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TONIGHT

Nathalie Handal

**water will reach
the rim of the glass but will not
allow itself to leave the glass**

**violence will erupt and horrors
will tie themselves to
every bare tree**

**tonight we will hear speeches
that tell us to open our legs
to scandal like whores**

**tonight we will see
tattooed waistlines and kalashnikovs
in the back trunks of cars**

**paralyzed memories and
revolutions behind
every house door**

**we will see red landscapes,
stones of light, light feathers swaying
in the nightscape**

**and wrinkles will multiply
on our faces tonight as every
dead raises from its grave**

**tonight exiles, immigrants, refugees
will be caught in songbirds,
cracked asphalt will recite old memories**

**tonight we will listen to the cracks of narratives
the screams of those strangled
by the night at night**

**we will listen to the longing
of purple evenings
under god's robe**

**tonight love will be difficult
and we will forget how to wipe the sweat
from my neck, breasts, words**

From the Editor's Desk

The 15th SAARC Summit cost at least three billion to the country, but its benefit to this country is highly questionable. It is true that by holding the conference here the Sri Lanka will hold the chair of SAARC for the next year and there will be benefits to some who will be appointed to posts with impressive sounding names. But the question is whether SAARC has achieved anything for the region or its people. The experience of the past 23 years is that SAARC conferences have been mere talk-shops with nothing to offer to the people. That is likely to be the case for the foreseeable future.

For an organisation like SAARC to be a success, the partnership has to be equal, irrespective of the sizes of the countries involved. With India seeking to play “big brother” and using the various SAARC meetings to push its agenda of regional hegemony, cooperation will be reduced to a series of one-sided bilateral relations.

Whatever the prospects are for SAARC, recent records of the governments of member states show the priority that democracy enjoys in the member states. The newest member, Afghanistan, is headed by a US puppet regime at war with its own people. The premier of Nepal should not have been here, and it was manipulation by a regional power that delayed the formation of a government in Nepal based on the outcome of the election to its Constitutional Assembly. The caretaker civilian government of Bangladesh is controlled by the armed forces and has been actively persecuting the main political parties and their leaders. The elected government Pakistan is unable to fulfil the wishes of its people who rejected the dictator Musharraf at the polls and is under pressure from the US to let him continue as President. The US also bullies it into doing the dirty work of fighting the Taliban and its sympathisers. Bhutan has a government elected through a stage-managed election manipulated by its king who still wields considerable power. The Maldives is still far from multi-party democracy, and charges of persecution of political opposition have been there for long. The biggest bourgeois democracy of the planet disgraced itself only days before the summit by the way its government survived a confidence vote by reportedly buying MPs from opposing political parties, and its

increasingly unpopular government is keen to sell out the country to the US before its term expires in a few months.

The host country has distinguished itself with its record of breach of human rights and freedom of the media. And there is rampant corruption, a field in which there will of course be powerful challengers for the top spot from among fellow members. As for merchandising legislators, Sri Lanka can give lessons for the rest of South Asia as well as a host of corrupt 'democracies'.

What the rulers of the eight SAARC countries have in common is willing submission to imperialist globalisation, the very cause of growing economic backwardness and poverty in each of the countries. As a recent statement of the Politburo of the New Democratic Party points out, the SAARC leaders who have declared aloud their opposition to terrorism are unwilling to examine the causes for what they call terrorism, but show an unprecedented interest in criminalising mass resistance to corrupt dictatorial regimes by calling it terrorism.

The summit conference has been conducted against a background of a rise in the number of cruel mass murders with civilians as target of attack, on the pretext of fighting terrorism as well as in the name of retaliation. Attacks on the media are threatening democracy and public protests are being dealt with in brutal fashion. Where strikes cannot be put down with help of the law, threats have become the norm.

Demolition of squatters' dwellings in the heart of the city of Colombo with no regard for their right to proper shelter and amenities is an illustration of the callous contempt in which people in power behold the poor. It is significant that the demolition took place a barely a fortnight before the Summit. The dwellings were described as a security threat to the Summit by senior officials of the Urban Development Authority that undertook the demolition.

These developments are ominous and mean that not only any section of the population that threatens the existence in power of the ruling elite, like critical media personnel, strikers and protesters, but also passive sections of the population may be sacrificed to serve the interests of a few. The days to come could be increasingly harsh, and the SAARC declaration against terrorism is symbolic of it.

Secession as Imperialist Tool

Imayavaramban

Imperialism and the National Question

Imperialism knows no principle except what it sees as its inalienable right to plunder the planet and its people. It will use anything from human and democratic rights to the right to self-determination to undermine any state that crosses its path; equally it will violate each of these rights to defend and expand its interests.

The principle of self-determination is not a product of bourgeois democracy but of the revolutionary ideology of the working class. Lenin proposed it to unite nationalities divided by imperial Russian oppression. He boldly summed up the right to self-determination as the inalienable right of a nation to secede. Thus self-determination came to mean equality among nations coexisting within the framework of a state out of their own accord and no form of coercion.

The notion of self-determination put forward by Woodrow Wilson 1918 targeted certain European powers, and had behind a liberal guise the expansionist interests of US imperialism that emerged as a major economic power in the wake of World War I. US support for the independence of various British colonies was considerably motivated by the desire for access to markets that were held captive by the colonial rulers.

The dubious nature of the stand of the US on the colonial question and self-determination was clear from its conduct in relation to South and Central America and the Caribbean since the late 19th century. Cuba was subject to a series of interventions that brought it under effective American control as was the case with the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Nicaragua. US annexation of Alaska and Hawaii in the latter half of the 20th Century was no more than the colonial style expansion akin to the annexation of parts of Mexico early that century. Island territories of

American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands are still under the US, which shamelessly holds on to Guantanamo, a part of Cuba, housing its naval base and its notorious military prison. The Philippines was a US colony since 1898 and its nominal independence followed Japanese occupation during World War II. The US now has military bases in many countries around the world and, significantly, its army of occupation is still stationed in South Korea and Japan, over half a century since fighting ceased in either country.

Colonialism disapproved secession except when the seceded territory could be annexed by it, as was intended in Tibet in early 20th Century, or if it helped to delay independence from colonial rule, as in the case in India. The colonial rulers were not interested in quarrels based on race, religion, nationality or any form of ethnic identity among their subjects unless it served their interests. Secession was not always part of the 'divide and rule' strategy.

In the colonial era self-determination mostly concerned liberation of a weak or small country from a colonial master or an imperialist power. With such issues resolved by the liberation of colonies and semi-colonies, foreign control took the form of neo-colonialism, where one or several imperialist countries dominated the economy of a former colony by means including terms of trade, foreign credit and development aid. Politics of identity came to the fore so that nationality, region, language and religion became fault-lines along which the people could be divided. That suited the local ruling elite and exploiting classes, since such differences served to divide the oppressed classes, except when they developed into a major conflict that posed a threat to the rulers.

The nature of the contradiction in the national question in the post-colonial era differs qualitatively from that in the colonial era; and self-determination needs to be seen in a wider perspective than at the dawn of the century when the question mainly concerned two nations, an oppressor and the oppressed. The situation where nationalities and national minorities comprising various ethnic groups united against a common enemy changed with the removal of a visible oppressor such as a colonial master or an aggressor like German or Japanese fascism.

Contradictions between nationalities, ethnic groups and communities developed into powerful divisive forces as the new elite classes that took nominal control over the state of the former colony failed to fulfil the expectations of the masses who supported them in the independence struggle. The ruling classes exploited the contradictions among

nationalities, religious communities and regions to divert attention from important issues concerning the economy and living conditions. Imperialism too benefited from it.

Imperialism and Secession

Let us now examine the stand of imperialism on the right of a people to self-determination. Secession is no end in itself either to the imperialists or to Marxist Leninists. But they differ fundamentally in the way they see the right of a people to nationhood, self-determination and secession.

Eritrea, forced to federate with Ethiopia in 1952 with US approval and made a province of Ethiopia in 1962, struggled for secession. The US sided with Ethiopia to crush the struggle until 1974, when a military coup overthrew 'Emperor' Haile Selassie of Ethiopia and set up a pro-Soviet government. Then the US supported the Eritrean struggle, and the Soviet Union in its rivalry with US for global domination supported Ethiopia. When the pro-Soviet regime fell in 1991, they switched sides, but nothing could stop Eritrean independence in 1992.

Even more cynical was the imperialist support for secession of the mineral rich Katanga Province of Congo in 1960 to weaken the government of newly independent Congo. Following the coup and the assassination of Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba in 1961, which brought the Congo under imperialist control, Katanga and its leader Tshombe were abandoned.

Imperialism forced the division of Vietnam and Korea; and the US defended the division of the former until its defeat by the people of South Vietnam in 1975 but still keeps Korea divided. The Chinese island of Taiwan was invaded by the fleeing reactionary Guo Min Dang (KMT) army following communist victory on the mainland in 1949, and the KMT regime in Taiwan was treated as the lawful government of China until 1972 when the US was forced to recognise the People's Republic of China. The US then changed its strategy and promoted Taiwanese secessionism in its bid to divide and weaken China. Tibet joined the secessionist agenda in the late 1950s and the CIA encouraged its feudal landlords to rebel. The uprising of 1959 was defeated and its leaders and their ally the Dalai Lama fled, and were sheltered in India under pressure from the US. Today the US is the main force behind the clamour for Tibetan 'independence'.

The Soviet Union and China recognised very early the importance of the correct handling of their complex national questions, and dealt with their respective national questions more effectively than any capitalist state. US imperialism found in militant Islam a way to undermine the two states. It found Islam to be more effective than tribalism or regionalism to mobilise resistance to the pro-Soviet government in Afghanistan. Thus the Taliban was nurtured by the US, specifically the CIA. What became of it later is another matter. Al Qaeda was another creation of the US, with support from Saudi Arabia, to use Islam in its anti-communist mission. US imperialism promoted secession in the Muslim majority states of the Soviet Union and in the Sinkiang Uighur Autonomous Province of China, and continues to stir trouble in Chechen Republic of Russia.

Since the fall of socialist regimes in Europe in 1989-90, imperialism acted fast to dismantle Yugoslavia, with no regard for the wellbeing of its nationalities. That was a joint imperialist project of the US and its European partners. Slovenia's relative prosperity tempted it to secede first. European powers also encouraged Croatia to secede and ethnic cleansing followed, with Serbs expelled en masse by pro-Western Croat forces and much bloodshed. Secession of Bosnia was even bloodier. The imperialists are now distorting history to blame Serbian nationalism for all ills, but they are answerable for most of the crimes. Little is said about the active role of the West to recruit Islamic Mujahideen fighters, and of the dubious role of the UN and NATO forces in Bosnia. The secession of Kosovo is a case of calculated aggravation of a national problem to punish Serbia for its defiance. But the West has over played its hand and the secession has revived calls by the Serb Republic of Bosnia to secede from Bosnia and move closer to Serbia.

On the contrary, in Georgia, not far from Yugoslavia, imperialism is protective about its client state. Georgian secessionists in Abkhazia and South Ossetia have a longer claim to secession than Kosovo and have de facto control of their territory for over a decade. But Russia is under pressure to deny support to them or to the secessionists of the Adzharia Autonomous Province who have grown strong in recent years.

Imperialism has used ethnic groups and nationalities to weaken liberation movements as it did in Vietnam and Laos. It tried to weaken Nicaragua's Sandinista government in that fashion, but failed owing to the correct handling of the national question by the Sandinistas.

