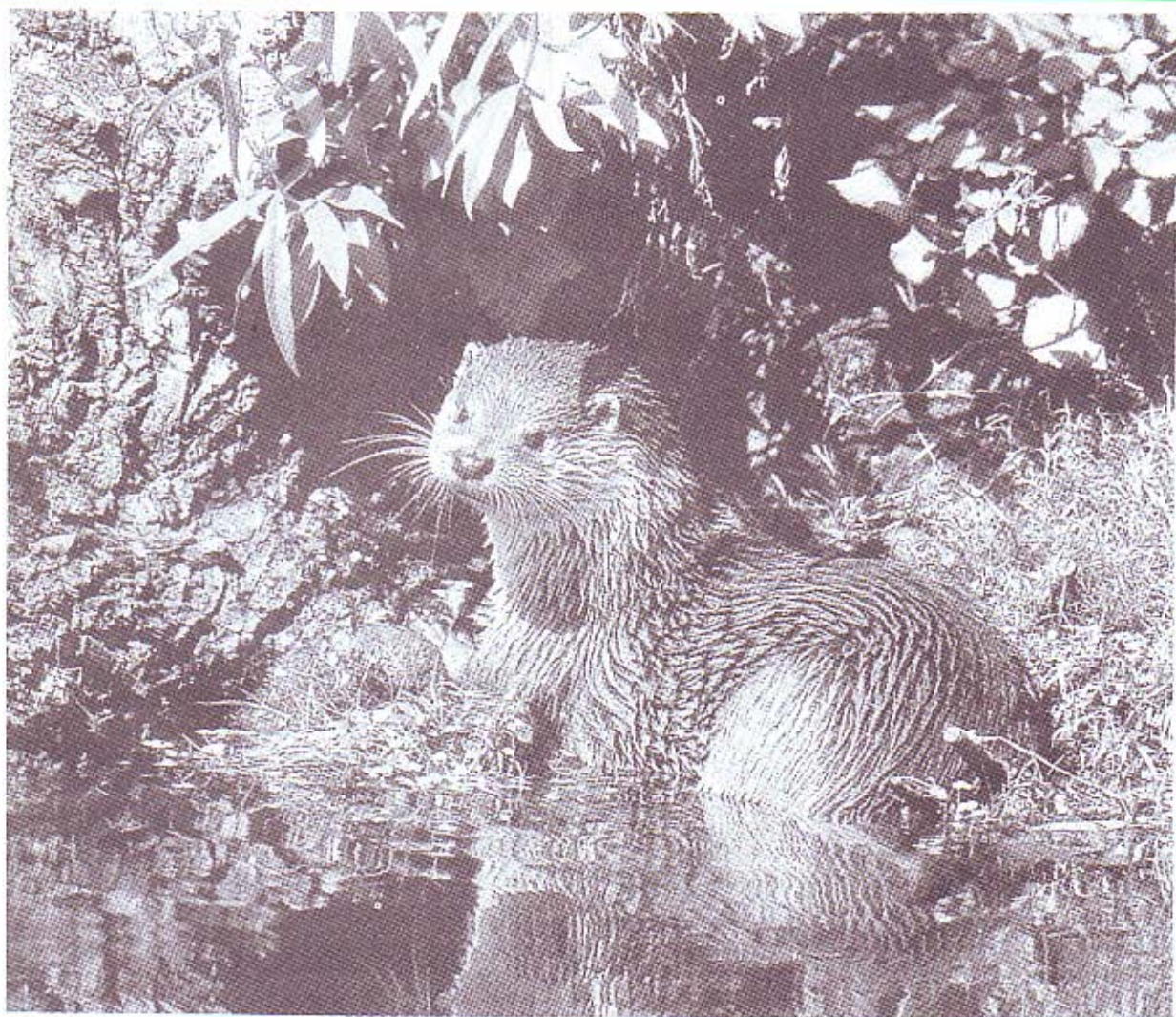


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of what you say, but I'll
defend to the death your
right to say it."*
Voltaire

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The Challenge

The recent speech by the leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has raised the hope of a resumption of negotiations between the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE. The LTTE leader V Pirapaharan in his "Heroes Day" message stated "We have not closed the doors for peace. We are open to the civilised method of resolving conflicts through rational dialogue. ...and we favour third party mediation for political negotiations. But we are not prepared to accept any pre-conditions for political dialogue."

Some of the non-LTTE Tamil parties which have in the recent past been pressing the Government to recommence talks with the LTTE saw in Pirapaharan's speech a window of opportunity for the Government to reciprocate. Even the main opposition United National Party, which had almost succeeded in thwarting the efforts of the Government to progress its devolution and constitutional reform proposals through parliament, has stated that the Government should positively respond to the LTTE leader's offer. Peace groups have advised the Government to grab the opportunity. Even those who are cynical about the LTTE leader's offer of peace negotiations have taken the view that the Government should respond at least to call what they describe as "Pirapaharan's bluff".

The Government itself has not set its face against talking with the LTTE. In fact recently the President herself expressed her willingness for talks with the LTTE. She was also not averse to third party mediation. But having gone through the experience of the aborted negotiations that took place between September 1994 and April 1995, the Government's position is that the LTTE should drop its demand for a separate state and agree to enter into political negotiations to be concluded within a time-frame. These pre-conditions are certainly unacceptable to the LTTE, and if the Government is to insist on these conditions, the prospect of talks between the parties resuming in the near future is remote.

In the same speech, the LTTE leader qualified his readiness for political dialogue without pre-conditions by stating, "We hold the view that political negotiations cannot be free and just if the Government utilises the military aggression on our soil and the restrictions imposed on the economic life of our people as political pressures. We are prepared to engage in initial talks to discuss the removal of such pressures and to work out a basic frame-work for political negotiations. Our people want their day-to-day urgent problems resolved immediately. They cannot wait over an indefinite time until the peace talks resume and the ethnic conflict is discussed, resolved and the solution implemented. They want the war to come to an end and the occupation army that torments them to withdraw and their urgent existential problems addressed immediately." Many have described the issues raised by the LTTE leader in this statement as the LTTE's own pre-conditions to be satisfied before political negotiations to begin. It was these issues that led to the breakdown of the Government-LTTE talks in 1994-95. If the LTTE persists in raising these issues as pre-conditions to be satisfied for political negotiations to begin, again the chances for peace talks recommencing in the near future are remote.

The presence of tens of thousands of troops in the north-east, the economic blockade, the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people, the death of thousands of combatants, the gross violations of human rights and the intolerable day-to-day problems faced by the people are a direct consequence of the ongoing war which has continued for over fifteen years. The war continues because of the failure to reach a political settlement to the unresolved national question. Hence if the problems faced by the people are to come to an end, it must be self-evident that what is of utmost urgency is to engage in negotiations without pre-conditions being set by either side with third-party mediation or facilitation with a view to reaching political settlement to the national question. That is the challenge that faces the Government, the main political parties and the leadership of the LTTE.

NEWS REVIEW

The PA presented its fifth Budget in Parliament in the first week of November. Although Deputy Finance Minister Peiris presented the budget in Parliament, there was speculation that he had not in fact been deeply involved in its preparation. This was fuelled by conflicting reports and photographs that appeared in the press regarding the involvement of the President in preparing the budget.

The budget was not viewed with favour by many supporters of the PA although some sectors of the business community expressed their satisfaction with it.

Several controversial items, such as the increase in rail fares and the reduction of the duty free allowance to Sri Lankans who worked abroad, were later withdrawn. This allowed space for opposition criticism of the budget, on the basis that some of the proposals had not been discussed in detail within the Cabinet and that the budget figures could not now be taken at face value.

Following the budget, there was an uproar in banking circles regarding a circular issued by the Inland Revenue Department asking for information regarding all those persons who had over Rs. 100,000 in their savings or fixed deposit accounts. This circular was later withdrawn.

There is also controversy brewing regarding the proposal to increase MPs and Ministers' allowances by 70%. MP Vasudeva Nanayakkara has launched a lone campaign against these proposals.

Conflict between the government and the UNP continued to fester, despite repeated appeals for bi-partisan approach to peace from within the country and abroad. At the Galle District Convention of the SLFP, the President said there was one last chance for the UNP to join the PA in seeking a solution to the ethnic conflict. However, Wickremasinghe, the UNP leader, has been adamant in rejecting any such overtures and stating that the UNP would not agree with the PA's proposals for devolution.

The visit of the British Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Derek Fatchett, to Sri Lanka saw a renewal of discussion about the proposal made by former Foreign Secretary Liam Fox earlier this year, which focused on a bi-partisan approach and commitment to peace. However, Mr. Fatchett was careful to emphasise that Britain had no intention of 'forcing' any form of solution on Sri Lanka. There was also a visit by a group of Parliamentarians from the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

A delegation from the Immigration Board of Denmark and the Danish Refugee Council also visited Sri Lanka in November, to study the situation with regard to those Sri Lankans who are being deported from Denmark following rejection of their asylum pleas. The mission was in the country to examine the veracity of statements made by the government that peace has been restored and asylum-seekers returned with no danger.

In November, the government began to intensify pressure on the South African government to make a firm commitment of rejection of the LTTE. This was in response to speculation that the LTTE was developing its base in Southern Africa and bringing pressure to bear on friendly elements within the South African government to extend its support to the LTTE's cause. The Sri Lankan government media has been full of speculative stories about the LTTE re-locating in South Africa since its base in the UK was being undermined due to the new laws against terrorist activity in England. Government officials engaged in deep discussions regarding this situation with a team of representatives from the South African mission in Delhi who visited Sri Lanka in early November. The urgency with which the government viewed the situation was confirmed when Foreign Minister Kadirgamer made a rushed visit to South Africa in mid November. The South African government, while reassuring the Sri

Lankan government of its friendly intentions towards this country, has not made any clear commitment to proscribe the LTTE or prohibit its activities on its soil.

Many of the Tamil political parties had expressed their deep disappointment at the remark attributed to the President while in South Africa a few weeks ago, that the Tamil people are not the original people of this island. ACTC leader Kumar Ponnambalam, who took upon himself to share the videotape of that particular interview with his colleagues, came in for a great deal of criticism from all sides for his role in denouncing the president's comment.

At month end, Mr. Ponnambalam was being sought for questioning regarding his links with the LTTE, by the CID.

Representatives of the Tamil political parties met with the President several times during November, to discuss matters relating to the government's devolution proposals and the present stalemate at the level of the Parliamentary Select Committee, as well as to discuss concerns repeatedly voiced by the Tamil political groups regarding the situation of food shortages in the Vanni. However, these talks have proved to be disappointing, and as a consequence, the TULF voted against the PA when the time came to vote on the budget.

The businessmen's peace initiative floundered in the face of the intransigence of the UNP. Following meetings with the group, it had been agreed that the businessmen would try to mediate between the PA and the UNP to support a bi-partisan approach to a resolution of the ethnic conflict. In keeping with this understanding, the government nominated four eminent persons to pursue the peace initiatives put forward by the business community. However, the UNP has refused to cooperate in this initiative, which remains stalled as a result.

November 21 to 27 saw the LTTE's celebration of their Heroes' Week which commemorates one of the first suicide attacks by the LTTE. On the birthday of LTTE chief Prabhakaran, he issued a statement declaring the readiness of the LTTE to begin a process of negotiations for peace. Although security was tightened islandwide in expectation of an LTTE

attack, no incident took place.

The Budget

On November 6, the People's Alliance government presented its fifth budget.

Deputy Minister of Finance, Prof. G.L. Peiris, who presented it in Parliament called it a budget that would take Sri Lanka forward to the 21st century and beyond, saying that the government had identified Information Technology (IT) as a major thrust area with a view to encouraging the exploitation of IT for national development.

In the preamble to the budget, the Minister said that the country had seen 6.4% growth in the past year, with a narrowing of the fiscal deficit. The total public debt (as a share of the GDP) had fallen, inflation and interest rates were down, and national savings had increased, with foreign reserves being maintained at a healthy level. Declines in international prices of crude oil, sugar and wheat had also led to reduction in expenditure.

The budget announced large-scale development in urbanization, regional industrialization, relief for pensioners, programmes for employment generation and skills development. New job opportunities for 150,000 to 225,000 youth would be made available during the next two years, the Minister said. He also announced grants to protect school children from malnutrition, and an increase of Rs. 80 million for the issue of Special Food Stamps to families receiving Samurdhi Assistance, aimed at encouraging mothers to breast-feed their infants.

Extension was given for tax relief and incentives permitted to the private sector for regional industrialization, till 31st December 1999. A five-year tax holiday was announced for institutions providing training in priority fields such as Apparel, Jewellery, Gems, Electronic and Computer Software.

The estimate for defence expenditure in the budget for 1999 is Rs. 47 billion. The Defence levy was increased by 1% - from 4.5 % to 5.5 % - and the stamp fee for an ordinary letter by one rupee from Rs. 2.50 to Rs. 3.50.

The budget also raised the prices of both local and foreign liquor by 10 % and the price of cigarettes of all brands by 50 cents.

The budget underwent reforms while it was before Parliament, with the Minister withdrawing a proposed increase of 25% increase in train fares.

This meant a loss of Rs. 300 million in terms of the envisaged budget. Other proposals, such as the reduction of the duty free allowance granted to Sri Lankan workers abroad, were also withdrawn following criticism.

The UNP created a controversy during the reading, by bringing in and displaying placards denouncing the PA within the Parliamentary chamber. The session had to be suspended for half an hour for order to be restored. The budget was passed in Parliament with the TULF, TELO and UNP voting against it.

The War in the North and East

There continued to be sporadic clashes between the security forces and the LTTE in the north and east throughout the month of November, although no major clashes took place.

An attack on the Naval convoy escorting the ship LANKA MUD-ITHA from Kankesanthurai in Jaffna peninsula to Trincomalee resulted in 17 naval personnel being listed as missing in action while a further 9 were wounded in hospital with injuries. However, the ship was not hurt and it returned to Jaffna without damage.

There were also several air strikes reported by the Air Force against LTTE bases and camps in the Mullaitivu area. There have been repeated reports of sightings of air craft in the northern skies, fuelling speculation that the LTTE has acquired aircraft for its military. This placed the Sri Lanka Air Force, already beleaguered by the loss of most of its aircraft in the past two years due to a series of mishaps, in a very precarious position. These fears were confirmed by an LTTE broadcast in late November, which stated that they used aircraft to scatter flowers on the graves of their fallen colleagues during their commemoration of 'Heroes' Week.

Within the military, the problems created by the lack of manpower continued to pose a major obstacle to the war effort. The transport bottleneck created by the suspension of civilian flights to the northern peninsula created many logistical and personnel problems for the army. In the meanwhile, continued exposures about corruption and mismanagement of

funds in the military led to the President taking charge of all matters relating to the purchase of arms and accessories to the security forces. She also appointed a special investigation to look into these allegations. The President also ordered the dissolution of the Tender Boards functioning under the Ministry of Defence to decide on tenders for the supply of accessories.

Civilian Life in the North

During the budget debate, TULF MP Tiruchelvam stated that food assistance to the north and east had been cut by 57%. He quoted figures for Jaffna saying that 416,000 persons were receiving food aid, that there was 60% unemployment in the peninsula and that 90% of the school buildings were in a state of disrepair.

Following intelligence reports about an impending attack by the LTTE on the Jaffna peninsula, security was tightened in the area. Fishing was banned in the Southern part of the Jaffna lagoon and in the areas from around Point Pedro to Pannai to Grunagar from November 5, as a safety measure. The military offered food assistance to those fishermen who were affected by this ban.

Following months of negotiation, on November 27 the government finally announced that it would give permission for the communication equipment requested by the UNDP's landmine clearing team to be taken to Jaffna.

However, given the transport problems, it remained to be seen exactly when the equipment would actually reach the peninsula. The mine-clearing team however remained optimistic that they could start work in the early part of 1999.

The assassination of Rev. Sridharan in Jaffna in early November while at prayer sent another strong message to the civilian population of the peninsula that they should not try to defy the LTTE in any way. Pressure on public officials continues, and although schools continue to function, there has been a lot of pressure on them to close down. In the meanwhile, Secretary of the Chavakacheri Pradesheeya Sabha, V. Arunanthi, resigned from his post, alleging threats.

The situation of food shortages in the Vanni areas continued to be a

controversial issue. At meetings with the President on November 6 and 13, representatives of the EPDP, PLOTE and EPRLF brought to her attention that the figures of people needing food aid in the Vanni was 350,000. The President rejected these figures. The government insists that the figures being presented by government officials in those areas are incorrect and inflated. For example, the Government Agent for Kilinochchi gives a figure of 36,000 while defence sources say there are only 13,000 persons in the area; for Mullaitivu, the GA's figure is 28,000 while defence figures state 8,300. In all, according to government figures, the state supplies food assistance to 137,967 persons in the 'uncle-ared' areas of the Vanni.

Restrictions imposed on the distribution of fuel in the Vanni have severely affected nearly 200,000 farmers. The Defence Ministry permits the issue of 700 barrels of kerosene each containing 210 litres per month in the Mullaitivu District. Kerosene at present is being issued only on family cards in the Mullaitivu District.

