

Tamil **TIMES**

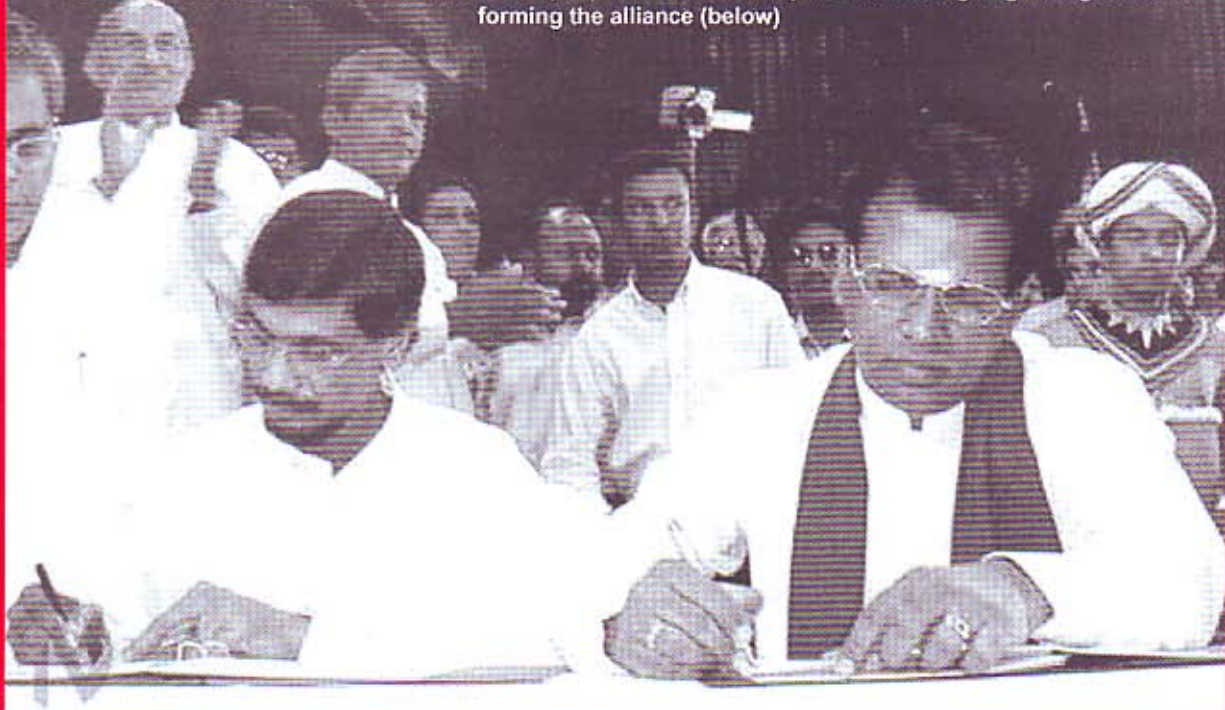
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Rev Uduwe Dhammaloka Thera and Rev EllawalaNedananda Thera of the Jathika Hela Urumaya (above); General Secretaries of the JVP Tilvin Silva (left) and SLFP Maithripala Sirisena signing the agreement forming the alliance (below)





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*"I do not agree with a word
of what you say, but I'll
defend to the death your
right to say it."*

-Voltaire

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Email: prajan@gn.apc.org
editor@tamiltimes.org
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An election with a difference

For the third time in five years the country has been plunged into an unnecessary and expensive election campaign merely because the President and the Prime Minister heading the two centres of state power did not have the wisdom to work out an amicable cohabitation arrangement for the governance of the country.

Heading the main rival political camps are the United Peoples Freedom Alliance (UPFA) led by President Chandrika Kumratunga and the United National Front (UNF) led by Prime Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe. Backing the UPFA are many other smaller parties including the LSSP, CP and the MEP. The parties that are supporting the UNF include the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC), Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) and the Up-country Peoples Front (UCPF).

Importantly this election is already proving to be different from previous elections at least for two reasons.

Firstly, the most significant, and with probable long-lasting impact on the political developments in Sri Lanka, is the decision by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to openly participate in the election campaign. Until the general election of December 2001, the LTTE for many decades had actively called for a boycott of the elections in the Northeast, and even targeted for attack those who participated in such elections. The basic premise upon which the LTTE did not want the Tamils of the Northeast to participate in the general elections was that such participation would have implied the acceptance by the Tamils of the unitary constitutional dispensation that operated in Sri Lanka, and such acceptance would compromise the sovereignty and separate nationhood that the LTTE was asserting on behalf of the Tamils. Even in the December 2001 general election, while the LTTE helped the formation of the Tamil National Front (TNA) and gave tacit support to its candidates, the LTTE did not officially participate.

However this time round, the LTTE appears to have made a conscious and substantial shift in its strategic stance. Its political wing leader, S P Tamilchelvam said, "We unanimously decided today (17 February) that the Tamil people should vote only for policies of the Tamil National Alliance. This is the wish of our leader and our leadership. Tamils should unite under one leadership and one policy for this election," adding that the LTTE's political wing would play a major role in the election campaign this time. The LTTE leadership has been fully involved in the selection of candidates - and many of them are known LTTEers - for nominations under the TNA ticket and drawing up the strategy and manifesto for the forthcoming election.

Confirming the widely held belief that the TNA was contesting this election as a proxy for the LTTE, the Secretary General of the TULF and one of the top-level leaders of the TNA, R Sampanthan, said, "We openly state that the Tamil National Alliance is contesting the forthcoming general election on behalf of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam," adding "TNA is contesting the forthcoming general election with only one objective. That is to show the international community that Tamils in the northeast are wholly behind the LTTE in the peace effort and Tamil people fully support the Interim Self Governing Authority (ISGA) proposals presented to the Government of Sri Lanka by the LTTE."

In this context, one is tempted to pose the question whether the sharp shift in the LTTE's stance towards participation in the Sri Lankan parliamentary election represents a new direction away from its secessionist ideology and a reflection of its readiness for a negotiated political and constitutional arrangement.

The distinguishing second aspect of this election is the direct intervention by a large number of Buddhist monks in electoral politics. Despite the opposition from the top two Buddhist Mahanayakes, these Buddhist monks have filed their nominations to contest in this election. The significance of this clerical intervention cannot be underestimated. To minimise its unprecedented character, some have suggested that Buddhist monks have always participated in political and election campaigns of political parties, and point out to the presence in the dissolved parliament of Rev. Baddegama Samitha Thero who contested and won in the December 2001 election. It must be noted however that Rev. Samitha when he contested the election, presented himself before the electors as a member of the LSSP which was a constituent member of the Peoples Alliance. As the Ven. Uduwe Dhammaloka Thera, General Secretary of the Supreme Council of the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) promised, Rev. Samitha did not ask the voters to elect him "to establish a Baudha Rajiya", or "to build a new nation based on Dhamma values and get rid of power-hungry politicians", or "to safeguard the Buddha Sasana and the country from falling into enemy hands" or to describe Sri Lanka as "a Unitary Buddhist State", or to "eliminate party politics in governance and revoke laws that don't suit any race or religion", or to "immediately bring the Bill against unethical conversions." In short Rev. Samitha did not make ostentatious display and use of his saffron robe nor did he promise to create a theocratic state, which is exactly what the monks of the Jathika Hela Urumaya are doing. Clerical intervention and domination is not a panacea for all ills in a society. The course of clerical tyranny, intolerance, abuse of power, sectarian violence, corruption and bribery, oppression of minorities and women are there for all to see in societies dominated by religious Mullahs of all varieties. Lay politicians may become and many are in fact corrupt and power-hungry. However there is no example in modern history that a just and decent society has been created by clerical intervention. On the contrary there are many examples where rivers of blood have engulfed countries and societies by excessive and obsessive religiosity.

Nominations for the April 2 General Election closed at 12 noon 24 February with both main political parties, the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) and the United National Front (UNF) fielding candidates in 21 of the 22 electoral districts, the exception being the Jaffna district where the UPFA will extend support to the EPDP candidates, and the UNF did not put up any candidates.

The UNF is composed of the UNP, CWC, SLMC and the UCPF led by Mr P Chandrasekaran. The SLFP and the JVP recently forged the UPFA which has expanded into a major multi-party political coalition with the entry into the Alliance of the two traditional Left parties, the LSSP and CP. The other parties in the Alliance are MEP, the National Unity Alliance of Ferial Ashraff, Desha Vimukthi Janatha Party the North based EPDP and the Sathasivam group with a following in the estate sector. Following the recent split in the SLMC, a faction (the Attaulla group) of it also has joined the UPFA.

In the run-up to nominations efforts were made to form a "grand alliance" of Tamil political parties comprising the TNA representing the Sri Lankan Tamils and CWC and the UCPF representing the Tamils of recent Indian origin. However these efforts did not succeed.

President seeks four-point mandate

President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga leading the United People's Freedom Alliance in the forthcoming election is calling for a "massive mandate" from the electors to (a) continue peace negotiations with the LTTE, (b) abolish the Executive Presidency (c) revise the Electoral System and (d) introduce a process of market-oriented economic development that also guarantees social justice.

Addressing a recent public meeting President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga asserted that a Government under her leadership will not in any way incite or provoke the LTTE to another war, adding that their intention was to strengthen the LTTE organisation politically and encourage them to enter into the democratic political framework. "We will encourage the LTTE to enter into the democratic frame work through Provincial Council or any other political mechanism introduced through a political solution", she said.

Although the UNF Government had not discussed a single word about a permanent solution to the national question, she however commended the UNF for at least stopping the war for two years. President Kumaratunga said the SLFP-JVP Alliance had a program for achieving lasting peace in the country and also for a giant program to improve the economy of the country soon after establishing a new government.

She said the country missed the best chance it had of solving the national question at a time the two major parties were placed in the position of working together during the last two years and added that the country missed that valuable chance.

At a meeting held at the BMICH Colombo, in an attempt to allay the fears of the business community regarding the SLFP's alliance with the JVP, the new Media and Telecom Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar, gave a firm and clear assurance to the three hundred strong business community that the peace process will continue and guaranteeing a new government that will be efficient, with easy access to those in business and industry.

The JVP leader, Somawansa Amarasinghe, who had until recently been in self-imposed exile for many years also made an attempt to confess to its past mistakes by saying that the JVP was a developing body, ever improving. "We have learnt from our past mistakes and we have opened a new leaf in our life. There is no

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point in talking of the past. Let us talk of the future. Our economic policy is very clear. It is a market-friendly economy driven primarily by the private sector with the state playing the role of facilitator," he told the gathering.

ering.

Asked by a journalist what the status of the Ceasefire Agreement would be, if the Alliance comes to power, Mr Kadirgamar said, "The Ceasefire Agreement will stand. The PA has complained of serious imbalance and we have been right. But there is no question about not wanting a ceasefire. The concept is fully supported by the PA, the President, the Alliance. We don't want a breakdown. The concept is more important than the document. The concept preserves the ceasefire. However, there are several unsatisfactory features in the document that need to be attended to. The Alliance is committed to a political dialogue for a settlement. We will initiate discussions with the LTTE and other parties. The LTTE is party to the conflict, so we have to talk with them. But we also have to bring about a just and durable solution. So we will also talk to other parties. But who to talk to and what to discuss are issues that need to be gone into."

PM seeks strong mandate

Prime Minister Ranil Wickramasinghe also has called on the electorate to give the United National Party and its constituent parties a strong mandate at the general election to form a stable Government which could secure the country's future.

"Give us a strong mandate at this decisive election which will determine the future of Sri Lanka. Within the next six years, we will create a new Sri Lanka", the Premier said. Addressing a Special Convention of the United National Party convened in view of the general election, the Premier pledged to build a new Sri Lanka within the next six years. "During the past two years, we have been able to rescue the country from its down-turn and laid a firm foundation to ensure a sustainable growth in every sector of the country. The country needs to continue that development process within the next six years to witness the fruits of our success," the PM said adding, "We must establish a permanent peace. The current ceasefire should be converted into a lasting peace."

Lamenting about the premature dissolution of the parliament, Wickramasinghe said, "It is undemocratic and unethical to have dissolved a Parliament which had a clear mandate from the people of this country. Besides, this dissolution has greatly affected the people."

LTTE to back TNA

The LTTE pledged its support to the Tamil National Alliance led by senior TULF parliamentarian R. Sampanthan, according to a Tamilnet report datelined 17 February.

The website quoted LTTE political wing leader S. P. Thamichelvan as saying "We unanimously decided today that the Tamil people should vote only for policies of the Tamil National Alliance. This is the wish of our leader and our leadership. Tamils should unite under one leadership and one policy for this election." He revealed the group's position at a press briefing at the conclusion of a three hour-long meeting with alliance leaders in Kilinochchi.

The secretary general of the Tamil United Liberation Front, R. Sampanthan was also present at the meeting with the press.

Thamichelvan said the LTTE's political wing would play a major role in the election campaign this time. Refuting a report in which he was quoted as saying that Sinhala parties cannot contest in the north-east, he said: "Sinhala parties can contest anywhere in the north-east. It is their freedom to do so. I only said that the Tamils might not prefer Sinhala parties."

LTTE Behind TNA

"We openly state that the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) is contesting the forthcoming general election on behalf of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)," said Tamil National Alliance lead candidate in Trincomalee district, Mr.R.Sampanthan, 23 February Monday evening when he addressed the first election seminar held at Hindu Cultural hall in Trincomalee.

"TNA is contesting the forthcoming general election with only one objective. That is to show the international community that Tamils in the northeast are wholly behind the LTTE in the peace effort and Tamil people fully support the Interim Self Governing Authority (ISGA) proposals presented to the Government of Sri Lanka by the LTTE," said Mr.Sampanthan.

He further said the forthcoming general election is a historic one as the LTTE would provide its support to ensure electoral success of the TNA. The results of the April general election would strengthen the hands of LTTE in the proposed peace talks.

LSSP, CP join alliance

The Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) joined the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) but its General Secretary Batty Weerakoon wasn't on the list of nominated candidates that was submitted to President Chandrika Kumaratunga.

"I won't be contesting or entering parliament on the national list. I've had a bellyful of it," Weerakoon told the press.

He said the LSSP would contest four districts while Prof. Tissa Vitharana had been proposed for a promised national list seat. Former parliamentarian Ven. Baddegama Samitha has been nominated from the Galle district, Keerthi Kariyawasam from Kalutara, Percy Wickramasekera from Colombo and Provincial Council Minister Y. G. Padmasiri from Kegalle.

Meanwhile, the Communist Party (CP) also joined the UPFA. They would be contesting five districts and have been promised one national list seat, for which General Secretary D. E. W. Gunasekera had been suggested.

Western Provincial Council Industries Minister Mahesh Almeida has been nominated from Colombo, former deputy minister Chandrasiri Gajadeera from Matara, Ayagama Pradeshiya Sabha Chairman Lambert Bandara from Ratnapura, provincial council member Jayalath Bandara Seneviratne from Anuradhapura and former judicial officer Lalith Andrahennedi from Hambantota.

The two parties have signed the same MoU, reserving their independence in respect of the ethnic issue.

"We say that the solution lies on the basis of a devolution of power," said Raja Collure, CP politburo member. "We also stress the necessity of a bipartisan approach to the ethnic problem, by which we mean that any government must act in consultation with the opposition.

SLMC to contest on own and UNF tickets

The Sri Lanka Muslim Congress decided to contest the April general election on the UNF ticket in Anuradhapura, Kurunegala, Puttalam, Vanni, Kandy and Colombo districts, while they will contest the Jaffna, Trincomalee, Ampara and Batticaloa on the SLMC ticket.

SLMC General Secretary Hassen Ali and UNP General Secretary Senarath Kapukotuwa signed the Memorandum of Understanding. Meanwhile, Port Development, Shipping, Eastern Development and Muslim Religious Affairs Minister and SLMC leader Rauff Hakeem handed over his nomination papers at the Ampara District Secretariat 23 February to contest the election from the Digamadulla District.

Hakeem said he decided to contest from the Digamadulla District to fulfil the hopes and aspirations of the Muslim community.

Hakeem contested the last election from the Kandy district and there were earlier reports that he would contest from the Colombo district this time. However, he is now contesting the Digamadulla district in terms of an agreement between the UNP and the SLMC

The talking point in SLMC circles was the failure of Ports Minister and SLMC leader Hakeem to convince Prime Minister Wickremesinghe to persuade a CWC nominee for Kandy district to step down in order to avoid Hakeem's defeat in Kandy, which resulted in Hakeem, reportedly looking desperately for a safe seat and opting finally to contest Digamadulla in the eastern Ampara district on his party's Tree symbol.

The CWC's nominee is Faizer Mustapha, son of Sri Lanka's High Commissioner in the UK Mr Faiz Mustapha. The CWC had insisted that its nominee should contest the Kandy district on the UNF ticket. Otherwise there was a threat that the CWC would go it alone in the Kandy and Nuwara Eliya districts.

Muslim Congress big-wigs were agitated, that the CWC nominee's father had got his diplomatic posting in the UK, purportedly pursuant to a condition in the Memorandum of Understanding between the UNP and the SLMC under which the latter supported UNP leader Ranil Wickramasinghe to form the government after the last general election. The SLMC leader had apparently requested the High Commissioner, who had been a legal adviser to the SLMC before his diplomatic posting, to intercede and ask his son to give way by dropping out from contesting in Kandy, but the father, had declined to interfere claiming when pressed for action that his son was an independent legal person and that he had no say in the matter.

It is also learnt that the SLMC apparently had pressurised the UNF not to include Muslims in its (UNF) candidates' list for Ampara, Batticaloa and Trincomalee districts. The two parties decided to field separate lists in the east following this pressure according to SLMC sources. The SLMC had wanted any Muslim candidate chosen by the UNF to contest in the east on the SLMC ticket (Tree symbol).

A former government MP said the UNF gave in to SLMC leader Rauff Hakeem's unreasonable demand. "The premier shouldn't have backed down," he said. Replying to questions, he said eight Sinhalese and two Tamils will contest Ampara on the UNF ticket. But Tamil candidates were being pressurised by the LTTE not to join the fray not only in the east but the entire north-east province. **SLMC ready to support UPFA**

A question mark has arisen in respect of the relationship between the UNF and the SLMC following a statement from the party leader who said that he was ready to support the UPFA if it was prepared to allocate more seats to the SLMC than those promised by the UNF. SLMC Leader Rauff Hakeem told journalists that even though his party had already signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the UNP, he was willing to consider supporting the UPFA after the elections, if the need arose. "What's important for us is more parliamentary seats," he said. He however denied that he had held discussions with the UPFA, but added that his party had publicized ten demands to which the UPFA had not responded to date. **Split in the SLMC**

Just a few days before nominations were to be submitted, a substantial breakaway faction of the SLMC, including three former parliamentarians, formed themselves into a new political party Muslim National Front (MNF), and announced that it was joining the SLFP-JVP alliance to contest the April elections in the Batticaloa, Trincomalee, Digamadulla and Vanni districts. The announcement by this powerful faction of the SLMC, led by former minister of highways Mr. A.L.M Athaullah is seen as a setback for Mr. Wickremesinghe's coalition.

Addressing a press conference in Colombo, Mr. Athaullah said he, along with former MPs from Digamadulla (Amparai) Mr. Anwer Ismail and Mr. H.M.M Harriss were joining the SLFP-JVP alliance to "strengthen President Kumaratunga's hand".

"We had several rounds of discussions with the JVP and SLFP regarding the policy of the Freedom Alliance over key issues such as ethnic, economy, fisheries, paddy farming and livestock. We

totally agree with the policies of the Alliance over these issues and decided to join the Freedom Alliance," Athaullah said.

The founder leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, A. H. M. Ashraff formed the party to provide security to the Muslim community without harming the interests of the majority Sinhalese and minority Tamils, he said. It was regretful that Rauff Hakeem, who became the Muslim Congress leader following Ashraff's death, had destroyed the party and betrayed the Muslim community for a portfolio, Athaullah said.

"Amidst war, the Muslim community in the East, lived in peace. But under the UNP and the LTTE peace agreement, the Muslim community fell from the frying pan to the fire. There is no peace in the East. People live in constant fear," he said.

The rank and file of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) was thrown into disarray following the formation of a new political party, and three former SLMC parliamentarians joining it. All three former SLMC MPs, H.M.Harris, Anver Ismail and A.Azeez, represented the Amparai electoral district in the dissolved parliament have joined the new party and are contesting the forthcoming general election in the Amparai district under the UPFA ticket. Mr. Harris, Mr.Anwer Ismail and Mr.Azeez signed the nomination papers in the presence of President Ms Chandrika Kumaratunge to contest on the UPFA ticket, Presidential secretariat in a press release said.

With the latest split in the SLMC efforts by Muslim theologians to form a grand Muslim alliance have come to nought. The Mosque Federation and the Jammiathul Ulema of the Eastern Province made several attempts to bring the SLMC, the Athaulla faction and the NUA under one umbrella on the premise that Muslims could achieve the maximum electoral benefits through a united alliance, but the latest move by the Athaullah faction to ally itself with the SLFP-JVP alliance had paved the way for a heated battle among Muslims in the Eastern province.

Many Muslims believe that if all Muslim parties contested the election as a united front, they could win as many as six seats in the east. They have warned that none of the Muslim parties will gain any seats, if they contest the election as rivals.

Nominations in the North-east

Eight political parties and two Independent Groups have entered the fray from the Jaffna district for the general elections.

The political parties are the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), Eelam Peoples Democratic Party (EPDP), New Democratic Party, Swaraj Party, Ruhuna Janatha Party, Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) and the United Socialist Party.

The Independent Group I is led by Mr. Anandasangaree, President, Tamil United Front (TULF) who has been denied nomination by the TNA. The symbol of the Independent Group I is Padlock. The Jaffna electoral district list of candidates of this Independent Group included names of Anandasangari, former Jaffna Mayor Sellan Kandyaan, TULF seniors S. Mutthulingam, Sellyah Vijayaratham, Aravindan Muhundan and Balasingham.

The Independent Group II is led by Mohamed Subi of Kilinochchi. Though he is the first candidate the other eleven are Tamils including two women. The election symbol is "Kooja". Altogether 120 candidates are in the field.

