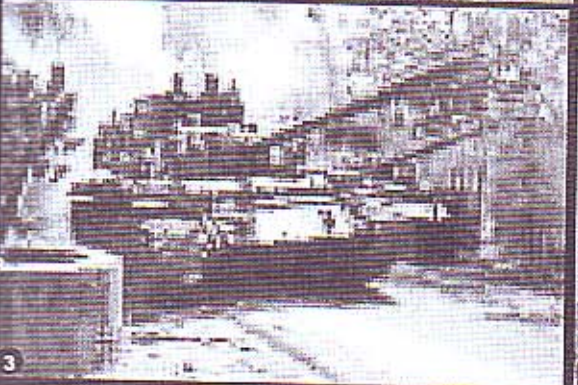


# Tamil TIMES

VOL XIX No. 9 ISSN 0266-4488 15 SEPTEMBER 2000 90p



1. Villagers looking at the wreckage of the crashed helicopter
2. Election posters in Colombo
3. Battle tank in action in Jaffna
4. SLMC leader M H M Ashraff
5. Troops in action in Jaffna
6. LTTE's fire-power






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right to say it."*

-Voltaire

**Tamil  
TIMES**

ISSN 0266 - 44 88  
Vol. XIX No. 9  
15 SEPTEMBER 2000

Published by:  
**TAMIL TIMES LTD**  
PO Box 121, Sutton,  
Surrey SM1 3TD  
United Kingdom  
Phone: 020 - 8644 0972  
Fax: 020 - 8241 4557  
Email: prajan@gn.apc.org

#### ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION

UK/India/Sri Lanka.....	£15/US\$25
Australia.....	Aus\$45
(Australian Bank cheques only)	
USA.....	US\$35
Canada.....	Can\$40
All other countries.....	£20/US\$35

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## A Depressing Picture

As the campaign for the General Election 2000 intensifies, widespread violent incidents have also markedly increased throughout the country. Not a single day passes without many such incidents including deaths being reported.

Election campaign related violence has become a familiar phenomenon in the electoral politics of Sri Lanka since 1977. Every election since then has been marred by acts of organised violence deliberately committed not for its own sake but to secure electoral advantage.

As much as violence, electoral malpractice by way of impersonation and stuffing of ballot boxes have also been on the increase, and many do not feel that it will be any different this time too.

That the credibility of the country's electoral process is seriously doubted is demonstrated by the fact that foreign election observers have to be invited by the country's Commissioner of Election himself to monitor that a free and fair election takes place.

More importantly, the action of the Commissioner in undertaking almost a covert exercise of printing stickers to be affixed to official polling cards without the knowledge of the government and other political parties is an indication of the loss of trust in the country's normal institutional mechanisms involved in the conduct of elections. His action in bypassing normal official procedure, about which he has been faulted, is an eloquent statement that in his view that these mechanisms are contaminated beyond remedy. This lamentable situation has been brought about by power hungry politicians primarily of the major parties which have ruled the country in recent decades.

Even as the temperature of the electoral campaign rises in the south of the country, the war games played in the northern Jaffna peninsula have made the election too much of an unwanted luxury for the civilian population there. The recent battles in Jaffna come in the context of the LTTE's declared aim of driving out the army and recapturing Jaffna before the end of this year, and the government's determination to not only resist such an endeavour, but also to regain as much territory as possible which it lost to the LTTE in April-May this year.

The battle for Jaffna is being fought with lethal long-range weapons of mass destruction and death. Towns and villages are being turned into rubble. Besides the hundreds of unaccountable number of civilian casualties, tens of thousands of people have become displaced not for the first time. As the battles move from one place to another, people are being displaced from one village to another. Hundreds of combatants on both sides have perished, and their unclaimed bodies are being disposed of without any ceremony in the form of mass burial or cremation.

The politics of the general election does not provide any room for optimism. The ruling Peoples Alliance faces an angry backlash from extremist chauvinist forces for having dared to push through parliament the constitutional reform bill which provided for more devolution of powers. But it has promised, if it wins, to convert the new parliament into a Constituent Assembly for the purpose enacting its constitutional reform proposals. The UNP, which for a time agreed to support the constitutional reform bill and at the eleventh hour refused its support is being supported by some influential members of the Buddhist clergy who mounted protest demonstrations against the bill. The UNP leadership says that the Maha Sangha and LTTE have to be consulted and that any new constitutional reform will be undertaken only with a "national consensus" and a two-third majority in parliament. Then there are the "authentic voice" of the Sinhala-Buddhists in the form of the Sihala Urumaya which is fighting the election on an ultra-Sinhala nationalist platform promising to "restore the rights of the Sinhalese lost under the UNP and the PA governments." The JVP while mouthing left-rhetoric has placed itself on its "patriotic platform" committing itself against any form of devolution of powers. The Sri Lanka Muslim Congress/National Unity Alliance are contesting several seats, most being in the eastern province, and are in support of the ruling party. The Ceylon Workers Congress is split, one group supporting the PA and the other the UNP. The TULF and the other non-LTTE ex-militant Tamil parties are also in the fray among which the EPDP and the EPRLF are in support of the ruling PA. The main politico-military force among the Tamils, the LTTE is, as usual, not participating in the elections. But there is no doubt that the LTTE is determined to defeat the PA, and would wish the UNP, being the only party that can defeat the governing party, to win a majority. To this extent, therefore, the LTTE may facilitate a UNP victory by whatever means at its disposal.

The outcome of the election appears to be unpredictable. Neither the PA nor the UNP are likely to secure a commanding majority of seats in parliament to be able to take the bold and decisive steps that are needed to restore peace and stability in the country. In this background, the outlook for Sri Lanka presents a depressing picture.

# Minister Ashraff among 14 killed in helicopter crash

Sri Lanka's Ports Minister M.H.M. Ashraff was killed in a helicopter crash Saturday, 16 September, together with 14 others on board the Mi-17 transport aircraft.

Ashraff has been the leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), a key member of the governing Peoples Alliance headed by President Chandrika Kumaratunga.

Ashraff, 52, had boarded the ill-fated Sri Lankan air force Mi-17 at the police headquarters in Colombo to travel to his home constituency of Ampara in the east of the country. Ashraff had been travelling with three bodyguards in addition to nine senior party stalwarts. The craft had a two-member crew who also perished in the crash.

"The aircraft had crashed in a fireball," a police spokesman said. "We can say that there are no survivors. The Minister was among those in the aircraft and we can confirm his death."

The helicopter went down at Aranayake, 110 kilometres (68 miles) east of Colombo and hit the Batalagala mountain, better known as the Bible Rock, in a jungle area. There was no apparent sign of bad weather in the central hill region. Local police said the helicopter had caught fire after the crash and villagers had reported seeing nine charred bodies. Two assault rifles were also found in the area.

Sri Lanka's Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickremanayake had also boarded another helicopter from the same place in Colombo Saturday morning but safely reached his destination in the town of Polonnaruwa, police said.

The cause of the helicopter crash has not been established, but there have been reports of alleged sabotage. The government has ordered an investigation identified the cause of the crash.

The SLMC leader who became a cabinet minister following the last general election held in August 1994 was expected to play a crucial part in the forthcoming general election to be held on 10 October. However, in recent

weeks Ashraff had had a fractious relationship with other cabinet ministers, especially another Muslim minister, A.H.M. Fowzie who holds the transport portfolio. Though belonging to the same Muslim community, Fowzie's base has been among the Colombo-based Muslims whereas Ashraff commanded considerable support among the Muslim community in Sri Lanka's eastern province. The two ministers often quarreled in public and President Kumaratunga had to intervene on several occasions to keep an uneasy truce.

Ashraff quit the cabinet on August 22 and went on a pilgrimage to Mecca the following day. At that time, he made it clear that he was severing connections with the Peoples Alliance and that the SLMC would contest the Oc-

tober elections on its own. However, his resignation was not accepted by the President, and on his return, Ashraff made peace with the government and re-entered the cabinet.

Ashraff had projected himself as a power-broker after Kumaratunga formed her one-seat majority government in August 1994 thanks to the seven seats of Ashraff's SLMC.

His attempts to contest the upcoming October 10 parliamentary elections together with the ruling PA ended in disaster as they failed to agree on the sharing of seats and Ashraff began to field candidates through another party, he recently formed, National Unity Alliance (NUA), as a front organisation for the SLMC. The NUA is contesting against the ruling party in several areas of the country.

However, the untimely death of the SLMC leader is seen by many observers as a big blow for President Kumaratunga's Peoples Alliance which is seeking to retain power in the October elections.

## 8 Killed and 24 Injured in Suicide Blast

A suicide bomber, suspected to be from the Tamil Tigers, triggered an explosion on 16 September just outside the Colombo General Hospital in central Colombo, killing himself and six others. The dismembered body parts of the victims, including those of the suicide bomber, were seen scattered at the scene of the carnage.

No one claimed for responsibility for the blast, which injured 24 people, four critically. But the blame was promptly placed on the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which reputedly has a suicide squad and has carried out attacks deploying suicide-bombers. The LTTE never officially acknowledges or comment on such attacks.

Fire Department Chief R. K. Nissanka is reported as having said that the bomber triggered the explosion when a policeman approached him for questioning. A civilian had drawn the attention of the police to a man who was acting suspiciously. Within minutes, the gates of the hospital and cars and

vans were splattered with flesh and blood and traffic on the usually busy Dean's Road was brought to a chilling halt. Only the head of the suicide bomber remained intact.

The suicide bomber and the policeman were killed instantly. Three people died en-route to the Hospital, and two died after arriving in the emergency ward, said Pushpa Soysa, head of the nurses training unit. Of the 24 injured 10 underwent surgery and four were in critical condition, Soysa said.

"I heard a big noise and covered my face with my hands and fell down. All I saw was people running everywhere," said J.W. Ariyawansa, who was heading into the Eye Hospital for treatment at the time of the blast. His right hand was badly injured and a piece of shrapnel lodged in his head.

The attack appeared to be a carbon copy of a bombing outside the prime minister's office on January 5 this year when 12 people were killed when a woman suicide bomber blew herself

while being searched by a female constable.

It is not known who the intended target of the suicide bomber was. Police could not immediately say what the bomber was aiming to attack, but the hospital had always been considered a prime target and has a huge security cordon encircling it. They said the bomber could have been lying in wait for a government VIP to pass that way or had been attempting to enter the hospital itself. However, it is speculated that the target was the Minister Health, Nimal Siripala de Silva whose office is located next to the Hospital. The explosion occurred a few minutes after the

Health Minister and World Health Organization officials had driven by.

Health Minister Nimal Siripala de Silva told the press he thought he was the target of the attack. "I passed that way just seven minutes before the blast. I suspect I was the target," de Silva said.

Shortly before the explosion, World Health Organization officials also drove past the area for a scheduled meeting with de Silva at the Health Ministry.

De Silva narrowly escaped being killed by a suicide bomber on July 4 1996 in the northern peninsula of Jaffna when he visited the region as Housing Minister to supervise reconstruction

work in the embattled region.

The bombing came as police and troops tightened security ahead of the October 10 parliamentary elections. Police had warned over the weekend that they had information of Tamil Tiger suicide bombers trying to infiltrate the capital to stage assassinations. Sri Lanka police rounded up at least 75 urchins from the capital Colombo during a two-day operation on 13 and 14 September aimed at preventing Tamil Tiger rebels using them as look outs, but in less than 24 hours, a suspected Tamil Tiger suicide bomber staged the devastating attack outside the main Eye hospital, killing himself and six others.

## Town Devastated In Battle for Jaffna

Chavakachcheri, the second largest town in the Jaffna peninsula has been recaptured by the Sri Lankan military at heavy cost. The town had been devastated by heavy artillery and rocket fire exchanged between government forces and the Tamil Tigers. Most of the buildings in Chavakachcheri were reduced to rubble and even the trees had been stripped by artillery barrages. Thousands of local residents had fled the area before the fighting erupted, nearly three weeks ago.

The once busy commercial centre is pockmarked with craters and heaps of blackened, still smoking rubble mark the spots where shops once stood. The very few buildings with walls intact are peppered with shrapnel and bullet holes from four days of fierce fighting in the town which lies on the main highway linking the peninsula with the mainland. A sign board describes a heap of shattered brick and wood as the Chavakachcheri District Hospital. "There were no civilians at all when we moved in," said Major General Sevali Wanigasekera, who commanded the military offensive.

Residents of Chavakachcheri first joined the ranks of the peninsula's 150,000 displaced people when the LTTE took the town in April this year during an onslaught which cost the military a large swathe of territory in the north.

TULF politician V. Anandasangari said he feared thousands of people displaced by the latest fighting would be deprived of their franchise. "That is why we have been asking for a ceasefire during this time," he said.

The latest developments in the battle for Jaffna come in the wake of the LTTE's determination to recapture its former stronghold before the end of this year, and the resolve of government forces to not only resist any threat to their hold on the Jaffna peninsula, but also to regain the territory they lost to the Tigers in the battles in April-May this year. Both sides are using newly acquired long-range weapons targeting each other's positions resulting in casualties, suffering, displacement of a considerable number of civilians.

The army has been on the offensive in Jaffna for weeks following the launching of operation Rivikirana. The recapture of Colombuthurai on September 10 and Chavakachcheri, a week later, had boosted the morale of the fighting forces, according to claims made by army spokesmen.

The battle for Chavakachcheri that devastated the second biggest town in the entire peninsula saw the armed forces unleashing a massive bombardment on the LTTE that pulverised their strongholds, military sources claimed.

The MiG 27s, one of the most advanced fighters in the former Warsaw

Pact armed forces, acquired a few months ago went in to action while the artillery including the MBRLs engaged the LTTE at Chavakachcheri. The bombardment forced the LTTE to vacate the town within two hours, officers said adding that a bid by the Tigers to force troops out of town ended in failure with a number of casualties.

The military said that LTTE's mortars and artillery do not threaten Palaly air-base and Kankesanthurai harbour, the two Main Supply Routes [MSR] for the security forces and the civilian population.

The two bases were subjected to heavy mortar and artillery bombardment in weeks that followed the fall of the strategic Elephant Pass base in May this year. The security forces were forced to suspend operations at these bases and looked for alternative ways and means of bringing in supplies to the troops, at that time fighting with their backs to the wall.

From that very weak position, the

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வெள்ளத்தனைய மலர் நீட்டமாய்  
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அழைக்கிறோம்.

military appears now to have the upper hand and is seeking to recapture territory previously lost to the Tigers and to block the LTTE from smuggling in armaments, particularly mortars, artillery and heavy calibre ammunition into the peninsula. Security Forces Commander [Jaffna] Major General Anton Wijendra claimed that LTTE used a large number of mortars, artillery and other types of ammunition during this month's battle and were facing a shortage.

As many as 10,000 mortars and artillery rounds were fired on the troops on September 3 during the first phase of operation Rivikirana. Mortar and artillery "rain" forced Wijendra to call off the operation. However, the second operation launched exactly a week after the first, saw troops swiftly seizing heavily fortified LTTE positions including those near the Colombuthurai jetty following devastating artillery and aerial strikes. On 20 September the government arranged for a group of journalists a tour of Jaffna, some 400 kilometres (250 miles) north of the capital Colombo to confirm military claims that Chavakachcheri was in government control. The journalists were taken to Colombuthurai jetty where troops of the Sinha Regiment hold the front line. Wijendra told journalists were that LTTE fire regularly mortars and artillery at army positions. "They have gun positions at Pooneryn on the other side of the lagoon," he said adding that the recent operations have crippled LTTE communication and supply lines across the Jaffna lagoon between the peninsula and the Wanni mainland. Troops conduct regular operations against the LTTE group operating in the Navatkuli area. Successful completion of these ongoing operations will allow the security forces to restore the MSR between Jaffna and Chavakachcheri, 15 kms east of Jaffna, on the 53 km-long Jaffna-Elephant Pass road.

In the battles of the last few weeks, the casualties on both sides have been heavy, each side claiming that casualties inflicted on the other was more.

The military encounters are set to continue despite the forthcoming elections on 10 October. "We will continue with our operations and we have no plans to stop them before the elections," Wijendra told reporters. ●

## The Only Link to Jaffna

The only remaining humanitarian link between the war-torn Jaffna and the rest of Sri Lanka is the ferry service run by the International Committee of the Red Cross, transporting medical supplies to all state hospitals in the peninsula said Mr. Harasha Gunawardene, Information Officer of the ICRC at a press briefing 12 September on board the new vessel "Jaya Gold" berthed in the Ports Authority jetty in Trincomalee harbour.

