

Tamil TIMES

Vol XVI No.10 ISSN 0266-4488 15 OCTOBER 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



Rev. Maduluwawe Sobhita Thera
- The Voice of the Sinhala Commission

★ **Sinhala Commission
Rejects Devolution**

★ **SINHALA COMMISSION
REPORT – ‘The Biggest
Conspiracy’**

★ **Fierce Fighting
Leaves 700 Dead**

★ **LTTE INCLUDED
IN US ‘TERRORIST’ LIST**

★ **Constitutional Reforms**

★ **One Country – One People**

★ **The Case of Shankar Rajee**

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Minister Mangala Samaraweera



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 கிரமமான, நம்பிக்கையான சேவை.

★ கொழும்புக்கு அர்ப்பணம் மிகுந்த உன்னத சேவை. (16 தினங்கள்) ★ தேயிலைப்
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-Voltaire

**Tamil
TIMES**

ISSN 0266 - 44 88
Vol. XVI No. 10
15 OCTOBER 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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NEWS REVIEW

"Reject Government Devolution Proposals" Says Sinhala Commission

The "Sinhala Commission" constituted last year by a number of Sinhalese and Buddhist organisations to examine the "grievances of the Sinhalese people for the last two-hundred years" issued what it described as its interim report on 17 September 1997. The report stated that the government's proposals for devolution of power would not only not bring about peace in the country, but also represented a "foundation for the break-up of the country". It said steps should be taken to ensure there was no ethnic division of the country for political or other purposes.

The report was taken in a colourful procession by the Secretary to the Commission clad in traditional Kandyan attire on the back of an elephant to the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress hall in Borella, Colombo, where copies of the report were distributed and a number of speakers addressed a public meeting.

Rev. Madihe Pannaseeha Thera going into the history of the report of the previous "Buddhist Affairs Commission" of the 1950s said, "Sri Lanka is a Sinhala-Buddhist country. Everybody including the rulers should recognise that fact. No minority can complain about discrimination in a true Buddhist society. Tamils and Muslims lived peacefully with Sinhala Buddhists. All we want is to restore that environment," adding that the Sinhalese would lose their country if the government's devolution proposals were implemented.

Rev. Niyangoda Vijithasiri Thera said that the devolution package and the proposed constitution giving effect to the package would change the country's historical base and its unitary character that had remained unchallenged for 2500 years.

Rev. Maduluwawe Sobitha Thera said that the Commission was appointed at a crucial juncture when the government was talking about bringing a new constitution to devolve power. The Sinhalese were a nation that had earned the praise of the world as a tolerant and compassionate people. But today they are being branded as chauvinists and rac-

ists. The Buddhists were the people who suffered most from 1815 to 1948 when the British ruled the country. Land belonging to the Sinhalese in the North and East were no more theirs. Twelve historic Bodhi trees have been felled down and 33,000 Sinhalese who lived in the North had been driven out. Though the government was saying that the package was to remove a historic injustice caused to Tamils, it did not say what this injustice was. The 1948, 1972 and 1972 constitutions recognised the unitary character of Sri Lanka, but today the government is going to introduce the concept of Union of Regions through a new constitution. He was calling upon President Kumaratunga and the UNP leader Ranil Wickremasinghe to bow to public opinion and that of the Maha Sangha and abandon the government's proposals.

The key points and recommendations of the Commission are:

- There is nothing to prevent an all powerful North-East Regional Council from treating the Constitution as a scrap of paper and declaring independence;
- The heroic sacrifices of the armed forces in preserving the unity and territorial integrity of the country would have been in vain since the foundation for the break-up of the country would have been laid through this Devolution Package;
- The government has set in motion a gigantic propaganda campaign to make the people accept these proposals by calling them peace proposals thus deceiving the people into believing that peace can be restored only by implementing them. But the fact is that peace cannot be restored through these proposals because the LTTE has already rejected the Package. Peace can be restored only by defeating those who have broken the peace, namely the LTTE;
- It is the duty of all those who are concerned with safeguarding the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the country and wish to ensure that it is not broken up to educate the people on the grave dangers to the Sinhala people and

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call upon them to reject the government's proposals;

- The people must call upon their representatives in Parliament to reject the draft constitution as it is fraught with the most serious consequences, both politically and economically for the Sinhala people as well as other communities and will endanger Buddhism and lead to the break-up of the country;
- The whole of Sri Lanka is the homeland of all its citizens and no part of it shall be recognised as the exclusive possession or habitation of any ethnic community or linguistic group;
- Steps should be taken to ensure that

there is no division of the country for political or other purposes on the basis of ethnicity;

- In any future constitution, provision should be included similar to Article 157 of the present constitution prohibiting any person or organisation from advocating the establishment of a separate state in Sri Lanka;
- Any devolution or decentralisation of power should ensure (a) the unitary status of Sri Lanka is safeguarded, and the government retains full control over law and order and police, state land, all ports, harbours and airports, all archaeological sites, and administration of justice.

comments, an orchestrated campaign was mounted against the government's proposals and the Minister in which hundreds of Buddhist priests have taken to take to the streets and holding protest meetings in Colombo and Matara, though attendance at these meetings have been disappointing to the organisers. Rev. Sobitha who is spearheading the campaign against the Minister said that the Maha Sangha could not be separated from the Sinhala Commission for the Buddhist priests have been involved in it from its inception and the Commission's report had the blessings of the Mahanayakes. He wanted the Minister to apologise for the disgrace he brought on the race and the Maha Sangha. Asked as to why the Minister should worship the Mahanayakes and then apologise, Rev. Sobitha said, "According to history even powerful kings have done that in similar circumstances" and gave examples from ancient times.

In a counter-move, public meetings attended by thousands of Buddhist priests who support the government's devolution proposals have also been held in an obvious response to the Sinhala Commission's report and the orchestrated campaign of protest meetings directed against Minister Samaraweera.

An estimated 5,000 saffron-clad monks walked through the streets of Colombo on 7 October, laid flowers at the feet of a statue of Buddha and chanted prayers for peace in a promenade opposite Colombo's town hall. "We cannot fight the war, we can only help in bringing peace to the country," said Rev. Batapola Nandahimi Thera, the vice president of the All Ceylon Clergy Society and one of the organisers.

Rev. Baddegama Samitha Thera, a Buddhist monk from southern Galle town, added: "This is to declare the Buddhist priests' opinion about the peace proposals that we are seeking a peaceful solution to the ethnic crisis in our country."

A political analyst in Colombo commented that it was very clear that the Buddhist clergy can no longer be regarded as a monolithic entity holding similar views on the ethnic question as it once was. The ability of the organisers of the meeting in support of the government's devolution proposals to gather such a large number of Buddhist priests revealed that not only that there is a deep division within the clergy, but also that a substantial number of them no longer believed in the concept of imposing Sinhala-Buddhist hegemony over the rest of the population.

The Minister caught up in the controversy produced by his remarks, in an apparent bid to clarify matters issued a

"Sinhala Commission, The Biggest Conspiracy" Says Govt Minister

The report of the Sinhala Commission opposing the government's proposals on devolution was the biggest conspiracy against the majority and should be consigned to the dustbin, Mangala Samaraweera, a senior minister in President Kumaratunga's cabinet told a press conference in Colombo on 25 September.

Reacting to the Commission's report, the Post and Telecommunications and Media Minister, Mangala Samaraweera said, "The report is the biggest conspiracy against the Sinhalese. The only people who will be happy are (Tamil Tiger rebel leader) Velupillai Prabhakaran and the arms dealers."

Samaraweera said the majority of people shared his feeling that the report would be rejected by the Sinhalese. "Soon the Sinhala people will consign the report to where it rightfully belongs - to the dustbin of history," he said.

The Minister's powerful denunciation of the Commission's report produced predictable angry responses from some leading members of the Buddhist clergy, who were in the first place instrumental in the appointment of the Commission. The chief among them is Rev. Madulawa Sobitha who described the Minister's statement as a gross insult to the Sinhalese race and the Maha Sangha (Buddhist clergy), and demanded a public apology.

Some of the editorial comments of the privately owned press, which has also been not favourable to the government's peace efforts, have also been critical of the Minister for being "immature" and "insensitive" in his remarks. However, an editorial comment in "The Observer" (18.9.97) published by the Lake House ridiculed the ceremonies associated with the presentation of the

Commission's report in the following terms:

"There could be no better exemplification of the contradictions inherent in our national character than the ceremony staged yesterday on the occasion of the handing over of the interim report of the Sinhala Commission to the Mahanayake Theras. The report had been borne on the back of a caparisoned tusker and taken in procession while the Secretary to the Commission had been at hand to do the honours dressed in the ceremonial regalia of a Kandyan chieftain. All this pomp and panoply to hand over the report to the Mahanayake Thera of the Malwatte Chapter who by the very vows of his calling is committed to the frugal and ascetic life....

"When the Sinhala Commission first met, we commented on the phenomenon of the commissioners wearing western dress. Now on the occasion of making the report public, they have had to regress to the feudal past. It is sad to think that in our search for a national identity almost 50 years after independence, we either have to look to the age of feudalism or the days of colonial slavery.

"In fact these contradictions were inherent in the very constitution of the Sinhala Commission. It was called upon to investigate the grievances of the Sinhalese people from the days of the British rule. Clearly the idea was to tell the world that it was not only the Tamil people who have grievances, but as the majority community the Sinhalese too feel aggrieved. This is equally clearly a narrow and parochial view of our present national condition. It is left to be seen what contribution a report prepared by such a Commission can make to the act of nation-building."

Following Minister Samaraweera's

statement on 1 October which said, "The Maha Sangha (clergy) was not mentioned in my statement... However, if any pain of mind was caused to the Maha Sangha, I sincerely express my regret." Rejecting that he had insulted the Buddhist clergy by his remarks, the Minister in a press interview said, "I regret if some people try to misconceive my statement as disrespect to the Maha Sangha. That is sad, But there was no such intention. I know there is a large section of the Maha Sangha who are supportive of the government's peace efforts. As true Buddhists they also want to see an end to this war in which lots of innocent lives, including Sinhalese, are being lost. So I still do not think it was an ill-conceived statement."

He reiterated that the sole objective of the Sinhala Commission had been to discredit the government's new constitutional proposals and that it was devoted to condemning the efforts to end "this cruel and devastating war."

Mr. Samaraweera said the Commission's report would strengthen the LTTE's claim that the Sinhalese would never agree to the reasonable demands of the Tamil people, adding that the "Sinhala Commission has now come to Prabhakaran's rescue and made available to the LTTE a good publicity report to justify their cause before the eyes of the world."

"If the war is prolonged the only people to get any benefit out of this are not the people of Sri Lanka, not the Sinhalese, not the Tamils, not the Muslims, not the innocent young boys who are dying in the battlefield. It will be the arms dealers," the Minister said.

In answer to a question whether the government had lent weight to the Commission's report by expressing its displeasure, Mr. Samaraweera said, "Look at the Sinhala Commission. It is the forces behind this pseudo commission, which have in various guises been coming forward at various points in history to obstruct any solution to this problem. Each time these forces agitated, the problem became even more acute and was passed onto yet another generation. What could have been solved very easily, perhaps in 1957, has today become a tragic and devastating problem. And so we must not underestimate these forces. We must accept that they are going to oppose sooner or later. That is what their sole intention was."

"Even though SW R D Bandaranaike as the then Prime Minister had the vision wanting to implement the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact in 1957, he was prevented from doing so. Looking back, I would say one of the saddest days of modern history was the day he tore of the B-C Pact because of the pres-

sure from certain sections, again of the Maha Sangha. In the famous statement he made that day at the gates of Rosmead Place, he told the waiting Buddhist priests: even though I am doing this at your request, you will see the results of this action in 20 years". Just as he predicted, by 1976 the seeds of separatism had already begun to evolve in this country with the killing of Alfred Duralappah," Mr. Samaraweera said.

Accusing the Commission of not including in its report the views of Sinhalese who gave evidence before it opposing its recommendations, Mr. Samaraweera said, "The Sinhala Commission does not talk about the grievances of the Sinhala people. Instead it is an attack on the government's devolution proposals and on the new constitution. Several Buddhist priests whom I know personally wanted to give evidence to the Commission. Since they did not fit into the agenda of this Commission, they were not invited. Even the ideas of those who were invited have not been represented.

President Urged to Carry on Peace Process

Sri Lanka's non-LTTE Tamil political parties, in response to a report issued by the Sinhala Commission rejecting the government's devolution proposals, have reaffirmed their support to the government's peace process and urged President Chandrika Kumaratunga to ignore attempts by extremists' to disrupt her peace initiatives.

Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) President Murugesu Sivasithamparam said that whenever there was a healthy approach to the ethnic issue, the extrem-

ist forces were all out to destroy it. "Past events remain a good lesson for the present generation of politicians to take meaningful steps in solving the ethnic crisis. We do not want this crisis to continue without an end. Much of the evidence given in the Sinhala Commission was incorrect and baseless. Determination to find a durable solution to the ethnic issue is the need of the hour. Therefore we earnestly urge the President to stand by her peace initiatives to end the ethnic conflict," he said.

Savumyamoorthy Thondaman, leader of the Ceylon Workers Congress, and a cabinet minister, said, "It looks as if the extremists are trying to activate their campaign again to derail the peace moves taken by the PA government. I believe that the President is strong enough to face the elements obstructing peace. The best thing I would suggest is to go ahead with the government's peace moves and ignore the extremists."

D. Sitharthan of the People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), which has returned to mainstream democratic politics having been in the past a militant armed group, said, "The earlier peace packages were also in disarray due to pressure by the extremist forces. In future the ruling and opposition parties must join hands in isolating the extremists. The President and her government are trying their best to find a solution to the ethnic crisis. Therefore the interruptions in the nature of reports and comments by the extremist forces will definitely be harmful to the genuine peace efforts. We are hopeful and confident that the President will overcome such obstacles."

Fierce Fighting Leaves Over 700 Dead

The ongoing military thrust to open the highway from Vavuniya to Jaffna resulted in fierce fighting between government forces and the Tamil Tigers and in the battles that raged during 5 to 9 October in the Vanni region, over 700 combatants on both sides are reported to have been killed and many more left injured.

While military spokesmen claimed that several hundreds of Tiger fighters were killed, a statement dated 11 October from the Tigers said, "Over 500 Sinhalese troops, including three high ranking officers, were killed in battles in Vanni over the last few days (5 October to 9 October). Several hundred were also severely wounded. The main theatre of war was Kanakaraynakulam and the re-

gion northeast of it. Apart from the large loss of life among the Sri Lankan army, valuable military hardware was captured by the LTTE. The quantity of captured items is on a scale unprecedented in the history of the conflict. Most of this hardware was captured in Vignanakulam and Karapukuthi, and included a considerable number of military vehicles. In addition, LTTE forces captured a large number of motorcycles, power generators, water pumps, construction materials, barbed wire rolls, military uniforms, cooking utensils and vast quantities of rice, flour, dhal and dried fish.

A previous statement from the LTTE dated 10 October said that "in the heavy clashes that took place at Vingnakulam, Karapukuthi and Katkidanku, Sri Lankan

troops suffered heavy casualties and were forced to withdraw to their original positions. LTTE forces have now regained control of these three towns and have meanwhile isolated and cut off supply lines to the soldiers occupying

Karapattamurippu, situated on the Mullaitivu-Mankulam road. 162 LTTE fighters have been killed in these battles. In these counter-offensive operations LTTE commando units have captured several ammunition depots and secured an immense quantity of arms and ammunition." The LTTE statement also listed the numbers and the different kinds of military hardware they claim to have captured from government forces."

The LTTE statement added, "Sri Lankan army stragglers and deserters from the last few days' fighting are being systematically hunted down in the jungles by LTTE forces. Many occupying Sinhalese armed personnel earlier lost their nerve and fled into the jungles. They are now being pursued in LTTE search and destroy operations. Over the last 48 hours, LTTE forces have been combing day and night the jungles bordering Karappkuththi, Vignanakulam and Sinna Adampan."

An earlier statement from the LTTE issued on 9 October said that the "troops who LTTE forces pushed back from Karapattamurippu to Periamadu and Sinna Adampan, made several futile attempts to link up with their stranded colleagues in Karipattamurippu. LTTE forces prevented any such link up. The

Karipattamurippu troops are now effectively besieged and surrounded by LTTE forces. These besieged soldiers are in disarray. They have no means of contact with the rest of the troops except by two-way radio. A major rescue attempt made by army was foiled by LTTE forces, who inflicted heavy losses on the occupying forces in terms of lives and equipment.

The claims made by the LTTE in their statements about the battles they were engaged in and the capture of an unprecedented quantity and quality of weapons have by and large been confirmed in a detailed report by the well informed correspondent of "The Sunday Times" (12 October 1997). Having confirmed in detail the sustained manner in which the Tigers took on the troops and stormed their bastions, the report states, "Security forces killed in action during confrontations from Sunday to Friday (5 to 10 October) is said to be just over 110 with more than 520 injured. This pushes the total number of soldiers killed in the 152 day long operation to over 810 and the wounded to over 4500. More than 1100 of those injured have been left out of

battle, according to military officials.

"But there are fears that a further unknown number may be dead although the exact count has not been established. This is from an estimated 100 to 150 soldiers declared Missing in Action following the string of LTTE attacks. The final tally will be only after troops link up with those at Karuppadimurippu.

"The attacks at Puliyanakulam by the LTTE quite clearly demonstrates that they are by no means a weakened force as often claimed by the politico-military establishment. Neither does the ferocity and size of the attack go in any way to support the boasted premise that the war is 85 per cent over and only a mere 15 per cent needs to be completed."

US Lists LTTE Among 30 'Terrorist Organisations'

The United States administration plans to bar supporters of 30 "terrorist groups" from the country and freeze their bank accounts as part of a new anti-terrorism legal drive, but observers say the punitive measures involved in the decision may be subject to legal challenges are overcome.

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright announced on 8 October the list of 30 organizations - nearly one half of which are Islamic fundamentalist groups based in the Middle East - saying it signals "the United States is demonstrating its leadership and determination against international terror."

Besides the 14 organizations based in the Middle East, the State Department list includes two Jewish groups operating in the United States and others from Japan, Turkey, Greece, Spain, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Chile, Colombia and Peru. In the case of Sri Lanka, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which has been engaged in a protracted violent war with Sri Lankan government forces for nearly fifteen years, has been included in the US list of "terrorist organisations".

The inclusion of the LTTE by the US in its list announced on 8 October of "terrorist organisations" was anticipated and did not come as a surprise because the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar had already told a press conference on 3 October that he had spoken in regard to the inclusion of the LTTE in the US list to Secretary of State Madeleine Albright who had told him a "decision was expected soon," and added that Sri Lanka hoped "it will be positive."

In announcing the list, Madeleine Albright said, "Our goal is to make the United States fully a no - support for terrorist zone." She said that members and representatives of these organisations are hereby ineligible for visas to enter the US, and are subject to exclusion from the United States. And any funds these organisations have in the U.S. will be

blocked, she added.

"The United States is responding to the threat (of terrorism) with every available tool. We are seeking the help and co-operation of all our citizens, and we seek to help the co-operation of peoples from around the world," she said adding that this requires a recognition that terrorism is not a self-sustaining enterprise. "It needs money and supplies to succeed."

The 1996 anti-terrorism law in the US was enacted after a string of suicide bombings in Israel carried out by the Palestinian group Hamas, which is opposed to the Middle East peace process, and a high-profile summit of world leaders in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt.

The law forbids, which was blocked in July by a California federal court, constitutionally protected fund raising for those groups in the United States. In addition, the bank accounts of members or supporters of the 30 groups will be frozen and they will be barred from residing or entering the United States.