A notable omission in the TNA's Jaffna list is the name of Appathurai Vinayagamoorthy (Ex-MP), President, All Ceylon Tamil Congress. He has been transferred to contest in the Vavuniya district.

Twelve TNA candidates are contesting the election for nine seats in the Jaffna district.

The TNA National list consisted of M. K. Eelaventhana, S. Suriyakumar, (Vadamarachchi Fishermen Union) R. M. Imam (Representing Jaffna Muslims) and P. Kanagalingam (Farmers Union).

The EPDP's candidates contesting in the Jaffna district are

Douglas Devananda, S. Sivathanan, V. K. Kugendran, S. Baskaran, S. Thavarajah, K. Manipalavarajah, Makeswary Velauthar, Sinna Bala, S. Jeevaratnam, N. Mathanarajah, T. Sritharan of EPRLF (Varathar Group) and Bawan.

Meanwhile, in a surprise development, former UNP MP for Jaffna district T. Maheshwaran, who was directed by the LTTE not to contest, also gained UNF nomination from the Colombo district. "There were a lot of requests for me to contest from the Colombo district and I could not refuse," Maheshwaran explained.

Leader of the Sinhala Maha Bhoomi Putra Party Dr. Harishchandra Wijetunga alleges that as his party representations were not allowed to enter the offices of Returning Officers of Jaffna and Batticaloa nominations could not be handed over.

He requested elections to those two districts be cancelled as his party was denied a chance to contest the two. He said that his agents who went to Jaffna to hand over nominations were not allowed to proceed beyond Omanthai, by some group of people, and those who were to hand over nominations to Batticaloa district were not allowed to go to the office of the Returning Officer for Batticaloa.

The TNA comprises four Tamil political parties all supportive of the LTTE - TULF (Sambanthan faction), All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC), Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO) and EPRLF (Suresh faction).

The TNA has submitted nominations for Jaffna, Vanni, Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Ampara districts under the Ilankai Thamil Arasu Katchchi - Federal Party (ITAK-FP) whose election symbol is "House". ITAK is contesting a general election after a lapse of 34 years. It last contested in 1970 under the leadership of S.J.V. Chelvanayakam. Thereafter the ITAK and the Tamil Congress merged to form the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) which took the "rising-sun" as its election symbol. It was under this symbol and the TULF the TNA candidates contested the last general election. However, the continuing legal wrangle over the leadership of the TULF has prevented the TNA from either contesting under the TULF ticket or using its "rising-sun" symbol, and forced them to contest the forthcoming general election under the ITAK ticket and its symbol, "house".

The TNA candidates in the Jaffna electoral district are: Messrs Mavai Senathirajah, Nadaraja Raviraj and S. Sivamaharasa of TULF, Ponnambalam Gajendrakumar and C.V.K. Sivagnanam of ACTC, M.K. Sivajilingam and N. Sri Kantha of TELO, Solomon Cyril of Jaffna District People's Forum; S. Sivanesan of Jaffna Coconut and Palmyra Federation activist, Mrs. Pathmini Sithamparanathan, Suresh Premachandran of EPRLF Suresh wing and A. Gajendran, President of International Thamil eelam Students Federation.

The TNA candidates in the Vanni electoral district are: Messrs Selvam Adaikalanathan, Sivasakthi Anandan, Sivanathan Kishor, Appadurai Vinayagamoorthy, Jon Bennet Christopher, Samiyoor Noor Mohamed Shajani, S. Kanagaretnam, Augustine Joseph Mariyanayagam Soosai and V. Noharathalingam.

The TNA candidates in the Trincomalee electoral district: Messrs R. Sampanthan, K. Thuraiyasingham, Gowri Muhunthan and Sahul Hameed of TULF, Sathasivam Shanmuganathan of ACTC, K. Ragunathan of EPRLF (Suresh wing) and V. Vigneshwaran of TELO.

The TNA candidates in the Batticaloa electoral district: Messrs Joseph Pararajasingham, Rajan Sathyamoorthy, T. Kanagasabai, Kingsley Rasanayakam, P. Ariyanethran, S. Jeyanandamoorthy, Miss Thangeswary Kathirgaman and S. Kanagaretnam.

The TNA candidates in the Ampara electoral district: Messrs Ariyanayakam Chandra Nehru, K. Pathmanathan, S. Vivekanandan, S. Rasanayakam, S. Sriskandarajah, S. Suntharalingam, S. Thinakarampillai, Thomas Thangathurai William, Ms. Yogambihai Sabapathy, Velupillai Kalyanasuntheram and Rasasekaram

Sivakumar.

The lead candidates on the TNA lists in Jaffna, Vanni, Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Amparai respectively are Mr. Mavai Senathirajah of TULF, Mr. Selvam Adaikalanathan of TELO, Mr. R. Sampanthan of TULF, Mr. Joseph Pararajasingham of TULF and Mr. A. Chandra Nehru of TULF.

TULF secretary general Mr. Sampanthan, ACTC President Mr. A. Vinayagamorthy, Secretary General of the EPRLF (Suresh wing) Mr. Suresh Premachandran, Mr. Selvam Adaikalanathan of TELO are competing in Trincomalee, Vavuniya, Jaffna and Vavuniya respectively, sources said.

In putting forward one candidate under the EPDP ticket, the EPRLF (Varathar Faction) said that "it is the considered assessment of our Party that the hegemony enjoyed by the LTTE in the North-East, which remains a militant organization known for its terror tactics even during time of peace, will ensure the maximum space to its proxies, the Tamil National Alliance, while denying that space to those Tamil Parties which do not recognize the LTTE as the sole representatives and oppose its undemocratic and hegemonic conduct.

"However, in response to the sentiments expressed by our supporters and sympathizers in Jaffna district and as a tribute to late Comrade Robert Subathiran, a member of the politburo of EPRLF and a charismatic personality in Jaffna who worked tirelessly to bring back normalcy in Jaffna by being the heart and soul of the Jaffna Municipal Council, we have decided to contest in Jaffna on the EPDP slate and the Veena symbol. We hope that our candidacy in Jaffna will also provide an opportunity for the People of Jaffna to give an expression to Robert Subathiran's moral courage and noble aims in the face of LTTE's nihilistic and terror politics. Comrade Subathiran's death at the hands of LTTE assassins in Jaffna has only spurred us to contest the elections in Jaffna in his memory.

In Batticaloa-Amparai district and other areas of the North-East we will not contest, but will call on the people to reject the undemocratic claims of the sole representative status of the LTTE and its proxies, the Tamil National Alliance."

UNF and UPFA National lists

The national lists of the two main parties, the UNF and the UPFA, were handed over on 23 February with Ronnie de Mel being a notable inclusion in the UNF list while former Premier Ratnasiri Wickremenayake and former strongman Anuruddha Ratwatte were notable exclusions from the UPFA list.

A significant feature was the inclusion of a large number of minority community members in the national lists of both major parties.

The UNF list includes: Kairahasp Nariman Choksy, Tilak Janaka Marapana, Prof. G.L. Peiris, Tyronne Lisle Dilano Fernando, Navin Dissanayake, Abdul Hameed Mohamed Azwer, Ronnie De Mel, Meera Mohideen Mohamed Musthaffa, Ali Zahir Moulana Seyed, Hussein Ahamed Baila, Ismail Mohamed Quddus, Fathima Teheema Kabeer, S.A.S. Vaduraunniza, W. P. S. Pushpa Kumara, Vadivel Puthirasigamony, Muthu S. Sellasamy, Perumalpillai Radhakrishnan, R. Paramasivam, Dr. Ranjith Atapattu, N. K. A. Sunil Yasanayake, Kesara Senanayake, R. Pathmanathan, Ravindra Randeniya, Dr. Raja John Pulle, M. A. Hassan Ali, Nivard Ajith Cabraal, V. Radhakrishnan, Sirinal De Mel and Indrani Irriyagolla.

The UPFA list includes Lakshman Kadirgamar, Prof. A. V. Suraweera, Prof. Vishwa Warnapala, D. E. W. Gunasekara, Segu Izadeen, Anwar Ismail, Prof. Tissa Withrana M. M. Zuhair, Ramalingam Chandrasekaran, Janadasa Peiris, A. S. B. Rani Perera, Cyril Wickremage, J. A. Mary Luceeda, Ajantha De Soya, Suppiyah Padma Sulochana, M. B. A. Aziz, S. Subaideen,

Chameera Koswatta, Waruna Deepthi Rajapakse, Philips Kumarasinghe, M. M. Wasantha Samarasinghe, Leel Gunasekara.

Expensive election

The Elections Department said the April 2 general election would cost the tax payer approximately Rs. 600 million. This includes expenses on foreign elections monitoring teams invited by polls chief Dayananda Dissanayake.

Answering questions, an official denied claims the poll would cost as much as Rs. 850 million. He said parliamentary elections in October 2000 and December 2001 cost the tax payer Rs. 648 and 596 respectively.

"We spent a staggering Rs 1,244 billion to conduct parliamentary elections in 2000 and 2001," he said, adding the expected expenses at the April 2 poll would raise the total costs relating to three general elections to Rs 1.844 billion.

Eighty tonnes of special quality paper with high security water-marks have been shipped to Colombo from the United Kingdom at a cost of Rs. 30 million, to print ballot and other election-related papers. Government Printer, Neville Nanayakkara told the press that cutting and printing ballot papers will commence (shortly) after nominations ended.

The production process of the ballot papers and other documents such as badges for election officials including senior presiding officers and junior presiding officers and posters to be affixed at the election booths will cost another Rs. 20 million, Nanayakkara said.

The paper is of a special type and carries a water-mark of the General Election in all three languages. A multi-coloured fluorescent fibre has also been incorporated into the paper as a security measure.

The total number of registered voters this time is 12,899,032 including of 470,824 voters eligible to cast their ballot for the first time.

Only 196 Members are directly elected by voters while 29 candidates will be nominated from the National Lists according to the percentage of the votes obtained by each party at the election. The new Parliament will meet on April 22.

Record number of candidates

Recognised political parties and independent groups have nominated 6,049 candidates for the April 2 General Election to elect 225 Members of Parliament.

The polls will see the highest number of candidates contesting a General Election in the post-independence history of Sri Lanka.

Nomination lists forwarded by six recognised political parties and six Independent groups were rejected.

Recognised political parties have forwarded 3,381 candidates while Independent Groups have 2,337 candidates in the fray. There are 331 National List nominees in all.

Returning Officers have rejected the nomination lists forwarded by the Kandurata Janatha Peramuna for Badulla District, Jathika Hela Urumaya for Hambantota, the National Development Front for Trincomalee and Galle, the Lalith Peramuna for Matara and the Muslim Kachi for Batticaloa.

Nomination lists of six Independent Groups filed for Colombo, Kandy, Kurunegala and Trincomalee districts were rejected.

The highest number of Independent Groups and political parties are contesting in the Digamadulla District. They have filed 410 nominees to elect seven candidates.

Six hundred and forty four candidates have filed nominations from the Colombo district. Only 20 will be elected to the Parliament.

Fresh polls, if election is rigged

Elections Commissioner Dayananda Dissanayake has warned that he would annul the results of any polling booth if rigging had taken place and order fresh elections for that particular booth.

Addressing District Secretaries on the conduct of the April 2 polls, the Elections Commissioner said that his warning was in keeping with a Supreme Court ruling.

Earlier, the practice had been to simply annul the votes of a booth where rigging had taken place and no fresh elections were held. An Election Department official said that in the event fresh voting had been ordered for a particular booth, the announcement of the results of the entire district would be delayed.

Meanwhile, the Commissioner has invited foreign monitors from Bangladesh, Pakistan, the European Union, the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Association of Asian Election Observers. A request from local polls observers that they be deployed in all polling booths was also being considered, an official said.

Voters in LTTE-held areas

The Commissioner of Elections is also due to hold talks with head of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission Chief Trond Furhovde to look into the possibility of conducting elections in the LTTE-controlled areas.

Mr. Dissanayake told the District Secretaries from the Northern and Eastern province at a separate meeting that taking into consideration a Supreme Court ruling that the voters in uncleared areas should be given an equal opportunity to cast their vote, he would be meeting the SLMM chief as well as officials of the Government Peace Secretariat. The GAs had pointed out that there could be practical problems in allowing hundreds of thousands of voters in the uncleared areas and getting them to vote within eight hours.

The Supreme Court in a recent fundamental rights case ruled that the Army action in preventing voters from uncleared areas from crossing into cleared areas to vote was a violation of their fundamental rights.

The Commissioner of Elections said he won't allow polling booths in areas held by the LTTE where more than two hundred thousand Tamil voters live. The polling stations would instead be clustered in places controlled by the Sri Lankan armed forces, he said. Addressing a press conference at his office in Colombo he said that he decided to do so for reasons of security, transport problems and land mines. The Commissioner said that he had earlier considered clustering polling stations for LTTE held areas in the no-man's land between the line of control but had decided against it in view of the threat posed by landmines.

Access to electronic media

Election Department will allocate time in the electronic media to all political parties and independent groups contesting the election, once the nominations are concluded.

Department sources said that all political parties and independent groups were free to use any media they prefer and the Department would allocate time in the electronic media as specified by the Election Law of the country.

Polls Chief warns state media

Elections Commissioner Dayananda Dissanayake has warned state media heads that a Competent Authority could be appointed to manage the state-run Broadcasting Corporation and Rupavahini corporation in the event of violation of guidelines he had issued recently.

The Commissioner, acting under the powers vested in him under the 17th Amendment to the Constitution, issued these

guidelines. But Mr. Dissanayake told a news conference that he had no powers to ensure that his guidelines would be adhered to.

Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation Chairman Hudson Samarasinghe confirmed that he had received these instructions from the Elections Commissioner.

Under the 17th Amendment, the Commissioner is empowered to take over the management of the Broadcasting Corporation and the Rupavahini Corporation in respect of all political broadcasts or any other broadcast, which impugn on the election.

The Commissioner of Elections has called on all radio and television broadcasters to refrain from broadcasting any programme likely to be construed as biased and partisan towards any particular political party, independent group or candidate contesting the election.

Foreign polls monitors

Around 140 foreign observers are expected to arrive in Sri Lanka in the first week of March to monitor the election and ensure that it is being held in a free and fair environment. The observers have been invited by People's Action for Free and Fair Election (PAFFREL) and the Centre for Monitoring Election Violence (CFMEV).

Chairman PAFFAFE, Kingley Rodrigo, told the press that his organisation would deploy about 20,000 observers to monitor the election, with the assistance of another 450 non-governmental organisations.

He said that 50 per cent of the foreign observers would be from the Asia Network for Free and Fair Election and others from Netherlands, United Kingdom and the United States. Rodrigo said as there would be 11,000 polling stations throughout the country, his organisation would detail at least two observers at each polling station to monitor whether the elections are held freely and fairly.

Rodrigo also said in a bid to effectively monitor the election 'Citizen's Committees comprising religious dignitaries from all religious denominations would be formed at constituency level in co-ordination with other organisations. He said the religious dignitaries would work as trouble shooters.

Convener of the Centre for Monitoring Election Violence (CFMEV), Sunanda Deshapriya, said that his organisation would have 40 foreign observers and added that it had already decided to detail observers, especially in violence-prone areas such as Puttalam, Kurunegala, Matara and Matale.

He also stressed that the CFMEV would closely work with the Police Commissioner and the Election Commissioner to hold a violence-free and fair election as the Election Commissioner had already granted permission to the CFMEV to officially enter all polling booths for monitoring purposes.

Calling on all Sri Lankan political parties to work towards ensuring free and fair parliamentary elections, Japan, a co-chair of the Tokyo conference on Reconstruction and Development on Tuesday said the Japanese government was contributing US \$ 30,680 to PAFFREL (People's Action for Free and Fair Elections).

The contribution is intended to cover costs relating to production of booklets on election monitoring, organizing seminars for election monitors and cover production cost of posters and leaflets against election malpractices.

The contract between the Government of Japan and PAFFREL would be signed in the near future, a release from the Japan embassy said. Furthermore, Japan is also considering the dispatch of Japanese election monitoring team to Sri Lanka in close consultation with the Commissioner of Elections in Sri Lanka, the release added

After the dissolution of Parliament

Prof. Jayadeva Uyangoda

Sri Lanka is on the way to an early parliamentary election, which many did not want, but some did really want. Those who wanted fresh elections are the new political coalition that the SLFP and the JVP formed. Even when the President, who had the constitutional authority to dissolve the existing parliament and call for fresh polls, appeared to be reluctant to take that drastic decision, a section of the new Alliance vigorously campaigned for dissolution until the President ran out of options. Now, Sri Lanka is going to have its third parliamentary election in four years.

Drift

Frequent elections, parliamentary or presidential, are indeed not a characteristic of a healthy political order. Rather, they indicate that the political order is unstable, the polity is acutely fragmented, political forces are divided in hostility and the country is in a directionless moment of drift. The Third Republic in France in the 1940s and early fifties and Italy until very recently had frequent elections necessitated by continuing political instability and crisis.

Sri Lanka after the mid-1990s appeared to have entered such a period of acute instability. In this period, parliamentary elections are held not due to a mandatory constitutional requirement or because the electorate needed frequent opportunities to change their representatives. Rather, they are held because the dominant political forces have failed to resolve their conflicts and antagonisms through post-election institutional processes.

The context in which President Kumaratunga made a decision to dissolve parliament to call for fresh parliamentary elections, when the parliament had just completed the second year of its six - year term, is characterized by a number of unusual dimensions. Firstly, the President did not consult either the Prime Minister or par-

liament before the dissolution. The Prime Minister did not raise any serious objections to his not being consulted, although he had a clear majority in parliament. It primarily indicated that antagonisms between the President's camp and the Prime Minister's camp had developed into a total breakdown of trust and the two leaders were not much bothered about procedural niceties concerning how democratic institutions should interact.

Violence

Secondly, while the President was preparing for her surprise dissolution move, her representatives were negotiating with the PM's representatives to work out a cohabitation framework for the two camps. The breakdown of the cohabitation talks, as precipitated by the dissolution of parliament, made it quite clear their antagonisms could no longer be managed through negotiations and peaceful means.

On the contrary, it has required some measure of violence. And ironically, parliamentary elections seem to provide them a legitimate space for the deployment of controlled violence against each other's camp. Elections in Sri Lanka have indeed become an intra-class struggle waged through non-peaceful means. The management of the contradictions within the ruling elite through limited violence in an election - this, to me, is the most alarming dimension in the parliamentary elections 2004 in Sri Lanka.

Thirdly — and this is also quite unique —, Sri Lanka's capitalist ruling elite has found itself capable of defying the wishes and demands of the core of its own class, the entrepreneurial elite. All the organized sections of the Sri Lankan capitalist class through their chambers and other similar organs repeatedly pleaded with both the President and the PM to work together in cohabitation and not to move towards fresh elections.

And both the President and the PM,

the two political leaders of that class, did not heed the demands of their own class and in fact frustrated them.

This is absolutely unique for a ruling class. The political leaders of Sri Lanka's ruling class are now in the process of actually isolating themselves from the core of their own class. In this context, the President has successfully moved towards the petty-bourgeoisie through the new alliance with the JVP. Mr. Wickremesinghe has no such options.

The bourgeoisie considers him as an indecisive and incompetent leader. The Sri Lankan bourgeoisie appears to be looking for a political leader who can restore political equilibrium in a deeply divided polity. They are unlikely to find one in the UNP.

No recovery

So, that is the leadership crisis Sri Lanka has at the moment. The uncertainty created by the sudden dissolution of parliament adds to the crisis. If the year 2003 is one that we wasted for nothing, the present year is no better. Actually, Sri Lanka may not achieve any significant level of economic recovery this year.

The three months till early April will not see any measure of new economic activity due to the uncertainty after dissolution. The first three months after the elections will also be a period of political uncertainty with no impetus for rapid economic recovery.

With six months of the year thus wasted, the year 2004 will have little or no capacity to take Sri Lanka forward in the path of rapid economic development. Sri Lanka as I see has already lost, to use a cliché, the economic bus, due primarily to the incompetent and inept political leadership of Mrs. Kumaratunga and Mr. Wickremesinghe.

Our annual economic growth rate will most likely remain as low as between 4 to 5 per cent whereas it should actually have been between 8 to 10 per cent. A dysfunctional political order, led by a thoroughly self-centred political leadership, cannot be economically functional either.

Moral crisis

Meanwhile, the Sinhalese polity is now showing symptoms of another

deep malaise. The sudden rise of the militant Buddhist nationalism is the most visible manifestation of this chronic malady, a proper understanding of which requires tools of social psychology.

The systematic violence and threats unleashed against the Christian minority, the clamour for a Buddhist theocratic state, the desire for returning the pre-1815 political order, and the increasing fear propagated in the media of the Sinhalese majority becoming an impotent minority are symptoms of a serious moral crisis that the Theravada Buddhist polity in Sri Lanka appears to be in. The political and intellectual cadre of this new impetus for Buddhist awakening seems to have no ethical constraints to propagate inter-community hatred.

The anti-Christian hatred that is propagated in the electronic media, newspapers, pamphlets, posters, public rallies and sermons will result in further dividing and weakening the Sinhalese nation. Sooner or later, religious parochialism might be replaced by caste and other tribalist loyalties.

The new movement is not one that can unify the Sinhalese or Sri Lankan people. It can only divide them because its ideology is grounded on the notion that the minorities, ethnic or religious, are an inherent threat to the majority. Its ideologues do not appreciate the value of diversity.

On the contrary, they advocate the position that the acknowledgement of pluralism weakens the preeminent place of the ethnic majority in the polity. Because of its authoritarian political potential, it will further erode the legitimacy of the Sinhalese nationalism as a political force.

In power, it may even attempt to do away with the democratic and humanistic gains that Sri Lankan people have made with great difficulty and sacrifice during the past few decades. There are already signs that their cultural and ideological program is a very authoritarian one.

Peace and democracy

While approaching parliamentary elections, the Sri Lankan polity finds itself at the crossroads. The choices people have before them are not terri-

No lasting solutions via unilateralist approach

Dr. Jehan Perera

Both President Chandrika Kumaratunga and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe have appealed to the people to give them a mandate to govern the country. President Kumaratunga has asked for a clear mandate that would enable her Freedom Alliance to continue with the peace process and to abolish the executive presidency. She has also promised to reform the electoral system that leads to slender parliamentary majorities and to bring justice to the poor through the market economy.

