

Tamil TIMES

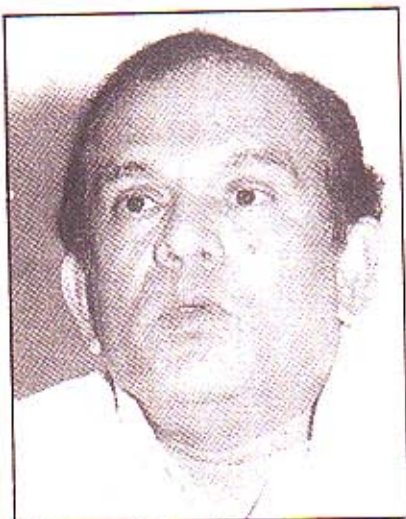
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LTTE Leader V. Pirabakaran Vows to Continue Struggle



Brush With Death – Sri Lanka's
Defence Minister Anrudha Ratwatte

- ★ PIRABAKARAN VOWS TO CONTINUE STRUGGLE
- ★ Probe into 'Missing Persons'
- ★ Sri Lanka Tops in Suicide
- ★ The Forgotten People
- ★ Battle of Closed Minds
- ★ Conflict : An Overview
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Whither Human Rights ?

Reported cases of arbitrary arrests, unacknowledged detentions, disappearances, rape of women and extrajudicial killings have been on the increase in recent months in the army-controlled areas of the north, particularly in the Jaffna peninsula. The gang-rape and murder of the 18 year-old Krishanthi, and the brutal murder of her mother, brother and neighbour who went in search of her would appear to be symbolic of the worrying development in regard to the human rights situation in areas under military control.

After it came to power, the Peoples Alliance government under President Kumaratunga was able to claim with some justification that the scale and extent of gross and widespread abuse of human rights which occurred for years under the previous regime had become a thing of the past. The government's action in appointing several Commissions of Inquiry presided over by judges to investigate past abuse of human rights was universally welcomed. It was the improvement in the human rights situation and the general perception that the government was committed to the of protection human rights that contributed a great deal to enhance the government's image and standing in the eyes of the international community. However, the increasing number of cases of human rights violations that have occurred in recent months and are continuing to occur in the army-controlled north of the country puts into serious jeopardy the government's credibility as to its commitment to protect human rights.

The fact of the matter is that in most areas of the north civilian administrative structures have become virtually non-existent. What is in place, particularly in the Jaffna peninsula, is military control of every aspect of life. It is almost a year since Jaffna was "recaptured" from the Tigers, but there has been no progress made to introduce a civilian element in running the administration. Stop and search operations undertaken by the security forces under cover of local curfews provide an ideal setting for errant men in uniform to commit excesses against defenceless civilians who have been deprived of any mechanism or avenue of complaint or redress.

The government's decision to set up a branch of the Human Rights Task Force in Jaffna is a step in the right direction. What is more urgently required is the progressive civilianisation of the administration in these areas. The government also must encourage and support the formation and functioning of independent citizens' committees at village level composed of persons with local knowledge and understanding. While these committees must be proactive, the ordinary people ought to be enabled to have unfettered access to them to make representations in respect of any grievances they may have. The security forces must be compelled to report any arrest they make within 24 hours to the office of the HRTF which should maintain daily up-dated lists of persons held in detention, and these lists must be made available for inspection by members of the public.

Justice delayed is justice denied is a legal cliché that is oft repeated. In the case of victims of human rights abuses, their experience has been that they do not normally have obtain even delayed justice. The relative speed with which the government took appropriate action in apprehending, investigating and bringing before court the perpetrators of the gang-rape and murder of Krishanthi must become the norm and not an exception in dealing with all cases of human rights violations. Prompt arrest and investigation, speedy trial and condign punishment against those who under the cloak of authority violate the human rights of others is the minimum that is expected of a government which professes to be committed to protection of human rights.

NEWS REVIEW

Anurudha's Brush With Death

Sri Lanka's Deputy Defense Minister, Anurudha Ratwatte, the Army Commander Rohan Daluwatte, the Inspector General of Police Rajaguru and other high-ranking military officials survived a brush with certain death at the hands of the LTTE on 7 December after their helicopter was forced to land due to mechanical problems in LTTE controlled territory in the north of the island.

The Minister and the generals were unhurt in the landing and saved in a hurriedly executed land and air operation just before the U.S. built Bell 412 air force helicopter could have become a target for Tamil Tiger attack. Airborne troops rushed to rescue the minister and officials and Sri Lankan troops destroyed the stricken Bell 412 to prevent it falling into Tiger hands.

With Gen. Anurudha Ratwatte were army commander Lt. Gen. Rohan Daluwatte, Inspector General of Police W.B. Rajaguru, overall Operations Commander Maj. Gen. Asoka Jayawardena and members of their bodyguards. The group was bound for a senior-level conference at Weli Oya military base in the northeastern part of the island.

They had to trek almost five kilometers through rebel-held jungle to find help from local Tamil villagers, Ratwatte told state television. "Now I know more intimately how soldiers operate in difficult jungle terrain like this," said Ratwatte. He described the drama as "a good life experience." Ratwatte appeared in good spirits and after his three-hour ordeal had insisted on completing his original mission, a visit to Weli Oya.

Analysts said the loss of Ratwatte and Daluwatte would have hit the two-year-old Kumaratunga regime hard and would have cast a cloud over the government's war effort against the Tigers. The pair are widely credited with the military's recent victories over the Tigers, including last December's recapture of the rebels' strategic northern stronghold of Jaffna. Daluwatte was promoted to army chief from northern commander after the Jaffna victory. Anurudha Ratwatte must have surely been one in the LTTE's top list for elimination, and the Tigers must be regretting the fact that they could not take advantage of the mechanical misfortune that Anurudha and the top echelons of the military faced in this incident.

Nine Service Personnel Face Rape & Murder Charge

The authorities in Colombo have offered immunity from prosecution to two security service personnel involved in a rape and murder case of an 18 year-old Tamil school girl in exchange for getting the two to testify against nine other security personnel accused of the same crime.

The authorities had to adopt this course because of the absence of other independent witnesses to the crime. Justice Minister G.L. Peiris said the action showed the government's determination to stamp out human rights violations by its security forces.

Krishanthi Kumarasamy, an A-Level student from girls school in Jaffna was taken into custody at a checkpoint in Jaffna on September 7 and disappeared. Her mother and 16-year-old brother, along with a 36 year-old neighbour, were taken

into custody when they went to the checkpoint seeking information. The military initially denied holding them, but their mutilated bodies were subsequently discovered in a nearby pit a month later. The government has pledged that it would do everything in their power to bring the perpetrators of these crimes to justice.

Peiris told reporters the two soldiers, who were not involved in the rape and murders but allegedly helped dispose of the bodies, had been offered conditional pardon in return for their testimony against seven soldiers and two policemen accused of the crimes.

"A conditional pardon has been offered to two accused in order to buttress the case for the prosecution," he said. "We have brought this case before the court - justice will be done," Peiris said. "It does not matter who is responsible - army, po-

lice, however high, however low, there's nobody who enjoys immunity from the law."

The nine defendants who are already in custody were recently produced before the Colombo Chief Magistrate to be formally charged with kidnapping, rape and murder. Though on an earlier date, the court agreed to an application from the defendants for the hearing of the case to be transferred to Jaffna, it was announced in Court that the case would be heard in Colombo.

The government is deeply worried about the increasing number of allegations about widespread human rights violations in army-controlled areas in the Jaffna peninsula. President Chandrika's Peoples Alliance government assumed office in 1994 pledging an end to gross abuse of human rights that characterised the period of the previous regime.

Peiris said Sri Lankans expect a sincere commitment to human rights from the ruling People's Alliance. "This is a fragile situation, it has to be constantly monitored and the government has to do everything in its power to see that fundamental rights are observed in practice," he said.

The rape and subsequent slaying of Krishanthi Kumarasamy has focused attention on allegations of increasing human rights violations in army-controlled Jaffna peninsula.

Dozens of women from Women's organisations in the mainly Sinhalese south of the island held posters of Krishanthi outside the courthouse where the hearing was held last time demanding punishment and saying the alleged rape and murder was part of a pattern.

'Heroes' Week

Colombo witnessed one of the most tightest security arrangements and security forces in the capital were placed on full alert in anticipation of the start of the LTTE's "Heroes Week," ending with "Great Heroes Day" on November 27. The LTTE has built up a tradition of launching spectacular attacks during this period on government forces or installations as a mark of honour to its fallen fighters.

In order to prevent or in anticipation of possible Tiger attacks, according to security sources additional forces from the outstations were mobilised to strengthen Colombo's security. Unusually large number of policemen and policewomen were seen patrolling the city and its suburbs most of them in civvies (civilian clothes).

The increased security and the alert meant delays from stepped up security checks and traffic jams due to road closures. The measures added to the inconveniences that have become a fact of life for Colombo residents and tourists after two massive suicide bomb attacks in the

capital early this year for which blame was attributed to the Tigers.

However the week passed without any major attack by the LTTE but with a mes-

sage from the Tiger leader V. Pirabakaran to his people that the struggle would continue until the Tamil nation achieved freedom.

HRTF Probes "Missing Persons"

The Human Rights Task Force (HRTF) is in the process of perusing a list furnished by the Government Agent of Jaffna, Mr. S. Pathmanathan, containing the names of over five-hundred persons who are said to have "disappeared" or whose whereabouts remain unknown.

The Chairman of the HRTF, Mr. R. T. Jansz, said that officials were engaged in the task of cross-checking the list supplied by the Government Agent with independent lists provided by residents of the area and the armed forces for the purpose of verification. He confirmed that the HRTF had already established that around fifteen persons as "missing" following comparison with the three lists.

"From the armed forces we obtained the names of those they have in their custody, and the GA gave us the data which have been submitted to him by various parties. We brought these lists with us and will try to trace the whereabouts of those named after going through all and completing the process of verification," Mr. Jansz said.

There have been continuing reports of persons "disappearing" after being taken into custody by service personnel in the military controlled Jaffna peninsula. In view of persistent demand from human rights organisations and MPs from Tamil areas, the government decided to open up branch office of the HRTF in Jaffna.

Three officials of the HRTF paid a preliminary visit to the peninsula on 12 November with the objective of opening branch of the HRTF in Jaffna. They held meetings with religious leaders, social workers, student groups and groups of residents mainly women. "The ladies made representations to us and appealed on behalf of about 47 missing persons including sons and relatives. Among them were a few Sinhalese women married to Tamil persons resident in Jaffna," Mr. Jansz said.

Many parties welcomed and expressed relief at the proposed setting up of a branch of the HRTF in Jaffna as the people there previously had no one to turn to when their friends or relatives were taken into custody or went "missing", Mr. Jansz added.

The HRTF is a government sponsored body, but is generally believed to operate in an independent manner. Its responsibilities include tracing of "missing" persons, and for this purpose has access to high security areas such as prisons, police stations and other places of detention used to hold persons in custody. Security forces and the police are under an

obligation to inform the HRTF of any persons taken into custody within 48 hours. However, the problem in practice has been that in a number of cases the security forces and the police have deliberately avoided complying with their obligations imposed by clear government directives.

Following representations from Batticaloa TULF MP, Mr. Joseph Pararajasingham, on many cases of reported "disappearances" in northern Jaffna, President Kumaratunga has directed investigations

in respect of each of the cases. Mr. Pararajasingham had furnished the President a list of 32 names of persons who had "disappeared" after being taken to custody by service personnel in Jaffna.

The LTTE in a statement dated 4 December issued in London stated that the following have been taken into custody by the army in Jaffna: Miss Arumugam Sivanthi of 2nd Cross Road, Colombuthurai was dragged out of a post office as she posted her application for the GCE 'O' level exam; Thangavelu Pramanathan (20), a tailor from Variyapulam, Chunnakam; Nadarajah Sriharan (22) of Chunnakam East, also a tailor; Selvarasa Kopiraj (18), a student from Point Pedro; Selvarasa Parthipan (20), a student from Colombuthurai; Kasithamby Tharmathasan (20) of Meesalai East; and Thangavadeivelu Rajendrakumar of Alvai, Jaffna.

Local Elections Postponed

In the face of almost unanimous opposition from Tamil parties represented in Parliament and those from outside, it would seem the Government is to postpone its proposal to hold elections in the new year for local government bodies in the war-torn north of Sri Lanka.

Local government bodies have remained almost defunct in the north for many years due to the prevailing military situation, and elections that should have been held according to law have repeatedly been postponed by virtue of emergency regulations. It is said that the government, particularly after the capture of many areas of the north including the Jaffna peninsula from LTTE control, was hoping to restore some form of civilian administration in these areas by the proposed local elections. Government spokesmen argued that restoration of local civil administration by means of democratic elections would enhance the prospect of civic participation and reduce the role of the military in undertaking tasks it is normally not expected to perform and for it become more accountable to civilian authorities for its actions in these areas.

However, Tamil political parties like the TULF, PLOTE, EPDP, EPRLF and TELO expressed their opposition to hold elections in the north of the island on the ground that the prevailing situation in those areas including the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people would not be conducive to hold elections that could turn out to be "free and fair".

Shortly after the government announced that elections would be held in respect of 23 local bodies in Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mannar and Vavuniya, six Tamil parties demanded that the decision be revoked. "The government has cited security reasons and postponed elections

in the south, but when war is still not over in the north the government is trying to hold elections," a statement issued by five Tamil parties said.

Explaining the reasons for the TULF objection to the holding of elections at the present time in the north, the president of the party Mr. Sivasithamparam said that normalcy had not been restored, the state of civil war still existed, hundreds of thousands of registered voters had been displaced and were not living in their homes, while most of the Tamil people were undergoing terrible hardship. The north was still under military control, no civil administration had been restored, and no democratic political party had been able to engage any political activities up-to-date, he added.

In spite of their opposition, it has been reported that PLOTE, EPDP and TELO have sent in their nominations while the TULF and EPRLF have declined to do so. PLOTE leader and Vanni MP, Mr. D. Sidharthan said that the government could hold elections in Vavuniya and Mannar districts and he had no problem joining the government in contesting the elections. "Although the people never wanted an election, the President has taken a decision, and we feel we should contest," Mr. Sidharthan added.

LTTE on Local Elections

The LTTE also condemned the government's move to hold local elections. In a statement dated 5 December issued from its London headquarters, the LTTE said, "We consider the moves to hold local government elections as an evil conspiracy to thrust an administrative machinery on the Jaffna people at gun-point with military backing. While condemning this we issue a warning that the govern-

ment should hold responsibility for whatever detrimental effects that follow such elections. A tight military governance prevails in the parts of the Jaffna peninsula under a Sinhala military occupation. The people are living as bonded slaves without fundamental rights and elementary freedoms under an oppressive military regime. They are in fear of army atrocities. The most heinous forms of human rights abuses occur frequently in these areas.

Instances of disappearances after army arrest are increasing day by day. The world is coming to know of these happenings, signifying the worst forms of state terrorism. The military approach to the ethnic problem is now under question. The state of war continues in the occupied zones due to attacks staged by the LTTE on the aggressor. The war has not come to an end. Normalcy has not been achieved. The world community is well aware of this state of affairs. The West has withheld development loans for the north and has asked the government to hold talks with the LTTE and achieve a political settle-

ment through peaceful means. This has created difficulties for the Chandrika government.

No tangible benefit has accrued to the government for the military adventures pursued in Jaffna. On the contrary it has contributed to a political failure. It has earned the hatred and enmity of the Tamil people. Above all the government has suffered condemnation by the world community.

To get over this awkward situation the Chandrika government is employing the deceitful ruse of holding elections. It seeks to conceal the military abuses by the same means. The government believes that it can thus deceive the world community.

The holding of fraudulent elections under duress and their depiction thereafter as just and democratic is nothing new in the experience of our people. We therefore request the citizens of Tamil Eelam to be wary and to avoid falling into the political trap laid by a deceiving government."

Sri Lanka Tops in Suicide

Sri Lanka is now said to have the one of the world's highest rates of suicide, with more than twenty young men and women killing themselves every day, according to a recent report by Matthew Chance from Colombo for the Voice of America.

It would seem that the situation has reached alarming proportions that the authorities in Colombo have stopped all government-run newspapers from reporting stories about suicide. No official reason for the ban has been given, but suicide among Sri Lanka's frustrated youth has become an increasing problem.

What is it that pushes so many Sri Lankans over the edge? A fashionable nightclub, crowded with young Sri Lankans, blares dance music out into the night. The people here are the lucky ones - Colombo's social and economic elite. For most Sri Lankans, the cost of a night out here would be as much as they could earn in a month. The gap between the country's rich and poor is ever widening - a fact which academics like Professor Janaka de Silva say is a root cause of the frustration that leads so many Sri Lankans to commit suicide.

There are unattainable goals that these young people have which pushes them to the brink. And there are a lot of cultural problems. For instance, there is TV which shows westernized romances and things like that. Then there are their homes, where parents are very strict with them and wouldn't allow them to go out with girls and so on. This kind of thing they cannot cope with.

Familiar problems to many, and not

just in the developing world. But researchers say Sri Lankans appear particularly bad at handling the strains of modern living. This is a country where suicide has become endemic. More than twenty young men and women kill themselves every day. Five times that number try but fail to end their own lives.

Alcoholism, stress and a civil war that has wracked the country for the past thirteen years may all be factors. But Lakshmi Ratnayake of the Sumithryo Counseling Service says the problem is primarily cultural. Could it be that Sri Lankans are more emotional and that they are unable to cope? They are not taught to cope at school: that is not something that is talked about. Also, our culture is such that we do not talk about whatever is bothering us with anybody else. We do not talk about anything that happens in the family with outsiders, because there is tremendous loyalty to the family. Even in the family, we are discouraged from talking to each other about our problems. We would never talk to a parent, or someone like that.

Although there may be no single explanation for the self destructive trend Sri Lanka, this isolation could understandably be the reason for many suicides. The government is taking little action - although it has banned state newspapers from reporting suicides in a bid to stem copy-cat deaths. But critics say it is failing to deal with the problem head on. Social stigma attached to suicide has plagued all independent efforts to counsel the young. And unless attitudes are somehow changed, health workers say the problem can only get worse.

Alleged Tiger Suppliers Arrested

Six more alleged LTTE operatives including a woman were arrested and remanded to judicial custody by the "Q" branch of the police in Madurai and Tiruchi in recent weeks, a report in "The Hindu" said.

Police identified those arrested as Rajendran, Shakuntala, Rajmohan, Baskher, Kuttipalam and Suresh. A powerful HF wireless set and a global positioning instrument used for boat navigation were also seized from, the police added.

The latest arrests followed the confessions of those arrested at Madurai and Ramanathapuram on 6 November. In the first operation a total of 11 persons were arrested and medicines and other equipment allegedly procured for the LTTE were seized. With the latest arrests a major racket hatched at Madurai for procuring supplies for the LTTE has been busted, according to the Director General of Police, Mr.K.K.Rajasekeran Nair.

A police press release said that Rajendran described as an LTTE agent was the first to be arrested on 19 November from who cash amounting Rs.8,810 was seized. He said he had received it from Shakuntala of Venkatachchapuram, Madurai. It had been given as advance payment for one of their hideouts in Madurai. Following information given by Rajendran, Shakuntala was arrested both of whom informed the police that their associates Baskher, Rajmohan, Kuttipalam and Suresh had escaped to Tiruchi, and the latter four were later arrested a few hours later at Tiruchi by a police Q branch team.

Incriminating material including two cyanide capsules, four video cassettes, medicine lists, bandage cloth packing machine, nylon packing ropes and polythene sheets were seized from them on 6 November.

In another operation by the Customs department at Vattanam junction in Ramanathapuram, six persons including two Sri Lankan Tamils were arrested and a big consignment allegedly bound for the LTTE was seized from them. The seizure in the mini-lorry included 23 gold biscuits, a 9mm pistol with 64 live rounds, two walkie-talkie sets, bags of cement and other materials worth totaling Rs.200,000. Investigations revealed that the kingpin of the operation, Indiran alias Johnson allegedly belonging to the LTTE had already left for northern Sri Lanka with another consignment. One of the two Sri Lankans arrested at Vattanam junction who had identified himself as Karuppiyah of Jaffna later turned out in fact to be an LTTE cadre Gadafi. The true identity of the other Sri Lankan who had given his name as Sathiyamoorthy was yet to be ascertained.

Third Party Mediation Only Hope for Peace

Hopes of ending Sri Lanka's ethnic war are at a low ebb, despite some of the most ferocious fighting in the conflict and months of talks on a government peace plan, a Reuter report datelined 24 November by Rohan Gunasekera quoting analysts and diplomats said.

The report added, "Its been a rough haul," said a Western diplomat who declined to be identified. "No one has landed a knockout blow. Both sides are drained in terms of resources and money." Bloody battles between Tamil Tiger rebels and government forces in which each side's death toll reached triple digits this year had failed to alter the military balance, he said.

"I'm very pessimistic," said Rohan Edirisinghe, a lecturer on law at Colombo University. "I think the peace process is stalled and needs a new initiative."

The only hope appears to be to resume talks with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) guerrillas, he said. The LTTE recently rejected a conditional offer by President Chandrika Kumaratunga to resume talks, saying they saw nothing new in her insistence that they indicate willingness to lay down arms and agree to a limited time frame for the dialogue. The Tigers torpedoed the last round of talks by sinking two navy gunboats in the eastern port of Trincomalee in April 1995.

A government peace plan, devolving wide-ranging powers to Tamils through a constitutional revision, appears to be stalled in a parliamentary select committee because of bickering between the ruling People's Alliance (PA) and the main opposition United National Party (UNP).

Kumaratunga's PA government has a one-seat majority in the 225-member parliament and needs the support of the UNP, which holds 85 seats, to get the two-thirds majority required to change the constitution. But UNP hardliners oppose the plan, which will turn Sri Lanka into a union of regions and make it a federal state in all but name, fearing it could be a stepping stone to the separate state the Tigers are fighting for.

Sinhalese nationalists have long feared that the tiny Eelam state Tamil separatists seek would dwarf Sri Lanka if it united with the 55 million Tamils across the narrow Palk Strait in India's Tamil Nadu state.

Political scientist Jayadeva Uyangoda said the devolution package could stand as a negotiating position put forward by the government in any future talks with the Tigers. "The peace plan is not dead," he said. "If the UNP abdicates its responsibility of finding a solution it is a real chance for the government to go it alone.