Secession as an imperialist tool has now transcended ethnic identity. In Bolivia, in an effort to counter moves by the state to control its

natural resources, the US is encouraging attempts by the relatively wealthy Santa Cruz Province to secede. Similar efforts are being encouraged in Venezuela in the fuel-rich state of Zulia. Also in Somalia, where the US proxy, Ethiopia is losing control following its overthrow of the government of the Union of Islamic Courts that restored order to the country, there are efforts to carve out the state of Somaliland. The legitimate struggle for self-determination by the Kurds divided between Iraq, Iran and Turkey could be cynically manipulated to control Iraq and destabilise Iran. Turkey will, however, be allowed to continue its oppression of the Kurds while attempt will be made to delude Kurdish nationalists into thinking of the US as an ally.

Thus the imperialist rules are clear and simple: for a state to safeguard its territorial integrity it should submit to the demands of imperialism; and if it seeks to defend its resources against imperialism it risks destabilisation of the state. Secession has become a weapon in the imperialist armoury to blackmail and bully countries of the Third World, without imperialism risking direct intervention.

Marxist Leninists and Secession

The fact that imperialism uses secession as a tool does not mean that Marxist Leninists and anti-imperialists should oppose the right to secession. On the contrary they should uphold the principle even more firmly. To Marxist Leninists the right to session is an integral part of the right to self determination and not a licence to secede at will. In fact, it is a proven way to prevent secession and conflicts between nationalities.

Many secessionist movements are the result of the denial of the right to secession or the forced annexation of regions without consulting the people concerned. Thus what is important is to determine the basis on which the call for secession is made and examine whether the call represents the genuine concerns of a nationality or the interests of exploiting classes and imperialism. Even where imperialism is seen to support a secessionist movement, a careful study of the call could discriminate between genuine concerns of a community and sinister manipulation by imperialism and its lackeys.

Stand by the People of Cuba

by

Manik Mukherjee
Socialist Unity Centre of India

The oppressed people from all over the world who are aspiring for freedom and emancipation from capitalist exploitation are inspired by the example of how Cuba under the leadership of Fidel Castro has been holding high the banner of socialism defying the might of the United States and the economic attack of the entire capitalist world. The United States never accepted the existence of socialist Cuba, practically in its backyard, and from the beginning of the victory of Cuban revolution it has constantly tried to bring about the toppling of the socialist government through internal intrigues and infiltration of hired counter-revolutionaries, through political propaganda spreading calumnies about Comrade Fidel Castro and the socialist system, threat of military invasion, and imposition of economic embargo.

Countless times the CIA had hatched conspiracies to assassinate Castro. But the Cuban people under the leadership of Comrade Fidel Castro and the Communist Party of Cuba bravely fought against the American machinations, and by successfully foiling these attempts defended their freedom and protected the socialist system in their country. The toiling people of our country salute the leadership of Comrade Fidel Castro and the people of Cuba for successfully resisting the imperialist aggression led by USA. With the victory of Cuban revolution the Cuban people have become free from the bondage of capitalist exploitation and are marching forward on the road of socialist development and progress. Cuba has made remarkable progress in the period following the revolution. Poverty and hunger have been eradicated. Superior education has reached the masses. Cuba has erected a remarkable public health system, so that the best possible medical attention is available for the whole people. Even the advanced

capitalist countries admire the excellence of the Cuban public health system.

Cuba is now passing through a difficult period. On the one hand with the dismantling of socialism in Soviet Russia it has lost the support and back up of a strong ally, and on the other hand it has to fight almost single-handedly the stringent economic blockade imposed by USA and its western allies. After the revolution when Cuba was building up its socialist economy, Nikita Khrushchev of Soviet Russia advised the Cuban leaders to concentrate on development in the agricultural sector and not spend its effort on industrial development. He assured that Cuba was a part and parcel of the socialist family and it would get all the industrial goods necessary for its development from Soviet Russia itself. Cuba followed this advice, but now that the counter-revolution in Soviet Russia has led to the disintegration of the socialist camp, this back up also does not exist.

Now Cuba is feeling effects of this deficiency in industrialization. It has realized that to survive in these hostile surroundings it has to embark on a process of rapid industrialization and modernization. So it is entering into agreements with foreign countries to set up industries in Cuba, but fully protecting the Cuban interests and the interests of the working class. At the same time Comrade Castro has been trying indefatigably to forge a unity of the progressive forces through Latin America to resist US hegemonism and stop the exploitation of the Latin American people by the US-based multinationals. That in so many Latin American countries the left and democratic forces are gaining ascendancy and the USA had to retreat from its aggressive postures in many occasions are measures of the success of Comrade Castro's efforts.

In today's world when the socialist camp has disintegrated and the imperialists are getting more belligerent only two countries Cuba and North Korea are holding high the banner of socialism. It is the bounden duty of the freedom-loving people of the whole world to stand by Cuba to convey the message to the imperialist powers that the people of the whole world are in total solidarity with Cuba in its determination to keep the flame of socialism burning. We are inspired by the exemplary courage and determination of the Cuban people and on behalf of the toiling people of India we express our solidarity with Cuba, its Communist Party and its leader Comrade Fidel Castro.

Throughout the world the people who are fighting against globalization and liberalization, against the multinationals' exploitation of the people and of the country's resources look up to Cuba for support

and patronage. It is of urgent necessity today to coordinate the anti-imperialist struggles being organized in different countries so that the imperialist menace can be decisively beaten. The struggling people of the world ardently desire that Cuba would play a leading role in this global coordination.

In India the ruling parties of the Central or State Governments – be they the branded bourgeois parties, or the reactionary rightist communal parties or even the so called left or communist parties – are engaged in a policy of establishing and maintaining close ties with the multinationals and foreign finance capital. These parties, centre, right or left, are inviting the multinationals and Indian monopoly houses, spreading out the red carpet for them, and giving them all opportunities and facilities for exploiting and looting the people. It is not that they are asked to invest obeying the conditions set down by the government to protect the interest of the workers and of the Indian people; on the contrary, the multinationals are setting down the terms for investing to wrest maximum benefits.

Special Economic Zones are being set up where the workers will have no rights and the multinationals will have the unfettered right to exploit and oppress. The governments are working in favour of imperialist globalization, but the Indian people are resisting these manoeuvres. Throughout India they are organizing to fight against the combination of national and multinational capital. Though the government machinery everywhere including in those ruled by the so-called left parties is used to crush such movements, the people are not giving up. The more the oppression the more determined they are becoming to fight it. In this life and death struggle the people are looking up for support and solidarity of the progressive forces of all countries, in particular from the socialist country of Cuba with its long tradition of anti-imperialist struggle.

I conclude with the hope that the people of Cuba will extend solidarity and support to the true anti-imperialist movements in our country.

[The above is the text of the talk delivered by Comrade Manik Mukherjee at the Fourth Asia Pacific Regional Conference for Solidarity with Cuba, Colombo 14th & 15th June 2008.]

Resolution of Armed Conflict: **A Comparative Study of Nepal and Sri Lanka***

by

MeeNilankco Theiventhran

INTRODUCTION

The importance of conflict resolution cannot be overstated in the South Asian context, where ethnic, class, caste and other conflicts are tearing society apart to hinder social and economic advancement.

Sri Lanka and Nepal, despite vast differences in their respective geographic and political situations, have much in common. The influences of dominant neighbours such as India and China, although to a less extent, play a crucial role in the conflict in both countries. However, the impact of the dominant foreign parties has led to contrasting trends in the two countries.

Conflicts mainly concern ethnicity, religion and caste; but gender issues remain important. While, in terms of ethnic diversity, Nepal has a far more complex situation than Sri Lanka, political diversity in Sri Lanka, with a longer history of party politics, has been more complex and its ground situation more alarming than common acknowledged. The People's War initiated by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), CPN(M), in 1996 found its way towards a peace process in 2006, which achieved a uniquely fast and extraordinary success when compared with other Asian countries, and would seem to set an example to the rest of world. People in Sri Lanka nurture hopes amid great fears.

The most impressive part of the Nepali peace process is the announcement of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement at the end of a decade long violent conflict. It leapt a step ahead of the peace accord of Sri Lanka in 2002 that failed. The peace process of Nepal despite smooth progress with optimism faces many challenges, even after a decisive outcome of the election to a Constituent Assembly (CA). Commendably, the parties have so far acted fairly responsibly at every

turn to avert possible negative impacts of crucial decisions. This seems to be an aspect where the Sri Lankan peace process has seriously failed.

Generally, the purpose of science is to identify problems and solve them. But solutions can be different in form, with each addressing a different aim. The purpose of this paper is to make a comparative study of the peace processes in Nepal and Sri Lanka and to learn useful lessons from the People's War and the peace process in Nepal. It is hoped that in the process pointers will emerge for action by the Sri Lankan people to bring peace to the country.

Sociological explanations of social conflict by Karl Marx, who posited a class struggle between proletariat and bourgeoisie intrinsic to capitalist industrial society, are among the most useful tools of conflict analysis. The strength of the Marxian approach is that it is dynamic, intuitively persuasive, and fitting well with history, and able to provide in one package an explanatory and to some degree a predictive description as well as remedies for contemporary problems. Given the importance of Marxist ideology in Nepali conflict, this paper also examines the possible role of a Marxist approach in making the peace process in Nepal more successful than in Sri Lanka. It should be noted that the aim is not to comment on peace processes or insurgency groups in general but to understand the nature of the conflicts in the two countries in a class perspective in order to draw lessons from Nepal's peace process.

Several Third World Marxists hold that the national struggle is a matter of class struggle. Over the past century, the national question in Sri Lanka has, at every stage, been developed on the basis of ethnicity and majoritarian politics. What many have missed are the class issues underlying the development of the national question. Failure to recognise the central feature that the political forces that upheld the cause of Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism have represented the interests of the ruling classes with a feudal-capitalist lineage would blind one to the class relationships inherent to the national question. The class content that forms the essence of the national question could be understood only through an analysis of the objective realities of the Sri Lankan social structure.

Turning to Nepal, the course of the struggle over the past decade was tortuous. The establishment of People's Power in the Nepali countryside was through mass struggle against feudal exploitation and domination and the implementation of land reform as well as definite steps to counter caste, gender and ethnic oppression in the name of tradition. The CPN(M) demonstrated that revolutionary struggle could achieve for

the people what parliamentary and other reformist methods failed to. The armed struggle, termed People's War, was a broad struggle against the state apparatus, especially the police and army, aimed to transform the state. The struggle also included countrywide campaigns such as mass demonstrations, hartals and blockades that increasingly demonstrated that the revolutionaries could bring the government to standstill. This showed that class played a dominant role in Nepal and brought about a radical change for the whole of Nepal. Thus, the ability of Nepal to resolve its 10-year long conflict is best understood in the light of class and class struggle. The question of class also may explain why Sri Lanka failed to resolve its conflict of 25 years.

THE PEACE PROCESSES IN NEPAL AND SRI LANKA

Between 2001 and 2006 Nepal and Sri Lanka experienced peace processes. Nepal had two failed peace processes in 2001 and 2003 followed by a successful peace process in late 2006. Sri Lanka, on the other hand, had a peace process, comprising six rounds of talks between 2002 and 2005, which ultimately failed. Some case scenarios from Nepal and Sri Lanka will be compared in this section to bring out salient differences between the two situations.

Ground situations that enabled the peace process

It is important to look back at how the respective climates for peace talks were created. In Nepal, ten long years of mass struggle had, in its course, paved the way for the peace process. Especially after the taking over of the government in May 2002 by the new monarch who ascended the throne following a palace coup in June 2001, most Nepali citizens realized that the struggle of the CPN(M), for the abolition of the monarchy was right. Given the popular upsurge against the monarchy, there was no alternative but for the main parliamentary political parties to come together to form a seven-party alliance (SPA) and seek the support of the CPN(M) to restore democracy in the country.

