessation of hostilities pact with you. There has now been a renewed spate of killings in the Northeastern areas. I am sure no one has enjoyed the latest battles - not the LTTE, not the armed forces, not you, and certainly not the vast majority of people: Sinhala, Tamils or Muslims. Then why is it being pursued? For whose benefit? All will lose by it, surely.

You've shown statesmanship again when you spoke in New York recently, signalling that you would be prepared to restart talks with the LTTE if they would agree to Complete Cessation of Hostilities, at least Symbolically Lay Down arms, and Agree to a Time-Frame for Serious Political Negotiations. If you confirm this stand again in Sri Lanka, I feel that the LTTE will respond positively, provided that your troops are firstly ordered back to barracks and to lay down their arms, and you declare not merely a cessation of hostilities, but a complete and permanent ceasefire as the LTTE had suggested before.

As for a time-frame for serious political negotiations, tentative dates could indeed be agreed upon within a matter of weeks, after the

ceasefire and symbolic arms-down. But before actual negotiations begin, there must be serious sets of proposals available to start discussions. It is my belief that the package you did bring out in August in good faith (which you must at least now send formally to the LTTE) does not go far enough to be acceptable to the Tamils. I recommend my own Peace Plan for consideration as a starting point, which was sent to you and others. I hereby offer to supply copies to all the 225 MPs through you, as soon as you want them.

Yours sincerely,

Prof. Kopan Mahadeva, Ph.D.,
99-101, Sutton Road,
Erdington, B23 5XA,

Dear Thamby Pirabakaran,
LTTE Leader:

You have become the foremost leader of Eelam's Tamils, and the idol of several million Tamils, and others all over the world, including thousands of Sinhala. No one doubts your dedication to the Tamils' cause. Your organisational skills, self-taught expertise in warfare, sense of discipline and political acumen are beyond doubt. Your personality and leadership qualities are profound.

Only as a last resort, almost in desperation, you decided to organise the Tamil youth as today's LTTE towards winning the legitimate rights and aspirations of Tamils through armed resistance to the oppressive and disingenuous methods resorted to by successive governments of Sri Lanka. I am sure you well know of the horrors of war. You also know of the value of human life, be it of your own cadres or of Sinhala soldiers, or civilians in the Tamil, Sinhala or Muslim sides. I do believe that you really hate warfare and killing, but have resorted to both only as the last resort, since as far as you could see there was no alternative. Tamils do realise that short-term losses of the past were for winning real justice and peace finally, and that from over there you can't seek much advice from outside, but do consult those devoted men and women

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The Devolution Package and the Northeast War

by Rev. S.J. Emmanuel, Vicar General, Jaffna.

For over a decade, Sri Lanka is caught up in an ethnic war of increasing death and destruction in the North and East. And of late the political package to end the ethnic conflict has been evoking heated discussions among various groups and leaders. Though both the war and the debate are proclaimed to be for peace and unity of the country, in reality they are being conducted on two different fronts – the debate within the Southern constituency seeking support from the people and the War in the Northeast alienating the Tamils. Thus effectively the debate and the war tend to scuttle one another making peace and unity more evasive than ever before.

The extremes in the Debate

The package of political proposals for a peaceful solution of the ethnic crisis and thereby seeking the restoration of peace and unity in the country marks a turning point in the political history of this country. Understandably it is receiving a great attention from various sections of the population and accordingly evoking diverse reactions. On the one side, there appears an euphoria, spontaneous applause and even a blind support from those who hope that the package, if implemented, will avoid injustices and discriminations against the minorities and usher in an era of peace and unity in the country. On the other side, there is a strong and desperate opposition, especially from the Buddhist hierarchy, who see the proposals as paving the way for a division of the country in favour of the Tamil, or more particularly the LTTE, demand for a separate Eelam.

Between these two extremist groups are the majority, who apparently prompted by the wisdom of past experiences and the *de facto* deteriorating situation in the country, keep their fingers crossed about the outcome of these proposals. Their experience of the past with promises of political parties in power and with pacts and agreements that were never implemented deter them from any euphoria or giving unconditional support to the proposals. The fund of unprecedented good will and trust generated in them by the new President keep them still open for options and changes in the approach and from opposing any good attempt towards a solution of the national crisis.

There is no doubt that the President has demonstrated much courage and political vision, far superior to all her predecessors, in coming out with a set of proposals for such a radical change in the constitution so as to move towards a stable solution for the ethnic problem. In comparison with all the broken-pacts signed between earlier leaders, and in comparison with the decentralization of power envisaged during the UNP regime, this package offers a horizontal sharing of power between the centre and the peripheries for a reasonable autonomy. This autonomy, going by the experience of many countries, will help resolve a number of regional problems as well as give a boost to broader development of the whole country with the active and responsible participation of the grass-roots talents.

The opponents to the package, mostly those politicians and bureaucrats used to centralized power and privilege, are reluctant to share power with the peripheries and lose their central importance and power. Although such power sharing is going on in other countries, the present supporters and beneficiaries of the unitary state-nation as well as the corrupt practices which have been going on for a long time within the centralized bureaucracy will hinder a genuine power sharing.

Debate in the South

Although it is encouraging that a large section of the southern constituency has come out in support of the proposals as a means to end the conflict and restore peace and unity without a division of the country into two conflicting blocks yet it is disappointing to see that the whole debate and discussion is taking place only in the south, and that too mostly in Colombo, and the discussions are centred almost entirely around the substance or content of the package (i.e. as to how much power, land, resources etc., should be given by the centre to the regions, especially the Northeast, and how much is to be retained at the centre), and not at all about the escalating war, nor about the viability or implementability of such proposals, nor about the undemocratic exclusion of the Northeast from the debate. The general attitude appears to be, let the paid soldiers from the poor peasantry

fight the war at the cost of their lives and bring us victory over the LTTE and we will go on with our dinner-debates and our decisions will be imposed on the Northeast!

The escalation of war towards a permanent stationing of troops and military bases in the Northeast, the absence of the people of Northeast in the debate and the overlooking or silence about the viability of such proposals in the context of war – these are omissions too glaring for any sensible person. The debates are, at their best, a concerted effort of many at a political education of the South for a devolution of power, possibly preparing the way for the future realities to come.

Participants and their Reasons for Support or Opposition

Among those taking part in this southern debate are people of various interests and institutions. There are the politicians from the various political parties – including some Tamil political groups – expressing support or opposition, partly motivated by their specific ideology and partly by political opportunism. Then there are the intellectuals and professionals, who have come out openly and voluntarily, individually and collectively, with their knowledge and expertise to help their motherland in crisis. The non-governmental organizations too stimulate debate and discussion on one point or other depending on their own interest and ideology. And finally the influential Buddhist and Christian hierarchies according to the self-understanding of their role in this country as well as according to their vision of unity and peace for the country.

There have been introductions of new constitutions and changes therein in the past, but the present debate appears to be well participated by all sections of the southern constituency.

Among the supporters of the package, there are the few who understand devolution positively as restructuring government to suit the multi-ethnicity of the country and preserving a unity of the country without further loss of lives through a senseless war. The proposals to make Sri Lanka into a Union of Regions is a wise move to get away from the unitary nation-state without endangering the unity of the country and the people. It is far better to acknowledge the plural character of the population and design a realistic unity out of the multi-ethnicity than to cling on to an unbuilt unitary-state as left behind by the colonial British and suffer the loss of so many lives.

The eloquence of the elite and of the

power-seeking politician to defend and preserve the unity, integrity and sovereignty of the nation, through immense loss of lives, not of their own sons and daughters, but of the poor peasants of this country, must be pointed out and condemned as a hypocritical patriotism.

Among the opponents to this package are the vociferous Sinhala chauvinists and the Buddhist hierarchy who speak the language of the Landlord imagining the Tamils and Muslims to be mere tenants in this land. There are also other opponents, those who have tasted for too long too much of centralized power, privilege and wealth at the centre. They are unwilling to devolve power and give up their posh residences and pajeros to those elected to govern the peripheries.

It is unfortunate that the majority of the backbenchers of parliament appear not to have the ability to present the package in a positive light. They are used to vote-seeking approaches. They resort to an anti-approach saying that the proposals are meant merely to wipe out the LTTE and their Eelam ideology. It is regrettable that their support to the President is so fragile and non-constructive for building peace and unity in the country.

Tamils of the South

Understandably for the majority of Tamils living outside the Northeast, the devolution package as a package aimed at rectifying injustices and discriminations is bound to be attractive and may evoke a sigh of relief and hope for the future. Depending on the degree of rootedness they have in the South, their reactions can vary from a Colombo-centred cosmopolitanism (anti-regionalism) to a Northeast based regionalism or separatism. In this context it is misleading to assess the opinion or stance of a few Colombo-based elite intellectuals as that of all the Tamils in the South.

The Government is informed by and talking mostly to Tamils who are born and bred in Colombo and who are well settled to enjoy a fair amount of success in business and comforts in living. They may be even in the envy of their Sinhala neighbours. In the event of a massive racial riot as was in 1956, 1958, 1977 and 1983 they have suffered. Many may have been unjustly discriminated against in promotions or suspected as potential terrorists in their workplace. They have a right to fight against the discriminations or injustices they suffer. But let them neither assume the leadership of a place or people with whom they have

not identified themselves for a very long time nor devalue or betray the just cause of those still surviving the death and destruction in the Northeast. The radically changed realities of the North and East call for their own leadership. Any meaningful debate must include that leadership.

On the other hand, the option of the Government to buy over some Colombo based able and elitist brains with mere Tamil names, (who have hardly any interests in the Northeast and have not visited these areas, not even as tourists, for the last few decades), to present as a Tamil minister to the world outside, or to count his voice as that of the Tamils of Northeast is a shameful deception. They are not even recognized, leave alone elected, by the Tamils of the South. It has been a well known practice of former governments to buy over such persons to make up for Tamil representation at the centre. But such tactics will not help in the future.

Still worse, those Tamils who got 'elected' with the suspicious backing of the police and the IPKF in a staged-election, and not reckoned by a majority of the Tamils as any genuine voice of the Tamils are more a hindrance than a help in resolving the Tamil crisis.

Among the active supporters for the package are a variety of Tamil parties or groups too. Their support is not unconditional and the motives behind their support make interesting analysis. The TULF stands out as one party that has all along fought for a devolution of power through a federal structure or at least through a structure of regional autonomy within a unitary state-nation. It is understandable that as a party remaining faithful to the democratic structure and the present unitary system of Government, they have come out openly in favour of the package of proposals. They may well represent the aspirations of a good section of Tamils living outside the North and East. But two things are questionable. One, in view of their long absence in the war zones and loss of identity with those suffering and surviving there, how representative are they of the present aspirations of the Tamils still surviving in the North and East. Secondly in view of the two-pronged approach of the Government, debating proposals in the South and continuing war in the Northeast, how they justify the war and the exclusion of Northeast from the debate.

The reasons for the absence and participation of the Northeast in the debate are evident to those who are well informed of the ground realities

there. While presenting the package to the country, both the President and her ministers have clearly stated their two pronged approach to the crisis, namely, that the proposals will be debated outside the North and East, that they will not be sent to the LTTE, that there was no intention of any dialogue with the LTTE, that the war in the North and East is to go on till the LTTE are exterminated, that the embargo and the restrictions on the life of the people will continue. Can such pronouncements, however much they may be intended for the Southern voter, ever create an atmosphere, leave alone a conducive situation, for a political consideration of proposals?