On one condition - the LTTE should be serious about a negotiated solution." Otherwise, he said, the government has to continue its two-pronged strategy of offering some autonomy to Tamils while pursuing a military campaign to weaken the rebels and force them back to the negotiating table.

Murugesu Sivasithamparam, leader of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), said progress in the parliamentary select committee talks was painfully slow. "If this process fails then we're back

to square one," he said, adding that the government should resume talks with the LTTE possibly with mediation by a third party. "The ground reality is that for a permanent solution to the problem, the LTTE has to agree," he said.

The Colombo University's Edirisinghe said third party intervention to bring the two sides together and dispel mistrust would help allay fears that the LTTE could use the talks to buy time to rearm and regroup as they had done before. "That's why a third party is needed," Edirisinghe said.

"People who can really apply pressure on both sides, people who have clout. There is an element of risk but I still feel that therisk has to be taken. The alternative is worse."

Donor Nations Pledge \$860 Million

The Sri Lanka Aid Consortium which gathered in Paris during the third week of November pledged an aid package of \$860 million to Sri Lanka for 1997. The amount was a modest increase from the \$850 million pledged in April 1995.

A statement from the World Bank said disbursement of the sum, which it called "generous" would need improved project implementation methods. The Bank said the highest priority for Sri Lanka beleaguered by a continuing armed conflict was peace and said donors countries were prepared to offer more aid if a settlement to end the island's civil war were reached.

"Deploing the cost of the hostilities and human suffering, donors hoped that negotiations leading to a peaceful settlement could be initiated without delay," the bank said. Donors also had stressed the need for quicker structural reforms to the Sri Lankan economy and reduction of the

fiscal deficit.

Public administration reform was also cited as a high priority, both to reduce the cost of the civil service and to make government more responsive to the needs of a modern economy. It said these actions would promote private sector-led growth and employment.

The Sri Lanka delegation to the Consortium meeting in Paris was headed by the Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs and Deputy Minister of Finance, Prof. G.L. Peiris. Delegations from Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States attended the meeting. South Korea attended the meeting as an observer.

The multilateral organisations that participated included the Asian Development Bank, the European Commission, the European Investment Bank, the International Finance Corporation, the International Monetary Fund, the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation, the Saudi Fund for Development and the UNDP.

It would appear that the delegations from the donor countries were impressed by the presentation of Sri Lanka's case for continued aid. World Bank representative Mieke Nishimizu, who chaired the Paris meeting, in her concluding speech referred to the appreciation expressed by the delegates from the donor countries in regard to the presentations made by Prof. Peiris which were described as "lucid" and "masterly".

Minister Peiris described the outcome as a singular vote of confidence by the donor countries on Sri Lanka and resolute faith on the President and her government which was indicative of the full backing of the international community.

Judge Appointment Challenged

The government is continuing to face severe criticism from powerful sections of the legal and judicial establishment over the controversial appointment of Ms. Shrani Bandaranaike to the Supreme Court bench.

In an unprecedented legal move, a group of lawyers have filed a petition in the Supreme Court challenging Ms. Bandaranaike's appointment alleging breach of their fundamental rights. The petition is being opposed by the Attorney General on behalf of the government on the ground that the appointment by the President was not a justiciable issue, the court did not have jurisdiction to hear the application, the President had also been cited as a respondent which could not be done under the Constitution, and that the petitioners had not stated as to how their rights have been violated by reason of the appointment.

Premadasa's Gold-plated Bed

The public auction of a 24-carat gold-plated king-sized bed and other luxury items imported by former President R. Premadasa received wide publicity and comment both locally and internationally.

The bed netted Rs. 405,000 (\$7230) at the auction held in Colombo recently and was purchased by a local businessman. The king-sized bed came with a dresser, wardrobe and two side-tables, all with gold-plated trimmings. It was part of a consignment of luxury goods ordered by Premadasa before he was assassinated in May 1993. The items spent the past three years in a sealed warehouse.

Opponents of the populist leader often accused him and his family of enjoying an extravagant lifestyle at public expense. It was reported at that time that the President's wife ordered her daily meals from five-star hotels.

Premadasa's daughter, Dulanjalee Jayakody, was critical of the publicity given to the auction of her father's gold-plated bed which she said was intended to sling mud at her dead father. She said that the bed was never intended for him. Her father led a spartan life and slept only a few hours each day and that the bed was intended for VIP guests at a government guesthouse.

Returned With Thanks

President of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) Mr. M. Sivasithamparam has declined to accept the payment of Rs. 500,000 from the government as compensation for the damage he and his family suffered when their home at 100 Norris Canal Road in Colombo was set ablaze and destroyed during the July 1983 anti-Tamil violence under the previous regime.

Though Mr. Sivasithamparam had, like many others who had suffered similar damage, previously applied for compensation, his reluctance in accepting the payment was because it had been made pursuant to a cabinet decision.

In a letter returning the payment, Mr. Sivasithamparam said, "I was under the impression that I would be compensated in the same manner as hundreds who suffered losses in July 1983. But now I understand that compensation in Rs. 500,000 was to be paid to me by a decision of the Cabinet. The Cabinet certainly showed no special favour to me. But I am a public man interacting with the government on behalf of the Tamils. I do not wish that there should be even the slightest suspicion that I am receiving any special treatment... Hence I have decided not to accept this amount."

An Almost Forgotten People

by S. Sivasegaram

It is now more than six years since Muslims were driven out of the north of Sri Lanka. Much has happened since in the country. There have been a change of government, the departure of two presidents, and the rise and fall of hope for peace. The war as the armed extension of the politics of national oppression and resistance persists with no end in sight, and there is no shortage of explanations for continuing with the war. The victims of war and violations of human rights and human life become important only to the extent that they help to score political points and strengthen propaganda. It appears that the Northern Muslims are among the forgotten people, even as far as many campaigners for peace are concerned.

I read a statement issued by the Northern Muslims Rights Organisation (NMRO) earlier this year explaining the plight of the displaced Muslims in refugee camps and elsewhere in the island and calling for positive action to help them to return to their homes. It was a dignified statement in which the signatories remembered things that were good in the relationship between the Tamils and Muslims of the North. They pointed out that an injustice had been done to them, wanted to know why, and asked for the wrong to be put right. Their statement was exemplary in many ways, especially in the expression of a willingness to forgive and a positive approach to finding a solution without asking for retribution.

In July this year, I was invited by my friend and well-known poet Jeyapalan to attend a meeting organised in Colombo by the NMRO to discuss their problems with interested Tamils. The spirit of the statement by the NMRO was reflected in the words of every Muslim who rose to speak and there was no hostility towards the Tamils, with whom they recognised that their future, like their past, was closely tied. They remembered many good things including the election of a Muslim as Mayor of Yaalppaanam. I was particularly moved when one speaker said that the only difference that he saw between the Tamils and the Muslims of Yaalppaanam was that the former went to the temple on Fridays while the latter went to the mosque. They rebutted attempts by certain Muslim leaders of the East and the South or for that matter any political party to use them for short-term political gains. Their appeal was to the Tamil people of the North and all that they wanted was a right to return home and the release of the Muslim youth detained by the LTTE. They refused to return to their homes with

the backing of the government and wanted to return only when it was possible and safe for the Tamils to return home. I recently received two publications, entitled *We Want to Go Home* and *Refugees are People* by Dr. S. H. Hasbullah, released by the NMRO, to draw attention to the plight of the Muslims. The NMRO also publishes a magazine in Tamil entitled *Ahadhi* over the past three years at irregular intervals with the tenth issue dated October 96, and I will recommend it to every clear thinking Tamil.

I was glad to read statements from leaders of the LTTE in the past year, implicitly admitting that the decision to drive out the Muslims was a serious mistake. I hope that the LTTE will soon follow this with more positive gestures which will help restore and reinforce the close links between the Tamils and Muslims of the North, since a strong bond between the Tamils and Muslims will only strengthen the just struggle of the Tamil people for their right to self-determination. A just stand on the question of the Northern Muslims is important to the struggle of the Tamils for justice, which is not against the Sinhalese, and the fair treatment of the Muslims will inevitably be a measure of the moral right of the Tamil nationality to ask for fair treatment by the Sinhala majority, and no Tamil with a conscience can afford to ignore it. ●

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"Fight Will Continue Until Liberation of our Nation"

-Tiger Leader V.Pirabakaran

"Let us struggle facing setbacks as challengers and victories as inspiration, let us continue to struggle with confidence under any difficulties and hardships. Let us struggle with unfailing determination until we drive the occupation army from our soil, until we achieve the liberation of our nation.... We cannot gain our rights by pleading with the Sinhala rulers. We must fight and win our rights. History has not recorded any liberation struggle that has won without fighting, without bloodshed, without death and destruction, without sacrifices," LTTE Leader Mr. V. Pirabakaran said in a message to the Tamil people on the occasion of the Tigers' Martyrs Day which fell on 27 November 1996.

The following is the text of Mr. Pirabakaran's full message:

"My beloved people of Tamil Eelam. Today is a day of veneration. It is on this day we venerate and pay our respects to our heroes who adorn our temple of freedom as thousands of shining flames of liberty.

Today is not a day of mourning to weep for the dead nor a sad day to plunge into sorrow. Today is the sacred day of our martyrs. Today we remember and venerate our fighters in our hearts who have sacrificed their precious lives for a noble cause. Today we salute them for their heroism and supreme sacrifice.

The price we pay for our liberation in terms of great sacrifices is invaluable. The sacrifices made by our heroes for the cause of our people to live with dignity and sovereignty are unparalleled in the history of the world. An epic of heroism unique in history has been created on our soil.

The freedom struggle of the Tamils has been a raging inferno for a long time. Several forces have joined hands with our enemy in a continuous effort to extinguish this fire of freedom. As a consequence, we have been facing various crises and set backs at different times. We are compelled to struggle alone against formidable forces without support or assistance from anywhere. Therefore, the price we pay for our freedom is immense. It is our martyrs who have paid with their lives to protect and preserve the flame of national freedom. During our long journey towards liberation we have crossed rivers of fire. It is our commitment to the cause that sustained us during these violent upheav-

als. The cause we have charted to fight for the right to self determination of our people is right, fair and just. From the beginning up to now, we are resolutely committed to our cause. Our cause is our towering strength. It is because of our firm commitment to our cause we have our importance, individuality and history.

The higher ideals of other Tamil groups could not withstand the political upheavals that swept Tamil Eelam. But no force could break our will.

The Indian military occupation of Tamil Eelam posed a major challenge to our determination. At that historical conjuncture when we were hard pressed by the military supremacy of a world power, we fought with fierce determination without giving up the cause. During that dangerous situation, determination became our ultimate weapon. It was by that moral power we were able to confront a great military power of the world.

We are now facing a new challenge, a new war of aggression. Our historical enemy, Sinhala Buddhist Chauvinism, has taken institutional form in the guise of Chandrika's regime and has been conducting a genocidal war against the Tamil nation. Having mobilised the full military might of the Sinhala nation, it has occupied the historical lands of the Tamils in the North.

The central strategic objective of this aggressive war was to destroy the military strength of the LTTE by utilising several divisions of troops and massive fire power. But the Sinhala army has failed to achieve this military objective.

The grand strategy of the army was to unleash large scale conventional modes of battles in the Jaffna Peninsula, a territorial region surrounded by sea and extremely disadvantageous to us geographically. The plan was to bog us down in the Peninsula and to destroy our military potential. We were aware of this nefarious strategy. Subsequently we organised a counter plan to fight back effectively the advancing columns and make strategic movement of our forces so as to preserve our military strength from annihilation. As a consequence, the strategic objective of the armed forces in the battles of Jaffna turned out to be a fiasco.

In the conduct of the war it becomes a necessary condition for a liberation movement practising the art of guerrilla

warfare to make strategic withdrawals and to loose areas of control. This cannot be categorised as a military defeat but can be regarded as a temporary set back. By preserving our military power and our determination, we could launch counter offensive operations at any place and at any time chosen by us when the right objective condition prevails. By such manoeuvres we could inflict heavy damage on the enemy's military power and even regain lost territories. This strategy is best exemplified at the battle of Mullaitivu where we inflicted heavy casualties on the army and recaptured the territory. This success was possible because we retained our military power.

This aggressive war that has been launched in the guise of a "war for peace" and as a "war for the liberation of the Tamils" has seriously disrupted the peace of the Tamils, reduced them to refugees, as subjugated people, destroyed their social and economic existence and brought them intolerable suffering. Though the Government of Chandrika has been cheating the world with its theory of peace, in practice it is conducting a brutal war against the Tamil people.

Jaffna Peninsula has been transformed into an open air prison. Having dismembered the region into different security zones with defence bunds, barbed wire fences and innumerable check points, this famous historical land of the Tamils has been brought under the rule of military terror. The incidents of arrests, detention, torture, rape, murder, disappearances and the discovery of the disappeared in mass graves reveal that a covert genocidal policy is practised in the army controlled areas.

The military atrocities occurring in the occupied areas and the anti Tamil persecution taking place in the South have exposed the real racist face of the Government. Compared to previous Sinhala Governments, it is Chandrika's regime which has inflicted a deep wound in the soul of the Tamil nation.

From the beginning we realised the Government of Chandrika would not do justice to the Tamils nor would it resolve the Tamil national problem. We were deeply dismayed when her Government adopted an intransigent and bellicose attitude during peace talks with the LTTE. The talks ended inconclusively when the Government refused to grant even meagre concessions to the urgent day to day needs of the Tamils and gave primacy to the interests of the military establishment. Since the Government believed in military supremacy, in military approaches and in a military solution, it did not treat the peace talks seriously and deliberately created conditions for the failure of the negotiating process.

From the beginning until today the deepest aspiration of this Government is to achieve military hegemony in the Tamil

homeland and to subjugate the Tamils under military domination.

This approach pre dominated by militarism and chauvinism has complicated the ethnic conflict and firmly closed the doors for peace. It has aggravated the armed conflict. It has seriously disrupted the Sri Lankan economy. In totality, Chandrika's Government has been caught up in an insurmountable crisis. The international community is now beginning to realise that Chandrika's 'war for peace' is not only destroying the Tamil national life but also plunging the entire island into a major catastrophe. To distract the world's criticism from her hard line military approach and for the escalation of the war, Chandrika is sending peace signals. While issuing statements that she is prepared for talks with the LTTE through third party mediation she has also laid down ridiculous conditions that we should surrender arms before talks. No liberation movement with self respect could accept such humiliating conditions.

Having unleashed an intense propaganda campaign categorising our liberation movement as a "terrorist" organisation and our freedom struggle as "terrorism" this Government is making every effort to ban our organisation locally and abroad. Furthermore, the Government is making massive military preparations to escalate the war and issuing statements that the LTTE would be wiped out within next year. In these circumstances, we have grave doubts about Chandrika's peace gesture.

We are not opposed to peace, nor are we opposed to a resolution of the conflict by peaceful means. We want an authentic peace, a true, honourable, permanent peace, a condition in which our people can live with freedom and dignity in their own land without external coercion determining their own political life. We have grave doubts whether the forces of Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism will allow such a peaceful life to the Tamil people.

Chauvinistic Sinhala Governments committed to repression and military solutions will not resolve the Tamil national problem by peaceful means. Historically the Tamils have learned this lesson. We do not believe that Chandrika's regime, which is the guardian and the political representative of Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism will bring authentic peace to the Tamils by resolving the ethnic conflict. Because of this distrust we sought third party mediation. We have made statements a year ago, calling for international mediation if possibilities of peace talks arise in the future. At that time, the Government of Chandrika did not favourably consider our suggestion. Instead, it escalated the aggressive war in the North, intensified the ethnic conflict and undermined the conditions of peace.

The Government may entertain a no-

tion that it has gained military hegemony by the occupation of Tamil lands and that this position could be used as a mode of pressure to its advantage in the peace talks. As far as we are concerned, peace talks under such conditions cannot be free and equal. We cannot expect justice from a Government that attempts to barter the rights of our people with military power as its trump card. It is for this reason, we want peace talks to be held in a congenial environment free from the pressure of military aggression. Our position is that political negotiations should be preceded by creating conditions for de escalation, withdrawal of troops and normalcy. We are prepared to talk and reach an agreement on these issues.

We do not expect Chandrika's Government to accept our just position. For years the forces of Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism believed in and practised a policy of military domination and oppression. Chandrika's regime too, is functioning under the shadow of military power.

Therefore we have serious doubts whether Chandrika's Government will give up the policy of military domination and resolve the conflict on the basis of moral power and justice.

We cannot gain our rights by pleading with the Sinhala rulers. We must fight and win our rights. History has not recorded any liberation struggle that has won without fighting, without bloodshed, without death and destruction, without sacrifices.

Therefore let us struggle. Let us struggle facing setbacks as challenges and victories as inspirations, let us continue to struggle with confidence under any difficulties and hardships. Let us struggle with unfailing determination until we drive the occupation army from our soil, until we achieve the liberation of our nation. Let us remember and venerate our martyrs today with a solemn pledge that we will wipe the tears of our beloved ones who are suffering under military occupation and repression." ●

RACISM & ETHNIC CONFLICT - A BATTLE OF CLOSED MINDS?

Nigel Pocock, University of Wales*

Like many parts of the world, Sri Lanka is torn by a conflict having its roots in two (or more) communities having different histories and traditions, which, in turn, give rise to different interpretations of reality. Our purpose is to encourage a perspective which 'deconstructs' this massive sense of reality held by all warring parties - if only they will stand back and be willing to engage in a little questioning.

The starting point of this enquiry lies in the research of the American experimental psychologist, Milton Rokeach, as recounted in his voluminous work, *The Open & Closed Mind* (Basic Books, NY, 1960). The key finding which keeps coming up, is that discriminations are made much more strongly on the basis of beliefs, rather than race (pp.140, ff). Indeed, it is questionable whether 'race, per se, is a valid concept today. Rokeach's research is backed up by studies in quite different settings, both of ethnic groups and of age-groups. Again, findings showed that people...

prefer as friends those who agree with them far more than those who disagree with them, regardless of race or ethnic group ... when beliefs are held constant, the subjects prefer other ethnic & racial groups almost but not quite as much as their own (p.153).

Conversely,

The more subjects reject the ethnic or racial outgroup, the more they reject their own group (ibid).

This means that, in practice, people have a prime loyalty to their beliefs, over/against their race. It may be, of course, that race and beliefs can become ideologically inseparable. In which case we would expect a total rejection of the group which is furthest from the subject's beliefs, whether Moslems vs. Hindus, Christians vs. Buddhists, Tamils vs. Sinhalese, communists vs. capitalists: the prime loyalty is based on belief, not race.

Disbeliefs are generalised, and rejection is made without specific and careful understanding. 'All Tamils are evil', and 'all Sinhalese are corrupt' become blanket statements, without distinction.

But people will accept others of another culture, if they share their core beliefs, i.e., a Christian Tamil will be likely to accept a Sinhalese Christian over against their cultural differences, unless the two are regarded as inseparable (as in Judaism).

Changing Attitudes

The foregoing suggests that as people find something in common with their neighbours, then prejudice (i.e., prejudging a case without a hearing, on the basis of a generalised disbelief system

begins to break down. But as long as social control by politicians, religious fundamentalists and others prevents this, prejudice is reinforced, even to the extent of war.

This was demonstrated by F T Smith in 1943, who found that prejudice was reduced as people of similar social status, but of different ethnic group, interacted (Rokeach, 1960: 162, 430). It seems likely therefore, that as inter-ethnic/cultural/ideological groups interact, that prejudice will, to some extent, dissolve. Conditioned avoidance of another group can be undone - without loss of personal identity as a Tamil or a Sinhalese. This is because as a (say) Christian Tamil discovers that he (or she) shares a great deal with local Sinhalese Buddhist neighbours (even on basic non-ideological levels such as child-rearing, sanitation, etc.) and that his/her core beliefs as a Christian are not threatened, he/she will become increasingly more friendly towards Sinhalese in general. The major problem is when a system is institutionalised in law, as (until recently) in South Africa, and, fifty years ago under Hitler, and (ironically) in modern Israel. In this case, the state sanctions conditioned avoidance of belief systems incongruent (in opposition) to those officially approved, and hence encourages a culture of violence, prejudice and irrational behaviour on both sides, Tigers, or Sinhalese state mechanisms.

The Cure for Intolerance?

This must come from two fronts - and it is impossible to predict which one. Communist absolutism was destroyed 'from below'. In other cases it may be necessary 'from above', i.e., government institutionalising by a gradual process, as when racial (ethnic/cultural) integration of children is required by law. Psychologists know this as the 'foot in the door' process, and it is supported by studies which show that action changes attitudes at least as much as the reverse (the popular model). Very often, nothing happens if we wait for attitudes to change: people must be encouraged to take action.

David Myers writes (1984:107), "It was said that if we were to wait for the heart to change - through preaching and teaching we would wait a long time for racial justice. But if we would go at it the other way around and legislate moral action, we could, under the appropriate conditions, directly affect heartfelt attitudes.

"Substantial change has, in fact, followed on the heels of desegregation. Since the US Supreme Court decision, the percentage of white Americans favouring integrated schools has about doubled. In the ten years after the US Civil Rights Act of 1964, the percentage of white Americans who lived, worked, or went to school only with other whites declined about 20 percent for each of these environments. During the same time the

percentage of white Americans who said blacks should be allowed to live in any neighbourhood increased from 65 to 87 per cent. Throughout the United States, more uniform national standards have been followed by decreasing regional differences in racial attitudes. As we have come to act more alike, we have come to think more alike."

This backed up by laboratory experiments, which show that when we do favours for another person, we grow to like that person more.

Another factor (again demonstrable examples can be produced) is public action. If an action is public, it has enormous personal coercion, and becomes very difficult to step back from. The lesson here, therefore, is for governments to seek discreet ways of reducing opportunities for public displays in which cultural differences are emphasised, and rather encourage those in which co-operation and desegregation is required.

The fundamentalist mind is compartmentalised in its beliefs (not thought through), with generalised disbeliefs (labelling opponents, without serious consideration of their case) - both demonstrated by Rokeach's experiments (1960).