In Sri Lanka, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) had some important military victories and their attack on the international airport had a significant impact on the economy. This set the platform for the Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) and the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and the LTTE. Besides, both warring parties wanted a break, and were subject to external as well as internal pressures relating to resources.

Creating the political space

Another important aspect of the Nepali peace process is that when King Gyanendra assumed absolute power, there was no political space for the political parties to work. All the political parties were sidelined and could not act. It was the CPN(M) that created the political space for them to work for democracy in Nepal; the People's War of the CPN(M) was what enabled the seven-party alliance of the political parties, which had been notorious for their bargaining for power with the monarch while bickering among themselves. For want of an alternative, the political parties, despite their differences, formed an alliance to restore democracy. The agreement between the SPA and the CPN(M) to restore parliamentary democracy by peaceful mass mobilization was potentially beneficial to the SPA, since the member organisations knew that King Gyanendra was doomed even before they formed an alliance, and that a working agreement with the CPN(M) with an assurance of return to democratic politics was the best option before them. The CPN(M) itself had decided in favour of a broad united front to isolate the King, mainly in consideration of the geopolitics of the region and the cost to the people in blood if the state of civil war was prolonged under conditions where the monarchy receives military backing from foreign meddlers. This is the most striking feature of the Nepali peace process.

In Sri Lanka the non-unity of the main political parties had been one of the main hurdles on which the failed peace process stumbled. The same kind of obstacle has hindered progress in subsequent attempts to revive the peace process.

Flexibility in approach

The differences in the outcomes of the peace talks in Nepal and Sri Lanka seem to relate to the need for a common objective and more importantly a shared desire to solve the underlying problems rather than merely seeking stopgap solutions for an ongoing armed conflict.

The main precondition laid down by the CPN(M) during the peace was 'abolition of the monarchy and the creation of a new republic'. But they agreed to an arrangement where a 'constituent assembly' will be formed through democratic election. The CPN(M) also agreed to join the political mainstream through an interim administration and showed their commitment to a competitive multiparty democratic system. Other major features of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) concerned human rights, the right to life and livelihood, civil and political rights, economic and social rights, the rights of women and children, and the right to personal liberty.

The CPA mainly concerned the promotion of democracy, human rights, and civil, political and economic rights defined in a broad sense, and respect for international conventions and treaties. The spirit of the CPA is clear in its preamble which emphasised democracy, peace and progression in the spirit of the historical struggles of the people.

The CPA also showed a strong commitment to the resolution of existing problems in the country, based on class, caste, region, sex; defence of democratic values, including a competitive multi-party system of governance, civil liberty, fundamental rights, human rights, media freedom, and the rule of law; and to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, international humanitarian laws, and basic principles and acceptance of human rights. In summary, the CPA was an assertion of the commitment of the signatories to democracy, peace, prosperity, progressive economic and social change as well as independence, indivisibility, sovereignty, and self-respect of the country.

The Sri Lankan peace initiative, in contrast, centred on securing a territorial stand-off and on seeking an alternative power sharing arrangement. The LTTE entered the talks with its call for a 'separate state' while the GoSL stood firmly by the 'unitary nature' of the state. Neither party was willing to accommodate other possibilities so that the talks always centred on power sharing with scant consideration for issues such as human rights, democracy, civil and political rights. As the talks approached a virtual standstill, the LTTE proposed an interim self-governing authority (ISGA), with little ambiguity about where from the talks should proceed from. A government that was sincere about a solution to the national question could have proceeded with negotiations using the ISGA proposal as the starting point to progress towards peace in a spirit of mutual understanding and accommodation. But that was not to be the case. While the UNP government dithered and delayed on various pretexts, the UPFA government did worse using other pretexts.

Mechanisms for implementation of agreements

Agreement was also reached between CPN(M) and SPA, although after painful negotiations, whereby Maoist combatants would remain confined in cantonments in seven different places with their weapons locked in storages within the designated cantonments. The locks were provided with a sensor device for surveillance by UN monitors through close circuit camera while the keys of the remained with the Maoist leadership. The Nepali Army was also required to lock up a matching number of weapons under surveillance by UN monitors.

The United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) was created in response to a written request in August 2006 to the UN Secretary-General by the SPA government and CPN(M) seeking the assistance of the UN to create a free and fair atmosphere for the election to the Constituent Assembly (CA) and the entire peace process. For that purpose the UNMIN was granted a mandate including the following:

- Monitoring the management of arms and armed forces of the government of Nepal and CPI(M).
- Assisting the parties to implement the agreement on the management of arms and armed personnel through a Joint Monitoring Coordinating Committee (JMCC).
- Providing technical assistance to the Election Commission in the planning, preparation and conduct of the election of a CA in a free and fair atmosphere.
- Assisting the monitoring of ceasefire arrangements.

CPN(M), in its bid to reorient its strategy, undoubtedly took a calculated risk, militarily in terms of safety of personnel and politically in terms of protecting the gains of its revolution. It was their declared willingness to abandon arms that created the space for them in the national political mainstream. This space was no gift to the CPN(M) but something won through political and military struggle.

The Sri Lankan peace process was marked by a series of broken promises and non-implementation of steps agreed upon at the table. It was the main reason for the peace process coming to a standstill.

During the second round of peace talks held in Thailand, the parties agreed to set up a sub-committee dealing with 'core' political issues; a sub-committee on de-escalation and normalization (SDN) to deal with HSZs; and a sub-committee for immediate humanitarian and rehabilitation needs (SIHRN). The GoSL's unwillingness to set-up these sub-committees created mistrust in the LTTE about the GoSL. Consequently, nothing could go right during the peace process. The fate of Post-Tsunami Operational Management Structure (P-TOMS) agreed upon in 2005, two years after the collapse of the peace talks, only confirmed that agreements on the table and the implementation of the promises seldom travel in the same direction, thus shattering the faith in negotiated agreements.

Give and take

The success of the negotiations in Nepal and their failure in Sri Lanka could also be explained in terms of the need for the involvement

of the masses. In Nepal, the CPN(M) entered negotiations with popular backing, and had the bargaining power to demand the implementation of the agreement by the SPA government, which was aware that non-implementation of the CPA and the failure of the process will be the doom of the SPA.

In September 2007, CPN(M) quit the Interim Government in protest against dithering by the SPA government on the question of the monarchy. CPN(M) demanded the immediate abolition of monarchy and an electoral system based on proportional representation, but the SPA refused. CPN(M) declared that it will launch peaceful protests, while reserving its right to counter those who try to suppress its peaceful programme. Through protests and peaceful demonstrations the CPN(M) pressurised the government, and the parliament resolved to abolish the monarchy and declare Nepal a federal democratic republic state, subject to the ratification of the resolution by the CA to be elected in April 2008. Parliament also adopted a proportional representation system for elections to the CA, following which the CPN(M) rejoined the Interim Government.

It was a matter of give and take between the SPA and the CPN(M) on crucial issues. CPN(M) withdrew its demand to declare Nepal a republic before elections to the constituent assembly, and the SPA accepted the Maoist demand for a fully proportionate system of election.

The spirit of compromise was very much lacking in the Sri Lankan peace negotiations even during the more optimistic early stages. Although the LTTE declared during the third round of talks held in Oslo that it was willing to consider a federal option in place of secession, there was lack of accommodation where it mattered, especially in the implementation of the CFA and accommodation of considerations outside the ambit of the CFA and the MoU, which were important to the successful implementation of the CFA as well as a lasting solution to the national conflict. Parties including political rivals of the UNP and the LTTE as well as the Muslim leadership of the North-East felt left out and used any available opportunity to undermine the peace process (as potential 'spoilers'). The UNP sought political mileage out of the CFA, which it failed to secure, and the LTTE insisted on being the sole representative of the Tamils and limited the role of the Muslim leadership. A more inclusive and consultative approach, leaving out only the diehard opponents of a peaceful solution, could have produced an altogether different outcome.

Dealing with failure

Peace negotiations between warring parties face obstacles, and Nepal and Sri Lanka were no exceptions. Negotiations between the CPN(M) and the Nepali monarchy have failed and resumed in direct and indirect ways; but, significantly, without recourse to middlemen neither local nor foreign. Even after the signing of the CPA, there have been disputes caused by pressures brought on the SPA on behalf of the embattled monarchy by the US and India, through the Nepali Congress (NC) and its leader Koirala through India, with whom the party and the leader had close ties and with whose blessings the SPA entered into agreement with the CPN(M).

Neither CPN(M) nor the SPA liked the CPA to be abandoned. The CPN(M) remained in the interim government despite protests about lack of consultancy on key issues like the status of the monarchy, the role of the Royal Nepal Army (RNA) and dealings with the UN, and most importantly about the election to the CA. Even when it left the government, the CPN(M) declared its commitment to the CPA. The leverage that the CPN(M) had was the rising mass support it enjoyed in parts of Nepal, especially Kathmandu, where earlier its rivals held sway earlier. It used mass demonstrations to display its strength and the mass support for its position on important issues, including the fate of the monarchy. King Gyanendra and officers of the RNA who were loyal to him were known to have held consultations with key officials from the US and India. The anxieties of the CPN(M) about the fate of the CPA were also fuelled by various utterances by Koirala, including one some months ago when his daughter, also a leading politician in the NC, indicated a strong desire to preserve the monarchy. Protests by the CPN(M) prompted member organizations of the SPA to persuade the Nepali Congress to retreat.

What seems clear in Nepal is that the parties to the CPA were unwilling to risk wrecking the CPA, and even less to be faulted for its failure. This is in contrast to its response to the failure of peace talks in 2001 and 2003, when CPN(M) resumed its People's War initiated in 1996 while simultaneously calling for mass mobilisation for democracy, justice and equality. It is, however, doubtful whether the Sri Lankan parties to the CFA felt sufficiently committed to save the CFA and build on the MoU, although the LTTE reacted to the failure of the talks with GoSL by merely calling for the reinforcement of Tamil nationalism, by which it meant the strengthening of Tamil national unity under its leadership.

While a call for Tamil nationalist solidarity is understandable and perhaps necessary, and it is true that the nationalism of the oppressed

cannot be placed on the same footing as that of the oppressed and any oppressed social group has a right to struggle for its rights and liberation, securing national rights and liberation through negotiations requires the promotion of goodwill between the nationalities as well as winning allies. A narrow nationalist approach does not help here. Equally, the GoSL, irrespective of the party in power, has for decades has all along pandered to chauvinism and portrayed the struggle of the Tamils as terrorism in order to maintain its electoral base which has been conditioned to chauvinistic ideology.

Thus, when talks failed, the tendency for both the LTTE and the GoSL was to assure their respective electorates that they had stood by the interests of the electorate and would not compromise. This approach was reinforced on the one hand by the reliance of the LTTE as well as the ruling political parties on narrow nationalist ideology for their growth and survival.

Also the two sides were insensitive to other urgent political issues. The LTTE effectively rejected the need to address contradictions based on caste oppression and regionalism as well as gender issues within the Tamil community; while the approach of the GoSL was limited to containing the LTTE and resolve the conflict by making concessions that will not be electorally damaging. Neither side was willing to take a comprehensive look at the national question, so that salient aspects of the national question concerning the rights of other minority nationalities let alone new issues created by internal migration including that by planned settlements and displacement were largely ignored.