Tragic escalation of war

However good and promising these proposals and debates may be, how mesmerized or fascinated the majority may feel with the leadership, their promises and their proposals, one cannot afford to lose sight of the tragic consequences of what is really going on today in the country, in terms of an escalating war and its irreparable losses. It does not require much intelligence or commonsense to see that the present pattern of escalation of war and acquisition of hardware for stabilizing this war as a permanent state of the country are taking the country to an irreversible disaster.

Both sides are going more and more for sophisticated weapons. While professors and politicians go on promising to their audience a war-victory and a peaceful solution in one and the same plate, and academics split hairs over the finer points of the professors' proposals, those engaged in war are escalating their efforts towards a permanent war in the Northeast. There is no sign of reducing the war or easing the conditions of life in the Northeast. With more and more loss of life and property, without any sign of victory or weariness, the blood-thirst and the hatred increases on both sides.

Therefore in spite of the courageous proposals for a radical change in the structure of the Government, in spite of the golden promises and enthusiastic debates and so on, we are not at all moving in the direction of reconciliation, peace and unity of the country. With every death and destruction going on in the Northeastern theatre of war, we are definitely and for all time moving away from reconciliation, peace and unity – those very ideals which the proposals proclaim to achieve.

However much the Government and the people of the South may try to

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justify this war as a war for peace, as a war directed only against the LTTE and not against the people of the Northeast, as a war to liberate the people from the LTTE, as a war to weaken, if not wipe out, the LTTE, the naked truth is that it is against those living in the Northeast, enormous lives and property are lost every day and the gap between the South and Northeast is widening beyond any proportions.

Besides the escalating war and its consequences for the people, there are also other measures of the Government directed to isolating the Northeast and punishing them with an inhuman embargo on the essentials for life.

Keeping the Northeast closed for journalists, the Army is dishing out well cooked newsreports and leading the country by the garden path to a grave deception about the Northeast reality. Trying to label and count all those killed by the Forces as Tigers and intensify hopes of a war victory over the Tigers is nothing but a dangerous deception of the country by the Government and its Armed Forces.

Nothing can be substitutive of the visit of journalists from Colombo and elsewhere to the Northeast, the theatre of war and its tragic consequences. Giving minute details of the war and its consequences in Bosnia with the help of pictures and in the next minute giving only an army-tailored report of tragic events happening in our own country and just a few hundred miles away from Colombo is a ridiculous attempt to deceive millions. Why are people and journalists not protesting against such restriction of freedom?

Nor is the attempt to justify the inhuman embargo and restrictions on the life of the people living in the Northeast acceptable to those still surviving in the war zones. What has the Government achieved by this embargo? People know that the Forces have achieved something, at least in their pockets. But otherwise?

Is keeping a population in an enlarged prison-peninsula without basic amenities for life, without sufficient food and medicine, without electricity, transport, postal services etc. and then subjecting them to continuous shelling and bombing to take over the land and people – are these going to pave the way for a reconciliation, peace and unity of the country? Or is it not making the Northeast another colony – imprisoned and supplied with mini-

mum food facilities till they are killed or captured alive?

Those who talk about integrity, sovereignty and unity of the country betray their hypocritical intentions when they cry out for war and more war. Most of these are people who have never even visited these parts but simply want to own the land and rule over the people.

After all the best judges about the consequences of the war are not those who fire the shells and drop the bombs nor are the majority living outside of the Northeast and haven't had slightest experience of the horrors of war or its consequences. In these circumstances one has either to visit these places for a direct experience of life-situations or at least believe the word of the survivors from the Northeast.

Options for the Government

In the context of a war that is consuming not only lives and property of the Tamils of Northeast, but also of the whole country what are the options left for the Government to move towards reconciliation, peace and unity?

One option is to go back into history and consider with realism a withdrawal of all the state forces stationed in the Northeast against the will of a people to enable a natural death of all militancy and terrorism.

The second is to stabilize the war as a permanent way of containing the Tamil protest for self-determination and rule. This will require compulsory military service for all youth including those in robes in order to maintain a Northeast colony!

The third and the more realistic, is to recognize willy nilly the newly emerged leadership of the Northeast Tamils, normalize conditions for human life in the Northeast and move towards a negotiated peace.

More than thirty years of an unwarranted and immoral Army presence in the Northeast (from the 1950s) has given birth, both to terrorism (1977) and to a full scale war (1991 – ?). For many in the South, for whom the history of this ethnic conflict starts only from 1983 or so, and that too, with the emergence of the LTTE, a wipe away of the LTTE and a military victory may appear a realizable solution and the politicians promises may appear well within reach. But realistically, as President Premadasa reminded us often, there can never be a true victory in this war. Winning the war means losing the other side.

From the beginning when the State Forces were sent to the North and East to put down with ruthless force

all forms of Tamil opposition, the Government has over-reacted to Tamil opposition and put its foot in the wrong place and in the wrong way. It is still striving to extricate itself without losing face. That is the bitter truth about this military mission to Northeast.

As evidenced in the history of all colonialism (British, French etc.) and imperialism (Americans in Viet Nam), true peace can usher in only with the withdrawal of a war in Northeast and a mortal fear of continuous terrorism hanging on in the South?

If pulling out of the Northeast is considered a shameful defeat by the Government and not a rectification of an earlier error in governance, if the majority still want to foster a superiority and dominance over the minority Tamils, then continuing the war with the support of a compulsory military service and international borrowing is inevitable. Increasingly with every Tamil considered as a potential threat, if not a terror, to the majority Sinhalese, then we slide into this horrible situation. Hopefully and happily, the majority of the major race are clearly against such a move.

Recognising the Defacto Leadership

The only sane and realistic approach is to begin acting from the *de facto* situation in the Northeast. Not all is lost. Neither the people have lost their humanity in spite of this prolonged war and inhuman restrictions on life. Nor are the LTTE adamantly war hungry and blood-thirsty as made out to be by emotionally charged reports. There is still hope for sanity, reconciliation, peace and unity of the country.

Speaking about leadership in the present North and East, it must be said at the outset that the absence of a form of democracy as in the South or the absence of elections (however corrupt and manipulated some of them were under the IPKF), does not necessarily mean absence of any leadership among the people there. People who tend to absolutise the ways of democracy and think only of those ways as valid forms of leadership, will not be able to understand, leave alone accept, the *de facto* LTTE leadership of the Northeast. Whether one likes it or not, as was done by President Chandrika, one has to acknowledge the *de facto* leadership and proceed.

The long and frustrating experience of Tamils for almost three decades when democratically elected parliamentary representatives were not listened to but heckled and finally thrown out coupled with the two de-

acades of military oppression or state terrorism in the North and East, has given birth to a new form of leadership in the North and East. All those who refer to the LTTE as a child of the Northeast, forget their own contribution for the emergence of such leadership. Who fathered such a leadership? Much more than the politics of the Tamil Congress or the Federal Party, or the combined TULF it was the oppressive actions of the State Forces sent to the Northeast almost like an army of occupation to suppress any Tamil aspirations with military violence. This has been accepted by President Chandrika too.

Whether one likes it or not, the *de facto* situation is that the LTTE has emerged to leadership, admittedly not through the elections the South is familiar with, but through militancy with the gun. It has established itself.

i) as the only group which articulates the liberative aspirations of the Tamils in the North and East,

ii) as the only protectors of the people against the violence, shellings and the aerial bombings of the State Forces

and iii) as the only group that has set up sub-structures (police, courts, education, transport etc.) of governance for human life to continue with some discipline.

The fact that Prabakaran is the *de facto* leader of the Tamils in the North and East is partly the result of the intransigence of the governments who responded to three decades of democratic leadership among the Tamils of North and East with military force and humiliating rejections.

Talks with the Tigers

The Government often justifies their course of present action stating that the LTTE has betrayed the trust imposed on them by the Government and has gone back to its war path, and hence they must be exterminated or weakened before any meaningful action. It is puerile to argue that the blame for the breakdown of talks must be borne entirely by the LTTE. Not to mention the failure of the Government, in not implementing promises or not bring to book the bribe-hungry army who refused to implement them must be not overlooked or forgotten.

It is the long experience of the Tamils that many things promised, agreed upon and even gazetted are not implemented by the army or the bureaucrats. In the political history of this country, how many times the Government either tore agreed pacts or went back on its promises to the Tamils? How many times the Tamils

felt totally betrayed by the Sinhala leaders?

So the present President is called to demonstrate her stateswomanship at this hour in calling the LTTE for a resumption of talks.

The LTTE went away from the negotiating table, not because war is a pleasure for them as some cry out in their midsummer madness, but because the Tamils do not believe any more in prolonged talks without an equal effort for their implementation. This applies even to the future. Unless and until some gesture of easing the life of people in the Northeast is made by the Government, no talks are possible with the LTTE. Talks under the threat of a total embargo or under the threat of an elimination by war has no meaning.

In a press interview on Thursday 17th of August 1995, Minister G.L. Peiris has clearly ruled out even the possibility of a third-party intervention as well as any talks with the LTTE. Understanding third party as a foreign government, we are left with two parties. Out of these two if one is the Government, who is the second? It must be the partner in conflict. If further talks with the LTTE are ruled out, then the Government is effectively saying, that the decision making process will be one-sided, that is by the Government in consultation with those outside the North and East, and that decision will be imposed on the second partner, that is, the Tamils of North and East – against their will. Is this once again the Sri Lankan mode of democracy!

In short, the approach of the Government amounts to dangling an

attractive set of proposals before the international community and the southern constituency as its sincere attempt and willingness to solve the problem peacefully through political reforms and at the same time pursuing a war of weapons on the LTTE and of restrictions (embargo on essentials, denial of communication, transport, prevention of journalists to Northeast etc.) on the people of Northeast. This approach of dangling the carrot to the South and wielding the stick to the Northeast will only aggravate the situation and become counter-productive to the whole country.

The present path of a war for peace, war to weaken or exterminate the Tigers and in that operation destroying what is left is counter productive if not suicidal. There is no justification for continuing this war. The immediate need is to show true statesmanship, create conditions for a truly human living in the Northeast and call for a resumption of talks with the LTTE directly or through a third party from where it broke off.

The LTTE leadership, in spite of going away in desperation from the table, has expressed its willingness through the international media that it is still open for peace-talks. without giving too much into a pharisaic mistrust of partners, let an opening be made for such talks even with the help of a third party mediation.

A government that claims itself to be democratically elected and mandated to bring peace and unity must show more understanding and statesmanship. Nothing by way of a return to the table is too costly to avert a disaster to the whole country.

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close to you very thoroughly before every major move the LTTE makes.

Although you have achieved within the period 1983-1995 much more than any other past Tamil leaders since Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan, by a diametrically opposite route chosen to suit the needs of your times, what you are yet to accomplish will determine how your contribution will be finally valued by the Tamils as well as by the other Sri Lankans, the outside world, and by history itself.

In this respect, it is well to remember that all wars are fought to ensure a more peaceful life to one's own people. In the case of Sri Lanka, peace would mean arriving at mutually just, workable pacts

with the country's 'democratically elected' Governments, whatever may be their earlier shortcomings. The Government of Mrs. Kumaratunga is keener to bring peace to the island by constitutionally granting the due rights of Tamils, than any previous regime. The present Opposition is led by a person of the same age-group as yourself and the President, who are all more honest regarding justice and peoples' welfare than the older men of the past. I believe you will do the right thing by the Tamils and by the island's other citizens if you now decide to re-enter peace talks for our Tamils' rights.

