

● SPOTLIGHT ON MADRID

LANKA

— *Bertram Bastiampillai*

GUARDIAN

Vol. 14 No. 15 December 1, 1991 Price Rs. 7.50 Registered at GPO, Sri Lanka QD/09/NEWS/91

FOR A FREER PRESS

*Chanaka Amaratunga
Ajit Samaranayake
Sarath Amunugama
S. Pathiravitana
Sunanda Mahendra
Mervyn de Silva*

INDIA:

*Shelton Kodikara
Thomas Abraham
Dilip Mukerjee*



Black Knight
It's your move

Briefly . . .

SELECT COMMITTEE

Following the acceptance of a private member's motion by the SLFP Kalutara District MP Mangala Munesinghe a 43 member select committee of parliament has been appointed to work out a solution to the ethnic problem. Mr. Munesinghe will head the committee.

The Government Parliamentary Group not only decided to accept the opposition MP's motion but also to back him as chairman.

The motion reads: 'This Parliament is of opinion that a Select Committee of Parliament be appointed —

- (a) to arrive at a political solution to the question involving the devolution of power to the Northern and Eastern provinces.
- (b) to prevent —
- (i) the disintegration of the nation;
- (ii) the killings of innocent civilians, members of the armed forces and youth fighting for a cause;
- (iii) the increased militarisation of the culture of violence in our country and
- (c) to achieve peace and political stability and utilise the reduced defence expenditure for rapid economic growth and national development.

NEW ARMY COMMANDER

Lt. General Cecil Waidyaratne has assumed command of the Sri Lanka Army; he was earlier Chief of Staff. The retiring Army Commander Lt. General Hamilton Wana-

singhe has been appointed General Officer Commanding the Joint Operations Command.

FIELD NEW HC

Mr. E. J. Field CMG has been appointed High Commissioner to Sri Lanka to succeed Mr. David Gladstone.

INDIAN PM WILL ATTEND

Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao has told Tourism Minister Thondaman who was on a visit to Delhi that he would come to Colombo for a SAARC summit if it is scheduled again.

HORDES OF QUACKS

Eighty thousand quacks are practising medicine in Sri Lanka compared to about 3000 qualified doctors. This was revealed by Independent Medical Practitioners' Association president Dr. Bernard de Zoysa. He said that most of the quacks were ex-hospital labourers, orderlies, estate dispensers and Dubai returned nurse aides.

The nation was heading for a serious health crisis if the authorities did not do something soon to check this, Dr. de Zoysa said.

TROUBLE AT THE CAMPUSES

Police released 14 students of those arrested for alleged involvement in violent activities at the Sri Jayewardene-pura University, following clashes on the campus. University authorities and police sources said there was no evidence of JVP activity behind the unrest. The issues are domestic, the police said.

The students were protesting against the setting up of Affiliated University Colleges.

At the University of Colombo two student groups engaged in fisticuffs.

TREND

MORE TOURISTS

When a count is taken at the end of the year, 1991 would have brought in 10 per cent more tourists than last year, according to Tourist Board expectations. 1990 brought 297,888 tourists representing Rs. 5,000 million. Tourism was the third largest foreign exchange earner that year, after garments and tea exports.

LANKA

GUARDIAN

Vol. 14 No. 15 December 1, 1991

Price Rs. 7.50

Published fortnightly by
Lanka Guardian Publishing Co. Ltd.
No. 246, Union Place,
Colombo - 2.

Editor: Mervyn de Silva
Telephone: 447584

Printed by Ananda Press
82/5, Sri Ratnajothi Saravanamuttu
Mawatha, Colombo 13.
Telephone: 435975

CONTENTS

News Background	3
Media	6
The Region	12
The Estate People as Bridge Builders	17
Middle-East	18
Book Review	23

NEW FROM PRIO!

Sri Lanka: Towards a multi-ethnic democratic society?

Report of a fact-finding mission to Sri Lanka by Neville Jayaweera

What are the roots of the conflict in Sri Lanka? How has the ethnic issue influenced the evolution of the conflict? What hopes are there for the emergence of a multi-ethnic democratic society and how can the international community assist the process of peace?

These are some of the questions which this report attempts to answer. Commissioned by PRIO, sponsored by the Norwegian government, Diakonisches Werk-EKD and NOVIB and written by Neville Jayaweera, development consultant and former senior Civil Servant in Sri Lanka, it will be of interest to international donor agencies, foreign ministries, researchers and all those working in development in Sri Lanka.

It contains a review of the history and causes of the conflict and examines the role of political parties, ethnic and religious groups, the military, vigilante and guerrilla groups and non-governmental organisations in the conflict and in the pursuit of peace. It also looks at the impact of President Premadasa's presidency and contains a lengthy interview in which he not only explains his past and present policies but outlines his understanding of multi-ethnicity and his vision for the future of Sri Lanka.

The report makes recommendations for achieving peace and multi-ethnicity which are already being considered by the government.

ISBN 82-7288-148-9

Published by the International Peace Research Institute, Oslo, (PRIO), Fuglehauggata 11, 0260 Oslo 2, Norway.

ORDER FORM

Please supply _____ copies of *Sri Lanka: Towards a multi-ethnic democratic society?*

Paper: Rs 200/- **ISBN 82-7288-148-9**

☐ Please invoice us (trade and institutional orders only) Purchase order No.

☐ Remittance.....enclosed. (Prepaid orders supplied post free)

Name:

Institution/Organisation:

Address:

Signature: Date:

Orders to: Marga Institute, 61 Isipathana Mawatha, Colombo 5, SRI LANKA

TOWARDS A VIA MEDIA

Mervyn de Silva

NEWS
BACKGROUND

The motto the LANKA GUARDIAN chose when it was launched in 1978 was "other news, another view". We have never forgotten our declared objective nor neglected its avowed or implicit demands. Yet resources — human, material and other occupational constraints (time, deadlines, strikes, hartals and 'red letter' threats in 1988) have taken too heavy a toll.

Though we did produce VIK-ALPA, which made quite an impact on the campuses and among radical youth groups, a steady Sinhala companion to the LANKA GUARDIAN proved beyond our reach.

The press, the daily press that is, has not only influenced political and political currents in this island but has been an increasingly controversial issue, certainly after the initial SLFP attempt to nationalise the pro-UNP LAKE HOUSE newspapers was thwarted by a single vote — one of several cast by a group of defectors.

But long before the "national press" became a target of State intervention, the print media had become an issue in the inter-party contest for political power. If it never led to legislative action, the reason had little to do with the intrinsic merit (or lack of it) the arguments presented by those who assailed the "national press" and its proprietors. The critics were from the well-organised Left parties which were a powerful voice in Parliament but never came close to the seats of power. Their common target was the Wijewardene-owned Lake House press, closely identified with the ruling conservative U.N.P..

Lake House did print Sinhala newspapers (and later Tamil). It was the authentic voice of an emergent Sinhala (Buddhist) capitalist class and the English-educated elite.

The press became "politics" once Mr. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, Prime Minister D. S. Senanayake's deputy as Leader of the House but not quite his chosen successor quit the UNP: It is only when the SLFP, led by this Oxford-educated aristocrat, became the articulate spokesman of a newly emerging challenger, the Sinhala-Buddhist elite, that the role of the press in Sri Lanka's politics became an electoral-parliamentary issue. In turn, the Sinhala press, both conservative (the DINAMINA, SILUMINA) and radical (Dhanapala's LANKADIPA), began to assert itself as the spokesmen of a more self-aware, more politically mobilised social group.

In the light of recent changes, it is very necessary to note that while the English language papers wielded "power" because of the character of the "power elite", the Sinhala newspaper had the circulation and therefore a wider, potential influence over opinion and events. This became particularly true once the Tamil question or the "ethnic issue" began to dominate the political discussion, inter-party debate and rivalry. The ethnic problem was admitted to the parliamentary agenda as a "language issue", SINHALA ONLY, the battle-cry of the SLFP-led Mahajana Eksath Peramuna, of which the main mobilising agent was the politically-minded Bhikkhus and their Eksath Bhikkhu Peramuna. Its improbable champion of course was Solomon West Ridgeway

Dias Bandaranaike. Since that time, one can argue that the mass media became part of the problem when an enlightened press could well have been part of the solution.

Although the debate on this question finds most participants using the modish term "media" (conscious perhaps that we now have T.V!) it is often forgotten that radio which is well over half a century old, enjoys much greater access to the community, than the written word. And radio has always been 100% state-owned and state-run. And this is no ordinary State or regime. In the 1970-77 period of the SLFP-led United Front (the 'Left' was kicked out in 1975) and in the 12 year J. R. Jayawardena (UNP) regime, the State of emergency lasted six and eleven years respectively! In short, this Sri Lankan State is no ordinary State. It is the State Of National Emergency, armed to the teeth, with the most draconian laws. The "freedom of the press" must be seen therefore in that context, a context of a State, fully and legally armed for repression, and in which the two resourceful communication channels, radio and TV, are part of the State's armoury.

Reporting Violence

Meanwhile trade union (labour) agitation, strikes and hartals the main modes of extra-parliamentary, anti-government struggle were soon to be replaced by armed revolt, JVP (1971) and LTTE by the late 70's, escalating after the 1983 anti-Tamil mob violence in Colombo and the South in July 1983. The economic and the ethnic were the main causes of unrest, organised violence

"Can one really distinguish between the mass media as instruments of information and entertainment, and as agents of manipulation and indoctrination?"

— HERBERT MARCUSE

and armed revolt. The two forces of violent protest are in fact inter-active. And remain so.

How does the press function in such a context. A good example was the state-run RADIO CEYLON during the 1958 riots. Here is E. F. C. Ludowyk's account:

"The contents of the bulletins broadcast by Radio Ceylon during the disturbances showed a meanness of spirit in keeping with the depths into which the country had sunk. The broadcasting services were a government department; their use by the party in power proved another deplorable result of the incursion of party politics into the administration"

Is the nature of ownership (state) the cause of the offence? The government did use the media to serve its cause but how? By playing to Sinhala chauvinist sentiment in order to "appease" the mobs and the mob leaders.