Psychologists like Edward de Bono have shown that this kind of attitude - with its narrow range of perception - can be changed through education. Using careful teaching in various techniques (de Bono calls them CAF - Consider All factors, OPV - Other People's Viewpoints, PMI - Plus, Minus, Interesting points) - children start to become less opinionated, less inclined to shout others down, and instead, to become more creative and reasonable, suggesting more possible means of solving difficult problems.

Governments, should, therefore, institutionalise styles of education with the long-term aim of expanding children's perceptions; of questioning, and developing complex, multifaceted answers to problems; of dispensing with authoritarian and narrow teaching methods, which invest in a particular ideology at the cost of a fruitful interaction with others. 'Diamond must rub against diamond'. For education and science to develop, a society that is both critical and tolerant must become a reality.

What we are appealing for in Sri Lanka is Karl Popper's ideal of an 'Open Society', in which a constructively critical society is institutionalised. Yet this must also have an ideology to underpin it. For it can be destroyed both by absolutists and by relativists (who relativise truth itself, creating a night in which all cats are grey, and consequently do not develop the kind of constructive criticism that enables knowledge to grow).

Deconstructing Violence

This brings us to another crucial aspect of the open society; it must criticise

and deconstruct ideologies of violence. All ideologies should be weighed and discussed. They should be relativised culturally (for we are all culturally-embedded) but not morally (for although morals may take different cultural forms, the intended meanings are arguably ultimately absolute i.e., expressed in different forms in, say, rural Africa, from western Europe, but with an underlying absolute, 'to love your neighbour as yourself'). How can we love our neighbour, if we are holding a gun to his (or her) head, raping and pillaging? Are we not laying the foundations of hurts that will take generations to heal?

Am I My Brother's Keeper?

The most dramatic breakthroughs happen when a group of people take the initiative: we have seen the Berlin Wall collapse. But the breakthrough we ask for, is in apologising, and not waiting for a reciprocal apology from the other side. Some may think this politically naive, but it is surely the reverse: those who think they are politically sophisticated are very likely to be acting out of the 'need' to legitimate their cause, and to substantiate their power, and to admit no fault. But this apology needs to be more radical still: it needs to be a grass-roots apology, not the apology of political big-wigs (although it may include this), for whom there is the suspicion that it may be no more than some devious, hidden agenda, or power-bargaining. It needs to be the people entering enemy territory, with a message of 'sorry'. Institutionalised power-interests will no doubt object - "they know best!"

Underpinning this radical action, is the fundamental assumption that human rights are not to be maintained by persons acting out of self-interest, but by persons seeking to maintain the rights of others. I am my brother's keeper! Human rights will only be maintained - and must be maintained by my acting in my brother's interest, and not my own.

And leadership and government cannot be ignored, as we have intimated. They need to facilitate for 'action'. But, in doing so, they must not be seen to be consolidating their own power, but rather divesting themselves of it. In practice, this means the encouragement to criticism at every level of society, a receptiveness to ideas that will reform Sri Lanka, the institutionalisation of a society that seeks to serve the other.

This means getting out the bowl, and washing another's feet. For it is only as we serve others, that all the psycho-social theory becomes reality, and conflict will cease, and there will be no more tears, and the weary will be at rest: for we seek a paradoxical economy where the last worker to arrive in the field, receives as much as the first!

Sadly, it is easier to kill someone, than to serve them.

* Nigel Pocock is a Theologian and a social-scientist. He serves as a consultant to Intercessors' Action Group.

CHANDRIKA: TAMIL MOON ON THE WANE

By D B S Jeyaraj

Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga has completed two years in office as the fourth executive President of Sri Lanka. Her performance has been evaluated from different perspectives by several analysts. A common factor in most of these accounts is the criticism regarding the hiatus between her pre-election promises and actual practice in power. These promises range from lowering the price of bread to abolishing the institution of executive presidency.

The cornerstone of Chandrika Kumaratunga's election campaign for parliament and the presidency in 1994 was the promise to resolve the issue amicably. This issue is one problem that has been tearing apart the country for several years. Apart from the moral and humanistic aspects of the on-going strife the practical aspect was the escalating economic cost of the war.

Although the theatre of war has been the North-Eastern provinces the impact of the violence has been felt in all parts of the country and by all sections of the people. It was that sad state of affairs where the war seemed to be "endless" that activated many different components of our diverse society to unite under the Chandrika banner. Their common bond was the burning desire to end this burning problem. This widespread feeling translated itself into overwhelming support for Chandrika at the Presidential elections. She received an unprecedented 63% of the votes. These votes were reflective of a wide stratum of society cutting across barriers of race, religion, caste and creed.

Even though many other issues were referred to in the Presidential stakes of 1994 the central issue which dominated the campaign was the ethnic problem. Myriad of posters depicting Chandrika as an apostle of peace were visible in all parts of the country.

In retrospect it seems clear that despite all her good intentions Chandrika did not have a clear plan of action to resolve the ethnic issue. It also seems clear that the People's Alliance on the whole had not evolved any concrete proposals collectively. Apart from a vague adherence to the concept of resolving the ethnic crisis many important PA members have not committed themselves to any meaningful programme of action. As such resolving the ethnic crisis seems to be a prom-

ise that relates to Chandrika alone. It is also clear that most of the voters particularly those from minority communities placed their trust in Chandrika Kumaratunga the individual and not in any party or policy statements outlined by political parties.

It could be surmised that Chandrika's initial plans for peace hinged very greatly around a positive response from the LTTE. A great deal of pronouncements stating that the LTTE was ready for a negotiated peace settlement by several Tiger leaders contributed to this assumption. LTTE supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran's statement that he was willing to consider a merged North-East province with federal powers as an alternative to Tamil Eelam reinforced this belief. All that Chandrika had to do was evolve an appropriate devolution package and everything would turn our hunky-dory was the naive expectation. The UNP was seen as the villain of the piece.

Cessation of hostilities was declared and preliminary negotiations began. Many missives were exchanged. Conditions and Counter-conditions were laid. After One Hundred days the fragile peace was shattered by the LTTE at the Trincomalee harbour. In the weeks that ensued the Tigers conducted a blistering campaign where the security forces suffered reversal after reversal. Chandrika was prone to charges of being allowed to be deceived by the LTTE. The whole positional stability of the Government was seen as being tenuous. Ultimately the Government had to get its act together and strike back with a vengeance.

When the Chandrika Government took the offensive the moral high ground was not with the LTTE. For the first time perhaps in the history of the armed conflict the Government in power was seen as justified in responding with force. The Sri Lankan soldier was seen as fighting a just war in contrast to his Tiger counterpart. Chandrika was seen positively as a leader who genuinely tried to resolve the problem peacefully. The war was seen as a "WAR FOR PEACE". The war would weaken the Tigers and result in either bringing them to the negotiating table or marginalising them into an insignificant entity. This was the wide-spread expectation.

It was felt that once a position of dominance was established by the government in hitherto LTTE controlled territory then

an acceptable political settlement could be enforced. Most Tamil people were expected to go along with this. Then came the devolution package or the proposals in their original form. On paper it was the best possible scheme that had been proposed by any government so far. International opinion and national opinion was firmly behind Chandrika. More importantly substantial sections of the Tamils too were her supporters. No Sinhala leader had reached this position in recent times.

Chandrika's stock reached an all-time high when Operation Riviresa Phase I was concluded successfully. This ebullience lasted throughout the second and third phases of Riviresa. With the peninsula under government control it was expected that normalcy would be ushered in gradually. A process of rehabilitation and reconstruction would be set in motion. Above all the political package was to be implemented quickly.

In the euphoric climate that prevailed two salient features were not taken cognisance of. The first was that the Tamil problem had begun long before the Tigers emerged on the scene. The LTTE, a virulent product of the problem was now aggravating the crisis further. Yet, the LTTE was not the cause of the original problem. It was an effect and not the cause. So all the blame for the problem could not be laid on the Tigers.

The second factor was that the LTTE had not been destroyed. It was weakened but not wiped out. It was down but not out. Also despite two decades of conflict the nature and dimensions of guerrilla warfare had still not been understood. The Tigers began striking back.

The war up to this point had gone well for the government. After the initial setbacks the government military machine had rolled on and on. Although considerable damage had been caused to civilian life, limb and property it was mercifully not in the region that was predicted. The most important aspect was that more than four lakhs of Tamil people had dared to defy the LTTE and remained in the peninsula. Many thousands more wanted to cross over from the Wanni to the peninsula. It was not that the government had completely won over the hearts and minds of the Tamil people but a very meaningful step forward had been taken. The government had been blessed with a political bonanza. It was expected that the Government would act constructively and maximise the advantage gained.

But then enter the serpent in this case the Tiger into the blissful garden of Eden. A constant and continuous spate of attacks generally in the North-East and particularly in the peninsula. A few deadly bomb attacks in Colombo and the suburbs. The situations had deteriorated quickly and effectively. The end result is that once again a process of alienation is now underway between the State and the

Tamil people. This feeling is most acute between the security forces and the ordinary civilian in certain instances of negative interaction.

The Tamil predicament could be categorised into five broad sectors. The problem faced by 1) the Eastern province Tamils, 2) Jaffna Peninsula Tamils, 3) Tamils in LTTE areas of the Wanni, 4) the refugees and travellers of Vavuniya, and 5) the Tamils in Colombo and the Sinhala areas.

There may be differences of opinion about the extent and nature of these problems but there can be no doubt that these problems exist. In the past few weeks many Tamil parliamentarians belonging to the TULF, PLOTE, and EPDP have highlighted these. Memoranda have been submitted. Letters have been sent to the President.

The important thing to note is that these problems are being described and issues raised by Tamil parliamentarians basically aligned with the government. This is not propaganda by the LTTE or pro-LTTE elements. The Tamil parties are backing the Chandrika government and are presumably on the LTTE hit list because of it. They are also prone to charges of "traitors", "collaborators" etc. for co-operating with this government. So when these political parties draw attention to these problems they are in a sense undermining themselves.

Yet they have no choice because being politicians they are sensitive to the ramblings of discontent within their constituency namely the Tamil people. They know that if this ground-swell is not curbed through positive action it could turn into a raging torrent that would engulf them.

After more than a decade of conflict most Sri Lankans are aware of practical realities. Except for the singularly naive no-one would expect civilians to be completely immune to the hazards of war. Although that state is highly desirable it is totally unattainable. But what irritates and enrages the average Tamil is the manner in which he or she is treated. In most cases interaction with the security apparatus of the state leaves the Tamil individual with the feeling that he or she is truly an unwanted second class citizen of this country.

Given the bomb attacks conducted in Colombo nobody disputes the fact that the police and security forces have to be constantly vigilant. It is in the nature of things that Tamils be more suspect than others of being Tigers because the LTTE is essentially a Tamil group. But what hurts most people is the callous, shabby treatment meted out to them in the process. Repeated searches, arbitrary arrests, inhuman interrogation, detention under pathetic conditions, etc. are rampant. A young Tamil married to a Sinhalese told me, "It is the routine humiliation that I cannot tolerate". If not for some enlightened judicial officers more Tamils would be lan-

guishing in remand.

This state of affairs can and must be remedied. The defence of "extreme security" reigns hollow when there are numerous incidents where people have been released through bribes or influence in high places. Once again no rational Tamil in Colombo expects the security personnel to cease vigilance against the Tigers or to stop enforcing laws and order but every Tamil definitely expects that he or she be treated humanely in these encounters. They should be entitled to freedom from unnecessary harassment. Some incidents of misuse or abuse of power by the authorities are likely to occur in the present environment but these should be the exception and not the rule.

The Eastern Province MP's of the TULF have time and again spotlighted the problems faced by the Tamils in that region. Dr Neelan Tiruchelvam of the TULF outlined in detail the peculiar predicament of the refugees and travellers in Vavuniya. The travellers are kept in a state of permanent transition.

EPDP and PLOTE MP's have raised these issues on several occasions. EPDP Secretary-General Douglas Devananda has sent a comprehensive memorandum to President Kumaratunga on these matters. In that he states there are 12,469 refugees in Vavuniya town. He also says that while 388,586 displaced persons in the Wanni receive dry rations a further 200,538 (66,241 - Kilinochi, 88,248 - Mullaitivu, 26,914 - Mannar, 18,433 - Vavuniya) are not receiving dry rations. Also 248,147 persons in the Wanni are not receiving drought relief allowances. Mr Douglas Devandanda also refers to the situation in Jaffna with full statistics. In that he outlines the problems which include arbitrary arrests, missing persons, assaults, sexual offences etc. Again it must be stressed that these complaints are not emanating from the LTTE but from the EPDP which in its own interest would not like to erode the credibility of this government.

Apart from these issues arising out of security concerns there is the appalling lack of developmental activity. Adding to the Tamil woes are the declining figures of Tamils in state sector employment and the non-implementation of Tamil as an official language. State sector employment and non-implementation of Tamil as an official language have nothing to do with the on-going war. These can be addressed immediately.

All these problems are creating a situation where the Tamil community is gradually being alienated from the government personified by Chandrika Kumaratunga. She is being increasingly viewed as a head of state who does not care for the Tamils. The Tamil parties who are supporting her from the opposition are asserting dissent as a result of grass root pressure. These parties are sensitive to

the massive shift in the mood of the Tamil people regarding Chandrika Kumaratunga who was until recently their great hope. The Tamil parties themselves are not likely to rock the boat as they still cling on to the hope that Chandrika will deliver the goods in the form of the devolution package.

The existential reality facing most Tamils is that of being at the receiving end of day to day hardship and discrimination. This reality is rapidly reducing the Chandrika image in their eyes. The promise of a political settlement that may never materialise cannot help sustain their confidence for long. If this trend continues Tamil parties supporting this government may be reluctantly compelled to revise their position or face political oblivion in the future.

What is tragic about the whole situation is the steady erosion of all the goodwill Chandrika had in the Tamil community. The clear advantage she had in terms of winning the hearts and minds of the Tamil people is no longer there. This does not mean that the Tamil opinion will shift in favour of the LTTE immediately in Sri Lanka but it is certainly moving away from Chandrika. Among the Tamil expatriates this tendency is more accentuated and there are definite signs of pro-peace elements turning towards the LTTE. This trend can be prevented in Sri Lanka and reversed abroad if President Kumaratunga would wake up to reality and act fast.

There is no doubt that if President Kumaratunga had a two thirds majority or if the LTTE co-operated fully Chandrika would have succeeded greatly in resolving the issue peacefully. But that did not happen and what is now happening is that she is being vilified by Tiger propagandists as a person who was insincere from the start. The question of whether Chandrika's intentions were genuine from the beginning or not will only be of academic interest if the current process continues. Sadly she does not seem to be aware that her image is being tarnished and act appropriately.

In fairness to President Kumaratunga she hopes to establish military supremacy over the Tigers in the North as well as implement an effective scheme of devolution. This is the only way for her to reassert her popularity in the face of growing unrest in the South over the rising cost of living. The moot question is whether she could implement the constitutional reform necessary on the political level and marginalise the Tigers on the military level. There seems every possibility that she would fail on both fronts if she allows the present trend to continue. Chandrika who was in Tamil eyes a waxing moon during elections is now in power a moon on the wane.

(Courtesy of "The Sunday Island")

A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE CONFLICT

by Dr. John Powers,

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Since I am at an Asian History Centre I am going to do a sort of historical overview. I find that in situations like this where you have a long standing conflict it is often very helpful to sort out the various strands of history, and in this case will be fairly recent history. In lots of cases it will help to make the situation clearer. So what I'm going to do is to look at what I think are the major stages of the conflict and at the end I'll suggest some ideas about moves that I think can be made in the future for resolution. As Mr. Armstrong said it is a very complex conflict and I think if you start to look at some of the histories it starts to become clearer. You will find that a lot of the major stages of the conflict parallel those of other states similar to Sri Lanka, i.e. fairly recently de-colonised states.

One of the problems, I think, with many of the newly de-colonised states begin with the experiment in democracy. In many cases it is the first time these countries have experienced democracy. And the problem is you have Western powers like the United States, for instance, supporting the idea of democracy and the process of democracy in these states. The problem is that the way democracy is practised in these newly decolonised states tends to be quite different from the way you find it in the Western democracies and in the older and more established democracies.

You can see this very clearly in Sri Lanka. In the Western democracies political parties form along political persuasions - they usually tend to have conservative parties and liberal parties and others. The fortunes of these parties will change in accordance with economic trends, public perceptions and so forth. But whichever party is in power the other party always has the opportunity of or at least the hope of being able to take power again by changing its image, by introducing new policies, and such. In a place like Sri Lanka this certainly is not true and the reason why is because the lines of the party are largely drawn in accordance with ethnicity and religion which means that the ethnic majority is always going to be in power. And no matter what the minority does there is no sort of policy that they can propose that would bring the ethnic majority to their side.

From the point of view of Western democracies you do have democracy

being upheld in the country - that is you have political parties and you have elections, you have winners and losers and so forth - but the problem is that the winners are always going to be from the same ethnic group when the lines are drawn according to ethnicity. And one of the problems is once the majority comes into power there will be a tendency on the part of the majority to feel that they have a popular mandate for whatever policies they propose which of course are going to be in line with what the majority ethnic group wants to have happen. From the point of view of the ethnic majority, of course this is a very happy situation because the people who come into power are going to represent their interest and values. From the point of view of the minority it is a very difficult situation because there's really nothing they can do to gain power themselves as they are always going to be on the outside in that sort of power struggle. So that is the sort of background to this.

In Sri Lanka I think this is particularly problematic in that the Sinhala majority - which constitutes about 74% of the total population - in addition to being the majority, has also two additional attitudes which tend to harden its attitude towards the Tamils. First of all is the idea that they are the sole legitimate inhabitants of the island, that they have been there since Time immemorial and that they have the sole right to be there. And also that the island is a Buddhist country and that it should remain a Buddhist country and that it is very important for the Buddhists to fight against any sort of encroachment by Indian Hindus. This was particularly important in terms of moves by the Government to grant even limited autonomy to the Tamils. Conservative elements within the country are very resistant to this because they see this as the beginning of Indian encroachment into Sri Lanka and the eventual engulfing of Buddhist culture which is of course deeply problematic in the view of Buddhist Sinhalese. There are also some long-standing attitudes of racism. On the part of the Sinhalese there is the notion that they are descended from Aryans and thus racially superior (when in actual fact this is not really true but they just tend to believe this) and that the Tamils are racially inferior and represent a foreign influence in the country which needs to be eradicated in order for the

country to reach its full potential.

So with this sort of attitudes it would be difficult to imagine a possibility for dialogue unless these attitudes are exposed for one thing and looked at in terms of the historical facts of the matter. The first stage of the process as I see it after independence in 1948 from Britain was the suppression of a minority - that is the Tamils primarily and also the other minorities - by the majority and reasserting its fundamental rights over against a minority which in their opinion had been unfairly advantaged by the British. And this is another important part of Sinhala attitudes. It is a very common Sinhala attitude or perception that during the British Raj the Tamils had an unfair advantage in terms of education, access to employment (particularly government and professional employment), etc. After the Sinhala majority came into power one of the things they began doing is similar to what you saw in Malaysia: implement affirmative action policies that would bring the Sinhalese on a par educationally and professionally with the Tamils.

And this was done in the early years. Fairly quickly the Sinhalese not only achieved parity with the Tamils but soon came to acquire a superiority in terms of education. One of the things that was particularly important in all this was the passage of the Language Act which made Sinhala the sole legitimate language of the country. Along with that there was a tendency not to teach Sinhala in the Tamil areas which meant that the Tamils had very little access to education or to professional employment which was one of the main requirements for this was a thorough knowledge of Sinhala, and in some cases there were quotas in the Universities which made it even more difficult to get a professional education.

Another problem of course is the fact that the island is highly segregated. Even on the village level the villages tend to be segregated along ethnic lines. This means that prior to the British colonial period there was really very little contact as far as I can tell between Sinhalese and Tamils. I have heard a number of Tamils tell me - and I don't know how true this is - that until they came to Colombo they never met a Sinhala. Though this may not be largely accurate it does indicate that there is a tremendous lot of separation and that the two see themselves as separate and have very separate histories and so forth. Ethnic problems are exacerbated when populations are concentrated in pockets so that there is very little interaction between them. The Sinhalese are a minority in 8 of the 24 districts on the island. Sri Lankan Tamils are in the majority in 5 and Indian Tamils in 1 and the Moors are in the majority in another.

One of the first stages in the conflict began shortly after Independence when

the Sinhala dominated Government came into power. The began passing a number of measures that actually discriminated against the Tamil population. The Language Act was one of the most important ones in that it served to keep the Tamils away from education and from professional employment.

One of the more important ones symbolically was the policy of repatriation, in which the Government proposed initially to repatriate 300,000 people compulsorily, 400,000 would be granted Sri Lankan citizenship and another 250,000 would become permanent residents according to the original formula. Behind this was the idea that the Tamils did not really belong there on the island. Although Tamils had been on the island for thousands of years, this was a common perception (deriving largely from the fact that during the British Raj they brought Tamils from India as cheap labour for the plantations). There was a widespread idea among Sinhalese that the Tamils were all from India, that they did not belong on the island, and that India was really their motherland and that they ought to go back there. And that if they had problems with the current situation in Sri Lanka it was not really their problem because it was not really their country and therefore it would be best if they were sent back.

But one of the problems was, of course, that from the Tamil point of view India was not really their homeland and it is very rare to find many Tamils who feel any real connection, any sort of memory of India. Even those who were brought to the plantations and their successors living there today only know Sri Lanka. So Sri Lanka, for the Tamils who are living in Sri Lanka, is very much their homeland and not India. But even with that the Government went ahead with it.

In 1954 the Prime Minister Kotawala began to try to implement this. The problem was that the number of applicants far exceeded expectations. 400,000 applied for Indian citizenship, 700,000 applied for Sri Lankan citizenship and as the Government went through each case individually it became clearer that this wasn't going to work - the reason being that as the Government began processing the applications and hearing all the petitions and so forth people were still continuing to have children so the population was increasing faster than the rate of repatriation. So this became a comical scene in which the Government was trying to send people back to India, a place with which they felt no kinship, but the people in Sri Lanka were continuing to have children who saw themselves as residents of Sri Lanka and as citizens of Sri Lanka though they weren't officially citizens of Sri Lanka. This situation was exacerbated by the Buddhist Revival Movement in the 1950's and culminated in many ways with the 1956 Election of S.W.R.D.