The MV JAYA GOLD chartered by the ICRC to transport patients between Jaffna and Trincomalee.

MV JAYA GOLD has replaced the vessel MV JAVA GULF from 1 September. JAVA GULF sailed back to Singapore after more than three years of service between Trincomalee and the Jaffna peninsula.

Mr. Harasha Gunawardene added that from January to August this year the vessel MV JAVA GULF transported 1241 patients between Jaffna

and Trincomalee. During this period it also transported 197 metric tons of drugs and medical equipments to all government hospitals in Jaffna peninsula.

He stressed that the ICRC transports cargo comprising medical supplies for the government hospitals, mail and humanitarian relief items to Jaffna.

Mr. Daniel Schriber, Head of the ICRC Delegation in Trincomalee said that the ICRC spends 3500 US Dollars daily to run the ferry service of transporting patients from Jaffna to Trincomalee. He added that ICRC spends 60,000 US dollars for fuel for every three months to run this ferry service.

MV JAYA GOLD sailed from Trincomalee on 12 September, Tuesday evening with 27 on board including 16 patients, medical officers, representatives of non-governmental organizations and government officers on official duty.

## Arms and Intelligence from Israel

The recent establishment of diplomatic relations between Sri Lanka and Israel has helped Colombo gain significant advantages in the form of intelligence and access to sophisticated Israeli weapons systems, according to Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar.

"I mean, all these years, we've been buying arms from them. Commercially, we were buying arms, but there were other things - intelligence and also speeding up supplies which they have done" - after the establishment of diplomatic relations, Kadirgamar said in an interview.

The decision to establish diplomatic ties with Israel was certainly "triggered by, I would say, the crisis we were going through," he acknowledged, referring to the onslaught by the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) on northern Jaffna town.

But he denied the contention in several quarters that the almost overnight decision was virtually a "knee-jerk reaction" because Sri Lanka believed that India and the United States were indifferent to its pleas for help after the LTTE captured the strategic Elephant Pass camp at the entrance to Jaffna peninsula and was on the verge of recapturing the city from the Sri Lankan forces, who had suffered heavy casualties.

Kadirgamar said that at no time did Sri Lanka "want India to intervene militarily. There was absolutely no question of asking India to intervene militarily. The IPKF (Indian Peace Keeping Force) episode was very bad for both countries. Neither country wants to repeat that."

He asserted that "even in our deepest hour of crisis we didn't even contemplate that (asking for military help

from India). So the Indian press reporting was confused."

"We had to take very measured approaches as far as India was concerned. In the first place, we had to keep India very closely informed about developments."

Kadirgamar recalled that "the moment we came to office, six years ago, and we did a review of the various questions, the president and I certainly were very much of the view that it is time that we re-established relations with Israel, which we had broken off about 25 years before."

He said the rationale for it was simple. "The whole world, little by little, had been recognizing (Israel). There are some 160 states now which recognize Israel, and India did that about 10 years ago. Also India, as everybody knows, has the second largest Muslim population in the world. And Sri Lanka is not a Muslim country."

"The other Muslim countries in the region don't have relations (with Israel) - Pakistan, Bangladesh, the Maldives, Malaysia, and Indonesia. But that's a separate thing," he said.

Thus, he said, the conclusion that he and the president arrived at was that there was no reason for Sri Lanka not to have diplomatic relations with Israel.

"We consulted our Arab friends and we found a number of Arabs were also recognizing Israel. Nobody had any objections to our recognizing Israel. We consulted (Palestine Liberation Organization) Chairman (Yasser) Arafat, who also said, 'Yes, you go ahead and do that but choose your time carefully' because at that time (then prime minister Benjamin) Netanyahu was not behaving well and I think Chairman Arafat didn't want us, a good friend like us to acknowledge at that time."

He said the delay in recognition was caused by "domestic constraint, because there is a small lobby, but a very sort of influential lobby that is against Israel being recognized for reasons of its own and, in coalition politics, you have to be cognizant of things like that."

"Therefore it was put on hold, waiting for us to judge what the best time would be to do it. Then when the fighting took place and this particular situation evolved, then it became very clear

## War of Words Dominates Jaffna polls

**By Nirupama Subramanian**

JAFFNA, SEPT. 24. In the absence of any meaningful campaign in this strife-torn peninsula, the dispirited run-up to the general election here has so far been dominated by a war of words between the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) and the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP).

Bereft of charismatic leaders to capture the imagination of an exhausted people, and unable to claim any contribution to bringing back peace to the peninsula, the two parties, each of which sees the other as its main opponent for the election, have resorted to pulling each other down in a vociferous slanging match.

"Our minds are not free, the situation is not free. How can it be when the EPDP openly goes about with arms threatening our candidates and supporters?" lamented the TULF vice-president, Mr. V. Anandasangaree, who is also the party's main candidate in the district. Sitting in his well-fortified office that was at one time this town's biggest cinema, the leader of the ex-militant EPDP, Mr. Douglas Devananda, hotly denied the allegation.

"Everybody knows the threat I face from the LTTE. These arms are for my own defence, we have never misused them against anybody. The TULF has no other platform for its campaign, so they are slandering us," he said.

In the last parliamentary election, the EPDP captured nine out of 10 seats in the peninsula and became the Tamil party with the largest number of MPs and the Kumaratunga Government's staunchest Tamil ally. But with only 2.97 per cent of the voters turning out, it was a deeply flawed election.

Nevertheless, the EPDP went to work with its new found clout, opened

offices in the peninsula after the Army took control of it from the LTTE in 1996 and began to woo the people in right earnest.

Much to the resentment of the TULF, in the run-up to the election, scores of unemployed youth are lining up outside its office as word spreads that the EPDP is doling out jobs in various government departments. They are screened and frisked and allowed in to leave their details with a party official.

At times, Mr. Devananda, who never leaves the office premises, descends from his first-floor perch to address the gathered favour-seekers inside the cinema hall. "Be patient, the elections are only a eye-blink away. After that, I will fulfill all your demands," he tells a group of people from Palai.

"I tell them that they are looking at me now, but if they vote for me, they will be watching a movie here, that's how quickly normality will be restored in Jaffna," he explains in an aside to a group of journalists present at the cinema hall meeting. But the TULF, which would like to re-establish its long-lost hold on the peninsula, is not amused.

"They are bribing the people before the elections, and the Chandrika Government is doing all it can to help the EPDP because it is assured of their support," said Mr. Mavai Senathirajah, a prominent TULF contestant in Jaffna.

After the killing of two TULF Jaffna Mayors in quick succession in 1998, party leaders stayed away from the peninsula and the Jaffna Municipal Council convened a relatively safe distance away, in Colombo.

Now, the EPDP is likening the TULF to "a shopkeeper at a temple festival", whose leaders came to Jaffna to canvass support only at election time.

"Even when the LTTE was knocking on the doors of Jaffna in May, our office here was open. Voters are asking the TULF leaders where have they been all this time, did their municipal councillors who were elected in 1998 get even one drain cleaned in Jaffna town? They have no answer, so they

to us that in our national interest, which must override all sectarian interests, it was time to do it because by recognizing Israel we were going to get certain advantages immediately," Kadirgamar said.

are attacking us when it is actually the LTTE they are afraid of," Mr. Devananda said. For its part, the TULF, which was once the undisputed leader of Jaffna but sidelined by the Tamil militancy of the 80s, believes that its traditional support base among the educated middle-classes is still intact.

In a situation where the Government is also helping the EPDP, we have no choice but to depend on the sensitive and sensible people of Jaffna to liberate the people from the EPDP," said Mr. Anandasangaree.

The wordy duel has made the elections in Jaffna seem like a contest between these two parties. But their squabble has failed to breathe life into an election that is underscored by voter disinterest.

That seems only natural with the war hanging over the heads. The International Committee of the Red Cross has estimated that nearly 1.6 lakh people were displaced within the peninsula in the recent fighting. That number could rise if fighting erupts.

For the people, the election is way

down on their list of priorities. At any given time these days, over 3,000 people are registered to leave the peninsula by the bi-weekly boat to Trincomalee, which, on its return run, brings back only 100 to 150 people each time.

"All that the people want now is to go back to their homes. They may vote in the elections, because they know that MPs can arrange telephones, and electricity and tickets on the ship to Trincomalee, but no one believes any more that any of these parties can give them back peace," said a senior citizen of Jaffna who declined to be identified.

Posters of various political parties and candidates are the only indication that an election is about to take place in the peninsula.

Most contestants are not even actively campaigning. In fact, high-profile candidates like Mr. Dharmalingam Sithadthan of the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam and Mr. Varatharaja Perumal of the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front have returned to Colombo.

(The Hindu)

## UNP Leader Threatens Constitutional Crisis

Sri Lanka may face a grave constitutional crisis if the country's main opposition party wins power at the general election scheduled for 10 October if an attempt is made to implement the UNP Leader Ranil Wickremesinghe's statement that he will remove President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga from her office if his party comes to power.

Constitutional experts point out that President Kumaratunga was elected for a six-year term last December. She has barely completed one year of the second term. If she is to be removed before the end of this term, an impeachment resolution on specified grounds has to be adopted by Parliament with a two-thirds majority. Even if the UNP wins, there is no likelihood that it will be able to obtain a two-thirds of the seats in Parliament. This being the situation, many are wondering whether the UNP leader has in mind any extra-constitutional means he will resort to give effect to his statement.

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# Jaffna's Traumatised Children

By Alastair Lawson in Jaffna, BBC,  
15 September

The most worrying aspect of the fighting for local people in Sri Lanka's northern Jaffna peninsula is the traumatic effect it has on children. The incessant shelling and bombing of Tamil Tiger positions by helicopters and aircraft can be heard even in the relative safety of Jaffna town – still held by the government.

The rest of the peninsula is under siege, and child psychiatrist, Professor Daya Somasundaran, says the constant bombardments are having a devastating effect on the mental state of children. "For the last few months, I think this has now become the norm almost. The level of sound and level of destructive power has really escalated to an unbearable level," Professor Somasundaran says.

"Many of these helicopters actually fire from areas where civilians are so that you are really under the helicopter when it fires," he adds. He says the trauma experienced by children takes many different forms, but will leave deep scars.

"They are unable to go to sleep or they have nightmares and end up screaming in the night. 'Some of them want to go and sleep with their parents, some of them start bedwetting again and there are disturbances in their eating habits,' he says.

The effects of living in a war zone are not just psychological. Every day, children are being injured or killed. Nine-year-old Ravi's family was displaced by the most recent fighting in Jaffna. When he and his brother strayed from the refugee camp where the family were sheltering, they came across a live hand-grenade.

Turai Ratna of the aid agency Care has been helping Ravi come to terms with what happened. "Along with his brother he went to fetch firewood and they found something like a ball, and his brother took the item in his hand and immediately it exploded. 'He was killed on the spot. And this small child was injured in the stomach,'" Turai Ratna said.

Children are being used by both sides in the bloody war for control of the Jaffna peninsula. Thirteen-year-old Renuka is

being held in solitary confinement at a government detention centre. She did not take the deadly cyanide capsule all Tamil Tigers are ordered by their leadership to swallow if they are captured.

Now she's being paraded before journalists by officials, who are using her as anti-Tamil Tiger propaganda.

"I and lots of other girls around my age all joined the Tamil Tigers together. We were told that the only way we could obtain true freedom was by joining the struggle for an independent state for Sri Lankan Tamils called Eelam. I was captured after an army patrol threw a hand-grenade at me as I tried to shoot them with my AK-47," she said.

Aid agencies are desperately strug-

gling to make life more bearable for children affected by the war. One project that has had an enormous impact is the Jaipur Foot Project on the outskirts of Jaffna town. Here artificial limbs are mass produced. Some 60% of patients visiting the centre are children who have lost limbs to landmines, shells and in bomb attacks. "It's very distressing for small children to be attended to after losing their limbs, but once they come here we fit them with artificial limbs," says N Sivanadan, the secretary of the project. "And once they leave the institution we are very happy that we have given them a new lease of life with artificial limbs," he says.

Another recent aid agency initiative is aimed at providing children like these with some kind of basic education by distributing learning packs. Many live in camps without schools, where sanitation is poor and food limited. It is hoped that small contributions like this will have some impact on the bleak future these children face.

## Perumal Challenges Ranil for Debate

PA National List Nominee and former Chief Minister of the North and East, Vardarajah Perumal has challenged the UNP leader Ranil Wickramasinghe to an open debate on his inclusion in the PA's National List.

The UNP leader has been going round the country criticising President Kumaratunga for having included Vardarajah Perumal's name in the Peoples Alliance Nation List of candidates in the forthcoming election.

In an open invitation to a debate, Vardarajah Perumal alleges that the UNP leader and his colleagues are trying to mislead Sinhalese by spreading false propaganda among them.

"I posed, several open questions to Ranil Wickramasinghe when the UNP unleashed some malicious propaganda over the inclusion of my name in the PA National List by the President. He has so far not replied to these questions and continued to indulge in pretentious propaganda campaign instead, well supported by some newspapers close to him. This is clear proof of his dishonesty and duplicity.

Now the same Ranil Wickramasinghe invites the president for an open debate over my inclusion in the PA list. This is

indeed an inappropriate and improper proposition. She is the President of this country. She has nothing to do with the coming election. Moreover, she along with her children had to take refuge in a foreign country during the 1989-1990 period after Vijaya Kumaratunge was assassinated. So she has had no conviction whatsoever with the happenings of that period.

Both Hon. Ranil and myself the only persons well aware of the happenings during 1989/1990. Former President Premadasa, Ministers Ranjan Wijeratne, Lalith Athulathmudali and Gamini Disanayake who had a direct hand in those happenings at that time are not alive today.

I hereby challenge Hon. Ranil Wickramasinghe to have a public debate with me over what happened during

1989/1990, so that I can enlighten those UNPers who spread malicious propaganda against me based on communal politics.

Further, I request Hon. Ranil Wickramasinghe and his people to stop forthwith such malicious propaganda against me if he fails to respond to my request for an open debate or rejects such a request."

## Threat to Candidates from 'Chankilian Force'

"Chankilian force", which is believed to be a shadow organisation of the Liberation Tigers Tamil Eelam (LTTE) is reported to have sent leaflets, warning the Tamil political parties to refrain from contesting the forthcoming Parliamentary elections. The leaflets described the Tamil parties currently engaged in the election propaganda as traitors and warned that they would be severely dealt with, sources said.

In a leaflet distributed in Jaffna, the 'Chankilian Padai' has dubbed the ex-Tamil groups, now in the electoral fray in Jaffna, as traitors. It warned that these groups will be annihilated and advised people in Jaffna to stay away from such groups, as they may become unintended victims in an attack.

In a written communication widely circulated in Jaffna, the Chankilian Padai pointed out that the former Tamil militant groups had not bothered to visit the people of Jaffna when they were displaced, deprived and starving after the

war but were now seeking votes from them. These groups had begun as freedom fighters but, at a time when the liberation struggle was about to succeed, had become "traitors" to the Tamil cause. They are there only to get money from the Sri Lankan Government, the leaflet said.

"We are not ready to put up with the weeds which are weakening our liberation struggle. We have decided to forcefully attack these national traitors. But at the same time, we are keen that the common people do not get caught and killed in the process," the Chankilian Padai said. According to the largest Tamil daily Virakesari, the message from the 'Chankilian Force' has instilled fear among the political parties in the fray in Jaffna.

A spokesman of a Tamil party in the North commenting on this threat said that they would not withdraw mainly because of the fact that the LTTE was trying to

prevent them contesting. "We know the nature of the LTTE and we have come forward to sacrifice ourselves and safeguard the democracy which is in danger in the North and the East," he said.