Private Sector

Was the privately-owned press any better? 20 years ago I presented a paper to a Manila seminar sponsored by the Press Foundation of Asia. I chose the title "The Three Voices of Lake House", the strident, provocative voice of the Sinhala papers; the timid, plaintive voice of the Tamil THINAKARAN (I had excerpts from both translated into English) and the apparently neutral voice of the DAILY NEWS... all published by the same firm. Yes, private ownership does not necessarily guarantee fair and accurate reporting, responsible presentation of news, or cool editorial detachment. It may not always be racial-religious bias or too immediate an identification with the publisher's own ethnic group. The reason could be as vulgar as money, through ever-rising circulation. The majority buy more papers.

Whatever the motive, the fundamental issue is "freedom" AND responsibility... a very

special social-moral responsibility in the kind of high-tension social context in which the mass media functions.

Social Responsibility

Is a total freedom of the press, guaranteed by the constitution but restrained in its actual use by a self-imposed professional code of conduct, the ideal *via media*? Even if this suffices with regard to the profession, there is the question of structure. Monopolies, especially of the state, have to be broken. But we know how the two major parties have responded in Opposition and then in power. Nobody could have been a greater defender of the press than the UNP out of office. Its leader, (later President J. R. Jayewardena) and its deputy leader (now President Premadasa) campaigned in the streets of our capital. Mr. J. R. Jayewardena's brother, the eminent QC, appearing before the constitutional Court, claimed that the Press Council Bill was the death-knell of Democracy. Would Mrs. Bandaranaike the SLFP leader, de-nationalise Lake House?

And what is to be done about those two powerful media — TV and radio? The day will come when communications technology and satellites in particular, will make national boundaries and restrictive laws meaningless to audiences in the poorest places. But until then?

No press can be freer, wildly freer than the American. But is it responsible? Ben Bradlee who retired recently as editor of the WASHINGTON POST, the paper that exposed 'Watergate' and brought down Nixon, chose PRESIDENTIAL LYING as his subject for a recent lecture at HARVARD. He demonstrates how the WHITE HOUSE has manipulated not only the US media but deceived the world through the press. The so-called GULF OF TONKIN incident which justified US intervention was a complete hoax!!

So what do we do?

- 1) As professionals, we must make every effort to open up the closed system. More and more "space" — that should be our common aim.
- 2) Since both major parties will resist total and instant privatisation, we must plan out a transitional programme for re-structuring at two levels (a) board of management (b) professional
- 3) A pre-election commitment (manifesto?) to broadcast what his/her party would do to "re-structure" the state-controlled media in the event of assuming office and a pledge to implement the promise within three months.
- 4) Organised professional bodies, particularly media and human rights-oriented groups, to map out a pre-election campaign to mobilise the voters and demand that all parties include "media" as a prominent issue on their platform.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES Air Mail

Canada/U.S.A. for 1 copy L/G
US\$ 50.00 for 1 year
US\$ 30.00 for 6 months

U.K., Germany, New Zealand, Australia, Netherlands, France, Japan, Holland, Philippines, Austria, Norway, Sweden, China, Ireland, Switzerland, Nigeria, Belgium, Denmark, Paris, London,
US\$ 40.00 for 1 year,
US\$ 25.00 for 6 months

Hong Kong, Saudi Arabia, Dubai, Bahrain, Arabian Gulf, Syria, Singapore.
US\$ 35.00 for 1 year
US\$ 20.00 for 6 months

India, Pakistan.
US\$ 30.00 for year
US\$ 17.00 for 6 months

Local
Rs. 200/- for 1 year
Rs. 120/- for 6 months

"For the first time, the young are seeing history being made before it is censored by their elders"

— MARGARET MEAD

Friendly advice from Japanese Ambassador

TV should be independent

Rohan Abeywardena

Japanese Ambassador to Sri Lanka, Isamu Nitta, may not be as outspoken or as well-known as former British High Commissioner David Gladstone, but Mr. Nitta, too has some "personal and friendly" advice to authorities here on such vital topics like the freedom of the media and human rights.

This may sound strange as the Japanese are rarely known for causing ruffles, but the Ambassador from the biggest aid-giving country to Sri Lanka said he sincerely felt that way and expressed his feelings on many occasions.

Early last week amidst a busy schedule, as he was preparing to leave for Tokyo for the annual briefing Ambassador Nitta spoke to "The island Sunday Edition" especially about the need to place the Rupavahini (an outright grant from the Japanese Government) under independent supervision like the British Broadcasting Corporation or the Japanese counterpart NHK.

Mr. Nitta, however, insisted that the opinion was his own based on the Japanese experience and he was not interfering in Sri Lanka's domestic affairs.

He said many Sri Lankans turned to the BBC or the All-India Radio to get a different view.

"Government should explain their policies to the people but people should have the final say. So they must hear the other side".

Besides he argues that an independent media was vital to pick out any malpractices.

"Criticism is a must, lest power corrupts".

Pointing to his own country, he granted that freedom of expression was not very old. But since the second World War

the independent TV there had played a big role in fostering that freedom.

Mr. Nitta sees abuses in independent television in Japan on pornography, violence and in airing "leftist view". "People are ashamed of these abuses on TV, yet they prefer independent television", he observes.

"Our experience tells us that free and independent media, both press and electronic, eventually help stabilize and develop a society."

While some donor countries have already restricted assistance to Sri Lanka for alleged violations of human rights here, ambassador Nitta defended his Government's continuance of high per capita assistance to Colombo in comparison to other poor countries. "We have a strong responsibility to cover this area. We have a special interest in the country — President Jayewardene's historic speech at the San Francisco Peace Conference, religious ties, the country's special location.

...." Last year Tokyo granted Sri Lanka over US \$ 170 million in assistance and over half of it as outright grants.

At the same time Mr. Nitta warned the Sri Lanka Government "not to give excuses to other countries to force Japan to cut aid. "Our foreign policy is also arrived at in conformity with our allies," he said.

The ambassador who left for Tokyo to brief his government about the collapsed SAARC summit among other things, also warned that Sri Lanka was not the only country in need of assistance.

Japan was obliged to assist the starving in Africa, the needs of poor South American countries, where there were also Japanese settlers, Eastern Europe just awakening from Communism and even China and India he said.

Returning to Rupavahini, Mr. Nitta said: "Every night I watch TV news. To get different views I read 'The Island' and translations of Tamil and Sinhala newspapers.

State control is something beyond our understanding."

(Sunday Island)

'Interview out of context' — Ranil

Wijitha Nakkawita

Leader of the House Ranil Wickramasinghe, said recently 'The island' seemed to think that it was the only independent newspaper in the country.

Answering a question from a foreign journalist at the weekly Cabinet press briefing Mr. Wickramasinghe said that the Japanese Ambassador should have known better than to give an interview to the 'The Island' in which the ambassador had said that the television should be independent.

The Minister said that the interview with the Japanese

diplomat had been taken 'out of context'.

Asked whether it was proper for a diplomat to comment on an internal matter, the Minister said that it was a matter for the Foreign Ministry, but he thought that the question should be asked from the Ambassador when he returned to Sri Lanka.

The Japanese ambassador is in Japan at present but the Japanese embassy has not denied the remarks published in 'The Island'.

The Case for Liberalisation

Chanaka Amaratunga

While the attempted introduction of a motion for the impeachment of President Ranasinghe Premadasa has produced a revival of the traditional Sri Lankan interest in politics, (whatever our views of the merits or otherwise of what was being attempted) one of the necessary conditions, without which any revival of political interest would be a barren fruit, remains unfilled. I refer of course, to the media. The state of the Sri Lankan media remains sadly constrained and it is glaringly obvious that those who formulate the media policy of government since 1970, have displayed not a single jot of intelligence or enlightenment. What is furthermore absurd is that such media policies are very counter productive. Those who would manipulate the media for their crude and narrow ends do not ultimately have much credibility with the public whose intelligence is not to be underestimated.

Nevertheless, it remains true that several of our principal parties and political personalities, while loudly proclaiming their commitment to a free media when in Opposition have, when in office, eagerly maintained and even advanced the degree of state control over the media. It is therefore essential that the Government and the parties of the Opposition be canvassed for a clear,

unequivocal commitment to the liberalisation of all branches of the media, print and electronic. The Liberal Party has from its inception been unequivocally committed to a truly free media. The section on reform of the media contained in the manifesto of the Democratic Peoples' Alliance was entirely of its making and was included at its insistence amidst a marked lack of enthusiasm of some of its constituent parties. The Liberal commitment to a free media was further developed in our proposals made to the All Party Conference which I set out below. They would I think form a good basis for an enlightened reform of the Sri Lankan media. I therefore hope a consensus will be established for the implementation of these proposals:-

1. That the government clearly inform all branches of the media whether state-owned or private that the free expression of all opinion will not only be permitted but will also be actively encouraged.
2. That all steps be taken to prevent controls of the media, overt and subtle such as the restriction of newsprint.
3. The repeal of the Press Council Act and its replacement with a new Press Council Act to guarantee freedom in the media including the freedom of individual journalists against the editors or owners of news-

papers, the preservation of high standards of journalism and the promotion of genuine choice in newspapers.

4. The repeal of the Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Ltd (Special Provisions) Act and the sale of the shares of Lake House by public auction reserving 25% of the shares for the employees of the Company.

5. The enactment of legislation making any attempt to intimidate journalists or the owners or management of newspapers or the electronic media, a criminal offence.

6. The removal of the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation and the Sri Lanka Rupavahini (Television) Corporation from the control of the state and the vesting of them in an Independent Broadcasting Authority which would consist of representatives of diverse political parties, academics, media personalities and other independent persons of standing.

7. The privatisation of the Independent Television Network. (The bids received for franchises for television or radio shall be placed before Parliament and shall be made public.)

8. The adoption of liberal and objective standards in granting permission for public performances of theatre and cinema. For this purpose the powers, functions and composition of the current Censor Board shall be reviewed.

Dr. Chanaka Amaratunga is Leader of the Liberal Party

(NEXT: Proposals For Independent Broadcasting Authority)

Journalists: No Group Identity

Ajit Samaranayake

The paradox of Sri Lanka's press has been that while it has always maintained high professional and technical standards and produced good journalists at all levels it has by

and large conformed to the values of the Establishment. Most newspapers have consistently supported the United National Party since the interests of their proprietors natu-

rally coincided with those of the UNP. The journalists, although they have competent professionals, have been affected by the insular political culture of an island nation and have taken for granted most of the smug assumptions on which our post-independence political order has been founded. There have been no professional organisations which have been able

to give them a sense of identity as a community and a sense of their rights.