Bandaranaike which was very explicitly backed by the Sangha and very explicitly committed to Buddhist chauvinism.

This was part again of the First Stage where the newly emerged majority saw this as having a popular mandate and pushed forward an agenda that was in line with the wishes and aspirations of the majority but which was deeply resented by the minority. But at this stage the minority was not really well organised and so was not very effective in challenging this.

After the Tamil Federal Party was formed and began having peaceful demonstrations is what I see as the beginning of the Second Stage. The First Stage is characterised by the Government pushing for more and more an agenda that marginalises and disadvantages the minority. At some point the minority becomes politically aware, begins to organise and begins to hold political demonstrations. When that happens, the next phase, which again you will find in many decolonised states - the Government responds by increased oppression, the idea being that the way to stop conflict is to nip it in the bud with extreme force. The majority does not generally see what the minority's problem is. So they see the agitators as people on the fringes, who, if suppressed, would make the conflict go away.

Of course that does not happen. What happens is that violence begets violence and when the Government begins using violence against the demonstrators the moderates in the Tamil faction become more and more militant. What it tends to do is to polarise attitudes. It polarises attitudes on the part of the minority but it also polarises attitudes of the majority. And another thing that inevitably happens in this sort of conflict is that the minority group becomes more and more militant as the Government uses more and more force. Moderates become less and less influential within the movement and the militants within the movement become more and more influential as the minority responds to what the Government is doing.

The next stage is when the Government realises that violence is not going to bring about a solution to the problem. It then begins to make meaningless and meagre concessions - which the Government did. At first it relaxed a little bit on language. It agreed that Tamil would become an official language of the country and would be recognised as the language of an ethnic minority but Sinhala was still going to be the language of the Government and the language of higher education. But they still did not teach Sinhala in the Tamil areas which meant that the Tamils had very little access to education.

Another thing that happens is that though the Government may make some symbolic and meagre concessions it gen-

erally does not follow through with this. They announce them but the conservative elements within the dominant party will tend to react against any sort of concessions at all towards the minority. So the Government is forced to withdraw from anything but a symbolic concession.

This of course leads to further militancy on the part of the minority. As the Government withdraws more and more from actually implementing even fairly meagre concessions (or even if there is some genuine meagre concession), at this stage (which I would refer to as the Third Stage) there is a gap between the aspirations of the current leadership of the minority and what the Government is actually offering. By the time the Government is ready to recognise that there is a problem and begin making any real concessions the demands of the marginalised groups of the minorities - in this case the Tamils - have increased. They have increased to a point where the Government is no longer willing to make those concessions because they have escalated (from the point where the granting of meagre concessions could have satisfied the minority). So they are no longer in a position to make the sort of concessions that are now on the table on the part of the minority.

When the Government refuses to do this what we see is an increase of violence as we see today. And the growth of movements like the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam which is fully committed to a full separation. Initially the Tamils were willing to exist within a federation - with their separate identity, language, culture, etc. respected. Now opinions on both sides have hardened to such an extent that this is no longer viable for many Tamils. Tamil leadership especially the leadership of the LTTE is completely committed to Tamil Eelam and has shown no willingness to negotiate on this. Any negotiation that does not begin with the recognition of Tamil Eelam is generally unacceptable to the Tiger leadership which I think is one of the problems we face today.

The next phase that comes off my list is outright Civil War as what we have today. You have a complete fragmentation of the society, a polarisation along ethnic lines and as the conflict escalates there is very little room for compromise on either side. I think it is sad too that the newly elected Government of Chandrika Kumaratunga came in with the promise of being able to make some real changes. It was surprising to me as I was following that despite the fact that she was the daughter of Bandaranaike (and there was suspicion on the part of Tamils because of this) there was a tremendous amount of hope on the part of the Tamil community she came into power that she was actually going to follow through on the sort of promises that she was making. It was

disappointing that when the peace talks began the Government offered a package that was supposed to be the basis of negotiation, there was really very little to it - i.e. it was mostly a lot of empty words and rhetoric but very little substance. So the Tigers, rather foolishly I think, walked out on the negotiations because the Government wasn't really putting anything on the table.

In doing that I think they undermined their own credibility internationally as an interest group. I think they were correct in that the Government was not really offering much but they made a very bad move in the interest of their public image. In walking out of the negotiations they showed the world that they were unwilling to negotiate. Even if the Government was not offering much it would have been better for their public image to have stayed in the negotiations. The Tamil leadership has become so radicalised that it is very hard to imagine that they are going to be able to agree to anything that any conceivable Sri Lankan government can propose. The Tamil leadership is fully committed to Tamil Eelam and nothing less and I cannot imagine personally any conceivable Sri Lankan Government being able to grant autonomy.

So I come to the point where I suggest some of the proposals that might lead to a solution to the conflict. One thing that I think is necessary is a giving on both sides. This was mentioned in some of the earlier talks. As long as both sides remain intransigent this sort of conflicts tend to continue. Both groups are locked in a conflict that neither can win. The Sri Lankan military despite its recent success in the conquest of Jaffna has only managed to control a very small part of Jaffna and all that really happened was that the Tamils just faded into the jungles of the East to continue the struggle. The Government lacks the resources to be able to win the struggle. Similarly the Tigers also lack the resources to win the struggle. There is no way in which the Tigers are going to be able to defeat the Sri Lankan army and no way in which the Sri Lankan army is going to be able to defeat the Tamils.

Given that, there has got to be some compromise. In conflicts like this three things tend to happen: a/ minority wins and they take power which is very unlikely in this case; b/ the majority is able to crush the minority militarily (as in places like Tibet and East Timor) and continues to suppress any attempt at demonstrations and so on; this is also unlikely in Sri Lanka; c/ the third thing which happens is that the conflict drags on - this is what you see today; neither side can win, but both sides are trying to exact as much retribution as they can from the other side, and to do as much damage as they can to the other side. But this not going to lead any sort of resolu-

tion. The only thing that can effect a resolution is when both sides compromise and work things out. But so far the leadership on both sides seems to be completely intransigent to any sort of real compromise.

This brings us back to the problem of democracy in decolonised states that are divided along ethnic lines. As long as democracy is completely majoritarian it is unlikely that the minority is ever going to be satisfied with the situation. And I think new forms of democracy have to be worked out in these sorts of states. There is some sort of mechanism for minorities to veto moves made by the majority that disadvantages them. This of course leads to a very cumbersome sort of state; leads to long negotiations; it leads to great difficulty in actually getting anything to actually happen. But on the other hand it does force the majority in power to actually sit down and negotiate with the mi-

norities. I do not know how this is going to happen but this has got to be implemented within some sort of federal system in order for the situation to resolve itself. Otherwise I do not really see a solution to it except for continued fighting which is not really a solution at all. National University. He has published on a wide range of subjects including Buddhist Philosophy, Western Analytical Philosophy, Indian Logic and contemporary Human Rights issues.

This is the text of speech delivered at the International Conference on the Conflict in Sri Lanka in June 1996 at Canberra, Australia. Dr. John Powers is a Senior Lecturer attached to the Asian History Centre, Faculty of Asian Studies at the Australian National University. He has published on a wide range of subjects including Buddhist Philosophy, Western Analytical Philosophy, Indian Logic and contemporary Human Rights issues.

LANKAN POLITICS AND PEOPLE UNDER SOVEREIGN RULE - Part I

by Dr.S. Narapalasingam

4 February 1998 will mark Sri Lanka's gold- en jubilee of independence from Britain, its colonial ruler since 1796. The two main political parties, the UNP and the SLFP have governed Sri Lanka since independence either alone or in partnership with minor parties. The respective leaders have praised the "achievements" of their parties and of their predecessors over these years. Even in this self-praise, the rhetoric has thrown a veil over the mess they have caused that has virtually torn apart the very fabric of the nation. On the other side of the coin, the Tamil parties have made their own contributions to the same deed. Lately, the woes of the Tamil people have been exacerbated to the extreme by those claiming to 'liberate' them from oppression.

Bane of Party Politics

In a truly democratic system, political parties compete to serve the nation and all its citizens in the best way each considers appropriate. It is the national interest that comes first in formulating policies, when they are elected by the majority of the people to govern. The parties in the opposition act like a watchdog of the people, pointing out any wrongdoing of the government and policies that they consider detrimental to the national interest. Despite the holding of Parliamen-

tary elections periodically with several political parties contesting, Sri Lanka's political system has since independence regressed subverting the basic principles of multi-party democracy. This is shocking because Sri Lanka was the first country in south Asia to enjoy full adult suffrage.

National interest was downgraded ever since cutthroat partisan politics emerged as the main driving force to win and retain ruling power. An examination of the motives behind the many decisions taken by the two major political parties at the national level in the fields of politics and national development, reveals clearly that these have been based largely on either narrow interests, often intended to hit at the political opponents or fixing short-term political solutions to long-term national economic and social problems. These deprived all communities of the benefits of the full economic potential of the nation as they were hell-bent on weakening the opponent rather than directing their efforts towards development. It more visibly harmed the Tamils both economically and politically, as they were at the receiving end of their common chauvinistic policies and actions. Particularly, the public utterances of influential leaders intended to placate the majority Sinhalese, disregarding the feelings and apprehension of the minority Tamils only served to

intensify racial hatred.

Commitments to declared goals that appeal to the people have been superficial and used as baits to win popular support. The two political parties never adhered steadfastly to their commitments to democracy, socialism, development, improving the living standards of the poor, rule of law, peace, human rights, justice and all other attributes that any citizen in a modern democracy would desire. These were sermonised by the self-serving politicians when they were either in government or in opposition. In the name of liberal democracy, the UNP and SLFP have together in competition managed to take the gullible people down the deceptive path of hypocrisy to the brink of anarchy.

The UNP founded in 1946 celebrated its Golden Jubilee recently. The incumbent leader of the party and presently the leader of the opposition, in an interview stated that the UNP had performed as a responsible political party in and outside parliament over the years. He also claimed that the party faithful had fulfilled the sacred objectives of the party, "to act democratically, act as a government as well as an opposition." With the adoption of the Executive Presidential system embodied in the 1978 constitution the first President announced the dawn of the "Dharmishta" era. But in reality, people have witnessed events that symbolized the very opposite of this noble system even under his rule.

The motive to introduce the 1978 constitution, as claimed by many independent commentators, has been to use the executive powers of the President to weaken the opposition. The abolition of the first-past-the-post elections in favour of proportional representation was also to prevent the catastrophic electoral setbacks of the kind faced by the ruling parties in previous elections. It has definitely served this objective as seen from the results of the 1994 general election. Even in the national task of preparing the country's constitution, partisan and sectarian interests have not been ignored. This is the third constitution adopted since independence, which has failed to obtain national consensus and currently is under pressure from various political as well as Tamil groups for radical reform. The fact that for nearly fifty years, the politicians have not been able to agree on a permanent constitution for the nation is by itself indicative of the kind of politics practised since acquiring full sovereign powers.

When the UNP was in the opposition after losing the 1956 election, it opposed the Bandaranaike - Chelvanayakam Pact. Had this Pact been not abrogated then and its provisos implemented in good faith the subsequent tragedies would have been averted. The present UNP leadership in customary fashion is refusing to cooperate with the present Government

to solve the ethnic conflict, disregarding the grave consequences to the national economy and the suffering of not only the Tamils but also the majority of the common people of all races in the country. As all sections of the population are fed up with the war, the UNP has now been cautious not to be seen as contributing to the protraction of the war. The expectation is probably that severe hardship of the people may help the party now in the opposition to regain the power to rule in the near future.

The SLFP has made fundamental errors of its own, since 45 years of its existence. Political expediency again dominated its decisions. Their long-term implications were disregarded. The very first one was declaring Sinhala as the only official language of the country. The nationalisation of plantations, ports, bus transport, distributive trade on petroleum products and insurance business; the take over of missionary schools; introducing the segregated educational system that emphasized ethnic division; monopoly on the imports of selected commodities; and proliferation of public corporations were all effected for dogmatic reasons. Political patronage was evident even in the management of many public sector programmes.

Political interference in appointments and management within the various nationalised ventures, discredited the principle of nationalisation even where it was justifiable. The contentious practice of selecting students for admission to universities on the basis of the indefensible method of "media-wise standardization of raw marks" was also initiated by the SLFP. The infamous "chit system" for employment in the public sector was also another of its legacy. The import license and quota system as well as the investment approval scheme were not without political and regional bias.

The SLFP while not in power has opposed the moves of the UNP such as the Dudley-Chelvanayakam Pact and the Provincial Councils set up under the thirteenth amendment to the 1978 constitution. The latter would not have been possible if not for the 1987 Indo-Lanka accord. It had opposed this move too presumably to embarrass its arch rival the UNP. The 1972 republican constitution was adopted during the time it was the major partner in a coalition government, ignoring the views of the Tamils and removing even the only safeguard to protect the interests of the minorities enshrined in the previous constitution. This was perceived by the Tamils as a spiteful action taken to weaken further the minorities. It also served the narrow aim to be seen as the party that provided the dominant status to Sinhala-Buddhists.

Consistently, there has been a lack of political will to act wisely in political

and economic fields in the interest of the nation and all its citizens. The link between socially acceptable advancements in these two fields for stability, prosperity and tranquillity has been completely ignored for the reasons stated above. Ironically, the biased policies and actions of the two main parties failed even to serve their own interests over the long term. Consequently, the recourse to unethical methods to retain political power became a common feature of Lankan politics. Thus, the process of undermining democratic principles and the rule of law, was initiated and sustained by the law makers.

Ethnic Factor

Communal representation in the legislature based on ethnic ratio, weighted as to offset the numerical strength of the majority Sinhalese had been urged by the Tamils as far back as the late 1920s when the Royal Commission under the chairmanship of Lord Donoughmore was considering constitutional reform. Despite the submissions of both the Sinhalese and Tamil leaders that legislative representation should be on communal basis, the Commissioners had proposed a legislature elected on the basis of universal adult franchise. The chief spokesman then for the Tamils was Sir Ponnambalam

Ramanathan, whose motion in the Legislative Council to reject the Commission's report was defeated. Tamils boycotted the first election for the State Council held under the Donoughmore Constitution only to return later to contest the next elections having realised the ineffectiveness of the boycott. This was not the only time the Tamil leaders boycotted elections and the Parliament. The sixth amendment to the present constitution which forced the Tamil MPs to vacate their seats in protest against having to take an oath of allegiance to the unitary constitution and disavow separatism produced some results but these came about solely through the Indo-Lanka Accord of 1987.

The multi-ethnic character of Sri Lanka had been recognized by the colonial rulers and the British had throughout given prominence to this when constituting legislative councils. Representation on the basis of ethnicity rather than territory had influenced their decision to the manner of constituting them. Since the British government had overriding powers over the legislature, this method of representation compelled the various multi-ethnic committees of the Council to function without ethnic bias. This was perfectly consistent with the form of government that prevailed before independence. Nevertheless, the ethnic factor was not discarded completely in the early years of sovereign rule. All the past Delimitation Commissions in defining and re-defining electoral constituencies had also given

prominence to ethnicity. Areas with mixed populations were made multi-member constituencies.

At the time the Soulbury Commission was considering constitutional reform, the thinking of the Jaffna Tamil leadership under the late G.G. Ponnambalam was not different. They pressed for "balanced representation" (the fifty-fifty formula) in the legislature so as to ensure that the Sinhalese majority would not be able to engage in actions detrimental to the interests of any minority communities. This not only offended the Sinhalese in many ways but also was based on an illusion that all the minority communities would stand together when the interest of any one group came under threat. In fact very few who were at that time representing the Muslims and plantation Tamils supported the fifty-fifty demand. The Commission rejected this proposal. Tamil leaders accepted the new constitution, considering its Article 29 as an adequate safeguard against racial discrimination.

Until communalism was made the focal point for mobilising political support, in the minds of the ordinary Sinhalese and Tamils the existence of traditional Sinhalese and Tamil regions in Sri Lanka was a fact of life. Although there was no legal right granted to this inexplicit notion of two distinct regions with different languages and cultures, they accepted this as an inherent characteristic of the multi-ethnic country. This was manifest in their normal description of a Sinhalese or Tamil who had taken residence outside his or her native place for whatever reason. Thus, a Tamil from the North living in the South was referred to as a Jaffna man by the Sinhalese. It is the leaders with their vested interests, who wrecked the peaceful co-existence of different communities by exploiting the ethnic division for shallow political gains.

Sinhala and Tamil Nationalism

The affluent Tamil leaders were more concerned like their counterparts in the South with safeguarding their own interests rather than allow power to slip into the hands of those in the lower rungs of the social ladder, who were in the peripheries. Despite the known stand of the progressive leftist parties on the rights of the minorities, for instance parity of status for both Sinhalese and Tamil languages, restoration of citizenship and voting rights for plantation Tamils and social justice for all citizens, the then Tamil leadership with their own self-serving brand of conservatism misled the Tamil people into believing that their culture, religion and places of worship would be destroyed, if the leftist parties were to rule. The Christian and Catholic churches which occupied a socially dominant position in the north played the religious card against these left parties. The likely break-up of the social

structure based on caste and wealth and the fear of harming their own political future necessitated the Tamil leadership to alienate the people from these non-communal socialist parties.

Both Sinhala and Tamil nationalism had existed even before the rightist parties dominated politics on either side of the ethnic divide, but these did not become mass confrontational movements until after independence. They were confined within the elitist groups. Their main concern was to secure their positions of influence and power, through horse-trading. Mr. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike who left the UNP in 1951 and inaugurated the SLFP is credited by many for championing Sinhala nationalism and giving the Sinhalese people who have been left in the peripheries the sense of belonging to the power centre. A somewhat parallel situation arose when the Ceylon Tamil Congress split and the Federal Party led by the late Mr. S.J.V. Chelvanayakam was formed in 1949. Only after Mr. Chelvanayakam was accepted by the Tamil people in the mid-1950s as their leader, some semblance of broad-based Tamil leadership emerged. But conservatism with its traditional social structure still persisted.

The new Tamil leadership advocated federalism within a united Ceylon having anticipated the exploitation of the unitary constitution by the Sinhalese leadership to their political advantage. It is mentioned that Mr. Chelvanayakam congratulated Mr. Bandaranaike when he left the UNP, complimenting the decision as farsighted. This could be attributed to the fact that Mr. Bandaranaike had advocated a federal system for Ceylon much earlier, after his return from Oxford university.

The racist anti-Tamil rhetoric used at public meetings by politicians in the South primarily to win votes in the elections was matched by the aggressive rhetoric of the Tamil politicians aimed at achieving the same goal. Like the Sinhalese leaders they too did not hesitate to give impossible promises to their voters. The Vaddukoddai Resolution of 14 May 1976 calling for the creation of a separate sovereign Tamil state was adopted at the first convention of the TULF under Mr. Chelvanayakam's chairmanship. The convention called on "the Tamil nation in general and the Tamil youth in particular to come forward to throw themselves fully in the sacred fight for freedom and to flinch not till the goal of a sovereign socialist state of Tamil Eelam is reached." Just before the 1977 elections, the TULF leadership promised to establish the autonomous Tamil state within one year, if the Tamil electorate elected its candidates! After the elections at the victory meeting held at Rama Krishna Hall, Wellawatte, Mr. A. Amirthalingam made a provocative speech declaring that Eelam would be achieved through bloodshed.

TULF must have also thought that by promoting militancy among the disillusioned Tamil youth, it could use them to achieve its political objective. Its leadership would never have dreamt that the forces that were let loose would in the end be so destructive as to even destroy some of its own stalwarts physically and push the survivors to the margins of politics. Nor the then UNP and SLFP leaders expected the "docile Tamils" to challenge seriously the might of their governments. (Governments never even considered specific statute to punish any individual or group inciting racial hatred and violence, as this would not have served their parties' interests. Moreover, without the sincere belief in racial equality this was infeasible for the governments.) Having indulged in confrontational politics centred on ethnic division for decades, only those who lacked even minimal foresight could have not expected the inevitable disaster to befall. This was misjudgment of gigantic proportions had.

Tamil Militants

While both the Sinhalese and Tamil political leaders are responsible for the emergence of militancy among the Tamil youth to achieve the goals professed by the democratic Tamil leadership, the period of ascendant Tamil youth militancy was also not dissimilar in so far as infighting for Tamil leadership was concerned. Instead of verbal assault, this time it took the most barbaric form resulting in brutal killings of not only the leaders of other groups claiming to represent the Tamils (there has never been shortage of leaders with dominant personality) but also intellectuals, including teachers and other respected citizens who did not succumb to the dictates of the militant leaders. Killings of members within their own groups were not uncommon. Internecine feuds even spilled over to foreign countries, where Lankan Tamils had migrated. Still many seem unable or unwilling to see the genesis of fascism within their own community.

Many Tamil youths, including school children have been lured to join the LTTE through effective propaganda portraying violence as exciting, admirable and heroic with the added promise to liberate the socially suppressed members from the traditional social structure. Even large measure of coercion has been used to recruit young boys and girls. Ironically, the actions of the security forces in the North-East also facilitate the recruitment drive of the rebels. They have been made to believe that only through military victory their future can be assured. Tamil youths who have been promised freedom from all sorts of oppression will continue to rebel against the society, if their aspirations raised high by propaganda are

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Local Elections in North Will Turn Out to be a Fraud

By S.D.Sivaram

The PA is determined to go ahead with the local government elections in the northern province early next year despite strong protests by all the Tamil parties and the opposition. The elections will certainly constitute the most distinct and unscrupulous fraud perpetrated on the Tamil people by the PA government since it came to power in 1994, promising to deliver them from the miseries of the decade long war. Nevertheless, assorted Tamil intellectuals and human rights advocates continue to argue that President Chandrika is the best bet for the Tamils because she is the only Sinhala leader who, despite some inevitable shortcomings, genuinely and sincerely respects the legitimate political aspirations of the Tamil people. (what are generally seen as her follies are attributable mainly, they say, to the incorrigibly chauvinist elements in the bureaucracy and the military) The PA's great fraud in the north has laid bare this illusion which a minute and determined section of the Tamil intelligentsia adamantly but subtly continues to propagate.

Why is the government, which still refuses to hold local government polls in

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dashed later, regardless of the outcome of the ongoing war.

