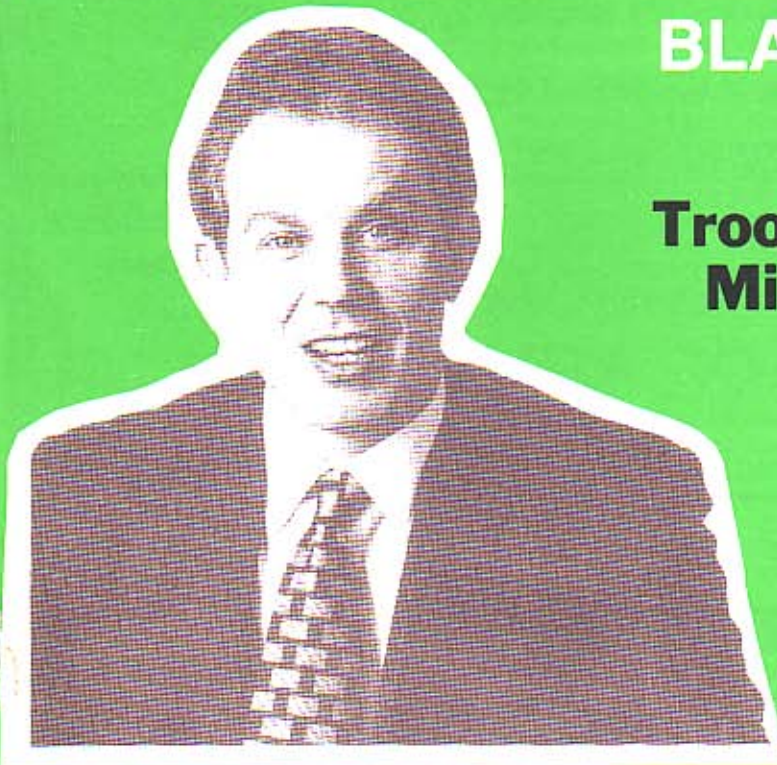


Tamil **TIMES**

Vol XVI No.5 ISSN 0266-4488 ' 15 MAY 1997 90p

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



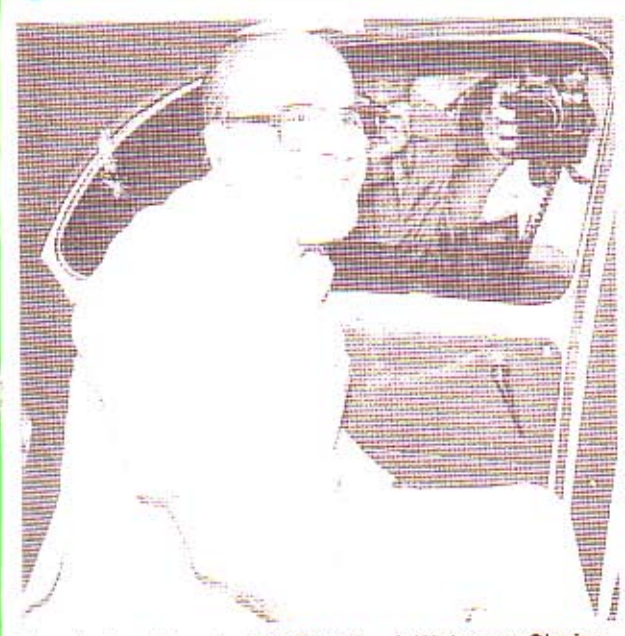
BLAIR'S MASSIVE VICTORY

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right to say it."
-Voltaire

Tamil TIMES

ISSN 0266 - 44 88
Vol. XVI No. 5
15 May 1997

Published by:
TAMIL TIMES LTD
PO Box 121, Sutton, Surrey SM1 3TD
United Kingdom
Phone: 0181 644 0972
Fax: 0181 241 4557
Email: prajan@gn.apc.org

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION

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

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CONTENTS

Blair's Victory	03
Military Offensive in the North	04
Broadcasting Bill Over-ruled	05
Focus on Human Rights	06
Indian New PM Welcomed	07
Future of PA-UNP Agreement	08
Father of Tamil Nationalism	11
MPs Call for Third-party Mediation	13
Towards a Credible Solution	15
A Win-Win Outcome, the Only Way	18
Pathway to Peace	19
Refugees- UNHCR Stance	20
A Plea From Trincomalee	22
Gujral the PM, for How Long?	23
Sonia Reviving the Mystique	25
Indo-Pakistan Relations	27
Lessons from Sri Lanka for India	29
Classified	30

BRITISH ELECTION AND BLAIR'S VICTORY

The recent British general election has produced a new Labour government. The revamped and refashioned Labour Party under Tony Blair's leadership won the most decisive electoral landslide since 1931. The sheer magnitude of the staggeringly emphatic Labour victory reflected in its stupendous parliamentary majority of 179 seats has been widely described as a political earthquake. The Labour leadership certainly worked and hoped for a victory. The several opinion polls consistently predicted a Labour win. But no one even in their wildest dreams expected such a crushing victory for New Labour under Tony Blair.

The Tories suffered their most humiliating and biggest electoral defeat this century. After being in power for 18 long years, the Conservative Party had become in the eyes of the people a degenerate party of political and moral corruption and sheer incompetence and complacency born out of an arrogance of power held for far too long.

"When a government, like an old-fashioned building, has become crazy and rotten, it stops the way of improvement, and only serves to collect diseases and corruption," wrote William Hazlitt of the Bourbons of old who never learnt until they were taught the painful lesson by the people. And deservedly the people administered the worst defeat upon the Tories summarily despatching them out of political power. A justly angry people inflicted an unprecedented electoral massacre which claimed as its casualties dozens of seats of once very powerful cabinet ministers, middle-ranking ministers, would-be future leaders and grandees of the 1922 Committee. The Tories were electorally obliterated in Scotland and Wales failing to get even a single seat thus losing their claim to be a truly national party of the whole country. That even with its Little-Englishish-Europhobic nationalist disposition, the fact that the Conservative Party was reduced to a minority party even in the English regions demonstrated the enormity of the electoral catastrophe it suffered.

Ending Labour's 18-year long exile from political power, and as the youngest Prime Minister since Lord Liverpool in 1812, Tony Blair led his party to a truly remarkable historic victory and entered Number 10 Downing Street mobbed and cheered by thousands of people evidently displaying the extent of their euphoria and enthusiasm for the new government they had helped to elect.

After 18 years of Tory rule, the country and the people were ripe-ready for change. But it should be realised that victory did not fall into Labour's lap just because people wanted change. In its long march back to power, the party had to be reconstructed and refashioned in policy and organisational terms to enable it to reach out to all parts of the country and all sections of the people. To his undeniable credit, Tony Blair made it happen and did so most decisively. And the new government led by him has a massive mandate from the people.

The central ideological thrust of 18 years of Tory rule has been the evil process of the consecration of private greed as opposed to collective public good, the stripping of public assets to the benefit of private monopolistic entities, the diminution of local democracy and accountability and substituting them with centralised bureaucratic power of Whitehall, and "quangoisation" of public sector and local government functions, and the redistribution of wealth from the poor to the rich in an accelerated pace.

The pronouncements of the new government during its first days in power and its legislative programme announced in its first Queen's Speech reflect the hopes and aspirations of the overwhelming majority of the people. They include the signing up to the "Social Chapter" of the European Union which will entitle the British people with the same social and economic rights as the rest, devolution of power to Scotland and Wales by the creation of a Scottish Parliament and a Welsh Assembly, the reform of the House of Lords by the abolition of the undemocratic, archaic and anachronistic entitlement to hereditary peerage, the abolition of the commercialisation of the National Health Service by removing the mechanism of the internal market, the introduction of a national minimum wage, the removal of the moratorium on local government house-building for the homeless by the release of funds hitherto prohibited from being used for the purpose, the removal of the ban on the right of workers to join trade unions -like those employed at the Government Communication Headquarters (GCHQ), the enactment of a Freedom of Information Act, the adoption of the European Convention of Human Rights into domestic law, and an ethical dimension to foreign policy with a focus on human rights in its dealing with other states. All these proposals constitute an ambitious, progressive and substantial commitment by the new British government.

The ultimate challenge and test of the new government will be its determination and ability to put into practice what it has promised, and if it does it will have the goodwill and support of the people in full measure leaving the Tories to languish in the political wilderness for a long, long time.

NEWS REVIEW

TROOPS LAUNCH MASSIVE OFFENSIVE IN THE NORTH

The Sri Lankan troops numbering over 20,000, backed by helicopter gunships, and armoured battle tanks, setting out from the northern town of Vavuniya on 13 May launched a major military offensive against what the military described as Tamil Tiger positions. With air-cover provided by warplanes, artillery and battle tanks, troops were bulldozing trees and vegetation and advancing along the flanks of the highway, wary of LTTE land mines and booby-traps. On the second day of the offensive, it was reported that the LTTE-controlled town of Omanthai, five miles into LTTE territory, had been captured by the advancing troops with little resistance being offered by the Tigers. The town was deserted as the army entered the town, a sure sign that the civilians had already moved out of the area. The troops while consolidating their positions in Omanthai were reportedly slowly advancing further towards Mankulam.

Reports datelined 14 May indicate that Tigers had begun to hit back at the advancing troops following the capture of Omanthai. Reports from the north said that heavy fighting broke out along the strategic Vavuniya-Kilinochchi road. "There is heavy fighting just north of Omanthai. Helicopter ambulances have begun to fly in and out with casualties," according to a military officer. An agency report quoting northern sources said that as many as 160 persons from both sides and including civilians might have been killed in the two days of fighting. On 15 May Brig. Tissa Jayatunga said that at least 18 soldiers had been killed and 31 wounded while claiming that over 100 Tiger fighters had been killed.

The objective of the latest offensive, codenamed "Operation Jaya Sikurui" (Sure Victory) is said to be to open up a land route linking government-controlled Vavuniya with the northern Jaffna peninsula through Kilinochchi. The government now relies entirely on air and sea transport to send troops and supplies to bases in Jaffna, and also to send supplies to the

civilian population there, because most of the north-central Vanni region between Kilinochchi and Vavuniya is under LTTE control. But the airforce has lost a number of transport aircraft in recent months, mostly in unexplained incidents, while the powerful Sea Tiger naval wing of the LTTE posed a continuous grave threat to naval convoys to Jaffna.

For weeks it was known that the troops preparing for the offensive, described as the second major operation this year, as Vavuniya saw an influx of thousands of troops with vast quantities of heavy artillery, battle tanks and armoured vehicles. It was also reported that in anticipation of the offensive, the LTTE was mobilising over 2,000 of its cadres in the north-eastern Mullaitivu region where LTTE's main military bases and headquarters are located. The Tigers have also been launching artillery attacks on the Vavuniya airbase in an effort to disrupt preparations for the offensive while massing hundreds of its fighters, including women cadres, and constructing bunkers along the Vavuniya-Jaffna route ready to defend their positions. In a pre-emptive strike the Tigers LTTE forces on 11 May penetrated Pankulam's army/police military complex - and its surrounding airforce fortifications - killing 20 Sri Lankan soldiers and 5 armed homeguards. The attack took place at 11.30 on Sunday night and caused all remaining Sri Lankan military personnel to flee from the fighting. During the attack, a Sri Lankan rescue bid failed dramatically, with LTTE forces successfully holding reinforcements at bay. Eight LTTE members lost their lives, according to a LTTE statement dated 13 May. The statement also added that two LTTE fighters have lost their lives at the start of Sri Lanka's latest military offensive just launched from Vavuniya. Lt. Murugaventhram Palaniappa Santhirakumar (Santhiran) and Mootharanjan Selvarasa Sureshkumar are the two who died.

For days before the launch of the offensive on 13 May, the military had been

shelling LTTE-controlled areas in the Vanni region from their bases at Elephant Pass, Kilinochchi and Vavuniya. The LTTE in a statement on 10 May said, "The Sri Lankan military has intensified its shelling of the Tamil population of Vanni. The multi-pronged attack is being launched from three Sri Lankan army bases - at Vavuniya, Kilinochchi and Elephant Pass. Sri Lanka's targets are residential Tamil villages which are densely-populated. The result, as usual, has been chaos - men, women and children have once more been uprooted as the long-range artillery has them running from pillar to post. Many buildings have already been ruined." Another LTTE statement dated 11 May said, "Non-stop shelling by Sri Lankan forces on Vaddakachi in the district of Kilinochchi has created an exodus of Tamil people to Ramanathapuram. The Vaddakachi school has had to be evacuated with students and teachers now crammed together in the Ramanathapuram school, which was itself already over-crowded."

The LTTE in a statement issued on the second of the offensive (14 May) said, Two Tamil civilians have already been killed and many thousands are fleeing at the start of Sri Lanka's latest military assault on the northeast Tamil population. Omanthai and Puliyankulam - both Tamil civilian centres - are scenes of devastation, with hospitals, public buildings, commercial centres and homes torn to the ground by heavy artillery fire from advancing Sinhala forces. MI24 helicopters and tanks are smashing up everything in their wake. The firing is intense, indiscriminate and remorseless... Civilians meanwhile have scattered in all directions with thousands forced to take refuge in unsafe jungle terrain. A humanitarian crisis is looming and set to worsen, with children and the elderly at particular risk. The international community's response to the impending disaster is yet to be seen as Sri Lankan troops prepare to continue further into Tamil territory. The bombing is continuing unabated."

According to military sources, the Sri Lankan navy also has joined the offensive and launched pre-dawn attacks on the north-eastern coast in the Mullaitivu district. The LTTE confirmed the navy's participation in a statement on 14 May which said, "A fleet of Sri Lankan gunboats raked Mullaitivu's shoreline at dawn yesterday killing a fleeing Tamil fisherman. Velupillai Vallipuram was hit while escaping from the navy's cannon fire. Although several other people were injured, most coastal fishing families managed to escape inland. They are presently living under trees in nearby forests."

The LTTE in statement on 16 May said, "LTTE forces at Omanthai yester-

(Continued on next page)

Court Rules Broadcasting Bill Unconstitutional

A government which came to power promising freedom of expression and media freedom cannot be credited much for its commitment to its promise nor its political sagacity when the country's Supreme Court dealt a severe blow by ruling that the controversial Sri Lanka Broadcasting Authority Bill enabling the setting up of a powerful broadcasting authority was unconstitutional. In a legal challenge mounted against the Bill, the Supreme Court ruled "that some of the provisions of the Bill are inconsistent with the provisions of the constitution and the bill as a whole is inconsistent with Article 10 of the constitution." Article 10 guarantees the fundamental rights of freedom of thought and conscience. Sri Lankan media organisations hailed the ruling as a victory for democracy.

Even friends of the government are at a loss to understand why the government did not produce a White Paper on Media Freedom as it had previously committed itself to do. If it had done so, it would have avoided the critical opposition it had to face and the humiliation of the Supreme Court order against the Bill.

On March 24, a Bill titled the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Authority was gazetted and subsequently presented in Parliament by Minister of Education Richard Pathirana in early April. The undue haste with which

this process took place led to speculation that it was timed to allow little or no room for the constitutionality of the Bill to be challenged before the Supreme Court. The Bill introduced in parliament sought to set up a Broadcasting Authority with wide powers to monitor, regulate and grant operating licences to radio and television broadcasters. The Bill provided for the annual renewal of broadcast licences from the authority's board of directors, appointed by the Minister of Media, who would consist of secretaries to various government ministries, including the defence ministry. The Bill also allowed for the Minister to remove any member of the Authority without clarifying steps and procedures to be followed in such an eventuality.

The nature of the composition of the Authority itself has been questioned by the critics of the Bill. The eleven-member Authority, as set out in the Bill, would consist of six government bureaucrats - Secretaries to the Ministries of Information and Broadcasting, Defence, Posts and Telecommunications, Education and Cultural Affairs (strangely, no such Ministry

exists!), Finance and the Chairman of the National Film Corporation. The other five persons would be nominated by the Media Minister.

Of the eleven, only two nominees are required to have experience in the field of broadcasting.

However, over 12 individuals and organisations including the leading opposition party, the United National Party (UNP), and the Free Media Movement have filed cases in the Supreme Court challenging the constitutionality of the Bill.

It is curious that the present government has afforded an undeserved opportunity to the UNP which was notorious for its assault on freedom of expression during its long years power by its effort to parent the UNP's child. It appears that the Bill in question was conceived and drawn up during the previous United National Part (UNP) government. It is said that it had even had the sanction and approval of the then Attorney General, Mr. Tilak Marappone. Even friends of the present government are aghast as to the present government's lack of political wisdom in its aborted effort to give birth and foster such a Bill of alien parentage.

The respected columnist and founder of the Free Media Movement (FMM) in Sri Lanka, Lucien Rajakrunanayake, observed, "One thing that those who seek the origins of this sudden bill discover is that it is in fact the handiwork of the previous government. The cat is out of the bag in a way, with one ex-officio member of the proposed authority being the secretary to the minister of education and cultural affairs. The present government does not such a ministry. What is more interesting is that this government which came to power bowing to the demands of the media helped by the campaign of those who spoke for media freedom which was threatened by the UNP, has to present a UNP draft bill, without even taking care to ensure that its fits the current reality."

The much respected non-political Civil Rights Movement of Sri Lanka, urging the government to withdraw the Bill, said in a press release, "The Bill authorise interference with the content of broadcasting programmes to an extent incompatible with freedom of expression and the public right to information.

"It enables interference with these rights well beyond the restrictions permissible under interactional standards. The manner of appointment and composition of the new Authority (which includes even the Secretary to the Ministry of Defence or his representative), and the provision

(Continued from page 4)

day stalled the Sri Lankan army's advance, inflicting heavy casualties on troops. A large number of government soldiers are known to have died and many more are injured, though exact figures are not yet available. LTTE forces are putting up stiff resistance to Sri Lanka's invading army. Some weapons and ammunition were captured and the body of one Sri Lankan soldier was recovered."

An agency report datelined said that troops rolled out of Omanthal, nine miles north of Vavuniya, on Friday afternoon, heading towards the heavily fortified Tiger-held town of Puliyanakulam further north. Troops had advanced about two 1.2 miles from Omanthal. They were being met by stiff resistance from the Tigers, according an official.

A pitched battle was being fought near Nedunkeni, about 25 miles northeast of Vavuniya, where troops advancing along an eastern flanks were being attacked by the Tigers, according to another official.

The army claimed that at least 28 Tigers, including four women cadres, were killed on the fourth day of fighting.

The army claimed that at least 28 Tigers, including four women cadres, were

killed on the fourth day of fighting. However, a statement by the LTTE on 17 May said, "As a tribute to their courage we list below the names of the first 23 (out of 37) LTTE fighters who lost their lives in the past four days (up to 16.5.97) fighting invading Sri Lankan forces at Omanthal and Nedunkeni. The remaining 14 names will be supplied shortly :- Yokarasa Kirupakaran; Srimurugan Sritharan; Kanesan Ravichandran; Muthuvelu Selvarasa; Tharmarasa Pavalakanthan; Arumugam Mahatevan; Jeyaratnam Sutharsan; Selvarasa Sriitharan; Sivanantham Parameswaran; Kathiravelu Rukmani Devi; Sivagnanam Santhirasekaram; Muthuras Jeevaraj; Anthony Croos Thangathurai; Amuthalingam Susinthiran; Kandiah Suriyakumar; Upali Sivagnanamoorthy; Sivasubramaniam Ratnakumar; Ramachandran Radiskumar; Krishnapillai Pushpa; Kanthasamy Kanthimathy; Velautham Rames; Krishnapillai Supashini; Sinnathurai Rajeswari."

International humanitarian agencies have confirmed that the four days of fighting between government forces and the Tamil Tigers has resulted in the displacement of an estimated 15,000 civilians from the war affected Vanni region.

that the Authority will be subject to Ministerial directions is a clear indication of an intention to keep broadcasting under political control of the government of the day.

"With regard to circumstances of its presentation, the Bill has not first been published as a White Paper for public consultation, as is gathered was the undertaking given by the Minister of Media, Tourism and Aviation to journalists. More surprising still, the report of the Committee appointed by the Minister to advise on the reform of the law on media freedom has not been published... These circumstances, in the view of CRM, display a most regrettable disregard for the many human rights and journalists organisations deeply concerned with freedom of expression and information, and for the public at large."

The FMM has commented on the fact that the provision for annual review of licenses allows for the restrictive control of privately-owned electronic media. The First Schedule to the Bill sets out the terms and conditions under which licenses will be granted. These terms amount to regulation of the content of programmes; licensees should refrain from including matters which offend against public morality or is likely to incite crime or to lead to public disorder or to lead to racial or religious disharmony OR matters tending to jeopardise the sovereignty or national security of Sri Lanka'. In addition, the licensee must 'ensure that news programmes... are presented with impartiality and with due regard to accuracy and the public interest...'. All these phrases could be broadly interpreted in a way that could constitute blatant censorship of news and views with a particular angle or focus, the FMM said.

Following the court ruling declaring the Bill unconstitutional, Lucien Rajakarunanayake of the FMM said, "We hope the government will give heed to the order of the Supreme Court and withdraw this bill."

The court ruling meant that in order for the bill to be enacted into law, it would need to be passed by a two-thirds majority in parliament, where the government has only a one-seat majority, followed by a national referendum. It was not immediately clear what the government planned to do with the Bill after the Court's ruling, but informed sources in Colombo said the government would withdraw the Bill and produce a White Paper for consultation.