The 9th US Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco largely rendered ineffective the new anti-terrorism law three months ago when it rejected the government's efforts to deport seven Palestinian immigrants for supporting the lawful activities of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, which is on the list which was announced by Albright. The court ruled immigrants have the First Amendment right to raise money and promote the legal activities of an extremist group, providing they do not intend to support terrorism.

Albright and her aides acknowledged the legal challenges facing the anti-terrorism law, but said the measures are "fully justified" and worth fighting for in the American courts.

Following is a list of the groups designated by the United States on as foreign terrorist organizations: Abu Nidal Organization (ANO) - Palestinian; Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) - Filipino; Armed Islamic Group (GIA) - Algerian; Aum

Shinrikyo (Aum) - Japanese; Euzkadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) - Basque; Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine - Hawatmeh Faction (DFLP) - Palestinian;

HAMAS (Islamic Resistance Movement) - Palestinian; Harakat ul-Ansar (HUA) - Pakistani; Hizbollah (Party of God) - Lebanese; Gama'a al-Islamiyya (Islamic Group, IG) - Egyptian; Japanese Red Army (JRA) - Japanese; al-Jihad - Egyptian; Kach - Jewish; Kahane Chal - Jewish; Khmer Rouge - Cambodian; Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) - Turkish Kurdish; Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) - Sri Lankan; Manuel Rodriguez Patriotic Front Dissidents (FPMR/D) - Chilean; Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (MEK, MKO) - Iranian; National Liberation Army (ELN) - Colombian; Palestine Islamic Jihad - Shaqaqi Faction (PIJ) - Palestinian; Palestine Liberation Front - Abu Abbas Faction (PLF) - Palestinian; Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) -

Palestinian; Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine - General Command (PFLP-GC) - Palestinian; Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) - Colombian; Revolutionary Organization 17 November (17 November) - Greek

Revolutionary People's Liberation Party/Front (DHKP/C) - Turkish; Revolutionary People's Struggle (ELA) - Greek; Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso, SL) - Peruvian; Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) - Peruvian.

LTTE Reaction

In reacting to the US decision, the LTTE in a statement dated 10 October said "that the attempt by the U.S. Government to tarnish the image of our movement will not in any way affect the popular support and sympathy we enjoy among the world's Tamils."

The full text of the LTTE statement said, "We wish to express our deep dismay and displeasure over the decision of the U.S. State Department to include our liberation organisation in the highly controversial list of so-called world terrorist movements.

"It is indeed regrettable that the American nation, which secured its own independence after a violent struggle for self-determination, and has ever since championed the cause of human freedom, has chosen to characterise and discredit the legitimate struggle of the Tamil people seeking to determine their political status, as a phenomenon of terrorism. We consider this indictment by the U.S. State Department unfair, unfounded and irresponsible.

"We wish to state that the U.S. decision to malign the Tamil freedom movement as a form of terrorism has far-reaching consequences in that it will en-

courage the racist Sinhala state to pursue its policy of war and military repression against the Tamils and thereby escalate the present armed conflict. This rather imprudent diplomatic move to placate Sri Lanka, which has a notorious record of human rights violations, will not in any way help the prospects of peace and reconciliation, but rather will contribute to the genocidal destruction of the Tamil nation.

"It will amount to a serious miscalculation on the part of the U.S. administration if this prohibitory measure is designed to stifle the growing international support of the world Tamil community to the Eelam liberation struggle spearheaded by the LTTE. The world Tamil community has an unshakeable conviction in the legitimacy of our struggle and in the passionate yearning of our people for freedom from Sinhala domination and oppression. Therefore, we are confident that the attempt by the U.S. Government to tarnish the image of our movement will not in any way affect the popular support and sympathy we enjoy among the world's Tamils."

Sri Lanka Hails Decision

Sri Lankan government on the hand has hailed the U.S. decision and said it

expected other countries to follow suit. "It's a victory for Sri Lanka's foreign policy and a testimony of a strong and healthy bilateral relationship with the United States," Foreign Ministry spokesman Ravinatha Aaryasinha told newspapers on 9 October.

"One can expect the spillover effect on other governments and international organisations which are looking at the issue. The LTTE, which has been portraying itself as a liberation organisation, has by this decision been squarely placed as a terrorist group," Aaryasinha said.

"They (LTTE) have been identified as a terrorist organisation because they are considered to be a threat to U.S. interests," a spokesperson for the U.S. embassy in Colombo told the press.

But Anton Raja, a spokesman for the LTTE in London, was quoted in agency reports as predicting that the US decision would only lengthen the conflict in Sri Lanka. "It is regrettable that the US has taken this step as it will only help prolong the war," he said. He accused Washington of ignoring what he said were atrocities committed by Sri Lankan forces in the north and east of the island.

Gov't's Constitutional Reforms Ready

The government, for its part, has finalised a full version of the proposed constitutions reforms which would be placed before the all-party Parliamentary Select Committee shortly, according to the Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, G L Peiris. Sri Lanka could hold a series of referendums to decide on the geographical unit of devolution of the north and east, but only after the new constitution is in place, the Minister told a news conference in Colombo on 2 October.

"We are not excluding any discussion or any other point of views, but as far as the government is concerned we now have a self-contained and complete set of proposals with regard to all aspects of the devolution proposals," Peiris said.

He said some political parties had expressed reservations about sections of the constitutional reforms but had not proposed alternative amendments. The government had proposed constitutional changes that would allow the devolution of some powers to regional councils, including a Tamil administrative unit in the north and east.

Peiris said once the new constitution was enacted, people in the eastern districts of Trincomalee and Batticaloa could decide whether the people living there want to be merged with the Tamil-dominated northern province. If the vote was for merging with the northern province, referendums would be held in three towns in eastern Batticaloa district, where Muslims are a majority, on whether they want to join the eastern province or become a separate council, Peiris said.

Another referendum could also be held in the Sinhalese-dominated Amparai district, and people would be asked whether they want to be part of the eastern province or join with the south-central Uva province, he said.

"There has to be some form of consultation with the people of those areas. Otherwise, morally, how could you justify any decision made here on their behalf," Peiris asked.

Analysts in Colombo say that the government's constitutional move is intended to meet some of the demands of the Tamil people, and by and large the non-LTTE Tamil parties have been sup-

portive of the government's efforts. But the LTTE, which is engaged in a bitter war with government forces, is expected to dismiss the proposals outright.

In regard to negotiating with the LTTE, the government has said it would be willing to talk to the LTTE only after a consensus among the majority Sinhalese political parties - at least between the government party and the opposition United National Party - was reached.

Tamil Parties Object

However, Tamil parties expressed serious reservations about the Minister's proposal to hold referendums to decide geographical unit of devolution in the north and east, saying they would only worsen the ethnic divide which has sparked a bloody civil war.

"The division of the north and east into several pieces and holding a referendum for each piece would only result

in aggravating the ethnic problem," said Douglas Devananda, leader of the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP). "We will not accept any type of referendum because nearly a million people who are displaced internally and externally in the north and east will not be able to exercise their vote," he added.

"A political solution should be based on a merger of the north and east. When the government is against the division of the country why should the traditional homeland of the Tamils be divided?" questioned Devananda.

"The north and east has been temporarily merged under the Indo-Sri Lanka peace accord signed nearly 10 years ago. We want the government to come out with some thing more than this, other than trying to bisect the two provinces," said Suresh Premachandran, leader of the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF).

investigations began after he was transferred to the capital Colombo.

Preliminary investigations had revealed that Pathmanathan siphoned off more than 108 million rupees (\$1.8 million) over a period of five years from food supply funds and payments for transport trucks, police said.

Police officials said Pathmanathan had paid excess money to the LTTE for hiring their trucks to transport food to the northern areas, which were under LTTE control. But Pathmanathan's lawyers told the court that the former official had little to do with payments to the LTTE as the money had been given to the truckers' association in Jaffna, which in turn paid individual truck owners.

Mothers of "Disappeared" Protest

The Mothers Front of Jaffna in northern Sri Lanka, which is under the control of government forces, formed to track the whereabouts of 750 Tamil civilians who are reported have "disappeared" after being taken into custody have been staging protests against the lack of government action in trace the missing persons. The Front has pointed out that the government's "human rights task force" never materialised, and neither are there any signs of the promised

"human rights commission" carrying out investigations in Jaffna. The also allege that in Jaffna is therefore left without any means to check human rights violations committed by the government's security forces, which continue to be on the increase.

The Mother Front held a protest fast in the Nallur Kandasamy temple premises 19th September. It is reported that over 500 women participated in this symbolic gesture.

Tamil Activist Killed

A Tamil political activist reportedly belonging to the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, which is apart of the ruling People's Alliance was shot dead by unidentified gunmen in the northern Jaffna peninsula 3 October.

S.P. Dharmalingam, 57, was at his residence at Colombuthural village in Jaffna when the gunmen shot him dead. It was not immediately clear why and by whom Dharmalingam was killed. But the police promptly placed the blame for the murder on the Tamil Tigers who have not made any statement either accepting or denying responsibility for the killing.

"Tamil Eelam-Scotland Friendship Train"

Hundreds of Eelam Tamils will be arriving in Edinburgh, for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) to forge a new friendship between the emerging nations of Scotland and Tamil Eelam (The Tamil Nation in Sri Lanka), states a news release issued on 3 October by the "Tamil Forum for Commonwealth 1997".

According to the release, "The friendship train begins its journey at 7am (25.10.97) from King's Cross station carrying hundreds of Eelam Tamils and arrives at Edinburgh Waverley station at 12 noon. From the station the Tamils will walk in procession towards the specially constructed Tamil Eelam Marquee on the Roof Top Plaza of Waverley shopping centre. At 1.30p.m, the Tamil Festival of Culture will start in the Tamil Eelam Marquee.

"Tamil Eelam Nation's presence in Scotland during the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Edinburgh has a political significance in relation to the events happening in Sri Lanka. The world will hear the authentic voice of the Tamil Eelam Nation, which is ruthlessly suppressed by the Sinhala Buddhist fundamentalist regime of Sri Lanka, whose President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunge will also be present at the CHOGM.

"Journalists are invited to travel with the Tamil Eelam Diaspora on the train journey where they will be able to meet many members of the Tamil community. This is also a unique opportunity for interviews and discussions.

"Also the Tamil Festival in Edinburgh

and other political activities by the Tamil Diaspora in Scotland on the 25th of October will create many interesting stories for the press. Many more exciting developments will emerge in the coming weeks as the Tamil Eelam Diaspora prepares itself for this massive show of strength."

Detained Former GA Released on Bail

A former chief administrator of Sri Lanka's northern Jaffna district, who was arrested and detained on suspicion of siphoning funds to the LTTE while he was in office was released on bail by a Colombo court on 3 October.

Chelliah Pathmanathan, a former Government Agent of Jaffna, detained from August this year under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, was granted bail and released after the Attorney General agreed to his bail application. As conditions for granting bail, Pathmanathan was ordered to surrender his passport and report to the police every month.

Pathmanathan served as a project officer for rehabilitation Jaffna which was under the control of the LTTE until December 1995 when government forces regained control of the peninsula. He was promoted as the Government Agent in November 1995, just before Sri Lankan troops captured Jaffna town, and continued in the post until early this year when he was transferred to Colombo. In-

AN "ELEGY" FOR THE EASTERN PROVINCE?

D B S Jeyaraj

The territorial integrity of the Eastern province of Sri Lanka is in for drastic transformation soon. The boundaries of this sprawling province hugging the greater part of the eastern coast are to be re-demarcated in keeping with the current political imperatives of the country. Of course it all depends on whether the people of the country at large in general and those of the Eastern region in particular go along with the controversial proposal regarding the possible trifurcation of the Province.

Earlier it was proposed to have a series of mini-referenda for the East in order to carve out new units of devolution. The first was for voters in the eastern districts of Batticaloa and Trincomalee. They would have to decide on the question of whether or not such districts and the administrative districts of Jaffna, Killinochi, Vavuniya, Mannar and Mullaitheevu should form one region to be designated as the North-Eastern region.

In short the people of Batticaloa and Trincomalee were to decide whether they wanted to merge with the northern province or not. If these people voted against such an option two separate Regional councils would be established for the northern region and the eastern region separately. These were in effect the present northern and eastern provinces without any changes of boundary.

If the voters of Trincomalee and Batticaloa opted for linkage to the north, then a second referendum was to be held in the polling divisions of Sammanthurai, Pottuvil and Kalmunai in the Amparai district of the Eastern Province. These were the electoral divisions corresponding to the earlier electorates of the district. These electoral divisions were to be asked whether they wanted to join the envisaged North-Eastern Region or not.

If the answer was in the affirmative these divisions would also be merged with it. If the answer is negative then a new region comprising the Kalmunai, Pottuvil and Sammanthurai electoral divisions would be created. This would be called the South-Eastern Region.

In that situation a third referendum would be held in the Amparai or Diga-madulla electoral division of the same district. These voters had the option of either joining the Uva Province or remain-

ing a separate entity administered by the central government. In the event of a separate Eastern region being created, the Amparai electoral division voters had the option of joining that Province too.

In this manner the original proposal paved the way for all electors of the Eastern Province to be consulted at different stages in three referenda. Depending on the results of these mini-referenda the East was faced with three possibilities for the future. A trifurcation, bifurcation or keeping the current territorial limits intact. These referenda were confined only to the Eastern Province and were distinctly different to both the Island-wide referendum stipulated necessary to ratify the proposed Constitutional changes or the contemplated consultative or non-binding referendum.

This was the original position of the government regarding the future status of the Eastern Province. These details were revealed at a press conference too after a special cabinet meeting endorsed the idea. Nevertheless subsequent reaction to the idea from different Tamil and Muslim parties necessitated a revision of position. The new plan was revealed by Constitutional Affairs and Justice Minister Professor G L Peiris at the recent meeting of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Constitutional Reform. Later another special meeting of the cabinet endorsed it.

According to this proposal the need for a second referendum in the Pottuvil, Kalmunai and Sammanthurai polling divisions to establish a South-Eastern Province was done away with. The new proposal was for the mandatory establishment of the South-Eastern Region consisting of the three electoral divisions if the voters of the Trincomalee and Batticaloa districts voted in the affirmative to merge with the districts of the Northern Province.

If and when that happened the Sammanthurai, Kalmunai and Pottuvil electorates would automatically be converted into the South-Eastern Province without a separate referendum. The Amparai electorate voters will then have a referendum where they would decide whether they wanted to have their own regional setup. If the verdict was in the affirmative then it would be duly proclaimed.

Otherwise the Amparai electoral division would be attached to the adjoining Uva province. Until that time the area will be administered directly by the Central government.

If the Trincomalee and Batticaloa voters rejected the idea of merging with the North then there would be no new South-Eastern province or region. But the voters of Amparai will be given the option of merging with the Uva or being separate but interestingly not remaining part of the Eastern province.

It must be realised that the devising of this formula as well as the old were all conditioned or influenced by the complicated ethnic composition of the Eastern province. The policy makers have been subject to the contending aspirations of the various ethnicities while being mindful of political realities. There is on the one hand a political desire to dismantle the current North-Eastern linkage set up ten years ago by presidential proclamation in accordance with provisions of the Indo-Lanka Accord. This position though tenuous still stands to date.

Rightly or wrongly it is perceived that majority Sinhala opinion would not tolerate the unconditional merger of the Tamil dominated North and the Tamil majority East. They want the North and East to be separate. Tamil opinion however disfavours such a de-merger and wants institutionalised recognition of a merged north-east as a Tamil province. The government seems to feel that allowing such a set-up would provoke a Sinhala backlash. This would possibly result in the total devolution package being rejected by the Sinhala people.

President Kumaratunga however is keen to provide the substance of devolution amounting to quasi-federalism for the regions particularly the North-East. She does not want to grant the "shell" of devolution as proposed by the 13th amendment enacted by the UNP regime. Stating that extensive devolution was provided under the old provincial councils is according to this government a deception of the Tamil people. The PA under Chandrika wants to provide genuine devolution for the peripheral units.

For this the President knows that a consensus to which the Sinhala people subscribe to is necessary. In order to procure majority consent for maximum devolution she thinks that an impression of the North-Eastern Province being "handed over" to the Tamils in its entirety should be avoided. The 13th amendment conceded on the unit of devolution by evolving a temporary merger of the north and east but cut back on the substance of devolution by reducing or undermining the scope and extent of powers de-

involved to the provincial councils.

Kumaratunga wants to constrict the Tamil unit of devolution if necessary but does not want to reduce the powers devolved to the councils. That is why she wants to prevent a total north-east merger which would be construed by the Sinhala hardliners as a sell out to the Tamils. She feels that the projection of such an impression would prove detrimental to the whole devolution project. Devolving extensive powers to the unit can always be justified as this is applicable to all regions. It is not asymmetrical devolution to the Tamil region alone.

This naturally is not welcomed by a vociferous section of Tamils who want both provinces to form one unit with current boundaries intact. Kumaratunga is not in a position to allow that. At the same time she is resolved to accommodate Tamil aspirations in this respect as far as possible. Kumaratunga does not want a total de-merger as she realises that it would be totally unacceptable to Tamil opinion at this juncture. This explains the new proposal that envisages some changes to the current eastern province but provides for a very positive opportunity for the bulk of the Tamil districts to merge together.

At the same time there is also the comparatively new development of emerging Muslim sub-nationalism mobilised in territorial terms within the Eastern Province. The separate ethnic consciousness of the Muslims was not taken into account by the Indo-Lanka accord provisions. The rise of the primarily North-East based Muslim Congress and the inclusion of that party in her fragile government has necessitated an accommodation of the Muslim viewpoint too.

The proposed formula of re-demarking the Eastern Province through referenda is aimed then at providing the three ethnic groups an opportunity to carve out for themselves three councils that would be dominated by their respective ethnic groups. The envisaged north-eastern region consisting of the Trincomalee, Batticaloa, Mullaitheevu, Mannar, Vavuniya, Kilinochi and Jaffna districts would have a Tamil majority of 81%. The envisaged South-Eastern province comprising the electoral divisions of Sammanthurai, Pottuvil and Kalmunai will have a Muslim majority of 59%. The Amparai electoral division if transformed into a separate region will have a Sinhala majority of 95%.

In 1881 the Eastern Province population had an ethnic ratio of 59.12% Tamils, 33.71% Muslims and 4.66% Sinhalese. A century later at the last official census taken in 1981 the ethnic ratio was 42.14% Tamils, 32.28% Muslims 24.92% Sinhalese. There has been a drastic de-

crease in the Tamil population and a marginal decrease in the Muslim population while the Sinhalese population has recorded a phenomenal increase. This was mainly through the State sponsored colonisation schemes where Sinhala settlers were re-located at government expense in the traditional homeland of the Tamil speaking peoples.

The Sinhala ratio that stood at only 4% even in 1921 increased by leaps during the State Council era and through bounds in the post-Independence period. The demographic alteration of the ethnic composition of their area of habitation has been a major grievance of the Sri Lankan Tamils in recent times. Current population projections put the ethnic ratio at roughly 38% Tamil, 32% Muslim and 30% Sinhala. The reality of a declining Tamil population in the East along with the ongoing effects of the war are the main factors reinforcing the Tamil demand for a North-East linkage.

There is a degree of resentment in extremist circles about the methodology of the proposed referendum for the East. Why not the entire East go to the polls in one move? Or why not a staggered referendum for all three districts separately? Why should Batticaloa and Trincomalee districts go it alone first? Why should the Muslim South-Eastern Council automatically evolve if the North-Eastern region is created? Why should the Sinhala dominated Amparai electorate be denied an option of remaining in the East? etc. are some of the perplexing questions.