Yours sincerely,

Prof. Kopan Mahadeva, Ph.D.,
99-101, Sutton Road,
Erdington, B23 5XA.

The 'Silent Emergency' in North-Eastern Sri Lanka

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Introduction

Emergencies may be 'loud' with much worldwide attention through television and newspaper coverage. These are too wellknown. On the other hand there are 'silent' emergencies which receive very little or no attention, but are more damaging and detrimental to the society, costing more lives and more disintegration than the 'loud' emergencies.

When a few hundred die in a 'bombing spree' or a 'military operation' in the North-Eastern Province (NEP) of Sri Lanka, much publicity is given to it and leads to demonstrations in the major cities throughout the world.

But many more are dying in the 'silent emergency' with no protests and no public demonstrations.

Today, 'wars' are lasting longer than previously, thus pushing more and more people every day into the group of victims of these 'slow onset emergencies'.

When 'slow onset emergencies' occur people start coping. Initially, the coping is non-erosive. There is reduction in dietary intake, switching especially to cheaper and less nutritious food, reduction in the number and size of the meals taken, and migration in search of employment.

As the emergency continues, the children start to suffer. As the parents spend most of their time in search of employment, collecting food, water and firewood, the care provided to the children decreases.

As the crisis continues the coping becomes erosive and seriously effects the family. They sell their livestock and tools used in their occupations such as agriculture, fishing and carpentry and even their lands - if they own any. Food becomes rationed within the family and the most affected by this process are the children and women.

During the final stage, coping mechanisms fail and a stage of destitution is reached. At this stage they become entirely dependent on charity or live in refugee camps. This stage of destitution leads to mental apathy, abandonment of children, prostitution, alcohol dependence and petty thefts.

In this stage of apathy most are reluctant to accept rehabilitation. They also live on the edge of starvation. Starving children form bandit groups causing social problems. Some of these children join the militants.

In the North-Eastern part of Sri Lanka we see people in all these stages.

The silent deaths

Deaths of pregnant mothers and children are occurring at an unprecedented rate in the NEP of Sri Lanka.

In 1988, following the occupation by the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF), 42 pregnant mothers in Jaffna district died as result of a complication related to their pregnancy. Jaffna district is only one of the seven districts in the NEP. Calculated at this rate (Maternal Mortality Rate of 220 per 100,000 live births) there would have been 110 mothers who would have died in one year as a result of a complication of their pregnancy. What is important is that this number is three and a half times the mortality 5 years earlier.

43% of these mothers who died were under 30 years. On an average each mother left behind three orphans with a bleak future. It is not known how many of these orphaned children lived to reach their next birthday. These mothers also left behind elderly parents and younger sisters and brothers who were under their care. What happened to them is anybody's guess.

More than half the maternal deaths were due to anaemia and infections, contributed by delay in transport to a hospital. Most of these deaths could have been prevented - if not for the war.

Children are also dying in large numbers. Registration of infant deaths in a war torn area is usually not complete. Data available in the Jaffna University field project area (which is within three kilometers from the Jaffna Teaching Hospital and having a better health care service than the rest of the NEP) indicates that the Infant Mortality Rate is 42.4 per 1000 live births. At this rate there should be over 2100 infants (children under one year) dying every year. This is double

the number of infant deaths which occurred ten years ago.

As in most of the developing countries children die of preventable causes. But the most heart breaking part of it is that most of the deaths in the NEP could have been prevented if there were enough Family Health Workers to provide Health education and primary care, or if there was enough fuel to transport them to a hospital, or if there were sufficient drugs in the hospitals to treat these children.

The food shortage

The ban on fishing, destruction of the fishing gear and army occupation of parts of the coastal belt deprived the people of the NEP their main source of animal proteins. The restriction on the transport of kerosine oil deprived the farmer of his ability to water his crop and was left at the mercy of the monsoon. The ban on the transport of fertilizer and pesticides prevented him from providing the manure and protecting his crop from pests. These, together with the state control on the transport of food to parts of the NEP resulted in a food shortage.

The food supplied to the refugees are mostly unfamiliar and sometimes unpalatable. Meat and fish are never supplied in refugee camps although fish had formed a regular diet of those displaced from the fishing villages. The refugees sell their rations to buy fish, meat, firewood, clothing, soap, etc., and thereby depleting themselves of even the meagre food rations supplied to them.

The unfamiliar and unpalatable food together with the emotional stress causes a lack of appetite which in turn leads to withdrawal from food - especially so in children.

When there is shortage of food the most affected are the children, women and the elderly. In general malnutrition decreases work performance and places a severe burden on individuals and societies. Malnutrition among children, especially infants and toddlers leads to poor physical and mental development. Malnourished children are liable to be stunted and also have impaired psychomotor development and cognitive functions.

Anaemia, among pregnant women predisposes to increased frequency of lowbirth weight, prematurity and increased perinatal mortality.

Surveys (1) carried out showed that in 1975/76, 3.7% of the children in Jaffna district were wasted and 28.4% were stunted. Among all the districts in Sri Lanka, Jaffna district recorded the lowest percentage of wasting. Recent studies (2) carried out in the

Jaffna district in 1993 showed that 18.9% of the children under three years were wasted and 31.4% were stunted. The present degree of wasting is more than five times that observed in 1975/76. These malnourished children are liable to develop severe forms of infections and die; and add to the numbers who die of the 'silent death'.

A moderate estimate puts at over 4000, the number of children under five years in the NEP who are wasted and most of them are going to die or be maimed for life, unless there is some intervention. Intervention programmes initiated by Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) working in the war torn areas are making some inroads into this problem. But more intensive action is necessary to avoid a calamity.

Observations made by health personnel and Non-Governmental Organizations working in the Jaffna district have shown that 50 to 100% of the mothers attending antenatal clinics in the Jaffna district are anaemic. Most of these severely anaemic mothers will die as a result of the pregnancy or bring forth premature or low birth weight infants who will eventually develop malnutrition and die of a respiratory infection or diarrhoea.

The percentage of low birth weight infants is also on the increase. In a study (2) it was found that 19% of the children born in the Jaffna district during the period 1990-92 were below 2500 grms at birth. More recent observations of children born to mothers in refugee camps indicate that the percentage of low birth weight babies born is over 35%. It has been found that more than half of those born with low birth weight eventually become severely malnourished.

Child Health

The World Health Organization has set targets in child health to be achieved by 2000 AD. Sri Lanka's Health Ministry is working towards this goal and hopes to eradicate soon, vaccine preventable diseases like poliomyelitis. But immunization coverage in the NEP is not satisfactory. Age appropriate immunization cannot be satisfactorily achieved due to lack of regular supplies of vaccines. Vaccines reach the Jaffna district (where one third of the population of the NEP live) by ship, only once a month. The quantity depends on refrigeration space available in the ship and there are no ships available for 3-4 months of the year, due to rough weather. Refrigerators are not available to store larger quantities of vaccines. Since the supply of electricity to the north has

been interrupted there is no continuous supply of electricity to maintain the electric refrigerators. Kerosine refrigerators do not function effectively because of the lack of pure kerosine. Solar refrigerators will be the answer - but there is no one to invest in a few solar refrigerators and save the lives of these children.

The Sri Lankan Ministry of Health provides a nutritional supplement named 'Thripasha' to malnourished children, and pregnant and lactating mothers. During the past four years the Jaffna district received only one eighth of the requirement, which was calculated before the escalation of the conflict - although the need is much more now.

The primary care for children at the village level is provided by the Family Health Workers (also termed Public Health Midwives). In the NEP only 42% of the Family Health Workers needed, are available. The main cause of this shortage is lack of training. During the years 1992-93 only 12 Family Health Workers capable of working in the NEP were trained (3) although two training centres are available in the NEP.

The lack of all these will contribute to childhood morbidity and mortality and eventually to the 'silent deaths'.

Education

Education has been considered the main asset of the Tamils of Sri Lanka.

With half of the population of the NEP displaced and several schools destroyed and many more damaged, the school attendance has dropped.

In a study of children in refugee camps in the Jaffna district it was found that 52% of the boys and 46% of the girls in the 16-18 age group did not attend school. With a lowering of the educational level, the health status will eventually decline leading to more disease and deaths.

Conclusion

The people of NEP are at a critical point in their history. The war has to end and rehabilitation started immediately. If this is not possible, a concerted effort must be made by all involved, to stop this decline in health status.

If this trend in disease and deaths continues the 'silent deaths' will eventually consume more lives than all the deaths directly due to the war in Sri Lanka.

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Situation Intolerable For Civilians

The government's conduct on the question of accountability in war is reprehensible and is hardly different from that of the last government. The food and medical situation is now rapidly deteriorating in the North. The LTTE in its own predictable manner is not prepared to take any responsibility for the well-being of the people. With both sides now conducting themselves with few inhibitions regarding civilian casualties, the plight of the people remains unenviable, the University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna) said in a statement relating to the current situation in northern Sri Lanka.

The following are excerpts from the UTHR(J) statement dated 10 October '95:

The events in Vadamaratchi, Jaffna on Friday 22nd September, had been widely reported except in this country. In the worst incident more than 30 school children were killed when the Sri Lankan Air Force dropped bombs

in the vicinity of the school in Nagar-kovil. The incident took place about 12 hours after the Government imposed press censorship on reporting military events.

Two days before, Sea Tigers attacked a supply ship returning from KKS and its naval escort. Although the Government claimed that the ship Muditha and a Dvora craft were damaged, the LTTE claimed that the latter had been sunk. On the 22nd morning the LTTE was moving the hijacked passenger vessel Iris Moana which was then close to Nagar-kovil according to local sources. Shelling had also commenced that morning from the Army base at Palaly, 15 miles away.

Seeing bomber activity overhead the principal and staff of Nagar-kovil Government School were in a dilemma about what to do with the pupils. In the prevailing state of anxiety no clear

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Continued from page 21

decision was taken. When the Junior School broke at 12 noon, the children began moving home and the senior boys remained. In the meantime a commemoration relay fast was taking place all over Jaffna for Thileepan (who went on a protest death fast during 1987. There was also a pandal (decorative tent) near the school over which the bombers had been active. Several children who had come out of school had sheltered under a tree near the pandal waiting for the bombers to leave. At about 12.45pm a bomb fell among the people under the tree, instantly killing 24 children and 15 others. The pandal was said to have been slightly damaged. Several of the corpses were beyond recognition and were identified by their possessions. The injured continued to die on subsequent days bringing the total dead to well over 50.

In the meantime sporadic shelling had also been taking a large number of civilian lives. On the 22nd itself a shell fell on a house in Savanai, Thumpalai, along Vallipurakovil Road going east from Pt. Pedro to Kudathanai and Nagar-kovil. Upon hearing bomber activity the mother asked her four children (14 years and below) to remain indoors and came onto the road to assess the intentions of the Air Force. Just then a shell fired from Palaly fell on her home killing her four children and a child next door.

The pattern of shelling, which continued for a week, was such that it took place about four times a day and at any hour, at least six shells at a time. They were fired into the Vadamaratchi area at random and were no doubt intended to vent the anger of the Forces on civilians.

With the commencement of 'Operation Thunderbolt' on 1st October around the Atchuvvely area, there was shelling into areas near Nelliady, Irupalai, Kopay and other areas closer to Jaffna town, all some way from the operational area. In Kondavil (a mile outside Jaffna municipal limits) four from a displaced family were killed by shelling. The fact that so many amputations are being performed in hospitals is a reflection of the strain on medical staff and the running down of normal facilities. People of the area praised the MSF for their unstinting service.