The Supreme Court verdict was critical of "unjustified discrimination" in favour of the state-owned media. The Court found no rational basis at all "for treating the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation and the Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation with special favour."

The Court's position on the composition of the proposed Broadcasting Authority was that "the Authority lacks the independence required of a body entrusted with the regulation of the electronic media." The Bill stipulated that the Authority should have a majority of ex-officio members and that all Authority members should be appointed by the Media Minister. The Court also sharply criticised the Bill for providing the Media Minister with the powers to issue directions to the Authority. The judgement states that "The Minister, with his unbridled power to make regulations, is placed in a position where

he might, through 'guidelines', interfere with the presentation of programmes and thereby undermine the principle of fairness, which is the heart of responsible broadcasting."

On the question of the lack of independence of the proposed Authority, the Court found that "both the right of freedom of speech and freedom of thought are placed in jeopardy."

The Supreme Court panel was headed by Chief Justice G. P. S. de Silva. The other members were Justices A. R. B. Amerasinghe and P. Ramanathan. The judgement was unanimous.

FOCUS ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Fundamental Rights:

Human rights groups in Colombo point out that the Fundamental Rights chapter of Sri Lanka's draft new Constitution has several disappointing clauses, restricting the scope of Human Rights.

On March 26, Justice Minister G. L. Peiris, at a press conference, released the draft text of 18 chapters of the new Constitution. The chapters that deal with the devolution of power were not among the texts released.

In examining the fundamental rights chapter of the present draft, human rights observers have commented that much of the text would benefit from being brought in line with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. There is particular concern regarding two Articles (24 and 25 in the present draft) which state that:

24: 'all existing written and unwritten law shall be valid and operative notwithstanding any inconsistency with the provisions of this Chapter', and

25: 'the subjection of any person on the order of a Court to any form of punishment recognized by any written law shall not be a contravention of the provisions of this Chapter'.

This, for example, means that women cannot challenge any act of discrimination based on personal laws that affect different communities differently in spite of being guaranteed equality in law in the fundamental rights chapter. Nor could anyone challenge the death penalty or even public caning as a cruel and degrading treatment, forbidden under Article 9 in the draft.

The good news is that the Parliamen-

tary Select Committee has indicated its willingness to receive representations from individuals and organisations wanting to place their ideas regarding the draft before the PSC.

The Bolgoda Lake Case:

In his address to the UN Commission on Human Rights on April 9 in Geneva, Ambassador Bernard Goonetilleke refuted recent information concerning the 'Bolgoda case' as misleading allegations.

The controversy arose when Chief Magistrate, Colombo, on March 13, ordered the case to be struck off the roll. This followed the failure of any members of the prosecuting team to be present in court on two consecutive dates - December 12 and March 13.

Human rights observers who have followed the case with keen interest were appalled at this turn of events. Earlier on, too, the granting of bail to the majority of the 22 members of the Special Task Force who were taken into custody over the appearance of over 12 bodies in the Bolgoda Lake in the months from June to August 1995, had created consternation among human rights circles.

However, in Geneva, Mr. Goonetilleke has claimed that 'it has been decided to file indictment directly against the STF personnel in the High Court without going through a non-summary inquiry to avoid delay.' According to Goonetilleke, 'the Solicitor General had confirmed that the case will continue'.

While hopeful that indeed this prosecution will come to pass, concern has been expressed as to why the Attorney General's Department did not have the courtesy to inform the Chief Magistrate, Colombo, of their decision in this respect. This seems to be yet another situation in which the government's left hand does not know what the right hand is doing!

The Attorney General has responded to criticism over his handling of the Bolgoda case by stating that he was awaiting further forensic reports before filing a case against the accused in a higher

court. Local officials from the Forensics Department say the reports requested have been handed in. The AG is apparently awaiting some reports from outside the country.

Meanwhile, two other cases which also generated a great deal of controversy were dismissed within the first week of April.

The case in which ASP Sumith Edirisinghe and Chief Inspector Anton Sisira Kumara were accused of involvement in the abduction and murder of persons in Hokandara in 1988/1989 was dismissed by the Additional Magistrate, Colombo on April 2, following notification by the Attorney General that he would not be pursuing the case further. The Hokandara 'mass grave' was one of those excavated during the last months of the previous regime. At that time, the PA was extremely vocal about bringing those responsible to justice.

The Wawulkeley case, in which six persons including 4 Police officers were accused of involvement in the abduction and murder of six youths in 1989 was also dropped by the High Court judge, Gampaha on April 4 on the grounds that there was insufficient evidence to clearly establish the identities of the accused.

Amnesty International has issued an urgent action appeal on 2 May concerning the recent disappearance of Kandiah Sivakumar, aged 20, and Kanagasabai Ravichandran, aged 20.

Kandiah Sivakumar and Kanagasabai Ravichandran, two firewood sellers from Rukam village, have been reported 'disappeared' after they were taken into custody by the army near the Black Bridge, Chenkalady, Batticaloa district on 20 April 1997.

According to eye-witnesses, they were stopped by soldiers from the Kommadurai army camp at around 2pm. They were on their way home from Eravur where they had gone to sell firewood. Their bicycles were also taken. The reason for their arrest is not known, but it is possible that they were suspected of having links with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the main armed opposition group fighting for an independent state in the north and east of the country. The village of Rukam is in an LTTE--controlled area.

When the young men's parents went to make inquiries at Kommadurai army camp the next day, the army officials told them that Kandiah Sivakumar and Kanagasabai Ravichandran had already been released. However, they had not returned home. Further inquiries by the Batticaloa Peace Committee and members of parliament have met with the same response.

Torture Charge Against Police:

A Tamil man presently in a Colombo jail is filing for wrongful arrest after undergoing excessive torture at various police stations. He was arrested in November while staying at a Vavuniya hotel. Local police beat him on the head with iron rods then kicked him in the face as he squirmed on the ground. He was then ordered to drink the blood that poured from his nose and mouth. A month later Rajendran Mahendran - who is 33 - was transferred to Borella police station (Colombo) where the torture continued. Officers squeezed his testicles in an iron device and denied him treatment even as pus leaked from his ears. He was later taken to Colombo magistrates court where he was remanded for an indefinite period. Mahendran is a father of three from Karainagar. He says not even the

scant legal formalities relating to arrest and detention under the country's draconian emergency regulations was observed.

Army Officers to Study Human Rights:

Sri Lanka's army has introduced human rights into its training curriculum and officers will eventually face tests on the subject before being promoted, military officials said. "The training is meant to improve the conduct of our troops in the field," a senior army officer said. "Human rights will be a compulsory subject in the Lieutenant-to-Captain and Captain-to-Major promotion examinations from next year."

All ranks must eventually sit for a test on humanitarian laws of war to qualify for promotions, the officer said. Human rights groups have accused Sri Lankan security forces of human rights abuses.

South Asian Nations Welcome New Indian Premier

Sri Lanka has welcomed the appointment of Inder Kumar Gujral as India's new Prime Minister, describing him as an old friend who would further strengthen ties between the two neighbours. "... there could be no more fitting choice to lead India in this, its 50th anniversary year of independence," President Chandrika Kumaratunga said in a message to Gujral.

"We in Sri Lanka have enthusiastically welcomed the significant impetus you imparted to the further strengthening of the long-standing close and friendly ties between our two countries," she said.

Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar said he believed that under Gujral's leadership ties between the two countries "will enter a period of unparalleled strength and mutual benefit." A foreign ministry spokesman earlier described Gujral as a sincere friend of Sri Lanka who understood the country well.

"He has even in the worst of times, as was in 1989, been able to steer Indo-Sri Lanka relations out of trouble," he said. "We have no doubt that the solid foundation he has helped lay as foreign minister will be further consolidated now that he is the prime minister of India," he added.

Gujral, during a visit to Sri Lanka in January last as foreign minister, had said India would do what it could to end the ethnic war. "India is ready to provide Sri Lanka any help she could give," Gujral said then. But he added that New Delhi supported a peaceful settlement of the conflict. "We are committed to a policy of

good neighbourliness and non-interference in Sri Lanka's affairs," Gujral said.

Pakistan and Bangladesh also have welcomed the appointment of Inder Kumar Gujral as prime minister, saying he would help smooth regional tensions.

Pakistani newspapers said Gujral would pursue a policy he crafted as foreign minister under the previous government of seeking better ties with India's old rival Pakistan and its other neighbours. "One of the best things about his becoming India's next prime minister is that the process of normalisation of ties between India and Pakistan will move ahead," said the Islamabad-based English language newspaper The News.

"In India, with the selection of I.K. Gujral as prime minister, stability is expected to return to the world's largest democracy," the paper said. "Such a development is conducive to reducing tensions in the region."

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's media adviser Mushahid Hussain said that Pakistan welcomed Gujral as prime minister. "We...hope that Mr Gujral, as he was stating when he was not in the government in the past, would take steps to resolve the primary cause of friction between India and Pakistan, namely the unresolved dispute of Jammu and Kashmir," Hussain said.

India and Pakistan have fought three wars since independence from Britain 50 years ago, two of them over Kashmir. Top Pakistani and Indian diplomats met for

three days in New Delhi at the end of March, the first such talks since 1994. Gujral, as foreign minister, met his Pakistani counterpart Gohar Ayub Khan in Delhi this month and is now likely to meet Sharif at a regional summit meeting in the Maldives in May.

Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina sent a warmly worded message of congratulations to Gujral. "We regard you as a genuine friend of Bangladesh and hold you in high esteem for your personal interest in and valuable contribution to promotion and strengthening of Bangladesh-India friendship and cooperation," her message said. She said Gujral's initiatives had led to "significant developments" in bilateral relations in recent months.

LTTE Seeks Gujral's Support for Tamil Self-Determination

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) said they hoped that India's new prime minister Inder Kumar Gujral would support the right of self-determination of Tamils of Sri Lanka.

In a letter dated 22 April addressed to the new Indian Prime Minister, the LTTE said, "We wish to congratulate you on your appointment to the honourable post of Prime Minister of the great nation of India. As you are aware, the Tamil people in the northeast of Sri Lanka have a long and valuable bond with the people of India which dates back several centuries. It is a relationship of the deepest historical significance for us and one which Eelam Tamils are committed to preserving and promoting. We are mindful not only of the close affinity we have with the people of Tamil Nadu, but also the greater religious and cultural aspirations we share with the entire nation of India. It is our sincere wish that the coming years will see a strengthening of this bond with the Indian people and a deepening of our friendship. This is possible because the Tamil people are truly inspired by your appointment to this eminent position.

"Sir, mixed with our enthusiasm at your appointment to this worthy role, we are hopeful that you might raise your own voice in support of self-determination for the Tamil Eelam nation and help to finally end the subjugation of the Tamil people, who are presently under physical attack in their own homeland.

May we stress that we wish you well in your role as Prime Minister of India and at the same time we pray for your earnest attention to the desperate and worsening plight of our people."

FUTURE OF THE CHANDRIKA-RANIL AGREEMENT

By D B S Jeyaraj

The month of April in Sri Lanka seemed to be the harbinger of good news on the ethnic front. The weeks preceding the traditional New year of Isura were full of hopeful expectations about a possible settlement to the ethnic crisis. The British brokered deal that materialised between the ruling PA and the chief opposition UNP on 3 April was the primary cause of this buoyant optimism.

The architect behind this British initiative was the former Conservative Under-Secretary of Foreign and Commonwealth affairs Dr Liam Fox. His name, the Sri Lankan "Lion" flag and the "Tiger" in LTTE provided ample scope for the media to project the exercise in "animalistic" terms. It was a case of two fables. All in lighter vein of course!

The old fable was about a lion and a tiger fighting over a deer and mauling each other fatally. As the feline creatures lay immobile suffering in agony a fox slunk in and made off with the carcass of the deer. The lion and tiger could hardly move and merely watched helplessly as the fox got away.

The modern political fable is about an island inhabited by tigers in the north and lions in the south. Both groups fight over the sharing of power to the point where a third party is required to mediate. Also the lioness presiding over the lions and the lion hoping to succeed her some day are also not on talking terms. A third party is required to facilitate a hi-partisan approach between both on talking to the tigers. So enter the fox! A British reynard at that!! This time as a third party hoping to end and not profit by the conflict. Tally Ho!!!

The British initiative was primarily of two phases one explicit and the other somewhat implicit. The efforts of Dr Fox resulted in the signing of two letters, identical in content, by Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga and Opposition leader Ranil Wickremasinghe. Both parties agreed to forge a bi-lateral approach towards the resolution of the ethnic conflict presumably due to British "pressure". That agreement envisaged an "ideal" situation where the government would brief and consult the UNP on matters concerning the ethnic conflict. The UNP would not

seek to undermine or oppose any initiative undertaken with the concurrence of that party. The UNP was obliged to implement any decision taken with its concurrence if and when it came to power in the future. This was the first phase of the British initiative.

The second phase although not expressed overtly was that of one where direct talks between the Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam was expected to occur. This was essentially a conjecture based on an assumption and related media reports. The assumption was in regard to the specific inclusion of the LTTE in the PA-UNP agreement as a party with which the government of Sri Lanka was likely to talk. Only the LTTE had been specifically referred to in the letter. This meant that talks with the LTTE was on the cards.

It was also surmised that Britain had obtained some definite guarantees from the LTTE regarding its willingness and consent to participate in talks. Media reports that a senior LTTE leader Lawrence Thilakar had travelled clandestinely to Sri Lanka and had met with the LTTE chief Velupillai Prabhakaran reinforced this assumption. Media reports further indicated that Prabhakaran had given the go-ahead and that two other LTTE personalities Anton Balasingham and Karikalan were now in the west awaiting a resumption of talks.

In that context hopes were raised about meaningful talks aimed at a negotiated settlement between the government and the LTTE being facilitated in due course. The UNP was not expected to obstruct it and some even conceived of a scenario where the UNP and the PA jointly talked to the tigers. This buoyancy in the island's political climate was reflected in the stock market with prices rising steadily in a "bullish" trend.

As the weeks passed this optimistic mood began evaporating. Apart from the release of the letters nothing seemed to move. The PA and the UNP were not displaying any forward movement in this regard. Statements by the government and the LTTE suggested an inflexible hardening of positions. The British intermediaries were caught up in electioneering. On

the other hand a major confrontation was expected to break out between the security forces and the tigers in the Wann. Also subtle moves seemed to be afoot to abort the Select committee proceedings on Constitutional reform. The situation was gloomy and peace loving people were becoming slowly disillusioned.

Even though hopes are turning into dupes it would be premature to conduct an autopsy on the British brokered agreement in Sri Lanka. It is pertinent however to seek out the reasons behind the current impasse faced by the British initiative.

A Prima Facie case can be made out that the chief cause for the decreased momentum is the government itself. Despite all the euphoric statements by government circles about the bi-lateral agreement it seems crystal clear that the PA has not got it's act together at least not just now. While the working and executive committees of the UNP have ratified unanimously the Chandrika-Ranil agreement the PA is yet to do so. There are valid reasons that would explain the government's seeming lethargy on the issue. But whether these reasons are acceptable from a Tamil perspective is another matter.

A basic attribute of any opposition in a democracy is to "oppose" and other constructive criticism. In Sri Lanka this opposition role had been distorted to an extent where the main party in opposition usually opposed every action of the government in power without being mindful of the general interests of the Country. The ethnic question in particular was the biggest Casualty in this respect. The ethnic crisis itself was created, compounded and perpetuated to a very great extent by the rivalry between the two major Sinhala parties. In fact a there is a strong correlation between the development of the two party system and the exacerbation of the Tamil problem in Sri Lanka.

Relations between President Kumaratun

ga and Opposition leader Wickremesinghe in recent times has reached an all-time low. There is a highly aggravated incompatibility of temperament between both. Their last one to one meeting was a disaster. Kumaratunga accused Wickremesinghe of not expressing a genuine commitment towards the resolution of the ethnic issue. The Colombo media quoted her as having said that Ranil had "Pittu in his mouth" (Katay pittu). Wickremesinghe also expressed his resentment and said publicly that he would not meet with Kumaratunga again.

It was against this background that Dr Liam Fox pulled the bipartisan approach rabbit out of his hat. Fox was able

to do this because of the personal relationship he had built up with Wickremesinghe and Kadirgamar. Foreign minister Kadirgamar was able to convince his President into going along with the British initiative.

Both the government and the opposition realise fully well that the British initiative is not a singular effort of that country alone. Britain has the tacit endorsement and backing of almost all the Western nations including the USA. In a sense Britain is fronting for all these countries in this exercise. These nations are the primary aid donors to Sri Lanka. Any political party in power or any party aspiring to power in the future cannot afford to ignore or reject the diplomatic endeavours of these countries. So when Britain exerted some pressure and in "Mafia jargon" made an offer that they could not refuse both parties complied.

In another sense the signing of the British brokered deal by the two leaders is also indicative of the greater pragmatic "sophistication" of Sinhala politicians in matters like this. Refusing to co-operate in an issue of this sort would reflect badly on them. Instead of demurring the easy way out is to go along with the motions of signing an agreement and receiving widespread praises for the statesmanship displayed. Thereafter it is not followed up with constructive action.

This is in striking contrast to the LTTE which has been harshly critical of the Chandrika-Ranil agreement. LTTE spokespersons have articulated tremendous hostility to this agreement and have reiterated their original demands thereby indicating a seeming inflexibility. This stance was totally unwarranted at this stage and has only helped to reinforce the negative image of the tigers further.

President Kumaratunga's willingness to sign this agreement has also helped the government in the international arena. International opinion was veering around to a position where the government was under pressure to suspend the war and commence negotiations with the LTTE. The PA-UNP agreement succeeded in sidetracking this line of thought. The aggressive hostility registered by the LTTE to the new development has helped to ease this mounting pressure for the moment.

Although the Chandrika-Ranil agreement was hailed as a breakthrough the particular manner in which it was signed made some observers sceptical. The letters identical in content were signed separately by both leaders and released jointly by Foreign minister Kadirgamar. The Colombo media reported that Dr. Liam Fox had tried to get both leaders to sign the

letters at a joint meeting. Both declined. So the separately signed letters were released jointly. The million dollar question raised by the doubting Thomases was as to how two persons who did not want to sit at the same table and sign the letters would in the future meet and discuss matters in trust and confidence? The very fact that a British intermediary had to travel six thousand miles to get two people living within a mile of each other to sign letters of agreement itself was a straw pointing to the direction of the blowing political winds.

After signing the letters the PA initially expected the UNP to back the Government in it's search for greater devolution. The UNP however made it clear that this agreement was not necessarily an unconditional endorsement of the PA's efforts in constitutional reform. Moreover the inclusion of the clause "with the concurrence of" bestowed a great political advantage to the UNP. The Opposition leader when briefed and consulted by the President on steps pursued regarding the ethnic conflict was not obligated to support each and every move. He was not expected to concur totally with the government line. More importantly the UNP was expected to support and implement only those decisions taken with it's concurrence. This placed the UNP in a position where it could pull the plug at any juncture. Wickremesinghe also stated that his concurrence would be predicated on the UNP executive and working committees concurring on the issues concerned. It was on this basis that the UNP ratified the agreement unanimously.

Also Chandrika Kumaratunga being president the onus is on her to initiate steps towards the resolution of the conflict. Ranil Wickremesinghe has only to respond to government moves. He can treat these moves on an issue by issue basis and express his consent or dissent. Even if Chandrika does not do anything or does not consult him it is not his problem. Since agreement on a bi-lateral approach does not signify a negation of politics Ranil can adopt a watch and wait policy in expectation of the President tripping up.

Details of the whole British initiative was kept a secret from the PA members including cabinet ministers. It was more or less a project of Foreign minister Kadirgamar and considered to be a feather in his political cap. The PA political leaders who are more sensitive to ground realities found that the PA-UNP agreement was politically advantageous to the latter. Although the statesmanship of Kumaratunga was also appreciated it was the UNP that stood to gain politically. Moreo-

ver the basic principles behind the government's peace through war strategy and its avowed aversion to third party facilitation was under challenge by this agreement. Also both the devolution and war lobbies within the government were disgruntled by this development. All this seems to have caused a revision of thought in government ranks. Combined with this is Kumaratunga's customary procrastinatory functioning style. This explains somewhat the fact that Chandrika has not obtained PA ratification even after six weeks of the signing of the agreement.

The 100 day truce between this government and the LTTE collapsed and war broke out again on 18 April 1995. Thereafter the Chandrika government has been following a two-pronged approach in combatting the LTTE. Militarily it seeks to weaken the Tigers through a "War for Peace" strategy. Politically it strives to isolate the tigers by formulating a political settlement embodying maximum devolution. In following this course of action the government has emphasised that it did not require foreign third party involvement. Actually the government strategists are not in favour of talks with the tigers at this point of time since they feel that their project is not over yet.

Under these circumstances it was hardly surprising that the Colombo government remained lukewarm to offers of mediation made in the past by countries such as Britain, Canada, Australia, Norway and Sweden. Inder Kumar Gujral was welcomed warmly in Colombo for enunciating his "Gujral Doctrine" for the South Asian region. Under this Doctrine India would not intervene even with a benign intent a fact that warms the cockles of the Colombo heart. When Yassir Arafat offered to mediate it was treated as a "gaffe" by Colombo and casually disregarded.