The simple answer to these questions may not be to the liking of Tamil critics of Chandrika Kumaratunga who see in her every move a diabolical conspiracy to undermine the Tamil people. Yet the harsh reality is that the whole exercise has been deliberately calculated to provide the Sri Lankan Tamils the maximum possible advantage in securing a pre-ponderantly Tamil North-East Region short of a complete linkage of both provinces. To a lesser extent the Muslims have been given an opportunity to carve out a distinct territory where they would be the majority community.

The current ethnic ratio in Trincomalee too has changed. The once Tamil majority district now has a population of 35.8% Sinhala, 32.1% Tamil and 28.6% Muslim people. In 1981 it was Tamil 34.3%, Sinhala 33.4% and 28.6% Muslims. The ravages of the war that has resulted in massive displacement along with the process of colonisation has resulted in the demographic change detrimental to Tamils. Likewise the Amparai district has roughly 41% Sinhala, 40% Muslim and 19% Tamil population. It is interesting to note that Even Amparai dis-

trict as at present does not have a Muslim majority. Batticaloa district however has an overwhelming Tamil majority of 72.9% and a minority of 25.9% Muslims.

It is obvious that if a province-wide referendum or a district by district referendum is held sheer arithmetic will defeat the Tamil aspiration of an extended North-Eastern homeland. A substantial combination of Sinhala and Muslim votes will defeat the merger with the north concept on a provincial level (Sinhala 30%+Muslim 32% = 62% > Tamil 38%). Likewise a district by district referendum will result only in the Tamil majority Batticaloa opting for a merger. In Trincomalee and Amparai the combined Sinhala and Muslim population is 64% and 81% respectively. So the chances are that the idea of linkage with the North will be vetoed in both districts.

A further complication would be a situation where Batticaloa opts to merge with the north but finds itself faced with a problem of territorial non-contiguity as the Trincomalee district in between the north and Batticaloa has rejected a merger. With Amparai and Trincomalee opting out Batticaloa choosing to merge would probably be politically nullified. It is to prevent such a scenario and provide the Tamils with a maximum possible opportunity to link the maximum possible eastern territory with the north that the idea of getting Trincomalee and Batticaloa to vote as one entity at the referendum has been mooted.

Let us look at the voter lists available. There are three electoral divisions in the Batticaloa district. In Kalkuda the voters in terms of ethnicity are Tamil 54,194; Muslim 22,350; Sinhala 357. In Batticaloa the figures are Tamil 80,296; Muslim 42,205; Sinhala 1188. In Padiruppu the voters are Tamil 67,206 and Sinhala 780. The total number of electors for the district are 269,904.

In the case of Trincomalee district it has three electoral divisions. Tamils are 45,148 in Trincomalee electorate, 17,339 in Mutur and 8,595 in Seruwila. The Muslims are 14,312 in Trincomalee, 535 in Seruwila and 44,520 in Mutur. The Sinhalese are 15,643 in Trincomalee, 2,371 in Mutur and 54,348 in Seruwila. The total number of electors in the district are 195,667.

By stipulating a joint referendum for Batticaloa and Trincomalee the Tamil aggregate will be 272,588 while the Muslim voters would be 123,722 and Sinhalese 63,727. Percentage-wise it would be 58.49% Tamil, 26.55% Muslim and 13.71% Sinhala in the combined Trincomalee-Batticaloa region. It is patently clear that combining both has elevated Tamils as the majority community in the

(Continued on page 29)

MANGALA AND THE SINHALA COMMISSION

By Amaradasa Fernando

When Mangala Samaraweera said that the Sinhala Commission were traitors to the Sinhala nation and soon would find themselves "thrown into the dustbin of history" he was echoing what Leon Trotsky said of the Mensheviks who opposed the Bolsheviks in ushering the Russian Revolution.

He said, "you are a contemptible lot, you have outlived your historical role. Your place is in the dustbin of history." Looking back into the prism of history, Trotsky was proved correct. Doubtless to say, this will be the same fate of the agitators against the devolution package.

Minister Samaraweera should be congratulated for his forthrightness. What the Sinhala Commission has done is to attempt to roll back the inexorable march of progress and history. They believe that they are the modern standard-bearers of the Buddhist Commission which in 1955 had a great influence in the formation of the MEP Government of Mr S W R D Bandaranaike in 1956.

At that time, there was a Sinhala Buddhist nationalist renaissance. The disabilities to the Sinhalese and Buddhists were many. This was part of the legacy of the colonial rulers coming from Portuguese times.

These disabilities were in the fields of education, employment, religion etc. when the Buddhists were treated as "infidels".

What the Sinhala Commissioners and those who support them seem to think is that they will be able to whip up the same communal and racist fervour that the Buddhist Commission was able to build up. What they have forgotten is that a great deal of water has flowed under the Kelani Bridge since the Buddhist Commission Report.

Racist agitators consisting of Buddhist monks and the laity started demonstrations when Mr Bandaranaike attempted to take away the sting of the "Sinhala Only" Act by introducing the Reasonable Use of Tamil Bill in 1958, assuaging the fears of the Tamils.

It was easy to rouse communal passions then, because the Sinhala Buddhists did have grievances. But could they blame the Tamils or the Christians

for their parlous state because since Independence in 1948 the government at the centre was controlled by the Sinhalese?

It must be said in fairness to the Sinhala Governments that there was some equity to the racial and religious minorities.

This was what really irked the Sinhala Buddhist nationalists. They felt that as a majority they should have all facilities on a proportional basis.

Mr Bandaranaike was pressurised by the extremists to introduce the Sinhala only Act on this basis. Left to himself, he would not have come to any hasty judgement to affect future generations. No doubt this gave the Sinhala: Sangha, Veda, Guru," a place in the sun. They wanted not only to dethrone English, but also to give the Tamil second class status, opposing the demand of the LSSP and the CP of Parity of status for Sinhala and Tamil as official languages.

While Mr Bandaranaike must be commended for giving into the economic and cultural aspirations of the Sinhala-Buddhists, it must be admitted that the Sinhala only policy was short-sighted in the long run. Today, the children of the very people who wanted English replaced by Sinhala are unable to get a job because of their lack of knowledge of English. Even the diehard Sinhalese are now sending their children to International Schools or to institutions abroad. Thus it can now be said that it was counter-productive, as it has affected the very segment that it was supposed to help.

Alas! As is always the case, the poor child is the one who has to suffer as is glaringly so in the ethnic war that is going on. It is the poor man's sons who are dying in the Northern Front, making it safe for Dr Gunadasa Amerasekera, Professor Nalin de Silva. Mr Gamani Jayasuriya etc to live comfortable lives away from the battle front. It also permits Vens Sobitha, Muruththetuwe Ananda etc. to preach and partake Dana in the safety of their temples.

Subtle Game

The writer was a witness when a meeting of the LSSP in the Town Hall in 1958 was broken up by racist thugs with

stones and bombs. Reggie Mendis a harbour worker had his hand blown off as he shielded Colvin R de Silva when a bomb was thrown at him.

Today all three languages, Sinhala, Tamil and English have been given the status of official languages, thanks to Rajiv Gandhi who twisted JRJ's arm to give this concession to the Tamils along with some amount of devolution in the form of Provincial Councils.

In 1958, it should not be forgotten that the UNP along with some sections of the Maha Sangha were against granting concessions to the Tamils. They were opposed to the Bandaranaike - Chelvanayakam pact of 1958. (Mr J R Jayawardene has inter alia carved a niche for himself, when he led his famous march to the Temple of the Tooth, but halted at Nittambuwa).

The Sinhala Commissioners must also be reminded that it was the UNP which started the infamous "Tar brush" campaign defacing the Tamil names on signboards. Today the UNP is playing a more subtle game by not coming out openly opposing the Devolution Package, lest they alienate the Tamils for good. They are making a section of the Maha Sangha and the eternally communal and racist-minded laity to do the dirty job for them. In this task they are being ably assisted by the fascist JVP, performing their usual fishing in troubled waters, from afar.

Now looking back in time, those Sinhala communalists must be hanging their heads in shame, as their hands are stained with the blood of innocent and gullible people who had to pay for their intransigence. But they were successful in turning back the clock of history.

This was repeated during the Dudley - Chelva pact of 1965. But this time the leaders were from the SLFP.

Nevertheless, the common factor always remained, that is the same communalists, but of a new generation, who will always be there to stir the communal cauldron.

Forty years ago, the then Mahanayakas of Malwatte and Asgiriya called Mr Bandaranaike a "traitor to the Sinhala nation and to Buddhism". Recently, one influential Buddhist High Priest had, in hindsight, said that had Mr Bandaranaike's plan for devolution in the form of Regional Councils, not been opposed the ethnic problem would have been solved, and thousands of lives would have been saved. The biggest joke is that there are differences between the communalists themselves. The Sinhala Commissioners, and some sections of the Maha Sangha say that they too are for devolution, but are opposed to only some clauses of the PA Package.

But Professor Nalin de Silva is opposed to this stance of the Sinhala Commission. In an interview he says that there is no ethnic problem and therefore no ethnic problem and therefore no devolution is necessary. I presume Dr Gunadasa Ameresekera also shares the viewpoint.

The JVP opposes the devolution package on the same grounds. They also say that there is no ethnic problem but only an economic problem and will be solved only under a communist government.

While some are saying that the package gives too much, moderates like Professor Jayaratnam Wilson are saying, "to come to Chandrika's proposals, there are some provisions, regretfully, which detract from anything that even remotely resembled federalism or even quasi federalism.

Whether such provisions were deliberately or without mala fide intentions is for the public to judge and for the Minister of Justice to clarify."

Prabhakaran who is a fascist and who would not like to face a democratic election, stands for nothing short of Eelam. Now once again the wheel of history has turned a full circle. The same charge is being levelled at Mr Samaraweera and President Kumaratunga as traitors to the Sinhala nation and to Buddha Sasana.

But the scenario is different today. The vast majority of the people have grown up politically. In 1983, the killing of 13 soldiers in the North was enough for a UNP Cabinet Minister to lead a pogrom against the Tamils, which resulted in burning alive hundreds of innocent Tamils and the torching of their homes and businesses.

When about 1200 in Pooneryn and 1500 odd soldiers in Mullaitivu were killed, the Sinhala people took it up stoically. And so did they when a national hero such as major General Kobbekaduwa was killed in a mysterious bomb disaster in Jaffna.

The Sinhala people have behaved honourably and decently under very trying conditions.

They will never again be led by false prophets. They will never again be led by false prophets. They threw a charismatic and eloquent Sinhala Buddhist leader such as Dinesh Gunawardene in his own pocket borough to the political wilderness. The mass of the people want peace.

They are tired of war which has killed more than 50,000 of the youth and billions of rupees wasted each year.

Last Chance

Surely, is this country going to be governed by a set of mullahs as in Afghanistan or Iran?

Mr S W R D Bandaranaike was a liberal and a man with a kindly disposition. He listened to everyone. Herein lies the difference between President Kumaratunga and her father. She is a liberal but is resolute.

She is faced with a diabolical intransigent fascist on one side and equally intransigent racists on the other side. The President has taken a resolute decision to cut the Gordian Knot. It is worth recalling a lesson from Ireland. Gladstone campaigned for Home Rule in Ireland which was his main election plank. It was rejected and he lost the election. As a result in 1916 there was a rebellion in Dublin and a civil war followed giving birth to the Irish Republic in 1924.

What Mangala Samaraweera said was perfectly true. The Sinhala Commission Report and their supporters are playing into the hands of Prabhakaran.

Finally, let me remind what George Santayana said of those who have short memories. "Those who will not learn the lessons of history, are condemned to relive it." I think the people had had enough of communalism in the past forty years.

This is the last chance for peace. We owe it to future generations. Let us not miss this chance. History will not forgive this generation if it does not fulfil its obligations. □

Devolution and the Sinhala Commission Report

by Cat's Eye

Minister Samaraweera's comments are currently the talk of the town. They have served to yank Cats Eye away from its preoccupation with cricket, Diana and an absorption in women's rights to a concern over issues of national importance. Having read the Sinhala Commission Report, Cats Eye cannot understand why there is so much excitement. Neither the Minister's remarks nor the reports are particularly concerned with issues relating to Buddhism. It may be that some groups feel that "Sinhala" and "Buddhism" are integrally related. In this context it may be important to remember that Buddhism is a universal religion. There are Thai Buddhists, American Buddhists, Japanese Buddhists etc. Those who want to make Buddhism into a parochial religion, must be reminded that some of the best literary works in Tamil are Buddhist, the

Sillapadikaram and Mannimekalai for example and that Buddhagosa, himself was a South Indian. Buddhism belongs to the world, not to any particular race or ethnic group.

Having said that Cats Eye wants to raise the preliminary issue: Why a Sinhala Commission? Commissions are mechanisms usually set up to inquire into areas where there have been criminal justice issues or where victims who have no access to political power have grievances that cannot be remedied by the political process. Commissions are therefore set up on disappearances, minorities, women, vulnerable groups etc. It is extraordinary when a majority community in a democratic society feels that it has no access to political power.

This brings to mind Bishop Lakshman Wickremesinghe's remark that the problem in Sri Lanka is that we have two



communities with a "minority complex." The fact that the majority acts as though it is a minority prevents the development of a generosity of spirit which is necessary for power sharing and which will only come if a majority feels secure and comfortable. Nowhere in the world do majorities share power willingly with minorities. Such power sharing comes about only with inspired political leadership that is committed to long term political goals and which then goes to its own people with a genuine sense of conviction. We hope that the present devolution exercise is one such process.

Too Little Too Late

Let us move onto the content of the Sinhala Commission Report. At the outset, let us make our position clear. Cats Eye has always supported devolution, not only as a political solution to the ethnic problem but also as a measure of good governance. The important factor about the devolution debate and the Sinhala Commission Report is that they raise questions about competing visions of the State - what models of the State do we really want for the next century?

The Sinhala Commission Report does not really take a stand on devolution. The bottom line argument appears to be that it is not opposed to devolution along the lines of the thirteenth amendment. This is a welcome step forward and it is an important shift in position for those concerned with Sinhalese hard line positions. And yet, we also know that those who defend the Commission Report with "blood and thunder" were the very same people who brought the country to a standstill when the thirteenth amendment was proposed. What does this say about our political process - always too little too late?

Sacrosanct Concepts

The first part of the report deals with legal arguments relating to the present devolution package. The central thrust of the debate is linked to the concept of "unitary" and the "supremacy of the central legislature." The Commission seems to feel that these are sacrosanct concepts which are part of the basic structure of the constitution and therefore even above the process of amendment, ie, they can never be changed. We have yet to see a judgement anywhere in the world which claims that the term unitary is beyond amendment. This is truly an imaginative construct of the Sinhala Commission. The notion of a unitary state and the supremacy of the Central Parliament comes from the Westminster model of democracy. The call for the supremacy of Parliament was not a response to minority agitation but a protection against a strong and intrusive monarchy. But history has moved on.

Today, Westminster, the mother of all parliaments, and the father of unitary states, is extensively devolving power to Scotland (the powers and areas are far more extensive than ours) and in a more limited manner to Wales. As usual, the colonial master responds creatively to changing times while the colonial subjects retain a mystical attachment to inherited colonial notions which are often the causes of ethnic strife in the first place. The extraordinary fact is that the

United National Party has also taken up this call. At the same time it is pushing hard for talks with the LTTE.

If the UNP thinks they can go and speak to the LTTE, clinging onto the concept of a unitary state, then they must be in Ga Ga Land!

Unity in Diversity

Cats Eye firmly believes that we must evolve a constitutional structure which reflects a commitment to the principle of unity in diversity. Federalism and devolution are the time honoured principles which have been evolved by democratic and not so democratic societies to deal with the problem of territorially placed minorities. These are not crea-

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tion of Tamil racists as Nalin de Silva proclaims but are in fact the international norm and not the exception. We do not see unitary and federal as bipolar opposites but as part of a continuum. Some Constitutions like the one in Canada are extensively federal, some like France are more unitary while the rest fall somewhere in between. Most students of Constitutional law are agreed that the Sri Lankan package is nearer the unitary side of the continuum with extensive controls for the Centre. Only the Sinhala Commission is striking a dissenting note.

The Sinhala Commission claims that the powers given in our package are more extensive than those contained in other constitutions. This is an extraordinary claim bordering on the ridiculous. One of the countries singled out for acclaim is Nigeria. Colonel Abacha will be very happy. While the rest of the world is about to think in terms of economic sanctions to deal with the most brutal regime on earth, somebody somewhere is actually holding Nigeria as a model for governance.

The comparative analysis of Constitutions done in the Report is selective, shoddy and very misleading. Some Constitutions give extensive powers in some areas and not in others. To pull out some sections and not others is a travesty of the truth. The selective treatment, especially the analysis of the German Constitution, distorts the reality. The German model of Federalism, despite having a concurrent list, is far more extensive than our package. That is why they call their

model "Federal" without any sense of shame.

The decision to leave out the Concurrent List in Sri Lanka should be analysed. It may be because the centralising tendencies of Sri Lankan political culture would have made such a list an intrusive, interventionist mechanism. To say that leaving out the concurrent list is to create a Federalism that does not exist anywhere in the world is completely misleading. Most federal constitutions do not have concurrent list. In addition, the Scottish package which is called "devolution" has no concurrent list at all and gives extensive powers to the region. This section of the Commission Report convinces CATS EYE, that behind a veneer of technical language, the Sinhala Commission is really involved in a distorting, rabble rousing exercise unworthy of the calibre of its members.

Police Powers

The Sinhala Commission is also concerned with the question of the devolution of police powers. They are totally opposed to the creation of two different police forces - the national and the regional. In any federal or devolutionary scheme anywhere in the world, the first area that is devolved is police powers. Since much of the demand for federal systems is because there is a feeling that the Central Government will not take care of your physical security - a strong perception among Sri Lankan Tamils fostered by such events as the 1983 riots - the area of police powers is always devolved. The Commission Report sees police as only a repressive apparatus concerned with national security. For those of us who work with women's issues, we see the police in a completely different light. To us, the concept of "community policing" is an important need of the future. We need police who are carved in a different mould, who are involved with the community, victim friendly and involved in the provision of community services. These police must come from the community and a structure of devolution is conducive to the creation of such a force.

We believe that there should be two police forces, one, a limited repressive apparatus, relating to issues of national importance and national security and a provincial force involved in community policing. Unlike the Sinhala Commission we have no concerns with regard to national security arising from the package. The large intelligence apparatus set up in the country in recent years will probably not be dismantled. The President has extensive powers to intervene in situations of emergency including the

dissolution of councils and the deployment of security forces. The Governor is her agent with his antennas to the ground. There is nothing more that need be given, unless the Sinhala Commission feels that the only way to govern the North and the East is to have it permanently under military occupation, even when there is peace. Being democrats, we are sure that is not the case.

Economic Devolution

The section criticising devolution from an economic point of view is troublesome because it poses larger questions about the model of development we want to pursue. The section is animated by two assumptions - the first that the Central Government should control economic development, mobilise resources and allow for a uniformity of policy. This flies in the face of successive governments' commitment to the open economy and privatisation.

The second, a corollary of the first, is that the Central Government has a monopoly on rational economic planning and creative ideas and that the provinces are a bunch of loonies who have to be controlled. This Colombo centric version of development is highly debatable. The "Wayamba Experience" for example under Chief Minister Jayawickrema Perera did point out that in certain areas the provinces may be a harbinger of creative ideas that the Centre could adopt. We believe that a pluralism of experiments and development strategies is an exciting way to go and will allow a "hundred flowers to bloom," tapping creative resources in the provinces.