Meanwhile, police say that investigations have clearly established that the LTTE was responsible for the assassination of former Mayor of Batticaloa Chelian Perinpanayagam and the Ampara district Tamil division People's Alliance Organiser S. Manohara-mpillai. Former Mayor Chelian Perinpanayagam and S. Manoharampillai were the People's Alliance candidates from the East and they were gunned down by the men of the LTTE's pistol group recently. The late Mayor of Batticaloa Chelian Perinpanayagam was a journalist and had worked at the 'Thinakaran' editorial of the ANCL from 1968 to 1978. He was also the Batticaloa correspondent for the SLBC for a brief period. The Deputy Inspector General of the Eastern Province Patrick Korale said that investigations conducted on the shooting incidents of the former Batticaloa Mayor and the other PA candidate have proved beyond doubt that the LTTE was responsible for those killings. He said that forty suspects have been interrogated and several of them detained.

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# Election Related Violence

A total of 502 incidents of election related violence have been recorded by the Centre for Monitoring Election Violence as of 20 September 2000. Of these 296 or 59% have been classified as Major Offences and 206 or 41% as Minor Offences.

The highest number of Major Offences continue to be reported from the North Western Province - 57 incidents or 19% of the total number of incidents recorded in this category. The PA is allegedly responsible for 54% of the incidents in the Major Offences category

and the UNP for 25%. Twenty one percent (21%) of all incidents reported (502) involve the use of firearms. Of these the PA is allegedly responsible for 63% of the incidents and the UNP for 13%. In another 21% of the incidents the party affiliation of the alleged perpetrators has not been identified.

Meanwhile, a European Union observer mission slammed Sri Lankan police over allegedly slack investigation into an election attack against the main opposition party in the violent run-up to national elections.

One person was seriously injured Saturday, 23 September, in an attack on a convoy of 15 vehicles carrying members of the main opposition United National Party. Police registered a complaint against Deputy Defense Minister Anuruddhara Ratwatte's son Mahen and his supporters, who allegedly fired at the convoy. "I have spoken to the police, to the candidate involved in the attack and to the victim of the assault and I am concerned as to how this matter is currently being handled by the police. I take this matter very seriously and expect it to be investigated," John Cushnahan, a European Parliament lawmaker, said in a statement. Cushnahan leads the 75-member mission that will submit their report on the October 10 parliamentary elections to the European Commission in Brussels.

## Mrs Ashraff in Joint Leadership of SLMC

The Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) has chosen the widow of its founder killed in a mystery helicopter crash to lead them in next month's elections, heading off a bitter power struggle.

The SLMC decided Ferial Ashraff, the widow of Ports Minister M. H. M. Ashraff, will share the leadership with the party's deputy leader, Rauf Hakeem.

The Supreme Council of the SLMC took this decision after long discussion on 17 September. The politburo of the SLMC met earlier, but failed to reach a consensus on electing a new leader and it recommended to the Supreme Council that the party needed a joint leadership at this critical juncture. Party spokesman, M. L. A. M. Hizbullah said, "This is an interim measure until the elections are concluded on October 10. Thereafter the party will take a decision on a permanent leader."

Mrs. Ashraff has been closely working with her husband and is suited to be at the helm of the party at this time, another spokesman of the party said.

Ferial Ashraff, 48, becomes the first Muslim political widow in Sri Lanka which like many other Asian nations has often produced women leaders following the deaths of their politician

husbands.

Ashraff and 14 others were killed when their Mi-17 transport helicopter crashed on 17 September half an hour after taking off from police grounds in Colombo. The cause of the crash remains a mystery and is being investigated.

Hakeem, 40, regarded as a moderate had been seen as the party's new unchallenged leader. But widow Ashraff's entry to the leadership battle threw the party into disarray, within hours of the burial of her husband, who founded the SLMC in 1981.

## SLMC Adopts Non-Sectarian Secular Identity

From being Sri Lanka's main Muslim political party, the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) has announced plans to shed its sectarian and sectional identity and adopt a national and secular identity.

Before his untimely death in a helicopter crash that occurred recently, the party's founder leader M H M Ashraff formed the National Unity Alliance (NUA), and nominated candidates for the 10 October election under the banner of the NUA. The NUA was set up

Ferial Ashraff, a pharmacist by profession, will replace her husband in the list of candidates contesting the eastern Ampara district in the forthcoming general election. Observers are of the view that the move would help the party capitalise on a wave of sympathy at the tragedy in the October 10 parliamentary elections.

The SLMC is not directly contesting the election, but fielding candidates under both the more secular National Unity Alliance (NUA) formed by Ashraff earlier this year, and the ruling People's Alliance (PA).

The SLMC was a key ally of President Chandrika Kumaratunga, when in 1994 the president formed a government with a slender one-seat majority thanks to the SLMC's seven seats.

by the SLMC earlier this year to present a less Muslim dominated image and provide a truly national character, the membership being open to anyone who subscribed to the policies of the NUA.

A statement issued by the party on 24 September said the SLMC would merge with the NUA. SLMC's new co-leader Rauf Hakeem, told the press that the word "Muslim" had been a stumbling block to projecting a united image, while still representing the interests of the country's Muslims.

"The question of having the label 'Muslim' has been a stumbling block to project ourselves as a truly national political force," Hakeem said. According to him, the party's late leader, M.H.M. Ashraff, had conceived of the NUA earlier this year as a party with greater national appeal. "Mr. Ashraff felt that there was a big vacuum in the national political scene for a truly national political ideology," said Hakeem.

Rauf Hakeem informed President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga that it was the intention of the late SLMC leader M.H.M. Ashraff to support her as long as she remains in politics. He said that even in future the SLMC will act in the same manner.

After Rauf Hakeem assumed the leadership he met President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga at Temple

Trees with representatives of the SLMC and they held discussions which lasted about one hour. Rauf Hakeem told journalists that he informed the President that the SLMC and the National Unity Alliance will extend their fullest cooperation to the President even in the future.

Hakeem has been appointed Minister of Ports in President Kumaratunga's cabinet.

## EU Mission Backs Poll Chief's Anti-rigging Drive

The European Union mission to monitor parliamentary polls in Sri Lanka, has backed Sri Lanka's Election Commissioner, who has been under fire for from some the ruling party circles for covertly ordering special security stickers to be put on poll cards to prevent impersonation.

The government has also taken serious exception to the chief elections commissioner's move to get the stickers printed at a private establishment instead of the government-run press.

The EU Election Observer Mission which began its work in Colombo on Wednesday 20 September said it had talks with Elections Commissioner Dayananda Dissanayake and was supportive of his efforts.

Dissanayake was reported to the Human Rights Commission (HRC) by the ruling People's Alliance official Ananda Goonatilleke for allegedly violating his human rights by a plan to prevent fraud during voting. Goonatilleke argued the stickers could end up in the wrong hands and lead to his rights being violated.

Appearing before the Commission, the Election Commissioner said, "I am not answerable to this commission or to any other person, not even the president," through his attorney, Elmo Perera. "The complainant has come here with a story and wants me to divulge what other measures I am taking to prevent fraud. This I will not do."

The HRC after a preliminary hearing said it could not determine if there was a "prima-facie case" to proceed, but gave eight days to the complainant to produce evidence in support of his charge.

The European mission said the elections chief explained the controversy over his attempts to print stickers that would be put on poll cards to distinguish between forged documents and the genuine ones.

"The Commissioner told us a great deal about it and we are fully satisfied why he has undertaken such an action," the European Observer mission leader John Cushnahan said.

Cushnahan, a member of the European Parliament, said the team hoped

to have 74 monitors who are expected to observe at least five percent of the 9,500 polling stations across Sri Lanka during polling on October 10.

"We are looking forward to working with the elections commissioner, but we will operate strictly independently of him, the government of Sri Lanka and all other parties," Cushnahan said.

He denied media reports that the EU members were being given security from the Sri Lankan police unit which provides protection to government ministers. "We have neither asked nor have been given state security," Cushnahan said. "We will not accept it either... We are not going to be led by our noses."

## CMEV Condemns Intimidation of Poll Commissioner

As an independent civil society group committed to strengthening and protecting the integrity of the electoral process, the Centre for Monitoring Election Violence (CMEV) is deeply concerned by recent media reports that the integrity and independence of the Commissioner of Elections is being questioned.

This arises from action he felt it necessary to take to prevent the use of stolen or forged polling cards on election day. The Commissioner maintains that he fully intended to inform the political parties of this action at the appropriate time.

The CMEV firmly believes that the electoral process is the basic mechanism for choice and change in a functioning democracy. Accordingly, the independence of the individual and office charged with the responsibility for the conduct of elections, is of para-

mount importance.

The CMEV maintains that further reports that the Election Commissioner has himself been subjected to threats and intimidation are truly shocking and are a dire indictment of the prevailing political culture. The persistence of such violence will reflect adversely on the Police and call into question both the commitment to and capacity for democratic governance in Sri Lanka.

The election monitoring group says that attempts to undermine the constitutionally guaranteed independence of the Commissioner of Elections and to impede him in the discharge of his responsibilities will gravely imperil democracy in Sri Lanka. The CMEV has called upon all political parties and civil society groups to extend their fullest cooperation and support to the Commissioner of Elections to ensure a free and fair election on 10 October 2000.



# The Wars of the Ballot And the Bullet

From Our Colombo Correspondent

## POLITICAL VIOLENCE

Both wars, the war of the ballot and the war of the bullet are holding sway. Cheliyan Perinbanayagam, journalist turned politician, was gunned down in eastern Padiruppu on Sunday, September 10, morning and a group of UNP heavyweights, Karu Jayasuriya, Anura Bandaranaike and John Amaratunga, had a narrow shave the next evening in the outskirts of Colombo where they were fired upon.

Labour minister John Seneviratne's motorcade was fired at by a rival group of his own party, People's Alliance (PA) on the evening of September 10 and a week earlier a deputy minister was severely beaten up by the followers of his party colleague.

Jayantha Anura, a candidate of the Left Democratic Alliance in the Colombo district was abducted and tortured in the first week of September and released only after he promised to quit the contest.

Cheliyan's was the first assassination of a candidate in the present election. Seven other supporters of the main parties, PA, UNP and JVP had been killed within the past 20 days. Three youths entered the Padiruppu home of 64-year-old Manoharam Pillai through the back door and pumped bullets at him and Cheliyan, 63, who had called on him to discuss poll strategy. Cheliyan was contesting the Batticaloa district as a PA candidate and Manoharam Pillai was the chief organizer for the PA for the Tamil areas in the adjoining Ampara district.

Cheliyan's wife Manonmani, vice principal Batticaloa Vincent Girls High School, and Manoharam Pillai's daughter Vijayaladshmi, put the blame on political rivals. They declined to name the possible assassins, although the authorities have identified the Tamil Tigers as the culprits.

Killing of Cheliyan and the abduction of Jayantha Anura are the result of

inter-party rivalry which had occurred in the past in Sri Lanka and occur in some other countries. The shooting at the Labour Minister John Seneviratne's motorcade represent another aspect of poll violence: intra party rivalry caused by the preferential voting system. This system was introduced to enable the voter not only to select the political party he wishes but also the candidate who should represent the party he had voted for.

Police and poll monitors say violence this time is more than the 1999 December Presidential election and the 1999 May provincial council election. They say 204 incidents of violence had been reported since nominations commenced on August 28. They said the number of complaints is raising daily with 19 reported on September 11: one murder, 5 armed attacks and 7 cases of arson. Twenty percent of the incidents involve firearms.

Religious leaders and intellectuals, concerned at the swelling violence have launch campaigns against violence. The organization named Alliance for Democracy (AFD) launched, on September 10, a campaign named Swarna Bandhana (Yellow Ribbon) to induce the contestants and supporters to refrain from acts of violence. Representatives of all political parties participated in the inauguration ceremony where yellow bands were tied on their wrists. But the violence is continuing.

## NOMINATION DRAMA

Nomination for the election closed on September 4 and was not without drama and fun. Sri Lanka Muslim Congress leader Ports and Shipping Minister M. H. M. Ashraff provided the biggest entertainment in his bid to win four places in PA's national list in return for contesting with the PA. Ashraff claimed that the SLMC would win eleven seats if it contested the election alone and demanded the PA to com-

pensate it for contesting under its symbol. Transport Minister A. H. M. Fowzie called Ashraff's claim a bluff. He said Ashraff would not win even 5 seats if he contested alone and added that Ashraff could not step into the eastern province without the ministerial security. Ashraff feigned that he was hurt and demanded apology from Fowzie which he refused to do.

Ashraff then tried another ploy. He set off on August 27 on a pilgrimage to Mecca causing difficulties for the PA in finalizing its nomination list. From Mecca he demanded the sacking of Fowzie from his ministerial post saying that both cannot sit in the same cabinet. Fowzie dismissed the demand lightly saying, "Then there should be two cabinets; a special one for Ashraff."

Ashraff returned on August 31 and made a show of it, declining state security and ministerial transport. He drove to a hotel suite in his private vehicle. He announced that he would meet the President for talks only if she invites him.

President Kumaratunga did not call him that night and a desperate Ashraff gave on September 1 a 36-hour ultimatum for the President to invite him. When the President invited him for a meeting at 6 p.m. on September 1 he kept away to raise his price. The President then struck back. She told Presidential Secretary Kusumsri Balapatabendi to find out the number of government vehicles Ashraff's personnel assistants were using. "Twenty-seven, Madam," Balapatabendi announced after a call to the relevant officials. "All are in the eastern province doing Ashraff's election work." The President smiled and instructed Balapatabendi to withdraw them at once.

That did the trick. Officers reported the matter to Ashraff and he requested minister Alavi Moulana to intervene and reschedule the meeting. It was done. "There was a mix up," Ashraff apologized to the President. "I was told that the meeting was at 9 p.m." He presented the President a kilogram of Saudi Arabian dates and the Holy Water he had brought from Mecca. The President gave the SLMC two seats in the national list and an agreement was worked out for SLMC to contest the electoral districts of Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Ampara on the PA symbol. Ten more districts he would contest on his own, not in the name of the

SLMC but under the National Unity Alliance (NUA), a front organization he had formed with the help of a few Sinhalese. In the other eleven electoral districts he agreed to work for the PA.

Next day, Ashraff was in for a shock. PA's organizer for Batticaloa, S. Ganeshamoorthy, filed the nomination papers without including SLMC nominees. Cheliyan was one of the prominent candidates in the PA list. Ganeshamoorthy announced that PA's Tamil supporters in Batticaloa detested contesting under SLMC leadership. Ashraff had arranged for deputy Posts and Communications minister Hisbullah to head the PA list for Batticaloa.

Undercut by Ganeshamoorthy, Ashraff submitted a separate list under NUA which included the name of former Regional and Hindu Affairs minister S. Rajadurai who is currently living in Singapore. Rajadurai had not given his consent to contest in the NUA list. - his signature on the nomination paper was a forgery. So was the affidavit. There are moves to take the matter to the court. All four Tamil names in the NUA nomination list for Jaffna was also forged.

### BOMBER'S BOMBSHELL

Though not equal to Ashraff's feat Ajith Kumara, who in 1987 lobbed a hand grenade at President J.R. Jayewardene while he was presiding over the government parliamentary group meeting inside the high security parliamentary complex had dropped a lethal bombshell. After a meeting with President Kumaratunga he announced that he is joining the PA abandoning his party, the JVP. He was a rabid JVP activist when he penetrated the stringent parliamentary security to throw a grenade at President Jayewardene to

punish him for signing the India-Sri Lanka Peace Treaty of 1987. The grenade missed the president but killed deputy minister Keerthi Abeywickreme and seriously injured National Security minister Lalith Athulathmudali. He was charged before the High Court but was released for lack of evidence. He has filed nominations for Galle district as a JVP candidate.

Two other celebrities of the 1980s are contesting the upcoming parliamentary election. They are Sepala Ekanayake and Vijithmuni Rohana. Sepala Ekanayake, was jailed for hijacking a 261-passenger Alitalia jet in 1982. His name figured prominently in connection with the 1983 July Welikade prison massacre of Tamil prisoners is contesting the Hambantota district on the Bhoomi Putra Party, whose election symbol is aeroplane. Vijithmuni Rohana, was the naval rating who assaulted Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi while he inspected the Guard-of-Honour accorded to him in Colombo in July 1987 after the signing of the Indo-Sri Lanka Peace Accord. He was pardoned by former President Ranasinghe Premadasa and is now contesting the Colombo district as a Sinhala Urumaya candidate.

The Marxist oriented Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) which spearheaded the 1971 and 1989 Southern insurrections and Sinhala Urumaya, the Sinhala fundamentalist movement backed by the powerful Buddhist clergy, are vying to emerge as the third force, opposed to the two main contenders for power, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) led People's Alliance (PA) and the United National Party (UNP).