The use of civilian population recklessly as an instrument in the war against the government, especially by provoking the Army into reprisals against them, inflicting economic hardships on them, forcing their displacement from their habitats, extorting money from them through various methods and destroying property and economic infrastructures without regard to the long-term consequences has been an appalling feature of the brutal war. The callous way some Tamils use the untold suffering of the fellow members of their community caused in the above manner for propaganda purposes than be concerned about the present plight of the people caught in the war is unbelievable. Perhaps this may be put to their adherence to personality cult and hero worship, which has prevailed even at the time of independence. The fact that the crisis facing the Tamils has reached the present state is a harsh judgement on the intellectual culture of the Tamils.

(To be continued)

the Sinhala dominated districts of the island and uses special emergency powers to postpone them indefinitely, rushing so zealously for polls to local bodies in the northern province where one cannot discern even the slightest possibility of the conflict diminishing in its intensity?

Firstly it is quite obvious that the PA is very uncertain of its popularity among the Sinhalese now. The majority of them, the rural poor and the urban middle classes in particular are disgruntled by sky rocketing cost of living, unemployment, the various consequences of economic mismanagement and the ad hoc style of government. Although one may come across patriotic Sinhalese who say they are willing to bear the economic burden so that the government may successfully prosecute the war in the north and defeat the LTTE, the victory hype of Gen. Ratwatte and his cronies, which for a while helped the PA enhance its standing in the south has certainly lost its appeal to the Sinhala masses now.

There have been reports in the press that PA ministers as well as back benchers have brought to the notice of their leadership the rising cost of living and the growing unpopularity of the party. The PA genuinely fears that elections to local government bodies in the Sinhala dominated districts can dangerously expose a very weak flank, inviting a reinvigorated attack by the UNP which, the party assumes, may, in turn, precipitate an unmanageable crisis.

On the other hand, for the PA, local government elections in the north can serve as an effective dry run for the all important task of smoothly securing the large captive vote banks in the north. At the next general election the PA can assure itself of a comfortable victory if it secures minority vote blocks. If the government is politically desperate by the time the next general elections approach, it can rely on the system of rigging that would be in place once the local government polls are 'successfully' accomplished early next year.

Politicians and analysts have expressed concern since the time the PA leadership began a concerted attempt to organise the Sudu Nelum movement which is an arm of the SLFP in the peninsula while refusing permission to Tamil

parties who had urged the government to let them work in Jaffna that the real agenda behind the move was to engage in the necessary ground work to safely and completely secure the captive vote bank there by fraudulent means if the need were to arise in the future to do so.

Needless to say, when governments in Colombo become politically disparate the victims are more often than not the people of the northeast. Politicians often tend to dump the precious lessons of history with ease to suit their opportunistic conveniences. Chandrika, it is quite clear, is no exception. 1981 was a turning point in the history of the Tamil militant movement. The cost and violent consequences of the UNP regime's attempt to fraudulently push through the elections to the District Development Councils that year constitute one of the most significant chapters in the rise of the armed movement for a separate Tamil state.

And again, few of the President's Tamil apologists seem to remember that the PA itself, in 1994, was quick to condemn the blatant and brazen swindling which the UNP regime engaged in at that time in the east when the local government elections were held in that province. However, conditions were relatively more stable in that region in 1994 than they are now in the north. The LTTE was present only in small numbers in the remote jungles of the hinterlands. They had very little military means to significantly and decisively impact on the population centres on the east's developed and politically important coastal belt. The army and the STF had their main strength concentrated in the hinterlands of the region. And hence, there were several security forces positions in every area defined by and coming under the purview of a local government body.

The LTTE's mobility and striking power were severely limited in the eastern hinterlands at that time by Special Forces operations. In other words, the conditions for holding local government elections in the eastern province, in the eyes of the UNP regime, were most perfect. Some Tamil groups were prepared to contest. Yet the whole exercise became a massive fraud. The matter was exposed in sections of the Sinhala and English press. Many Tamils, mostly boys from the non-LTTE groups or dropouts working with the army who were 'elected' have been killed by the Tigers since then. The officials of these local government bodies have been complaining that the government is not providing resources to carry on with their work and that their power has been severely circumscribed by the centre's bureaucracy. If this was the case in the east in 1994 and after, it would not take one much effort to imagine what would happen in the north once the government foolishly goes ahead with

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Rajani Thiranaganama Memorial Lecture - 1996

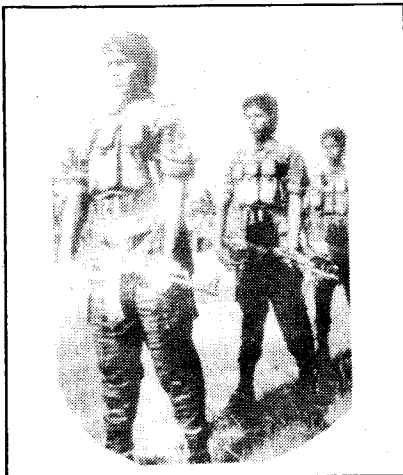
TIGER WOMEN AND THE QUESTION OF WOMEN'S EMANCIPATION

Radhika Coomaraswamy

I am often asked, as the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, what do I feel about the women cadres of the LTTE. As someone who has been entrusted with the task of attempting to protect women victims of violence, how do I respond to a situation where women become the perpetrators of violence. Let me be clear at the very beginning so that there is no room for misunderstanding - I do not believe that inducting women into a fighting force is a step toward empowerment and equality. I believe that the recruitment of women into the fighting ranks signals the militarisation of civil society - a militarisation which in itself is inimical to anyone who believes in human rights. The militarisation of civil society destroys the important human rights values of due process, non-violent resolution of disputes and the celebration of humane values of compassion and tolerance. The militarisation of women is a move away from these foundational values of human rights so large segments of the population are instilled with a militaristic approach to society and

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the polls.

There are twenty three local government bodies in the four districts of the northern province. The Jaffna municipality is the largest of these. The majority are located in the peninsula. The Urban Councils of Pt. Pedro, Chavakachcheri, Kayts, Chunnakam, Vavuniya, Mannar and Kilinochchi are in areas under the army's control. The Vavuniya urban council is the only local body in the north which is run by elected members. The PLOTE controls it. The Mullaithivu urban council area is under the LTTE's control. Apart from these, a significant number of Pradeshiya Sabhas which usually form the majority of the local government bodies lie in areas both in the peninsula and in the Vanni which are either dominated or are in the firm military and administrative grip of the Liberation Tigers. It has been demonstrated time and again that the security situation in the Jaffna town and other areas in the peninsula which are said to be under the army's control can be extremely precarious. In short, it is only through a gross and unprecedented fraud that the PA can show the world that it was able to successfully hold local government elections in the northern province. ●



its problems. The induction of women fighters into the LTTE is an example of this militarisation. As women concerned with non-violence, we can only be critical of the dynamics which have led to this process. As people concerned with human rights, we have to question and challenge any discourse which attempts to promote this perverse militarisation of civil society as a step toward the realisation of equal rights among women.

Having made my position clear, I would like to explore the phenomenon of women LTTE cadres and its implication for the role of women in society as well as their symbolic representation. The task is made even more daunting because there is international fascination with the topic of women fighters. The BBC has already made two documentaries, both of which focus on the women tiger phenomenon. The fascination of the international media rests on the fact that this is an unusual and unique development. Though there have been women guerrilla fighters, the complete transformation of South Asian women from the Sita Devi ideal to armed guerrillas raises curiosity and concern. In addition the phenomenon of suicide bombing, the complete annihilation and mutilation of the female body in pursuit of a political cause, is also unusual and disturbing. Both these factors combine to allow for international fascination with the subject of armed women fighters of the Tiger movement. Tiger women are against the current of mainstream thinking about women. This uniqueness privileges them in the world of the media where what is extraordinary and unusual is also seen as newsworthy. Peter Schalk

in his article Tiger Women says that 8% of LTTE cadres killed in combat for the period 1982-1991 were women. This percentage has increased in recent times. He estimates that there are 3,000 women fighters ready and willing at the disposal of the LTTE command. What is also interesting is that he points to the fact that except for one or two isolated cases, there is no record of women fighters dying before 1987. The systematic strategy of developing women cadres was only inaugurated after the Indo-Lanka Accord when the LTTE was suffering from a loss of manpower and resources. It would not be cynical to assume that the change toward including women in the LTTE fighting force was a result of material considerations and the need for personnel and not a concerted ideological shift in their thinking about women's empowerment. Though Adele Balasingham argues otherwise, there is definitely a correlation between the militarisation of women and the LTTE need for a larger base for the recruitment of personnel. The induction of women and children is primarily a result of this material determinant, the need for a constant supply of cadres and personnel.

Whatever the actual motive of the LTTE in inducing women into the armed cadres, there is no doubt that this decision has led to a major transformation in the way a Tamil society deals with and represents its women. Whatever reservations we may have about the overall militarisation of women, there is no doubt that the actual role of women in Tamil society has been drastically altered. With regard to the issues of dowry, inter-caste marriages, the seclusion of unmarried women etc. ... there have been major changes in the perception as well as operation of Tamil society. These social issues which were a major burden in the lives of Tamil women have been eradicated at least for the moment. LTTE strategy and the imperative of displacement have completely changed the routine and structure of a sedentary, agricultural community which was once infused with stifling rituals and customary practice. Inequitable social practices which kept unmarried women at home and menstruating women in the back garden have given way to virile forms of mobilisation. For survival, non-combatant women, either in the war torn regions of the North and the East or in the refugee camps, are forced to develop a public persona. They are compelled to interact with armed men, bureaucratic officials and international agencies if they want to meet the exigencies of day to day living. There is no sanctity in their homes and in refugee camps they have no home at all. They are compelled to negotiate terms with the real world, no longer subject to the paternal protection offered to them in the Thirukkural. They are not kept away from the hard decisions which make up the real world. As armed women cadres,

they have to engage in rigorous training, receive and assert military authority, and even dispense justice in certain limited circumstances. They have begun to enjoy some of these male prerogatives as a matter of course.

While these factors seem transformative, the important question remains - how permanent are these changes? The war reality of the Northern and Eastern provinces has created an interregnum, a crisis of opportunity to radically change the status of women in Tamil society. But in actual fact, these changes are not being articulated in ideological terms. Once peace returns, will Tamil society revert back to casteism and oppressive sexist practices? A cursory glance at the Tamil diaspora in other countries seems to imply that once people leave the atmosphere of war and return to some semblance of peace, the rituals and practices return. The numerous announcements for various rituals and practices, including the coming of age ceremony for women contained in the Tamil Times seems to indicate that the present reality is not really transformative and that once peace returns, the old attitudes will condition Tamil social life again. Yet, one may also conclude that, in the North and the East, the present suspension of Tamil cultural life as we once knew it, will probably leave an indelible mark and that some of the transformative potential may also be realised. The longer the war lasts, the more women become militarised, the less likely is the chance that they will return to the Sita Devi ideal of times past.

Despite these dislocations with regard to the role of women in Tamil society, there are still important questions to be asked about Tiger women and women's equality. Despite the celebration of armed women cadre by LTTE ideologies, there is still no evidence that women are part of the elite decision-making process. They are not initiators of ideas, they are only implementers of policy made by someone else, by men. This authoritarian model of decision making does not really empower women as political and social beings. They become cogs in the wheel of someone else's designs and plans. They are not the creators, the visionaries, the entrepreneurs of any political or social project. They are the consumers, not the producers of the grand political project. This disempowerment, the inability to affect the fundamental policy and decision making process in a given society is an important measure of women's equality. In this context the Tiger women of the LTTE are really without true political or social empowerment. Until they are given access to decision-making at all levels in a free and democratic manner they will remain dispossessed. Neloufer de Mel, in a recent article, asks whether LTTE women are agents or victims - the answer must lie in the appre-

ciation that Tiger women are not given the freedom to determine their own destiny; they are helping to act out the perceived destiny of someone else.

The induction of women into the fighting force of the LTTE has resulted in a major transformation with regard to the symbolic representation of women in Tamil society. For many decades, anthropologists have pointed out that in Hindu society generally, and Tamil Hindu society in particular, the privileged woman is the auspicious married woman with many children and material wealth. The status of a married woman was idealised as the only condition worth speaking about. As Kenneth David, Susan Wadley etc have pointed out, unmarried women and widows were considered to be inauspicious - shakti without control. The celebration of the ideal of prosperous married women in peace time Jaffna was instilled in all the cultural rituals from birth, to marriage to the funeral. Unhappiness in a family was often blamed on the Shakti of the women since her energy was not powerful enough to ward off evil. This Tamil obsession with the married woman was an important market in the ideals and aspirations of young women.

The LTTE has changed all that - even if it is for the worse. According to individuals who have studied the writings of the LTTE on women cadres, the LTTE privileges two types of women - the militant mother and the armed virgin. Neither of these ideals has resonance with the traditional Tamil ideal of the prosperous wife whose children are all living and doing well. According to writers such as Malathy De Alwis, the militant mother is a common image in all nationalist thinking, especially when that nationalism is in conflict. Writers have also pointed out that the Militant Mother is a common image in the war poetry of the Tamil Golden Age - or Sangam period. In this poetry, mothers rejoice when they hear tales of brave deaths of their sons. One of the BBC productions focused on the mother of Captain Muller, an LTTE martyr, and the mother was spouting words of joy and celebration at the brave death of her son. The continuity with Sangam poetry is all the more remarkable. Sivaram in a series of articles pointed out that present day LTTE ideology may be influenced by this Sangam literature. But in the case of militant mothers there seems to be a direct connection, even in the words that are used.

The ideal of the armed virgin, however, is not present in Tamil literature or culture. Virgins were expected to stay at home where they would be protected from devouring forces of evil. Nowhere in Tamil literature is there a role model of a virgin armed to kill. This is pure LTTE innovation. This perversion of Tamil culture is seen by writers such as Adele Balasingham as a welcome step in the liberation

of women. But we must seriously consider the impact of such a vision for Tamil women as a whole. The privileging of the armed virgin does radically alter Tamil notions of women's identity and dress. As mentioned earlier, women's identity in Tamil culture has always been linked to the married women. This was symbolically represented by the wearing of rich sarees, brilliant jewellery, flowers in flowing hair, silver anklets, a silver toe ring and a red pottu on the forehead. Today the views presented are of women in combat fatigues, in boots, with no make-up, jewellery or ostentation, often with their hair cut in short male styles, wearing a cyanide capsule around their neck. Those who comment on this ideal have also noticed that it puts forward androgyny as an ideal - both men and women aspiring to the same thing with an identity of purpose and style. But it is androgyny in a male sense - the masculine completely wiping out the feminine. This is the privileged woman of the LTTE movement. Is this liberation?

In some ways it is difficult to answer this question. On the one hand, the liberation from rich sarees, jewellery and flowers in the hair is seen by many young women as an escape from the rigid confines of social life in earlier Tamil society. There is freedom of movement and an equality of social and political commitment to a cause. There is a radical transformation of the self-image, a woman no longer protected, sheltered and kept at home, but a woman seemingly empowered by a gun, enjoying free movement and camaraderie with the other sex. However, the LTTE is also clear that the ideal woman remains a virgin; sexuality is seen as an evil debilitating force.

And yet one has to be cautious. Firstly, for all its negativity, the earlier Tamil notion of the ideal woman was a celebration of life. Prosperity, sexuality, love of music and the arts, these were all important aspects of the married woman paradigm. This rejoicing in the material and artistic of life is severely missing in the LTTE's notion of an ideal woman. Self-sacrifice, austerity and androgyny are put forward as ideals. Death, not life, is celebrated. The greatest feat for a woman is to die a martyr. This celebration of heroic death is an aspect of most nationalist movements but in the LTTE it is a major factor which determines and conditions the life of women who have dedicated themselves to the cause. This preoccupation with death is a major transformation from the earlier life paradigm of woman whose shakti was meant to prolong and nurture life. Women as nurturers is a concept which is completely lacking in the LTTE ideology, a concept which is the basis for solidarity among women's movements throughout the world.

Secondly, the LTTE notion of androgyny, or making women and men act in the

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same way is a death knell to femininity. In some ways social constructions of femininity have been strongly criticised by feminists. But feminists have also celebrated the positive qualities of certain constructions of femininity - the networking among people, nurturance, social bonding, gentleness, compassion, tolerance, etc. qualities long recognised as feminine are as important in the human personality as aggression and empowerment. In this sense, the complete eradication of femininity by the LTTE is not so much a victory for women but a triumph for the masculine world view of authority, hierarchy and aggression. The women's movement has pushed for androgyny but where all the personalities develop their masculine and feminine sides - a wholeness often captured by the Hindu concept of Ardhanareswara, half man - half woman. Women have never fought for the complete annihilation of the feminine identity, only for its recognition and empowerment, shakti or karpu in describing the power of women. There is no sense of an independent woman, empowered by her own agency, who makes decisions for her own self-realisation. Her liberation is accepted only in so far as it fits the contours of the nationalist project. There is no sense of autonomy or empowerment as an end in themselves. Kumari Jayawardena among others has written extensively on how nationalist movements put forward women's liberation programmes only insofar as they fulfil nationalist aspirations. In that sense the LTTE would not approve of the international women's movement which puts social justice and identity, politics above the concerns of nationalism. The notion of empowered female agents, creating their own political and social agenda, independent of male authority, asserting autonomy and identity would not be accepted as part of the LTTE policy on women. In addition the universalism of the women's movements which attempts to subvert nationalist categories from within, while asserting international ideals of women's solidarity across cultures, against war and for peace, would not find resonance with the LTTE notion of women's equality.

Finally, the LTTE ideal of the armed guerilla woman puts forward an image of purity and virginity. There is enormous emphasis on both these characteristics. LTTE women are groomed as one group in one division with one purpose. In the LTTE ideology misogyny or hybridity is a terrible crime. The women are described as pure, virtuous. Their chastity, their unity of purpose and their sacrifice of social life supposedly gives them strength. They are denied sexual or sensual experiences. This refusal to accept hybridity, sensuality, sexuality, the social mixing of human beings as an important part of everyday life, is a foundational principle of nationalist ideologies and the LTTE is no excep-

Whither Tamil Nationalism In Tamil Nadu ?

T N Gopalan

Ethnic nationalism could be the war-cry of the "short 20th century". And in the post-Soviet Union world it could indeed have become the most potent force. But how far a multi-nation state like India, with a relatively democratic apparatus in place and striving hard to create (or recreate what has been lost in the years since independence) an all-embracing Indian nationalism, would be hit by the rise of the sub-national movements?

This question has been agonised over in academic circles and in the media for quite some time now and with increasing concern of late. Apart from the tribal nationalism flaring up in the North-East virulently, it is surprisingly Tamil nationalism which has been a focal point for the com-

tion. The armed virginal woman cadre ensures that this notion of purity, based on denial, is a part of the social construction of what it means to be a woman in the world view of the LTTE. Those of us who value multiculturalism based on diversity and hybridity can only be stifled by the monocultural vision which conditions the life and times of the armed women cadre of the LTTE.

In conclusion, it may be said that the armed women of the LTTE forces the feminist movement to come to terms with its own assumptions. The empowerment of women by giving them arms and taking them out of the home, making them do the most masculine of activities, is put forward as an aspect of women's liberation. By putting forward this ideal, the LTTE forces us to come to terms with the foundational values of feminism. Unless feminism is linked to humanism, to non-violence, to hybridity and a celebration of life over death, it will not provide society with the alternatives that we so desperately seek. Feminist practices only have legitimacy if they are based on humanistic principles; otherwise they lose their moral anchor and dissipate into abstract notions of equality. So, let me end this lecture by celebrating a life, the life of Rajni Thiranagama, who was brutally murdered a few years ago. She was a Tamil, married to a Sinhalese, living in Jaffna, fighting the moral authority of four armies, the IPKF, the LTTE, the Sri Lankan Army and the EPRLF, struggling against all odds for the humanistic resurrection of the broken palmyrah. ●

mentators - surprising in that Tamil nationalism has long since ceased to be militant and is unlikely to prove disruptive of the greater Indian polity even in the distant future. Most of the contending forces in the political arena actually compete with each other in establishing their "patriotic" credentials.

Still the concern is understandable in that the middle classes which have a vested interest in a larger entity are constantly haunted by the Tiger phenomenon arising from the neighbouring island. Even if they do not look under every bed for a Prabhakaran, the possible eddy effects of the Eelam struggle are giving them many a sleepless night.

The objective of the present discussion is not to examine the desirability or otherwise of Tamil nationalism as such but to find out how alive and effective it is - effective in terms of political mobilisation, that is.

The issue came to the forefront in November in the backdrop of two or three developments - a conference of the Thamizh Chandror Peraval (Council of the Tamil elders) and another organised by the Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) on the one hand and the depositions of the former and present Chief Ministers before the Jain Commission inquiring into the possible conspiracy behind the assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.

In fact the depositions were by themselves a sufficient commentary on Tamil nationalism, to be more specific, on that variant which identifies itself with the Tigers in toto, seriously believes that the Tamils are a race born to rule and nostalgically looks back to the days of the 'glorious' Tamil kings of yore. (It may be appropriate to note here that in the Tigerdom such a belief is sedulously fostered by every means available to the rulers.)

And so when two leading Tamil politicians, representing two important mass-based parties, openly and categorically come out against the Tigers, that speaks volumes about the support the Tiger-type Tamil nationalism enjoys in Tamil Nadu or at least of their perception of the matter.

Predictably it was Jayalalitha who came out very strongly against the LTTE. "Before the assassination, they were perceived as the saviours of the Sri Lankan

Tamils, but after the event they were seen as a group of deadly terrorists who should not be encouraged", she said.

And she went on to recall with pride her role in putting down the LTTE activities in the state and pressurising the Centre to ban the organisation.

It should be recalled here right through to the later part of 1990 she had remained a strong votary of the Tigers. So much so that even after the massacre of the EPRLF leaders that she maintained that warts and all the LTTE was the sole option before the Lankan Tamils - apparently under the belief that saying anything against the Tigers could prove politically disadvantageous to her.

However, when she realised that taking an anti-Tiger stance would not boomerang on her, instead could even catapult her to power, she executed a neat u-turn and portrayed them as monsters and vilified the then Chief Minister Karunanidhi for encouraging anti-nationals.

And once in power, she not only went after the Tigers and their supporters with a vengeance but made life miserable for the ordinary refugees she even damned them for breaking the law of the land, indulging in dacoities and the like and sought to compulsorily repatriate them all - evidently she did all that because she believed that such an approach would go down well with the electorate.