In such a context they have been completely unprepared for the assaults on press freedom by successive Governments, be they the take-overs of Lake House and the Times of Ceylon, the Press Council Bill, the progressively mounting pressures on the press and now the threat of a Media Commission with wide-ranging powers.

In such a context, while it is necessary to ask each political party to formulate and present a media policy, I feel that the initial challenge is before the journalistic community itself. It must begin a process of looking inwards and initiate a deep-going dialogue on the nature of its functions and responsibilities. What is its social responsibility and how successfully has this been

accomplished? Should there be any limits on editorial freedom either by governmental edict or proprietorial fiat? Has the press been objective enough in discussing sensitive national issues such as the National Question and the problems posed by the confrontation between the JVP and the state?

The first imperative and precondition for an independent and vigorous press is removing the incubus of governmental pressure which is now lying heavily over it. Whether by the use of the CID against unfriendly newspapers, economic pressures such as curtailing newsprint or the intimidation of proprietors, successive Governments have sought to pressurise newspapers to the line. This climate of fear has to be removed. The Government on one hand piously talks of the need to broadbase the owner-

ship pattern of newspapers but it is precisely this onnipotent role of the Government which prohibits the growth of the newspaper industry in the climate of a freedom and a proliferation of newspapers and journals is the best guarantee of press freedom.

The Government can no longer postpone the broadbasing of Lake House as envisaged by the bill. Similarly the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation and the Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation should be managed by independent authorities constituted of eminent persons so that they will reflect the totality of national life and not be clumsy instruments of those who are in power. But the first imperative is a climate of freedom without which nothing is possible.

The writer is Associate Editor, Island and an active member of the Working Journalists Association

Media (3)

Alternative Press

Sunanda Mahendra

It was only recently that the term 'alternative' came into use in reference to mass media but the concept is of significance to journalism in Sri Lanka too.

The means by which the people at different times of history protested against social inequality and injustice may be called 'alternative means of communication.' Against misdeeds of kings the people protested with one or two sentences, a verse or perhaps a fable. (Aesop was the greatest practitioner of the art of 'alternative communication'.) All this combined to convey an alternative view of society.

However, the most developed alternative forms of communication resulted from the progress of education on the one hand and that of Communication technology on the other.

The structure of established and traditional mass media is

normally controlled by some unilateral force. Experts on mass communication call this an authoritarian view. A mass medium controlled by the state or by a religious sect or by any other established force never frees itself from that force.

The definition of alternative media of communication as given in media historian Donald Paneth's "The Encyclopedia of American Journalism" deserves our attention. It identifies alternative media as non money making publications emerging from the underground which contain facts and comment. This category of mass media which took root about 1966 must be considered a by-product of New Journalism. It started exposing the injustices in American society. It also acted as a force against the Vietnam war. Thus the background to the emergence of an alternative medium of communi-

cation was the coming together of persons sensitive to certain social problems.

After the second world war these alternative trends spread to a large number of other fields too. Some of them extended to alternative trends in sexual relations, and to alternative trends in enjoyment. Another trend was the large number of publications against apartheid. In the U.S. and in Britain the alternative press made a great contribution against the black-white conflict. In the same way it also conveyed socio-political messages.

The young men and women attending universities, too were attracted towards alternative media of communication and as a result they too, on many occasions became alternative media persons.

In this context the main alternative trend of communication appears to be in depth investigation of existing conditions and to persuade the audience to protest. A media person can introduce an element of sensationalism to such in depth investigations and protest. But such a media

person cannot last long in the field. Such media persons will not gain much credibility either.

In our country too, alternative press has a long history. However, it is a history of protest more than of in depth investigation. The religious newspapers and the nationalist

newspapers took a path of protest. However the emergence of political parties like the Lanka Sama Samaja Party, the Communist Party and the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna led to a change in the content of the alternative press. One such stage was when the power of the

newspapers was used to lead the working class struggle. Another was when newspapers were used for the purpose of winning the teachers' demands.

Dr. Sunanda Mahendra is Senior Lecturer, Dept of Mass Communications Kelaniya University. This report is an excerpt, from a paper read at 5th Anniversary Meeting of the RAVAYA.

Media (4)

Hand over to private sector

S. Pathiravitana

Now that privatisation is in the air and nearly everything of major value is to be privatised sooner or later, it should be the government's aim to hand over the most valuable thing it now holds in the form of the Rupavahini, the SLBC and the major newspaper group in the island to the private sector.

If we are told that steps are being taken to hand over some of these bodies to the private sector, then we must take care to see that they do not fall

into the hands of the friends of the government who would naturally have to be grateful to those who made this gracious gesture.

In the Soviet Union ventures that are being privatised, we are told, are now in the hands of not crony capitalists but crony bureaucrats. Obviously, that kind of privatisation cannot deliver the goods as the proponents of privatisation have in mind.

The difficulty that governments have in parting with

their media is that they think that the job of dressing up the government can be done better by themselves. But the trouble is that there are too many clever tailors ready to take up this task. All the prancing over the TV screens, all the modulation of the sound waves and the print layouts cannot overcome the impression formed in the public mind that the emperor has no clothes.

Or to put the matter differently by recalling a timeless Sinhala proverb at its pithies — Even though you may succeed in fencing the entire country you may never succeed in fencing the mouth (Rata vatakaraveta bendath kata vatakarabae bandinda).

The writer is a former DAILY NEWS editor.

Media (5)

Need for an open political culture

Sarath Amunugama

Practically realisable democracy has the following basic elements: universal adult suffrage in free elections, the right to run for public office, freedom of expression, association, political organisation and dissent, alternate sources of information and genuine policy choice, the accountability of governments to voters; rule of law within a system of inclusive citizenship, equal rights, effective participation, informed free choice and ultimate majority control of the public agenda.

Two conclusions can be immediately drawn from this tabu-

lation of 'indices' of a democratic society. The first is that freedom of information and the media is a primary indicator of democracy. The second is that Sri Lankan political culture is woefully inadequate precisely in this aspect.

I will confine my comments to the electronic media. Radio, particularly its news division, was comparatively free till the setting up of S.L.B.C.. It is ironic that the granting of Corporation status to Radio Ceylon was meant to give it greater freedom. In reality the opposite has happened due to the pressures of our political culture.

Now the Media Commission is presented with a similar

sanguine rhetoric. The fears of media practitioners are quite reasonable considering their past experiences regarding state intervention in the media.

Sadly, the present government has the worst record since Independence regarding the media. While talking glibly about media freedom it has practiced a vicious and undemocratic media policy.

Today everyone, except the person who is legally entitled to give directions to the SLBC and SLRC under their respective acts i.e. the Cabinet member in charge of Information and Broadcasting — seem to be giving directions to the electronic media. Legally, a Minister of State or his Secretary cannot give directions under the SLBC and SLRC Acts of Parliament.

Political directions have, in terms of these laws, to be in

(Continued on page 24)

Dr Amunugama was Secretary of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

Democracy and Press Freedom: a short history

Ajith Samaranayake

I am privileged on this occasion to be invited by the Editor and staff of "Ravaya" newspaper to speak on this vital subject at a time when it has assumed great pertinence to Sri Lanka's very existence as a democratic polity. 'Ravaya' both as a magazine and a newspaper has unwaveringly upheld a commitment to the freedom of the press and has acted as a forum for the expression of dissenting points of view at a time when the country was in danger of being gobbled up by an all powerful orthodoxy. This is in no small measure due to the courage and dedication of its Editor Mr. Victor Ivan who although coming into journalism late in a colourful and chequered life has boldly committed himself to the tenets of informed and decent discourse. I take this opportunity to wish him and his equally committed staff many more years of active intervention in the affairs of this country.

Democracy and press Freedom — these two concepts were almost taken for granted in that heady dawn after independence when we as a nation flattered ourselves with the comfortable belief that ours was the model democracy to emerge out of British colonial rule, the idyllic country with a literate population used to the ways if adult franchise well served by the Welfare State, in short the archetypal political Eden of the

Westminster ethos to which we are again paying nostalgic homage. But so much has happened since then which has exposed on what fragile a base that comfortable belief was founded. Communal violence bordering on holocaust, a powerful ethnic insurgency which has earned a place in the folklore of armed rebellion, two insurgencies by dissatisfied youth of the majority community, the near decimation of a generation and the serious erosion of democratic institutions culminating in near anarchy and societal collapse have served to explode our illusions.

What function did the press perform in this situation?

Was it able to act as a shaping force of public opinion taking society in the direction of democratic, civilized, harmonizing values or was it the pliant tool of the establishment pandering to the worst prejudices and instincts of the rabble? That is the painful question which we have to address ourselves to.

Historically the press as we know it was the product of the hegemony of the English-educated comparador bourgeoisie over the rest of Sri Lankan society immediately before and since independence. D. R. Wijewardane, Sri Lanka's best known and most distinguished press baron, got the idea for a newspaper from the British 'Daily News' now long defunct

though his own protegee here is thriving albeit under a different dispensation. The Times of Ceylon was the authentic mouthpiece of British Plantation interests. Even though the Gunasenas who owned the recently collapsed Independent Newspapers wore a striking Sinhala Buddhist visage they were at heart seeking to compete with the liberal, comparador Wijewardanes of Lake House for the mantle of press overlordship.

This class of newspaper owners shared the same outlook and beliefs as Sri Lanka's post-independence political leadership. This was basically a class educated in English and thus alienated from their roots, reared on a comfortable liberalism which could not last beyond the boom days of the Korean war, intellectually shallow and culturally and spiritually impoverished. They had known no great upheavals or struggles, were not baptized by the raging fires of revolt which had raged elsewhere in the colonial world. On the contrary they believed in polite protestation and parliamentary language.