After a week of maintaining that the bombing of children at Nagar-kovil was LTTE propaganda, the Defence Spokesman admitted the incident. The

first reports had been based on an MSF press release from Paris. The Defence Spokesman however said that what had been bombed was an LTTE facility and suggested that several of the dead must have been LTTE cadre.

After the very bad experience of the abortive July military operation, people are not taking chances, and at the least sign of danger are leaving their homes to trudge along the road towards an area deemed safer carrying their meagre belongings, and then back again a day or two later when some decide that there is no immediate danger. Incidentally, when the Army withdrew from areas which it had captured in July, hundreds of civilians who had remained in those areas were harassed by the LTTE and a few were arrested by them as suspected Army informers. The reality is that a large number of poor people do not have any other place to go to during Army incursions.

The firing of shells into the Methodist Mission compound in Puttur, which is since late under Army control is also a cause for further concern. The shells that were fired in the early hours of 9th October fell on the mission hospital now housing old folk, killing nine inmates. If these had been fired by the LTTE as claimed by the Government, it places the civilians in a difficult dilemma when the Army advances. The LTTE has been since July warning civilians not to remain in areas which the Army would bring under its control. The dilemma would become worse as the Army now 7 miles away (with a two mile strip of no-man's land) nears Jaffna. With the oncoming rains, the situation could become intolerable for the civilians. Even if the Army takes a monsoon break merely confining itself to shelling, it will be torture for the civilians.

The Government's conduct on the question of accountability in war is reprehensible and is hardly different from that of the last Government. The main effect of the censorship has been to keep the people of this country in the dark about the sufferings of a particular section of its citizenry. Although the mainline press had rarely come out with factual information regarding civilian life in the war-torn North-East, there had been some openings in recent times to write about the people. By imposing censorship the Government has been seen to be more concerned about the public coming to know about the ugly event for which it must take responsibility, rather than about preventive and disciplinary me-

asures to minimise civilian suffering.

The food and medical situation is now rapidly deteriorating in the North. The LTTE in its own predictable manner is not prepared to take any responsibility for the well-being of the people. Its refusal to reopen the Elephant Pass or Pooneryn land routes together with its Sea Tiger attacks on ships near KKS harbour, are symptoms of its total disregard for civilian interests. To the LTTE, commemoration meetings and public gatherings have been a 'Heads I win, Tails you lose' proposition. The Government, whose Air Force observes these gatherings from the air sees them as a provocation. Similarly when the tortuous seaborne supply of food from the Government does not reach the people of Jaffna in time, the LTTE campaign on it by crying genocide. If the people are on the other hand provided with adequate food by the Government, the LTTE then boast that they are running the civilian administration efficiently. But it is the Government's duty to ensure that they have their own agenda reflecting concern for their own people. It is this concern that would save them from playing to the LTTE's agenda.

With both sides now conducting themselves with few inhibitions regarding civilian casualties, the plight of the civilians remains unenviable.

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THE SUB-CONTINENTAL SCENE

Kashmir: Concrete Measures, Not Balancing Acts, Needed

by Seema Mustafa

The long-awaited Kashmir 'package' has been announced and elections recommended for mid-December. Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao appears to have ended his policy of drift, which tore apart the sensitive Valley for five long years, to cull some kind of compromise, which he hopes, will pass for action. Compromise because the so-called policy announcement by the Prime Minister appears to be a neither here nor there solution, inherent in which is the danger of not solving the existing problem of alienation within the Valley on the one hand, and whipping up communal frenzy outside the Valley on the other.

The timing of the election, for one, could not be worse. Never has Kashmir gone to the polls in the snow bogged month of December when even the most ardent supporters of the Kashmir proposal will have to admit that the turnout, even in the best political conditions, will be from negligible to low. The timing is crucial in the present situation as the low turnout will give credence to the militants' inevitable propaganda of a rigged election where the security forces and not the people of the Valley are the 'voters.'

This, of course, will not be the main problem and considering the tenor of the Prime Minister's announcement and the reaction thereafter it will be overtaken by other, far more far reaching, consequences. Kashmir presents a case for clear, direct, unmitigated action. There is no room for compromise, no room for appeasement of either the militants or the Bharatiya Janata Party fanatics active in the rest of India, as the Valley presents a situation where the government has to step in and take action which will ease the peoples' pain and give a signal of trust and confidence. The government can proceed further only by disarming the militants of their emotional hype, of offering a solution which will be acceptable to the people, fed up of strife and unrest and longing for peace and in the process isolating the extremists. The last is very possible, judging from reports coming in from the Valley, particularly as the extremists are now having to rely more on the gun than on the

support available to them at the initial stages.

Rao has done the very opposite. And the only reason that his action is being hailed by certain sections is that for the first time in his five year innings, the Prime Minister has taken some action. Such is the political climate and the sense of despair that action, however trivial, seems to be welcome. But a closer look will reveal that this 'action' is fraught with dangerous consequences for it can retard the peace process and also create a situation whereby the opening seemingly created might be closed for a long time. As it appears to be an opening but actually there is no space inside which can convert it into a viable political option.

Prime Minister Rao's announcement has to be seen with only one yardstick in mind, the people of Kashmir. The BJP hysteria, the international criticism, and the Pakistani outburst have to be kept out of the purview of any meaningful analysis as all these amount to pressure tactics which have nothing to do with the well being of India, but are, in fact, detrimental to Indian interests. The people of the Valley have to be brought back into the fold as it were, their sense of alienation reduced, their trust in the Indian system revived – and any announcement regarding the Valley should at least be able to prepare the ground for this *marham, patti* as one would say in Urdu, for the cure to be long-lasting and effective.

In this context, Rao's package is defective in two respects. One, it has not kept the people of the Valley in mind but is more in the nature of a balancing act between the strident note set by the BJP and the demand of autonomy raised by the extremists in the Valley. This old Congress practice of balancing two extreme positions, and resorting to political jugglery to settle complicated political issues has long ceased to work. In fact, the result of such action has always been counterproductive and created tremendous unrest, the most recent example of course being the Babri Masjid episode where the government spent years in talking to Hindu fanatics and Muslim

extremists in its supposed search for a secular solution! Eventually it had to take sides, and the result is there for all to see.

So also in Kashmir. This compromise formula will not work. It has been made clear from day one. The BJP is opposed to it, the extremists in the Valley are not going to accept it. Rao has in effect, spoken of autonomy for the Valley without giving it. He has spoken of an election, which cannot be held in real terms. And by changing the titles of the governor and chief minister into Urdu equivalents he has sought to give a bright wrapping to an empty package. No one can buy it, the extremists, the secularists or most importantly, the people.

The BJP is looking for a political issue and will oppose any initiative in the Valley, short of abolition of Article 370. It cannot be wooed or won over as Rao has tried to do by softening the autonomy offer into a meaningless exercise. The situation is such that the BJP will cry itself hoarse even if the Prime Minister visits the Valley, so the question of even trying to deal with this communal force is merely to give fanatics credibility. The same goes for the militants. Nothing will be acceptable to them, short of self-determination and complete freedom. The government can bend backwards to strike a dialogue but the militants have tasted heady power through the gun, and are not going to give this up for some political deal. For both, the BJP and the militants in the Valley, power and not the future of the people or the country is the determining criterion for any action or dialogue.

The Prime Minister is thus left with only one yardstick as stated earlier – what is in the best interests of the people of Kashmir and the nation. Peace is the answer but this can only be effected through mature, committed, decisive, clear political action. One has chosen these adjectives with care as all these requisites are necessary for restoring peace in the Valley.

If Rao was really serious in his offer, and was not doing it as an experimental precursor to the forthcoming polls, he would have gone about it entirely differently. For one, he would not have made such a crucial announcement from the back of beyond, but from within his own country. It is not an international issue but one with completely Indian dimensions, and the entire world can be reached from Indian soil as well. He would have not bothered with the cosmetics of nomenclature but would have made a unilateral announcement of autonomy as per the Nehru-Sheikh Abdullah Delhi Agreement of 24 July 1952.

There can be no polls unless the people come out to vote. The people will not come out unless the right signals are sent, and a feeling of confidence created. The 1976 accord is meaningless as it came at a time when much water had flowed beneath the bridge, and the process of alienation of the Kashmiris had already begun.

The Valley which had come out resoundingly in favour of India at the

time of Independence was sidelined from the process of development. As if this was not enough, elections were rigged by the Centre in Kashmir, and the electoral verdict of the people repeatedly tampered with to install chief ministers Delhi could control. The 'Lion of Kashmir', Sheikh Abdullah was jailed, and in the long torturous history of the Valley the people were continuously sacrificed for poli-

tical considerations and power. The alienation did not come over night, it has a long history behind it and any solution today has to address itself to this history.

The time for talk, drift is over. If Kashmir has to be solved the Centre has to act. But to act, not with the Lok Sabha polls, but with the people of this beautiful, sensitive Valley in mind.

BJP Stands Exposed

T.N. Gopalan

The Bharatiya Janata Party, (BJP), this right-wing communal party, seeking to impose a Hindu hegemony on India, today stands poised tantalisingly close to the Red Fort, a conventional metaphor for the seat of power in New Delhi.

Consequent on a variety of historical factors including misplaced cultivation of the Muslim vote-bank through misconceived policies by successive Congress governments, today the overwhelmingly Hindu population of the country is swept by a wave of revanchist ideology, though the degree of communalisation might vary from region to region.

Inevitably the BJP which has played a very important role in fanning the communal flames is hoping to reap a rich electoral harvest in such a vitiated atmosphere and whatever happens to the party is of serious concern to the media.

The ugly factional squabbles in Gujarat and the parting of ways between it and the Dalit-based Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in Uttar Pradesh, the largest state in the country, seems to portend ominous things for both the BJP as well as for the entire country.

The moral bankruptcy of the party, as revealed in the major developments of October, almost ruined its claim to be a much better alternative to the Congress.

The BJP, had always prided itself on being a 'disciplined party' whose members, however ideologically queer they might be, are a 'dedicated lot' whose commitment is only to their cause.

Since the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS), the close-knit godfather organisation of the Hindutva forces, is generally perceived to be charting the BJP's course meticulously, such claims of high moral ground by the BJP were readily conceded by observers.

And so what happened in Gandhi Nagar, the capital of Gujarat in Sept.-

Oct. came as a rude shock not only to the Sangh supporters, but even to the media in general.

A senior BJP MP Shankarsinh Vaghela, followed by more than 40 MLAs presented himself before Governor Naresh Chandra on Sept. 27, demanded the dismissal of the BJP Chief Minister, Keshubhai Patel, and staked his claim to form a government, the entire country was stunned.

It was a gesture in daring and defiance unprecedented in the history of the country — such a brazen challenge to the high command had never been thrown even in the chequered career of the hopelessly divided Congress. Any show of dissent would be confined to the party forums alone and aimed at convincing the high command of the need to change, say, a chief minister or the leader of the state unit of the party.

What the 55-year-old Vaghela, who had built the party brick by brick in Gujarat, did was to contemptuously ignore all norms of inner party discipline, split the legislature wing, establish contacts with the Congress and reportedly get their assurance of support if and when he was invited to form a government.

What he did thereafter proved even more galling to the BJP leadership. He withdrew into his native village, hardly 15 km from the state capital, along with his followers and barricaded all the approach roads. He humiliated party president L.K. Advani, who incidentally represents Gandhi Nagar in the Lok Sabha, by refusing to meet him or his emissaries.