A total of 29 political parties and 99 independent groups have fielded

5048 candidates; but only four of them, JVP, UNP, Sinhala Urumaya and Citizen's Front, a break away of the UNP, are contesting all 22 electoral districts. PA wanted to contest all districts but was prevailed upon by the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP), a PA ally, to step down in its favour. But its Jaffna organizer Velmurugu Thangarajah rebelled and is leading an independent group.

Elections Commissioner Dayananda Dissanayake says ballot papers in most of the electoral districts will be one and a half feet long.

### THE CAMPAIGN

The campaign is now in full swing. President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga and UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe are addressing largely attended district level conventions. JVP, with its superior organizational capacity, is also holding massive meetings.

The issues discussed at these meetings include:

- New constitution
- War, Pirabhakaran and the LTTE
- Varatharajah Perumal and
- Cost of living and salary increase

President Kumaratunga has vowed to enact a new constitution that provides for the establishment of regional councils with wide powers if her party is returned with a two-third majority. If it fails to get the two-third majority the new parliament would be made a constituent assembly and the constitution would be enacted. She had placed a time frame of two months.

Wickremesinghe says that his government would enact a new constitution in consultation with the Maha Sangha and the LTTE.

President Kumaratunga said she would continue the war till Pirabhakaran enters the talks and a political solution id worked out. Wickremesinghe was willing for a ceasefire followed by talks. He is willing to provide the people in Vanni with food and medicine.

On the basis of Wickremesinghe's position on war and ceasefire President Kumaratunga is trying to show the Sinhala people that Wickremesinghe is in tow with the LTTE. Wickremesinghe's counter to that is Varatharaja Perumal who had been accommodated in PA's national list. "Pirabhakaran never unilaterally declared independence. Vara-

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thajah Perumal did," he says and asks: Was Buddha Sasana minister Jayakody had been dropped from the PA's national list to give a place for Varatharajah Perumal?

Wickremesinghe has promised the government servants Rs. 2000 pay rise and says economy measures like abolishing the Executive Presidency would give the resources to fund the pay rise. This is his answer to President Kumaratunga's query: "Rs. 90 billion would be needed to give Rs. 3000 pay increase. From where is he going to find the money?"

#### OPERATION RIVI KIRANA

On September 3, a day before nominations concluded, the army launched Operation Rivi Kirana (Sun Ray) to capture at least a portion of the territory in Jaffna peninsula lost to the LTTE in April. The army broke out of the defence lines at five points, two in the east of Jaffna town and three to the north of Chavakachcheri. The aim, in the first phase was to retake the territory north of the Kandy Road.

Troops from Sarasalai were allowed in without much resistance and counter attacked near Chavakachcheri. Troops withdrew to its original position with heavy loss of men and material. At Aiyalai and Colombothurai Tigers put up stiff resistance and counterattacked inflicting heavy casualties to the troops.

Troops resumed a limited offensive a week later on September and claimed to have advanced to Navatkuli.

Defence Ministry says it is engaged in strengthening its defences of the Jaffna town but a sense of unrest had spread among the people of Jaffna. They expect a massive attack by the LTTE. People are tired of the war. They yearn for peace. Such seems to be the feeling of the ordinary soldiers.

Anuradhapura police found a soldier behaving in a suspicious manner near the Peace Statue September 10 night. They found that he was carrying a claymore mine and two hand grenades. He told the police that he was from the Engineering unit from the Trincomalee military camp and was on an important mission. Grilled further he confessed that he was trying to blow up the Peace Statue. He said: There is no peace in the country. Then why is this Peace Statue here. ●

# The Unitary System Vs Devolution

Dr. S. Narapalasingam

**T**he draft Constitutional Bill presented to Parliament on August 3 has become the primary election issue. The governing party, led by President Kumaratunga, has gone into the election with the promise to bring back the Bill before parliament for adoption if elected to power.

However, its opponents are campaigning for the defeat of the government because they want to kill any attempt at constitutional reform because they reject the idea of devolution of powers. Masquerading as the saviours of the country, the "rejectionists" claim that the proposals contained the draft constitution will lead to the division of the country as desired by Tamil separatists. They mounted street protests and one Buddhist monk, Ven. Hadigalle Wimalasara even indulged in a fast-unto-death stunt. The rejectionists want the unitary character of the state to be retained. They ignore the fact that it is the unitary system that enabled majoritarian domination over minority communities leading to secessionist demands

Dr. Jayampathy Wickremaratne, Consultant, Justice, Constitutional, Ethnic Affairs and National Integration Ministry, in a recent interview has explained very clearly the rationale for power sharing and devolution. He said, "the use of one's language, job opportunities, economic and educational opportunities and distribution of resources - all depend on political power. If the distribution of political power in multi-ethnic societies is imbalanced, the inevitable result is that the communities without political power become disadvantaged. So in multi-ethnic societies, sharing of political power in an equitable manner among communities is a must for stability... Where a minority is geographically concentrated, the demand is for regional autonomy. This is inevitable. When people with a common cultural identity are geographically concentrated, they would want to

express their cultural identity in political form. Thus arises the demand for regional autonomy."

President Chandrika Kumaratunga has also emphasised the consequences of denying power to the minorities. Speaking in support of devolution, she asked: "Twenty eight per cent of the population are non Sinhalese, eight per cent are Catholics. Do you want us to have them butchered and thrown to the sea?" She also said: "As long as the Tamil people are being attacked and injustices are caused to Muslim people, they will join hands with people like Prabhakaran for their own liberation. If we don't give these people satisfactory solutions, we cannot prevent the Tamil people from going after so many Prabhakarans."

It is the very unitary system the opponents of devolution want to preserve that is endangering unity, democracy, progress and the territorial integrity of the country. There is in principle no problem in having a unitary system in a multi-ethnic country, if all citizens feel they are treated equally with regard to their rights, security and opportunities to advance and prosper and all regions including those parts where the majority are from the minority ethnic groups are developed objectively as an integral part of the overall development process of the country. Certainly, this has not been the case in Sri Lanka where the unitary system was enabled the concentration of power in the major ethnic group, the Sinhalese. It then became not just politically affordable but advantageous to ignore the rights and aspirations of the minorities in the continuous contest between the leaders of the UNP and SLFP to win Sinhala votes. The system divided the Sinhalese and Tamils politically into permanent majority and minority groups.

The assumption that the same system is the safeguard against separation is plainly absurd. In fact, no constitution can prevent a region from seced-

ing, if the majority there are determined to separate and there is some internal and/or external backing. The 'protectors' of the small island nation are only deceiving themselves and the naive people by their blind faith in the political system that has proved to be an absolute failure in Sri Lanka. The system has already produced one of most violent secessionist conflict in the world. The shouts of division and threat to Buddhism and the Sinhala race via devolution are therefore a propagandist ploy.

### Devolution and Ethnicity

There is the view that "as long as devolution is going to be ethnic related, this issue is going to persist, putting the multi-ethnic multi-religious peoples of this country against one another." (The Sunday Times editorial of August 13). This implies that all national policies have hitherto been determined and executed without regard to the ethnic factor!

Unfortunately, the ethnic factor cannot be wished away or ignored after it has been nurtured and used by the

political leaders as a means to win votes and capture power. It is hypocritical to pretend that it is only the minority communities who are communal and the majority Sinhalese shunned communalism in favour of a collective identity transcending ethnic and religious divisions in the society. Any reasonable Sinhalese will readily acknowledge that both in framing national policies and even where these appeared liberal, the ethnic factor was not ignored in their implementation.

Can any one honestly claim that ethnicity was not a key factor in the contentious land settlement policy followed by successive governments? Was ethnicity not a determining factor when the Sinhala Only Act was passed and when ethnic quotas were introduced for admissions to the universities? Declared policies to correct the past mistakes have not been effectual for various reasons. Some may be due to practical difficulties, but the callousness of the authorities to the concerns of the minorities is generally the main cause.

The proposed devolution scheme is

regionally symmetrical (not asymmetrical based on regional needs as proposed earlier by the UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe) and does not grant any additional or special powers to the North-East Council. After embracing ethnic politics for nearly 50 years, the call that devolution should not be ethnic related itself reinforces the existing fears and mistrust of the minorities.

### Unit of Devolution

The above editor's view shared by some political analysts too is that the units in the "devolution" schemes proposed earlier in 1958, 1966, 1987 and now in 2000 have all been opposed by the Sinhalese because the unit was larger than the existing district. In the case of the 1981 District Development Council scheme, "the Sinhalese by and large even if grudgingly, accepted this as a mid-way approach to devolution", because "the word development emphasised the economic development aspect of the council rather than the ethnic aspect".

Paradoxically, one important reason why this is not acceptable to the

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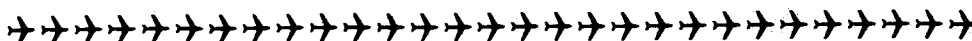
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Tamils is given in the same editorial. "It was just that J R Jayewardene's own Government was responsible for destroying what it created by disrupting the Jaffna DDC elections and not seriously implementing the plan." The Tamils are anxious that they do not want to be in this position, where the exercise of their legitimate rights and devolved powers depends on the whims or charitable mood of the central government. Moreover, development means HUMAN DEVELOPMENT and economic development, though crucial is only one aspect. Suffice to note that human development as the process of widening people's choices and the level of their achieved well-being requires human freedom. The latter entails the recognition of economic, social and political rights and importantly their observance in practice. For sustaining unity and peace in a plural society such as we have in Sri Lanka, it is important that these basic rights and opportunities for development are available freely to all the citizens in all regions of the country.

#### **Sihala Urumaya**

The twists and contradictions in the arguments to retain the unitary cum majoritarian system are apparent in the stated objectives of the Sihala Urumaya Party, formed recently to safeguard the rights of the majority Sinhalese in the wake of the moves to satisfy the 'aspirations of the Tamils' through the devolution of power and the granting of citizenship to the remaining stateless 'Indian Tamils'. According to the party's press release of August 18, "Sihala Urumaya (National Heritage) hopes to treat all communities and races alike without any discrimination but in doing so it will not allow the erosion of the rights of the Sinhala people as had happened and continue to happen under both the PA and UNP. We recognize that many injustices have been done to Sinhala people to pacify the minorities and get their political support. Instances are far too many to enumerate here. People are aware, for example, that the UNP set up provincial councils and the PA is trying ruthlessly to give up the unitary status of the country which is part of the heritage of the Sinhala people, by forming a federal state to placate the minorities and remain in power but which would cause

national disaster." They also promise to restore "the lost rights of the Sinhalese" under the UNP and PA governments.

The interpretation they have given to what is 'national' unequivocally refers only to the Sinhalese. The unitary cum majoritarian rule is considered their heritage (although this is a false claim in terms of history) and nothing must be done to tamper with it! Though they say that they will "treat all communities and races alike without any discrimination" what they make unashamedly clear is that the Sinhalese should have an entrenched superior and dominant status. In their vocabulary, the meaning of equality is clearly that given in the 'Animal Farm' story - all are equal but some are more equal than others.

#### **The Maha Sangha**

The contradictions and contortions on the religious front must also needs highlighting. First there is no constitutional role in a real democracy for prelates of whatever religion either to decree on the structure of the democratic system or to veto a system that the people want to have. The liberal thinker, Harim Peiris in his weekly column in the Daily News of August 19 has pointed out that only in a feudal monarchy, the clergy being essentially an important representative of the common man's interest, the latter can expect the monarch to consult them.

A political role for the Sangha, that to with a veto power over elected representatives, in an independent Sri Lanka where sovereignty rests with the people is simply unacceptable. What a section of the influential Buddhist clergy is trying is not only to obstruct a viable political solution to the national problem but also the democratisation process too. Power sharing and devolving political power are fundamental to both.

The intensity of the opposition to devolution by the Mahanayakes was discernable from the statement made by the chief prelate of the Amarapura Chapter Ven. Madihe Pannasecha Mahanayake Thera soon after the Ven. Hadigalle Wimalasara Thera called off his fast. The prelate after signing the joint declaration of the Mahanayakes against the new constitution in Kandy

had gone to the fasting monk in Colombo and gave the assurance that the Mahanayake Theras of the Malwatte, Asgiriya, Ramangna and Amarapura Chapters would themselves fast, if any attempt was made to revive the constitutional proposals.

The political culture in Sri Lanka as many would agree has evolved over the years by the power seekers courting with groups considered useful for winning votes in the elections. Regrettably, this practice which started initially with religious leaders has got extended to include gangs of the underworld as well. The difference being that by virtue of their respectful position in the society, the prelates have appropriated for themselves powers to which they are not entitled to legally or otherwise. On the other hand, they have done little to stem the behaviour that is inconsistent with Buddhist principles in the society, now visible in the rise in murders, rape, suicides, organised violence against political opponents and the breakdown in law and order.

These prelates also say that they want a violence-free election and have even volunteered to be 'monitors' in the October 10 parliamentary elections, a role meant for independent bodies and individuals. These priests are neither independent nor do they advocate non-violence. They are self-confessed partisans and are opposed to a peaceful resolution of the ethnic conflict as they want the present war to continue until the 'enemy' is crushed. They vehemently oppose the political parties advocating devolution of powers and their support to the other parties is largely for this reason. Some are also closely affiliated with certain political parties. Despite this oddity, the privately owned press has welcomed their offer to be election monitors.

#### **UNP's Change of Position**

Among the many Sri Lankan political leaders only a few by any reasonable definition can be called national leaders or even statesmen. The quality to lead the people along the correct (morally and politically) path has been lacking. The propensity to follow powerful pressure groups and succumb to the demands of extremists for narrow political gains has been exceptionally high. The chaos, indiscipline, instabil-

ity, corruption, poor management and financial and economic losses contributing to the lack of progress can be laid down squarely to this weakness. Moreover, in recent times the yawning gap between their rhetoric and deeds has disappointed the discerning voters. The disappointment seems to have intensified as to abhor the political systems imposed alternately by the two main parties.

UNP's 1999 presidential election manifesto - My Pact with the People - clearly stated, "The people of Sri Lanka especially the minorities deserve a directly elected chief executive who stands above the fray of political battle. This person could be a president, accountable in Parliament or a directly elected Prime Minister who will sit in parliament and hold special executive powers." But now the UNP has changed its position pledging to abolish the executive presidency because the UNP leader lost in the contest with Mrs Kumaratunga. On the other hand, the Peoples Alliance promised in 1994 to abolish the office before getting elected that

year. The abolition of the Executive Presidency would involve a wholesale structuring of the 1978 Constitution, but the PA could not do it because it did not have the required majority in parliament. Without a bipartisan consensus, there was no way such an exercise could have been undertaken.

However a bipartisan consensus between the PA and the UNP was reached on the draft new constitution (with the exception of only four out of the 256 articles). But, instead of continuing to negotiate on the disputed Articles, or move their own amendments when the draft was presented to Parliament, at the eleventh hour the UNP suddenly withdrew its support and brought the entire constitutional reform process to a halt. It wanted the government to consult the Maha Sangha and the LTTE on the entire draft. The motive to take this stand, especially at the late stage just few weeks before the parliamentary elections is questionable, because the LTTE had already rejected the draft while the Mahanayakes had already declared their opposition and

organised street protests and demonstrations.

The latest election manifesto of the UNP mentions that the party if elected will have direct unconditional talks with the LTTE. But it does not make it clear whether UNP would agree to ceasefire and withdraw the military from Jaffna as demanded by the LTTE as a precondition for the commencement of "unconditional talks." Perhaps the UNP leader has in mind a bipartisan consensus between the LTTE leadership and the Maha Sangha preceded by direct negotiations between the two parties!

The UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe told the press recently that an "intelligent" leader could bring about an understanding between the apparently irreconcilable parties, the Tamil Tigers and the Maha Sangha. He was confident that he had that intelligence to accomplish this task. To quote his words: "If you are an intelligent leader, you can do it. I think I can do it." If he does it, certainly he deserves the Nobel Prize for Peace!



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My dear Periya Annah,

On September 4, the final day of the nomination for the October 10 parliamentary election, we fled to Chunnakam but returned to Nallur three days later. Mother and sister were crying and were in a state of panic when we went home around noon that day after a bicycle joy ride through the town with my friends enjoying the nomination koothu. A few shells had exploded in Nallur, Kalviyankadu and Chundikuli while we were at the Stanley Road where some of the political party offices are located and a supersonic Mig 27s swept threateningly low over Jaffna town a few minutes later shuddering windows and splintering glasses. This had shook our 'bold' sister who started shivering. Naturally mother was disturbed.