We agree that there should not be complete anarchy with regard to economic and social policy. But we feel that the Reserve List takes care of that through the more benign mechanism of the setting of standards. The Reserve List allows the Central Government to set standards with regard to education, teacher qualification, curriculum content, the professions, set standards in agriculture, regulate and enhance of quality standards in industry, labour regulation, intervention in terms of natural and environmental disasters, national environment, tourism, etc. The alarmist approach of the Commission belies the reality. If the Central Government wants to intervene, it can and we are sure it will intervene. It has all the levers and tools to do so.

Even in the area of Land, the battle cry of the Commission, the hysteria is misplaced. Even though Land is vested in the Region, the Centre, "may, after

consultation with the relevant Regional Administration, require the Regional Administration" to make available land...and "the Regional Administration will comply. "There is no ambiguity. The will of the Centre must prevail. This is of course not mentioned in the section on Land in the Commission Report but then the Commission is not claiming a dispassionate fact finding, only a passionate one.

The same is true with finance. With all the ranting and raving about foreign loans and grants, they do not really draw the attention of the reader to the fact that all this activity must be within national policy, national guidelines, and national regulations. In an era of globalisation, there can surely be no other framework. If private companies, corporations and

Running through the pages of the Commission is another belief that the Sinhalese are the custodians of morality, rationality and good sense and that the minorities, especially the Tamils are violent, irrational hordes. The belief that the Tamil dominated administrations will go rampaging around destroying Buddhist temples and archaeological sites is an example of this. Given the ferocity of the current civil war this has not happened, why will it happen during times of peace?

If the Sinhalese Buddhists can be trusted to protect Hindu, Muslim and Christian places of worship in their areas why not the reverse? There have been isolated incidents in the North and the East but we must also point out that during riots Kovils, Mosques and Churches have also been destroyed in the South. Let us also not forget what happened to the Jaffna Public Library.

NGOs can raise foreign loan and grants, why not elected democratic bodies? What more power does the Centre want? There are more subtle, modern ways of controlling the periphery without bashing people over the head and stifling large communities. Except for some attachment to some medieval notions of authority, power and subjugation of the periphery by the Centre, we do not understand the Commission's fears.

Fear and Human Rights

And fear is the central element. Running through the pages of the Commission is another belief that the Sinhalese are the custodians of morality, rationality and good sense and that the minorities, especially the Tamils are violent, irrational hordes. The belief that the Tamil dominated administrations will go rampaging around destroying Buddhist temples and archaeological sites is an example of this. Given the ferocity of the current civil war this has not happened, why will it happen during times of peace?

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We realise that for both the Sinhalese and Tamils, fear and mistrust are at the core of the present crisis. Both sides feel that political administrations run by the other will repress them, discriminate against them, prevent freedom of movement, and not guarantee physical security or the right to livelihood. The answer to these concerns does not lie in preventing effective devolution but in strengthening the fundamental rights chapter of the Constitution and the fundamental rights jurisprudence of the Supreme Court.

People must be able to live without fear, prejudice or ill treatment in any part of the island. Only a human rights conscious judiciary and a human rights conscious civil society will guarantee these essential components of a life with dignity in either a centralised system or a devolved polity. That is the real bottom line.

Cats Eye wants to reiterate that we support the devolution package - we in fact think it does not go far enough. We feel that it is a political solution to the ethnic conflict but we also feel that it heralds a new type of politics - a politics aimed at power sharing, coalition building, consultation and consensus where diversity is allowed within a framework of unity.

We feel that the centralised, monolithic approach to governance is out of date and inefficient. We need to look toward decentralised structures aimed at providing empowerment to the different sections of our community. We feel that this reflects a feminist vision of the State, away from the values of control and repression, which have animated our policy makers for so many years since independence.

After fifty years, let us move on.

(Courtesy of "Sunday Island")

National identity and unity that prevailed at the time of independence were destroyed by the political leaders to whom acquiring and retaining the power to rule outweighed all other interests. Sustaining national unity became not their concern.

The unitary constitutions of the country since independence did not have entrenched provisions to prevent the enactment of laws that accorded rights and privileges to any ethnic or religious group not granted to the other groups. There was no comprehensive Bill of Rights either that guaranteed the safety and security of citizens individually and collectively as members of a distinct community. Political parties either in power or in opposition exploited these shortcomings for their own advantage. Politics along communal lines became the norm.

Sinhala extremists backed by top Buddhist prelates were able to influence the political leaders in power preventing them from granting equal status to all ethnic groups. Whenever there were attempts to grant some autonomous powers to the Tamil region, these were opposed by Sinhala chauvinists. The interim report of the Sinhala Commission released on 17 September 1997 shows that the same old scaring tactic of the resulting danger to Sinhala race and Buddhist religion is being adopted by some notables to kill the Government's devolution proposals. They are anxious to portray themselves as the saviours of Sinhala-Buddhists.

The Commission was supposed to look into the injustices committed against the majority Sinhalese but instead it had focused its efforts on sabotaging the Government's devolution proposals. It has not specifically identified in its report the grievances of the Sinhalese. Considering the background of the members of the Sinhala Commission many would have expected it to seek "truth and reconciliation" in the divided society. But it seems to have had a hidden political motive to obstruct the attempt to unite the divided people through power sharing. The two concepts that Sri Lanka is - (a) multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural country and (b) Sinhala-Buddhist country contradict fundamentally and hence cannot be reconciled in one democratic system. Those notables, who insist that Sinhala-Buddhists have more rights than the members of minority groups are themselves encouraging separatism. The chauvinistic forces in the South that contributed to the rise of Tamil nationalism are now using the same methods to sustain it. Both groups have

"ONE COUNTRY-ONE PEOPLE" TO BE OR NOT TO BE

by Dr. S. Narapalasingam

impulsively been helping each other to sustain their common objective of keeping the gulf between the two communities wide. The verdict of the Sinhalese people in the 1994 parliamentary elections silenced the Southern forces. They were activated by the LTTE when its leadership resumed the war after withdrawing hastily from the peace talks in April 1995. This was a great disappointment to the progressive politicians in the South who campaigned and succeeded at last, against formidable chauvinistic forces, in convincing the Sinhalese people that the Tamils were treated unfairly by previous governments and that the armed conflict between the State and the LTTE should be settled by entering into peace talks with the latter.

UNP's Unhelpful Stand

Previous attempts to decentralise power failed to placate the Tamils as these did not go far enough to give them the right to decide on crucial matters on which their present and future well-being, safety and security depended. As in the case of many crucial proclaimed policies and enacted laws that reflected the acceptance of these in principle by various governments rather than sincere moves to redress the grievances of the Tamils, the actual implementation of the concerned acts here too was restricted as to make them ineffectual. The central administration was able to obstruct the administration of the decentralised units as these had to depend on the centre for funds, staff and other inputs. Political patronage also played a key role in these schemes, annulling the intended aim of decentralising power.

President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga's determination to change the present constitution, accepting the reality that the restoration of national unity and peace required the granting of extensive devolution of powers to the regions is unprecedented in the politics of independent Sri Lanka. In fact, the entire international community welcomed her Government's devolution proposals, because they understood the factors that contributed to the present crisis. The distrust of the Tamils in unitary constitutions is so deep that any form of unitary structure for Sri Lanka is likely to be identified with majoritarian rule - the system

of rule by the majority community primarily for its own benefit.

The devolution proposals which the present Government is keen to incorporate in the new constitution have been before the Parliamentary Select Committee on Constitutional

Reforms for more than 18 months. Despite several sittings and protracted discussions, consensus has not been reached between the Government and the main opposition party - the UNP - on some key elements of the devolution package. Even within the coalition Government, a few members have raised objections to some of the proposals. However, it is the UNP that holds the trump card in the poker game. The crafty architect of the present constitution had seen to it that the rules would favour the main party in the opposition if it wanted to obstruct victory for the Government in this game, in which he was a maestro.

The UNP and some other parties claim that the approval of the people in a referendum without the two-thirds majority in Parliament will be useless to give legality to the proposed new constitution. The present coalition Government has only a one-seat majority in the Parliament. This is attributed to the replacement of the first past the post system by proportional representation with preferential votes in the present constitution. Had the old system prevailed, it has been claimed by the President herself that the PA coalition would have secured more than two-thirds majority in the August 1994 General Elections. It is also obvious even to political amateurs that under the existing PR system with the SLFP and the UNP on opposite camps, either party cannot obtain two-thirds majority in a general election, even in partnership with other minor parties.

The public does not know the precise nature of UNP's reservations on the proposals. As the main opposition party its leader has a responsibility to submit an alternative set of proposals that will address effectively all the issues that led to the present bloody conflict. Although, he has been hinting on several occasions that he is not against the concept of devolution, he has not indicated the kind of devolution acceptable to his party. If the party is adamant that any devolution of powers should be within the unitary structure, it could tell the people how the thirteenth amendment to the 1978 constitution under which the Provincial Council system was established should be revised to devolve more powers that would address satisfactorily the con-

cerns of the Tamils.

Since it is simple majoritarian rule that permitted the legislature to enact discriminatory laws and its executive branch to discriminate against the Tamils in various ways, UNP could have suggested an alternative system that guarantees equal rights and privileges to the Tamils as well as their safety and security through power-sharing. In the absence of any suggestions, one may be tempted to infer that the party favours majoritarian rule or just wants to sabotage the Government's devolution proposals. Whatever the true reason, it appears that the party does not want to be seen as the chief saboteur. In this case, it may have found a proxy in the Sinhala Commission. However, UNP is likely to see the reaction of the Sinhalese people to the recommendation of the Sinhala Commission and then decide what its stand should be when the draft constitution is presented in Parliament.

In an interview with the Reuters correspondent in Colombo on 12 September, President Chandrika Kumaratunga stated, "We have been talking to the UNP at various levels. They have not said what they like or don't like in our proposals. We have just drawn a blank." Hence the Government has been compelled to examine various options, including a

non-binding referendum on the draft constitution to get the people's affirmation of the proposals.

The UNP will be seen as collaborating with the extreme parties in the south, which are supporting the Sinhala Commission in opposing the Government's devolution scheme, if it openly canvasses against devolution in such a referendum. Regardless of its outcome, this option will not help the UNP to maintain its claim as a responsible national party with the expectation of obtaining support from other Tamil parties.

Explaining Devolution

Government's latest campaign to solicit the support of the people for replacing the present constitution by a new constitution that recognises explicitly the multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural features of the island and devolves powers to the different regions was launched on 25 August 1997 in Anuradhapura by President Chandrika Kumaratunga. It was called the "Saama Thawalama" or the "Peace Caravan". The key message to be conveyed to the people in the whole of Sri Lanka being that "we are all Sri Lankans living in one country as one people." The slogan used was "Sri Lanka - One country, One People". There is no doubt that this is posi-

tive effort and deserves support.

The people would have been in somewhat calmer frame of mind to understand devolution and the need for it, had there been a ceasefire and some easing of their suffering. On the contrary, the suffering of the people in all parts of the island, particularly in the Northeast have increased as a result of the protracted war, which is now in its fifteenth year. Hopefully, a more conducive climate can be expected soon for the people to feel that it is possible for them to live as one people in one country.

The British Experience

The recent initiative towards devolution in Britain may be useful to explain the aims of devolution in the right perspective.

TULF along with other Tamil parties represented in Parliament supports the Government's devolution proposals. However, its leader feels that the chosen slogan "One Country - One People" for soliciting the support of the people to the devolution package does not emphasise the "pluralistic, multi-ethnic and multi-religious" character of the population. This is not a fair criticism and indeed unhelpful at this juncture. It is true that it has an ambivalent meaning. The more liberal one is:- Diverse people with distinct identities united as one people

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in one country for peace and prosperity to all. In this latter context, Sri Lanka in the same way as Britain is one country.

English people accept Scotland to be a distinct nation. The English, the Scots and the Welsh have separate ethnic, cultural and regional identities but yet they regard themselves as one British people living in one country. A vast majority of the Scottish and Welsh people do not object to this concept.

It is relevant to mention here that there are many features that recognise Scotland as a distinct nation. To cite a few: Scotland has its own currency, judiciary, legal system and national flag. There are separate national teams representing England, Scotland and Wales in international sports events. The separate identities of the Scots and the Welsh are retained even in the British army. These have not been regarded by the people and their leaders as features that pose a threat to the unity of the British people and the Union.

It may be recalled that in the previous referendum held in 1979, the Scots rejected a separate Parliament for Scotland. In the recent referendum in Scotland, held on 11 September 1997, 74% of those who voted were in favour of a Scottish Parliament. 63.5% wanted the Parliament to have tax-varying powers. In the referendum in Wales held on 18 September 1997, the people there voted by a narrow margin of 0.6% for a Welsh Assembly. The people in Wales rejected the same proposal in the 1979 referendum by a margin of nearly four to one. The significant shift in the attitudes of many Welsh people towards devolution is due to a sense that Wales would be better served by the Welsh people deciding themselves the order of priorities for public spending rather than by the Secretary for Wales in Westminster. The administration of services could be better run locally than by Whitehall in London. The 60-seat Welsh assembly would have less powers than its Scottish counterpart. Unlike Scotland, Wales did not have the same history of independence. Hence Welsh patriotism tends to be more cultural than anything else. It is also worth noting that Britain is going for asymmetrical devolution, which has relevance to the situation in Sri Lanka where the cry for self-rule is mainly in the North-East region.

The new Labour Government considers devolution as essential to modernise the constitution of the United Kingdom. The fact that the vast majority of the people in Scotland and Wales want to keep the Union, reflects the fair and just way they have been treated by the governments in Westminster. Soon after the emphatic vote for a Scottish Par-

liament, the British Prime Minister Tony Blair said, "this is the beginning of the end of big centralised government and is the way forward in the modern era."

1997 is said to be the year Britain is beginning to move from its past into its present. Devolution has been deemed necessary by the new Labour Government to bring democratic power closer to the people and to the people's priorities. Since the Union treaty of 1707, England and Scotland have remained as two nations in one country and the English and the Scots have had the same opportunities in all walks of life.

Muddled Approach

At the present time utter confusion prevails in the minds of all the major players not knowing which way to turn having started their adventurous journeys along different paths. The local political scene too has become very much divided and without international pressure it is difficult to see how all the three parties whose consent is vital to a political solution could jointly agree to negotiate. The pseudo "patriots" will condemn any foreign/international help, though not external financial aid, that is offered to resolve the internal problems which the natives cannot solve by themselves. Misplaced pride, greed for power and prejudice have prevented the Lankan leaders to co-operate in finding a just and permanent solution to the national problem.

President Kumaratunga told Reuters in an interview on 12 September 1997: "With a total lack of dialogue between the government and the LTTE, one would need a third party in order to at least begin that dialogue." In the same interview, she is reported to have said that the government will talk to the LTTE only when its proposed constitution aimed at devolving more power to minorities by creating regional councils was ready to become a legal document. The contradiction here is self-evident.

What sort of dialogue can one expect when there is nothing to discuss once the proposals have reached the stage of implementation? The need for a third party mediator has been there for the past two years, but the various parties were buying time hoping that the ensuing events would turn in their favour. This failed strategy has only inflicted unbearable losses to the country and the people.

The Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs in a recent interview with Voice of America told that the country's two main political parties must agree on a constitutional framework before a peace process can begin in earnest. Peace talks without such an agreement would be futile. He told reporters in Colombo on 4 September 1997 that the

Government was having discussions with the UNP "about what can be offered to the LTTE in possible peace talks."

The familiar Lankan political scene is that the leaders know precisely the correct steps to be taken to tackle the problems but for reasons best known to them these are not pursued. Prof. Peiris is one member of the Government, who has been seriously advocating a consensual approach and working hard towards bringing the UNP into the fold but unfortunately the same enthusiasm has not been seen among others.

The leader of the UNP, Ranil Wickremesinghe, keeps saying that the Government should talk to the LTTE, while the fighting is on. His party is opposed to changing the present unitary structure and he has also said recently that any amendment to the constitution should be according to the procedure stipulated in it, which is that it must be passed first by two-thirds majority in Parliament and subsequently approved by the people in a national referendum. Any other method would be illegal and UNP would challenge it, the UNP leader says.

When the UNP is not prepared to support the Government's devolution package and also fails to openly state its position on many relevant issues, what is the assurance that it will support the amendments to the constitution that are acceptable to both the Government and the LTTE? If the UNP and its leader are to be taken seriously about their often repeated willingness to talk to the LTTE, then in the spirit of the letters exchanged between the President and the UNP leader (the Liam Fox letters), he should first engage in a genuine attempt with the Government to reach an agreed set of proposals that can be put to the LTTE.

Tragedy waiting to strike

The mounting hardships of the people and the human losses resulting from the war have been considered to be inevitable by the leaders. It was reported recently that the operation "Jaya Sikurui" was costing the Government Rs 2.4 million a day not including the cost of destruction to assets, lost production and human losses. The very costly operation to open a land route to Jaffna seems to have reached a stalemate close to Puliyankulam town. Government's military position in the east has become more and more vulnerable in the east where the LTTE appears to control more territory now than about two years ago. The ongoing war, besides inflicting heavy casualties on both sides, has brought about unprecedented displacement and sufferings for the civilian population in the war torn areas.

Many foreign academics and politi-

cal leaders have suggested ways to move forward towards settling the conflict peacefully. But all these have fallen on deaf ears. Even the agreement arranged by the Under Secretary of State, Dr. Liam Fox, in the previous British Government, in which the President and the Opposition leader consented to consult and co-operate in resolving the North-East conflict has so far remained a dead letter.

There are many individual governments and international organisations willing to help in the negotiation process towards finding an acceptable practical solution. They appear to be more concerned about the terrible consequences of further protraction of the war on the people and the economy of Sri Lanka than the Lankan leaders and warlords. They can help only upon the request of all the concerned parties, but that request is not forthcoming.

Recently, Professor Michael E. Brown, Associate Director International Security Program had a series of meetings on the current stalemate in Sri Lanka with the leaders of various political parties on both sides of the Parliament. Without revealing the details of the discussions, in his speech he is reported (The Island of 21/9/97) to have stressed the following:

- President Kumaratunga has taken some bold steps in the right directions;
- Sri Lanka's tragedy is people oppose peace efforts for domestic political reasons;
- The opposition party in Sri Lanka should not wait until the government's efforts fail, thinking that it would improve its chances at the next election;
- There is a dire need for the ruling party and the UNP to work together to end the North-East conflict and on this depends the success of the devolution package too;
- Sri Lankan military has no chance of defeating the LTTE totally;
- A ceasefire with the LTTE is paramount if Sri Lanka intends to find a lasting solution because there is no way the government could implement the devolution package if hostilities continue;
- At any one point negotiations with the LTTE should take place;
- Outside powers have a role to play but this is limited to facilitating Sri Lanka - LTTE talks;
- Devolution and economic development are necessary to restore the economy.

A devolution scheme that has the approval of the Government and the opposition, including the political parties representing the minorities in Parliament will have the total support of the international community. In this event, if the

SINHALA COMMISSION: AN INVITATION TO FEUDALISM?

By Ameen Izzadeen

I think it's back to feudalism. The Sinhala Commission interim report presented to the Mahanayakes of the Trinikaya on Wednesday after it was brought atop an elephant by commission members dressed in Kandyan style, is a subtle invitation for feudal style governance or dictatorship where the minorities will have to live at the mercy of the majority.

The report and its recommendations, harping much on what the commissioners call historical facts - their interpretation of history - are more reflective of the extremist opinion of the section of the Sinhala community than highlighting the real grievances of the Sinhalese.

That the Sinhalese were denied their due place under colonial rule is undis-

puted and granted. Even the extremists Tamil elements would agree. But these wrongs were to a large extent righted with the introduction of political reforms, beginning with the 1931 Donoughmore constitution. Unfortunately this very process triggered an antithesis, creating panic and fears of discrimination in the minds of the Tamils.