Prime Minister Wickremesinghe has been more general, promising to create a new Sri Lanka in six years. There is no doubt that what the President and Prime Minister seek to do has great merit. The question is whether these pledges can be fulfilled by any single political alliance that acts alone.

The most obvious example would be abolishing the executive presidency. The executive presidency is an institution that is firmly based in the constitution, which is the country's supreme law. It is so powerful an institution that it enabled the President to dissolve a Parliament that had four more years remaining, and which had a stable parliamentary majority. Certainly President Kumaratunga's conduct as President, and the conduct of her predecessors as President, are convincing arguments for abolishing the executive presidency. It is an institution that has proven to be unsuitable for good governance at the present stage of the country's political evolution.

bly attractive ones. To have even the minimum degree of political sanity for Sri Lanka, the Sri Lankan people will have to defend peace and democracy in the coming months. Vote for Peace! Vote for democracy!

(The writer is Head of the Political Science Department of the University of Colombo)

But obtaining a mandate from the people to change the constitution and abolish the executive presidency is likely to be a tricky affair.

Assuming that the Freedom Alliance does receive a majority of seats in Parliament, there will be difficulties in figuring out what the mandate really was for. The parties comprising the Freedom Alliance have already said many things, some of which are quite unorthodox. Leading the list would be the JVP's desire to purge the country of its western and Christian heritage by reverting back to the pre-1505 social and cultural traditions. There may be some sections of the people, especially those who have been burning down Christian churches, who might give this prime place in their decision to vote.

Further, abolishing the executive presidency is not a simple matter of arguing that a clear mandate for whatever purpose was received from the people. It also requires that well laid out procedures in the constitution, the country's supreme law, are followed. The main procedures in the case of the abolition of the executive presidency would be to obtain a 2/3 majority in Parliament and thereafter subject that decision to the people to be ratified at a referendum. If any attempt is made to circumvent this procedure, a legal challenge can be made to the Supreme Court. It is difficult to believe that the Supreme Court could agree to the legality of any procedure that is outside of the constitution.

Political bipartisanship

There is some speculation that there are innovative methods by which the constitutional requirement of a 2/3 majority in Parliament may side stepped. There is the precedent set in 1972 of a constituent assembly consisting of the elected representatives of the people that operates outside of the existing constitution and creates its own new constitution. While the constitu-

ent assembly of 1972 itself enjoyed a 2/3 majority of elected Parliamentarians, it could be argued that even a simple majority would suffice. Still for all, it is unlikely that the Supreme Court would permit such a flouting of constitutional procedures.

Apart from observing basic legal requirements, there is another very important reason why the Supreme Court is unlikely to approve of unilateral methods of changing the constitution. A reading of Sri Lanka's experience in changing constitutions, whether in 1972 or 1978, would reveal that efforts by a single political faction to change the constitution led the country into more problems.

Both in 1972 and 1978 the ruling parties enjoyed 2/3 majorities that they proceeded to employ to abolish the previously existing constitutions. But the constitutions they created were terribly flawed documents, because they reflected the vision of only one faction of the polity, rather than all political, religious and ethnic communities in a plural society.

For instance, in 1972, the ruling party ignored the protests of the main opposition parties, and the ethnic minorities. The framers of the 1972 constitution were so convinced of their moral uprightness and intellectual superiority that they did not even bother to respond to the proposals put forward by the Tamil parties.

They ignored the sentiments of the ethnic and religious minorities entirely. The framers of the 1978 constitution made a greater show of consulting the opposition parties and minorities. But the constitution they finally came up with reflected the vision of the ruling party only.

In developed political societies, most notably in the West, there is a great deal of respect given to the due process of law.

The use of raw power within those societies is moderated by procedures, which are monitored both by the courts of law and by public opinion. The role of ad hoc decision making is constrained by procedures and conventions

that political leaders seldom flout, and if they do so, at great cost to themselves. The grave weakness in Sri Lankan politics, which the Supreme Court will be duty bound to note, lies in the total lack of respect for procedures and processes.

Post election

The issue of the executive presidency is the most obvious example of the need for a principled process driven by a bipartisan approach. The present electoral system of proportional representation makes it virtually impossible for one party, or one alliance, to muster the necessary 2/3 majority in Parliament. There is a need to involve the main opposition party in constitutional reform. But it is not only the issue of constitutional reform that calls for a bipartisan approach. Taking forward the peace process also requires such political bipartisanship and respect for process.

The success of the present peace process was because both the UNF government and LTTE respected the process they set in motion. One of these was to engage in relationship building between each other, which prevented each side from engaging in hostile name calling of the other. When one party does not call the other by derogatory names, it means that they are prepared to respect them and to listen to them. Prior to commencing the peace process, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe also proved his bona fides regarding the peace process by campaigning on that basis at several elections that he lost, partly because his opponents depicted him as having a secret pact with the LTTE.

Another process-oriented decision of the UNF government and LTTE was to strictly adhere to the relationship with the Norwegian facilitator, and to ensure that all their communications went through that channel. However, there was a fatal shortcoming in the UNF government's approach to the peace process. They failed to include the President and the opposition in it at all. The stalling of the peace process, and the inability of the UNF govern-

ment to take it forward beyond a certain point, was largely due to the lack of political bipartisanship.

When the LTTE suspended its participation in peace talks in April 2003, it cited the lack of implementation of promises by the UNF government as a key justification. The government in turn sought to excuse its tardy implementation of promises, and the establishment of joint government-LTTE mechanisms, on the grounds that constitutional impediments stood in the way. The UNF government was extremely skilful in stopping the war and obtaining international support to resuscitate the collapsing economy.

But after a point it got stuck and blighted the hopes and aspirations of the people. The period prior to a general election offers considerable scope to civil society to extract promises from the contesting politicians.

Civil society groups need to make use of the present opportunity to make constructive demands of the political parties in the public interest. One clear and public promise to be extracted would be to sincerely work together, and not in opposition, on the peace process and constitutional reform after the election. Such a promise will also do much to reassure the people who are apprehensive that after the election there could be witch hunting and revenge taking.

Whichever political party or alliance forms the next government, it will need to work in partnership with its main rival if the President and Prime Minister's pledges are to be fruitful to the country. The civil society voice calling for a policy of bipartisanship on the peace process and constitutional reform needs to be raised at this time and in as many forums as possible.

There will be no short cuts to taking forward the peace process or abolishing the executive presidency. The lack of legitimacy inherent in unilateral and short cut methods will lead to Sri Lanka losing ground internationally, and will only assist those who prefer to see the country in chaos, weak and divided. □

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Religious Conversions and Religion-Related Violence

Religious conversions and religion related violence against individuals and churches have been in the news for some months in many parts of the island. Globally, such conversions have always been controversial, and religions have been central issues in violence and wars at every level for millennia. But in our history, except in times of foreign invasions and colonial rule (whether South Indian or European), such violence has been localized and short lived. Virtually all of us are descended from those who had changed their faith, whether in the recent or distant past, for one reason or another. Tolerance and generosity to those of other faiths has been a cherished Sri Lankan tradition through most of our history. Religious conversion and diversity are not new to us; but for at least two centuries we have not experienced sustained widespread religion-related violence.

This is not to suggest that there had been no coercion to secure conversion during colonial times. Under both Portuguese and Dutch rule, the state and church were closely linked. The Dutch denied to non-converts government jobs and contracts, and the right to register inherited property; Roman Catholics were specially targeted for persecution, and many of them found refuge in the Kandyan provinces as, on other occasions, persecuted Muslims. Under the British, the state-church link weakened, and the intensity of coercion dwindled, but the playing field for conversions remained distinctly uneven.

People may convert for a variety of political reasons, or in response to missionary activity, or for socio-economic gains, or for one personal reason or another. Most conversions are linked directly or indirectly to political factors such as a relevant regime change. Thus, the conversion of Emperor Constantine to Christianity in the 4th century A.D. led, very quickly, to millions of his subjects embracing his new faith. The conversion to Buddhism of Emperor Asoka in India and King Devanampiya Tissa in Sri Lanka led to similar results. In India, the rise and fall of Hindu, Jain, Sikh, Buddhist and Moghal kingdoms has

been reflected in the changing religious profile of the population. Similarly, European imperial expansion into the Americas, Africa, Asia and Australasia resulted in the rapid spread of Christianity. The Cholas and other Hindu rulers established their faith in the South East Asian lands they conquered. Muslim imperial expansion into Africa and Asia resulted in the rapid spread of Islam, overriding some of the earlier Hindu and Buddhists gains.

Sometimes there may be political conversions in the opposite directions as a signal of revolt. Dramatic examples include the conversion of Dr. B. Ambedkar and millions of Indian Dalits (untouchables) to Buddhism in the middle of the last century and, across the globe, not long afterwards, of thousands of Black Americans into Islam. The move to convert some Jaffna Tamil "untouchables" to Buddhism was short lived, but such conversion, signalling political revolt, are continuing in many lands.

Missionary activity has also been a major factor in religious conversion. Buddhism and Christianity have long and sustained missionary traditions. Historically, the Buddha launched the first major missionary programme when he sent out 60 missionaries with the directive, "Go forth and preach the Dhamma for the spiritual and economic well being of the multitude", with the advice to suffer persecution without retaliation. Despite hostility, and lack of funding or backing from the authorities, these pioneer missionaries were very successful. Five centuries later, the first band of Christian missionaries fanned out with similar directives, under equally adverse conditions, and with similar success. In some periods, Hinduism produced very successful missionaries (such as Shankara Acharya of Kanchi), and so did Islam. Particularly in the case of Christianity, missionary activity often followed in the wake of imperial expansion. In contrast, the spread of Buddhism in East Asia, well beyond the ambit of Indian imperialism, was mostly through South Indian missionaries. Sri Lankan missionaries had a lead role in the spread

of Buddhism in Burma, Cambodia and Laos; the religious and cultural linkages then established yet survive. Almost invariably the strategy, used very successfully, was to first convert the ruler. In fact Constantine, Asoka and Devanampiya Tissa were converted by missionaries; so too the rulers of several East Asian countries including China, Korea, Vietnam and Japan, and many countries in South East Asia.

The other major factor referred to was socio-economic gains, but this cannot be separated from the political factor. Clearly, there are socio-economic benefits in adopting the faith of the ruling class. Independent of, or supplementary to any missionary activity, some of the early Christian converts in the European colonies in the Americas, Africa and Asia sought socio-economic gains. Inevitably, this was resented by those who did not convert – whence the familiar derogatory Sri Lankan barb, "rice Christians".

The different conversion categories, viz. political, missionary and socio-economic are neither independent nor mutually exclusive. They overlap and reinforce each other. It is when political factors, missionary activity and socio-economic inducement work in conjunction, e.g. as in Sri Lanka at the peak of the colonial period, that the environment is most favourable for conversions. For example, many teachers converted to gain admission to Christian Training Colleges, and many children to gain scholarships or admission to Christian schools. Many such converts reverted to their old faiths in due course, but many others did not.

The political factor may not always be linked to the faith of the ruler or ruling class. In a democracy, the religion of the majority of the population may count for more than the religion of the ruler. In Sri Lanka, with the approach of independence, and particularly with the introduction in 1931 of the Donoughmore reforms including universal franchise, many Christians found it advantageous to revert to their ancestral faith. The derogatory Sri Lankan term Donoughmore Buddhist was especially applied to politicians who so reverted to Buddhism, but even today many in all walks of life find it prudent to do likewise.

The residual factor listed was "personal reasons". Muslim traders and Portuguese soldiers arrived in large numbers a few centuries ago, and married local women who then converted to the faiths

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of their husbands. Even today, in the case of inter-religious marriages, such conversions occur. There could also be other personal reasons – such as changes in religious conviction effected without the mediation of missionaries. But currently the scale of such conversions may be negligible.

The changes in the statistics of the religious affiliation of the population are revealing. We note that the proportion of Buddhists, which was 60.0% in 1901 had risen to 69.5% in 1981, and the rising trend is continuing; of Muslims, which was 6.9 % in 1901 had risen to 7.6% in 1981, and the rising trend is continuing; and of Christians, which was 9.8 % in 1901 had declined to 6.9% in 1981, and the declining trend is continuing. There had been no major migratory flows in the British period, except of Malayaha Tamils (mostly Hindus), and that migration was largely circular up to the 40s and declined from the 60s on account of "repatriation" to India. This decline is reflected in the drop in the proportion of Hindus from 22.0% in 1931 to 15.5% in 1981. The proportion of Malayaha Tamils peaked to 15.4% in 1931 and fell to 5.5% in 1981. There

has been no complete census since 1981, but the partial census of 2001 does not indicate any radical changes in the trends referred to above.

The increase in the proportion of Christians up to the 1911 census is not surprising; conversions from Buddhism and Hinduism were only to be expected in the colonial period. What is significant is the subsequent continuing decline in the proportion of Christians, which is now about two thirds of what it was a century earlier. In an earlier period, the emigration of Burghers may have been a minor contributory factor in this decline, but there is no evidence that there were disproportionately more Christians among the emigrants from the other communities in this period. What is causing the decline now? The likely explanation is that many Christians are reconverting to their ancestral faith, mostly into Buddhism, which is emerging with increasing dominance as the leading faith of the population of Sri Lanka. This process, initiated by Ven. Migettuwatte Gunananda Thera and others in the colonial period, is yet continuing.

If Christianity is declining in aggregate terms, why is there so much con-

cern about relatively small numbers of conversions to Christianity? It could be that in particular localities even small numbers of highly visible new conversions and the erection of new churches may be seen as threatening by the local Buddhist / Hindu population. From their perspective, neither the decline in Christian population elsewhere, nor the fact that most of the conversions are from other (older) Christian denominations into new ones, is of any consequence; what offends is the public rejection of their old faith by the new converts, coupled with the intrusion of an unfamiliar aggressive Christian feature into the religious profile of their neighbourhood. A feature of some of these conversions that is obnoxious to many of all faiths is the attribution of the economic gains of these converts to divine grace and favour in reward for accepting conversion; in a few cases there is an even more repulsive feature – the desecration by the convert of symbols of the former faith.

In the colonial period the eruption of such conversions was more severe and spread across in the island, but the reaction was muted. Why is it that today the small numbers of conversions in a few

scattered localities is blowing up into a national crisis? The explanation may be that some among the non-Christian population, particularly among Buddhists, spurred by the accumulated resentment of the inequitable advantages previously enjoyed by Christian individuals and institutions (some of which, especially relating to access to foreign funds, are continuing), may consider that now, with the political and social balance tilted in their favour, the tables could and need to be turned to compensate for past handicaps and humiliations. Many Buddhists may also feel more empowered to react aggressively.

Two strands of the reaction have emerged. The immediate demand to legislate against Christian evangelical activity. The other is to clip the wings of those Christian institutions that yet enjoy social prestige and influence through the provision of quality education and training and socio-economic development and welfare services. There are many, including those of all faiths, who empathise with this reaction, but fear the consequences of precipitate legislation and other unilateral action, and consider that any legislation and other state intervention is best decided on after consultation among the leadership of Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim and Christian communities. The relations between these leaders has always been cordial, and a consensus solution should be possible even in this controversial field.

There is a perception among many Buddhists and Hindus, and some Muslims and Christians too, that there is currently considerable "unethical" religious conversions into some Christian sects, often involving substantial material inducements, and sometimes accompanied by acts desecrating objects sacred to non-Christians, and that the authorities concerned have acted neither to check such "unethical" conversions nor to prosecute those responsible. Similarly, there is much alarm among many Christians and others that there is considerable violence directed against Christian individuals and institutions, and that the authorities concerned have acted neither to check such violence nor to prosecute those responsible. Whether or not these perceptions and fears are justified or exaggerated, it is necessary to immediately and effectively address them collectively.

It is therefore proposed that an inter-religious team of eminent persons held in high regard by the leaders and others of their own as well as other faiths

The peace process and the general election

Dr. S. Narapalasingam

The term of the UNF Government that started with general optimism in December 2001 has been prematurely ended and a new government will be elected on April 2. Although the peace talks have remained suspended since April last year, significant developments have taken place subsequently affecting the prospect for a negotiated political settlement to the ethnic conflict. It is, therefore, timely that these are reviewed and the future of the peace process looked at in the emerging political environment.

The Ceasefire Agreement and the beginning of the peace talks in Septem-

ber 2002 gave much hope to the people in all the communities that their desire for lasting peace will at last be fulfilled. By the end of 2002, there were some positive signs that a political settlement based on federalism was close at hand. The chief Cabinet spokesman and head of the government's negotiating team Prof. G. L. Peiris announced the imminent change from unitary to a federal constitution. But there were no signs from the top that the Government was in favour of abolishing the Executive Presidential system, which is intrinsic to the 1978 unitary constitution. Since the support of the incumbent President and her coalition PA in the opposition was not solicited for changing the present constitution, the real intention of the UNF Government remained unclear. Although the President announced her readiness to abolish the system that has been at the centre of the recent cohabitation crisis, the Prime Minister has not given any indication so far that his UNF will initiate a similar move.

From the very beginning, the Government's strategy has been to sustain the ceasefire and keep the LTTE engaged in peace talks and in civil work with the intention of creating an environment helpful for development. The transitional period was also to be used for confidence building and restoring 'normalcy' in the war-torn North East. The government took for granted that the LTTE could be enticed to follow its path to peace. It also for some reason wanted to move more slowly than the situation required. The regular statements praising the LTTE for joining with the Government in the peace efforts and for the consensus reached in the sessions in Thailand and Oslo on various matters useful to strengthen the ceasefire and move forward towards a final settlement were central to its peace strategy. But the failure to implement certain critical provisions of the ceasefire agreement and the Washington preparatory donors' meeting held without LTTE's participation led to the suspension of the peace talks in April last year.

Although the UNF government was

be commissioned by religious leaders/civil society/state authorities to:

- 1) Formulate guidelines and codes of conduct in respect of:
 - i) religious conversions
 - ii) socio-economic development and welfare activities of religious bodies, and the need for inter-religious co-operation in such activities so as to avoid the identification of any particular religion with the benefits disbursed, with particular regard to any disparity in access to foreign funding
 - iii) religious activities, speeches and publications that may offend or spread prejudice against those of other faiths
 - iv) religion related violence and incitement to violence
- 2) Recommend the structure and powers of an inter-religious body that could monitor, entertain complaints and intervene in consultation with state authorities and religious bodies in respect of i), ii), iii) & iv) above.
- 3) Recommend if any legislation is necessary in respect of the above and, if so, the scope of such legislation.

Signatories: Brig. Ranjan de Silva; Dr. Asoka de Zoysa; Dr. H.S. Hasbullah; Mr. M.C.M. Iqbal; Mr. Stanley Jaya-weera; Prof. W.D. Lakshman; Mr. Kethesh Loganathan; Prof. M.A. Nuhu-man; Mr. W. Sterling Perera; Prof. K. Sivathamby; Dr. Selvy Thiruchandran; Dr. Devanesan Nesiha (Convener) □

taken back by the LTTE's counter proposals for setting up an Interim Self-Governing Authority (ISGA) for the North-East under their command, it maintained its positive stance. It gave the impression that a compromise was possible through negotiations. Even after the recent political crisis, at a meeting in Kandy on January 12, the former Plantation Industries Minister Lakshman Kiriella said seventy five per cent of what the LTTE was asking for has already been given (through the Provincial Council system) and only the balance twenty five per cent remain to be settled!

But the LTTE saw such announcements as part of the Government's strategy to use the peace process for obtaining the foreign capital needed for developing the island's economy, which along with the state of non-war would be seen by the electorate as its remarkable achievement. As a result, Government's determined efforts to win the confidence of the LTTE backfired. The Tigers complained that the Government contrary to its reaffirmed commitment, failed to provide funds for rehabilitation and development of the North-East and facilitate the resettlement of displaced persons. Apparently, the LTTE saw an opportunity to turn these failures to their advantage and moved swiftly to draw the attention of the world to their commitment to peace and the problems faced by them in resuming the negotiations. LTTE leaders announced repeatedly their readiness to discuss the ISGA proposal. But the Government was in no mood to resume the stalled peace talks and discuss the far-reaching proposals submitted just four days before the eruption of the political crisis in November 2003.

The internationalisation of the peace process meant by the Prime Minister to provide a safety net to the Government has paradoxically benefited the LTTE. The Government too has achieved some benefits. There are no more war victims and additionally it has brought the LTTE to a position where it is difficult for them to resume the war. The LTTE's current move to use the forthcoming elections to influence the political establishment is also a significant development. The Government has received aid pledges totalling US\$ 4.5 billion though much of this is tied to progress in the peace

process. Significantly, the peace process is alive despite the tug-of-war between the President and the Prime Minister because of the continuing interest of the donor community in establishing peace and stability in the island dented by two decades of war.

The Tigers have valid reasons reinforced by the recent SLFP-JVP alliance for keeping their weapons and military prowess ready to meet any eventualities. The pressure exerted by some powerful countries for the decommissioning of LTTE's weapons has also abated for the time being. Anton Balasingham's reaction to the proposed Indo-Lanka Defence Co-operation Agreement (DCA) underscores the importance the Tigers give to their military position vis-à-vis the Government. He said the pact would "upset the balance of forces to the disadvantage of the LTTE". It is widely believed without military power the Tigers have little bargaining clout, though some resent the way it has been used to claim the LTTE as the sole representative of the Tamils in the N-E.

LTTE seeking external funds

The one-day international conference hosted by the LTTE in Kilinochchi on January 19 is another significant achievement in mobilising international sympathy and support to their efforts towards establishing a self-governing authority for the North-East region. It was dubbed the 'Northeast donor conference'. The LTTE boycotted the June 2003 Sri Lanka's donor conference held in Tokyo and also declined the invitation to attend the donors review meeting on January 23 in Colombo. The Tigers also boycotted the previous follow up meeting to the Tokyo conference in mid September 2003.

Diplomats and officials from Japan, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Netherlands, Canada, Switzerland, United Kingdom, Germany, France, European Union, ADB, World Bank, JICA, JBIC, UNDP, UNICEF, and CIDA attended their meeting in Killinochchi. The intention of the Tigers to take the process of normalisation unilaterally with the support of those countries and foreign organisations sympathetic to their present predicament and of the Tamil people was evident from the welcoming speech delivered by the head of LTTE's political division S. P. Thamil-

selvan. He gave some convincing reasons justifying the need for setting up an efficient interim administrative structure with sufficient executive power to reconstruct the devastated infrastructure and bring about normalcy.