REVISITING THE SRI LANKAN NATIONAL QUESTION

Today the countries of the Third World face several problems and crises, of which the ones that concern contradictions between the nationalities and the related struggles seem to be the most prominent. The national question in each country could be seen to be based on them. In handling the national question, each nation state resorts to military oppression, in accordance with the needs of its ruling classes. The environment of national crisis is taken advantage of by the forces of imperialism to serve their needs and interests in the countries of the Third World. The dominant countries provide direct and indirect assistance and support to military oppression of nationalities by the nation states. Meantime, for the ultimate purpose of serving their own interests, they also assess the forces involved in the liberation struggles

and accordingly provide them with support. As a result, conflicts based on ethnic, linguistic and religious nationalism are prolonged.

It is the national question that projects itself as the main contradiction and as the war and struggle in Sri Lanka. The national question needs to be seen as a problem concerning all nationalities of the country. Further, we see in each of the sections representing the different aspects of the problem ideologies based on a conservative outlook and courses of action based on them. Especially among ideas put forward on behalf of the Sinhala and Tamil nationalities, one finds claims to an ancient history, conservatism, purity, hierarchy, and fear for the future, distrust, and mutual rejection. The national question and its solution are viewed on their basis. The notion of “our country” is declared aloud in terms of the notion of majority and minority. As a counterpoint, the notion of “Tamil Eelam” is emphasized as a demand for a separate state.

What many who comment on the national question choose to ignore or to avoid is its class basis. Anyone who excludes class in the analysis of the national question will readily fall in line with chauvinistic or narrow nationalistic positions. Hence it is important to take account of the nationalities, and understand the class roots that run through them and the respective roles played by them in the national question.

The social order of Sri Lanka is, via its semi-colonial and semi-feudal condition, being transformed into a neo-colonial social order. Hence, it cannot be denied or concealed that the fundamental contradiction in Sri Lanka is one of class. However, the national contradiction, accompanied by the related struggles, is overshadowing the principal contradiction as the main contradiction today. The national contradiction has on its one side the war of oppression by the Sinhala Buddhist ruling classes and on the other the liberation struggle of the Tamil nationality.

Although it is possible to resolve the ethnic contradictions that have taken the form of the national question, the chauvinistic capitalist ruling class forces are not prepared for a just solution. They, essentially, put forward their class interests.

What is essential for the future of Sri Lanka is the granting of the highest forms of autonomy, incorporating equality, democracy and human rights, on the basis of the right of nationalities to self determination within a united Sri Lanka. It is only through such autonomies that would guarantee the wellbeing and future of the nationalities that unity, mutual understanding and development could be achieved for all nationalities, and it could be ensured that Sri Lanka

is a multi-ethnic country with unity and prosperity. But the question has still remained whether the chauvinistic capitalist ruling class forces will offer such a solution.

That is why it is essential to insist on the importance of struggles founded on the basis of class struggle. The importance is to point out that the liberation struggles of nationalities should be carried forward with policies based on class struggle.

CONCLUSIONS

It is important to note that democracy, justice and peace was installed in Nepal through a people's war, where ordinary citizens of Nepal tirelessly struggled for peace and democracy. Even though the road was a bumpy and posed several difficulties, the will of the people to fight for themselves kept the peace process in track. When asked about joining the peace process and working with SPA deputy leader of the CPN(M) Dr. Baburam Bhattarai said "strategic firmness and tactical flexibility of the Maoists made this peace process a success". The question remains whether this element is missing in Sri Lanka.

The comprehensive approach in Nepal succeeded, because it had a different starting point and integrated the democratic struggle with the struggle for ethnic and other social rights. The Sri Lankan problem has somehow been historically narrowed to national conflict between two groups to blind the public to other pressing and even more fundamental issues, including democratic and human rights. The situation in Sri Lanka has been messed up for decades, and needs a new start and the struggle should be for peace, democracy and social justice, based on the recognition of national and ethnic rights.

The current Sri Lankan situation demands the transfer of power in the hands of the ruling classes to the true representatives of the people. Major changes are required in state power. People have lost faith in the ruling classes. The old system of government and administration of the ruling classes have reached their limit of incompetence. The ruling classes have forfeited their eligibility to continue to rule the people. Under these conditions, the people of Sri Lanka are affected in many ways, directly and indirectly. Even the comfortably off middle classes and the considerable wealthy are starting to feel insecure.

Thus, not only the ordinary masses, but also those living in relative comfort are compelled to seek changes through alternative political activity. Hence it is necessary to transform completely the old

approaches of the people, to undertake new initiatives and to carry forward new forms of struggle in new directions. Trade union activities of workers and peasants, strikes, electoral political meetings, processions and demonstrations have only provoked harsh responses accompanied by violence, and yielded counterproductive results.

Thus several struggles that are distinct from those of the past need to be carried out, outside the scope of the parliamentary electoral arena and the confines of trade unions, unlike the struggles carried out within and outside the electoral arena, and in ways different from that of traditional propaganda.

The armed struggle of the JVP in 1971 and 1988 and the armed struggle for the right to self determination of the Tamil people have led to a feeling of disgust among the people. The situation has deteriorated since then. The oppressed people have no choice or alternative but to impair the existing system of government and the ruling classes through the correct form of struggle and establish a meaningful democratic government. To achieve that, new forms of mass struggle with fresh meaning should be launched. It is in that way that great mass struggles and uprisings take place across the globe.

Today, a political climate prevails in which the people stand face to face against the ruling classes, their political enemy. That confrontation requires no less than a fundamental social change and to that end urgently demands a new popular uprising under the appropriate radical change in political leadership. The maturing of this condition and the achievement of victory depends on the entire Sri Lankan people.

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Globalisation and Growth of Poverty:

by

Sri

It is three decades since the introduction of the imperialist programme of globalisation in Sri Lanka. The imperialist policies of privatisation, liberalisation and the arrival of multinational companies were put into practice. Did that lead to greater prosperity or to greater poverty?

From the reports of the Central Bank and the Department of Statistics one may discern a fall in the standard of living of the working people. The rate of growth of poverty is certainly more than what the statistics would show. Yet, they can be used as scales for measuring minimum levels.

According to information from the Central Bank, the per capita income of an individual increased from US\$ 858 in 2002 to US\$ 1504 in 2006. The average annual income of a Sri Lankan is Rs 165,000. But this is not representative of the reality. Per capita income does not mean that all the people are getting incomes comparable to it.

Two million people who belong to the topmost income group receive 40% of the earnings in the country. Their average annual income is Rs 462,500. At the same time the poorest two million receive Rs 12,815 per annum. Their monthly earnings are close to a thousand rupees.

With the per capita income of the wealthiest two million a poorly balanced 36 times that of the poorest two million, the income of nearly a fourteen million is less than what is received by the richest two million.

Poverty in Sri Lanka has a rural character. In 2006, urban poverty level stood at 6.7% and rural poverty level stood at 15.7%. That in the plantation sector was 32%.

According to information from the Department of Statistics, in the Western Province the poverty level was 5.4% in the Colombo District and 8.7% in the Gampaha District, despite the Western Province generating 50.1% of the nation production. It should be noted that poverty dominates the population with agriculture as its occupation. Agriculture in the country has been badly neglected over the past 20 years in keeping with the advice of the World Bank.

The Sri Lanka Department of Statistics has provided fresh data relating to 'poverty assessment' in March 2008. This information is based on the income and expenditure of households during the year 2006-07. While officially the poverty level is said to have declined to 15.2%, statistics reveal that 2.8 million people live below the poverty line.

What is significant here is that the North-East is not included in these estimates. Consequently, the number living below the poverty line has been underestimated. The poverty levels identified are despite the remittance of Rs 276.81 billion to Sri Lanka in 2007 by the nearly 1.5 million working abroad.

In 2006, 85% of the population had access to clean water and hygienic living conditions. This means that 15% of the population had no access to clean water or hygienic living conditions. In the North-East only 43% of the households have access to clean water and hygienic living conditions.

Only 80% of the population has access to electric power. Thus 20% are compelled to use unsubsidised kerosene for their lighting. Access to electric power also varies from province to province: in the Western Province 92% of the households have electricity whereas only 57% in the Uva Province have electricity.

Poverty level is 27% in the Uva Province, 24% in the Sabaragamuwa Province and 22% in the Central Province. The Ratnapura District in the Sabaragamuwa Province and the Nuwara Eliya District in the Central Province have the largest number of poor people, with 250,000 each making a total of 500,000. Between 150,000 and 240,000 are poor in the each of the Districts of Kurunagala, Kandy, Badulla, Kegalle, Gampaha and Monaragala.

A person receiving social welfare under the Samurdhi scheme receives a mere 91 rupees per month. This information too is from statistics published by the Central Bank. In 2002 the poverty line was

determined as a per capita monthly income of Rs 1423. Based on 4.2 persons per household, Samurdhi relief is a mere 6% of that income.

Although it is reported that the number of people below the poverty line in 2002 was 3.2 million, Samurdhi relief was made available to 1.9 million households, implying that 8.0 million people benefited.

Of the poorest 30% households only 50% received Samurdhi relief. It is also said that 10% of the wealthy as well as 18% households with high income levels received Samurdhi relief.

In 2006-07 the poverty line was determined as a per capita monthly income of Rs 2233. Although the poverty threshold has risen by 57%, Samurdhi relief rose by 14% only.

While one statistic claims that 2.8 million people are poor, 7.6 million persons below the poverty line are receiving Samurdhi relief. It is thus clear that Samurdhi relief has not alleviated or eliminated poverty in the past five years.

Although every government has granted relief of one form or another to the poor on the pretext of eliminating poverty in Sri Lanka, relief has not reduced poverty. It has only served as a political tool.

The open economy was implemented by destroying the national economy under the guidance of imperialism and behind the guise of the deceptive bourgeois parliamentary democracy. The increase in poverty rate is a consequence of it; i.e. while the rich became richer and richer, the toiling masses were pushed into poverty and became increasingly impoverished. This is what the government statistics demonstrate. The reality of poverty is even bigger than these statistics reveal.

There are no shortcuts for the alleviation of such poverty. The World Bank and the programmes of the non-government organizations that act as its agents are mere eyewash and deflection of attention from the real issues. It should be clearly understood that poverty can be eliminated only through a mass political struggle for social transformation and the establishment of people's government through that struggle.

Build a World Peace Movement*

by

EA Vidyasekera

Secretary Coordinator, Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organisation

The Afro-Asian Peoples Solidarity Organisation thanks the World Peace Council for inviting a delegation of our organisation to participate at this assembly. We congratulate the WPC for holding such an event in this region, which is the first time in its history.

Today the progressive and forward looking people all over the world pay attention to the progressive changes taking place in Latin America. Fifty years ago it was only Cuba which shined as a bright star facing the biggest challenge and threat from the strongest imperialist power in the world. With the democratic elections making changes in favour of left and socialist forces the number of bright stars in the constellation have multiplied. Among them the Bolivarian revolution under the charismatic leadership of President Hugo Chavez in Venezuela has made a worldwide impact strongly defying the US hegemony in the region.

The most contentious issue that the people of the world face today is the growing aggressiveness of imperialism despite fiascos in Iraq and Afghanistan. The total "defence budget" of the US today stands at \$ 515 billion which is half of the worlds' military spending. While doing this Washington cries 'wolf' against China, whose new defence budget is only \$ 58.8 billion. At the same time the US continues to modernise and build new military bases world wide and expand NATO in Eurasia encircling Russia and China on the false pretext of protecting against threats from Iran and North Korea. In pursuing these adventurous policies the US stoops to any method undermining the United Nations and international treaties such as NPT.