It is not disputed that a section of the Tamils were a privileged lot under the British but this does not mean the downtrodden Tamil civilian coping with the oppressive caste system and other economic burdens was any better off than his Sinhala brethren - if I may be allowed to use a term of fraternity. The socio-economic and political yoke around the downtrodden Tamil led to the armed rebellion against the state. It is the civilians on both sides of the communal divide, who are affected most. One cannot also ignore the plight of the Sinhalese in the villages close to the theatre of war.

The pogrom on Tamils took place in 1983 but can anyone deny that no Tamil was killed or harassed for the mere fact of him being a Tamil before 1983?

Pre-1983 violence against Tamils which I witnessed as a child and what followed after 1983 - massacres of innocent Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim people, - make me query why men cannot treat fellow men as equals in Sri Lanka. Who is responsible for the massacres and the mayhem? The answers still elude me and the Sinhala Commission Report, it appears to me, has made them a mirage.

The report, in my opinion, is more an anti-package exercise than a document containing grievances of the Sinhalese. The Sinhalese and the National Joint Committee have all the right to highlight the grievances faced by the majority community. In newspaper advertisements and speeches at the 17 September ceremony where the report was released, several Buddhist monks of the highest order and other dignitaries pointed out with examples of grievances of the Sinhalese. They include the Deegavapiya land issue, the rights of the Sinhalese who lived in the north, the cutting down of historically significant Bo trees and the fear of losing the identity of the world's only Sinhala state. The

LTTE disregards a formula that has universal approval for settling the conflict, it would be throwing away the last chance for the Tamils to gain their acknowledged collective rights as a distinct ethnic community.

It is high time that all the major players re-examine rationally their respective stances and strategies on the resolution of the ethnic conflict. The consequences of sticking to their fixed positions can be so serious as to deprive them for ever their own political ambitions. Those who stand to gain from widespread turmoil will be the newly rising class of corrupt officials, racketeers, criminals and other lawbreakers. The rule of law will disappear in several regions. Sri Lanka will then be "one country" only in name and the people disunited even more than ever before, because various dissident groups will be fighting to grab what is left of the wealth of the people. Economic hardships will be the driving force for such groups to emerge and they will be helped by the lack of honest and effective enforcement of law and order. This scenario is not imaginary, it exists in those countries in Africa and elsewhere where internal conflicts have not been resolved in time. If the leaders do not move forward courageously towards the peace goal, such a tragedy cannot be an unlikely scenario in Sri Lanka. This is the message that must get registered fast in the minds of all peace loving people. □

speakers also outlined their desire for peace and pointed out that the minorities lived peacefully under Sinhala kings.

The urged the government to keep in mind the more than 2,000 years of history of this land when handling matters of national importance, like the constitution.

Well the written history - whose authenticity is always a subject of intellectual debate - may suggest that Tamils and Muslims co-existed peacefully with the Sinhalese. Yes, within the socio-political and economic order of that era, it seemed a sine-qua-non for survival. It was long before this country was colonised, the introduction of democratic values like equality and freedom and the Sinhalese elite took over the political leadership from the British.

Many were the scenarios that have passed by the landscape of socio-political and economic order of the world. Today the situation is different. What we need is a system for peace that will fit today's environment.

In the light of this, the question that arises is whether the Sinhala Commission citing history is asking all of us to revert to a feudal, political and social structure where a Sinhala Buddhist king would command the obeisance of all his subjects. Or does it want a constitutional clause that the head of state should be a Sinhala Buddhist and this country never be identified as a pluralistic one.

The need of the hour is not any move that would increase the communal hatred in the minds of the people but efforts that would bring the people together. On this score, the Sinhala Commission has failed in its civil duty, through its reports tackle logically the constitutional obstacles to an adverse economic consequence of the devolution package.

One of the speakers at Wednesday's ceremony, opposing the package said the country was a unitary state even during the colonial period. But he failed to mention that sovereignty lay elsewhere. It seems having a foreign sovereign as head of state is acceptable to the proponents of the Sinhala Commission but power sharing with a people of this country to restore peace is demonic.

We conjure up a tear-drop or an inverted mango-like land block when Sri Lanka is mentioned. Our nationalistic feelings constitute this image and we refuse to compromise on it. A liberal and fair-minded nationalist may, however say "take anything but not part of the land" which he considers his country. A federal system which would not change the geographical shape of Sri Lanka is acceptable to a liberal nationalist.

Within this framework, a devolution package or a constitution which contains

The Worsening Human Rights Situation

Frederica Jansz

Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar in his address at the 52nd General Assembly of the United Nations called on the international community to declare the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) a terrorist group and close their doors to the Tigers fund raising campaigns on foreign soil. Kadirgamar focused his speech on children being used in armed conflict, calling for the eradication the use of children being used to fight wars under the ages of 18. The Minister stressed the need for strict adherence to the Convention on the Rights of the Child by all actors in armed conflicts. He further blamed NGOs and other groups for not lending voice to the issue of child soldiers in Sri Lanka, recruited mainly by the LTTE.

Since the Peoples Alliance government assumed power in 1994, it has continued to advocate an improved human rights situation in Sri Lanka. Promising the rights of minority groups will not be violated the present political administration in Sri Lanka recently set up a Human Rights Commission.

The Human Rights Commission (HRC) appointed by the government is however sadly lacking in initiative and drive and has not yet adopted a proactive role. Rarely is an official available at the HRC offices in Colombo to answer queries or more important, record statements of human rights violations. One HRC official said the Committee intends opening an office in Jaffna but cannot find the right personnel to man such a post. It would require a knack of knowing how to "deal with both sides," he said. The HRC is met with scepticism in Colombo, while many human rights activ-

ists maintain this body needs to get its act together first in Colombo before embarking on a project that will end before it has even begun.

it could be seen as an attempt to bring about peace. Whether peace would dawn as a result of this is another question but the attempt has to be encouraged if the spirit of it is aimed at peace. If the Sinhala Commissionists and the members of the National Joint Committee are opposed to the devolution package, the democratic system - which some of them termed western scrap unsuitable for Sri Lanka - demands that their right to be heard should not be denied.

Let them do their work, and the government its. The people will decide.

(Courtesy of Sunday Times)

ists maintain this body needs to get its act together first in Colombo before embarking on a project that will end before it has even begun.

Although it is claimed that normalcy has returned to Jaffna, several protests and demands not only about missing persons but also about many other basic rights are often voiced. More than 500 persons are reported to have gone missing since government forces occupied Jaffna. Recently the government suggested this figure to be vastly exaggerated, claiming names in the missing persons list had been doubled. In spite of government rhetoric sincere attempts made by some local bodies to make independent inquiries into cases of missing persons draw a blank.

However it is not only the government forces who remain guilty of human rights violations. The LTTE too were recently found guilty by Amnesty International for not adhering to and maintaining a basic human rights profile.

Government forces continue to initiate acts of terror against sections of the civilian population in the north and east of the country. The most recent was the murder of more than ten Tamil villagers in Amparai on September 24 by Policemen of the area. The Policemen attached to the Central Camp Police Station are reported to have gone on the rampage and invaded the 4th colony, a village in Amparai, killing more than ten and injuring at least fifteen Tamil civilians. A number of houses were also reported to have been torched by these policemen. The police are reported to have carried out this attack in retaliation to the killing of a policeman and a soldier by unidentified persons at the 3rd colony, Amparai. Hundreds of houses belonging to Tamils were torched in this incident. The police personnel have since been transferred pending an inquiry, but not before instilling terror into the remaining villagers of the area.

Rev. Arulpalan is yet another murder committed by unknown forces in the north. A priest of Konavil, in the Killinochchi district, Arulpalan was reportedly taken in for questioning by the Sri Lankan Army on 25th August this year. He was not seen again until his decomposed body was discovered on 9th September together with two others in a hastily dug

grave. Aid workers in the northern peninsula said one of the bodies had its head cut off.

While there is no proof or evidence yet as to who could be responsible, humanitarian organisations assert a serious problem exists in the Vanni where the Army have admitted to killing on sight any human detected crossing the line from uncleared territory to government controlled land. Security Forces personnel say they cannot take any chances as it could be the LTTE. Some 90 persons have gone missing since the beginning of this year from this particular area in the Killinochchi district.

Acts of murder and disappearance in the north and east seem to continue unabated while the voice of human rights activists in Colombo seems to have become less effective. It is indeed pathetic that a vacuum has been created for members from some political factions with blood on their hands to fill this vacuum virtuously pledging the causes of human rights.

Brutal forms of torture still continue to be reported in many a police station and prison. Amnesty International has recently lent focus to the extent of torture in various countries - torture which

is calculated to disintegrate the mind of an intelligent victim. In Sri Lanka it has become an almost accepted stance to perceive that if one is a Tamil and arrested on suspicion of being connected with the LTTE it is a duty committed by the armed forces to protect the country from terrorism.

The present censorship on news relating to the situation in the north is one of the main reasons for even those well meaning people to remain in ignorance of the appalling human rights violations that continue in Sri Lanka today. The lack of independent news coverage whereby even foreign correspondents are barred from visiting certain areas in this country is also the reason for the governments own failure to sell the proposed devolution package in the South.

The murder of Rev. Arulpalan has not caused any ripples in government or military circles. He was just another Tamil mistaken to be a Tiger. The brutal slaying of all those other Tamil people also do not require any explanation according to the authorities who when questioned did not even know a serious problem exists in the north for hundreds of civilians attempting to cross the line from rebel held territory to government land.

Many of these civilians are farmers and others who for various reasons are forced to make that crossing into Killinochchi and other areas in order to complete a days work. However the military say the LTTE too move around in civilian attire and so no chances can be taken.

Meanwhile a Defence Ministry statement asserted that the murder of Rev. Arulpalan could be an act of the LTTE to discredit the armed forces. The press release countered allegations that the priest had been taken into military custody before his body was found saying the church is situated outside the boundaries of the area cleared by the armed forces which is not accessible to service personnel. The Defence Ministry statement further asserts that government troops maintain a reciprocative rapport with over five hundred thousand civilians in the peninsula.

Tamil political party leaders in Colombo too have faulted the government for failure to solve the grievances of Tamil civilians. They allege the government turns a blind eye to the arbitrary arrests of Tamil people in the south, refugees being harassed at Vavuniya by security force personnel and the lack of a regu-



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lar ferry service from the areas of Trincomalee and Mannar to Jaffna. The ferry service has been disrupted following LTTE attacks on vessels carrying returning refugees. Some 10,000 civilians are reportedly stranded at Trincomalee awaiting transportation to Jaffna.

Other than appealing to the President there seems to be no mechanism in place to effectively monitor the human rights situation in the country. Non-Governmental Organisations also seem to have receded into a state of lethargy allowing the atrocities to continue. While it is true efforts are being made by sections in the military to win the hearts and minds of the Tamil people in the north and east, excesses and violations continue.

Meanwhile a government propaganda drive is rolling along at half steam to promote the power sharing package. The theme of the campaign "one country - one people" seems to be misplaced when thousands of Tamil people in the north and east are today living under conditions that are anything but similar to that of their brothers and sisters in the south. Some of them have lost all their belongings and are totally dependent on the governments relief measures and other aid. Problems faced by people in the Vanni are unimaginable as they remain a lost entity, minus food, medicine and other essential items.

Some 50,000 people from the east recently called for an end to the war. A memorandum requesting an immediate cease-fire was handed over to the ICRC. The military are reported to lose some 700 soldiers every three months in the long drawn out battle against the rebels. The loss to rebel cadre can only be guessed. The stark reality is, death and destruction are common features in Sri Lankan society making little or no impact as it does not affect the so-called middle and upper classes in the south of the country.

Incidents of rape continues unabated. The most recently publicised case reported from the east of the country was that of the alleged rape and murder of Mrs Murugesapillai Koneswary, mother of four, who according to reports was raped and killed by the exploding of a hand grenade on her abdomen. It was believed that the grenade was used to destroy all evidence of gang rape. JMO for Colombo L D D C Alwis later said the issue of rape could not be determined due to the body being in a highly decomposed state. The autopsy, which was undertaken solely to determine whether or not Mrs. Koneswary had been raped, did not address the cause of death, which according to Dr. Alwis is not in dispute.

Two members of the Vigilant Coali-

tion who visited Mrs. Koneswarys home soon after the incident say a large hole has been left in the concrete floor of the thatched hut which bears the marks of the explosion. Blood and shrapnel bear witness to the dastardly crime that took place on May the 17th this year.

According to Koneswarys neighbours, the former had numerous problems with the Police at Central Camp in the Kalmunal district, which included frequent and persistent harassment at the Central Camp checkpoint. Two months prior to her murder, police from Central Camp had allegedly come to Mrs. Koneswarys home and cut down and took away a Margosa tree from her yard. Although she is reported to have quickly filed a complaint with the OIC at Central Camp, nothing was done. Subsequently Mrs. Koneswary had travelled to Ampara and complained to the DIG of Ampara who intervened on her behalf, instructing the Central Camp police to return the timber to the family. It was after this incident that the verbal abuse and sexual harassment of Mrs. Koneswary began.

As a result on the 27th of May, at approximately 11.00 p.m. as described by her four-year old daughter, some "uncles with guns" had entered the hut carried the little girl outside and left her near a neighbours fence. According to villagers Mrs. Koneswary had that night sent her eldest three children to her relatives nearby keeping only her four-year-old daughter with her. The child is the sole witness, to the ensuing crime.

An inquiry ordered by the President does not seem to be getting anywhere as human rights activists claim it is not even known as to who has been delegated the task of conducting the investigation into the Koneswary murder case.

The Mothers Front of Jaffna has written twice to President Kumaratunge, demanding the withdrawal of the Emergency Regulations and protesting against the rape of women by members of the security forces. A section of the letter states, reprisals by the security

forces against civilians and their property have now become a common feature. These search for "terrorists" the letter states, has now resulted in the indiscriminate arrest of innocent persons and children, rape of women and young girls and plunder and looting.

The Centre for Womens Research in Sri Lanka, CENWOR also in a letter to the President, states the incidence of gang rape in civilian environments in this country is high. In most instances these crimes continue to go unpunished and undetected.


The Government is engaged in an immense effort to win the confidence of the civilian population of Jaffna and find a solution to the war. CENWOR had queried these initiatives asking how can national or international credibility be acquired when this type of grave crime is committed by members of the armed forces against defenceless females.

Unfortunately such incidents when they go unpunished or are not condemned by the majority community, provide fodder for the LTTE who will thrive in such situations encouraging Tamil women to enlist with the organisation.

Meanwhile a frustrated activist for human rights asked, "Why is it always necessary to approach the President each time?" Why, she says, are there no proper mechanisms in place to which these issues could be addressed and a witness protection program be implemented in order that such crimes do not escape justice.

In the murder case of Krishanthi Kumaraswamy nine soldiers have been charged on eleven counts including the killing of Krishanthi and three members from her family. Krishanthi too in September last year was forcibly raped and was later murdered by a group of eleven soldiers.

The questions now being asked is how sincere the government is towards implementing and maintaining a credible record on human rights. □

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JAFFNA - FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Dr Thayalan Ambalavanar, Jaffna

*Mid pleasures and palaces though we may roam
Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home.*

- J H Payne

As the Russian-built Ukrainian-man-ned Lion airways plane began its descent, I felt a surge of excitement course through me. We had just overflow the islands of Delft, Kayts and Karainagar, but this was going to be my first aerial view of the peninsula in twenty years and my first view of my homeland in just over ten years. It was to be the first of many disappointments.

The familiar clusters of palmyrah trees that I remembered covering the landscape around the Palaly airfield were now few and scattered. No doubt cleared for security reasons. Those that remained however, stood tall, straight and proud. As we clambered down onto Jaffna soil, the heat of the dry, parched land hit me almost like a physical blow. The mild summers of the west were hardly the best preparation for the sweat covered condition that was to be mine from arrival!

The journey by bus from Palaly to Yalpannam gave me the first opportunity to assess the changes that had taken place in the last ten years. After the first few miles, a sense of despondency settled over me. My eyes were met by the sight of the dry, rain-stained land where houses were in ruins, where vehicles, other than ours, were non-existent and a landscape was devoid of civilians. The surprisingly excellent condition of the road was small consolation. However, every few miles we encountered the presence of confident troops at numerous checkpoints, and apparently, in full control of the situation.

It was a while before the first civilian occupied areas were encountered. People, obviously not well-off, straggled along the roads. The iron steed of Jaffna, the bicycle, was a ubiquitous presence on the road. The sight of men and women having to dismount these at the numerous checkpoints became a familiar sight. May houses, though damaged, were still occupied. It was hard to imagine what life in those conditions must be like.

As we approached Yalpanam it was evident that the Palaly road was the only one in good condition - again for the convenience of the army. Most other roads could be termed as such only due to the patches of tarmac that still exist between

the potholes! My long-awaited sight of Yalpanam itself, revealed a town showing all too clearly the effects of nearly fourteen years of bombing, shelling and neglect. Some of the streets retained their familiarity, but even here there was hardly a building that was not pock-marked by bullets or shrapnel. The "New Marke", Duriappah's proud creation, had suffered tremendously and the bus stand area itself has shrunk in size while large areas of the town have become incorporated into a large army camp. In the midst of this destruction and decay, however, the Tamil small businessman has managed to keep his shops well stocked with items from Colombo. Having imagined that, due to the lack of electricity, I would not get another cool drink after leaving Colombo, I was pleasantly surprised to be able to get one, albeit at three times the Colombo price! (Yet more evidence of our entrepreneurial skills!). The town is one of the few areas that does get a limited supply of electricity at night, but this is patchy and intermittent.

Over the next few days I had opportunity to see more of the town. The sight of utter devastation that exists in the immediate environs of the town hall and library was heartbreaking. Buildings have been levelled and all that remains is rubble amidst which workers try and retrieve bricks for use elsewhere. Between the ruins of the town hall and library stands proud, tall and intact, the memorial column to S J V Chelvanayakam. A sad reminder of lofty principles, high ideas and hopes that today is a sad and crushing reality.

Fourteen years of war and deprivation have taken a heavy toll on the peninsula and its people. Survival is what it's all about now. The gradual gravitation backwards appears to have been particularly hastened by the enforced 'displacement' that took place in November 1995. The effects of the physical uprooting of a community together with the neglect that the land suffered in those months are all too evident. There appears to be much residual bitterness at that experience.

The middle class community no longer appears to exist in Jaffna in any

significant size. Those who belonged to the poorer sections are now the dominant group, both by virtue of their own efforts and by the voluntary exile of others. Even for them the opportunities for work and further advancement in the peninsula are few. Those who can, will leave and add to the vast Tamil diaspora that exists in Colombo and abroad.

In the face of all these difficulties, educational institutions have continued to function and maintain the standards for which they are renowned. Education - the foundation of the Jaffna person's progress remains as important as ever - if not more. There appears to have been no diminution in the number of tutorials available, including some with enthusiastic titles like 'Keen Academy'! Unfortunately at present all this will only help lead more young people out of the peninsula.

Jaffna, with its lack of electricity, limited transport and facilities (including medical) and the ongoing brain drain has gone backwards in terms of development and progress. To bring it back to a level that existed even prior to 1983 will take many years of hard work and imaginative leadership. Hard work and the Tamil people are old friends! The grit and determination that these hardy people have shown over these turbulent years allied to their ingenuity and resourcefulness can prove equal to the task. Provided of course there is the stability that can be brought about only by a just political settlement. The latter remains as much a mirage as always.

During my years in the west, I have heard many Tamil expatriates speak nostalgically of their happy days in Yalpanam. They remember those days when they awoke to the sounds of a cock crowing or to the peel of temple bells. They remembered reclining in 'easy' chairs or the veranda, wafted by soft breezes. They remembered that most civilised 'practices' - the afternoon siesta, with a smile! The sweetness of the Jaffna mango, they say, is unmatched by other fruit. To them I can only say that, I am lucky to be rediscovering these and other wonderful realities that can come only from being here in one's homeland.