Against that background the very fact that the government had consented to go along with the British initiative itself was a surprising development. It was in a way a tacit admittance that the current government strategy was a failure. Still taking other factors into consideration the government may have been compelled to agree. But it soon made its position clear when Kadirgamar stated publicly that there was no decision at "that point of time" of talking to the tigers or resorting to third party mediation. He emphasised that the original Preconditions for resuming talks with the LTTE still stood. This had a predictable outcome. The LTTE responded very harshly to Kadirgamar's views and reiterated their original position with a vehemence that shocked all those yearning for a peaceful solution. The

situation was back to square one again.

The government was also faced with an internal development. Both the military lobby led by Anuruddha Ratwatte and the Devolution lobby headed by G L Peiris were dismayed. In the case of the former the concern was that an initiation of dialogue with the LTTE would result in that organisation raising certain demands. One such demand was an insistence that the army should revert to pre-1996 positions. This was not acceptable to the military lobby. Also that lobby is still confident that it could make greater inroads into what is now tiger territory and weaken the LTTE further. It must be understood that the "weakening the LTTE" concept of the army relates primarily to assessments made in a positional warfare framework and lacks an appreciation of the dimensions of guerilla warfare of which the LTTE are masters. So Mr Ratwatte wanted some more time to break the LTTE back and then negotiate if necessary from a position of strength.

In a separate development the proponents of greater devolution such as Professor G L Peiris were also dismayed. The Parliamentary Select Committee on Constitutional Reform has made considerable progress in the direction of a wide consensus endorsing greater devolution. The resumption of talks with the LTTE would mean that those deliberations would be in limbo. These misgivings were strengthened when subtle moves to scuttle the process was made on the pretext that there was no need for the select committee as the LTTE was going to enter negotiations. The select committee then resolved that in the event of the LTTE entering into talks with the government some linkage between that and the select committee process should be established so that both processes could reinforce each other.

This then was the crux of the dilemma faced by the government. A reluctance to admit the failure of the current two pronged strategy combined with the need to reconcile the viewpoints and demands of both the military and devolution schools of thought. Adding to this was the realisation that the UNP was not going to back the PA in pushing the devolution package and that notwithstanding the agreement Ranil Wickremesinghe was not required to endorse every move by the government. Along with this is the "personal" factor where President Kumaratunga apparently is yet to get over her "aversion" in meeting Ranil for direct dialogue. The cumulative effect of all this has been a conspicuous lack of forward movement by the government after the fanfare following the release of the Chandrika-Ranil

letters.

Judging by the past experience of the Indian mediation exercise where the Indian intermediaries had to prod and nudge the Sri Lankan leaders into taking meaningful steps on the ethnic front it seems clear that only further action by the British could galvanise the government into taking further steps. Otherwise it would be a case of blissful inertia.

Unfortunately the British parliamentary elections and the campaigning involved prevented the British from taking further action on this. The election itself has seen the Labour in the corridors of power. Tory Foreign secretary Malcolm Rifkind has been defeated but the architect of the Chandrika-Ranil agreement Dr Liam Fox has retained his constituency. He is tipped to be the Shadow Conservative Foreign Minister. There is some speculation that Fox may be given some special status by the Labour government to continue with his mediatory efforts but others rule that possibility out.

Robin Cook, the new Labour Foreign Secretary had been briefed when in the opposition about the British efforts in Sri Lanka. He was broadly supportive of it. It would be however the non-cabinet rank minister of state in Foreign Affairs Derek Fatchett who will be overseeing the Sri Lankan issue. Derek Fatchett was earlier the Labour spokesman on the South Asian region and is very familiar with the Sri Lankan situation. He has also addressed many Sri Lankan political gatherings.

Incidentally Prabakaran the LTTE leader has in a congratulatory message sent to Tony Blair appealed for "support and sympathy to win the political rights of the Tamil Nation in Sri Lanka". Chandrika Kumaratunga in her message to the new British Prime Minister does not refer to the so called British initiative at all.

Political observers feel that there would not be a major deviation of policy towards Sri Lanka by the new British government. Still, it would require some time to get it's act together and address the Sri Lankan problem again. The danger is that the conflict may escalate during this interregnum and worsen the situation. Already both sides are preparing themselves for a massive confrontation in the Wanniar region.

The expectations generated by the Chandrika-Ranil agreement made most peace loving people of Sri Lanka hopeful of a settlement. That euphoria is fading fast and a sense of dejection and disillusionment is setting in. □

S J V Chelvanayakam was born on 31 March 1898. His death occurred on 26 April 1977. He was elected to the first parliament in 1947 on the All-Ceylon Tamil Congress ticket. Consequent to serious differences within the Tamil Congress on a fundamental issue, the issue which was in the fore-

front at the time, being the Citizenship and Franchise rights of the Hill-country Tamils, he broke away from the Tamil Congress and formed the Federal Party in 1949.

Initially, the Tamil people were somewhat sceptical of his policies, such scepticism was soon dispelled and they reposed complete trust in him. He was overwhelmingly acknowledged by the Tamil people as their undisputed leader since 1956, and remained their supreme leader until his demise in 1977. Even after his demise, the vast majority of the Tamil people continued to look upon him as their guide and the mentor who showed them the correct path.

This tribute to a great leader on the eve of his 100th birth centenary year attempts to sketch some of the outstanding attributes of his political thinking, the manner in which he gave shape to his thoughts, both amongst his own people and in his dealings with successive Governments, and to some sterling, personal qualities for which he was held in the highest esteem by everyone, friend or adversary, who came into contact with him.

Firstly, Mr Chelvanayakam had a vision that was both far-sighted and crystal clear. He always kept his options open, but he was never confused and there was never a shadow of doubt in regard to his ultimate political objective.

Secondly, he possessed an indomitable will which would never succumb and which could not be conquered either by blandishments, inducements or force; he was however, always amenable to an honourable compromise in keeping with what he considered to be the legitimate aspiration of his people.

Thirdly, his integrity both in politics and in personal life was beyond any semblance of reproach. These were the hall-marks of Mr Chelvanayakam's character as a leader, which became the cornerstones of the political leadership he gave the Tamil people.

When he actively entered the political scene in about 1947, the Tamil people were on the horns of a political dilemma. The representations made on their behalf before the Soulbury Commission for balanced representation, had only resulted

THE FATHER OF TAMIL NATIONALISM

By R Sampanthan, Secretary General TULF



in certain meagre safeguards under Section 29 of the 1947 Constitution which, as subsequent events conclusively proved, were utterly inadequate.

There were two options before the Tamil people - the first, which was the easy option, was to extend co-operation to the majority-led Government, without the Tamil people receiving anything in return to allay their misgivings, nor even a commitment in regard to the future of the Tamils as a people, and without a clear understanding as to the basis on which such co-operation was being extended, with the consequence of having to make compromises on vital issues, in the hope that the government would act justly in the future.

The alternative which Mr Chelvanayakam delineated was the more difficult option, which was to define certain political objectives, and strive for the achievement of those objectives, so that the Tamil-speaking people who were numerically a minority in the whole country, but were concentrated in certain parts thereof would acquire through adequate constitutional arrangements, a political entitlement and status, that would assure them their self respect, security and well-being. He wanted the Tamil people in particular, to fully understand the implications of the policy he defined and develop a sense of commitment to its achievement.

Mr Chelvanayakam did not seek to

arouse the emotions of the Tamil people. He spelt out his thoughts to them in clear and cogent language, but with moderation. When he spoke of the Sinhala people, he did so with consideration and respect. He inculcated into the Tamil-speaking people, the Tamil people in particular who responded to him with

sincerity, the awareness and the conviction, that the majority of people did not have the right in the guise of democracy to rule them or subjugate them.

He instilled into them, the realisation that vital concerns, such as their language, their culture, their social and economic well-being, and the utilisation of the natural resources in the areas which they had historically inhabited, and where at the time of independence, they were concentrated, were intimately linked to their very survival as a people in the country, and that if they did not have the right and the power to make and implement decisions on such fundamental affairs, their lives would be devoid of the basic elements of human dignity and liberty.

These were the matters which were at the core of the several resolutions passed by the Federal Party under the leadership of Mr Chelvanayakam at successive conventions and constituted the pith and substance of the negotiations he conducted with successive governments. Mr Chelvanayakam campaigned for affective and foolproof arrangements for the sharing of the power of governance. He clearly identified the link between language and territory and was convinced that any resolution of the multiplying and mounting grievances of the Tamil-speaking people would have to accord recognition to this inextricable link.

Mr Chelvanayakam was the only Tamil leader who unified the Tamil people, differences based on region, religion or caste, withered in the face of the policies which he so clearly articulated.

Mr Chelvanayakam was a Christian, but the Tamils, the vast majority of whom were Hindus, accepted him unequivocally as their unquestioned leader. Mr Chelvanayakam's unequivocal stand in opposition to the Government on Citizenship and Franchise relating to the Hill Country Tamils, earned for him their eternal esteem.

He was greatly concerned about the plight of the Tamil-speaking Muslims and made strenuous endeavours to explain his policies to them, and win their confidence. Some Muslim representatives were elected to Parliament as candidates of the

12 TAMIL TIMES

Federal Party.

The power and pelf that flowed from office in Government, however, proved too alluring for them to resist. The Muslim people trusted him and respected him. Dr M C M Kaleel, the much respected senior Muslim leader making reference to Mr Chelvanayakam after his death said "Chelvanayakam did not fight for the Tamil cause alone. Whenever and wherever he found people being unjustly treated, he promptly took action to see that justice was done. For instance, in 1976, when the Muslims who gathered in the Puttalam Mosque completely unarmed were shot down by the police killing six and injuring many more, he was the only MP who promptly demanded from the Prime Minister Srimavo Bandaranaike to appoint a Commission to inquire into the incident." Chelvanayakam was irrevocably committed to non-violence and peaceful methods of resolving the ethnic conflict. He constantly explained to the people the Gandhian philosophy of non-violence and wanted them to develop a belief in non-violence and become strong adherents of non-violence. Ever since he assumed the undisputed leadership of the Tamil people in 1956, he endeavoured to resolve the conflict by peaceful methods with every successive governments.

The understanding with Prime Minister SW R D Bandaranaike, commonly referred to as the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam pact, was entered into in 1957. Between March and July, 1960, he held intense negotiations with the new leadership of the Sri Lanka Freedom party for the revival of the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam pact.

The assurances given before the defeat of the United National party government in March 1960, were not even vaguely remembered after the electoral victory of July 1960, and once ensconced in the seat of power, though the Federal Party had even mobilised Tamil support for the SLFP in many predominantly Sinhala areas.

A civil disobedience "Sathyagraha" campaign was launched in early 1961 in the Northern and Eastern Provinces in protest against the unjust policies pursued by the government, particularly on the language issue. For several weeks, the Kachcheris, the offices of the Government Agent in the districts of the North-East, were blocked by thousands of volunteers, who peacefully sat at the entrance reciting prayers and singing religious hymns. Government administration in the North-East came to a standstill during that period. Mr Chelvanayakam was firmly insistent that at no stage should the campaign become violent. This was amply demonstrated at a late night meeting held in Vavuniya at the height of the campaign at-

tended by representations from all districts to decide on the action that should be taken in the event of the government declaring an Emergency and imposing a curfew which was considered imminent.

Almost every delegate from every district urged that the curfew should be defied by getting the Tamil people out on the streets in their thousands.

Mr Chelvanayakam having listened with characteristic patience to everyone stood up and said: "The time has not come for us to sacrifice the lives of our people in that way. If a curfew is imposed, we shall suspend the campaign but we shall resume it."

There was pindrop silence. His was the last word. The understanding with Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake commonly referred to as the Dudley Senanayake-Chelvanayakam pact was signed in 1965. In 1970 the government sought to frame a new constitution and he made every effort to seek accommodation of Tamil aspirations.

Not only were the meagre safeguards provided in the 1947 constitution done away with, the new constitution introduced several provisions, including for the first time the provision in regard to its unitary character, which was anathema to the minorities generally and to the Tamils in particular.

It was a clear message to the Tamils who were advocating the formulation of new constitutional mechanisms, which would accommodate their aspirations, that the government did not recognise their existence, and would never yield. Mr Chelvanayakam resigned his seat in Parliament in 1972 and challenged the government to contest him. He wanted to demonstrate that the new constitution was utterly unacceptable to the Tamil people, and that they abhorred the same. The by-election was not held for well-nigh three years and when eventually held Mr Chelvanayakam vindicated his position with an overwhelming majority.

The government was unmoved and repression against the Tamils continued. Mr Chelvanayakam adopted every democratic method to find a just solution to the national question. His efforts were unfortunately never reciprocated, despite the several efforts made by him.

After Mr Chelvanayakam's demise, the United National Party government elected in 1977 did one better when it drafted the 1978 constitution. It even entrenched some of the new provisions introduced by the 1972 constitution. The 1978 constitution had now virtually become an albatross. The Tamil people did not partake in the making of any of these constitutions.

Justification

It was at this time, that the Tamil

United Front and thereafter the Tamil United Liberation Front were formed. The Tamil people had reached a state of abysmal despair. Mr Chelvanayakam was the founder President of the Tamil United Liberation Front. Messrs G G Ponnambalam and S Thondaman were co-presidents.

The Vaddukoddai resolution of May 1976, which sought the establishment of an independent sovereign state, was clearly indicative of the commencement of the last-ditch struggle. Mr Chelvanayakam was left with no alternative.

An honourable compromise with the political leadership of the majority people had consistently proved elusive. The Vaddukoddai resolution did, however, have an electrifying impact on Tamil Youth, who in the context of all that had happened, began to feel, not without a degree of justification, that the battle had passed into their hands. Mr Chelvanayakam faced several disappointments in his continuous efforts to resolve peacefully the ethnic conflict. His indomitable will, however, prevailed. He never dithered, he could not be flustered, he remained calm and became even more determined than ever before to pursue his goal with single-mindedness. He knew that his goal was just and that it would be achieved. The country has paid and continues to pay an enormous price for the failure to resolve the ethnic conflict peacefully during Mr Chelvanayakam's lifetime.

He was held in the highest respect by people of all communities and different walks of life. He was regarded as a leader of impeccable integrity. Mr J R Jayewardene, as Prime Minister, speaking in Parliament, on the vote of condolence said: "I have not met anybody in my community or any other community who said that Mr Chelvanayakam would let you down." Mr Chelvanayakam had been let down on so many occasions; yet, he was not a leader who would let others down, and this fact was being acknowledged on the floor of Parliament by the incumbent Prime Minister.

The Communist leader, Mr Pieter Keuneman described Mr Chelvanayakam as "a man of personal and political integrity." Mr Lalith Athulathmudali, of a younger generation, speaking in Parliament on the vote of condolence said: "Samuel James Veluppillai Chelvanayakam was born in Ipoh. Ipoh is known as the cleanest city in Malaysia. Perhaps it was in the fitness of things that Mr Chelvanayakam's life was marked by a cleanliness unknown in contemporary politics".

Mr Chelvanayakam was able to conclude pacts with two Prime Ministers of the SLFP and UNP, respectively, both of whom were much respected leaders and wielded considerable influence within the majority community. Both Prime Ministers

were unable, during their periods of office, to implement the understandings they arrived at with Mr Chelvanayakam, but there can be no doubt that they accepted the substance of the said understandings.

He did not consider these pacts as final solutions. He made it clear that he regarded them as interim adjustments, but he was prepared to follow a gradualist approach in order to achieve his ultimate goal of having the diversity within the polity recognised by adequate constitutional mechanisms for the effective sharing of power.

As a leader committed to non-violence and democratic values, he was convinced that he had to persist in that path. The contents of the pacts, however, defined important parameters on some vital issues for the eventual peaceful resolution of the conflict. The stronger party with the capacity to reciprocate was not willing to carry the process forward, and take decisions in the larger interests of the country.

The Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement, the 13th Amendment to the constitution and the current exercise in constitutional reform, regard certain aspects of the under standings reached with Mr Chelvanayakam as useful bench marks. Cumulatively, his thinking constitutes the foundation on which any superstructure can be built.

It is not without significance that the questions of citizenship and franchise rights of the hill-country Tamils have been substantially resolved. It is perhaps only certain limited aspects that need attention. Sinhala and Tamil languages are entitled to parity of status and the major political parties are no longer at variance on the acceptance of this position.

Lack of adequate political will at different levels coupled with bureaucratic prejudice and sloth have greatly contributed to tardiness in implementation even of the present provisions. At one time, these were considered explosive issues, brooking no accommodation. The country has come to accept today that these issues have to be resolved in a manner that is just and equitable by all people. Mr Chelvanayakam's basic position on these issues has been vindicated. Writing about him is synonymous with writing about the struggle of the Tamil-speaking people, particularly the Tamil people for equality and justice. No account about him can be complete without raising the question as to how he may have reacted in the present situation.

Mr Chelvanayakam would have candidly stated with much justification that the present situation was brought about not as a result of any fault on the part of the Tamil people, and that successive Governments had every opportunity to

arrive at an honourable compromise with the Tamil people under his leadership, before the present situation developed.

He would have reminded the country of the immense suffering and sacrifices the Tamil people have consequently endured for over a period of four decades. While acknowledging the tragic loss of valuable young lives from all communities in the course of combat, he would have vigorously urged that it is the Tamil people who face the brunt of this cruel war and that the agony and the horrors experienced by the Tamil people have consequently endured for over a period of four decades. While acknowledging the tragic loss of valuable young lives from all communities in the course of combat, he would have vigorously urged that it is the Tamil people who face the brunt of this cruel war and that the agony and the horrors experienced by the Tamil people would be a never-ending phenomenon unless the war is halted. He would have strenuously urged that steps be taken to bring the war to an end.

He would have been steadfast in his commitment to non-violence. He would not have deviated from the Gandhian philosophy of civil disobedience and passive resistance which he all along, preached

and practised. Nevertheless, he would have understood the reasons for the radical transformation in the attitudes of Tamil youth.

Nelson Mandela was not prepared to renounce armed struggle while in jail, or even after he was released from jail, until he had reasonable cause to be convinced that the stage had been reached when the white Government was willing to enter into meaningful negotiations with the African National Congress. Mr Chelvanayakam would have advocated neutral mediation between the Government and the LTTE, even if he could not have supported the armed struggle waged by the LTTE, so that the thick air of distrust that prevails between the two sides could be attenuated.

He would have urged all the people of the country to extend their support to a just and peaceful resolution of the conflict, not merely in the interests of the Tamil people, but in the interests of the country as a whole.

If efforts at a just and peaceful resolution proved abortive he would have been as determined as ever before, that the struggle should continue.

The Tamil people will always remember Mr Chelvanayakam with affection and adoration. □

MPs Call for Third Party Mediation and Talks with LTTE

Twenty-two Sri Lankan parliamentarians who attended a five-day workshop in April on conflict resolution sponsored by the London-based International Alert have called for peace initiative including negotiations with the LTTE. They have also supported the idea of third-party mediation.

The Members of Parliament, from six political parties, submitted their proposal to a parliamentary committee studying the government's proposals for devolution of powers to regions aimed at ending the war between the government and Tamil Tigers, Sarath Amunugama, of the main opposition United National Party (UNP), said. "We suggested that the LTTE be brought into any talks, at a time when we are possibly looking at a peace initiative," Amunugama told the press.

The group of MPs, which included members of the ruling People's Alliance and many opposition parties, made the suggestion after returning from the Philippines where group members observed conflict resolution practices by Manila and the Moro National Liberation Front

(MNLF) in their attempt to bring peace to Mindanao Island.

The MNLF, the largest of the island's Moslem guerrilla groups, signed a peace accord with Manila in September last year after a 24-year-old battle. But two rebel splinter groups, including the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), are still waging war against Manila, despite nearly three years of negotiations.

"We thought the progress made by the Philippine government and the MNLF had brought about a positive stand to that conflict," Amunugama said. "It was their initiative that made us appeal to our authorities to draw the LTTE to peace talks," he said.

FORMER INDIAN INTELLIGENCE CHIEF GOES PUBLIC ON LANKA:

At a seminar organised in the last week of April by Dr V Suryanarayanan at the Centre for South and South-East Asian Studies of the Madras University, former Indian Intelligence Bureau chief M K Narayanan went public with an account of what happened in the run-up to the ten-year-old peace agreement for Lanka signed by the late Rajiv Gandhi and J R Jayewardene. The meeting was ignored by the Chennai media, but TULF members were present. A key low profile confidant of Rajiv Gandhi involved in the political intrigues which preceded the agreement, Narayanan was bitter about the way the LTTE went back on its "assurances on peace".



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TOWARDS A CREDIBLE POLITICAL SOLUTION

By Dr.S.Narapalasingam

The PA Government will be completing half of its present term this August. There have been many pronouncements concerning the peace process, intended to end the fourteen-year old civil war and achieve lasting peace in Sri Lanka. What has been implied in this term is that peace, harmony and national unity could be achieved solely through constitutional reform. The devolution package proposed by the Government more than a year ago has not yet been approved by the Parliamentary Select Committee. Nevertheless, it has been heralded by the Government as the principal vehicle that will bring peace to the people in Sri Lanka. This simplistic assumption has ignored the many obstacles that must be overcome and the gulfs that must be bridged in order to move forward towards this goal. The reluctance of both sides to de-escalate the war effort and begin negotiation for arriving at an acceptable political solution has only made the peace process appear an abstract concept.