With the price of a litre of kerosene oil being Rs. 180/- in the area, farmers are unable to start their cultivation activities though the rainy season has already set in. This was brought to the notice of the authorities at the conference of G.A.s of Vavuniya, Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu and Mannar Districts held recently. Farmers who had made all preparations for the cultivation of nearly 100,000 acres of paddy in areas not under the control of the armed forces in the above four Districts have now abandoned their activities due to the fuel shortage.

Violence in the areas close to Vavuniya town have continued to terrorise the population. On November 13, a PLOTE member, Chandramohan, was shot dead while riding his bicycle. On November 14, President of the Vavuniya Multi-Purpose Co-operative Society, Mr. Veerasingham, was brutally attacked and badly injured.

Civilian Life in the East

Batticaloa continued in darkness for the second month, with no signs of the electricity being re-installed.

Following numerous reports of public protests against the abduction of young children by the LTTE, this practice was called to a halt. However,

the LTTE presence in the area continues to be felt strongly, and a climate of fear prevails.

Restrictions of transport of food and other essential items within the areas not under army control in the east continued to present a major obstacle to normalcy. Villagers in the Vakarai area, for example, have lived with the fact that they can only take a minimum amount of food across the 'border' between military controlled and LTTE controlled areas. Certain items such as polythene and milk food are totally prohibited. This creates many difficulties for families with young children.

In Trincomalee, displaced persons who had spent months in camps waiting for their turn to travel to Jaffna have been agitating for an early passage. On November 11, over 500 persons at the 3rd Mile Post Refugee Camp in Uppuveli launched a fast demanding that they be sent back to Jaffna immediately. The strike was only called off after intervention by some political leaders of the area.

At present, there is only the LANKA MUDITHA which plies between Jaffna and Trincomalee, which transports both people and goods to the north. Thousands of people are stranded at both ends, unable to travel, and the onset of the monsoon effectively means a halt to even the LANKA MUDITHA's trips. The attack on the convoy escorting the ship in early November heightened the fear, and has frightened off all other possible ship-owners from taking on the government's offer to provide transport to the north. Civilians complain that the use of these ships to transport armed forces personnel places not only the military but also civilian passengers at risk. However, at present, the military has no option but to utilise this mode of transport.

Estimates say some 5000 persons are stranded in Trincomalee waiting for transport to the north, while similarly over 1500 persons wait in Jaffna for transport to the south. Soldiers are unable to come home on leave, students unable to report to schools and universities, workers unable to report for jobs, expatriates stranded for weeks without being able to return to their homes, schools and jobs outside

the country. However, the resumption of air service to the north has been ruled out, say Defence Ministry sources, because of fears of an LTTE attack.

Human Rights in the North and East

In the face of mounting criticism locally and from abroad about its lethargic handling of the investigation into the allegations that there is a mass grave located near the Chemmani check-point in Jaffna, the government issued a statement reiterating its commitment to the investigation. However, in practical terms, nothing has happened. Jaffna Commander Balagalle has placed the area under Police guard and made it out of bounds to other than authorised persons. He has also welcomed comments and suggestions from the human rights groups in Jaffna that have been agitating around this issue, such as the Guardians' Association.

Kumarapuram :

In November, Mutur Magistrate R.M. Jayawardena committed the accused in the Kumarapuram massacre case to trial at the High Court. At the non-summary proceedings presided over by him, he said that there was sufficient evidence to take this action.

In this case, 6 soldiers and 2 civilians stand charged with the murder of 24 Tamil civilians (including 2 infants, 3 children under the age of 10 and 8 persons between the ages of 11 and 20) and the attempted murder of 26 more Tamil civilians on the 11th of February 1996. The accused were indicted on 103 counts, and there were 54 civilian witnesses.

The massacre occurred in February 1996, after the bodies of 2 members of the security forces were found at the 58th milepost junction on the Mutur-Kiliveddy road. The men had been shot dead. Their colleagues then went on rampage in the village nearby, and killed 24 people. Since the village was in close proximity to the army camp, many of the villagers who testified had identified the accused quite clearly as having been among the group who entered the village that day.

Mylanthanai :

The case in which several members of the armed forces are charged with the massacre of 35 villagers in Mylanthani, following the deaths of General Kobbekaduwa and several others has been assigned to the High Court.

Colombo. The case will begin on March 17, 1999.

The Search for Peace

The space for developing a peace initiative within the mainstream political parties of Sri Lanka remained extremely limited. At a meeting with representatives of the TULF on November 13, the President said she was willing to open negotiations with the LTTE within a stipulated time-frame, and discuss a cease-fire thereafter. On November 22, Mannar Bishop Joseph said he felt that the LTTE would consider returning to the negotiating tables if the Thimpu principles would form the basis of the discussion. The LTTE also issued a statement calling for negotiations to mark the birthday of their chief Prabhakaran on November 26. However, the response of the government to this overture remained unclear, while the UNP remains committed to a policy of non-co-operation with the government in this regard.

At the Puttalam District Convention of the SLFP, the President went on record as saying that even if the UNP did not join the PA to push the proposed Constitutional reforms through Parliament, 'we have found alternative methods of enact Constitutional reform'. This has refuelled speculation that the PA will continue to explore extra-Parliamentary means of bringing about Constitutional reforms and should send off alarm bells in the ears of all democratic forces in Sri Lanka.

In the meanwhile, Britain is prepared to act as a facilitator to find a solution to the ethnic issue in Sri Lanka if the Sri Lankan Government extends an invitation to it to do so, said the members of the British Parliamentary delegation in Colombo on a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association sponsored tour. However, the government remains literally paranoid regarding external intervention or mediation in the Sri Lankan conflict and Opposition Leader Wickremasinghe has rejected any offers made by the President out of hand. Speaking at a series of UNP rallies throughout the island, Wickremasinghe has gone on record as saying that the UNP had decided not to support the political solution presented by the PA Government.

However, the Foreign Minister

continued to reiterate that Sri Lanka is not willing to accept any third party mediation as a means to resolving the ethnic conflict. Speaking in South Africa, Mr. Kadirgamar was reported as saying that Sri Lanka has no faith in third party mediation as many problems had cropped up in past settlements arrived at through third party mediation. According to the Minister, talks with the LTTE in the past had only produced negative results.

The Ven. Malwatte Wimalabuddhi Thera, the Ven. Thalalle Dhammaloka Thera, the Ven. Madithiyagala Vijitha Thera, the Ven. Kumarakagama Vajira Nayaka Thera, the Ven. Mapalagama Vipulasara Thera, the Ven. Batapola Nanda, the Bishop of Colombo Malcolm Ranjith, Mr. Yogendra Duraiswamy, Dr. Radhika Cumaraswamy, popular actress and environmentalist Iranganie Serasinghe were among those who attended the inaugural meeting of the Alliance for Peace in Colombo on November 11. Towards the end of the meeting, a few young Buddhist monks and laymen began shouting anti-peace slogans and a scuffle ensued.

Those present have alleged that the National Movement against Terrorism was involved in this incident. In the past months, the NMAT has been extremely vocal in its criticism of all those who speak out for peace and mention negotiations with the LTTE. In leaflet distributed at the Alliance for Peace meeting, the NMAT called for the arrest of all those who make this appeal, singling out several individuals for arrest. In a press statement issued a few days prior to this incident, the NMAT stated: 'If government, opposition or any other party or group continues to jeopardise the security of the state, its people and the Sinhala race by spearheading irresponsible, suicidal and destructive peace talks that will culminate with the break up of this country, we the people who are against separatist terrorism will rise'. Political observers see this as an ominous portent of more such altercations to come.

Disappearances Commission

The Presidential Commission on Missing Persons announced the postponement of its intended visit to Jaffna, on the grounds that they could not trace many of the complainants.

Most of the complainants, it was found, had left their former places of residence, and attempts made to locate their present addresses through G.As and the ICRC have not been adequately fruitful. A spokesperson for the Commission said that the would now take action through newspaper advertisements to request these persons to notify their present addresses to the Commission.

The Commission held sittings in November, Trincomalee and Batticaloa during November. Their mandate was to inquire into those complaints made to the previous Commissions which had not been investigated by that Commission.

There were 12 such cases on record for Trincomalee, 150 for Pollonnaruwa and 34 for Batticaloa.

The South African Connection

In what government media described as 'a pre-emptive strike against the LTTE' Foreign Minister Kadirgamar flew to Pretoria on November 15, to plead the Sri Lankan case before the leaders of South Africa.

Although the publicly adopted stance of the government is that it fears that the LTTE will move its international operations to South Africa once the situation in Europe becomes difficult, in fact, what seems to have disturbed the government is the growth of pro-Tamil and pro-LTTE sentiments within South Africa including within the South African government, and speculation of possible interventions by South Africa to call for a negotiated peace in Sri Lanka.

Reports from South Africa state that several Tamil organisations that work in solidarity with the LTTE are already well established there. Among them are: the People Against Sri Lankan Oppression (PASLO), Dravidians for Peace and Justice (DPJ) and Tamil Eelam Support Group.

Plantation Areas

Following the settlement of the strike on the Passara plantations, the Badulla Magistrate on November 27 ordered the arrest of 37 persons allegedly involved in the incidents in which the Superintendent's house was set on fire. Trade union representatives have alleged that the fire was set by the owners of the planta-

(continued on next page)

(Continued from page 7)

tion themselves to bring the trade union to disrepute.

Among those whose arrest has been ordered are MP T.V. Sennan and former Provincial Councillor, Velayutham.

University Unrest

A clash between two rival student factions at the Kelaniya University on November 19th left injured, 3 of them seriously. The clash was between the United Student Front and the Student Solidarity Foundation and arose over disputes regarding the forthcoming Student Council elections.

Following the clash, the University was declared closed.

Civil Society Actions

Several civil society actions marked the month of November. A broad network of peace groups calling itself the Alliance for Peace held its first public meeting at the Public Library in Colombo on November 11. The meeting was extremely well attended with representation from different sectors of civil society and members of all ethnic, linguistic and religious groups being present. During the course of the meeting, some persons allegedly from the National Movement against Terrorism (NMAT), which has been actively denouncing any calls for peace as being pro-LTTE tried to disrupt the meeting and an altercation ensued. Later on, the Ven. Sobitha, a well-known Buddhist monk who is also linked to the NMAT, denounced the attack and distanced himself from this action.

NGOs Protest:

On November 17, a coalition of NGOs organised a demonstration and public meeting against the Voluntary Social Service Organisations (Registration and Regulation) Act and in particularly recent Amendment to the Act which empowers the Minister of Social Services to intervene directly in the internal affairs of a voluntary organisation. The demonstration was well attended and a petition signed by over 500 non-governmental organisations from all parts of the country and from all sectors of society was released. The original of this petition is due to be handed over to the Minister in charge.

"We Have Not Closed the Doors for Peace"

LTTE Leader

"We have not closed the doors for peace. We are open to the civilized method of resolving conflicts through rational dialogue. Since the Sinhala leadership lacks the political will and sincerity to resolve the problem we favour third party mediation for political negotiations," leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Velupillai Pirapaharan, said in his annual "Heroes Day" message delivered on 27 November 1998.

The following are extracts from Tamil Tiger leader's message as released by LTTE International Secretariat, 211 Katherine Road in London:

"While the whole world has radically transformed and moving on the path of peace, progress and harmony and preparing itself to embrace the new millennium Sri Lanka is still caught up in a turbulent conflict. The Tamil national question continues to torment

the Island as a burning issue fuelled by war and violence. Why is it that the Tamil ethnic conflict, with a prolonged history of more than half-a-century, continues to be an insurmountable problem while the world is undergoing change, resolving tensions and conflicts?

The Tamil people are demanding none other than their inalienable rights. Therefore, political justice is on their side. What are we demanding? What are we struggling for?

We aspire to live peace fully with freedom and dignity, without the interference of anyone, in our own soil, in our Motherland where we are born and bred; in our own historical homeland which belongs to us. We too, are human beings. We constitute ourselves as a human society possessing the basic rights of human beings. We are a national formation with a distinct language, culture and history. We therefore, demand that we should be recognized as a community of people as a social formation with distinct characteristics. We have the right to determine our political status. On the basis of the right, we aspire to choose freely a political model suited to us to govern ourselves.

This is what our people are demanding and fighting for. The Sinhala nation has been denying this just and civilized demand. It is precisely for this reason that the Sinhala state has been oppressing and suppressing our people. Successive Sri Lanka Governments have neither integrated or assimilated our people within the unitar system nor allowed our people the right to secede.

Instead, they have always attempted to repress and subjugate our people. It is for this reason we have been compelled to fight a political struggle for the last fifty years. Though the forms of our struggle have changed in accordance with the historical compulsions, we continue to fight for political rights, for our right to live in freedom. Now the Tamil struggle has ex-

Displaced Muslims:

On November 22, over 5000 displaced Muslims from the northern parts of the island came together in Puttalam to commemorate the 8th anniversary of their expulsion from the peninsula and to put forward their calls for a negotiated settlement of the ethnic conflict and the creation of an atmosphere within which they could return to their homes. The meeting, which was organised by the Northern Muslims' Rehabilitation Organisation, brought together displaced Muslims from 66 Welfare Centres in and around Puttalam.

Violence Against Women:

November 25 was International Day against Violence against Women. The Sri Lanka Women's NGO Forum carried out a poster campaign denouncing violence against women and announced a public rally on December 8 as part of its participation in the global campaign of 16 days of activism against violence against women.

(From INFORM)

nded and escalated into a war between two nations.

It is none other than the anti-Tamil attitude of Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinism that has turned Sri Lanka into a blazing cauldron of violence. The Tamil national question arose as historical product of this racist oppression.

The world has changed with the passage of time. Similarly the politics of the world also has changed. But the politics of the Sinhala nation has not changed. It is unfortunate that the Sinhala politicians have not realized this fact. Fantasies that arose from ancient mythology have grown and developed into hegemonic ideas which exert tremendous impact on the Sinhala political and intellectual world. As a consequence the Sinhala nation lacks the ability to comprehend objectively the very basis as well as the rationale behind the Tamil issue and to deal with the problem humanly.

Over the years our people have been shedding tears of blood under the oppressive grip of sinhala chauvinism. We are deeply saddened by the fact that their long standing suffering has not yet touch the conscience of the world community. Apart from this apathetic attitude shown by the international community towards the problems of our people, the massive financial and military assistance provided to Sri Lanka by foreign countries has also exacerbated their tragic plight. The assistance provided by foreign countries has also encouraged the rigid, irreconcilable and bellicose attitude of the Sinhala chauvinists. The world community has always fought for the cause of the oppressed and it has always raised its voice of protest or intervened whenever there have been incidents of human rights violations, crimes against humanity or repression of minority nations in any part of the world. But we are dismayed to note that the international community is observing a muted silence over the colossal tragedy faced by the Eelam Tamils. Encouraged by the economic aid, military assistance, political, moral and diplomatic backing gained from international countries, Sinhala chauvinists have been adopting a genocidal policy against the Tamils with single-minded ruthlessness and arrogance. We are aware of the fact that the international community is misguided by the sophisticated misinfor-

mation campaign carried out by Sri Lanka. It is unfortunate that the world community has uncritically assimilated the preposterous theories advanced by the Sri Lankan state (i.e. war for peace) to legitimize its military campaign against the Tamils. Nevertheless, facts about the plight of the Tamils have also found their way to the international arena. Atrocities and injustices committed against the Tamil people for the last several decades have been well documented and submitted to international forums. International human rights organisations have expressed serious concern that the state oppression against the Tamil has reached genocidal proportions. It is well known internationally that more than sixty thousand innocent Tamil civilians have been brutally done to death over the years by the terror and violence unleashed by the racist state in the Tamil homeland. Further more, more than eight hundred thousand Tamils, who fled the country and sought refuge all over the world, bear testimony as living witness to the barbaric nature of the Sinhala state oppression. The world is aware of all these facts. Yet, we are surprised and deeply saddened to note that this monumental human tragedy has not yet aroused the concern of world community.

We are well aware that in the present world order every country pursues its own national and commercial interests. Yet, the civilized world has always given primacy to the universal values of human rights and freedoms. What dismays us is that the countries which lead the civilized world are reluctant to raise their voices against the uncivilized forms of oppression unleashed against the Tamils. Nevertheless, we have not lost hope. One day the truths that are buried deeply in the mass graves of Tamil Eelam will emerge from slumber and reveal the true face of Sinhala chauvinism. Only then the tragic story of our people will touch the heart of the world. Until such time, Eelam Tamils living all over the world should continue their campaign relentlessly about the tragic existential conditions of our people in the Tamil homeland with the objective of arousing the conscience of humanity.

So far, not a single voice of rationality is heard from the Sinhala national against the war. None so far has made a plea to put an end to the war and

resolve the problem by peaceful means. From politicians to the monks, from intellectuals to the journalists, every one calls for the intensifications of the war. The Sinhala nation wants to continue the war to subjugate the Tamil nation.