The influence of this class on the country's press was necessarily debilitating. The press by and large supported the establishment of the day which meant the UNP. While there were no overt restrictions, taboos or pressures on the press

as such during the first decades after independence the press was not adventurist or crusading in the sense in which that word is understood in journalism. To be sure it was possessed of a high degree of professionalism and Sri Lanka during that period has produced some outstanding and remarkable journalists. But by and large the newspapers were supportive of the establishment, conformed to its values and concerned itself with parochial issues which were of interest to the English-educated upper and middle classes of the time. During these early years the Sinhala newspapers did not have an independent existence of their own as such. They largely reflected the thinking of the English-educated classes on major issues except for the 'Lankadeepa' which was known for its vigorous and robust journalism and individual point of view.

The attempt to correct this imbalance provided even more disastrous. The Sri Lanka freedom party (SLFP) both singly and in coalition with the left had been quite correctly critical of the imbalance in a press which supported the UNP and the status quo. But its take over of Lake House euphemistically rationalized as a 'broad-basing' only substituted a Government monopoly for private monopoly. With the subsequent politicisation of the Times under the SLFP and its take-over by the UNP the process of the Government's intervention in newspapers has become accelerated.

My contention, then, has been that caught up between the early laissez faire liberal 'toler-

ance of the immediate post-independence period and the later intervention of Governments in the field of newspaper publishing Sri Lanka's press has not been able to play the great crusading role expected of it in a newly-emergent country. If I seem to have overstated or exaggerated my case it may be to drive the point home all the more forcefully but let me add that to be fair by the press it only reflected the failure of our post-independence political elite to rebuild the new Sri Lanka nation.

Now against that ideological and political context let us look at the facts. During the early years after independence there were no overt pressures or taboos which applied to newspapers but they were quite happy to support the UNP. The highpoint of this support was of course the bizarre rituals which were enacted in the aftermath of the sudden death of D. S. Senanayake, the father of the nation, when Lake House openly showed its hand as the Kingmaker by maneuvering his seemingly unwilling son Dudley onto the vacant throne much to the chagrin of the more senior but not necessarily qualified Sir John Kotalawela. Later when the first popular revolt against the first Dudley Senanayake Government broke out in August 1953 the press blandly proclaimed 'Business as usual' when the whole economy and administration had come to a standstill as a result of the hartal by the LSSP and CP. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike the apostate from the bourgeoisie was their pet hate and he was daily thrown to be drawn and quartered by the enormously talented but thorough-

ly prejudiced Collette. It was only the visionary D. B. Danapala, bi-lingual to his fingertips, who dared to defy the brown sahibs of the 'Times' and their English Editor, Victor Lewis, and reflected in the newly-established 'Lankadeepa' the stirrings which exploded in the popular victory of April 1956. During the period up to this untimely death the architect of that victory got a uniformly bad press. During the first communal riots in 1958 an all-embracing press censorship was imposed by Governor General Oliver Gunatilleke who took over the show, while after Bandaranaike assassination the short-lived Caretaker Prime Minister W. Dahanayake openly used the state radio for political broadcasts in the form of a 'Political Notebook.'

During the first administration of Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike attempts to take over the Lake House press continued. A Press Commission was appointed and a bill to establish a Newspaper corporation was introduced finally leading to the collapse of that Government. The campaign against the SLFP and its coalition partners was well orchestrated by the three-newspaper groups and there were even allegations that large sums had been spent to bribe and cajole. After an attempt to stage a coup de tat by right-wing officers of the army, navy and police against the Sirima Bandaranaike government was aborted it was revealed that a front page welcoming the new regime had been produced and kept ready at the 'Times'.

The Dudley Senanayake Government which took office at the General Election in 1965

received the usual support from the press (or the national press as it was called) but where it didn't it did not hesitate to seal the press of the LSSP-oriented 'Janadina' for carrying a story that the Prime Minister was present at a barbecue and to prosecute the irrepressible Editor of CP-oriented Aththa.

The rest is recent history. Despite the emergence of Upali Newspapers the resurrection of the Times under Ranjith Wijewardane and the flowering a small crop of alternative publications outside the mainstream media the basic pattern which I have set out above has remained. Some of the mass circulation as well as alternative newspapers have been able to develop and propagate a populist-radical critique of the establishment but sometimes their writings have been marred by a majoritarian chauvinism. On the whole, however, the newspapers have been pretty tame finding in increased pressures from the Government an excuse for conformity and self-censorship. They have both contributed to and have become prisoners of the prevailing intellectual and moral confusion generated by the clash of loyalties produced by two revolts on the two sides of the ethnic divide. But this is precisely the danger which it confronts as well.

The large bulk of the mass-circulation independent press is owned by private proprietors who can be influenced, intimidated, scared and cajoled in many ways to toe the line. Under such circumstances independent minded journalist in such publications are faced with the choice of either toeing the

line themselves or being put on the shelf if not shown the door. The press is vulnerable to such pressures precisely because through its general timidity and conformity the press has failed to act as a rallying point for dissidence and alternative points of view. Although professionally and technically newspapers in Sri Lanka enjoy high standards as a community journalists have not been able to assert their rights and maintain high ethical standards. They have too often, hemmed in by Government and private owners tended to wash their hands of moral responsibilities. This is best illustrated by the current struggle against proposed Media commission where other bodies such as student unions, trade unions and even provincial councils and local bodies are more vociferous than newspapermen and their associations.

This is why a journal like 'Ravaya' which has a remarkable record to its credit during these brief five years has such a large role to play. For the first few decades after independence we clung to the illusion that the laissez faire liberalism of our society political elite and their good-natured tolerance would guarantee the freedom of the press much in the way of assured aristocrats tolerating the foibles and eccentricities of fellow nobles pretending to a bohemian way of life. The lesson of the last three decades surely is that it is only an informed polity conscious of its rights which can guarantee the very existence of democratic freedoms in the face of monolithic Governments aggrandizing themselves at the expense of a steadily shrinking civil society. In creating such public opinion vigorous press has a definite role to play.

ARMS AND THE FREE PRESS

Asked about his experience of secrecy and the defence industry, in Britain, PAUL FOOT of the Daily Mirror can only "state the obvious namely that pretty well all information relating to the sale of arms, either from government or from private organisations, is completely inaccessible"

It is a familiar refrain among journalists: JANE CORBIN of the BBC's PANORAMA tells a similar tale. Reporters exploring the weapons business must expect little help and a good deal of obstruction, just as politicians bold enough to broach the subject find themselves up against a wall of restriction and bureaucracy. . . ."

— MATHE d' ANOONA
INDEX ON CENSORSHIP

Aspects of Indo-Sri Lanka Relations

Shelton Kodikara

I have known Bradman since our student days in the University, more than 40 years ago, and since those days have kept in touch with him, off and on, and always followed his career and achievements with great interest. Bradman has written an important book on an important subject. It is a valuable addition to the political literature of Sri Lanka. It is both interesting and informative, written in a nice, easy style, making it very readable to specialists in politics, both commentators and practitioners of politics, as well as to non specialist public audiences. The fact that the book was written in a short time, to meet a deadline coinciding with the aborted SAARC summit meeting earlier this month detracts nothing from the value of the book. In fact, I am of the opinion that, apart from the meetings of the Standing Committee and of the Council of Ministers of this SAARC summit which have already been concluded, this book might stand out as one of the abiding achievements of that summit so far or as one of its worthwhile products, in the sense that Bradman might not have written the book had it not been for the scheduled Summit. Or at any rate he might not have written it at this time. You will note that I have said "one of its abiding achievements so far" meaning that I do not exclude the Sixth SAARC Summit from being satisfactorily concluded in the not too distant future.

However that may be, the subject of my talk today is on "Aspects of Indo-Sri Lanka Relations" and on this subject, too, I would like to take off from the useful discussion which is contained in the latter part of Bradman's book, in chapters

This talk by Dr. Shelton Kodikara was given at a ceremony connected with the release of Bradman Weerakoon's "Premadasa of Sri Lanka: A political biography". The ceremony was organised by the India-Sri Lanka Society.

7, 8 and 9. Here is an insider's account of the incumbent President's own role and his objectives in respect of the negotiations with the LTTE, to the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord of July 1987, to India's own involvement with Sri Lanka's ethnic problem, and to the Indian military in Sri Lanka.

I am one of those who take the view that the 1987 Accord was conceived in haste, signed in a hurry and in relative secrecy, and delivered without sufficient preparation to the people of Sri Lanka and India as the proper foundation for the conduct of Indo Sri Lanka relations and the solution of Sri Lanka's ethnic problems. Letters of Exchange were attached to the Accord which had no relation to the Accord proper, and which could have been justified only as a *quid pro quo*, and which could have no meaning if the original premise of the Accord, which was to establish peace and normalcy in Sri Lanka, was not fulfilled. It was the height of naivete on the part of the signatories to that Accord to have thought that Tamil militant cadres in Sri Lanka could or would have been disarmed in a matter of three days! Bringing down the IPKF to Sri Lanka, even before the ink of the signatures in the Accord were dry was not only most ill conceived since it was bound to inhibit Sri Lanka's freedom of action on matters relating strictly to Sri Lanka's internal affairs; but it also proved to be very counter-productive in that it led to the escalation of the Southern in-

surgency the suppression of which was precisely the objective of the former President who wanted the IPKF in the North so that Sri Lankan security forces could be released from the North for counter-insurgency operations in the South. What happened in reality was that not only did the IPKF get embroiled in a long war with the LTTE, but the very presence of the IPKF became a discrete factor confusing and compounding the structure of Sri Lanka's domestic politics.

These issues are graphically recounted in Bradman's book which gives us a clear insight into the workings of President Premadasa's mind when he asked the IPKF to quit Sri Lanka in 1989. The Indian military presence had enhanced the popularity of the Southern insurgency to such an extent that there was a virtual state of anarchy in the South. The President took the wind out of the sails of the JVP by asking the IPKF to leave.

There were other reasons why the IPKF presence had become objectionable in Sri Lanka and I can express these best in Bradman's own words. At p. 75, referring to President Jayewardene's own statement that though Sri Lanka was a small country, it had 15 million people to die if anybody invaded its Bradman writes:

"Now, in 1989, the ball was in Premadasa's court. The IPKF was in his country albeit to disarm the LTTE. But their physical presence in Sri Lanka was causing major problems of governance to him. In the North and the East his Government had little control. Visitors from abroad would come and go subject only to the whim

and fancy of the Indian army. All airports and sea-ports in the North and East were under the control of the IPKF. In practical terms, the sovereignty of a third of Sri Lanka had been ceded.