He said: "The ceasefire agreement (MoU) is two years old. Yet it is sad to mention that those noble intentions of alleviating the hardships of the people directly affected by war, enshrined in the ceasefire agreement, still remains 'intentions' and intentions do not alleviate the hardships." With regard to the defunct sub-committee SIHRN, he explained: "(it) was institutionalized only on realization and mutual agreement that a just and lasting solution to the conflict is time consuming and therefore urgent humanitarian needs cannot be put on hold. This institution has, by its ineffectiveness due to lack of cohesion and executive power, has tragically demonstrated that it was only an empty shell without necessary ingredients for effectiveness. SIHRN, thus, is a standing example of a mechanism that cannot deliver if it is devoid of the necessary power."

Thamilselvan drawing attention to the fact that negotiations to recommence and subsequent agreement on the establishment of an interim administrative structure (apparently this refers to the ISGA) are going to take a very long time said: "Urgent humanitarian needs of the people cannot remain unfulfilled till then. Essential humanitarian needs for day-to-day life on the one hand; resettlement, rehabilitation and reconstruction on the other are areas that need immediate actions." Incidentally, the LTTE leadership appears to be seeking international support for legitimising its administrative setup that is already functioning in parts of the North East. It is being strengthened progressively to perform the entire gamut of administrative functions.

Thamilselvan also told the foreign dignitaries, "We do have in the areas administered by us in the North East, an effective administrative infrastructure with limited resources but overwhelming support and participation of the people. Economic build-up, education, health, law and order are some of the areas, which we have built up over time and functioning effectively. Corruption and malpractices are things unheard of

in this region. Moreover, we as responsible representatives of the Tamil people with a future vision have now formulated the Planning and Development Secretariat (PSD), which will function as an official unit of our organisation. Additionally this unit will be in charge of development strategies and policy planning relating to the Tamil homeland."

At the donors follow up meeting in Colombo on January 23, some donors had expressed their willingness to be flexible with regard to the earlier condition that linked the release of the pledged funds to the progress at the peace talks. Apparently they feel that funds needed for urgent humanitarian work should not be withheld because of this stipulation. This is also a clear sign that there is some sympathy for LTTE's unilateral efforts to finding ways and means for meeting the immediate needs of the Tamil people.

The following six demands listed in the campaign started (but suspended

because of the April elections) to collect signatures in the Jaffna peninsula for a memorandum to be sent to the international community indicate the LTTE's immediate aims:

1. The international community should recognize the Tamil freedom struggle;
2. Sri Lanka Army should leave the traditional homeland of Tamils;
3. Action should be taken to restart the stalled peace talks;
4. An interim administrative structure for the northeast province should be handed over to the LTTE on the basis of the Interim Self Governing Authority (ISGA) proposals submitted by the LTTE.
5. The countries concerned should lift the ban on the LTTE.
6. LTTE should be accepted as the sole representative of Tamils

The demand that the Sri Lankan Army should leave the traditional homeland of the Tamils is more complex as this is intrinsically tied to final settle-

ment of the conflict. The peace process acknowledged by both sides to take a long time to reach fruition has been characterized by contradictions arising from their different aims. The step-by-step approach they agreed without much emphasis on the promotion of mutual trust, reconciliation and unity was intended to help the realization of their separate covert aims. The present dicey situation is the result of the two contradictory processes kept exclusive for tactical reasons. In the case of the LTTE, the leadership considers the conflict to be between two separate authorities, one based in Colombo and the other in Wanni.

The LTTE delegation led by S. P. Thamilselvan that visited some European countries recently briefed the governments about the immediate humanitarian needs of the Tamil people that require urgent attention. They also presented the case for donor nations to disburse funds for urgent humanitarian needs through organizations in the



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North-East and through their own mechanisms. Before leaving for Europe, Thamilselvan told the press in Kili-nochchi: "Our people are losing faith in the peace process. We do not believe that the international donor community would grant large-scale aid to Sri Lanka until the political impasse is overcome. Unless we attend to the pressing day-to-day problems of our people, they will start losing faith in the peace process". The message conveyed was they were keen to sustain the peace process and foreign countries must help by providing funds for meeting the humanitarian needs of the Tamil people.

The LTTE delegation also briefed the EU parliament members on the reasonable and indispensable importance of extending all support direct to the North East. Thus, it is clear that the LTTE has started implementing its alternative plan justified as necessary by the political situation in the South. The move to seek assistance directly from foreign governments is integral to this plan. The strategy to achieve a permanent settlement seems also to focus on creating a tight situation where by necessity the other parties will have to give in.

The SLFP-JVP pact

The Memorandum of Understanding signed by the JVP and the SLFP on January 20 after a year of dialogue has made the peace process increasingly uncertain. Now the JVP has become a third southern force in the power struggle. The SLFP-JVP coalition, named the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) has virtually nothing in common in so far as the political settlement to the ethnic conflict is concerned and has added another wild card to an already highly unstable political situation. President Chandrika Kumartunga has gone all out to maintain cordial relationship with the LTTE leadership after she took control over the Defence Ministry. If as leader of the UPFA, she can persuade the coalition partners to safeguard the peace process by following her advice, there is some hope that at least another war could be avoided.

Among the 'Five Noble Objectives' of the UPFA mentioned in the document is the creation of ethnic harmony. What is relevant to the present analysis is how

they propose to achieve this noble objective. Briefly these are:

(i) Launching "a multi-faceted programme which will ensure that all people who have made Sri Lanka their home viz. Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslims and others should not suffer any discrimination on grounds of race, religion, language or culture and totally to remove all manifestations of differential treatment.

(ii) Combating and defeating all attempts at separatism based on language and religion and safeguarding the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of the country, through ensuring the unity of all ethnic groups and guaranteeing to everyone of them equal benefits of economic development; and

(iii) While rejecting separatism and political violence, both parties emphasize that a negotiated settlement to the ethnic question should be found through a correct dialogue with the LTTE and other relevant groups and communities so that political solutions which will safeguard the political equality and democratic rights of the Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslim and other communities will be arrived at.

These are nothing but aspirational statements having no practical value in the present context. These would have made some sense four decades ago when the ethnic problem was at its early stage. There is no way of reversing the current standing of the LTTE both internally and externally to the level needed to give meaning to UPFA's approach to ethnic peace! The problem has evolved from mere complaint of discrimination to the claim of the right of internal self-determination.

The contradictory positions of both parties on the ethnic problem are seen in the MoU. "The SLFP holds the view that these (the agreed) objectives could be achieved by the devolution of power to provinces within a united state. The JVP holds the view that the same objectives could be achieved by administrative decentralization to the local authority level, in order to ensure the ethnic identity and safeguard the cultural heritage of all groups within a unitary state". The LTTE leadership will consider even the SLFP's view as unacceptable, unless it corresponds with the 1995 devolution proposals.

In a recent article Prof. Jeyadeva Uyangoda assessing the impact of the new alliance on the current political dynamics has said the political agenda stated in the MoU is "not relevant to Sri Lanka's current realities and challenges." It "raises some disturbing questions about the incapacity of the old as well as the emerging political leadership in the Sinhala society to even simply understand what the Sri Lanka's present crisis is all about." His view is that "the new alliance adds nothing new to make the Southern political society capable of constructively handling the prevailing political stalemate" and it "has the potential to become even a stumbling bloc to any further progress in Sri Lanka's conflict transformation and peace process."

Surprisingly, no great disappointment was visible in the reaction from Wannu to the contradictory positions of the two main associates in the new alliance. S. P. Thamilselvan at the meetings he had with foreign leaders before leaving for Europe reiterated their readiness to negotiate with any party that has the people's mandate. He also stressed the need to resume peace talks without delay and move forward the peace process. The LTTE has again shown their keenness to establish permanent peace in the country despite the difficulties.

The challenge

At the meeting organized by the National Movement for Peace and Democracy (NMPD) on February 22 to mark the second anniversary of the ceasefire agreement, Ven. Mahagalkadawala Punyasara Thera said: "Everyone who has ruled the country since independence has contributed to the racial conflict to gain power for themselves, and it is the same love of power that has forced a needless election on the masses causing them to suffer even more." The NMPD is an independent organisation of artistes, activists and religious leaders formed recently. Its inaugural public meeting was held on February 7 at the New Town Hall in Colombo hours before the official gazette notifying the dissolution of Parliament was released.

Politics in Sri Lanka for decades has been characterized by the clash of greed for power and arrogance of power. The avaricious and arrogant politicians also

believe in the effectiveness of their own version WMDs (words of mass deception). Over-confidence in the ability to outmaneuver the opponents is also a trait of those actively engaged in power politics. Hence, they are not very worried about public opinion. According to the recent opinion poll by Org Marg Smart, over 70% of the people, even those in the North and East, wanted the President and the Prime Minister to reach a compromise and continue to cohabit for the sake of peace. This is what the business community in Sri Lanka, peace groups and the aid donors also wanted, but their appeals fell on deaf ears. The NMPD also appealed not to go for a snap election. Nevertheless, the SLFP and the JVP succeeded in persuading the unwilling President to dissolve Parliament and call for early snap polls.

Election prospects

The poll estimated to cost nearly Rs. 850 million would only serve to test the relative popularity of the main parties. The JVP with its doctrinaire policies will most likely gain strength at the expense of the UNF and the SLFP. The loss will be more to the SLFP than to the UNP. On the other hand, the outcome of the election in the North-East appears to be a foregone conclusion. The TNA is contesting as the LTTE's proxy. The LTTE will claim that it has the mandate of the people to implement its alternative plan and set up the N-E self-governing authority, if the negotiations show little progress for whatever reason. The conditions laid down by the LTTE for the TNA to contest as the proxy include the right to make decisions without consulting the alliance on all matters concerning the Tamil people and the N-E region.

The April 2 general election is not going to help in ending the rivalry between the UNP and the SLFP and end confrontational politics. Without the partnership of the UNP and the SLFP consensual politics vital for solving national issues is not possible. The prospect for either alliance securing enough seats to sidetrack the other is nil and the present peculiar PR system of electing members to the Parliament is meant to prevent this outcome. The winning coalition will not have enough majority seats to amend the present Constitution

Return to a safe 'House' as the 'Sun' sets in TULF crisis

D. B. S. Jeyaraj

The loose coalition known as Tamil National Alliance (TNA) hopes to contest on a platform of Tamil unity at the forthcoming elections. Ironically, disunity within the ranks of its premier constituent has prevented the TNA from using the widely known rising-sun symbol at the hustings. Instead the TNA including the anti-Anandasangaree faction of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) is reverting back to the 'house', the symbol of the old Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi or Federal Party. The ongoing spat between President

and this is a major impediment to the resolution of national issues, unless the two parties led by the President and the Prime Minister agree to cooperate in finding an acceptable political solution to the national question.

Given the present ground realities, if the national leaders are really committed to the future well-being of the people and the country, they should take a more direct and unambiguous approach to peace and convince the people the imperative to settle early the country's main burning issue with the backing of the international community given the present ground realities.

Those who have been reluctant to take risks in the pursuit of real peace are now taking risks with the future of the country to achieve their narrow political aims. Posterity will judge them as true national leaders or political opportunists interested only in power depending on their stances and performances in the new Parliament. If 'save the nation' slogan is meant to secure votes only and not to settle the major burning issue peacefully, the country has a very bleak future. The country is already divided and the realistic method to unify the country is to adopt an agreed federal system. This is the proven system for assuring the peaceful co-existence of all ethnic groups in a country divided regionally with different ethnic and cultural features. □

of the TULF, V. Anandasangaree and his now estranged former parliamentary colleagues acting at the behest of the Tigers has indirectly deprived the TULF from using its party symbol in use from 1977. In the current situation neither Anandasangaree nor his opponents within the TULF can use the rising-sun symbol.

With his one-time comrades trying to oust him from the party by convening a central committee meeting at the 'Tiger' infested territory of Thirukovil, Sangaree was compelled to go to courts seeking relief. The Colombo District Court issued an interim injunction first and later extended it up to March 16.

The ruling also instructed Secretary General of the TULF, Rajavarotheyam Sambandan and Senior Vice President Joseph Pararajasingham not to act in any party matter without consulting TULF President Anandasangaree.

Sudden dissolution of parliament and consequent elections saw the TULF parliamentary group sans Sangaree in a tricky situation. Neither the central committee nor the nomination board elected by it could meet and take decisions independent of Anandasangaree. Moreover, the TULF President's participatory consent was necessary for any key decision to be taken.

With nominations being called between February 17 and 24 the LTTE controlled faction could not afford to wait until March 16th. So Sambandan and Pararajasingham prayed the Appeal Court asking it to set the injunction aside so as to enable the party to finalise its list of candidates. The hearing was scheduled for February 19. In the meantime the TULF nomination board met on February 18.

Anandasangaree was presented with what seemed at face value a fait accompli. The TULF in association with TNA alliance partners had selected lists of candidates to contest at the forthcoming general election from the

North-east. They were all supposed to contest on the TULF symbol, the rising-sun. The TNA had done so even in the 2001 polls.

Interestingly, the TULF parliamentary group sans Sangaree along with leaders from other TNA parties had been summoned to Kilinochchi by the Political Wing leader of the LTTE, Subbiah Paramu Tamilselvan, on February 16. Certain decisions on finalising candidates on the TNA list and choice of a symbol in lieu of the rising-sun etc. were discussed there.

In a bizarre turn of events LTTE Intelligence Wing Chief, Pottu Amman and Police Chief, Nadesan were also associated in these seemingly 'political' discussions. The presence of Pottu and Nadesan at the meeting is seen as a blatantly crude attempt to intimidate the TNA politicians. This, however, seems entirely unnecessary as the very sight of Tamilselvan's walking stick is enough to make some TNA guys go dizzy.

So when the TULF nomination board met on 18 February, the crucial decisions regarding nominations had already been made in Kilinochchi by the Tigers who had donned the TNA thinking cap for all. Sangaree noted that the names of loyal party men who had stood by the TULF through thick and thin were missing and that a number of outsiders were included as potential candidates.

Secretary General, Sambandan replied that very few applications had come from party men and that this list was the best of the lot. Sangaree then queried from the others whether there were no available candidates in their areas. While the majority maintained a studied silence, the newly appointed David Naganathan from Vavuniya blurted out that there were several people available in Vavuniya.

Never in the history

The TULF president then suggested that advertisements be placed in the media quickly calling for fresh applications. Sambandan then said that such a practice had never been followed in the history of the TULF. Sangaree had then retorted "Never in the history of the TULF has the party gone to courts. But we are there now.

So there is a first time for everything."

Finding the nomination board silently unresponsive, an angry Ananda-sangaree then came out with a proposal. "Since the LTTE is making decisions for us let them do the entire thing. Let us hand over everything to them and ask them to select their own candidates. Let none of us contest this time. Let the Tigers field a list and we'll support them. I myself will campaign for the LTTE," he said.

If the TULF ex-parliamentarians were really teaming up with the Tigers without any selfish intentions then Sangaree's invitation would have been a golden opportunity for them to demonstrate their unselfishness by dropping their parliamentary ambitions then and there. But then their modus operandi has been that of hailing the LTTE as 'sole' representatives of the Tamil people and becoming MPs as representatives of the people.

Having dropped his bombshell, a hurt and angry Anandasangaree walked out from the nomination board meeting of the party of which he was a founder-member and had worked hard to safeguard courageously in the face of direct LTTE violence in the not so distant past.

Press reports in Tamil newspapers on February 19 stated the names of candidates on the TNA lists were finalised in Kilinochchi on the 16th. Thus, Sambandan and Pararajasingham were on a weak wicket when the Appeal Court took up the case on the same day. The crux of the appeal was that the interim injunction should be set aside so as to enable the party to meet and decide on candidates. But the media was reporting that candidates had already been selected in Kilinochchi under LTTE auspices.

Wijedasa Rajapakse, Anandasangaree's counsel, informed court of his client's readiness to discuss and finalise candidates on behalf of the TULF if and when the names and complete details of applicants were furnished. In any event the Secretary General and Vice President of the TULF were treading on thin ice by taking party decisions without con-

sulting Sangaree. A very strict application of the District Court's injunction could deem these activities as 'contempt of court'.

Having heard both sides, Justice Udagama of the Appeal Court decided that further hearings were required to delve into the complicated matter at hand more deeply. He ruled that the petitioners provide written submissions within a week's time and set the next date for February 24th. He also advised them to follow the terms set by the interim injunction closely and consult the TULF president on all required matters.

Against that backdrop Sambandan and Pararajasingham could either patch up their differences with Sangaree and take unified decisions in the future or dissociate and presumably even resign from the TULF to carry on unfettered activity relating to the TNA. Had the choice been their's to take independently, the chances were that both would have effected rapprochement with Sangaree as there is really no deep division among them. Unfortunately this was not a decision for them to take. It was Tamilselvan who had insisted on Anandasangaree being removed from presidential office and was exerting constant pressure on the TULF to do so. So there was no chance of the LTTE allowing the TULF'ers to mend fences with their president even if they wanted to.

Practically impossible

With the appeal hearing being put off for February 24 the last day of nominations the question of formalising candidates for the TNA under the TULF rising-sun symbol on or before that date had become practically impossible. Anticipating such an eventuality the LTTE and TNA had already made other arrangements.

There were three symbols to fall back on for the TNA in case of being deprived of the rising-sun. There was the 'bicycle' of the All Ceylon Tamil Congress; the 'lighthouse' of the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation; and the 'house' symbol of the ITAK or Federal Party.

When the FP and TC amalgamated into the TUF and later the

TULF both parties ceased to use their old symbol. The clash between Kasi Anandan and Rajadurai in Batticaloa many years ago saw the former contesting on the FP symbol of house while the latter was the official TULF candidate with the rising-sun.

Later the symbol went into disuse but in 1989 when the Indians forced the EPRLF, TELO, ENDLF and TULF to contest under the rising-sun symbol, former Opposition Leader, Appaillai Amirthalingam thought it prudent to revive FP registration and keep the 'house' safe in case of an unexpected emergency.

After Amirthalingam was killed by the LTTE, his trusted deputy Mavai Senathirajah kept the FP alive at least officially though no membership meetings were held or office-bearers elected. He was its secretary general. The FP came into focus recently when Senathirajah and some old federalists opposed to Anandasangaree tried to resurrect it as a separate entity and constituent of the TNA. The Tigers frowned upon this idea of supplanting the TULF and Senathirajah hastily withdrew the idea.

Though Appathurai Vinayagamoorthy of the Tamil Congress wanted the TNA to use the bicycle symbol the LTTE hierarchy felt that from a Tamil nationalist outlook the Veedu (house) was the next best thing to the uthayasoorian (rising-sun) and not the bicycle or lighthouse.

In any event the LTTE would not have liked the TELO symbol to be used whatever the current relationship. The Tigers find it easier to manipulate unarmed politicians of the TULF or ACTC as opposed to the militant turned democratic TELO leaders despite the outward subservience they have shown.

So now the house will be the TNA symbol.. Once again the north-eastern provinces will be submerged with 'house' oriented electioneering as in 1970 and the years before. Only there will be no countervailing symbol of the bicycle as in those days.

Sun, but not rising sun

The sun however will not rise in this election. Though the TULF and

Tamil media refer to their symbol as uthayasoorian or rising-sun in the books of the elections commissioner it is officially 'sun' and not rising sun. This writer recalls nostalgically his covering of the TULF gaining the symbol officially in May 1977.

I was a cub reporter then with the Tamil daily Virakesari and was assigned the elections department round. That impartial, efficient, affable yet no nonsense administrator Ernest Dias Abeysinghe was elections commissioner then. Amirthalingam, M. Sivasithambaram accompanied by lawyers Kandasamy and Rudramoorthy went for the crucial meeting with the commissioner to gain official recognition of the symbol.

I then went along with them to Siva's house at 100 Norris Canal Road where the Amir - Siva duo drafted an official press release expressing joy at the awarding of the rising-sun symbol. The TULF getting the rising-sun was "big news" for a Tamil paper and I got my first lead in journalism on account of that story. So the incident is yet fresh in memory.

Later when I cross checked with Dias Abeysinghe by phone the Commissioner told me that officially it was the "sun" and not the rising-sun that had been awarded to the TULF. He told me that it was the same symbol used by the Sri Lanka Freedom Socialist Party (SLFSP) led by C.P. de Silva in 1965. I hastily corrected the story for the later editions. But the northern and eastern editions went to town with the news about the TULF getting the rising-sun and not the sun.

It is the term rising-sun that has struck over the years. The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) led by C.N. Annadurai and now Muttuvel Karunanidhi in Tamil Nadu too has the rising-sun as its symbol. As a result a number of DMK oriented Tamil films and film songs refer to the Uthayasoorian.

Most acceptable symbol

In 1977 the TULF won resoundingly at the polls winning 18 of the 19 Tamil seats in the north-east. In 1989

the sun was used again for an umbrella network of groups and the TULF that got 12 seats. In 1994 the TULF got five and again in 2000 also five seats. In 2001 the four parties calling themselves the TNA contested on the TULF sun symbol because that was the most acceptable and widely known symbol among the Tamil people.

This time it appears that the sun will not appear on the ballot papers. Even though Anandasangaree has succeeded in preventing the TNA/LTTE using the symbol for its own benefit he himself would not be able to use it. Being unceremoniously ditched from the TNA list by his colleagues on the orders of the LTTE, Anandasangaree and his loyalist rank and file of the party have no other option other than to contest as 'independents' as he cannot use the TULF party name or its symbol, the sun.

So now the TNA seeks refuge in the house symbol of the FP. After 2001 elections some TNA leaders like Sri Kantha (TELO) and Suresh (EPRLF) wanted to formalise the TNA as a distinct political party and do away with the TULF, ACTC, TELO, EPRLF etc. This, however, was resisted by the older TULF and ACTC (the oldest Tamil party).

The LTTE did not favour structural unity and preferred instead a functional unity. The LTTE also wanted to keep inter-party differences simmering so as to facilitate their manipulation and control of the TNA. Had the TNA been formally incorporated as a party then it need not have been subjected to this last minute symbol change.