Sri Lanka is a Buddhist country, a nation that follows the teachings of the Compassionate One who preached the noble ideals of love, truth and enlightenment. We are surprised as to how the evil of racism and militarism has raised its ugly head in a Buddhist society that thrived on the philosophy of "dharma".

Today the war has expanded and escalated into a full-fledged conflagration in which armed forces of the two nations are confronting each other. The Sinhala nation is engaged in war of aggression to occupy Tamils land and to subjugate the Tamil people. We are fighting to protect our people and liberate our soil from alien aggression. The Sinhala nation is engaged in a war of injustice where as we are engaged in a liberation struggle in which justice is on our side.

Chandrika's government, which has reached the peak in oppressing the Tamils is determined to escalate and continue the war. Her government is bent on prosecuting the war through the military campaign have demoralized the army, brought massive destruction of life and property and shattered the economy of the country. Chandrika's military project has crumbled and failed to achieve any of its strategic objectives. The fundamental objective of the war is to defeat and destroy the Liberation Tigers. But the LTTE has not been defeated but rather has grown immensely in strength acquiring wider experience in the art of modern warfare and turned out to be an invincible force. The wanni battles caused a serious of debacles and massive casualties to the Sinhala armed forces. The 'Jayasikuru battles, which was undertaken with the grand design to open the road to Jaffna, has prolonged for more than a year and half and reached an impasse with the fall of Killinochchi.

Chandrika's political project of establishing Sinhala state administration in the occupied Jaffna peninsula is also being shattered. We cannot allow the Sinhala aggressive army to occupy

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even an inch of our homeland nor will we permit Sinhala state administrative functions in the occupied Tamil lands. We are shedding blood and fighting a deadly struggle with the primary objective of liberating our motherland which is the very foundation of the national existence and economic life of our people. Therefore we cannot permit the foot print of the Sinhala aggressors to remain embedded on our sacred soil.

We do not believe that Chandrika, who has become the author of the most blood strained chapter in the history of oppression of the Tamils, will bring peace to the country by resolving the Tamil national issue by peaceful means. She is a firm believer in a military solution and lives in an illusion that political conflicts can be solved by military means. She is also a prisoner of the Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinistic ideology. One cannot therefore expect a leadership dominated by such thinking to be humane and compassionate enough to do justice to the Tamils.

We have not closed the doors for peace. We are open to the civilized method of resolving conflicts through rational dialogue. Since the Sinhala leadership lacks the political will and sincerity to resolve the problem we favour third party mediation for political negotiations. But we are not prepared to accept any pre-conditions for political dialogue. We want the political negotiations to be held in an atmosphere of peace and normalcy, free from the conditions of war, military aggression and economic blockades. We are not stipulating any pre-conditions for peace talks. We are suggesting the creation of a climate of peace and goodwill to hold peace talks, a congenial environment in which our people must be free from the heavy burden of suffering imposed on them. We hold the view that political negotiations cannot be free, fair and just if the Government utilizes the military aggression on our soil and the restrictions imposed on the economic life of our people as political pressures. We are prepared to engage in initial talks to discuss the removal of such pressures and to workout a basic framework for political negotiations.

Our people are facing unbearable suffering in the form of death, destruction, displacement, hunger and star-

IS SRI LANKA READY FOR PEACE TALKS AGAIN ?

Jehan Perera

In his annual address to mark Heroes' Day, the LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran, spoke of the need to solve the Sri Lankan conflict in the manner of a civilised society. In civilised societies matters of contending rights would be settled by negotiations based on principle. The unfortunate example of Sri Lanka is that power and ambition have often prevailed over rights. Mr Prabhakaran's recent offer to negotiate a settlement to the ethnic conflict may also be analysed in this light.

Those who are concerned by the destruction and suffering caused by the 15 year war would rejoice in the LTTE leader's offer to talk peace with the government. It was only a week earlier that President Chandrika Kumaratunga had told the leaders of the Tamil

vacation. They live as prisoners in their own homeland, facing daily, various forms of military atrocities. Our people want their day-to-day urgent problems resolved immediately. They cannot wait over an indefinite time until the peace talks resume and the ethnic conflict is discussed, resolved and the solution implemented. They want the war to come to an end and the occupation army that torments them to withdraw and their urgent existential problems addressed immediately. Is Chandrika's Government prepared to take a bold step to deal with the immediate essential problems of our people and resume political negotiations in a congenial climate of peace and goodwill? If not, the possibility for peace and a peaceful negotiated political settlement to the ethnic conflict will become remote.

We do not anticipate that the hawkish and racist attitude of Sinhala chauvinism will undergo fundamental transformation. If such change does not take place Sinhala chauvinism will bear the responsibility for creating the concrete historical conditions for the birth of independent Tamil state. ●

parliamentary parties that she was willing to negotiate with the LTTE. Both Mr Prabhakaran and Mrs Kumaratunga need to be applauded, and supported, if their offers to talk peace to one another are genuine.

But peace is still, alas, a considerable distance away. As several analysts including the JVP spokesman Wimal Wimalawansa have cautioned, the peace offers of the two leaders should not be viewed in isolation from their strategies to promote their interests. The LTTE and the government have their own goals which they seek to achieve through a multiplicity of means. Offers to talk are one of these means. Military operations are another means.

From the viewpoint of those who want a less violent society, it is preferable that the two leaders should try to obtain a more advantageous position through words than by bombs. They should be encouraged to switch channels from bombs to words in their conflict with one another. The international media gave considerable publicity to Mr Prabhakaran's peace offering. This should not be grudged.

It is certainly preferable that the LTTE should pile on the pressure on the Sri Lankan government in this manner through political means (words) rather than through the more accustomed military means (bombs) which has led them to a position of strength in the country. The change in tactics may herald the dawn of a more civilised search for a long lasting solution to the country's ethnic conflict.

But to be realistic a peaceful solution itself is still a while away. For there to be a solution, it is essential that the conflicting parties should be willing to respect the rights of the other side, while fighting for their own. With its ban on the LTTE as a terrorist organisation, and its continuing efforts to have it banned internationally as well, the government has de-

nied legitimacy to the LTTE. There can hardly be any question of rights to an illegitimate organisation.

On the other hand, a distinguishing feature of the LTTE leader's Heroes' Day speech was its lack of concern for the other peoples who inhabit this country. There was only a concern for the Tamil people in an island that is also home to Sinhalese, Muslims and Indian Tamils. The black and white portrayal of the conflict also demonstrated a terrible lack of self-critical awareness. Any community that seeks justice must first of all be self-critical about its own conduct in the past. Second they should be concerned also with the rights of others, and not be so self-absorbed that they are only concerned with themselves.

In particular the black portrayal of the Sinhalese may be natural to a man who has spent most of his life keeping alight the flames of Tamil nationalism. But it was not at all helpful, or accurate, for Mr Prabakaran to say that "So far not a single voice of rationalism is heard from the Sinhala nation against the war. None so far has made a plea to put an end to the war and resolve the problem by peaceful means. From politicians to monks, from intellectuals to journalists, everyone calls for an intensification of the war. The Sinhala nation wants to continue the war to subjugate the Tamil nation." This would create a demonised image of the Sinhalese people in the eyes of Tamils, especially those of the younger generation who are cocooned in the north-east and do not know better. If Mr Prabakaran's intention was to foster Tamil hatred against the Sinhalese then it would seem that real peace is still far from his mind.

The Sri Lankan government's ban on the LTTE and policy of making it

difficult to communicate with them would have much to do with this unfortunate frame of mind within the LTTE. But it also may be that Mr Prabakaran, as the supreme military leader of the LTTE, is devoting most of his time to fighting against the Sri Lankan military which is at his doorstep. There is a need for the LTTE to consider setting up a fully fledged political organisation, on the lines of the IRA-Sinn Fein arrangement, if peace through the civilised means of political negotiations is to be a reality. At this time, however, it is to the LTTE's credit that it does permit some voices of Tamil civil society to emerge out of the hatred and division of the ethnic war. The Bishop of Mannar, Dr Rayappu Joseph, has been quite forthright in stating that the Tamils should give up the idea of a separate state, while stating that the Sinhalese should be prepared to relinquish the unitary constitutional framework of governance.

For many years, from the early 1980s, there have been many people from among the Sinhalese people who have opposed the war and have stood for genuine power sharing with the Tamil people in the form of regional autonomy or federalism. They were not strong or numerous enough to stand up and halt the juggernaut of war. But in more recent times the voices for peace in the Sinhalese civil society have grown more numerous. In the past two months, not only the country's business leaders, but also an Alliance for Peace of more than one hundred organisations have activated themselves to end the war. Among those who braved assault at that public meeting by a smaller group of pro-war agitators, and prevailed, were Sinhalese intellectuals, Buddhist monks and journalists.

More scientific evidence of the change in the consciousness of the Sinhalese people has also emerged from the results of the public opinion survey carried out by the Centre for Anthropological and Social Studies of the University of Colombo. As many as 77 percent of the respondents said that they did not believe that a military solution could bring about a solution to the ethnic conflict. But the problem is that they do not know what the political solution should in fact be. They have not been provided with an alternative vision of a governmental system that could satisfy Tamil aspirations while restoring peace.

The task of the peace movement is to take more and more Sinhalese in the direction of accepting the basis of the political framework that could satisfy the Tamil people. One such basis would be the Thimpu principles on which all the Tamil parties are agreed, including the LTTE. A large enough number of the Sinhalese intelligentsia and opinion leaders would need to support negotiations on those principles as a legitimate basis for peace talks.

Without the backing of a large sector of public opinion, the government cannot be expected to deliver to the Tamil people the genuinely federal framework that would do away with the rationale for the war. It was only when hundreds of thousands of Israelis were prepared to come to the streets to support the principle of an exchange of "land for peace" that the government got the courage to reach a new level of agreement with the PLO.

Thus, it becomes evident that a great deal of work on both sides of the divide still need to be done if peace talks between the LTTE and government are to yield a political settlement. In the meantime, the government can take up the LTTE leader's challenge of talks with foreign mediation. They could talk first about creating a conducive environment for peace talks as requested by Mr Prabakaran.

There is a pressing need to humanise the war. The Sri Lankan ethnic conflict has been a very cruel one, especially to the combatants. Hardly any of them are taken prisoner, being killed instead. This can be seen in the very high ratio of those killed to

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Whither Peace Hopes After Great Heroes Day

D B S Jeyaraj

Sixteen years ago on Nov 27th Sathiyathan alias Shankar of Kambarmalai in the Vadamarachy division of Jaffna passed away at a hospital in Madurai in Tamil Nadu. He had been injured when the movement he belonged to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) launched an assault on the Chavakachcheri Police Station and taken across the sea to India for medical treatment where he succumbed to his injuries. Shankar was the first member of the Tigers to be "martyred" for the cause. Today by its own admission the LTTE have sacrificed more than 13,300 in the struggle for Tamil Eelam. Shankar's memory particularly the date of his demise has now become etched in the annals of contemporary Tamil politics as "Maaveerar Naal" or "Maaveerar Thinam" meaning Great Heroes Day or Martyrs Day.

It was in 1989 during the time when the Indian army was occupy-

ing North-East Sri Lanka that the LTTE first observed "Great Heroes Day". LTTE leader Velupillai Pirapaharan decided that November 27th should be the day to commemorate the fallen fighters of the LTTE as Shankar was the first to die in combat on behalf of the movement. The first such observance was a low-key affair with meetings being held clandestinely in the Wanni or northern mainland. The highlight then as it is now was the address delivered by the LTTE chief to a gathering of young Tiger cadres. The speech was videotaped and circulated widely.

The next year 1990 saw the LTTE in control of most areas of the northern province and substantial portions of the East as the Indian army departed from Sri Lanka at the request of former President Premadasa. The great heroes day was commemorated on a wider scale. A speech was delivered by Prabakaran in Jaffna. The

made it easier for the government to de-legitimise the LTTE in the eyes of the world. Such acts also make it more difficult for ordinary Tamil civilians to represent the legitimacy of the LTTE's liberation struggle for Tamil rights in the country. They also make peace work among the Sinhalese more difficult. It is sad that so many years of warfare have been necessary for the level of aspirations of the two sides to come near enough to one another for them to be wedded together by a third party mediator. But still the two conflicting sides seem to be too far apart. More years of unrestrained warfare is too dreadful a thought to contemplate. By engaging in preliminary talks to produce a conducive environment for negotiations on the three areas give above, it may be possible for the government and LTTE to come closer together, slowly but surely. The return to peace and normalcy will be a step by step process, not a once and for all event. ●

next year saw the entire week preceding November 27th being declared "Maaveerar Vaaram" or "Kilamai" (Great heroes week). A variety of events including meetings, processions, exhibitions, special rituals of worship etc. were held in honour of the fallen LTTE fighters. By this time the LTTE had also begun building memorials called "Maaveerar Thuyilum Illangal" in their honour too. Special burial grounds were set up as "Maaveerar Mayanangal" also. Great heroes day however was to commemorate exclusively the LTTE fighters who had died. Neither the ordinary Tamil people who had died in this long conflict nor members of other Tamil groups who laid down their lives for the ideal of Tamil Eelam were considered eligible for the label of "Maaveerar". Not even Kuttimani, Thangathurai and/or the others who died in the Welikade massacre.

That year saw the official function being held at Chavakachcheri. It was the last official LTTE function where Pirapaharan and his erstwhile deputy Mahathaya were seen on the same platform on amiable terms. In fact the idea of commemorating a great heroes week was said to have been introduced by Mahathaya. It so happened that the LTTE leader was born on November 26th in 1954. Mahathaya's decision on a commemorative week saw the leader's birthday too coming under the same week (November 21st to November 27th). It must be noted however that the LTTE does not make any special mention of the leader's birthday although Tamil expatriate LTTE supporters used to do so. In recent times presumably on a directive from the LTTE hierarchy the practice has virtually ceased abroad too.

The LTTE however has continued with the practice of commemorating annually the Great Heroes Week with special emphasis on the last day or great heroes day. It has also become a custom that on this great heroes day the LTTE leader, Pirapaharan, delivers an annual address. Depending upon military circumstances it is either rendered in person at a public meeting or broadcast through radio. Since the LTTE leader is an elusive personality who is seldom seen or heard by the public at large, the Great Heroes Day address has become perhaps the solitary opportunity for the world to know at first

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those injured. Usually the ratio is about one to nine, but in Sri Lanka it is one to two. International law and the Geneva Conventions do not permit the killing of those who are surrendered, even if they wear uniforms.

Second, the government can take steps to lift the economic embargo, especially on kitchen fuels and fertiliser. Even the government soldiers at the front say that this severely affects the civilian population, while not really hindering the LTTE from getting its supplies. The LTTE gets all its wants from the armed forces themselves, either by overrunning army camps or by bribing the soldiers and by smuggling from India. The economic embargo in every sense is a counter-productive exercise in futility.

Third, the LTTE can agree not to launch specific and targeted attacks against civilian establishments. The suicide bombings of civilian targets have confirmed its terrorist image and

hand what the LTTE line of thought is on current issues. Hearing or reading Pirapaharan himself articulating the latest Tamil Tiger position has assumed greater importance of late because of the established belief that the LTTE leader is the sole and determining factor on what LTTE policy is. Sometimes the address turns out to be empty rhetoric shedding more heat than light on the situation. On other occasions it has served as a straw in the wind pointing to the direction in which the LTTE is proceeding.

This year's Great Heroes Day the tenth in the series was looked forward to with eager anticipation. The main reason for this was the expectation that the LTTE leader would explicitly state his position on possibilities of resuming negotiations with the government. It was quite obvious that the LTTE displaying tremendous military resilience had stymied the military advances of the army in the Wanni. It had also destabilised the situation in Jaffna. With the opposition United National Party(UNP) sabotaging the Peoples Alliance (PA) government's efforts to introduce Constitutional reform it seemed clear that no new

political package was in the offing. National and international opinion was veering around to an acceptance of the ground reality that the LTTE had not been considerably marginalised politically nor significantly weakened militarily. Moreover the chief opposition UNP was openly calling upon the PA government to initiate talks with the LTTE. Also many influential western nations and powerful non-governmental organisations were exerting indirect pressure on the government to resume talks with the Tigers. Thus the political tide of international and national opinion was flowing heavily in favour of the LTTE.

What was expected of the LTTE at this juncture was a clear signal that it was amenable for talks. Since it was the LTTE which seemed to be in a position of strength in the present situation an expression of such intention was not doubted.

It was this hopeful mood that perhaps led to many journalists, politicians, commentators and analysts recording very positive responses to this year's speech by the LTTE leader initially. For a few days there were euphoric expectations that peace was

round the corner because the LTTE leader had expressed that their doors were not closed for the resumption of negotiations with the government. Sober reflection upon the content of the whole speech would not have justified such expectation.

The LTTE held the main rally of the Great heroes day commemoration at Mulliyawalai in the Mullai Theevu district. A remarkable feature of the rally was the personal appearance of LTTE supremo Pirapaharan who lit the traditional lamp at 6.06 pm and commenced his speech a minute later. Two other highlights of the day were the formal inauguration of the LTTE air wing and the observing of similar meetings in other parts of the Wanni. It has been the long cherished dream of the LTTE and its leader to acquire and deploy aircraft in its war against government forces. In recent times there have been media reports that the LTTE possessed at least two helicopters and two small planes. The great heroes day saw LTTE aircraft showering flowers from the air in homage to the fallen comrades. The LTTE anti-aircraft unit with its deadly arsenal was present in full force on gro-



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und to counter attack any Sri Lankan air force planes that may have ventured into "Tiger airspace". But no such manoeuvre occurred.