Neighbours had already left, some to the Nallur temple and others to unknown destinations further north, by the time I returned home. We joined the northward trek, sister carrying a weighty suitcase, mother hauling a sack-full of cooking utensils and I pushing my bicycle loaded like a mule. When we reached Chunnakam it was already congested, there were people everywhere, in gardens and even under the trees. I reserved a place under a tamarind tree, kept mother and sister to guard it and went in search of a better shelter.

I was advised to go to a refugee camp run by a Non-Governmental Organization. What a terrible sight it was. It was already brimful and stinking. There were men playing cards and women cooking dinner.

I asked a harassed official why things were so awry. He heaved a somber sigh and said: "Thamby! What are we to do? Over 200,000 of Jaffna peninsula's 500,000 people are displaced. Most of them are living with relatives, friends or on their own. NGOs are catering to the poorest, those who have no means of fending for themselves," he said. I left to the tamarind tree without a murmur. The fact that we have you abroad disqualifies us from seeking NGO assistance.

There are over 10,000 of destitute

## Letter from Jaffna

persons in those camps. I found that a large number of them are from our own fishing community, the most affected section of Jaffna peninsula's population. Others are either farmers or casual workers.

As you are aware that our community suffered most since the beginning the Eelam struggle but from September 4 the situation worsened. On that day fishing was totally banned. I must raise my hat to our fellowmen of Vadamarachchi East for their courage and determination. On September 8, over a thousand of them demonstrated opposite the Mannakadu Army Camp in Vaddamarachchi East demanding the lifting of the ban. It was a failure, I must admit. But the fact they had the guts to challenge the military command should be hailed. I must also applaud the EPDP for the swiftness with which it capitalized on such a predicament; it took up the matter with army authorities and announced that the ban would be removed with the next few days.

Whatever its faults, whatever its over reaching ambition, EPDP is the only party with a visible presence in the Jaffna peninsula, and its half a dozen party offices are the only places Jaffna's harassed people can go for redress. And with elections a month away they swiftly exploited it. The latest joke doing its rounds here is about a mobile employment service the EPDP had commissioned. Two weeks ago it sent a batch of about 50 boys and girls to the People's Bank Colombo head office for interview for the post of bank clerks. The EPDP had arranged their travel to Colombo and back and their transport to the bank's headquarters. The rumour mill is spreading the story that the fee was Rs. 300,000. TULF's senior deputy president V. Anandasangari was not bold enough to say it openly but had dubbed the EPDP with the nickname, "viyaparigal" meaning merchants. EPDP chief Douglas Devananda was equally resourceful. He called the TULF with greater pungency,

"koothani" meaning dancing front.

Whether koothani or not the TULF is posing

the greatest threat to the EPDP which enjoyed power for the past six years on the strength of its nine parliamentarians it secured in August 1994 with the blessings of the UNP. In 1994 Jaffna peninsula was under the control of the LTTE and the polling stations for the ten seats were set up in the army held areas. EPDP which contested the election bagged 10,744 of the total 13,479 valid votes cast. The total number of registered votes was 596,366. The SLMC the other party in the fray polled 2098 votes. EPDP won nine seats and SLMC one.

Devananda has to win a substantial number of seats in the upcoming election if he is to continue to wield power in the next parliament. That is not so easy. Apart from the TULF, All Ceylon Tamil Congress which is exploiting its traditional vote bank and the sympathy for the slain Kumar Ponnambalam also pose a threat. Tamil Congress chief Appapillai Vinayagamoorthy had roped in A. Manikkajothy, former LTTE Colombo chief, who initiated the President Premadasa-LTTE talks in 1989, as his deputy. Though the LTTE, it is said, had warned the Tamil Congress not to exploit the title Mamanithar it awarded to Kumar Ponnambalam for its electoral gain, the Tamil Congress will naturally exploit the pro-LTTE vote bank. PLOTE and EROS which had joined hands too have pockets of influence.

Besides the direct challenge from these traditional political heavy weights EPDP has to contend with two independent groups which claim government patronage. Ruling People's Alliance (PA) wanted to contest the Jaffna peninsula under the leadership of its Jaffna Organizer Velmurugu Thangarajah but Devananda succeeded in persuading President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga not to do so. Thangarajah revolted and is heading an independent group. Former North-East Province chief minister A. Varatharaja Perumal, who enjoys government patronage too had fielded a strong con-

tingent including former EPDP MP Rameswaran who wields considerable support in EPDP's little kingdom, the islands.

Others of the 14 political parties and six independent groups that had filed nomination may splinter votes some like the three Sinhala parties - Sihala Urumaya, Bhoomi Putra and Ruhunu People's Party - may collect only a handful. The representatives of these parties flew into Jaffna in the morning and returned after handing the nomination papers. Sihala Urumaya, often referred as Sinhala Urmaya, is contesting Jaffna to show the country and the world that Jaffna is an integral part and parcel of the Sinhala State!

Devananda's latest job distribution project had been buckled by Thangarajah. The EPDP which claims to be the government's accredited representative in the north announced two weeks ago that the government's poverty alleviation Program, Samurthi, would be implemented in the Jaffna district and invited applications from Jaffna youth for the post of Samurthi officers. Government officials refused to entertain applications saying that they had not received instructions from the concerned ministry but were pressurized by Devananda to accept the applications and hold interviews which they did. Thangarajah immediately blew the lid off the fraud announcing that the government had not decided about Samurthi appointments.

EPDP is now being accused of threatening opposing candidates. Two from the TULF and one from the TELO led independent group had announced their withdrawal. TC and Thangarajah have announced that their candidates are under threat. I learnt that two methods are employed to threaten the opponents. First, the candidate's family is informed that the LTTE disfavors their contesting the election. If that fails armed men appear and issue the required warning.

The EPDP, I learnt, is not going to have that easy in the run up to the election. Hand grenade attack on three EPDP armed men at Point Pedro some days back is a pointer to what may happen.

With love  
Younger brother,  
Anthony

## Isn't the Nationalist a Mental Patient?

Dr. E. W. Adikaram

**A**re you a Sinhalese? If you are a Sinhalese how do you know that? I have asked this question from many who call themselves Sinhalese. I have so far never received a satisfactory reply from any of them. I have also asked those who say that they are Tamils, Telegus etc. as to how they know that they are Tamils, Telegus and so on. From them too, I have never received a satisfactory reply.

When this question is asked, some get annoyed. Some ask back why I should ask this question when the reply is so obvious. Some consider that the question is asked merely for fun. Still others reply that they have never given thought to this question. Anyway a satisfactory, a logical and an acceptable reply does not come forth from any of them.

"I am a Sinhalese because my parents are Sinhalese." This is the argument of many. This surely is not a reply but only shifting the question a little further, as the next immediate question would then be "How do you know that your parents are Sinhalese?" This shifting can go on further and further, but the question will not thereby be solved. "A person is Sinhalese because he speaks the Sinhalese language." This is another argument that is usually adduced. But there are people of other nationalities who speak only Sinhalese because they happen to be brought up from early childhood in homes where only Sinhalese is spoken.

Simply because they speak the Sinhalese language they do not thereby become Sinhalese. And also there are Sinhalese people who speak a language other than Sinhalese because they were brought up in non-Sinhalese homes. They are not considered non-Sinhalese simply because they cannot speak Sinhalese. It is therefore clear that one is not a Sinhalese just because he speaks Sinhalese. Similarly a person does not become an Englishman simply because he speaks English.

If so, how can one conclusively

know that a person is Sinhalese, Tamil, English, German or Japanese? There is no reply that could be given to this question. A right reply can be given only to a right question. A right reply cannot be given to this question because the question is wrong. When in truth there is no such thing as a nationality, how is it possible to give a right reply when one is asked to which nationality a person belongs?

If you have an infant child please examine its entire body as carefully as possible. Is there any special part of its body or mark which differentiates it as a Sinhalese child? However much you may search you will never find such a distinguishing characteristic. There are people different in colour of skin such as black, brown, white, yellow etc. that is due to the fact that their ancestors lived for thousands of years in places differing from each other in climatic and geographical conditions. But that colour does not give an indication as to what nationality a person belongs.

As that child who is common to the entire human race grows up he will be given a name and will be deemed to belong to a particular race or nationality. That child who at the time is incapable of logical thinking, who cannot discern fact from non-fact and who hasn't the ability to compare and contrast, accepts unthinkingly and unknowingly the nationality that has been thrust upon him. Having accepted it he gradually comes to believe that he belongs to that particular nationality. Please think over the fact that you became a Sinhalese not because you had something naturally Sinhalese but because of the belief created and imposed on you by the environment and society including your parents.

Species of birds differ by birth from one another. Between the eagle and the dove, between the quail and the peacock there is a natural difference. Is there such a difference between the Sinhalese and the Tamil, between the Englishman and the German.



So are the other animals. They have species differing from one another. There are natural characteristics that differentiate the tiger from the bear and the horse from the bull. Is there such a difference between the Japanese and the Jew or between the Chinaman and the Eskimo? Unlike birds and animals, all human beings in the world belong to one species only, the human species. In truth there is only one human race; what goes as Sinhalese, Tamil, English and a thousand other nationalities are only designations born out of belief and having no intrinsic significance whatsoever.

If one sees things that do not exist and believes that they do exist, such a person we call a mental patient. On one occasion when I went to the mental hospital at Angoda to visit a friend who was a patient there, a person calling himself His Majesty Diyasena the King of the Sinhalese spoke to me and got into conversation with me. Not only did he firmly believe that he was King Diyasena but in his behaviour he even showed an affected regal demeanour. If any one told him that he was not Diyasena, he would naturally consider

that person a lunatic.

If we consider as insane a person who calls himself a non-existent King Diyasena, how can we consider as sane those people who call themselves Sinhalese, Tamil, English when in truth there is no such thing as a Sinhalese nation, a Tamil nation or an English nation. There is only one human race. We are human beings and not Sinhalese, Tamil or English. Biologically this is so. But those who are fettered with the belief that there is racial difference are incapable of seeing this fact.

As the idea of nation has come into being by assuming as existent something which does not exist, nationalism has to be necessarily considered a form of insanity. Not only here but in the whole world the vast majority of people are tethered with that belief, with that delusion.

The main cause for all the wars that took place in the world in the past was this psychological ailment, namely nationalism. Even in the modern world which, due to advancement in science, has all the opportunities for comfortable living, man has to suffer because of this disease of nationalism and its

inevitable political tentacles.

In big countries those who suffer from this madness, contrive to bring about murder on a big scale with nuclear weapons etc. In small countries like Sri Lanka they kill human beings on a smaller scale and they hurt people's feelings with various ridiculous mad activities such as the defacing of name boards written in languages other than their own.

Mankind today is living in a most critical stage. Many do not understand how dangerous the present situation is. We should understand that the forces that work in the world today are different from those that existed in the past. Even a slight mistake can make the entire human species disappear from the face of the earth.

We can avoid that catastrophe and survive this critical period only if we act sanely with the feeling that this is our world and not by murdering each other saying that this is our nation and our country. Shouldn't we therefore be free of this insanity of nationalism and thereby cease to be enemies of mankind?

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## Missing Mother's Tasty Rice and Curry

**O**verlooking vast tea gardens and flower farms, a tin-roofed building on a small hill echoes with the laughter of boys playing an unusual game of charades. One gestures as if plowing a rice field. Another playmate hazards a guess: "He is digging a mass grave." "No," says another. "He is bayoneting a half-dead soldier."

The boys are former Tamil Tiger child soldiers who have either surrendered or been captured in the civil war that has savaged parts of Sri Lanka for 17 years.

To an Associated Press reporter and photographer who were allowed by the Sri Lankan military to visit the rehabilitation camp, the youngsters tell of being lured into action by videos depicting Tamil heroism, of planting mines and of going on reconnaissance missions. One boy speaks of missing his mother's cooking.

Once freed from detention, they are caught in a limbo. They can try to live in the Sinhalese-dominated south as Tamil outsiders under constant suspicion, or move back to the Tamil north and risk punishment for abandoning the fight for a Tamil homeland on the island.

According to the United Nations, more than 300,000 girls and boys aged under 18 are involved in fighting in more than 30 countries, and their plight will be highlighted at a weeklong conference beginning Sunday in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Canadian government agencies are playing host to the International Conference on War-Affected Children. Of the 50 children coming to the conference, 25 are from countries involved in wars: Sierra Leone, Angola, Rwanda, Colombia, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Israel and Burma.

In Sri Lanka, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam have admitted only once to using child fighters. During a 1998 visit by Olara Otunnu, U.N. rep-

resentative for Children in Armed Conflict, they said they would stop recruiting fighters aged under 16.

But the independent University Teachers for Human Rights, a group of Tamil intellectuals, accused the rebels in July of forcing boys and girls as young as 10 to serve as fighters and of torturing those who refuse.

Why children? Because children make good soldiers, says Henrik Haggstrom of the Swedish chapter of Save the Children, who has worked for more than 10 years with militias that use children.

Modern lightweight weapons enable kids as young as 10 to be efficient killers. They can carry bombs and infiltrate enemy lines. Adult soldiers are reluctant to shoot children.

There is no credible estimate of how many child fighters are with the Tamil rebels. But the Sri Lankan military says it often finds one or two bodies of children among 10 to 15 rebel corpses after a battle.

The Tamil Tigers are outlawed in Sri Lanka. Their office in London asked that questions be faxed but did not reply to them.

In the rehabilitation center, among tea and farms growing marigolds and roses, are 34 former child fighters, now aged 14 to 20.

"Smile. Sad faces are only good for begging," says a poster hanging on a wall at the center.

The charades were organized by James Thompson, a British drama lecturer who runs trauma counseling workshops in Sri Lanka. He didn't mention war, just asked the boys to act out whatever they pleased.

The Sri Lankan military gave the AP access to all the boys, but only two would talk, and they would give only a first name. Jeyashanthan, a slim young man in a T-shirt, pants and slippers, stood under a mango tree and spoke haltingly of his recruitment, occasion-

ally trying to change the subject.

He said he was 14 in 1994 when "annas", or big brothers, as he called the rebel recruiters, came to his village in Achchuveli in the northern Jaffna peninsula. They put on a video show of modern-day battlefield exploits and epics about the invasion of Sri Lanka by India's Tamil kings centuries ago.

"I made up my mind and told my mother," said Jeyashanthan. "I was picked up by another group of 'big brothers' and taken to a training camp where I found 300 others like me."

He said he saw his parents and 10 brothers and sisters only once more over the following six years.

"I missed the tasty rice and curry my mother cooked," he said.

"At the camp, we had to wake up at 4:30 a.m.," he said. "At daybreak we had to assemble and pledge allegiance to Vellupillai Prabhakaran, honesty and the cause of Tamil Eelam." Prabhakaran is the Tamil Tigers' leader. Eelam means homeland.

"The first few weeks were terrible. Many of us could not stand the physical training. But the 'big brothers' told us pain will bring liberation," he said.

"There is no freedom in the movement. No music, no commercial films, no swearing or smoking," said Jeyashanthan. Drugs and sex were also banned, he said.

"Later they gave us training with weapons and use of land mines," he said. "The commander - 'big brother' would stand in front of a blackboard and write down the do's and don'ts. They made dummies using straw and would tell us to use them as targets."

After three months of training, Jeyashanthan said, he got his first assignment, to join half a dozen other kids reconnoitering military camps.

In late August 1998, Jeyashanthan said, he reconnoitered the town of Kilinochchi. A month later the rebels attacked it. About 900 soldiers and guerrillas died during the two-day battle.

Jeyashanthan insisted he never shot or killed anyone. "I wasn't involved in direct shootouts," he said. But he would not say whether the mines he planted killed anyone.

In November 1999, Sri Lanka

troops raided a rebel camp near Kilinochchi and captured him. He was brought to the rehabilitation center in Bandarawela, a town of 60,000 people 120 miles east of Colombo, the capital.

"No one knows I am here," said Jeyashanthan. The rebels, he said, "will shoot me, kill me, if I go back."