The trust of the Tamil people is vital for them to believe that all governments will implement the reformed constitution in good faith. Their past bitter experience concerning relevant constitutional amendments that assured some of their rights on paper but in practice were ineffective in eliminating discrimination by the State institutions in the contentious matters continues to haunt them. So far no tangible measures have been taken "to win the hearts and minds" of the people affected by the war, although this has been pronounced as necessary time and again by the Government. This tends to support the prevailing opinion of sceptics that acknowledging the right policy is one thing and implementing it is another!

The underlying flaw in the current approach to the peace process is the perception that for the realisation of peace not several successive measures (some are complementary) but merely a single move in the form of a constitutional change is sufficient. Any political solution to be credible in the context of the past failures, therefore, requires not only a different approach but also built-in safeguards

to prevent the subversion of the fundamental principles of the constitution.

Bipartisan approach

The undertaking given by the President and the Leader of the opposition that they will adopt a common approach to the resolution of the ethnic conflict signals a departure from the familiar failed route taken in the past to settle the conflict peacefully. Under the agreed bipartisan approach, the government is obliged to consult the main opposition party in all discussions with the Tamil parties, including the LTTE and obtain its concurrence before coming to any agreement with them. The positive side of this agreement is that the search for a political solution has been taken out of adversarial politics that has been the bane of the country since the mid-fifties.

The negative aspect is that it could be used by the opposition party to delay the settlement of the conflict, if this is perceived to be tactically useful in the near future. The grass on the other side always appears greener to some and this illusion may tempt the opposition party to give the impression that it only can deliver the goods. If the Tamils allow the two main parties to play the familiar ball game, then they cannot blame anyone else for their plight. So far the Tamil political parties have been diplomatic in their relationship with the government and opposition parties. They have been having discussions with the Government and the UNP even before the two sides agreed to a common approach. The emerging solidarity between the Muslims and the Tamils is also helpful to prevent any division among the ethnic minorities to be exploited by the opposition parties for undermining the devolution proposals.

LTTE too has to rethink its stand on secession and the use of force to achieve its goal, in the light of recent happenings in Sri Lanka and the interest taken by the British Government in persuading the two main parties to agree to a common approach. LTTE cannot also ignore the position taken by other governments worldwide with regard to its demand for a sepa-

rate independent state in the North-East. The common approach, based on the understanding that exists between the Conservative and Labour parties in Britain in dealing with IRA violence has other implications to the LTTE, if it continues to seek political power through the same violent method.

If the opportunities for a political solution continue to be missed, because of the intransigence of the Tamil rebels, political future of the Tamils in Sri Lanka will be jeopardised. Even if the militants succeed in gaining full control of a part of North-East, the ethnic problem will continue to remain unresolved with all its ramifications. These will only exacerbate the problem, inducing more Tamils to flee the country and causing permanent difficulties to those remaining in Sri Lanka. Tamils do not reside exclusively in the North and East of the country. Sizable numbers live in other parts of Sri Lanka along with the majority Sinhalese. Present estimates suggest that the number of Tamils living in the exclusive Tamil areas of North-East has dwindled.

The real choice at this juncture for all the communities in Sri Lanka is to accept a political structure, where their concerns are dealt with in a way that it neither permits domination of one ethnic or religious group over the others nor gives room for any fear that the future of any one group is in danger. This can be done only by recognizing their concerns first and then building jointly the constitutional frame starting from the basic principles that allays their fears - real or imaginary. There is an interconnection between the concerns of the various groups and therefore all must be considered together in designing the constitution.

In a recent interview, the Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs Prof. G.L. Peiris said: "One of the requirements for a democracy to function is that there should be a broad consensus with regard to fundamentals." This applies to the constitution of a multi-ethnic country, if it is to be accepted and revered by all the citizens.

Thanks to the initiative and effort of the International Alert Peace Group (IAPG), a group of parliamentarians belonging to six political parties in the government and opposition has urged the Select Committee on Constitutional Affairs "to make every effort to draw the LTTE into discussions". In a letter addressed to the chairman of the committee, it has suggested that "the conclusions of any discussions with the LTTE should then converge with the constitutional re-

forms envisaged by the Select Committee". The Government stands to gain considerable support nationally and internationally by making the first move towards this end. Given the way the last talks broke down and Eelam war III was started instantly, a refusal by the LTTE to negotiate with the Government in good faith will severely damage its credibility as a movement fighting for the liberation of the Tamil people.

Minorities Concern

The main concern of the minorities stems from the adverse treatment they received after independence from successive governments of the two principal parties - the SLFP and UNP. They had functioned simply on the doctrine of majoritarianism (in which the views of the minorities were irrelevant). In consequence, the Tamils in particular felt alienated from the body politic and had no say in matters that affected their welfare, safety and security. They were also handicapped by national policies that denied them the same advantages given to the majority Sinhalese. Over the years the development of those areas, populated predominantly by the minorities had been neglected, while land development was tied to the colonisation schemes that altered existing demographic pattern in favour of the Sinhalese. Trincomalee was not developed for the reason that Sinhalese families had not been settled there in sufficient numbers to change its ethnic composition.

The implementation of some state policies, which would have benefitted the minorities was either neglected or done half-heartedly. Even after the recent change from Sinhala only to Tamil also as an official language, those who cannot speak or read the Sinhalese language experience difficulties in dealing with different organs of the government. The constitutional rights of the minorities have been undermined by the application of other overriding provisions in the constitution. The pogroms, intimidation and acts of destruction that hurt the Tamils in particular and in which the State is believed to have had a hand are also a course of concern.

Military and other institutions responsible for security and the enforcement of law and order, dominated by the majority Sinhalese are perceived by the Tamils as a threat to their security. The blatant violations of fundamental human rights by the security personnel since the ethnic conflict escalated into a bloody war and in which the victims are mostly the civilians have only reinforced this feeling. Despite the various assurances of the authorities to punish those responsible for

these ghastly acts, the fact that very little has happened in practice is also of much concern. The Tamils feel that not only they have been subjugated but also robbed of their dignity.

Sinhalese concern

The concern of many Sinhalese has its roots in the historical invasion of parts of Sri Lanka by Tamil kings in India. They also feel that under the "divide and rule" policy of the British colonial government the Tamils have benefitted unfairly. Although this perception has no relevance to the current situation, yet the old grievance persists. Associated with this is their concern that once some ruling power is given to the Tamils they would become a threat to the Sinhalese. The presence of a regional Tamil state in south India separated by a strait which spans only 22 miles between the two coasts reinforces the fear. Often it has been cited that unlike the Tamils, the Sinhalese as a distinct ethnic group live only in Sri Lanka. Politically influential Buddhist clergy have taken the role as the soleprotector of Theravada Buddhism, which they fear will come under threat, if the Tamils (non-Buddhists) gain unrestricted power. The rise of Tamil nationalism as a counterweight to Sinhala chauvinism has raised this fear.

Common concern

The concern of the general public is related to the way the executive and judicial branches of elected governments function. Over the past decades, corruption in government; misuse of power to curtail democratic freedoms; institutionalisation of violence in the body politic; politicisation of administrative machinery including the public authorities responsible for law and order; mismanagement of public funds; lack of transparency and accountability in government; shielding corrupt public officers considered loyal or useful to the ruling party and its leadership; and the harassment of their opponents through various unlawful means have been conspicuous. The overt and covert restrictions on freedom of expression have often been used to conceal the acts of omission and commission of governments and to silence the critics.

The two main political parties that ruled Sri Lanka since independence have taken turn in accusing the members and henchmen of the other party of unlawful acts of killings, assaults, threats, abuses and destruction of properties. Ironically, both the main parties when in power have resorted to the same unacceptable tactics to suppress the opposition. Thus, a vicious circle of authoritarian rule, justified on the tit for tat principle, has been established through constitutional machi-

nation and various devious methods. This has been made possible by the deliberate omission of checks and balances in the constitution needed for preventing the misuse of power. The institutions presumed to protect the rights of citizens and democratic freedoms are either powerless or controlled by the State that they are in effect worthless.

Extrajudicial punishments including killing with the tacit approval of government leaders, failure to bring to justice the violators of human rights and the undue delays in bringing lawsuits against suspects accused of serious crimes (i.e. double standards in prosecuting suspects) have all heightened fears among the masses that an authoritarian or a police state under the cloak of democracy is surfacing. The days when anyone could register a legitimate complaint in the local police station and expect it to be dealt with earnestly according to established rules are history now. The fear of the powerless and the poor, including those who do not have any connection with those wielding power is that they cannot expect justice from a corrupt system. It is the very process of obtaining prompt justice that has lost credibility.

Integrated approach to constitutional reform

A credible political solution to the national problem must sincerely tackle the causes that led to the present crisis. Unless this is evident in any effort to find a political solution, the latter is less likely to be believed by the people as credible. The approach to constitutional reform should not be piecemeal, as seems to be the case now. Any reform lacking coherence could make the key provisions such as those relating to equal rights of all citizens regardless of racial, linguistic or religious differences and devolution of powers to the regions ineffective. In this regard, the importance of specifying the values and principles supporting the entire constitution cannot be overemphasized.

The criticism of some experts on the incomplete draft constitution (only 18 chapters) released recently by the Chairman of the Select Committee to the public for their consideration and comments is that it has not tackled the central deficiencies in the present constitution. This is due to the failure to deem the constitution as an instrument to protect the people against all arbitrary actions, on the part of the legislative and other branches of government. The various concerns mentioned above have to be considered together in detailing the principles.

The agreed bipartisan approach is re-

stricted to the resolution of the ethnic conflict. A broader consensus is needed to determine the constitutional principles that will provide the solid foundation on which the various chapters and the provisions can firmly rest. Even now it is not late to go back to basics and reach a broad consensus first on the fundamentals, including the structures of government and the checks and balances needed to prevent the misuse of power. In the first instance, especially the two main parties should agree to exclude the odious provisions in the present constitution that permitted the abuse of ruling powers in the past.

These may necessitate revising some parts of the chapters discussed by the Select Committee but this in the long term will prove to be worthwhile. The principles apart from helping in the design of the entire constitution will serve to decide whether or not any new or changes to the laws and provisions that may be proposed in the future violate them. These will also ensure that different provisions are not contradictory. Any dispute in interpreting the provisions or the laws can be settled by the Constitutional Court or the Supreme court with reference to the specified principles. There are other reasons too for adopting this logical approach in the Sri Lankan context.

Conflicting signals have already been emerging from the statements issued by various influential members of the UNP with regard to both the structure and powers of central government and the devolution proposals presented by the Government. Some time back the leader of the opposition stated asymmetrical devolution of powers to the regions would help to resolve the ethnic conflict. There is merit in considering this concept, given the LTTE's demand for a separate state. Once an understanding is reached on the principles pertaining to devolution and the need for the same, it would facilitate to reach a satisfactory formula to devolve powers. Parties would be bound by the agreed principles and any subsequent arguments in drafting the relevant provisions would be confined to secondary matters, which can be settled consensually without weakening the main frame. They will also find it difficult to vacillate on or retreat from the stands taken earlier at the time of agreeing to the constitutional principles.

There are some other important issues which should be decided by consensus. These include: the basis of grouping the districts/provinces into different regions for devolution; relationship between the various regions and between regions

and the centre; authority over state land, police, finance, foreign aid given for use in a specified region, development and judiciary at the regional level; electoral system at the national, regional and local levels; organizational arrangements to ensure the independence of the judiciary, police and other law enforcement authorities and the equality of all citizens regardless of their ethnic origins, religious faiths and political affiliations; methods and rules for appointing persons to independent bodies responsible for ensuring the adherence of constitutionalism, rule of law and non-partisan administration at all levels; bill of rights; and the exceptional circumstances requiring the use of emergency powers; and the non-derogable rights of citizens under the state of emergency.

The memorandum of Agreement for Reconciliation and Peace signed by the three major parties in South Africa was indispensable in initiating the constitution-making process there. International Alert (IAPG) can play a facilitating role in reaching a similar agreement between the Government and the LTTE, with the concurrence of the UNP. The credential of IAPG as an impartial organization solely interested in helping to restore peace by encouraging the antagonists to negotiate for a political settlement cannot be in doubt. This should be clear from the initiative it took to familiarise the Lankan MPs from both the government and opposition parties including those representing the Tamil parties, with the experiences of other countries in resolving ethnic conflicts in the hope that the lessons learnt could be applied to Sri Lanka. Moreover, the sincere statements made by its head on the present situation relating to the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka also indicate the impartiality of the organization. The fact that he is a Sri Lankan should be considered as a positive factor.

Reference is made to my earlier article published in the TT of February, 1997, titled "The 1996 South African Constitution -Lessons for Sri Lanka," for other useful instruments put in place to ensure

the process of constitution making is smooth and efficacious. The power given to the Constitutional Court to overrule any provisions in the final draft (approved by the Assembly) inconsistent with the agreed principles is significant. The court had no power to suggest changes to the principles, which remained sacrosanct once these were approved by all the main parties.

Urgent relief and rehabilitation measures

The procedure outlined above for changing the present constitution aimed at addressing the various concerns, including those of the minorities takes time to succeed. The need for suspending hostilities arises not only to create a conducive atmosphere for reaching a broad consensus on all the key issues outlined above but also importantly to resettle the refugees in their original dwelling places. The much needed relief work to help them to regain their lost livelihoods also requires an organizational effort. The cooperation of all the concerned groups is also essential for this purpose. Without a cease fire agreement, the reconstruction and rehabilitation work in the war-torn areas cannot proceed swiftly.

Given the present plight of the people affected by the war, the humanitarian relief work cannot wait until the adoption of a revised constitution. A US Committee, which studied the conditions of the refugees has urged the Government to take urgent relief and rehabilitation measures or seek help from the international community. Foreign aid, promised by the donors for rehabilitation work is contingent on the two sides agreeing to a negotiated settlement and in the interim ending all acts of violence. It is senseless to delay the implementation of these measures both from the economic and political standpoints. There cannot be a better way to begin the process of national reconciliation, which is crucial for lasting peace. These measures will also help towards reaching a credible political solution acceptable to the people. □

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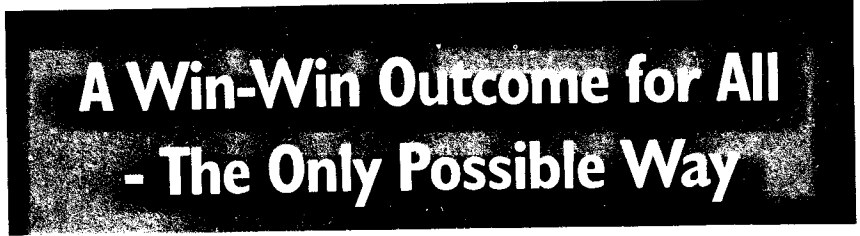
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A recent event sparked off a sigh of relief and raised hopes in the hearts and minds of those thousands of mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, and sons and daughters who have been yearning for peace. That event which generated this unprecedented euphoria of exuberance was none other than the news flashed over the media networks that President Chandrika Kumaratunge and Opposition Leader Ranil Wickramasinghe have signed a bipartisan Accord to mutually collaborate in all democratic efforts leading to a negotiated solution to the ethnic crisis. Whatever cogent motivation that seems to underline this unique gesture, be it political expediency or a mature expression of national leadership that transcends petty-mindedness and party sycophancy, the initiative and attempt to search for a just and durable solution to this debilitating malaise must be welcomed with the optimism it deserves.

Tongues will certainly wag and critics with a touch of cynicism will want to impute ulterior motives or intentions veiled in vested interests to the Chandrika-Ranil Accord. Diehard fundamentalists and nationalists of the worst sort, whose views have been rejected by the general public, will surely refer to the twosome as "traitors". They are those who wish to reduce the pluralist character of this country to one race, one language and one religion. These ultra-conservatives are wilfully blind to what this has cost this nation in terms of human lives and limb and material resources. The war effort has bled this country to the tune of Rs 23.7 billion in 1994, Rs 35 billion in 1995, close upon Rs 45 billion in 1996 and a projected Rs 50 billion for 1997 - an astronomical total of Rs 153.7 billion within a short period of only four years - not taking into what the country has had to bear since the inception of the ethnic conflict. If this proverbial sword had been converted into a mighty ploughshare, would not this beleaguered country have flowed with milk and honey several times over. But instead, if one were to calculate the damage caused to life and limb, then over 50,000 lives snuffed out by the war effort would be a reasonable guesstimate with thousands of others being maimed for life. What is most unfortunate is that those who have sacrificed their lives have been in their teens - the flower of our youth. Is this the horrendous legacy those who are hard-hearted want us to bequeath to our future generations?

The Motive Behind the Event

Rumours have been rife as to the suddenness of the Chandrika-Ranil Accord. How was it possible for Liam Fox of the British government to manoeuvre such a consensus within so short a time? Were



Oswald B Firth OMI, Director, Centre for Society and Religion

the British Tones collecting credits from abroad to boost their sagging image at home prior to the oncoming general elections to be held on 1 May? Or, had the LTTE expatriates exerted their influence on the British Foreign Office to ease the pressure on the battlefield at home? Or did President Chandrika fear a showdown when the "Political Package" would be tabled in Parliament? Or would a Referendum on the "Package" weaken the position of the UNP in the eyes of the electorate? Was the stick of foreign aid restrictions being used to tame the government? What role will Britain play. Is it that of a mediator, facilitator, and an honest broker? Has the government now changed its stance and expressed its willingness to dialogue with the LTTE? Will the LTTE be the sole representative of the Tamil people? Multiple are the questions that remain unanswered.

Adequate answers to these questions may not be immediately forthcoming. Nevertheless, those who have been displaced or lost a loved one in this war have reached their tether and are ready to challenge the leaders of the two major political parties to shed their party political differences in the greater interest of the country.

The Chandrika-Ranil Accord is perhaps a small step forward on the long journey towards peace. Having suffered the travails of a fourteen year war, many indeed are those who are suspicious that these unctuous pronouncements, made by President Chandrika and the Hon Ranil Wickramasinghe, in the name of peace could end in an hollow political fiasco bringing us all back to square one. Frustrated hopes in previous peace initiatives have created a niche for scepticism in people's minds, which can be dislodged only when pronouncements on peace are matched with definite plans for action.

Need for a Definite Plan

The logical question that surfaces in the minds of many is "What next?" On the one hand, the ongoing war shows no signs of abating. Despite precious monetary resources, running into over Rupees Three Billion being squandered on obsolete weapons - for which no-one appears

to be accountable - the security forces keep engaging in one major operation after another with bold claims that the LTTE has been weakened and that the war is 75% over. The government continues to operate on the assumption that the LTTE can be pressurised into accepting the Devolution Package once the government forces have succeeded in taming the rebels.

However, what is not brought into the equation is the LTTE's strong overseas lobby which is its instrument for propaganda and fund raising. The LTTE may find itself weakened on the manpower front, since certain populated areas have been captured by the security forces, weakening its potential for new recruits. But the LTTE's machinery still remains formidable, as is evidenced by the repeated blows it has succeeded in inflicting on the security forces - air supremacy. How could a government which had refused to accommodate third-party mediation and talks with the LTTE, mobilising popular support under the slogan: "First War then Peace", suddenly express its opinion in favour of talking to the LTTE!

Such contradictory stances must give way to conditions prevailing in reality. With LTTE manpower depleting and the government coffers being drained out on the war front, the war can never end with a victory to one party while the other suffers defeat. A win-win situation for all parties concerned will be possible only if a way out of the crisis can be worked out through dialogue.

Towards a New Sri Lanka

Having struggled for years to achieve the emancipation of his people, Nelson Mandela eschewed a Constitution for South Africa that would implant the supremacy of the black people over the whites. Rather, it was to be a new South Africa, born of a new vision where the rights of all South Africans would be guaranteed irrespective of colour or creed. This is perhaps what a dialogue among all parties must attempt to ensure for the present and for posterity.

Our lives are constituted more by our own prejudices than by our judgements.

(Continued on next page)

Pace is not just the absence of war. Experience has taught us and history will show that talks and negotiations alone will not bring peace in Sri Lanka. Agreements and pacts were made from time to time between the two major ethnic communities but these did not help to bring about ethnic harmony. Often promises were broken or agreements abrogated even before they were implemented. This may be because the climate essential for peace and harmony was not present in the country. Wars, it is believed, do not begin on the battlefield. It is said in the preamble to UNESCO's constitution, "Wars begin in the minds of men. It is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed." Peace will not prevail when violence ends unless there is a change in the hearts and minds of the people. A spirit of "live and let live" should be born in our hearts. Respect and concern for our fellow beings should grow in our midst. How do we create the necessary climate for lasting peace? What steps will pave the way for peaceful co-existence without fear and tension?