More theatricals were to follow. When the Chief Minister returned post-haste, started mobilising his supporters and true to their reputation a group of the saffron brigade tried to storm Vassan Vaghela's village and attack the rebel MLAs, the dissident leader simply flew the entire lot to a posh hotel in the neighbouring Madhya Pradesh in a specially requisitioned private aircraft.

Even as the senior leaders cried foul, blamed it all on the collusion of the Congress and a leading industrial house, alternatively cajoled and bullied the dissidents, Vaghela himself remained impervious to it all and stuck to his demand that Keshubhai Patel step down as Chief Minister.

There were only two options before the BJP high command — to sit tight, dare Vaghela to form a government with the support of the Congress and face the odium or simply give in to his demands including Keshubhai's removal and a greater say for him in the governance of the state and avert the disadvantage of losing power in its own bastion on the eve of general elections.

The BJP, never tired of projecting itself as a principled party, chose the second option, gave in all the way and installed a compromise candidate as the new CM.

At the end of it all Mr. Advani admitted, 'Everybody felt relieved, but none of us is happy with the developments', though whatever happened 'was no compromise of principle, but only crisis management'.

Such contortions and tribulations in a state where the BJP had coasted to power, bagging 121 of the 182 seats in the Assembly elections only ten months ago, showed up the party as a god with clay feet, a sanctimonious humbug, a clone of Congress shorn of all principled behaviour and which would do just anything, give just anything, to cling on to power, besides being riven by all kinds of dissensions and ego-clashes.

The image of Mr. Advani, considered the party's mascot and chosen to steer the party through the next year — his controversial rath yatra five years ago had brought down the then V.P. Singh government and catapulted the party to a position of strength rivalling that of the Congress itself — suffered a big dent and it was the moderate A.B. Vajpayee who worked out the compromise successfully. A factor which could even help tone down BJP's stridency on various fronts.

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Even as the commentators were assessing the fall-out of the Gujarat developments, came the news that after all its high-pitched rhetoric of its concern for the Dalits, it had finally decided to pull the carpet from under the feet of the Mayawati's government in U.P.

In the latter state, it may be recalled here, when the Samajwadi Party (a party essentially of intermediate castes, and with a strong appeal among the Muslims) and Bahujan Samaj Party (of Dalits, and Most Backward Castes) coalition government fell through only four months ago under the weight of its own internal contradictions.

It was then the BJP, the largest single party in the Assembly, came forward to extend unconditional support to an exclusively BSP government. With no other party ready to incur the odium of opposing the Dalits also falling in line, the acerbic and volatile Mayawati became the first Dalit chief minister in the country -

incidentally an eloquent testimony to the lot of the Dalits in 18 years after independence and to the Congress's own commitment on the issue.

The BJP's strategy evidently was to outgrow the perception that it was a party of the upper castes and to forge an alliance with the most oppressed in the Hindu hierarchy whose problems with the more numerous and increasingly powerful intermediate castes are more acute now than ever in the past. The upper caste-Dhalit front would be a winning combination, the BJP calculated.

However it failed to take into account neither the untenability of such a pact nor the suicidal streaks in both Mayawati herself and in the BSP party as a whole. While she ran amok antagonising and humiliating the bureaucracy, encouraging known criminals and blithely ignoring any plea from the state leaders of the BJP, but keeping the Advani and company in good humour, her mentor Kanshi Ram continued with his baiting of the Manuvad, organising a Periyar Mela in Lucknow, denouncing Ram and Gandhi and generally cultivating his

own constituency in his own inimitable ways, raising apprehension in the minds of the top echelons of the BJP that alliance with such a temperamental outfit could ultimately backfire on it, robbing it of its traditional vote base.

Suddenly all the concern for the Dalits evaporated into thin air, and the BJP withdrew support from Mayawati and the BSP government had to bow out.

What followed was even more disgusting. The BJP let loose horse-traders with bulging purses among the distraught BSP MLAs and staked a claim to form the government.

Mercifully the sordid drama came to an end with the dissolution of the Assembly.

What next for the BJP and what next for the nation? Has the former been discredited enough to be repelled by the votes and is the Congress in a position to exploit the situation to its advantage? Can a third force to the left of centre on the political spectrum still emerge? Observers will be groping for answers to such questions in the months to come.

PAKISTAN

Wake-up Call in Pakistan Army Trouble in the Army

P.S. Suryanarayana

The latest rumblings within the Pakistan Army, a major player in the country's peculiar 'constitutional order', seem to have been detected 'in time'. Remedial measures have been initiated, going by current indications. All the same, the episode, whose contours and political connotations remain a mystery, was no tempest in a tea cup. Nor is Pakistan bogged down in clearing the fallout of either a failed coup attempt or a conspiracy of some other kind.

In the absence of authentic information on the true nature and scope of the events that led to the arrest of an unspecified number of relatively senior Army officers, guessing games are aplenty. Both the 'informed' sections of the Pakistani media and the knowledgeable Western diplomatic circles in Islamabad are agog with theories.

Of the greatest significance is the fact that Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto herself has chosen to acknowledge, even if only in reply to a journal-

ist's question, that an undisclosed number of army officers were being interrogated for 'non-professional activities'. And thereby hangs a tale - with many gaps.

Pakistan's Army is no stranger to dictatorial power; stories of successful coups and abortive attempts at usurpation of authority litter the pages of the country's history.

Viewed in this light, there is no reason why the results of the current investigation should not be made public, especially when Benazir is keen to endear herself to the United States which, whatever its other faults, is quintessentially a democracy.

However, the circumstances of the latest episode are complex, and the question is whether Benazir is losing control over events. As a leader with a proven capacity to face challenges head on, she is, nevertheless, known to turn adversity to her advantage.

In this sense, she may have already hinted that the latest crisis is of some

adverse consequence to the concept of ultimate civilian authority over national affairs. The basis for such a reading is her singular plea of 'national interest' as the rationale against speculation on the ramifications of the latest stir.

Some observers tend to believe that her plea for the preservation of 'national interest' in this specific context might not be a political code-phrase for a probe into an offence such as, say, drug-related transactions by the Army officers now under arrest. If drug trade menace should at all figure in the discussion on the apparent unrest in the Army, the reason is not far to seek. Not long ago, former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif had spoken of his having disapproved of an alleged blueprint, said to have been prepared by the Army, for raising funds for its presumptive covert and overt operations abroad through drug trafficking.

Now, although Benazir has declared a *jihad* or holy war against the drug trade, besides social and political evils such as terrorism and poverty, the invocation of 'national interest' is seen to reflect a much larger national agenda of protective politics than that of safeguards against relatively less treasonable offences such as drug trafficking.

A reasoning of this order leads to a critical question - does Benazir's concern for 'national interest' conceal a desire for her own political survival or

a plea for the preservation of a system that could one day subsume itself as a genuine pluralistic democracy? It is of course possible that both these aspects define her urge to sustain the present dispensation and prevent the apparent unrest in at least some pockets of the Army from spreading any further. Whatever her compulsions, the policy preferences and operational style of the country's Army chief in the present circumstances will be of greater consequence to any eventual denouement.

It is a truism in Pakistan's contemporary politics that the Army chief, Gen. Abdul Waheed, has consistently acted in a manner designed to give the civilian politicians a transparent chance to democratise a polity that was ravaged by the ruthless totalitarianism of Gen. Zia-ul-Haq, not to mention the methodical martial rule of Field Marshal Ayub Khan. Gen. Waheed supervised the general election of 1993 in a manner that earned him highly deserved praise for conducting the 'fairest' polls ever in Pakistan. It is this image of a democracy-friendly demeanour that Gen. Waheed may have to uphold as he unravels the secrets of the crisis.

There is no indication that Gen. Waheed and Benazir could be out of step with each other in trying to put the house in order. To this extent, even as Benazir struts on the international stage in a bid to prove that all is well at home and that the only Pakistan-specific issue in need of urgent attention is the 'Kashmir dispute', some Pakistani observers tend to suspect that a cover-up of the causes of the crisis may have already begun. But this apprehension is of a very vaguely defined dimension.

In this overall milieu, the U.S. attitude towards the Benazir Government could become important. After all, it is no secret that Benazir has offered to place Pakistan in the forefront of America's so-called battle against Islamic fundamentalism. However, there is no credible indication yet that the Pakistani authorities have taken the Clinton administration into confidence about the details of their efforts to decode the motives and methods of the renegade military elements.

In fact, as independent enquiries reveal, the only conclusion the U.S. seems to have made so far is that the civilian and military authorities in Islamabad have been alerted by a 'wake-up call' of indeterminate implications for Pakistan's internal democratic experiment.

The only give-away clue to the crisis at this time is to be found in a 'reactive'

statement by the leader of an Islamic religious group with a political agenda in Pakistan. Comments by the 'Amir' of the Jamaat-i-Islami are critical of the Army for its alleged effort at purging its ranks of puritanical Muslim faithfuls in the name of investigating a purported crime by them.

Obviously, the reference is to the available unconfirmed indication that some Army officers, including a 'Major-General' and a 'Brigadier', were caught gun-running. All those figuring as suspected 'conspirators' are identified as Islamist puritans, and one of them is even said to have been a military attache in Pakistan's High Commission in New Delhi.

If it is indeed a 'revolt' by Islamist radicals unhappy with Benazir's pro-U.S. policies and the Army chief's political 'neutrality', a related question will be of greater long-term relevance to Islamabad. In this sense, the issues at stake will throw up a question mark over the new 'discipline' of the Pakis-

tan Army – does the crisis symbolise an internal putsch in the Army or a move to overthrow the civilian regime or indeed both?

If it is eventually established that Islamic fundamentalists were trying to upset Benazir's appellation of a 'modernising Muslim state', she will probably portray herself as an Islamic Joan of Arc in need of Western support. Should, on the other hand, proof be established that the suspected gun-running was primarily aimed at arming the Kashmiri militants on the Indian side of Jammu and Kashmir, nothing substantive may be heard about the outcome of the investigation. It is, however, arguable that Benazir, who fancies herself as a Margaret Thatcher-like 'Iron Lady', cannot afford to suppress the findings of the investigation and draw an iron curtain around her country. In the end, Benazir's equation with the Army chief will be what matters.

(Frontline, November 17, 1995).

Lankan Tamils Stand Friendless in Tamil Nadu

T.N. Gopalan, Madras.

Operation Riversea might be claiming huge civilian casualties in Jaffna, but not a leaf stirs in Tamil Nadu. At least the Operation Leap Forward did bring most of the political parties on to the streets, even though it was a ritual exercise shorn of any serious emotional content and no party had contemplated any significant follow-up.

But Riversea has not evoked much of a reaction even though the reports reaching Madras said that the situation over there was rather critical and the Lankan army might even capture Jaffna before long.

See this dirge from Mr. Karunanidhi:

'Oh, the valiant children of Eelam... Have you perished in the great struggle? We're drowned in sorrow...'

(This is a free translation and rather shortened. The original published in *Nakkeeran*, a popular Tamil weekly, is much more evocative.)

His ally, the ever outspoken Dr. Ramdas of the Pattali Makkal Katchi, was, as usual, strident in his denunciation of the 'army atrocities' in northern Lanka while the other self-proclaimed champion of Lankan Tamils, DK leader K. Veeramani sent a telegram to the UN general secretary seeking intervention, but neither have the

strength to carry on any sustained struggle, even if they have any such inclinations – Veeramani's credentials are particularly suspect in that he has never raised his voice against the many punitive measures initiated by the Jayalalitha regime against the Lankan Tamil refugees in the state.