Bhavan, slim and tall and looking older than his 19 years, said he was one of three brothers and was given to the guerrillas by his family at age 16. "The rebels asked each family to give one child toward the cause. So I joined."

He said he was captured by the army last December as he tried to get his family out of rebel territory. They were separated and he does not know their fate.

"I was never bothered by the hard life or fear of death when I was with the 'big brothers.' But what I missed was my lonely mother," Bhavan said. His father, a farmer, died when he was 10. Last year he received a letter from his mother asking him to come home to help the family financially, as the rice crop had failed.

"I debated whether to tell the 'big brothers' about this, or just flee. I was worried they might not believe me, so I escaped during an operation," Bhavan said. He hid in a thicket and when his group advanced to attack, he turned back and ran.

The army caught him. "I was questioned and occasionally beaten for 2 1/2 months, when I was in army custody," he said. "I don't know why, but one day the questioning stopped and they brought me here."

Bhavan said he has studied carpentry. The boys stay up to one year at the center and leave with papers explaining their background, said an officer, Capt. K. Abeyratne. Still, they are sometimes arrested at military checkpoints by soldiers who believe the documents are fake.

Bhavan said he has no idea where he will go when he leaves the camp.

"There will be no end to the whole thing until both sides talk peace and come to a settlement," he said. Then he added: "What's the point in living?"

"Sri Lankan Youngsters See Death" Associated Press,

(Guardian Unlimited, 10.09.2000)

# Ashraff - Always in the eye of the storm

Ajith Samaranayake

M. H. M. Ashraff who was killed in a horrible helicopter crash at Aranya yesterday morning was a phenomenon in Sri Lanka's politics extinguished in his prime. In a matter of little more than a decade he took Sri Lanka's politics by storm. Since then he has always been in the eye of the storm and the manner of his going will further confirm his posthumous claim to a place in Sri Lanka's political mythology as much vilified hero and martyr.

An Attorney-at-Law by profession Ashraff saw as nobody else did before him, the political potential of the Eastern Province with its predominant Muslim habitation. Before his advent, Muslim politics had been dominated by Colombo-based politicians who had aligned themselves to the two major political parties, the UNP and the SLFP. But Ashraff had by the eighties seen the potential inherent in the Muslim community for the forging of an independent Muslim political party. He was no doubt permeated by the waves of radicalism then sweeping across the Islamic world and the growing power of the Arab states.

The style was the man. I remember distinctly how in 1989 on his parliamentary debut as leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, he answered hecklers with an aplomb which more senior parliamentarians might have envied.

Soon he was maturing in every direction. He studied the methods adopted by S. Thondaman, that patriarch of minority politics, and forged alliances with the government in power which would best ensure the interests of his community. He supported the Premadasa government and had no hesitation in helping President Kumartunga to form her government in 1994 even though strenuous overtures were made by the UNP to take him to their

side.

During the last few years, Ashraff set his sights beyond the politics of his community. He sought to forge a broad alliance with all the national communities in the form of the National Unity Alliance. He never gave up his campaign to bring about consensual politics inviting all major political leaders for the SLMC conventions. Only last week he addressed an open letter to UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe.

Like most path-breakers, Ashraff was much misunderstood both by sections of his own community as well as by extremist Sinhalese. Both sections accused him of trying to be a king-maker and his recent joust with fellow Minister Fowzie is too well known to need repetition. But Ashraff was always a resilient man and this was best demonstrated when he learnt Sinhala to debate the Ven. Gangodawila Soma on television. Only last week, he appeared on a television chat show, showing a marked improvement in his Sinhala in a very short time.

Ashraff then saw the potential and strength of a separate Muslim identity but sought to channel it in a progressive direction and finally align it with a broader national alliance of unity. Perhaps in this endeavour, he was in too much of a hurry, but then again perhaps, the times demanded such haste.

He certainly antagonised many. Perhaps he was ahead of his times, but whatever reservations one might have of his personal political style or his single tenure as a Cabinet Minister, there can be little doubt that he sought to break the mould of traditional Muslim politics and lead a bold socio-political experimentation with a community which conventional wisdom saw as being backward.

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# 'A Separate State is the Only Solution

- Vaiko

Vaiko Gopalasamy, leader of the Tamil Nadu political party Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK), is a prominent member of India's Parliament and a close ally of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee. But he is most often in the news for his vocal support for Sri Lanka's Tamil minority and their calls for a separate state. Vaiko spoke to Time Asia contributor Maseeh Rahman in New Delhi recently. Edited excerpts:

**TIME:** What impact will October's parliamentary elections in Sri Lanka have on the island's ethnic conflict?

**Vaiko:** No matter which party emerges with a majority, the election results will only testify to the intransigence of the Sinhalese, who will continue to perpetuate genocide against the Tamils.

**TIME:** But isn't there hope that if President Chandrika Kumaratunga's People's Alliance wins convincingly, she could push forward her plan to give more powers to the Tamil-majority districts?

**Vaiko:** During the last election [in December], Kumaratunga promised many things, but she did not implement them. And in recent months there has been loud talk of "devolution of powers." But what has happened? The constitutional amendment did not go through Parliament. The Buddhist clergy showed that they would never allow such a thing. Both political groupings in Sri Lanka, the People's Alliance and the opposition United National Party, are under their thumb. The Sinhalese are just not prepared to provide any sort of real devolution of powers to the Tamils. This has been the attitude of the Sinhalese, particularly the Buddhist clergy, right from the time of independence in 1948.

**TIME:** Don't you think President Kumaratunga is sincere in seeking to resolve the problems with the Tamils?

**Vaiko:** Kumaratunga has hoodwinked the entire international community with the mask of providing dialogue and peace. She's been very clever- she's also been more treacherous than her predecessors. In the past, when she was offering peace talks, she was procuring arms all over the world. Now, even if she had managed to get the constitutional amendment passed, it would not have solved the problem. Because the so-called devolution package does not satisfy the aspirations of the Tamils, including the moderates.

**TIME:** So even if Kumaratunga's party emerges with a two-thirds majority, you do not see a solution to the problem.

**Vaiko:** They're not sincere about giving reasonable rights to the suffering Tamils. So they will never implement a proposal that gives justice to them.

**TIME:** In the past, it is the Tamils who have been accused of breaking the cease-fire, and not responding to peace offers. Is that correct?

**Vaiko:** The armed struggle of the Tamils is the result of the genocidal attacks and stepmotherly treatment of the Sinhalese government. Without 'the gun,' the Tamil struggle would have been totally dissipated. At least with the gun they've been able to sustain the demand for justice. Otherwise there would not have been a murmur in the whole world about the plight of the Tamils.

**TIME:** Did you read the press reports about a 14-year-old prisoner of war in Jaffna, a young girl who says she was recruited to fight by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) at the age of seven.

**Vaiko:** The Sri Lankan government has been using so many methods to malign the LTTE. How can you count on the testimony of a girl who is in the custody of the Sri Lankan security forces? Her statements would have been made under duress.

**TIME:** Are you saying the LTTE are not using children to fight the war?

**Vaiko:** Teenagers are being used, but not by compulsion. They are there on their own motivation. They have seen how their fathers and mothers have suffered, and that's why they go. It is not a simple thing to give up your life [but] they go and die with a mission. Does anyone bother asking about the bombing by Sri Lankan forces of areas where innocent Tamils are living? Refugees who have reached Tamil Nadu from Jaffna relate heartrending stories. They say that children are taken away by the Sri Lankan security forces and their lips are broken, their eyes are blinded... Why? Because when they grow up they are destined to fight [for the LTTE]. Even the Nazis did not commit such horrible crimes.

**TIME:** People on both sides have suffered. How will this end?

**Vaiko:** When Yasser Arafat says his ultimate goal is a separate Palestinian state, nobody accuses him of being a terrorist. The Tamils have a hundred more justifiable reasons for a separate state than the Palestinians. For thousands of years they had their own separate kingdom; they're a separate race. The British united the island, but after they left, the Tamils were treated like slaves. Regional autonomy can never satisfy the aspirations of the people. I was with Velupillai Prabhakaran [the LTTE's secretive leader and confessed assassin] for nearly a month in 1989 when the war was going on. I realized then that the separate state of Eelam is the only solution. It will happen one day. The LTTE is on the road to victory.

**TIME:** What has allowed Prabhakaran to continue fighting for so long?

**Vaiko:** He's a man of indomitable iron will and determination. His name inspires the people of Eelam. He is a man of exemplary personal character. And he has no equal when it comes to military strategy.

**TIME:** There's a fear in New Delhi that a separate Tamil nation in Sri Lanka will lead to a similar demand this side of the Palk Straits.

**Vaiko:** There's a vilification campaign to mislead the people of India.

# The Veerappan Phenomenon

T.N.Gopalan

**F**or nearly six weeks now, brigand Veerappan has been throwing rings around the Tamil Nadu and Karnataka State governments. He had abducted popular Kannada film star Rajkumar, in his early seventies, and three of his associates, from his farm-house on the inter-State border on the night of July 30. Up to now, there has been no sign of the actor's release.

Mr.R.R.Gopal, Publisher-Editor of the sensation-mongering Tamil bi-weekly *Nakkeeran*, has been shuttling between Chennai and the forest hide-outs of Veerappan, carrying messages back and forth. The two State governments are bending impossibly backwards to please the bandit in an attempt to persuade him to give up his prized hostage.

The Rajkumar fans ran amok immediately after the abduction. Several Tamil establishments in Bangalore and elsewhere were ransacked. The Tamils in that state are still cowering in fright.

The S.M.Krishna government in Karnataka is haunted by visions of the vicious anti-Tamil riots in December 1991 when the Narasimha Rao government set up a tribunal to adjudicate on the Cauvery river water dispute. Any fresh bout of riots would mar

Bangalore's image as the cyber-capital of India and could choke the flow of foreign investments.

Karunanidhi's prestige too is at stake. If anything goes awry, it could damage his party's prospects in the next year's Assembly elections.

At one stage it had looked as if Rajkumar would be released. The two governments pretended to be conceding most of Veerappan's demands, and the brigand himself seemed to be satisfied with their response.

None of the demands, incidentally, except perhaps for the unstated ransom part, had anything to do with Veerappan or his associates at a personal level. The demands embraced a wide range of issues, from releasing Cauvery water as stipulated in the interim award of the Tribunal to higher wages for the plantation labourers. He was making out that he was only seeking justice for the Tamils as a whole.

Nakkeeran Gopal acknowledges Veerappan has indeed become a hardened Tamil nationalist and quotes him as saying, "From a leader of six lakh Tamil villagers around the forests, I have come to champion the cause of six crore Tamils in the country. I have no personal axe to grind..."

The Tamils of Tamil Nadu are proud to be citizens of India, the greatest democracy in the world. When the Bangladeshis asked for a separate state, did the people in West Bengal want to go with the Bangladeshis?

**TIME:** But we now hear of a Tamil liberation front in Tamil Nadu, after the kidnapping of the Kannada movie star, Raj Kumar, by the sandalwood smuggler Veerappan.

**Vaiko:** It's a splinter group made up of one or two individuals. Veerappan is a bandit who has killed more than 120 people and 2,000 elephants. He can be given an opportunity to reform. But

there is no possibility of him emerging as the leader of a separatist movement.

**TIME:** Do you think New Delhi is doing enough to help the Tamils in Sri Lanka?

**Vaiko:** I am not asking India to divide Sri Lanka. But a separate state is inevitable. If it is established by the Tamils, India cannot be blamed or be held responsible. The Indian government is sympathetic to the Tamils' cause. But it will never commit the blunders of the past, those committed by the government of Rajiv Gandhi (who militarily assisted Colombo to fight Prabhakaran's insurgents).

(Courtesy of Time Asia)

Many of his demands may not be implementable at all, like taking the Cauvery dispute to the International Court of Justice or raising the procurement price for tea leaves or making Tamil the second administrative language in Karnataka. He himself seems to be conscious of the ground realities as seen in the fact that he is not insisting on them any more.

But then he seemed to be happy highlighting the grievances and showing up the politicians as hypocrites and leaving the matter at that.

But all the fond hopes of the two governments that Veerappan, satisfied with their response would set Rajkumar and three others free, with no major loss of face for them.

Unveiling a statue of poet Thiruvalluvar in Bangalore or setting aside funds for the rehabilitation of the victims of the atrocities of the Special Task Force (STF) set up to nab Veerappan are a small price for the governments.

But everything came to nought with the Supreme Court clamping an indefinite stay on the withdrawal of the cases against the supposed associates of Veerappan being tried under the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act, the TADA.

Ah, how dare you cave into the demands of a bandit? Is there no rule of law? How could you cite possible anti-Tamil riots as a reason for the withdrawal of the cases? If you cannot govern, get out and make way for someone else who can, screamed the judges.

The self-righteous columnists, why the middle classes in general, are in raptures over the stinging reprimand administered to the Karnataka government on the issue of the release of the TADA detenus. "The Court has now struck a blow for the rule of law," said commenators. "We're becoming a soft state," the President of India said expressing his concern over the nexus between criminals and politicians.

But Veerappan's demands should not blind anyone to the actual plight of the detenus. Critics never seem to take into account the absolute misery and total helplessness of the situation of the 51 detenus still behind bars. Another 76 are out on bail, but they too are a harassed lot, having to trek a long distance to the courts and the police stations every once in a while and con-

stantly humiliated and terrorised by the police.

Observes Mr. Mathews Phillip, Director of South India Cell for Human Rights Education and Monitoring (SICHREM), "The joint Special Task Force of the two states went on a rampage during 1992-94. The sheer scale of the barbarities they inflicted on innocent people in 35 villages in and around the Veerappan haunts is something incredible and appalling... Only when we were mounting a campaign for the release of the TADA detenus in general, after the expiry of the Act, we came to realise the gross injustice meted out to the hapless villagers... There are now 12 women still inside and who are covered by the indefinite stay clamped by the supreme court... Go, take a look at them, see for yourselves whether they could really have committed the crimes attributed to them... The self-righteous are really turning the issue on its head when they say that a mighty government is caving in before a terrorist... What is happening is that it is an outlaw who has shocked the nation out of its by highlighting the injustice meted out by our lawfully established authorities and the way the legal system has been held hostage by a insensitive few..."

27-year-old Velliyamma of Sethukuli village is an accused in the sensational murder of Superintendent of Special Task Force Harikrishna and sub-inspector Shakeel Ahmed in Aug. 1992, is charged with attempting to murder 20 others who were injured on the occasion and with committing dacoity, taking away guns and ammunition from the felled STF personnel. She is one of the 51 behind the bars.

Widowed, torn away from her two young children, the younger hardly eight-months-old at the time of her arrest way back in 1992, she is a complete wreck now. She does not even seem to know what she is charged with. "Naan avungalukku sakaayam pannadha cholraanga...(They say that I helped Veerappan's gang.) But neither I nor my husband had had anything to do with Veerappan..."

"But why did they pick on you?"

"Who knows? After some police officers were killed, they herded out many in our area.... Within the next few days they told me my husband had been

killed in a police action.... I went through a harrowing time at the hands of the STF men in the Pannari camp... I was finally transferred to this (Mysore) prison, then they tell me I'm a TADA detenu..."

"Who's taking care of your children now?"

"My ageing mother, doing menial jobs..."

"Shall we arrange some monetary assistance to her?"

She instantly breaks down. "Aiya (sir), I don't want any money... please ask them to release me... I've suffered hell.... I'm dreading the day my mother will pass away.... what will happen to my children?..."

Abdul Kareem, a retired police official and father of Shakeel Ahmed, one of Veerappan's early victims went to court challenging the withdrawal of the cases against the TADA under trials, without pausing a moment to ponder their plight or their background. If anything his own son has been accused of many an excess, including torching huts of suspected accomplices in sheer desperation.

The Supreme Court gladly latched on to his petition and rapped the Karnataka government on the knuckles. It did not direct the petitioner to approach the lower courts first as has been its wont.

But Veerappan himself remains unfazed. Unless the cases are withdrawn against the 127 villagers and the five Tamil extremists detained in Tamil Nadu, Rajkumar would not be released, he has said in no uncertain terms.

Now the two governments are working over-time to move the apex court again and somehow persuade it to bale them out, whatever the legal niceties or their "moral concerns."

It is to be noted here that Veerappan is not demanding the release of his own brother Madhaiyan and other associates still in jail.