First and foremost, we should learn to see beauty in diversity. Diversity does not necessarily lead to conflict. In fact, life is more interesting and richer in a multicultural, multilingual, and multinational society than in a homogeneous society. Why do people love to visit India? It is because of the variety of cultures it has to offer with its cosmopolitan society and

(continued from page 18)

As the philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer would want us to believe, in his book *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, "the concept of prejudice did not originally have the meaning we have attached to it. Prejudices are not necessarily unjustified and erroneous, so that they inevitably distort the truth... Prejudices are biases of our openness to the world. They are simply conditions whereby we experience something - whereby what we encounter says something to us. This formulation certainly does not mean that we are enclosed within a wall of prejudices and only let through the narrow portals those things that can produce a pass saying, "Nothing new will be said here." Instead we welcome just that guest who promises something new to our curiosity". This bias can be positive were we to perceive Sri Lanka as a plural-ethnic, multi-cultural society. The Sri Lanka we want to build for the future must be something new. This bias needs to be fostered so that our experience of the others, as being different from us, will help us build for the future a pluralist society where all religions, languages, and cultural differences could co-exist harmoniously, each respecting the rights of the other. □

IS THERE A PATHWAY TO LASTING PEACE?

Sakuntala Kadirgamar, Tokyo

the wide range of lifestyles, music, food, etc. Likewise, in Sri Lanka, the music, dances, drama, paintings, etc. if shared and appreciated by everyone will enrich us. Music is considered to be the best form of communication. It is said if a picture speaks a thousand words, a song can speak even more. Learning to appreciate each other's culture is a prerequisite to lasting peace. By crossing cultural borders we could extend our identity without losing it. One of the things we all enjoy in Sri Lanka is the different kinds of food prepared by each ethnic community and when it comes to savouring these delicious dishes we have never let culture stand in our way. Similarly, we have to learn to accept differences if we want to live amicably. Glorifying a monocultural past and turning a blind eye to the beautiful richness of other cultures is going to isolate us from others. It will be to our advantage if we give up prejudices and negative stereotyping and remember that all cultures in our land are equally worthy.

Moreover, when we think of ethnic harmony, language is often a barrier to communication, mutual understanding and co-operation. Both communities will profit if we study each other's language. This would be of immense help in building bridges. Further, at the last JALT (Japan Association for Language Teaching) Conference held in November, 1996, there was a delegation from UNESCO's Linguapax International Committee, which held talks and seminars to teach foreign languages through peace studies. Linguapax combines the Latin words "lingua" (language) and "pax" (peace) to mean "peace through language learning and teaching. English language through peace studies in Sri Lanka will help to promote better understanding between different cultures. In many high schools and colleges in Europe peace studies are undertaken with the intention of influencing the minds of children and young people. We too, should involve our children in Sri Lanka in peace and get them to learn new ideas and values.

Furthermore, it is unbelievable that in a country where the four major religions of the world are preached and where

about 99 percent of the people are religious violence has come to stay. What have these religions taught us? In every religion we are told to reach out with love and compassion to others. In the words of Fr Mervyn Fernando in his article, "Ethnic Conflict: have the religions failed?" he says "What has been particularly disconcerting is the paralysis of the religions vis-a-vis the ethnic conflict in the country. One would have expected the highest authorities of the respective religions to take the lead in going above and beyond the ethnic divide to bring the warring parties to negotiation and dialogue for a non-violent settlement of the problem... But barring some efforts of a handful of individuals and groups, taken on their private initiative religious authorities have remained on the sidelines, perhaps making an occasional statement, throwing the onus of the matter on the government which is itself a party to the problem." We cannot but agree that Sri Lanka is likely to be a better place if all religions direct their efforts towards peace. In a multi-religious society, we should avoid being dogmatic and learn to respect the teachings of other religions. This will pave the way for religious harmony to a great extent.

In addition, the pacifist, Rajmohan Gandhi, in his speech entitled "Preparing the World for Non-violence" said that a major obstacle to peace is our tendency to demonize others and forget our own evils. He referred to the 1919 British army massacre of 319 Indian men, women and children at Amritsar. Shortly after the massacre, a meeting of the Indian National Congress was held to condemn the British for the massacre at Amritsar and to condemn the Indian mobs who killed 5 British soldiers in retaliation. The Congress Party members overwhelmingly voted in favour of the first motion condemning the British massacre of Indians but voted against the second motion condemning the killing of the British soldiers. One participant stated, "No son of an Indian mother could have drafted that motion." At this point, Mahatma Gandhi stood up to say, "The person who drafted the second motion was me. And I believe that only the son of an Indian mother could have drafted

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UNHCR'S STANCE IN SRI LANKA

By S Kanasa Thasan

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has performed the important task of protecting and assisting the world's expanding millions of refugees and internally displaced people under the most difficult political, logistical and financial circumstances. It has been inevitably subject to pressures both from the countries of origin of refugees and displaced people, not to meddle in their internal affairs, as well as from countries of refuge, who look for UNHCR cover to avoid or minimise domestic political, social and financial pressures posed for them by the increasing refugee population. Since the countries of refuge are also the ones which finance the UNHCR almost entirely, it would be understandable for the UNHCR to be particularly sensitive to their interests - notwithstanding its claim of being "humanitarian and non-political."

Overall, the UNHCR has performed creditably in meeting its responsibility for the world's refugees and internally displaced people. Regrettably, however, the same cannot be said of its stance in Sri

Lanka.

Sri Lankan Refugees Need UNHCR Protection

The UNHCR's own literature in defining "refugees" states that "The causes of many refugees have shifted; in recent years, the primary causes have been civil wars and ethnic, tribal and religious violence. The UNHCR considers that people fleeing war and war related conditions and whose state is unwilling or unable to protect them, are in need of international protection and should be considered refugees." Refugees from Sri Lanka also qualify for UNHCR assisted "international protection" being in the category of "large groups of refugees, as opposed to individual cases, fleeing persecution, conflict and widespread violations of human rights."

While each individual refugee country is clearly free to establish its own refugee determination procedures, as part of its protection function the UNHCR has an important role in advising them in setting up those procedures and monitoring their implementations and also in advising

them about relevant conditions in the countries of origin of refugees.

UNHCR's statements on Sri Lanka have acknowledged that due to the resumed and escalating armed conflict in the Tamil North East, the human rights situation there is precarious. Both sides in the conflict are guilty of human rights violations there. However, the UNHCR's statements have painted a relatively benign picture of the security conditions and human rights situation for Tamils in the rest of the country. This is clearly intended to make the point that Tamils at risk in the North East have safe refuge elsewhere within Sri Lanka.

Since the UNHCR is the international organisation responsible for the protection of refugees, its assessment has been a key factor in Sri Lankan refugees being denied even temporary protection, by refuge countries in the West. The results have been catastrophic. The BRC report notes, for example, that in the UK whereas between 1991 and 1993, 95% of all Sri Lankan applications for asylum were awarded Exceptional Leave to remain, between 1994 and 1996 94% were refusals. Moreover, nearly every western country has launched aggressive programs of repatriation of Tamil refugees.

Other Sources Contradict UNHCR

The UNHCR has persisted with its assessment, even in early 1997 (UNHCR Return of rejected asylum seekers to Sri Lanka), despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary offered in several recent reports by the US Department of State (January 1977), the US Committee for Refugees (USCR) (March 1997), the British Refugee Council (BRC) (February 1997) and Amnesty International (AI) (various dates), Asia Watch (AW) and by other human rights organisations. The UNHCR's stance has been repeatedly criticised by Tamil organisations and by many human rights NGOs to no avail.

A particularly troubling aspect is that the UNHCR does not in fact have the resources in Sri Lanka to adequately and independently monitor the human rights situation or even the fate of the refugees who have been involuntarily repatriated to Sri Lanka. The UNHCR has acknowledged that it is involved only in "passive monitoring" of the situation.

All the reports cited confirm that serious human rights violations by security forces occur, mostly against Tamils, not only in the North East but also elsewhere, principally Colombo. These violations include disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and more pervasively torture, arbitrary detention and assault; that even the limited protection provided in the Emergency Regulations (ER) and the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA) are routinely violated and

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(continued from page 19)

ted that motion." Then in a totally unprecedented move, the conference agreed to revote on the two motions and subsequently passed them both. Therefore, according to Mahatma Gandhi, impartiality is absolutely essential when resolving a conflict situation. Let us be quick to condemn any act of violence no matter who committed it, irrespective of the numbers involved.

One has to visit the peace museum and the peace park in Hiroshima to realise the horrors of war. There are paintings, pictures, videos and writings on the walls to take us back to August 1945 to show the sufferings, the desolation, and the misery of the people who were unfortunate to live through this tragedy. When my friend seated next to me expressed her anger by asking how human beings could be so cruel to inflict pain on others, my heart was miles away with the suffering people in the war-ravaged areas in my hometown. Although we didn't go through a nuclear holocaust, several items there

reminded me of the war victims in Sri Lanka. The women with their children wandering in the streets looking for refuge, the children in search of their parents, the dead bodies, the broken homes and the roofless buildings in many ways were similar to what some of our less fortunate brothers and sisters have experienced in the war. The future seemed dismal and hopeless. Yet, when I stepped outside and saw the impressive modern city of Hiroshima rebuilt after the war, my feelings for my country began to change. The streets of Hiroshima were teeming with people and traffic. The city looked beautiful with its quietly flowing rivers surrounded by the hills. Everywhere there was an air of freedom and safety. Above all, I had a feeling of peace and tranquility which I never experienced before. If we have the will and the determination that the Japanese people had, we too can come out of this tragedy. We can rise above the ashes and rebuild our broken homes, schools and hospitals. A new beginning will bring forth long-standing peace. □

that security forces enjoy impunity for their violations. Moreover Tamils are under suspicion and under surveillance not only by the security forces but also by neighbourhood watch committees set up with Government support.

Typical of the UNHCR's relatively benign view of the security and human rights situation for Tamils even outside of the North-East is the statement in the UNHCR information update of September 1996 (quoted by BRC) that "the treatment of detainees remained correct and torture and other forms of mistreatment were not practised by the police and security authorities in Colombo. This contrasts starkly with statements in the US State Department's human rights report for 1996 which noted the "deterioration in the human rights record of the security forces" and that "impunity for those responsible for human rights abuses remained a problem." After referring to the extension of Emergency Regulations to the whole country in April 1996, the report also notes that "crucial safeguards built into the ER were being routinely ignored by security forces, especially those provisions requiring receipts to be issued for arrests and ordering the security forces to notify the Human Rights Task Force (HRTF) of any arrest within 4 hours. Although security force personnel can be fined or jailed for failure to comply with the ER, none was known to have been punished during the year."

The US State Department report also notes that "Members of the security forces continued to torture and mistreat detainees and other prisoners both male and female during interrogation. In November a Supreme Court judge stated publicly that torture continued unabated in police stations in spite of a number of judicial pronouncements against their use. During the year no one was convicted of torture under the anti-torture law." "security forces continued mass arrests of young Tamils, both male and female... Major sweeps and arrests occurred in Colombo, the east and increasingly in the Jaffna Peninsula."

The report of the BRC which focused on the UNHCR's assessment more directly, had the following comments on the position of Tamils in Colombo. "Despite the attempts by the Government to promote human rights, the culture within the Sri Lankan security forces remains suspicious of Tamils - in particular young males, although all Tamils, whether male or female, young or old, are at risk. That Tamils should come under suspicion because of actions of the LTTE is understandable. What is concerning is the continued use of detention without trial, and in contravention of the Emergency Regulations; of torture to extract confessions, often in language not understood or spo-

ken by the signatory; and of extrajudicial executions which are linked to the security forces. While there has been a systematic reduction in human rights violations, particularly against the Sinhalese population, there continues to be human rights violations in Colombo, particularly against Tamils, which the government appears to be unwilling or unable to prevent. It is for this reason that Colombo should not be assumed to be safe for Sri Lankan Tamils."

UNHCR's Insensitivity

The insensitivity and almost cavalier attitude of the UNHCR to the problems facing Sri Lankan Tamils is illustrated by the recent interview granted by the UNHCR Representative in Colombo to a reporter from the newspaper "De Telgraaf" from his home country, The Netherlands. He is reported to have said that the Tamils have nothing to fear in Colombo or even Jaffna, unless they engage in terrorist activities, that Tamils enjoy freedom of movement just like other Sri Lankans and that therefore the Tamils who had recently arrived in Amsterdam should be denied asylum as economic migrants.

This writer was informed by the UNHCR office in Geneva that the report was "a distorted reproduction" and that the UNHCR had strongly protested the alleged "distortions." However, he was not provided with a copy of the protest, even after repeated requests. Nevertheless, the sad fact remains that the reported statements are broadly consistent with the general stance of the UNHCR on Sri Lanka.

The UNHCR office in Colombo has also followed a similar pattern of understating the acute problems facing the hundreds of thousands of internally displaced Tamils in the North, in terms of shortages of food, shelter, medical care and sanitation. Since access by reporters and other observers to the North is tightly restricted by the Government, there are few outside reports available on the situation of the displaced persons. One is the recent US-CR report. While commending the Government for assuming responsibility for assisting internally displaced persons and other civilians in areas outside government control, it notes that tens of thousands are at risk because the government will not provide them with adequate food or medicines, shelter, water, sanitation, nor allow the international community to do so. The shortage of essential supplies is also confirmed by the Government Agent based in Vavuniya - the only transit point for supplies - in 1996. He notes that, after March 1996, food assistance has not been provided by the government for 206,000 displaced persons "causing untold hardship to these families as they are not in a position to earn any sort of in-

come due to the severe drought in the area. "The USCR and the Government Agent also underscore the even greater cuts in the supply of medicines and medical care facilities.

The USCR report also states that the UNHCR should not use its Open Relief Centres (ORC's) for displaced Tamils in the North to "actively dissuade Sri Lankans seeking refuge in India." In the US-CR's opinion, those seeking refuge in India have done so voluntarily. It states that the UNHCR should not seek to "impose the ORC on would be refugees or use its existence as a pretext for interdicting and returning refugees to Sri Lanka. "This comment was clearly promoted by UNHCR's controversial policy of actively promoting the involuntary repatriation of refugees.

Conclusion

Contrary to the UNHCR's assessment, the current security and human rights situation of Tamils in Sri Lanka can be summarised as follows. Tamils in the North East are exposed to severe war related conditions and human rights violations by both warring sides; their flight out of these areas either to the South or to India is severely restricted by the Government for security and other reasons; and Tamils present outside the North East including several tens of thousands of internally displaced, are exposed to insecure conditions and massive violations of their human rights. There is also strong evidence that the Government, despite its numerous declarations of commitment to human rights is at the very least "unable" to protect the human rights of Tamils. As noted by BRC, "The Government's attempts to promote human rights have been slow to change the cultural and institutional prejudices and practices which have resulted in continued patterns of abuse, particularly within the security forces."

An analysis of UNHCR's stance on the general security and human rights problems in Sri Lanka (and perhaps in other countries), is complicated by its reluctance to make public its views on these areas. It is the writer's understanding based on his contacts with UNHCR that they are made available only to interested governments. Since the governments of the refugee country as well as of countries of refuge are not likely to challenge an understatement of these problems, the interests of genuine refugees and displaced people could easily suffer. This is especially so when the UNHCR does not respond to criticism by the NGO's and others, when its views somehow become public, as in the above quoted instance in Sri Lanka. This practice of secrecy and non-accountability is unjustified, especially in the case of a humanitarian organisation like the UNHCR.

(Continued on next page)

POINT OF VIEW

SHOUT AND PLEA FROM TRINCOMALEE

by K.A.Reddiar, Trincomalee

As a regular reader of Tamil Times, which is available in the Trincomalee Urban Council library, I wish to express my opinion about this monthly journal. Although the news review and the various articles published on issues concerning the Tamils are useful to the Tamil expatriate community, I wonder how many find the time to read them. They are always busy making money or preoccupied with other matters that concern them and their families only. An expatriate Jaffna Tamil, who is always inward looking, may not be bothered about the fellow countrymen, unless any of his close relatives are still in Jaffna. After the army took control of Jaffna and communications restored, it is now possible to contact people there with some difficulty. This would have helped them to be in touch with their relatives.

In order to grasp the psyche of the Jaffna Tamils, I like to mention in brief the following facts:

Jaffna Tamils held sway in the 1950s

(continued from page 21)

There is thus a compelling humanitarian need for the UNHCR to review and modify its current stance on Sri Lanka and for it to urge countries of refuge to meet the well founded case for international protection for Sri Lankan Tamil refugees - at least by way of temporary protection and the suspension of involuntary repatriation. The UNHCR would have then done its legal and moral duty, irrespective of what the refuge countries do thereafter.

The Governments of refuge countries of the West also have a moral, if not legal, responsibility to offer such international protection, at least on a temporary basis. It is equally important that they act in every way possible to press for the improvement of the human rights situation, and for the resumption of negotiations between the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE. Only such actions will offer a real answer to the refugee problem which they confront. It is futile to regard the civil war, which is the underlying cause of the refugee problem, as a strictly internal problem to be resolved internally. □

and 1960s. They enjoyed a powerful life and migrated even then to the UK, when entry was much easier. The lavish obituary notices published in the Tamil Times are reminiscent of their glorious past when Jaffna Tamils prospered reaching dazzling heights. What was then the position of the Tamils in the Eastern province and of the upcountry Tamils? Did they show any sympathy and helped them to ameliorate their pitiful living conditions?

The Jaffna man even now does not consider the Tamils from the Eastern Province as his equal. He is hell-bent on maintaining his supremacy even at this critical time. His own economic interest comes first before anything else. "A public servant from Jaffna comes to Batticaloa with a travelling bag on transfer and returns to Jaffna after few years with amazingly large amount of wealth, notably paddy lands," was the saying that did the rounds in the 1960s. I doubt seriously whether the Jaffna Tamils and Eastern province Tamils can ever have a sincere consensus on matters of common concern.

The root cause of the present violent conflict is the discriminatory method of selecting students for admission to the universities. The main victims of this selection method were the Jaffna students. But the average Jaffna man even now fails to realise a vital fact that others recognize and appreciate. The quota system has helped the underprivileged students from the Batticaloa and Ampara districts to gain admission to the science, engineering and medical facilities, dominated before by the privileged Jaffna students. As a result, today almost all the officers in the public service, including the executives in the Batticaloa district are Tamils from the Eastern province.

The Tamil intelligentsia in the Eastern province feel that they should not tie themselves politically with the Tamils in the Northern province. Why should they depend on the Jaffna Tamils when the Eastern province has sufficient resources, including skilled manpower to shape their future and be masters of their destiny? The Muslim leaders too are privately

canvassing for controlling their future independently, without associating with the Tamils in the North.

Let us not forget that it is the Tamils in the Eastern province and Mannar district, who are facing the brunt of the terrible effects of the ongoing war. The peasants there are becoming poorer, while the Tamils in the North are able to keep their heads above water through foreign remittances even though they have lost much of their former financial clout. The Northern province has been hardly affected by state sponsored colonisation. In contrast, the situation in the Eastern province is very different. Now Trincomalee district is dominated by the Sinhalese in almost all walks of life. I wonder how many of the Tamil Times readers are aware that today neither the Tamils nor the Muslims can operate any passenger transport services in Trincomalee. Almost all fishing activities are also carried out by the Sinhalese. As things are, the next chairman of Trincomalee's urban council will be a Sinhalese.

Despite all these happenings, the Jaffna Tamil intelligentsia still wants to continue their dominance over the Tamils in the Eastern province. They continue to boast publicly about their life in Jaffna and of their superior culture. They mourn with some dismay that it is the dropouts from the Jaffna society who decided to settle in Trincomalee. They are regarded as inferior and a Tamil girl from Trincomalee cannot marry a Tamil boy from Jaffna. So much for the domineering attitude of the Jaffna Tamils towards Tamils in the Eastern province and their self-serving economic interest.

Let me now come to the material published in the Tamil Times. The striking thing about the contributors to the Tamil Times is that they are exclusively Jaffna Tamils. This underscores the fact that Tamil Times is only concerned about their aspirations. It is supposed to be the only neutral journal of the kind published overseas on Tamil issues. Surely, it has much to offer to its readers. As an illustration, I list below some issues that could be addressed, events that could be included in the News Review and topics of interest (but ignored so far) for articles so as to broaden its horizon:

- (1) Issues concerning the Tamils in the Eastern Province as well as the upcountry Tamils;
- (2) Social, cultural and religious events in both the Northern and Eastern provinces;
- (3) Living conditions in the North, East and the Upcountry for the Tamils;
- (4) Living conditions of Tamil expatriates/refugees in Europe and other continents;
- (5) The attitude of the new generation of

Tamils born and brought up in Europe and other Western countries towards the struggle in Sri Lanka;

(6) Introductory essays on places of historical, educational and religious importance in the Northern and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka;

(7) If peace is regained, the prospects for the offsprings of the expatriate Tamils to socially integrate with their counterparts in Sri Lanka;

(8) The prospects for the return of normalcy (peace and tranquillity) in the North and East as in the 1960s;

(9) Background papers on the origin, social customs and culture of Tamils in the Eastern Province. Very little is known about the history of the Tamils in the Eastern province, since it is eclipsed by that of the Jaffna Tamils in most published articles;

(10) The plight of unmarried girls in Jaffna due to the exorbitant dowry demanded and recently as a result of the dearth of suitable bridegrooms;

(11) The ecological damage resulting from indiscriminate felling of palmyra trees and devastation of forest reserves in the North-East;

(12) The long-term effects of malnutrition and acute shortage of medical personnel in the North and East of Sri Lanka;

(13) The disruption to education and disappointing results in the last G.C.E (A/L) examination, particularly in Jaffna (not to be deceived by the few who obtained A grades in four subjects);

(14) The widening gap between the haves and have-nots as a result of the war and its long-term impact on the Tamil society after peace is restored; and

(15) The growing influence of various church groups, especially among the underprivileged Tamils, who under the harsh economic conditions are induced (money is involved) to defect from Hinduism.