Even as the war was raging, Union Home Secretary K. Padmanabhiiah visited the state and urged the AIADMK government to contain militancy, tighten the grip on pro-LTTE Tamil nationalist groups and beef up coastal security to ward off possible infiltration either by militants or a refugee influx.

Only Mr. V. Gopalasami, general secretary of the Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK), protested the blatantly inhuman move to block the entry of the refugees.

Incidentally the Home Secretary had specifically mentioned the PMK, MDMK and the DK when talking about the pro-Tiger lobby. 'We won't be cowed down' declared Gopalasami and went on to criticize the centre for 'endorsing the current Lankan offensive against the Tamils'.

However, as has been underlined in these columns earlier on, having hitched his star to that of the Communist Party (M) which denounces the LTTE

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as a fascist force, there is no way he is going to translate into action his professed concern for the Lankan Tamils.

Only a couple of months ago he had ducked a question from this correspondent whether he would dare make the sufferings of the Lankan Tamils both here and in the island a major theme of his election campaign.

Meantime the government of India had been rushing men and materials to fight the fire resulting from the Tiger attack on the oil installations in Colombo and virtually sealing off the Indian coastal waters both for the militants and the refugees.

For its part the AIADMK government has further tightened the restrictions on the special camps, making life even more difficult for the inmates.

However, a relatively positive fall-out of the dramatic escape of the LTTE men from the Vellore camp in August has been that all the families put up at the Hyder Mahal have been relocated in normal camps – only the unmarried and allegedly hard-core youths continue to be detained in Tipu Mahal. That many of them are physical and mental wrecks and not necessarily that involved with the Tigers, the government will not concede.

The conditions in the special camps elsewhere are even worse with no relief in sight. It will be a long, long time before the Lankan Tamil community can recover from the Rajiv assassination.

As of now the Tamil Nadu politicians are more worried about the panchayat elections slated for Dec. 2, working out various combinations in the hope that the verdict in the rural areas might give a clue to the mood of the electorate and the prospects in the next year's general elections.

The last time the local body elections were held in the State was in 1986 when the DMK captured the chairmanship of 64 out of 97 municipalities while the AIADMK-Cong-I combine won only 22. The DMK also performed better in the rural segment, bagging the chairmanship of 138 out of 380 panchayat unions, the AIADMK claiming 120 and the Cong-I 89. The DMK had virtually reversed the trend in favour of MGR ever since 1972, setting the stage for its come-back three years later.

Right now elections are to be confined to the panchayats alone, evidently because Jayalalitha is jittery about how well she will fare in the urban areas, what with a constant barrage of media criticism over her style of functioning and corruption.

Again the DMK was the first to be off the blocks, clinching an alliance with the PMK, the Tiwari Congress led by Mr. Vazhapadi K. Ramamurthy and the Communist Party (CPI). The Tiwari Congress leaders are unhappy about Ramamurthy's 'unilateral decision' to join hands with a party tainted by its association with the 'Rajiv killers' and thus annoying Sonia Gandhi who alone could make any difference to the sagging fortunes of this rump, but Ramamurthy has put his foot down. A small section led by Mr. Prabhu MP is assiduously wooing Jayalalitha, but it might not get anywhere for the Tiwari Congress's survival in the state depends solely on the hold of Ramamurthy among the Vanniyars.

Of course the CPM and the MDMK are fighting the elections together and it will be the first major trial of strength for Vai.Go.

Again as usual the official Congress is in a fix as to which way to go, with different factions pulling in different directions.

Even as the TNCC leader Kumari Ananthan pompously announced a nine-party front led by the Congress – most of the partners are virtually non-existent, they all hope to cash in on some sectional appeal or other – union minister K.V. Thangabalu claimed that the front had no official sanction, meaning the assent of the Prime Minister.

This minister is said to be a frontman for Jayalalitha and is ranged against Karuppiiah Moopener in the

internal power struggle. Though he has no roots in the state, the fact that he is propped up by the lady and that Narasimha Rao himself does not seem to have finally turned his back on the AIADMK, lends some credibility for Thangabalu.

The High Command has not yet come out with any statement of intent on the alliance issue.

Yet another imponderable is the Rajni factor. The superstar continues to keep people guessing, though the media is awash with reports of a grand coalition of the Congress and MGR loyalists disenchanted with Jayalalitha and Rajnikanth's plans to campaign for it in the panchayat elections by way of testing the waters.

As for the AIADMK itself, it seems to be in a pickle of sorts, what with the Centre closing in on the clan of Jayalalitha's confidante Sasikala, launching systematic investigations into the wealth amassed by senior associates of the Chief Minister, her image being perceived to have taken strong knocks and the alliance with the Congress still failing to materialise despite her best efforts.

It is indeed a dicey situation. With all talk of dismissal of the Jayalalitha government on corruption charges or her resigning in the wake of a possible adverse ruling against her in the supreme court in the case challenging the sanction for her prosecution still remaining in the realm of speculation, one has a feeling that the Jaya show will go on some more time to come.

Celebrating the Eclipse Taking Science to the People

by T. Jayaraman

On Tuesday, October 24, 1995 hundreds of thousands of Indians watched the total solar eclipse as the majestic celestial phenomenon swept through one of the most densely populated regions of the world. Millions more outside the path of totality watched the phenomenon on television, in a unique programme in which leading scientists took science directly into people's homes.

On the occasion of the last total solar eclipse in 1980, the near-hysterical mass fear that was evoked in vast sections of the population was striking. The media, though they also carried scientific information, were full of alarmist

statements, based on obscurantist or pseudo-scientific ideas that provoked a sense of fear and alarm. These statements, together with the more common superstitious fears, provoked entire cities close to or on the path of totality, like Madras or Hyderabad, to close down during the period of the eclipse. Most people stayed indoors, behind shut doors and windows, waiting for the dreaded period to pass; and public transport stayed off the roads.

How was the situation different during this eclipse? Acutely aware of the 1980 experience, a number of scientific institutions and popular science organisations launched a prolonged national campaign before this eclipse. Volunteers had over the

past year spent considerable amount of time and energy in educating and informing the public of the event that was to take place. Safe, inexpensive solar filters for viewing the eclipse were manufactured and sold in unprecedented numbers. A sustained media campaign provided substantial information to the public on the total solar eclipse and educated it on safe methods of watching it. Science was certainly more in evidence this time than in 1980.

Nowhere were the results of this campaign more in evidence than in West Bengal. Large numbers of people made the trip from Calcutta to Diamond Harbour, which was in the path of totality, turning the occasion into a mass science festival. Every observer on the scene commented on the marked difference in attitude between 1995 and 1980. In the city of Calcutta itself, where the eclipse was close to totality, large numbers of people gathered in the streets to watch the phenomenon. Those who are concerned with the development of a scientific temper in India can legitimately gain some satisfaction from the results of this national campaign, especially after the experience of the 'milk miracle' a few weeks ago.

Doordarshan deserves full credit for the extraordinary resources it invested in the live coverage of the eclipse from the path of totality. Professor Yashpal, other scientists and lay correspondents rose splendidly to the occasion.

But there were also a number of negative features in the popular and media reaction to this event that allow no room for complacency. The campaign to provide scientific information on the eclipse was met by a counter-campaign in the media. This came from astrology and pseudo-science which constantly created confusion amongst the public.

The absurdity of astrology in the age of space travel is obvious. When spacecraft visit various planets in the solar system and gather scientific data for different kinds of study, to treat these planets as the origin of malefic influences on the daily life of people or individuals is laughable. If anything, the scientific understanding of these planets provides us with valuable insight about the earth itself, a point that has been frequently made by scientists like Carl Sagan. It is clear from their pronouncements that the purveyors of astrology prey on the uncertainty that exists in people's minds regard-

ing political and social events, or for that matter the numerous accidents that can befall anyone.

The Railway Ministry benefits from the link frequently made by astrology between railway accidents and planetary movements. This absolves it from any responsibility in the matter of proper maintenance. And apologists for Nazism may well draw sustenance from the astrologer B.V. Raman's pronouncements: Hitler's rise and fall had to do with the stars and nothing to do with politics or society. The number of such absurd statements is too large to go through in detail. It is sufficient to reiterate that no statistical correlation in any scientific sense is present between planetary movements and events on earth. What is presented by astrologers is a random selection of events that coincide with eclipses, something that one can always easily find.

Alongside astrology also appears other kinds of pseudo-science which uses scientific terms to confuse the ill-informed. Claims are made for 'poisonous gases that will harm the foetus', for strange radiation or enhanced radiation that is present only during eclipses, for 'magnetic effects' that will suddenly make their presence felt, for the possible contamination of waters. The list is virtually endless. All of them are unscientific and baseless, without an iota of evidence; indeed in the case of most such claims there is firm evidence to the contrary. Some of these claims carry labels of respectability. In one of the more bizarre news stories that came out after the eclipse, doctors in the Thane Mental Hospital 'confirmed', after a study that was specially conducted, that there were no special effects due to the eclipse on their patients - as if such an absurd proposition required any scientific rebuttal at all.

Even more revealing are the accusations levelled at scientists when they rebut astrology or simply issue statements encouraging people to watch the eclipse. In a clear appeal to obscurantism and fundamentalism of the brand, scientists are accused of 'ignoring the traditional wisdom' of ancient Indian sages and an attempt is made to portray them as being anti-religion. There are also persistent attempts to smuggle in astrology into respectable scientific circles, like the award given to an astrologer at the Indian Science Congress a few years ago, demonstrating the political clout

that sections of this obscurantist fraternity carry.

It is clear that scientists, as well as those interested in the development of a scientific temper, cannot reply to these attacks in the media and on public platforms with kid gloves on. What is needed is a strong response that nails down the blatant attempt to mislead the uninformed and exposes as well the links that such arguments have to fundamentalism. There is no need to be defensive in combating the obscurantist appeal to tradition. It is modern Indian science that is the inheritor of the tradition of ancient Indian science and the true followers of Aryabhata or Varahamihira are the astronomers and astro-physicists of today, and indeed all those who carry forward the spirit of critical enquiry, and not those who simply parrot the ancients. Any attempt to ward off attacks on superstition by accusing scientists of being anti-religion must also be replied to clearly and firmly. While religion is a matter of personal belief, there is no room in the practice of science for godly intervention or other supernatural causes as either the cause or the explanation of natural phenomena.

There are also more sophisticated apologists of 'miracles' and belief in supernatural phenomena or plain superstition who have argued that the tendency to believe in non-scientific and irrational explanations constitute some manifestation of a deep popular protest against a dominant 'authoritarian' rationality which is thrust on the people. Or in another variant they equate the 'authoritative rhetoric' of science to the rhetoric of religion or astrology and argue for an even-handed treatment of science as well as superstition and irrational beliefs. Many of the proponents of these and other apologist viewpoints find ready space in the media. And too often, unfortunately, many scientists are defensive in the face of the 'pro-people' posture that seems implied in these arguments.

While obscurantism cannot be justified in the name of popular protest, it is not even true that rationality has become the dominant feature in Indian society today. The very fact that perhaps more people took a ritual bath in the Ganga or at Kurukshetra on the day of the eclipse than watched the phenomenon at Diamond Harbour

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WEDDING BELLS

We congratulate the following couples on their recent wedding.