From elephant poaching to Tamil nationalism has indeed been one long journey. How did this come about? Is he merely a dreaded killer that he is made out to be? Or is he yet another Robinhood the poor admire? Or a politician in the making with the right criminal track-record?

Nobody has any clear-cut answer. The 61-year-old Koosai Muniasamy

Veerappan has fascinated the Tamil society like never before. He is turning out to be a charismatic personality.

An AIADMK leader, one of the first benefactors and collaborators of the brigand denied any personal involvement with Veerappan whom he dreads to this day. He was disarmingly frank except for disowning direct links with Veerappan.

"He might have been in my employ sometime, I don't know... I was a leading contractor for clearing bamboo and other trees.... we all used to stray well beyond the areas marked out for us and make good money... It was not difficult... we regularly greased the palms of the forest officials... He might have learned a trick or two from contractors like us, I agree... But at the time, in the seventies, am sure he was no more than a wood-cutter..."

This leader also recalled how he used to upbraid Veerappan's elder brother Madhaiyan "who used to be nabbed for illegal felling.... I took pity on him, put in a word and get him released, occasionally I'd give him a lift in my jeep and advise him against doing such illegal things..." He never seemed to be conscious of the irony of his statement.

Be that as it may, around that time, trained by another Vanniar hunter of the area, Veerappan switched over to the more lucrative elephant poaching. Ivory fetched phenomenal prices. The leader quoted above and a few others formed a cartel. With the official backing, AIADMK was in power at that time, their business flourished.

As elsewhere in the country, the Coimbatore-Salem region, in the western part of the state, is poverty-stricken when it came to the rural segment - the urban areas were relatively better-off. Coimbatore is the second most industrialised town and Salem is a booming weaving centre. But it is a different story in the rural backwaters.

With nothing to live on but rain-fed agriculture, and the poorer sections taking recourse to forest produce, Veerappan's enterprise was a god-sent opportunity for them to make the much-needed money.

More than that he was a natural leader and dared to take on the officials, the contractors, the entire exploitative system, while his skirmishes were lim-

ited to the establishment, rarely harming those who did not come in his way.

Apparently some old-world values were deeply ingrained in him and he abhorred crimes against women. To quote his wife Muthulakshmi, "Many may fear him, but they also love him. He is always just, never misuses his power, helps out the villagers in their times of need, metes out instant justice to wrong-doers..."

In an environment where sexual exploitation is accepted as something inevitable, Veerappan rose above it and thus commanded a great deal of respect among the poor. Only the other day the wife of a person who was killed by Veerappan said before the camera, "Veerappan is a good man. Well he might have done certain things which are not right... But that was all part of his fight against the government... We all respect him..."

The fact remains that the people both love and dread him. He can be and has been ruthless towards his enemies, real or imaginary. There is no point in glorifying his elephant-killings or sandalwood-felling to which he turned after trade in ivory became illegal. He is

a brigand pure and simple. These days he lives almost purely on the ransom he manages to make the abducted cough up. But the point is he has been driven to whatever he has been doing by an unjust social and economic system. The Vanniar caste to which he belongs is among the most backward castes though they are numerically preponderant in the northern and north-western belt. If today Tamil extremism has begun to attract the youth in those very belts in considerable numbers, it is because of rising unemployment.

Says 71-year-old Pulavar K. Kaliyaperumal, considered a father figure of the Tamil nationalist movement in a couple of districts in the northern and central districts, "This is the time to strike hard... People are frustrated... The Dravidian parties, and now the PMK, have all betrayed them... The democratic charade has not freed them from the shackles of poverty and oppression... The youngsters are getting restive and the alliance with Veerappan is timely..."

It is under the influence of some young leaders of the Tamil Nadu Liberation Army (TNLA) that Veerappan

is now trying to shake off his brigand-age past and wants to emerge as a leader of the Tamils.

Veerappan has not harmed Rajkumar or three of his associates so far. If only the glitch over the release of the under-trials is overcome, Rajkumar would be released unharmed. And what if the Supreme Court refuses to come off the moral high-horse? The possible consequences are too dreadful to even contemplate and nobody dares to.

Assuming that Rajkumar would be released sooner than later, what next? No one knows whether Veerappan will emerge from the forests and take to politics. Chances are with the ransom money, some say running into crores, he could seek to build a powerful militant movement from inside the forests.

Whether that comes about or, as some say, there is a terrible crack-down on the militant network after Rajkumar's release, hundreds and thousands of people living in Karnataka-Tamil Nadu border and in other Vanniar-dominated districts are going to pay a heavy price for the failures of the Indian ruling elite. That is a depressing thought in the new millennium. ●

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## Book Review

# Between Fear and Hope: Sri Lankan Refugees in Tamil Nadu

V.Suryanarayan and V.Sudarsen

116pp, T.R.Publications, Chennai, US \$15

It is now almost exactly 10 years since those unfortunate inmates of the 125-odd Sri Lankan Tamil refugee camps in Tamil Nadu set foot on the Indian soil. They number around 65,000.

There are a few thousands more of them, persons of some means and who live outside the camps, getting by without any governmental assistance, and these latter could be living in their adopted home for up to two decades.

Ironically neither of the two categories do exactly feel at home here, vulnerable as they are to the constantly changing political mood in the state.

An honest and objective appraisal of their situation would certainly result in the unmasking of the politicians parading themselves as doughty champions of the Tamil interests the world over.

It is not that the Lankan Tamils in Tamil Nadu are a terribly persecuted lot. They and their hosts do seem to have arrived at some unstable equilibrium over a period of time. But the important question is why the ethnic or language affinity has not resulted in their integration into the mainstream. And worse they dread all the time deportation or arrest.

Books like the one under review are indeed welcome in such a context.

Prof.V.Suryanarayanan is a respected and well-known commentator on Sri Lankan Tamil affairs. And his co-author is a professor of Anthropology.

It is quite warm and not a dry, detached academic work. It empathises fully with the plight of its protagonists. It also calls for a national law to address the refugee situation and offers a lucid account of the tortuous history of the Lankan Tamils up to the present day.

The authors point out, 'The nation-building experiments which gave dispro-

portionate advantage to the majority community and marginalised the minority groups further worsened the situation,' and quote Ms.Sadako Ogata, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, saying that the refugees are doubly insecure: 'they flee because they are afraid; and in fleeing, they start a precarious existence.' None can dispute the bona fides, the sincere concerns of the authors.

But having said all that, one cannot but wonder whether they have been cramped by the fact that their efforts were funded by the UNHCR itself.

It must be noted that its role during the forcible repatriation of the refugees in 1992 had come under severe criticism from various quarters.

The UNHCR did seem to be playing a rather dubious role in the entire disgusting episode. The authors prefer to gloss over such matters, uncritically quoting the UNHCR's defence.

If all that endorsed by the UNHCR had indeed been voluntary, how come there has been no repatriation at all in subsequent years? Is it merely coincidental that none volunteered to go back after Jayalalitha was forced to give up her coercive methods to send back the hapless refugees? The authors do not bother to grapple with such tricky questions.

Also little is said of the degrading conditions in the so-called special camps in which alleged ex-militants and their families are accommodated.

The sensational escape of some of the inmates from the Vellore camp in 1995 was actually triggered off by the frustration of the youth incarcerated there, the conditions being much worse there than even in regular prisons.

Again none could fault their call for 'national legislation on refugees, combin-

ing the humanitarian needs of the refugees with the security interests of the state,' given all that happened on this soil including the EPRLF massacre of 1990 and the Rajiv assassination a year later.

All the same one wonders why there should be such a deep concern over the security interests of India when the available space could have been devoted to discussion at a greater length of the problems of the refugees.

They tend to dismiss the UN convention on refugees to which India is not a signatory as Euro-centric. They also blame the West for its double standards which is certainly well-taken. But that is no reason why India or any other country should refrain from acceding to the Convention.

One more caveat. In the otherwise well-documented work, the authors facetiously talk of 80,000 Lankan Tamil refugees living outside the camps.

They do not cite any specific study to back up their claim. The fact is that no such study has been undertaken at all by any agency. After the Rajiv assassination those living outside the camps were asked to register themselves with the respective police stations. The final figure then projected by the police was in the region of 26,000 or so.

And in a recent press release the police scaled down the figure to a mere 10,000, implying perhaps the rest have left the country.

But there are others who argue that many have not registered themselves and have 'merged' with the society. Even if such be the case, 80,000 is surely on the high side, it may be suggested. For all its faults, India has certainly been relatively good hosts, taking in refugees from various quarters without much of a griping and trying to ensure some reasonably decent living conditions for them despite its own economic difficulties.

The distortions on the Lankan Tamil front could be blamed on the role that the Tamil Tigers have played.

All the same the creeping intolerance and insularity do not augur well for the future, and the UNHCR-sponsored book is a timely intervention. ●



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### MATRIMONIAL

**Jaffna Hindu seeks groom** for sister, 36, permanent resident Australia, employed leading bank. Willing to migrate. Send horoscope, details. M 1191 c/o Tamil Times.

**Tamil Catholic parents seek groom** for fair, pretty daughter, 28, part qualified accountant in employment in London. Please send details. M 1192 c/o Tamil Times.

**Sri Lankan Hindu lady**, divorcee without encumbrances, 52, in good employment in London seeks partner. Please send details. M 1193 c/o Tamil Times.

**Jaffna Hindu Tamil parents seek partner** for son, 28, M.Eng (Cambridge), ACA part qualified, in employment in leading UK accountancy firm. Send horoscope, details. M 1194 c/o Tamil Times.

**Jaffna Hindu parents from respectable family seek bride** under 30 for son, 31, in flourishing business in London. Send horoscope details. M 1195 c/o Tamil Times.

**Jaffna Hindu Tamil seeks bridegroom** for niece, 30, working in Colombo. Reply with details enclosing horoscope. M 1196 c/o Tamil Times.

**Jaffna Hindu parents seek groom** for recently qualified doctor daughter, British citizen. Please contact M 1197 c/o Tamil Times.

**Jaffna Hindu parent seeks bride** for professional son, 37, in USA. Please send details. M 1198 c/o Tamil Times.

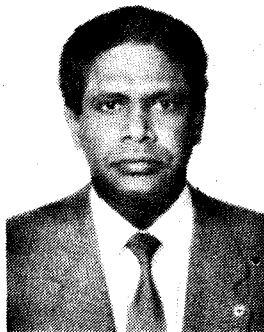
### WEDDING BELLS

We congratulate the following couple on their recent wedding.

**Rakulan son of Mr. & Mrs. Balendran** of 4 Demesne Road, Wallington, Surrey SM6 8PP and **Anjala daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Balachandran** of 9 Starts Close, Locksbottom, Orping-

ton, Kent BR6 8NU on 10.9.2000 at Thurrock Civic Hall, Grays, Essex.

### IN MEMORIAM



In loving memory of **Mr. Kathiravelu Krishnamoorthy (Baby Rasa)** on the first anniversary of his passing away on 21st August 1999.

Fondly remembered and sadly missed by his loving wife Selvaranjane, close relatives and friends. - 402-2466 Eglinton Avenue East, Scarborough, Ontario M1K 5J8, Canada.



In loving memory of **Pararajasingham Vasanthakumar, FCA (Sri Lanka), CPA (USA)** on the second anniversary of his passing away on 24th September 1998.

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by his grieving wife Savitri and children Prasanthi (McMaster) and Ashwini (Harvard); father-in-law Dr. P. Sivasothy and mother-in-law Mrs. S. Sivasothy; brothers

Thirugnanam, Thambipillai and Gnanasivam; sisters Sivayogawathy and Sivagnanawathy; brothers-in-law Natkunasingham, Sivapathasundaram and Sivakumar and sisters-in-law Indra, Gowri, Saraswathi and Ramani. - 5038 Heritage Hills Blvd., Mississauga, Ontario, Canada L5R 1V5.

In Ever Loving Memory of Our Dearly Beloved Daddy

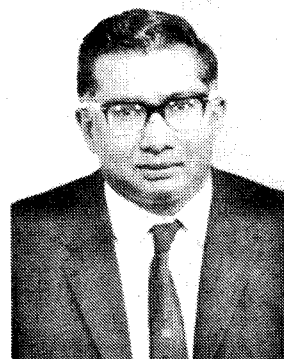
**T. J. Rajaratnam**  
(Retired High Court Judge)



Called to Rest 15.9.81

We speak of you in Love and Pride  
Years may pass and time may fly  
Yet memories of you Darling Daddy  
Will never die  
Your Love and your Memory will  
Live in our Hearts Always.

Fondly remembered and sadly missed by your loving wife Arul; children Rohini, Renuka, Rajiv; sons-in-law Vijayan, Sriharan; grand children Vasi, Ravi, Prathi, Jayanthi and Ajit.



In loving memory of **Mr. S. Bala**, on the first anniversary of his passing away on 28th July 1999.

Remembered with love and affection by his beloved wife Thanam; loving daughters

Susie and Kumutha; sons-in-law and grandchildren.

Sadly missed by close relatives and friends. We treasure the memories, love and care.

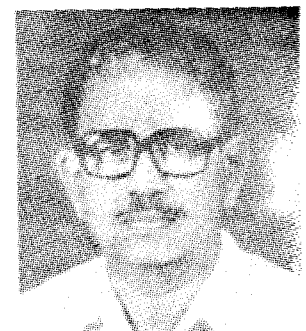
May God bless and keep him in eternal peace.

**Susie Nandapalan, Wilmslow**



In loving memory of **Mrs. Rajeswary Sambanthan** on the first anniversary of her passing away on 30th August 1999.

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by her loving husband Sambanthan; loving children Chandraguptan, Pragashini, Raveendran (Ragu), Thevarajan and Shankaran; son-in-law Varathan; daughters-in-law Rita, Kamala, Suganthini and Sureka; grand children Aarabi, Priyanka, Gowthaman, Vigirathan, Brinavan, Sharanka, Vithuran and Sharuka - 861 Consort Crescent, Mississauga, Ontario L5C 1J8, Canada. Tel: 905 281 1578.



In loving memory of **Deva Rajan N., FSI., Licensed Surveyor, Leveller & Valuer** of 257 Arasady Road, Kantharadamam, Yalpanam.

Fondly remembered on the ninth anniversary of his passing away on 31

continued on page 31

continued from page 30

ng away on 11.9.91 by his beloved wife Padma; brother Punjaksharam; sister Mrs. Saraswathy Panchadcharam; children Sujithan, Siva Kumaran, Rajam, Jeyaraman, Rengan and Raj Iswari; sons-in-law Theventhiran and Virthanakumaran; daughters-in-law Jeyadevi, Suhanya, Thangalogini and Helen; grandchildren Jamuna, Karthika, Bharathan, Uththami, Luxmanan, Sri Ram, Vaitharani,

Vithuran, Devarajan, Poorani, Pavithran and Dhurka, sisters-in-law, brothers-in-law, relatives and friends. - Flat 4, 24 Mansfield Road, Ilford, Essex IG1 3AZ.

#### FORTHCOMING EVENTS

- Oct 1** Sathurti; Feast of St. Theresa of the Child Jesus.  
**Oct 2** Feast of the Guardian Angels.  
**Oct 3** Sashti.  
**Oct 4** Saraswathy Poojah

starts; Feast of St. Francis.

**Oct 6** Saraswathy Poojah final day.

**Oct 7** Vijayadhasami; Purattasi Sani (3); Ketharagowri Viratham starts; Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary; South London Tamil Welfare Group (SLTWG) Drop in. Tel: 020 8524 3285.

**Oct 9** Sukkla Eekathasi; Feast of St. Denis.

**Oct 10** Pirathosam.

**Oct 12** Full Moon.

**Oct 14** Purattasi Sani (4); Feast of St. Callistus.

**Oct 15** Feast of St. Thomas.

**Oct 16** Sankadahara Sathurthi; Karthigai.

**Oct 18** Sashti.

**Oct 19** Dance Drama - Sri Krishna Avathar at Logan Hall, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1 0AL. Tel: 020 8458 5091 (J. Rajkatie) or 020 7381 3086 (Bhavan).