The following are some specific questions to ponder, which I hope will stir the minds of the contributors and the readers of Tamil Times. Surely, someone should be able to provide the answers:

(a) Will the inward looking Jaffna Tamils with their financial power derived from the settlement of large number of their stock abroad and enterprising nature, integrate with the underprivileged and deprived peasants in Mannar and the Eastern Province? What is the thinking of the younger generation of Jaffna Tamils living abroad on this question?

(b) How will the youths in the North and East, who have got used to the gun culture adjust their attitudes to a no-war situation? What sort of life will they lead then?

(c) Can the Tamils patch up their differences with the Muslims?

(d) Can the younger generation of Sinhalese and Tamils, after this atrocious war

GUJRAL, INDIA'S NEW PREMIER, BUT FOR HOW LONG?

T N Gopalan

78-year-old Inder Kumar Gujral is India's new Prime Minister. Widely respected and variously described as a scholar, pacifist and cocktail socialist, he is sure to restore some of the prestige lost during the inglorious reigns of Mr PV Narasimha Rao and Mr H D Deve Gowda. But how long will he last and can he really withstand the pulls and pressures inevitable in such a higgledy-piggledy coalition like the United Front for even the rest of 1997?

Already the rumblings in Bihar, in the wake of the charge-sheeting of Chief Minister Laloo Prasad Yadav by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), barely within ten days of Gujral's assuming office at that, are casting an ominous shadow on the Centre.

An opinion poll conducted by the reputed India Today revealed that if elections are to be held now, the BJP would stand to gain the most, at the expense of both the United Front and the Congress. The BJP, already gloating over the exonerated of its aggressive president Lal Kishen Advani in the money-laundering racket case, is going around preening its feathers and trying to win over regional allies - only a few months stand between us and power at the centre, they brag openly. But that is looking too far into the future. What is of immediate interest is the current scenario and the process by which the mild-

make peace and live together in harmony?

(e) Will unity among the Tamils be a reality or a dream?

I wish to draw attention to the fact that the majority of Tamil youths here cannot write fluently in English, as a result of neglecting the language in schools and in the universities. I, therefore, suggest that the Tamils in the North, East and the Up-country should be invited to write in Tamil on the issues and topics that I have listed above, if they have difficulty in expressing their views in English.

Finally, I must emphasize that I have not written this letter out of some provocation, in case the readers come to such a conclusion. I am fluent in all three languages and in my work place both Sinhalese and Tamil languages are used. Hence, I have the opportunity to feel the pulse of the people from all communities. □

mannered ex-fellow traveller came to occupy the top job.

If only the united front leaders show enough care to choose someone who would not be as petty and provincial as Mr Gowda, that would bode well for the nation, this correspondent had written in his last month's despatch. As it happens Gujral, the External Affairs Minister in the Gowda cabinet, is a very polite, self-effacing, relatively unambitious man who definitely has a much larger perspective of the world around him than his predecessor, the humble farmer who could not see beyond Karnataka and his own clan. But he lacks a mass base. Though he is part of the Janata Dal, he only has a marginal role to play in the party affairs, and he should be all at sea in the appalling politicking tearing apart of the rudderless Janata Dal.

Ironically it is his soft-spoken, apparently unpushing and almost wimpy personality sans any political clout on his own which has unexpectedly catapulted him to the top, edging out Govindasamy Karupiah Moopanar from Tamil Nadu in the process. The latter was seen as untrustworthy by the CPM because of his perceived proximity to Mrs Sonia Gandhi while their candidate Mulayam Singh Yadav from the Uttar Pradesh was unacceptable to the other UF constituents because of his abrasive and scheming nature, apart from the hostility he evokes among the Dalits in the UP. And thus Gujral emerged as the compromise candidate. But then it is at best an unstable equilibrium because the selection process proved very contentious, even nasty, bruising many an ego and leaving many questions unanswered. Even the President Shakar Dayal Sharma remained convinced until the very end.

Ironically, it was the generally low-profile and non-controversial Moopanar who fired the first salvo when he made his displeasure at the way his claims were overlooked, and his MP's decided to stay out of the UF ministry as a sign of solidarity with their leader. The decision sent alarm bells ringing among the Indian industrialists too since the Tamil Maanila Congress's decision meant that Mr P Chidambaram would not be the Finance Ministry any more and such a prospect was perceived as a disaster to the liberalisation process. It took all the persuasive powers of the UF, the Congress, Gujral, Kesri and everyone

who matter to assuage the wounded feelings of Moopanar and the TMC trooped back ten days later.

There was also another irony in the Moopanar episode, in the very fact that he should have emerged as a front-runner in the race at one stage. For he is known to have displayed a distinct aversion to political office, turning down ministerial offers from the days of Mrs Gandhi. He is perceived to be content with holding court true to his background as a feudal lord and back-stage manoeuvres. Besides heading as he does a mere 20-strong group in the Lok Sabha, he should never have come to be projected as the future Prime Minister. But then he was for two reasons - one his general consensual politics, unwilling to tread on anyone's toes and, more than anything else, his acceptability to Mr Sitaram Kesri who had pulled the rug from under the feet of Gowda.

Moopanar himself kept everyone guessing about his intentions, though he would not categorically rule out his candidature, leading many to believe that he was positively inclined. In one of his off-the-record chats with some journalists including this correspondent he disclosed that he had stood down in favour of Gowda last year only because he wanted to avoid the embarrassment of an encounter with Narasimha Rao who was still the Congress President and CLP leader at that time.

As speculations mounted and no other candidate offered himself openly, it was presumed that Moopanar's election was a foregone conclusion. But there were other forces at work. The CPM quietly let it be known that it would not like someone too close to the Congress and the erstwhile ruling family to become the next PM. It feared that Moopanar could become a proxy for Congress and Sonia and so wittingly and unwittingly strengthen the position of the Congress, a prospect they contemplated with horror, especially so when the Congress is the CPM's main rival in its own bastions of West Bengal and Kerala; secondly he could merge with the Congress some time, sounding the death-knell of the anti-Congress UF for good. Besides Chief Minister Karunanidhi and his nephew Murasoli Maran were not too excited at the prospect.

Later on the CPM was to say that it had opposed Moopanar not because his credentials as a UF leader was suspect but because it preferred a strong North Indian leader at the helm of affairs who could take on the BJP, the major threat in the next elections.

Samajvadi Party leader Mulayam Singh's only attraction is his uncompromising anti-BJP stance and the goodwill he enjoys among the Muslims. Otherwise his image is that of a dada, a patron of thugs, highly casteist and crafty. And since

he has sought to destroy the CPI during his rule as the CM of the UP, it strongly opposed CPM's proposal. For his part Deve Gowda backed the candidature of Ramvilas Paswan, a Dalit leader but with nothing else to recommend him. It was in such circumstances that Gujral emerged as the compromise candidate.

Born in Jhelum in undivided Punjab, now in Pakistan, he studied in Lahore and took to both the freedom movement and Marxism early. Though over a period of time he became totally committed to the freedom movement, his fascination for Marxism remained.

During Mrs Gandhi's heydays of flirtation with socialism, he emerged as a key member of her kitchen cabinet. But he could not hold his own in the brash Sanjay Gandhi court and was shunted off to Moscow as India's ambassador. After some years in the political wilderness, he joined V P Singh's Jan Morcha against Rajiv Gandhi and became the external affairs minister in the short lived V P Singh government.

And when it was toppled, Gujral went into semi-political retirement and became busy with his scholarly pursuits besides dabbling in some kind of activism. He was elected to the Rajya Sabha from Bihar as a goodwill gesture by the Janata Dal which wanted someone like him to be part of the



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When Sonia joined Congress(I), West Bengal chief minister Jyoti Basu expressed surprise saying that he never knew she had been out of it all these years! Well, such has been the power of the mystique of dynasty over Congressmen and women. Having grown accustomed to charismatic leaders for last several decades, they are in need of one Gandhi. G K Moopanar showed his true Congress colours when he said her entry has "solved" the leadership crisis in the Congress(I). He compared her with Annie Besant, when asked whether a foreign-born woman could successfully lead the Indian people! The left must now be feeling glad that it did not allow this Congressman to become prime minister.

Sonia is relatively free now, having married off daughter Priyanka in March last. Son Rahul studies in the West, making occasional trips home. Sonia's only Gandhi family rival, Maneka, is an MP, but is out of the ruling Janata Dal for having been a follower of Ramakrishna Hegde. Maneka, in any case, is out of the rough and tumble of daily politics and spends her time giving television talkshows on being kind to fellow animals. Of course, Sonia can boast of running the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation, which is engaged in constructive developmental projects.

The more important question is whether Sonia is a Gandhi, whether she can become an authentic offshoot of the Congress genealogical myth of empire-building. And whether Congress boss Sitaram Kesri, once a diehard sycophant, will allow her to take on him. Immediately after the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, the Congress satraps, including Kesri, in their wisdom or otherwise, offered the party chief's post to her on a plat-

(continued from page 24)
Gowda ministry.

His doctrine on relationship with India's neighbours, referred to in earlier reports, of non-interference and generous attitude towards smaller nations, and his Pakistani origin does augur well on the foreign front. This combined with his general geniality, lack of vaulting ambitions and an unwillingness to engage himself in any machinations, should indeed make him an ideal choice in the current troubled conditions. Moopanar himself conceded, "I have no problem with him at all. He would make a much better PM than myself."

Still his lack of a mass base, his influence does not extend beyond New Delhi, particularly India International Centre, a favourite haunt of the capital's intellectuals, is sure to come in the way of his effective functioning as the pilot of the ship.

REVIVING THE DYNASTY MYSTIQUE - SONIA JOINS CONGRESS AS RAO FACES INDICTMENT

G.Ramesh

ter but she had declined. 10 Janpath, her residence, started assuming mysterious qualities ever since. Later, prime minister P V Narasimha Rao, another once-diehard sycophant, decided to assert himself, but she kept up a discrete silence. When dissidents like Arjun Singh quit the Congress and sought her blessings, the silence became unbearable. Ultimately, she chose to go public over the "slowness" of the Rajiv Gandhi trial and got daughter Priyanka to visit the Jain Commission inquiry proceedings at New Delhi. Narasimha Rao was not eager to placate her, as prime minister, and later, as leader of the Congress(I) party in Lok Sabha. She is known to have supported Kesri's claim to party presidency which saw Narasimha Rao's exit.

It is clear that Sonia's entry into politics has direct links with the Bofors gun deal probe which is nearing completion. The Deve Gowda regime put the screws on the probe and unearthed quiet a few things, thereby incurring Sonia's displeasure. The probe found out that Rajiv-Sonia's Italian friend Ottavio Quottrouchi, who had stayed in Delhi for more than three decades, is a key recipient of the gun deal payoffs. He had managed to give the slip to the CBI during the previous Rao regime and is now in Malaysia. Kesri, even with his new-found clout with new prime minister Inder Kumar Gujral, may not be able to stop Quottrouchi's eventual extradition to India, but Sonia has a lot more at stake than a mere Italian

How could he rein in such cantankerous street-fighters like Mulayam Singh or Laloo. And what is the support base he can fall back on to assert himself? How could he enforce his will in say a case like the fodder scam - the biggest to hit the nation since independence, of the order of Rs 950 crore, involving the siphoning off of government funds meant for purchase of fodder by the Animal Husbandry Department of the Bihar, dating back to the late seventies and flourishing right up to the times of Laloo - when a key accused is himself the President of the JD, Laloo? Not many are optimistic. He is too good for the job, someone like Arnold's ineffectual angel beating his wings in the void. If he manages to survive for even two more years and check the BJP's growing sway, that will indeed be a genuine miracle, and a welcome one at that. □

friend.

The next issue at stake is the ongoing Rajiv assassination case trial at the Poonamalee sub jail and the proceedings of the Jain Commission inquiring into the wider conspiracy behind the assassination. By joining direct

politics, Sonia can keep the heat on the court and commission proceedings, since both have reached a crucial stage.

In the assassination case trial, the defence examination of the investigating officer, T Ragothaman, has just been completed. The stage is now set for the questioning of all the 26 accused persons by the new Special Judge, V Navaneetham. Arguments are expected to commence by June and conclude by September when the judge would reserve his orders. The Jain Commission proceedings got a fillip with the recent depositions made by Narasimha Rao.

Narasimha Rao denied charges that he was close to self-styled godman Chandra Swami who is suspected to be part of a close-knit group around former prime minister Chandra Shekhar and was opposed to Rajiv Gandhi taking over as prime minister after the 1991 elections. Narasimha Rao, however, stated that the Chandra Shekhar regime had dealt with the threats to Rajiv Gandhi's security in a casual manner.

Sonia's last predicament arises from the squabbles within the Congress(I). Having withdrawn support to the Deve Gowda regime, Kesri is under attack from several factions as he never got to speaking about any alternative gameplan. Congressmen know that the next time Kesri tries such a gimmick, he may not hold any aces up his sleeve. A number of Congress leaders are looking for alternative power centres within the party, but none has emerged so far. Hence, Sonia may have decided to get into scene just to keep the Congress(I) flock together. The Congress(I) has been told by the Indian election commission to complete its organisational polls by the middle of next month. Under the present circumstances, Kesri is bound to get elected, but he may have to listen to Sonia.

The happenings within the Congress(I) would also be affected by the framing of charge-sheet against Narasimha Rao and 19 others in the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha bribery case. The case relates to the sordid episode of corruption when four JMM members of parliament helped out Narasimha Rao to survive a no-confidence motion in parliament after receiving huge bribes. The list of accused reads like a who's who in Indian politics - Buta Singh, Satish Sharma, Ajit Singh (all

(Continued on next page)

DMK-TMC Ties Strained

T N Gopalan, Madras

How serious was the candidature of Mr Karupiah Moopanar in the prime ministerial race? Was he only a media creation or were his chances really sabotaged by DMK chief Karunanidhi and his nephew Murasoli Maran? These questions will continue to haunt Tamil Nadu for a pretty long time to come. In the interim, the relationship between these two electoral allies has become severely strained. Though it is a bit too early to say that the two parties have reached a point of no return.

Truth will out, Karunanidhi declared in the State Assembly, and his innocence will be proved beyond doubt. Will it ever clarify the confusion surrounding the entire selection process? There are varying accounts doing the rounds in the National Press, some more credible and some less so. But the common thread running through it all is that the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister was less than enthusiastic right through, though for the sake of records he did say at one stage that he was in favour of Moopanar.

However the sustained campaign by a section of the Press, led by someone like the inveterate DMK-baiter Cho S Ramaswamy, that Karunanidhi had gone out of his way to block his ally's candidature, seems to be a bit of an exaggeration and highly motivated.

While the TMC men do not hide their

anger about the DMK leader's role and talk of betrayal in public, Moopanar himself makes teasing statements implying that Karunanidhi had not lobbied hard on his behalf and that he is upset about it. The general refrain among the TMC circles is that it only required some more push, some more effort to shove Moopanar into the South Block (the office of the Prime Minister) and that for selfish reasons, Karunanidhi refused to lend a hand. At one stage Moopanar said, "I have no regrets and am not bitter towards anyone who had opposed my candidature. After all each one of them would have had his own political compulsions..." The meaning will not be lost on the TMC cadres. It will be quite a while before Karunanidhi overcomes the odium of having sabotaged the chances of a fellow Tamil.

Already Jayalalitha has sought to fish in troubled waters, expressing her heartfelt sympathies for Moopanar, though indirectly, and blaming the Chief Minister squarely for doing in an ally, a Tamil at that. Evidently she is hoping for some realignment of political forces in the not too distant future.

The developments in New Delhi in the third week of April have come as a body blow to the prestige of Moopanar. Severely denting his cultivated image of being above any hankering for political offices.

(continued from page 24)

former union ministers), Bansi Lal and Veerappa Molly (former chief ministers of Haryana and Karnataka respectively) and the bribe-takers, all belonging to a subaltern movement of a long-suppressed tribal region. The court also dismissed three pleas seeking to summon Kesri as an accused in this case.

Once the charge-sheet gets filed, Narasimha Rao is bound to feel the heat and the MPs under his control will find it tough to go along with him. Narasimha Rao is facing another case - one relating to the cheating of now-deceased NRI pickle-king Lakkubhai Pathak - and his son had been arrested in the Rs 133 crore urea import scam. Kesri would be only too willing to use this to clip Narasimha Rao's wings within the party, but Sonia, by jumping into the fray now, can be expected to take over the Rao faction as well.

That a former prime minister is facing trial for bribing legislators to drum up

support for his regime indicates two major trends in contemporary Indian politics: firstly, the judiciary is getting assertive; secondly, political leaders still think they can manipulate these cases and their results to settle scores with their rivals or to protect their friends. Sonia's entry into politics, Kesri's antics and Narasimha Rao's dithering certainly do not reflect the first trend! Nevertheless, all of them are in politics, commanding the respect of substantial sections of India's polity. This is the paradox: politicians are quite brazen about their responses, but they also want to command respect.

Sonia is expected to take the democratic plunge anytime by announcing a series of tours. She has excellent relations with the church in Kerala and the north-east and might start from one of the two places. Whether her entry helps the Congress(I) or herself, it is bound to be welcomed by the Bharatiya Janata Party which is eager to go hammer and tongs against the Congress(I) for accepting an Italian-born woman as its supreme leader!

If he and his followers allowed themselves to be carried away by the media projections only to land with a thud, the DMK chief too made some strategic errors during those eventful days, cutting a sorry figure at the end of it all.

The moment Gowda tendered his resignation, there were furious speculations in the media that Moopanar was a hot contender, even the natural choice, because of his general acceptability among all the UF constituents and to the Congress especially. In the past, he used to repudiate in public any ministerial aspirations, but this time round kept his peace. At the height of political activity, he retired to Coimbatore to participate in the first anniversary celebrations of the Tamil Maanila Congress. There was a general mood of expectation and the apprehension among the senior leaders centred around Karunanidhi's own game-plan.

"He could be up to any mischief. He would not relish the prospect of Moopanar's accession? Someone who is less powerful than him in the State? At the very minimum he will have to go to the airport to receive Moopanar every time he comes to Tamil Nadu, a very galling proposition. Thus far it has been the TMC leader who would call on the Chief Minister. At a more serious level with Moopanar at the helm of affairs, he could be expected to strengthen his party and prepare to go it alone in the next elections. That could come in the way of the Karunanidhi's mind at that point of time. Veiled threats were held out at the plans for Stalin in the State. At least that was how the TMC interpreted convention to the DMK government "if you stand in the way of our leader, we could create problems for you." Such was the message.

The Chief Minister maintained an enigmatic silence, giving rise to all kinds of speculations. Only on 17 April when he left for New Delhi, he at last spoke up in favour of his ally. That too in a convoluted way - "if the mantle is passed on to Tamil Nadu whom else would I support other than Moopanar?" As if the Prime Ministership goes by rotation, snapped the TMC leaders later.

Even as the D-day neared and the CPM went about thwarting Moopanar's candidature, the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, the Assam Chief Minister, Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and Karunanidhi himself, all members of the Federal Front, did not really bother to rush to the rescue of the chief of the other constituent of the Front, the TMC. Each of them had his own reservations about Moopanar, and finally when Gujral's name cropped up, they enthusiastically backed him.

Now, according to some reports Moopanar was never a serious candidate

ill-informed media persons and some business houses actively promoted his case. He never stood a ghost of a chance. Apart from the TMC itself no one else was for him, it is argued. However the fact remains that the CPM threw up Mulayam's candidature only to spike Moopanar's chances, the very same party which had offered the job to the TMC man last year. They said openly Moopanar might walk back to Congress, ditching the UF at some stage. Karunanidhi did not protest. That is the TMC's major grouse. "How could the DMK keep quiet when its credentials as the UF constituent was questioned?" Moopanar himself wondered.

Chidambaram lashed out at the other members of the UF at the final meeting of the Steering Committee when Gujral's name was decided upon.

Outraged at the turn of events, the TMC MP's spontaneously decided against joining the new ministry. We will support from the outside, they said, making President S D Sharma wonder about the new government's stability. Karunanidhi claimed that he had been kept in the dark otherwise his party too would have kept out in solidarity. "We are really sorry that our ally could not make it. But there was little we could do about it when there were no takers for him." Such was his defence. But it did not wash. The general perception was between them the uncle-nephew duo had blown up Moopanar's chances. And so passions ran high in the State. A TMC man burnt himself to death in despair over the loss of face experienced by his leader. Self-immolation has thus far been a hoary Dravidian practice. Some agitated youngsters burnt an effigy of Maran. Fierce speeches denouncing the DMK's treachery were made at the state executive of the party.

Meantime in the assembly the TMC MLA's had started turning the heat on the government, charging it with laxity on the law and order front, of taking half-hearted measures to curb the "infiltration by the Tigers," of increasing corruption in the administration and so on.