The role of the IPKF in Sri Lanka has become the subject of debate and comment in India itself. Coincidentally, a book on the IPKF has just been released in India itself, authored by a former Commander of the IPKF, and commenting on it, a reputed retired General of the Indian Army has said that the IPKF "could not achieve the desired result, as it had no political mandate and the fighting command had too many masters to report to". This explains the peculiar irony of the IPKF fighting one group of Tamil militants while arming and training others and the Sri Lanka government doing much the same thing in a different context.

The fact remains, however, that it was precisely because the IPKF did not achieve the desired result that Indo-Sri Lanka relations has gotten to its present impasse.

I am very mindful when I say this that the IPKF was, as our High Commissioner in New Delhi put it, "an invitee force", and it is very deserving of Sri Lanka's tribute for the many sacrifices it made in men and materials in this country under very difficult circumstances.

My point is that its failure to achieve its allotted task of bringing about peace and normalcy in Sri Lanka made the proper implementation of that Accord difficult, if not impossible. We are still living under the shadow of that failure.

I am not saying something that is already not known and which is already not the subject of comment when I say that Indo-Sri Lanka relations are at present at a very low ebb indeed. Wijesoma, some of whose cartoons illustrate the

pages of Bradman's book, had a sketch of harassed-looking personality trying to paper over a widening crack in Indo-Sri Lanka relations only two days ago. I think the cartoon exaggerates the real situation. There are elements of friction in the best of bilateral relationships. Indo-Sri Lanka relations have so abundant a tradition of goodwill and common interests to be able to weather the storm in the present situation.

India and Sri Lanka have had consultations about the status of the 1987 Accord, and Bradman has mentioned that a new friendship treaty to replace it has also been proposed. I think that it is important at this stage that our two countries must know what their mutual obligations are. I think it is important that India should not give Sri Lanka the impression that it is too interfering in Sri Lanka's internal affairs.

It is a common attribute of interstate behaviour that a great deal depends on perceptions of the intentions and acts of the actors of politics. Very often perceptions turn out to be misperceptions. This has been the case with Indo-Sri Lanka relations in the past. India misperceives certain tendencies in Sri Lanka's foreign policy or internal policy. Sri Lanka misperceives India's intentions towards Sri Lanka.

We are meeting today under the auspices of the Sri Lanka-India Friendship Society, and it is opportune to recall in this context that Sri Lanka and India have resolved problems in their relationship in the past which at times seemed intractable. The question of the citizenship status of Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka, for example, took many years to resolve, almost 50 years, but it was eventually settled by negotiation between the two countries in a spirit of friendship and compromise.

The problem of demarcating the maritime boundaries between our two countries presented no problems—it only demanded a lot of hard work and a spirit of give and take on both sides. I am sure that whatever frictions that presently mar the relationship bilaterally can be overcome in the same way and in the same spirit.

Sri Lanka simply cannot afford to make mistakes in its relations with India. There is too much at stake in the bilateral relationship as far as both countries are concerned. For Sri Lanka the problem is not simply that India is our big and powerful neighbour, but that India is our only near neighbour. Our history has been determined by our proximity to India. We have numerous cultural affinities. The potential for economic collaboration between us is vast, and it is a happy augury that the Indo-Lanka Joint Commission was set up in July this year. SAARC, though temporarily suspended, holds out good prospects for economic cooperation in the areas of trade, preferential tariffs, joint ventures, and so on.

We must hasten to restructure our relationship with India on the basis of mutually acknowledged principles of non-alignment. Towards this end, Mr. Chairman, let us hope that Bradman Weerakoon's book has made some contribution. It should find a place in the libraries of political scientists, journalists, politicians, diplomats, soldiers, in short all those who are interested in the politics of Sri Lanka and of Indo-Lanka relations. I hope that we will see an updated second edition in the not too distant future.

Indo-Sri Lankan amity – at low ebb

Thomas Abraham (Hindu)

The dramatic collapse of the Colombo summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has left in its wake a cloud of suspicion, acrimony and gloomy predictions about the future of Indo-Sri Lankan relations.

The mood in the Premadasa Administration is bitter, and it is quite clear that at least in the short term Indo-Sri Lankan relations will remain at a low level. Mr Premadasa had invested a great deal of time and energy in supervising every detail of the summit and had intended it to be the grandest show that Sri Lanka had staged since the nonaligned summit in 1976 when Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike was Prime Minister. The SAARC summit was clearly intended to rival the nonaligned summit, and prove that Mr. Premadasa, who has maintained a low profile internationally since taking office, had what it took to a leader of the region. India wrecked this show, and the anti-Indian feeling that has never been far below the surface in the Premadasa Administration erupted in full flow. The clumsy way in which India acted has shown up the weakness in its diplomacy and has cast legitimate doubts about New Delhi's ability to provide leadership to the region.

Not the beginning of the end

But, despite the ineptness that India displayed at Colombo, it would be wrong to see this as the beginning of the collapse of Indo-Sri Lankan relations, or SAARC for that matter. In New Delhi's perception, Indo-Sri Lankan relations were at a low ebb any way. Mr. Narasimha Rao's absence at Colombo was a reflection of India's feelings towards Sri Lanka. His presence in Colombo would not have led to any dramatic improvement in relations either.

To see the collapse in Colombo in context it is useful to re-

view the course of Indo-Sri Lankan relations over the last year or so. After the withdrawal of the Indian Peace-Keeping Forces in March 1990, New Delhi retreated into a shell. The intense, interventionist phase of India's Sri Lanka policy was replaced by a low key, non-reactive, policy of total non-interference. Sri Lanka came extremely low in New Delhi's list of priorities, and except for concern over the presence of refugees in Tamil Nadu, the ethnic issue was regarded as an internal affair of Sri Lanka.

For Sri Lanka, this was an ideal state of affairs. The unwritten objective of Colombo's policy towards India has been to avoid coming under the shadow of its giant neighbour and preserve its freedom of action to the extent possible. Since 1990, Indian Governments have helped Colombo achieve this. The crackdown on the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Tamil Nadu was another positive trend in Indian policy as far as Colombo was concerned. Though the underlying fears of Indian intervention still remained, policy makers in Colombo were assured that India was not likely to involve itself in Sri Lanka in the short term.

Several causes of Irritation

While Sri Lanka was reasonably happy with the state of its relations with India, India saw several reasons for irritation, but never articulated them publicly. Mr. Premadasa was seen in New Delhi as being fundamentally anti-India, a reputation which began with his opposition to the Indo-Sri Lankan Agreement and reached its peak in June 1989, when he issued a public ultimatum to the IPKF to leave. In his public speeches till today, Mr. Premadasa has always described his efforts to remove the IPKF as one of the achievements of his administration. This has not gone down well in Delhi.

The revelation that the Sri Lankan Government had supplied weapons—Colombo euphemistically described this as "sharing equipment with the LTTE"—was another cause for annoyance. The arming of the LTTE by Sri Lanka was no secret to the Indian Government. In fact, it was no more of a secret than the Indian Government's original arming of the Tamil militants. Colombo's explanation that the arms had been given to fight the Tamil National Army (TNA) (allegedly armed and trained by India) did not help matters.

The expulsion of the All India Radio correspondent in Colombo was seen as another instance of Sri Lanka's insensitivity to India's concerns. Indian diplomats in Colombo had urged the Government to hold off the expulsion, and as a compromise had offered to have the journalist recalled to India after a few weeks.

All these events had led to a situation where goodwill towards the Sri Lankan Government was at a low level in New Delhi. Added to this were the genuine fears about the Prime Minister's security in Colombo. Two Indian security teams visited Colombo in September and October and made a detailed study of the security environment. While the Sri Lankans had done everything possible to see that Colombo was secure, the fact that LTTE suicide bombers had been able to assassinate a senior Minister and destroy a military headquarters weighed heavily on those in charge of the Prime Minister's security, and they advised him not to go.

It is quite clear that the Prime Minister was reluctant to go to Colombo for various reasons, and when he did not come, India was understandably accused of engineering the failure of the summit. What happened in Colombo has highlighted one of the weaknesses of Indian

(Continued on page 16)

India after the Cold War

Dilip Mukerjee

The end of the Cold War and Sino Soviet rivalry gives India an opportunity that it has not had in the past 35 years of ordering its relationship with South Asian neighbours without the complications stemming from adverse external influences. Another fortuitous but favourable factor is that the country's economic plight makes it obligatory to opt for a lower-cost foreign policy, which means relying upon diplomacy rather than military power to ameliorate security problems.

That there is a minority government in power in New Delhi is not necessarily a serious handicap. There is a fair degree of consensus among mainstream parties on the need for cooperative relations with the US, Soviet Union and China, the three major powers that have played a significant role in the Subcontinent. There are no sharp differences on issues involving South Asian neighbours either, though the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) finds it necessary to take a sterner attitude towards Muslim Pakistan.

It is something to be thankful for that India was well positioned to cope with the end of the Cold War. Even while ex-prime minister Indira Gandhi seized upon the Soviet Union's Afghan predicament in the early 1980s to get the most she could out of Moscow by way of hi-tech weapons in return for India's grudging acquiescence, she also took care to hedge her bets by making overtures to Washington and Peking. The results were slow in coming but the cumulative change was clear by the time the Cold War was winding down.

Among the most important consequences for South Asia is the loss of Pakistan's strategic relevance to the US, highlighted by the cut-off of both

military and economic aid because of nuclear transgressions. The change has hastened the recognition of India as a country with which mutually supportive relationship will fit in with US global objectives.

Not surprisingly, the US administration is now encouraging India to explore the scope for military linkages. Transfer of technology for a high-performance combat aircraft that India has set its heart on building illustrates one facet, while the other is symbolised by more recent steps for training and other ties between the US and Indian armed forces.

Simultaneously, Washington has made a major political gesture by accepting the Indian position that Kashmir is an issue which has to be settled bilaterally between New Delhi and Islamabad as envisaged in the agreement the two signed at Simla in 1972. There is, therefore, no need to hark back to UN Security Council resolutions of 1948 — thus implicitly thwarting Pakistan's efforts to put India on the mat at the UN.