**Oct 21** SLTWG Drop in. Tel: 020 8542 3285.

**Oct 23** Krishna Eekathasi.

**Oct 24** Pirathosam.

**Oct 25** Feast of Forty Martyrs of England & Wales.

**Oct 26** Ketharagowri Viratham ends: Deepavali.

**Oct 27** Amavasai.

**Oct 28** Skanda Sashti commences; SLTWG Women's Front Meets. Tel: 020 8542 3285.

**Oct 31** Sathurthi.

**At Bhavan Centre, 4A Castletown Road, London W14 9HQ. Tel: 020 7381 3086/4608. Fax: 020 7381 8758. Net: www.bhavan.net**

**Oct 6** 7pm Durga and Saraswati Pooja. The Goddesses are worshipped by Bhavan teachers & students by means of singing & instrumental to accompany the devotional music. All welcome.

**Oct 8** 6pm Vina Concert by Katpagam Swaminathan from India.

**Oct 11 & 12** 6.30pm to 8pm Kathak Workshop by Malabika Sen from India.

**Oct 15** 6pm Kathak Dance by Malabika Sen from India.

#### IN MEMORIAM



*But where's the man who counsel can bestow,  
 Still pleased to teach, and yet not proud to know?  
 Unbiass'd, or by favour, or by spite;  
 Not dully prepossess'd, nor blindly right;  
 Though learn'd, well-bred; and though well-bred, sincere;  
 Modestly bold, and humanly severe:  
 Who to a friend his faults can freely show,  
 And gladly praise the merits of a foe?  
 Bless'd with a taste exact, yet unconfined;  
 A knowledge both of books and human kind;  
 Generous converse; a soul exempt from pride;  
 And love to praise, with reason on his side?*  
 (From Alexander Pope 1688 - 1744)

**Mr. Ponnudurai Narendra Nathan**, most dearly beloved and adoring husband of Gnanambal; dearest loving and proud Appa to your children, Dr. Thrinayani Jegathambal, Dr. Mrs Sowmya Wijayambal, Mrs. Sobhana Meenambal, Dr. Mrs. Priyadarsani Brahathambal, Adhithya Thrilochanan, Mrs Vasutharini Girijambal, Agasthya Ponnambalam and Ambika Dhakshayani; father-in-law of Dr. P. Arulampalam, S. Raveendran, T. Ilangoan, R. Srikanthan and Dr. Mrs Meera Narendranathan; darling dearest Thaththa to your grandchildren, Abhirami Janani Raveendran, Amarnath Thirumadhavan Raveendran, Nirmala Arulampalam, Janaki Saruhasini Srikanthan, Janarthanan Ragavan Ilangoan, Dhivya Saraswathy Ilangoan and Divani Kruthika Narendranathan.

Appa, your physical presence may not be here with us anymore, but the legacy you left behind is, and will be there forever guiding us through this life. Always remembered with love and pride, especially on this the sixth anniversary of your passing away on the 24th September 1994. God Bless. (Address: 53 Crossways, South Croydon, Surrey, CR2 8JQ).

#### Australian Newsletter

The Annual Ganesha Visarjan Festival was held at the Sri Venkateswara Temple in Sydney on 3.9.2000. As in previous years, there was a large crowd of devotees. After the Ganesha Homam commencing at 7 a.m. and the abhishekam at 10.30 a.m., followed by poojas and Archanas, a beautifully decorated Utsava moorthy and a deity of Ganesha made out of clay were taken in procession around the temple. The deity of Ganesha in mud was taken in procession accompanied by over a thousand devotees to the nearby Stanwell Park and immersed in the adjoining waters of the Pacific Ocean. The crowd stood transfixed as the waters washed away the Ganesha along with the flowers and garlands.

There were several stalls set up in the temple grounds by various organisations and a canteen serving various kinds of Indian food, sweets and soft drinks. There was also a cultural show from 10.30 a.m. which was appreciated by the devotees. The Ganesha colouring competition for chil-

dren was very popular as in previous years.

The Tamil Senior Citizens' Association of New South Wales held its annual general meeting on 26th August 2000 and the following were elected office-bearers for the ensuing year.

**President:** Mr. Samy Pasupati, **Vice-President:** Mr. T. Mahadeva, **Secretary:** Mr. K. Sivagnanam, **Asst. Secretary:** Mr. S.K. Thisairasa, **Treasurer:** Mr. R. Naganathan, **Asst Treasurer:** Mr. S. Tharmapalan, **Editor:** Mr. A.S. Dharmapalan.

The Siva Yoga Swami Guru Poojah is being observed regularly on the first Saturday of each month at the Strathfield Community Centre, 1 A Bates Street, Homebush, Sydney.

#### Wanted to Rent

Respectable professional gentleman wishes to rent two bed-roomed residence in Wimbledon, Putney, Earlsfield or Wandsworth Common areas. Contact David Luxmikanthan working hours 0208 772 7431, afterwards 0208 889 1277.

## Dr. C. Mylvaganam – A Tribute



Dr. C. Mylvaganam, scholar, athlete, surgeon and teacher passed away on 29th July 1999. This tribute is being paid to remember him on the first anniversary of his demise.

Dr. Mylvaganam had a brilliant career at St. Benedict's College, Colombo both academically and in the athletic field. In the Matriculation form he carried away all the prizes and was awarded the General Proficiency Gold Medal, while in the same year he became Senior Athletic Champion and set a pole vault record which stood for thirteen years.

He passed out of the medical college in 1947 with a Gold Medal for surgery and went on to become an FRCS. From 1958 to 1963, he was Surgeon, Jaffna Hospital and from 1964 to 1970 Surgeon, Kandy General Hospital. It was during this period that I came under his influence and as a raw internee I served under him.

Dr. Mylvaganam, Myla to his many friends was a surgeon par excellence. He was a Doctor in every respect. He had an excellent bedside manner, did a thorough examination of the patient and made regular ward rounds. On one occasion he actually took over my ward round as I had to play in an important rugger match in Dimbula – that is the kind of man he was. His surgery was precise, due to his extensive knowledge of anatomy, not the cut and chop we too often see. He was always there for us, supportive, correcting mistakes, guiding us along. As we gained in experience, he gave us more responsibility, small minor surgeries and then those requiring better skills were entrusted to us under his watchful eye. In fact I have performed more operations under his guidance than many an FRCS trained abroad.

Peradeniya Medical Faculty was in its infancy then and many of the early medical graduates from Peradeniya learnt more than the rudiments of surgery under Dr. Mylvaganam, there being no Peradeniya Teaching Hospital in those days. To us housemen and students he was not merely a Consultant, he was a friend, teacher and a Father Figure. Many were the parties we were invited to at his home, Dorwin

Bungalow, where we saw another side of this great man, the Family Man in the bosom of his family and those strong family ties, which we witnessed in the sixties persisted throughout his life. He was also a lively entertainer at student picnics.

After his long stint in Kandy, he served briefly at the Colombo General Hospital before spreading his wings to seek new challenges by taking up an appointment in Zambia as Head of the Department of Surgery at the Ndola Central Hospital in 1973 and from there to Guyana Pharmaceutical Corporation and later as Medical Advisor to the National Insurance Corporation of Guyana.

Returning to Sri Lanka in 1990, he lectured at the Private Medical College, Ragama until 1993. Myla lived a full life, travelled extensively to all parts of the world. Blessed with a happy marriage, he and his wife celebrated their Golden Wedding, three weeks before his passing away, surrounded by their children and grandchildren. A most devoted Husband, Father and Grandfather and the best Teacher I have ever known, his passing away left a void that can never be filled.

**Medico.**

## Vocal Arangetram of Ahila and Mithila



It was one of those special days on which the Mountbatten Hall at the Bharatha Vidya Bhavan, Castletown Road was packed to capacity and overflowing. The occasion was the carnatic vocal arangetram of the Ramakrishna sisters Anila and Mithila of Epsom, Surrey.

The sisters had a successful Bharatha Natya arangetram last year under the guidance of Smt Subadra Shanteepan - the innovator of the Madras Dhananjayan school. This was their vocal arangetram under their guru Smt Sivasakthi Sivanesan, a product of the Yalpanam Sri N Veeramani Iyer, Kalyana Krishna Bhagavathar and Chithoor Subramanya Pillai. These names of great stalwarts in music speak for themselves and Smt Sivasakthi's extraordinary ability to train vocalists was clearly evident in the standard displayed by Ahila and Mithila.

The sisters started off with a Varnam (Ragamalika) by Prof. TVG and moved into higher gears with composition by Maha Kavi Bharathiyar, Dr. Balamurali, Swami Purandaradasa and of course the great saint Thyagarajah. After the interval they presented the Ragam Thanam Pallavi followed by compositions by Lalgudi, NS Chithamparam, and again Maha Kavi Bharathiyar (ChinanChiru Kiliye). The Thillana in Misra Sivaranjani was by Maharajapuram Santhanam.

The success of sisters like Sulamangalam sisters and Bombay sisters is partly due to the alignment of voices and the beauty with which their two voices blended into one. I noticed such marvellous fusion in the presentation by Ahila and Mithila. My opinion was echoed in the speech by the chief guest who was no lesser person than the great musician Sangeetha Kalanidhi B. Rajam Iyer, Principal of the Teachers' College of Music, Madras. While quoting from 'Sangeetha Rathnakara', the Bible of Carnatic Music, he said: 'the gayaka ladchanam is that the voice must be pleasant to hear, must have sruthi perfection and the voice must be aligned.' I saw all this in the two young sisters.

The guru Smt Sivasakthi Sivanesan also deserves praise for choosing a 'Varali' Pancharatna, very rarely chosen and even less frequently sung. But Ahila and Mithila rendered the Varali Pancharatna (Kana Kana Ruchira) by St. Thyagarajah with authenticity and touched our hearts.

I must make very special mention of the solo raga alapana (Kalyana Vasantham) by Mitra, who reached great heights in her clear, distinct and melodious voice. While listening to their voices I closed my eyes and was immediately transported to the auditorium of Sathkuru Gnanananda Hall of Narada Gana Sabha, Mysapore during the December music season.

Well done and congratulations Ahila and Mithila.

**Wimal Sockanathan**

## Little Whispers

A page dedicated to the Tamil youth of the new Millenium

**By Miss Jana Wimal**

'I do not agree with a word of what you say, but I'll defend to the death your right to say it'. Voltaire's succinct yet emphatic words, still bring a smile to my face, when I think of the depth and moreover the beauty to their meaning. They make the same impression on me as they did, when I first read them several years ago on the Editorial page of the Tamil Times, where they still have pride of place in every issue to date.

Yet how many of us can honestly repeat

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those words and mean them? And how many people do we know, that would say that to us? Perhaps however, the real issue is, how many of us are allowed to express our views, honestly and unsuppressed and without fear of judgement from, not necessarily our parents but other members of the community.

These issues could be related to life's big controversies, religion, racism, homosexuality, drugs etc. However, more commonly perhaps, how many of us can say that we share the exact same view point with our parents and other members of the older generation on for example the commonly debated question such as: 'Is it acceptable for two people to live together before or instead of marriage?' Answering yes to this question, does not mean we have the intention to do it, nor does it make us party to a scandalous way of life, it is simply a viewpoint, yet how many people simply say 'no', to avoid shocking or disappointing or being overheard and judged by 'other Tamil people'. Then there are the more personal issues behind the closed doors of many a Tamil family, the pros and cons of arranged marriage, late nights out (clubs, bars, drinking etc), talking/socialising with members of the opposite sex in public, achieving bad examination results, the pros and cons of a 'good' degree. No doubt, a lot of readers will be able to relate to some or all of the above issues.

Having spoken to many other young people on this matter, one begins to realise a trend, while so many Tamil teens believe that they have the most strict and unreasonable parents than all their peers, their parents believe that they have the most troublesome and rebellious children. This is the case from those of us studying medicine at Oxford right through the spectrum to those of us who have decided against further education and perhaps entered straight to employment or otherwise straight after school. But again this is another issue, why should our educational background dictate our place in the spectrum of Tamil youth.

Perhaps another spectrum by which the 'range' of Tamil youth could be displayed, would be how 'Tamil' each one of us is. After all how many of us have heard the various comments such as 'That person is so uncultured' or alternatively 'That person is so well behaved and so traditional'. Identity is a big issue of our generation. A person can at one extreme be described as traditional at the same time being old fashioned and UN-cool, while at the other extreme a person battles between being an uncultured 'coconut' (brown on the outside, white on the inside!) and being modern and westernised. A century ago such confusion would never have arisen, because, to put it crudely, brown people and white people lived among their own kind. Whatever other conflicts that may have existed at the time within races themselves, or otherwise, this inner cultural

identity complex wasn't a forerunner. Yet now, 100 years on, here we are, brown people living in a predominantly white land. Living, working, pro-creating and bringing up a new generation, surrounded by a foreign colour and more importantly a foreign culture, leaving this new generation with an inability to be sure exactly who to be, how to act ... or just 'how' to 'be'. This is an inner conflict that faces much of the younger generation of the Tamil community, outside their homeland.

Homeland. Sri-Lanka. Is that really home? In that case how many of us have visited 'home' in the last 10 or 15 years. How many of us have ever been 'home' at all? How many of us consider home to be the soil we have spent most of our lives on to date? What exactly does Sri-Lanka mean to each of us? Is it a far and distant exotic island which we can relate little to? Or conversely, is it a place one can't wait to return to? Or is it simply nothing more than the four walls of Katunayake airport, that protect us from the outside while on transit in the middle of a holiday to perhaps India. How do you feel about Sri Lanka? How do you feel about the present situation? It is not proposed to provoke a political discussion, but to provide a platform for personal views of the younger generation.

This page would provide a channel through which the Tamil youth can express themselves openly. Letters and articles expressing your views not only on issues addressed here, but on the vast array of other matters that affect our generation are welcome, whether it is to sing the praises of the Tamil community or lash out with a vengeance at the strains of our culture or if on the contrary to give a review of a recent event in the Tamil calendar. It is not proposed to limit the page to be read and written by youngsters necessarily. The older generation needn't feel alienated as this page is the place where the younger generation are the Chief Guests, and not just little whispers.

Please address your letters, articles, etc to Little Whispers, c/o Tamil Times, P.O. Box 121, Sutton, Surrey SM1 3TD.

## The Violin Duo



Violin Vidvan Sri. L. Kothandapani after staging two very successful Arangetrams last year presented yet another, this time a duo, Gowri and Kirisha, daughters of Mr. & Mrs. Mahandran of New Malden on 5th August 2000. They started their violin classes about ten years ago at the

Kingston Institute of Tamil Culture under the guidance of Sri Kothandapani. It was a faultless performance in every respect from start to finish and was organised to a precision.

The concert started in the traditional style with a Varnam in Valaji raga, a composition by the violin maestro Lalgudi Sri Jayaraman followed by Deekshidar's Vathapy in Hamsathwani and Saint Thiagarajar's Entharo in Sri raga. After Sapathiku in Abogi, the main piece of the evening, the Ragam, Thanam, Pallavi followed. Gowri played the raga Keeravani effectively and presented the Thanam gracefully. After rendering the Pallavi, there was the Swara Prasthara which flowed as Ragamalikai as opposed to playing one raga at a time and playing swaras. It consisted of Kalyanavasantham, Hamsathwani, Brindhavani, Sivaranjani, Kapi and Vasanthy. After four more pieces, the concert concluded with the Thillana in Misra Sivaranjani by Maharajapuram Shanthanam and Thirupukal by Arunagirinather. The alignment of the violin playing of both artistes blended to give the impression of a single person playing.

Sri M. Balachandar on the Mruthangam and Sri R.N. Prakash on the Gatam accompanied the duo. These two skilful artistes supported the performers quite elegantly and showed their prowess in the Thaniavarthanam. They played so freely appreciating and acknowledging each other's skills. It was a rare treat indeed.

Sri Kothandapani deserves to be credited for the good selection of pieces and the orchestration. He continues to maintain the high standard set in his earlier programmes. Gowri and Kirisha should be congratulated for their excellent performance and it is hoped that they would continue to perform and excel.

The debutantes, their parents and the Kingston Institute of Tamil Culture can justly be proud of this concert.

## The Sri Lanka Railway Past-Employees Welfare Association, United Kingdom

The Christmas celebrations of Millennium 2000 will be held on Saturday, 9th December 2000 at No. 181 Squadron Air Training Corps Hall, 192 Merton Road, Wimbledon from 11am to 3.30pm with music, musical chairs, game of Tombola, Raffle etc., and traditional Christmas lunch.

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**M. Balasundram.**

(for Hony., Secretary)

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