For the people of the world, specially the developing countries, eradication of poverty, peaceful economic development, growth with equity, fair trade and using their own natural resources such as oil for the betterment of the quality and standard of life of their own people is the priority. Millions of people in these countries lack basic needs such as clean drinking water, cheap medical treatment, and eradication of diseases and illiteracy. Prescriptions of the imperialist dominated institutions such as IMF and

World Bank and the structural adjustment policies only retard their progress and make them poorer. Worst of all these is the ongoing process of privatisation of the world under trans-nationals such as Coca Cola and Pepsi Cola. In India through a strong people's movement, such as in Kerala, was able to close down Coca Cola and Pepsi Cola as they drain the clean water supply to the people. It is a good omen that within the United States too the Pacific Institute, a sustainable development research organisation in Oakland, California, has launched a campaign against bottled water as it concerns huge energy consumption, green house gas emissions, waste, environmental effects of water extraction, the perils of privatisation and social issues. Such movements need to be strengthened and integrated with the rest of civil society and with peace and solidarity movements. As known through the experience of the people in the developing countries, multinational corporations including the pharmaceutical industries extract huge profits by keeping the people in abject poverty. These multinational companies are richer than most countries in the developing world. In 2004, the revenues of the US car company General Motors were \$ 191.4 billion, greater than the GDP of more than 148 countries. In the fiscal year ending 2005, the US retailer WalMart's revenues were \$ 285.2 billion, larger than the combined GDP of sub-Saharan Africa. They are rich and politically powerful and capable of dictating terms to governments of developing countries.

With the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the socialist countries in Eastern Europe, the US unilaterally assumed the position of the sole super power in the world. This paved the way for intensifying the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia leading ultimately to the extinction of the Yugoslav federation. As the Balkan states were brought under the umbrella of NATO, the latter's mandate extended as far as Afghanistan. With an invented propaganda lie, Iraq was invaded to bring the oil resources directly under US, but this has further exacerbated the crisis in the Middle East. The bleeding in Iraq, Palestine and Afghanistan continue to intensify. The whole region has become a humanitarian catastrophe. Although only few months are left of the Bush presidency, there is no likelihood that the incoming president, whoever it may be, will genuinely facilitate the peaceful settlement of Middle East problem.

Despite US sponsored UN Security Council sanctions, Iran is not prepared to submit to US hegemony. The US has already come into conflict with the Russian Federation over the US missile shields in Poland and the Czech Republic. The conflict has further aggravated with the attempts to incorporate Georgia and Ukraine into the NATO. US militarism has extended to African continent precisely with the motive of controlling oil resources. There is more and more foreign penetration into the African affairs whose result is continued tension and conflict, indirectly assisted by some African rulers also indulging in profligacy and corruption.

It is crystal clear that the greatest danger to the peace and stability are the hegemonism of the US combined with some of EU policies. The ongoing conflict in Palestine and Lebanon are an example. While talking about peace process, Israel is rewarded for sabotaging any peaceful settlement of the conflicts.

The time has come for building a strong peace movement world over by uniting all the fragmented groups. We all admire the historical role played by the WPC. We are certain that this assembly held in Latin America will be an appropriate forum to launch such a movement to integrate with the civil society in Latin America. AAPSO since its inception had been closely cooperating with WPC in strengthening the peace and solidarity movement, in multifarious activities. We shall continue that process in future.

Last February, the AAPSO had a representative international gathering in Cairo from 26th to 28th commemorating the 50th anniversary of the organisation, where the WPC was represented. That conference contributed immensely to the future strategy of AAPSO. I also wish to mention here that the All India Peace and Solidarity Organisation will be hosting the 8th Congress of AAPSO next year. Owing to the very close relationship between the WPC and the AAPSO, it is important to take joint initiative on agreed projects between the two organisations. This can be at both international and regional levels. As some of the national organisations are based on both peace and solidarity, grassroots mobilisation is feasible.

AAPSO takes great pleasure in attending the WPC Assembly. We are happy to be here in Caracas, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Since we are meeting in Venezuela, in South America, it is important to integrate Latin America Civil Society Organisations with African and Asian organisations in future. We request our friends who are present here from Latin American countries to pursue these contacts. We hope this will enable us to link our organisations with Latin American experiences. Mutual contact and visits may help us to expand and consolidate the movement. We sincerely thank the hosting committee COSI providing us an opportunity to learn about their new experiment in building a socialist society in the 21st century.

[*Text of speech delivered on behalf of AAPSO at the Assembly of World Peace Councils, Caracas, Venezuela, April 8-13, 2008].

NDP Diary

NDP Statement to the Media

Stop Attacking the Media

24th May 2008

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New Democratic Party issued the following statement in connection with the abduction of Keith Noyahr, Associate Editor of *the Nation* on 22nd May evening.

Intimidation, abduction, attacks, detention and killings comprise the plight of media freedom today. Continuous perpetration of attacks of various forms against the media is a blatant violation of fundamental and human rights. It is as part of this series of misdeeds that of Keith Noyahr, Associate Editor of 'The Nation' was abducted by unknown persons two days ago and released close to his home with severe attack wounds. He has been admitted to the Colombo National Hospital for treatment of the serious injuries suffered. It is disgraceful for a government incapable of taking the necessary steps against continuing acts of abduction, attacks and detention in the name of unknown person to talk about the freedom of the media. The New-Democratic Party strongly denounces the above incident and the continuing acts of abduction, attacks and detention to which media personnel are subjected.

In Sri Lanka today, all media personnel live under unsafe conditions. Media personnel who communicate independent news and views to the country and the people have to carry out their duties amid anxiety and fear. This state of affairs exposes the double act of the government on the question of media freedom. Media personnel in the country have on occasion been killed, attacked and detained. Some months ago media personnel attached to the state-owned Rupavahini Corporation were subject to continuous attack. Recently three Tamil media personnel have been arrested and detained without trial. Already several Sinhala and Tamil media personnel are under prolonged detention without inquiry. The abduction and attack on Associate Editor of *the Nation* is a continuation of the above trend.

It is under circumstances under which the abduction, attacks and disappearing of media personnel and members of the public by 'unknown persons' continued unhindered that Sri Lanka was defeated in the election

to the United Nations Human Rights Council. Even at this stage the government should sincerely come forward to put an end to the ongoing violations of fundamental and human rights. They should take firm steps against the so-called 'unknown persons'. The Party points out that it is only through such action that the media personnel and the public could be protected.

SK Senthivel
General Secretary, New-Democratic Party.

NDP Statement to the Media

Stop Targeting Civilians

12th June 2008

The Politburo of the New-Democratic Party issued the following statement denouncing the increasing number of attacks on civilians in the north, east and south of the country.

Murderous attacks targeting civilians in the north, east and south of the country are increasing on a daily basis. Ordinary Tamil, Sinhala and Muslim people who are not involved in the war are killed and injured in these planned indiscriminate cruel attacks. The New-Democratic Party strongly denounces these murderous attacks on civilians which are carried out as acts of revenge. The Party also appeals to the two warring parties on behalf of the people to put an immediate end to their attacks targeting civilians.

Recently there has been an increase in the number of cruel murderous incidents with civilians as target of attack. Planned attacks have been carried out against ordinary civilians travelling for their daily needs and to work. It is barbaric to subject unarmed civilians who play no part in the war to Claymore attacks, suicide bombings and other such attacks. These attacks have killed men, women, children, the old and the young, and students in the North and the South. Many have been seriously injured and are disabled for life. Such attacks are not by any means justifiable methods of warfare. They only serve to instil fear for life among the ordinary Tamil, Sinhala and Muslim people and to propagate weird mutual ethnic hatred among them.

Meanwhile, there is no compensation or assistance from the government for those killed or injured in attacks on civilians in the North. All such

losses of life there are included in the list of Tigers eliminated. On the other hand, ordinary Tamil people are arrested and detained in response to revenge killings in the South.

Overall, it is the ordinary Tamil, Sinhala, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil people who are affected and are made to face the losses caused by targeted attacks on civilians. The parties involved in these attacks seek to make political and military gains from the attacks. These attacks only serve to plunge the country and the people deeper into destruction and create circumstances that facilitate interference and infiltration by foreign forces.

The only way to put an end to the problem is to stop the war due to the national question and seek an appropriate political solution through negotiation. The Party points out that the bulk of the obligation and responsibility lies with the President and the Government.

SK Senthivel

General Secretary, New-Democratic Party.

NDP Statement to the Media

30th Anniversary of the

New-Democratic Party

3rd July 2008

The Central Committee of the New-Democratic Party issued the following statement on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the founding of the Party.

The whole country and the people are being driven towards a deep abyss by the pursuit of a cruel war and the implementation of a neo-liberal economic system. The pursuit of war is the result of a Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinistic capitalist stand unwilling to offer a just solution of any kind to the national question. Meantime, a liberal privatised economic policy is being guided by imperialist globalisation. If these two serious problems and their adverse consequences are not subject to review and appropriate solutions not found, there is imminent danger of further aggravation of the ongoing destruction by war and the ravages of poverty. The supreme responsibility and duty to stop it lies with the entire working people and the nationalities of the country. People's movements should be organised to exert pressure against those in power who pursue the wrong political, economic and

military policies and against those seeking to come to power to implement the same policies, but in different forms. Genuine democratic, left and progressive forces should come forward to develop and carry forward common programmes for the purpose. The New-Democratic Party emphasises that only the powerful people's movements thus created can overcome the hazardous challenges facing the country and the people, and make progress.

The Mahinda Chinthanaya government is troubled by its inability to win the war that has been going on for the past quarter of a century and by its difficulties in facing the economic crisis. This calamitous situation is not something for which the Rajapaksha government alone is responsible. It is the adverse result of a constitution that has been in force for three decades and the executive presidential system under it. Both hereditary ruling class political parties have enjoyed power under the dictatorial executive presidential rule of a single individual and a single party, as initiated in 1978 by JR Jayawardane. Neither of these parties nor their leaders had been able to find a solution to the national question that has been transformed into war. Their Sinhala Buddhist chauvinistic positions would not allow them to do so. At the same time, compelled by forces of globalisation, they welcomed and implemented its economic systems, for which their affinity and loyalty towards imperialism was an added reason. The net effects of these and accompanying problems are being experienced by the people in the form of destruction by war, economic crises and a rising cost of living.

Meantime, behind the curtain of war, individuals who were and are in power and those close to them have become very rich by accumulating wealth through corruption, fraud and abuse of power. But the children of the ordinary workers and peasants of the South have been sacrificed as cannon fodder on the warfront. This situation persists to this day. Likewise, those who get killed daily in the North-East are the ordinary people and their children.

On the other hand, multinational companies continue to plunder the resources of the country and exploit the toil of the workers. The country's agriculture has been wrecked and an import-based consumer market has been expanded. As a result, the peasants who comprise the majority of the country's population have become impoverished, and the people have been made to await foreign shipments for essential food items as well as pay higher prices for them.

The rulers of the country conceal such truths and continue to deceive the people by claiming that the cost of living in the country has risen as a result of the increase in oil and food prices in the world market. The fact that the spending of many billions of rupees each day on the war also has contributed to inflation and price increases is also being concealed. Unable

to award wage increases in keeping with the rising cost of living, the government, in order to placate opposition by the state and private sector employees, has offered modest increases in wages that are totally inadequate to meet their needs.

While destruction and displacement continue as a result of the pursuit of war with all its ferocity, there is a rise in the incidence of some of the worst forms of violation of human rights. Unlawful killings, abductions and disappearances continue uncontrolled. Denial of trade union and democratic rights is assuming new forms. Freedom of the media is under threat and media persons are being attacked and killed. Political detainees have remained in prolonged detention without inquiry.