The second highlight was the staging of commemorative rallies in other places in the Wanni region. This was the first time after the fall of Jaffna that the LTTE was commemorating great heroes day on such widespread scale.

Velupillai Pirapaharan read out from a prepared text. The LTTE leader is a man of military action and not a platform orator. His delivery was not strikingly impressive. But what was impressive was the "confidence" manifested in his tone. This was not artificial bravado aimed at boosting sagging morale of cadres and supporters. On the contrary it was more representative of a man sure of his goal and assured of his motives. Although much of what Pirapaharan said was a replay of previous great heroes day addresses two differences were visible or audible. One was that the speech had been crafted cleverly with a lot of political sagacity.

Thus the address on this occasion conveyed an initial and superficial impression that the LTTE was ready for a meaningful settlement this time.

Instead of rejecting matters outright as in the case of the devolution proposals the LTTE leader this time confused readers, viewers and listeners by appearing to be amenable to peace negotiations without preconditions whereas in fact he had really imposed stipulations. He also avoided reference to contentious issues. The other was that the speech had also a lyrical quality about it giving rise to speculation that the poet laureate of the LTTE "Puthuvai" Rathinadurai may have had a hand in "polishing" it.

The LTTE leader in his speech expressed once again his willingness to engage in dialogue. He stressed that the LTTE was still keeping the doors for talks open. Pirapaharan reiterated that the LTTE was always amenable to peaceful negotiations and blamed the Sinhala governments for not responding accordingly and unleashing war on the Tamils. He also stated that he was not stipulating any preconditions for peace talks. He said however that the Tamil people had no faith in the government. Therefore negotiations should commence only

with the aid of a third party as facilitator or mediator. Moreover no preconditions should be imposed on the LTTE. On a prima facie level these utterances of Pirapaharan certainly indicated a willingness for peace negotiations.

The problem however was over his insistence that congenial conditions should be created as a prerequisite for peace talks to begin.

It was the French philosopher Alphonse Karr who observed that "The more things change the more they remain the same". It was certainly a truth with a twist as far as Pirapaharan's speech was concerned. Although parts of it seemed to indicate that the situation had changed a scrutiny of the address in its entirety suggested that things remained unchanged as ever. In fact some of the points emphasised by him only evoked a sense of *deja vu*. The subtle nuances of the speech retained contradictory elements that negated any realistic hope of negotiations commencing shortly.

Because the LTTE chief was actually imposing severe preconditions indirectly while calling directly for talks without preconditions. While calling for the creation of congenial conditions for talks Pirapaharan stated, "We hold the view that political negotiations cannot be free, fair or just if the government utilises the military aggression on our soil and the restrictions imposed on the economic life of our people as political pressures. We are prepared to engage in initial talks to discuss the removal of such pressures and to work out a basic framework for political negotiations".

Although these points would seem innocuous the discerning observer would detect what Pirapaharan is aiming at. By referring to "military aggression on our soil" and "removal of pressures" etc. the LTTE leader is actually asking for the removal of the armed forces and relaxation of the economic embargo on the LTTE controlled Wanni. Pirapaharan emphasised in his speech that the suffering people could not wait for a political settlement to materialise for their problems to cease. The day to day problems had to be addressed first. The overtones of this request made it clear that it was a demand that had to be complied with before talks began.

While there certainly is humanistic merit in asking for a lifting of the embargo it is unrealistic to expect the government to lift it before real negotiations commence. Likewise insisting that the army withdraw from captured areas too is an impossible demand practically. It is as unrealistic as the government insisting earlier that the LTTE should lay down arms as a prerequisite for talks.

The call to create congenial conditions for talks is a modified repetition of the preconditions that the LTTE set during the abortive Govt-LTTE talks between January to April 1995 in Jaffna. The LTTE insisted then that "makkalin andraadappirachinaigal" (the day to day problems of our people) had to be addressed before "adippadaipirachinaigal" (fundamental problems). Kumaratunga obliged and the 100 day dialogue saw no discussion of substantive political issues relating to the conflict. The four conditions outlined by the LTTE were removal of economic embargo, lifting of fishing ban, removal of Pooneryn camp and the right for LTTE cadres in the East to carry arms openly. The government went a long way in agreeing to the first two demands. As to the latter two demands, the government agreed to review them in three months depending on the progress of talks on issues relating to a political solution to the conflict. However, as the government did not agree to all the demands in their totality within the time frame specified by the LTTE, the talks were broken off and war erupted. The Tamil people whose suffering was so high that their immediate problems had to be redressed first was the LTTE credo in preliminary talks. But when war was thrust on the people a far worse situation was imposed. It continues still.

In today's context the "removal of military aggression on our soil" can mean a number of things. If the Northern and Eastern Provinces in their entirety constitute "Thamil eelam" then the army has to withdraw from quite all these areas. Even if it is a return to pre-1995 positions it means the whole peninsula and a segment of the Wanni. Given the experience of past negotiations, no government in Colombo would agree to these LTTE demands before a framework for a political solution has been agreed

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between the parties. It is a case of being once bitten twice shy. If the government is really convinced that the LTTE is genuine then it can take the risk of commencing talks under the conditions set by the LTTE. Since that is virtually impossible the possibility of talks remain quite remote. One option is for some preliminary low-key exploration of talks to begin abroad while the war continues. But that too is not likely because of the constraints on the government.

The government is unlikely to take the risk of beginning a dialogue that may end in another collapse as such a development would make it vulnerable to political defeat. Also taking such a move may even cause convulsions within the army. As mentioned in these columns earlier the government too is caught in a war trap. Its two pronged politico-military strategy to marginalise the LTTE has so far failed to show meaningful results. In such a context it would be regarded as suicidal for it to abandon or put on hold the current military campaign and start talking to the Tigers. Such a move is possible only if the government is absolutely sure of the LTTE's readiness to arrive at a negotiated political settlement. But in the absence of such trust talks now seems out of the question. If it starts talks now which ends in another failure resulting in the resumption of war again, the government will face a great political storm that it can ill afford to.

Under these circumstances it is hardly a surprise that the so called peace hope that began with a bang after great heroes day has now turned into a whimper. Although "Jayasikurui" has been suspended another operation codenamed "Rivibala-ya" (Sunpower) has commenced. The goal seems to be the capture and consolidation of the Mankulam-Mullaitheevu road instead of aiming for Kilinochchi that seems so near and yet so far. Already Oddusuddan has been seized. Anuruddha Ratwatte had a narrow shave when LTTE shells landed within yards of him while the minister was visiting the newly captured area.

The real danger posed by this new development is that once the Mankulam-Mullaitheevu road is captured and consolidated the quadrilat-

Govt Should Grab LTTE's Offer to Negotiate

K T Rajasingham

Power and authority warp judgment in the war-torn Sri Lanka, where peace, harmony, unity and national integration are unable or unwilling to be brought to the fore, as egocentricity and craving for power take the driver's seat. War drums continue to deafen ears, when military campaign changes infinitely from "Sure Victory" (Jeya Sukuru) to "Lightning Force" (Rivi Bala), heralding another bloodied phase of antagonism.

War continues to rage on unabatedly, though the rival protagonists of the conflict have openly declared their willingness for a negotiated political settlement. Irrespective of the usual political vituperative rhetoric's, Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunge, the President of Sri Lanka and Velupillai Prabhakaran, the Tiger Supremo, stated unequivocally that, they belief in a negotiated political

settlement, instead of a military solution. Yet, the scourge of war ravages on, uninterruptedly.

Longing for Peace

War and peace are the two contradictory catalytic elements, in the active turbulent landscape, that transform the political scenario in Sri Lanka. Political and militant leaders, earlier believed in the military campaign to bring about solutions to the ethnic conflict. As both warring parties poised equally, perceived their strength and weaknesses relatively in the same ratio, none of them was able to bring about militarily solution, to end the stalemate. The war, without end in sight, continues to intensify unabatedly.

Peace, perceived the elusive element in the Sri Lankan politics, demands' statesmen like qualities, valor, courage and sacrifices from those who play the lead role. No one was ready to give, peace a chance, in the political make-up, but, people are longing for it. In the second week of September, Social Scientists' Union of the University of Colombo, carried out an opinion survey, to ascertain, "Whether people favour military or a political solution?" The poll was conducted in all the provinces across the Island, except in the North, revealed that, the majority of the population belief that, a military solution to the conflict is not possible. Professor S.T.Hettige, of the department of Sociology, in the University of Colombo, organized this survey revealed that, in reply to another poignant question. "Do you think that military option alone can solve the problem?", total of 77.4 percent of the respondents said "No," while 20.7 percent said "Yes" and 1.9 percent said "do not know." Survey reveals that, more than three quarters of the population, believed in a political settlement.

Declarations

Earlier, a glimmer ray of hope emerged, just after the South East Asia Regional Conference (SARC - a severe

eral zone known as Welio-Oya would be fully under army control.

More than fifty Tamil villages were "grabbed" and the inhabitants chased away in order to create the Welio-Oya zone. Armed Sinhala settlers were brought in to turn it into a Sinhala area. A large number of military camps were established to further retain control. Tamil village names were changed. Mankindimalai for example became Janakapura named after General Janaka Perera. The traditional Tamil name "Manal aaru" itself has become "Weli-Oya". It is a deliberate strategy to break the territorial contiguity of the Northern and Eastern Provinces. Already "Jayasikurui" has helped drive Tamil people away from the northern areas of the proposed "Weli-Oya" again. If and when Welio-Oya becomes a firm geo-political reality the Tamil hawks who want "Eelam" as well as the doves who want a north-east merger will face a reality on the ground that would be formidable to surmount. After all possession is nine-tenths of ownership in law.

nation grouping) held in Colombo, when Chandrika Kumaratunga, in a significant announcement, expressed her willingness to accept a third party facilitation, to negotiate with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). She added that, she was ready for talks, provided, the Tamil militants agree to give up the demand for a separate state of Eelam.

Again, Chandrika Kumaratunga, the President, reiterated that, her Government was prepared for talks with the LTTE, within a stipulated time frame, irrespective of a cease-fire. She stressed that, a cease-fire could only be decided on the basis of progress in the talks. President Kumaratunga told this to the senior members of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), when they met her on November 13, at the "Temple Trees," her official residence.

"Our Government believes in a negotiated political settlement for the ethnic crisis. But, we cannot rush to talks with the LTTE. We are prepared to talk to them within a stipulated time-frame and then decide on the cease-fire, depending on the progress of the talks," the President was quoted.

Consequent to the Sri Lankan President's declaration for talks, on November 27, Velupillai Prabhakaran, the leader of the Tiger movement, declared that, the LTTE too is ready for a negotiated settlement, if talks are mediated by a third party.

In his address to mark the anniversary of the "Maveerar Naal" (Heroes Days), he declared, "We have not close the doors for peace. We are open to the civilized method of resolving conflicts through rational dialogue. We favor third party mediation for political negotiations. We are suggesting the creation of a climate of peace and goodwill to hold peace talks, a congenial environment. We are prepared to engage in initial talks to discuss the removal of such pressures and to work out a basic framework for political negotiations."

The declaration by the leader of the LTTE, considered a welcome sign, to set the stage for negotiation, to end the protracted ethnic conflict, to restore normalcy and peace. Political analysts, who studied Prabhakaran's speech, in conjunction with the announcement made by the President on November 13, expressed hope that, the platform for the future political

negotiation is erected. Now, it is in the hands of the warring partners, to come to terms with the modalities, for the negotiation.

Earlier, the leader of the opposition and the leader of the United National Party (UNP) Ranil Wickramasinghe, expressed, "This is a major move by the Tigers and it is a positive one, to which the Government must respond. They can't stay silent." He continued, "The government has dilly-dallied too much on this issue and now they have to take it up." The leader of the opposition also said, "Their (Tigers) genuineness is a matter to be tested. It may be a concern in everybody's mind, but you can't hold back an opportunity like this on those grounds." But, the government is maintaining a studied silence, and yet to formally respond officially to Prabhakaran's speech.

In the meantime, few other leaders of the main opposition UNP, such as A.C.S.Hameed, former Minister of Foreign Affairs and the only leader who has met Prabhakaran personally, for political discussions during the time of President Ranatunge Premadasa's tenure of office, Anura Bandaranaike, the former minister and the brother of the Sri Lankan President and Tyronne Fernando, who was also former foreign minister, urged the government in the floor of the parliament, to take serious note of the offer for peace talks by the Tiger leader, during the committee stage of the votes on Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Lakshman Kadirgamar became the first high ranking governmental leader to reply to the offer made by Prabhakaran on December 1, in the floor of the parliament, stating that, he was not prepared to answer such questions on the run. He said "I am going to spend time in trying my best to contain this group as much as possible, before we begin talks. I am not going to answer this question, because, that type of question is a bear-biting question." He however accepted that, there should be some form of negotiation with the LTTE, but not at the cost of advancing the war.

When both the rival parties declared publicly, their willingness to settle the ethnic conflict, in the most civilized form, political pundits also declare a studied and cautious optimism. They have not ruled out, the outside chance, that both these dec-

larations may be for the international consumption and not to be taken seriously. Any how, it is being viewed that, both the warring partners, the President and the Tiger Leader, have already tested through their military campaigns, that neither of them were able to subdue the other, nor to arrive at any military resolutions. Also, they are fully aware of the high cost of the war, that is going on for years and years.

Cost of war

In 1977, the defence budget allocation was a pittance of only, Sri Lankan Rupees (Rs.) 750 million, when compared it with the present annual defence expenditures. In 1986, it rose to Rs. 5.84 million, and from then onwards, military expenditures began to rise steadily. Each year's allocation on defence spending, by the People's Alliance government, began to increase astronomically. In 1995, the allocation was Rs. 24 billion, but the actual amount spent was Rs. 34 billion. In 1996, the allocation was Rs. 34 billion, but the actual expenditure was Rs. 46 billion. In the meantime, Marga Institute of Sri Lanka, revealed that, Rs. 165 billion was spent on 1996, which was 21.3 percent of the GDP, in their report on the cost of war, released at the National Peace Council convention, on 5 January 1998. Similarly, in 1997, actual allocation was Rs. 44 billion, whereas the total expenditure rose to Rs. 46.6 billion, and for the year 1998, the allocation is Rs. 44 billion, but the actual expenditure, up to now, exceeds Rs. 56.2 billion. Recently, the government allocated Rs. 47 billion for the fiscal year 1999. These amounts do not reflect the money collected, for defence expenditures, under the government's defence levy.

Casualties

On the other hand, several thousands of rural Sinhalese youths who joined the Sri Lankan security forces, as an alternate opportunity to solve their unemployed status, have lost their lives. The leader of the opposition, Ranil Wickremasinghe, said in parliament, on October 10, that, since the war resumed in 1995, the Sri Lankan Army (SLA) had lost 11,548 and 23,057 wounded. During the period of 1983 to 1988, the SLA lost 1,187 killed and 843 wounded, between 1989 and 1994, total of 2,679 troops were

killed and 5,565 wounded. Up to date the government had failed to contradict these figures and provide any new set of figures, regarding the SLA casualties.

More than 27,000 army deserters were reported in the national media, which clearly indicates that, in the midst of the Sri Lankan armed forces, reliance on the armed campaign is a subject for a serious contest and by deserting, the army personnel had given a serious warning to the government, to stop the campaign forthwith, for a negotiated political settlement.

According to The Voice of Tigers' radio broadcast of 28 November 1998, the total LTTE cadres martyred since 1982, to date, is 13,233.

On top of all these losses, government troops and the Tamil militants, nearly 60,000 civilians have died since the outbreak of the ethnic conflict in 1979. Other than the ethnic conflict, when the Janata Vimukti Perumuna's (JVP) insurrection started in 1971 April, nearly 15,000 Sinhalese youths were killed mercilessly and again between 1988-90, nearly 50,000 Sinhalese youths were hunted down

and killed by the security forces, who were alleged, active JVP members.

North and Eastern provinces are under the Emergency rule, since April 1971, except for a few irregular brief respites. Nearly a thousand Tamils are held captive incommunicado, without any indictment, in the make-shift detention centers, at several army facilities in the North and Eastern provinces, under emergency regulations, considered an extra-legal extension of the supreme law. Nearly 1,500 Tamils youths languish in several high security prisons, throughout the country, arrested under suspicion and held under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), the worst draconian law, ever adopted in any civilized country. Despite international human rights groups' condemnations, reports continue to emerge regularly of disappearances and extra judicial killings.

In real sense, the North and Eastern provinces are under a diarchical rule, administered, on one side by the Sri Lankan armed forces and on the other side, by the LTTE, horrendous situation that places the people in constant dilemma, unable to serve the

two masters satisfactorily, for their very survival.