After the humiliating electoral debacle - which again had nothing to do with the issue of the Lankan Tamils - she has pretty little to bank upon except the Tiger card to win back the favour of the masses. The point is not whether she is right or not but simply that in the eyes of a populist leader taking an anti-Tiger stance could prove productive.

If Jayalalitha, a brahmin by birth, and hence instantly becomes suspect in a Dravidian Tamil nationalist discourse, had behaved true to her character, pray what did that wonderful saviour of the Tamil cause, the unique leader of the Tamil-speaking community the world over, Mr M Karunanidhi, have to say?

"I have ceased to be a sympathiser of the LTTE over a period of time and they in fact planned to eliminate me. On that score accepted more security," he told the Commission and was at pains to prove that his policies as the Chief Minister in his previous tenure had had the approval of the central leaders at that time and that the MGR regime too had encouraged the Tigers no end.

His Tamil Eelam Supporters Organisation Conference in 1986 had attracted leaders cutting across the political spectrum, he recalled in an attempt to prove that the Lankan Tamil cause had had the endorsement of most political parties at one stage or other - the message being that if he was going to be indicted, there were others who were equally guilty. He also claimed that he had advised Mr

V Gopalsamy to tone down his pro-Tiger rhetoric.

His version of how he came to distance himself from the LTTE makes for very touching reading indeed. Initially he had sympathised not only with the Tigers, but also with other militant organisations like the EPRLF and the TELO. However he became disenchanted with them slowly as they started eliminating such leaders as Srisabarathnam and Amirthalangam. The EPRLF massacre was the last straw. Thereafter he would have nothing to do with them, he asserted. Though it is generally believed that his then government was taken off its guard by the massacre, the fact remains that it had helped the killers get away safely. At one stage during the Jaya regime there was even a threat of his being arrested for abetting the escape of the killers. His own Home Secretary R Nagarajan had actually charged him with issuing oral instructions to that effect. The trial is still on in that case and Karunanidhi's assertions must be seen in that context. Mercifully he would not call the Tigers a group of deadly terrorists or go back on his opposition to the Indian Peace Keeping Force either. The Tamil civilians in the peninsula suffered a great deal at the hands of the Indian forces, he reiterated. In the circumstances nothing could be more illogical than asserting, as some sections in the media tend to do, that the Tamil separatism and tiger-type militancy are looming large on the horizon.

Anyway some observers tend to get panicky whenever such essentially talking shops like the Chandror Peravai or the PMK conferences are organised. This is not to deny that there has always been and will always continue to be a very articulate, vocal and vociferous Tamil nationalist section which tears its hair and beats its breast over the evil days that the Tamil community has fallen into and declaiming that the Tamils, the Tamil-speaking non-brahmin sections, can flourish only in a separate Tamil state. But they always take care to see that in their zeal they do not go overboard and wind up behind the bars.

The Chandror Peravai, launched during the last months of the Jaya regime, as a professed attempt to bring all Tamil enthusiasts under one banner, has had a very indifferent one-year existence. It did not achieve much except holding some occasional seminars and issuing some innocuous statements once in a while. And so the anniversary show was destined to be a more serious sabre-rattling exercise, to make up for the opportunities lost.

There was a lot of it, the speakers lamenting that the Brahmins should still rule the roost in many walks of life, that the Hindi-speaking Marwaris and Telugu-speaking communities too should fatten themselves while Tamils continue to be exploited but remain oblivious that they

were being taken for a ride by everyone around, that they should be losing interest in their own glorious mother tongue and develop a craze for English, ad nauseam.

"Wake up you Tamils before it is too late." Such was the clarion call of the Peravai though nobody spelt out or seemed to know how to wake up the sleeping Tamils or do what after they had woken up.

Though the image of the LTTE was hovering in the background all the while, there were repeated laudatory references to Prabhakaran and his followers, still the Peravai's concern avowedly was more general, the betterment of the Tamils in India.

The PMK's latter-day TESO was a more straight forward Tiger-hosanna show. The previous day Director General of Police K K Rajasekhara Nair issued a statement warning that anyone making any statement supporting "banned organisations" would be prosecuted.

When sought for his comments Union Minister for Personnel S R Balasubramanian conceded that the Lankan Tamils had their own problems, but threatened that any action promoting the "banned outfits" would be viewed seriously.

The twin-threat one from a Malayalee (the DGP) and other a Telugu-speaking Naidu, as the speakers at the PMK conference crudely put it, only spurred the Tiger-votaries into making hysterical statements, holding up the LTTE acts as an inspiring saga in Tamil history and eulogising Prabhakaran as the sole leader of the besieged Tamil community and whose example had better be emulated by all others.

Mr Thiagu, a Naxalite-turned-Tamil nationalist and organiser of the Dhileepan Manram, wanted to know whether the life of Rajiv was more precious than those of Dhileepans and Kittus and Mr Supaveerapandian, a Tamil professor, recounting the noble history of the Tigers asserted that they could never be vanquished, notwithstanding some temporary setbacks and that they knew best how to conduct the Eelam struggle. A concert by Thenisai Chellappa full of high-decibel paeans for Prabhakaran and nasty digs at his critics was another highlight of the show. This writer who also spoke tried to draw the attention of those wildly rooting for Prabhakaran to first stop and think as to why under a regime like that of Karunanidhi even the innocent refugees should be harassed midsea and cases registered against the fishermen ferrying them in and why the Eelam cause should have gone out of the agenda of most political parties.

Anyway such voices were lost in the din of hallelujahs for Thambi. A resolution demanding unrestricted entry of the refugees was among the saner points at

(Continued on page 35)

THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE SYSTEM - THE CASE FOR ITS ADOPTION

by Oswald B Firth OMI & Richard A Olas

Among the numerous proposals submitted to the Parliamentary Select Committee for Constitutional Reform (PSCCR) for its consideration, there is a particular one that predicates the functional integration, to an appreciable degree, of the Members of Parliament of whatever Government is in power with those in the Opposition, at least as far as the participatory, decision-making process at the Parliamentary level is concerned. The manner how this proposal is expected to be implemented is by incorporating into the Constitution-to-be, in an appropriately modified form, the Executive Committee system, à la the Donoughmore Constitution, to suit the multi-party pluralistic character of the present Sri Lankan polity.

A wide gamut of considered views in favour of its adoption, from authoritative sources whose credentials are beyond question, has already found expression in ample measure. Of them, there is the veteran politician of the calibre of the late Mr SWRD Bandaranaike, who had been a most perceptive actor in the political arena for no less than 26 years until his untimely death, the late Dr Colvin R de Silva, the eminent constitutionalist, lawyer and politician in his own right, the other seasoned politician, Mr Dinesh Gunawardene, the MEP leader, who has made an unprecedented proposal to the PSCCR with regard to the Executive Committee system, and the Rhodes scholar/academic turned politician, Professor G L Peiris, who also has made one of the most convincing cases in favour of this system. Of the NGOs, the Organisation of Professional Associations representing 32 professions in the country has also made its submissions to the PSCCR to the same effect. In this regard the academic studies done by the late Dr IDS Weerawardana, the former Lecturer in Economics of the then University of Ceylon in his book "Government and Politics in Ceylon", and that of Dr Jane Russell's "Communal Politics Under the Donoughmore Constitution: 1931-1947" provide a wealth of objective material at an in-depth level.

The case of Mr Bandaranaike's is one that gives much food for thought because he, having been at one time a fervent supporter of the Executive Committee system, then a convert to the Cabinet system, once again became a reconverter to the Executive Committee system, which also revealed his generally open-ended frame of mind. What adds credibility to

this volte face of his is that his reconversion came after having gained first-hand experience of the strengths and weaknesses of both these systems, from the unique, vantage position of a Minister, the Leader of the House, the Leader of the Opposition and Prime Minister under either the Donoughmore or the Soulbury Constitution. He was thus eminently qualified to compare the merits and demerits of the Executive Committee system with those of the Cabinet system. As such, in 1957 he made the following observation which deserves serious consideration. "In countries where you cannot hope to get two parties to divide on purely political issues, there should be a modification of the system where all MP's regardless of party, have some share in executive work. Under the Donoughmore Constitution, backbenchers of all parties shared the executive work and you avoided the bitterness and sense of frustration that is liable to develop not only among the Opposition parties, but even backbenchers of the government. There were defects in the executive system as it was worked in Ceylon, but it was a mistake to have scrapped it altogether." (Hansard, 1945, 8 November).

SWRD's Lamentation

In this regard, Jane Russell is of the opinion that, ABandaranaike's final judgement on the Donoughmore dispensation vindicated the [Donoughmore] Commissioners who had adduced as one of the reasons for the system that: 'Politicians in Ceylon are always involved in details of administration. The politician would lose touch with reality were he to overlook them. The [executive] committee system will therefore make a virtue of necessity and give free play to the peculiar genius of the Ceylonese themselves' (ibid pp 214-15). The fact that he lamented over the exclusion of the Executive Committee system from the Soulbury Constitution, which was structured on party lines, indicates its validity and viability even under a Parliamentary form of government.

The other ardent advocate of this system was none other than Dr Colvin R de Silva in presentations he made at several seminars on Constitutional Reform organised by numerous NGOs including the Centre for Society and Religion and the Council for Liberal Democracy (CLD). At the seminar on "Parliament: Its Powers, Functions and Roles", organised by

CLD, Dr de Silva stated that "the most important thing about the set-up [Donoughmore Constitution] was this. Those [Executive] Committees had tremendous power in the initiation of legislation. And secondly, in the supervision of the execution of the legislation. It was in the Committees that the Bills that ultimately came before the Board of Ministers and through it to the State Council, originated... There were various Departments under each of these Committees... according to the subjects allocated to these Committees, and actually the Committees could meet again in the matter of the Executive tasks of the various Department. That is, bring their influence to bear and take up those matters in the Committees and make their decisions to be carried out, so that the Ministers are not quite as free to use their powers as they are today. Finally, all these matters came through the Board of Ministers as I said. What I wanted to stress was this: In those Committees there would come up matters which most closely concerned the people, for the simple reason that the people in those Committees were those who had been chosen by the people. This brought the whole process of the Government in the country, aside from what the Governor was responsible for, into close relationship directly with the common people. Their wishes, their demands, their dislikes, all got reflected in these Committees precisely because the Committees had all the powers of legislation and also powers of Executive action being ensured". (Ideas for Constitutional Reform edited by Chanaka Amarantunga, published by CLD).

At another presentation at a seminar on "The Presidency and the Institutional Form of the Sri Lankan State" also organised by the CLD, Dr de Silva, when referring to the Donoughmore Constitution once again emphasised that "it carried with it a very valuable institution, the Executive system from which I think, if I say so to you, it was the major misfortune that we got away, for that system may have been capable of improvement. And I firmly and personally believe that, had that system been carried over to the new stage of Constitutional changes keeping that form and basis, much of the problems of the minorities with regard to the participation in power at the Centre might have been, to some degree at least, assuaged and compensated for, even if it might not have fulfilled their requirements completely". (ibid)

The sum and substance of these presentations were that: (a) Governance, both legislative and executive, became a collective, interlinked effort and the responsibility of all the legislators and not just those in power; (b) there was an effective curbing of any authoritarian tendencies of the respective Ministers; (c) it enhanced the capacity to initiate a greater

volume of legislation; (d) it facilitated a closer relationship with the people; and (e) it sensitised the legislators regarding the problems of the minority communities with greater acuteness.

A Holistic Approach

Probably it was left to Mr Dinesh Gunawardene to even go beyond both Mr Bandaranaike and Dr de Silva in his advocacy of the Executive Committee system when he made a strong case before the PSCCR that it should be an integral part not only of the Parliamentary set-up but also of the District Councils (which in his opinion should be the basic unit of devolution) as well. Whether one agrees or not with what the basic unit should be, this two-pronged approach would facilitate power-sharing at both the Centre and at the periphery at one and the same time, even if the unit of devolution were to remain at the Provincial Council level. This is truly a bold and innovative move with far-reaching consequences, the most significant of which would be the close relationship the electors will have with the elected. Moreover, if accepted by the PSCCR in the form as suggested by Mr Gunawardene, devolution of power would have gained a meaningful dimension with the sharing of power by all are elected to such bodies.

The implied logic behind adopting the Executive Committee system at all levels of these politico-administrative structures pre-supposes is that like peace, power-sharing between those in power and those out of power is also indivisible. To restrict such power-sharing only at the Parliamentary level would not only be a contradiction but also counter-productive and self-defeating. His is a more holistic approach which deserves to be extended even to the Pradeshiya Sabhas, Municipalities, Urban and Town Councils as well, which is where the day-to-day micro-level problems of the people are closely felt and, therefore, could be effectively solved. Such power-sharing through the Executive Committee system at all these levels, particularly where all the three major communities live together, would go a long way in welding them into harmonious social units. This is a far cry from confrontational politicking which is the order of the day under the existing set-up with precedence already created for the Opposition to oppose for the sake of opposing!

The most explicit treatment of this subject was done by Professor G L Peiris when he adduced no less than 13 reasons in favour of the adoption of a modified form of the Executive Committee system in the OPA Journal Vol 15, 1992-93 on "Sri Lanka's Constitutional Problems; Lessons from the Donoughmore Constitution". In his opinion, "In the setting of Sri Lanka's present constitutional problems, the Donoughmore Constitution, so far as the wielding of executive power is

concerned, had two particularly valuable features (excerpts of which are reproduced below for want of pace):

(a) In terms of the Donoughmore system, the legislature did not divest itself of executive power and surrender it to an extraneous body such as the Cabinet. On the contrary, the legislature by the expedience of constituting itself into a variety of Executive Committees, retained executive power in its own hands and used it effectively throughout the life of the legislature...

(b) In view of the excessive politicisation which is undoubtedly a grave problem in Sri Lanka today, we would place particular emphasis on the scope which the Donoughmore Constitution allowed for persons with differing political ideologies and points of view, and certainly not belonging to one political party, to make an active contribution to the formulation and implementation of executive policy.

Deserves Serious Reflection

If the central concern agitating us is the necessity for ensuring adequate control by the elected representatives of the people over the exercise of executive power - admittedly crucial in a modern welfare state - then we would suggest without hesitation that the following features of the Donoughmore Constitution, which is part of Sri Lanka's constitutional heritage, deserve serious reflection.

(1) The Donoughmore system enabled a continuity and an intensity of involvement in executive policy on the part of the legislature, which is not realistically achievable under the Cabinet system of government.

(2) This encouraged Members to state their preference with regard to the Executive Committee which they would belong to - for example, health, education or local government. Each Member would freely and deliberately choose, as the area for his contribution, a subject which he found congenial and in which he had special knowledge or experience.

(3) Every Member of Parliament, by virtue of his membership of an Executive Committee, acquired the right to exercise supervision over government departments falling within the purview of the Executive Committee to which he belonged. This valuably enhanced his sense of responsibility and relevance.

(4) This regularity of involvement encouraged members of the legislature to secure a grasp of administrative details, which they would perceive, was certainly not expected of them by the assumptions of the Cabinet system.

(5) The clear impulsion of an executive as well as a legislative role to Parliament and the explicit division between these two functions, fortified by the recognition of distinct procedures in respect of the discharge of these disparate functions, rendered Parliamentary scrutiny of

government much more meaningful and productive under the Donoughmore Constitution.

(6) The fact that Parliament had a separate opportunity in executive session to address itself to matters of administrative detail, naturally, gave it ample scope to focus upon broad issues of legislative policy in legislative session.

(7) The dual aspect of Parliament's supervisory role gave the legislature far greater leverage with regard to control of public finance - a function which goes to the very root of Parliamentary responsibility in the context of representative government.

(8) The smallness of the Executive Committees in which administrative business was transacted engendered a sense of intimacy which was conducive to greater frankness and candour. Posturing was seldom resorted to in this environment.

(9) The Executive Committee system, which was the basic feature of the Donoughmore Constitution, encouraged compromise and willingness to give and take. All points of view tended to be taken into account before a decision was made, and the attainment of consensus was, therefore, easier.

(10) The Executive Committee system lent itself to the establishment of viable consultative mechanisms consisting principally of sub-committees and joint committees. Where a project involved diverse aspects and ramifications, all the relevant Executive Committees had to be consulted and their responses had a bearing on the final decision which was arrived at.

(11) The modalities pertaining to the Executive Committee system gave free rein to the ventilation of grievances; this made it possible for tensions to be alleviated, and redress sought, before problems assumed alarming proportions. In this way a useful safety valve was provided.

(12) The Executive Committee system had special usefulness in relation to ethnic, religious and cultural diversity. In a small Committee the minority's standpoint tended to receive greater consideration and, since every vote counted, a differing view was generally not brushed aside. Attitudes of confrontation were thus avoided.

(13) The system, by its very nature, could be expected to provide a significant impetus for the strengthening and development of a multi-party system which, clearly, would enrich public life in the setting of a multi-racial and multi-cultural community".

Some Positive Features

This overview of a variety of positive features inherent in the Executive Committee system provides convincing testimony of the need to incorporate this constitutional devise, not only at the Parliamentary level but also at the Provincial

Council/Pradeshiya Sabha/Municipal/Urban/Town/Village Council levels.

Professor Peiris has been sensitive to the fact the Sri Lankan society has "changed a great deal during the intervening years" and as such, instead of any "uncritical and mechanical absorption into the constitutional law and practice of Sri Lanka (of) these attributes of the Donoughmore Constitution", he rightly asserts that certain relevant features relating to the Executive Committee system could be "imaginatively adapted and applied to contemporary conditions of Sri Lanka". In this regard, he pinpoints two particular areas that should be taken into account, namely "to exercise effective supervision and control over the executive (and) to draw divergent political perspectives and persuasions into vital areas of the government process so as to prevent unhealthy fragmentation of the community into warring groups activated by rancour and bitterness vis-a-vis their opponents".

His stance underlines the benefits that would accrue by the incorporation of these elements into the Constitution which are expected to provide lasting solutions to many an ill that afflicts Sri Lanka's body politic. Implicit in his presentation is also a critique of the Cabinet system which, in his opinion, suffers from certain inherent structural cum functional infirmities and inadequacies that have rendered it ineffectual in the overall governance of the country by whatever government is in power.

Of particular relevance is the weightage Professor Peiris has given for the solution of the ethnic problem which had been mainly due to the sense of alienation felt by the minority communities from the mainstream of national life which, in his opinion, could be remedied by reconstituting the Executive Committee system because then "the minority standpoint tended to receive greater consideration."

He seems to be having both the hindsight and the foresight not to blindly adopt this system lock, stock and barrel. For many have been the instances in the past where there had been a serious dereliction of duty on the part of those who wielded power under the Donoughmore Constitution. In fact, there had been some Members of the then State Council who had contrived to manipulate it to their own advantage to further their own vested interests, which often reduced it to a game of musical chairs as to who should be in which Executive Committee so that their hidden agenda could be implemented! It had even led to a kind of an aberration in the form of the controversial Pan-Sinhala Board of Ministers in 1936, which according to Jane Russell, "The most significant and unfortunate result of the Pan-Sinhalese Ministry was it provided ample fuel for the Ceylon Tamil communalists. Predictably, the communalists represented

the Sinhalese leaders as megalomaniacs to their electors. Dr I Thambayah, the President of the Jaffna Association, who had been in 1925 a fervent Christian sectionalist and an anti-Hindu, had taken up an extreme communalist stance by 1937 (when he asserted) that 'the Sinhalese people are glutted with power, which they were able to grasp by reason of the vast numerical strength of their community. Now they desire larger accessions of power. The present Board of Ministers, a purely Sinhalese body, deliberately devised, planned and plotted, and schemed into existence is the climax of Sinhalese communal aspirations'. This convinced the Tamil political leadership of the day to be unreservedly critical of this system" (ibid)

A Few Minus Points

Among the other criticisms of the Executive Committee system the following also deserve serious attention by the PSSCR (a) it contrived to assert the hegemony of the majority community at the expense of the minority communities, specially the Tamils; (b) there had been many instances of favouritism in appointments to the public service; (c) nepotism became "a sense of familial responsibility dominated Members' attitudes to a degree". (Russell); (d) bribery and corruption were not conspicuous by their absence in respect of appointments of personnel into the public service. This even led the late Mr G G Ponnambalam to move a resolution in the State Council to the effect that "Appointments of Public Servants should in no case be referred to the Executive Committee"; and (e) there was the inability of the Board of Ministers to assume collective responsibility due to pressures on them to pull in every direction according to their whims and fancies.

Lack of space here does not permit us to enumerate here a host of other criticisms that have been levelled against it, which should be the subject of a separate study. It behoves the PSSCR and also the Minister for Constitutional Affairs to pay heed to these criticisms made not only by the Tamil community but also by academics who have done extensive studies on this subject. In this regard Weerawardana's book (referred to earlier) has devoted no less than 26 pages in two of its chapters on the subject on the Executive Committee system, which is replete with numerous references where it had faulted, due to the manner how it had been made to function or rather dysfunction instead of any inherent structural defects.

Such acts of omission and commission, however, should not detract the PSSCR and the Minister for Constitutional Affairs, and also the Opposition from taking all necessary steps to re-install the Executive Committee system in the pre-eminent position it enjoyed under the

Donoughmore Constitution, but with all safeguards taken to ensure that it functions at an optimum level.

Whatever is said and done, among the other reasons that could be adduced in favour of such an adoption of a modified form of the Executive Committee system are:

(1) That it would enhance the participatory character in the decision-making process of all the legislators, irrespective of whether they are in the Government or in the Opposition, and particularly those who represent the interests of the minority communities.

(2) That there would be a more consensual approach when such decisions are made, in contrast to the adversarial approach as at present which is abortive of much results.

(3) That to that extent, the sense of alienation that legislators, not only in the Opposition but also among the backbenchers of the Government party itself, often feels, will be reduced to the minimum.

(4) That the decision-making process will cease to be the monopoly or the prerogative of the Cabinet of Ministers and/or the party in power, with scant attention being given to the legislators in Opposition.

(5) That this would result in the present top-down imposition being substituted with the bottom-up approach that would give a sense of gratification to all legislators participating to all legislators participating the proceedings of Parliament that they have all made their contributions in the formulation of most of the legislation.