At a public meeting in Kumbakonam while Karunanidhi denied the charges against him, Union Minister of State for Petroleum, T R Balu came down hard on the TMC for the effigy burning and dismissed its pretensions with contempt. The very next day Chidambaram's effigy was burnt in Nagapattinam. Both Moopanar and Karunanidhi acted swiftly to contain the damage - a student congress office-bearer resigned owning responsibility for the effigy incident, the guilty DMK men were arrested and Karunanidhi issued a strong warning against those maligning the TMC leaders and maintained that his relationship with Moopanar continued to be fine.

INDO - PAK TALKS AMIDST POLITICAL CHANGES IN INDIA

By G.Ramesh

The land of Punjab, which had long been the crossing point for near-eastern civilisations into the sub-continent, has managed to offer prime ministers of two countries in the last few months: Nawaz Sharief and Inder Kumar Gujral share topography and history; they both speak Punjabi and Urdu; and are determined to get peace and prosperity to their once-undivided land of the five rivers. Of course, 78-year-old Gujral has had the additional distinction of having fought for the independence of the sub-continent from the banks of Jhelum, now in Pakistan. No other Indian prime minister except Jawaharlal Nehru has evoked such enthusiasm and goodwill in Pakistan as Gujral. Pakistani foreign minister Gohar Ayub Khan even claims credit for predicting that Gujral will be the prime minister.

The setting is dreamy: India is celebrating the 50th year of its independence. And a Pakistan cricket team is touring the country on a goodwill mission, ever hoping for an India-Pakistan cup final. Pakistani players don't seem to be minding the possible antipathy of Indian crowds

Having made his point Moopanar asked his MP's to get back to the ministry, providing that much more stability to the Gujral government. Everyone heaved a sigh of relief. But the TMC, cut up as it is over Karunanidhi's betrayal is not going to take the snub lying down in whatever way it can, it will create problems for the DMK. Only because there are no immediate elections on the anvil, the party has put on hold any plans to mobilise the people on issue of "the hurt to Tamil pride" as seen in the side-lining of Moopanar. But surely this is the beginning of the end of the alliance. Whether Moopanar will accept the proffered hand of friendship from the AIADMK or Jayalalitha herself would entice him with the leadership of the anti-DMK front or a coup will be staged in the AIADMK to dethrone Jaya and thereafter an alliance led by Moopanar will be formed are all questions which defy answers at the moment. But surely the DMK has some unnerving moments ahead of it, and the state politics is all set to enter a tumultuous phase. □

at all. Attacking batsman Shahid Afridi, a 17-year-old, says his dream is to play in India in India. Saqlain Mushtaq, the wily off-spinner, says the huge crowds are an additional factor why Pakistanis should propel themselves to give their best. Both players are here for the first time. "It's great to be here," says captain Rameez Raja, all smiles. "Apne log hai na," he says in Urdu, commenting on the crowds. The sense of homecoming is evident. And one wishes the two countries were had never separated in the first place!

The Congress(I)'s decision to withdraw support to the Deve Gowda regime has, willy-nilly, brought Gujral to the seat of power. Well, such are the turns of history! The withdrawal of support, it may be recalled, came just when Indo-Pak talks were being held in New Delhi. And Gujral, then foreign minister, was stunned into deep silence! Clearly, the Congress(I) was jealous of the Gujral doctrine of buying peace with India's neighbours. Not that the Congress had any other choice if it could manage to ascend to the Delhi throne, but the party didn't want the united front to hog all the credit for the expected breakthrough in the talks. However, the Congress has to now contend with Gujral meeting Mian Nawaz Sharif in Male during the SAARC summit!

During the talks held in March last, Pakistani secretary of foreign affairs Shamshed Ahmed insisted on according primacy to the Kashmir problem. This is in line with Nawaz Sharif's oft-repeated stand. Pakistani president Farooq Ahmed Leghari had also sought to raise the issue several times. Pakistan had managed to get a resolution passed at the Organisation of Islamic Countries special summit at Islamabad in March expressing solidarity with the people of Kashmir. India responded by saying that the Kashmir issue should not be raised at all during the talks, except within the ambit of the 1972 Shimla agreement. Pakistan has now taken the stand that the Kashmir problem cannot be brushed aside, which means that it wants to discuss Kashmir and other issues simultaneously.

Gujral, on his part, has criticised Jammu & Kashmir chief minister Farooq Abdullah's suggestion to let the Pakistan-

occupied Kashmir to remain with that country. Before the first round of talks, there was an agitation by Kashmiri Hurriyat leaders on March 12 at Srinagar protesting against custodial killings. Three senior leaders, Syed Ali Shah Geelani, Mohammed Yasin Malik and Abdul Ghani Lone, were arrested and released later. Later in the month, Shabir Shah, senior Kashmiri militant leader, was arrested while on his way to the United Nations Military Observers' Group (UNMOG) in Sonwar demanding that the Kashmiris be given place in the ongoing Indo-Pak talks. The Hurriyat leaders were prevented from holding a similar demonstration in New Delhi. And the Hurriyat ended up getting the valley to hold a bandh against the talks.

During the first round of talks, the Indian side avoided getting provoked. This was clear from the fact that two major events did not get politicised. The first was the discovery of a 34-metre-long tunnel in the Indo-Pak border on March 15. The tunnel, in the Ajnala sub-sector of the Punjab border, might once have been used by the Khalistanis and smugglers. The second was the gunning down of seven Kashmiri pundits in Sangarampura in central Kashmir on March 22. These families had not left the troubled valley even during the 1990s when the majority of pundits decided to migrate.

Gujral, indeed, in the meantime, had come up with several major concessions for Pakistani visitors. According to him, the Indian government will

- * exempt young and elderly visitors from police reporting, an extremely troublesome affair;
- * waive visa fees for elderly Pakistani visitors;
- * increase the number of Indian shrines which can be visited by Pakistani pilgrims;
- * expand cultural contacts between the two countries;
- * all free flow of Urdu, Punjabi and English books; and
- * allow one-year multi-entry visas for Pakistani businessmen.

The announcements evoked thunderous cheers from across the border and Pakistan was forced to make some gestures including the release of 38 Indian children held for over two years at the Edhi centre in Karachi. Pakistan also has spoken of a reciprocal relaxation of visa restrictions for Indian pilgrims who want to visit Sikh shrines in Pakistan and Indian business teams.

The run-up to the second round of talks has not been without hiccups either. Pakistan suspects that the former chief minister of the Sind province, Abdullah Shah, may have crossed over to India. Shah is facing several charges including

South Asia has nearly 40 per cent of the world's poor people, but spends around 14 billion dollars on arms.

India ranks 142nd in the world in terms of real per capita income, but first in total arms imports. Pakistan's comparative ranking 119th and tenth. India and Pakistan together spend twice as much on arms procurement during 1988-92 as Saudi Arabia, though the Saudis are 25 times richer than the two countries put together. Global military expenditure went down by 37 per cent during 1987-94 but military spending in South Asia went up by 12 per cent. This is mainly in India and Pakistan. The expenditure continues to rise.

India is trying to acquire 4.5 billion dollars worth arms. This can finance primary education for 45 million children, provide safe drinking water for 220 million people and family planning services for 22 million more couples.

the sensational murder of Murtaza Bhutto in Karachi in September last.

In the Kashmir front, Indian troops foiled an attempt on April 22 to smuggle large quantities of arms in the Kupwara sector. On May 5, the Indian government accused Pakistani troops of resorting to unprovoked firing in the Kargill sector. The Indian government is also worried that Afghan Taliban units might start backing extreme Islamic outfits in Kashmir. There have been disturbing reports of idol-hating Taliban threatening to take over the Bamyar valley known across the world

for its huge stone Buddhas dating back to the Gandhara period. India has just been witnessing an exhibition of the famous French writer Andre Maulraux' fascination with Gandhara art and the statues are dear to all artlovers here. In any case, there has been some news that Taliban going slow on Bamyar. Also, Pakistan has been distancing itself from Taliban militias. In any case, there has been a clear sign of de-escalation of conflicts, at least in the Mohar sector of the Kashmir valley, where the Indian government decided to replace regular army units with paramilitary troops.

Pakistan also fears that sub-regional co-operation among the seven SAARC members, at India's behest, will lead to isolation of Maldives and Sri Lanka. Nawaz Sharif is expected to raise this issue at the SAARC summit at Male.

It is to the credit of Nawaz Sharif that, in the meantime, he got the Pakistani national assembly to vote unanimously to scrap the dangerous provisions of the Eighth Amendment invoked by president Leghari to dismiss prime minister Benazir Bhutto in November last year. The move to scrap the provisions was part of the poll promises given by Nawaz Sharif. Predictably, Bhutto backed Sharif's move. Sharif himself had been dismissed in 1993 when the then president Ghulam Ishaq Khan invoked the same powers which had been put into the constitution by Gen Zia Ul Haq. Sharif is now expected to concentrate on the Council for National Defence institution set up by president Leghari. Sharif might soon get a bill passed in the national assembly authorising the prime minister to appoint the military chiefs. □

IN BRIEF

CHENNAI POLICE FOIL EXTORTION BID FROM LANKAN FAMILY: Four Lankans were arrested on charges of attempting to extort Rs 2 lakh from a Lankan family staying at Mylapore in south Chennai early this month. Of the four arrested youth, three were inmates of the Puzhal refugee camp on the outskirts of the city. They had written a letter to Mrs Kamalalakshmi Durairajah asking her to part with the amount. The family had been through a similar experience ten years ago when Mr Durairajah was kidnapped by suspected TELO members and released later.

GNLF TO INSTAL HITLER STATUE IN DARJEELING: Strange it may seem, but Gorkha National Liberation Front leader Subhas Ghising thinks Adolf Hitler deserves a statue in the picturesque hill station of Darjeeling, because of his friendship with Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose!

Ghising may well have his way because chairs the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council created after a decade-long confrontation with the left front government. He has already installed a Hitler statue at Shikhola in Kurseong subdivision. The left front leaders of West Bengal have been stunned by Ghising's antics and have been quick to point out that Hitler did not aid Netaji though the latter is known to have met him twice during his year-old stay in Berlin in 1943 and that Netaji had to slip out of Germany and go to Japan for aid.

ANCIENT COINS CONFIRM LINKS WITH ROME: Roman coins issued by emperor Glory Aroma Norum, who ruled during 5th century AD, have been unearthed in Alagankulam in Ramanathapuram and Kodumanal in Periyar districts of Tamil Nadu. Other significant artefacts unearthed including pot shards, semi-precious stone beads, deer horns, born arrow heads and crystal sickle confirmed that Kodumanal played a vital role in export trade during the sangam era of the ancient Tamils.

India at 50: Lessons from Sri Lanka

If we do not watch out, we are in serious danger of committing in the second half-century of our Independence the mistakes that have plagued Sri Lanka in the first half-century of its Independence. In both countries, the core problem of nation-building has been the relationship between ethnicity and nationhood. We found one answer. The Sri Lankans found another. Ours was the right answer: we have survived. Theirs was the wrong answer: their problem has become intractable. What underlines the apprehension of our making their mistakes is that there is an astonishing parallelism in the political history of the two countries, especially in the dimension of ethnicity and nationhood, through the 20th century.

As in India, so in Sri Lanka, till the advent of the Twenties there was a relative absence of communalism, either religious, racial or linguistic, in nationalist politics. The brothers Ponnambalam - Sir Arunachalam and, later, Sir Ramanathan - were not only the unchallenged leaders of the Tamil-speaking community, but also the leaders of the Sri Lankan political class, in easy and comfortable relationship with eminent Sinhalese like F. R. Senanayake and D. B. Jayatilaka.

Divisions

The tapering over of communal divisions in Indian politics by the Lucknow Pact of 1916 was paralleled in Sri Lanka by the formation in 1919 of a nationwide, all-ethnic, secular. Ceylon National Congress, under the leadership of Ponnambalam Arunachalam. But even as the Hindu Mahasabha and the Muslim League between them communalised Indian politics through the '20s and '30s, so in Sri Lanka did the ethnic factor begin rearing its head in all its dimensions - religious, linguistic, racial. The somewhat unceremonious exit of Arunachalam from the Sri Lankan political scene in 1921 signalled the emergence of ethnicity and nationhood as the leitmotif or politics in the island; the appointment of the Donoughmore Commission in 1931 to examine the further evolution of constitutional arrangements for the country further aggravated the communalisation of Sri Lankan politics. It was, in fact, to underline the ethnic divide, rather than find a solution for it, that in 1926 the young SWRD Bandaranaike proposed federalism as the answer to Sri Lanka's then nascent ethnic problem. His position was the logical culmination of the philosophy of ethnic separatism underlying the approach to nationhood of the Sinhala Mahajana Sabha, established in the same year as the Ceylon National Congress.

Indeed, so consistent was SWRD Bandaranaike in his approach to state

structures based on ethnic separateness that as early as 1940, as Minister of Local Government, he proposed Provincial Councils. Tragically, however, for Sri Lanka they had no Mahatma Gandhi to steer the nationalist movement away from the shoals of narrow ethnic identities and communal politics. Their nationalist leaders like the Senanayake brothers and Jayatilaka were too enmeshed in the ethos of the Sinhala Mahajana Sabha to escape from its sectarian compulsions, however much, in their personal lives and philosophical attitudes, they might have belonged to an eclectic, inclusive, composite tradition.

Hindu Mahasabha

The top rung of the Congress kept itself away from community-based and communal politics and, after 1937, prohibited the participation of Congressmen in the activities of the Hindu Mahasabha, the RSS and other such communal organisations. In Sri Lanka, in contrast, the top-rung secular Sinhala leadership was not so careful. The result was that there was not only a growing rift through the 30s and 40s between the Tamils and the Sinhalese, there also developed the rift between the soft

Sinhalese nationalism of the Senanayake brand and the harder Sinhala Nationalism of the Bandaranaike brand.

The initiative for maintaining a secular composite all-ethnic Sri Lanka nationhood passed to the Left primarily the remarkable labour leader A. E. Goonesinha and, after his eclipse in the late 30s to the Lanka Sama Samaja Party under N. M. Perera, Phillip Gunawardene and Pieter Keuneman. Alas as in India, so in Sri Lanka, the Left did not indigenise its imported Marxism-Leninism, concentrating too much on the urban proletariat and organised labour and not enough on the rural masses, with the result that in both countries the Left lost the role which in two such poor countries one would have imagined might well have devolved on them by right.

The Partition of India as the price of Independence, reinforced rather than diminished the impetus in the newly independent India towards the assertion of a composite nationhood and the establishment of a secular state. In Sri Lanka, on the other hand, the absence of a similar ideological commitment to a composite nationhood brought to the fore, on the very morrow of Independence, the problems of ethnicity and nationhood which have plagued Sri Lanka ever since. To put it aphoristically (and, therefore, somewhat simplistically), whereas India posited a unitary nationhood and a plural state, Sri Lanka posited a plural nationhood and a unitary state. The Indian formula worked because

a unitary nationhood permitted of the devolution by the Union of the Union's powers to the federal units without calling into question the indissolubility of the Union.

In Sri Lanka, the call for federation came to be associated with the apprehension of claims to independence, now or in due course, for the several Sri Lankan 'nations' (leading, inter alia - and notoriously - to SWRD Bandaranaike's rejection of his youthful espousal of 'federalism' and 'Provincial Councils'.) The self-description by the Sinhalese of themselves as the Sinhala nation provoked the backlash of the Tamil describing themselves the Tamil nation. Chelvanayakam, founder of the Ilankai Tamil Arasu Katchi (which misleadingly but quite deliberately, he translated into English as the 'Tamil Federal Party') put this point bluntly in a speech at Jaffna College on August 24 1952: "When I first went to the south of Ceylon in 1915, the Sinhala people there lived as a race: today they have become a nation. We in North and East Ceylon should also achieve national status.

Independence

That was the beginning of the end of G. G. Ponnambalam's last-ditch effort to promote Tamil interests within the framework of a composite Sri Lankan nationhood. Sinhala majoritarianism had, in any case, made the Ponnambalam position look unreal, even catatonic. Indeed, not even Chelvanayakam's stinging remark, "This is your Independence, not ours," could persuade the Sinhala political leadership to abandon its espousal of a majoritarian nationhood. The rejection of a composite nationhood by both Tamil and Sinhala leaders generated an upward spiral of clashes followed by insincere agreements followed by betrayal, until the Holocaust was unleashed in 1983.

The Sinhala dream of an island which they would rule with the Tamils living on Sinhala sufferance has become a nightmare. On the Tamil side Tamil nationalist politics is so caught in the coils of violence, fratricidal killings and internecine war that a Jaffna University Tamil academic Rajan Hoole, mourns, in the current issue of Counterpoint, Colombo's thought-provoking political magazine, that "The (Tamil) people have become so disillusioned with the politics of liberation that they expect nothing good from the liberators." Tamil Eelam, he bemoans, is "neither policy nor a goal". It is, he says, 'a slogan'. There seems no way out of this unending tunnel.

If Hindutva either rules or becomes the determining parameter of our conception of ourselves as a nation, all that the Sri Lankans have suffered for the last fifty years would be ours to suffer for the next fifty. Therefore before we begin preening ourselves on India at Fifty being better than Pakistan, we must ask ourselves whether we intend India at Hundred to be worse than Sri Lanka.

-The Hindu

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MATRIMONIAL

Jaffna Hindu brother, professional engineer and Canadian citizen, working in Canada, seeks educated vegetarian groom for his slim, fair, strict vegetarian science graduate sister, 32 years, 5'3", teaching Physics and Computers at Colombo. Please telephone 613 547 5940 (Canada).

Jaffna Hindu parents seek partner for doctor daughter, 27 years old, 5'2" tall, residing in Australia. though intended partner is preferred in same profession, other professionally qualified persons are also considered. Contact with horoscope and full personal details. State whether willing to migrate to Australia. M 936 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna Hindu parents seek qualified bride for doctor son, 28, permanent resident. Send horoscope, details. M 937 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna Hindu parents seek professional bride in UK for son, 30, M.Sc. Computers in excellent employment. Send photo, horoscope, details. M 938 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna parents seek suitable bride below 35 for Engineer settled abroad, disabled, religion immaterial. M 939 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna Hindu parents seek professionally qualified bride in UK for graduate son, 28, British Citizen, Analyst Programmer in permanent employment. Send horoscope, details M 940 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna Hindu sister in Canada seeks bride for brother, 37, in good permanent employment in Canada, Mars afflicted in seventh house. Send horoscope, details M 941 c/o Tamil Times.

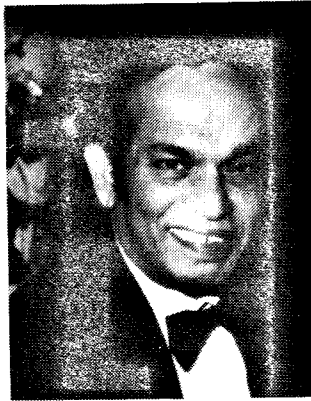
Jaffna Hindu sister in Canada seeks bridegroom for sister, 33, permanent resident working in Canada. Send horoscope, details. M 942 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna Hindu sister in Canada seeks groom for sister, 44, permanent Canadian resident.

Divorcees, widowers considered. Send horoscope, details M 943 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna brother in Canada seeks bridegroom for sister, 40, smart, young looking, teaching in Colombo. Send horoscope, details, M 944 c/o Tamil Times.

OBITUARIES



Mr. Sabaratnam Sabanathan, Consultant Cardiothoracic Surgeon, Bradford Royal Infirmary; Hungarian Professor, Royal College of Surgeons; Examiner for the Royal College of Surgeons of England, Honoured in Marquis Who's Who in the World, 1997; beloved husband of Thirumani; loving father of Anusa (Student, Kings Medical College, London) and Anetha; son of the late Mr. Sabaratnam, teacher and Mrs. Maheswary Sabaratnam; son-in-law of Mr. & Mrs. Thirunavukarasu (Canada); loving brother of Sabanathan (Australia), Sabanesan, Sabaeesan (both of London), Sabanirajan (Colombo), late Sabalingam, Gowri, Sumathi and Vanathi (all of France); brother-in-law of Thirukumar, Yogendran (both of London), Udayakumar and Shanthi (both of Canada) passed away on 29th April 1997 and was cremated on 2nd May.

The members of the family wish to thank all friends and relatives who attended the funeral, sent messages of sympathy and floral tributes and assisted in several ways during the period of great sorrow. - 8 Foster Park Road, Denholme, Bradford BD13 4BE, Yorkshire.



Arasaratnam - Parimalam: loving wife of late J.M. Arasaratnam of Navalar Road, Nallur South, Jaffna, dearly beloved mother of Jayaseelan (Surrey), Indra (Sydney), Sakuntala (Tokyo) and Dharmaseelan (Chennai); mother-in-law of late Carmini and Vimala, A.C. George and Silan Kadrigamar; much loved grandmother of Roshan and Nilanthi Jayaseelan, Nimalan George, Nirmini Somanader, Ajayan and Ahilan Kadrigamar and great-grandmother of Nathan and Jonathan George; sister of late Mrs. Rasammah Arulambalam, late P.A. Senathirajah, late P.W. Rutnam, and sister of Mrs. Pooranam Arumainayagam (Jaffna) sister-in-law of Mrs. Lily Jesudason (U.K.) and Mrs. Gnanaparani Rutnam (Sydney), passed away peacefully at Durdans Hospital, Colombo after a brief illness while visiting Sri Lanka with her daughter and son-in-law. Funeral services in Dehiwela were conducted by the Ven. Joseph Sarvanandan, Archdeacon, Church of Lanka, Jaffna, Rev. A. Jeyakumar (JDCSI) and Rev. S.K. Kadrigamar (Methodist Church). Tributes were paid by long time friends of the family the Ven. Sarvanandan, Rev. Yohan Devananda and the Ven. Samitha Baddegama Thero. Members of the family wish to thank all friends and relatives who attended the funeral and sent

messages. - 5-4-22 Minami-Aoyama, Minato-Ku, Tokyo 107, Japan & 44 Athabaska Ave., Seven Hills, N.S.W. 2147 Australia.