The Chinese posture has changed too. Instead of ringing declaration of solidarity with neighbours vis-a-vis regional and other "hegemonists," Peking now advocates resolution of bilateral problems in South Asia, including Kashmir, on the basis of *Panchsheel*, the five principles of peaceful coexistence.

Peking is, of course, still nursing its relationship with India's neighbours through arms supplies and modest economic assistance, but this is no longer specifically geared to check-mating India. While advising India to be magnanimous, China is at the same time quietly urging the smaller countries to seek realistic solutions to disputes — as their analysts freely acknowledge.

On the bilateral plane, the remarkable improvement that has taken place since Rajiv Gandhi's visit to Peking in December 1988 is strikingly brought out by a perceptible easing of tensions along the northern border. Confidence-building measures, among them direct communications between local military commanders, have made it possible for New Delhi to move three out of its 11 mountain divisions from its northern border with China to the western border with Pakistan — evidently with matching cutbacks on the other side. The bugbear of Sino-Pakistan collaboration is gradually being laid to rest.

With the sea change in the external context, can India afford to pursue a more relaxed neighbourhood policy? Its stance, particularly during Mrs Gandhi's later years and her son's subsequent five-year tenure, has been seen by critics as overbearing and hegemonistic, an assessment evidently validated by an excessive preoccupation with building up its military muscle — a major factor contributing to unsustainable fiscal and external deficits.

Although such comments have been made by many others, both at home and abroad, a German diplomat, the country's deputy consul-general in Bombay, made news in August when he gave voice to them with a bluntness uncharacteristic of his profession. His indictment was quickly disowned by his superiors but the issues he raised must still be addressed.

Leaving aside Pakistan as a special case, India's overwhelming size and power guarantees deference by other South Asian neighbours though this in itself does not make problems any easier to resolve. It should be now clear to New Delhi that arms-twisting is almost always counter-productive. The air-

dropping of food supplies or the so-called bread bombing of Jaffna in Sri Lanka in 1987 was to signal that India could not countenance an all-out offensive against Sri Lankan Tamil enclaves in the north because a massive exodus of refugees across the straits would cause outrage to their cousins in India's Tamil Nadu.

Colombo was cowed into signing the Indo-Sri Lankan treaty but the rapidity with which it unravelled shows it was basically flawed. Moreover, India has paid dearly for the misadventure in terms of casualties sustained by the Indian peace-keeping force and Rajiv Gandhi's subsequent assassination for which the Tamil Tigers guerrillas evidently bear responsibility. A fall-out from the Jaffna episode was Nepal's panicky purchase of arms, including anti-aircraft guns, from China, leading to a crisis in Kathmandu-New Delhi relations which was overcome only after a change of regime in both countries.

India will have to find other ways of solving the problems it has with neighbours: the demographic overspill from Bangladesh, the flow of the third-country goods across the open border with Nepal, the detabilising impact of Sri Lanka's ethnic strife and demarcation of maritime boundaries with Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Negotiations are the obvious way but India, more so than neighbours, can be faulted for dragging them out endlessly and on occasions resiling from hard-won understandings. Demonstrations of good faith are called for, and this should include a willingness to accept mediation or adjudication — to both of which New Delhi is very much averse.

As far as Pakistan is concerned, there is growing international evidence to substantiate India's charge that it is deeply involv-

ed in aiding and abetting secessionist in Punjab and Kashmir. Secessionist sentiments in both states are not, however, Pakistani implants and many thoughtful Indians recognise that the source of the problem is the violence done to federal concepts by an imperious Mrs. Gandhi and her son. A search for political solutions cannot even begin while externally sustained violence continues on the present scale. However, there are few takers for the BJP's call to sanitise the border by armed action against Pakistan because its formidable deterrent capability makes a decisive outcome unlikely.

Taken together with strong international pressures against escalation, this explains the Indo-Pakistan negotiations that dragged on for two years. While

the danger of war by accident has largely been averted, India has shown no inclination whatsoever to discuss the substantive issue of Kashmir though the Simla accord specifically calls for negotiations to achieve a final settlement.

In the present state of public opinion, no government in New Delhi can afford to be accommodating in this regard. This, alas, means continuing tensions along the western border, obliging both sides to keep their powder dry. No policy of good neighbourliness will be of any use because the answer can only be found by the Indian political establishment through honest introspection.

(Courtesy FEER)

Indo-Sri Lankan. . .

(Continued from page 14)

policy, a weakness of style rather than substance. The problem at Colombo was not so much that India did not come, but that it failed to communicate the real reasons for its absence. The Sri Lankan Government was perhaps not fully aware of the extent to which its relations with New Delhi had sunk. Neither in private nor in public did Delhi clearly communicate its unhappiness with Sri Lanka. Instead, on the one hand it maintained that its relations with Colombo were good, and on the other, it worked behind the scenes to see that the summit collapsed. The crucial link between Colombo's actions and New Delhi's reaction was never made clear, and so India's decision to stay away from the summit was seen as that of a wilful, arbitrary bully.

A statement of concerns

A clear statement of India's concerns, followed by a warning that India would react badly unless there was more

sensitivity towards it would have proved more effective. Now, the message that India had tried to convey, by staying away from the summit has been lost. What India had been trying to signal was that it wanted a more friendly foreign policy from its neighbours. Instead, what has been conveyed is the impression that India acts arbitrarily and is a danger to all its neighbours.

The Sri Lankans are convinced that India never intended to come to Colombo and that instead of saying so at the beginning had allowed all the preparations to go ahead before backing out at the last minute. Viewed from Colombo, this episode has illustrated what is perceived as one of the more unpleasant characteristics of India policy — of maintaining a public facade of highly principled idealistic policies while following a private policy based on unabashed realpolitik. If only India could drop the mask and clearly announce what it expects from its neighbours and what it is willing to give.

The Estate People as Bridge Builders

Paul Caspersz

At one end of the bridge stand the Tamil-speaking people with real grievances (and more and more imaginary grievances tend to become real, if the solution of the real grievances is too long delayed). The grievances were acknowledged as legitimate by the now ruling United National Party. In its 1977 Election Manifesto it stated unequivocally:

The United National Party accepts the position that there are numerous problems confronting the Tamil-speaking people. The lack of a solution to their problems has made the Tamil-speaking people support even a movement for the creation of a separate State. In the interest of national integration and unity, so necessary for the economic development of the whole country, the Party feels such problems should be solved without loss of time. The Party, when it comes to power, will take all possible steps to remedy their grievances in such fields as:

- (1) Education
- (2) Colonization
- (3) Use of Tamil Language
- (4) Employment in the public and semi-public Corporations.

We will summon an All-Party Conference and implement its decisions.

The Tamils

The elections were duly held and the UNP was elected to power with an overwhelming majority. On 4 August 1977 in his first Statement of Government Policy in the new Parliament, Prime Minister J. R. Jayewardene repeated verbatim these words of the Manifesto, merely substituting the words "my Government" for "The United

National Party" and omitting the words "when it comes to power".

The Manifesto and the Statement correctly identified the main current problem of Sri Lanka's inter-ethnicity. It is the problem of the sub-identity of the Tamils within the overarching identity of the people of Sri Lanka as Sri Lankans. The formulation of the question accorded with the perceptions of the Tamil United Liberation Front.

Of its direct ancestor, the Federal Party, there cannot be the slightest doubt. In its Election Manifesto in 1970 the Party stated:

The Tamil-speaking people of Ceylon (also) believe that a Federal Type of Constitution that would enable them to look after their own affairs alone would safeguard them from total extinction. Only under such a Constitution could the Tamil-speaking people of this country live in dignity and with our birth-right to independence as equals with our Sinhalese brethren.

It is our firm conviction that division of the country in any form would be beneficial neither to the country nor to the Tamil-speaking people. Hence we appeal to the Tamil-speaking people not to lend their support to any political movement that advocates the bifurcation of our country.

That was the position of the Federal Party in 1970. In mid-1972 the Tamil United Front, formed (under the leadership of S. J. V. Chelvanayagam) by the merger of the Federal Party, the Tamil Congress and the Ceylon Workers' Congress, put

forward their 6-point demands to the government of Mrs Bandaranaike. The last demand was for "a decentralized structure of government". The demands went unheeded by the Government and sadly had no resonance in the new republican Constitution of 1972, even though it was drafted by the Marxist scholar and historian, Dr Colvin R. de Silva. Disappointed and frustrated, the Tamil United Front altered its designation to the Tamil United Liberation Front. In 1976 the Tamil United Liberation Front adopted the Vadukoddai resolution and with some resistance from the Ceylon Workers' Congress began its demand for the separate socialist State of Tamil Eelam.

At the other end stand the Sinhalese in resolute opposition to the demand for Eelam. If the opposition were only to separation, the tensions between the Sinhalese and the Tamils could be contained. This is so because the vast majority of the Tamils would not want separation if there was genuine redress of their grievances. It is the readiness and determination to provide redress, and actual redress, that are far too long in coming. Sometimes, as in the case of the language grievance, there is redress on paper but no implementation. Tamil has been declared an official language by Constitutional Amendment 13 just as Sinhala is, but in the railway stations in places like Kandy the overwhelming majority of public address announcements continues to be made only in Sinhala and English. Public transport and private transport for the public carry nameboards in Sinhala only or in Sinhala and English. The same gap

(Continued on page 24)

MADRID: Land for peace ?

Bertram Bastiampillai

The Middle East Peace Conference is indeed a welcome and positive step forward. It is heartening to know that there are talks but patience is needed to be even optimistic; it is premature to be hopeful just now. One can only have hopes, after a while.

Fortythree years of bloody strife and both parties still maintaining adamant aggressive attitudes cannot but make observers nervously anxious and truly sceptical. The recent initiative cannot be expected to yield miraculous results, and accusations and counter accusation from the parties in the talks, need to be anticipated. Emotion will naturally cloud the thinking and articulation of the belligerents. Anyway, in spite of an atmosphere of charge and counter charge, that both Israel (Yitzhak Shamir) and Palestine (Hanan Ashrawi) would begin direct negotiations on Sunday (3rd November) is yet another step forward in what may turn out to be a protracted process with so many hurdles on the way, and success at an almost unreachably elusive distance.