Prabakaran in his address has stressed, "Is Chandrika's government prepared to take a bold step to deal with the immediate essential problems of our people and resume political negotiations in a congenial climate of peace and goodwill. If not, the possibility for peace and a peaceful negotiated political settlement to the ethnic conflict will become remote. -If such change does not take place, Sinhala chauvinism will bear the responsibility for creating the concrete historical conditions for the birth of an independent Tamil state".

LTTE's Offer

Accordingly, Prabakaran has said that, in case, his offer is not made use of, they will get back to their demand of a separate state. This means, presently, Prabakaran and LTTE are not going to consider the issue of "a separate state of Tamil Eelam" when they sit down with the Government's representatives to negotiate about peace. This offer directly coming from the Tiger leader, therefore, the Government should not hesitate to grab and make perpetual peace, a reality. ●

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At a Century's End Closing Remarks on the National Question

Dayan Jayatilleka

The National Question, as I understand it, concerns and comprises of the relations within a state formation, between nations and the state, and therefore with each other.

There is a faintly discernible parallel, which needs to be theoretically worked out, with the contradiction between the forces and the relations of production. Just as forces of production come into conflict with relations of production, nations seem to come into conflict with the existent framework of their relations with the State and therefore with each other. Therefore these relations are not permanent, and the National Question 'you always have with you'.

Endless as the war may seem, it is the Tamil National Question in its modern sense that is the oldest political question in the country. It may be argued that it is one of the two oldest political features or phenomena in the island, the other being universal franchise.

The Tamil National Question is not only the oldest, but also the most fundamental or 'deepest' political problem. The other major one, the Constitutional Question, that of the Executive Presidency versus the Westminster model, is not only of far more recent vintage, it is also to do with the form of Government rather than with the surstructure of the state. The National Question is, however, bound up with the questions of the form, structure and 'extent' or reach of the State. These are:

- (1) One state or two independent ones (secessionism)?
- (2) One state but more political space at the periphery, different relations with the centre? (devolution/autonomy)?
- (3) One state, but consisting of two or more states sub-units (federalism)? One state but consisting of two or more roughly equivalent states in a loose overarching relationship (confederalism)?

Now that the issue of the funda-

mental class nature of state power (the question of revolution), is no longer - and not yet - on the agenda, the Tamil National Question becomes the most fundamental problem in that it calls into question the basic shape of the state.

The debate on the Tamil National Question has so far been characterised by mirror images, by symmetrical claims of victim-hood, by historicist deviations. Both Tamil and Sinhala sides have resolutely remained prisoners of the past. What we need is to analyse the situation from a problem-solving perspective, one that is, finally, policy-prescriptive.

Quadraphenic Country

'Sinhalese are a majority with a minority complex' (Leslie Goonawardene) while 'Tamils are a minority with a majority complex' (K. M. de Silva as cited by Michael Roberts). True, but in fact the reality is even more dialectical. The Sinhalese have both a majority and a minority consciousness ('we are 76%' and 'we Sinhalese have nowhere else to go') while the Tamils too have both a minority and a majority consciousness ('we are an oppressed minority' and 'we have over 50 million brethren'). In short two national consciousnesses which are each dualistic.

Each nation's identity is schizoid. Two schizoid nations add up to a picture of what the British rock band The Who, titled their famous 1970's album after: Quadrophonia (i.e. quadruple schizophrenia). The phenomenon of multiple personality disorder is well known in psychology.

The Tamils will settle for nothing less than federalism (of a loose sort). The Sinhalese cannot afford to grant federalism. Indeed they can less afford to grant it than to suffer the consequences of its non-granting. The latter is less risky. A centralised state is needed for safeguarding an embattled sovereignty and for social interventions. Sinhala views have to be

taken into account if any ethnic accord is not to be a settlement under siege; i.e. if it is to be durable.

The Sinhalese - and the island as a whole, or the Lankan state as a whole - cannot afford to grant more than a full blooded (augmented) provincial autonomy i.e. '13th Amendment plus' - which the Tamils will not accept. Thus, there will be a permanent 'deficit'. This deficit can be sought to be reduced, but never eliminated. Reduced by means of a trade off: more powers for smaller (i.e. provincial) unit(s) or vice versa.

But the powers in a trade off will either be too few for the Tamils or too dangerous for the Sinhalese. Similarly the unit will always be too small for the Tamils or too big for the Sinhalese. Thus the Tamil ethnic/ National question can never be resolved.

It can only be addressed and managed i.e. partly co-opted, partly accommodated, partly contained.

Much will have to be left to the vagaries of the electoral marketplace (i.e. what the Tamil voters/parties can extract from the Sinhala parties/candidates). Conjuncture is (almost) all.

Geo-strategic continuum:

The Longest Durce

The jury is still out - and one suspects will remain so for quite some time - on the Continuity vs Change debate on Lanka's ethnic question (and ethnicity in general). Is the ongoing war sourced in the modern era, i.e. is ethnonationalism a quintessentially modern phenomenon or construct? Or does its roots run back through millennia? Or is it a combination of the two - and if so, what is that specific articulation of change and continuity?

The continuity thesis has been propounded for the most part, by the Sinhala chauvinistic writers - and their historicist version has been justly faulted. However, a cooler geo-political view, in the best Western realistic tradition of international relations, would also yield a picture of a strong patterning in the tapestry of the island's history; a patterning in which the preponderant motif has been rise and retrenchment of marvellous developmental civilisations at the hands of military invasions from the Northern plain. (The indispensable text on the island's history is Prof K M de Silva's 'History of Sri Lanka' 1981)

These incursions have had sev-

eral variants. They have been launched either from across the horizon i.e. by this or that Dravidian power centre, or by the descendants of the Tamil settlers in the North of the island. Sometimes there has been collusion between the two; sometimes contention. Sometimes the invasions from across the North have been by either of the Tamil players (indigenous or South Indian) autonomous of the other.

There is, significantly, another variant: the project or resultant of the military thrusts has, at times, shifted from incursion/invasion to the establishment of Northern domination over the island. (It is during one such effort that there were raids on Panadura!).

Thus, ethnicity apart, the geo-political pattern is clear:

- 1) A constant (or constantly recurrent) military threat to the South (or the Greater South, since we are speaking of the Anuradhapura period as well) emanating from the North (or the Greater North, encompassing South India).

- 2) The permanent potential and recurrent phenomenon of Northern invasion i.e. from a Southern vantage point, 'invasion from above' (and often 'from without'); from a Northern vantage point, a downward thrust.

- 3) The Southern developmental civilisations always had this Sword of Damocles over their heads.

It is this long persistent geo-political pattern that renders intelligible not only Prabhakaran but the strategic responses of Jayewardene and Premadasa: the former, deploying the Far North (IPKF) against the Near North (Tamil Eelanism/LTTE) and Premadasa, the reverse.

Both were attempts to exploit the contradictions between the two Norths, breaking up/pre-empting a Northern bloc or compact. Both efforts succeeded at the highest cost - Rajiv Gandhi and Ranasinghe Premadasa. But was a greater historical cost averted, by these costs at the highest level?

This geo-strategic pattern was re-activated, not by Arunachalam, Ponnambalam, or Amirthalingam, as the primitivistic Sinhala chauvinistic ideologues claim - but specifically and precisely by Velupillai Prabhakaran. The reason is simple: the geo-political pattern is one of military invasion, of

warfare. Not politics, Parliamentary arithmetical 'blackmail' (as the chauvinists put it), constitutional lobbying or ideology or even economic subversion. It is the enormous historic achievement of Prabhakaran that he reactivated that process and pattern. (A loosely analogous point has been made by 'Taraki', some years ago in the Lanka Guardian, referring to the traditions, largely Indian, of Dravidian militarism and contextualising Prabhakaran/LTTE against that backdrop. The point I seek to make is different and differently focused i.e. on this island's military history.)

The politics in the political economy of development

Development is not only uneven, it also tends to be unevenly perceived.

Ernest Gellner and Tom Nairn have registered and amplified the point that the unevenness of capitalist development generates/regenerates ethnic identities and consciousness. While agreeing with this thesis, my own argument is slightly different, namely that even policies consciously aimed at 'evening up' development, even policies that materially do so, can be perceived as ethnically loaded. Furthermore such perceptions can generate responses which derail the development process.

Development policies must be fashioned in such a way that they anticipate and pre-empt conflicts which may undermine the development process and of course address and alleviate those conflicts that do so/threaten to do so. Such conflicts are not only socio-economic and spatial (class/caste/region), but also those of identity and identity driven consciousness. These include ethnic, religious, cultural identities; collective identities of a cross class/non class kind.

Development cannot be identity-blind, because in a multi-ethnic, multi-religious society with a majority community, the perception of development is not always identity blind. If development is likely to be perceived as identity-laden, then surely development policy planning must be identity-sensitive.

Of these identities the most important from a development point of view are those upon which collective mobilisation with a significant potential for organised violence can take place.

(Gender is obviously is not one such).

Development policies must therefore be evaluated for such conflict potential before they are deemed sustainable. This is specially so in a society such as Sri Lanka in which the minorities - in contrast to the majority - draw on religious systems whose myths place a high premium on violent forms on self sacrifice and martyrdom.

In a polity in which the state is not perceived as neutral as between the communities and is seen to have inscribed within it, the dominance of any one community (ethnic, religious or a combination), then the development programmes of the state run the risk of being viewed with circumspection if not suspicion by the non-hegemonic communities. The private sector is the mirror image of this. Thus in a multi-ethnic society, all economics is - or risks being perceived as - ethnoeconomics.

Development strategy has therefore to be definitely a matter of political economy. And the 'political' in political economy in any multi-ethnic society is fundamentally the management of the national/nationalities question(s). It is a question of a 'development contract' or 'compact' which entails, in the first instance, a negotiation with the primary 'identity blocs' (i.e. communities with conflict potential) - which means negotiations with the given, organically evolved dominant factions (leaderships) of those blocs. In short a 'united front from above'. At a latter stage, when the development process and consciousness have matured and when the former has provided a material basis for such differentiation, a policy of a united front from below may be adopted, reaching out to people as poor, have-nots etc. The first stage cannot be skipped over and development cannot proceed unmediated to an undifferentiated people - because such a people exist only in the abstract, while the 'premises from which we begin are not arbitrary ones, not dogmas, but real premises from which abstraction can be made only in the imagination. They are the real individuals, their activity and their material conditions of life, including those which they find already in existence and those produced by their activity'. (The German Ideology - Marx and Engels)

The Arrival of Sonia as BJP Bites the Dust

T N Gopalan

In a stunning blow to the BJP's prestige and morale, the party was trounced in three of the four states which went to polls in November.

And Congress under Mrs. Sonia Gandhi was the victor in all the three states. The Congress did lose though in Mizoram in the North Eastern region, but then it is a small state with its own peculiar features and so the developments there rarely affect the political situation in the country as a whole.

The most important message from the elections is that Sonia Gandhi has at last arrived, perhaps in her own right, and it is her strategies which should dictate the future course of the Indian politics.

The drubbing that the BJP received in Delhi, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh has astonished even the most ardent of the Congress supporters.

While the exit polls and most opinion surveys did indicate that the party would stand to lose in both Delhi and Rajasthan, it was tipped to make it in Madhya Pradesh vanquishing the ruling Congress there. (Though one opinion poll did predict victory for the Congress there too and some others talked of inconclusive results.)

Such predictions did make the BJP jittery, but it tried to put on a brave face, saying after all it was perhaps anti-incumbency factor at work. If the ruling BJP in Delhi and Rajasthan was going to be defeated, it was going to turn the tables on the Congress at Madhya Pradesh.

And more important, Madhya Pradesh is a much bigger state than the other two sending as it does 42 MPs to the parliament. Put together Rajasthan and Delhi send less MPs.

In the circumstances it was argued that "it's nothing more than anti-in-

cumbency. People just unhappy with their respective state governments are voting them out. Even though we do feel bad that our own governments too should not have come up to the expectations of the people, we'll take it in our stride. Anyway in the trade-off we only stand to gain..."

Right through the run-up to the polls everyone from Prime Minister Vajpayee downwards took pains to insist whatever the outcome, the polls could not be termed as a referendum on the performance of the BJP-led coalition.

They were after all acutely aware of the lack-lustre reign, of the way things were drifting beyond control, of the general state of discontent and of the fact that the Hindu bomb had not really excited the Hindu electorate to a point where they are willing to forgive the rulers for their other omissions and commissions. To put it simply, a big defeat was staring the BJP high command in its face and it was readying itself to face the eventuality.

But none was prepared for the sheer scale of the electoral disaster which hit the BJP. Of the 197 Assembly seats in Rajasthan, the Congress bagged as many as 150 seats, leaving the BJP a paltry 33 and in Delhi itself 51 of the 69 seats went the Congress way, the BJP having to be content with a mere 15 - a humiliating rout by any standards.

Only in Madhya Pradesh the Congress juggernaut wobbled a bit. It bagged 172 seats against the 119 of the BJP. Still the victory in the largest of the three states which went to polls was the sweetest of all for the Congress, and terribly bitter for the BJP.

In both Rajasthan and Delhi the Congress was storming back to power after a decade. In Delhi especially the

Congress was thought to have been consigned to the margins permanently. What with the memory of the horrendous anti-Sikh riots of 1984 still vivid in that community's mind and the culprits yet to be brought to book no one would have imagined even six months ago that it could recapture the people's imagination.

The India Today, a leading English weekly, generally pursuing a pro-BJP line came out with a screaming cover story a week before the polls, UNFIT TO GOVERN - "As the BJP faces a rout in the state elections, its ability to rule comes under scrutiny, reviving prospects of a mid-term poll." It also carried an opinion poll which pointed to such a rout.

One of its editors, a frothing right-wing commentator, summed it all up, after narrating the various instances of bungling by the BJP regime, "Vajpayee was a great communicator. He could sell any idea, any dream.

Tragically he lacked the audacity. He got bogged down in minutiae, pettiness, intrigues and plain incompetence. The mandate was squandered.

The man India awaited is now a man waiting to depart." The anguish of such hard-core supporters is all too understandable. From the time it came to power in March last, the Vajpayee regime has been lurching from one crisis to another without any let up whatsoever.

Barring that dubious achievement of exploding nuclear bombs in Pokhran in May last, there is nothing much to show up for its track-record, on the positive side, that is.

Easily it is the inflation, skyrocketing prices, which seem to have turned the tide against the BJP. Especially the much talked about hike in onion prices on the eve of the elections had angered the electorate no end in the northern region where onion is almost a staple food item.

That apart Delhi itself reeled under recurrent power-shortage and near-complete break-down of law and order. Sensing there could be danger ahead, in a belated move, the BJP high command chose to replace an apparently complacent and callous Sahib Singh Verma as the Chief Minister by a more suave and media-savvy Sushma Swaraj. But the resulting factional bickering showed the party in an uglier light.

And in Rajasthan the BJP could

simply not reap a nuclear harvest. the people there were not taken in by the pyrotechnics, they were more concerned with their day-to-day problems. Not that the Congress could deliver the goods. But simply they have had enough of the BJP's divisive agenda which, while only serving to stir up more troubles, has nothing else to offer by way of better governance or economic progress.

Rajasthan has figured in the national newspapers time and again gang-rapes and the politician-criminal nexus. With no other option but the Congress to fall back upon, the voters have done so, overwhelmingly.

If that is so how could Digvijay Singh could be returned to power in M.P? Is it the case that he is a paragon of virtue or he had provided an eminently likeable administration? Some talk about some innovations on the grass-roots level democracy and some populist measures.

Yet others would like to believe that the verdict is a resounding slap on the Hindutva forces. "The central message from the electorate is that

India and its people will not be swayed by the politics of hatred and bigotry. That genuine secularism and peace are non-negotiable articles of faith and that militarism, as reflected by the nuclear explosions and its jingoistic aftermath, is not inherent in the Indian psyche. Some sections of the country, notably the well-off middle classes who cavil and complain about everything while sucking up the benefits that the system has to offer, may subscribe to these pernicious agenda, but the mass of the people, even when they are crushed under the burden of absurdly high prices, will not be shaken from these moorings. Their faith in democratic processes remains unshakeable and these are the people who came out to vote once again last week. "

The argument is that the BJP represents everything that is antithetical to the idea of India and conversely, the Congress, for all its crimes and misdemeanours, its stupidity and arrogance, represents the larger Indian reality.

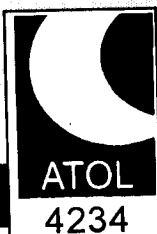
The Congressman can be accused of hubris, corruption and even ineffi-

ciency, but the party's ideology and culture have always been inclusive, an aggregate of every aspect and diversity of Indian life. Whenever it has deviated from that path, it has paid a heavy price: Its flirtation with right-wing Hindutva during Narasimha Rao's regime cost it the elections after five years of unprecedented and path-breaking economic progress. The voters were simply unimpressed with the story of liberalisation because they had seen the Congress jettison its, and the country's, sacred values.