US and Japanese multinational companies have already penetrated the domain of liberalised and private sector economy. They have since been joined by Indian businesses. The forces dominating the US and India have to this day given every possible form of direct and indirect assistance to pursue the war. But their rivalry to dominate over Sri Lanka continues. There seems to be a tendency for the two to await an opportunity for direct intervention.

Hence, talks should be initiated to find a just political solution to the national question, which has been renamed as terrorism. Meantime, a national economic policy should be carried forward to curtail the increase in the prices of essential food items and lighten the burden of the rising cost of living. It is also essential that the constitution with an executive presidential system is amended. The New-Democratic Party emphasises that to achieve these, a powerful people's movement should be built that transcends the desire for parliamentary seats and positions.

S.K. Senthivel

General Secretary, New-Democratic Party

NDP Statement to the Media

The 15th SAARC Summit

5th August 2008

The Politburo of the New-Democratic Party issued the following statement on the recently concluded 15th SAARC Summit.

The Mahinda Rajapaksha government has conducted the 15th SAARC Summit Conference at a cost of three billion rupees to carry forward the war rather than find a just political solution to the national question and to

divert the attention of the people who are confronted by economic crises. Meanwhile, India has used this conference once again to serve its regional hegemonic purposes. Beyond this the Colombo Declaration by SAARC has not offered any feasible solution to the problems faced by the people of South Asia. These conferences for regional cooperation have in the past 23 years been mere talk-shops to gather to discuss and disperse. The reality is that people have not gained anything from them in the past and will gain nothing in the future.

The basic problem of the SAARC countries is poverty. More than half the population of these countries are compelled to live below the poverty line. The unequal nature of economic, political and social structures of these countries and its survival form the basis of poverty, which has been aggravated by imperialist globalisation. The ruling classes of the SAARC countries are carrying forward their economies in collaboration with this imperialist globalisation. Its adverse consequences manifest themselves as economic, political, social and cultural crises. Unable to find solutions, the governments and the ruling classes struggle to face the opposition of their people, and in the process unleash oppression. Activity to oppose oppression is dubbed terrorism and social forces that struggle are dubbed terrorists by the ruling classes. What the SAARC leaders have declared aloud as opposing terrorism concerns this. But they are not ready to examine the causes for what they call terrorism. At the same time, they have expressed an unprecedented interest in bringing under criminal law what they consider terrorism. This is an attempt to transform the rule of law into military rule.

Further, India has used this SAARC conference to create opportunities to reinforce its regional hegemonic intentions. For instance, it made its fullest effort to conclude the CEPA amid a situation in which it has provided military support to Sri Lanka. It was also evident that India also used the conference to strengthen its position *vis a vis* its commercial investment ventures.

The SAARC Summit Conference has not achieved anything mention worthy except to make a show of the offer of the chair of SAARC to Sri Lanka and its President for the coming year. What will be left of it will be that the cost of this pompous conference will be additional burden on a people already burdened by war and economic crises. The position of the Party is that this Summit Conference is of no benefit not only to the people of Sri Lanka but also to the people of all the member countries of SAARC.

S.K. Senthivel
General Secretary, New-Democratic Party

NDP at the 4th Asia Pacific Regional Conference for Solidarity with Cuba

The New Democratic Party was represented by Comrades SK Senthivel, General Secretary and E Thambiah, National Organiser at the Fourth Asia Pacific Regional Conference for Solidarity with Cuba held on 14th & 15th June 2008 in Colombo. Participation by the NDP was made possible by pressure from progressive elements among the organizers, despite attempts by Sri Lankan revisionists and those from across the waters, who did not have any qualms about inviting the chauvinist JVP, with a strong anti-Marxist track record.

Comrade Thambiah addressed the Conference on behalf of the NDP. The text of his talk will appear in the next issue of New Democracy.

Appeal for Support

The NDP publications, *Puthiya Poomi* and New Democracy uphold democratic values and defend the interests of the oppressed, independently of ethnic, religious or any such identity. They are unique among Sri Lankan journals for high journalistic standards, useful content and coverage of issues that are unaddressed by mainstream media and publications of political parties representing the interests of the exploiting classes. The rise in the costs of printing and postal rates have added to the financial burdens of the Party, which relies on financial support from some supporters and well wishers, also struggling against the rising cost of living. The Party has neither NGO funding, nor rich patrons.

Hence the Party appeals to readers and well wishers to contribute to its Publications Fund by adding to the subscription, making a donation, or sponsoring the publication of part or whole of an issue of either journal. Payments may be made to:

S Thevarajah, account number 452868
Bank of Ceylon, Supermarket Branch
Colombo 11, Sri Lanka

Please mention 'Publications Fund' in the covering note addressed to:
47, 3rd Floor, CCSM Complex, Colombo 11, Sri Lanka.

Sri Lankan Events

Provincial polls: painting by numbers

Having won the Eastern Provincial Council Elections, by means fair or foul, the government has gone in for early elections in the North Central and Sabaragamuwa Provincial Councils where the ruling party functions as a minority. The strategy seems to be to bring the provincial councils under government party control before parliamentary elections in 2010 by taking advantage of the propaganda value of the apparent military gains on the northern war front as well as the split in the JVP and quarrels about the leadership in the UNP. The Supreme Court dismissed two fundamental rights petitions filed on 13th June by the UNP and JVP challenging the dissolution of the Provincial Councils, stating that the Governors of the Provincial Councils had followed legal procedure in the dissolution of the councils. The JVP and the UNP have protested about the abuse of state resources for election purposes. But such objections served no purpose in earlier elections and things will not be any different now. The elections will be of little consequence unless they deliver an unlikely decisive blow to the government.

Unauthorised Attacks?

Dwellings of squatters along the railway line in Colombo 2, who had been residents with legal access to amenities and registered voters, were demolished by the Urban Development Authority with help from the police. This act of vandalism took place despite a court order against it. The alternative accommodation to which the victims were forced to move are incomplete and badly lacking in basic facilities including ventilation and toilets. The President later denounced the heartless act of demolition and claimed that he was unaware of the events. A few weeks ago, the President similarly claimed ignorance of how a demonstration by students and members of the Buddhist clergy was subject to tear gas and water cannon attack by the police and asked the police not to attack students and clergy in this fashion. If such serious breaches of democratic and fundamental rights could occur without the knowledge of an executive president, it makes one wonder if there is a parallel government in operation.

Mystery of the passport

Muralitharan (a.k.a. Karuna) the leader of the TMVP was sent to prison in Britain for illegally entering the country on a false passport. On release, he was extradited to Sri Lanka without fuss. British human rights organisations expressed disappointment at their government's failure to let Karuna be tried for alleged human rights violations. Karuna, in his response to demands in Sri Lanka to arrest him for travelling on a forged passport, claimed that he had travelled on a legitimate passport and not a forged one. He is probably right. Then who are the culprits?

One also begins to wonder whether the British authorities were aware of the irregularities, from the very outset. If so, for whose consumption is the theatre of arrest, detention and extradition?

Pawns in Indian chess games?

The Indian government claims to be keen on a peaceful solution to the national question in Sri Lanka, although its record in this respect is not impressive. It uses the warm relationship that China and Pakistan have with Sri Lanka as pretext to become a leading arms supplier to the Sri Lankan government. Three decades ago it used the pretext of Sri Lanka moving close to the US as its excuse to promote Tamil militants. Soon after it changed loyalties and turned against the main Tamil militant movement.

The rise in the frequency of attacks by the Sri Lanka Navy on South Indian fishermen has embarrassed the DMK in power in Tamilnadu on whose support the Congress-led alliance ruling India depends for survival. Much play acting has gone on at the centre and in Tamilnadu, where on the one hand arrests of suspected LTTE activists and supporters have been intensified to impress the Sri Lankan government and opponents of the LTTE including its allies in the Congress; and on the other hand the Chief Minister led a public protest against the attacks on fishermen and demanded action by the central government.

Strangely, Tamil nationalist parliamentarians find signs of Indian support for the Tamil cause in the most opportunistic Indian move to gain control over the affairs of Sri Lanka. What is equally amazing is the muted response of the JVP to the presence of Indian naval vessels in Sri Lankan waters during the SAARC Summit, although even a few weeks ago it breathed fire against Indian meddling in Sri Lanka in the name of ending the war.

International Events

Afghanistan: Aggressor in Trouble

Reports from Afghan battlefronts indicate that the US-led alliance of aggression and occupation is suffering major setbacks at the hands of the Taliban who are tightening their control over southern Afghanistan; and disagreement is growing within the US military establishment on the correct strategy. US allies like India use the pretext of defending a secular government against fundamentalist terror to justify support for the US puppet regime of Karzai.

The explosion in early July in the vicinity of the Indian Embassy in Kabul that killed forty-one including two Indians and injured over 140 others should be seen as a warning against Indian support US aggression besides being a demonstration of Taliban's ability to strike targets in the capital. Another explosion at the end of the month outside the Pakistani consulate in Afghanistan's peaceful western Herat province that wounded at least one police guard is further signal that the Taliban sees all who engage with the regime as collaborators.

Whether fundamentalism is acceptable to the people of Afghanistan is a matter for them to decide. One has every right to express support for people's struggles for democratic and social rights, but it is immoral to endorse imperialist aggression and bullying in the name of human and fundamental rights. Progressive forces the world over give unqualified support for Taliban's anti-imperialist struggle; equally they distance themselves from the reactionary parochialism of Taliban.

Pakistan: Wake-up Call

In January, Pakistan reiterated that it will not let American forces hunt al-Qaida and Taliban militants on its soil, following a news report that the US was considering expanding military and intelligence operations into Pakistan's tribal regions. Despite denials at the time that the US President Bush's top security officials discussed a proposal to deploy US troops to pursue militants along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, it was reported at the end of July that a top CIA official travelled secretly to Islamabad in July

to confront senior officials with new information on ties between the ISI, the country's powerful spy service, and militants operating in Pakistan's tribal areas.

The success of the Taliban lies in its relating to the people in ways that pro-US regimes have never been able to. For instance, people in the border regions seem to prefer the Sharia courts established by the Tehrik-i-Taliban to resolve disputes rather than wait for action by the tribal administration. US imperialism will never learn that the rise of pro-Taliban forces in Pakistan is due to the failure of democracy, for which the US is answerable to a great extent because it has always undermined democracy in Pakistan by seeking to set up a client regime of one kind or another. The aggressive approach of the US makes it difficult for even the most pliant elected regime to abide by the wishes of the US.

Implied threats by the US were followed by firing, shelling and killing of a security personnel as well as an intrusion into a border post in Bajaur agency in July. Some 11 Pakistan troops, including one officer, were killed June 10 when US planes bombarded a Pakistani border post in the neighbouring Mohmand Agency tribal district. Pakistan lodged a strong protest with Afghanistan and the 'International Security Assistance Force' and warned that such incidents must not be repeated. The Pakistani Foreign Office spokesman emphasized that military action inside its territory was the exclusive responsibility of Pakistani forces.

Recent events have shown that the democratic forces of Pakistan should realize that the question of democracy in Pakistan is inseparable from the struggle against US imperialism inside Pakistan as well as internationally.

India: Late Awakening of the Old Left

Withdrawal of support by the Left Front to the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government, was a welcome move, but came rather late in the day for the parliamentary left as well as the country. The left MPs had previously helped the UPA government to bring into being the Patents (Amendment) Act and the Special Economic Zones Act based on pro-imperialist policies. The CPI and CPI(M) vacillated and held back from making a decisive break when the UPA government signed the Indo-US Defence Framework Agreement and voted against Iran at the IAEA. Their muted protests allowed progression towards the finalization of the US-India nuclear power agreement.