(6) That thus the final outcome of each Bill, Act or motion would have been subjected before they are presented to Parliament for ratification, to a thorough evaluation from different perspectives. For the give-and-take interaction done informally across the table would be in sharp contrast to the formal, lengthy 'speechifications' done standing, which often produce more sound than sense, with vituperative epithets casts with gay abandon across the floor of the House.

(7) That this renewed feature would be instrumental in evolving a vibrant political culture of mutual tolerance and respect for opposing viewpoints that is sadly conspicuous by their absence today. It would generate also a sense of conviviality, and also consultation, compromise and consensus (a Premadasa aphorism that seems to have been honoured more in the breach than in its observance!)

(8) That such a healthy relationship would have a benign impact on our social values and norms, and above all on the behavioural pattern of all segments of our society now so deeply fractured, whose fissures are felt down to the grassroots family units. At least to certain degree it could help restore the cohesive, organic

character of our rural society, where over 80% of our live, which is a dire need of the hour.

(9) That, last but not the least, power-sharing in a meaningful way both at the Centre and also at the periphery would be a living reality, though yet an elusive dream - with concrete results that would give a sense of belonging to all communities, investing the devolutionary process with an added significance. In turn, this could ensure the territorial integrity of the country, provided other essential pre-conditions are also fulfilled.

It would, however, be too presumptuous if one were to repose faith exclusively in this device as the panacea for all the country's political ills. The very complexity of our problems today demand a multi-pronged approach if they are to be resolved without creating more new intractable problems.

Nevertheless, the adoption of a revised version of the Executive Committee system, as suggested above, would mark a complete break from the 48-year tradition, since Independence, of the Parliamentary form of government in which whatever government party and the official Opposition have been in office, they have been forever congealed in their respective strait-jacketed adversarial positions. They have remained with daggers drawn on either side of their 'Berlin Wall' as if that was how it had been pre-ordained for them even before they were elected to office!

Once such a reconstituted Executive Committee system got institutionalised as a part and parcel of our political process at all levels its spin-off effect could have far reaching consequences. For, such radical change could induce the politically partisan contending forces in and out of power, who are now in a perpetual state of conflict and confrontation, to interact with each other in a spirit of give-and-take tolerance, mutual respect and harmony on an unprecedented scale. If this laudable, yet elusive, objective becomes a reality, it could truly be said that Sri Lanka would have attained that degree of political maturity we could be proud of.

This should in turn have a far reaching impact on our socio-cultural milieu with the vast concourse of our people beginning to emulate the example set by the political elite. It could then create a climate that would be conducive for a qualitative transformation of the prevailing ethos of our society, leading to paradigm shift in the sphere of human relations from one of bi-polarity to that of bi-partisanship - in every layer of our society. It is only then that Sri Lanka would have come of age, in more than one sense of that term.

Fr Oswald B Firth is the Co-Director of the Centre for Society & Religion (CSR). Richard A Dias is the Associate Editor of "Social Justice", which is published by CSR.

INDO-BANGLA RELATIONS NEW INITIATIVES

by G.Ramesh

India's external affairs establishment departed from a time-tested convention in allowing the visit of West Bengal chief minister Jyoti Basu to neighbouring Bangla Desh. The custom has always been, and perhaps still is, to get a union minister to lead such delegations to neighbouring countries. In today's India where federalism is a somewhat more respected concept, the 60-year-old veteran leader is more than a union minister. He was the frontrunner for the prime minister's post this May until the CPI(M) politburo vetoed the proposal to join the united front government at the centre. And Deve Gowda has no choice but to listen to this leader who put the CPI(M) on the pedestal of bourgeois respectability.

Basu is easily the most well-known Bengali to the world this century after Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Subhas, Chandra Bose, Ravi Shankar and Satyajit Ray. Ever since leading the left front to a political comeback in the 1977 elections in West Bengal, Basu has become a leader with a broad mass appeal cutting across poor and middle peasants in rural Bengal. By evolving a strategic plan for the development of the peasantry's rights in rural Bengal, he ensured the CPI(M)'s victory in all subsequent elections of the state. Though the CPI(M) could well have formed a government by itself, Basu is keen to lead a coalition of left parties at the Writers' Building, the seat of power in Calcutta.

One of the subcontinent's senior most politicians, Basu has an enigmatic air about him. These days, he is known to be well-disposed towards multinational capitalism. His bhadralok (Bengali middle class) background, British university education and supreme indifference makes him a peculiar social democrat, willing to use liberal, pragmatic as well as tough methods to combat diverse diverse political opponents - the right-wing BJP, the Congress and left extremists. He has quite a few friends in intellectual circles: the Marxist economist Ashok Mitra, who has been sympathetic to the Lankan Tamil cause, has served as his finance minister, American linguist-philosopher Noam Chomsky visited rural Bengal at Basu's invitation last year; Basu was even known to be keen to get Gabriel Garcia-Marquez to inaugurate the annual Calcutta international festival this year - that is before the mercurial Latin American writer went underground for a while.

Basu successfully concluded a six



day visit to Dhaka last week. He was accompanied by two of his closest ministers Buddhadev Bhattacharya and Dr Ashim Dasgupta. The visit was at the instance of the newly elected Bangla prime minister Hasina Wajed, who quickly recognised the role Basu could play to settle the age-old dispute on the Farakka barrage across the river Ganga (as it is called in Hindi heartland) or river Padma (in Bengali). Hasina, who is a pragmatic leader, knows Basu's clout with Delhi. She ensured that Basu's visit coincided with the 25th anniversary of the Bangla Desh liberation war in which Indian armed forces played a key role to help her father Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman. Hasina could afford to ignore the protests of protocol made by her archrival and predecessor Begum Khaleda Zia about Basu's visit. Her foreign minister Abdus Samad Azeez was with Basu throughout the visit.

Basu promptly told Hasina that the final decision for a permanent solution on the river water dispute could be arrived at during her visit to Delhi next month. He made a phone call to Deve Gowda to brief him about the talks. The intractable problem of refugee flow from Bangla Desh to India, especially the northeastern region, will have to wait, Basu apparently made it clear to Hasina. The influx created tensions in Assam ruled by Asom Gana Parishad, which is part of the united front government at Delhi.

Basu's ties with Bangla Desh are too close. It was sweet homecoming for the aging patriarch. In spending a few of the six days at his ancestral village of Barodi, the aging Basu emulated Garcia-Marquez whose novels keep returning to Macondo, the dream village of his forefathers. And Bangla Desh is special to every Bengali

(continued on next page)

TAMIL NADU'S POLITICAL SCENE GETS MURKIER

It puzzles Tamil Nadu as to why Muthuvel Karunanidhi has spared former AIADMK ministers who have recently chosen to defy Jayalalitha. They are quite a handful - S Kannappan, who is an accused in the coal import scandal along with Jayalalitha; S D Somasundaram, who was very close to Jayalalitha's friend Sasikala Natarajan's family not long ago; S Muthusamy, whose sprawling Chennai house was raised; C Aranganayagam, who was sacked by Jayalalitha after the teachers' training colleges scandal, his successor Ponnusamy, the raid on whose residences came to a halt after he joined the rebel camp in a jiffy; S Thennavan, her information minister who was in charge of the notorious World Tamil Conference public relations at Thanjavur. And so on.

At the same time, Karunanidhi has gone hammer and tongs against her loyalists in the AIADMK. Almost every body's houses have been raided, with a few exceptions like V R Neduncheshaian. At least three are behind bars at a given time. Of the two former ministers recently released from jail, K P Krishnan, is lying low. Another, Indira Kumari, has taken to religion. The state government has collected a huge list of properties bought by Jayalalitha's arrested friend Sasikala.

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in India. It is from here that Ritwik Ghatak, arguably the greatest of modern India's filmmakers, came to Calcutta. But for the division of Bengal by the British and the trauma of Partition, both Bengalis are homes for Bengalis who taste the same salty fish and share the same devastating cyclones from the Bay.

The only other recent occasion when a chief minister of an Indian state got similar official powers on external affairs was when M G Ramachandran and later Muthuvel Karunanidhi was asked to deal with political and militant groups of Lankan Tamils. No doubt, the whole exercise was disliked by the external affairs establishment at Delhi. The entire process was kept under the prying eyes of Indian intelligence agencies. Yet, both leaders negotiated with the LTTE and other Tamil leaders on numerous occasions. MGR did not live long enough to find out the aftermath of the Indo-Sri Lankan agreement to which he lent qualified support. And, in 1990, the then Prime Minister V P Singh allowed Karunanidhi to keep a channel open to Ranasinghe Premadasa. Why such initiatives were not destined to help

Jayalalitha is fighting court battles seeking anticipatory bail after she was charged in seven major cases, one of them being dealt with by the Central Bureau of Investigation. Some of her bank accounts have been frozen and a police team went to her granite residence at Poes Garden last month. The big question, however, is when the state government would arrest her, for how long she would be detained.

In any case, the amazing fact is that everything is up for sale including probes and cases. The wheeling-dealing institutionalised during Jayalalitha's reign is fully operational in the probes against her. It has been suspected for quite some time that financial deals are being worked out to save the looters. From time to time, Karunanidhi makes some noise about seizing the ill-gotten wealth of Jayalalitha and her cronies, of Sasikala and her Manargudi clan, of corrupt civil servants and their henchmen, and constituting a special court to punish them all. However, nothing much has resulted and the regular courts have been pulling up government lawyers while framing of a selective few is being done even as the state government coolly lets off others.

Karunanidhi is undecided about the fate of very many top-rung officials who grew fat and rich during the Jayalalitha

Tamil cultural communities on either side of the Palk Straits is another story altogether!

The most important visitor in the sub-continent, however, was Chinese Premier Jiang Zemin who came to Delhi and Islamabad. His visit to both countries was marked by cordiality. In Delhi, the Sino-Indian talks on longstanding border disputes got a boost. At Islamabad, the talks centred around defence deals. However, in matters political, visiting Chinese leaders always resemble the far-off Egyptian sphinx than the fire-spitting dragon back home! Despite this, the Chinese leader gave ample hints to suggest to Pakistan to move towards a negotiated settlement with India on the Kashmir dispute. China seems to be telling Pakistan that it can discuss the United Nations' resolutions for a plebiscite in Kashmir with the Indian side but not press for such a demand. While the Indian media has gone gaga over this apparent shift in the Chinese stand on Kashmir, Pakistan's reaction is not clear. It is also not known as to what extent the Afghan war scenario was discussed by Jiang and Pakistan President, Farooq Leghari. ●

reign. Five IAS officials have been arrested, four suspended and several others interrogated on corruption charges so far. Karunanidhi has a few trusted men among the officials, but he has found it hard to get honest persons to whom probes on corruption charges against the previous regime could be entrusted. The temptation to go in for quick deals with corrupt officials who want to save themselves is getting irresistible for the relatively clean ones.

The Hindi word benami needs no translation to other Indian languages, especially Tamil! Characteristic of this culture, key bureaucrats are known to have floated finance companies in the names of their friends and relatives. At least ten such companies, after collecting deposits from unsuspecting middle classes promising exorbitant rates of interest, firms have downed shutters now. More than 20 promoters of such firms, have been arrested. And Karunanidhi's good intentions are not sufficient to ensure quick refund for duped persons. He wants to set up a special court to try financial offences involving local bigwigs.

Prime Minister, Deve Gowda is obviously more adept than Karunanidhi in springing surprises and working out deals to snub probable political rivals. Deve Gowda went one up against TMC boss G K Moopanar by arresting his bosom-pal, M Gopalakrishnan, the former high-profile chairman of the cash-strapped Chennai-based public sector Indian bank. Moopanar could not prevent the arrest though he was alerted by his own proteges in the Union ministry.

If Deve Gowda can bail out his mate, Narasimha Rao, why not do it for old friend, Jayalalitha. After all, only last year, Deve Gowda had tried hard to woo her to join the National Front from which Karunanidhi was dropped. Jayalalitha dashed off to Delhi last month to meet Deve Gowda. Result: a quick order revoking the earlier detention of her friend Sasikala under the Foreign Exchange Act. Karunanidhi's protests were just too feeble.

Palaniappan Chidambaram immediately got into the act since foreign exchange comes under his finance ministry. The result: Sasikala was interrogated in a fresh case of foreign exchange violation in a deal between the Moscow-based Intersputnik satellite agency and the now defunct JJ TV. A stunned Sasikala swooned inside the Chennai central prison before her release. She was shifted to a nearby government hospital. A humane Jayalalitha rushed to the hospital, their friendship got promptly revived even as finance ministry's men rearrested Sasikala.

The sudden death of Dr M Channa Reddy, who was quite a colourful personality as governor of Tamil Nadu, is posing fresh problems for ruling establishments

(continued on next page)

BLAMING THE DEAD FOR DISASTERS

by G.Ramesh

Indian disasters have the knack of hitting world headlines. Even as the new government took charge in Delhi this summer, tragedy struck the annual Amarnath yatra in Kashmir where a "Sivalingam" in an ice-covered setting comes in view. More than 200 pilgrims froze to death in a blizzard before army helicopters began airlifting the stranded lot. The only redeeming feature of the tragedy was the help from Kashmiri Muslims to save the pilgrims. A report by a bureaucrat, Singupta, is yet to see the light of day.

Within the next two months, the capital and some other cities of north India were hit by Dengue fever. The official toll (such a concept will be possible only in India) at Delhi alone crossed three hundred. The epidemic was an obvious consequence of last year's Yamuna floods which brought in so much slush on which unknown mosquito variants carrying the virus could thrive. The fever simply terrorised the capital's elites including the international diplomatic corps for a month before subsiding.

Come October-November the Bay of Bengal produces vengeful cyclones and the Andhra Pradesh coast is the worst sufferer in the process. The state had its first cyclone, a freak one, in June itself. The second cyclone which hit Kakinada coastline last month has been the worst, bringing so much havoc, flooding entire villages with tidal waves, destroying rice and chilli crops and gardens, and causing the disappearance of more than 1,300

fishermen, who ignored warnings and went out to sea. Despite advance information about the severity of the cyclone, the district authorities had simply failed to carry out the task of persuading thousands of villagers to get out. The Delhi establishment has admitted that the cyclone was more than a national calamity. Its Rs 50 crore aid was simply peanuts for the gigantic task of rebuilding infrastructure in the destroyed areas. Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu wants at least Rs 500 crore for this task. Even as relief work goes on, the state faces a third cyclone.

One dim wintry November evening, the plains of Haryana north of Delhi (where it is stated that the Mahabharata war was once enacted) witnessed the worst midair collision in recent aviation history. Two planes were to have crossed each other at a height difference of 1,000 feet. It was like two mighty astras destined to meet and perish. 351 passengers and crewpersons were killed as two international flights rammed against each other shocking the poor villagers of Charkhi Dadri down below. Involved were a Boeing Saudi airliner, carrying mostly

migrant workers from north India to Daharan and Jeddah, and a Kazakhstan jetliner carrying cargo and a few passengers coming to Delhi from Chimkent.

The aftermath of this grave tragedy at a height of 14,000 feet only confirmed the worst stereotypes of images of modern India which the world has come to believe. The air corridor from the West is too narrow for a busy international airport like Delhi. The Air Traffic Control in Delhi has not been sufficiently updated to enable the overworked control engineers to verify the exact height of the two planes. The controllers at the panel only know the distance of the planes from the airport and have to depend on the word of the pilot for important details like the height.

The current theory doing the rounds is that the Kazakh plane pilot had "cut corners" while descending or that he had misunderstood the "fly at 15,000 feet" height directive given by the controllers in English. The Saudi pilot also did not seem to have acknowledged the controllers' instruction not to go above 14,000 feet. However, to blame it all on the deceased Kazakh or Saudi pilots is wrong. The plain fact is that the tragedy could have been averted, despite possible pilot error, if the controllers had taken some care to keep the two planes laterally separate.

Everyone must come to feel personally responsible for vagaries of nature like quakes and cyclones, said Mahatma Gandhi. On the other hand, a superfluous modern India feels free to blame the dead even for its own follies.

Michael Jacksons, Beauty Contests and Fasting Gandhians

T N Gopalan

Sarve jana sukino bhavanthu. (Let all people be happy) - ancient Sanskrit saying. Saarejehan se acha hindustan hamaaraa (Our Hindustan, India, is better than all other countries in the world) - Urdu poet Mohammed Iqbal.

Thani oruvanukku unavillaiyanil indha jakathinai ajhithiduvam. (Even if one person has to go without food, we will destroy this world) - Tamil poet Bharati.

Some oft-quoted lines supposed to reflect the Indian ethos down the ages. This vast nation, comprising a multitude of ethnic groups, is generally believed to have preserved such noble values at some level or other, notwithstanding the turmoils that have repeatedly wrought havoc. Even the Partition massacres tended to be dismissed as an aberration.

Until recently that is. The continuing blood-bath in the North East, the increasing inequities thanks to liberalisation and

an atrociously corrupt breed of politicians have together contributed to a widespread sense of disillusionment.

Imagine someone like a noted economic expert saying, as one such actually did in a column in a leading newspaper recently, that it was wrong on the part of the company managements to undertake to be the keepers of their workers, like building housing colonies or hospitals or schools for them. For in doing so the share-holders who have invested their money in the firm are cheated of their due share in the profits. the company's moral (sic) responsibility is to its share-holders first and not to its workers or to the community at large. That is supply-siding with a vengeance.

In such a suffocating atmosphere where greed and self-centredness are defined as the only acceptable standards for any society, no one except those writ-

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both at Delhi and Chennai. Reddy was a tough governor sent by Narasimha Rao in 1993 to rein in Jayalalitha. Once she bowed in for an electoral alliance with the Congress(I). Narasimha Rao coolly ignored Reddy's protestations, Deve Gowda would like to push his own list of names, but he will have to listen to Karunanidhi and Moopanar.

Besides the issue of the new governor. Karunanidhi has other reasons to be worried. He plans to go to the United States sometime in the next two months; the state government denies reports that he will undergo a medical check-up in the West. The chief minister, it says, is fine. The trip, it is stated, will promote investments of NRT's (Non-Resident Tamils) in Tamil Nadu.

ing jingles for the Doordarshan (India's official TV channel) seem to believe that there is still anything noble left in this country. That clichéd French phrase, *fin de siècle*, these days is more appropriately descriptive of India than of many other countries. The hysteria generated by such events as the beauty pageants and the Michael Jackson concerts and the stench emanating from the innumerable scams daily unravelled do make one wonder seriously about the future of India. And then the one great symbol of compassion and humanity, Mother Teresa, is fighting for her life in the hospital.

Amid such overwhelming gloom come reports of the waves being made by a rebellious Gandhian of Maharashtra, Anna Hazare (seventy plus), bending such a lumpen government as that of Shiv Sena's to his will. Perhaps not all is lost. Certainly not as yet such was indeed some comforting message of November.

The beauty pageant in Bangalore and the Jackson concert in Bombay both seemed to have held the nation in their thrall for some time. The much-touted Jackson concert cannot, certainly, be branded as decadent as the Miss World contest. Jackson's own reputation might be very unsavoury and his acrobatics on the stage might even be found offensive by the lovers of classical music. Still everyone is entitled to his or her taste. But what one found jarring was that the entire media, the middle classes, the well-heeled youth especially, should have gone gaga over the event, Lakhs of rupees and lots (and lots of man hours and reams of newspaper space went down the drain in the process)

Apparently even the courts in this country were under his spell. For this very Jackson who had promised to tour India a couple of years ago and then abruptly cancelled his programme causing huge losses to the promoters was allowed to get away scotfree even though everyone knew pretty well that once he left the country it would be next to impossible to get at him and make him cough up the compensation.

He was also treated as a VVIP guest by the Maharashtra government. And that was the high point of hypocrisy which characterised the event right through. For Maharashtra is ruled by the Shiv Sena - BJP coalition which would like to show itself off as the most jealous guardian of all that is noble and precious and Indian, rather Hindu culture. Of course neither the BJP nor the Shiv Sena would bother to tell the people where exactly did Jackson fit into the paradigm.

The Shiv Sena which had arm-twisted the concert organisers into agreeing to dole out a percentage of the gate collection to some project initiated by it was naturally the most vociferous in promoting the show. Though its coalition partner was wincing and squirming over it all, the

party chose to lump it in the interest of the survival of coalition. It rather concentrated its fire on the beauty pageant at Bangalore where it was not in power.

The pageant, a crassly commercial project and unabashedly promoting the view of women as nothing more than sex-objects would be contemptible wherever it is held and most certainly in an impoverished Third World country like India, an India especially in which the traditional sanctimonious standards would profess to respect women as Shakthi, a goddess.

There were indeed protests from various feminist organisations. The BJP was very virulent in its attacks on the show and tried to organise bandhs. A young man in Madurai and a member of a front organisation of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), in a moment of madness, even burnt himself to death in protest. But all to no avail. The people of India's Silicon Valley themselves, the Janata Dal government there especially, seemed to view the occasion as something of historic importance - again there was a mad rush for the tickets, the most prestigious section of which were priced at a whopping Rs 25,000. They all went gawking, those who could not make it to the stadium were rivetted before the television sets. Even such "thinking and socially conscious" actresses like Shabna Azmi and Revathi lent their support to the show. It was in such circumstances the Anna Hazare saga came up. First he is only 56 years old and not a septuagenarian as specified earlier. This ex-serviceman-turned-Gandhian, seems to have won the respect and admiration of the people through his sincerity and dedication. A driver in the army, Hazare, on returning to his native Ralegan Siddhi, found that his villagers had taken to large-scale alcoholism - massive deforestation and spiralling population had wrought havoc on Siddhi.

He spent most of his savings on renovating the village temple, the typically Gandhian way of reaching out to the people through traditional symbols. Thereafter regreening Siddhi, fighting alcoholism, mobilising women power in developmental work, all followed in quick succession and the Ralegan Siddhi today is a remarkably transformed village. None even smokes there, leave alone drinking.

The experiment is sought to be replicated in other parts of Maharashtra too by the Hind Swaraj Trust floated by Hazare. He had lashed out at the previous Sharad Pawar-led Congress regime for its corruption and, for that reason, had almost become the darling of Ghiv Sena. But when he started training his guns at its own minister, Bal Thackeray and his clan were predictably annoyed.