Mrs. Suntharavalli Tharmalingam (82), beloved wife of Dr. S.A. Tharmalingam (89) former Mayor, Jaffna Municipal Council and daughter of Dr. & Mrs. Saravanamuthu of Kaddudai, Jaffna loving mother of Mrs. Tharmambal Navaratnam (Brentwood), late Dr. (Mrs.) Tharmavalli Sathyamoorthy, Dr. (Mrs.) Tharmasoathy Balaraman (London) and Dr. (Mrs.) Tharmadevi Vignarajah (Australia); loving mother-in-law of Dr. Navaratnam (Brentwood), late Dr. Sathyamoorthy, Prof. Balaraman (London) and Dr. Vignarajah (Australia); grand mother of Sarvesvaran, Janani, Jeyaganeshan, Dr. Vaseeharan (South Africa), Anand, Varshini, Yarlini, Thayalan and Dinesh passed away peacefully after a brief illness on 4.5.97 in Brentwood and was cremated at Upminster crematorium on 8th May.

The member of her family wish to express their sincere thanks to all friends and relatives who attended the funeral, sent floral tributes and messages of sympathy and assisted them in several ways during the period of great sorrow. - 5 Windy Hill, Hutton, Brentwood, Essex CM13 2HF. Tel: 01277 223981.

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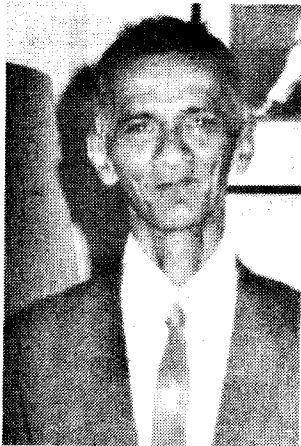
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IN MEMORIAM

Seventh
Death Anniversary

In loving memory of the late **Mr. W.V. Selvaratnam**, Retired Secretary, Local Government, Sri Lanka, who passed away on 14th May 1990, in Dartford, UK.

Fondly remembered by his wife **Rajeswary** (Dartford, UK); son **Rajeselvan** and family (Toronto, Canada); daughters **Vathsala** (Dartford, UK) and **Vasanthi** and family (Canter-

bury, UK). - 119 Hawley Road, Dartford, Kent DA1 1PB. Tel: 01322 279451.



In loving memory of **Mr. Tham-bidurai Shanmugarajah**, Attorney-at-law, J.P., U.M., of Kon-davil East, Sri Lanka on the third anniversary of his passing away on 5th May 1994.

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by his beloved wife **Ananthavalli**, loving daughter **Sharmini**; son-in-law **Ranjit**; loving grandchildren **Praveen** and **Anjana** and mother-in-law **Mrs. Sivapackiam Navaratnam**. - 102 Loutitt Street, Yellowknife, N.W.T., Canada X1A 3M5. In everloving memory of **Dr. Parameswaran Kandiah** on the seventh anniversary of his passing away on 12.5.90.



Sorrowfully remembered by his beloved wife **Pathmasany** and loving children **Thayalan** and **Anjali**. - 29 Mounston Close, Hartside Grange, Hartlepool TS26 0LR, UK.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

- June 1** Ekathasi.
June 2 Pirathosam.
June 3 Karthigai.
June 4 Amavasai.
June 5 Feast of St. Boniface.
June 7 7.00pm Shruthi Laya Shangam & Mahajana O.S.A. (UK) present Vocal Recital by K.J. Yesudas at Barbican Centre, Silk Street, London EC2.

Tel: 0181 399 7848.

June 8 Association of Sri Lankan Catholics (UK) celebrate Feast of St. Anthony at St. Bernard's R.C. Church, 17 Mandaville Road, Northolt, Middx. Holy Mass at 4.00pm followed by refreshments. All devotees welcome. Tel: 0181 422 6126.

June 9 Sathurthi.

June 11 Shasti; Feast of St. Barnabas.

June 15 Fathers' Day.

June 16 Ekathasi.

June 18 Pirathosam.

June 20 Full Moon.

June 21 South London Tamil Welfare Group organises Day Trip to Margate Beach. Tel: 0181 545 3313.

June 27 Feast of St. Cyril.

June 30 Ekathasi.

At Bhawan Centre, 4A Castle-town Road, London W14 9HQ. Tel: 0171 381 3086/4608.

June 7 6.30pm Flute Recital by Ronu Mazumdar from India.

June 21 6.30pm Hindustani Music Concert by Chaya Matanga & Troupe from India.

CANADIAN
NEWSLETTER

It is springtime now and time of election fever. The Canadians go to the polls on the 2nd of June to elect a new Government. The ruling Liberals are expected to win again but with a greatly reduced majority. The real contest is for the second place for which The Reform Party, a national party and Bloc Quebecua, a regional party from Quebec are vying with each other. The leader of the party in this contest will be the leader of the opposition.

The Suresh Manickavasagam Trial is about to resume in two week's time. He was detained a year ago under The Immigration Act for allegedly being a member of the LTTE.

The Tenth Anniversary of the Tamil Catholic Community of Toronto was celebrated with a dinner dance on 3rd May at Etobicoke. The occasion marked the 40th anniversary of the priesthood of Rev. Fr. Christie Joachim Pillai, the spiritual director of the Organisation. Fr. Christie is a graduate of the Gregorian and Angeleum Universities of Rome and is at present Professor at the St. Augustine Seminary of Toronto and Visiting Professor of the University of Toronto. He has also served at the Ampitiya Seminary in Kandy and has worked in the Seminaries in the United States before going over to Canada. He is a highly respected and sought after person in Toronto.

The Chief Guest of the function was His Excellency Most Reverend Nicola De

Angelis, the Bishop in charge of the ethnic communities in Toronto. The present President of the Tamil Catholic Community of Toronto is Mr. P.S. Soosaitasan. The past presidents were Brigadier David Ratnarajah, Mr. Philip Joseph and Mr. M.J.A. Jeyanathan.

One of the noble objectives of this organisation is the setting up of a long term care facility. The Sri Lankans hope that with the assistance of the church and the government, this organisation will succeed in meeting this long felt need of the Sri Lankans.

Alaveddy Arunodaya College O.S.A. (Canada Branch) held its Third Annual General Meeting on 19th April at the Oriole C.R.C., Don Mills and elected the following office-bearers for 97/98. **President:** S. Sivalingam, **Vice-Presidents:** V. Velupillai & Mrs. Gnana Navaratnam, **Secretary:** T. Gangatharan, **Asst. Secretary:** S. Pathmanathan, **Treasurer:** T. Jegadasan, **Asst. Treasurer:** D. Thayalan, **Committee Members:** G. Arunasalam, T. Senthinathan, S. Sivalinganathan, R. Yoganathan, S. Surenthiran, K. Villavarajan, T. Vinayagaratnam and Mrs. Kamala Premkumar.

The function ended with a well attended dinner.

Basket Ball First for Sri Lankans in Canada: Anton Baptist of Bloor Collegiate Institute, Toronto has been selected to represent Canada as a member of The Toronto All-Stars on the Belgium Basket Ball Tour. Anton will take part in the European Community Tournament to be

held in Antwerp, Belgium. The group will consist of 400 participants and their parents from United States and Canada.

London Tamil Theatre Group
Performs in Canada

The Tamil Performing Arts Society (TPAS) of London, a very popular and well respected Tamil Theatre group is participating in a Tamil Drama Festival in Canada at Birchmount Collegiate Institute Hall, 3663 Danforth Avenue, Scarborough.

The festival consisting of four of their plays will be held on 24th May 1997. When the group visited Canada in 1994, the plays were hailed as very modern and appealing by many critics and they have been invited again. The members of the group travelling to Canada include Kanagasabai Krishnarajah, Anandarani Balendra, Mano Manuelpillai, Sathiamoorthy, Santhakunam, Vasudevan and Director K. Balendra.

TPAS has performed over 170 times in Sri Lanka and in the U.K. During the past few years, it has presented similar drama festivals successfully in Australia, France, Switzerland and Norway and has given special performances in Holland and Ger-

many. Some of their plays have been broadcast over national radio and television network in Sri Lanka and over the community radios in Canada and in London.

For more details please telephone 416 755 8470 (Canada).

AUSTRALIAN NEWSLETTER

Tamil Senior Citizens' Association, New South Wales: As part of the 'Seniors Week' programme, an interesting cricket match was played on 20th March at Airey Park, Homebush between the President's Eleven and the Secretary's Eleven captained by Messrs. Murugesu and Thangarajah respectively. Prior to the start of the match Mr. Andrew Ho, Council Member, Strathfield Municipality hoisted the National flag. It was a keenly contested match in which the Secretary's team won by a narrow margin of 14 runs. A notable feature was that each team had a playing lady member.

An elegant trophy was donated by Dr. A. Balasubramaniam of Homebush in memory of his father-in-law, the late Senator S.R. Kanaganayagam, in addition to individual trophies for the players, umpire and scorers. This generous gift was gratefully acknowledged by the President on behalf of the association. The president also thanked the players, the umpire, the scorers and Mr. P. Rajaratnam who successfully organised the match.

The trophies were distributed by Mrs. Devi Balasubramaniam. Dr. Balasubramaniam congratulated the association on the excellent services it was providing for the Tamil Senior Citizens of the area. There was a large attendance and a raffle was conducted with three prizes donated by Sivasakthi Stores, Homebush; Dr. J.C. Thuraisingham (on holiday from London) and Mr. P. Rajaratnam.

The Tamil Senior Citizens organised a Food Fair on 26th April to raise funds to help the needy in the North and East of Sri Lanka. It was held at the Homebush Primary School from 9am to 2pm.

Poetry Competition: Mr. Thuraiappah Kanagarajah, a member of the Tamil Senior Citizens' Association has reached the semi-final position of The 1997 International Open Amateur Poetry Competition. His poem was entitled 'Australia'. The finals are to be held in mid-1997.

Hindu New Year Celebrations: The Tamil Senior Citizens celebrated the Hindu New Year with prayers for the Tamils of Sri Lanka at the Sydney Murugan Temple on 14th April. On 20th April a very large number of them travelled by coach to the Sri Venkateswara Temple, Helenburgh to participate in the Sangabhishekam to Lord Ganesha.

The New South Wales Federation of Tamil Schools Inc. organised a book launch on 6th April at the Homebush Primary School Hall. The proceedings began with songs in praise of the Tamil Language and the Tamil people. The

president Mr. Prabhakaran addressed the gathering and this was followed by the launching of the two Tamil books. Various speakers reviewed the books and the proceedings ended with a vote of thanks from the secretary.

Mr. Pradeepan Jeganathan — An Appreciation

The tragic and untimely death of Pradeepan Jeganathan (32), at the hands of car hi-jackers on the night of 31st March 1997 has sent shock waves through the whole spectrum of the Asian expatriate community in South Africa.

My own close friendship with Pradeep's father goes back to half a century. I have known Pradeep from his infancy. I recall vividly the beautiful bonny baby he was and later his progress stage by stage until he left Sri Lanka in 1980 with his parents for Lusaka, Zambia. When I came over to South Africa in 1988, he had already graduated and was working as a Tutor in the Department of Mathematics. He was also following the B.Sc. (Hons) course in Mathematics as a part time student and on completing it joined the University of Cape Town for the M.Sc. Here again through sheer merit he was able to get a tutorship while following the part time course. He completed the M.Sc., in 1991 and the next year was appointed Lecturer in Mathematics at his Alma Mater — the University of Transkei — a post he held until his death 'with absolute dedication and distinction' (to borrow the phrase from Prof. Dan Naayiyana, his Vice Chancellor at the University).

Pradeep was a self-made man who supported himself through the major part of his post graduate education declining the persuasive offers of his parents to finance full time study for the Ph.D., which was nearing completion in December 1997. He was a highly independent person, had always an open mind and resisted prejudicial views. He was very generous to the less fortunate, but never made his generosity public. It was ironic that for the past two years, he had been paying University tuition fees to two local students. He never believed in 'Savings' or 'Foreign Currency Accounts'. His wish was to live well and help the deserving. His only failing was the love for a powerful car and he realised his dream last year when he bought a BMW 535i — the car which tragically cost his life at the hands of car hi-jackers. Fate had nicely conspired with the killers and engineered Pradeep's end. He got his migration visa to Australia in 1994, but chose to continue till he could qualify for his sabbatical full-pay leave of an year at the end of 1997, when his Ph.D., thesis would also have been submitted. He was to have attended an International Mathematical Symposium in the States during the last week of March, but the visa was refused because of his Sri Lankan passport. His paper was accepted for another Mathematical Conference in Brisbane during the first week of April, but this trip was frustrated by the inability of the Vice-Chancellor. Disappointed by these,

he planned to spend 10 days with his course supervisor in Cape Town and give transport to his mother to Cape Town to consult a rheumatologist. He planned to leave on the 31st morning but his mother preferred to leave on 1st April. When he did arrive on the 31st night, the car hi-jackers were just there to accomplish their job! One has to believe in FATE to piece out the mystery of his death.

He had few friends; but the few he had he held them to his heart with 'hoops of steel'. Those of us who knew him well, will always remember his smiling face, his irresistible sense of humour, his warmth and humility, his incisive intellect, his love for classical music and his passion for travel. They say 'those whom the Gods love, die young', and so it was with Pradeep who lived truly through only the first phase — 'Bhramachariyam', missing the more fulfilling phase 'Illaram'.

To his parents, sisters and brothers the loss is colossal and the gaping wounds will remain unhealed for many years — perhaps for a lifetime. I can only commend to them the message of Pradeep's Professor, Ghriis Brink, 'In mourning for what he will now not be able to achieve, let us not forget to be grateful for what he has already achieved, and let this help to sustain us'.

May his soul attain eternal bliss.

J.G. Thambyrajah.

In Memory of Mellitus A.S. Tisseverasinghe On the First Anniversary of His Passing Away



Born: 4.1.1948.

Died: 18.5.1996.

Mr. Mellitus Anton Sugunarahaj Tisseverasinghe known by some as Mellitus, by others as Rajan, even as Mr. T, but for me he was always Tisse.

Tisse had his secondary education at St. Patrick's College, Jaffna and went on for higher studies to St. Joseph's College, Colombo. He excelled in his studies and became the youngest Chartered Accountant I know of, having qualified at the age of 23. After working for a short time in the corporate sector, he set up his own practice in 1974 under the name and style of 'Tisseverasinghe, Sothylingam & Co.' which is still very well known as T.S. & Co. His dynamic personality, enthusiasm and

energy enabled the firm to gain high recognition in accountancy circles. He secured contracts with Price Waterhouse, Dubai which provided his staff and the firm with international expertise.

Tisse distinguished himself as a Fellow of the Institute and served as a member of the Chartered Accountants Council from 1980-81. As a young member of the council he was always enterprising. He took an active interest in the activities of the Institute and focused specially on the need for education and professional training. He contended that the Institute should make every endeavour to raise educational standards of students and provide them with reference material and training facilities so that the accountants produced by the Institute would rank supreme. To demonstrate this he took special interest in his trainees and liaised with the Institute on their behalf. He was not only concerned with his trainees' professional education but also lent a helping hand to all those in need.

Tisse was a keen sportsman, having won a gold medal in the Public Schools Sports Meet in Sri Lanka for discus throw.

He moved to the UK in 1985 to provide his children with the best possible educational opportunities and their achievements have been a source of great pride to him. He was the Hon. Auditor of St. Patrick's O.B.A. in UK, and Hon. Treasurer of the Chamber of Commerce. He always focused his attention on new things to do.

Tisse was always a loving son, brother and son-in-law. He was a devoted husband to his wife Lorraine and a loving father who was very proud of his two children Jitesh and Sharmila and he knew that they would carry his name with pride.

Tisse will always be remembered as a kind and considerate man, who always kept his promise to others, and extended to them the same warmth as for those closest to him. People used to think that he was a reserved man, but he was a fun loving and outgoing person whose eyes twinkled with his joy of life. His smile was worth a thousand words. He is greatly missed and remembered by my family and myself and everyone who knew him. I hope that this humble tribute will catch the eye of those Sri Lankans who knew him and those that did not as his heart was always in Sri Lanka.

"They that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them let the light shine". Isayah - Chapter 9 Verse 2.

Dubsey P. Kanagaratnam.

Hartley Past Pupils Hold Kalai Vasantham

Hartley College Past Pupils' Association (UK) held its annual Kalai Vasantham on 26th April 1997 at Coombe Girls' School Hall, New Malden, Surrey. The proceedings started with the lighting of the traditional oil lamp by the Chief Guest, Mrs. Chandra Ratnavel (nee Alagaratnam), a former teacher, who spoke of her days at Hartley, which brought happy memories.

Mr. V. Santhalingam, the President of the Association appealed to all Hartleyites to join the Association and strengthen it.

The programme for the evening included the singing of the School Anthem in Tamil, Kannan Dance, Peacock Dance, an Instrumental Ensemble and Bharatha Natyam all performed by children of Hartleyites and their friends. The highlights were an immaculate Bharatha Natyam performance by students of Mrs. Subathra Sivadasan, a brilliant recital by Mr. Arunan Sriskantharajah and a Tamil comedy drama by Dr. Baskaran and friends titled 'Manisi Vendam Kasai Pidi', an extremely hilarious farce decrying social evils. Mrs. Nirmala Rajkumar functioned as compere and Mr. G.D.M. Kulasingham, the Secretary proposed the vote of thanks. The evening's items were organised by Mr. A. Easwaramohan, the Vice-President and the function was attended by over 400 Hartleyites and friends and was well received.

Kokuvil Hindu Old Students' Cultural Evening

Kokuvil Hindu College Old Students Association (U.K.) had its annual cultural evening on Sunday, 3rd of May, at Claremont High School, Kenton. A Variety entertainment of an exceptionally high standard was provided by artistes in carnative vocal music, Veena and Bharatha Natyam, almost all of them drawn from the prestigious Bharathiya Vidhya Bhavan. Smt. Sivasakthi Sivanesan enthralled the audience with her excellent vocal music recital. Sivasakthi's students - an array of talented young girls - delighted the audience with their fine performance on the Veena. Students of Sri Prakash Yadagudde received rapturous applause for their Bharatha Natyam. The orchestra for the evening was provided, among others by Mr. M. Balachandran on Miruthangam and the two teenage brothers Prytharshan (Ganjeera) and Pirashanna (Morsing and Gadam). The humorous monologue rendered by Pirashanna was very much appreciated and applauded.

Mr. S. Sivanayagam, journalist and writer of Saturday Review fame, himself an old student of Kokuvil, was the Chief Guest. In his short speech he recalled his student days and paid tributes to his Alma Mater and to his Gurus. Dr. P. Arumugaraasah, the President of the Association, welcomed the gathering and thanked them for their co-operation and support.

Shropshire/Staffordshire Tamil Associations

This association held their Annual Lunch at the Crown Centre, Stourbridge, West Midlands on 16th March 1997. The aim of this lunch held every year, is to raise funds for charities both local and in North East Sri Lanka, which is being ravaged by the on-going ethnic war. The association was founded in 1985 and since then has raised a total of £17,000.00 up to the end of last year. Funds have been sent to the Jaffna Hospital, Refugee Relief Organisations,

the Ramakrishna Mission Orphanage at Batticaloa etc. Recently they sent £6808.00 to the Jaipur Limb Fitting Workshop in Jaffna in association with the Rotarians Handsworth and International. This was in addition to £1,800.00 sent by them earlier.

They are a purely social organisation comprising just 9 families in the Shropshire and Staffordshire area mainly. However, for Annual Lunches they obtain assistance from a few other non-member volunteers. These 9 families meet once in about 3 months to discuss matters arising with fund raising and future plans, and also make it a social occasion.

At the recent lunch about 200 visitors arrived, with good ticket sales at the door, mainly due to the publicity efforts of its few members and their friends. They expect to raise a net figure of at least £1,000.00 for charitable causes. These Annual Lunches also enable the younger generation to meet and display their entertainment talents, while the older generation meet friends and acquaintances they have not met for a long time and reminisce and chat. They also enjoy a nice meal of rice and curry in congenial surroundings. Lunch is followed by a short period of entertainment. This time they had Bharatha Natyam, tap dancing and singing for half an hour only, to enable visitors to get back in time to their homes in far away places.

It is sincerely hoped that more funds would be raised in similar fashion by the Tamil Diaspora of Great Britain.

Past Copies of Tamil Times

Past copies of Tamil Times are available for sale in 15 volumes, the present series being volume 16. The price of each volume is £25 by surface mail. The price for each volume in other currencies is US\$45/Can\$50/Aus\$55. Australian dollar cheques should be drawn on Australian Banks only. Those interested are requested to send a cheque/draft/money order in favour of Tamil Times Ltd to

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