The strife between the Israelis had been and is sustained by mutual fear, and the personal intensity of emotions that is manifest make the leaders on the different sides look at anything done by one side or the other with distrust. Bitter experiences had made the peoples ranged on opposite

sides believe that their cause justifies the employment of any means, however ruthless or exacting.

Historically, there is enough ground to account for the mutual fears seething among the Palestinians and Israelis. Before the genesis of Israel in 1948, the Jews in Palestine had been victims of Arab attacks. The Arabs felt that their land was being confiscated by another alien people. As the state of Israel was declared in 1948 Arab armies embarked on an aggressively violent offensive. On the Jewish side too bloody atrocities occurred. Horrible massacres were perpetrated on Arab villages. Both groups were culpable and one's action fuelled that of the other. Stereotypes and images of them continue to exist on each side still. Unfortunately, the Israelis tried to explain their actions and justify their existence by their hostile image of the Arabs and the Arabs resorted to a similar exercise in turn. Fear and ignorance have reinforced the wrong image one has had of another over decades; this cannot be erased entirely.

Only a very few are not prejudiced by fear and hate. This few can be found on both sides and are able to understand one another and see the ultimate uselessness and the immediate damage of the continuance of anger and hatred depicted in violent actions time after time. It is the existence of these few that can

inspire any guarded optimism.

It is in such a context that those who had been helplessly watching the Israeli-Palestinian strife accompanied by mayhem and murder keep hoping even against odds for a political resolution. The present endeavour by the United States therefore appears heartening and one wishes good fortune to President George Bush and Secretary of State James Baker. At the same time one cannot discount the almost insuperable and frightful human impediments to the restoration of peace.

Israelis have because of their fear the Palestinian uprising committed violent acts against the Arabs and generated wrath among their military leaders and other militant groups. Fear, recrimination and reprisal, and despising one another are usual and standard characteristics found on both sides. The consequence of nursing such unhealthy sentiments is the creation of the cycles of harmful reaction in each side. Over the last forty years fear, both among the Arabs and the Israelis, have led only to more confrontation and militant engagement and greater fright on the two sides.

However, when one immediately looks at the meeting in Madrid and what is to follow from it one cannot get away from the fact that the real participants in the Middle East peace parley have not been showing serious signs of seeking

Prof. Bastiampillai teaches history at Colombo University.

peace. It appears more true to believe that they have been more than coaxed; they have been apparently coerced to come to talk peace. Yet the peace talks still can end positively if every participant in the discussions could go back with a sense of achievement or else they would soon work to flout any likely agreement. Also, the conference has to be representative of the realities on the ground. Then both sides, the Arabs and the Jews, have to realize that they have more to profit by taking to peace and abandoning arms. Just now, one cannot see that both sides are going to experience a sense of achievement or that both sides are going to benefit by coming to peace. Israel does not have the mind to lose land or give up settlements while the Arabs do not feel that they would have a state.

In fact, today's issues grown so intensely complex are difficult ones that centre around politics. They are more complicated and not so specific. One wonders whether there had been enough thinking of peace ahead over substantive issues and of differences for which bilateral solutions have already been considered. Moreover, reading the different statements emanating from the parties who have had an involvement in the long lasting conflict they do not seem to have converged at the conference with a clear sense of what the desired end should mean. There is the thorny and mixed question of the representation of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) but here perhaps a weakened PLO may have to reconcile itself more to the representation accorded

to others with whom they have a nexus. After all, the PLO erred in its judgements in regard to the Gulf crisis, it may be conceded, and has to pay a price for it. But on the other hand are not the stances of the Syrians and Israelis far apart and hard to reconcile.

Of course, the present talks have posed a dilemma to the PLO. The officials of the Organisation no doubt have accepted that they will have no direct role in the peace process. But the PLO want better conditions for any Palestinian participation in the discussion and an assurance that a land for peace basis will be integral to the negotiation. The PLO however cannot reject the peace talking initiative outright because all the relevant Arab states have agreed on it. The PLO cannot hence stall a process that could solve a problem that had baffled the Middle East for so long.

Yet the PLO at the same time has apprehensions that it is not only forfeiting its role as the sole representative of the Palestinians but also that Israel and the Arab nations could end their belligerency without solving the Palestinian issue, perhaps. Jamil Hilal, head of information in Tunis of the PLO has expressed the fear that "By excluding the PLO, the US and Israel may be aiming at excluding the main issues of an Israeli withdrawal and... Palestinian national rights." That is why the PLO had tried to insist that it is a participant but Israel has been asserting that she will be speaking only to Palestinians who do not represent the

PLO. Both the rights of the Palestinians and land are subjects which if not addressed would mean a peace that would be of little avail finally.

The issue of representation had certainly created serious problems indeed. It was a challenge for the US, Israel, and pro-US governments to discover Palestinians who could participate in the talks without PLO approval. In fact, the US and Israel had wanted the Palestinians to be represented by officials who were neither PLO members nor residents of East Jerusalem and they even tended to exclude delegates from the Palestinian diaspora. On the other hand, important Palestinians had been proclaiming that their participation hinged on the PLO's acceptance and hence the leadership in Tunis had the feeling that it could not be completely left out. Then even though the Arab governments had not brought up the role of the PLO with Washington, executive committee member of the Organisation, Abdullah Hourani had challenged all the parties to single out even one Palestinian who would participate without the PLO consent.

The question of the PLO and its representation has definitely posed enough of pre talks problems; this should not be ignored. The US and Israel wanted the Palestinians to form a part of a joint Jordanian-Palestinian team. The PLO on the contrary wanted to name delegates and even to design the Palestinian negotiating position at the peace discussion. All this shows how vitally the PLO was concerned and now it being officially out of the conference does not spell smooth sailing in the talks.

The PLO is bent on pressuring Israel to stop building settlement in occupied territories. This has been a persistent and thorny problem and much of the success of the peace talks would depend on how the talks would end in bringing to a halt the establishment of these settlements — an intolerable sore to the Palestinians. While the US seems to have recognised the prudence of Israel ceasing to create settlements prominent Israelis like Ariel Sharon do not agree. Will the US make Israel see reason?

Another indispensable condition for making any worthwhile result of the talks would be adherence to the requirement contained in the United Nations Resolution 242 which would mean an Israeli withdrawal from all of the occupied territories including East Jerusalem. To effect an Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories is difficult to imagine; and from East Jerusalem would be almost forbiddingly formidable to envisage. And a complete withdrawal according to the Palestinians would imply the removal of all Israeli military facilities from the territories.

Then there is the insistence of the Palestinians that they have a right to self determination which appears unlikely to be conceded by the US. Perhaps there could instead be a compromise that would allow some kind of association between the Palestinian territories and Jordan which could be acceptable to the US.

While the Syrians think of the meeting as one where Israel would return the Golan Heights

in return for ending Syria's state of war, Israel believes the meeting is about peace and has nothing to do with land. A reconciliation of such a difference in understanding can be possible only if a side like that of Syria can persuade the US to push harder the other side, Israel, to accept the need for an equitable settlement.

The Israeli strength and survival with its obstinate unreasonableness towards the Palestinians had been possible largely all this time because the US had bailed it out always. So much aid to Israel had been available as loans because of the US underwriting them; loans have been later converted into aid that need not be repaid again because of the US. The nuclear status of Israel has been glossed over and accepted by the US which of course tolerates no nuclear capability among any others such as Pakistan or India. Even though much of business or industry is state owned in Israel, the US has still considered it to be a capitalist state with a free market economy. And in spite of her denial of participatory democracy to several, whom Israel had forcibly brought under her rule, the US had yet regarded her as a democracy in a region with governments devoid of democracy.

Now after the Gulf War however when apart from her only trusted ally in the middle east, Israel, the US had cultivated other earlier unlikely allies than Egypt, who are willing to recognise the state of Israel. This should make the US risk a gamble and accept the responsibility to use her present single super power status to

endeavour to settle this old fight. While acquitting herself of commitments to Israel at the same time she should show proper concern for the interests of and her relations with the Arab states. In doing this the principal difficulty will be to make both the Jews and Arabs see the importance of humanism and reason. This however is not easy for a few indeed are reasonable.

Nevertheless the present time looks ripe at least to have initiated the process towards creation of peace. Since the Gulf war some basic power relationships had changed and this furnishes hope for the prevalence of some reason in the middle east. With the end of the cold war Soviet military support for Syria declined and made President Hafez Azad turn to better relations with the US. Second, Israeli and the US apprehensions of communist influence have almost ceased which made it possible for the joint Soviet-American invitation to the peace conference in Spain.

Substantial decrease of Soviet power has lessened the need for the close ties of the past between the US and Israel and the enormous aid that the US doted out to bail her because Israel is now not all that of a strategic help to America in an important region. The Gulf war had demonstrated that the US forces could be effective in the middle east without Israeli help.

Although the US may still because of historical and moral reasons have to assist Israel yet now a more detached con-

nection between the two is likely and the US will be relatively more committed to her own values and interests. And in turn the Israelis know that they cannot bank on unqualified assistance from the US and they can relate to the US only by indicating reciprocal concern to the US interests too.

It is in this background one has to view the US concern to end the Israeli hold of the West Bank and the Gaza strip and the inhabitants there numbering around one and a half million. But the US has a hard task here because Yitzhak Shamir and his Israeli government want to annex these very same territories and if they tenaciously cling to such a plan peace will not come to the middle east. If on the other hand Israel would forfeit the occupied territories to preserve the US support then conditions augur well for a settlement.

Also, if the Israelis want to have substantial foreign investments, and long term contracts are desired by Israeli companies then the insecurity over the question of the occupied territories needs to be solved peacefully. Further, the pressure of absorbing Soviet immigrants, building dwellings for them and other economic compulsions can drive Israel to abandon her protective economic policies and enter into the world market. Economic pressures may therefore make Israel to be more accommodative and realist and perhaps make the pursuit of peace worth the while after all.

It is time to make Israel accept that it is illegitimate to deny the Palestinians freedom and justice. The suppression of the Palestinian aspirations for

freedom entails in its wake the violation of individual rights like the right to free speech, assembly and association. Palestinians have for long been denied freedom from torture or force, from illegal detention, from unlawful confiscation of property and those who battle for freedom have to fear of deportation, disappearance and death. Its only the United States that can coerce Israel to act more fairly and justly and see reason and now is the time to do it if the US wishes to push her plans to bring a peaceful settlement of the middle east conflict successfully.