Such an argument does have a modicum of truth, but there is a lot more to Congress defeat under Rao and its revival under Sonia. If people punish a party for swerving from secularism, what explains the Congress defeat in 1967, 1977 or 1989? And why would people vote in BJP government in so many states and plump for it in so many seats spread all over the country in the last Lok Sabha elections?

A dissatisfied electorate, first and foremost concerned with their day-to-day problems, try one party after

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(continued from page 22)

another in sheer desperation.

And there is a lot of scope for the charisma factor among a gullible people like the Indians.

And so more a plausible explanation for the BJP's rout would be that its budget failed miserably, the situation only aggravated by global recession and this was compounded by the way the poor Prime Minister was buffeted around by the likes of Jayalalitha, his image thus taking a battering that could never have been anticipated even by the more sceptical among the observers. The able Prime Minister stood exposed as someone who was unable to do anything decisive on any front, a prisoner of his allies on the one hand and all the time having to fend off the Sangh Parivaar breathing down his neck.

With the very same media which projected him as the leader for whom the nation was waiting for too long badly mauling him, the word went around even to the remotest corners.

Add to this the way the RSS hardliners were trying to somehow or other promote the Hindutva agenda and the arrival of Sonia Gandhi. As Sonia began assuming complete control of the Congress, those sections which had deserted the party only nine months ago started coming back.

As Mr. Krishna Ananth, a noted commentator, told this correspondent, "The power-brokers who thought the Congress was a sinking ship came back with their tails between their legs. They could not be happy with a party like the BJP. Besides under Sonia the old upper castes-Dalits-Muslims axis stands reinvigorated. The BJP with its exclusivist agenda can never hope to become Congressized as many of its supporters were predicting it would.

That Sonia has been restrained in her hour of triumph and is not in a tearing hurry to topple the Vajpayee government by roping in the disparate elements who would like to do so at the earliest for their own reasons do offer some comforting picture, of a relatively decent political scenario.

For a nation that would be burdened with a population of nearly a billion as it steps into the next millennium, millions of whom would remain mired in poverty, such cosmetic changes do not offer much hope. ●

Mujib's Killers Brought to Justice at Last

Ramesh Gopalakrishnan

23 years after the mass murder of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his family members, Bangladesh experienced a defining moment in its history last month when the killers of the president-liberator of that country were finally tried and sentenced to death. A Dhaka court, after an 148-day-long trial, condemned 15 of the accused to death by an open firing squad. All of them are former army officers. Only three of them - Lt Col Syed Farooq Rahman, Lt Col Sultan Shariar Rashid Khan and Lt Col Muhinuddin Ahmed are in custody and the others were tried in absentia. The only civilian to be acquitted was Teheruddin Thakar, who was state minister for information under the assassinated leader. Three lower ranking army men also acquitted were: Abdul Wahad Zoarder, Marfat Ali Shah and Abdul Hashem Mirdha.

Bangladesh wrote yet another chapter of its bloody history on August 15, 1975. That morning, the Sun dawned blackish red. President Mujib, Begum Mujib, three sons - Sheikh Kamal, Sheikh Jamal and 10-year-old Russel (named after the famous British philosopher), Rosy Jamal and Sultana Kamal (wives of the two sons), Mujib's younger brother Sheikh Nasser, one cabinet colleague, many relatives and close political allies were gunned down. A total of 26 persons were massacred as army men and security guards burst into Mujib's residence in the pre-dawn attack and pumped bullets into all and sundry.

The only survivors of the family where Mujib's daughters Sheikh Hasina and Sheikh Rehana as they were out of the country at the time of the attack. The two had to spend out decades in exile.

Well, other countries in the sub-continent have witnessed assassinations starting from that of Mahatma Gandhi. And sometimes, the assassins have gone scot free, in what could well have become a familiar legal drama. Yet,

in Bangladesh, there was not even the familiar legal drama. For 21 long years, no initiative was taken to bring the Mujib killers or the murderers of four other top national leaders inside the Dhaka central jail, the same year, to trial. This was because the murders formed part of a coup d'etat which established another rule of another set of laws in Bangladesh.

Yes, the new government of Khan-dekar Mushtaque Ahmed, who could have been one of the accused but for his death several years ago, gave the assassins immunity from prosecution by promulgating an infamous ordinance. Successive governments abided by the ordinance and let the killers go scot free till Sheikh Hasina came to power in 1996 and repealed the ordinance in a determined effort bring the killers of her father and family members and others to justice.

Even the First Information Report on the murder of the president and his family and friends could be recorded in a police station only after the repeal of the immunity-ordinance.

The genesis of the assassination lay in the birth of Bangladesh: those for liberation led by Sheikh Mujib and the army sections which saw the need for Pakistanisation of the country were against each other. The president was almost too liberal, and the fundamentalist sections wanting him out backed the army brass ready to kill him. The president could not out-manoeuvre the army brass out of office and the latter took swift revenge on him for liberating the country with India's help. The successive governments in Bangladesh ruled almost by martial law with some of them even giving the Mujib killers plum diplomatic posts abroad!

Eleven of the accused sentenced to death are still abroad and the present government has requested the Interpol to locate them. Another accused, Major Bazlul Huda, was extradited, soon after the verdict, from Thai-

land where he had been lodged in prison for shop-lifting in Bangkok. The fugitives are reportedly hiding in various countries including the United States, Canada, Germany, Libya and Zimbabwe and some of them are on the run, according to the Bangladesh government.

The deep chasm that the assassination created in Bangladesh politics is responsible for its bitter and traumatic history. The no-holds-barred tussle for power between the two Begums, Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia, is well-known and the extent of the bitterness between the two is beyond grasp. One of the women had lost her entire family and the other her husband, Zia-Ur-Rahman, the martial law administrator, in political coups, but the two are unrelenting in their quest for power. At one stage, the Commonwealth had to step in and monitor the elections held two years ago and the transfer of power from Khaleda to Hasina.

For Begum Khaleda, Sheikh Hasina is no more than an Indian stooge, like her father. Khaleda's Bangladeshi Nationalist Party (BNP) led a massive demonstration against Sheikh Hasina's regime on the very day the verdict against the Mujib killers were passed. The BNP termed the verdict politically motivated and dubbed Sheikh Hasina as an autocrat. All agreements made by Sheikh Hasina with India are documents of servility and submission, according to the BNP.

The seventies certainly were a decade of suspicion and intrigue for the subcontinent. On June 25, 1975, Mrs Indira Gandhi had clamped the infamous emergency in India. Reports spoke of her having heard the deteriorating situation in Bangladesh even in February that year. Sheikh Mujib was fast losing control over the situation, the nickname Bangabandhu given to him was fast giving way to abuses from political enemies. Mujib had responded to this threat using a totalitarian tactic: he pronounced Bangladesh to be an one-party state. This led to proliferation of news reports about plots and conspiracies to eliminate him. Of course, Mujib never believed them. Even when Mrs Indira Gandhi sent a personal emissary to meet him, Mujib told him that those getting ready to revolt against him were "his own children". The emissary was R N Rao, India's chief intelligence

officer, and he reported this back to a worried Indira Gandhi.

The assassins had chosen their day by accident or utmost care. August 15, 1975 was Independent Day in India which was to renew its now-very-tired tryst with destiny. Unlike now, India in 1975 was still young and was facing its first experience with dictatorship. Some of its tallest leaders including Jayaprakash Narayan were in jail and Mrs Gandhi was getting ready to address her customary Red Fort speech when she was informed of the ghastly coup. A stunned Mrs Gandhi got convinced that similar forces could get at her and went on to deliver a tough and sombre speech. The Emergency was unrelenting, and two years later, she lifted the restrictions and lost the elections and, three years still on, she even recaptured power. However, her assassination came at a proverbial moment on October 31, 1984, by her own guards seething with anger over the army action on the Golden Temple of the Sikhs at Amritsar earlier that year.

History had a way of repeating itself, said Georg Hegel, and added dis-

ciple-turned-rebel Karl Marx: "the first time as tragedy and the second time as farce". In the subcontinent, one could well say that the genres of farce and tragedy coexist in political life. Every contemporary assassination in the subcontinent is a tragedy, despite the belated realisation sometimes that the assassinated leader could well have been a tyrant or on his or her way to becoming a tyrant. The wounds of the tragedy almost never heal in a climate of suspicion and hatred and a new politics of atonement, thus, is nowhere in sight. However, the elements of farce add a new dimension to the whole macabre event of assassination: the real history of people, of their drudgery, their misplaced hopes, their fears, suspicions and insecurities - remain the same as ever. And the cycle infinitely plods on. This is what a farce is: it is as if the whole thing never happened or is waiting to happen once again, almost anew, to another set of leaders leading this hopeless equatorial region of the earth, its faceless millions engrossed in daily toil when they are not escaping from ethnic strifes and cyclones. ●

BOOK REVIEW

DISCRIMINATION WITH REASON ?

I appreciate Dr S Narapalasingham's comprehensive and scholarly review of "Discrimination with Reason?" in the November issue of Tamil Times, but hasten to make a clarification.

The book covers discrimination and reverse discrimination in the United States, India and Malaysia and, therefore, does not deal with "Standardisation".

As I have stated in my article titled "Standardisation Debate Revisited - Clarification of Affirmative Action" published in The Island (Colombo) of 27 October 1998, "What was called Standardisation in Sri Lanka was an attempt to equate the performance of different linguistic groups (in effect, ethnic quotas based on the ratio of student populations) which is a concept totally alien to American affirmative action and to the American Constitution. Affirmative action permits various disabilities and characteristics to be taken into ac-

count in deciding on admission or recruitment. e.g., if a student is from a severely disadvantaged school (such as, in the Sri lankan context, ill-equipped, or ill-staffed school in a remote village or estate) this handicap could be taken into account, i.e., such a student could be selected ahead of a student from an elite school (such as, in the Sri Lankan context, Royal, Visakha, Trinity or Jaffna Hindu) who may have had a marginally higher test score. On the other hand, to discriminate solely on the basis of ethnicity (such as, in the Sri lankan context, to discriminate between Sinhalese medium and Tamil medium student of Royal College, as was done under "Standardisation") is not affirmative action but plain racism."

Devanesan Nesiah

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BOOK REVIEW

'Scarred Minds': An Insider's Story

Review by Marwaan Macan-Markar

Colombo has been a comfortable place to live in. And I make that observation in relation to some of the other villages and towns scattered throughout the crescent of the war zone in the north and the east. For it is only in the capital that such a spectacle as this could have been possible: the pulse of night life barely skipping a beat soon after a battle that resulted in over 1,500 young men being mowed down in 36 hours. Conduct a survey of the night clubs in the city and you would realise this. Recall the scenes on the streets during the week of September 28 and you would have more proof. And daytime was no different. The cityscape throbbed with a festive energy. It was something that would have hardly been the case between Pottuvil and Point Pedro, between Trincomalee and Talaimannar. For those who live in such areas would have had no respite from coping with the footsteps of war walking through their lives. For them, the freedoms of Colombo would have been but a dream during that period.

This, of course, is not something novel, this distinction. Anyone who has followed the tragic course of this war would have noticed how time and again this disparity would have been played out. It has assumed the proportions of a cliché, in fact. And naturally, it would have been understandable if one came across people who chose to migrate to the comforts of the capital from their scarred homes, their destroyed neighbourhoods. It would have been a decision needing little explanation, such a flight. History has offered us ample testimony. If not from Jaffna to Colombo, then from Batticaloa to Paris.

There are, however, those who, despite the temptations of such comforts, despite the ample chances that

have come their way to move, have chosen not to. There are men and women who have gone against the wave of such a tide. People who have made a conscious choice to remain in their dismal surroundings and pursue their calling. Heroes, in a sense. And they do so at tremendous risk to them and their families. And among this rare breed is a man such as Daya Somasundaram, the only psychiatrist in the Jaffna peninsula.

Those who have come into contact with Somasundaram in the north would, no doubt, have appreciated his decision. For where else could a man with his professional bent be most wanted? For Jaffna is, of all localities in this country, the most scarred, the most destroyed of places. And given his unique position, he would have been like an island in a sea of trauma. But to many, the heroism of Somasundaram would have been unknown. A fact quite understandable.

Yet that, I feel, has every possibility of changing, now that this academic from the Jaffna University's faculty of medicine has brought out a book of the world he lived and worked in. For *Scarred Minds: The Psychological Impact Of War On Sri Lankan Tamils* is an insider's tale of tremendous sensitivity. It lays bare the wounds that have accumulated in the geography of the minds and the hearts of hundreds of people. It threads together the narratives of ordinary men and women, boys and girls who have had to endure the sufferings of a war that has gone out of control.

Within the pages of *Scarred Minds*, then, you come across those like Mrs. T, for instance, aged 65. She was in an excitable state when admitted to the psychiatric unit. "The history was that she had been 'normal' up to 10

days back when she had been travelling by boat from Delft in May, 1985. The boat had been stopped by navy personnel and all those aboard had been cut up with swords and knives. She had seen her son and close kinsmen cut to death in front of her and had herself received serious cut injuries."

Then there is also the middle-aged engineer whose three children and mother-in-law had been forced out of their homes by soldiers and shot dead on the street. "He spent his days in deep sorrow with attacks of crying spells, the pangs of grief buffeting him like waves. His mind was preoccupied with thoughts of his children. He complained of loss of purpose in life with suicidal ruminations. His nights were particularly bad with recurrent nightmares about his children and their suffering, specially his pretty daughter. The soldier had lifted up her frock and shot her through the groin. She could not walk and had to drag herself along the road and finally bled to death for lack of medical attention.

And there is, further, the account of Mr. K, aged 22, who had been a helper in a local militant group. "After his group had been proscribed, he had been arrested by the dominant group. According to his history, he had been tortured for two weeks and detained for three months. He had been beaten all over the body with hands, legs, knees, poles, iron rods and stepped on till he lost consciousness. He had been hung by his two thumbs and also upside down by his ankles and beaten on his soles ... Two needles had been driven through his fourth finger."

They are but a few of the people that Somasundaram has encountered, treated and written about; victims of a cruel political tide that has battered their lives. But this book, though, does not limit itself to spotlight such individual narratives only. It goes beyond. It uses such accounts to build up a case that is, essentially, a powerful critique against the war. It attempts to develop an argument from its early pages to show why those who have taken to the gun to resolve their political differences have often ignored what Veena Das, in her foreword to the book, has identified as

the 'excluded third party' in the conflict, the ordinary people caught between the fighting forces; people who literally have had little say against the bullets raining down on them. After all, what they have wrought - those who subscribe to a violent creed - have, in Somasundaram's words, contributed significantly to the permanent pain of this 'third party'.

As he puts it: "We are not, after all, dealing with a disease that enters the body as an alien organism and then leaves it after running its course. We are dealing with a situation in which the conditions of violence have led to chronic feelings of fear, despair, pain and grief apart from functional impairments of a wider variety. Therefore it is only through discussions with all sections of the population including members of militant groups, their supporters and ordinary civilians caught between the different warring groups, that a new way of resolving the problems may emerge."

Furthermore, given that this work in the main is the product of an aca-

ademic, it does include sections that go beyond a simple chronicle of personal narratives and enters the realm of scientific analysis. Drawing from a rich literature of psychology and psychiatry that exists in the international domain, Somasundaram sets about explaining and interpreting the state of mind of his society. It is here, too, that he offers hope to those with broken lives; he suggests manners in which they can cope with what has been so that they may move on.

Where he stands in relation to the militarisation of Jaffna is a theme that runs through the course of this book. He has been troubled endlessly by it. Hence the armies of the Sri Lankan state and those of neighbouring India in the form of the peace-keeping force come across as oppressors, as the perpetrators of a score of repulsive acts; rape, for instance.

And the Tamils militant groups are not spared, either, for what they have wrought. They, too, come under Somasundaram's critical eye. And he writes of them in a manner that is courageous, stating what he knows with-

out resorting to the charade of an apologist. He writes with the spirit of a humanist. And in doing so, he conveys his own reading of their activities in a manner that has, till now, been only available in fragmented forms, in sporadic reports, by drawing upon his knowledge in the field of mental science.

During the LTTE-TELO clash in Jaffna, he says that "the militants were evidently in a disturbed state. They appeared glazed and not quite oriented, their grim faces darkened with eyes bloodshot and staring and their movements were stiff, jerky and mechanical and the speech terse. As they moved to pile up the bodies at road junctions and set them on fire, they were inhumanly cold, like automatons carrying out a prescribed action."

But before it reached such a boiling point, Scarred Minds spends some time delving into the early years of the Tamil militancy, the manner in which it became a draw among sections of the youth and, most impor-

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CRY THE BELOVED ISLAND

By Prof. Ernest Ariasingam Champion,
Perrysburg, Ohio, USA

I am a 71 year old Sri Lankan with many physical ailments including arthritis which makes walking very painful. But none of these hurt me as much as what my countrymen and women have done for the past fifteen years.

I left Sri Lanka in 1966 with my wife and children because I sensed the dark clouds approaching, but I never thought the dark clouds would remain so long hiding the beauty of this serene and bounteous land. A land lapped by the oceans and kissed by gentle breezes.

