

Damaging campaign by elements in the UK

Sri Lanka's High Commissioner in the United Kingdom, Mr. Noel Wimalasena has sought the assistance of the Minister of State to combat a public relations problem the Sri Lankan government is facing there.

The Tamil Eelamists and the LSSP (Vasudeva Nanayakara's group) both have active local branches which are using sympathetic British sources for propaganda damaging to Sri Lanka, Mr. Wimalasena says.

The former works through such papers like the Guardian and the Observer and such institutions as Amnesty International and the Institute for Race Relations. The latter are in collaboration with left organisations in the UK like the Labour Party Young Socialists and the Socialists' Party.

"In both cases, they have so won over their supporters, playing upon their latent liberal susceptibility to a plea of violation of human rights, that my official attempts to project a correct image are being frustrated by being denied publication in the appropriate journalism. Moreover, the very large Sri Lankan community here, seeing the damaging publicity but failing to see any official correction, is naturally perturbed", Mr. Wimalasena says.

He has suggested that Sri Lankan newspapers which have a wide currency in the UK be used to counteract the false propaganda by publishing the correct position.

Mr. Wimalasena has sent the Minister, Mr. Anandadasa de Alwis copies of letters he had written to the Editor Guardian, London and the Editor, New Statesman, London regarding incorrect and damaging reports published by them last month.



N. Wimalasena

In his letter to the Guardian Mr. Wimalasena says:

"I refer to the report appearing at Column 8, Page 3 of today's issue of your paper, concerning cyclone relief for Sri Lanka.

"The cyclone was a national disaster affecting large areas of Sri Lanka, and its impact was equally felt by the various communities living there — Sinhalese,

Tamils, Muslims, etc. The relief and rehabilitation programme launched by the Government is a comprehensive, national one, embracing all those affected. This has been amply recognised by the many governmental and non-governmental foreign organisations which have already, and so generously extended assistance. They include, in a significant degree, both the British Government and British-based relief agencies.

"It is, therefore, both regrettable and damaging for your Staff Reporter to seek to inject an element of communal disharmony and prejudice into this national tragedy, by implying that the Tamil community has suffered to any particular degree.

"If that was also the intention of the body said to be seeking to mobilise relief assistance, then their efforts are likely to be counter-productive, for the Sri Lankan Government cannot be expected to permit this national tragedy to be exploited by particular communal and political elements for their own ends.

"All assistance for cyclone relief in Sri Lanka is being (Continued on Page 3)

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 channelled through the President's Fund, which is a national fund to which all communities of Sri Lanka have contributed. Those in Britain who desire to contribute to this are invited to do so through this Mission. I would request you kindly to give this letter urgent and appropriate publicity in your paper. Thank you, Yours truly N. Wimalasena.

This is Mr. Wimalasena's reply to a report published in the New Statesman on January 19:— Bruce Page, Esq., The Editor, New Statesman, London —

"Sir, I refer to the article about my country by Mr. C. Hitchens in the 19, January issue of your journal, in which he declines even to use the country's correct name.

"The author derides Third World countries in general and Sri Lanka in particular, without any mention of the underlying causes of underdevelopment or any reference to the fundamental aspects of contemporary international affairs. His arrogant bias is nowhere more evident than in his contemptuous disparagement of the Sacred Buddha Tooth

Relic, which is venerated by hundreds of millions of Buddhists who would doubtless be very offended by his remarks.

"His subjective opinions, however offensive, could have been ignored, but he has sought to lend verisimilitude to an otherwise prejudiced and mischievous narrative by adducing facts so incorrect as to demand rebuttal.

"He deplores the release only now of political detainees from the 1971 armed insurgency. Presumably he would advocate for Britain also that armed insurgents who seek to destroy its democratic structure and to overthrow its elected government should not be detained except briefly? And, military expenditure in Sri Lanka has always been under 10% in comparison with social welfare expenditure of over 30%.

"Indian Tamil labour on Sri Lanka's tea estates enjoys the franchise, and their elected leader is a Cabinet Minister in the present Government. He and his Party, the CWC, have publicly repudiated the separatist policy of the Sri Lankan Tamil TULF.

"The predominantly Sri

Lankan Tamil area, the Jaffna Peninsula, was unaffected by the cyclone. The most severely devastated parts were the Batticaloa, Amparai and Polonnaruwa districts, which have very large concentrations of Sinhalese and Moors, besides the Tamils who also live there.

"The TULF, which calls for separation, claims a mandate in two provinces: the North and the East. At the last general elections, it received only 31.2 per cent of the vote in the Eastern Province, which returned twice as many UNP Government MPs as TULF MPs. Even in the Northern Province, 31 per cent of the Tamils voted against the TULF. And, only 52.4 per cent of all Sri Lankan Tamils live in that province.

"I believe your readers deserve and would value the benefit of this correction of a prejudiced, misinformed, mischievous and misleading appraisal of Sri Lanka today. It is saddening and a trifle surprising that such an article should have found publication in the New Statesman, which once enjoyed high standing in the Third World which your writer is at such pains to denigrate.

"With high esteem, Yours truly, N. Wimalasena.