The desperation of the UPA Government to get the nuclear deal through at a time when the people were increasingly burdened by soaring inflation was

a direct consequence of the US-directed policies pursued by a government, which was only too willing to break its election pledges to the nation but honour at any cost its promises to the US President. The nuclear deal is grossly inadequate to meet India's energy needs, and will only shackle India to the strategic interests of the US in Asia.

A positive outcome of the withdrawal of support by the Left Front is the exposure of the bankruptcy of India's bourgeois parliamentary democracy. The purchase of votes of several MPs, for crores of rupees each, by a government desperate to secure a vote of confidence to allow it to sell out the country to US imperialism was denounced as a national shame by many observers. The point is that the events only reiterated the reality.

Any struggle against a sell out of this nature, to be effective, needs to be a mass campaign that rises above short sighted parliamentary political considerations. It is important that all left and progressive sections of the Indian polity learn from their experiences and rise above narrow sectarian interests to unite in mass campaigns against the betrayal of the interests of India and its people.

Nepal: Continuing Mischief

Nepali reactionaries bared their teeth following their electoral defeat, but failed save the 240-year old feudal monarchy or stop the founding of a federal democratic republic, although the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) was short of a majority in the Constituent Assembly to fulfil the pledges contained in its agreement with the Seven Party Alliance.

Nepal is still a semi-feudal, semi-colonial country. The 10-year long armed struggle led by the CPN(M) weakened feudalism and made possible the CA and democratic elections to it. But feudalism is still alive. It has ganged up with comprador capitalism, US imperialism and Indian expansionism to block radical transformation of social, economic and cultural institutions and to threaten Nepal's national integrity and the sovereignty of its people.

The newly established republic is linked to the imperialist world order, and not the "New Nepal" that the oppressed classes, social groups and nationalities need. The people need to eliminate feudalism and imperialism from Nepal under the joint dictatorship of democratic and patriotic forces led by the party of the proletariat.

Counter revolution, guided by the US and India, led by the reactionary Nepali Congress supported by narrow nationalist Madhesi Janadhikar Forum, and aided the revisionist Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist Leninist) is determined to prevent power from slipping into the

hands of the oppressed. The opportunistic alliance of the NC, MDF and CPN(UML), manipulated by Indian expansionism in breach of the agreement between the CPN(M) and the Seven Party Alliance endorsed by India, engineered the defeat of the CPN(M) sponsored presidential and vice-presidential candidates to the CA. The alliance is a regrouping of opponents of social justice threatening the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of Nepal. Thus the tussle in the CA is class struggle in the form of a contest between the Indian dominated comprador bourgeoisie and democratic and patriotic forces led by the proletariat.

It was against this background of developing conspiracy that, CPN(M) leader Prachanda rejected the demands by the NC and CPN(ML) to disband the People's Liberation Army and to disarm the CPN(M). [Interview on 02.07.2008 for the *"Boletín informativo do Comité Galego de Solidariedade co Nepal"*, reproduced by the web site, *Revolution in South Asia*]. The refusal is correct and the CPN(M) should back it up with firm mass political action.

Since the election of the President and the Vice-President the formation of the new government has become deadlocked, and needs to be broken. It demands the unity of all democratic and patriotic forces in struggle, as a strong united front of anti-feudal and anti-imperialist forces under the leadership of proletariat against national capitulation and for the seizure of power to build a New Democratic Nepal. The CPN(M) is under pressure to lead the new government of Nepal, and may be compelled to. Much will depend on developments in the coming months. Excerpts below from the editorial of the Red Star, organ of the CPN(M), July 25-August 10, 2008 are instructive.

Since the Maoists emerged as the largest party through the CA election, the parliamentary parties began to plot conspiracies to stop the Maoists taking power. In line with this attitude, the two-thirds provision to remove the Prime Minister was changed; the Maoists were forced to abandon the Presidency by betting this post against monarchy. Having done that, the parliamentary parties wanted to dissolve the PLA, abandon progressive land reforms and the restructure of Nepalese society. Finally UML broke away from the understanding of forming a government with the Maoists, and a coalition was formed between the NC, UML and MJF. This was an undemocratic, unnatural and vengeful act against the Maoists.

However, the first President of Nepal is from an oppressed nationality, a Madhesi. This was possible because of Maoist policies and politics. Again, it is an interesting point that the CPN(UML) and the CPN Masal, so-called leftist parties, lined-up with the Congress. It is an expression of the political degeneration of these parties to the

level of parliamentary cretinism. Nevertheless, this is a potent example of how class polarisation is manifested at this critical juncture of history. Although they are different by name, the NC, UML, Masal and MJF are feudal and bureaucratic capitalists. They stand against the Maoists because it has been historically impossible to write one constitution that is suitable for two classes.

The people will understand that it is not correct for the Maoists to join a government if nothing can be done to serve the people. The Maoists should form a united front with revolutionary, progressive and patriotic forces against the reactionaries, opportunists, and the forces of the status quo that want to drag Nepal backwards.

Israel: Time for Truce

The Israeli cabinet approved a German-mediated agreement with the Hezbollah to hand over two captured Israeli soldiers and give information on Ron Arad, an Israeli airman missing for two decades, in exchange for five Lebanese prisoners, including Samir Qantar who was locked up in an Israeli prison since 1979.

Israel also agreed to an Egyptian-negotiated six-month truce starting 19th June with Hamas, whose immense popularity among Palestinians in Gaza made not only the Hamas but also Gaza targets of Israeli bombing, shelling and economic blockade. The truce by and large has held, despite a few serious incidents of violence.

Hot on the heels of the ceasefire came a proposal by Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad for national reconciliation between the Fatah and Hamas whereby there will be an effective truce between combatants on both sides; a transitional government comprising officials acceptable to Fatah and Hamas for Gaza as well as the West Bank; and agreement on a date for presidential and parliamentary elections to resolve the current political deadlock.

All of this was in the wake of the drubbing that the US- and Saudi-backed Lebanese government had at the hands of the Hezbollah in early May. The Doha agreement of 21st May, put an end to the 18-month conflict, and brought in Michel Suleiman, the Lebanese Army Commander acceptable to Hizbollah acting as President, and enhanced Lebanese opposition representation in the cabinet, with constitutional power to block decisions by the government. Yet, interested parties tried to stir trouble between the Sunni Muslims and the Hezbollah in mid-June, but failed because of the firm stand taken by the Hezbollah.

Hezbollah proved its deterrence capacity when Israel was forced to cancel its Washington-approved attack on 11th May in support of the Siniora government in Lebanon. Israel can no more attack with impunity its Arab neighbour Lebanon. Also, the Shiite sectarian label attached to Hezbollah by the West is peeling off in the course of its anti-Zionist and anti-imperialist struggle where it showed accommodation towards other faiths and drew in members of other communities. In short, Hezbollah has restored the self-respect of the Arabs after 60 years of humiliation and 41 years of expansionist occupation and aggression. It could become the model for the anti-imperialist forces in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Egypt to emulate, making it more dangerous to imperialism and Zionism than the most lethal Islamic fundamentalist organisation imaginable.

Hezbollah and Hamas need to be more on the alert during peace than during conflict, since the enemies of social justice seek peace only when they cannot win the war and use periods of peace to prepare themselves for a more intense war. The left and all progressive forces should encourage the Hezbollah and Hamas to emphasise anti-imperialism and to find common cause with all forces resisting imperialism nationally and internationally.

Iraq: Muffling the US Media

New York Times reported on 26th July that Zorah Miller, the photographer who took images of marines killed in a suicide attack on 26th June and posted them on his Web site, was subsequently forbidden to work in the US Marine Corps-controlled areas of Iraq. Miller has since left Iraq, and Major General John Kelly, the US Marine Commander in Iraq, is now seeking to have him barred from all US military facilities across the world.

The newspaper observed that in contrast to the conflict in Vietnam which was notable for its open access to journalists, the Iraq war marks an opposite extreme. After five years and more than 4,000 American combat deaths, searches and interviews turned up fewer than half a dozen graphic photographs of dead American soldiers.

The Philippines: Fighting Tyranny

Initiative is shifting towards the New People's Army in its fight against the Armed Forces of the Philippines. Gregorio "Ka Roger" Rosal, spokesperson for the Communist Party of the Philippines, said on 8th June that the recent string of NPA victories in the Ilocos-Cordillera and Bicol regions, the

Visayas and Mindanao against the demoralized AFP showed that the claim by President Gloria Arroyo and the new AFP chief of staff's that the revolutionary movement will be decimated by 2010 was baseless and self-delusive.

The vicious widespread military offensives launched by the AFP in March to wipe out the revolutionary forces in the northern, eastern and western Samar by 2009 have come a cropper. As the CPP spokesperson pointed out, it was the AFP rather than the NPA that took a beating. But the more losses the AFP suffered the more it pursued its offensives so that at the end of their 'counter-insurgency' operations it will be the AFP and not the revolutionary forces who will be weakened.

The AFP has out of desperation has made baseless allegations against the NPA about attacks on civilian targets, often by forces loyal to the government. This time it has accused the NPA of grenade throwing in Nabunturan, Compostela Valley that killed three civilians and wounded several others. The revolutionary forces condemned the criminal attack against civilians and added that they were verifying reports that AFP intelligence operatives were behind the attack, following devastation suffered by the newly deployed 3rd Special Forces Battalion at the hands of partisans in the same town days earlier.

Prof. Jose Ma. Sison, Chief Political Consultant National Democratic Front of the Philippines on 5th June 2008 denounced the Agence France Presse news report on 5th June stating that "A Dutch court (i.e. District Court of The Hague) gave prosecutors the go-ahead Thursday to pursue murder charges against Philippine communist leader, despite an earlier dismissal of the case". This was despite the District Court of The Hague affirming the position that since the examining judge decided to close the preliminary investigation on November 2007 and the prosecution has not provided evidence to overturn the decision of the Court of Appeal on 3rd October declaring that there is no prima facie evidence against me. Sison pointed out that the Court of Appeal in The Hague also ruled that there was a political context for the unfounded charge against him. In sharp contrast to the absence of prima facie evidence against Sison, the Dutch prosecution office and Dutch police have turned up witnesses and documentary evidence to prove that two assassination teams were dispatched from the Philippines to the Netherlands to kill Sison between 1999 and 2001. But the Dutch authorities had failed to investigate seriously these infringements of Dutch sovereignty and territory.

Meantime, violations of human rights of Filipinos in the Netherlands were exposed by the International Association of Democratic Lawyers in its intervention delivered to the United Nations Human Rights Council, during its 8th Session in Geneva on June 11, 2008 during the Universal Periodic Review of the human rights record of the Netherlands. The IADL cited the arbitrary arrest and detention of Prof. Jose Maria Sison and indiscriminate raids by the Dutch police on the office of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines and the homes of NDFP personnel in August 2007. Persecution continued despite the dismissal of trumped up charges against Sison, based false information provided by the Arroyo government, by the Philippine Supreme Court on June 1, 2007, and seriously prejudiced peace negotiations facilitated by the Norwegian Government.

South Korea: Defiant Masses

An estimated 50,000 people gathered in Seoul on 5th July 2008 to demand the reversal of a government decision to resume US beef imports and the resignation of the increasingly unpopular President Lee Myung-Bak. South Korea, once a big market for US beef, suspended imports in 2003 following the outbreak of "mad cow disease" in the US. Protesters had previously clashed with police, forcing riot troops to fire water cannon and arrest 228 people. Around 100 protesters and 40 security officers were wounded in clashes, with a male citizen reportedly suffering a cerebral haemorrhage. Unable to control a series of protests with numbers reaching 100,000 the government renegotiated the agreement in June, with the US agreeing not to export beef from cattle older than 30 months, which is thought to carry a higher risk of mad cow disease, or BSE.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who is from South Korea, has since called for a resolution of the political turmoil. But nothing can appease mass opposition to the half a century long US domination of South Korea, until US bullying ends and the south is reunited with the north; and public anger in South Korea is high against what many see as the government's willingness to cave into Washington and ignore health concerns.