Life in Jaffna at present is certainly no bed of roses, but the people remain hopeful that, as in the words of that popular song, - 'Things can only get better'. (September 1997)

"When men are oppressed, tortured and killed, it is called oppression, but when women are tortured and killed, it is called tradition."

-Talsima Nasreen, Bangladesh Writer

JAFFNA: A VISION SKEWED

[Text of Special Report No 9 dated 7 June 1997
by the University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna)]

(Continued from last issue)

A particular group of vulnerable persons, whose numbers could rise to more than 150,000 with the current military situation in the Vanni, is of a kind that has been unknown during this century. These are mainly Vanni returnees from the late 1995 exodus. They record a high incidence of septicaemia, malaria, cerebral malaria, typhoid and the so-called 'fire fever'. The latter has been known particularly among Jaffna's displaced population from about 1991. The victims succumb within two days. These people have to carry the scars of the 'Exodus' that was primarily a game for those who articulated it.

Yet little has been heard about concern for the health needs of the people from those who were vocal on the subject when the LTTE was in control. It would appear as though their medical problems had ceased to exist along with the people themselves. The romance in highlighting their problems has vanished. Jaffna no longer has the glamour where expatriates could come in and carry back a coveted video record of their having tea with LTTE functionaries. Jaffna is only fit to be a free-fire zone. (See addendum on Jaffna hospital.)

Those who have tried to persuade Tamil doctors to come and work in Jaffna, even from Colombo, have found the effort singularly unrewarding. The British Foreign Minister who was in Jaffna last December had also made the observation that efforts at trying to persuade Tamil doctors in Britain to spend a short time in Jaffna while receiving all the benefits of working in Britain, also turned out to be futile. The propaganda is such that even those who may have considered going to Jaffna are being discouraged by fellow Tamils. In Jaffna itself several middle class areas are largely empty of inhabitants. There may be just one couple who have the care of parents, grand parents, uncles, aunts and other elders whose other descendants had left. One such young man who was himself being asked to come abroad by his doctor brother, who told him that there is soon going to be an attack to

liberate Jaffna, observed sceptically: "*In earlier years those who were leaving Jaffna were considered traitors in LTTE propaganda. Now supported by LTTE propaganda those abroad consider themselves patriots, while we who are trying to keep life going for ourselves and those around us are regarded as traitors!*"

13. The Search for Remedial Measures

We stated at the beginning that the issue of missing persons is a reflection of much of what has happened. The numbers missing in each division is also a measure of the gulf between the people and the authorities in the area. As for external consequences, the Government may well get away by dragging its feet and inviting foreign observers at some convenient time to report that the human rights situation has improved in a technical sense. Yet it is widely recognised that quantitative improvement is farcical unless it is matched by benign institutional changes and the removal of repressive laws. Of these we have seen nothing. Even the President's feeble attempts at reform could make only a limited and temporary impact as they are not supported by criteria or processes for evaluation, matched by a system of rewards and punishments to encourage certain tendencies and to discourage others.

Thus pressure needs to be constantly applied to hold the Government accountable in the fullest sense possible. Means must be developed to counter the Government's evasiveness. Apart from individual tragedies, the failure to address the human rights issue fully or to merely treat it as a public relations ritual, poisons the political atmosphere to a point where the options left are unserviceable.

Given the situation described in this report, one could easily see how the situation could deteriorate if the human rights question is not addressed urgently: The gulf between the Army and the people will grow, the Army becoming more harsh with the people in re-

sponse to LTTE provocations that include more frequent attacks on anyone perceived as an opponent. Terror takes over the community. All those who had hitherto lacked the courage or conviction to take any stand whatsoever, would take refuge behind slogans like "It is wrong to criticise the LTTE" and "You could never trust a Sinhalese government or a Sinhalese army".

We have been here before and it is political terrain in which the LTTE feels most at home, where it has so far found no match. Its job would become about as easy as carrying out selective assassinations and keeping up provocations. Then all those, who took bold initiatives, spoke up or tried something different and constructive, would find themselves isolated, frustrated and even eliminated.

In such an impasse talks with the LTTE would be advanced as a lifeline, not as being about democracy, peace or devolution, but as a truce - an elusive truce between two oppressive agents, both having good deal to hide. There will be nothing in it for the people. We have been here before too.

Variants of these very real dangers must be kept in mind while addressing what needs to be done. To begin with, the Government should not be allowed to get away with further excuses for not opening up Jaffna fully. If human rights organisations and journalists have unhindered access, it would do a lot of good. Jaffna has two options. It could improve dramatically or die the slow death it is undergoing now.

To those who were prepared to ignore the hidden realities of the LTTE's regime, what obtains in Jaffna today looks more repressive - freedom of movement has been curtailed, arrest is less predictable and crime seems more conspicuous. But many of those who have lived through the vicissitudes of the last two decades refuse to see things so pessimistically. There is today more freedom, perhaps just a little more, to speak one's mind openly, if they dare. With varying degrees of clarity, many see the crucial importance of pushing this freedom to its limits.

It is futile to compare what occurred under the LTTE with what exists today. That would be to apply static criteria instead of looking at what could be done. When the Sri Lankan Army, which in the past had alienated the ordinary Tamil by its actions and its virtual transformation as a Sinhalese Army, tries to administer without much political initiative, people resent its overriding authority as well as its inefficient functioning. The LTTE regime, being part of the community, having suppressed all forms of independent initiative by the people, was

able to provide the elementary services with much efficiency. But the politics of the LTTE has a very dangerous flaw: its constant need to enhance the very real insecurity faced by the Tamil people, tap their lower instincts for hatred and revenge, and so use them to further brutalise the 'enemy'. It progressively suppresses any potential there is for peace building. The tragic plight of the Vanni returnees from the engineer-led exodus of late 1995 is characteristic of what it will bring again and again. This makes the freedom of thought and expression far less abstract and equally more precious.

The people who flocked back to Jaffna in April 1996 saw some changes - an army that was disciplined, and a government which showed at least a vision of finding a political solution to the ethnic problem. This vision was allowed to become skewed. The reader of this report, we hope, would have found food for thought on what needs to be done to redeem that vision.

ADDENDUM

Miscellany on Jaffna Teaching Hospital
From 1986 when shells fired by the army from Jaffna Fort fell in and around Jaffna Teaching Hospital (JTH), it has occupied a central place in the drama sur-

rounding the war. On the one hand the hospital was crucial to the morale and well-being of the community, and on the other there was propaganda benefit to be derived from incidents that pointed to the Government's ill-will or malignity towards the hospital. With the politics having become serpentine and callous, the issues concerning the vicissitudes of the hospital have never been clear-cut. (See the Broken Palmyrah' and subsequent reports of the UTHR(J).) From its heyday in the early 80's when the medical profession in Jaffna counted a number of persons of international standing and the future promised great things, the hospital is today faced with many uncertainties. The current position is briefly reviewed below. **Staff Position: Only the department of medicine that counts three specialists - Dr (Mrs) Ganeshamoorthy, Dr (Mrs) Nagendra and Dr. Anandaraja - could be said to be stable. A few departments having consultants/specialists, but where the position remains shaky are: Ophthalmology (Dr. Kugasthasan,) ENT (Dr. Sivasubramaniam), Obstetrics (Dr. Karunakaran, supported by the Resident Obstetrician, Dr. Gunaratnam) & Pathology (Dr. (Miss) Sinnappah). There is an anaesthetist (Dr (Mrs) Theivedran), but there had been no surgeon**

since the return of refugees in April 1996 until the arrival of the MSF surgeon on 1st April 1997. Some positions with no consultant/specialist are: Paediatrician, Neurologist, Neuro-Surgeon, OPD (for the past six years) & Surgeon.

The hospital is very short of junior level doctors, among whom are Senior House Officers (SHOs). These persons are normally recruited a year after passing out as doctors. But in Jaffna an SHO now means something much more. A number of them have served six years in that position without going elsewhere to further themselves in the profession as was normally the case. Many felt obliged to delay their departure as there was no one to relieve them. Though lacking avenues to attend conferences, seminars and in general discuss their work in broader fora, the work during the war years was such that they had acquired valuable experience and skills - sometimes even performing surgical operations.

Some of the staff positions as at present are: Medicine - 2 out of 4 SHO positions filled; Obstetrics - 2 out of 3; Surgery - nil out of 3; Paediatrics - nil. Out of 26 vacancies for interns, only 5 are filled. Labourers - no apparent shortage after 70 were recruited recently by



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advertisement. Nurses- short by 120 out of a total of about 300 positions. Despite the dire shortage, 24 hours coverage is provided through voluntary arrangements among doctors.

Some reasons for the shortage:

The isolation of Jaffna and the lack of senior persons from whom skills can be acquired or guidance sought, has made JTH unattractive for the young wanting to move ahead. The natural first step should therefore be to attract senior persons, and to address the question why those fairly well settled in Jaffna life have left. There are also reasons besides the more obvious ones related to the war with no end in sight. Those remaining do so for a mixture of reasons- eg. professional or moral dedication, a strong bond with the place and its people, facing a rare challenge - and in sum, service and life in Jaffna offers them a satisfaction they could not get elsewhere.

What recent events, particularly the '95 exodus had done, was to virtually wipe off the modest capital several of them had for an emergency as land and property, thus putting them under much pressure. It has been pointed out that the money that is available to redress this shortage could perhaps be used far more effectively. USAID spends an estimated Rs.6 lakhs (US\$ 10 000) a month to provide 3 MSF personnel who are much needed. If a similar sum from well-wishers is used to provide incentives for a few years to local doctors who would work in Jaffna, the results, it is averred, would be more effective and permanent. The health ministry too, it is said, would do well to address an anomaly that obliges returning senior expatriate doctors to work on contract at the lowest point of the consultant's scale, with no allowances.

Medical Supplies to Jaffna

Requests for supplies have to be endorsed by the Ministry of Health and then processed by the Ministry of Defence. When Jaffna was under LTTE control, the first was routine while the latter (MoD) made cuts in the list before passing it. From April 1996 the MoD has made no cuts except for disallowing Ketamine, an anaesthetic that could be used in the field.

All gifts to Jaffna Hospital need MoD approval, and this is now routinely granted. NGOs (e.g. ICRC&MSF) are now not allowed to take their own supplies of medicine to Jaffna. The MSF for example has to get its medicines from JTH. Previously, under LTTE control, the NGOs used to supplement what JTH received in short- supply. A hospital spokesman said that the NGOs still had the option of donating the medicines to

JTH in Colombo, which would then be approved by the MoD, transported to Jaffna and then be available from JTH.

Up to the end of last year, the JTH however had problems with supplies. The Commissioner General of Essential Services, who is said to have been unsympathetic and has since been replaced, had insisted that medical supplies to Jaffna should go in normal cargo vessels and not in the ICRC ship that did weekly trips to Jaffna. This had resulted in long delays (e.g. 25 days from Colombo to JTH) and up to 30% loss by pilferage. Matters came to a crisis during Deepavali (November) 1996, when merchants used their influence to push the ship with medicines out of KKS harbour and unload instead vessels with festive goodies and aerated waters. The resulting shortage of medicines led to protests and the question of transport by the ICRC was taken up again. The minister of health is regarded both sympathetic and co-operative.

Buildings and Infrastructure

Sections of some buildings (e.g. surgical ward) were badly damaged. The three storey maternity block that faces Victoria Road and the Army HQ (i.e. Subash Hotel) is not used since the Army has cited security reasons and forbidden its use. This has been a sore point which the hospitals authorities have raised with the Army again and again. The Army too has changed its mind several times on the matter. Maternity patients now use the very inadequate ground floor of an incomplete building with no proper labour room. Bed space is so short that patients are sent to the floor 3 hours after delivery. (It used to be 24 hours during 1995.) Patients not wanting to risk having labour pains during curfew hours have also contributed to the congestion.

The Army HQ being close by has also resulted in a constant intrusion of security personnel into the hospital premises. The wall at the corner of Victoria Road and Power House Road has been broken and a sentry point has been sited there, making the staff anxious about moving to and from the nearby Intensive Care Unit during the night.

The general health of the population:

An indicator of present conditions is the significant rise in infant mortality. In times before the war the quality of life index for Jaffna District was among the highest. Both the birth rate and infant mortality were below the national average. Today infant mortality is about 30% higher than the national average of around 33 per 1,000. Asked if the present disabilities faced by Jaffna Hospi-

tal have had a significant adverse effect on the population, resulting in a higher death rate, a senior doctor at the hospital replied that there would have been an adverse effect, but at the same time it would be difficult to quantify. The answer he said is more complicated. To begin with, he said, those who come to the hospital are already a select group who are more knowledgeable than others. The very poor often do not come at all. Much more important, he said, is the breakdown of paramedical services and pre-natal care, particularly in the more rural areas. He also confirmed that the effect of the Vanni returnees has been to boost the adverse statistics significantly.

As for the more critical cases, he said, their transfer to Colombo is today more streamlined because of the ICRC ship going every week. Giving an example of a very critical case, he cited the case of a girl with a sub arachnoid bleed who needed brain surgery. She had come to Jaffna hospital on a Monday in mid May. On Tuesday she was flown to Colombo by an airforce plane. The catch here, he said, was that her family had to pay for her air transport and for those who accompanied her (Rupees 3,200/= per person). This is something that cannot be afforded by those who are poor. But he felt that it may be possible to transfer the expense away from the patient if the matter is taken up for discussion.

Post-mortem examinations

From what we have been able to find out, neither the Army nor any other section of the security forces has applied any form of pressure on JTH as regards post-mortem examinations. The shortcomings in these examinations, the senior doctor said, have more to do with the lack of experience, exposure and specialised training on the part of the doctors performing these examinations. Normally such persons should have regular opportunity to discuss their work at conferences and also have had specialised training abroad. These are among the handicaps faced by young doctors in Jaffna. Some of the cases covered in our reports are instructive.

In our Special Report No 7, of August 1996, we recorded the case of the university entrant who was tortured at the Kalviankaadu army camp, was admitted to Jaffna Hospital when he started having fits and later died. The boy had an enlarged kidney and high blood pressure, a condition deemed unconnected with torture. The post-mortem examination also revealed a blood clot in the brain, almost certainly connected with indiscriminate assault. The doctor was

(continued on next page)

clear in his mind that torture had been the cause of death. The hospital reported the matter to the HQI, KKS Police. The HQI took the matter seriously and placed 12 soldiers under arrest. The army captain at the camp approached a doctor concerned and wanted to know the cause of death. He wanted to protect his men and kept arguing that the enlarged kidney was the cause of death. The doctor refused to discuss the matter further. But he was clear that no intimidation was involved. A judicial officer visited Jaffna and the doctor agreed to testify in court at Anuradhapura. As is too often the case in such situations, nothing more was heard. The senior doctor added that even today, if the hospital authorities reported any finding of foul play to the police, the normal investigation and arrest would take place. But whether things would go beyond that is yet to be demonstrated.

In the same report (Sp. Rp 7) we reported abuses at Kaladdy army camp. During the same period the body of a youth was sent to JTH by the army who claimed that he had died in a shooting incident. On the surface this seemed acceptable. But later one doctor noticed that there was an entry wound, but no exit wound. He became suspicious, as when he returned to Jaffna in April last year, he found a knife left behind by a soldier who had been in the house. It was of the kind that was driven into a person and then given a twist. He got a technician to x-ray the corpse and found that there was no bullet found in the body. He concluded that the youth had died from stabbing. But it is not known whether he recorded his conclusion. Often working in an environment where there is no seriousness about taking action, doctors doing post-mortem examinations tend to become despondent over the seeming futility of their work. Now for two cases dealt with in the present report.

We referred to doubts concerning the cause of death of 9 civilians in connection with Ponnalai mine explosion of 29th January 1997. The Army had claimed that the mine explosion rather than firing by the soldiers had been the cause of death. The senior doctor who spoke to us said that there was no finding to contradict the army's version. There were no bullets found in any of the bodies. But, he added that this was corroboratory as regards the Army's claim, but not confirmatory. He said that one normally does not find bullets in the body as they generally pass through leaving an entry wound and an exit wound. In the Ponnalai incident no foreign particles were found in the bodies. Apart from objects hitting the body in an explosion,

Benazir Bhutto Compelled to "Settle Accounts"

Ramesh Gopalakrishnan

Switzerland is good for climate, watches and banks without account numbers. Swiss banks are part of the mystique and intrigue in the Indian subcontinent. For ordinary mortals like us, the Swiss banks are places which certainly contain the ill-gotten wealth of the politicians around. This was amply proved by the still-unresolved Bofors gundeal scandal, where the Indian sleuths brought back, from Switzerland, literally a black box supposedly containing the secret beneficiaries of "commissions", an euphemism for bribes!

Swiss bank accounts are sans names of the account holders and numbers assigned to them, and hence no one



death could also occur, he said, due to tissue damage from the air hammer effect, leaving no external injury. He said that given the fact that the Army's integrity in such matters is not rated high, one needs to be more careful.

If after shooting a person, the Army subjects the body to a bomb explosion, it would be difficult to determine the cause of death, unless the doctor concerned was an expert who could distinguish between a bullet injury and an injury from a particle shot out by an exploding mine also leaving entry and exit wounds. It would, he said, have taken the calibre of someone like the late Professor Saravananathan to make the distinction. He added that in the case of Ponnalai incident, local opinion from the Moolai area seemed to suggest that the army's version was correct. The doctor was then asked about the Puttur mine incident where the post-mortem report seemed to have concluded that the 16 year old boy had died from the mine explosion, whereas in fact, he was seen alive following the explosion. "This may be a case in the point I made," he replied, "There was no intention in the part of the doctors to give a false report. If the body had several injuries of the kind described, death due to the mine explosion would have seemed a natural conclusion. But these injuries could have been faked. The Jaffna Medical Association is very concerned about maintaining a high standard of professionalism in post-mortem examinations as is possible under present conditions," he concluded. □

is likely to know to whom an account belongs. All big-time politicians from all parts of the world, especially political dynasties from the sub-continent, are rumoured to have stashed away huge funds in Swiss banks. This money is certain to be laundered brought back to the home-countries for personal or political use especially during election-time to bolster up electoral successes which again will guarantee opportunities to be in power to stash away more and more of their ill-gotten gains.

The Bhutto dynasty seems to have lost its mystique, at least once, in contemporary Pakistan's troubled history. The reason: freezing stuff in Swiss land! Yes, certain Swiss banks have frozen, since September 8, four accounts of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto, her husband (better known as Mr. Thirty Percent) Asif Zardari and mother Begum Nusrat Bhutto. The banks, acting on a request from the Pakistan government, went on to defend their decision to freeze the accounts. However, the Pakistan government has not yet conclusively proved the corruption allegations against Zardari, who has been in prison pending investigations after being accused of hatching a conspiracy to murder Benazir's brother Murtaza Bhutto.

Pakistan has a new post to fight top-level corruption: something Indian prime minister I K Gujral could create immediately! The post in Islamabad is held by Senator Saifur Rahman, chief of the Ehtasab (Accountability) Cell. His job is to co-ordinate the various full scale

(continued on next page)

probes against Benazir and Zardari. The Ehtasab cell is under the direct supervision of prime minister Nawaz Shariff. According to Rahman, an amount of 50 to 80 million US dollars had been hidden in the Swiss accounts. Rahman also made it clear that Benazir would have to return all the ill-gotten wealth to the public.