Hazare, based on some evidence collected by him, named two ministers of the coalition as guilty of serious corruption

and wanted them to be sacked forthwith. Besides he also demanded some specific measures to weed out corruption in the administration. When the government sought to ignore him, he abruptly went on an indefinite fast, taking only citrus juice.

The Shiv Sena supreme Thackeray known for brazening his way out and preening himself on tough-talking, first sought to ignore, then ridicule and then vilify the Gandhian. But when they found the support for the fasting Hazare snowball, people flocking to have a dharshan of the new Gandhi, Thackeray and the coalition government were alarmed, and finally the two ministers concerned submitted their resignation.

Putting up a brave front, though, Chief Minister Manohar Joshi said that the two would continue to be in his cabinet though divested of their respective portfolios for the nonce and any final action would be taken against them only after the committee appointed to go into the allegations against them submitted its report. Hazare himself was nominated as a member of the inquiry committee.

At the time of going to the Press, Hazare was yet to call off his fast and was making some more demands.

Whatever the outcome of the tug-of-war, even if Hazare backs off ultimately, and the two ministers and the Maharashtra government get away with it all, still something had indeed been gained on the front of accountability.

Much more than the courts and the investigating agencies putting on the mat heavyweights like Jayalalitha or Narasimha Rao, the fact that a frail, defenceless Gandhian could make a mighty and, in the instant case, a thoroughly irresponsible regime known for its penchant for thuggery, sit up, take notice and make some victory of some sorts for those who are concerned about integrity in public life. Hazare still remains something of an enigma. Though nobody suspects that he could be cloaking his lust for power with shibboleths, it still remains a mystery why he should have chosen a couple of lowly ministers with little mass base as his target. When the Sena is known to rake in money through its gangsters, patronising rackets in real estate why would not Hazare turn his focus on such more obnoxious evils? Say he was not heard of much during the horrid anti-Muslim riots of 1993. Surely he did not raise his voice on the Kini-murder controversy - wherein a tenant who refused to vacate an apartment owned by a man close to the Thackerays was found dead under mysterious circumstances. Besides how many corrupt politicians he could vanquish through fasting? But never mind. At least he has been able to bring a government like the Shiv Sena's to its knees, even to its senses perhaps. And that is a great triumph and offers some ray of hope in an otherwise gloomy scenario. ●

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MATRIMONIAL

Jaffna Hindu father J.P., seeks professional partner for graduate daughter, 28, 5' 1½", resident in Colombo. Send horoscope, details. M 901 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna Hindu parents seek fair good looking bride, 22-26, doctor/professional in similar field for smart vegetarian son, 27, computer software engineer in reputable US corporation. US resident/ willing to relocate send horoscope, details. M 902 c/o Tamil Times.

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Jaffna Hindu seeks partner for sister, 32, university lecturer in Sri Lanka. Send horoscope, details. M 904 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna Hindu parents seek bride for son, 31, civil engineer in Colombo. Willing migrate. Send horoscope, details. M 905 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna Hindu doctor uncle seeks partner for nephew, 37, 6', Canadian resident with permanent employment. M 906 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna Hindu family seek educated partner preferably in good employment for son, British citizen, mid-thirties, in managerial position. Send horoscope, details. M 907 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna Hindu parent seeks professionally qualified groom in employment for daughter, British citizen in early forties, doing well professionally. Send horoscope, details. M 908 c/o Tamil Times.

WEDDING BELLS

We congratulate the following couples on their recent wedding.

Sivasathan (Suthan) son of the late Mr. P. Sivalingam and Mrs. T. Sivalingam of 'Valarmathy', Vilukiddy, Chunnakam and **Balasukanthini (Sukanthy)** daughter of Mr. & Mrs. K. Balasingam of Perumkulam Junction, Chavakachcheri/23 Robert Road, Dehiwela on

24.8.96 at Sri New Kathiresan Temple, Bambalapitiya.

Bahirathan son of Mr. & Mrs. V. Muthurajah of 59 Gihon Spring Drive, Etobicoke, Ontario M9V 4S4, Canada and **Pra-santhi** daughter of Mr. & Mrs. T. Biswanath of 16635 N. Cave Creek Road, Apt. 110, Phoenix, AZ85032, USA on 25.11.96 at Richmond Hill Temple, Toronto, Canada.

Amaran son of the late Mr. R. Wijayarathnam and Mrs. P. Wijayarathnam of 262 Douglas Street, Unit E, Petaluma, California, USA and **Rupi** daughter of Mr. & Mrs. S. Srikanthan of 26 McLeod Road, Colombo 4 on 5.12.96 at the Crystal Ballroom, Hotel Taj Samudra, Colombo.

Mugunthan son of Mr. & Mrs. T. Siva Subramaniam of 19 Anderson Road, Northmead, NSW 2067 and **Thushyanthy** daughter of Mr. & Mrs. E. Jeyaseelan of 13 Sloop Street, Seven Hills, NSW 2147 on 14.12.96 at Willoughby Civic Centre, Chatswood, Australia.

Balaraman son of the late Mr. Thanmavarathar and Mrs. Thanmavarathar of Kaithadi North and presently of 32 Pereira Lane, Colombo 6 and **Sivakamaseunthary** daughter of Mr. E. Thillainayagam and the late Mrs. Thillainayagam of Chunnakam and presently of 16 3/9 Amarasekara Mawtha, Colombo 5 on 14.12.96 at Hotel Sapphire Hall, Colombo 5.

OBITUARY



Mrs. Elizabeth Ranees Kuna-nayagam beloved wife of the

late Mr. Stickney Kuna-nayagam, mother of Vimala Thuraiaratnam (Zambia), Charlesly Kunanayagam (Sri Lanka), Manohari Rajaratnam (U.K.), Sathien Kunanayagam (Sri Lanka) and Karuna Gnasegeram (Canada); mother-in-law of Balan, Sakunthala, Noel, Indra and Anandan passed away peacefully on Friday 29th November 1996. The funeral service was held at the South Harrow Methodist Church and the remains cremated on Wednesday 4th December.

The members of her family thank all friends and relatives who attended the funeral, sent messages of sympathy and assisted them in several ways during the period of great sorrow. - 103a Malvern Avenue, South Harrow, Middx. HA2 9ER. Telephone: 0181 248 3057.

IN MEMORIAM

Third Death Anniversary



Three years ago, on 12 December 1993, Mrs. Gnanambikai Perumal Pillai (nee Gnanasundaram) passed away suddenly and unexpectedly in Washington DC, USA.

Greatly loved and respected, deeply missed and always remembered by her husband, Dr. C. Perumal Pillai and children Ravi, Usha, Jeeva and Ranjit; sons-in-law Desmond and Michael; daughters-in-law Shanthi and Vasuhl; grandchildren Rajesh, Shahila, Meera Arun and Arjun.

In memory of her ideals and legacy, a 'Srimathi Gnanambikai Trust' (a charity) has been established in June 1995. It is perpetual in character. The Trust's main objective is to assist the economically disadvantaged youth, particularly

girls/women living in the North-East region of Sri Lanka, by awarding scholarships to advance their education in the field of Social and Agriculture Sciences, Mathematics, Medical Sciences, Management and Information Technology. It becomes operational no sooner normalcy returns to the North-East Region. - 41 2/1 Gregory Road, Colombo 7, Sri Lanka.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

December 28 7.00pm to midnight. The League of Friends of The University of Jaffna presents Annual Dinner Dance at Harrow & Wembley Progressive Synagogue Hall, 326 Preston Road, Harrow. For tickets Tel: 01923 225850.

January 1 New Year's Day.

Jan. 5 Eekathasi.

Jan. 6 Pirathosam.

Jan. 7 Feast of Epiphany of Lord Jesus Christ.

Jan. 8 Amavasai; Feast of the Baptism of Lord Jesus Christ.

Jan. 12 Chathurthi.

Jan. 14 Thai Ponghal; Shashti.

Jan. 17 Feast of St. Anthony.

Jan. 18 Karthigai.

Jan. 19 Eekathasi.

Jan. 21 Pirathosam.

Jan. 23 Thai Poosam. Full Moon.

Jan. 25 Feast of The Conversion of St. Paul.

Jan. 31 Feast of St. John Bosco.



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Mr. E.K. Shanmuganathan – An Appreciation



The demise of Mr. E.K. Shanmuganathan, Principal Emeritus, Jaffna Central College and former Director of Education, on 4th December 1985 in Nigeria is a big loss to the community at large for which he rendered meritorious service for more than three decades.

After education at St. Johns College, Jaffna he graduated as B.A., (Cey) in 1949 and later B.Sc. Econ., (Lond) and Dip. in Ed., (Cey).

Shan chose teaching as his career and joined St. Johns College and later served at St. Patricks College. He taught History, Economics and English with competence. In 1964 he joined Kopay Christian College as Deputy Principal and was later appointed Principal. His tenure there from '64 to '71 is acclaimed the 'Golden Period' of the institution by the community.

I had known Shan when he was Principal at Kopay and had moved with him closely since then. He was always cheerful, humble and tolerant and had an attitude of give and take. He was a voracious reader and well informed. He was a man of exemplary character and with moral uprightness.

Selfless service to the community had been the hallmark of Shan. The creche and nursery school at Neervely for farming and office workers was his brain child. While an assistant teacher he started them with assistance from various organisations and functioned as its president for thirty years. As Secretary, Social Services, Jaffna District Council, he was involved in projects of Orphanages, Cripples Home and Home for Elders. He was a keen co-operator and as President of Vali, East M.P.C.S. Union was responsible for its phenomenal growth and imposing buildings. He was also president of the Co-operative Dairy Society.

Shan's achievements in the educational field and his services to the community earned him the reward of the highest promotion as a selection grade Principal. He was appointed Principal, Jaffna Central College in 1971. Administering an institution of that size and to satisfy the aspira-

tions of the school community was very challenging and Shan did it ably and well. Always immaculately dressed, he was very punctual and did not allow anyone to disregard punctuality. Totally dedicated and loyal to the institution he expected the same from the staff and students. He also served as President, Northern Region Principals' Association.

In October '80, he was transferred to the Ministry of Education as Director of Education in charge of Plantations Schools Unit. He was popular, efficient and very competent contributing a great deal to the upliftment of the schools in the plantations sector. In mid-1982 he retired and took up a post in the Ministry of Education in Nigeria. The decision to go to Nigeria was to support two sons in their education in U.K. In December '85 while at work, he developed a breathing problem and passed away after a heart attack.

His family has lost his guidance and loving care, and the Tamil community one who had its interest at heart. His wife Selvaranee and the three sons Sanmugendran, Selvendran and Sivendran are now in UK. When one looks at Shan's life it is evident that his services were selfless and not done to do good to others but rather because it was the very law of his being. As a Karma Yogi his soul would have attained Moksha.

K. Gunmaratnam,
Retired Principal, Nelliady M.M.V.

Children Enact Panchali Sabadam



South London Tamil School of Croydon has earned for itself a celebrity status for producing quality Tamil dramas. The children of this school displayed their skill in enacting in three parts the entire Ramayana a couple of years back. Their latest venture at the South Norwood Stanley Hall on 23rd November, was an episode in the Maha Bharata, 'Panchali Sabadam', a title given by poet Bharati, for the incident in which Draupathi takes a vow to avenge the indignity suffered by her in the hands of Duchathanan. The Script in dialogue form included occasionally Bharati's thrilling poetry, and the girls and boys between the ages of ten and twelve, enacted with unusual gusto. Their clear enunciation, remarkable gestures and articulations and the professional looking costumes and stage decor enthused the large audience. The staff of the school and parents of the children deserve all praise for bringing to perfection the children's Tamil delivery, make up and costumes.

Earlier in the programme, the children

displayed their skills in music – Vocal, violin, veena, mridangam – and Bharatha Natyam, the cultural activities the school conducts in addition to Tamil language. It is hoped that the pressures of the 'Eleven plus' and GCSE examinations would not overtake the enthusiasm for cultural aims of our Tamil children in this country.

A remarkable feature in the function was the open-hearted and truthful compliments uttered by the Chief Guest, Ms. Toni Letts, Deputy Mayor of Croydon. She said, 'while the Media and the TV in this country are full of news of rebellious and unteachable pupils, we are able to notice here real disciplined and quality students. But where are the reporters? Where are the cameras? What better compliment could one expect for the South London Tamil School and its children?'

The Feast of the Year For the Ear



The vocal Arangetram of Selvi Arrthy Sivakumar, disciple of Sangeetha Vidwan Smt. Prema Ganeson of Asia (Academy of South Indian Arts), was staged at the Beck Theatre in Middlesex on 28th September 1996 under the distinguished patronage of Mr. & Mrs. Tardios, headmaster and headmistress of St. John's Senior and Junior Schools. Arrthy beaming with supreme confidence commenced with the traditional Viriboni Varnam in Bhairavi Ragam. Despite the battle she was waging against her heavy cold and the obvious reduction in Sruthi, she succeeded in creating the requisite musical atmosphere and establishing contact with the rasikas thus demonstrating her skill, ability and talent in rendering every piece with commendable clarity.

With a cultivated melodious voice, her rendering embraced a compass of nearly two and a half octaves effortlessly – an enviable gift for any Karnatic vocalist. Her expression and flawless enunciation of the sahityas in Tamil, Telugu and Sanskrit were beyond reproach.

The programme has been thoughtfully constructed with a selection of compositions by great composers namely – The Musical Trinity, Saint Thiagaraja, Muthusamy Dikshathar and Syama Sastry in Telugu and Sanskrit embellished by com-

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positions in Tamil by Gopalakrishna Bharathi and Papanasam Sivan. Syama Sastri's Marivere Gathi (rarely attempted in an Arangetram) in Anandha Bhairavi Ragam, Misra Chapu Talam and Saint Thiagaraja's Arabi Pancharatnam though long and difficult pieces with intricate talas interwoven with Chitta Swaras with parallel Sahityas were rendered to perfection.

In the Ragam, Thanam, Pallavi (music composed by Karaikudy Krishnamurthy), Arrthy displayed only modest talent in Raga Alapana which is learnt only by observation at concerts of veteran musicians. Arrthy should do well to observe, absorb, digest and work on Ragas and Swaras herself.

The Guest Speaker Mrs Padma Jayaseelan made some of the comments referred to above and said: 'On the whole, the programme was an enjoyable one - a result of dedicated training and sacrifice. Her guru Prema Ganeson and her parents deserve all the compliments for producing a brilliant Arangetram which was more of a traditional concert.'

Arrthy was accompanied by Karaikudy Krishnamurthy on the mirudangam, Bangalore Prakash on the Gaddam, Thiruvalluvar Kothandapani on the violin and Susa Sriskandaraja on the Thambura.

Ranganayaki.

New Projects Supported by S.C.O.T.

SCOT, the UK-based charity which raises funds for relief and rehabilitation projects in Sri Lanka has agreed to donate over £6,000 in the August to November 1996 period. Faced with a number of requests from new and established charities working on the ground with Tamil people in Sri Lanka, the organisation has pledged money to eight separate organisations. These include:

- the All Ceylon Hindu Congress which is to receive £1,000 to meet part of the building costs of a hostel for displaced children who attend the Hindu College.
- the Trincomalee Women's Hindu Association to whom £1,000 will also be sent to fund various agricultural projects which have been costed by the Agriculture Department.
- the Hindu Samaya Abhiviritti Sabha who are being sent £1,000 for carpentry

classes in refugee camps in Vavunia, Batticaloa and Muthur.

Others receiving funds are the Federation of Trincomalee District YMHA (£500), Mannikkavasagar Boys Home (£500), Swami Chidrupananda of the Ramakrishna Mission (£1,000) for relief work, the Lions Club (£1,000) towards the running costs of a cancer patients home, and Vipulanandan Students Orphanage in Akkaraipathu (£600) to help with running expenses.

Dr. S. Balakrishnan, Project Officer explained: 'Every month we consider the various requests that we receive and the General Council determines whether and by how much we can support them. These last few months have seen a continued pattern of growing financial support that has been needed and that we have been able to give these worthwhile and committed projects in Sri Lanka.'

For more information on the work of the Standing Committee of Tamil Speaking People, please contact: Dr. Balakrishnan, tel. 0181 952 0983.

Tradition Bound Concerts



The classical music concerts on 23rd and 24th November at the A.D.T. College, Putney, London SW15 and the Bhavan Centre, London W14 respectively in aid of S.C.O.T., by the front rank South Indian maestro T.V. Sankaranarayanan was a welcome sweetener for the lovers of true Carnatic music in London. Looking back T.V.S. as a young lad was considered a prodigy, displaying the trade mark modulations of his maternal uncle, Madurai Mani Iyer. His father Vembu Iyer used to lend second voice to Mani Iyer. Now in his fifties, TVS has not lost his range of voice and gamaka variations. It was by design or request that the concert consisted of only

Tamil songs, not forgetting to recall Madurai Mani's trade mark in Kaa Paa Lee and Kaa Vaa Vaa. A surprising episode was T.V.S.'s addition of a song scripted by Dr. K. Sivakumar, a past President of SCOT and a lover of Tamil. It was a Virutham and TVS sang it in true melody. Siva should venture further into his nostalgia.

Sri P. Sunder Rajan of Delhi on the violin and Srimushnam Raja Rao on the mridangan displayed their combined accompaniment to the vocalist with perfect synchronisation and, where necessary, elaborations of their own. It was a sumptuous Kacheri. Wimal Sockanathan who introduced the artistes did a perfect job with necessary details and in clear diction.

It is heartening to note that in addition to the relief and rehabilitation work that SCOT has been so ably supporting it continues with its tradition of hosting cultural programmes of excellent quality.

Sivapatha Sundaram.

Pension Boost From Abbey Life

After the success of the Abbey Life "How to Ensure Your Business Survives if Your Health Doesn't" seminars held recently, Deryk N. Bull, Executive Associate of Abbey Life, has now launched a further promotion of the Headstart Pension Incentive.

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The Moon and the Chariot

by Mahaakavi

"The village has gathered to draw the chariot, let us go and hold the rope" one came forward.

A son borne by mother earth in her womb to live a full hundred years. Might in his arms and shoulders light in his eyes and in his heart desire for upliftment amid sorrow.

He came. He was young. Yes, a man.

The brother of the one who only the day before with agility of mind as wings on his shoulder climbed the sky to touch the moon and return.

A hard worker.

He came to draw the rope with a wish in his heart: "Today we shall all be of one mind".

"Halt" said one.

"Stop" said another.

"A weed" said one.

"Of low birth" said another.

"Kill" said one.

"Set alight" said another.

The fall of a stone, the slitting of a throat, the flight of a lip and teeth that scattered, the splattering of blood and an earth that turned red. A fight there was and people were killed.

A chariot for the village to draw stood still like it struck root. On it the mother goddess, the creator of all worlds sat still, dumbfounded at the sight of the zealotry of her children.

Out there the kin of the man who only the day before had touched the moon is rolling in dirt.

(written around 1969)

Skanda Old Students Meet

The Eleventh Annual Reunion Lunch, A.G.M. and Variety Entertainment of the Skanda Varodaya College Old Students Association (UK Branch) were held on Sunday, 17th November 1996 at Manor Park Hall, Malden Hall, Surrey.

After a sumptuous lunch, the Annual General Meeting was held. The president of the association Mr. Kandiah after welcoming the old students, their families and friends referred to the passing away of the former principal Mr. V. Sivasubramaniam on 26.4.96. He stated that Mr. Sivasubramaniam had devoted over 42 years of his life of 87 years on service to the college as a teacher, vice-principal and principal. The college had recorded an impressive performance of successes in examinations and sports during the period he was vice-principal and principal. Generations of students in several walks of life and adorning many learned professions in several countries would remember with gratitude the benefits of having come under his guidance.

He also referred to the passing away of Mrs. Kamalanathan, wife of the present principal on 1.10.96 and several old students of the college who had paid dearly with their lives in the ongoing war in the North East. The gathering paid their respects to them in silence.

The Treasurer, Mr. R. Vimalendran submitted his annual report which disclosed that the association had a balance of £2,777 in its coffers. The election of office-bearers for the ensuing year took place and the following were elected unanimously. **President:** N.S. Kandiah, **Vice-Presidents:** S. Kanagasabai and S. Sivagnanam, **Secretary:** A. Ragumoorthy, **Treasurer:** R. Vimalendran, **Sports Co-ordinator:** S. Nimalananda, **Cricket Secretary:** A. Sathianathan, **Football Secretary:** M. Sivanathan, **Netball Secretary:** Dr. (Mrs.) M.J.K. Sabanathan, **Cultural Secretary:** M. Sathiamoorthy,



Committee Members: Mrs. Vatsala Gangatharan, S. Nadesan, P. Rajanayagam, P. Sivalingam and V. Umachandran.

The final item was a variety entertainment provided by the old students and their children. A fascinating veena recital was provided by Hari Sivanesan and Karthiga Gangatharan. M. Sathiamoorthy entertained the audience with light songs and was accompanied by Angello Kumarathan on Mridangam and Marino Kumarathan on Kanjeera. The recital drew rounds of applause from the appreciative audience.

A scintillating performance of four Bharatha Natya items provided by Janani Nagarajah brought the proceedings to a close with the audience having had a very enjoyable time.

(Continued from page 24)

the meet.

Dr Ramdas, founder leader of the PMK, whose sincerity cannot perhaps be questioned and who is generally more exercised about the social conditions than about the returns at the hustings, was a bit more conciliatory towards the DMK than the rest. Urging the Chief Minister to come out in the open in support of the Eelam struggle, he said that the entire state would stand by him if the Centre sought to victimise him for his pro-Eelam stand.

Most of the mainstream political parties chose to ignore the conference altogether. But as usual the media, especially the English language papers, presented hair-raising reports, as if the Tigers were all set to overrun the state yet again. Barely a week after the PMK conference

everybody seemed to have lost interest in both the PMK and in the Tiger lobby in general.

The much vaunted Tamils were lost in watching the mindless film masala dished out by the Sun TV owned by the DMK's ruling family or in discussing the great beauty contest in the neighbouring Karnataka.

Few realise that Tamil nationalism has become a spent force. In times of agitations for increased reservations for themselves at the cost of the rest by the innumerable sects and sub-sects that make up the Tamil community today and of the mind-numbing satellite channels, with no visionary leader around, any kind of political mobilisation overstepping the narrowest of selfish concerns has a bleak prospect, notwithstanding the chest-thumping few who love the microphones and the ovations. ●

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