Yet the tragedy of it all is that we people of colour, Asian or African never thought about crossing the oceans in search of other lands to

conquer and subjugate, to exploit and even humiliate. We left that to the Europeans who gave us colonialism and slavery, two institutions which gave birth to racism as we came to know it. On the contrary we have over the years expended our energies, our money and our ingenuity in destroying each other, unable to share God's bounty equitably and with goodwill. We have destroyed cities and turned our young men and women into killers.

We have forgotten that we people of colour are the heirs to the legacy of three of the greatest statesmen of the twentieth century who by their lives and deeds saved their people even from foreign subjugation, gov-

the people who were forced to wear hoods and play the role of informant. And among them was a young woman. Here, in fact, is what a man who found himself before this hooded woman noticed on the day he was paraded before her. "I became very moved," he said, "when I saw the eyes peering through the sack were those of a woman and that she was crying."

These are then some of the situations that Scarred Minds has touched on to drive home a point that has for years been left on the margins: the psychological cost of this war. Its authority comes from the fact that it is a product of a man who has the kind of first hand experience, eye-witness accounts, that few have taken the trouble to chronicle and analyse. It is an insider's tale of a plague that has spread within the body of men, women and children. A tale that seeks to disturb. A tale that has the power of striking us in the solar plexus. So that we may know after all these years what it has been like to live in a land where the fire of fear still burns. ●

ernmental oppression or plain subjugation and purposeful humiliation and grinding poverty. I refer to Mahatma Gandhi, Dr Martin Luther King Junior and Nelson Mandela. The genius of the three men was that each saw clearly in their struggle that the most potent weapon of the weak in their battle against the mighty is the moral weapon. The gun is always the weapon of the weak.

Gandhi facing the might of the British Empire sat quietly by his spinning wheel preaching a gospel of non-violence realising that if the Indian people resorted to violence they would lose the high moral ground they occupied as the oppressed. Very early in his life in South Africa Gandhi facing the harsh cruelties of a racist South African government which was essentially a British administration, gave voice to words of wisdom which all minorities, for that matter all people, all governments would do well to remember. On one occasion a young Indian in South Africa protesting the harsh pass laws declared angrily "I will kill the first policeman who lays a hand on my wife." The young Gandhi got up and calmly told the young man "There are causes in this world for which I am prepared to lay down my life, but there is no cause on earth for which I am prepared to kill." I call this the distilled wisdom of the ages. The foresight of a man who saw clearly that his country must come out of this struggle with clean hands and heads upheld in the knowledge that the might of the British Empire had no weapons to fight against a people who held the high moral ground. The killings in India as in Sri Lanka started only after the British left and the Indians finally killed their great apostle of peace. It is said on one occasion during the British rule Gandhi was brought before the court charged with sedition. In a crowded courtroom as the accused was brought in the Judge of the Supreme Court rose from his bench in deference to the high moral stature of the accused.

In the end we saw the Union Jack being unfurled at a midnight hour in August 1947 and the Indian Tricolor rise in all its glory, a new nation had

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tantly, the kind of extreme clannishness that took hold, resulting in members of one organisation pledging "total and blind obedience". This, according to Somasundaram, resulted in the Tamil groups showing a greater amount of "intolerance, hatred and cruelty towards each other". And its effects on the civilians, the ones not involved in the tussle for power, the 'excluded third party', was severe. It could have been a matter of life and death. Of safety or suffering.

One of the most moving chapters of this book, though, was not written by Somasundaram; rather by Anna Doney, a clinical psychologist. And she opens up the world of torture, the manner in which this form of physical and mental pain was forced on civilians by, largely, the two armies that did control the peninsula over a period - the Sri Lankan forces and the Indian Peace Keeping Force. The LTTE, too, gets a mention here.

Doney also goes into the world of

been born with hardly a shot being fired. The great lesson to be learned is that the weak are not bereft of weapons to fight the mighty but they are not weapons wrought of iron but weapons that derive power from the human spirit in defence of good against evil.

When I came to the United States in 1970 I already knew a good part of American history, but what I did not realise was how bad race relations had been. I came at the tail end of the civil rights movement when the Civil Rights Bill had been passed which made segregation illegal and the Voting Rights Bill gave black people the right to vote without fear of intimidation or violence. However it is what I saw in documentaries and read in books about what actually happened for 200 years to black people I was amazed how they ever overcame the extreme deprivation and humiliation that slavery and racism brings.

The cruelties of slavery are well documented and as one reads through history one wonders whether like Lady Macbeth there will ever be water enough to wash the stain of slavery which America inherited. After slavery was abolished racism flourished. Black men were lynched for so much as looking at a white woman and the final act of lynching was to cut the genitals off the man hanging from the tree as though those genitals were a threat to the white race. Blacks had to sit in the back of the bus and use separate toilets in public rest rooms.

Then came the day when a poor seamstress Rosa Parks boarded a bus in Montgomery, Alabama and since the bus was empty took the first seat available. As the bus filled with white people the driver asked her to move to the back. She sat stubbornly weary and tired of years of humiliation. The driver summoned the police and she was arrested and taken to jail for violating the laws of segregation of Montgomery, Alabama. Word spread rapidly and the black community decided to take a stand and boycott the buses. But who would lead them? They knew the white establishment would destroy any black leaders and brand them as agitators and commu-

nists. It was then that the black community turned to a relatively unknown young preacher Dr Martin Luther King Junior and he reluctantly agreed. A meeting was called in one of the churches and poor black people flocked in large numbers. Looking at the documentary of what happened that night portrayed so vividly in the series "Eye on the Prize" I realised that once again God had given the moral weapon into the hands of the weak to smite the mighty. Martin Luther King's first words to the crowded church were "Our cause is just". Then he went on to say "If we are wrong the Constitution of the United States is wrong, if we are wrong the Supreme Court of the United States is wrong, if we are wrong God Almighty is wrong". With those few simple words he placed the whole civil rights movement on such a high moral plane and challenged anybody to prove him wrong.

More importantly he opened the door to well meaning white people to join him in a crusade of righteousness and many did. Some even paid with their lives. Well meaning Americans sitting in the comfort of their living rooms saw on television a battle of evil against good. Saw their country exposed to the world with all its warts and it was not a pleasant sight. Without raising the barrel of a gun even though some blacks were itching to do so Martin Luther King led his people to the "promised land" even though he himself did not get there. But before he died the world paid him homage by conferring on him the highest accolade with the Nobel prize for peace. America owes this great apostle of non-violence a great debt because as he himself once said "America should rise up and hold these truths as self evident that all men are created equal." He challenged America to live up to its creed recited each day by schoolchildren "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the republic for which it stands, one nation under God indivisible with liberty and justice for all."

Liberty and justice for all is a moral concept not easily killed by guns.

When Nelson Mandela finally walked out of his prison in Robyn Island, saints in heaven and on earth metaphorically held his hand as he walked out unbroken and proud.

For fifty years the racist regime in South Africa had crushed the human spirit by implementing the laws of apartheid. When the British left South Africa they left 90% of its people without the right to vote. The British therefore are as much culpable as the Afrikaners in the subjugation and humiliation of blacks, Asians and people of mixed origin in South Africa. Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan until the very end gave comfort and succour to this most vile and vicious system ever devised by man.

But as Nelson Mandela was sitting in jail and the years rolled by, 22 in all, he knew that his people poor and despised as they were held the high moral ground while the government of South Africa was slowly sinking into the morass of political and social infamy. They were expelled from the United Nations and the Olympic games. No nation would even play cricket with them. They were forced to carry their badge of shame, and many of them did so gladly, quite oblivious of the terrible fate that would befall their children if sanity did not prevail.

Alan Paton that great South African wrote a novel of the travails and fears of both black and white South Africans and gave as its title "Cry, the beloved country". Fortunately well meaning South African leaders such as DeKlerk realised their nation will perish in rivers of blood and released Mandela and gave the black people their birthright, the right to vote.

Today Mandela stands tall almost of mythical proportions. This son of a Chief held his high moral ground and led his people to the promised land.

It is one of the great ironies of history that when the British finally granted independence to the people of Ceylon, they took the high moral ground that the time had come for the people of Ceylon to be masters of their own destiny. But Great Britain once again as they did in South Africa left

(continued from page 28)

the minorities at the mercy of the majority believing that the majority would realise that their prosperity depends upon the morality of their actions towards the minorities. Sadly enough this did not come to pass. On the contrary succeeding Sinhala governments chose to alienate the minorities by appropriating to themselves all the power that was given to them. The final act being when the Bandaranayake Government passed the 'Sinhala only' Act. Rising in Parliament as a lone figure the late Dr Colvin R deSilva uttered the prophetic words "Mr Speaker one language two nations, two languages one nation".

When Velupillai Pirabakaran and his band of young men took up the gun in what they believed was an act of last resort in defence of a Tamil homeland, Tamils held their heads high because here were our youth finally challenging the might of the Sri Lankan government. There was released a genuine feeling of pride and Tamils from New York, California, London, Paris, Toronto, Sydney and Melbourne not only cheered but opened their purses and millions poured into the "movement" as it came to be known. The answer of the Sri Lankan government was not to negotiate but to crush what they believed was a challenge to the unity and well being of the country.

For a while we Tamils held the high moral ground because we were per-

ceived as the oppressed by the world outside. But then a day came when as with all revolutions the guns paid for by well meaning Tamils began to be trained not only against a common enemy but also against any and all voices of dissent. We began to kill our own and little by little those who could afford it began to leave. Doctors, engineers and teachers fled by the droves. Today the Tamils are not only an occupied people they are also without a middle class which is the backbone of any nation.

The legacy of Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Mandela have been forgotten and swept into the dust of history. Both sides have abandoned the high moral ground and opportunists and chauvinists have moved in. Will Chandrika Bandaran-ayake Kumaratunga have the courage to unite our people? Will Velupillai Pirabakaran ever realise that no amount of killing will take him and his people to the promised land? Will the Maha Sanga rise to its sacred duty and implement the great ideals of that great Prince of Peace the Lord Buddha? Will well meaning Sinhalese and Tamils finally say enough is enough? Will this blessed land return to its great glory? Will there ever be peace makers among Sinhalese and Tamils who can truly be called sons and daughters of God?

I lay awake at nights hoping for an answer, before this aching body of mine is turned into dust or will I die lamenting like Alan Paton "Cry the beloved country"?

Tamil Language Made Compulsory

The State government of Tamil Nadu in South India has announced its decision to give recognition only to those nursery and primary schools which taught the Tamil language as a subject. This step is regarded as a measure that would ensure that all children attending these institutions are taught the indigenous Tamil language.

Additionally, under the directive issued by the State government, the schools should teach subjects such as geography, history, mathematics and social studies through the medium of the Tamil language from the academic year 1999-2000.

In order to encourage nursery schools to adopt the Tamil language as the medium of instruction, the State government would reduce by 50 per cent the fee for recognition and also to obtain State assistance including the supply of text books free.

At present, those studying in unrecognised schools are not allowed to be admitted to recognised educational institutions. There would be no change in this practice. There are nearly 20,000 unrecognised nursery and primary schools in the State. Of these, the recognised institutions accounted only for 2,100.

In the State, there are 1,008 primary and middle schools where presently the Tamil language is not a subject of study and students were taught in English and in their mother tongue. In announcing the government's measure, the Chief Minister of the State, Mr M Karunanidhi said that steps would be taken to appoint language teachers in all these schools so that students could learn the Tamil language besides their mother tongue and English.

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MATRIMONIAL

Jaffna Catholic doctor seeks educated partner, with a good sense of humour, for son, 32, Ph.D. (Engineering) in employment in UK. Send details. M 1063 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna Hindu parents in US seek professionally qualified bride below 25 in UK or Sri Lanka for accountant son, 26, 6'. Send details. M 1064 c/o Tamil Times.

Tamil Auntie seeks kind and sympathetic professional groom less than 40, prepared to work in Malaysia, for Sri Lankan origin doctor niece, 36, working in Malaysia. Send horoscope details. M 1065 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna uncle seeks professional bride in UK for nephew, 29, M.Sc., (Computer Engineering) working as software engineer in UK, Mars eighth house. Reply with horoscope, details. M 1066 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna Tamil brother in Malaysia seeks professional or graduate partners in UK, Europe for sisters 38, 5'6" and 37, 5'8", both fair, beautiful, London educated in excellent employment in Malaysia. Send details. M 1067 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna Hindu parents seek doctor groom for their doctor daughter, 25, working in London. Please send horoscope, details. M 1068 c/o Tamil Times.

Professional uncle seeks for niece, doctor's daughter, 34, Executive, Insurance Company after University in Australia, innocent divorcee; partner, Hindu professionally qualified doctor, accountant or lawyer under 38. Willing move from Australia. Please forward horoscope, photograph. Will

be returned. Confidentiality assured. M 1069 c/o Tamil Times.

Hindu parents seek professional groom for fair, attractive daughter, B.Sc., 26 Canadian citizen, doing dentistry in US. Send horoscope, photo, details. M 1070 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna Hindu parents seek qualified bride for son, 32, computer software engineer in US. Mars eighth house. Send horoscope, details. M 1071 c/o Tamil Times.

Sri Lankan Hindu Tamil parents seek for their pretty daughter, 25, slim, medium complexioned, British born, British University graduate, Post Graduate training in teaching; professionally qualified groom of similar background, British born or British educated. Send details M 1072 c/o Tamil Times.

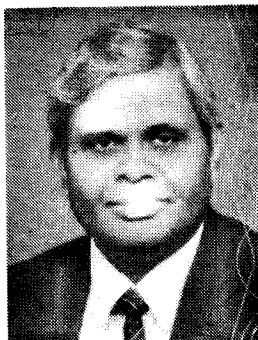
WEDDING BELLS

We congratulate the following couples on their recent wedding.

Vanathi daughter of Mr. & Mrs. K. Nithiananthan of 4a Syon Park Gardens, Osterley, Middx. TW7 5NB, UK and **Suriyakumaran** son of Mr. V. Nadarajah and the late Mrs. Kausala Nadarajah of 5/35 The Crescent, Homebush, NSW 2140, Australia on 28.11.98 at Brent Town Hall, Wembley, Middx. UK.

Sri Sundar son of Mr. & Mrs. A. Velupillai of 7 Oldfield Court, Ajax, Ontario L1T 3S6, Canada and **Suganniya** daughter of Mr. & Mrs. A. Sothinathan of 360 Frank Street, Apt 502, Ottawa, Ontario K2P 0Y2, Canada on 29.11.98 at Sri Ganesh Temple Hall, Richmond Hill, Ontario, Canada.

OBITUARIES



Mr. Thamboo Thuraisingham (Tom) (63), son of the late Mr. & Mrs. N. Thamboo of Urelu, Jaffna; beloved husband of Pathmasani; loving father of Naresh Arjuna and Dinesh Nagulan; father-in-law of Asha; brother of late Ethirmanasingham and Ratnasingham (Canada) passed away in London on 16th November 1998 and was cremated on 21st November.

The members of his family wish to thank all friends and relatives who attended the funeral, sent messages of sympathy and floral tributes and assisted them in several ways during the period of great sorrow. - 2 Fullers Avenue, Surbiton, Surrey KT6 7TE. Tel: 0181 391 9147.

Maragathavalli, beloved wife of the late P. Kanapadhipillai J.P., Attorney-at-law and N.P., Uduppiddy, Jaffna, Sri Lanka; beloved mother of Mahadeva (Colombo), Kamala (Zambia), Mahendran (Colombo), late Sarojini (Jaffna) and Gowri (Jaffna); loving mother-in-law of Triveni, Manikavasagar, Saradha, Dr. Keetheeswaranathan; sister of the late Ramalingam, the late Sivagurunathan, the late Subramaniam, the late Senathirajah, the late Mylvaganam, Mrs. B. Maheswaran (Colombo) and Mrs. M. Sankarakumaran (Kandy); sister-in-law of Mrs. M. Subramaniam (USA), Mrs. N. Mylvaganam (Jaffna), Mr. S. Maheswaran and Mr. C. Sankarakumaran passed away in Uduppiddy on 5th December 1998 and was cremated on 6th December.

The members of the 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. - Box 34939, Lusaka, Zambia. Tel: (01)224807.

IN MEMORIAM



In loving memory of **Mr. Karthigesu Balasingam**, Retired Station Master of 105 Palaly Road, Kanthermadam, Jaffna on the second anniversary of his passing away in Scarborough, Canada on 15th December 1996.

Greatly loved, deeply missed and always remembered by his beloved wife, children, daughters-in-law, son-in-law and grandchildren. - 5 Empringham Drive, Scarborough, Ontario M1B 3Y1, Canada.

Fifth Death Anniversary

Mrs. Gnanambikai Perumal Pillai



(4th July 1924 - 12th Dec. 1993)
Wife of late Dr. C. Perumal Pillai.

Five years have drifted by, since you were taken from our midst. Your loving care and gentle guidance still strongly missed. In your peace we find solace.

Your children, Ravi, Usha, Jeeva and Ranjit; sons-in-law Desmond and Michael; daughters-in-law Shanti and Vasuhi; grandchildren Rajesh, Shahila, Meera, Arun and Arjun.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Jan. 1 Full Moon; Feast of Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God.
Jan. 2 South London Tamil Welfare Group (SLTWG) Drop in. Tel: 0181 542 3285.