Pakistan has gone a step ahead, seeking the permission of British and French authorities to freeze accounts of Benazir and Bhutto. The Ehtasab Cell has worked hard to obtain copies of four letters written by Cotenca Inspection and Societe Generale de Surveillance, two companies involved in inspection and evaluation of imports into Pakistan; and letters to three offshore companies, indicating the involvement of Zardari and his associates.

The London-based Sunday Times immediately published a report stating that Benazir was getting sick of Zardari and was about to leave him. The quarrel, resembling a poor soap opera, was over the murder of Murtaza in which Zardari had been named one of the accused. Benazir quickly denied the report, while threatening to take the issue to the British Press Council. However, she didn't deny that part of the reports which said she quietly attempted to manoeuvre her way to get her husband nominated to the Pakistan Senate!

The next bombshell came in the form of a news report which alleged that the Bhutto family had stashed away more than three billion US dollars in foreign countries. The report damned Benazir further by saying that much of the money came from drug-trafficking profits and is known to have been blocked in assets held in Britain, France, Switzerland, Luxembourg and even Poland! To counter the allegations, Benazir attempted to evolve a strategy of verifying the Pakistan government's claims. She decided to send a delegation of lawyers to Switzerland. However, the Swiss authorities confirmed to Benazir that action was taken on receipt of valid documents.

Benazir and her aides have attempted to level counter-allegations against prime minister Nawaz Shariff. She claimed that he had got a stay order against the examination of his foreign accounts. In the meantime, her colleague and former minister Naseerullah Babar alleged that Nawaz Shariff's aide and former Intelligence Bureau chief Brig Imtiaz possessed hundreds of thousands of dollars abroad in foreign banks. Who doesn't, if you are in powerful and influential positions in the sub-continent?

Well, the British authorities have confirmed receipt of a letter written by the Pakistani government seeking help to

THE CASE OF SHANKAR RAJEE And Redundant Rebellions

Ramesh Gopalakrishnan

Year 1989 and the end of the cold war. The famous French director Jean-Luc Godard had decided to shoot a film on the German Line which has just been dividing the two worlds: Allegemeine Neuf Zero. As peoples of the Eastern Eu-ropce cross over to the Western paradise, an old man clothed in Sherlock Holmes-style overcoats and pants waits in a railway station. He is the typical Western spy in the socialist Eastern Europe which is just disappearing. The glasnost spy. His project-land has gone and his headquarters in Paris has been dissolved. He finds that every direction leads to the Western world and has nothing to spy about. He has nowhere to go. May be he never should have started out in the first place, but his journey in space and time is destined to be mad. He might well have been the proverbial adventurer in the era of a Miguel Cervantes, but now he is no more than the puzzled Joseph K of Franz Kafka's novel The Trial, who waits eternally for his condemnation at the hands of the judge who is never-to-be!

The condition of someone like Shankar Rajee is similar, but there's a crucial difference. He starts out not from the West, but from the other side: the Third World-that-once-was. Unlike

probe the assets of the two in Britain including a mansion and hotel in Sussex. According to them, no decision had been taken as yet. The probe goes on and Benazir would have to wait for some more time before the next round of anxiety. Nevertheless, Benazir is abroad most of the time, not knowing whether to stay in Pakistan and confront her detractors irrespective of the outcome, or find a safe haven somewhere abroad. An extremely caring mother, she has decided to admit her children to a school in Dubai for the time being.

She also fears that Shariff might use the results of these probes to liquidate her party and also get her disqualified from the parliament thereby bringing an ignominious end to his only powerful political opponent in Pakistan. In that eventuality, she has no option to cry for help from the Pakistani judiciary and trudge the stairs of the court buildings. A long haul for the bold Daughter of the East till her "accounts of the West" in the West are satisfactorily "settled"! □

Godard's dumb and haggard spy played by Lemmy Cauton, Shankar is suave and articulate, having been one of the founders of the Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students (EROS), the pioneer organisation of the separatist Eelam struggle in the Indian Ocean island of Sri Lanka. While Cauton takes trains between the East and the West, Shankar flies between the North and the South. Cauton, in the earlier film Alphaville of Godard, plays the spy to perfection. And Shankar has had his moments of glory having been trained by the late Abu Jihad, the Palestine guerrilla leader and aide of Yasser Arafat. Earlier, Shankar's practice partner was none other than Velupillai Prabhakaran. Militarily, he was no less than a Commandante.

Politically too, Shankar has been part of EROS delegations at various levels.

And now, this legend has to wait inside four walls of the Madras central prison, hoping to go free after a sentence which might never arrive, after all!

Shankar, for the records, was arrested on the night of July 26 by the Customs authorities. The charge: he was carrying currencies worth 54 lakh Indian Rupees which he had not declared. And Shankar's friends in the Indian Intelligence agencies got the alert, but chose to be silent. Hence, the militant leader, who now looks more a visiting executive of a transnational firm, had to trudge to the prison after spending a few hours before a magistrate. He has been detained under a foreign exchange violation act, and no real trial may take place at all. There would only be periodic review sessions at a court where Shankar is free to challenge his detention.

Shankar's is a tough legacy like that of Godard's spy, but there are more differences. Godard's spy is a residue from the past and a dwindling species. Godard's spy is alone. Shankar, though from the past, is part of a community along with his Tamil populace. Whether they travel or not, Shankar's Tamil brothers and sisters wait and wait, in city lodges, port yards, railway stations, airport lounges, quarantine rooms and special refugee camps. While Godard's hero ultimately stays put in a station toilet, Shankar's folk keep moving and moving till geography halts them.

In Tamil Nadu, for instance, hundreds of Tamil militants wait in various jails with-

out trial. Eighteen LTTE supporters were transferred, for instance, from the Mandapam refugee camp near Rameswaram island to the Haider and Tippu Sultan Mahals in the historic Vellore fort. Forty of the LTTE militants staying in the Haider and Tippu Mahals took a leave out of the names of these warriors who had fought the British and broke out of the fort. The jailbreak which took place two years ago shocked Tamil Nadu's politicians and they decided to beef up surveillance in several camps where militants had been lodged.

True, Shankar has no business possessing so much foreign currency, but then, he is no ordinary passenger either. He has been helping his would-be-betrayers, the Indian intelligence officials, for eight long years, ever since the 1987 Indo-Lankan agreement fell through. While the LTTE abhorred the terms of the agreement, a lot of Tamil militant groups saw, in the agreement, an opportunity to re-enter mainstream Lankan politics. The EROS went through an intense debate on the issue for more than two years. EROS leader V Balakumar, who had earlier advocated a softer line on the LTTE, decided to work along with the LTTE after the exit of the Indian troops from Sri Lanka. Living in and travelling through India, Shankar was left with no

option but to charm, with his articulatory abilities, the Indian intelligence agencies. This incurred him the wrath of the LTTE, which had accused leaders of other militant groups of passing on information on the LTTE to the Indian intelligence agencies. And all militant groups in Sri Lanka were slowly marginalised by the LTTE, leaving no space for the emergence of a new leadership. Living in Madras, Shankar kept a low profile and managed to survive, even as LTTE militants went about ruthlessly eliminating other groups. The price he had to pay for this was his proximity with the Indian intelligence agencies.

When these agencies smuggled arms and currencies through militants like Shankar into Sri Lanka, it was all part of a grand strategy to fight the LTTE. Now, Shankar's act has become nothing less than a crime. For the media, Shankar's arrest was just a news item filed by the crime beat reporter. It predictably was small news. True, the media wanted polished militants like him to lend two-line quotes on current events, political or military. (I recall Shankar's dictating from memory over phone the entire contents of the 1987 agreement to journalists). But his arrest evoked no response from the media for nearly a month. Two women journalists, Jaya

Menon and Nirupama Subramaniam, figured out his arrest and wrote on the issue in the Indian Express. The Hindu published a Colombo datelined PTI story quoting EROS general secretary K Sudhakaran of writing an apology letter to Indian Home Minister Indrajit Gupta seeking Shankar's release. All this, predictably, has been of no avail. And Shankar is still in jail.

The heroes of Kafka and Godard are alone. They seek not loneliness but solitude. However, militant leaders, lost as they are, have many colleagues. Seething with rage and embittered by the resulting confusion, they find themselves redundant in the new world. They are in deep trouble with almost no friends in times of distress. But, they too need a lot of time and solitude to reflect on their deeds and words. Yes, they are, yet again, on a New Line Zero. □

"We vest our nations with consciences, identities and memories as if they were individuals. But if it is problematic to vest an individual with a single identity, it is even more so in the case of a nation."

- Michael Ignatieff, Index on Censorship

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Police Go On Rampage

Five people were killed, 35 injured and 45 houses set on fire 23 September by a rampaging group of policemen in the Central Camp 4th Colony in the Amparal district in eastern Sri Lanka apparently in retaliation for the killing of a policeman, a home-guard and soldier on the previous day. Following protests by local parliamentarians and human rights groups, the government has instituted an investigation. In the meantime those suspected of involvement in the rampage have been transferred from their posts pending the probe.

On 22 September, a Monday night at about 8.30pm a group of gunmen presumed to have fired upon a party of four travelling on bicycles and killed three. The incident occurred at Vijithapura or the Central Camp 3rd colony which has a predominantly Sinhala population. The persons killed were a policeman from the Central Camp police station, a home guard from the area, and a soldier currently serving in the north. He had come home to attend a "Dhana" ceremony in Vijithapura. The survivor was a Buddhist priest. One report says that the assassins spared him deliberately while others say that he too was targeted but

(Continued from page 10)

region. Utilising the Tamil majority of Batticaloa the Sinhala ascendancy in Trincomalee has been effectively undermined and Tamil strength enhanced in overall terms.

This gives a fighting chance for the Tamils to mobilise themselves in their entirety and outnumber both the Sinhalese and Muslims in hustings. As such prospects of winning the referendum which needs only 50% + 01b of the total votes cast for victory. Furthermore the provision to create an automatic Muslim majority region in the Amparal district if and only if Trincomalee and Batticaloa districts opt for merging with the North places the Sri Lanka Muslim congress in a position where it would be compelled to canvass in favour of a linkage with the north. It has been the Muslim Congress position that special arrangements for the Muslims are necessary only if and when a North-East linkage is created. The Muslims do not want any special unit if the Eastern Province remains separate from the North.

(To be continued in next issue)

managed to escape.

On the following Tuesday the 23rd at about 2.30pm in broad daylight two groups of persons with firearms, knives, swords, axes and poles "invaded" the predominantly Tamil Central Camp 4th colony. The total number of persons in both groups amounted to a little more than fifty. The Fourth colony agricultural settlement scheme itself consists of three divisions. People living in the third division saw a mob of armed persons entering their area and began running to the second division in fear. To their horror they found a second group of persons entering the second division from another direction.

The bulk of the people in the third and second divisions of the fourth colony were trapped between them. Eyewitness accounts state that some assailants crouched in firing position and let loose on the unarmed civilians. The pathetic people running helter skelter to save their lives were shouting in a fearful frenzy "Arohara" a religious chant of the Hindus at sublime moments of devotion. The people of the first division in the fourth colony escaped to the adjacent tracts of jungle land and were spared the agony of the second and third divisions. It was the area between the points of Farm Adi and Vettai adi at the fourth colony that suffered the most.

The invading "hordes" also assaulted and hacked persons they could lay hands on. Many of the attacked men, women and children ran and cycled to safety by simply taking refuge in the outlying shrub jungle. The mayhem unleashed could have been far more serious but for the timely intervention of the Special Task Force stationed at nearby Sorikkalmunai. The STF rushed to the scene, chased away the rampaging mob, brought the situation under control and ensured the evacuation of the affected people to another Tamil Village Sena-ikkudiyalruppu.

Five people were killed and 37 persons injured in the incident. Initial reports said that 25 people were missing but subsequent reports do not refer to anyone "missing". About 45 dwellings have been razed and torched with another 85 damaged. Almost all houses in the area have been looted and a substantial number of livestock and poultry is missing. The persons killed are Veluppillai Packiyarajah, Ponniah Sathasivam, Vellaikkutti Suntharalingam, Kanapathipillai Kumaraswamy, and his wife Rangana-

yaki Kumaraswamy. The husband and wife were killed in their home while the other three met death in the open spaces. Suntharalingam a native of Veelamunai was merely visiting the Fourth colony when death struck.

The identity of the attackers is no secret. Most of them were dressed in civil with khaki trousers and black shirts. A few, however, were in police uniform. They were no strangers to the villagers of the Fourth colony. They comprised police personnel from the Central camp Police station and home guards from Vijithapura. The police station is only about a mile from the Fourth colony and the people knew by sight at least the persons deployed there.

Residents from the Fourth colony have gone on record as saying that they could identify the bulk of their attackers. Fearing possible intimidation by the perpetrators of the crime the government has transferred out all those on duty at the Central camp police station. A full scale inquiry has been ordered into the incident. All political parties representing Tamils as well as human rights organisations have urged the government to take appropriate and meaningful action over the incident. □

5,000-Year-Old Human Grave Found

Sri Lankan archaeologists have begun excavating a site believed to be of a 5,000-year-old human grave that was discovered by villagers in the south of the island.

According to the director of the Department of Archaeology Dr. Siran Deraniyagala, the discovery was made about a month ago at a mining lagoon in Hambantota district, about 180 km (112 miles) southeast of the capital Colombo.

Initial excavation has revealed that the physical indications of the human skeletons were primitive and could be of Sri Lanka's prehistoric man, Dr. Deraniyagala said.

"We hope that within the next couple of months we will be able to ascertain the precise nature of the period and the content of the site," he said. "If there is any presence of metal or ceramic we will be able to date the skeletons," said Dr. Deraniyagala, adding that Sri Lanka might have to look for foreign expertise for a detailed analysis of the skeletons.

He said that further excavations could also reveal any insight into a link between the stone age and the pre-historic period.

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MATRIMONIAL

Jaffna Hindu mother seeks partner for daughter, 40, attractive, divorced, working professional, residing in Canada with two children entering university. M 976 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna parents seek suitable partner under 36 for engineer son, disabled and working abroad. M 979 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna Hindu parents seek partner for US raised son, 26, doctor employed in US with citizenship. M 980 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna Hindu aunt seeks educated partner for nephew, CIMA accountant in good UK employment, 36, Mars afflicted, British citizen. Send horoscope, details. M 981 c/o Tamil Times or telephone 0171 624 5108.

Jaffna Catholic seeks partner for brother, 42, British Rail engineer, house owner. Send details. M 982 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna Hindu parent seeks groom for daughter, 25, M.Sc., in UK employment, British born. Send horoscope, details. M 983 c/o Tamil Times.

Jaffna Hindu parents seek educated partner for son, 28, British Citizen, graduate engineer in good employment in London. Send horoscope, details. M 984 c/o Tamil Times.

WEDDING BELLS

We congratulate the following couple on their recent wedding.

Skandakumar son of Prof. (Tawney) & Mrs. S. Rajaratnam of 194 The Heights, Northolt, Middx., and **Sukanthi** daughter of Dr. & Mrs. K. Sundaramoorthy of 72 Ranelagh Road, Southall, Middx., on 6.9.97 at Copland Community School, Cecil Avenue, Wembley, Middx., UK.

OBITUARIES

Kanmanni beloved wife of V. Thiagaraja (formerly of Mahajana College, Tellippalai); loving mother of Sriskantharaja, Rajani and Rajabhavani;

mother-in-law of Gnanapoonkothai, Rajalingam (USA) and Nadarajalingam; eldest sister of Saraaswathy Arumugarajah (Canada), Parameswary Satchithanatham (Sri Lanka), late Kanthasamy (formerly of TRRO & Saturday Review), Parameswaran (Sydney), late Gnanambikai and Mangayakarasi Dharmarajah (Canada) died on 11th September 1997 and the funeral took place on the 13th in Melbourne. - 15 Harris Crescent, Glenwaverly, Victoria 3150, Australia.



Mrs. Annaletchumy Ariyanayagam, 84, Retired teacher from Sri Lanka, wife of the late Eliyathamby Ariyanayagam, beloved mother of Tharmasuthan (Melbourne), Sathiyakeerthy (Dr. Ariyanayagam) and Chandrakanthan (Shanthy); mother-in-law of Prehashini, Dr. Jacintha Ithayamalar and Dr. Thevaki and grandmother of Priyesh, Kamalesh, Timothy and Rachel passed away peacefully in London on 28th August 1997, after a brief illness.

The funeral took place on 8th September 1997, followed by a memorial service on 4th October at West Croydon Methodist Church, conducted by Rev. Sam Jeyathilakarajah.

The members of the family wish to thank all relatives and friends who attended the funeral/memorial service, sent messages of sympathy and assisted them in many ways during the period of great sorrow. - A. Chandrakanthan, 11 Dinton Road, Colliers Wood, London SW19 2AR. Tel: 0181 543 3714.

IN MEMORIAM

Lovingly Remembered on the 8th Anniversary of the Passing Away of



Daniel Selvarajah Sanders, Ph.D, ACSW,
 Sept. 28, 1928 - Oct. 14, 1989
 The Seventh Annual Daniel S. Sanders
 Peace and Social Justice Lecture

Internationally known as a leader in efforts to achieve world peace, human rights and social justice, Daniel S. Sanders was Dean, Professor and Director of International Program at the University of Hawaii, School of Social Work, USA from 1971-1986.

Dean, Professor and Director for the Center for the Study of International Social Welfare Policies and Services, University of Illinois, School of Social Work at Urbana-Champaign from 1986-1989.

Founder and first President, Inter-University Consortium for International Social Development (IUCISD) 1980-1989.

President UNA-USA, Hawaii Chapter 1983-1986. Dan received the Peace Award by the United Nations in the International Year of Peace for the IUCISD in 1985.

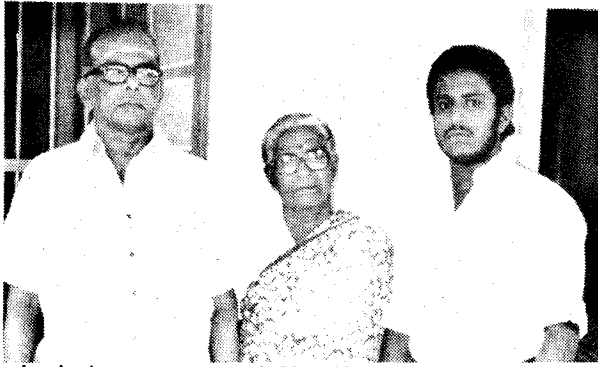
Dr. Mary Jo Bane, Former Assistant Secretary for Children and Families, United States Department of Health and Human Services, gave the annual lecture on 'Protecting Poor Children in the wake of Welfare Reform' (Mary Jo Bane resigned from her high-ranking position in protest after President Clinton signed the welfare reform bill). The response to her lecture was overwhelming since she had extensive experiences as an administrator of social service program for children and families at both the state and federal levels. Dr. Bane discussed the danger to poor children posed by recent changes in the US welfare system, what opportunities are presented for genuine reform of the system, the obligations of society to poor children and their parents, and what actions should be taken by local communities, state governments, and the federal government to better protect children in poverty.

Social Work Scholarship established in 1997

1. Daniel Selvarajah Sanders Doctoral Award in International Social Work; School of Social Work, Ph.D. program, University of Hawaii at Manoa.
2. The Daniel S. Sanders Fellowship in International Social Development; School of Social Work, Ph.D. program, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.
3. Daniel Selvarajah Sanders Scholarship Fund to educate a deserving student at Jaffna College, Vaddukodai, Sri Lanka.
4. Daniel Selvarajah Sanders Scholarship Fund for second year social work students at the National Institute of Social Development (NISD), formerly Ceylon Institute of Social Work, Colombo Sri Lanka.