To sum up, the peace conference got off because of the reluctance of the middle east states who could not afford to do so to say no to the world's only super power especially with the debacle in the USSR which

weakened Russia so much. But each actor also has an interest at stake: Syria would like to have back Israeli occupied Golan Heights, and she can get it now not via Russia but the US and the West; Lebanon, subordinated by Syria, want Israelis expelled from the South; and, perhaps hopefully for all, Israel cannot do without finance from the US to manage the Jewish immigrants from the Soviet. Yet, for peace to endure and for problems to be solved, most importantly, the weaker Palestinians have to be assisted to get the Israelis to vacate the West Bank and the Gaza strip and the path should be cleared for the emergence of a Palestinian state. It is then that one could acclaim a task has been accomplished; a long distance lies ahead with several stop overs.

Brains Trust

Cardinal Walesa broke the Bread
But it didn't work out the way The Master said.
The multitude by the dying Sea
At Gdansk it was, not Galilee
Awaited in vain from the miracle hats
The Free Market loaves (and the FM sprats)
Walesa said that Demand would stir
Champagne would bubble & wheels would whirr
Fun toppling old Gods while the summer went by
But only dead leaves stir in the Wintry sky
Tons of Butter gone rancid New Ships gone to rust
Theres a slump in the shares of the Harvard Trust.

U. Karunatilake

VASA OPTICIANS

207, 2nd Cross Street,
Colombo - 11.

Telephone : 4 2 1 6 3 1

Ace Radio Cab

- * Computerised meters * Can be summoned to your doorstep
- * No call up charge within city limits * Vehicle access from selected stands
- * Receipts issued on request * Company credit available

Call 501502, 501503 or 501504



Another Aitken Spence Service



BOOK REVIEW

Sri Lanka Foundation. Human Rights and Religions in Sri Lanka. A Commentary on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Colombo: Sri Lanka Foundation, 1988.

On 10 December 1948 the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. On 10 December 1988 the Human Rights Centre of the Sri Lanka Foundation, having completed the work of three years on Human Rights and Religions, published its 350 page volume on the subject. The publication was a fitting commemoration of the fortieth anniversary of the Declaration. The Editor of the volume in his Preface calls the patient work it required "an initiative unparalleled in this world". This remarkable claim is not without legitimacy.

The originality consists in approaching the subject of Human Rights from the standpoint of four great world religions: Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. Sri Lanka was well placed to attempt such an approach. A small island, it yet has the distinction of being the only country in the world where the four religions coexist, each authentic in doctrine and vibrant in practice. What has to be said in a review which intends to be not merely laudatory is that the approach of the book is — as perhaps it consciously set out to be, and as its title indicates — that of a passive commentary whereas it might without loss have also been that of a constructive critique. The Commentary is

unquestionably careful, methodical and authoritative. What is not played in it is the note of dynamic, forward development.

From no watch tower could a better critique have emerged than from that of the great Asian religious traditions. The Declaration emphasizes the primacy of the individual. A commentary on it from the standpoint of religions should have emphasized the equal primacy of the Community, which is fundamental to religion.

The individualist approach to rights in the Western tradition — in which the Declaration is fully anchored — goes back to classical Greece and Rome. Then began the definition of justice as *sum cuique* (to each one what is one's own) and the concept of the *ius naturale* as the foundation of justice for the individual. Admonished by the King Creon not to bury the body of her slain brother, Polyneices, Antigone disobeys, saying that she has to act in accordance with the immutable laws of the gods. In more modern times the western tradition comes down to the twentieth century through the *Magna Carta* (1215), the teachings of Aquinas and the Scholastics of Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), the *Petition of Rights* of 1628, the *Bill of Rights* of 1689, the writings of Locke, Montesquieu, Voltaire and Rousseau, the

American Declaration of Independence of 1776, the American Constitution and its famous Amendments, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of 1789.

The Commentary lost, so it seems, the ideal opportunity to turn the searchlight of the eastern tradition of community upon the western tradition of individualism. Indeed, it was the eastern tradition that was universal until the western took off schismatically in separate rationalist, materialist and technocratic directions. The Commentary could have made a powerful case for the revision of the Declaration according to the rich insights of Community provided by the Buddhist ideal of the sangha, the early Christian communitarian ideal of each for all and all for each, the Islamic vision of the oneness of all humanity as seen in the practice of table fellowship, the Hindu ideal (later vitiated by the introduction of caste and outcaste) of the unity of all human life in the love and the life of Brahma. The Commentary could have pleaded that Article 29 which, alone among the 30 Articles, speaks explicitly of "duties to the community" should be central in any further revision of the Declaration. Whether through awe or through diffidence, the Commentary refused to handle the brief.

The Commentary gives evidence of the extent of the opportunities it missed nowhere better than when it gives the comments of the four religions on Article 17 which sets out "the rights to own property

alone as well as in association with others". The four religious traditions are unanimous in asserting that the right to property is not absolute and that the right of one person or body of persons to own property is entirely subservient to the right of every other person or body of persons to live. When privatization is the fashion of the IMF hour, the reminder would have been most timely.

The western tradition never tires of saying that the State is for the Person, not the Person for the State. Thereby it misses the third intervening reality, namely, the Community. The human person antedates the State. It does not antedate the Community. Person and Community begin their histories together, inextricably linked to each other, forming themselves and each other. The greatest achievement of the Sri Lanka Commentary could so easily have been to point out the lacuna of a Declaration of the Rights of the Human Community in the Declaration of the Rights of the Human Individual.

The Commentary's approach to Human Rights though religion has also the weakness of its undoubted strength. The strength is in pointing out very systematically and most convincingly that each of the human rights as enunciated in the Declaration is in accordance with the religious traditions, cultures and beliefs by which we live and hence cannot be lightly trampled on. Arbitrary arrests, prolonged detentions without trial and torture prohibited by Articles 5 and 9, are violations of human rights; they are also mortal sins against religion.

The weakness lies in every approach to justice through religion. The religious approach tends by its very nature to blunt the cutting edge of Justice. It underplays conflict and urges collaboration. It abhors struggle and sanctifies harmony. It promotes compromise and fears confrontation. Religion

has in history often been an upholder of the *status quo* and institutionalized religion has nearly always been so. The religious institution has often been the spiritual arm of the temporal power of the State. In mediaeval and earlier times it played the prime role in the consecration of kings. In modern times its highest dignitaries sit in the first row at State tamashas; it pours holy water on the armed forces of the State. The role of religion in society is exercised in two areas: cult and moral choice. The State has no objection to action in the first area: it gives

people something else to do besides thinking of how they are governed. It tolerates action in the second, at least as long as religions confine it to the church or temple courtyard. Indeed, about religion's overstepping these confines, the State need not really bother. Religion seems to have traded the right for security and privilege. Any liberation thrust of religion is wholly marginal to the mainstream, rather like the clown's piece in a Shakespearean tragedy. The Commentary might have helped us to think that it need not necessarily be so.

The Estate ...

(Continued from page 17)

between statement and fulfilment and sometimes even the lack of a clear statement characterize the other areas of Tamil grievance, as recognized in the UNP Manifesto and reiterated in the first Statement of Government Policy.

The role of the Estate Tamils in the inter-ethnic drama is to make both sides understand the imperative of meeting each other halfway. On the one hand, to the Tamils of the North and East the Tamils of the Centre are an irrefragable argument against the feasibility of Eelam. If Eelam were to be established in the North and East, the Estate Tamils would be in a state of intolerable psychological and political instability and uncertainty. On the other, to the Sinhalese of the South and West the Estate Tamils by their very presence in the Centre of the island are

most compelling reasons for the fair and just settlement of Tamil grievance. For unless these grievances of the Tamils are redressed, the conflict of the North and East will progressively engulf the Centre too with the direst consequences for every section and for everyone. But the redress of minority grievances has of necessity to be based on the real and realistic acceptance of pluralism and has of necessity to flow from the moral and political will to grant the legitimacy of the separate subidentities and consciousnesses of the groups that together form the society of the unified nation-state. The Estate Tamils are an argument both for such intellectual acceptance and for such moral and political determination. Their role may therefore be conceived as being one of integrating, without assimilating, the various sub-identities in the country in an overarching national identity.

Need for an...

(Continued from page 8)

writing. These directions are to be published in the annual reports of these media institutions and should be subject to Parliamentary Scrutiny. None of these safeguards are effective today.

So we have to go back to the question of the need for a genuinely liberal political cul-

ture which provides 'space' for dissent. The Media is a major instrument in ensuring the accountability of a government. Such a political culture can arise only out of a new politics for Sri Lanka which sees an end to the personality cult and sycophancy. To free the media we must strive to create an open society free from the old politics of manipulation and double talk.



ENRICHING RURAL LIFESTYLE

Why there's sound of laughter in this rustic tobacco barn....

There is laughter and light banter amongst these rural damsels who are busy sorting out tobacco leaf in a barn. It is one of the hundreds of such barns spread out in the mid and upcountry intermediate zone where the arable land remains fallow during the off season.

Here, with careful nurturing, tobacco grows as a lucrative cash crop and the green leaves turn to gold... to the value of over Rs. 250 million or more annually, for perhaps 143,000 rural folk.

Tobacco is the industry that brings employment to the second highest number of people. And these people are the tobacco barn owners, the tobacco growers and those who work for them, on the land and in the barns.

For them, the tobacco leaf means meaningful work, a comfortable life and a secure future. A good enough reason for laughter.



Ceylon Tobacco Co. Ltd.

*Sharing and caring
for our land and her people.*



We are a different kind of Guardian to you.

There are a multitude of Guardians during your lifetime.

- They who guard the freedom of speech & expression.
- They who protect the basic human rights of mankind.
- They who guard the democratic freedom to which each of us is entitled as citizens.

Each of us is a Guardian to others who look to us for their dependency in day to day life.

But the difference is our Guardianship rests on our deep concern for your future. We are trusted Guardians of your hard-earned money, guiding you on how to spend and how to save for you and your dependents tomorrow.



So Reach out Today
For your Life-Long Guardian
PEOPLE'S BANK
A Different kind of Guardian for you.