Mongolia: Shift to the Left

The Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP), a former communist party, and Mongolia's oldest political party, which ruled Mongolia has claimed victory in the recent elections to the Grand Khural, or parliament. The party, which ruled Mongolia from 1921 until 1996, when it was defeated

by the Democratic Party in the wake of events that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union, claimed the majority of seats in the Grand Khural (the parliament) leaving them poised to end four years of coalition government with their political rivals.

The results indicate a desire of the people to see a more stable government that can deal with the economy left in a mess by the earlier right-wing coalition, with inflation running at 15%, rampant unemployment and corruption, although the national economy grew by 9.9 percent in 2007, thanks to the vast deposits of copper and gold. The direction that the new government will take on state control over its natural resources and issues of social welfare is yet to be seen.

Venezuela: the Struggle Ahead

The Venezuelan Bolivarian project now faces numerous difficulties and an opposition capable of a coup plot or the assassination of the President. On November 23, the Bolivarian project will face its next test, at the elections for governors and mayors. The United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) in the process of construction needs to demonstrate that it is the leading force of the country. While Chavez himself has majority support, the same cannot be said for the PSUV with more than 5.5 million members, because of petty leadership rivalries. But the heart of the issue is the ideological struggle that is beginning to be waged around a socialist project which still continues to lack many definitions. Points made by Rafael Ramirez, Minister of Energy and Petroleum in an interview published in *Punto Final* are particularly relevant.

(T)here are no workers, there is no national bourgeoisie, there is nothing. What exists is a group of people who live off petroleum rent. This has its response in millions of men and women who make up the sectors marginalised not only from economic activity, but also marginalised in the cultural sphere and from everything. In this country we have a serious problem of exclusion. Excluded from what? Well, excluded from the petroleum rent! Therefore, to talk seriously about socialism, this has to necessarily pass through the strengthening of the state. The state is the only entity capable of guaranteeing that the control of the immense petroleum rent can have a useful social destiny.

In Venezuela we are in a basic and crucial battle: rescue our sovereignty and return to the nation the use of its resources. This battle passes through the defence of the right of the Venezuelan

people to decide their destiny with the aim of moving towards socialism. Of course, it is not about waiting until everything is resolved in order to begin to construct socialism, because this could potentially lead us in any direction. We are already taking steps forward in the economic sphere. It is fundamental that we create the economic bases to sustain the support that the people are giving to President Chavez's socialist proposals. If we are not careful, we could end up trying to construct a socialism immersed in capitalism. The structures that existed when Chavismo came to power are still there, many of them intact. Our principal problem has been how to impact on these structures, reform them, and in some cases, get rid off them, creating new structures.

To struggle for socialism, in capitalism, is very difficult, because capitalist values and relations are still present, they influence and pressure us. If we make a mistake, they reproduce themselves. That is why the discussion over socialism in Venezuela has to consider that this is a process that is just beginning, and which has to be accompanied by an intense practice.

We have had important achievements, we have also committed more than a few errors. Our revolution has to be very critical with itself, discuss with a lot of loyalty the question of unity in action, to see and analyse how to better and more rapidly advance, accompanying President Chavez, who is the leader of this process.

Paraguay: Change with the Times

The election victory of former Catholic bishop Fernando Lugo on 20th April will on 15th August end 61 years of rule by the right-wing Colorado Party when Lugo takes office. Lugo, known as the "bishop of the poor" is associated with the social democratic Socialist International through Revolutionary Febrerista Party and has vowed that his government would be "characterized by honesty and not by corruption" in a clear reference to the rampant criminality of the Colorado rule. He championed the cause of Paraguay's indigenous peasant population and then resigned from the Church in 2004 to pursue a political career. While it is unlikely that Lugo will pursue an anti-imperialist line like those of Chavez and Morales, his election to office is symbolic of mass sentiment in Latin America.

Chauvinism of the JVP bared

ja.vi.pe.: upata pavata vipata (Birth, life and death of the JVP), Sucharitha Gamlath, Sahasra Publications, Colombo 10, 2008, pp. 120, Rs 200.00.

The book on the JVP, a collection of essays in Sinhala written around fifteen years ago by Professor Sucharitha Gamlath, was launched on May 14th in Colombo. Significantly, its launch coincided with the inauguration of the National Freedom Front (JNP), the breakaway faction of the JVP, led by Nandana Gunathilaka and Wimal Weerawansa. The author writes from a Trotskyite perspective. Although interpretations are subjective in places, the factual information is correct and make the book a valuable document illustrating that the JVP has not been a Marxist organization.

The JVP was founded on chauvinism, following the expulsion of Rohana Wijeweera from the Ceylon Communist Party led by N Sanmugathasan. When the SLFP, LSSP, the revisionist CP, and affiliated trade unions demonstrated on 8th January 1966 against the agreement between the leaders of the UNP and the Federal Party to devolve powers to the Tamils, Wijeweera supported the protest, against the decision of the Party; and took advantage of the absence of the Sanmugathasan, away at a conference in Albania, to abuse party resources and print leaflets supporting the chauvinist protest, which were promptly confiscated and destroyed. He also opposed making Tamil the language of administration in the North and East. It was for such offences and for building secretly an organization of Southern Sinhala youth that he was expelled.

Of the five theoretical lectures for JVP cadres that formed the basis of the failed 1971insurrection, the one on Indian Expansionism portrayed the plantation workers and Indian small traders as arms of the Indian expansionist enemy. The next insurrection (1987-89) was against the Provincial Council proposal in the Indo-Sri Lanka accord of 1987. Again, in 2002, the JVP, to strengthen its vote bank among Sinhalese, opposed the ceasefire agreement and the MoU between the Prime Minister and the leader of the LTTE. Besides opposing a negotiated solution to the national question, the JVP advocates a military solution, and promotes the war reactivated by the Rajapaksha government.

The JVP denounced the old left for being submerged in parliamentary politics and claimed that it was the genuine left, only to get sucked into

parliamentary politics even faster. But, while the old left at least pays lip service to a political solution and devolution of power, the JVP bitterly opposes these from a chauvinistic point of view. The media and capitalist parties repeatedly refer to the JVP as left and Marxist, but that cannot make the JVP left or Marxist.

The claim in the book that the JVP went wrong because it was not a Trotskyite party is unsubstantiated. The JVP has at no stage referred to Stalin or Mao to justify its policies. It was, however, a member organization of a Fourth International from 1978 until a few years into this millennium. It merely used the space created by the failure to build a Marxist movement in the country, which applied the Marxist Leninist lessons to the problems of the petit bourgeoisie and the peasantry as well as the national question.

Thus it is not possible to endorse all the views expressed in the book. However, there is much to agree with and commend about the courageous exposure of the chauvinism of the JVP in relation to the national question.

-ET-

An important historical document

caathiyamum athaRkku ethiraana pooraattankaLum
(Castism and the struggles against it), Vehujanana & Ravana,
South Vision, Chennai, 2008 pp. 242, Rs 300.00 in Sri Lanka
at Puthiya Poomi Publications, 47 CCSM Complex, Colombo
11, Sri Lanka.

The second edition of this book in Tamil by SK Senthivel (Vehujanana) and N Raveendran (Ravana) is a slightly enlarged version of the first, published in 1986. It deals briefly with the origins and development of caste in South Asia, and distinguishes the caste structure in different parts of Sri Lanka from each other and from those existing in India.

It deals with the nature and development of caste and caste oppression in Sri Lanka; the interaction of the caste system with the state, including colonial rule; struggles against caste oppression, with emphasis on the Jaffna peninsula, where caste oppression, 'untouchability' and the struggle against them were most acute; and explores ways to eradicate castism. The thrust of the work is to show how efforts to secure social justice for those oppressed by caste in the Jaffna Peninsula culminated in a mass movement against castism and untouchability, led by the Left Communist Party (the Marxist Leninist section of the Communist Party

(also known as Peking Wing Communist Party) that split from the revisionists in 1964).

Reformist attempts to address grievances of those oppressed by caste are discussed and their achievements and shortcomings pointed out in the context of the resilience of deep seated prejudices of the oppressor. The need for a militant struggle and the need to take up arms are explained and, very importantly, the possibility of uniting significant sections of the 'higher castes' in the struggle for social justice for those oppressed by caste is demonstrated, contrary to the narrow outlook of Dalitists of Tamilnadu which only led to caste politics of a new kind offering no prospect of an end to caste discrimination and oppression.

The leading role of the Marxist Leninists in the mass struggle to combat caste oppression was exemplary in many respects. It was the only mass struggle as well as armed struggle to successfully achieve the goals that it set for itself; and it restricted the use of arms to the enemy bearing arms and to the period for which the use of arms was necessary. It demonstrated that, under a correct political leadership, class solidarity can override caste loyalties in the struggles for social justice.

The book clearly states that caste and castism cannot be eradicated overnight or by decree, while emphasizing the need for any movement for political and social democracy and social justice to resolve the problem of oppression by caste. It also records the current status of castism in the context of the liberation struggle of the Tamil nationality, and effectively puts to rest the bogus claim of Tamil nationalists that caste contradictions do not exist any more and that they should not be talked about amid a struggle for liberation. It also exposes the bankruptcy of making caste the central contradiction at the expense of struggles against other forms of oppression, and most importantly class struggle.

The value of the book lies not only in its being the only comprehensive document on the struggle against caste oppression in Sri Lanka, but also in its demonstration that genuine Marxist Leninists do not use class struggle as a pretext to shirk responsibility towards struggle against other forms of social oppression but rather integrate such struggles with class struggle. It makes essential reading for those who are concerned with the question of caste and caste oppression as well as to those on the left who are interested in knowing how caste oppression could be fought without compromising on issues of class struggle as well as other forms of oppression.

-ET-

The Deluge and the Tree

Fadwa Tuqan

**When the hurricane swirled and
spread its deluge of dark evil
onto the good green land
'they' gloated. The western skies
reverberated with joyous accounts:
"The Tree has fallen!
The great trunk is smashed!
The hurricane leaves no life in the Tree!"
Had the Tree really fallen?
Never! Not with our red streams flowing forever,
not while the wine of our thorn limbs
fed the thirsty roots,
Arab roots alive
tunnelling deep, deep, into the land!
When the Tree rises up, the branches
shall flourish green and fresh in the sun
the laughter of the Tree shall leaf
beneath the sun
and birds shall return
Undoubtedly, the birds shall return.
The birds shall return**

Translated by Nathalie Handal

BETHLEHEM

Nathalie Handal

Secrets live in the space between our footsteps.

**The words of my grandfather echoed in my dreams,
as the years kept his beads and town.**

**I saw Bethlehem, all in dust, an empty town
with a torn piece of newspaper lost in its narrow
streets.**

**Where could everyone be? Graffiti and stones
answered.**

**And where was the real Bethlehem--the one my
grandfather came from?**

Handkerchiefs dried the pain from my hands.

Live trees and tears continued to remember.

**I walked the town until I reached an old Arab man
dressed in a white robe.**

**I stopped him and asked, "Aren't you the man I saw
in my grandfather's stories?"**

**He looked at me and left. I followed him--asked him
why he left? He continued walking.**

**I stopped, turned around and realized he had left me
the secrets
in the space between his footsteps.**

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