With much love to Rajan, Mrs. Christobel Chelvathy Sanders. Sanders/Niles families, Selvaranee, Chandranee, Chandran & Mangai, Balan & Susila; Ariam & Sushila, Alagan & Thavayogam. Augusta Niles, nieces and nephews. - 1807 Vancouver Place. Honolulu, Hawaii 96822, USA.

IN MEMORIAM



In loving memory of Mr. K.N. Jeyaseelan, Mrs. Rukmani Jeyaseelan and their son Mr. Jeyaseelan Gnana-Easwaran on the tenth anniversary of their passing away under tragic circumstances in October 1987 in Kondavil, Sri Lanka.

Sadly missed and fondly remembered by daughter /sister Mrs. Naga-Easwary Sivapalan and family (UK) and son/brother Mr. Jeyaseelan Linga-Easwaran and family (Canada). - 6 Jerbourg Close, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire. ST5 3LR.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

November 1 Skandasasti 2nd day; Feast of All Saints.

Nov. 2 Feast of All Souls.

Nov. 3 Chathurthi.

Nov. 4 Feast of St. Charles.

Nov. 5 Soora Sankaram.

Nov. 6 Thirukkalyanam.

Nov. 7 Iypasi Veli (4).

Nov. 8 6.45pm Tamil Performing Arts Society presents Drama Festival at Winston Churchill Hall, Pinn Way, Ruislip, Middx. Tel: 0181 459 4335/470 7883/509 2092; 7.00pm London Veena Group presents Music of Three Traditions of Spain, Israel & India at Merton Hall, 76 Kingston Road, South Wimbledon, London SW19 1LA. Tel: 0181 543 2126; SLTWG drop-in Tel: 0181 545 3313.

Nov. 9 Remembrance Sunday.

Nov. 10 Ekathasi; Feast of St. Leo.

Nov. 12 Pirathosam.

Nov. 14 Full Moon.

Nov. 15 6.45pm Tamil Performing Arts Society presents Drama Festival at Waltham Forest Theatre, Lloyd Park, Vinns Terrace, Walthamstow, London E17. Tel: 0181 459 4335/470 7883/509 2092; Feast of St. Albert.

Nov. 16 6.00pm S.C.O.T. presents exclusive Vocal recital in London by the most acclaimed Monarch of Carnatic Music Sri T.V. Sankaranarayanan with

accompanists from India at Battersea Town Hall, Lavender Hill, London SW11. Tel: 0181 693 4088/952 7249/8709897.

Nov. 17 Sankatahara Chathurthi; Kaarthigai Somavaram (1).

Nov. 21 Feast of Presentation of Our Lady Mary.

Nov. 22 M.I.O.T. Youth Forum presents 'Medicine, is it for you' at St. George's Medical School, London SW17. Tel: 0181 715 3101 (Shiamala); Arumuga Navalar Guru Poojah; Feast of St. Cecilia.

Nov. 24 Kaarthigai Somavaram (2).

Nov. 25 Krishna Ekathasi.

Nov. 27 Pirathosam.

Nov. 29 Amavasai; S.L.T.W.G Drop-in. Tel: 0181 545 3313.

Nov. 30 First Sunday of Advent.

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

Nov. 15 6.30pm Hindustani Vocal by Sanjeev Abhyankar.

Nov. 22 7.00pm Taal Tarang by Shebshankar Roy - Tabla and Balachander - Mridangam.

Nov. 23 6.00pm Carnatic Vocal by T.V. Gopalakrishnan.

Nov. 29 6.30pm Kathak - Sujata Banerjee & Sitar - Subroto Roy.

Nov. 30 6.00pm Bhavan's Teachers' performance Veena - Sivasakthi Sivanesan, Sitar - Vijaykumar Jagtap, Tabla - Shibshankar Ray and Mridangam - Balachander.

AUSTRALIAN NEWSLETTER

Abaya Karam Concert: The annual 'Abaya Karam' concert in aid of the Durgapuram Mahalir Illam in the north and the Ramakrishna Mission Orphanage in the east of Sri Lanka took place on 6th September 1997 at the Bankstown Town Hall, Sydney. This year the Lingalayam Dance Academy presented a Bharata Natyam dance drama 'Ashta Pathinikal', choreographed and directed by its director, Anandavalli. Anandavalli came to Sydney in 1985 and established the Academy in 1987.

'Ashta Pathinikal' is the story of eight chaste women from Hindu mythology - Arunthathi, Anusuya, Savithiri, Sukanya, Sita, Nalayini, Draupadi and Kannagi. The music and lyrics for the performance were specially composed by Smt D.K. Pattammal. The story of each 'Pathini' was narrated at the beginning of each dance drama by two dancers who seemed to have a real understanding of their lives and danced with great distinction. The accompanists were Shivaganga Sahathevan - Vocal, Balasri Rasiah - Mridangam, Narayanadas Kopathidas - Violin and Varalakshmi Sritharan - Veena. The compere Shaktidaran Sivanathan did an excellent job.

Mr. K. Sivanathan, President of 'Abaya Karam' outlined the aims of the organisation, thanked the public for their support and announced that he had already remitted 3000 dollars to each of the organisations Durgapuram Mahalir Illam and Ramakrishna Mission Orphanage, Batticaloa and was hoping to send further amounts when the accounts are finalised. The Vice-President, Mrs. Devi Balasubramaniam thanked Anandavalli and her students for an evening of excellent entertainment, the accompanists for their support, and the individuals in charge of sound and stage management. She had a special word of thanks for the audience who had turned out in large numbers to support a great cause.

Ganesh Visarjan Festival: The annual Ganesh Visarjan festival was held at the Sri Venkateswara Temple on 7th September. After Ganesh

Homam very early in the morning followed by Abishekam and puja, the Utsava Moorthy beautifully decorated with masses of flowers and garlands was taken in procession around the temple accompanied by musicians playing natheeswar-am music. As in past years thousands of devotees participated in the festival. Hundreds of children took part in the popular Ganesh colouring competition. A cultural show was conducted from 10 a.m. in a specially erected marquee. Many of the Hindu Associations in New South Wales took part in dance performances, vocal recitals and instrumental music.

There was a very popular canteen selling Indian food - dosai, Idly, vadai, rice and curry etc - as well as coffee and soft drinks.

The Visarjan Ganapathi, which is a statue of Ganesh made of clay and beautifully decorated was taken in procession to the nearby Stanwell Park beach. After a puja performed by the priests at the beach, the clay statue was immersed in the waters of the Pacific Ocean to the cheers of 'Jai Ganesh' by the devotees assembled there. It was a truly beautiful spectacle to watch the huge waves sweep up our Ganesh statue and take it away to rest on the ocean bed till the clay slowly dissolved.

Lecture on Tamils in Australia: Natanalaya (The School of Dancing and Music) presented a lecture demonstration at the Homebush School Hall, Sydney on 14th September on 'Tamils in Australia and 1996 Census of Population' by Dr. A. Kandiah who is a language specialist in the Institute of Languages, University of New South Wales. The lecture was well attended.

On this occasion Natanalaya donated 50 Ph.d. theses concerning Tamil Language, Literature and Culture written by scholars of Tamil Nadu to the Sydney Arivakam (Community Library). The Sydney Arivakam is a very successful venture which aims to provide free reading material on Tamil Language and Culture to the Tamils of Sydney. This library was established through the efforts of Tamils of Sri Lanka.

Miruthanga Arangetram of Barathan



The Miruthanga Arangetram of Barathan son of Mr. S. and Mrs. Sitalakshmy Balayogan of Browning Road, Manor Park, London E12, took place on 23.8.97 at the Waltham Forest Theatre, Lloyds Park, London E17. Barathan is a disciple of Sri Muthu Sivaraja, the popular miruthangam performer and tutor, who has produced several miruthangists.

Though it was his Arangetram, Barathan played with a lot of confidence and maturity. His Thani Aavarthanams in Misra Chapu and Kanda Tirupudai Talas were well received by the appreciative audience with repeated applause. The vocalist was Smt Ambika Thamotheram, a musician of international repute and the violinist was Smt Gnanambikai Pathmasigamani, a graduate from the Carnatic College, Madras. The other accompanists were K. Sithamparanathan - Morsing, A. Ganathan - Gatam, S. Visakan - Ganjira and G. Peruntha - Tambura. The programme was ably compered by the well known broadcaster Wimal Sockanathan.

The chief guest Dr. Ambikapathy and the guest of honour Smt Arunthathy Srikantha Rajah complimented Barathan on his dedication and proficiency in the art.

Mythili's Violin Arangetram



On 23rd August 1997 London's Watersmeet Theatre was witness to the blossoming of a budding Violin artiste, Selvi Mythili

Sarvananther, disciple of Smt Kalaivani Indrakumar. The Chief Guest for the function was Mrs. Helen Hyde, Headmistress of Mythili's school and the programme was compered by Sabanitha Manohar.

The highlight of the programme was the address of Mr. P.P. Kanthan, musicologist and musician, who was the Guest of Honour. After thanking Mythili's parents he congratulated the teacher for having shaped the pupil to Arangetram level and the pupil for having picked up the requisite skills in such a short span of six years. It was remarkable that Mythili was able to handle difficult ragas like Misra Karna Ranjani, Joupuri, Desh and Mohana Kalyani with raga bhava and without deviating from the norm. The swaraprasthara in the Madhyamavathi piece had a good structure and cadence with impressive swara combinations. In the Ragam, Thanam and Pallavi, without which no high level concert was complete and where the acme of the artiste's ability was tested, the raga delineation was crisp and clear and the Pallavi was chastely rendered.

Mentioning that the playing of Karnatic music on violin was not easy, Mr. Kanthan traced the travel of the violin, in a rudimentary form out of India to the west and its return in the modern form when Balusamy Dikshitar, brother of the famous composer Muthuswamy Dikshitar, got a present of a violin from the leader of the British East India Company band and worked on it to make it produce Karnatic phrases and gamakas. Renowned western violinists like Yehudi Menuhin had admired the way the violin was handled in India and now many schools with differing styles had sprung in the country, such as Mysore Chowdiah's using seven strings.

Arangetram was not an end in itself, but the beginning of a new and more difficult phase and Mr. Kanthan expressed the hope that, following the footsteps of violin maestros of the past and the present, Mythili would one day adorn the musical firmament of London as a leading violinist.

Mr. Kanthan also complimented Soruban Sarvananther and Paskaran Sreekar-am whose interaction on miruthangam and gadam respectively was of a high order - a matter of tribute to their guru Sri Karaikudi Krishnamurthy.

Ealing Road Library Helps Tamil Community

Ealing Road library is collaborating with the London Tamil Centre to promote its facilities to the members of the Tamil community. Senior citizens, members of the Tamil Day Centre will be visiting the library on the last Thursday of each month to use its facilities, which include new Internet and video lending services. It is hoped that these visits would provide an opportunity for the library to develop its collection of adult and children's Tamil books, music and videos in consultation with local users.

The Tamil Day Centre at 253 East Lane,

Wembley provides Tamil and English newspapers, magazines from Sri Lanka, India and the UK, videos on health promotion, many classic films, health screening and lectures on health promotion. For more particulars please contact the library's Customer Services Manager, Yamuna Tharmendiran on 0181 937 3561.

Sathyaram - Dance Drama



King Harichandra, Chandramathi and son Logidasan with Vishwamitra's disciple Natchathira Iyer.

Nadana Bramam, the reputed School of Bharatha Natyam presented the Dance Drama Sathyaram on 13th September 1997 at the Secombe Theatre, Sutton to a capacity audience. Dr. K. Sivakumar, the Chief Guest while reviewing it made the following comments.

Before you have actually recovered from the reeling emotional impact of the performance I am sure you would want me to do this honour to the people who had been working so hard to make this production a success. It is no easy matter in this country to select a theme of this nature and produce a dance drama of such excellent quality. We could see that many of the children may not have Tamil as their first language, they may not be fluent in it and may not understand the intricacies of the emotions that need to be portrayed. Still they showed excellent understanding of the Bhava that was necessary. I felt that the Guru Smt Girija Varothayasingar has done a marvellous job both in the role of King Harichandra and in getting this performance together and in the

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choreography. Girija has been a dance teacher for several years, has produced several excellent students and I am sure you will want to greet her.

It is difficult to select individual performers in a united effort of this quality. But I am sure you will want to pay special tribute to Sai Swarupini's portrayal of Chandramathi and the emotional impact it had on you. Without going further into the performance of each and every performer, I would say that everyone including the children made their valuable contribution.

I want to pay a special tribute to Pulavar Sivanathan who has produced the basic material which has been used. His poetic genius along with the musical brilliance of Smt Ambiga Thamotheram has greatly helped to promote the dance techniques used by Girija. I greet Pulavar Sivanathan for his great service to Tamil poetry and look forward to his continued success.

What we have had is not mere entertainment, but spiritual enlightenment. In society which is sometimes predominated by acquisitive greed and materialism, it is important to keep hold of ancient and traditional values. The truthfulness that King Harichandra so steadfastly upheld has been a very important theme for us to follow. As the sacred Thirukural powerfully expounds, if you are honest and truthful, you don't need to indulge in other charities. This evening's performance has been an important vehicle, an important media by which the message has been given not only to the students, but I think to all of us.

Let me pay a brief tribute also to the musicians, particularly Smt Ambiga Thamotheram whom we have known for many years for her excellent service to music and I am pleased that she has produced the musical scores for this performance, Sri Paramasamy Kirupaharan on Miruthangam, Sri T.L. Kothandapani on Violin, Sri Pitchaiappa Gnanavarathan on Flute; they all deserve our compliments. Finally a special tribute is due to those who worked very hard behind the scenes. Everything worked like clockwork, the make-up was good, so was the entire performance, I think it has been of excellent quality. There has been one message - 'Truth alone triumphs'.

Skanda Old Students 12th Annual Day

The Twelfth Annual Reunion Lunch, A.G.M. and Entertainment of the Skanda Varodaya College Old Students' Association (UK Branch) were held on Sunday, 14th September 1997 at Manor Park Hall, Malden Road, New Malden, Surrey. After lunch the proceedings commenced with the singing of the college song. The president of the association Mr. N.S. Kandiah welcomed the old students, their families and friends and stated that the activities of the association since the last A.G.M. were confined mainly to sports. Our football, cricket and net ball teams had taken part in tournaments conducted by

the J.S.S.A.(UK) and the United Tamils' Association and had good performances. Our cricket (over 40) and net ball teams had taken part in the competitions held on Mahajana open day and won shields. He thanked the secretaries for cricket, football, net ball, the sports co-ordinator and members of the teams who had put in a lot of hard work and achieved success.

Mr. Kandiah requested Mr. S. Nimalananda, who had visited the college back at home recently to make a statement regarding his observations. He stated that he visited the college on a working day met Mr. Sivaji, the new Principal and the secretary of the local Old Students' Associations. He had found that the college premises are being shared by Nadeswara College and the number on roll of the college had gone down to around 600. The number of students in the Advanced level science class had dwindled to 6. Assistance was requested for the buying of sports equipment and he had undertaken to place the request before the committee.

Mr. R. Vimalendran, the Treasurer presented his annual report which showed that the balance to the credit of the association stood at £2906.82. There was a surprise birthday party for the president, who had turned seventy five. Mr. Kandiah offered the thanks of his wife and himself for the honour bestowed on both of them by the association and the nice present given to him to mark the occasion. The election of office-bearers for 1997/98 followed.

A grand music recital by a distinguished old student, Sangeetha Pooshanam Mr. Pon Sundaralingam who was visiting London from Toronto took place before a very appreciative audience. The Guest of Honour on the occasion was Mr. P.P. Kanthan, noted musicologist and musician, who honoured the artiste 'draping him in gold'. After wishing Mr. Kandiah many more years of fruitful service to the community, Mr. Kanthan provided his expert comments on the music of the evening. Recalling that only two weeks earlier he had felicitated the artiste in another function, Mr. Kanthan noted that since then many delectable programmes by the same artiste had followed, fully justifying the application of the famous saying about Julius Caesar: 'He came, he saw, he conquered'. Starting with the Hamsadvani piece Jnanamudalvane, the tempo was kept to the end, delighting the audience. The raga alapani in Kalyani brought out the delicate nuances of the raga and the juxtaposition of Hindolam with Kalyana Vasantham which had only one swara difference was a bold and marvellous attempt. The swaraprastharas in the Hamsadvani, Kalyani and Hindolam pieces sparkled like jewels in their structure and cadence. There was a rich fare with a wide repertoire of music with the artiste equally in command from Thyagaraja Kriti to Thiruppugazh.

There was appropriate and noteworthy accompaniment support from Gnanambi-

kai Padmasikamani (Violin), Nadamani Muth Sivarajah (Miruthangam), Kandiah Sithamparanathan (Morsing & Tabla) and Senthil Chelvi Vamanananthan (Tampura).

Carlton Leisure Trophy

A one-day knockout spectacular organised by Ceylon Cricket League was held on Sunday, 7th September 1997 at the King George's Recreation Grounds in Tolworth. The chief organiser of the event was Mr. Yogan Yoganathan, secretary, Ceylon Cricket League, which is the oldest surviving Cricket organisation in the UK. The tournament was sponsored by Carlton Leisure, the well-known Sri Lankan Travel Agency in UK.

Notably, the Chief Guest was Mr. Edward Davy, M.P. for Kingston and Economic Adviser of the Liberal Democrats. He presented the trophies to the winners and the runners up of the tournament. The winners were the Southall Lankiens who beat the Tamil Union in an exciting final. A match for the under 14's, sponsored by Orient Cuisine of Surbiton was also played. Orient Cuisine were in charge of the catering for the day and special credit goes to its proprietor Mr. Rasa Tharmayagam.

After the conclusion of the matches a minute's silence was observed in memory of Diana, Princess of Wales and Mother Theresa. The Chief Guest Mr. Edward Gray was presented with a silver tray by the Ceylon Cricket League which was handed over by Mr. Harry Vaheesan, Director of Carlton Leisure Travel Agency.

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Punithapuram, a colony in South Madras conceived by Eshan, is 5.5km from Velachery, 7.5km East of Madras International Airport and by the proposed Singapore Corridor.

The houses are a blend of traditional Indian concepts and values, and the Western attitude towards quality living. They are designed on 'Vasthu' principles with internal courtyards and slope roofs, featuring marble floors, built-in cabinets, granite work tops and glazed tiles. All finishes and fittings have been specifically chosen. The houses are categorised as follows:-

Sarada	1700sq.ft on a 2400sq.ft plot	3 bedrooms with study and garage for one car.	Semi-detached
Sivaranjani	1900sq.ft on a 2400sq.ft plot	3 bedrooms with study alcove and garage for one car.	Semi-detached
Savitri	2500sq.ft on a 4800sq.ft plot	3 bedrooms with study and porch and garage for two cars.	Bungalow
Bhagyawathy	2700sq.ft on a 4800sq.ft plot	3 bedrooms with study alcove and garage for two cars.	Bungalow
Kalyani	3600sq.ft on a 4800sq.ft plot	5 bedroom house with a garage for two cars.	Bungalow

Punithapuram is planned exclusively for people living abroad and is being promoted by a Malaysian company based in India. Experienced in Property Development, Eshan is setting a standard in India. The plots at Punithapuram have been approved by the Government of Tamil-Nadu and houses will be ready for occupation by December 1998.

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For further enquiries, you may contact: **Eshan Holding Limited, 'Eshan Agham', 6 Bishop Garden, Greenways Road, Chennai 600 028, INDIA. Tel. No. (91) (44) 494 2281, (91) (44) 493 5036. Fax No. (91) (44) 493 5049.**

Representatives of Eshan Holding Limited are available in the UK between the 1st and 14th of November 1997, and may be contacted for details at Tel. No. 01372-812595 and Fax No. 01372-739572.

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