As for the sun symbol all diehard TULFers will only hope that it is a temporary sunset. Just as the setting sun of the west rises again in the east the TULF sun could set now and rise again at the next elections. If the inner party crisis is resolved satisfactorily or the verdict in the forthcoming election is conclusive, then a fresh sunrise is possible on the political horizon. □

Anti-conversion law should not be pursued

The Civil Rights Movement (CRM) of Sri Lanka has in a statement stated that any move to enact hasty and ill-considered laws directed at so-called unethical conversions would only serve to exacerbate tensions in our already fragile and fragmented society.

The CRM points out that there is also the real danger that for the government to now make "unethical" conversion an offence will be seen as appeasement of, and encouragement to, the lawless elements which have been engaged in deplorable acts of violence and intimidation against Christians and places of Christian worship in recent times. It might result in not less, but more, attacks, using the excuse that the offenders are only intervening to prevent activity that the state has now deemed unlawful. It could appear to legitimize the lawless acts already perpetrated. The likely result of an "anti-conversion" law will be arbitrary arrests and prosecutions, and the harassment of believers of minority religions.

The full text of the CRM statement of 23 January issued by its Secretary Ms Suriya Wickremasinghe is as follows:

"The adoption of legislation to regulate a change of religious belief or faith is not, in the view of the Civil Rights Movement (CRM), a measure the government should take in response to the issues that have recently been raised regarding "unethical conversions".

It is neither practicable nor desirable to try to legislatively define conversions by "unethical" means, while protecting the constitutional right to manifest one's religion or belief. Such a law must necessarily be imprecisely defined. The right to abandon the religion one is born into and the right to adopt a religion of one's choice has always been recognized in our society. People change their religions for a multiplicity of reasons, sometimes very personal; in the sphere of thought and belief the law cannot

delve into people's minds. Legislative definition cannot hope to deal with the diversity of situations in which conversions may take place. Conversion may at times be comparatively sudden, in other instances it may be a process that takes place over a considerable length of time. It may be prompted by a wide variety of motivations, and by a combination of them. Conversions in certain contexts have long been known to, and treated with tolerance by, society. One example is a change of religion on marriage, which can be due to various factors. Another is where a religion change coincides with engagement in electoral politics. Is the law now to probe into and possibly criminalize such actions too?

Another factor is that persons subject to the alleged "unethical" conversions are frequently from amongst the more disadvantaged groups in society. Is the law to bar them from obtaining solace where they can find it? In fact in some countries people disadvantaged by a cruel caste system have converted to other religions - including to Buddhism - to gain acceptance into a community where their basic human worth and dignity is accepted. Are we to say that they are unfairly induced to abandon their religion of birth?

One has only to contemplate the diversity of situations that arise to highlight the complexity of the subject and the impracticability of state intervention.

Attempts to make people change their views on various subjects are part of the normal interaction of members of society. Support for this political party or that, the open economy versus protectionist measures, the consumption of alcohol as against teetotalism, and many other issues are constantly canvassed with passion and even aggression. At election time in particular, tremendous efforts are made to influence people to adopt certain views, with varying degrees of success. This is a manifestation of

the freedom of expression and freedom of belief. People are free to campaign for various causes, though this may often serve as an irritant to those committed to other loyalties. Persons who try to convince others that their particular brand of faith is the true religion must be accorded the same freedom and tolerance by society. The fact that the right to manifest one's religion can be subject to restrictions as may be prescribed by law in the interests of public order, or for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights or freedoms of others, should not lead to hasty laws that can harm the peaceful existence of religions in the country.

There is also the real danger that for the government to now make "unethical" conversion an offence will be seen as appeasement of, and encouragement to, the lawless elements which have been engaged in deplorable acts of violence and intimidation against Christians and places of Christian worship in recent times. It might result in not less, but more, attacks, using the excuse that the offenders are only intervening to prevent activity that the state has now deemed unlawful. It could appear to legitimize the lawless acts already perpetrated. The likely result of an "anti-conversion" law will be arbitrary arrests and prosecutions, and the harassment of believers of minority religions.

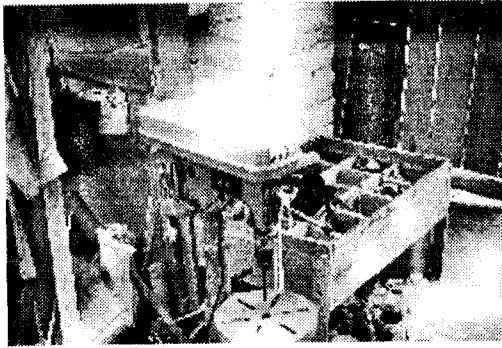
It is preferable that groups in society, if they have complaints of this nature against the practices of other groups, should seek to tackle such issues amongst themselves, with the assistance of civic-minded citizens, rather than seeking the intervention of the law. Harmony achieved in this manner is more likely to be lasting, whereas court proceedings produce acrimony, bitterness and a sense of persecution. In this regard CRM notes that a serious effort is being made to set up an inter-religious body that can take meaningful steps to address the question of conversions. This is a responsible approach towards defusing tensions; tensions which in our already fragile and fragmented society would only be exacerbated by the passage of hasty and ill-considered laws." □

Reintegration Assistance offered by International Organisation for Migration

The International Organization for Migration has been involved in assisting asylum seekers wanting to return back to their home country since 1999, under the Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme (VARRP). The number of people returning under the programme has steadily increased over the years, and Sri Lankans are now the third largest nationality departing. Anyone who applies to the VARRP is eligible for **reintegration assistance**. The aim is to provide financial support for activities that would benefit the returnees, to facilitate self-sufficiency and sustainable return to the country of origin.

Reintegration assistance may be in the form of accessing job-oriented training and education and setting up a small business. IOM can also assist in finding places in school for the children of returnees. The applicant identifies what they would like to do and IOM tries to find a suitable activity. Of the many Sri Lankans that returned home last year, about a third applied for reintegration assistance. Below are 3 such cases in more detail:

Mr D and his family arrived back in Sri Lanka in August of last year having spent 4 years in the UK. He requested assistance to start up a Batik Factory in his hometown of Koswadiya, Mahawena as he had more than 10 years experience in this field before leaving for the UK. IOM assisted in buying material, dyeing equipment and the dyes themselves. The business has become extremely successful with Mr D employing 20 people to fulfil orders. The whole family is now very happily settled in Sri Lanka.



Mr C returned back to Jaffna in February of last year. As he had significant previous experience in the welding trade, IOM helped him start up a welding workshop in his hometown of Chavakachcheri, Jaffna. Through the reintegration programme, IOM purchased all the necessary tools and equipment for his business. Mr C currently employs 3 people and the business is proving to be very successful.

Mr J returned back to Sri Lanka in April 2003. IOM assisted him in setting up a poultry farm at his residence in Jaffna. Financial assistance was provided to him to build sheds and fencing. IOM also purchased the birds and provided help towards the maintenance of the farm. Mr J has now expanded the farm from 50 birds to 300 and is receiving a good income from this business.



Mr S left Sri Lanka in 1996 because of the war. In the UK, he worked in many different places including petrol stations, pharmacies and shops. After returning to Sri Lanka in 2003 under the VARRP, he decided to further his education. With IOM's assistance, he is working towards a Higher Diploma in Software Engineering, and a diploma in Accounting and Finance (CIMA). He is very happy in Sri Lanka at the moment due to the peaceful situation.

If you are interested in finding out more about the Voluntary Return and Reintegration Programme please contact IOM. Details can be found on the opposite page.



Are you an asylum seeker or refugee who is considering returning home?

If you are thinking about returning to your home country, assistance is available through 'Choices' at Refugee Action and IOM (the International Organization for Migration). These two organisations work in partnership together.

Choices offer information, advice and support to asylum seekers and refugees who are considering return home or are exploring options to stay in the UK. This independent, confidential service can help you to make an informed decision whether to stay in the UK or return home.

If you decide you would like to return home, IOM can help you through the 'Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Programme' (VARRP). This programme assists asylum seekers of all nationalities and has been running since 1998. We will:

- advise you on travel documents you will need
- arrange the flight to your home country
- meet you at the airport on departure and on arrival
- assist with transportation to your final destination
- offer reintegration support to facilitate your sustainable return home

Reintegration assistance is offered in your home country. It can cover vocational training courses, setting up a small business or access to education. Assistance is provided through IOM offices worldwide and is dependent on local resources in your home country.

Contact IOM from anywhere in the UK for more information on how to apply to return home. Information, translated Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and application forms can be downloaded from the website www.iomlondon.org

IOM London: Tel: 020 7233 0001 Fax: 020 7233 3001 e-mail: varrp@iomlondon.org
or come to the office at 21 Westminster Palace Gardens, Artillery Row, London SW1P 1RR
(near St James's Park tube and Victoria station).

Contact Choices if you are in England or Wales and are interested in exploring your options about staying in the UK or returning home. More information is also available on the website www.refugee-action.org.uk

London office: 3rd Floor, The Old Fire Station 150 Waterloo Road London SE1 8SB Tel: 020 7654 7700 Fax: 020 7401 3699	Manchester office: 1 Tariff Street Manchester M1 2HF Tel: 0161 233 1200 or 0800 917 2719 (free from a landline) Fax: 0161 236 4285	Leeds office: Suite 7, Floor C, Josephs Well Hanover Walk Leeds LS3 1AB Tel: 0113 244 5345 Fax: 0113 243 5448	Leicester office: Muslim Community Resource Centre, Melbourne Centre, Melbourne Road Leicester LE2 0GU Tel: 0116 261 4846 Fax: 0116 251 1712
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Contact Options if you are in Scotland

If you are interested in exploring your options about staying in Scotland or returning home. More information is also available on the website www.ymcaglasgow.org

Options at YMCA Glasgow: 33 Petershill Drive, Glasgow G21 4QQ
Tel: 0141 557 2355 Fax: 0141 557 0874 e-mail: options@ymcaglasgow.org

Contact NERS if you in North East England

NERS: 3rd Floor, Forum House, The Forum, Wallsend High St, Tyne & Wear NE28 8LX
Tel: 0191 200 1199/1108 Fax: 0191 200 5929 e-mail: wallsend@refugee.org.uk



IOM International Organization for Migration



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Jaffna library opened without ceremony

The Jaffna Public Library, a cultural icon for the country's minority Tamil community in northern Sri Lanka, was reopened to students on 23 February, more than two decades after it was gutted in an act of deliberate arson by security service personnel who went berserk in May 1981.

The reopening was a low-key affair without any accompanying ceremony. "We opened just to students who want to use the library to study for examinations," said chief librarian S. Thanabalaasinh, adding that because of lack of funds to pay staff it would be open only for three hours each afternoon.

The library had been set to reopen with the president of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) Mr V Anandasangaree and the then Mayor of the Jaffna Municipal Council being chief guests at a public ceremony last year as a step toward healing wounds in the island's 20-year civil war. But pressure from the Tamil Tigers forced authorities to postpone the ceremony.

Jaffna is the cultural heartland of the island's Tamils, and the library had been a repository of nearly 100,000 Tamil-language books and manuscripts, including rare palm leaf writings.

About 40,000 have been replaced through donations.

With funds provided by the government of President Kumaratunga and donations from the public, work on rebuilding the gleaming white icon began in 1998, and went ahead through some of the war's worst fighting over control of the northern peninsula.

Thanabalaasinh, who has worked out of a temporary building for all of his 14 years as librarian, said he was pleased to see the library finally in use, but added there were still hurdles to overcome.

"The students are very glad they can come, but still there are financial problems. I hope we can open to others soon," he said.

Peace Council urges not to fan communal fears

The National Peace Council (NPC) in a press release said on 13 February that the general election should focus on future co-existence and co-operation and refrain from fanning fears and apprehensions of the people regarding racial and religious issues.

The Press release said the President's decision to dissolve Parliament had come after a political crisis that pitted the President against the Prime Minister and his government. With the dissolution of Parliament the country faced another general election in less than four years. The National Peace Council's was disappointed that the country was plunged into an election when it was facing acute financial difficulties that had made life a bleak prospect for most of its people. This was also an election that the vast majority of people had not asked for or desired.

"What most people wanted, as their first choice, was for the President and Prime Minister to work together in a manner of mutual co-existence even though they came from two rival political parties. Unfortunately the country's political leaders failed to make sufficient effort to reach an agreement to work together. There was no dearth of such potential agreements, including those proposed by the committee of high officials they themselves had appointed apart from civil society proposals.

"Despite the premature election the country now faces, the National Peace Council continues to believe that the best answer to Sri Lanka's problems of ethnic conflict and economic and democratic development would come through bipartisan

policies and actions. The alternative would be further division, polarisation and impoverishment.

"We are disturbed by the early emergence of negative campaigning by political parties that aim at fanning fears and apprehensions of the people regarding the breakdown of the ceasefire, the division of the country and the threat posed by one community to the other. We call on all parties not to incite ethnic or religious antagonisms but instead use the election as an opportunity to create greater understanding and interaction between the different communities.

"Whatever the specific outcome of the forthcoming general election, the need for a bipartisan approach to resolve the ethnic conflict and develop the country will remain undiminished in post-election Sri Lanka. This requires that both sides should keep in mind that their conduct in the election campaign should not further rupture their relationships or alienate sections of the polity."

Need for upright Candidates - OPA

The Organisation of Professional Associations (OPA) has called upon leaders of political parties to act with a high sense of responsibility and commitment when selecting candidates and to strictly adhere and comply with the laws of the country during the period before and after the General Elections.

The OPA has pointed out that political leaders should take note when nominating candidates as it is an important exercise. "The leaders should act upon stringent guidelines to reflect that candidates nominated are worthy of representing the people. In the past, political parties have nominated candidates even with criminal backgrounds and persons who have been accused of bribery, corruption, nepotism, misuse of public property and abuse of power".

The Organisation points out that the chosen candidates must be committed to the development of the country and not the self. "Persons with integrity who have demonstrated soundness of moral principles in behaviour and free from moral wrong or guilt should be nominated. The candidates must be upright, veracious, honest and straight forward", the statement said.

While the OPA accepts that it is a difficult task for any political party to choose such persons, the Organisation stresses the need that a party should not nominate persons who are guilty of violating such principles.

Noting that the quality of those elected has been extremely poor the Organisation has urged the political parties to obtain a declaration from each candidate. The declaration should consist of educational qualifications and profession, assets and liabilities, pending criminal cases if any, pending investigations or charges if any and the declaration to abide by the election laws and other laws during the election campaign.

In the conduct of the polls the OPA calls on the parties to refrain from using public resources and honour the right of the people to choose their representatives without fear, intimidation, bribery or corruption. In the post-election period the OPA has appealed to all those elected to agree to a common agenda and arrive at a consensus to rebuild the country.

National Council to combat election violence

The Chairman of the National Advisory Council to Combat Crime said that eradicating violence during the general elec-

tions was one of the main responsibilities of the council and should focus its attention on this.

Ven. Dr. Bellanwila Wimalarathana Thera mentioned this when its members gathered at the opening session of the Council at the Internal Security Ministry.

Ven. Wimalarathana Thera said nowadays most of the people in the country were afraid of post-election violence and attacks. The winning political party supporters attacking the losers was a common practice today and many people were worried over this. As a council to combat crime, we have a responsibility to be on alert for election related violence.

Secretary to the Internal Security Ministry, M. N. Junaid said the council was formed not only to act on election related violence but as an all-time council to combat crime.

The distinguished members are:

Ven. Dr. Madagoda Sumanatissa Thera, Hindu Vidyantithi Bhramasri S. Kuhanantha Sarma, Most Rev. Dr. Oswald Gomis, Alhaj Dr. M. A. M. Shukri Jamia Naleema, Kingsley T. Wickramaratne, Governor, Southern Province, Monty Gopallawa, Governor, Central Province, IGP Indra de Silva, Dr. A. T. Ariyaratne, Chairman, Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement, Godfrey Gunat-hilaka, Deputy Chairman, Marga Institute, Dr. L. J. Mendis, Director, Concerned Professionals Forum, Dr. Deepika Udagama, Faculty of Law, Colombo University, Mr. Mahendra Amarasuriya Chairman, Joint Business Forum, and Mr. Kingsley Rodrigo, Chairman, PAFFREL.

The secretary and convener to the committee is Mr. M. N. Junaid. The Council, a concept of President Chandrika Kumaratunga is to establish People's Committees at District or Divisional level. These committees would work on crime, narcotic, illicit liquor, religious rivalries and conflicts, political animosities and child abuse and rape.

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Britain warns political parties not to undermine peace process

Britain has urged Sri Lanka's political parties to keep down their rhetoric in the run up to April elections and warned against undermining the fragile peace talks with the Tamil Tigers. Foreign Office Minister Mike O'Brien called for free and fair elections in the island, and expressed the hope that stalled talks could resume shortly after the April 2 snap poll.

A statement issued in Colombo on 23 February after O'Brien's talks in London with his Norwegian counterpart, Vidar Helgesen, a key figure in the Sri Lankan peace talks, said an end to the ethnic conflict was essential for stability. "The peace process is a legitimate issue for Sri Lanka's political parties to have different views on," said Mr. O'Brien. "But we urge their leaders to ensure that their, and their supporters' actions and rhetoric during the election campaign do nothing to undermine the important gains that have been made in the peace process or to make it more difficult to resume peace talks after the election."

Mr. O'Brien said Britain remained fully committed "politically and practically" to supporting Sri Lanka's rehabilitation and development in the embattled northern and eastern regions as well as the rest of the country. "It also stands ready to provide longer term development assistance as long as there is continued progress in the peace process," he said.

Right of voters in LTTE areas must be upheld

The National Peace Council (NPC) and the People Action for Free and Fair Election (PAFFREL) in a statement issued on 26 February stated, "The right to vote freely without external constraint or intimidation is an essential requirement of citizenship in a democratic polity. But due to the civil war most of the people living in LTTE controlled areas have been denied this right to vote for about two decades. The People's Action for Free and Fair Elections (PAFFREL) and the National Peace Council (NPC) welcome the LTTE's announcement that there will be opportunity for voters in the north east to cast their votes and that any political party could contest in the north east. We call on the election authorities to ensure that the voters in the north east are able to exercise their right to vote without external constraints.

In the past two decades it was not possible for the election authorities to have polling stations in the LTTE controlled areas due to the conditions of war that prevailed. But in this period of ceasefire, we appeal to the Elections Commissioner to use his discretionary powers to devise an innovative method by which the people in the LTTE controlled areas will be able to cast their votes at the general election in their own areas under the supervision of the Elections Department. If this can be done, it will be an opportunity for the voters to enjoy their inalienable right of selecting their representatives in Parliament and also to express their aspirations about the future of the peace process.

The past practice of clustering polling stations outside of the LTTE controlled areas has required that people living in those areas have had to travel long distances to cast their vote. This method has proven to be very unsatisfactory as there is only a rudimentary public transport system in those parts of the country. Further there have been occasions when security reasons have been given, even arbitrarily, to prevent voters from crossing over from LTTE controlled areas to the location of clustered polling stations. The Supreme Court has ruled that some such actions by the Sri Lankan military in the past violated the right of people to vote.

We call on the Elections Commissioner to discuss how best

elections can take place in the LTTE controlled areas, that will have legitimacy with all sections of the population. We recommend that the Government and LTTE Peace Secretariats be called upon to jointly facilitate dialogue on this matter. The assistance of Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission, ICRC and the UN agencies may be sought to help identify safe areas where polling booths could be located. These agencies could also perform an election monitoring role to augment the role of PAFFREL. The presence of national and international monitors in those areas can serve to reassure the election authorities, the voters and the general population about the legitimacy of the election result.

Apart from the right to vote, the PAFFREL and NPC also consider the right of political parties to campaign freely for election to Parliament and thereby enable the voters to make informed decisions to be a fundamental democratic right. A free and fair election is not only about enabling voters to cast their vote without intimidation or fraud on the day of the election, but is also about what happens during the entire period of the election campaign. We call on the LTTE to enable all political parties that wish to conduct their political campaigns in the north east to do so in the LTTE controlled areas as well, by creating a secure environment. Such a decision by the LTTE would help it gain further legitimacy and confidence in the eyes of national and international communities as an expression of its commitment to the democratic process that has begun to evolve with the commencement of the peace process."

Call for fair electronic media coverage

Transparency International of Sri Lanka (TISL) said that it was concerned with the electoral standards in Sri Lanka and added that the important aspect for a free and fair election was to have balanced media coverage, in particular in electronic media managed with State resources.

TISL has also made representations to the Commissioner of Elections to act under the relevant Constitutional provisions in order to prevent unfair coverage in electronic media and the misinformation during election campaign. "We call upon the President, Prime Minister, Media Minister, Media Ministry Secretary, all heads and board members of state owned media institutions to immediately take following steps," Executive Director J.C Weliamuna said in a press release.

The steps that should be taken are, engage in non-political voter education programmes, give equal opportunities for all political parties to explain their respective manifestos and programs, resist political influence in all program including news bulletins and special ad hoc programmes, introduce in a transparent manner comprehensive guidelines to be strictly followed by the media during the elections, ensure that all political parties have equal opportunities in all political broadcasts during the campaign period.

This should cover equal opportunities in term of time, technical quality as well as right of reply, all media institutions should have a political media expert who is also be responsible to Elections Commissioner and the public and such person should not be selected and appointed to cater political parties, ensure that the reporting during election period does not contain election manipulations, all political leaders including the President should be considered as a political party leaders (whether they contest or not) and selected leader should not be given preferential treatment in coverage, during the entire period including blackout period.

NCC opposes moves to enact anti-conversion law

The National Christian Council in a statement has expressed grave concern in respect of a series of recent attacks on Christian places of worship. It has also expressed opposition to the enactment of legislation to prohibit "unethical conversions".

The following is the full text of the statement issued on 6 February 2004:

"The National Christian Council is gravely concerned over the continuous stirring up of resentment against Christians and the increasing incidence of unchecked violence directed at Christian places of worship. It is obvious from the pattern of these attacks that they are well-planned and co-ordinated and are meant to intimidate Christians and provoke undesirable religious strife in the country. Consequently we are dismayed that the police have not taken swift and adequate steps to curb these senseless acts and urge that all those responsible for such acts of violence be dealt with without fear or favour under the law and that security and order be restored.