Dinesh son of Mr. & Mrs. S. W. Wijayanayagam of 90 Mossbrook Crescent, Scarborough, Ontario M1W 2W9, Canada and Darshini daughter of Mr. & Mrs. P. Jayanandan of 507-2900 Battleford Road, Mississauga, Ontario L5N 2V9, Canada on 28.10.95 at Sangam Banquet Hall, Mississauga, Ontario.

Sivabalan son of Mr. & Mrs. C. Balasingham of Araly North, Vaddukoddai, Sri Lanka and Sutha daughter of the late Mr. Kulanthavel and Mrs. P. Kulanthavel of Vaddu South West, Vaddukoddai, Sri Lanka on 12.11.95 at Recreation Complex, Ellesmere Road, Scarborough Canada.

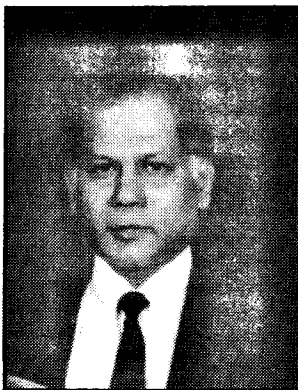
Sivaganesan son of Mr. & Mrs. S. Navaratnam of Puloly East, Point Pedro, Sri Lanka and Anusha daughter of Mr. & Mrs. S. Rajendra of 28 Herry Park Road, Walthamstow, London E17 6LJ on 11.11.95 at London Murugan Temple, London E12.

Sivaratnam brother-in-law and brother of Mr. & Mrs. Kanagasabanathan of 10 Stonehill Court, Apt. 207, Scarborough, Ontario M1W 2X8, Canada and Shyamala daughter of Mr. & Mrs. C. Duraisingham of 32 Bandaranayake Mawatha, Colombo 12 on 4.11.95 at St. Lawrence Martyr Church Wedding Hall, Scarborough, Canada.

OBITUARIES



Gnanaranjani Selladurai, Teacher Hindu Ladies College, Jaffna, Beloved wife of the late Mr. Selladurai, Palaly Training College; loving mother of Banurekha; daughter of the late Mr. and Mrs. Thillaiambalam of Aiyankoil Street, Vannarponnai; sister of Kamalasani Rasiah (Sri Lanka), Meenalasani Thambyahpillai (UK), Gowrie Thurairajah (Sri Lanka), Thayapari Rasaendiran (UK), Jegatheesan (Canada) and Karthikeyan (Australia) passed away in Jaffna after a brief illness on 24.9.95 - 34 Grange-way Gardens, Redbridge, Ilford, Essex IG4 5HN.



Mr. E.F. Xavier, born 18.6.1939, beloved husband of Rani, loving father of Frank and Davina; son of late Mr. & Mrs. Edward of Kayts; brother of Rani Arulanantham (Paris), Baby Celestine, Baba Thaninmayagam and Saroja Charles (Colombo) passed away in London on 27th October 1995.

The funeral took place at the Hampstead Cemetery, London NW6 on 6th November 1995.

Mrs. Xavier and members of her family sincerely thank all the relatives and friends who attended the funeral service and funeral and sent floral tributes, messages of sympathy and condoled with them during their time of great sorrow. - Flat 4, 18 Woodchurch Road, London NW6. Tel: 0171 328 8550.

Mailvaganam, Vamadeva, Retired Manager, Bank of Ceylon, beloved husband of Ambiga; loving father of Sumathi, Komathi and Inthumathi; father-in-law of Mohanadas; brother of Meenalajani, Late Vanajalajani and Balakumar and brother-in-law of Varatharajah (Toronto) and Sivapackiam passed away on 24th October and funeral took place in Jaffna. - Thillagaddy, Chunnakam/ 146 Ridge Lane, Watford, Herts. Tel: 01923 235552/ 3161 Eglinton Avenue East Apt 714, Scarborough, Ontario M1J 2G7, Canada. Tel: 416 267 4220.

IN MEMORIAM



Richard Jeyarajasingam
 Born: 20.11.28

Called to Glory: 27.11.90

*This is your day of memory
 But everyday will be a day
 When by your family
 You are remembered lovingly.
 No one day goes by
 Throughout the year
 Without some thought that
 Brings you near
 Within our hearts you will
 remain*

*And someday we shall meet
 again
 Saved by faith in Him who said
 The word of life that raised
 the dead,
 The light that shines through
 death's deep rift
 Eternal life is God's own gift.*

*Fondly remembered by
 Ranees and Children.*

Third Death Anniversary of Dr. P.S. Alageswaran



Born: 4.7.28 Died: 10.11.92

*A beautiful life full of kind
 deeds*

*A helping hand to those in
 need*

*Unselfish, loving and kind
 Sweet memories that are left
 behind.*

*Much loved and missed by
 Ratnes, Krishna, Shyamala,
 Family, Friends and Relations.*



In loving memory of Mr. P.V. Nadarajah on the seventh anniversary of his passing away on 16th November 1988.

*Fondly remembered and
 sadly missed by his loving wife
 Thilagavathy; children Usha,
 Varathan, Nalini and Nanthini;
 sons-in-law Sivanathan, Rajku-
 mar and Vathsayan; daughter-
 in-law Savithiri; grand children
 Bairavi, Luxmi, Uruthiran and
 Abhirami. - 45/6 Everton Road,
 Strathfield, NSW 2145, Au-
 stralia.*

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

December 2 Eekathasi.

Dec. 3 Feast of St. Francis Xavier.

Dec. 4 Pirathosam; Karthigai Somavaram 3rd Monday.

Dec. 5 Thirukkarthigai Dheepam.

Dec. 6 Full Moon; Feast of St. Nicholas.

Dec. 7 Feast of St. Ambrose.

Dec. 9 1.45pm Launching of Book of Poems of Lakshmi Srikantha Rajah at Parkhouse School, Arthur Road, Wimbledon, London SW19 7DZ.

Dec. 9 4.00pm Navalar Day Celebrations at London Muru-

gan Temple Annexe, 78 Church Road, London E12 4AF. For details Tel: Mrs. T. Muttucumaraswamy 0181 675 3698.

Dec. 11 Karthigai Somavaram 4th and last Monday.

Dec. 14 Feast of St. John.

Dec. 18 Eekathasi.

Dec. 19 Pirathosam.

Dec. 21 Amavasai.

Dec. 25 Christmas; Chathurthi.

Dec. 26 Feast of St. Stephen.

Dec. 27 Thiruvembhavai Starts.

Dec. 29 Feast of St. Thomas.

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

Dec. 21 6.30pm Carol Singing, Dance and Snacks. All welcome.

CANADIAN NEWS LETTER

Demonstration at U.N. Headquarters:

Over 5000 Sri Lankan Tamils from Canada demonstrated at the U.N. Headquarters in New York where the 50th anniversary meeting was held attended by World Heads of State including President Chandrika Kumaratunga. The participants called for the recognition of Tamil Eelam as a state with Prabaharan as its leaders. The demonstration was followed by a meeting addressed by Mr. Sam Duraiswamy, President of the Tamil Eelam Society of Canada; Mr. R. Thangavelu, Vice President of World Tamil Movement, Canada and others. Just before the scheduled demonstration Mr. Suresh, President of the World Tamil Movement was detained under the Immigration Act and continues to be in detention.

Ceylon Tamil Jewellers Association of Toronto was inaugurated on 24th September, through the initiative of Mr. Siva Sivaramalingam, Chairman, Business and Finance Committee of the Canada Ceylon Tamil Chamber of Commerce.



Ceylon Tamil Jewellers of Toronto

A seven member executive committee was elected to manage the newly formed association.

Quebec Referendum: The Quebec Referendum dominated the Canadian scene in October. The French Canadians settled in the province of Quebec exercised their constitutional right as founding fathers and took a vote on separation from Canada. The election was conducted in a very peaceful manner and the separatists lost by a slender margin. However it was a moral victory for them and the English Canadians are now considering to offer the province of Quebec a distinct society status and also a veto over future constitutional changes to the Canadian constitution. These developments have made some of the Sri Lankan Tamils wonder whether similar provisions cannot be made for the N.E. province of Sri Lanka in the

peace proposals of the Chandrika government.

Family Services Association: Mr. M.J.A. Jeyanathan, a former executive of the Bank of Ceylon and past president of the Society for the Aid of Ceylon Minorities in Canada, has been elected Director of the Family Services Association of Metropolitan Toronto. The F.S.A. is a non profit making organisation, run by a board of 18 members and is a prestigious organisation.

Mr. Thillainathan Manickavasagar – An Appreciation

Mr. Manickavasagar, Emeritus Director of Education in Sri Lanka passed away peacefully on 12th June 1995. He was born on 2nd January 1920 into the affluent Hindu family of Malavarayar of Puttur, Jaffna, and studied at Atchuvally American Mission College, Puttur Sri Somaskanda and later at St. John's College, Jaffna. At St. John's, he came under the personal supervision of the principal Rev. Henry Peto during the years 1935 to 1939. He graduated from the Madras University and joined the teaching profession in June 1943. The major part of his teaching career was at Skanda Varodaya College, Chunnakam.

In 1949, Mr. Manickavasagar underwent post graduate training at the Maharagama Teachers' College and subsequently became a Circuit Education Officer, Grade 1. In 1963, he was awarded a Colombo Plan scholarship in the teaching of English as a second language at the University of Sydney, where he distinguished himself as a debater and had the honour of being appointed to the Committee for Debates.

In 1969, he was appointed Education Officer – English. He served in the panel of writers of Textbooks in English and made valuable contributions. He was also an advisor to the Tamil and Hinduism Text Books Committee, and served on the Central Transfer Board for Teachers. Later he was promoted Chief Education Officer.

In 1971, he was appointed a Director of Education and was put in charge of the newly created Tamil Unit of the Ministry of Education. In 1972, he was appointed Director of Education of Northern Region. It was during his tenure of office that the Jaffna University Campus was established at Parameshwara College in the midst of stiff opposition from the staff and students of the college. His timely action in arranging their transfer to neighbouring schools avoided an ugly situation, and the inauguration of the Campus took place in 1974. He also launched a campaign for the

eradication of social disabilities in the schools in the region and achieved great success. Later he was Director of Education for Eastern Region.

In 1980, he was promoted to Class 1 of the Education Service and was assisting in the restructuring of the Education Department into 24 administrative districts. As the Chairman of the School Structure Committee, he was responsible for making recommendations regarding the opening of new schools, upgrading schools etc.

Wherever Mr. Manickavasagar served, he took an active part in the social, cultural and religious activities of the people. In Nawalapitiya, he played an important role in the organisation of the first Thirukural Conference in 1954. He was Vice President of the All Ceylon Hindu Congress and of the Vivekananda Society. He was President of the Sri Lanka Education Administrative Service Union and was an active trade unionist until his retirement.

Mr. Manickavasagar came to Canada in November 1990. He soon became involved in the social, religious and cultural activities of the Tamil people who revered him for his eminent goodness. He was patron of the Sri Somaskanda College OBA, President of the Hindu Cultural Council, the Music Society (Kalai Koyil) and a director of the Senior Tamils Centre and the Society for the Aid of Ceylon Minorities. In recognition of his services, he was honoured in February this year by the Eelam Tamil Information Centre the Catholic Immigration Bureau (Scarborough) and was presented the Murugesu Kandiah Memorial Medal.