Jan. 7 SLTWG Women Front meets. Tel: 0181 542 3285.
Jan. 13 Eekathasi.
Jan. 14 Thai Pongal; Pirathosam.
Jan. 16 SLTWG Thai Pongal celebrations. Tel: 0181 542

3285.
Jan 17 Feast of St. Antony.
Jan. 21 Feast of Father Joseph Vaz; Sathurthi.
Jan. 22 Shashti.
Jan. 23 SLTWG Drop in.
Jan. 25 Feast of Conversion

of St. Paul.
Jan. 26 Karthigai.
Jan. 27 Eekathasi.
Jan. 29 Pirathosam.
Jan. 31 Full Moon; Thai Poosam; Feast of St. John Bosco.

AUSTRALIAN NEWSLETTER

Jaffna College Alumni Association, New South Wales. The tenth anniversary of the association was celebrated on 14th November 1998 with a Dinner-Dance, at the Ryde Civic Centre, Sydney. This year also marked the 175th anniversary of Jaffna College and it turned out to be a dual celebration.

The Alumni in Sydney were especially happy as the function coincided with the visit of Rt. Rev. Dr. S. Jebanesan, the Bishop of Jaffna and past Principal of Jaffna College. The proceedings commenced with a prayer followed by the welcome address by the President Dr. S. Satkunarajah. After welcoming the guests, he extolled the contribution of Jaffna College to the people of Jaffna and extended a special welcome to Rt. Rev. Dr. Jebanesan, the chief Guest. Dr. Jebanesan detailed the long history of Jaffna College, its achievements in the past, the role it played in Jaffna society, the trials and tribulations of recent years and explained how the school was still serving the children of the area in spite of enormous difficulties. He exhorted the Alumni to help the college in any way it could.

The speech was followed by a flute recital by the brothers Mugunthan and Kannan Indrarajah and a music recital by Brian and Christine Lal. Soon afterwards the Band struck up and dancing went on with breaks for dinner and the raffle draw. The Vice-President of the association Dr. A. Balasubramaniam thanked the organisers of the function and extended a special welcome to the Chief Guest.

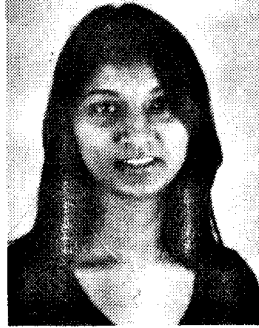
National Heroes Day to remember the men and women who had laid down their lives for the cause of Tamil Eelam was observed on 28th November 1998 at the Ukrainian Youth Centre, Lidcombe, Sydney. The Tamil flag was raised, followed by the singing of The Tamil Eelam National Anthem. Speeches were made and members of the public lighted lamps to honour the dead.

Croydon Tamil Community Centre (CTCC)

1524 London Road, Norbury, London SW16 4EU. The centre was inaugurated on 14th April 1998 by the Mayor of Croydon and is actively functioning between 10am and 4pm on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Tamil Television, Sri Lankan Newspapers, updated Internet news, Magazines, books etc are available. The Croydon Council assists in the running of CTCC.

On Wednesdays, between 11am and 2pm seminars and discussions with lunch are being arranged. Cultural programmes are held during weekends.

For further details, please contact Mr. Srinivasan on 0181 763 2221.

Amuthavani's Top Performance

Amuthavani daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Anpananthar, owners of the pioneer business house, Vanee Agency of Manor Park, London E12 has come out with flying colours at the recent A level examination ranking among the 25 candidates with the best results. She obtained 4 A's in Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics and German and gained admission to do medicine at the Royal Free Hospital. She continues to maintain her brilliant academic record having obtained 10 A's of which 6 were A* at the G.C.S.C. two years back. She was a pupil of the City of London School for Girls and at the Prize Distribution of the school by The Right Worshipful the Lord Mayor of London held on 14th October 98, received The Marcella Ellis Prize for Science and The Dorothy Malone Award for non academic service.

Amuthavani is also a carnatic musician and in September last year had her veena arangetram at which, the Chief Guest, the former Dean of Fine Arts of the Annamalai University applauded her for what appeared to be a professional performance.

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Renuka's Bharata Natya Arangetram

The Bharata Natya Arangetram of Remi Renuka daughter of Mr. Shanmugam and late Mrs. Rani Shanmugam of Ennapetal, Germany took place on 4th October 1998 at 'The Haus Ennapetal'.

Renuka is a student of 'Natya Shanathi' Pavithira Selvakanthan of Pavithira Kalalaya, Dortmund, Germany. Pavithira has been a disciple of Mrs. Kirupa Ratneswarar and Adyar K. Luxmanan of Madras. Renuka is the third student to graduate from her school. It should be mentioned that two years back Adyar Luxmanan visited Germany with his musicians to conduct Pavithira's dance performance in Dortmund.

Renuka's debut commenced with the traditional Nadarajar Anjali, Alarippu, Jathiswaram, Gowthvam and went on to the well known Varnam 'Ni Intha Mayam' in Danyasi ragam which was performed very well.

After the interval came the pathams; 'Asai Mugam', 'Neela Malar' and 'Velli Swaram'. The highlight of the second half was the patham 'Mahishasura Marthini' in Revathi Ragam depicting the Goddess Sakthi as a destroyer of evil. The performance concluded with the Thillana in Maduvanthu Ragam. It was observed that a lot of importance was given to costumes as Renuka exhibited six of them with the result that guest speakers delivered lengthy speeches. The Chief Guest was Mrs. Rajani Suresh Kumar from London. The programme was compered by the former SLBC presenter Mr. N.T. Jegan. The orchestra consisted of Nattuvangam: Pavithira Selvakanthan, Vocal: Ambika Thamotheram (London) & Pathmalojani Kumarachandran, Mirdangam: S. Pranavanathan and Violin: M. Devaraja (France).

Dr. Nagalingam Sivasubramaniam

- An Appreciation

Any person who met Siva even for a very brief period could not but like him. Siva was a sincere friend, a guide, a philosopher, a visionary and a doctor in every sense of those terms.

Known endearingly to his close friends as 'Sivasuppan', a name that he often enjoyed being called, and which went well with his puckish humour and sometimes mischievous behaviour, Siva evinced remarkable brilliance both in his secondary school career and as a student of medicine at the University. As a student, his days were not merely confined to his books, he had a full round career enjoying every moment of it - this was later to be reflected in his attitude to life and to those with whom he interacted. Even at the pinnacle of his career as the physician to the royalty of Malaysia, Siva kept in close touch with his friends both at home and abroad.

When he came over to Australia, although a Member of the Royal College of Physicians, Siva opted for general practice. Over the years he was adored and respected by his patients and his staff. His diagnosis was spot on, and his treatment appeared incredibly simple, unceremonious and transparent. He believed in the miraculous powers of the human system to heal itself. At the end of the day, the patient went back home positively confident - it was all part of the good fun. Siva was intrinsically kind hearted, understanding and extremely sensitive to the feelings and susceptibilities of others. His warmth which was evidently sincere and spontaneous, yet when it came to a fight, he was unrelenting and uncompromising. He fought his battles both silently and articulately. Many viewers in Australia will recall the manner in which he took on the mighty and the wealthiest media magnate and tycoon, culminating in a public apology being unreservedly offered on television, when the viewers watched the pathetic spectacle of the presenter eating humble pie. The propriety of Siva's professional conduct was thus vindicated. Perhaps, even Providence had to first make him unconscious for a brief spell before his life could be snatched away.

Siva eschewed and despised creature comforts. He was most comfortable while in a discussion on politics, world affairs, community matters, people, literature and above all philosophy, whether it be ancient, modern, western or eastern. Having been a self tutored student of philosophy, he retained an abiding interest in its continuing study. Siva was indeed a great person. Many a definition has been proffered for greatness. Not that we say that Siva was great because he did great things. It is just that he did great things because he was great.

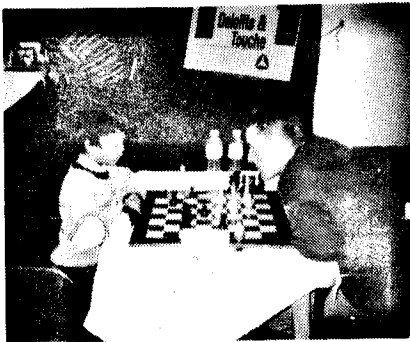
On the night of 16 May 1998 while in action of being of service to the Strathfield community in the endeavours of providing them with a modern library, Siva fell unconscious and went into a deep sleep from which he never awoke. Our final farewell to Siva is reminiscent of that of Horatio to his dearest friend and philosopher, Hamlet Prince of Denmark:

'Now cracks a noble heart. Good night,
sweet prince
And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!'

S. Jayathanan,

Sydney.

Murugan at Nine Breaks Chess Records



Although most chess players start young, the truly gifted ones show great promise and make rapid progress when they are very young. In recent years England has produced and nurtured many such players and one who has been hitting recent headlines is Murugan, 9 year old son of Mr. and Mrs. Thiruchelvam of New Malden, Surrey, both of whom are accountants.

At the age of 3-1/2, when Murugan's brother and sister, 6 and 5 years elder to him considered Murugan too young to play with them, their mother showed him the chessboard, the chess pieces and the moves and he started playing the game by the age of 4. Murugan's first tournament was just before he was 5, when he played in the Under-8 Rapid-play competition (each player is allowed only a total of 30 minutes, as opposed to 2 to 4 hours per player in normal tournaments) at the Elmbridge Chess Festival and tied for third place. Soon afterwards, at 5 years and 1 month, he won first prize in the Kingston Under-8 Rapid-play competition, beating children over 2 years elder to him. At 6-1/2 years he won first prize on 5-1/2 / 6 points (1 point for a win and 1/2 point for a draw) in the Under-10 BCF (British Chess Federation) grading section of the Rapid-play tournament at Golders Green for players of all ages. Murugan's achievement at that age is a British record. At 8 years and 10 months Murugan shared with another boy, who was nearly 11 years old, the first prize in the all-England Under-11 competition. A month later he won outright the London Under-12 competition.

In October 1998, at 9 years and 10

months, Murugan has broken two records, as discussed by Malcolm Pein in his chess column in The Daily Telegraph of 20th October. In the open section of the Maidstone Congress, Murugan held the top-seeded Croatian, Grand Master (GM) Bogdan Lalic, to a draw. By doing this Murugan became the youngest child ever to avoid defeat by a GM, beating the world record held by India's Surya Ganguly who defeated a GM in 1994 at 10 years and 3 months. It is interesting to note that Lalic is in fact Murugan's coach. We should be pleased that Murugan has upheld our tradition of not exceeding one's Guru. As to whether this was by choice or not is something one has to ask the youngster. The previous record was held by Luke McShane, who drew against a GM in 1994 at the age of 10 years and 8 months.

At the Maidstone Congress, Murugan tied for the fourth place on 4/6 in a strong field which included International Masters, in addition to GM Lalic. The other recent record was also earned in this Congress when he reached the BCF grading of 225, equivalent to the international rating of 2400. Previously, in March 1998, at 9 years and 3 months, Murugan was admitted to the International grading of 2020, breaking the British record held by Luke McShane, who gained his first International rating at 9 years and 6 months. In late October/early November 1998 Murugan, as the strongest British player in the category, was chosen to represent England in the Under-10 section of the World Junior Championship in Spain. He scored 6-1/2/11, a good score considering the strength of the competitors from all over the world. The section was won on 8-1/2/11 points by a Russian boy.

Murugan's next main goal would be to become an International Master. At his present rate of progress he will probably achieve this, breaking another record. But it is relevant to note the word of caution given by British GM Jon Speelman, who has devoted the whole of his chess column in the Observer of 25.10.98 to Murugan. He writes 'Chess development is not linear but rather goes in steep ascents interspersed with plateaux and even some dropping away. One shouldn't burden Thiruchelvam or any other junior with expectations which can become a millstone impeding their progress. Nevertheless, there is every prospect that he will become a truly fearsome player'. Speelman should know because he too started very young.

It is quite a responsibility for the parents of a talented child to strike the right balance. Murugan would spend many weekends and some week days participating in chess congresses. His parents have to take him to the various venues, in the UK and abroad, see that his needs are met and at the same time ensure that he does not fall behind in his school work and other development. As is often the case with chil-

continued on page 33

continued from page 32

dren gifted in chess, Murugan is doing well in school, is particular about completing homework assignments and, like any other boy, plays football, badminton and other games. He has been learning the Mridangam as well, but has suspended his lessons at the moment and hopes to take it up later. Mr and Mrs. Thiruchelvam should be congratulated on their guidance and the hard work they are putting in.

Leonard Baden, the veteran Chess-writer and journalist, who contributes to *The Guardian* and the *Financial Times*, has predicted that Murugan will be in the England team for the 2008 Chess Olympiad and readers would no doubt wish it.

Dr. S. Sriharan.

Called to the Bar in Canada



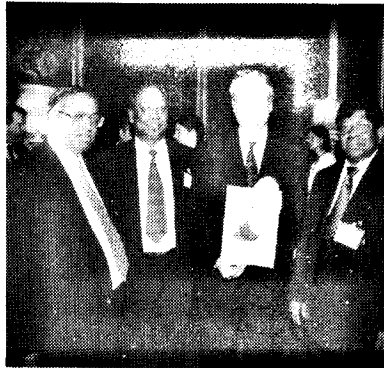
Kala Somanader Gnanasegaram, Attorney-at-Law Sri Lanka, A.I.I. Canada, has been called to the Bar as a Barrister and Solicitor in Toronto, Canada. She was a legal officer in the Bank of Ceylon prior to migration to Canada.

She is the daughter of Mr. Sam Somanader and the late Olive Somanader of New York, U.S.A.

Western Jewellers Sivasundaram Honoured

The British Government has for the last several years secured the assistance of the business community to promote the arts. The Association for the Business Sponsorship of the Arts has been actively performing the function of bringing together business donors and arts associations through the Pairing Scheme. Mr. V. Sivasundaram, of Western Jewellers, 230 Upper Tooting Road, London SW17 was honoured with a Pairing Scheme Award by The Rt. Hon. Chris Smith M.P., Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sports, at an impressive ceremony on 28th October 1998 at Lancaster House, London SW1; for sponsoring the Tamil New Year Festival organised by the London Tamil Centre. The picture below shows those present at the ceremony L - R Dr. Ratnam Niththyananthan, Director of Studies,

London Tamil Centre; Dr. N. Sriskantharajah, Chairperson, London Tamil Centre; The Rt. Hon. Chris Smith M.P. and Mr. V. Sivasunderam of Western Jewellers.



Dikshithar Day Celebrations



The annual feature in the calendar of Lalgudi School of Music (UK) - Dikshithar Day - was celebrated on 31.10.98 at Kingsbury High School Hall. Compositions of Muthuswamy Dikshithar were presented by the students of the school and students of other music teachers.

The proceedings commenced with the group recital of 'Vatapi Ganapathim Bhajeham'. Around 30 students of the school, starting with the beginners and ending with the very advanced students played the Violin in groups. The final group of four violinists Priyah Sivagnanam, Ravi Ramdass, Nirshanthan Nagarajah and Parthiban Nagarajah played for about forty five minutes and presented very well co-ordinated classical music of a high standard with improvisations. Aparna Narendran, the school's vocal student sang with excellent sruthi alignment and a ringing voice and received the spontaneous applause of the audience. The climax of the evening was reached with Arvind Jayan's solo violin recital consisting of an elaborate Poorvikalyani raga alapana and the Kriti 'Meenakshi me Mudam Dehi'. He excelled in his tonal quality, clarity and sweetness of the phrases.

The Chief Guest, Prof. S. Swaminathan,

Manager of the London Tamil Sangam and Lecturer, London University distributed the certificates and prizes to the winners in the Music Examinations of the School held in September. He congratulated the students on the high standard of the performances that day and complimented the good work done in the school for the cause of authentic carnatic music in England. The hall was filled to capacity in spite of the bad weather that evening.

Merit Award for Dr. Saba



Dr. Shanmugam Saba, Ophthalmic Surgeon, Stobhill General Hospital, Glasgow has been presented with a Greater Glasgow NHS Merit Award in Ophthalmology in recognition of the provision of particularly innovative health service to the people of Greater Glasgow.

The Glasgow Lord Provost, Mr. Pat Lally, while presenting the certificate of merit and a cheque in the City Halls referred to Dr. Saba's dedicated work with in the National Health Service, which had earned for him the appreciation and gratitude of the people of Greater Glasgow for his outstanding work in caring for fellow citizens.

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★ கொழும்புக்கு அர்ப்பணம் மிகுந்த உன்னத சேவை. (16 தினங்கள்) ★ தேயிலைப்
பெட்டிகளிலிருந்து, முழு அளவிலான தனிப்பட்ட பொருள்கள் வரை. ★ கார், மற்றும்
20 அடி, 40 அடி முழு வர்த்தக சரக்குகளுக்கு விசேட கட்டணம். ★ மின்சார உற்பத்தி
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