We are mindful that all Sri Lankans of goodwill wish to see this country as a place where people of different ethnicity, languages, religions and ideologies are respected and treated equally, feel safe and live together with mutual tolerance. We are also concerned that Sri Lanka must remain the country reputed for religious tolerance and diversity. The State and Police in particular, have a primary role to play in this regard. Any further delay in doing so could communicate a serious bias against a minority religion.

We also wish to comment on the demand to enact legislation to restrict conversions from one faith to another, and reported steps that are being taken to do so. Although what is meant to be outlawed is "unethical conversions", we fear that since the difference between the two will be almost impossible to define, and also given the present climate, this legislation will have very adverse repercussions on genuine conversions. History teaches that people do change their affiliation from one religion to another for several reasons. For some, the tenets of another religion may appeal more than their own. For others disillusionment or a crisis might motivate them to renounce their religion and look elsewhere. In both these examples the principle of inducement could be proved operative. And yet in such circumstances, the judicial determination and interference of a third party on the ethics of such a personal decision, will be highly questionable and undesirable.

We are also anxious that such legislation will inevitably impose restrictions on the social service and social action, through which our Churches have served our people for generations and which is an intrinsic and inseparable part of our responsibility and practice as Christians.

At a wider level, we wish to point out that any restriction on the propagation of religion will be tantamount to a corresponding denial of a basic right of citizens of this country to freely choose a religion, belief or ideology since one needs proper information to exercise this right in any meaningful way. It is precisely the exercise of this right that made it possible for all the religions practised in our country at present to spread. Consequently all Sri Lankans need to take very careful cognisance that any attempt to tamper with this tradition will undermine the very fabric of our identity and character as Sri Lankans, and create a reactionary process, which could soon spread into other areas.

We wish therefore, as both Sri Lankans and as Christians to place on record, our inability to support any legislation that seeks to restrict conversions for whatever reasons, since it will inevitably obstruct the right to practice our respective faiths and ideologies as well as the right of individual choice and freedom. We feel very strongly that to the contrary such legislation

will add to religious disputes and continuing tensions. We hope that all others who share these values will similarly voice their opinions. To remain silent now could well prove a grave irresponsibility.

We are certainly mindful of the very serious allegations that Christians are buying converts. We have and will continue to unequivocally condemn these methods. They dishonour Christ and make a mockery of Christianity. We wish to affirm that as responsible Churches built on the values of Christ we too possess a meaningful spirituality and work with a conscience and understanding of what is right and wrong. Consequently we too are equally convinced that people's vulnerabilities such as poverty should not be exploited and reiterate that we are ever willing to co-operate in assisting in investigating definite instances and introducing corrective measures together with the leaders of other religions. Our view is that such irritants between religions ought to be remedied by inter-religious dialogue and intervention rather than through legislation with potential for unfair obstruction of true religion. We welcome the endorsement of the proposal to establish an Inter Religious Council of religious leaders which could among other things investigate and report on allegations of unethical religious Conversions and practices.

We therefore invite all those who seek a remedy of a particular problem through legislation to review their intention and to consider a process, which we think will be more acceptable to the democratic and religious traditions of the people of our country. We assure them of our co-operation if such a shift is made. We also reiterate our appeal to our political leaders to play a more consistent and a visible role in this matter and to provide leadership towards a freer and safer Sri Lanka for all communities.

May the God of peace bless all communities and leaders and keep us united and faithful by the best in our respective traditions for the good of our people."

The signatories to the NCC statement are: Rt. Rev. Kumara Illangasinghe - Chairperson - National Christian Council of Sri Lanka, Bishop of Kurunegala, Church of Ceylon; Rt. Rev. Duleep de Chickera - Bishop of Colombo, Church of Ceylon; Rt. Rev. Dr. S. Jebanesan - Bishop in Jaffna - Church of South India; Rev. Noel Fernando - President - Methodist Church Sri Lanka; Rev. W. Warshamanage, President - Sri Lanka Baptist Sangamaya; Colonel Dr. Brian Tuck - Territorial Commander - The Salvation Army; Rev. C.N. Jansz - President, Dutch Reformed Church; Rev. George Stephen - Moderator - Presbytery of Lanka

Surveys forecast victory for Freedom Alliance

A countrywide survey conducted by a joint university panel has indicated that the Freedom Alliance would secure a clear victory at the April 2 General Elections. A Reuters survey of financial institutions also revealed that the Freedom Alliance would win the most number of seats.

The university survey forecasts 120 seats for the Freedom Alliance while the UNF is slated to secure 86 seats. The Reuters poll gave a figure of 104 seats to the Freedom Alliance and 99 to the UNF and some of its allies.

The university panel comprising 15 intellectuals, including professors, senior lecturers, lecturers and students is now finalising the report, a member of the panel said.

They predict that the Freedom Alliance will lead in the Gampaha, Kalutara, Galle, Matara, Hambantota, Digamadulla, Trincomalee, Kurunegala, Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Badulla, Moneragala, Ratnapura and Kegalle districts.

Meanwhile, according to their survey in Colombo, Nuwara Eliya and Puttalam, the UNF is ahead of the Freedom alliance. There will be a close tussle in Kandy and Matale districts.

The five seats in Batticaloa are likely to be equally shared by the Freedom Alliance and the Tamil parties.

The Tamil National Alliance is expected to gain a majority in Vanni and Jaffna, according to the survey. Out of the 15 seats in Jaffna and Vanni, the TULF, EPDP and EPRLF are likely to total at least six seats.

In the dissolved Parliament, the UNP and its allies had 114 seats while the SLFP and the JVP had 95 seats.

The survey forecasts that the TNA would not make much impact on the balance of power to form a government though many people think that the TNA would be the deciding factor in forming a future government.

The Reuters survey noted that the TNA was tipped to win a median 22 seats, up from 15 in the outgoing Parliament.

There are no other opinion polls on the upcoming elections, but markets have been paying close attention to the outcome, with the stock market and rupee responding swiftly to developments.

Twelve banks, research firms and fund managers, both Sri Lankan and foreign-owned, took part in the Reuters poll. They included Commercial Bank of Ceylon, DFCC Stockbrokers, Eagle NDB Fund Management, First Capital, Frontier Research, Hatton National Bank, JB Securities, Standard Chartered Bank and People's Bank. Three other institutions did not want to be identified.

Monks for a 'Baudha Rajjya'

Ven. Uduwe Dhamma-loka Thera, General Secretary of the Supreme Council of the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), which is fielding over 200 Buddhist monks to contest the forthcoming election, is promising strict discipline within the party, a cleaning up of corrupt politics and the establishment of a Baudha Rajjya, where all religions and races would enjoy their rights. The Thera who heads the Colombo district list of candidate monks has said that their main aim was to build a new nation based on Dhamma values and get rid of power-hungry politicians who forgot the people once they came to office.

In an interview with a Colombo newspaper, Dhamma-loka Thera says that their action was a steo "to safeguard the Buddha Sasana and the country from falling into enemy hands" and "to create a clean political environment."

As to the policies of the JHU, he says, "The main policy is that this country is a Unitary Buddhist State. That is why we are contesting in all districts. The country will be ruled according to the doctrines of Lord Buddha. Our manifesto which is to be launched in Kandy on March 2, will consist of political, economic and Buddhist Policy (Sambuddha Prathipadawa) - which also deals with the state and nation. The economic policies (Arthika Prathipadawa) will be in line with the teachings of Lord Buddha. After April 2 we will create a new party consisting of Bhikkus, Bhikkshuni, Upasaka, Upasika, lay men and women that will work towards a Baudha Rajjya."

As to the nature of their election campaign, he says, "The Bhikkus will only engage in Bodu Maha Samulu (Buddhist Conferences), which will be held throughout the country. They will be different from the usual political meetings as no politician will take the stage. We will engage in a righteous way that will not tarnish the Bhikshuthwa or Bhikshu Prathipada. There will be no competition as there will be no canvassing for preference vote nor any poster campaign. We consider voting a 'sacrifice of principle' for a greater cause (Prathipaththi Pujawa) and our decision to stand for elections as a 'procession of aspirations' (Paramitha Perahera). Our laity will invite the people to make their sacrifice by voting. Our first duty would be to go to the Rajjya Sabha (Parliament), eliminate party politics in governance and revoke laws that don't suit any race or religion. We would also immediately bring the Bill against unethical conversions."

As to the North East issue, the LTTE, the peace process and future negotiations, he says, "The policies are still being

discussed. What has been decided up to now is that this country is a Buddha Rajya - where the Dhamma will prevail. There will be no religious or ethnic division and all races and religions will enjoy rights. Even non-Buddhists are happy with the policies, so there will be no need for war. If one breaks the law he will be dealt with by the law."

On the issue as to how members will be chosen, he says, "What matters is that those who come to Parliament should be well-educated, committed to the Dhamma and knowledgeable in the art of ruling the state. The Bhikkus who are contesting have agreed to hand over undated resignation letters so that if one of them goes against our principles, the leader could remove him.

Even the Superior Council has a Kathikawatha that it has to abide by (Code of Rules). If one member violates the code the rest could take action against him. One such code is that if a member engaged in any unethical action that would discredit the Bhikshuthwa, he would have to resign or the others could make him resign. This policy existed even in the days of Lord Buddha."

Donors affirm aid pledged on condition

The co-chairs of the Tokyo donor conference who met in Washington on Tuesday, 17 February called for the earliest possible resumption of peace talks, while expressing their disappointment at the breakdown of the "co-habitation" efforts, a statement issued by US State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said.

The statement is as follows: The co-chairs of the Tokyo Conference on Reconstruction and Development of Sri Lanka (the United States, European Union, Japan, and Norway) met in Washington on February 17 to discuss the international

community's support of Sri Lanka's peace process. The co-chair group is pleased to note that in cooperation with the Sri Lankan Monitoring Mission, the parties have largely upheld the ceasefire in Sri Lanka for two years. With each passing month more displaced Sri Lankans return to their homes and more humanitarian demining occurs. The co-chairs applaud these indicators of peace, while at the same time call for the earliest possible resumption of peace talks, which have been suspended since April 2003. A return to the peace table, along with strict adherence to the terms of the ceasefire agreement, is essential to sustain the peace process for the benefit of all ethnic communities in Sri Lanka.

The co-chairs express their disappointment at the breakdown of "co-habitation" efforts. They call on all political figures to work to ensure that parliamentary elections scheduled for April 2 are free, fair, and peaceful, and conducted in an atmosphere free of political violence throughout the country. They underscore the importance that campaign rhetoric must be devoid of religious and ethnic intolerance and must not be used in ways that undermine the important gains that have been made in the peace process.

The co-chairs encourage donors to provide support for independent local and international election monitors and call on all parties to ensure that they can carry out their mission in safety. After the elections conclude, the co-chairs urge the political parties to work expeditiously to establish clarity of responsibilities, so that the peace process - and the entire process of governance - can resume, regardless of the outcome of elections.

The co-chairs welcome the LTTE's statements of commitment to the ceasefire and to negotiations. The co-chairs encourage them to act responsibly during and after the election campaign.

The co-chairs reiterate their continued determination to implement their assistance pledged at the Tokyo Conference, based on the principles of the Tokyo Declaration, which makes clear that assistance by the donor community must be closely linked to substantial and parallel progress in the peace process. In the meantime, mindful of the Tokyo Declaration, the co-chairs recognize that there are particularly urgent needs for assistance for people in the war-torn areas and throughout Sri Lanka. The co-chairs call on all donors to continue delivering humanitarian relief and rehabilitation assistance to all needy areas of the country.

The co-chairs will convene a meeting at an early date after the elections.

Eight more child soldiers freed

Tiger Tigers have freed a further eight child soldiers, raising to 33 the number of underage combatants released in the past three weeks, the United Nations agency for children said.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) handed over six girls and two boys aged between 14 and 16 to a transit home run by UN children's agency UNICEF in the rebel-held northern town of Kilinochchi. The release on 17 February followed two batches of 25 children who were freed last week and last month after UNICEF rejected LTTE denials that they were recruiting child soldiers.

"The fact that 33 children have been released in the last three weeks shows the commitment by the LTTE to demobilise children in their ranks," a UNICEF spokeswoman said. "But still more than 1,000 child recruits remain with the LTTE."

"This number needs to drop until there are no more children in their ranks."

UNICEF had documented cases of 1,301 children below the age of 18 in the ranks of the LTTE and had proof of children as young as 10 being enlisted.

The LTTE announced last week that they had appointed a committee to study the UNICEF list and examine the ages of members who joined their organisation claiming they were over 18.

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Human rights groups, including Amnesty International, have also asked the Tigers to stop raising so-called "baby brigades".

UNICEF in its annual report for 2003 said the Tigers recruited 709 underage fighters during the year to bring the number held by them to 1,301 at the end of December.

The Tigers have not admitted recruiting children, but have said there were youngsters volunteering to carry out LTTE political and administrative work as they were unable to make a living elsewhere in the impoverished region.

NMPD calls upon all parties to resume peace process

The National Movement for Peace and Democracy (NMPD) while celebrating the second anniversary of the ceasefire agreement called on all political parties to resume the peace process with consideration to the LTTE proposals and to quell the endeavours to create a dictatorship under the guise of a Sinhala Buddhist nation by false patriotic forces.

During the proceedings, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe together with Minister of Enterprise development, Industrial Policy and Investment Promotion, G.L.Peiris and Minister of Lands Rajitha Senarathna paid a short visit after attending the UNP convention held at Town Hall during the morning. They were warmly greeted by the audience.

Ven.Mahagalkadawala Punyasara Thera said, "Everyone who has ruled the country since independence has contributed to the racial conflict to gain power for themselves, and it is the same love of power that has forced a needless election on the masses causing them to suffer even more."

The force of the people should not be prostituted and sold to the highest bidder and wrongfully used for political purposes

added the Thera. He also said that no person has power to dissolve parliament when there's a majority in parliament.

Vasudeva Nanayakkara, addressing the hundreds gathered at the Vihara Maha Devi Park called on all political parties to unite for the continuation of the peace process and for it to be protected for the sake of it self and not for any other political agenda. He claimed that all those who were against the peace process were also "traitors of the nation."

Rev.Fr.Anura Perera representing the Inter religion peace foundation said, "the peace process should be expanded to represent people of all religions and political parties and not be limited to a handful of ministers," Unlike in foreign countries Sri Lanka has no force to pressurize the politicians to listen to the voice of the people.

He said that if the SLFP-JVP alliance is sincere in their quest for peace they should send a team representing the alliance to hold talks with the LTTE, as it would then clear the doubts of the people as to what their future would hold.

TUs call for joint action

The Ceylon Mercantile, Industrial and General Workers' Union (CMU) and the Ceylon Bank Employees' Union have invited other trade unions in both private and public sectors for a meeting at the CMU headquarters for consultations on joint action to protest "the prevailing situation under which millions of working people, including hundreds of thousands of workers belonging to trade unions, are undergoing increasingly severe hardships due to the uncontrolled and ever-rising cost of living".

In a circular sent to the TUs, the leaders of the two unions Bala Tampoe and M.R. Shah state that "a small minority of the population is living in luxury - private mansions and residential towers and luxury vehicles".

This situation has developed in the country in the context of globalisation of the capitalist economy and the submission of successive governments to the dictates of international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, the circular states.

The two unions state that the serious damage caused to the country's economy by the disastrous war in the North and East has also had adverse effects on living standards and that these continue despite the ceasefire agreement between the Government and the LTTE. "The political deadlock between the President and the Prime Minister, with regard to the control of Armed Forces, manifests their inability to share State power under the present Constitution.

They are thus unable to negotiate jointly with the LTTE for a constitutional settlement on the administration of the North-East", the circular adds. The unions expressed confidence that whatever government takes office after the April 2 General Election, even international financial institutions would have to pay heed to the voice of the organised working class."

Foreign aid delayed due to political situation

World Bank Country Director, Peter Harold said Sri Lanka has already received close to US\$ 1 billion of the US\$ 4.5 billion pledged at the Tokyo donor conference last year. He says the country still has to receive the balance US\$ 3.5 billion, promised during a period of four years. He however was not sure as to the amount already received this year.

He pointed out that although much emphasis has been laid on the US\$ 4.5 billion aid package, the amount that has already been received by the Sri Lankan government is not mentioned often.

Harold explained that of the US\$ 1 billion that was already

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received by the Sri Lankan government, close to US\$ 300 million came as programme funds while about US\$ 700 million came as project assistance (budgetary support). Therefore, Sri Lanka has been receiving roughly US\$ 60 million a month as project assistance. He also said that with the dissolution of parliament, the country would not be entitled to the money allocated for budgetary assistance.

Speaking of the rate of disbursement, Harold stated that the rate of disbursement for this year so far has been lower than the previous year (2003) as the money for budgetary support has been affected due to the dissolution of parliament.

As for the rest of the donor funds and foreign investments, Harold stated that apart from the ongoing projects, there would be a delay in funds as the country at present is functioning under a caretaker government.

However, President Chandrika Kumaratunga's decision to sack all non-cabinet and deputy ministers has also paved the way to delay further the expected foreign aid, as funds pledged for the rehabilitation of the north-east cannot go ahead as there is no ministry in charge of rehabilitation anymore.

According to Harold, it is not the case of the Tokyo money being lost as it was promised for a period of four years. He also noted that there are more important things to worry about than money. "Money is important, but it is not the most important thing," he said.

Green light to expel two Sri Lankan Tamils

The European Court of Human Rights on 17 February gave the Netherlands the green light to expel two Sri Lankan Tamils,

saying they would not face a real risk of torture if expelled to their homeland.

The court said it "found that no substantial grounds had been established for believing that the applicants, if expelled, would be exposed to a real risk of being subjected to torture or inhuman or degrading treatment."

"In both cases, the court considered that, even if the applicants were apprehended on arrival at the airport in Colombo or subsequently in the course of an identity check, given the current climate in Sri Lanka, it was unlikely that they would run a real risk of being subjected to ill-treatment."

The two Sri Lankans, hailing from a region under the control of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), told the court they arrived in the Netherlands in 1995 after fleeing their homeland in the wake of ill treatment on suspicion of belonging to the rebel Tamil group.

The court said in a statement that it "could not ignore the very real progress that had been made which had led to a substantial relaxation of the previously precarious situation for Tamils arriving or staying in Colombo."

Rise in attacks on Christian places of worship

The police seem to have finally succeeded in identifying a gang of persons involved in most recent attacks on Christian places of worship. Attacks on churches which were intermittent and isolated until recently, have ballooned into an issue of serious national concern, with unidentified gangs attacking and destroying these places of worship, purportedly to protest al-

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leged unethical religious conversions.

Around 30 churches were attacked by gangs in recent weeks despite the arrest of some of the culprits. President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga recently ordered police to take stern action against those responsible for these attacks, but the incidents continue to increase, raising concerns as to whether the attacks are being orchestrated to create ethnic unrest in the South.

Unethical conversions of Buddhists into Christians is touted to be the main issue behind these attacks, although heads of Christian denominations have categorically denied that such conversions take place. Religious zealots have however seized the opportunity to create ill will among different religious faiths by resorting to such attacks, which have been condemned by the Buddhist clergy and the majority of people.

The attack on a community centre at Kebethigollawa on 9 February by a gang that allegedly included two Buddhist monks, was a case in point. The attack took place around 9.15 am, with a group of persons travelling in a Hi-Ace van setting fire to the community centre, believing it to be a church. The fire caused extensive damage to the building and totally destroyed its furniture.

Meanwhile, a Pradeshiya Sabha Member who learnt of the incident had informed the Kebethigollawa police about the group. The gang had fled the area after setting fire to the centre and had been proceeding along the Medawachchiya road. A police party from Kebethigollawa rushed to the Rabbawewa junction along the Medawachchiya road, intercepted the Hi-Ace van and arrested the gang.

On careful examination, the police found a sticker with a false number pasted over the genuine number plate of the van. The van had been traced to a person from Sadagalle, Koshena

in the Bulathsinhala area. Further investigations had revealed that the van belonged to an individual from Bulathsinhala. The owner had stated that his son had taken the van to visit a friend in the outstations.

The two Buddhist priests travelling in the van had been identified to be from Keleniya and Homagama while the rest of the gang were from Heiyantuduwa, Bulathsinhala and Kadawate. Police also found a retired Sri Lankan engineer, now domiciled in Australia, among the gang. According to police, the same engineer had been involved in an earlier attack on a Church in Homagama and had been released on bail.

Before the attack on the Kebethigollawa community centre, a group of persons had visited the World Vision office at Kebethigollawa and after threatening the employees, had removed several documents from the office. World Vision staff have lodged a complaint at Kebethigollawa police.

The Apostolic Church at Padaviya was the first church to be threatened by mobs demanding its closure, on February 10, 2003. However, according to reports, there have been 107 incidents of violence, threats and intimidation from January 1, 2003 to January 12, 2004. The total number of incidents reported for 2003 were 91. After the announcement by the Minister of Buddha Sasana, W.J.M. Lokubandara on August 1, of plans to introduce anti-conversion laws, there had been 80 incidents of intimidation and violence.

Several Christian churches in Anuradhapura, Polgasowita, Embilipitiya and Kaluvenkemi in the Eastern Province, Gampaha, Galle, Kandana, Kadawate, Rathgama, Thanamalvila, Lunugamvehera, Horana, Hikkaduwa, Kesbewa, Kandy, Kegalle, Mt Lavinia, Nugegoda, Kurunegala and Keleniya are reported to have come under attack by unruly mobs from early December 2003.

Police believe that some unseen force is working hard to spread religious discord after the passing away of the Venerable Gangodawila Soma Thero. The government had condemned attacks on churches and instructed the police to take stern action against the culprits.

Buddhists, Hindus present anti-conversion draft bill

A "Buddhist-Hindu Committee" comprising of leading Buddhist and Hindu organisations on 11 February released their draft bill on "freedom of thought, conscience and religion and to prohibit proselytising". They pledged to pursue the enactment of the draft bill into law to take it to its logical conclusion.

The convener of the Committee, General Secretary of the All Ceylon Hindu Congress (ACHC) Murugesu Neelakandan told a news conference held at the All Ceylon Women's Buddhist Congress (ACWBC) headquarters that they would push for anti-unethical conversion legislation when the next government assumes office.