Mr. Manickavasagar is survived by his wife, Gnanambigai, daughters Mrs. Sarjidevi Sathianathan, Dr. Shantha S. Raj, Miss Paranaladevi, Mrs. Susheeladevi Robinson and sons Mr. Srikrishnanathan and Mr. Thillainathan.

Kavijar V. Kandavanam, Canada.

Bharatha Natya Arangetram of Arulmoli Sivagunam

The Bharatha Natya Arangetram of Doramatilla Arulmoli, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Sivagunam of Walthamstow took place on 30th of September '95 at the Lloyds Park Theatre, London E17. Arulmoli also fondly known to many as Suji, had her audience captivated and enchanted by her impressive performance. Suji's dance repertoire was unique and had all the traditional components of a Bharatha Natya Arangetram. Credit goes to her Guru Mrs. Pathmini Gunaseelan for introducing two Christian

pieces into the dance repertoire without disturbing the traditional norm.

The dancer commenced her Arangetram with 'Pathanjala' a Christian theme



seeking blessings from God in Ragamalika. This was followed by Jathiswaram in Raga Kalyani and Sabtham in Raga Ragamalika. The Varnam was a 30 minute piece in Raga Sangaraparanam and one could see the excellence in foot-work and aesthetic abhinayas.

For the first time in an Arangetram a Patham relating to our Homeland was introduced and was very well received by the audience. This was written by Pulavar Sivanathan for this special occasion and was presented as the 'Holy Awakening Of Mother Tamil Eelam'. The navarasas were excellently portrayed by Suji in her Sancharibhava illustrations, which realistically expressed the longing for the freedom of the oppressed people and was in empathy with the spellbound audience. The Vocalist for this Patham was her talented Guru. This was followed by a Patham 'Annunciation' – the announcement of Christ's birth by the Angel Gabriel to Our Lady. This Patham was a mini dance drama which was very elegantly and artistically performed. Incarnation is the fulfillment of the prophesy of the Messiah as quoted in the Old Testament, bridging of the old and the new order. God enters human history, the base of Christian belief. Thillana in Raga Birinthavana Saranga was a brilliant piece in quick

tempo which she performed with ease. Her gestures were graceful and there was gaiety in her movements and awareness of aesthetic bhava in her performance.

The Guru Mrs. Pathmini Gunaseelan is a talented teacher and Suji is her seventh student. She founded the Narthana Kalalaya in 1985, to promote the Kalashetra style of Bharatha Natyam. Her Nattuvangam, choreography and careful selection of the dance pieces have greatly assisted Suji in bringing out her superb artistic talents.

The chief guest for the performance was Rev. Fr. T.E.T. Rajan, who in his well received speech insisted continuity in this unfathomable perennial cultural heritage of the East.

The impressive ensemble of accompanying artistes for that evening were 'Eelathu Seerkhazhi' Mr. Manikam Yogeswaran the vocalist, Mr. Muthu Sivarajah on his Miruthangam, Mrs. Kalaivani Indrakumar on the violin, Mr. Pitchaiyappa Gnana-varathan on the flute and completing the ensemble were Kandiah Chidambaranathan on the morsing and Mrs. Thayalini Skandamoorthy on the Thambura.

Smt Rathika Rajan.

An Unforgettable Experience



It was the rhythmic vibrations, full of colour and elegance, beautifully created by Shobana, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Balaratnam, Northwood, Middlesex and disciple of Smt. Selvaluxmy Ramakrishnan, along with her accompanying orchestra that engulfed the auditorium at the Logan Hall when she had her Bharatha Natya Arangetram on the 9th September '95.

Debutant? One wondered since it resembled more of a professional session of challenges between a well seasoned dancer and an orchestra of artistes who manifested their distinct talents throughout the evening and the charming young performer turned up trumps at every piece of

her well selected repertoire. Gifted in many ways – ideal physique, natural poise, stamina – she may have, but the sheer hard work coupled with dedication and determination must be of astounding proportions.

Shobana's execution of every piece, especially the intricate 'Varnam', lively 'Panthaattam' and the dazzling 'Thillana', had stylish precision and graceful expressions and were synchronous with the rapturous orchestra and all these with overflowing confidence throughout that bewitched the chief guest Miss Gypsy Booth – Principal of Gypsy Booth School of Ballet and Theatre Arts – who, in her speech, couldn't hide her fascination and praised what she saw as the best of a different dimension in this form of ancient stage entertainment.

The satisfaction and appreciation of Shobana's splendid contribution that evening was there to see on the happy faces of the accompanying musicians and that gave away the score of the occasion. Perhaps it is that spiral of hypnotic eastern rhythms they created that gave Shobana the extra momentum that resulted in an evening of scintillating experience.

The rich vocals of 'Sangeetha Sironmani' Sri K. Rajasekharan from Madras were ably supported by Smt. Selvaluxmy Ramakrishnan on nattuvangam, the magical miruthangist Sri Bhavani Shankar, violin maestro Sri Chandrashekar and serenading flutist Dr. Nimalraj. In their company, vocalist Rajasekharan could have sung all night, especially the ever-green creations like Parathiyar's 'Kaani nilam vendum', without moving anyone off their seats. Ravi Sanguhan's crisp competing and the imaginative lighting of Chitra Satkunanathan added extra spice to the evening's entertainment.

If there was another key winner other than Shobana to take pride and to share the acclaim at the end of the events, it must surely be Shobana's guru Smt. Selvaluxmy Ramakrishnan who had been the kingpin of the whole setup from perfecting the youngster to such standards of excellence through fine edged choreography to providing us all with an evening to remember. For a person who helped Shobana to achieve the biggest among all her other conquests – speech and drama, music and dramatic arts (gold medal), plus jazz, ballet etc., she was quietly confident and was beaming with delight throughout the performance.

One can only admire the Bharatha Natyam teachers like Smt Selvaluxmy Ramakrishnan, who despite the many adversities of having to perfect several youngsters in countries other than the 'natural lands' of this fine artistry and yet still manage to produce stars performing class acts and surely ought to raise the hat to their hidden assets.

Well done Smt Selvaluxmy Ramakrishnan and more of them please. What an experience for one evening and for once, I didn't have to carry my children to the car at the end of it all.

Logan Rasiah.

Continued from page 15

sorship on all news pertaining to the war is responsible. The most unfortunate things is that there are some who are keen to tell others what they consider as appealing to the listeners and some who want to hear only what coincides with their biased views. The saying: one can take a horse to the pond but cannot force it to drink the water is apt here. However, some lights are visible in the darkness. The group of nine Tamil unions and parties in Sri Lanka have called for the immediate resumption of the attempts to negotiate a settlement. It is clear that the Tamils in the war zone are not in a position to make this demand. Posterity will blame the others for their silence and indifference to the happenings affecting the Tamils caught in this war. People are ready to applaud courageous acts in this war turning a blind eye to their long-term effects on the society as well as peace and unity in the whole country. As pointed out earlier, peace is what every society aspires to have and this is not possible

without a will to seek it. Both the warring factions have only made it more difficult to bring the people together within and between the different communities.

The intransigence and defiant attitude displayed by the LTTE in previous attempts to reach a negotiated settlement of the conflict have complicated further what was already a complex process. The trust and hope that prevailed until April 19 when the truce agreement was unilaterally broken and the attacks on military targets resumed instantly by the LTTE cannot be expected to return suddenly after the war became atrocious claiming the lives of thousands of armed personnel and civilians. The present Government has repeatedly told the world that the ongoing war is not of their choice and they have been unwillingly forced into it. Their response to the call for a cease-fire now is disappointing as seen from Sri Lankan foreign minister's comment given to reporters at the Auckland Commonwealth meeting. 'My reaction to a

cease-fire would be that we have had bad experience with cease-fires. Their track record with regard to cease-fires is bad. They have used them to regroup and rearm. Before meaningful negotiations are held which do not involve a separate state, there must be some clear evidence that they will be willing to renounce violence and commence negotiations that will conclude within a reasonable amount of time.'

It is to be noted that the present Government did not place any conditions when it had four rounds of talks soon after it was elected on a mandate of all the people to settle the conflict peacefully. This hardening of attitude is the result of the hasty and perhaps miscalculated decision to throw away the opportunity to reach a political solution. The joint statement of the nine Tamil unions and parties reflects the growing fears that the Government might resort to force to resolve the conflict, despite its past declaration rejecting the military option. This must be taken seriously, considering the events over the past few weeks.

Continued from page 29

makes it clear what the 'dominant' reality is. The fact that these people were joined by many political leaders, public figures and others, or, to take another example, the manner in which powerful sections of Indian society greeted the milk miracle, makes it clear that obscurantism has a considerable following in ruling circles. The obscurantism and irrationality that we witness in Indian society is no new phenomenon. It is a continuation of what has existed in our society for a long period. Its persistence points to yet another national goal that we have failed to achieve in the years after Independence.

The plain fact is that science in India, along with education, has been kept away from the majority of the people and the encouragement that the development of a scientific temper has received, apart from much lip-service, is still far from adequate. With the constant efforts of fundamentalisms of various brands to make political headway using obscurantist beliefs, it is clear that what we need is more science and not less of it. Mass science education of good quality together with the elimination of illiteracy and the promotion of universal school education is one of the major unfinished tasks on the national agenda for development. Occasions such as the total solar eclipse provide

opportunities to speak to people directly about science. Such campaigns are no substitute for continuing education. Nevertheless, they provide a chance to awaken and stimulate people's interest in science in a participatory way.

The increasing role that popular science movements are playing in taking science to the people, and the increase in similar efforts by scientists acting on their own and in cooperation with popular movements, have no doubt contributed in a significant way to the different mood that prevailed during this eclipse compared to the one of 1980. But the relative effectiveness of their campaigns in different parts of the country is also a pointer to the larger social questions involved in combating obscurantism. It is clear, in comparing the response in West Bengal to that in other parts of the country, that the seeds sown by the campaign fell on much more fertile soil there - prepared by a political and social history that has given much needed space to rationalism and science and held obscurantism, at least to some extent, at bay. This is not to take away from the value of the efforts made elsewhere in the country, especially in Kerala where people did not have the opportunity this time to witness anything spectacular. Popular science movements take their message to a much broader section of the people if they link up in a bigger way with trade un-

ions, NGOs, kisan organisations and students', youth and women's movements.

Science can do even better in 1999. A more concerted campaign through the media and greater efforts to ensure availability of means to view the eclipse safely will prove rewarding. There is no reason why the Bolivian example, where the Government itself ensured through a mass distribution of solar filters that more than half the population watched the total eclipse of November 1994, cannot be emulated in India. There should also be greater effort to counter the more alarmist statements from a section of the medical profession. The kind of anti-eclipse watching campaign that they launched (for instance, a newspaper and television campaign by the National Blindness Control Programme under the Ministry of Health of the Government of India urged people not to watch the eclipse at all) is something that could be prevented. The lesson is that there must be a serious effort to bring influential sections of the medical community into the planning phase of the campaign.

Again in 1999, with the end of the millennium close at hand, astrology and pseudo-science will be out in the field in full cry. They must be met Kasparov-like, by a combination of solid home preparation and offence. (Courtesy: Frontline).

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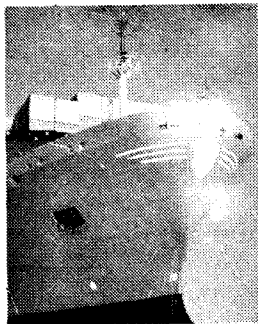
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