"Proselytising has not only affected Buddhism, but affected Hinduism as well. It has been brought to our notice that Christian fundamentalists have converted hundreds of poor Hindu families in the North and East by unethical means," he said.

"Certain, destructive groups are misleading the public by saying that freedom of expression will be impaired by such a Bill. The freedom of thought, conscience and religion including the freedom to have and adopt a religion of one's choice is an absolute right guaranteed under Article 10 of the Constitution and cannot be subjected to any restrictions under any pro-

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vision of the Constitution.”

Many international covenants including the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) have recognised this as a basic human right.

“ICCPR Article 18(2) states, ‘No one shall be subjected to coercion or undue influence which would impair his freedom to have and adopt a religion of his choice’. Sri Lanka is a signatory to this convention,” he said.

A Committee member and Attorney-at-Law Manoharan de Silva stated that they would be presenting the draft Bill to President Chandrika Kumaratunga, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and Buddha Sasana Minister W. J. M. Lokubandara shortly. “We don’t ask that the bill that is in the drafting stage at the Ministry of Buddha Sasana to be replaced by our draft bill. We only want the contents of our bill be seriously considered when drafting the ministry bill,” he said.

All Ceylon Buddhist Congress President Milina Sumathipala, All Ceylon Women’s Buddhist Congress Secretary Indrani Devendra also participated at the press conference.

Rights Award for Radhika

DAYTON, Ohio - One of the world’s leading voices against violence will receive the University of Dayton 2004 Monsignor Oscar Romero Award for Leadership in Service to Human Rights.

Radhika Coomaraswamy, former United Nations Special Rap-porteur on Violence Against Women, will receive the Romero Award on Feb. 27, in the Kennedy Union Ballroom on the UD campus.

The award presentation, which is free and open to the public, launches the “Violence Against Women” conference. The conference will examine the issue from a variety of international perspectives.

“Radhika Coomaraswamy is the leading expert on this issue,” said Mark Ensalaco, director of international studies and human rights programs at UD. “Violence against women and children is such a pervasive issue that crosses cultures. We don’t burn brides in the United States, but we do batter women.”

Coomaraswamy, in her nine-year term with the United Nations, travelled widely, reporting her findings to the UN Commission on Human Rights. In Brazil, she reported on domestic violence, in South Africa on rape in the community, and in the United States on women in prisons. In Rwanda and East Timor, she investigated violence against women during armed conflict; in Afghanistan, she looked at religious extremism; and in India, Nepal and Bangladesh, she addressed the trafficking of young girls. She also has intervened on behalf of women seeking clarification from governments in cases involving violence against women.

Coomaraswamy directs the International Centre for Ethnic Studies in Colombo and oversees programs on multiculturalism, federalism and constitutional reform.

The Romero Award is named for Monsignor Oscar Romero (1917-1980), who as archbishop of San Salvador, spoke publicly and from the pulpit in defence of the poor of the country and denounced the state-supported death squads. He was assassinated while he was celebrating Mass

Indian Scholarships

The Government of India, through its High Commission in

Colombo has offered five scholarships under the Commonwealth Scholarship/Fellowship Plan and three Scholarship under the Indo-Sri Lanka Cultural Exchange Program to Sri Lankan nationals for studying in Indian universities during the forthcoming session of 2004-2005.

These are part of a series of full paid scholarships extended by the Government of India to Sri Lankan nationals. The High Commission also selects 47 bright young nationals of this country for pursuing various undergraduate courses in different universities under fully paid scholarship programme. The High Commission and Ministry of Tertiary Education are in the final stages of short listing candidates for this scholarship. While all scholarships cover full tuition fee for the entire duration of the course, students are also paid a monthly sustenance allowance of Indian Rupees 2500/- (US \$55/-) p.m. at undergraduate level and 3500/- (US \$78/-) for postgraduate courses. An annual grant for books, stationery at the rate Indian Rupees 3000/- (US \$67/-) is provided to undergraduate students, 4500/= (US \$100/=) to postgraduate scholars and 10,000/= (US \$ 222/=) for M. Phil/ Ph.D students. Scholarships also cover monthly accommodation charges up to Indian rupees 2500/= (US \$55/=) per month, a news release said.

Besides, all ICCR scholars in India are provided full healthcare facilities, first class train fare and an annual grant I Rs. 2000/= for educational tours to various parts of the country, apart from several other auxiliary benefits. Earlier, during disruption of academic session in late 1980’s early 1990’s Government of India had also provided one time 500 additional scholarships for Sri Lankan students apart from existing schemes. Candidates interested in applying for a Commonwealth/Cultural Exchange Scholarships can contact the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Training, 18, Ward Place, Colombo 7. The last date of receipt for list of duly recommended list of candidates from Ministry of Tertiary Education to the High Commission is February 23, 2004.

Mahabodhi will rival Vatican, Mecca

Buddhism’s holiest shrine has been formally dedicated as a world heritage site, with Indian officials saying it would one day rival the Vatican or Mecca.

Officials from India’s tourism ministry and the UN Educational, Social and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which declared the Mahabodhi Temple a world heritage site in June 2002, sponsored the dedication, attended by Buddhist monks from around the world. The Mahabodhi temple is the holiest of the four sacred sites related to Buddha, who was born in Lumbini, Nepal, and is said to have attained enlightenment in this eastern Indian pilgrimage town.

Experts believe the Mahabodhi temple dates from the fifth or sixth century. It is one of the earliest Buddhist shrines built entirely in brick which has survived the onslaught of Muslim Mughal emperors during their 500 years of rule in India. The officials said the ceremony and efforts by the government to spruce up Bodhgaya would bring its popularity on a par with the most revered sites of the Catholics and Muslims. “There is a plan to elevate Bodhgaya as a holy place like the Vatican and Mecca for the millions of Buddhists in over 20 countries,” said Bodhgaya administrator Brajesh Mehrotra. He said the state government of Bihar, where Bodhgaya is located, has invested three billion rupees (65 million dollars) to revamp Mahabodhi tem-

(continued on next page)

A 'Framework for Peace' urged

Extracted from the Executive Summary and Recommendations of the publication titled 'The Sri Lankan Peace Process at Crossroads', authored by Tyrol Ferdinands, Kumar Rupasinghe, Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu, Jayadeva Uyangoda and Norbert Ropers.

To all parties

(1) Develop a comprehensive and common strategic framework of multiple peace negotiations and peace building which: (a) ensures that all parties become co-owners of the peace process (principle of inclusivity); (b) is based on an explicit understanding of organising the processes of negotiations (principle of transparency); (c) utilises various levels and channels of bi- and multilateral problem solving methodologies (principle of multi-track diplomacy); and integrates international human and humanitarian rights standards through a holistic MoU.

(2) Imbue the next phase of peace talks with the concept of 'principled negotiations'. This is comprised of four basic principles: (a) the conflict issues (e.g the Interim Administration) as well as the relationship between the parties (e.g. the trust building between the LTTE and the parties in the South) have to be addressed; (b) the talks should try to iden-

tify the enlightened and common interests of the parties and overcome bargaining from adversarial positions; (c) these discussion should be framed and organised in such a way that mutual gain is achieved, and agreements should be based on jointly accepted principles (e.g. principles of fairness, justice, equality, democracy, good governance and pluralism).

(3) Consider an early Framework of Principles Agreement that outlines the contours of the final agreement between the main stakeholders. A similar agreement should be formulated for an Interim Constitution, which is based on a multi-stakeholder consensus.

(4) Ensure representation of women at all levels of the peace process. Consider the gender-specific needs, interests and role of women, men and children in the peace process. Implement the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, and develop benchmarks for its meaningful implementation in Sri Lanka.

Support and integrate women's peace-building activities on all levels of engagement and ensure that women's concerns are reflected in all programmes for relief, reconstruction and rehabilitation. Help to develop benchmarks for a meaningful implementation of UNSCR

(continued from page 32)

ple and clean up Bodhgaya. UNESCO will also plough in funds to promote the site following the dedication ceremony, which comes after a three-day international Buddhist conclave at New Delhi, to popularize spiritual tourism in India.

Hundreds of candles were lit around the temple and towering gates and decorated arches sprung up to welcome some 400 delegates from 25 countries who arrived here Thursday from New Delhi. Indian tour operators together with the government have come up with a tour package of 360 dollars to visit eight Buddhist tourist circuit cities where Buddha taught and lived, a state tourism official said. "Bodhgaya is already a central international pilgrimage and has monasteries built by Buddhist devotees from 36 countries," he said.

Tour operators were unimpressed. "What we need is good connectivity

because religious tourism attracts the elderly, but travel in Bihar is difficult which makes it very difficult for us to sell Bodhgaya," said Indian Tour Operators' Association President Jyoti Kapoor.

Ven. Tich Quang Ba, a Buddhist scholar who represented Australia and New Zealand at the New Delhi meet, has said that Bodhgaya was one of the deadliest places in lawless Bihar, where hold-ups of religious tourists are common. "Bodhgaya is like a woman in tattered clothes with a painted face. What is important is good roads, nice places to stay, which Bodhgaya lacks, and security, which Bodhgaya never will have unless the government shows some commitment," said operator Ashwin Bharadwaj.

An international airport was built a year ago at Gaya, 25 kilometres (14 miles) from Bodhgaya, but flights from Buddhist destinations of Thailand and Sri Lanka come only once a week.

1325 in Sri Lanka.

(5) Clarify the third-party role of Norway and identify the most suitable combination of facilitation (organising and supporting the communication and interaction between the parties according to their requests) and mediation (structuring the process proactively according to the concept of principled negotiations). Encourage Norway to assist in the coordination of the multiple international efforts for promoting the peace processes.

To the President/PA and the Prime Minister/GoSL/UNF

(6) Utilise the historic opportunity for a paradigm shift in the southern polity and establish an interim power-sharing arrangement between the President/PA and the Prime Minister/UNF-led GoSL, with joint ownership in the peace processes. Negotiate on MoU outlining in detail the principles, norms, rules and procedures for cohabitation as well as sharing the responsibility, the credit and the blame for the course of the peace processes. Develop a 'Framework for Peace in the South', in collaboration with the other parties, civil society and the corporate sector, to establish an overall conceptual as well as institutional framework for the interim arrangement.

Exhibit exemplary and joint leadership with respect to the national mission of bringing an immediate, just and sustainable peace to the country. Leaders of various stakeholder groups should consider possible gestures of conciliation towards acknowledging past wrongs, moving towards a new inclusive nation-building process.

For example, the two main political parties that constitute the 'Sinhala State' could extend a joint statement of apology to the minority communities for past human rights violations, such as the attacks on places of worship and on schools where civilians had taken refuge, and the burning of the Jaffna Library.

Similarly, the LTTE leadership could extend apologies for attacks on civilian villages, places of worship including the Temple of the Tooth.

(7) Initiate a comprehensive programme of reforming and restructuring of the Sri Lankan State based on equal participation of all communities in the country. The conceptual basis of this initiative could be a combination of the Oslo Communiqué between the UNF-government and the LTTE from December 2002 and the PA-proposals for constitutional reform from 1995.

To the LTTE

(8) Accommodate the request for a balanced self-rule and shared-rule without the loss of the internal self-determination principle for the Tamil people. Express a clear commitment to the mutually agreed-upon Oslo Communicaque and negotiate a framework agreement or an Interim Constitution based on the concept of a federal multi-ethnic Sri Lankan state that should give expression to the rightful claims of all minorities in the North East and in the South.

(9) Elaborate further on the proposal for the ISGA to accommodate concerns of the Muslims and the Sinhalese in the North East through a 'Framework for Peace in the North East' and explicit power-sharing mechanisms, while taking into account upcoming proposals from the Muslim community. Support adequate participation of a Muslim delegation in the peace talks.

(10) State explicitly the commitment of the LTTE to establish a representative and pluralist democratic system in the North-East, and elaborate on the mechanisms for guaranteeing human rights and the rule-of-law.

To the Muslim polity

(11) Elaborate a common framework for pursuing Muslim interests in the peace process, and enhance the capacities of Muslim experts to contribute to the discourse and the negotiations on restructuring the State. Identify multiple tracks to promote the interests of the Muslim community through participation in the negotiation process as well as through direct negotiations with the LTTE and the UNF/PA.

To Norway as facilitator

(12) Provide more capacities for facilitation and engagement with other stakeholders within and outside the country. Expand the knowledge base for principled negotiations among all stakeholders. Take the lead function for burden sharing among national and international agencies that might help in disseminating this knowledge.

(13) Make use of 'single-text proce-

dures' when negotiating agreements, i.e. generate drafts of common papers and use them as the main basis for consensus building rather than allow the parties to stick to formulations because they came out of 'their' drafts.

(14) Address the conceptual and human security shortcomings of the CFA, and elaborate on it further together with the parties towards a Consolidated Cease-fire Agreement (CCFA) including a set of Confidence and Security-Building Measures (CSBMs). Explore together with the parties how the leadership of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) could be handed over to another country without endangering the stability of the truce in order to ensure no conflicts of interest between the roles of the facilitator and of the monitor.

To the international community

(15) Facilitate a comprehensive framework for a pro-active and complementary support of the peace process among the co-chairs as well as India and all like-minded countries in favour of an inclusive peace process. Elaborate a clear structure of burden-sharing including the support of frameworks for peace and human rights in the South as well as in the North-East.

(16) Establish an International Support Group of eminent persons who, in their personal capacities, can assist the principal parties. They would undertake public actions and engage in quite lobbying, particularly at critical junctures when internal capacities for peace appear inadequate. In addition, they can provide support in understanding the dispute in the wider framework of the on-going changes in the international arena.

To the donor community

(17) Encourage and support a strategic framework for transition among all stakeholders for a comprehensive reconstruction and development process in the country, particularly the war-affected North-East.

As a first step, assistance should be provided to facilitate a new mechanism for the delivery and implementation of short-term reconstruction and develop-

ment aid to the North-East. Encourage and assist inclusive dialogues on medium - to long-term priorities for institutional and structural reform of the State, as well as on human rights capacity building, while exploring how the donors can support these reforms.

To civil society

(18) Expand the political space that was created by the peace processes, to take the role of critical supporter and multiplier within the overall society. What the country needs now is a highly diversified and broad-based peace movement with links and leverage in all communities.

Strategic alliances should be formed to engage with all political actors and for building up a critical mass of agents of change within the civil society. Insiders representing all stakeholders should form networks of close cooperation with outsiders from trans-national civil society to make the international support of the peace process as multi-partial and pro-active as possible. The citizens of the country have to be prepared for re-constituting Sri Lanka as a multi-national federal State.

To the Diaspora, the International Community and the Sri Lankan State

(19) Involve the Tamil, Sinhalese and Muslim men and women of the diaspora in a meaningful way in the reconstruction and development of the war-affected areas in Sri Lanka. Accept that the majority of the diaspora will not return, but rather will participate in this process on the basis of circulation.

It is unlikely that most members of the diaspora will return to the homeland on a permanent basis; rather, they will circulate between both their host and home country.

To support their involvement, the host countries as well as the Sri Lankan State should reformulate their citizenship, migration and development policies in the direction of dual citizenship; grant legal status to non-resident Sri Lankans; improve consular services; and establish a comprehensive infrastructure for mobilising the skills and investment potential of the diaspora.

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SLFP-JVP MoU

The following is the full text of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) signed on 20 January 2004:

1. Sri Lanka, which is country blessed with plenitude of natural resources, and an ancient and rich cultural heritage is today facing an unprecedented crisis. This crisis, which has gripped the totality of Sri Lanka's society, is manifest in political, economic and cultural spheres.

As a result of the wrong policies followed by the ruling United National Front (UNF) government, the country faces the prospect of losing its territorial integrity and the establishment of a parallel Eelamist state. Conditions for international support for such a separation are being fostered by the UNF. At the same time the foundations of a vibrant national economy are being systematically destroyed and a new economic configuration based on crony capitalism, racketeering, corruption and subservience to international financial institutions is being rapidly established.

Faced with this debacle, which affects all Sri Lankans, irrespective of race, creed or language, the people are seeking a new path of governance.

2. The economic policies of the UNF are determined by lending agencies with scant regard for local priorities and the aspirations of the people. These policies include the sale of strategic national assets such as State Banks, petroleum industry and power, and of economically viable state ventures such as insurance and vital social services, such as transportation (CTB and Railway), to political favorites in a manner particularly lacking in transparency. In the field of agriculture, policies inimical to local farmers are being pursued. Laws relating land sales are being amended to suit foreign investors, a water tax has been proposed in the guise of water management and fertilizer subsidy and other assistance granted by the previous government has been curtailed.

The so-called development policies of the UNF government have been undertaken with scant regard for preserving the natural habitat, and environmental protection. The natural resources of the country are being pillaged with no regard for economic consequences.

The poor are called upon to bear the brunt of these policies. The safety-net against poverty established by the Peoples' Alliance Government has been removed by curtailing social welfare programmes. For example:

- * Cutting Samurdhi benefits
- * Removing fertilizer subsidies
- * Cuts in allocation of school textbooks and uniforms,

- * Rapidly rising cost of living
- * No parallel wage increase
- * Abolishing of public sector recruitment
- * Voluntary retirement schemes
- * Amendments to worker legislation safeguards
- * Lack of incentives for domestic production
- * Cuts in public education and health
- * Rise in unemployment, poverty levels, malnutrition and suicide and alcohol rates
- * Rise in grave crime rate

3. The ethnic question of Sri Lanka too has taken an undesirable turn since the formation of the UNF government. In the name of the aspirations of all our peoples for an honourable and durable peace, the UNF has set out on a path which would lead to a separate Eelamist State.

The MoU signed by the Prime Minister did not have the prior approval of the Head of State-the President, Parliament or even the cabinet and the parliamentary group of the UNF. The terms of the MoU have been flagrantly violated on numerous occasions by the LTTE, but the UNF government has been unable to respond. Consequently, the objectives of the separatist forces have received a boost while the legitimate rights of Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim peoples of the country have not been recognized.

As result of these lapses the separatist LTTE forces have become stronger:

- * The LTTE has laid claim to a naval zone for its Sea Tigers thus reinforcing their claims to a separate navy. Their claims have been entertained by the Norwegian Monitoring Mission.
- * The security forces of Sri Lanka have been under intense pressure to vacate the High Security Zones. They have been rendered ineffective in the Northern and Eastern provinces.
- * LTTE is also continuing to abduct thousands of innocent Tamil children, extort money in the guise of "taxes" and harass Muslims and the Sinhalese to drive them out from the eastern province.

Accordingly, the so-called Peace Process will not usher in a durable peace but threatens the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of the country degrading its dignity.

The LTTE's proposals for an Interim Self-Governing Authority go far beyond the

resolution of the problems of the Tamil people and other minority communities, and create the basis for a separate Eelam state.

4. Today, basic human and democratic rights are being violated in our country. Prior to the establishment of the UNF government, the Peoples Alliance (PA) and the JVP with the active support of the United national party set up several independent commission following the 17th Amendment to the Constitution. Today, they have been made ineffective. Many of the powers and functions of the Independent Police Commission have been re-vested in the Inspector General of Police due to the lack of facilities and staff in the National Police Commission.

Over 60 SLFP activists have been murdered. Over 3000 party members and suffered have suffered loss to person and property. The Prime Minister and the Minister of Internal Security took no action against these violations of our law. UNP representatives, their kith and kin and party supported attack the police with impunity. Law and order has broken down. As a result organized crime including murder; robbery, kidnappings and rape have become the order of the day. The UNF government brought the Police and prisons under a single Ministry, thereby setting the stage for the creation of a Police State.

The former Minister of defense attempted to grab the defense power of the President. Fortunately the Supreme Court held that the proposed 19th Amendment was unconstitutional thereby thwarting the Government's attempts to impose dictatorial rule in the rest of the country. The government failed to take action, while the LTTE set about crushing the democratic and human rights of all communities- Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim in the North and East. Under the "ceasefire" leaders of Tamil organizations opposed to the LTTE were brutally murdered. The Muslims of the eastern province were deprived of their rights and physically attacked.

The UNF government's attempt to set up a one party, police state dictatorship was strengthened by its stranglehold on the media. It unleashed a 'media mafia', which controlled the flow of news and information thereby violating the citizens' right to information.

For all these above mentioned reasons, joint action to prevent the drift towards a one-party, anti-democratic, UNF dictatorship has become an urgent national responsibility and priority.

It is in this backdrop that the President was compelled to take over the defense, Internal Security and Media ministries, as she was constitutionally empowered to do.

5. Under the UNF government the traditional values and culture of the country has been degraded in the guise of the "open economy". A culture of greed and exploi-

tation has been implanted. The principle of community, mutual responsibility and political decency have been replaced by a 'winner takes all philosophy which has no place for the poor, the underprivileged and the handicapped.

6. Our foreign policy, which was based on regional co-operation and mutual respect, has been replaced by one of servitude and the absence of national dignity. Such a change in our policy can even pose a threat to our neighbouring countries. We must therefore return to a balanced approach, which is our valuable legacy from the past.

7. It is clear that in respect of the above mentioned five areas, the UNF government has rapidly brought the country to the brink of disaster.

8. In terms of the analysis set out above, it is imperative to implement an alternative plan of action encompassing the economic, political and cultural spheres in order to save the country from destruction. The time has come for the creation of a broad, patriotic, popular national alliance, which will be the way forward for all the people of our country- be they are Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim Malay and Burghers.

The time is now opportune for such a broad patriotic national alliance, which will present and carry out an agreed common programme of national resurgence. This is therefore a historic moment.

9. We therefore, have dedicated ourselves to the task of establishing a government, which will seek to implement the following. "Pancha Maha Piliweth" or the Five Noble Objectives of Governance:

A) The Economy

* To promote an economy, which will give pride of place to local production in both agricultural and industrial sectors, encourage local farmers, entrepreneurs and industrialists and rejuvenate local companies and industries.

* To lay emphasis on increasing productivity in both public and private sectors, which will be afforded significant roles in economic development instead of indiscriminately selling off national assets in a corrupt manner

* To emphasize the significant role in development of efficient and modern management, including all necessary measures to promote transparency and good governance.

* To revive and adopt global advances in modern technology, maximize foreign capital investment on the basis of mutual benefit with a view opening our country to global economic progress.

* To solve the pressing economic problems of the masses by granting a variety of relief measures.

B) Ethnic harmony

* To launch a multi-faceted programme which will ensure that all people who

have made Sri Lanka their home viz. Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslims and others should not suffer any discrimination on grounds of race, religion, language or culture and totally to remove all manifestations of differential treatment. Further on the basis of such equality, to guarantee fundamental, human and democratic rights to all the above-mentioned groups.

* To ensure that attempts at separatism based on language and religion combated and defeated and the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of the country be safeguarded, through ensuring the unity of all ethnic groups and guaranteeing to every one of them equal benefits of economic development.

* While rejecting separatism and political violence, both parties emphasize that a negotiated settlement to the ethnic question should be found through a correct dialogue with the LTTE and other relevant groups and communities so that political solutions which will safeguard the political equality and democratic rights of the Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslim and other communities will be arrived at.

The SLFP and JVP agree that this problem must be settled on the basis of ensuring the equality of all ethnic groups and guaranteeing of all human and democratic rights, which will signify such equality, as well as by strengthening respective democracy.

The SLFP holds the view that these objectives could be achieved by the devolution of power to provinces within a united state. The JVP holds the view that these objectives could be achieved by administrative decentralization to the local authority level, in order to ensure the ethnic identity and safeguard the cultural heritage of all groups within a unitary state. However both parties agree that divergence of views regarding final settlement should not be an obstacle to their journey together to overcome the serious crisis, which is faced by Sri Lanka.

Both parties agree to enter into a process of political dialogue with the LTTE and all other relevant groups and communities on the correct basis, including granting their rights and eliminating inequality and mistrust among them and consolidating democracy. Both parties further agree to go forward to a final solution and abide by the results of the negotiation process and the wish of the majority of the people.

C) Strengthening Democracy

In order to strengthen democracy we will formulate a New Constitution:

* Executive Presidency will be abolished and the Sovereignty of Parliament will be further strengthened.

* This will include necessary safeguards to ensure the rights of all communities.

* A new electoral system will be introduced, which will reflect wishes of the

people.

* The two parties agree that in order to further strengthen the sovereignty of the people and halt the present march towards authoritarianism and the breakdown of law and order the Independent Commissions should be strengthened. Reform measures affecting the Police, the judiciary and the police services would be undertaken with a view to depoliticizing such institution.

D) Cultural Policy

While safeguarding the national identity and the cultural heritage of all sections of the Sri Lankan people, the two parties agree that useful influences of cultures from all over the world would be made use of in the free and vigorous growth of indigenous cultures. It was agreed that every attempt should be made to halt the rapid erosion of social values and direct society towards cultural rejuvenation based on traditional values, to rebuild a desirable political culture in our society.

E) Foreign Policy

The two parties agree that our foreign policy should be based on safeguarding our sovereignty and independence while maintaining friendship and goodwill with all State and international organizations. Our foreign policy will not be aligned or subservient to any camp. In particular, we should ensure that our foreign policy should not endanger the sovereignty and independence of our neighboring states but should rather preserve and expand our existing goodwill with these neighbouring countries in the spheres of political, economic and cultural relations.

We believe that the implementation of the "Pancha Maha Piliweth" set out above will help Sri Lanka to emerge from the present crisis and be the basis of a National Regeneration. We believe that a people based development can be evolved on the basis of public accountability, transparency and good governance. It is our belief that the United National Front government, which has created a crisis among all the people who live in Sri Lanka, should be defeated at the earliest possible time.

We also believe that by dedicating ourselves to the achievement of the five goals enumerated above a new administration based on the people's participation for national reconstruction should be established.

Based on the above mentioned principles we invite all patriotic progressive people belonging to all communities to united to bring such a government into fruition.

We solemnly pledge that we will safeguard this Agreement based on the "Pancha Maha Piliweth" and to commit ourselves to make such a programme a reality for the benefit of our Nation. We now pledge and proclaim our firm resolves to build such a future for our motherland and seek the active support of the each and every patriotic Sri Lankan citizen to achieve that end. □

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About People and Events

IN MEMORIAM

Seventh Death Anniversary



Mohanadas. K. Samuel
(18.1.35 - 4.2.97)

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Sadly missed and lovingly remembered by wife Utaiwan; children Monti, Manee and Mike; son-in-law Allan; grandsons Nicolas and Colin; mother Rasamanie; sister Chandra; brothers Indran and Peter and their families.

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Sixth Death Anniversary



In loving memory of **Mrs Pakiaratnam Kandiah** on the sixth anniversary of her passing away on 3rd February 1998. Fondly remembered and sadly missed by her only sister Mrs Parimalaratnam Thirunavukarasu of Yogarswami's Abode, Colombuthurai, Jaffna; children Sivayogaratnam, Sivayoganathan, Sivayogeswary, Sivayogaiswaran and Sivayogan; sons-in-law Varatharajah and Sivathasan; daughters-in-law Umasakthy, Sivayogi and Amirthavalli; several grandchildren and great grandchildren.

- 3 New Leasow, Walmley, Sutton Coldfield,
Birmingham B76 1YL.

Second Year Remembrance



In ever loving and precious memory of **Mr. Supplah Kanagalingam** on the second anniversary of his passing away on 27th February 2002.

Dearly missed and remembered with love and affection by his beloved wife Pavalam; loving children Jayanthi Lingabala, Skanthabalan, Shanmugabalan, Kuhabalan, Suganthi and Amirithi; sons-in-law Balendra, Dr. Sivanesan and Yogeswaran; daughters-in-law Vasuki, Ilamathi, Prabha and Vasanthakumari; grandchildren Karthika, Kavitha, Archana, Vibushana, Myuresh, Kumaresh, Sandra, Robert, Josephine, Kishanie, Nirushan, Shiventa, Vimalan, Keerthana, Shankari and Gajan; great grandchildren Kumaran and Pranavan.

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**Fourth Year Remembrance
Mr. Canagaratnam Balendra**



In loving memory of Mr. Canagaratnam Balendra on the fourth anniversary of his passing away on 18th February 2000.

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by his beloved wife Parameswari; loving daughters Balini, Anushia and Damayanthi; son-in-law Chelvayogan, Balendran and Sivamohan; grandchildren Gomathie, Meena, Athavan and Anjali

— 4732 Scenic View Road, Lexington,
Kentucky 40514, USA.

**Fifth Death Anniversary
10. 02.2004**



Mrs Regina Rajanayagam

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by her beloved husband Rajanayagam; brothers Ratnam, Jesudasan, Anton James and Prince; sister Cecilia Lawrence; brothers-in-law Dr. Arasaratnam and Nadarajah; sisters-in-law Mrs Anula Arasaratnam, Mrs Parames Selvaratnam and Mrs Mahes Sivayoganathan; niece Shamini and nephew Anton.

— 13 Arbuthnot Lane, Bexley,
Kent DA5 1EH.

First Year Remembrance



In loving memory of Mr. Appapillai Sockalingam, former Attorney-at-law, Jaffna on the first anniversary of his passing away on 23rd February 2003.

*We owe so much to you Appa,
In our hearts you will always be.*

Fondly remembered and sadly missed by your sorrowing wife Gnaneswary; loving daughters Dr. Inthuvathany (UK) and Rathyvathany (Canada); sons-in-law Dr. Uthayakumar (UK) and Dr. Kirubaharan (Canada); grandchildren Arani, Aarthy, Aathman and Aathmika; brothers Thigaparalingam (Canada) and Vasuthevalingam (Jaffna).

— The Beeches, Garth Road, Letchwirth,
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Tel: 01462 681575.

Anniversary Remembrance



In loving memory of Mr. Chelliah Sivasampu on the twelfth anniversary of his passing away on 9th March 1992..

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by his two sons.

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In ever loving memory of

Thanabalasingham Pararajasingham

Sivagamasoundaram Pararajasingham



Our dearest Aiyah and Amma who departed this world two years and six years ago respectively. We are grateful to God Almighty for blessing us through the love and affection for so long.

Life goes on, but you will always be missed.

Your ever loving children, son-in-law, daughter-in-law, nephews, nieces, grandchildren and great grandchildren.

-285 Malden Road, New Malden, KT3 6AH.

FORTHCOMINGS EVENTS

Please note - Apr 1 11 a.m.
Colombuthurai Yoga Swa-migal
Abhisekham and Guru Poojah
followed by Prasatham at Sree
Ganapathy Temple, 123 Effra
Road, London SW19.

All welcome.

Mar 2 Sukkla Eekathasi
4 Pirathosam; Feast of St. Casimir
5 Mashi Chathurthasi
6 Fullmoon
7 Mashi Maham
8 Feast of St. John of God
9 Sankadakara Sathurthi; Feast of
St. Francis
16 Krishna Eekathasi
17 Feast of St. Patrick
18 Pirathosam; Feast of St. Cyril
19 Feast of St. Joseph
20 Amavasai
23 Feast of St. Turibius
24 Sathurthi
25 Karthigai; Feast of the Annun-
ciation of Lord Jesus Christ
26 Shasti
30 Sri Rama Navami

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Mar 12 7.30 p.m. Bhinna Abi-nna
(Separate yet one) by Gaurav
Mazumdar (Sitar) and Lol Coxhill.
Balachandar (Mridangam)

Mar 13 2.45 to 4 p.m. Spirituality
Discourse - "Our True Identity" by
Dr. Vijai. S. Shankar. All Welcome

Mar 20 3 to 4 p.m. Lecture Dem-
onstration on "Spiritual Healing" by
Dr. Sudhir Seth. All Welcome

Mar 21 6 p.m. Bharatanatyam by
Kumaran Bala

Mar 28 6 p.m. Veda Mahima. Con-
cert by Students of Pandit Vishwa
Prakash

Mar 30 7 p.m. Rama Navami cel-
ebrations. All Welcome.

WEDDING BELLS

We congratulate
the following couple
on their recent wedding.

Prabakaran, son of Mr. &
Mrs Kunaratnam of Temple
Road, Chankanai, Sri Lanka
and **Shasikala**, daughter of
Mr. & Mrs. Annalingam of
Palaly Road, Kondavil East,
Kondavil, Sri Lanka on 7th
February 2004 at the London
Sivan Temple Wedding Hall,
Lewisham, London SE13 5ES.

British Hindu Child to appear in Channel Five Documentary

Rooftop Productions, an in-
dependent film producing com-
pany making popular pro-
grammes about the non-Euro-
pean world for mainstream tel-
evision audiences are produc-
ing a 13 part television series
for Channel Five TV. The first
was broadcast between Octo-
ber and December 2002. Each
programme in the series will
look at the difference in culture,
society and religion between
Britain and another country
through the eyes of a 2nd and
3rd generation British child,
whose parents/ grand parents
came from that country. The
series is aimed at children ages
7 - 12 years, although many
older children and adults watch
it.

Rooftop Productions are
now looking for a Hindu child
with roots in Bali, Sri Lanka or
Africa. The selected child and
one parent will be taken to that
country for one week in the
Easter Holiday this year.

During this time on loca-
tion, arrangements will be
made for the child to stay in a
village with a local family (non-
relatives) for 2-3 nights with
children of the same age, go to

the local school, do his/her
share of household chores
alongside the family's children
and take part in community ac-
tivities.

The experiences on loca-
tion will allow the child and the
television audience to see what
their life would have been like
if they had not grown up in the
UK. The structure of the pro-
gramme would be child-
focussed and both the British
and local children in each pro-
gramme would be encouraged
to speak for themselves about
their daily lives, hopes and
dreams. This would allow the
UK television audience to get
a real and lasting insight into
what it would be like to live in
the non-European world.

For more information about
Rooftop Productions, please
visit the website: [www.rooftop-
productions.co.uk](http://www.rooftop-productions.co.uk).

The Rooted website: [www.globo-
gang.org.uk/rooted](http://www.globo-
gang.org.uk/rooted)
gives more information on the
first set of programmes.

If you or someone you
know may be suitable for this
programme, do not hesitate
to contact Sophie on 020
7523 2381.

Dances of India

by Richards Karunairajan

- A Review -

Richards Karunairajan's *Dances of India in English* is a timely and welcome publication. Focussed principally on the needs of the South Asian Diaspora in their new homelands in North America, Europe and Australia and especially the first generation children caught up in dual cultural lifestyles, Karunairajan has given an excellent insight into our dance traditions.

In his easily readable writing style, he has simplified complicated terminologies of the classical and folk dance traditions of India and examined the various myths in which they are ingrained with meaningful perceptions and also drawing the readers' attention to various natural events the world has known for eons of time but enveloped in accretions of mythology.

He deals with Bharata Natyam in greater detail and the reasons for it becomes evident to every Indian and Sri Lankan with great pride for it is a tradition that goes back to the roots of our faith in a Creator. This was, as he emphasized, long, long before the Hindus called themselves Hindus, and likewise



others called themselves whatever. All divisions based on faith are occurrences of much later times.

As the president of the Tamil Isai Kalaamanram of Ontario, Thampiah Siripathy pointed out in his introduction to the author and the book, among the

various significances of *Dances of India* is that it was written by a Christian who has seen numerous parallels in the Bible and the Vedas of old thereby underscoring the unity of faith in one Supreme Eternal Being and Karunairajan's theme that every human being is a child of One God.

Beginning with an excellent introduction of *Natya Sastra*, Karunairajan proceeds to a study on the Deity of the Dance and the various concepts with which humankind perceived and recognized God in His many roles and finally dwells on the dance traditions of Bharata Natyam. After brief studies on other classical dances such as Kathakali, Kuchupidi, Mohini Attam, Kathak, Odissi and Manipuri, he gives a good introduction to an array of folk dances throughout the Indian sub-continent.

Finally, as Part Two in his study, he deals with the Devadasi controversy as no other writer has dealt so compassionately on this subject and eventually leads the reader to the resurgence of the dance tradition that nearly became extinct with an appropriate chapter on Kalakshetra.

Dances of India is a study presented in an easy style typical of Karunairajan's writing skill and his commitment to the music and dance traditions of the people of India and Sri Lanka.

Kamini Kaushal, Madurai, India.

Copies of the book are available from Rajah Bookshop, located at the Bhavan Centre, (Institute of Indian Culture), 4a Castletown Road, West Kensington, London W14 9HE; E-mail: rajahbookshop@hotmail.com; Tel: 020 7385 0565; Fax: 020 7385 4185.

Initial launch will be at The Logan Hall, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1 at the MADRAS & ASIA Bharatha Natya Dance Drama - Shakthi Prabhaavam on 6th March 2004 at 7 p.m. in aid of Jaffna Teaching Hospital and sponsored by MIOT (Medical Institute of Tamils).

Normal Price: £ 5. Launch Price £ 3

Australian Newsletter

It has been a rather unusual weather at this time of the year here. Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania witnessed unusually significant rainfalls and it is widely believed to be an atypical summer in almost a century.

Incumbent Premier Peter Bettie's Labour Party triumphed in Queensland state elections in spite of somewhat criticised imprisonment episode of erstwhile popular leader of One Nation Pauline Hanson.

Annual Tamil writers' festivals were held in Canberra in January and hitherto twice in Melbourne and once in Sydney through the persistent efforts of Mr.L. Murugapoopathy. The festival includes thought provoking sessions groping socio-cultural issues and cultural extravaganzas. A much-admired teacher R Ambikaibalan, known as Ambi Master was honoured for his literary contributions on the occasion of his silver jubilee at the festival this year.

Uduvai S Thillai Nadarajah, a well known literary personality toured Australia recently. He is one of the Tamil senior government officials in Colombo, currently serving as Additional Secretary in the Ministry of Education and cherished for rendering yeoman service during the massive displacement in the history of Tamils during his stint as GA for Killinochi. In Australia, he addressed Tamil literary and social gatherings in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne and

graced the writers' festival in Canberra.

It was a historical occasion when rail link from southern city of Adelaide to the northern city of Darwin was established in January. It is the longest rail route of about 2,979 kilometres in continental Australia. Two locomotives moving about forty-three carriages stretching to about one kilometre and transporting about two thousand odd tonnes operate on this route.

Even at best of times Australian quarantine is stringent, yet it is being stiffened as deadly bird flu is spreading across its neighbours in Asia. This disease is passed on to humans by direct contact with sick birds or their droppings, but the possibility of human-to-human transmission is doing the rounds now. If that happens, it could kill millions across the globe and more so if it combines with a human influenza virus to create a new virus transmissible among humans.

Melbourne and Sydney witnessed grand Tamil sporting festivals during the Australia day weekend. No doubt, it turned up as a great family day with a wide range of sporting activities including certain Tamil ethno games and enjoyed by one and all. Thaipooam, a grand day in the calendar of the Hindu Tamil Diaspora was observed with grandeur ceremonies with Kavadi in Sydney, Melbourne, Perth, Adelaide, Brisbane and Darwin.

S. Sitsabesan, Melbourne

Help Needed from Willing Volunteers

I am a Research Student at the University of Leeds studying 'The Culture and the Identity of Srilankan Tamils'. I am looking for Tamil Srilankans in Leeds and the surrounding areas eg Bradford, Huddersfield etc to spare me only one or two hours of their time to offer personal thoughts and feelings on living in Britain, culture and identity. Any age group, male and female needed. Any opinions or views will be entirely confidential.

Please contact

Shanthini Sathiakumar,

Tel: 07971648446

Email:

spl3src@leeds.ac.uk

Croydon Academy of Eastern Arts celebrates its Twenty Years of Service

Croydon Academy of Eastern Arts formerly known as South London Tamil School (SLTS) was established in Croydon in 1984 to provide facilities for the learning of Tamil Language, Eastern Arts and Cultural Subjects. The academy is a voluntary project managed by the parents and teachers, operating from the Ashburton Centre, Shirley Road, Croydon, offering its services on Friday evenings (6.00 to 10.00 pm) and all day Saturday (9 am to 5.30 pm).

Tamil Language teaching is provided to the children from the beginners up to the Ordinary and Advanced GCSE standard. Over the years, many students of the school have achieved top grade passes in both Ordinary and Advanced level public examinations.

The Academy provides facilities for the teaching of Vocal Music, Bharatha Natyam, Veena, Violin, Miruthangam, Keyboard, Flute etc. It had been at the forefront of imparting this knowledge and its students have had their Arangetrams.

The Academy also has Cricket, Football and Netball Clubs for the children, Badminton Club for parents and hosts an Annual Sports Day with Inter House activities during summer. Pre-

paratory classes for 11 plus entrance examinations and GCSE are also conducted on Saturdays.

The celebrations would be a three day event in February/ March 2004 as follows.

Day 1 on Sunday, 29th February 2004. Cultural Evening from 5.30 – 9.30 pm. at Archbishop Lanfranc School Hall, Mitcham Road, Croydon, Surrey. The programme includes Vocal Music, Veena, Violin, Mirudangam and Bharatha Natya Dances. The Chief Guest is Geraint Davies, M.P. for Croydon Central.

Day 2 on Saturday, 6th March 2004. Exhibition, Workshop and Foodfair from 10 am – 6 pm at Ashburton School Hall, Shirley Road, Croydon, Surrey.

All welcome.

Day 3 on Saturday, 13th March 2004. Spectacular Cultural Evening, 6 – 10 pm at Ashcroft Theatre, Fairfield Halls, Croydon, Surrey.

There would be a special line up of programmes including Vocal Music, Orchestral Music, Bharatha Natyam, Tamil Drama and Dance Drama. The Chief Guest is the Mayor of Croydon.

The Governing Committee of the Academy extends its invitation to all the

parents, their friends, the local community, helpers and well wishers to join them in celebrating this landmark event

For further details and tickets please telephone 020 8251 8457, 020 8660 7405 or 020 8654 5792.

Farmland Heritage

When January dawns in yonder

homeland

Our spirits leap and liven hopes anew;

For soon it will be harvest time

And pongal feast and family reunions.

In the land of my people,

For eons and generations of time

Farmers gathered their oxen teams

Sickles, sacks and palmyrah mats

Neighbours lent mutual succour

And fields yielded their grains of gold.

For farmers of old their abode was

parish;

Were leaders, providers, judges and

friends.

Their families went beyond their homes,

To surrounds and villagers far and near.

Since trades and skills were their fortes

Shared to serve common aims and

ethos

Their communal life had corporate

goals

That sustained values chaste and

virtuo

Victor Karunairajan



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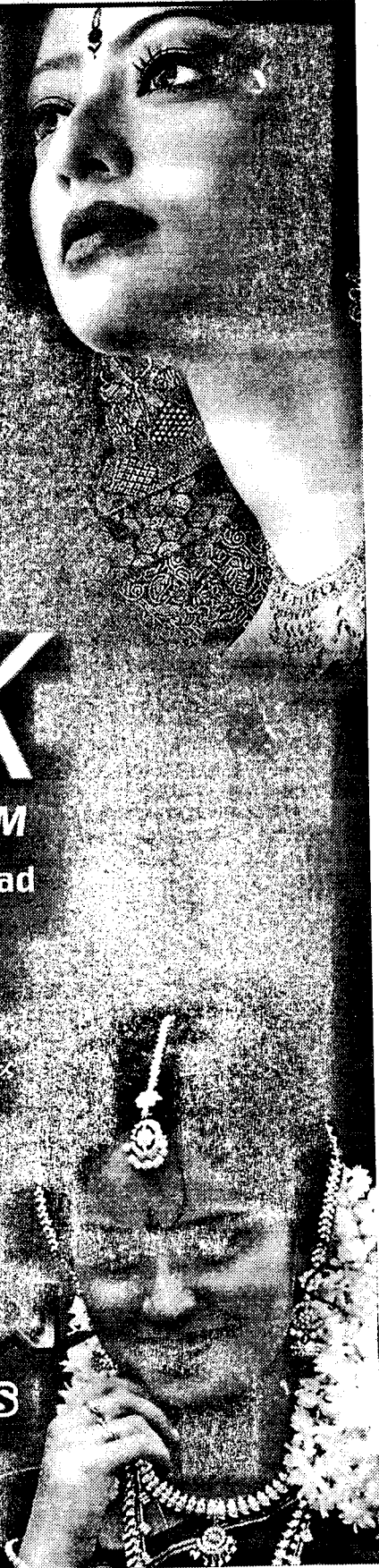
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